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Migration, caste and livelihood: evidence from Indian slums

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Abstract

This paper based on a primary survey of slum dwellers in four Indian cities examines the caste dimension of migrants and the nexus, if any, between caste and the job market participation. Based on the quantitative exercises, we observe overlaps between social and economic status. A higher propensity to migrate is evident among the population belonging to the general (GEN) category and other backward castes in comparison to the scheduled castes and tribes who are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. The disadvantaged castes are not even in a position to take the benefits of migration. Further, those with higher caste status seem to have better endowments required for absorption in the urban job market; the migrants of higher caste status are absorbed in relatively better jobs compared to the lower castes. Migrant workers from GEN category draw relatively higher incomes. On the whole, when both the caste and migration dimensions are combined, at the lower echelons, migration does pay if the worker is better off in terms of caste status. From this point of view, it is argued that special programmes offering improved access to livelihood opportunities need to be pursued in the rural areas so that the disadvantaged castes are able to reduce their vulnerability.

Keywords: caste, migration, labour market, slums, urban