

Kerala's Magnetic Appeal: Alluring Migrants Nationwide

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Abstract

Understanding the factors that make a location a preferred destination for migrant workers can be valuable information for various regions and policymakers. Identifying these aspects can aid in creating effective policies and strategies to attract and accommodate migrant labour. This statement emphasizes the importance of comprehending the elements that attract migrant workers to a particular location. By gaining insights into these factors, it provides valuable information that different regions and policymakers can utilize. The identification of these aspects is crucial in developing successful policies and strategies aimed at attracting and effectively accommodating migrant labour in a given area. When a successful model is developed in a specific context, its applicability can extend to different situations. For example, Kerala has emerged as a preferred destination for migrant workers. The idea here is that the practices and strategies that make Kerala successful in attracting and accommodating migrant labour could be adopted by other states, leading to similar positive outcomes and benefits in those regions. This suggests the potential for a broader application of successful models to enhance the effectiveness of policies and practices in various locations. This research explores the distinctive features that render Kerala a preferred choice for migrant workers, delving into the factors that contribute to its status as a favoured destination in the context of labour migration.

KEYWORDS: Migration, Migrant Labour, Internal Migration, Inter-state migration

INTRODUCTION

Migration, whether it's within districts, between states, or across international borders, often attracts attention due to its significant impact on demographics, economies, and social dynamics. It can lead to shifts in population, cultural diversity, labour markets, and resource distribution, prompting interest from policymakers, researchers, and the public alike. Understanding and managing migration is crucial for addressing associated challenges and harnessing potential benefits in various geographical scales. The choice of destination for migrants is just as crucial as their origin region because it determines the socio-economic and cultural context in which they will integrate. Different destinations offer varying opportunities, challenges, and living conditions. Migrants often consider factors like job prospects, social networks, safety, and overall quality of life when deciding where to relocate. The destination choice influences their ability to adapt, contribute to the local community, and establish a new life. Understanding the origin and destination aspects is essential for comprehensively addressing migration dynamics. If there is an increasing inflow of migrants to a particular place, it suggests that the location serves as a hub with

attractive opportunities. This could include job prospects, educational facilities, better living conditions, or other amenities that draw people to relocate. The influx of migrants often indicates a perception that the destination provides favourable conditions for personal and professional growth. Analyzing these migration patterns can offer insights into the economic and social dynamics of the region, as well as the factors that make it appealing to newcomers. The Inter-State Migrants Policy Index indicates that Kerala is at the forefront in terms of effectively treating migrant workers. This suggests that Kerala has implemented policies or practices that prioritize the welfare and fair treatment of individuals migrating from other states for work.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to the India Human Development Surveys of 2004 and 2011, Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and(1) Kerala have emerged as the regions with the most substantial net in-migration rates. The statement of the problem centres on the pivotal role of internal migration for a country, with a specific focus on Kerala as a preferred destination for inbound labour migrants in India. The notable question guiding this study pertains to understanding the distinctive factors that render Kerala a preferred migration hub. This research aims to investigate and elucidate the specific reasons and underlying factors that contribute to the attractiveness of Kerala for migrants, thereby addressing the lacuna in the existing understanding of the dynamics surrounding internal migration in the region.

The programs initiated by the Kerala government are designed with the primary objective of enhancing the quality of life for migrants. The overarching goal is to extend government assistance to all Indians, ensuring that every citizen benefits from these initiatives. Despite these efforts, various factors contribute to the uneven distribution of advantages among migrants, leading to instances where not every individual experience the intended positive impact. This discrepancy can arise due to a diverse range of reasons, highlighting the need for a comprehensive analysis of the implementation and outcomes of these programs. The impact of the Kerala government's schemes for migrants is not confined to the state alone; rather, it extends to the entirety of India. This is attributed to the fact that Kerala serves as a destination for migrants originating from various states across the country. Consequently, the comprehensive nature of this study encompasses the entirety of India, as the schemes' influence resonates beyond the geographical confines of Kerala, reaching migrants from diverse regions.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Internal migration plays a key role in the development of both sending and receiving states. Migrants and their families benefit from remittances, which can contribute to inclusive and sustainable development in both origin and destination states. The significance of this study lies in its ability to shed light on the broader implications of the Kerala government's migrant schemes, transcending regional boundaries. By recognizing that Kerala, as a migrant destination, affects individuals from diverse states, this research contributes valuable insights into the nationwide repercussions of state-specific initiatives. Understanding the extended reach of these schemes is crucial for policymakers and stakeholders, as it enables them to formulate more informed and inclusive strategies that consider the varied needs and experiences of migrants throughout India.

This study holds significance as it unveils the broader ramifications of the migrant schemes implemented by the Kerala government, surpassing regional confines. Acknowledging Kerala's role as a migrant destination influencing individuals from various states, the research provides valuable insights into the

nationwide impact of state-specific initiatives. This understanding is pivotal for policymakers and stakeholders, equipping them to craft more informed and inclusive strategies. By considering the diverse needs and experiences of migrants across India, this research facilitates the development of policies that comprehensively address the multifaceted challenges associated with migration.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In India, the realization of rights for impoverished internal migrants, particularly in the realm of health, has proven to be elusive. The Interstate Migrant Workmen Act of 1979 has encountered shortcomings in effectively registering interstate migrants, thereby impeding the timely implementation of programs catering to the healthcare needs of these internal migrants. In response to this issue, the Government of India instituted the Krishna Committee in 1982. This committee recommended the establishment of health check posts in migrant pockets, as documented in the Government of India's report in 1982. Despite these recommendations, functional health check posts were surprisingly not established in migrant pockets. There is an imperative to develop a comprehensive system of healthcare facilities in these migrant pockets, tailored to address the unique challenges faced by migrants in their destination regions(2). The current policies fall short in providing a protective framework for the health of migrants and necessitate revision to adequately address their healthcare needs(3).

Policy formulation and implementation in India predominantly adhere to a static framework, often overlooking the distinctive nature of the seasonal migrant population characterized by frequent movement. Consequently, the majority of interventions have been concentrated either at the source or destination (4). Any policy endeavour seeking to enhance the circumstances of seasonal migrants and their offspring should account for the inherent mobility factor and the associated challenges experienced within the population during such movements(5).

Migrants encounter limited access to urban subsidized housing initiatives or slum rehabilitation programs, primarily due to the absence of ration cards at their destination addresses and the requirement for state-specific documents to establish eligibility for affordable housing schemes(6). Seasonal migrants, not in need of permanent housing at their destinations, often seek cost-effective alternatives, typically favouring makeshift shelters such as tents covered with plastic sheets or residing under bridges. Despite various programs introduced by both state and central governments to enhance urban housing, with a specific emphasis on permanent or long-term migrants, these initiatives fall short of addressing the distinct challenges faced by migrants (7).

The Right to Education (RTE) Act establishes a compulsory directive for all schools to admit children originating from diverse regions or states. However, the efficacy of this legislative mandate encounters impediments when attempting to enrol older migrant children in age-appropriate classes as stipulated by the RTE Act. This hindrance arises due to the presence of significant learning gaps(8). Consequently, it becomes imperative to conduct a comprehensive re-evaluation of the practicality of the existing provisions within the RTE Act. After this assessment, requisite amendments should be undertaken to fortify and enhance the educational inclusion of migrant children.

Various states have implemented initiatives to offer education to migrant children arriving from other regions and those left behind. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan have, to some extent, acknowledged the mobility aspect linked with seasonal migrations(9). Additionally, states such as Gujarat and Maharashtra have established seasonal boarding schools for migrant children and enlisted volunteers to provide psychosocial support to left-behind children after school hours(10).

Recognizing the linguistic challenges encountered by migrant children in destination site schools, educational volunteers proficient in the mother tongues of migrant children have been appointed through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in Kerala(11).

The findings of a study conducted by Aajeevika Bureau on migrants in Ahmedabad revealed that, on average, approximately 41 percent of their income is allocated towards meeting their nutritional needs (12). This substantial proportion of income spent on food highlights a significant financial burden for migrant families in the region. Furthermore, the research indicates that migrant children are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition(13). This susceptibility is attributed to the circumstances wherein their parents are engaged in precarious, low-income employment characterized by regular uncertainties and frequent shifts based on the availability of work. The instability in parental employment adversely affects the ability of migrant families to provide consistent and adequate nutrition for their children, contributing to the observed instances of malnutrition among this demographic.

OBJECTIVE

1. This research explores the distinctive features that render Kerala a preferred choice for migrant workers, delving into the factors that contribute to its status as a favoured destination in the context of labour migration.
2. The study aims to pinpoint any discernible gaps or deficiencies in the existing government initiatives designed for the welfare and support of migrant workers in Kerala.

METHODOLOGY

The study was based on secondary data from the existing literature published in different journals and various government publications. The secondary data regarding various schemes of the government of Kerala were collected from different portals of the government of Kerala. Economic Review of Kerala for the year 2021 was used for the study.

IDENTITY AND REGISTRATION

The Kerala government has inaugurated the “Athidhi Portal” to facilitate the registration of migrant workers. Launched statewide on August 7, the portal, overseen by the labour department, allows both employers and contractors involved in bringing temporary workers to the state to register their personnel. (14)The primary objective is to streamline the registration process for migrant workers, implementing a distinctive identity system. This initiative underscores the commitment of the Kerala government to ensure that no migrant worker remains unnoticed. Additionally, the administration is contemplating the establishment of aid desks at train stations, crucial points of arrival for a significant number of migrant workers. (15)The Labour Department has announced that the statewide launch of the portal and the registration of temporary workers will be imminent. For those interested in enrolling, the process involves visiting the official website at athidhi.lc.kerala.gov.in. On the homepage, individuals should select the “Migrant Sign-up” option and provide essential details such as name, date of birth, mobile number, OTP, password, and captcha code. Upon completion, clicking the submit option will generate a unique ID for each employee, as facilitated by the Labour Department.

EDUCATION AND CHILD RIGHTS

The ‘Roshni’ program, initiated by the district administration in collaboration with the District Panchayath,

Education Department, SSA, and NGOs, aims to improve the social engagement and educational achievements of migrant children. (16)The initiative supports migrant children in gaining proficiency in Malayalam, English, and Hindi by employing code-switching strategies through tailored packages. Additionally, extra morning sessions lasting around 90 minutes precede regular classes. Educational volunteers proficient in Hindi, Bengali, and Oriya are enlisted to facilitate seamless communication and better understanding of the children's challenges. The project also focuses on ensuring balanced morning nutrition and organizing comprehensive intellectual enhancement workshops and educational tours for the children of migrant labours. Over 2500 migrant children, primarily from Bihar, West Bengal, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Assam, and Nepal, are registered in district schools. However, research indicates that these students often exhibit irregular attendance, with a significant number dropping out during the academic year.

The state of Kerala is expanding its provision of creches dedicated to the children of migrant workers who have migrated in pursuit of enhanced opportunities. (17)In a recent development, the Women and Child Department has resolved to establish a creche exclusively catering to the offspring of migrant labourers. This initiative follows the prior establishment of a creche for the children of migrant workers by the department. A project initiated under the Women and Child Department aims to inaugurate 14 such facilities across the state, specifically designed for the children of migrant labourers. Officials have articulated that the decision stems from the recognition of the myriad challenges confronting migrant workers, encompassing difficulties in securing housing and arranging adequate care for their children during work hours. The objective is to furnish a secure and nurturing environment for these children while their parents engage in employment within industries and the construction sector. This not only aims to alleviate the parental burden, especially for those lacking access to affordable childcare alternatives, but also endeavours to ensure that the children receive the requisite care and attention. The utilization of social responsibility funds from various institutions is earmarked for the infrastructure development of these creches. Panchayats have been tasked with submitting plans for fund allocation, with four employees, including two from other states, designated to care for the children. Additionally, transportation facilities will be provided to transport the children to the creche. Experts view the decision to expand the number of creches for migrant workers' children as a commendable step forward for Kerala. They advocate for the state government to further ensure the Implementation of diverse welfare schemes benefiting migrant workers, thereby fostering positive impacts on the economy and society

HEALTH AND SANITATION

The Kerala state government has introduced a healthcare initiative named Awaz Health Insurance,(18) primarily designed to provide medical insurance and accidental death coverage for migrant workers. This plan offers financial security for labourers in Kerala facing health risks. Enrolled individuals are entitled to complimentary medical care at all state-run public hospitals and certain accredited private hospitals, with coverage extending up to ₹15,000 for any illness or injury.

The accidental death benefit amounts to ₹2 lakhs, and beneficiaries can file claims by submitting appropriate documentation in the unfortunate event of a worker's demise. Eligible migrant labourers must fall within the age bracket of 18 to 60. During enrolment, employees are required to provide their fingerprints, iris scans, and employment-related documents, receiving an insurance card upon completion. Additionally, accepted identification cards, such as Aadhar Card, voter ID card, driving licence, etc., must be submitted during the sign-up process. Notably, the premium for the Awaz Health Insurance Scheme is

entirely subsidized by the Government of Kerala. Families can register for the scheme at the Village Office or Akshaya Kendra in their respective panchayats, and the registration process is free of charge. The scheme has established partnerships with over 200 hospitals across the state.

HOUSING

Pioneering a national initiative, the Kerala government has successfully concluded the construction of accommodation facilities for migrant workers within the state. (19)Termed as the “Apna Ghar” project, it currently holds a valuation of Rs 8.5 crore and has the capacity to house 640 individuals. Equipped with piped gas connections, fully-furnished kitchens, and recreational amenities including volleyball and badminton courts, the inaugural cohort of migrant workers is poised to encounter a welcoming environment akin to a home away from home within the ‘Apna Ghar’ project. (20)The Initial phase of the project will provide accommodation for 620 workers, ensuring complimentary access to electricity, water supply, and LPG gas. The building features designated resting spaces on every floor, a volleyball court, and a landscaped lawn with benches. To enhance safety and surveillance, a round-the-clock security system and CCTV infrastructure have been meticulously implemented

FINDINGS

1. The implementation of registration schemes for migrant workers by the Kerala government signifies a proactive step towards addressing the concerns and well-being of the migrant labour force within the state. This initiative reflects the government's dedication to creating a system that not only recognizes the presence of migrant workers but also ensures their inclusion in various social and welfare programs. By introducing registration schemes, the Kerala government aims to establish a formal mechanism to document and track the migrant workforce. This can lead to a more efficient management of labour-related data, allowing for better planning and allocation of resources to meet the specific needs of this demographic group. The emphasis on registration underscores the government's commitment to understanding the scale and distribution of the migrant workforce, enabling them to devise policies and programs tailored to their unique requirements.
2. Education schemes likely involve the development of specialized educational modules or curriculum adjustments that consider the diverse backgrounds and experiences of migrant children. This could include language support programs, cultural sensitivity training for teachers, and flexible learning approaches to accommodate the transient nature of the migrant population. The intention is not only to bridge educational gaps but also to create an inclusive and supportive atmosphere where migrant children feel welcomed and valued.
3. The Kerala government has accomplished the successful completion of constructing accommodation facilities dedicated to migrant workers within the state. This achievement highlights the government's commitment to addressing the housing needs of the migrant workforce, ensuring their well-being, and creating a more inclusive living environment.
4. The healthcare initiatives recently introduced by the Kerala state government represent a significant stride towards prioritizing the well-being of migrant workers within the state. Specifically designed to cater to their unique healthcare needs, these initiatives focus on offering comprehensive medical insurance and accidental death coverage.
5. The provision of medical insurance implies that migrants can avail themselves of medical treatments and services, alleviating the burden of healthcare expenses. This is particularly crucial given the often-

vulnerable socio-economic circumstances of migrant workers, for whom healthcare costs might pose a significant challenge. Recognizing the inherent risks associated with certain occupations, insurance coverage provides a safety net for migrant workers and their families in the unfortunate event of an accidental death, offering financial support during challenging times. By tailoring these healthcare initiatives specifically to the needs of migrant workers, the Kerala government demonstrates a proactive approach to addressing the unique challenges faced by this demographic. It not only acknowledges the vital contributions of migrant workers to the state's economy but also underscores the importance of their health and well-being in the overall socio-economic landscape.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the implementation of registration schemes for migrant workers by the Kerala government is a strategic move that not only facilitates better governance by organizing labour data but also demonstrates a commitment to the well-being and inclusion of migrant workers in the state's developmental agenda. Housing, Health and Education schemes may serve as a model for promoting social integration and community development, fostering a sense of belonging among migrant workers within the state. The initiative underscores the importance of recognizing the contributions of migrant workers and addressing their needs beyond just employment, emphasizing their inclusion and welfare as integral aspects of the government's agenda.

Additionally, the education schemes might incorporate measures to ensure the continuity of education for migrant children, even if they move frequently. This could involve the establishment of coordination mechanisms between schools, sharing of educational records, and facilitating smooth transitions for students moving from one location to another. The introduction of these healthcare initiatives reflects a comprehensive commitment by the Kerala state government to promote the health, safety, and overall welfare of migrant workers, thereby fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment within the state.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The interpretations presented in this paper and any mistakes are the sole responsibility of the author. The authors thankful for helpful comments from the editor and guides that undoubtedly improved this paper. The author thanks the anonymous referees for many helpful suggestions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: The author(s) declare that they have no conflict of interest

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The research adhered to ethical guidelines and ensured the protection of participant's right and confidentiality throughout all stages of the study.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request

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