

Dharavi Fortnightly

Issue 01

A NEW NORMAL

As the new normal sets in, and Dharavi gears up to resume business as usual, its vital workforce is on their way back or have been here for some time now. With various discourses about India’s lockdown policy claiming an exodus of workers from cities, our first issue of Dharavi fortnightly attempts to present a parallel narrative through the lens of circulatory urbanism.

Elicited from a comparative study of those who went to their native place during the lockdown and those who didn't, we revisit their last few months keeping in mind age-old patterns of circular migration. Based on parameters gauged from our 15 Dharavi Weeklys, we highlight trends between the decision to go to the native place and various avatars of socio-economic and financial security which a city like Mumbai boasts about.

Our respondent group of 33, where 36% of the people went back to their villages during the lockdown, prove that the journey to their villages was not a rare phenomenon, but rather a frequent one. It ties back to the concept of circulatory urbanism, which shows the existence of interconnected habitats, dual household mechanisms and families having a presence in two places at the same time i.e. the city and their native place.

Why return to the village?

While the lockdown may have changed the movement patterns for many, all our respondents seasonally migrate for various reasons such as familial ties, festivities and

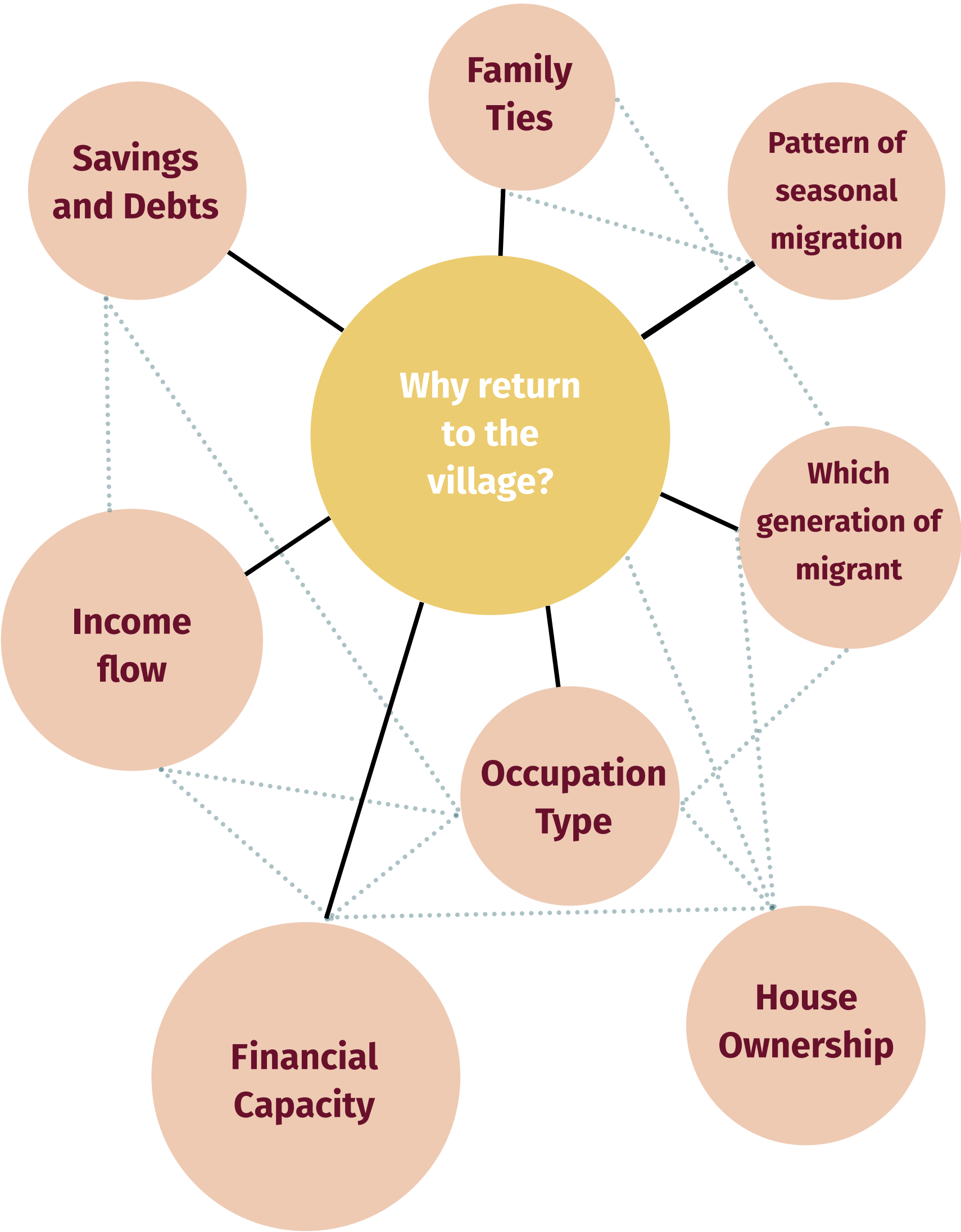


Tarun Swami practising farming back at his village.

family events, farmwork, income opportunities, vacation etc. Cities such as Mumbai are economic powerhouses that attract crores of Indians from across the country, and root people by providing economic security through livelihood opportunities and the networks built around them.

Studying people’s decision to return to their native place during lockdown may provide insights about how

circular urban systems and seasonal cycles respond to people's needs when faced with the uncertainty of a pandemic and the resultant economic condition. It will also help distinguish between the journeys undertaken to cope with the pandemic or ones that simply aligned with the patterns of circulatory urbanism. The trend which emerged during our survey requires further analysis.

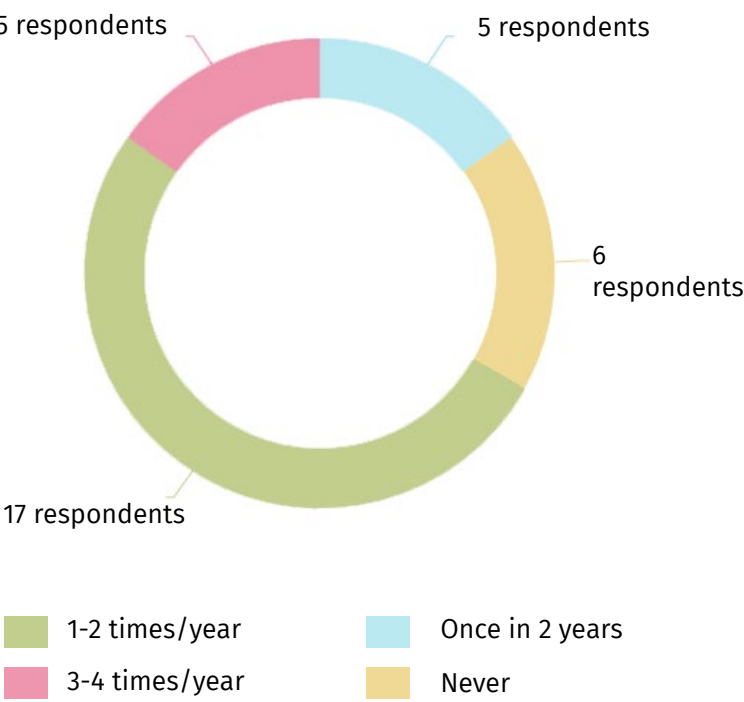


Factors correlating to the decision of returning to the village.

The next few pages show data that we have collected and generated to compare the effects of various factors on Dharavi residents' decision to return to the village during the lock down.

12 respondents went back to their village during lock down

21 respondents didn't go back to their village during lock down

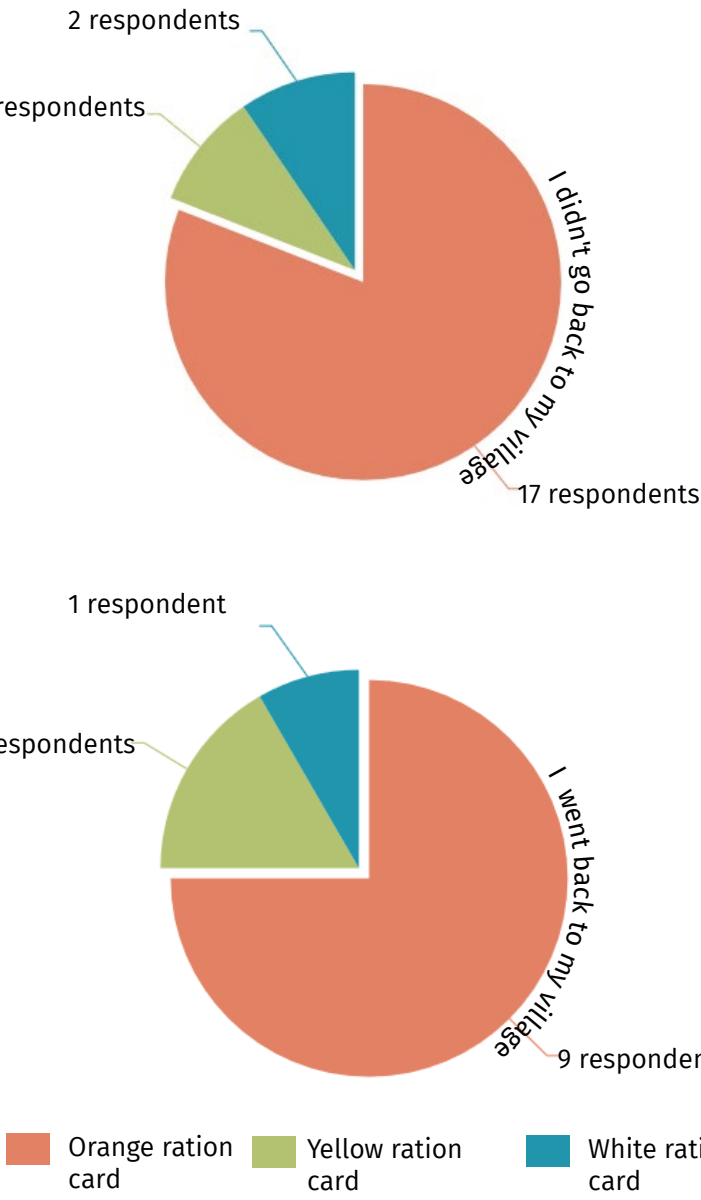


The chart shows the no. of respondents and their frequency of visiting their village.

Most of our respondents visit their village regularly, frequency ranging from once in 2 years to 3-4 times in one year. There is no direct correlation between going back during the lockdown and no. of visits to the village, which makes the case for an already strong dual household system.

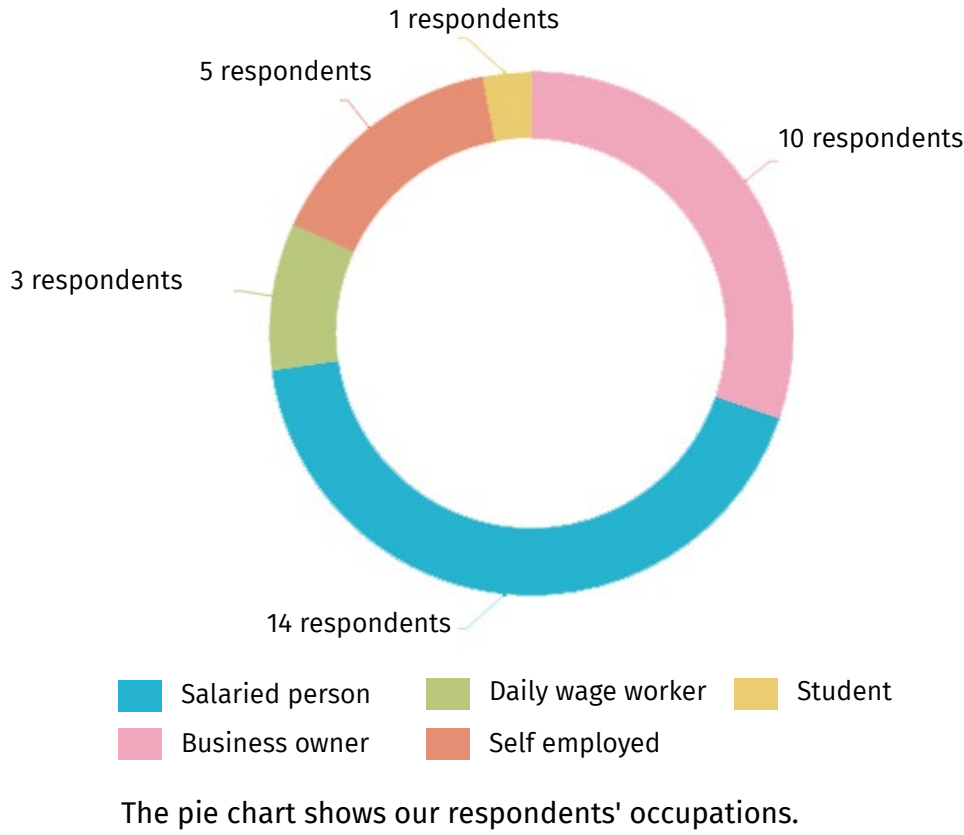
Ration cards

The following pie charts indicate that a proportionally equal number of people of all ration card colour groups had decided to go to the village during lockdown versus staying back, indicating a weak correlation between going back during the lockdown and the income group. It may also indicate that the colour of ration cards may not be an accurate method of inferring people’s income groups due to an outdated system of categorisation, and an inefficient system of upgradation.

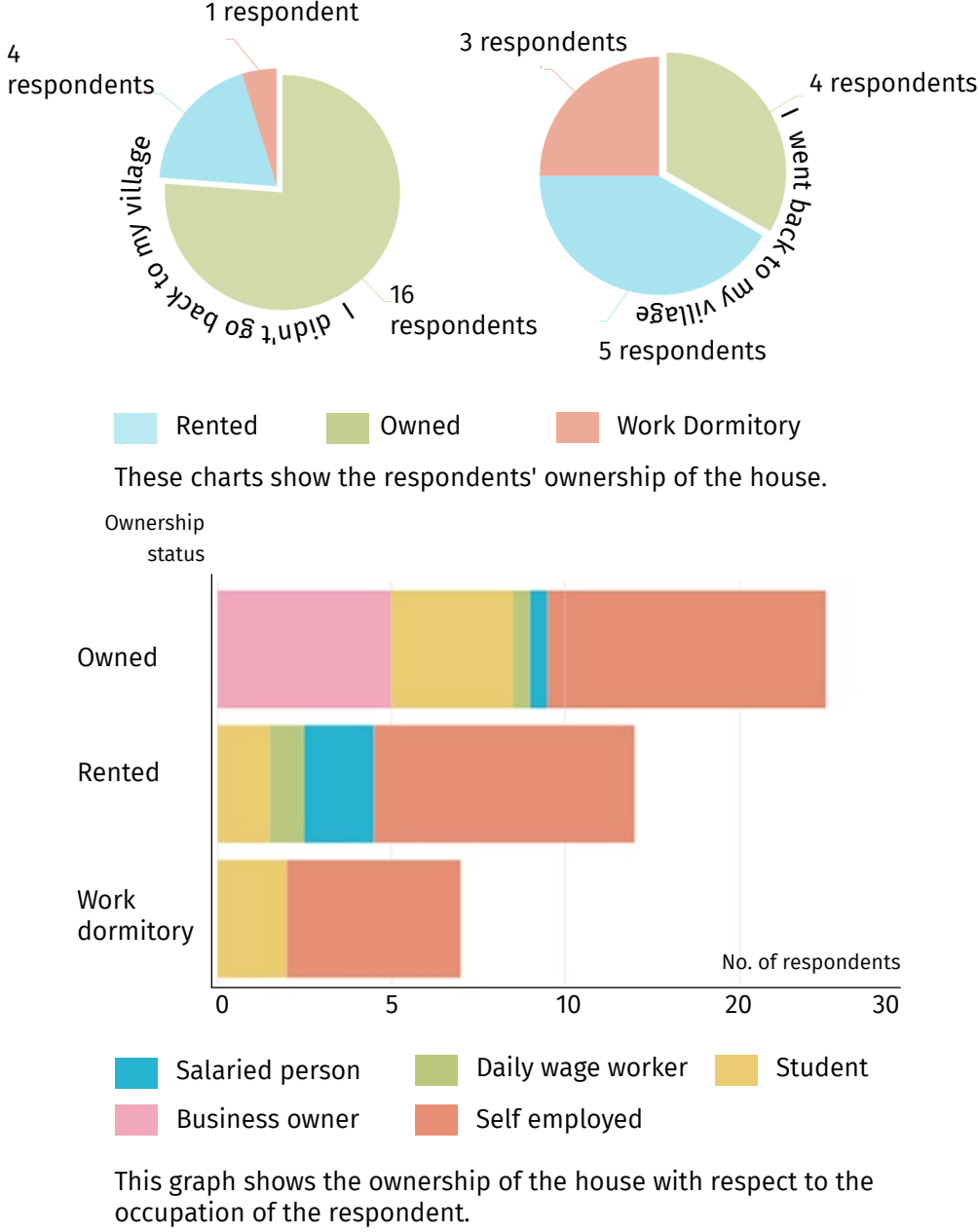


These charts show the distribution of ration cards owned by the respondents.

Occupation type



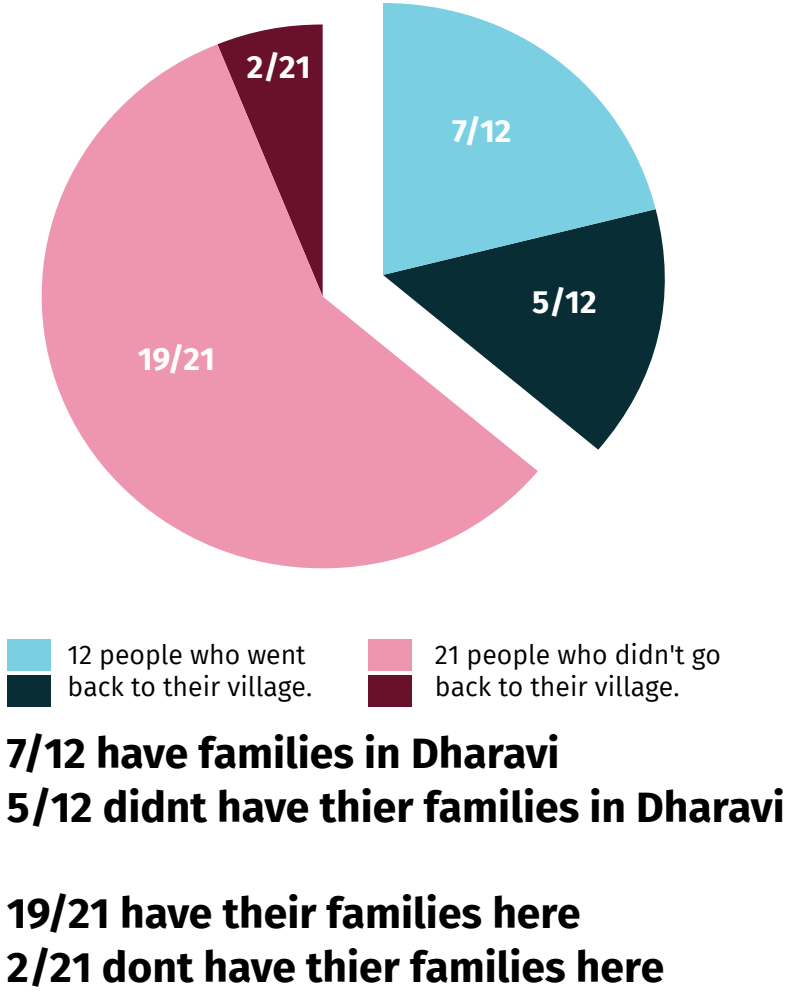
House Ownership



The status of house ownership seems to have a strong correlation to the decision to stay in Dharavi. It is also interesting to note that most business owners, which if migrants, tend to be the second, third, and fourth generation, all own houses. This increases their sense of rootedness in a location, providing shelter and financial security and thus a reason to stay put. Similarly, for most salaried workers living in work dormitories, with homeownership in their respective village decided to leave during the lockdown. The city offers accommodation and not housing for most seasonal migrant workers.

While those who had a family and home back in the village traveled back as and when they could, there were some who longed for the same. “We feel it would’ve been better if we had an immediate family member in the village, we could have gone back to the village. This pandemic made us consider a family member moving to the village.” -Vidya Mane

Immediate family in Dharavi



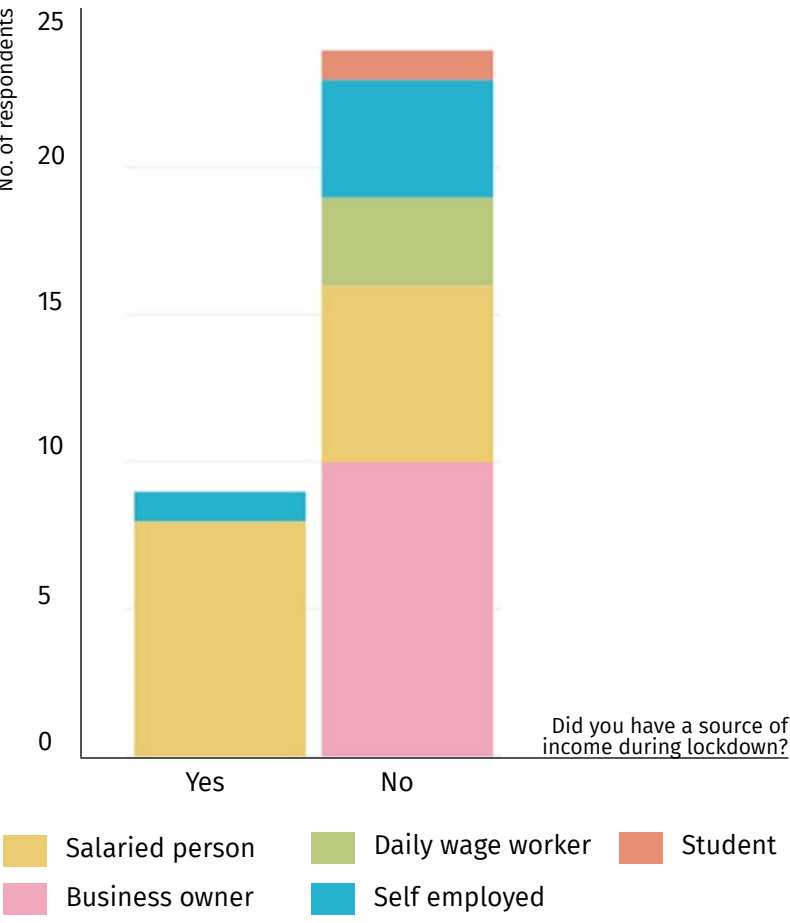
Those who have their immediate families in Dharavi and who didn't go back to the village are almost equally proportional to those who have families in Dharavi and went with their family to their native place during the lockdown. This shows that the population going to their villages were not primarily single working migrants, and our respondents have stated multiple reasons such as financial insecurity, fear of the virus itself, the burden of feeding the entire family with no income, lack of food and supplies in the city, lack of proper living conditions and strong family ties in the village.

Families with Dual households

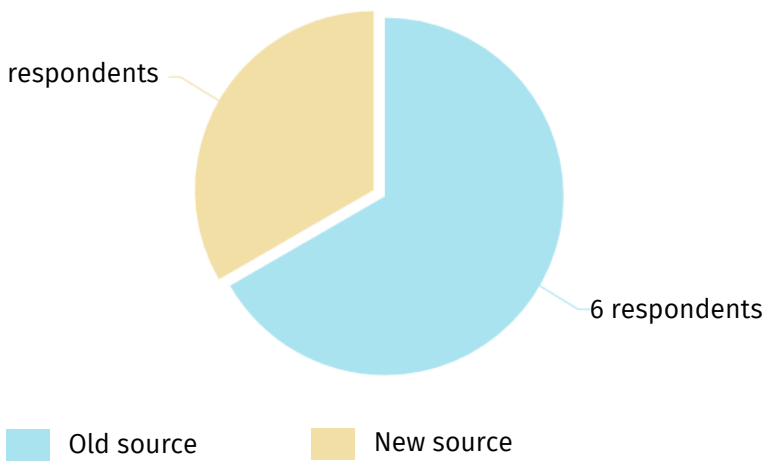
Bhagirath Yadav is a carpenter who works on daily wages. His immediate family lives in the village and he lives in Dharavi alone. Though he does visit his family once every year.

When we asked him about which place is home to him, he said, "Dharavi is my home, my family is not here but Dharavi enables me to provide for my family. People of Dharavi are much more kind and considerate than the people in the village. During the first phase of the lockdown I was in Dharavi and was helped by my employer and others with food and ration, this is something which won't happen in the village."

Source of income during the lockdown



The graph shows the respondents who could/could not earn an income during the lockdown wrt to their occupation



The chart shows if the respondents who were able to earn an income during the lockdown earned from an old source or a new one.

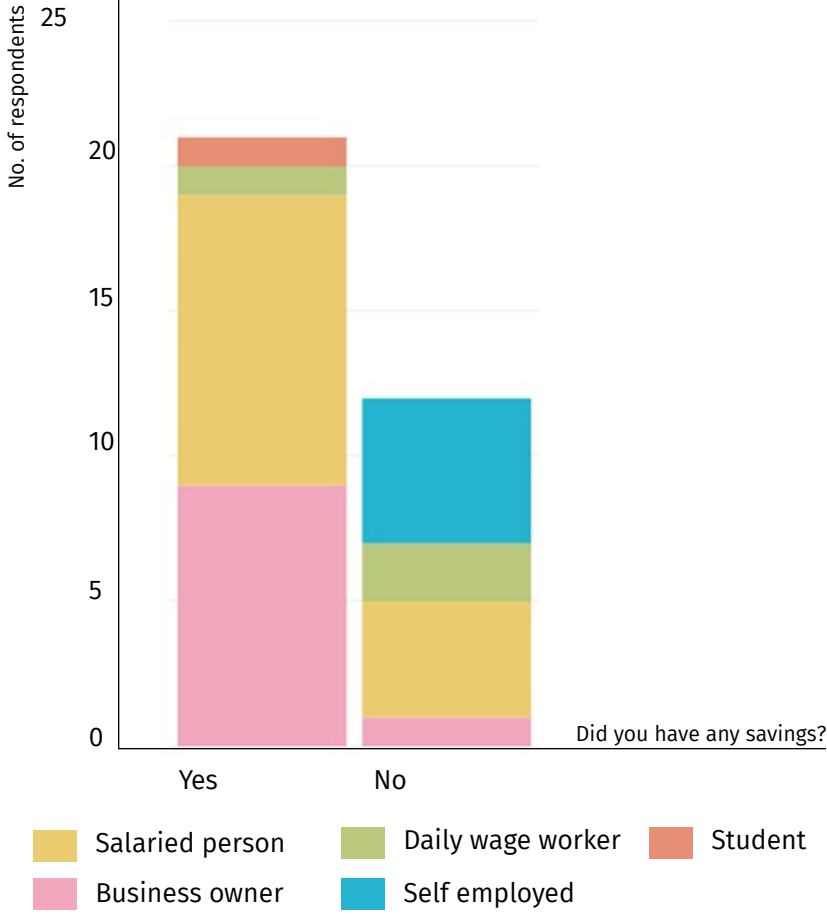
The pandemic saw the closure of the informal sector of Dharavi, a \$1 billion economy (Mint, April 2020). In this context, 72% of our respondents had zero income for almost 5 months. Many respondents belonging to the salaried group and without income claimed to be working during the period without any pay, even with jobs such as a school teacher and a hospital nurse. However, out of respondents who earned an income during the lockdown, 3 out of 9 moved to a new source of income, either in the city or their respective native place.

A papad seller took up a job at the Sion hospital as a caretaker in a COVID ward. Shubham Shukla, a door-to-door salesman, and Ashish Kadam, a light designer technician, started to deliver milk to survive through the lockdown. 11 out of 12 people who went to their village during lockdown are confident of returning to the city, primarily driven by the desperate need for money.



A house in Dharavi Koliwada.

Do you have any savings?

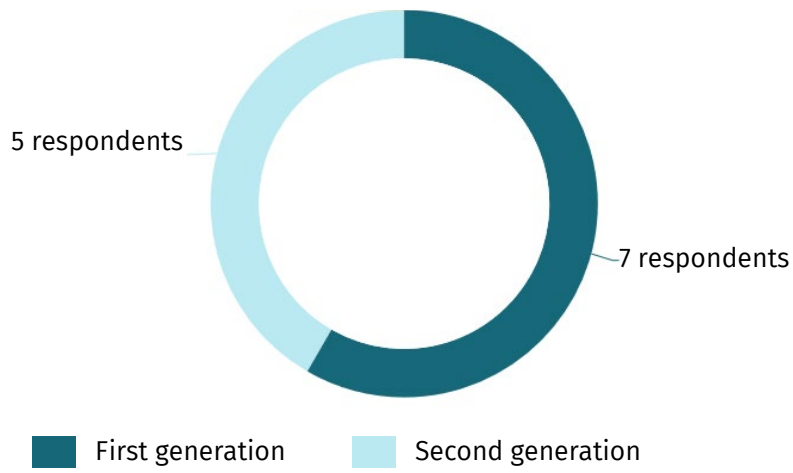


The graph shows if the respondents had any savings wrt to their occupation

Two-third of our respondents have savings, primarily belonging to business and salaried groups. 7 out of 21 respondents with savings claim to have exhausted all of their savings during lockdown. 90% of our respondents without savings went into debt.

Out of the people who have debt, 50% went back and 50% stayed in Dharavi. So debt collection was irrespective of going back, since the main reasons for it were house rent, bills, school fees, food supplies, medical bills, amongst many others.

Migrant generation

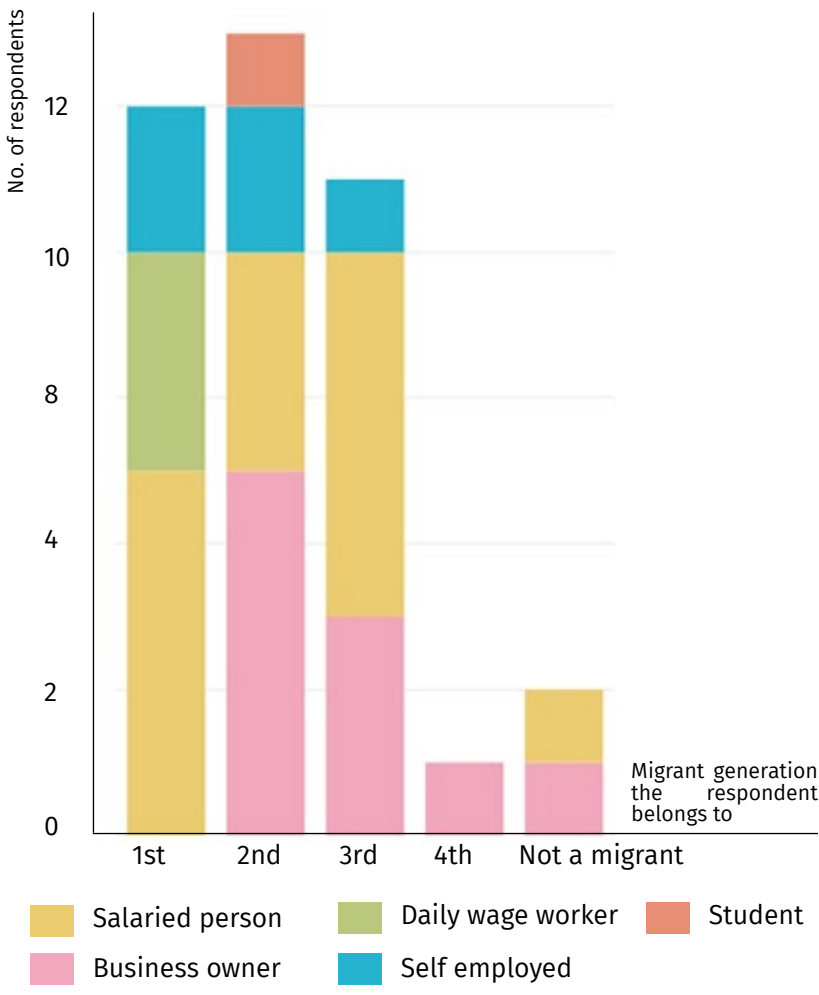


The chart shows that the 12 respondents who went back to their villages during lockdown were first and second generation migrants only.

75% of the first generation migrants chose to go back, which might indicate strong familial ties and a strong dual household system in the village, vis-a-vis the third and fourth generation migrants whose familial and native ties may have gradually weakened over time or migrated out of the village.



A second generation migrant running a local business in Dharavi.



The graph shows the respondents' generation of family migration wrt their occupation.

Amongst our pool of respondents, no first generation migrant is a business owner, indicating that it may be essential to live for a few generations in Mumbai to develop a form of livelihood security and financial confidence.

Employer - Employee relationship

During the lockdown, the dependency of the worker on his employer increased multifold. All of them attest to hiring the same employees back, demonstrating strong employer-employee relationships.

9 out of 10 businesses owners corroborated to helping their employees through the economic hardships tilll they went home. Help includes providing food grains, cooked food, monetary support, and travel fares to and from the village. All of them attested to hiring the same employees back.

Dharavi Stigmatised

Our respondent, Rekha Gade worked as a household help in Bandra where she lost her job because she was from Dharavi. The stigma and fear was so deep that Rekha’s previous employer suggested to her daughter’s employer to discontinue her job as well. Lucky for her daughter, her employer was not an easy sway and retained her, and paid her during the lockdown as well.

Another instance of stigmatisation revealed itself when Vidya Mane, a social worker in Dharavi, referred her friend for a job in the bank. The applicant was rejected as she belonged to Dharavi.

A void in Dharavi felt by the residents

With many leaving for their villages during the lockdown, those left truly felt their absence in their professional and day-to-day inter-personal transactions.

Broken Supply Chains

Arbaz helps his father run a carton business. When he was asked about the absence of workers and its effect on their business, Arbaz said “ we only have two people and we didn't have any work during lockdown, but recently we’re getting some work and only one employee has returned. So we hire labour from others for night shifts, which becomes more expensive.”

“ I run a business whose main clientele are daily wage workers who are migrants. The Clothes i sell are not what a salaried person would wear. The price range is most suited for daily wage workers. ” -Gulzar Khan, garment trader.

Habib Tepu corroborates this, adding that essential links such as transport machinery and loading-unloading, are also migrant-driven. It is difficult to hire local manpower for laborious tasks.

Giriraj is a contractor from Dharavi who has experienced the void not only in day-to-day essentials but in his profession as well.
“ In addition to all the workers being in their respective villages, my work is also affected by the kinks in the supply chain as migrants also run the supply of construction materials. I am unable to get materials required for my work since those are closed as well.”

“Most of the vegetable vendors and small convenience-store owners were migrants, that it made it difficult to get vegetables and other essentials”. -Kavita Koli and Savita tai.

For those who stayed, what helped?

Ashish Kadam is a member of the Panchsheel Baudhya Samiti, a religious community organization which has collectively provided food, health and monetary support for all its committee members. Members pay an annual sum of Rs 3,000, and receive a plethora of benefits, one that has proven very important during the pandemic. Though Ashish was running low on savings, he was not worried due to this community support.

When we asked about mounting debts or having to borrow essentials on credit, our respondent from Kumbharwada, Dharavi, Ranchoddas said “Dharavi is a huge community and under that kumbharwada is a tight knit community. We do not need to get things on credit notes, everyone is like a family to each other and consider it a help.” -Ranchod Das

"The only problem in Dharavi was that everyone had small houses, close to each other, without proper ventilation. It was not healthy for people to sit inside the house all day long during the lockdown. In villages, people have big houses and space to roam around."

- Habib Tepu, welding workshop owner in Dharavi



Family in their home in the city.



Same family outside their village home.

These images are from our research on circulatory urbanism.