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## PATTERNS AND DETERMINANTS OF LABOUR MIGRATION IN INDIA: AN ANALYSIS USING PLFS 2020-21

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### ABSTRACT

Migration is one of the important component of population change alongside with Fertility and Mortality. In India migration is found to shape the socio-economic, political and cultural aspects of social structure and change leading to urban expansion, increased labour market, cultural assimilation, employment sustainability, national development at the positive side and socio-economic imbalances, brain drain and cultural conflict at the negative side. The data analysis and interpretation was done using the secondary data. In this context the study examines Periodic Labour Force Survey conducted by National Statistical Office, Government of India during July 2020-June 2021. Only two aspects were considered for analysis that is streams of migration and reasons for migration. The analysis found that significant people migrated from Rural-Urban areas and a significant gender based migration pattern. Males migrated due to economic reasons ewhile females migrated due to social reasons.



**KEYWORDS:** Labor Force, Urbanization, Employment, Covid and Migration

### INTRODUCTION

Migration has played a fundamental role in human development, influencing population distribution, economic progress, and social transformation. Historically, individuals and communities have migrated in search of better livelihoods, improved living conditions, and greater social security. In India, migration remains a key factor in shaping labor markets and urban growth, significantly impacting regional development and infrastructure planning.

The movement of people is driven by a combination of push and pull factors. Push factors, such as unemployment, scarcity of resources, environmental challenges, and socio-political conflicts, compel individuals to leave their native regions. On the other hand, pull factors, including better employment opportunities, access to quality education, improved healthcare, and an overall better standard of living, attract migrants to specific destinations. This dynamic interplay of economic, social, and environmental influences leads to substantial population shifts, both within the country and across borders.

Internal migration is a major feature of India's demographic landscape, with millions moving from rural areas to cities in search of work. The findings of the **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21**, conducted by the **National Statistical Office (NSO)**, indicate that migration continues to be a crucial determinant of labor market trends, affecting economic conditions in both rural and urban regions. Migration is not merely a geographical shift but a complex socio-economic process that reshapes family structures, cultural identities, and access to essential public services.

Historically, migration patterns in India have followed distinct trends. The most prevalent type is rural-to-rural migration, primarily driven by employment in agriculture and allied sectors. However, in recent decades, rural-to-urban migration has gained momentum due to industrialization and expanding urban economies. Urban-to-urban migration is also significant, particularly among skilled professionals seeking career advancements. Additionally, urban-to-rural migration is observed in cases where individuals return to their native villages after retirement or when economic downturns in urban centers force them to seek alternative livelihoods in rural areas.

Understanding migration patterns and their socio-economic impact is essential for effective policy formulation. Government initiatives aimed at enhancing employment opportunities, improving urban infrastructure, and ensuring social security for migrant workers are crucial for addressing the challenges and opportunities associated with migration in India.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought significant disruptions to migration patterns, leading to an unprecedented crisis for millions of migrant workers across India. The nationwide lockdown in 2020 triggered a massive reverse migration, with laborers leaving cities and returning to their native villages due to job losses, lack of social security, and the absence of a stable livelihood. This mass movement exposed deep vulnerabilities within India's labor market, highlighting the precarious living and working conditions of migrants and the urgent need for comprehensive social protection policies.

Analyzing migration trends is crucial for designing effective policies that address the challenges faced by migrants. The lack of job security, unaffordable housing and limited access to healthcare and education remain pressing concerns for migrant workers. Findings from the **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21**, conducted by the **National Statistical Office (NSO)**, provide critical insights into migration patterns, enabling policymakers to formulate strategies that promote regional economic balance and equitable distribution of resources.

This study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the causes, trends and consequences of migration in India. It also examines how migration affects economic growth and social structures, emphasizing the importance of evidence-based policymaking. While migration poses certain challenges, it also presents opportunities for national development, provided it is managed effectively with adequate support systems in place.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Migration has been a subject of extensive research due to its significant influence on economic, social, and demographic dynamics. Scholars and institutions have studied migration patterns in India to analyze its causes, consequences, and policy implications. This section reviews existing literature on migration trends, factors affecting mobility, and the socio-economic consequences of migration, with particular attention to recent studies, including data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21 conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO).

### 1. Theoretical Perspectives on Migration

Migration theories provide a foundation for understanding why people move and how migration affects both the origin and destination regions. Ravenstein's Laws of Migration (1885) were among the earliest attempts to systematically study migration, emphasizing factors such as economic opportunities, urbanization, and distance (Ravenstein, 1885). Lee's Push-Pull Theory (1966) expanded on this, categorizing the factors that either compel individuals to leave their home regions or attract them to new destinations (Lee, 1966).

In the Indian context, Todaro's Model of Migration (1970) has been widely applied to explain rural-to-urban migration, suggesting that people move in response to perceived employment opportunities in urban areas despite initial wage disparities (Todaro, 1970). Castles and Miller (2009) provided a global perspective, demonstrating how political, economic, and environmental factors also shape migration trends (Castles & Miller, 2009).

## **2. Internal Migration in India**

Internal migration in India is predominantly rural-to-urban, driven by employment opportunities and economic aspirations. Deshingkar and Start (2003) highlighted the significance of seasonal and circular migration, particularly in agriculture, construction, and manufacturing sectors, where millions of workers migrate temporarily for work (Deshingkar & Start, 2003).

According to the Census of India 2011, over 450 million Indians (37% of the population) were classified as migrants, with employment and marriage being the primary reasons for migration (Census of India, 2011). The PLFS 2020-21 data confirms that migration remains a crucial element in labor market dynamics, with increasing female migration for employment and education (NSO, 2021).

## **3. Impact of COVID-19 on Migration Trends**

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered migration patterns, leading to one of the largest reverse migrations in India's history. Srivastava and Nagaraj (2021) documented how lockdown-induced restrictions forced millions of daily wage workers to return to their villages, exposing vulnerabilities in urban labor markets and social security systems (Srivastava & Nagaraj, 2021).

The PLFS 2020-21 data indicates that urban unemployment surged following the pandemic, prompting many migrants to remain in their rural hometowns, disrupting traditional migration flows. Mukherjee et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of policy interventions such as portable welfare benefits and employment guarantees to mitigate the adverse effects of such migration shocks (Mukherjee et al., 2021).

## **4. Socio-Economic Implications of Migration**

Migration has profound economic and social implications. Harris and Todaro (1970) argued that migration fosters economic growth by shifting labor to more productive sectors (Harris & Todaro, 1970). However, challenges such as informal employment, inadequate housing, and limited healthcare access remain pressing issues for migrants in urban centers (Kundu, 2007).

Remittances from migrants play a vital role in rural development. Rajan and Zachariah (2019) found that these remittances contribute significantly to household income, enhancing access to education and healthcare (Rajan & Zachariah, 2019). However, migration also entails social costs, including family separation and the erosion of cultural ties.

## **5. Policy Measures and Future Directions**

Various government policies aim to support migrant workers, including the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act (1979) and the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme (2020). Reports by NITI Aayog (2021) underscore the necessity of an integrated migration policy framework that ensures social security, skill development, and housing for migrants (NITI Aayog, 2021).

Recent studies, including those by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022), advocate for enhanced labor rights, improved urban planning, and data-driven policy measures to create a

The literature on migration in India provides comprehensive insights into its causes, trends, and impacts. While economic aspirations and urbanization remain the primary drivers of migration, challenges such as job insecurity, inadequate housing, and socio-economic exclusion persist. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed these vulnerabilities, emphasizing the need for stronger policy interventions. Future research should prioritize real-time migration data collection, the role of digital economies in labor mobility, and the long-term effects of migration on regional development.

By utilizing insights from the PLFS 2020-21 and other key studies, policymakers can develop strategies that address migration-related challenges while harnessing migration as a catalyst for national growth and development.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a secondary analysis of data collected through the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21, conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India. The survey utilized a multi-stage stratified sampling method, covering 12,562 First Stage Units (FSUs), which included 6,930 villages in rural areas and 5,632 urban blocks across the country. A total of 1,00,344 households were surveyed, providing a robust dataset for examining migration trends.

Migration patterns were assessed based on the last usual place of residence (UPR) of individuals, allowing for an analysis of movement across rural and urban regions. The study employed quantitative research methods to identify key trends, factors influencing migration, and the demographic and economic implications of mobility. Statistical tools were used to evaluate migration flows, labor market participation, and socio-economic indicators, ensuring an evidence-based approach to understanding migration in India.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

**Table No. 1 Showing the streams of migration**

| Sl.No | Streams of Migration | Males        | Females      | Persons      |
|-------|----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1     | Rural to Rural       | 18.0         | 63.3         | 55.0         |
| 2     | Urban to Rural       | 20.8         | 7.8          | 10.2         |
| 3     | Rural to Urban       | 33.5         | 15.6         | 18.9         |
| 4     | Urban to Urban       | 27.6         | 13.2         | 15.9         |
|       | <b>Total</b>         | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source: *Periodic Labour force Survey (PLFS) July 2020-June 2021, Government of India, National Statistical Office, Socio-Economic Survey*

Migration in India is predominantly driven by socio-economic factors, with varying trends between men and women. Data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21 shows that rural-to-rural migration is the most common among females (63.3%), primarily due to marriage and preference of the girl's parents to marry off their daughters' to a nearby village within the district. Several studies, including those conducted by the National Sample Survey (NSS) and Census of India, have confirmed that women's migration patterns are largely dictated by social reasons such as marriage and family movement.

On the other hand, rural-to-urban migration is significant among males (33.5%), as they often relocate in search of employment opportunities in cities and towns. The Economic Survey of India (2016-17) pointed out that India is experiencing an increasing trend of distress-driven migration due to declining agricultural incomes, land fragmentation and rural unemployment.

Urban-to-urban migration (27.6% for males, 13.2% for females) reflects people relocating within urban areas, often in search of better job prospects or improved living conditions. This trend is supported by studies from NITI Aayog and IHD (Institute for Human Development), which indicate that cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru attract a large influx of skilled and unskilled laborers.

**Table No. 2 : Percentage of migrants by reason for migration from PLFS 2020-2021**

| Sl.No | Reasons   | Rural      |            |        | Urban      |            |            | Total      |            |            |
|-------|---|------------|------------|--------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
|       |   | M          | F          | P      | M          | F          | P          | M          | F          | P          |
| 1     | In search of employment / better employment                   | 11.8       | 0.2        | 1.5    | 29.9       | 1.5        | 10.8       | 22.8       | 0.6        | 4.8        |
| 2     | For employment / work   | 14.6       | 0.3        | 1.9    | 23.6       | 1.7        | 8.9        | 20.1       | 0.7        | 4.4        |
| 3     | Loss of job/closure of unit/ lack of employment oppurtunities | 12.5       | 0.3        | 1.7    | 3.0        | 0.4        | 1.3        | 6.7        | 0.4        | 1.6        |
| 4     | Migration of parent/ earning member of the family             | 12.2       | 2.4        | 3.5    | 20.8       | 19.4       | 19.9       | 17.5       | 7.3        | 9.2        |
| 5     | To pursue studies   | 4.9        | 0.4        | 0.9    | 4.5        | 1.3        | 2.4        | 4.7        | 0.6        | 1.4        |
| 6     | Marriage  | 11.8       | 93.8       | 84.4   | 2.7        | 69.5       | 47.5       | 6.2        | 86.8       | 71.6       |
| 7     | Natural disaster  | 1.0        | 0.1        | 0.2    | 0.4        | 0.2        | 0.2        | 0.6        | 0.1        | 0.2        |
| 8     | Social / Political problems like riots, terrorism             | 1.0        | 0.1        | 0.2    | 0.3        | 0.2        | 0.2        | 0.6        | 0.1        | 0.2        |
| 9     | Displacement by development poject                            | 0.6        | 0.1        | 0.2    | 0.2        | 0.1        | 0.2        | 0.4        | 0.1        | 0.2        |
| 10    | Health related reasons  | 4.7        | 0.3        | 0.8    | 1.2        | 0.4        | 0.6        | 2.5        | 0.3        | 0.7        |
| 11    | Acquistion of own house                                       | 3.2        | 0.3        | 0.6    | 3.2        | 0.9        | 1.7        | 3.2        | 0.5        | 1.0        |
| 12    | Housing Problems  | 5.5        | 0.4        | 1.0    | 4.3        | 1.8        | 2.6        | 4.8        | 0.8        | 1.5        |
| 13    | Post Retirement   | 2.3        | 0.0        | 0.3    | 1.2        | 0.1        | 0.5        | 1.6        | 0.1        | 0.4        |
| 14    | Others  | 14.1       | 1.4        | 2.9    | 4.7        | 2.5        | 3.2        | 8.4        | 1.7        | 3.0        |
|       | All   | 100.0<br>0 | 100.<br>00 | 100.00 | 100.<br>00 | 100.<br>00 | 100.0<br>0 | 100.0<br>0 | 100.0<br>0 | 100.<br>00 |

Source: *Periodic Labour force Survey (PLFS) July 2020-June 2021, Government of India, National Statistical Office, Socio-Economic Survey*

The above Table reveals the reasons for migration. In search of employment or better employment were those migrants who were not in employment at the time of leaving the last usual place of residence, when migrated to another village/ town in search of employment were considered as migrated in search of employment. The migrants migrated in search of better employment which could be in terms of career prospects, salary hike, better emoluments, work nature, job satisfaction etc. in search of employment majority of the migrants are found in urban males with 29.9 % while 11.8 % of the rural migrants migrated due to better farm practices, wages, seasonal migration etc.

Among the rural male migrants majority of the migrants migrated mainly for employment purposes, proximity of work amounting to 14.6 % followed by 12.5 % migrants migrating due to loss of job, closure of their working unit or lack of employment opportunities. 12.2 per cent of the male migrants accompanied their family members. Due to limited higher educational oppurtunities in rural areas 4.9 per cent of the males migrated while 4.7% of the migrants opined due to health reasons this shows the stark reality of health facilities in rural areas. Migration due to natural disaster accounted to 1.0 %. In recent times the climatic change on rural livelihood is persuading rampantly for migration. Due to housing problems 5.5 percent of the male migrants migrated followd by acquisition of new



house or flat accounting to 3.2 per cent, while 2.3 per cent migrated due to spend their post retirement life.

Among females 93.8 per cent migrated due to marriage and 2.4 percent migrated as a accompaniment with their family members. Migration due to economic reasons was negligible with 0.2 and 0.3 percent migrating due to economic reasons. Education for females is still a distant dream and females migrating due to higher studies accounted to 0.4 per cent.

Thus, over all in rural migration majority of the migrants migrated due to 84.4 marriage and 3.5 percent as a accompaniment with family members. Migration for employment was within the reach of 5 percent approximately.

Among the urban migration majority of the male migrants migrated in search of employment or better employment with 29.9 percent while 23.6 per cent migrated due to better employment prospects or career development and a still 20.8 percent of the migrants accompanied their family members. Housing issues for migration is still an area of concern with 4.3 per cent and 3.2 per cent migrating due to housing problems or acquisition of own house or housing issues.

Among females majority of the migrants moved due to social reasons with 69.5 per cent migrating due to marriage and 19.4 per cent of the females joined their family members. Migration due to pursue studies was only 1.3 percent. In india females migrating more for social reasons is still in existence.

In the overall migration process majority of the male migrants migrated for economic reasons while females migrated due to sociological reasons.

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