WALKING THE TIGHTROPE
Exploitation of Migrant Children in Tourism in Goa
Goa, since the late 1980s has been a popular
destination. A harsh reality that came to light
was the involvement of a few tourists in the
exploitation of children. With the growth of
tourism, there has been a steady increase in
the migrant population from other Indian
states and neighbouring countries (Nepal),
who come to Goa in search of employment.

During the first three decades post the
liberation from the Portuguese rule in 1961,
bureaucrats, teachers and industrialists
from neighbouring states were encouraged
to come to Goa. The 1980s and 1990s,
witnessed a major boom in the construction
industry accompanied by a phase of
exponential expansion of the tourism
industry. The migrant workers took over jobs
at all levels – administrative, supervisory,
shop floor, construction, vendors, small
traders, tourism and even fishermen. Over
the years this resulted in almost 80% of
the migrant communities getting employed
as casual and low-skilled labourers in the
unorganised sector.

This research explores the inter-linkages
between three areas: children, tourism and
migration. The research methods included
questionnaires, observations, interviews and

Migration can be described as the movement
of people from one place to another for
the purpose of taking up permanent or
temporary residence, usually across a
political boundary. People either choose to
move voluntarily or because of circumstances
are forced to move involuntarily.

focus group discussions with people of migrant
households, children, members of the tourism
industry, tourists, district and state government
departments, law enforcement agencies
and community members knowledgeable
on the issue. The total sample size was 658
respondents covering 14 slums across the state.

Situation of Migrant Households
A significant number of the migrant people
to Goa are from Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh,
Rajasthan, Bihar, Maharastra, Gujarat, Jammu
and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh,
Odisha, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and
Nepal and belong mainly to socially deprived
groups such as the Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled
Tribes/ Nomadic Tribes or Other Backward
Communities.

These families face heightened levels of
discrimination in every aspect of life. They
have been driven from their homes to
unknown places in search of a means of
earning a livelihood with the hope of having
a better future for themselves and their
children. Lacking skills and assets, most
Key statistics on the situation of migrant households

• 38% have resided in Goa for more than 16 years and fall under the domicile category but continue to be considered as outsiders, thereby facing social exclusion.

• 30% are involved in tourism related occupations. Of this only 30% are women working mainly on the beach, in shops and hotels.

• 82% do not even earn a minimum wage leading them to live a hand to mouth existence. 34% draw a monthly family income below Rs 5000; while 48% earn between Rs 6,000 to Rs 10,000 per month.

• 58% in the tourism industry are paid a daily wage.

migrants end up in the unorganised sector, with significant numbers employed in tourism. A large percentage of the migrant population earn a living by selling items on the beach, working in shacks/restaurants/hotels as cooks, cleaners, security, waiters, as drivers or entertaining tourists by performing acrobatics. Though they are the backbone of tourism and its allied sectors especially when it comes to the low paying jobs, they are not recognized as employees; their conditions of work are often miserable marked by long hours of work, meager wages and no security of work. Employers prefer migrant workers to local people because they are willing to work for lower wages, work harder and longer, take less leave, are more submissive and demand less. The invisibility of their work coupled with their educational status and income pattern makes these communities vulnerable.

Adding to their woes are the abysmal living conditions that they find themselves in. Most migrant workers live clustered together in slums, ghettoized along the lines of caste, class and linguistics. The houses provided to them whether on rent or by the employer, often lack provision for water, electricity, drainage and sewage systems. Deplorable and unhygienic living conditions have increased the health hazards of the migrant people making them more susceptible to disease and infection.

The migrant people, suffer not only the harsh working and living conditions but also face the social consequences in terms of the wrath of local people. The Goans believe that it is the migrant people who are responsible for many of the negative impacts of tourism in Goa. They are blamed for drugs, sex work, taking away job opportunities and polluting the Goan identity & culture. While being an integral part of the society, the migrants are seen as a liability that one needs to tolerate.

Situation of Migrant Children

A child by the virtue of being born into these families faces the risk of being pushed into exploitative situations. This vulnerability is intensified as they grow older, as the state does not have proper processes and systems to ensure that their safety is assured and that their rights are upheld.

Varied reasons were given to explain why children were not enrolled/dropped out of school but the ones most frequently voiced
Right to Education became a Fundamental Right under the Constitutional Amendment of Article 21-A. According to the Right of Children to Free & Compulsory Education Act, 2009 all children belonging to the age-group of 6 to 14 years must compulsorily be enrolled in schools.

were related to livelihood issues and skepticism about the usefulness of education. Gender discrimination, the constant movement from one place to another, constraints of time and financial affordability by the parents, lack of documents proving legal identity, lack of access to quality education and discrimination faced by children in schools were also reasons stated that adversely affect the education of children.

Given the marginalisation and situation of poverty that the families find themselves in, many children engage in activities by way of helping their parents, taking care of younger siblings or older grandparents, helping in household chores or working in income-earning activities. Children very often do not have a choice of the work they engage in, but do so out of necessity to earn and based on the availability of the job. Tourism is one such area that provides opportunities for children to be part of the invisible labour force. This then pushes them into spaces where they are at-risk of being exploited – economically, physically, sexually and emotionally.

It was common knowledge among people that child labour is illegal and therefore information on child labour was often withheld. In tourism, children were mainly involved in selling trinkets, performing acrobatics (sometimes using rings of fire), rope circus, working in shops/ small eateries/ restaurants/ hotels, mostly working on the beach belt without any adult supervision.

Children as young as 4 years old were found working. Very often it is the parents themselves who send/ initiate children into working. Children said that their siblings and friends also worked.

Key statistics on situation of migrant children

- 92% lived with their parents, 14% of whom belonged to single parent families.
- 27% had never enrolled nor were they able to complete their education. Only 3% had completed 10th standard.
- 31% of the children work, 53% of whom are directly involved in tourism.
- 34% of the children working also study while 65% have dropped out of school.
- 53% of the children studying, work 3 to 4 hours a day, another 20% work between 5 to 12 hours
- 67% earned a daily wage
- 48% are addicted to substances, tobacco and smoking are among the common addictions.
children are in unsafe environments when parents have gone to work, leaving them alone at home or when they themselves are working. These children are extremely susceptible to all forms of exploitation at the work space and public spaces and also become an easy prey for travelling sex offenders and paedophiles.

Almost everybody stated that it is the migrant children who are most vulnerable - experiencing verbal and/or physical abuse, sexual harassment, trafficking and labour. 31% from the tourism industry have been witness to tourists, mainly domestic, exploiting children. When asked about whom to contact to report when they see a child in distress - 58% of children, 52% from the tourism industry and over 70% of the tourists had no information.

Apathy towards child protection could be discerned on the part of government officials. An official from the Goa Tourism Development Corporation in response to a question about what he would do if he encountered a tourist asking for a child companion replied “We ignore them or report it to the police” while a BDO from North Goa when asked about the role of the Department of Panchayats in protecting children in a survey form responded “Not Applicable”.

The migrant families and children in particular are walking the tight rope. Tourism does not recognise their work and their contribution to the economy. While the powerful in the region thrive through the control of tourism, it is the migrant communities who continue to be oppressed including being discriminated and sexually exploited in their struggle for survival and livelihoods. We need to recognise how degrading tourism in Goa has become, the brunt of which is being borne by the migrant people.

How can this be tackled?


Establishing the foundation of decent living and decent work is a must. There is a need to conduct an enquiry into the status of the migrant people as well as review and amend current legislation to ensure adequate protection of the rights and interest of migrant people. To carry out extensive research to examine the sector-wise contribution of migrant people in different industries of the economy to understand their role in the development of Goa.

Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) in collaboration with the Department of Tourism (DoT) should develop a “State Plan of Action to Counter Child Exploitation in Tourism in Goa” by involving all the stakeholders. Strengthen helpline services (like 1098 Childline) by guaranteeing that they have the networks and services that the child in distress needs, including victim protection services and police follow-up as required.

The DWCD could also provide awareness and capacity building programmes for government officials.
officials and law enforcement authorities to effectively address cases of child abuse, including the process of penalising the offenders. The DoT needs to be aware of the various Codes and its mechanisms that exist on child protection and to work with various sectors, where the exploitation of children occurs frequently.

Every village needs to set up and have a functional Village Child Protection Committee. Partnerships to be developed between the panchayats, police and NGOs by creating social auditing systems for examining the status of children in tourism.

Extensive media campaigns should be conducted, in partnership with DoT and the tourism industry, to inform tourists that the exploitation of children, child sex tourism and child labour is not acceptable. The tourism industry should push for a "zero tolerance to child exploitation" policy in its bid to have a form of tourism that is responsible.

This research is part of our work on ‘Reducing Violence Against Children, with special focus on sexual exploitation of children and child sex tourism’ done in collaboration with Caritas-Goa, Centre for Responsible Tourism, Children’s Rights in Goa, EQUATIONS, Jan Ugahi and Vikas Samvad.


This research is also part of the Global Study on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism (www.globalstudysectt.org).