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## Challenges in controlling COVID-19 in migrants in Odisha, India

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## Dear Editor,

The new strain of Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), believed to have engendered from animal sources (Bats, Pangolins & Others), causes novel Coronavirus Disease (nCOVID-19), which has bloomed out as a pandemic as declared by WHO and has covered most parts of our planet [1,2]. This outbreak has taken a heavy toll on the global economy and the stock market and also has multipronged impact in various other socio-economic sectors. Due to the unclear mechanism of its transmission, it becomes extremely difficult to develop evidence-based infection control protocols to prevent community transmission.

Meanwhile, India has reported 2,268,675 positive cases with nearly 45,257 deaths as on August 11, 2020 [3]. The Indian government announced a lockdown across the country in mid-March and extended it till May 31, 2020, wherein the people were ordered to stay home to prevent the spread of the virus. As per report, 130 crores of peoples are living in this subcontinent. Moreover, 50% of world population is living in India and China alone. Considering such a huge population in this part of the globe, it becomes highly imperative to take adequate steps to control the onward

transmission of the virus to put a brake on the spread of the disease. In this country comprising of 28 states and 8 union territories, a large number of people, mostly from eastern fringes of the country (Odisha, Bihar, West Bengal, Telangana, Jharkhand etc.) are working in different other states for their livelihood. Governments of different states have taken steps to bring their people to their own states by trains, buses, etc. freely as their companies were closed due to lockdown. Also quarantine centers have been arranged for them with free boarding and lodging facility along with some financial assistance. But it was observed in some places migrant peoples instead of staying in quarantine centers moved freely here and there and visited their own house members in blatant violation of the pandemic protocol. This poses a huge challenge before the administration to control the infection.

In Odisha, 100 Corona positive cases were reported before the entry of these migrant peoples which increased dramatically after their return. It prompts us to rethink about the propriety of the decision taken towards control of the outbreak. It would have been wise if they would have been brought back before lockdown, when the transmission of virus was minimal. As this novel virus is transmitted ( $R_0 > 5$ ) significantly as compared to other viruses, so it is important to avoid mass transportation of people where the risk factor of infection is substantially high, because these people come in bulk in trains and buses. The possibility of infection from asymptomatic carriers is also pretty high. In this context, the state

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governments should have discussed with each other to take proper steps before mass transportation of migrant workers to their respective states. Another important aspect is in some areas companies are reopened with proper guidelines, where these peoples were working. If these migrant workers are denied reemployment in their previous companies, then it would create a big challenge for the government to provide them with alternate source of livelihood, otherwise it will cause a huge humanitarian issue. Now, the fate of thousands of migrant people of Odisha is hanging in balance and time will say what will happen, until then we have to watch and see. The same situation prevails for migrant workers of other states as well.

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### Declaration of competing interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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