

Housing for Circular Migrant Workers – Current Status and Way Forward

CONFERENCE REPORT



THE CENTRE FOR LABOUR RESEARCH AND ACTION

ROSA-LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG

NOVEMBER 2025



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Mallica
November 2025

Photos: Ashwinbhai Vaghela, Dineshbhai Parmar

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Introduction

In the context of migrant workers, circular distress migration has become a way of life for tens of millions of rural poor. The problem of housing at destinations cuts across all types of such migration. The housing policies and programmes like ‘housing for all’ are not relevant for such migrants, as these focus on ownership, while migrant workers are not interested in housing schemes based on ownership. Moreover, for a complex set of reasons, such as earning less than a living wage, irregular employment, social discrimination, lack of appropriate policy, including land policy, coercion by employers to extract long hours of work, lack of awareness and collectives, they by and large are unable to access alternate housing for short periods of their stay.

Consequently, a good number of the most poorest and marginalised workers perform live, in addition to workplaces, in the open on pavements, under flyovers, near railway tracks, in shared rented rooms in deplorable conditions or within the worksite, facing innumerable problems. Keeping in view the socio-economic reality of circular migrant workers, there is an urgent need for a robust alternative policy. Centre for Labour Research and Action, a labour rights organisation working with circulatory migrant labour, has worked extensively on the housing issues of migrant workers in Gujarat.

CLRA had organised a national-level workshop in 2019 on this theme in Delhi that came up with a number of recommendations - some of them being the incorporation of affordable rental housing as a key component of affordable housing schemes, standardising housing provisions across labour laws and enforcing these, amongst others. Now, half a decade after the COVID pandemic and the state responses in the context of housing for circular migrants in particular, it is a good time to review the changes that have taken place during the last six years and the impact these changes have had primarily on the accessibility of the housing. Has the public rental scheme made any significant headway? What have been other changes in the migrant housing scenario? What has been the progress with respect to SUH schemes?

The broad objectives of the consultation were:

- **Critical assessment of informal rental housing and the role of the state in assisting such housing as affordable, adequate rental housing**
- **Examining the provisions of housing and their effective implementation in the labour codes vis-à-vis the existing labour laws and suggest/demand additions/changes**
- **Discussion and chalking out programme to move forward with focus on (i) restructuring of existing/adding new schemes/programmes/policies, (ii) inclusion of SUH scheme in the housing programmes with experience/evidence-based modifications, (iii) action/awareness programmes for promoting common understanding of adequate housing and collective self-action for adequate housing as a legal right, (iv) evaluations, surveys, data-bank, etc and (v) preparation of a charter/vision statement and creating a national platform for sustainable action programme**

The Centre for Labour Research and Action and Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung organised a one-day national-level consultation in Ahmedabad, which was attended by over 30 people from cities such as Bangalore, Mumbai, New Delhi, as well as Ahmedabad. The primary objective of the meeting was to discuss the issue of housing during circular distress migration, which has become a reality for millions of rural poor in India. The problem of housing at destinations is an issue which cuts across all types of migration, and the current housing policies, such as ‘housing for all’, are not relevant for the majority of these migrants as these mostly focus on ownership housing.

The Centre for Labour Research and Action, in collaboration with Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, organised a one-day consultation with stakeholders, activists and researchers working in the space of housing for migrant workers and urban poor.

The introductory remarks were given by Sudhir Katiyar and Ashok Khandelwal. **Sudhir Katiyar, founder of CLRA**, emphasised the importance of a discussion on seasonal migrant workers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how it revealed the poor housing conditions for circular migrants in particular, who had to return to their source states. He invited the participants to the session and explained the urgent need to talk about rental housing and shelters in a climate where most focus is placed on ownership-based housing policies.

Ashok Khandelwal, a senior researcher, added that the current landscape for housing has been focused on the Public-Private Participation mode wherein the profit becomes an important aspect. Khandelwal further noted that the emerging reality of the real estate market in urban growth centres is that it essentially excludes the poor. The developers today, in pursuit of high profits, are more focused on creating luxury villas instead of affordable rental homes, thereby placing the success of the PPP model under further threat. The scheme ARHC, the only rental housing scheme of the central government, too, is based on the PPP model and thus is not part of social housing for the poor migrant labour. By its very design, it appears exclusionary for the poor and marginalised and is not committed to the needs of migrant workers. There is an urgent need to intervene at a policy level to ensure social housing, so that more government land and property are made available for the needs of migrant workers’ housing.

As part of the inputs into the consultation, Ashok Khandelwal, a senior policy expert on housing, has written a comprehensive note summarising the policy and various initiatives undertaken for the housing of seasonal migrants since the last five years, when the previous workshop was organised. The complete report has been uploaded to the website and can be found [here](#). [A summary of his report can be found at Annexure I on page 16](#)

Session 1: (Formal Rental Housing) – chaired by Swastik Harish

Mallica, a researcher associated with the Centre for Labour Research and Action, presented the [research](#) conducted by the organisation at the two Model 1 ARHC sites in Gujarat – in Ahmedabad and Surat. The presentation detailed the conditions at the two sites through surveys conducted across 27 households. The research reflected the partial success of the two sites owing to the well-maintained conditions at both sites, which are currently being managed by private entities. The units in both sites are equipped with appropriate facilities such as water, electricity, gas and enough space for 3-4 member families to live in. The rent amounts, however, at Rs5000, are higher than average rent amounts in the country. Further, the survey results found that most inhabitants stood in the spectrum of semi-permanent to permanent migrants and do not intend to go back to their source destinations. Thus, while catering to the LIG and EWS households, the target group of circular, seasonal migrants or those who earlier lived in unauthorised colonies is completely lost sight of in the implementation of the scheme. The question, thus, still remains how rental units can better serve circular, seasonal migrants in the country. A link to the presentation can be found [here](#)

Mukta Naik, an independent researcher working on urbanisation and urban planning, began by documenting the history of rental housing in the context of migrant labour in India. She discussed the shortcomings of the Draft Urban Rental Policy of 2015, which first acknowledged the need for rental homes for the migrant workers. While the policy discussed formal rentals, it missed the informally supplied rental options already available to the migrant workers and how they might compete with the formal options. Formal and informal rentals act as a continuum and are not clearly demarcated with a straight line. She referred to the Working Group on Migration study, which studied migration in India and recommended hostels for circular/seasonal migrants who are often left out of such surveys. Alongside the lack of affordable options also lies the growing tendency of evictions, which is further marginalising migrant workers. Without rental housing, where would they go?



“While schemes such as ARHC might be catering to LIG and EWS communities, seasonal migrants are not the focus at all. Other than the obvious issues of lack of flexibility in rental options, there is a lack of affordable schooling options and a lack of livelihood gaps for women in these areas” - Mukta Naik, on the government’s Affordable Rental Housing Complexes scheme

Naik stressed the importance of actually catering to migrant workers and questioned whether schemes such as ARHC are doing so. While schemes such as ARHC might be catering to LIG and EWS communities, seasonal migrants are not the focus at all. Other than the obvious issues of lack of flexibility in rental options, there is a lack of affordable schooling options and a lack of livelihood gaps for women in these areas. A link to the presentation can be found [here](#)

Next, **Ashok Khandelwal, a senior researcher and activist**, discussed the four projects of rental units constructed under Model 2 of the ARHC scheme in Tamil Nadu. This is being implemented by the Tamil Nadu Urban Habitat Development Board (TNUHDB). The housing units are in the form of dormitories and are intended to be used by single women workers/employees of a given industrial unit. As part of his findings, he noted that one of the hostels in operation caters to women employees of Foxconn (a private technological firm). The other two projects also house regular workers of industrial units. All beneficiary workers of the completed projects are thus meant for regular employees who enjoy relatively higher regular wages. The housing facilities are not meant for seasonal-circular migrants. Even female employees with family stand excluded.

Further, an interesting point to note is that one of the prime objectives of the project is to increase the productivity of the workers, thereby serving the needs of private capital rather than acting as an affordable option for all seasonal migrant workers. This shows the heavy penetration of profit motives driven by the corporate interests in the formal rental schemes. ARHC Model-2 thus appears to serve the interests of capital rather than short-term poor migrant workers. Whatever subsidies are provided, in the form of cash or through relaxed regulations, are benefiting the corporations and not the poor short-term migrants.

Post the presentations, the participants discussed the findings. Swastik Harish noted that in one of the projects referred to by Khandelwal, the 60-acre land is actually provided by the Government of Tamil Nadu. Further, another participant noted that Foxconn was also provided with gram panchayat land for building a plant. This thereby shows the nexus between the dominant proprietary classes and their results in the implementation of such schemes.

Sai Rama Marella noted that the scheme referred to by Ashok Khandelwal for female migrant workers was designed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development; there was a possibility of engaging with different ministries in developing housing for those individuals who directly come under the said ministry. Preeti Oza noted that, no matter the obvious problematic surveillance measures, one needs to acknowledge the importance of schemes in enabling the upward mobility of women. Radhika Sabavala noted that there was a need to make existing schemes more accessible for the target population. Khandelwal concluded by adding that the government, as custodian of land, needs to stop monetising land as it belongs to the people and should initiate social housing catering specifically to the city makers in short-term migrant workers. A link to the presentation can be found [here](#).

Session 2 (Informal Rental Housing)– chaired by Renu Desai

Ekta, Assistant Professor at the Department of Planning, School of Planning and Architecture, spoke about the need to understand rental housing from the users' perspective, as rental housing is a consumption good. The life cycle of the family, the work they are involved in, all of it determines the nature of housing they are most likely to adopt.

She then discussed her field work in EWS (Economically Weaker Section) housing units in Delhi – Dwarka Sector 19 and LIG housing units in Sector 23B. In Dwarka, only a few units were assigned to EWS households. Further, there was a mix between MIG (Middle Income Group) and EWS towers within the same plots. Ekta also noted the lack of social acceptance of MIG groups of EWS households. In the case of LIG housing units, only a few plots were actually occupied by informal workers and drivers were denied flats since they owned multiple vehicles. In Vijayawada, Ekta noted that the EWS households, while occupying a few houses, again faced a lack of social acceptance from other households in the area. Upper-income households don't wish to associate themselves with households from lower-income groups. Her presentation can be found [here](#)

By dividing consumer behaviour into clusters, Ekta was able to explain the different externalities which impact rental housing choices. For instance, 'constraint-driven choosers' are less bothered about legality and infrastructure quality of the homes, while stability-oriented choosers are looking for long-term, socially cohesive environments where physical amenities are a priority. Thus, it is important to know who migrants are and what their needs are when building rental homes. Increasing the supply – through 'filtering' – or increasing their capacity to pay are important factors to focus on for building viable solutions.

Next, **Sai Rama Marella, a researcher with the Indian Institute of Human Settlements,** presented his work on blue tarp settlements – found in Bangalore – which house seasonal migrant workers living in the city for 3-6 months. The homes are made using tarpaulin sheets, bamboo and asbestos and are usually located in disputed low-lying lands. The families also pay rent for the piece of land occupied by them, usually Rs300-500 a month to local strongmen. The workers are mostly construction workers, waste pickers, and domestic helpers, who earn Rs300-500 a day. *The homes, Sai notes, act as an entry point to the city for the workers who have only now come to the city.* Some even spoke about how they plan on moving to a government-run housing unit. Interestingly, the settlements differ from slums in that they don't have any adjoining infrastructure. When the families are away, the particular unit is used by other families who are visiting at the time. Furthermore, the settlements aren't fixed, unlike slums.

Sai raised questions about the difficulty in placing the needs of seasonal migrants who are spending such limited time in the city, and perhaps also don't have an Aadhar domicile. He concluded by urging policymakers to understand housing interventions in a multidimensional way, wherein housing, labour, infrastructure, and disaster are not understood separately but are interlinked. A link to his presentation can be found [here](#).

“The blue tarp homes act as an entry point to the city for the construction workers who have just arrived in the city and plan to move to more pucca homes in the future.” - Sai Rama Marella, on temporary blue tarp settlements covered by his research in Bangalore

Swastik Harish and Mahesh Gajera, both Directors at the Shelter Square Foundation, presented their work on their worker hostel – Republic Shelter and Mess (RHM). Incubated by Aajevika Bureau, RHM is located in Surat and caters to the workers in the powerloom sector who majorly hail from Orissa. For a majority of the workers in the city working in this sector, their living conditions are poor. The team wanted to devise a model wherein the hostel was affordable, while offering good-quality housing. The team also wanted to focus on enhancing the productivity of the workers, because it is irrefutably an important facet of their lives, considering they are daily wage workers. The team realised that for the workers, housing was their last priority as their income was usually quite less. Gajera mentioned that they did not consider that the workers, despite the low prices and good facilities, wouldn't consider this as an option at all.

In Surat, the team devised a model where the monthly rent was fixed at (approximately) Rs3600, which would include the lodging and food for the workers. The planners have also included a recreational space for the workers, along with a prayer hall and activities such as picnics. Harish also noted how the management also learnt of an instance where the workers at the shelter were planning a strike, thus noting the importance of common spaces such as shelters in organising efforts, which ultimately strengthen their rights. Studies conducted by the team found that the workers were actually able to perform better at work due to their better physical and mental health. Harish mentioned that one of the workers noted that the fact that they could reach out to someone with an issue was itself a major source of relief for them. A link to their presentation can be found [here](#)



Studies conducted by the team found that the workers were actually able to perform better at work due to their better physical and mental health - Swastik Harish and Mahesh Gajera on the ShelterSquare shelter for migrant workers run by them in Surat.

Session 3 (Shelter for Urban Homeless) - Chaired by Preeti Oza

Anurag Anthony, Vice President at Urban Management Centre, spoke about their team's efforts in assessing the conditions of existing shelters for the homeless in the city of Ahmedabad. He noted that the urban homeless are under-reported. The National Urban Livelihood Mission has been operative since 2014 and has six components. The shelters currently running under the scheme are running past full occupancy.

He notes that bureaucracy's failure lies in the inability of different ministries and departments to collaborate with each other. In a study done by Anthony's team, it was found that across most government schemes, there is a provision to provide housing to the same beneficiary through shelters. Due to the overlaps, a single family could access 3-4 schemes to enhance their lives.

Further, in shelters, they found that the dormitories have a separate male and female section, which deters families from accessing the same. In a video film that his team made, it was found that several homeless people are also choosing not to go to these shelters due to such arrangements. The shelters were also not equipped to manage those who had mental disabilities. Considering that the shelters aren't well equipped to connect the persons with the right schemes, the team suggested that separate shelters could be constructed to provide more care facilities.

Denis Macwan, one of the managers at the Morabhagal Shelter for Urban Homeless run by CLRA in Surat, shared his experiences of running the shelter for the past several years. He spoke about the high percentage of workers in the city of Surat being forced to live in slums and on the footpaths. He noted that in Surat, the SMC had planned for a total of 50 shelters, although there are only 20 running. In a survey done by the team amongst 11,000 workers, they found that several shelters were turning people away because they were running at full capacity.

The Morabhagal shelter is free of cost, and the workers have managed to find a safe space at the site. Further, the team made considerable changes in the unit by providing for a cooking space behind the shelter where the workers could cook. Further, CLRA also provided for joint dormitories for families to stay, thereby catering to the needs of the workers. CLRA has also urged the families staying at the shelters to go to school, and approximately 30 of the children are currently studying in SMC schools. He concludes by noting that, considering the needs of seasonal migrant workers, shelters are a good scheme for their needs.

CLRA also provided for joint dormitories for families to stay, thereby catering to the needs of the workers. CLRA has also urged the families staying at the shelters to go to school, and approximately 30 of the children are currently studying in SMC schools.”

Denis Macwan, on the shelter home run by CLRA in Surat.

Rosamma, a freelance journalist, spoke about her study at an Apna Ghar worker hostel run by the Bhavanam Foundation in the industrial area of Pallakad. The hostel has a total of six floors and is heavily surveilled, making the research difficult. Through her study, she found that the rooms had not been lent out to individual workers but to firms that assigned spaces to their workers.

If workers changed their jobs, they would most likely have to move out of the space. Two other workers from Kerala worked in a private firm, and they reported that there are as many as 10 workers living in a single room – this even though the workers are currently paying rent to the tune of Rs8-10,000 per month. She also noted that the infrastructure and other facilities in the facility aren't up to date. There is only one government-run Apna Ghar hostel in the state, and they are barely breaking even at the time of the study.

Ashok Kandelwal, in response to Anurag Anthony's presentation, noted that the existing scheme already has provisions for different types of shelters, including family shelters and special shelters like those for the sick and mentally disabled. What is required is effective need-based implementation and creation of more shelters, as per at least the minimum norm of one shelter for 100 homeless for one lac. The scheme, per se, should not be shelved or radically altered. Others noted that shelters are supposed to have 'Shelter Management Committees', which would manage the space and report the requirements of the people living there, which would help in resolving the needs of the members.

Preeti Oza also noted that the lack of definition of the homeless is an issue which has been flagged multiple times. When she and her team tried to help those living in slums get homes under the ARHC, she was told that the beneficiaries wouldn't count as 'homeless' since they lived in slums. Shweta Damle noted that the argument for appropriating private property for public housing was a futile attempt. Advocacy efforts should focus on making better use of empty government-run property. Bina Jadhav noted that when the Chandola Lake evictions had taken place, her organisation helped those who were rendered homeless find a place in some of these shelters. When the activists would go to meet the evacuees later, they found that they had been asked to leave, thereby hinting at the dismal state of the shelters in the city of Ahmedabad.



Session 4 (Labour laws and housing) – Chaired by Shweta Damle

Renu Desai, Director at the Shelter Square Foundation and a researcher, discussed the prevalence of housing provisions in different labour laws and their current implementation. The Contract Labour Act was the first to mention the provision of housing. However, the law, much like several, doesn't talk about permanent residential accommodation and only makes reference to temporary accommodation. She notes that the Interstate Migrant Workers Act actually does have provisions for housing for workers who are employed by a contractor in another state and are hired to work in another state. The Act provides for both temporary as well as permanent housing provisions, including a space for cooking and toilets. However, this Act is poorly implemented. Desai noted that she has yet to see a single site where this is implemented. The Act also excludes intra-state migrants and those migrants who are already living in the state where they have been employed.

The Building and Other Construction Workers(BOCW) don't even mention temporary accommodation for the workers. The Factories Act is not clear in the housing provisions. It does not provide permanent housing for those already living in the factory premises. She also notes that several laws with regard to these provisions tend to be written ambiguously, thereby making it difficult to identify their shortcomings.

With regards to the latest labour codes, she notes that, considering the political economy, a repeal of the Codes might be a struggle, and advocacy could be focused on working in parallel with existing laws/Rules in enforcing better living conditions for workers. Even before the Codes were introduced, several laws – some mentioned by Desai – were not being enforced properly. For instance, in case the AMC is contracting a project, one can demand to learn of the provisions for housing within these contracts. She mentioned the case of the Sabarmati River Front project, there was absolutely no mention of housing. A link to the presentation can be found [here](#)

The Interstate Migrant Workers Act provides for both temporary and permanent housing provisions, including a space for cooking and toilets. However, the act excludes intra-state migrants those migrants who are already living in the state where they have been employed.”- Dr Renu Desai on the lack of implementation and ambiguity of labour laws, with respect to housing.

Dinesh Parmar, Director at the Centre for Labour Research and Action, discussed the state of housing in brick kilns in the rural areas of Gujarat. He discussed the poor state of housing – usually just a tarp sheet held together with bamboo – which the circular migrants have to construct when they arrive from different states to work at these brick kilns. When the workers arrive, at first, they have no place to stay at all. They themselves have to clean the site and build the house themselves.

He noted that there are a total of approximately 1500 brick kilns in the state. The workers usually hail from Chhattisgarh, UP and Rajasthan and belong to the SC, OBC and ST communities. Through several pictures, Parmar was able to show the shocking state of housing in which the workers live. There are no toilets, and the water is also often unhealthy to consume. The workers live with the threat of snakebites, and the lack of sanitation facilities forces women to get up very early to take a bath when it is still dark out. A link to the presentation can be found [here](#). In response to Renu Desai, Swastik Harish noted that perhaps with regard to labour laws, researchers could work towards finding legal precedents in cases in order to better fight future violations. A link to his presentation can be found [here](#).

In response to Dinesh Parmar, Swastik Harish suggested the possibility of a study which compares the housing conditions of source vs. destination sites and builds better guidelines based on the same.

Concluding remarks by Ashok Khandelwal and Sudhir Katiyar

Ashok Khandelwal began raising the question: After so many years of development, how come the nation still ignores and overlooks the housing problems of migrants and the homeless? One of the reasons is that there is a lack of a national-level migration policy and a policy for the homeless. There is not even a proper definition of homeless. Also, there is a lack of a proper set of data of seasonal/circular migrants as well as the homeless.

Speaking of some solutions, he mentioned that a major challenge, in addition to relevant policies, is access to land in urban growth centres. Currently, the land market is heavily distorted due to high and fast increasing inequality. To address this challenge, land with public entities should be earmarked through mapping of the entire city to understand which parts of the land and buildings can be used to develop need-based housing for poor short-term migrants and the homeless. The other suggestions made by him included extending direct benefits to the beneficiaries through rental vouchers and incentives to private entities, including individual households, to develop/create rental housing stock. To conclude, he advocated for a Right to Housing campaign, which can formulate the stakeholders' demands. For a detailed set of recommendations, please refer to section VI of his write-up.

The way forward

- There is a need for a Right to Housing campaign, which can be formulated according to various stakeholders' demands.
- There is an urgent need to enumerate the total homeless in the country and provide a working definition of 'homeless.'
- There needs to be a mapping of the entire city to understand which parts of the land can be used to develop housing options. Land equality is very high currently, and the land market is heavily distorted.
- Affordable housing schemes are currently too few in number, and the very limited options are not serving the needs of circular migrant workers. Rental housing policy needs to be designed keeping in mind the perspective of the workers most likely to live in them. Direct benefits can be provided to beneficiaries through rental vouchers. Heavy incentives can be given to private entities to develop more property.
- Housing policy interventions need to be understood in a multidimensional way, wherein housing, labour, infrastructure, and disaster are not understood separately but are interlinked.
- Advocacy can be focused on better implementation of existing labour laws, instead of entirely focusing on the repeal of the new labour codes.

- Different central ministries can include housing in their agenda to provide better housing for those people who come under the said ministry. For instance, the model of the Women and Child Development ministry providing worker hostels in the form of Apna Ghar hostels can be replicated by more ministries, such as the Ministry of Labour and Employment or the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- The Shelters for the urban homeless are not run efficiently and are not fully equipped to accommodate those people with special needs. There is a need to develop these shelters. In most cases, the mandated 'Shelter Management Committees' responsible for the upkeep of the shelters are also non-functional. Further, all shelters provide separate male and female dormitories, discouraging workers from seeking shelter.



We need to build a campaign for national housing along the lines of the Right To Food, which was launched before the National Food Security Act. There is a need for a very specific roadmap.
-Ashok Khandelwal, on the way forward for housing for migrant workers

Annexure I- Housing for short-term migrant workers: Issues, Policies, Programmes and Way - A summary

In the wake of the COVID-19 lockdown, the mass exodus of migrant labour from cities back to distant homes with innumerable problems, including risk to life, exacerbated the housing problems the migrants face in the cities. It highlighted the importance of the adequacy of the housing, as many returned because they could not isolate themselves if they fell ill due to the lack of minimum space in the houses they lived in. Moreover, due to a lack of access to an adequate, regular water supply, workers were unable to take preventive measures like regular hand washing. It also exposed the lack of security of tenure due to non-payment of rents.

Housing is a worker's right and the State's Obligation: Supreme Court and High Courts have held that housing is a fundamental right under different Articles of the Constitution, including for short-term migrant labour, and governments are obliged to ensure adequate housing for decent life for all, including workers. Various international instruments like the Human Rights Declaration, Sustainable Development Goal-11, to which India is signatory, also enjoin the governments to ensure adequate housing. As per the Constitution, housing is a state subject, and interstate migrants come under the central sphere. Despite recognising the need for affordable rental housing, neither the Central nor the State governments have initiated any meaningful effort. West Bengal built almost 20000 units in the 1960s and 1970s, but experience has become a financial liability due to mismanagement. Maharashtra too made efforts, but shelved them. Kerala's Apna Ghar, the only exception, is the first fully funded rental housing project exclusively for migrant labour. The project is alive and under expansion. Two projects are operational (i) with a capacity of 650 migrants at Kanchikode industrial area, Palakkad district and (ii) with 500 beds in Kinalur industrial area, Kozhikode district. Three others in the pipeline. Evaluation study finds workers largely satisfied with rental housing. The question of expandability, however, looms large given the huge financial gap between requirement and availability.

Affordable Rental Housing Complex Scheme: In the wake of Covid 2019, the GOI announced the Affordable Rental Housing Complex (ARHC) scheme in 2020 under PMAY-U. It is for urban areas with two models: Model-1 consists of available vacant houses with the local bodies/public entities, and Model-2 provides for the construction of new rental housing complexes by Public/Private entities in PPP mode on their own land for a dignified, safe 'walk to work's housing.

A reading of the ARHC scheme documents suggests (i) a bias towards manufacturing workers with a focus on productivity (ii) it is part of the ongoing ecosystem based on 'for profit' businesses (iii) GOI cash support is only in the form of TIG, other support is by states (iv) Model-1 scheme does not have much relevance, as most of the vacant houses are in big cities like Delhi and Mumbai, and are located at far off places, quality is not good and lack services and infrastructure (v) the overall target set for five years was miniscule -mere 2.95 lakh units on the upper side. The new version of ARHC vertical in PMAU-2-U also has almost similar provisions.

Model-1 targets by and large remain on paper, as out of the total 2,10,032 units, 83,534 were identified for conversion, but only 5,648 have been converted into rental units to date. Total units sanctioned under Model-2 are 82,273, out of which 60,386 sanctioned, and all the completed 35,425 beds are in the form of dormitories and in the state of Tamil Nadu. They cater exclusively to the workforce of the manufacturing units of iPhone assembler Foxconn, consisting of regular, relatively well-paid single women.

Thus, overall, out of the total target of 2.95 lakh units sanctioned, just about 41,083 rental units, a mere 13.92 per cent of the meagre target has been realised. All units are beyond the reach of the seasonal migrants, the excluded, poor and deprived group of seasonal and circular migrants of the informal sector.

Challenges in access to adequate housing: The primary reasons for lack of access to housing can be located in (a) acute shortage of adequate housing stock in big cities for the low-income group, and total invisibility of housing needs of rural-rural labour transient migrants in the discourse as well as policies and programmes. The overall shortage in urban housing can be attributed to a shift in the vision of the Central government beginning in the 1980s from direct intervention to facilitators, leading to an increasing role of the private sector and self-managed finances on the part of poor households and a focus on growth with increasing 'deregulation for ease of business'. Urban Housing, in particular, both ownership-based and rental, is now part of 'for-profit' businesses. ARHC, based on the PPP mode, is part of a 'for-profit' business.

The following outcomes, among others, of the current growth model add persistent bottlenecks in realising workers' rights to housing : (i) high inequality in income /wealth: per capita income and profits are rising on the one hand, and regular employment and wages are declining on the other (ii) unequal growth at the regional and social level, displacement, etc leading to forced migrations

(iii) weak labour protection, restricted/denied labour rights through inadequate provisions, filters, administrative control through rules, deregulation, lax/poor implementation mechanism, low wages (v) distress for the poor and marginalised by exclusions of the poor and migrants in governance.

Way Forward: The role of the Central and State governments is critical to address challenges for ensuring adequate housing. The following measures will help move forward:

1. Contributions of the migrant labour in building urban India must be recognised, like Pravasi Bhartiya, and should be honoured. Like Kerala, migrants should be called 'Guest Workers'. Negative images and perceptions about them must be changed.
2. Essential Policy measures required: (i) Standard definitions of Adequate Housing, Affordability needs to be adopted and used, (ii) National Migrant Policy and Rental Housing policy of 2015 should be finalised and implemented. (iii) Land use policy should be reframed to include use for adequate, affordable housing, including social rental housing, in situ development of slums/unauthorised colonies, following the principle 'people matter not land' (iv) Land for Social ARH for the poor and migrants near work locations should be identified and marked.
3. The ARH vertical in the MPAY-2-U should be suitably modified: (i) Small home owners should be made part of ARH with appropriate support and incentives to upgrade/construct additional spaces. (ii) For Model-1, the work of retrofitting and creating infrastructure should be the responsibility of the concerned entity/ULB. (iii) Priority may be given to interested non-profit organisations and use of CSR funds for operation and management of rental housing (iv) Public entities should have a separate mechanism for rental housing including social rental housing. Appropriate training should be provided for this.
4. Provision of workers' hostels should be included in the SUH Scheme and ARH: Seasonal migration is male-dominated. There is a need to set up a workers' hostel for both males and females in all industrial, commercial and residential areas.
5. Suitable questions should be included in the forthcoming enumeration/Censuses of houses (mid-2026) and population (Feb 2027) for seasonal migrants and the homeless.

6. The Labour Codes should be amended to: (i) make the housing provision mandatory for the (principal) employers for all plantation and construction workers, (iii) extend employers' housing to other sector workers like sugar-cane harvesters, brick-kiln workers, quarry workers, slat-pane workers etc. and inter-state migrant workers (ii) specify minimum standard of housing, infrastructure and services (iii) Applicability should be universal without any number filter (iv) All concerned local agencies responsible for providing infrastructure and services should be associated with employers temporary shelter complexes provided at/near worksites. (v) Minimum wage is the primary legal provision for workers with respect to housing. Fixations should be strictly based on 15 the ILC recommendation with the Supreme Court addition.

7. Other measures: (i) JAGA Mission Approach of Odisha should be adopted for slums development (ii) Urban governance should ensure identification and inclusion of seasonal migrants and homeless: (iii) Government-supported rental units with subsidized rates for vulnerable groups be planned (iv) Employer-assisted housing: Incentivizing large employers to develop rental housing for workers (v) Rental vouchers be provided as direct subsidy to the needy (vi) Improve civic and social amenities in neighbourhood where migrant/urban poor live.

Recommendations for workers collectives, non-profit civil society organisation and concerned citizens: (i) Non-profit organisations and workers collectives should initiate efforts to provide/facilitate housing to urban short-term migrants independently/ in collaboration with employers. (ii) Mass awareness programmes about the importance and right to adequate housing among the poor, vulnerable and excluded need to be planned and carried forward. Migrants, including long-term migrants, contribute to the urban growth; they are city-makers and are struggling daily to assert their citizenship. Mass awareness will consolidate power to negotiate and inclusion in urban governance. (iii) Migrant Workers' housing needs to be protected and promoted through various means, including collective negotiations with employers, new experiments in collaboration with and support of all stakeholders, and need-based judicial intervention. (iv) 'Right to Housing Campaign' should be initiated, like the right to food and education.

A link to the report by Ashok Khandelwal can be found [here](#)

Annexure II: List of Participants

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The Centre for Labour Research and Action (CLRA) works to promote the rights of workers in India's vast informal economy. It conducts research to understand the working and living conditions of workers in the informal sector. Based on this understanding, it advocates with the state to help workers secure their rights.

Alongside this, CLRA has played a pioneering role in documenting seasonal migration streams that supply labour to labour-intensive sectors such as agriculture, brick kilns, and building and construction. CLRA's work has helped create pathways toward establishing alternative models of worker organization. These models have been developed by taking into account workers' workplaces and the temporary nature of their employment, the crucial role of contractors, the nature of production processes, and the socio-economic backgrounds of the workers.



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