

## Far From Home: Support for India's Migrant Guest Workers During COVID-19



Photo: CASA, India

Imagine that you have to travel far from home in order to find work to support your family. You find a job in the city, and a place to stay, so that you can work and send money home to your loved ones. But then, a global pandemic shuts down the economy. There is no longer work, and you must leave the city to return home. It isn't safe to travel- but the

crowded city is unsafe as well, and you will have nowhere to stay since you are no longer working.

This was the case for millions of migrant guest workers in India. When the COVID-19 crisis meant that businesses had to shut down, the economy came to a grinding halt. Guest workers were one of the hardest hit populations in the country at the onset of the pandemic. Lockdown was enforced with very little notice, making travel difficult, and leaving many stranded with nowhere to stay, but no way to get home again.

21- year old Vimla Devi is a migrant worker from Nepal. She migrated to India with her family in search of better livelihood alternatives. However, her husband abandoned her, making her the sole caregiver of their children. Still, Vimla was determined to provide for herself and her children, in spite of the male dominated social structure that limits opportunities for women--and in spite of the pandemic that limited her opportunities even further.

Thankfully, Week of Compassion partners with established presence in the region are supporting Vimla and her family, along with many others in similar situations. They connected Vimla with employment digging and clearing roads in nearby villages. This provided her a daily wage, while also paving the way for a permanent job down the road.

With their long-standing presence and knowledge of the region, our partners are working to meet the multi-dimensional needs that continue to arise from this crisis. They provide hygiene kits and disinfectant and share critical information about preventing the spread of

disease. They distribute both dry rations and hot meals to some of the most vulnerable. So far, awareness initiatives have touched millions of lives. Other program elements have directly impacted nearly 700,000 people in more than 2,000 villages--and the reach continues to grow. Looking ahead to long-term needs, they are also implementing education and livelihood support programs that will empower families and communities to provide for themselves moving forward.

India currently has the second highest infection rates in the world, and are projected to be the highest in the near future. While their numbers are now declining, the situation remains tenuous. Given the current situation, rates could spike again quickly. And even if numbers continue in a hopeful direction, the economic impact of this crisis will be felt for years to come.

As in so many other places around the world, this pandemic has exposed pre-existing cracks in economic structure, showing that many are left behind and made extremely vulnerable in a crisis situation. Through our global network of partners, Week of Compassion is present in places like India, supporting urgent, immediate needs; while also working to build stronger infrastructures and create opportunities. The importance of long-term relationships is crucial in this regard, and we are grateful for our partners whose foundations of trust and connection help enable this type of life-giving development work.

The gifts that you share through Week of Compassion support these and other responses in this time of global crisis. Together, we can share our compassion to make a difference in the lives of those facing unthinkable challenges.





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Alabama,  
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Florida, Long-Term  
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*Week of Compassion is the relief, refugee and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.*

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