

A Study on the Patterns and Dynamics of Labour Migration in Karnataka

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ABSTRACT:

Migration plays a pivotal role in shaping India's economic and demographic structure by supplying a continuous flow of labour to rapidly urbanizing and industrializing regions. It mitigates regional imbalances in the availability of skilled and unskilled workers, thereby supporting key sectors such as construction, manufacturing, and services. Census data reveal a steady increase in internal migration, rising from 29.1% in 1971 to 37% in 2011, underscoring its growing significance in the national economy. Internal migration in India occurs in various forms—*intra-district*, *inter-district*, and *inter-state*—with *rural-to-urban* movement being the most dominant pattern, largely driven by employment opportunities. Karnataka, one of India's more industrially advanced states, has emerged as a major destination for labour migrants, particularly in cities like Bengaluru, Mysore, and Mangalore, which offer abundant employment in construction, manufacturing, and the service sectors. However, the state continues to face substantial regional disparities; northern districts such as those in Kalyana Karnataka remain economically underdeveloped, prompting significant out-migration toward southern and metropolitan areas. This study highlights the economic drivers, spatial patterns, and regional inequalities influencing labour migration in Karnataka, emphasizing the need for balanced regional development, infrastructure expansion, and employment generation in lagging districts to achieve inclusive growth.

KEYWORDS:

Labour Migration, Regional Disparities, Rural-to-Urban Migration,
Employment Opportunities, Industrialization, Inclusive Growth.

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Introduction

Migration profoundly influences the Indian economy by supplying a steady labour force to regions undergoing rapid urbanization and industrial growth. The mobility of labour addresses local shortages of both skilled and unskilled workers, which is essential for various sectors including construction, manufacturing, services, and public infrastructure. Historical data from the Indian Census indicates a continual rise in internal migration over time, with the Census of 1971 reporting that 29.1% of the population were internal migrants, a figure that increased to 37% by the 2011 Census. This trend underscores the importance of migration in shaping India's demographic and economic landscapes. Internal migration in India is classified into three categories: intra-district (movement within the same district), inter-district (migration between districts within a state), and inter-state (migration across state lines), each driven by diverse socio-economic factors and encompassing varied migration experiences, from short-term cyclical movements to permanent relocations.

The Census data categorizes internal migration streams as rural-to-rural, rural-to-urban, urban-to-rural, and urban-to-urban, with rural-to-urban migration being the predominant pattern driven by the search for improved job opportunities, particularly in urban areas where industries and services are rapidly expanding. Such rural-urban migration aligns with global trends as documented in the World Migration Report, which highlights similar patterns in developing countries. Multiple factors motivate internal migration in India, with work and business opportunities being the primary drivers as individuals seek employment in both formal and informal sectors.

Additionally, many migrants engage in temporary movements during peak labor demands, such as harvest seasons or construction booms. Educational aspirations also spur migration, as students frequently relocate to urban centers for better educational access, while family-related factors, including marriage or job transfers of relatives, further contribute to migration flows. Migrants in India find employment across various industries, notably in construction, which serves as a significant employer, particularly for rural migrants. Moreover, they secure positions in modern sectors such as information technology as well as traditional services including domestic work, retail, and transportation.

Karnataka has emerged as a prominent destination for labor

migration, with cities such as Bengaluru, Mysore, Mangalore, Hubli, and Belagavi serving as major hubs for internal migrants seeking employment opportunities. These urban centers are characterized by industrial growth and modernization, attracting a substantial influx of workers from both within the state and other regions of India. Notably, the construction and manufacturing sectors stand out as significant employers of labour migrants, driven by rapid urbanization that fuels the need for a large workforce in the construction industry and the simultaneous growth of manufacturing industries in the region. Such sectors provide both short-term and long-term employment prospects, particularly appealing to labourers from rural areas where job opportunities are often scarce.

Despite being one of the more developed states in southern India, Karnataka exhibits pronounced regional disparities, particularly between its northern and southern districts. Areas such as Kalyana Karnataka and Kittur Karnataka lag behind southern regions in terms of industrial development, infrastructure, and employment availability. These imbalances are exacerbated by uneven resource distribution, insufficient political focus, and geographic limitations, resulting in significant out-migration from the northern districts, particularly Kalyana Karnataka, as residents seek better economic opportunities elsewhere.

The concentration of industries in these more prosperous areas provides higher wages and superior employment prospects, thereby drawing workers away from the economically disadvantaged northern districts. According to the Census of India and the Registrar General of India, the predominant motivations for migration in Karnataka comprise employment, business, education, and marriage, with employment emerging as the principal driving force behind this migratory trend

Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of the study are as follows,

- To examine the patterns and trends of internal migration in Karnataka
- To study the reasons and motives for internal migration in Karnataka

Trends and Pattern of Labour Migration in Karnataka

Labour migration in Karnataka is a significant socio-economic phenomenon driven by both pushes and pull factors. The state's diverse economic landscape – ranging from agriculture and construction to

information technology and manufacturing – has created varying labour demands across regions. Rural distress, caused by uneven rainfall, land fragmentation, and lack of non-farm employment opportunities, pushes workers from rural districts such as Kalaburagi, Raichur, and Bidar to urban and industrial centers. Conversely, cities like Bengaluru, Mysuru, Mangaluru, and Hubballi-Dharwad attract migrants due to the availability of employment in construction, domestic work, transport, hospitality, and small-scale industries. Seasonal migration is especially common among unskilled and semi-skilled workers, who move temporarily during agricultural lean periods in search of wage labour.

The pattern of migration in Karnataka reveals regional imbalances in development. Northern Karnataka, being less industrialized and prone to droughts, contributes the majority of out-migrants, while southern and coastal regions, with better infrastructure and economic opportunities, serve as key destinations. Inter-state migration is also prominent, with workers from neighbouring states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Bihar employed in the state's booming construction and service sectors. Migrant labourers often face challenges such as low wages, job insecurity, poor housing, limited access to healthcare, and lack of social protection. The informal nature of their employment further exacerbates their vulnerability, leaving them excluded from most labour welfare schemes and social security benefits.

Table-1: Internal Migration in Karnataka (Census 2011)

Type of Migration	Number of Migrants	Percentage of Total Migrants
Within District Migration	11.9 million	65.7%
Inter-District Migration	4.3 million	23.7%
Inter-State Migration	1.9 million	10.6%
Total Internal Migrants	18.1 million	100%

Source: Census 2011: Data on Migration from the Registrar General of India

Table-1 highlights the internal migration in Karnataka (Census 2011). The table on internal migration in Karnataka from the 2011 Census reveals that the majority of migrants, around 65.7 percent, move within the same district, indicating high levels of local mobility, often driven

by factors like marriage, employment, or relocation within rural or urban areas. Inter-district migration accounts for 23.7 percent, reflecting significant movement between different districts within Karnataka, likely influenced by urbanization, better employment opportunities, or education. Inter-state migration, where people move to Karnataka from other states, makes up 10.6 percent of the total internal migrants, suggesting a smaller but important flow of persons coming from neighbouring states for similar reasons. Overall, the data shows that 18.1 million people in Karnataka engaged in some form of internal migration as of 2011.

Table-2: International migration in Karnataka (Census 2011)

Type of Migration	Number of Migrants	Percentage of Total Migrants
Immigrants from Other Countries	92, 206	0.5%

Source: Census 2011: Registrar General of India.

Table-2 describes the international migration in Karnataka (Census 2011). The table on international migration in Karnataka from the 2011 Census shows that a small number of migrants, 92,206 people, emigrated to Karnataka from other countries. This group represents only 0.5% of the total migrant population in the Karnataka state, indicating that international migration plays a minimal role compared to internal migration. The low percentage suggests that Karnataka primarily experiences migration from within India, with relatively few people moving to the Karnataka state from abroad.

Table-3: Reasons for Migration in Karnataka

Reason for Migration	Number of Migrants	Percentage of Migrants
Employment	3.1 million	17.1%
Education	0.7 million	3.9%
Marriage	6.5 million	36%
Moved with Household	5.1 million	28.2%
Others	2.7 million	14.8%

Source: Census 2011: Registrar General of India.

Table-3 highlights the reasons/causes for migration in Karnataka. The table detailing the reasons/causes for migration in Karnataka from the 2011 Census highlights that marriage is the most significant factor driving

migration, with 6.5 million individuals (36%) relocating for this reason. This reflects cultural practices where marriage often leads to changes in residence. Following marriage, a substantial portion of migrants, 5.1 million (28.2%), moved with their households, indicating family-based migration patterns. Employment is another critical motivator, accounting for 3.1 million migrants (17.1%), which suggests that job opportunities also play a significant role in migration decisions. Education, although less influential, still affects 0.7 million individuals (3.9%), pointing to the pursuit of academic opportunities. The "Others" category includes various reasons for migration, comprising 2.7 million people (14.8%). Overall, these figures illustrate the diverse motivations behind migration in Karnataka, with social and familial factors being particularly prominent.

Table-4: Period of Migration in Karnataka (up to 10 years Tenure)

Migration (up to 10 years tenure)						
	Employment	Business	Education	Marriage	others	Total
Rural	5, 738, 013 (44. 26)	2, 113, 394 (16. 30)	3, 624, 619 (27. 97)	829, 735 (06. 40)	657, 566 (05. 07)	12, 963, 327 (100. 00)
Urban	3, 640, 460 (42. 44)	1, 718, 804 (20. 01)	1, 921, 660 (22. 36)	722, 121 (08. 41)	582, 805 (06. 78)	8, 585, 854 (100. 00)
Total	9, 378, 477 (43. 52)	3, 832, 198 (17. 78)	5, 546, 279 (25. 73)	1, 551, 856 (07. 22)	1, 240, 371 (05. 75)	21, 549, 181 (100. 00)

Source: Registrar General of India, Census 2011, Data on Migration, Karnataka State

Table-4 describes the period of migration in Karnataka (up to 10 years Tenure) which reveals about the period of migration for tenure of 10 years in the Karnataka State. According to the data given by census 2011 about 44.26 percent from rural part of Karnataka migrate for employment, about 16.30 percent migrate for business, about 6.40 percent from the rural part of Karnataka migrate for marriage, about 5.7 percent from the rural part of Karnataka for other reasons. The people from the urban areas of Karnataka of about 42.44 percent of them migrate for employment, followed by about 22.36 percent how people make it for education, about 20.01 percent of urban area people migrate for business, about 8.

41 percent from urban areas Karnataka migrate for marriage and about 6. 78 percent of the urban people migrate for other reasons. Combining both rural and urban areas about 43. 52 percent migrate for the purpose of employment, about 17. 78 percent migrate for business, about 25. 73 percent for education and about 5. 75 percent from Karnataka migrate for other reasons.

Conclusion

Labour migration in Karnataka represents a complex interplay of economic, social, and demographic dynamics. While the state's urban and industrial centers continue to benefit from a steady inflow of labour, rural and backward regions face persistent challenges that push people to seek livelihoods elsewhere. The Census 2011 data clearly show that internal migration is the predominant form, with marriage and employment emerging as the two most influential factors. The rural-urban divide in migration motivations further illustrates the unequal distribution of development opportunities within the state. To address these imbalances, policies must focus on enhancing rural livelihoods through skill development, agricultural diversification, and promotion of small-scale industries, while also ensuring better working and living conditions for migrant labourers in urban areas. Strengthening social security mechanisms, improving data systems on migration, and fostering regionally balanced growth are essential steps for Karnataka to transform migration into a sustainable driver of economic and social progress.

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The Authors have no conflict of interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this article.

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