

# **Making Way for the Men: Gendered impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown on workfare guarantee in India**

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We examine the gendered impacts of a local labour supply shock on the world's largest rural workfare guarantee programme in India, that has historically employed a large number of women in a context where rural women tend to have limited options for paid work. We used the COVID-19-induced lockdown in India in March 2020 as an exogenous shock that triggered large scale return migration of workers from their place of employment to their place of origin, overwhelmingly in rural areas.

The consequent expansion of local labour supply in high outmigration districts occurred without commensurate expansion in avenues for employment combined with the inadequate expansion of workfare guarantee to meet the surge in demand. Using a difference-in-differences approach that compares districts that likely saw a large share of return migrants with those that did not, we find that women were crowded out of MGNREGA at the margin, within six months of the lockdown. Women workers amongst all MGNREGA workers fell by 1.2-1.5 percentage points and the share of women in all MGNREGA workdays declined by 1.2-1.6 percentage points. In levels, these are huge considering the scale of the programme.

Our research suggests this effect holds for the entire year as well, consistent with popular observation that economic recovery has been slow and rural distress persists. Our findings are robust to inclusion of covariates that are possible confounders, to different definitions of high return migrant districts and controls for gender composition of the returnee migrants. Ongoing work attempts to uncover the channels through which this effect occurs.