

Bericht von Ram Esteves, Mitarbeiter der Partnerorganisation ADATS, vom 01.06.2020

Dear Everyone:

When we didn't find a single Migrant at the border yesterday, we seriously thought that government measures to send back Migrant workers have finally kicked in. We couldn't have been more wrong. Today, we assisted 49 persons and the 20 days total has reached 2,085.

At 1:45 in the afternoon we got a call that 14 Migrants had reached the border and were waiting in the hot sun. ADATS Staff immediately went and distributed bread, jam, water packets and ₹ 500 each before stopping an Anantapur bound lorry and loading them onto it. All 14 were a gang of self-employed potters from Madhya Pradesh, selling garden pots to houses and office complexes in Hosur. They somehow managed to run their business for 2-3 months during the Lockdown. But demand dropped so low that they finally found it impossible to continue. They took a taxi and reached the border.

This evening at 5:45 pm we received yet another call. On reaching the border we found a mixed group of 35. In spite of having had fairly good jobs before the Lockdown, they were all in a terrified state when we found them. Even without asking, we knew they had gone through the mill in Bangalore.



Among them were 3 families comprising 10 persons, including children, from Chhattisgarh. They had been working in a poultry farm at Chintamani. Unlike city employers, the farmer looked after them quite well. Even during the 67 daylong Lockdown he helped them. But then he himself got bankrupt because of the senseless ban on goods movement. He couldn't get feed concentrate, transport the broilers, or bring in a fresh batch of day-old chicks. When he didn't have any more feed, he literally gave away two month old chicken at whatever price local people paid, rather than let the birds starve to death. With this paltry collection, he gave his workers ₹ 2,000 each and wished them a safe journey. Trusting the government and believing they could catch a much publicised *Shramik* train they all went to Bangalore. After waiting outside the railway station for a day or two they decided to trek home and reached the border this evening.



Another group of 11 youngsters from UP and Nagpur were a centring gang working on contract wages. When construction work stopped during the Lockdown, they were left high and dry. Hunger reduced them to a miserable state. When the Lockdown was finally relaxed, they went to avail government measures. They must have had such terrible experiences that they were scared to elaborate. We did not press.



Yet another group of 7 men, 5 women and 2 kids from West Bengal were gardeners in a nursery in Bangalore. This too shut down and they had to leave.

The only saving grace today was that we actually managed to stop a lorry that was going all the way to Jharkhand! After willingly loading all 35 Migrants, the driver asked, "Is it alright if I ask them for a fare of ₹ 200 or ₹ 300 each?" "After reaching, please!" "Hmmm... perhaps I will have to spend from my pocket to feed them on the way..."

We have run out of money. But we cannot stop.

Best wishes,

Ram