

# Slowly, migrants return to Delhi and NCR: 'There's no work back home'

**ANANYA TIWARI**

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 12

FOR A month after the lockdown was announced in March, Sandeep Vishwakarma (22) stayed back in Haryana's Karnal, where he worked. But all jobs had dried up. In April, he and other construction labourers left for Panipat on foot. Now he's back.

On Wednesday, he reached Delhi after an almost 11-hour bus ride and headed to Rewari on a vehicle arranged by a contractor. Leaving his family behind at Sitapur, he now hopes to land a job at a factory at Rewari. "I was earning Rs 10,500 per month at Karnal. We are at Rewari now, and a company still has to hire me. Then I will know how much I will earn. There is no work at home and I need the money," he said.

At the Anand Vihar ISBT, a steady stream of migrant workers from Uttar Pradesh are arriving in Delhi to resume work in NCR, around three months after the lockdown was eased.

Many left Delhi right after the lockdown on March 24 on foot.



**At Anand Vihar ISBT.** *Praveen Khanna*

Among them was Giriraj Singh (28), who used to work at an aluminium plant in Nangloi. He left for Badaun on foot, hitching a ride on the way. Now, he is returning to work at the same plant for Rs 12,000 per month—what he was earning earlier for eight hours of work. "I have two children below the age of six... I need to earn. I am scared of the virus, but there is nothing I can do about it," he said.

Avneesh Sagar (19) and his

brother Patiraj Sagar (18), from Jalalabad in Shahjahanpur, arrived Wednesday at the bus station to head back to their job at a utensil-making factory at Bawana for the same wage of Rs 14,000 per month. Avneesh said, "Both of us left before the lockdown as work had stopped. The factory has called us back now. There is no work at home, even the harvest season is over."

Several neighbourhoods in

Delhi, such as urban villages and unauthorised colonies which were primarily populated by migrant workers, are still largely empty as homeowners wait for tenants to return.

Honey Bharti (32), who runs a clothing store and owns a four-storey house at Khichripur village near Patparganj, used to rent eight rooms to tenants for Rs 3,000-4,000 per month. The tenants, who hailed from UP and used to work as carpenters, auto and e-rickshaw drivers, factory workers, street vendors, are yet to return.

He said, "Even after lockdown was partially lifted, an auto-driver, for example, was earning only Rs 300-350 per day. This is barely anything as he has to pay rent to the rickshaw owner. He said he can't pay rent and went home."

Himanshu (29), who runs a general store and rents out 10 rooms for Rs 2,000-2,500 per month at Ghondli Village in East Delhi's Krishna Nagar, said, "Only one family from Bihar stayed back. The rest are ready to return if factories call them. But their employers keep saying there is no work, don't come now."