ONE NATION, UNEQUAL ACCESS

Assessing Ration Portability and Food Security for Seasonal Migrant Brick Workers in Rajasthan and Gujarat

First Phase of a Nationwide Study on the One Nation One Ration Programme

Centre for Labour Research and Action

With Support from Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung - South Asia

DECEMBER 2024

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

The One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) programme was introduced to address the historical exclusion of migrant workers from India's Public Distribution System (PDS), with rollout gaining rapid urgency during the mass deprivation caused by the COVID-19 lockdowns. By enabling interstate and intrastate ration portability, the scheme aimed to guarantee uninterrupted access to subsidized foodgrains, irrespective of where a worker migrates for employment. This study, based on a field survey of 1,012 seasonal migrant brick worker households in Rajasthan and Gujarat, reveals that while ONORC has made much progress since it was first piloted in 2019, serious systemic barriers continue to limit its reach and reliability for such workers.

Migrant workers remain dependent on dealer discretion, faulty technology, adhoc allocation and supply, and word-of-mouth channels in the absence of official communication, all of which limit their ability to claim their legal entitlements under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013. Survey results indicate that 70.8% of respondents were aware of ONORC, but only 50.5% attempted to use it, and among them, just 58.6% successfully accessed rations. This suggests that awareness does not translate directly into uptake, as many workers faced structural and operational challenges when trying to collect their ration, or were not aware of options like ration-splitting. The most commonly reported barriers include dealer refusals (53.5%), stock shortages at the FPS (47.4%), and biometric authentication failures (30%). Even those who were able to access ration portability faced ongoing challenges, such as inconsistent operating hours at ration shops and frequent stockouts, forcing them to make multiple trips and lose work hours.

The findings also highlight the crucial role that workers' organizations can play in building awareness and linking workers to social entitlements. Brick workers in Rajasthan, where the Rajasthan Pradesh Int Bhatta Majdur Union has done extensive outreach to link workers with ONORC, reported significantly higher levels of awareness compared to respondents in Gujarat (88.6% vs 30.0%).

ONORC has the potential to fulfill some of the promises of the NFSA for migrant workers, but it must account for the varied ground realities and lived experiences of its 'target beneficiaries.' Sustained effort is required, particularly in resolving implementation gaps, improving transparency and accountability, expanding outreach and engagement, and addressing intersecting vulnerabilities that continue to deny seasonal migrant workers their right to subsidized foodgrains.

Report Structure: The report begins with an introduction in Chapter 1 that sets the context for the study and outlines the evolution of rights-based food security in India leading to ONORC. Chapter 2 reviews insights from previous research on ONORC and briefly explores interstate portability transaction data. Chapter 3 presents detailed findings from the field survey of migrant brick kiln workers in Rajasthan and Gujarat. Finally, Chapter 4 shares the personal narratives of five women brick workers to complement the quantitative insights.

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Chapter 1. Introduction and Context Setting

Seasonal Migration, the Right to Food, and ONORC

This chapter provides a brief background for understanding the intersection of seasonal migration and food insecurity in India. It highlights the systemic exclusion of seasonal migrant workers from the Public Distribution System (PDS) and how the National Food Security Act (NFSA) failed to address the unique challenges faced by these workers. The chapter introduces the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme as a policy response to these gaps and explores its limited success in meeting the needs of migrants. By laying out these foundational issues, this chapter sets the stage for analyzing ONORC's impact through the study of brick kiln workers in Rajasthan and Gujarat.

India's food security landscape presents a striking paradox: while the nation operates one of the world's largest food distribution networks, it continues to face severe challenges in ensuring food security for its most vulnerable populations. While granaries overflow and grains rot in warehouses, millions of Indians remain food insecure. This contradiction is particularly confounding in the case of seasonal migrant workers, who constitute a significant yet chronically underserved segment of India's workforce. While official statistics have been unable to capture its true scale, informal estimates suggest that between 100 and 200 million people in India engage in seasonal migration.

These workers face a double burden: they depart their home regions due to food insecurity, only to encounter systemic exclusion at their destinations, where documentation precarity, economic constraints, and sociocultural barriers effectively render them invisible to the state's welfare apparatus. The extreme vulnerability of migrant workers was laid bare during the disastrous March 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, which triggered a mass homeward migration of approximately 11.4 million workers. This exodus was marked by widespread deprivation, with countless migrants left stranded without food, shelter, transport, or basic necessities. Reports of starvation deaths among migrant workers dominated the news cycle. A survey conducted by the Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN) in April 2020 revealed that 96% of migrant workers surveyed across India had not received any rations through the existing Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).

But the precarity that seasonal migrant workers face is not a sudden crisis; it is rooted in a deeper history of inadequate legal protections and structural marginalization. Understanding why programmes like ONORC are both necessary and contested requires some consideration of India's broader struggle to recognize and guarantee the right to food. Over decades, an evolving tapestry of constitutional principles, international obligations, and grassroots advocacy has shaped the country's food security framework—and, at times, exposed its most glaring shortcomings. The following section briefly touches on this historical and legal trajectory, offering a foundation for assessing ONORC's impact on the lives of brick kiln workers in Rajasthan and Gujarat, and its potential for fulling some of the promises of the NFSA for all seasonal migrant workers in India.

1.1 The Evolution of Rights-Based Food Security in India

Legal Foundations of the Right to Food in India

International Law. The right to food is a fundamental human right under international law, ensuring that everyone has access to adequate, safe, and culturally appropriate food for a healthy and active life. It is explicitly recognized in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948) and Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966). By ratifying these instruments, India is obligated to protect and fulfill the right to food for all, addressing both availability and accessibility in equitable ways.

Constitutional Guarantees. In India, the constitutional basis for the 'right to food' emerges from the 'right to life' and the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs). Key constitutional provisions relevant to the right to food include:

- Article 39(a): Directs the state to ensure adequate means of livelihood for all citizens.
- Article 39(b): Mandates that material resources must be managed for the common good.
- Article 47: Obliges the government to raise nutrition levels, enhance public health, and improve living standards.

Additionally, the right to food is implied within the fundamental right to life under Article 21, which states: "*No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.*" This interpretation has been affirmed and expanded through judicial interventions, recognizing the intrinsic link between the right to life and access to adequate food. In line with the principle of "progressive realization," the Supreme Court of India has been instrumental in expanding the right to life to include the right to food (interpreted as a right to live with dignity), also driven in large part by civil society advocacy. Early judgments like Francis Coralie Mullin v. Union Territory of Delhi (1981) established that basic necessities, including food, are integral to human dignity. Building on this foundation, the landmark case PUCL v. Union of India (2001) marked a turning point, recognizing the right to food as an actionable entitlement under Article 21.

Judicial Activism and Civil Society Interventions

Initiated during a famine, PUCL v. Union of India led to interim orders mandating the expansion of existing welfare schemes like the Public Distribution System (PDS), the Midday Meal Scheme, and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). The Court employed the tool of "continuing mandamus," maintaining oversight to ensure the government actively prevented starvation and strengthened food security measures. Since 2001, numerous interim orders have reinforced the state's accountability for fulfilling the right to food—an obligation that remains urgent. Recent Supreme Court directives (April 20, 2023; March 19, 2024; and October 4, 2024) called on state governments to issue ration cards to around eight crore migrant workers registered on the e-Shram portal who still lack subsidized food grains under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

Civil society organizations, particularly PUCL and the Right to Food Campaign, have been central to this legal and policy evolution. By documenting exclusion, mobilizing public opinion, and pressuring the government, they helped establish food security as a legally enforceable right. Their grassroots activism exposed systemic neglect of marginalized communities, creating the momentum that culminated in the NFSA 2013.

The National Food Security Act (NFSA) of 2013

The NFSA provided a statutory framework to institutionalize many of these rights-based principles. Covering up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population, it guarantees subsidized food grains through the PDS. While priority households are entitled to 5 kg of food grains per person per month at subsidized rates, Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households receive 35 kg per month. The Act also introduces provisions for universal maternity entitlements, supplementary nutrition for children, and cooked meals through the Midday Meal Scheme and ICDS. Making these entitlements legally binding represented a milestone in India's campaign to combat widespread hunger and malnutrition.

Over the years, however, the NFSA has faced criticism for excluding over 100 million eligible beneficiaries due to its reliance on outdated 2011 Census data. The Act's narrow focus on wheat and rice has also drawn scrutiny, as it overlooks the need for more diverse and nutritious food baskets. Advocates argue that universalizing entitlements is both feasible and essential, particularly given India's chronic surplus of food grains. Importantly, the NFSA did not account for seasonal migration, leaving a critical gap for millions who move across state and district lines in search of work each year.

One Nation, One Ration: A Policy Response to Migrant Nutritional Needs

Historically, the PDS has operated on a location-specific framework where ration cards are tied to specific Fair Price Shops (FPS) in the beneficiary's home state. This fundamental design created immediate barriers for seasonal migrants who move across state boundaries for work. When workers migrated, they could not access their entitlements at their destination, effectively severing their connection to food security entitlements. ONORC scheme, piloted in 2019, sought to address this gap by enabling nationwide portability of ration cards and extending food security entitlements to migrant populations.

The groundwork for the scheme was laid earlier. Starting in 2012, the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) underwent end-to-end computerization, introducing Aadhaar-seeding, electronic point-of-sale (ePOS) devices, and a centralized repository of ration cards under the NFSA. By 2018, the pilot Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IMPDS) provided beneficiaries a way to claim entitlements at any FPS through biometric authentication—paving the way for the eventual nationwide rollout of ONORC.

Initially piloted in four states, ONORC gained critical momentum during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdowns and economic disruptions left many migrant workers stranded without food or income, spotlighting the programme's potential to mitigate this crisis. In response, the government expedited ONORC implementation under the 'AatmaNirbhar

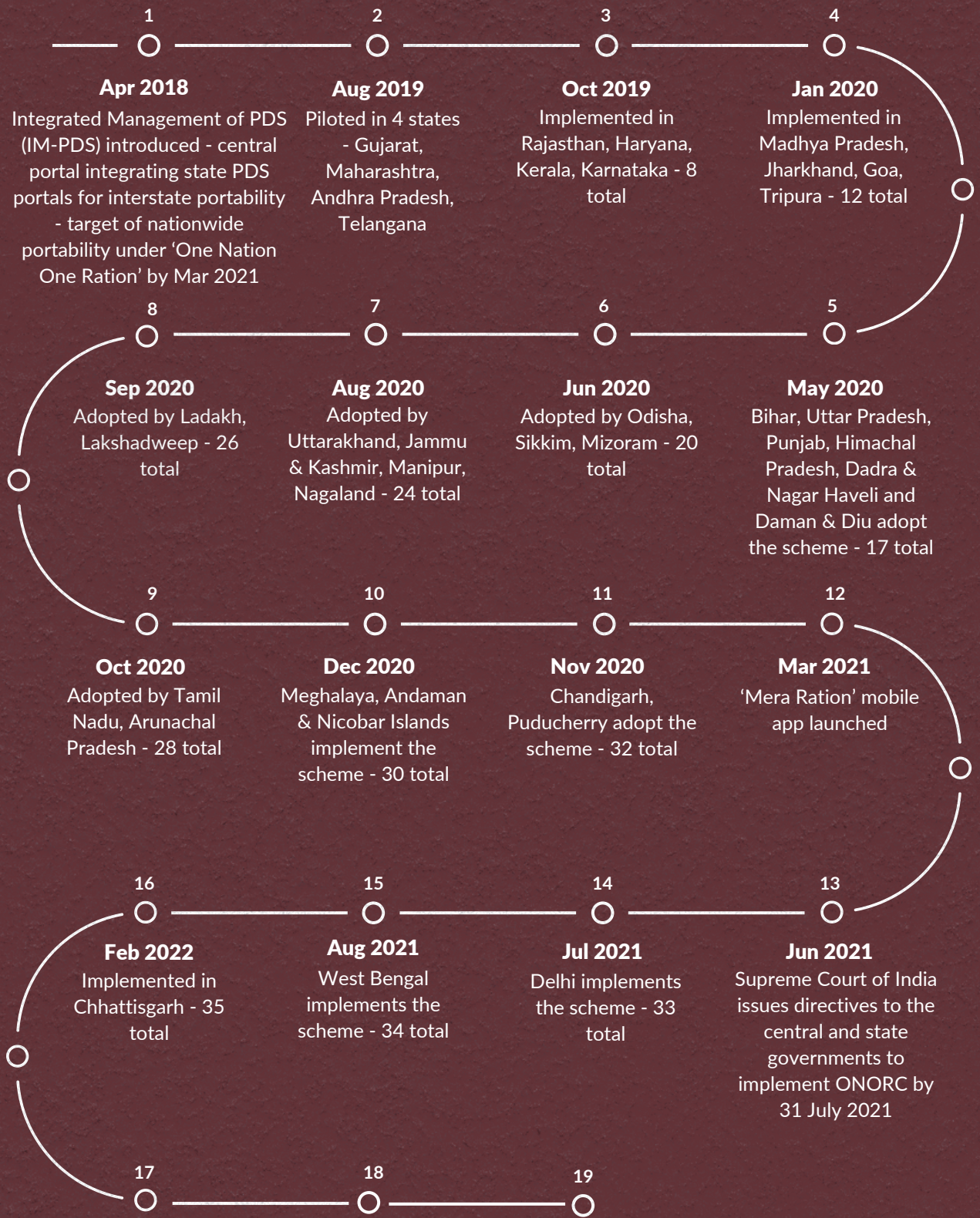

Figure 1. Timeline of Key Events in ONORC Implementation

Bharat Abhiyan,' targeting nationwide coverage by March 2021. Subsequently, on 29 June 2021, the Supreme Court ordered central and state governments to ensure the scheme's rollout by 31 July 2021. By June 2022, 36 states and Union Territories had adopted ONORC.

Over five years after the scheme was piloted, it continues to be plagued by operational issues, and struggles to reach the majority of its intended beneficiaries. While there has been much progress over the past year in terms of uptake, the impact it has had on the lives of seasonal migrant workers, particularly interstate migrant workers, remains unexplored. This study attempts to understand the ground realities, through the lens of migrant brick workers in two states - Rajasthan and Gujarat.

Rationale for this Study

Brick workers form the largest cohort of family seasonal migrants in India. They are also among the most marginalized workers in the country, operating at the intersection of extreme poverty and systemic exclusion from state welfare mechanisms. The exploitative piece-rate system in brick kilns compels entire brick molder (*pathera*) families, including children, to work together, and along with the system of advance payments (*peshgi*), traps them in a cycle of debt bondage and dependency.

Migrant brick workers, especially women and children, face severe nutrition-related challenges exacerbated by their working and living conditions. Women and girls, often the last to eat, endure severe caloric deficits, compounded by physically demanding 14–16 hour workdays and caregiving responsibilities. Pregnant women lack maternal care, worsening intergenerational health outcomes, while children as young as five work alongside parents, losing access to school and mid-day meals—a nutrition source. Most remain unlinked to ICDS and health programmes (e.g., Mamta cards). Exposure to toxic air pollutants (PM2.5, CO), indoor smoke, contaminated water, and poor sanitation further impairs respiratory health, nutrient absorption, and overall wellbeing, while reliance on unregulated healthcare leaves them vulnerable to ineffective or harmful treatments.

ONORC has crucial implications for brick workers families, because when they migrate, they lose access to school mid-day meals, ICDS services, and home-state ration entitlements. Ensuring portable PDS access for brick workers at their destinations is critical to preventing child malnutrition, supporting maternal nutrition, and reducing overall food insecurity among these migrating family units.

The right to food of seasonal migrants under NFSA remains grossly underexamined. In light of developments related to portability of NFSA entitlements, this study focuses on examining the extent to which ONORC has been able to reach seasonal migrant brick kiln workers in Rajasthan and Gujarat. Through a rapid field survey and select narrative interviews, it seeks to understand the experiences of these workers. This study forms the first phase of a larger exploration of whether ONORC has effectively reduced seasonal migrant workers' vulnerability to hunger and deprivation, as well as the more far-reaching impact effective food security mechanisms have on workers' lives.


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Chapter 2. Reviewing ONORC Implementation

Evidence from Literature and Interstate Transaction Data

In the five years since the launch of ONORC, only a handful of studies have documented the progress of the scheme in general and fewer still have specifically focused on outcomes for interstate seasonal migrant workers. This chapter synthesizes findings from prior research on ONORC to critically assess the implementation of the programme so far. A preliminary examination of interstate portability transactions recorded between 2019 and 2024 provide additional insights into uptake trends and regional variations, providing a foundation for the analysis of field survey data in the next chapter.

2.1 Thematic Review of Evidence from Other Studies

2.1.1 Vast Untapped Potential in Interstate PDS Portability

Since the launch of the scheme in 2019, **intrastate uptake of PDS portability has far exceeded interstate portability.** Tumbe and Jha (2024) found that, by September 2023, intrastate portable transactions outnumbered interstate transactions by 98:2, a ratio far higher than the proportions of internal migration (88:12) and economic migration (69:31) they derive from Census 2011 data. Even using conversative estimates, they suggest the **capacity for 2–3 million monthly interstate transactions**—of which less than a quarter is currently realized.

This huge untapped potential for interstate PDS transactions is further evidenced in the fact that about **two-thirds of all interstate transactions since July 2021 have been recorded in Delhi alone.** In contrast, states like Maharashtra and Gujarat, despite being major migration destinations, report much lower uptake. Analyzing data from over 2 million interstate portability transactions, Agrawal and Agnihotri (2022) show that **just 8% of FPS shops across the country recorded 80%** of these, and that interstate migrants purchase foodgrains much less frequently than intrastate migrants or local consumers.

2.1.2 Low Awareness of Key Features Among Both Migrants and FPS Dealers

Across studies, **low awareness levels** regarding the specifics of ONORC among both beneficiaries and PDS dealers have been found to be one major reason why uptake has been low, especially in the case of interstate migration. Beneficiaries and dealers are both generally more familiar with intradistrict and interdistrict portability, while knowledge of interstate portability—the scheme's hallmark feature—remains disproportionately low.

Given the limited outreach and engagement efforts by the state, misconceptions and informational gaps continue to inhibit interstate adoption. Many beneficiaries believe that physical ration cards are mandatory or that additional registration is required at the destination FPS—errors perpetuated by informal word-of-mouth channels and lack of access to official guidelines (Baseler et al., 2023; ADB, 2023). Awareness of ration-splitting—a feature allowing family members to draw their unit entitlements from multiple shops in the same month—remains limited. ADB (2023) notes that only about half of migrants using portability know about this option, and even fewer actually use it. Meanwhile, digital tools

like the Mera Ration app remain underutilized, with fewer than one-third of beneficiaries aware of them (Dalberg, 2022; ADB, 2023). Incomplete information and persistent misconceptions disproportionately hinder interstate migrants, who arguably stand to gain the most from portability's potential benefits.

While most FPS dealers know that beneficiaries can obtain rations outside their home district, confusion persists about whether a **new ration card or separate registration** is required for interstate usage. In some cases, dealers even believe beneficiaries must present a physical card (ADB, 2023). Dealers also frequently lack clarity on essential ONORC provisions, such as **ration-splitting and alternative verification methods** when biometric authentication fails (Dalberg, 2022). Despite official training drives, many dealers misinterpret ePoS protocol, assuming workarounds are disallowed. Furthermore, awareness of other features (e.g., the Mera Ration app, toll-free helplines, requesting additional stock) remains limited, inhibiting dealers' ability to guide migrants through the portability process. Although a large share of FPS dealers report having attended **ONORC trainings**—often conducted online during the pandemic—the quality and depth of these sessions vary widely (ADB, 2023). Dealers who participated in hands-on, in-person workshops demonstrate a better grasp of interstate rules, exception handling, and the Mera Ration app, while those reliant on virtual modules or scarce official updates remain uninformed about critical details (Dalberg, 2022). Consequently, only **a small subset of FPS shops actually handles the majority of interstate transactions**, as more cautious or less-informed dealers may turn away migrants or fail to mention key scheme benefits (Agrawal, 2023; IndiaSpend, 2023).

2.1.3 Technological and Administrative Barriers to Access

Technical glitches, complex authentication requirements, inconsistent state procedures, and irregular stock distribution collectively prevent many interstate migrants from using their ONORC entitlements effectively:

1. ePOS and IMPDS Glitches. A significant obstacle for interstate migrants arises from ePOS devices and the IMPDS portal. Both can suffer slow connectivity, incomplete data displays, and error messages mid-transaction (ADB, 2023). In some cases, rations are deducted at the back-end but never physically issued because the system stalls before final confirmation (IndiaSpend, 2023). An analysis by Agrasar, a Gurugram-based NGO, found that nearly one-third of complaints from 500 migrant families stemmed from a non-functional IMPDS site, illustrating how technical breakdowns prevent many from completing transactions. While device malfunctions and connectivity problems chiefly affect beneficiaries, they also impose extra burdens on dealers.

2. Authentication and Biometric Failures. Although most transactions rely on fingerprint authentication, frequent mismatches or multiple failed scans result in ration denial for eligible beneficiaries (ADB, 2023). This is a significant issue for beneficiaries like brick kiln workers, because due to long hours of mixing clay and shaping bricks, the friction ridges on their fingers and palms often wear out. Alternative methods—like iris scans or one-time passwords—are rarely utilized, with FPS dealers often unclear on how to apply them (IndiaSpend, 2023; Dalberg, 2022).

3. Ration Card Linking and Registration Constraints. The requirement to seed ration cards with Aadhaar posed a major barrier, especially in the early phases. Migrants who do discover errors in their ration card or Aadhaar details typically must travel back to their home states for corrections (ADB, 2023). For most seasonal migrant workers, the expense of such trips is prohibitive, effectively blocking access to rations at their place of work. Dalberg (2022) also notes that households without ration cards altogether, while eligible, often remain stuck in bureaucratic limbo, unable to enroll due to missing documentation or Aadhaar-related issues.

4. Supply Chain and Stock Inconsistencies. Shortages at Fair Price Shops (FPS) are a significant challenge for both migrants and dealers. Dalberg (2022) notes that **dealers fear "footloose" migrant customers will surge unexpectedly**, consuming rations meant for local clientele. Similarly, ADB (2023) finds that **government allocations typically reflect the number of ration cards officially tagged to a shop, not the added demand** that portability might generate. This mismatch leads dealers to hesitate when supplying migrant beneficiaries, worried they will be left with insufficient stock for their usual customers. Some dealers even reported outright stockouts, which they attributed to unplanned demand. The resulting hesitance leaves many interstate beneficiaries turned away, even when entitlements should be available (ADB, 2023). Moreover, **state portals open at staggered times** each month—e.g., some launch early, others mid-month, and some vary widely (IndiaSpend, 2023). This lack of uniform scheduling can mean that migrants arriving after their home state's "window" closes cannot draw rations, regardless of their entitlement or need.

5. Fragmented State Administration. Each state controls its beneficiary data updates, commodity entitlements, and portal synchronization. Variations in distribution cycles between states mean that if one state dispatches grains later—or if there are delays in reconciling online and offline records—dealers might receive shipments too late or in inadequate quantities (ADB, 2023). Additionally, some states offer additional grains and items in their entitlements, causing confusion among migrants who expect the same benefits at the destination under ONORC. Similarly, any change in ration card status—such as Aadhaar seeding or beneficiary additions—must be processed by the home state, which can take weeks or months to reflect on the portal.

6. Limited Use of Grievance Mechanisms. Existing portals and helplines are not easily accessible or well understood. When workers are denied their entitlement due to supply-side failures, very few lodge formal complaints (ADB, 2023). Reasons range from not knowing where to file grievances to fear of losing wages while navigating opaque systems in their home and destination states. Among those who do register complaints, just a fraction see their issues resolved. Agrasar's analysis suggests that repeated disappointments (e.g., shops opening inconsistently, missing ration details, or unlinked Aadhaar) drive many migrants to abandon the scheme altogether, relying instead on informal food sources or private markets.

7. Perceived Business Risks. Dalberg (2022) revealed that nearly one-third of dealers surveyed felt their "business model" is threatened by portability. These dealers worry about losing their regular patrons if they cannot efficiently manage surges in migrant demand. Some also fear backlash from local residents who might resent longer queues or diminished stock availability. Without a robust mechanism to compensate dealers for larger or fluctuating workloads—such as commissions tied to each successful portability transaction—many continue to remain hesitant to expand their services to migrant beneficiaries.

2.1.4 Gender, Disability, and Access to Ration

Women workers, particularly those who are widowed, divorced, or separated, face systemic barriers in accessing ration portability under ONORC. Documentation requirements for obtaining or updating ration cards are particularly restrictive for those forming new households after separation, as proving their eligibility can be difficult. Additionally, many marginalized women who need portability remain unaware that they are entitled to use it (Dalberg, 2022). Even those who are aware encounter additional gendered challenges at Fair Price Shops, such as male relatives controlling their ration cards, household restrictions on their mobility, and exploitative practices by dealers. Many women also struggle to navigate the bureaucratic and technical processes involved with their paid work and unpaid domestic labour, making regular trips to ration shops difficult (ADB, 2023).

Although the proportion of women accessing ONORC has increased in recent years, disparities persist. Transaction records suggest that women, on average, purchase slightly lower quantities of food per transaction compared to men. It is unclear whether this is due to dealers manipulating stock availability, women purchasing rations based on household needs and not full entitlements, or other structural factors in food distribution (Agrawal, 2023).

Persons with disabilities face additional barriers, including unreliable state-level ration portals and mobility constraints that make traveling to ration shops particularly difficult. Many rely on neighbors for updates on system functionality, and the lack of direct transport options further limits their ability to access entitlements outside of their home state (IndiaSpend, 2023). Such intersecting vulnerabilities highlight how ONORC, while intended to increase access to food security, continues to reflect the broader systemic exclusions that shape India's welfare systems.

2.2 Brief Overview of Interstate Portability Transaction Trends

This preliminary exploration of interstate portability transaction trends is based on monthly records available on the IMPDS portal (https://impds.nic.in/portal/), spanning mid-2019 through December 2024. Successful ration draws by migrants from a given source (home) state in a given destination (sale) state, aggregated monthly, are analyzed to identify usage volume trends over time. Specifically, the focus is on identifying Overall transaction volume trends over time and by sale and home state, prominent seasonal or structural trends in adoption, and highlights specific to Rajasthan and Gujarat.

2.2.1 Overall Trends and Key Influencing Events

Total interstate portability transactions across all destination states rose from 4,598 in 2019 (launch year) to 7.7mn in 2024, with a cumulative 16.8mn recorded in this period. The first surge in transactions appears in 2021, going from 25,000 in the first two years combined to over 800k in 2021. The second, more rapid expansion presents in 2022-24, scaling from 3.6mn in 2022, to 4.7mn in 2023, to 7.7mn in 2024 - a 112.5% increase.

These surges can be linked to two catalyzing factors: the COVID-19 lockdowns, that forced states to intensify public distribution efforts, and a series of Supreme Court directives from 2020 onward, which repeatedly underscored the constitutional priority of food security over bureaucratic or quota-based constraints.

The first small uptick in 2020 coincided with the first national COVID-19 lockdown enforced on March 25, which threw millions of migrants into crisis. In May 2020, the Supreme Court-responding to the plight of stranded and unemployed workers-ordered states to provide free food, shelter, and transport. Although these directives focused primarily on immediate relief (e.g., community kitchens and travel support), they likely nudged states to intensify existing ration schemes, laying groundwork for broader uptake of portability under ONORC.

A more pronounced surge in 2021, when transactions rose to 813k, coincides with the Supreme Court's June 29, 2021 judgment explicitly mandated all remaining states to implement ONORC by July 31, 2021, removing many of the remaining administrative hurdles to interstate usage of ration cards. The continuing pandemic—and the resulting need for portable social protection—pushed both central and state governments to accelerate the ONORC rollout. The dual pressure from judicial orders and pandemic-driven necessity explains much of the surge between 2020 and 2021.

In 2022, transactions more than quadrupled again, reaching 3.6mn. The Supreme Court's follow-up orders in April and July 2022 pressed states to update ration coverage using more recent population data and reduce delays tied to eKYC. The Atmanirbhar Bharat and PMGKAY extensions, in tandem with the SC's insistence on ration for migrants lacking local cards, further expanded the scheme's reach among interstate workers. This momentum carried into 2023, which saw transactions climb to 4.7mn—likely a result of sustained compliance efforts (e.g., mandatory issuance of new ration cards to e-Shram-registered workers) and ongoing recovery from earlier pandemic disruptions.

By 2024, the total rose to a record 7.7mn transactions. Repeated Supreme Court deadlines, especially the March 19, 2024 and October 4, 2024 orders threatening strict penalties for noncompliance, appear to have spurred states to finalize eKYC processes and issue cards more aggressively. These measures sought to ensure that interstate migrants were no longer excluded by rigid NFSA quotas or outdated census data.

Taken together, the data strongly suggest that judicial intervention and COVID-19–era imperatives played critical roles in driving year-on-year growth in interstate ration portability transactions, along with continuous technological improvements and policy initiatives.

2.2.2 Highlights by destination state. While ONORC was only implemented in Delhi in July 2021, it alone accounts for about 66% of all recorded transactions (11.2mn total). Haryana (1.9mn) and Maharashtra (1.2mn) rank second and third, respectively. These three industrial urban hubs see significant migrant inflows, and account for 85% of all interstate transactions in the country. Gujarat (462k) and Rajasthan (290k) form the next tier. Northeastern and island states, such as Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Nagaland, Mizoram, Lakshadweep - show minimal transactions. It must be noted here that these figures reflect transaction volumes, not unique workers or ration cards. Multiple transactions by the same household or individual are counted more than once.

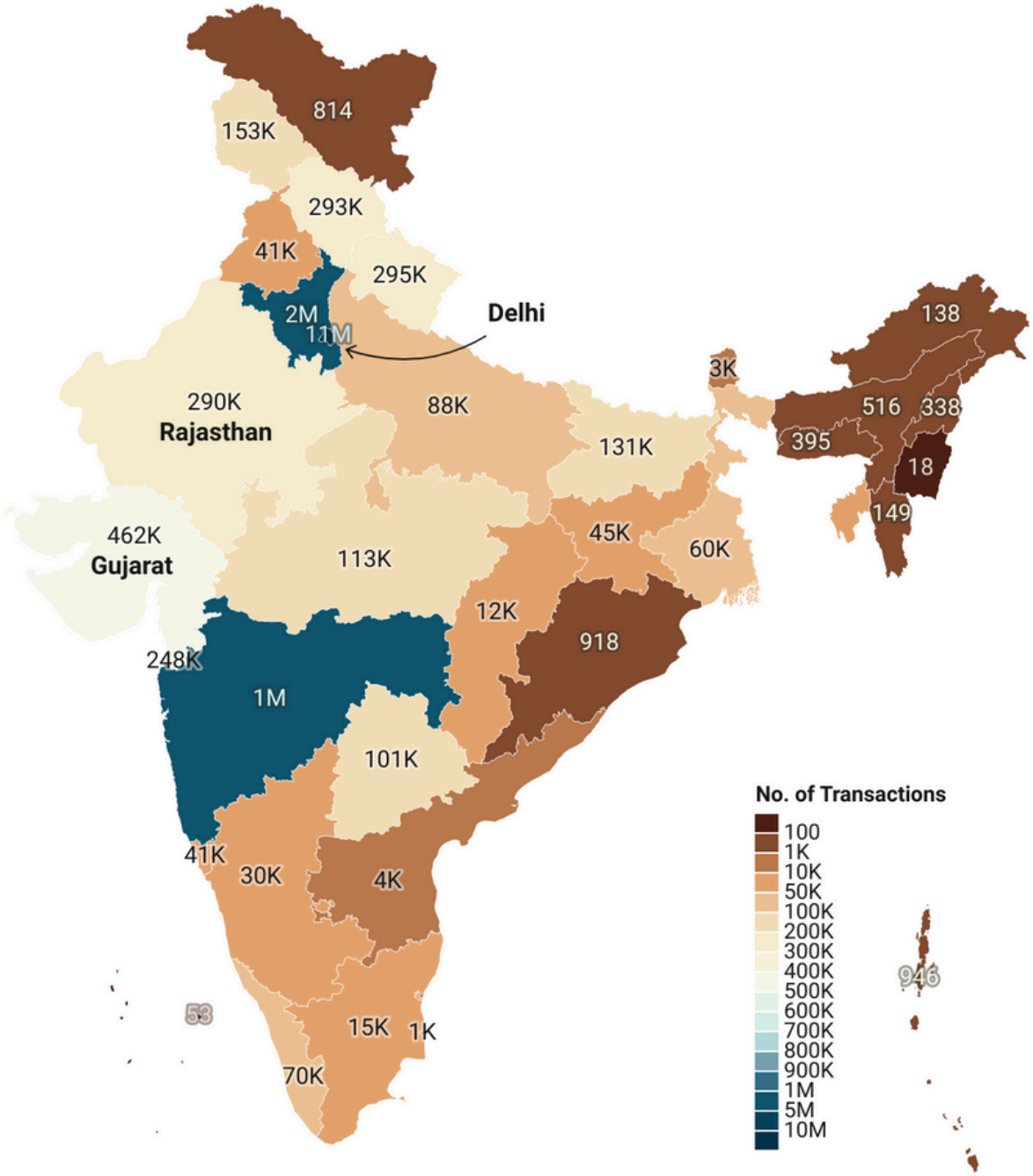

Figure 2. Interstate Portability Transactions under ONORC by Destination (Sale) State (2019-2024)

2.2.3 Highlights by home state. For the period 2019-2024, Bihar (7.4m) and Uttar Pradesh (7.3m) were the top home states by total transactions, together accounting for 87.6% of all recorded interstate transactions. They far exceeding the next-highest totals, which include Madhya Pradesh (878k), Haryana (233k), Jharkhand (151k), Rajasthan (150k), and Uttarakhand (147k). These figures indicate that the scheme is indeed reaching states known for large out-migrant populations. Smaller states and UTs show negligible or no interstate portability usage. Arunachal Pradesh, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Mizoram, and Nagaland register only single- or double-digit transactions over the entire period, and there are no recorded transactions for Chandigarh, Meghalaya, and Ladakh, among others.

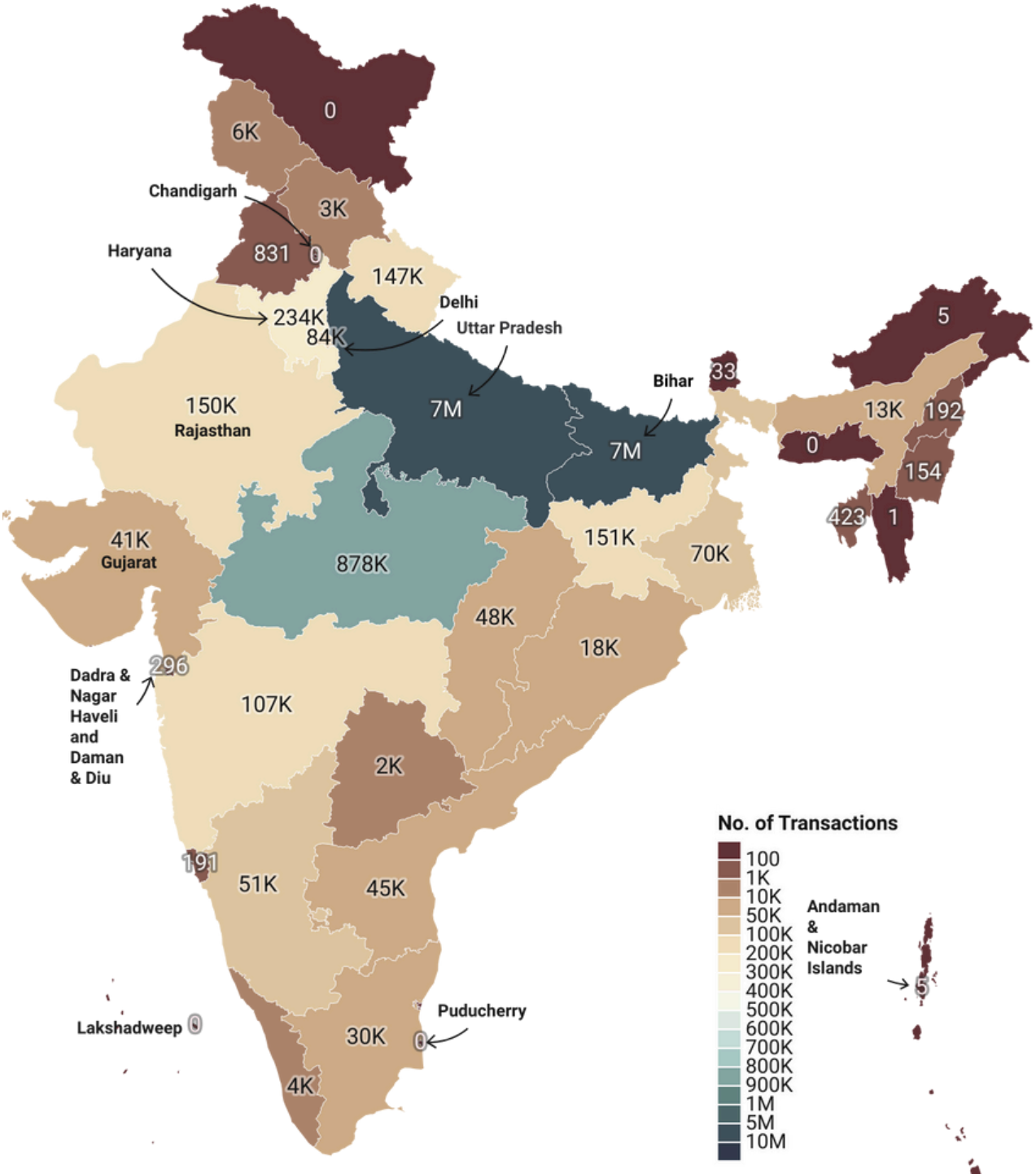

Figure 3. Interstate Portability Transactions under ONORC by Source (Home) State (2019-2024)

2.2.4 Rajasthan Overview: Interstate Portability Transaction Trends (2019-2024)

Interstate transactions under ONORC in Rajasthan have risen steadily each year, from a near-zero baseline through 2020 to its highest recorded monthly volume in December 2024 (23,074). The highest number of transactions here are recorded by migrants from Uttar Pradesh, followed by Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Uttar Pradesh routinely contributes some of the largest blocks of transactions monthly, often over half the volume; for example, over half of interstate transactions recorded in December 2024 were by migrants from UP (12,390). Bihar is the second most prominent contributor, together with UP accounting for over 80% of all monthly transactions. This is in line with the national trend and established migration corridors. Madhya Pradesh, while not as high as UP or Bihar, consistently appears in the 3-4 digit range by 2023-24, reflecting a sizable flow of workers from central India. Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Maharashtra also register monthly transactions, but generally at lower levels. Interestingly, Chhattisgarh has only recorded 1,462 transactions between May 2022 (first appearance) and December 2024 (reaching an all-time high of 125).

There is a consistent prominent seasonal pattern in transactions, with a dip mid-year and peak activity towards the end of the year. Most years show marked surges from September–October through January–February. Monsoon months (June–July) typically see a marked drop, with transactions climbing again in August-September. These trends are consistent with seasonal migration cycles in sectors like brick kilns and the timing of major festivals.

The data thus confirm that the largest shares come from the well-known migration corridors (UP–Rajasthan, Bihar–Rajasthan, MP–Rajasthan), matching broader labour-movement patterns observed in brick kilns, mining, construction, and other sectors. The clear seasonality of portability uptake also suggests that in Rajasthan, the scheme is largely being used by seasonal migrants.

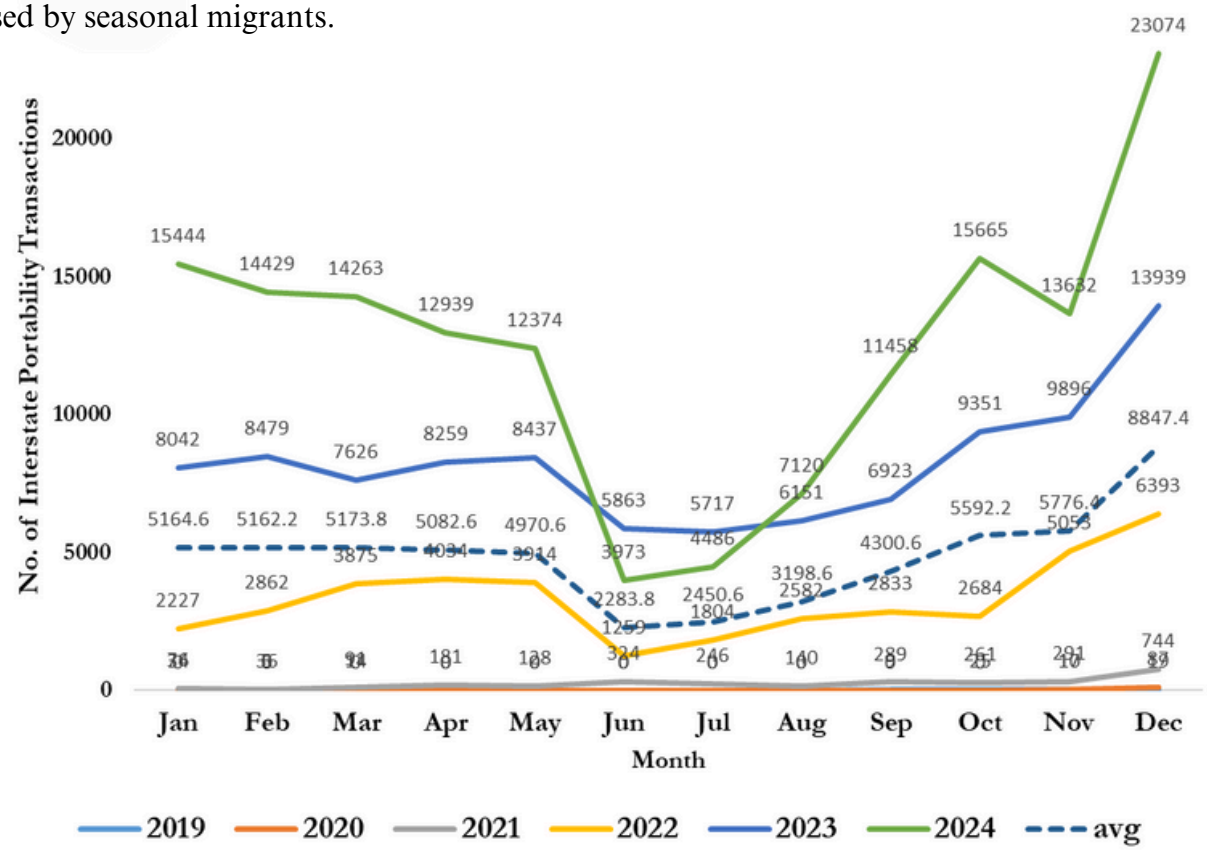

Figure 4. Monthly Interstate Portability Transactions in Rajasthan between 2019 and 2024)

2.2.5 Gujarat Overview: Interstate Portability Transaction Trends (2019-2024)

From a handful of transactions per month in mid-2019, interstate ration usage in Gujarat rose steadily through 2020–21 into thousands per month by 2022, to well over 10,000 monthly transactions in 2023–24, finally culminating in a record 26,443 transactions in December 2024.

Uttar Pradesh consistently shows the largest transaction volumes by late 2023 and 2024 (10,669 in December 2024). Bihar is a close second, frequently posting figures in the 4,000–7,000 range towards the end of each year (peaking at 7,389 in December 2024). Together, UP and Bihar have accounted for 65.5% of all interstate ONORC transactions in Gujarat since June 2020. Madhya Pradesh has generally reported monthly transactions in the 2,000–5,000 bracket after 2022 (reaching 5,659 in December 2024). Other states with moderate totals include Jharkhand and Rajasthan, each in the hundreds to low-thousands by the latter half of 2023–24.

Unlike Rajasthan, Gujarat's transaction data do not reveal a clear mid-year dip or end-of-year spike. The overall pattern is predominantly a sustained, incremental month-by-month increase rather than large, repeating surges or slumps. This may suggest that migrant inflows to Gujarat are relatively stable year-round, or at least less tied to a single seasonal industry (e.g., brick kilns, mining) than in states like Rajasthan. This data may largely reflect uptake by migrant labour from UP, Bihar, and MP in Gujarat's large-scale industries (e.g., textiles, construction, manufacturing). Further investigation may be necessary to understand the extent to which seasonal migrant workers are using ONORC. The survey of migrant brick workers in Rajasthan and Gujarat, detailed in the next chapter, is a first step towards this.

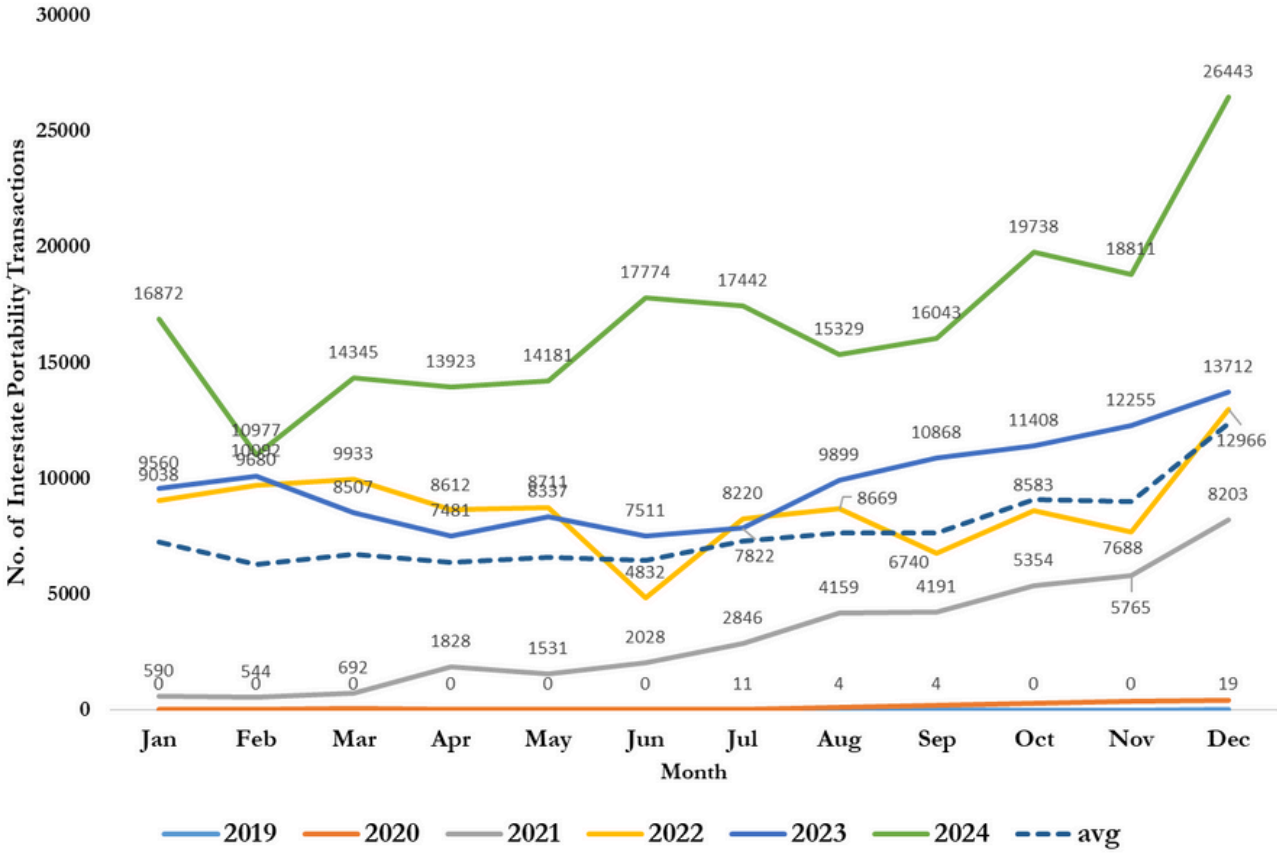

Figure 5. Monthly Interstate Portability Transactions in Rajasthan between 2019 and 2024)

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(24)

ताप्राप्त गृहस्थी राशन कार्ड

राशन कार्ड संख्या :-
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सामाजिक आर्थिक एवं जाति आधारित जनगणना
गृह क्रमांक - C
जिला का नाम / कोड :- Banka/ 23

(वरिष्ठ महिला का नाम)
(गृहस्थी का मुखिया १८ वर्ष या उससे अधिक की महिला होगी। यदि १८ वर्ष से कम उम्र की महिलाएँ हो तो पुरुष गृहस्थी का मुखिया होगा। जैसे ही १८ वर्ष महिला की उम्र होगी वह गृहस्थी की मुखिया हो जायगी।)

2. पति/ पिता का नाम :- / जकरन लेया

3. पेशा :- मजदूरी

4. आवासीय पता :- मोहल्ला / ग्राम :- Tappadih
पंचायत / वार्ड न० :- Naraenpur
प्रखंड / नगर निकाय का नाम :- Barahat

5. लक्षित जन वितरण प्रणाली के दुकानदार का नाम / कोड :-
पंचायत / वार्ड न० :-
प्रखंड / नगर निकाय का नाम :-

6. राशन कार्ड निर्गत की तिथि :-

प्रखंड आपूर्ति पदाधिकारी / आपूर्ति निरीक्षक का नाम एवं हस्ताक्षर (मुहर सहित)

कार्यपालक पदाधिकारी
नगर निगम / नगर परिषद् / नगर पंचायत
प्रखंड विकास पदाधिकारी का हस्ताक्षर (मुहर सहित)

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Chapter 3. Findings from the Field

Rapid Assessment Survey of Migrant Brick Kiln Workers' Experience of ONORC in Rajasthan and Gujarat

The field survey was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the ONORC scheme in ensuring food access for seasonal migrant brick workers in Rajasthan and Gujarat. It focused on awareness, uptake, and barriers to access, capturing the experiences of 1,012 migrant households across key kiln clusters. By documenting ground realities, the survey provides empirical evidence on how ONORC functions for interstate migrant workers and identifies systemic obstacles that hinder its intended impact.

1. Objectives. The purpose of this rapid field survey was to assess the awareness and utilization of the 'One Nation One Ration Card' programme (henceforth ONORC) among seasonal migrant households working in brick kilns across Rajasthan and Gujarat. Specifically, the survey sought to understand the:

- **Levels of awareness** of ONORC among migrant brick worker households in Rajasthan and Gujarat
- **Extent of utilization** of ONORC by migrant brick worker households in the two states
- **Primary barrier**s—logistical, technological, administrative, and cultural—that prevent the migrant households' effective access to ration portability in these states

2. Methodology. The field survey was conducted in two phases to capture migrant workers' experiences with the ONORC programme: (i) in May-June, 2024, at the destination states—Gujarat and Rajasthan—towards the end of the brick production season; (ii) and again in September-October 2024, in the source states of Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The survey team, consisting of experienced labour organizers in Rajasthan and Gujarat, conducted in-person interviews with migrant brick worker households. The structured questionnaire deployed included both close- and open-ended questions to assess awareness and uptake of ration portability under ONORC, as well as to identify barriers to access. For participants who had never heard of the programme, surveyors provided essential information on how to use portability when they migrate again. Additionally, a brief survey was carried out with 30 ration dealers operating Fair Price Shops (FPS) around the brick kilns surveyed in Rajasthan.

3. Sample Size and Composition. The sample included 1,012 migrant brick worker households, of which 70 percent had worked in Rajasthan and 30 percent in Gujarat during 2023–24. Participants were selected purposively, with one adult member surveyed per household. The respondents self-identified as seasonal migrant households, defined as having lived away from their home block (sub-district) for work for at least 60 days in the past year, with at least one member returning home during that period. Because interstate migrants are ONORC's primary intended beneficiaries, the survey aimed for a 3:1 ratio of interstate to intrastate migrant households. After excluding 25 unreliable interviews, the final sample comprised 75 percent interstate and 25 percent intrastate migrant households. Within the intrastate group, 18 percent were interdistrict migrants and 7 percent were intradistrict migrants (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of surveyed households by type of migration (all figures except n in %)

Destination	Interstate	Interdistrict	Intradistrict	n
Rajasthan	72.5	18.6	8.9	705
Gujarat	80.8	16.9	2.3	307
Total	75.0	18.1	6.9	1012

4. Findings

4.1 Migration Profile

Family vs solo migration. Overall, 87 percent of the participants had migrated to the brick kilns along with their families, while the rest were solo migrants. Family migration was more prevalent among the Gujarat participants at 95.7 percent, compared to 83.1 percent among those surveyed in Rajasthan (Fig. 6). This is in line with what is commonly known about the dependence of brick kiln labour on family units - usually including children.

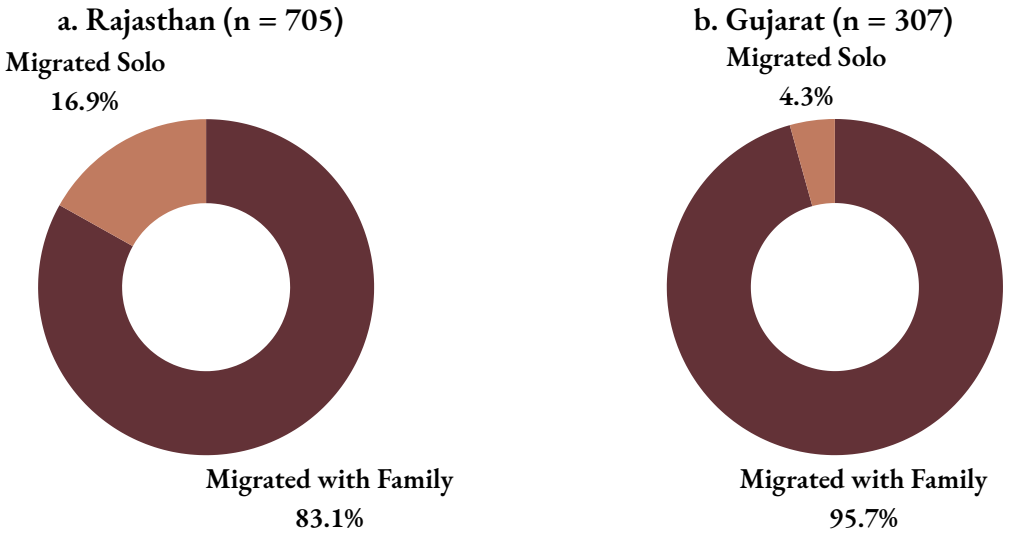


Figure 6. Distribution of family versus solo migrants among surveyed participants in a) Rajasthan; and b) Gujarat

Source State and District. Most households surveyed in Rajasthan originated from Uttar Pradesh (40.3%), followed by Rajasthan itself (27.5%) and Chhattisgarh (25.3%), with smaller numbers from Bihar, Odisha, and Jharkhand. In Gujarat, the largest share also came from Uttar Pradesh (46.9%), followed by Chhattisgarh (29%) and Gujarat (19.2%), with the remainder from Madhya Pradesh (2.9%) and Rajasthan (2.0%) (Table 2).

For Rajasthan, five districts—Chitrakoot, Mahasamund, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, and Jaipur—accounted for over half of all surveyed households. This geographical distribution was even more concentrated for participants surveyed in Gujarat, with more than 82 percent hailing from just five districts: Bilaspur, Dahod, Kasganj, Janjgir-Champa, and Mathura (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of surveyed households by source state and source district (n = 1012)

Destination	Source States	% of HH	Source Districts	% of HH
Rajasthan n=705	Uttar Pradesh	40.3	Mahasamund (CG)	15.1
	Rajasthan	27.5	Chitrakoot (UP)	13.4
	Chhattisgarh	25.3	Bareilly (UP)	9.5
	Bihar	6.5	Shahjahanpur (UP)	8.9
	Odisha	0.3	Jaipur (RJ)	8.0
	Jharkhand	0.1	Others	45.1
Gujarat n=307	Uttar Pradesh	46.9	Kasganj (UP)	33.2
	Chhattisgarh	29.0	Bilaspur (CG)	22.1
	Gujarat	19.2	Dahod (GJ)	18.3
	Madhya Pradesh	2.9	Janjgir-Champa (CG)	4.3
	Rajasthan	2.0	Mathura (UP)	4.3
			Others	17.9

4.2 Awareness and Uptake of ONORC

By migration type. Overall, 70.8 percent of participating households were aware of ration portability (Table 3). In Rajasthan, 88.6 percent reported basic awareness of ONORC's provisions, with intradistrict migrants showing the highest awareness at 98.4 percent. Conversely, in Gujarat, only 30.0 percent of households were aware of ration portability, although interstate migrants reported slightly higher awareness (35.9%) than other groups.

Table 3. Rate of awareness of ONORC by migration type (all figures except n in %)

Destination	Interstate		Interdistrict		Intradistrict		All Types	
	% HH	*n*	*% HH*	*n*	*% HH*	*n*	*% HH*	*n*
Rajasthan	87.6	511	87.0	131	98.4	63	88.6	705
Gujarat	35.9	248	3.8	52	14.3	7	30.0	307
Total	70.7	759	63.4	183	90.0	70	70.8	1012

Among the 717 households aware of ONORC, only about half (50.5%) had actually tried to use ration portability (Table 4). 51.1 percent of portability-aware households in Rajasthan and 46.7 percent in Gujarat reporting an effort to access the scheme.

Table 4. ONORC access attempt rate by migration type (all figures except n in %)

Destination	Interstate		Interdistrict		Intradistrict		All Types	
	% HH	*n*	*% HH*	*n*	*% HH*	*n*	*% HH*	*n*
Rajasthan	55.3	449	43.9	114	33.9	62	51.1	625
Gujarat	44.9	89	100.0	2	100	1	46.7	92
Total	56.0	538	44.8	116	34.9	63	50.5	717

By source state. Participants from Uttar Pradesh working in Rajasthan reported the highest awareness rate in the sample, at 91.9 percent, followed by workers from Rajasthan (90.7%),

Chhattisgarh (82.6%), and Bihar (87.0%) (Table 5). In Gujarat, workers from Chhattisgarh reported the highest awareness levels at 64.0 percent. Interstate migrants from Bihar (67.5%) and UP (60.9%) in Rajasthan reported the highest attempt rates. In both states, participants from Chhattisgarh were the least likely to have tried to use ration portability.

Table 5. ONORC awareness and attempt rates by source state (n = 1012)

Dest.	Source State	Awareness Rate (% HH)	No. of HH	Attempt Rate (% HH)	No. of HH
RJ	Uttar Pradesh	91.9	284	60.9	261
	Rajasthan	90.7	194	40.3	176
	Chhattisgarh	82.6	178	41.1	146
	Bihar	87.0	46	67.5	40
	Odisha	50.0	2	100.0	1
	Jharkhand	100.0	1	100.0	1
	Subtotal	**88.6**	**705**	**51.1**	**625**
GJ	Uttar Pradesh	38.9	144	46.4	56
	Chhattisgarh	64.0	89	43.8	32
	Gujarat	5.1	59	100.0	3
	Madhya Pradesh	0	9	0	0
	Rajasthan	16.7	6	0	1
	Subtotal	**30.0**	**307**	**46.7**	**92**

Did not try to access ONORC. 355 households did not try to use ration portability, despite being aware of the scheme (Table 6). Participants shared a number of key reasons for this, the most frequently cited being that family members who had not migrated to the brick kiln were collecting their entitlement back home. The second most common reason was not possessing a ration card at all, which kept households from trying to use the scheme.

Table 6. Participants' reasons for not trying to access ONORC (all figures except n in %)

Reason for not seeking PDS rations at destination	Rajasthan		Gujarat		Total	
	Interstate (n=201)	Intrastate (n=105)	Interstate (n=49)	Intrastate (n=0)	Interstate (n=250)	Intrastate (n=105)
"Family members back home are picking up our quota of foodgrains"	67.7	93.3	59.1	0	66.0	93.3
"No ration card"	28.4	7.6	36.7	0	30.0	7.6
"Others here who tried were unsuccessful"	6.0	0	0	0	4.8	0
"We don't eat the grains provided here"	1.0	0	2.4	0	1.2	0
"We don't know when the shop opens"	0.5	0	0	0	0.4	0
"We did not bring our ration card here"	0	0	2.0	0	0.4	0

4.3 Successful Attempts

Of the 362 households that reported having tried to access portability, 212 (58.6%) had received rations under ONORC at least once over the previous season (Table 7). This rate was a little over half in Rajasthan at 56.4 percent, and higher in Gujarat at 74.7 percent.

Table 7. Proportion of households able to collect ration at destination (all figures except n in %)

Destination	Interstate		Interdistrict		Intradistrict		All Types	
	% HH	*n*	*% HH*	*n*	*% HH*	*n*	*% HH*	*n*
Rajasthan	59.3	248	60.0	50	14.3	21	56.4	319
Gujarat	75.3	40	50.0	2	100.0	1	74.7	43
Total	61.5	288	59.6	52	18.2	22	58.6	362

4.4 Barriers to Access

Could not access ONORC. 41.4 percent of the 362 households that tried to seek ration were unable to. Respondents shared multiple challenges, the most common being the FPS dealer denying service to migrants outright, followed by not enough foodgrain stock at the FPS for migrants, and household/entitlement data not showing up on the dealer's device (Table 8).

Table 8. Participants' reasons for being unable to access ONORC (all figures except n in %)

Reason for not being able to use ration portability	Rajasthan		Gujarat		Total	
	Interstate (n=101)	Intrastate (n=38)	Interstate (n=10)	Intrastate (n=1)	Interstate (n=111)	Intrastate (n=39)
Dealer denies service	53.5	68.4	50.0	100.0	53.2	69.2
Local FPS does not have stock for migrants	27.7	47.4	0	0	25.2	46.2
Technical issues with ePOS device	40.6	39.5	0	0	36.9	38.5
Authentication failure/fingerprint does not match	38.6	23.7	20.0	0	36.9	23.1
Multiple visits made but FPS always closed, no fixed timings	41.6	15.8	40.0	0	41.4	15.4
Household details don't show up on portal	56.4	47.4	20.0	0	53.1	46.2
Issue with ration card	2.0	2.6	0	0	1.8	2.6
Family members had collected ration back home in the same month	1.0	0	0	0	0.9	0

Challenges shared by those who availed rations under ONORC. Participants who did use ration portability successfully in the past season reported a number of barriers that hindered access (Table 9). Of the 212 households that did collect rations, about one-fifth (20.1%) said they did not face any ongoing issues during this process. The majority of respondents shared multiple challenges, including dealers frequently refusing service, technical failures, and mismatched dietary preferences.

Table 9. Challenges faced by those collecting rations at destination (all figures except n in %)

Challenges shared by those who were able to access ONORC	Rajasthan		Gujarat		Total	
	Interstate (n=145)	Intrastate (n=33)	Interstate (n=12)	Intrastate (n=2)	Interstate (n=157)	Intrastate (n=35)
Dealer often refuses to provide service citing no stock for migrants	14.5	24.2	0	0	13.4	22.9
Technical issues with ePOS machine/portal	10.3	30.3	0	0	1.3	28.6
Foodgrains available at destination don't match our dietary preferences	40.0	0	50.0	0	40.8	0
Do not receive our full entitlement of foodgrains	13.8	18.2	33.3	50.0	15.3	0.2
Have to make multiple visits to the FPS to get ration; FPS is always closed when we visit, no fixed dates or times	60.0	9.1	100.0	50.0	63.1	11.43
Fingerprint not recognized/does not match	20.0	30.3	0	0	18.5	28.6
Issues due to not having brought ration card	0	0	0	50.0	0	2.9
Only received once despite continued efforts	3.5	3.0	0	0	3.2	2.9
No major issue faced	12.4	9.1	0	0	11.5	8.6

4.4 Ration Dealers' Experiences

A survey of 30 Fair Price Shop (FPS) dealers was undertaken in three districts of Rajasthan —Jaipur, Ajmer, and Bhilwara—to understand their perspectives on implementing the ONORC scheme. The selected respondents were located near brick kilns where the union has been actively engaging with workers and FPS owners to operationalize the scheme. Given the

Given the small sample, the findings are not representative of all FPS dealers in these districts.

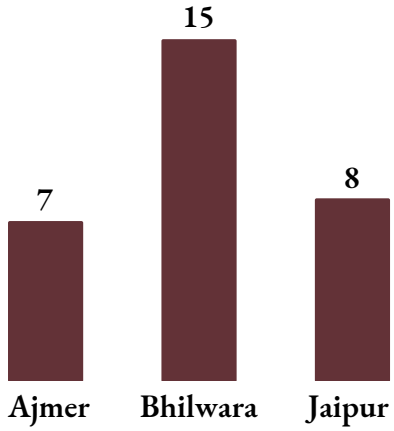


Figure 7. Distribution of surveyed FPS dealers by district (n=30)

Awareness and linkage. 29 of 30 FPS dealers surveyed were aware of the portability scheme, and 28 of these reported actively distributing rations under ONORC. Only one dealer was unaware of the scheme, and another dealer, although aware, did not distribute rations to migrants.

Migrant workers served by FPS. The number of workers who accessed rations through ONORC varied significantly across the surveyed FPS dealers (Fig. 8). On average, 59 migrant workers reportedly approached these shop. Of these, roughly 43—about three-quarters—were able to receive rations successfully. Over half, or about 57%, had served less than 50 migrant workers, 10% had served between 50 and 100 workers, and 33% had served 100 workers or more.

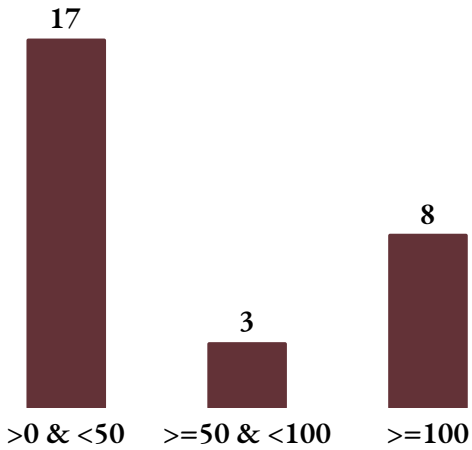


Figure 8. Number of migrant workers served by surveyed FPS Dealers (n=29)

Challenges faced by FPS dealers. When asked about problems they encountered while implementing the ONORC, 21.4 percent of the 28 dealers reported facing no issues. The remaining 22 dealers named multiple challenges (Fig. 9). The most common challenge reported was lack of sufficient stock allocated for migrant workers (42.9%), followed by malfunctioning electronic e-PoS machines (28.6%), and fingerprint mismatches (21.4%).

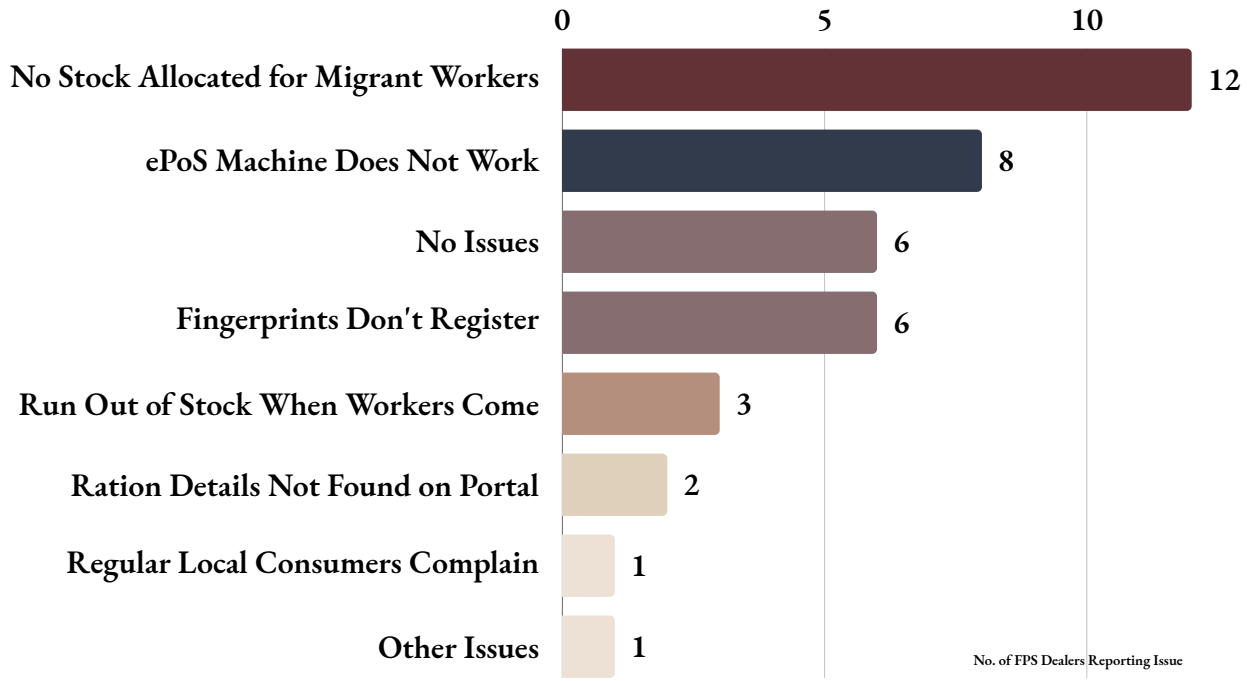


Figure 9. Challenges related to ONORC shared by surveyed FPS Dealers (n=28)

FPS Dealers' Suggestions. Dealers were asked for their suggestions for strengthening ONORC implementation (Fig. 10). Two key recommendations emerged: ensuring the portal remains functional at all times (11 mentions) and maintaining sufficient stock for migrant workers (8 mentions). Others highlighted the need to improve digital linkage and card availability, address fingerprint mismatch issues, and continue building on the "good scheme" aspects of ONORC.

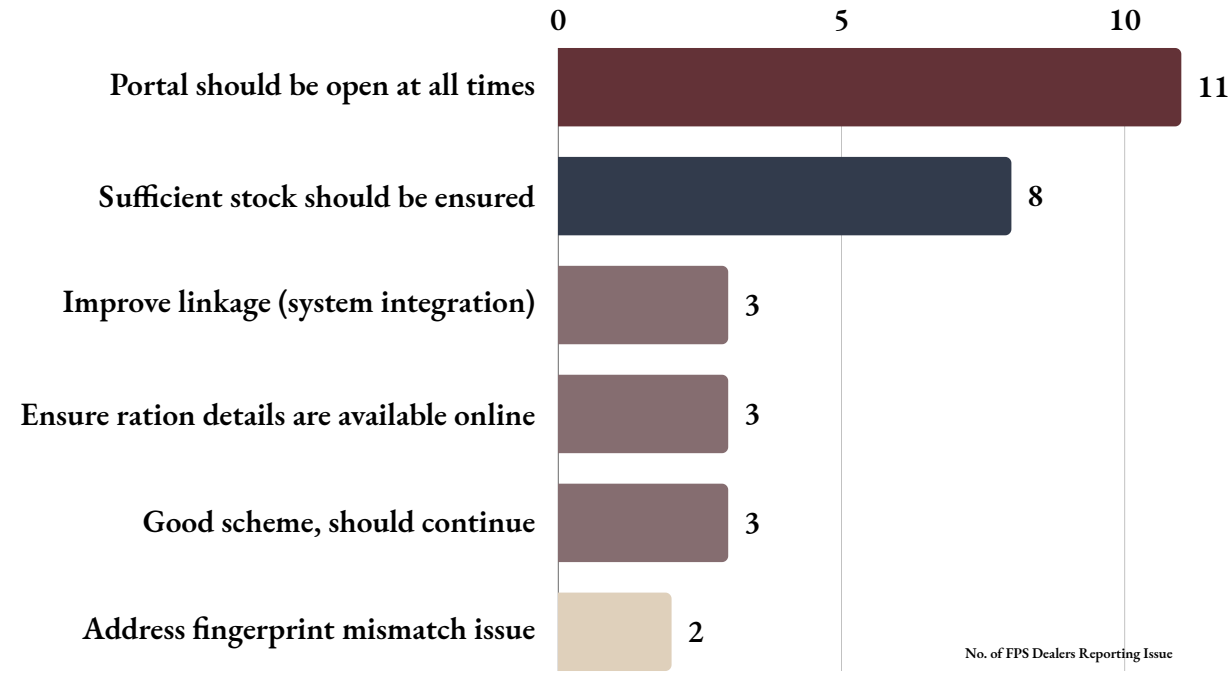


Figure 10. Suggestions related to ONORC shared by surveyed FPS Dealers (n=28)

5. Discussion

5.1 Awareness and Uptake

The findings from this rapid assessment survey reveal significant variations in awareness and uptake of the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme among migrant brick workers in Rajasthan and Gujarat. The high overall awareness rate of 70.8% suggests that the ONORC scheme has reached a majority of migrant workers, particularly in Rajasthan, where nearly 88.6% of surveyed households reported being aware of the scheme. This contrasts sharply with Gujarat, where awareness was significantly lower at 30.0%. Much of the disparity between these two groups can be attributed to extensive awareness-raising efforts in brick kilns in Rajasthan driven by the Rajasthan Pradesh Int Bhatta Mazdoor Union (RPIBMU) over the past two years, which have likely contributed to high levels of awareness observed. On the other hand, the lack of initial information dissemination in Gujarat suggests that the state's outreach efforts have been insufficient. As stated earlier, the sample is not representative of the migrant brick worker population in these two states. While the findings show that collectivization and organizing work can go a long way in disseminating critical information and linking workers to social entitlements, it is clear that a large segment of the migrant brick worker population remains untouched by the scheme's benefits due to lack of awareness of key features.

The data also uncovers a critical issue: awareness does not necessarily translate into action. Despite 88.6% of the surveyed households in Rajasthan being aware of the scheme, only 51.1% of those who were aware actually attempted to use ration portability. This indicates a significant drop-off between awareness and utilization, and points to potential barriers that keep informed households from taking advantage of portability. In Gujarat, although awareness was low at 30.0%, nearly half of those aware (46.7%) did attempt to access foodgrains under ONORC. The primary barriers to uptake seem to be related to systemic issues rather than a lack of information. These include logistical and technical challenges such as not having a working ration card, difficulty navigating e-POS systems, not being aware of the ration-splitting feature, and a general lack of trust in the system due to previous negative experiences shared by others in the community. Cultural and dietary mismatches also play a role, as some respondents expressed reluctance to collect food grains that do not align with their usual diets, which in this case typically meant needing rice instead of the wheat provided at their nearby FPS.

Variations by source state. The findings by source state reveal important insights into regional variations in effectiveness of the scheme. Among interstate migrants surveyed in Rajasthan, migrant workers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar reported the highest levels of awareness at 91.9% and 87.0% respective. 60.9% and 67.5% respectively of workers from these states who were aware of the scheme attempted to access it, reporting the highest conversion from awareness to action. This finding is in line with nationwide transaction data, which shows that workers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar accounted for the vast majority of all interstate portability transactions as of December 2024. Conversely, respondents from Chhattisgarh, despite reporting a high awareness rate of 82.6%, showed a significantly lower uptake at only 41.1%, which is also in line with national trends.

To emphasize the last point, awareness of the scheme alone does not ensure actual uptake. In Gujarat, awareness levels were generally low across all source states, with the highest being among respondents from Chhattisgarh at 64.0%. Again, uptake for these workers remained limited at 43.8%. The overall significant drop from awareness to uptake for families from Chhattisgarh may point to more nuanced regional, cultural, dietary factors as well.

Reasons for not attempting to access ONORC. The primary reasons cited by respondents for not attempting to access rations under ONORC reflect both logistical challenges and personal preferences:

- **Family Members Already Collecting Rations at Home:** This was the most frequently cited reason across all categories. In Rajasthan, 67.7% of interstate migrants and a significant 93.3% of intrastate migrants reported that their family members were collecting their ration quotas at their home locations. In Gujarat, this reason was stated by 59.1% of interstate migrants. The general lack of awareness of ration-splitting along with dietary preferences and mistrust of the system may be contributing factors.
- **Lack of a Working Ration Card:** 28.4% and 36.7% of interstate migrants in Rajasthan and Gujarat respectively reported not having an active ration card at all. Thus a significant proportion of eligible households remains excluded from the public distribution system due to technopolitical bureaucratic processes.
- **Community experiences of unsuccessful attempts, dietary mismatches, and lack of information on FPS ration distribution schedules** were also reported as factors that kept workers from trying to collect their entitlement at the destination.

5.2. Success Rates

The proportion of households that were able to collect rations at the destination varied significantly by migration type and state. Overall, 58.6% of households that attempted to access portability were successful. This figure stood at 56.4% for participants surveyed in Rajasthan. In contrast, Gujarat saw a higher overall success rate of 74.7%, although the smaller group size does not allow for credible comparison.

Interstate migrant respondents generally fared better in both states, with 75.3% of these participants in Gujarat and 59.3% in Rajasthan being able to access portability over the previous season. Surprisingly, intradistrict migrants in Rajasthan had the lowest success rate at 14.3%, possibly indicating severe barriers to access, but this needs further exploration.

5.3 Barriers to Access

Challenges reported by respondents who could not access ONORC. The issues reported by respondents who attempted but were unable to access rations under ONORC reveals distinct challenges across migration types and source states, in line with findings from other studies. In Rajasthan, the most frequently reported issue among interstate migrants (n=101) was **dealer refusal to provide ration to migrants**, affecting over half (53.5%) of respondents. **Lack of adequate stock at the FPS** was another major supply-side issue reported, affecting 27.7% and 47.4% of interstate and intrastate households respectively. Technical issues presented a major barrier again, with e-POS machine, IMPDS portal, and authentication

failures affecting a significant proportion of both interstate and intrastate migrants.

The Gujarat subgroup reported the same issues, albeit in smaller absolute numbers, reflecting the trends found in Rajasthan and in the literature. Additionally, 41.4% of all participants who remained excluded from the scheme reported having to make multiple attempts and losing days/hours of work to visit the nearby FPS, only to find it closed, highlighting a lack of reliable service hours and information dissemination as a critical access barrier.

Challenges reported by those able to access ONORC. Logistical and systemic challenges persisted even for households that did manage to access the scheme. In Rajasthan, the majority of interstate migrant workers (60.0%) reported needing to make multiple visits to the FPS due to inconsistent operating days and hours. This issue was less pronounced among intradistrict migrants (9.1%), suggesting that operational issues may disproportionately affect interstate migrants. All 12 interstate migrants in the Gujarat subgroup also reported this challenge. Another ongoing hurdle reported in Rajasthan was the FPS dealer frequently denying service to migrants, saying no stock was supplied or left for them. 40.0% and 50.0% of interstate migrant respondents in Rajasthan and Gujarat respectively noted that the foodgrains available at the destination did not match their traditional dietary preferences.

Technical issues also persisted among those who received rations at their respective destination locations. In Rajasthan, 20.0% of interstate and 30.3% of intrastate migrants reported fingerprint recognition issues, while 10.3% interstate and 30.3% intrastate migrants shared issues with the e-POS machine and portal. Other issues reported by participants in both states included not receiving full foodgrain entitlement, challenges at the FPS due to not having brought a physical copy of the ration card along, and not being able to access ration again after the first successful attempt. Overall, 11.5% of interstate and 8.6% of intrastate migrants in this group reported facing no major issues.

The challenges reported by the respondents who managed to use ration portability indicate that while ONORC is functional for some, it is far from seamless. Issues such as dealer awareness and discretion, inconsistent FPS operations, technological failures, logistical challenges, and dietary mismatches, among others, highlight the need for significant operational reforms and improved alignment of the public distribution system with the actual realities and needs of migrant populations.

5.4 FPS Dealers' Perspectives.

The survey of FPS dealers, while not representative, provides useful insights into their perspective and experience. The dealers highlighted several operational challenges they face in implementing ONORC, including insufficient stock, technical issues with e-POS systems, and authentication failures, which also directly impact migrant workers' access to their entitlements. However, they generally expressed satisfaction with the potential of the scheme. One dealer shared that ONORC was good for their business, as an increase in uptake would increase their earnings from commissions. Their key recommendations included ensuring portal availability 24x7 and supply of adequate stock for migrant clientele.

Chapter 4. In their Words

Accounts of Women Brick Workers' Experiences and Struggles

This chapter documents the lived realities of five women workers who migrate seasonally with their families to brick kilns in Rajasthan. Through their voices, insight is gained into the precarious nature of their migration, the ways in which they navigate everyday survival, and the impact of the ONORC on their lives. While the quantitative survey findings and review of evidence from other sources provide an overview of systemic patterns, these narrative accounts offer a closer perspective, revealing how the programme functions in practice, the conditions under which these workers access essential entitlements, and the burdens they carry both at home and at work. Informed consent was obtained from all participants for the use of their names, photographs, and narratives. However, for the purposes of this report, and in consultation with the participants, pseudonyms have been used in place of real names and certain identifying details have been left out.

The accounts narrated by the women suggest that ONORC has indeed provided them and their families **some degree of food support and financial relief,** however limited, at the destination. While their specific experiences have all varied, all five women reported that access to the scheme helped reduce household expenses slightly. For most, this meant **savings of ₹500–₹850 a month**. However, **inadequate quantity, quality, and variety** remain major concerns. All five women explained that the monthly wheat entitlement in Rajasthan is insufficient, and does not match the quantity and variety of rations they receive at home. Some struggled with the poor quality. **Persistent technical and logistical hurdles** make collection difficult, unpredictable, and time-consuming. All of them shared how they often have to walk long distances each way, only to be turned away due to **server failures, stock shortages, or biometric mismatches**. Fingerprints worn down by years of molding bricks often fail to register, and dealers do not use alternative verification methods, forcing workers to return empty-handed and lose work hours. **Local residents are prioritized** over migrants, further delaying access. **Without a fixed distribution schedule**, workers rely on **informal information channels** to know when the shop is open. The unpredictability of the system means workers must **adjust their work around ration collection**, sometimes working late into the night to make up for lost hours.

None of the women learned about the scheme through official sources. No SMS alerts, no government outreach, no structured information reached them. Instead, they discovered the scheme through word of mouth—village leaders, labour organizers, and NGO facilitators. Each needed direct intervention from the union or CSO to access their scheme. Even today, they remain unaware of any grievance redressal mechanisms. When ration is denied, delayed, or reduced, they have no formal channel to challenge it. Their right to food remains conditional rather than guaranteed, contingent on navigating bureaucratic control, technological failures, and discretionary power, reinforcing their status not as rights-holders, but as beneficiaries of an opaque system. Still, despite these barriers, they continue to assert their right to food—persisting, demanding, and refusing to be ignored.

I. Meera
Mahasamund, Chhattisgarh to Ajmer, Rajasthan

For the last 17 years, 34-year-old Meera from Ankori village in Mahasamund, Chhattisgarh, has been migrating with her family to brick kilns in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Back home, Meera and her husband struggled to find stable work together. Their financial struggles deepened after the untimely death of two of their sons, whose medical treatment had left them in heavy debt: "Earlier, our family did not migrate. But we lost our sons, and had to repay the loans we took to cover their treatment. So we took *peshgi* (advance) and left to do *thapai* work at the brick kilns," Meera explains. Ever since, the family has relied on these advances to survive crises: "A couple of years ago, I suffered from a stroke, and we took *peshgi* from this kiln to pay my medical bills. We came back to pay off our debt." The family has been coming to this brick kiln in Ajmer since 2021.

Although migration now seems routine, the early years were difficult. "We felt helpless trying to adjust to this life," she shares, "Now, we know more, and have become used to it." Each monsoon, Meera and her husband together make the decision on where to migrate. She explains why stopped going to Uttar Pradesh: "We don't like the weather there, the housing conditions are worse, and the payment system at the brick kilns is unfair. We prefer coming to Rajasthan now." They still worry about their children's education. "Because we don't have money, we can't leave them at home, they have to drop out of school." Each season, they miss the relatives and friends they leave behind. Occasionally, unexpected emergencies at home mean they have to return midway through the season.

Life at the kiln. Meera's day starts at 5 a.m. She wakes up, makes tea, cleans their living space, fetches drinking water, and prepares food. "My husband sometimes helps with cooking vegetables, but my daughter assists me with all the household chores. My son does not help at home." Once household work is done, Meera begins her long hours of brick-making. "My husband prepares the clay. I start preparing bricks—mixing clay and shaping the bricks. From 9 in the morning to 5 or 6 in the evening, I shape bricks, arrange them in rows, and set them aside to dry. Then I stack the dry bricks."

Together, Meera, her husband, and her son produce 3,500 bricks a day. The family receives a *kharchi* of ₹4,000 every ten days, part of which is carefully spent on essential food items: "With this money, we purchase rice, tea leaves, sugar, milk, vegetables, pulses, and other necessities. The wheat we get from the ration shop saves us about Rs. 720 a month, so we have more to spend on other food."

All four family members are listed on their yellow ration card. Before the state elections in Chhattisgarh, she explains, the villagers were encouraged by the winning candidate to have their ration cards ready. Using her ration card, Meera received ₹1,000 every month under the 'Mahatari Vandan Yojana' - a scheme for married women in Chhattisgarh that claims to support their health, nutrition, and financial independence.

Accessing ration through ONORC. Meera first learned about the scheme three years ago from the village sarpanch (head) in Chhattisgarh. She started using the scheme after migrating to Rajasthan, with some help: "When we came here, the union and NGO here helped us register online through their mobile phones. For the first time, with their support, we were able to go to Ghooghra and collect our ration."

Although Meera's husband owns a smartphone with internet access, they have never received any official communication about ONORC. She does recall hearing about the scheme once in a speech by Prime Minister Modi.

Challenges. While ONORC has provided some relief to the family, several challenges persist. The first is the mismatch in entitlements between different states: "When we come here, we only get 20 kg of wheat. But in Chhattisgarh, we receive 35 kg of rice, 1 kg of salt, 1 kg of sugar, and 1 kg of pulses. 20 kg of wheat is not enough even for a small family." The quality is also inadequate: "The wheat available here is not clean. At home, the rice and other items are of good quality. And this wheat is not enough for pregnant and breastfeeding women." The family has also had to change their food habits: "Here we eat roti in one meal, and rice in another. At home, we only ate rice. But after migrating, we have learned to eat roti."

The commute to the FPS is another issue. The nearest ration shop is 4 km away, and Meera and her husband walk 45 minutes each way to collect their entitlement. The long journey disrupts their work, but they have no other option. "I can go alone to the shop, but carrying 20 kg of wheat on the walk back to the kiln is hard," she shares, "And my husband feels that since we are migrants, it is better to avoid any problems with locals, so we both go together."

At the shop, they have to wait long hours: "The ration dealer first prepares a slip, then gives the ration. Due to the crowd, we have to wait for a long time. The local villagers say, 'Give us the ration first,' so the dealer serves them first. After that, we workers get the ration." She adds that, beyond this, she does not feel discriminated against by the dealer: "His behaviour is okay. He lets us sit when the line is long, and if we ask, gives us water to drink."

Technical failures at the dealer's end present a significant barrier to access. "My husband's fingerprint never registers on the machine, because of our work," she explains. "My fingerprint usually works, but when it doesn't, the dealer does not send any OTP or share any other way for verification. We have to go again the next day." On other occasions, the server is down, forcing them to return empty-handed, wasting an entire day that could have been spent working.

Because there is no fixed information about ration distribution dates, Meera and other workers rely on informal word-of-mouth updates to know when the shop will be open: "Recently, a new fixed date—the 15th of every month—was set for distributing ration to migrant workers," she shares. The dealer has also been given their mobile numbers to notify them in advance. But it remains to be seen whether this system will be followed.

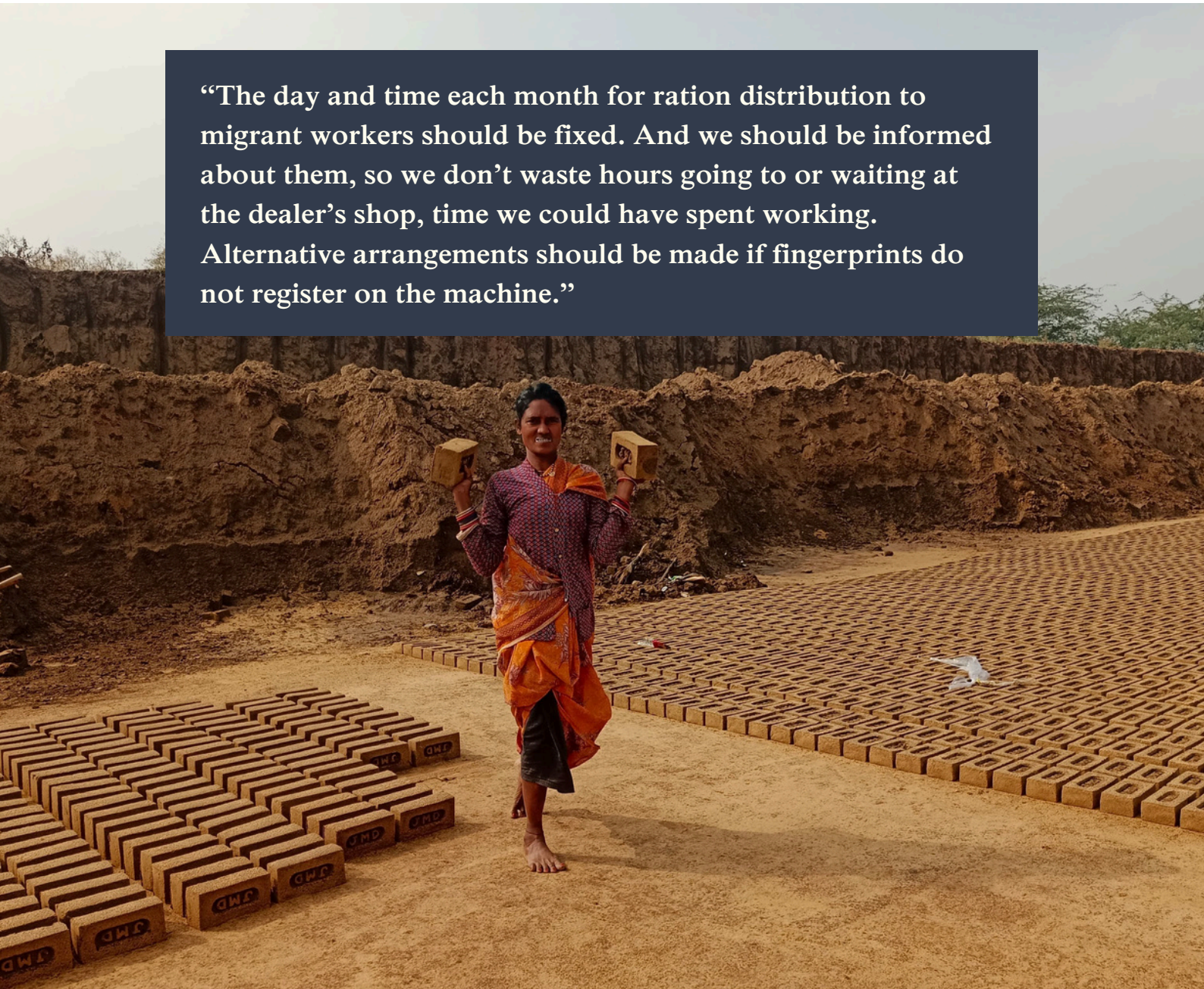
Delays in collecting ration come at a cost for the family. "We have to work late into the night on returning, so the prepared wet clay doesn't go to waste," she shares. The family has never heard of the 'Mera Ration' app, and doesn't know of any helpline numbers for registering grievances in either state. But Meera recalls filing a complaint once in Chhattisgarh: "Back home, there was one occasion when the people in my village didn't receive our ration. All of us went from our village to the district office, along with people from 10-12 nearby villages, to file a complaint."

Debt and Repayments. Meera's husband manages the family's money. A large portion of their *kharchi* goes towards clearing their debt: "He gives me ₹200 for personal expenses and necessities. Then, he gives ₹100 to the children. The remaining money is spent on essential household items and loan repayment installments." This season, they are working to pay off a loan taken to purchase farmland in their village. She explains: "We took a loan of ₹1 lakh from a women's self-help group. After covering necessary expenses here, we send Rs. 5,540 every month to our village to cover our payment installment." Meera played a key role in securing these funds and fought to register the land in her own name: "With this loan and the *peshgi* from the brick kiln, we bought the farmland we wanted. I insisted that the land should be in my name. I even left the house for my maternal home when my husband did not agree. He eventually gave in, convinced me to return and registered the land in my name."

Access to Healthcare. For Meera and her fellow workers, accessing medical care while living at the kiln is difficult. When she falls ill, her only option is a government hospital, but she finds the commute impractical. "Recently, I suffered a stroke. The government hospital is 3 km away, and I have to leave work to go there. Even reaching the hospital is a challenge, as there is no transportation available from the kiln." The workers have to manage on their own, relying on private transport at high costs. Even when they do manage to get treated at the government hospital, "the medicines provided there do not work as well," she shares. Meera and the other workers to turn private doctors instead: "We call a private doctor because it is easier. When we don't have money, we inform the *munim*, who calls this doctor. The expense is added to our tab."

Community and solidarity. At the kiln, an informal group for women workers has been facilitated by the local NGO, where they discuss and address their problems collectively: "We listen to each other's problems, understand them, and find solutions together." The women also help each other manage day-to-day crises. When ration collection takes longer than expected, neighbouring women and adolescent girls at the kiln help the family prepare meals and with other chores. They also discuss ration-related issues with each other.

Meera's Suggestions for ONORC. Meera emphasizes her right to food: "Receiving ration is our right. We should get sufficient ration. A poor family cannot survive on 20 kg of wheat. Each family should get grains based on the number of members." She adds that ration entitlements at the destination should home-state entitlements: "Instead of 20 kg, we should receive 35 kg of wheat or 35 kg of rice, just like in Chhattisgarh. We should also get rice, chana, salt, and sugar here. Pulses should also be included in the ration." She stresses that "if a family has pregnant or breastfeeding women, they should receive additional rations." Finally, she urges the government to resolve technical and logistical issues that prevent the families from accessing their entitlements.



"The day and time each month for ration distribution to migrant workers should be fixed. And we should be informed about them, so we don't waste hours going to or waiting at the dealer's shop, time we could have spent working. Alternative arrangements should be made if fingerprints do not register on the machine."

II. Mamta
Banka, Bihar to Bhilwara, Rajasthan

Mamta Devi, a 40-year-old *thapai* worker from **Odhara village in Banka District, Bihar**, has been migrating to the same brick kiln in **Mandal, Bhilwara** for the last **eight years**. She, her husband, son, and daughter-in-law make the 1,600-kilometer journey every year in search of work: "We **prefer life in our village** in Banka, but there is **no work** there. We have no choice —we have to **migrate to survive.**"

Each year, they travel by train to Bhilwara, **crammed into the unreserved general compartment** with hundreds of other workers. The journey is long and grueling: "We travel with our children and luggage, squeezed into a space where there's barely room to stand. The toilets are filthy, and it gets unbearably crowded." This year, Mamta traveled alone first, with her husband arriving later. She describes the particular struggles women face: "Last time, a woman gave birth right there in the general coach. It caused huge difficulties. She is now working at a nearby brick kiln. The kiln owner heard about how hard our journeys are." But beyond the physical hardship, **there is also fear.** At the railway station, she recalls a troubling encounter: "The police or station master - I am not sure which - stopped us and demanded, 'Which kiln are you going to? Give us your *bhatta malik's* (kiln owner's) number.' They told us, 'It's too crowded, you don't have a reservation—let us talk to your *malik*.' We got scared. We worried something else might happen, so we didn't give them his number." These experiences have made Mamta rethink how she and her fellow workers travel: "Travel is a big problem. Next time, **I will tell the kiln owner to arrange reserved seats** for me and the others, so we won't have to go through this. The journey is so hard, and sometimes we fall sick, so we always carry medicines with us."

Once at the kiln, Mamta and her family stay for 8–9 months, typically working **12 to 13 hours a day for 25–26 days** a month. If it rains for three to four days consecutively, brick-making halts entirely. Their daily **schedule shifts with the seasons**: "Right now, in winter, we start around 7 or 8 in the morning and finish by 6 or 7 in the evening. In summer, I sometimes begin at 2 in the night because the heat makes molding bricks unbearable during the day." Sickness offers no real respite: "If I get sick, I rest—but I don't like my husband working alone. Sometimes I take medicine and keep going; other times, when it gets too bad, I have to stop." At home, **domestic responsibilities are divided among family members**: "My husband brings wood. I do the cooking. My daughter-in-law and I handle the rest of the household chores together."

Learning about ONORC. Mamta first heard about the ration portability scheme in 2021, from a **village elder** back home in Odhara. But even after the scheme was implemented nationwide, she could not find information on how to access it in Bhilwara. With **no communication from the government** at any level, they relied on **informal channels**: "We had heard that wherever you work, you can collect ration there. But at first, it wasn't happening. When we asked around here, they told us, 'You'll only get it in your home village.'" Things changed after the NGO intervened in late 2022: "After she spoke to the dealer, we finally started getting something here."

Dealer exploiting system. In reality, getting ration has been far from easy. Mamta usually **walks to the ration shop**, accompanied by two to four other women. But instead of receiving wheat, they are often **handed cash**. She explains how the system has shifted over time: "Sometimes, instead of giving us wheat, they give us money instead. **Some families don't want wheat** at all. They say, 'Where will we find a mill to grind it? It's easier to buy flour directly.' I actually want the wheat, but **everyone else takes money, so I do too.** I got wheat a few times at first, and it was of good quality. But this past year, it's just been cash." The families from Bihar also prefer rice over wheat, and use this cash to buy rice in the open market.

Even when Mamta and some other families insist on collecting their wheat, the **dealer always has an excuse** ready: "He tells us, 'No stock,' or 'You're staying far away; you won't want to carry it; just take the money.' In those situations, we have **no choice but to accept the cash**." The dealer in question enter their details on the ePOS machine and gets their fingerprint authenticated, but **keep the workers' quota of wheat for himself.** He even **pressures them into buying goods from his brother's shop**: "He asks for our fingerprint and then says, 'take clothes or utensils, otherwise I won't give you ration or money.' Sometimes he **claims our fingerprint didn't register.** But we can't tell if he's lying. **We don't even know where or how to complain about this.**"

Mamta's family's official monthly entitlement in Rajasthan is **25 kg of wheat.** At a market rate of Rs. 35 per kg, this would save them Rs. 875 per month and help supplement their dietary needs, but in reality, they never actually get it. The dealer gives them Rs. 500, most likely selling their wheat in the open market and pocketing the remaining Rs. 375. "We need about 50 kg of grains each month—35 kg of rice and 15 kg of wheat—to feed the family. 25 kg of PDS wheat would save us more money and last us about 15 to 20 days."

Years of migration to Bhilwara have changed the family's food habits. Previously, they ate mostly rice, but over time, they've adjusted to more wheat-based meals. "At night, we eat roti now. We've gotten used to it. **We prefer rice**, but it's more expensive or harder to get here. Our **entire diet has changed** because we're here for 8–9 months of the year."

Forced spending, unfair prices. The family's main support comes from the *kharchi* they receive every 15 days. They receive ₹1,000 in cash and a ₹3,000 ration slip, but the **slip can only be used at the kiln owner's brother's shop**. This system leaves workers with little choice: "If we don't spend the full ₹3,000, he notes it as store credit, but never returns the money." Since the *kharchi* is never enough, they also buy vegetables or fish on credit from local sellers, settling the bill every 15 days. But here too, they face another injustice. "The **local shopkeepers charge us a lot more than they charge the locals**—whether it's vegetables, clothes, or anything else."

Alcohol abuse is rampant across kilns here, leading to conflicts that divide workers along village lines. "If there's a fight, people from my home village support me, but other villages won't.

“Once men drink, they start shouting abuses and don’t know what they’re doing. **Alcohol is a big problem.** On *kharchi* day, some men spend everything on liquor and lose their ration slip. Then the shopkeeper lies about them already taking ration, and might charge them double instead. If a big fight breaks out, we have to go to the kiln owner or to the NGO team. Some owners try to find out the truth, but others don’t care.”

Back in Banka, Bihar, work is scarce. “We prefer our life in our village, but we have to come to Rajasthan because there’s no work at home.” Mamta’s **husband handles the family’s finances:** “He gives me some money, gives some to our son, and uses the rest to pay off our advance and other debts.” She shares that she cannot read or write, and only started learning about government services through the NGO’s interventions at the kiln in recent years. “The facilitator comes to the center here on the kiln, organizes meetings, and tells us a lot of things.” Last year, her daughter-in-law opened a bank account, but keeping it active proved difficult. “Because we didn’t make any transactions, it got closed. We’ll have to open it again.”

Mamta wishes the government would **provide rice and other items in their ration entitlement** instead of just wheat. She also wants basic facilities at the kiln. “We have problems with **toilets and bathing areas.** These should be provided by the owner.”

When asked about her aspirations, for herself and for her family, she candidly shares: “We have no big dreams now—just two meals a day is a lot for us. Our work is very tough. Even though we put in so much labour, the **wages remain so low.** I never went to school, and **my children don’t study either; they do *thapai* with us**.” Being both a migrant and a woman comes with additional struggles. She knows she is not alone. Many other women at the brick kilns here share her reality.

“The locals treat us differently because we are from outside. And everyone exploits us women workers in one way or another. Molding bricks, cooking meals, having children, and caring for them—that’s it. That’s where our hopes and desires end now.”

III. Shakti
Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh to Bhilwara, Rajasthan

Shakti and her family have been migrating for work in **Rajasthan's brick kilns for the past 13 years.** Their decision to first leave their village in **Chitrakoot district, Uttar Pradesh**, behind for 8-9 months a year was driven by necessity and longstanding community practices. She explains: "There is **no work available in our village,** and we **don't own any land for farming**. The people in our village had already been migrating to work in brick kilns for years, so one year we **decided to go along with them** and migrated as a family. Since then, we've been coming to work at the brick kilns here together every year."

At a brick kiln in Asind, Bhilwara, 40-year-old Shakti and four other family members do ***thapai*** **work for 13 to 14 hours a day**. Beyond that, Shakti **shoulders all domestic labour** at home—cooking, cleaning, fetching water, and child-rearing. "After working all day kneeling on the rough ground molding bricks, and also managing all household work after this, my **knees hurt a lot. Our diet is also poor, and it makes our bodies weak**."

Families at this kiln receive their ***kharchi*** **every 15 days**, based on wages accrued that are calculated using an extremely low piece-rate per thousand bricks. "This **allowance is not enough to meet my family's needs**," Shakti says. "We buy food items from the local market, which is about 10 km away. From the ration shop, we only get some wheat, which is not enough. We are forced to buy more flour from the market, which is **more expensive than what we have back home.** The prices at the market are higher for us migrant workers."

Learning about ONORC. Shakti first learned about interstate ration portability under ONORC from the Rajasthan Pradesh Int Bhatta Majdur Union: "I didn't know about the scheme initially. Three years ago, union members came to this brick kiln and explained to us that we could now collect ration from the FPS near the kiln instead of only from the shop in our home village." Her family of five owns one smartphone with internet, but they have **never heard of the 'Mera Ration' mobile app or any helpline numbers.**

In the beginning, accessing rations in Bhilwara was difficult: "We had to visit the ration shop multiple times, because it wasn't always open—there were **no fixed days or times**. Initially, they would give **priority to local residents** and only after distributing to them would migrant workers like us get ration at the end of the month. Sometimes, even then, they would say the **stock was finished** and turn us away." Now, "if there's a problem, we **call the local brick workers' union**. They work with the dealer and local authorities and resolve the issue for us."

For many seasons, Shakti's household lost out on rations once they left Uttar Pradesh: "We only received ration when we returned to our village for a few months each year, and the rest of the year, the **dealer in the village would take our share of rations for himself.** Now, after the introduction of ONORC, we are able to collect our entitlement throughout the year. For 3–4 months when we are at home, we get it there, and for 8–9 months while working at the brick kiln, we get it here as well. **This scheme is very useful for workers like us.**"

Despite the benefits of ONORC, **several barriers** persist. Shakti's and her husband's **fingerprints often fail** the biometric scanner because, "due to the arduous labor involved in molding bricks, our fingerprints get worn out." When that happens, "we have to **use our children's fingerprints** to get our ration."

Another challenge is the 4 km trek to the nearest FPS: "We have to **walk there and back on foot.** Sometimes we find transport, but usually we don't, and then we have to walk back carrying 25 kg of ration on our heads. On the days we go to collect ration, we make fewer bricks. Sometimes it takes the whole day at the shop, and a **day's worth of clay gets wasted.**"

Because of these disruptions, the dealer told them, "you migrant workers will only get ration after the 15th of the month." They now wait until then, call the dealer, and go in groups. "Even after the 15th, the ration dealer sometimes claims that the stock is finished," Shakti notes. She also says, "the **dealer does not treat us migrant workers well** because we are considered outsiders. Apart from the union, no one has helped us."

In Rajasthan, the family gets **5 kg of subsidized wheat per person**, totaling 25 kg each month. "This PDS wheat lasts about half a month," Shakti explains. "We still need to buy enough flour from the local market for the rest of the month, at **₹35 per kg**. We are also **rice eaters traditionally,** and we wish rice was provided here as well." In contrast, their ration entitlement back home **in Uttar Pradesh includes wheat, rice, and additional items like spices, tea, soybeans, and soap.** Though insufficient, the subsidized wheat does save them some money: "At this price point and quantity, the PDS wheat does end up **saving our family ₹875 per month.**"

While Shakti and her husband make the decision to migrate together each year, she shares that "**the money remains with my husband**." Having never been to school, she cannot read or write, and says she knows little about workers' rights, but she **has heard the union discuss wages and entitlements** at the kiln sometimes.

Talking about working conditions at the brick kiln, she notes that **owners and managers are often hostile:** "Sometimes, they hurl abuses or make excuses when we ask for improvements in conditions or ask for some of our wages mid-season." She highlights the severe toll the hard labour and the exploitative piece rate and advance system takes on the health of women workers. "Our work is a family effort," she shares, "the entire family works together to make bricks, and this work is something we decide for and manage ourselves. Whether a woman is pregnant or has a young child, she still has to do this work. A husband alone cannot do all the work, and if we don't work, **we won't get enough *kharchi***. We won't be able to survive life here without enough *kharchi*, and we won't make enough at the end of the season to **clear our *peshgi*** (debt/advance). If we don't work, the family cannot survive. Women return to work making bricks just **8–10 days after giving birth**, sometimes sooner. There's no such thing as maternity leave or any kind of paid leave here. The more bricks we make, the more money we make, and **since we never have enough to leave, we must all work as long as we can.**"

She adds: "We are poor people, and even the wages we earn at the end of the season are very low, the wage rate is very low, that is why we have to keep returning to do this work. We do very hard labour day in day out, **just eating roti and rice isn't enough to sustain us**, we need proper nutrition. That's why you will see that **most women working at the brick kilns appear weak and undernourished.**"

Shakti's Suggestions. The government does not care about seasonal migrants like her, she thinks: "we spend most of our time away from home, so we **rarely get a chance to vote.**" But she shares a number of recommendations for improving ONORC for workers like herself:

- **Dedicated Ration Dealer for Migrants.** "There should be a separate ration dealer for migrant workers, one who provides rations throughout the entire month. This way, we can collect ration whenever we have the time, especially on our *kharchi* days, so that our work doesn't get disrupted."
- **Proximity to Work Site.** "Ration should be available near our workplace so that we don't have to walk such long distances, nor carry such heavy loads on our heads."
- **Match Home State Entitlements.** "Other items like those we receive in our home state, Uttar Pradesh—such as rice and other essential items—should also be included in our entitlements here in Rajasthan."
- **Quality, Quantity, and Variety.** "Subsidized ration is our right, and we should not be denied this right. The quantity of PDS foodgrains should be increased as it is currently very little. The quality should also be better. But just wheat alone won't have a much of an impact on our health. More variety of essential items should be included in our entitlement."

Despite representing a key target demographic for the scheme, logistical and technical barriers, inadequate entitlements, and punishing work schedules continue to define Shakti's experience with the ONORC as an interstate migrant worker. "We do very hard labour day in, day out," she reiterates. "We are poor people… **we should receive more support.**"

"If I get a chance to speak to the government, I would urge them to increase the quantity, quality, and variety of subsidized ration provided."

IV. Rani

Mahasamund, Chhattisgarh to Ajmer, Rajasthan

For 8 months a year, Rani, her husband, and their two young children, leave their village in **Mahasamund district, Chhattisgarh** to mold bricks in other states. 25-year-old Rani and her family have done ***thapai*** work for years—7 years in Uttar Pradesh before ending up in **Ajmer, Rajasthan** this season. Hailing from the Satnami community, and having completed primary education, she speaks of a life shaped by denied opportunities and a constant struggle for survival. "Our **life in the village is much better,**" she says, "but **poverty forces us to migrate for work**. We have no other choice."

For Rani, each day begins before sunrise and ends long after sunset. She spends **16 hours shaping and drying bricks**, and the few hours in between are consumed by **care work**—cooking, cleaning, collecting wood and water, washing clothes, and caring for her children. "The workload leaves me exhausted," she says. Even so, she has no choice but to press on. She describes experiencing **persistent fatigue and bodily pain** from her grueling routine. "When I face health problems," she explains, "I seek help from family members. I also carry basic necessities and medicines along with me when we migrate."

The family relies on **₹1,500–₹2,000 monthly in *kharchi*** provided in three installments: on the 10th, 20th, and 30th. This amount, however, barely covers their expenses. "It is not enough," she says, explaining how they often have to request money from relatives back in Chhattisgarh, just to make it through the month. Back home, Rani's family is "able to access healthy food and maintain decent health." Here, however, the nearest **local market is 12 km away**, and with no reliable transportation, she is forced to purchase essentials items from the shops next to the kiln at **artificially inflated prices**. "This affects our savings, and leaves us **less to spend on food and basic medical care**," she shares.

Accessing ONORC. "I learned about the scheme through local labour organizers after arriving at the kiln last year," she explains. Her family owns one smartphone with internet access, but they have **never received any official communication about ONORC**, such as an SMS, and have **never heard of the 'Mera Ration' app or of any official helpline numbers.** The union helped them register their details online, and after initial hurdles, they started collecting their ration entitlement here.

She recalls her first attempt to access rations in Rajasthan, when she went to the local FPS along with 25 other women brick workers. Only 2 women received rations that day, the rest were sent away. The following month, the same group of women travelled 10 km to a different village where an iris scanner was used for biometric authentication. "All but two women received rations that time," she says.

Challenges Faced in Availing Entitlement. Rani's ration card is blue, covering her entire family of four, and marking them as a Priority Household (PHH) under NFSA. Back home in Chhattisgarh, this card entitles them to 35 kg of rice, 2 kg of chickpeas, 1 kg of salt, and 1 kg of sugar. According to her, "The **quantity of rations in Rajasthan is much less compared to Chhattisgarh.**" In Rajasthan, using the same card, the family receives 20 kg of wheat from the local FPS. Rani explains: "the wheat we get here provides a little relief, but the amount is not enough for even half of our needs and the **quality is not as good** as that of the rice we receive in our village." On occasions when the FPS runs out of stock for migrants, they "purchase grains from local shops at high prices, so that no one goes hungry."

The **local ration shops do not have fixed operating days or timings**, so the workers typically rely on the NGO working at the kiln for updates. "When the *balwadi* worker tells us that the ration shop is open and distributing ration to migrants, we go to collect our rations." Along with the NGO (CLRA), the labour union and the *munim* (manager) have also helped Rani and her husband with information on FPS timings and locations. "I have not interacted with or heard from any local officials about the scheme," she adds. Beyond erratic timings and **frequent stockouts,** Rani usually does not face other issues with the FPS dealer.

Transportation is erratic, but with support from family and fellow workers, Rani manages: "Sometimes, the kiln owner provides a tractor to take us to the ration shop. But usually, we walk. Sometimes I go alone to collect the ration, sometimes my husband goes, and other times we go together. I don't face any difficulty going alone, but collecting ration is challenging because the grains are heavy. **Work is affected** when we go to collect ration, but we make up for the time lost together."

On control over household finances, Rani emphasizes that she has an **equal say on expenses and savings**: “I also manage the money we earn here. We both decide where to spend money together, as husband and wife." She knows that workers have certain rights, but on basics like paid leaves or toilets, says: “all those facilities are not available at brick kilns.”

Rani voices **strong concerns about gender discrimination** at the kiln: “Men at the kiln see women as weaker and do not see us as equal workers. They also do not assist the women with cooking, cleaning, or washing clothes.” She also strongly condemns alcohol abuse and domestic violence rampant at these kilns: “Men drink alcohol, use abusive language, and beat their wives—this must stop.”

She notes that “**women at the kiln help each other**,” stepping in to manage one another’s workload. Sometimes other women workers from Chhattisgarh help out with cooking, childcare, or on occasions that the family doesn’t meet their production target, with molding bricks. In turn, she also helps her fellow workers in times of crisis.

Rani’s Suggestions. Rani urges that **discrimination against women** and the challenges they face—both at work and within their own families—must end. On ONORC, she has three key suggestions. “The **ration shop should be open every day**,” she says, “so there are no difficulties in collecting rations. And the **brick kiln owner should provide transportation** for workers to collect rations so that there are no issues and our work is not affected.”

She also wants the government to increase the quantity and variety of the PDS entitlement in Rajasthan under ONORC to **match what they receive in their home state** of Chhattisgarh.

“The essentials we are entitled to through the public distribution system are important for fulfilling my family’s nutritional needs. Affordable food is our right, and we will continue to claim it.”

V. Salma
Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh to Jaipur Rural, Rajasthan

Salma Begum has been migrating from Kalyanpur village in **Pilibhit District, Uttar Pradesh**, to work at brick kilns in **rural Jaipur** for the past ten years. Her entire **household of eight** accompanies her each season, leaving no one behind in the village. She has **no formal schooling, and with no land, and no viable work available at home**, kiln work has become the family's primary means of survival. As Salma puts it, "We do not have land for farming in our village, and to manage household expenses, I have to work at the kilns along with my family. This is how we **manage our children's marriages and other expenses**. Our extended family also does this work.

A ***thekedaar*** **(labour contractor) from from her own village** first introduced Salma to brick work, and has arranged her family's migration every year since. "I come to the kilns with my whole family, and after over the years, these kilns have become an extension of home. Along with doing ***thapai*** work, I also have to handle **all the household chores**," she explains. At the kiln, the contractor gives the family their ***kharchi*** **weekly**, which she budgets carefully. She says, "With this, I buy a week's worth of ration—wheat, rice, flour, vegetables, oil, essentials for the children, and some necessities for myself. I also keep some money aside for emergencies."

Although Salma has worked in Rajasthan for a decade, she only began accessing her subsidized ration entitlement here three years ago, after the implementation of ONORC. For the first seven of those years, her family had to forgo their ration benefits for eight to nine months annually. "I never collected ration before, but since this scheme started, I have been able to get ration here," she notes. Salma learned about the scheme through union members who visited the kiln. She recalls, "Three years ago, when organizers from the Rajasthan Pradesh Int Bhatta Majdur Union came, they told me that the central government has a scheme under which we can get ration here. Before that, I never knew I had this right. **Neither I nor any member of my family have ever received any official information** about this scheme. I have never had a smartphone, and **no dealer ever told us about it**."

Since then, Salma has gone to the local FPS every month to collect her household allocation of 20 kg of wheat for 4 listed members. “Now I myself go to collect ration every month after coming to the kilns,” she says. However, the process is fraught with **delays, shortages, and technical failures**. “Often the ration dealers say they don’t have stock for us migrant workers,” she explains, noting that it is a widespread issue: “This is not just a problem for me but for all interstate migrant brick workers in this area. Even after so many years since the scheme started here, there is **often no stock available for people from other states. And the dealer’s machine is also not reliable**.” Biometric authentication is another issue. “Often our **fingerprint does not match**,” she says, attributing these mismatches to “long hours of working with rough soil and clay to make bricks,” which **wears down the friction ridges** on *thapai* workers’ fingers and palms.

Additionally, “the nearest **ration shop is very far** from the kiln,” she says. She usually walks the distance, and on rare occasions is able to find a shared rickshaw. Even when stock is available, Salma explains there is no guarantee they will receive the entitlement on time: “There is **no fixed schedule** for ration distribution here, and sometimes we travel all the way without being sure because no one else knows either, only to find the shop closed.” These irregularities can cause **major disruption in her work**, keeping her from reaching her daily raw brick production target on days she tries to collect her ration.

Salma **does not blame the dealers** themselves: “I do not face any discrimination with the ration dealers while collecting ration here. I think the dealers are ready to provide the ration, but due to lack of stock and the portal not opening, they are unable to give it to me.”

When such problems arise, she often **seeks support from labour organizers**: “I try to contact the union to get information when these challenges arise. Sometimes when I ask them when the shop will open, they call the dealers to find out. They often help resolve ration-related issues for us.”

When the system works, the family’s ration entitlement provides them some relief. “It provides me with enough flour, **saving about ₹800 each month**,” she notes. “The wheat is also of **good quality**, better than what is available in the market. After collecting the wheat, I get it flour milled, and use it to make roti. Fortunately, we have never gone to bed hungry at the kiln. But the savings from the ration do help us purchase other essential food items.”

Migration, Salma explains, is a **family decision** each year: “My husband asks for my opinion, and after we discussing it, we decide that our family will go. But there are really no other options.” Once at the kiln, she carefully manages essential household expenses, but their joint **earnings remain with her husband.** “He gives me some money for the expenses at the kiln,” she explains. Salma points out that she **does not perceive gender discrimination at work**. “I never feel that there is inequality between men and women at the kilns because we both work together in brick-making,” she observes. At home, however, the **traditional division of labour** persists. “I am the one who has to handle all the household chores. I do not ask my husband

to do household work because I do not like it when he does it." But on days when she is inevitably delayed at the ration shop, her husband occasionally steps in. "While my family supports me, **I believe that household work is women's work**," she states, adding that she does not see this as unfair.

Salma does **feel unsafe at times** when traveling alone to collect ration. "I feel afraid going alone to collect ration from such a distance, fearing that someone might behave inappropriately on the way. Sometimes, **my family does not let me go alone, but I still go anyway**," she says. She reports **no direct discrimination at the FPS** itself: "Sometimes my husband goes and sometimes I go to collect ration, but at the ration shop, I never felt that anyone was treating me differently because I am a woman from another state."

Salma's Demands. Salma stresses the importance of **better conditions for women workers** at the brick kilns: "If I get the opportunity to say anything, I will speak about women's rights and will advocate for **toilets and bathing facilities** at the kilns." When asked about the changes she would like to see in ONORC, Salma is clear: "The **stock of foodgrains should be increased** at all ration shops, and technical challenges in the system must be resolved."

> **"This quota of affordable ration is our right. We should receive our full entitlement every month."**

Consolidated Demands of Migrant Women Brick Workers

1. **Adequate and Expanded Entitlements**
   a. We demand that the quantity of ration provided at the destination be increased to match entitlements and best practices in home states like Chhattisgarh.
   b. Wheat alone does not meet our nutritional needs; more variety is necessary for our health. We call for pulses, chana, salt, sugar, and other essential items—similar to what many of us receive in our home states—to be included in our entitlements.
   c. Additional rations must be ensured for pregnant and breastfeeding women to support maternal and child health.
   d. The quality of subsidized foodgrains provided in Rajasthan must be improved.

2. **Reliable and Accessible Distribution System**
   a. A fixed monthly schedule for ration distribution must be established and clearly communicated, so we do not lose work hours waiting at the dealer's shop.
   b. All ration shops must maintain sufficient stock of food grains and essential items.
   c. Technical glitches, such as server failures, must be resolved swiftly to ensure timely distribution.
   d. There should be provisions for alternative authentication methods if fingerprints fail to register on the machines, ensuring we are not denied our rightful rations.
   e. Ration dealers should be audited; those who exploit the system and sell our entitlement in the open market should be penalized.
   f. We must receive our full quota of subsidized rations every month without delay or denial.
   g. We need a dedicated ration dealer who remains open throughout the month, allowing us to collect rations on days when we are able (for example, on *kharchi* days) without disrupting our work.

3. **Proximity and Transportation**
   a. Ration shops must be located near brick kilns to avoid long commutes and carrying heavy loads over large distances.
   b. Brick kiln owners should provide transportation for us to collect our entitlements so we do not lose valuable work time or income.

4. **Dignified Working and Living Conditions**
   a. Violence against women workers at the brick kilns must stop.
   b. Women should be recognized as equal workers.
   c. We demand proper toilets and bathing facilities for women at all brick kilns.

Our right to affordable food is non-negotiable, and we will continue to claim it.

Concluding Remarks

While ONORC has emerged as a promising intervention to bridge longstanding gaps in food security for seasonal migrant workers, its promise remains unfulfilled for many. The field survey of 1,012 migrant brick kiln worker households shows that although awareness is relatively high - 70.8% overall - there are many hurdles on the journey from knowing that the scheme exists to successfully accessing ration entitlements. In Rajasthan, where extensive outreach by labour organizers has boosted awareness to nearly 88.6%, only about half of informed households make an attempt to use portability, and in this group, just 56.4% succeed. In Gujarat, the picture is even more challenging, with workers reporting an awareness rate of just 30% and uptake correspondingly low. Figure 11 shows the drop-off in workers from being aware of ONORC to actually being able to use ONORC.

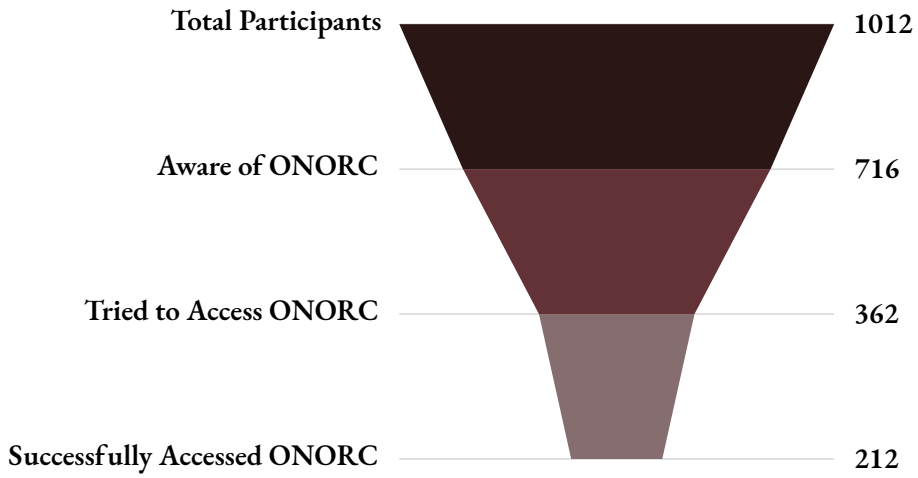


Figure 11. Drop-off between awareness and uptake for surveyed migrant brick workers

Key obstacles emerge from both systemic and operational failures. Many workers did not attempt to access ONORC because family members back home collect their rations, and nearly one-third lack a valid ration card - a gap that can be remedied by expanding PDS coverage and ensuring all eligible households are provided ration cards. For those who did try to access portability, technical glitches, dealer discretion, stock shortages, and the absence of fixed operating hours at ration shops consistently undermined success. Even when rations were collected, the workers reported persisting issues of dealer gatekeeping, technical and logistical failures, inadequate entitlement quantity and quality, and mismatches with traditional dietary preferences.

Structural, operational, and administrative barriers must be addressed to increase ONORC uptake by seasonal migrants workers. Improving the reliability of technical systems, simplifying documentation processes, enhancing dealer awareness, accountability, and sensitivity, and expanding outreach in high-traffic migration corridors are key. Grassroots organizations can play a critical role in awareness raising and highlighting last-mile gaps. Design and implementation of portability must be tailored to ground realities - along with larger systemic reforms in the PDS and addressing the root causes of food insecurity in rural India - for the promises of the NFSA to be translated into real, dignified support for the millions who labour in the margins of the economy.

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Annexure: Glimpses of Migrant Brick Workers Accessing ONORC in Rajasthan

Photo Credits: Rajasthan Pradesh Int Bhatta Majdur Union






उचित मूल्य की



Centre for Labour Research and Action (CLRA) works to protect and promote the rights of migrant workers in India's vast informal economy. Having worked with some of the most marginalized communities in the country for close to two decades, CLRA remains committed towards realizing a future where every worker is recognized, valued, and able to lead a life of dignity, equity, and justice. To achieve this vision, CLRA has over time evolved an effective paradigm that rests on four pillars: building worker power, undertaking action research that informs its policy advocacy, providing comprehensive support services at both source and destination, and collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders and allies.

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