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# Interstate Migrant Workers In Kerala: A Study On Their Quality Of Life And Welfare Measures

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## Abstract

The movement by people from one place to another with the intent of settling temporarily or permanently in the new location for diverse reasons is termed as “Human Migration”. The Constitution of India guarantees liberty of movement for all citizens. The foundational principles of free migration are enshrined in clauses (d) and (e) of Article 19(1) of the Constitution, which guarantee all citizens the right to move freely throughout the territory of India, and reside and settle in any part of the territory of India. It is estimated that nearly 31.5 million interstate migrant workers have become an essential part of Kerala’s economy and work force. The state also offers the highest wages for migrant workers for jobs in the unorganised sector in the entire Indian subcontinent. This study examines the interstate labour migration to Kerala, welfare measures taken by the government of Kerala to promote the social security, health and living standards of these workers based on the available secondary evidence.

**Keywords :** Internal migration, inclusive development, migration policy, migrant’s commission

## 1.Introduction

Migration is the movement of a person from one location to another either within the same country which is also known as internal migration or between different nations which is also term as international migration. No restriction is placed upon the distance of the move or upon the voluntary and involuntary nature of act, and distinction is made between external and internal migration” (International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, 2008). Migration is characterized by a relatively permanent change of residence from one city or rural area to another city (Kok, P. 1999). It is also the movement from one neighborhood to another within the same city (residential mobility); temporary moves for purposes such as seasonal employment or to attend school and voluntary or involuntary movements across national boundaries (immigration, international labour migration). People choose to move out of their family, friends and the society in which they are brought-up, because of some significant reasons, primarily for an opportunity to earn and live with dignity.

Generally, there are two basic factors involved migration namely (a) distance and ( b) duration.

Based on distance, migration can be further classified into four categories as (i) Rural to Rural ii) Rural to Urban iii) Urban to Rural iv) Urban to Urban. It can still be further divided into following categories based on distance as: a) Intra-district, b) Inter-district c) Intra-state d) Inter-state e) National and International. Migration can also be classified under three categories based on duration a) Casual-temporary b) Periodic- seasonal and (c ) Permanent (Massey, D. S et al ,1993).

Todaro (1969) explained the reasons of migration in terms of push and pull factors. He tries to classify the motives of migration as push factors which emphasize on the situation at the origin - place from which migration starts and pull factors which explains the situation at the destination. Unemployment, flood, earthquake, drought, (i.e., natural calamities) etc have been listed as push factors. Pull factors that determine migration are noted as availability of jobs, higher wages, better health care and social security etc.

## **2.Major Reasons for Interstate Migration of workers to Kerala**

The major reasons identified for the migration of Interstate workers are landlessness, scarcity of sufficient water for agriculture, low income from agriculture and allied activities lower wages, seasonal employment at home state, advance /debts, better wages and employment opportunities in other states, attraction of city life, sustained employment opportunities, limited hostility from host community and paucity of local workers. While we analyse the reasons for huge influx of interstate workers to Kerala it is observed that the higher wages for a daily wage worker is a major determinant. In 2018 when the average national daily wage for a male labour engaged in agriculture sector was ₹321 it was ₹767 in Kerala, where as a daily wage worker in Gujarat earns only ₹265, in Tripura it is ₹270, in West Bengal it is ₹329, in Uttar Pradesh ₹247 and only ₹239 in Odisha. This influx is further augmented by the inflow of relatively high amount of Gulf remittances by expatriate Keralites from Middle east. The Gulf migration facilitated migrant households to achieve higher levels of income, acquisition of assets which resulted in high spending on construction and enterprises which fuelled the interstate migration of unskilled workers into Kerala (Surabhi, K. S., & Kumar, N. A.2007).

## **3. Objectives of the study:**

The objectives of this study on “Interstate Migrant Workers in Kerala: A study on their quality of life and welfare measures ” is as follows:

1. to assess demographic profile of migrant labour in Kerala.
2. to understand social security and welfare measures for interstate workers in Kerala
3. to identify the problems faced by Interstate workers in Kerala
4. to make suitable suggestions for improving the welfare and living standards of interstate workers in Kerala.

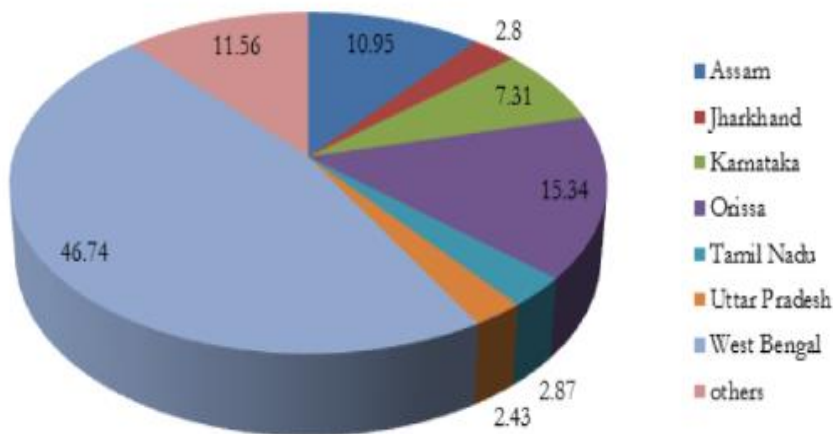
#### 4. Methodology

Secondary data is used for this study which include research / government reports, censuses and NSO reports, the Internet, reference books, organizational reports and documents from NGO's.

#### 5. Interstate workers in Kerala

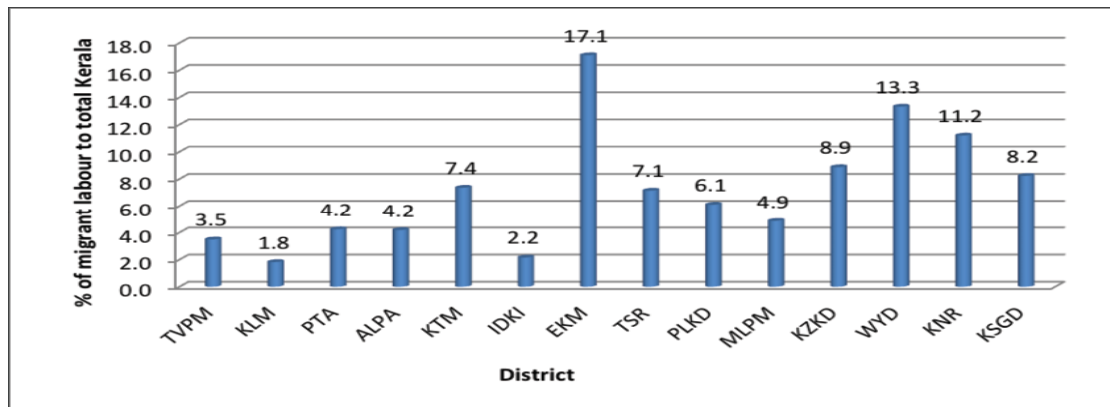
Kerala since 1956 attracted migrant labourers from the nearby states, especially from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. During 1961 to 1991, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka workers supplemented the native workers in catering to the requirements of the blue collar labour force (Kumar 2016). The specific areas where migrant labourers are mainly engaged are plantations and brick kilns. Workers from Karnataka catered to the districts of Wayanad, Kannur and Kasaragod while in all the districts, workers from Tamil Nadu were available.

Neighbouring states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Maharashtra were the major migrant source states till 2011, but since this trend has changed and West Bengal, Assam, Odisha and Bihar emerged as the major source states for the Guest workers. Kerala recently has become a welcome destination for migrant workers who constitute around 10 % of its total population. In their study, Parida, J K & Raviraman K (2021), for State Planning Board estimated that there are over 31.5 lakh domestic migrant workers in Kerala. It is reckoned that one in every twelfth person in Kerala is an interstate migrant worker. The distribution of migrant workers from different states is given in the below figure.



Source : Economic Review 2017,( Kerala State Planning Board)

It is seen from the above figure that out of the total Inter State Migrants ( ISM) workers 47 per cent are from West Bengal followed by Orissa (15%) and Assam (12%). The distribution of district wise migrated workers in the state shows that Ernakulam has the highest proportion of 17 per cent followed by Wayanad 13 per cent and Kannur 11 per cent. District wise presence of Inter State Migrant Workers in Kerala in percentage is shown in the below table.



Source: Economic Review 2017,( Kerala State Planning Board)

The recent trend in the employment sector in Kerala shows a large inflow of migrant workers from states such as West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand besides the neighbouring states.

### 6. Major Sectors where Interstate workers employed in Kerala

The major industries/ sectors where interstate workers are employed in Kerala are construction sectors, plywood factories, hotels and restaurants, agriculture, plantations, brick-kilns, quarries, fish and seafood processing, garment making and manufacturing construction. It is seen that 60 per cent of the migrant workers are engaged in the construction sectors, 8 per cent in manufacturing, 7 per cent under hotels and restaurants, 2 per cent each under trade and agriculture and the remaining 21 per cent engaged under other activities.

### 7. Problems faced by Interstate workers in Kerala

The migrant workers are compelled to work in groups in unhygienic conditions near their working place without proper health facilities and safety standards and there are severe violations of their rights as citizens ensured by the constitution. The issues they confront are congested accommodation-makeshift/permanent labour camps, limited access to sanitation/safe drinking water, unhygienic toilets, lack of medical facilities, educational facilities for their children and outbreak of epidemics in their camps.

### 8. Social welfare schemes for interstate migrants in Kerala

In Kerala interstate workers are treated as “Guest Workers” because Kerala perceives them as not as some one who had just come here because of their need but Kerala also needs these migrant workers to keep rolling the stone of progressiveness. Kerala is an early bird among other Indian States to enact a social security schemes for the interstate migrant workers. Kerala Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme 2010 enacted in 2010 is a comprehensive

legislation for interstate migrants' welfare. Few of the major social welfare schemes enacted in Kerala for interstate migrant workers are as listed below:

### **8.1 Kerala Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme 2010**

Any registered interstate migrant worker is entitled to benefits like accident/ medical care up to ₹25,000, ₹1 lakh to the family in case of death, education of their children and termination benefits of ₹25,000 upon completion of five years of work. Also in case of a worker's death there is provision in Kerala Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme 2010 for the embalming of the body and air transportation from this fund.

### **8.2 Aawaz:**

Awaz Health Insurance Scheme (AHIS) is a scheme through which Government of Kerala provides medical insurance scheme to all guest workers. They are entitled to get ₹25,000 worth medical insurance and ₹2 lakh as death assistance which no other State in the country provides.

### **8.3 Apna Ghar:**

This is a 'project' for providing houses for interstate workers at reasonable rates on rental basis. This provides quality, hygienic, safe and secure hostel accommodation for interstate migrant workers while working in Kerala. These dwelling units have shared rooms, multiple kitchens, dining areas, bathrooms, toilets and recreational facilities. Moreover, these hostels also have sewage treatment plant, rain water harvesting, power backup and surveillance system.

### **8.4 Social Security**

Discussions are on to create a unique Identification card which will help them avail all Schemes and serves regardless where they migrate to.

### **8.5 Grievance Redressal**

In order to redress the grievances of the migrant labourers with out delay Govt has already . set up facilitation center in each district equipped with language sensitive and competent staff on 24 x 7 basis

### **8.6 Ration and food safety**

To ensure Right to Food Govt. of Kerala extended kerosene and rice rations to interstate migrant workers under one nation one ration scheme. This will give access to food grains even when there is zero income due to illness or accidents

## **9. Findings**

The study has revealed inspite of having ample social security schemes, the interstate migrant workers face lot of hardships. Not only the wages are not properly given, their working and living conditions are far from satisfactory. The camps are unhygienic and breeding ground of epidemics. Many of the epidemics which were extinct seems reemerging from the migrant labourers. Substance abuse and dependence on alcohol is quite common which lead them to criminal activities. The right of their children for education is seemed denied at many areas. Unsafe work conditions lead to lot of workplace accidents and deaths where there is no adequate compensation for their families. The study has also revealed that interstate migration is a very stressful process with various factors like job uncertainty, poverty, social and geographic isolation, time pressures, poor living conditions, intergenerational conflicts, separation from family, lack of recreation etc.

### **10. Recommendations**

The study based on the above observations recommends few suggestions for ensuring improved working and living conditions for the migrant labour which are highlighted below. The Government shall bring out a State Migration Policy, to serve as a roadmap for regulation and protection of interstate workers and shall constitute a Migrants Commission in line with Women's & Children commission and involve migrant workers/representatives in policy planning. Monthly health screening, health checkups for interstate workers and their families may be carried out regularly through periodic free health camps. All the welfare schemes for them may be published in their local language and labour departments must inspect their dwelling units once in fortnightly. There shall be facilitation centres at major arrival points/nerve centres. Proper education facilities may be arranged to their children. As human resource requirement is vital and inevitable for the growth of the state, there is a need to understand the skill of migrant workers and increases the level of confidence through capacity building programs which surely increase their productivity and boost their confidence which directly gives a boost to our GDP and increase their standard of living.

### **11. Conclusion**

Interstate migrant workers influence to Kerala's economic surge immensely through majority of them are in the informal economy. Migration goes synonym with growth and development. As we undergo the phase of urbanization, the dependence of migrant labour will also grow considerably. A state policy on Migrant labour will ensure better access to entitlements and basic working conditions which is essential in building rights based assurance for the migrant labour employed in the state. It will deliver them with benefits and opportunities through access to social protection and access to justice which will change the conditions of interstate migrant workers

An integrated data base of interstate workers in Kerala and the record of their influx and efflux is vital to offer them various facilities. Despite the government's proactive and migrant friendly welfare schemes interstate migrants, face harassment and exploitation. There shall

be adequate awareness and sensitization among employers and other allied sections that the migrant workforce is crucial to the state's economy, infrastructure development, growth of service industry and should ensure and assure a safe and secure working environment for migrants.

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