

A STUDY ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF NORTH INDIAN MIGRANT WORKERS IN CHENNAI CITY

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ABSTRACT

Migration has become an integral component of India's labour market, driven by regional disparities in employment opportunities and economic development. The present study examines the socio-economic conditions of North Indian migrant workers in Chennai city, with particular emphasis on their financial status, employment patterns, and working conditions. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire from 150 respondents, out of which 144 responses were received, and 6 were excluded due to incomplete information, resulting in a final sample of 138 respondents for analysis. The study adopts a descriptive research design and employs simple statistical tools such as percentage analysis and averages. The findings reveal that the majority of migrant workers belong to the economically active age group and are predominantly employed in the manufacturing, service, and construction sectors. Although migration has improved their employment opportunities, their income levels remain moderate, with a significant proportion earning within the lower and middle-income categories. The analysis further indicates that a large number of migrant workers lack access to social security benefits such as health insurance, provident fund, and paid leave. Hypothesis testing using the Chi-square method shows a significant association between employment sector and access to social security, while income differences across sectors are not statistically significant. The study also identifies key challenges faced by migrant workers, including low wages, long working hours, poor housing conditions, and limited access to healthcare. The study concludes that while migrant workers contribute significantly to Chennai's economic growth, their socio-economic conditions remain vulnerable. It emphasizes the need for policy interventions focusing on skill development, improved working conditions, social security coverage, and better living standards to ensure inclusive and sustainable development.

Keywords: Migration, Socio-Economic Conditions, Migrant Labourers, Employment, Social Security.

INTRODUCTION

Internal migration is a critical component of India's economic transformation, facilitating labour mobility from less developed regions to economically vibrant urban centres. Chennai, one of India's major metropolitan cities, has witnessed a substantial influx of migrant workers from North and Eastern states, driven by the demand for labour in industries such as manufacturing, construction, and services. Migrant workers from states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, and Assam migrate to Chennai in search of better employment opportunities, higher wages, and improved living conditions. These workers form the backbone

of several labour-intensive industries, contributing significantly to the city's economic expansion. However, despite their economic importance, migrant workers often face precarious working and living conditions. Many are employed in the informal sector without job security, written contracts, or access to social protection schemes. Their average monthly income, approximately ₹15,902, remains only marginally above the poverty threshold, highlighting their economic vulnerability. In addition to financial challenges, migrant workers encounter issues such as long working hours, occupational hazards, inadequate housing, and limited access to healthcare and education for their families. Language barriers, cultural differences, and social exclusion further compound their difficulties. This study aims to analyse the socio-economic conditions of North Indian migrant workers in Chennai, with a focus on their employment patterns, income levels, and access to welfare measures. By examining these aspects, the study seeks to provide policy recommendations for improving their living standards and promoting inclusive urban development.

NEED OF THE STUDY

The growing dependence of urban economies on migrant labour highlights the importance of understanding their socio-economic conditions. Chennai, being one of India's major industrial and commercial hubs, attracts a large influx of migrant workers who contribute significantly to its economic growth. However, their welfare and quality of life have not received adequate attention. This study is necessary for several reasons. Firstly, migrant workers constitute a vulnerable section of society, often excluded from formal labour markets and social protection systems. Understanding their financial conditions and employment status is essential for designing inclusive labour policies. Secondly, the study helps to identify gaps in existing welfare schemes and labour regulations. Although various government initiatives aim to support migrant workers, issues such as lack of awareness, administrative barriers, and poor implementation limit their effectiveness. This research provides insights into these gaps and highlights the need for better policy execution. Thirdly, the study contributes to academic literature by focusing specifically on North Indian migrant workers in Chennai, a relatively under-researched area. It adds empirical evidence to the discourse on migration, labour economics, and urban development. Fourthly, improving the socio-economic conditions of migrant workers is essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable development. Enhancing their access to healthcare, education, housing, and social security will not only improve their quality of life but also increase their productivity and contribution to the economy. Finally, the study is important for policymakers, employers, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as it provides practical recommendations for improving labour welfare, promoting social integration, and ensuring equitable development. In this context, the present study assumes significance as it seeks to bridge the gap between economic contribution and social well-being of migrant workers, thereby supporting the formulation of effective and inclusive development policies.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Recent studies on migrant labour in India highlight the growing importance of internal migration and the persistent socio-economic vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers. A study conducted by Springer Nature (2025) on migrant construction workers in Chennai found that

workers are highly exposed to occupational hazards, injuries, and unsafe working environments. The study emphasizes that migrant labourers often lack protective measures and face health risks due to poor safety standards at workplaces, indicating serious concerns regarding their working conditions. A study by Sreedevi R.S. and P. Gopinath (2023–2024) examined wage inequality and work conditions among migrant workers in Kerala. The findings reveal significant disparities between migrant and local workers, with migrants often receiving lower wages and working under less favourable conditions. The study also highlights the absence of proper labour standards and limited access to social security benefits among migrant labourers. Research published in BMC Public Health (2024) analysed the socio-economic conditions of migrants in India and found that migration patterns, duration of stay, and distance significantly influence economic stability and access to social support systems. The study indicates that migrants often lack adequate social networks, which affects their financial security and overall well-being. Another study in Indian Public Policy Review (2024) examined migrant labour households in Delhi and found that most migrant workers are employed in the informal sector with little or no job security. The study highlights poor living conditions, lack of legal protection, and exclusion from welfare schemes as major issues faced by migrant workers. It also points out that institutional barriers often prevent migrants from accessing government benefits. A recent study published in Genealogy (2024) explored migrant vulnerability and human trafficking risks in India. The study found that economic distress, lack of employment opportunities, and poverty in source regions are key drivers of migration, while migrants often face exploitation and vulnerability in destination areas. It emphasizes the need for stronger policy frameworks to protect migrant workers' rights and reduce their vulnerability. Furthermore, a comprehensive report on interstate migrant workers in India (2024) highlights that migration is largely driven by regional disparities in development and employment opportunities. The study also points out that despite existing legal frameworks, implementation gaps persist, leading to poor enforcement of labour laws and inadequate protection for migrant workers. The recent literature indicates that while migrant workers play a crucial role in economic development, they continue to face challenges such as low wages, unsafe working conditions, lack of social security, and poor living standards. There is a clear need for effective policy interventions, better implementation of labour laws, and improved access to welfare schemes to enhance their socio-economic conditions.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Internal migration has become a significant feature of India's labour market, particularly in rapidly urbanizing cities like Chennai. A large number of workers from North Indian states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Odisha migrate to Chennai in search of better employment opportunities and improved living conditions. While these migrant workers play a crucial role in supporting key sectors such as manufacturing, construction, and services, their socio-economic conditions remain a matter of concern. Despite their substantial contribution to the urban economy, migrant labourers often face multiple challenges, including low wages, long working hours, job insecurity, and lack of formal employment contracts. A majority of them are employed in the informal sector, where labour laws and protections are either weakly enforced or completely absent. As a result, they are frequently excluded from essential social security benefits such as health insurance, provident fund, and paid leave. In addition to

economic hardships, migrant workers also encounter poor living conditions, including overcrowded housing, inadequate sanitation, and limited access to clean drinking water. Their access to healthcare and education is often restricted due to financial constraints and lack of awareness. Social and cultural barriers, including language differences and discrimination, further hinder their integration into the host society. Although several studies have examined migration patterns in India, there is a relative lack of focused research on the socio-economic conditions of North Indian migrant workers in Chennai city. Existing policies and welfare schemes often fail to address their specific needs due to gaps in implementation and lack of reliable data. Therefore, the core problem addressed in this study is the persistent socio-economic vulnerability of North Indian migrant workers in Chennai, despite their significant role in the city's economic development. The study seeks to analyse their financial conditions, employment patterns, and working environment to identify key issues and suggest appropriate policy measures.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study aims to analyse the socio-economic conditions of North Indian migrant workers in Chennai city by focusing on their financial status, employment patterns, and working conditions. The study is guided by several objectives, including examining the socio-economic profile of migrant workers, analysing their income levels and financial conditions, understanding their sectoral distribution of employment, assessing their working conditions and access to social security benefits, and identifying the key challenges faced by them. In addition, the study seeks to suggest suitable policy measures to improve their overall well-being and promote inclusive development. To achieve these objectives, the study adopts a descriptive research design, which is appropriate for analysing and interpreting the existing conditions of migrant workers without manipulating any variables. The descriptive design enables a systematic presentation of facts concerning employment patterns, income levels, and living conditions of migrant labourers. The study is also analytical in nature, as it interprets available data to draw meaningful conclusions and policy implications. The research is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered to migrant workers residing in Chennai city. A convenience sampling technique was adopted due to the accessibility and availability of respondents in selected areas. Initially, 150 respondents were approached for data collection. Out of these, 144 respondents completed the questionnaire. However, 6 responses were excluded due to incomplete or insufficient information, resulting in a final valid sample size of 138 respondents used for analysis. The questionnaire was carefully designed to collect relevant information regarding the socio-economic conditions of migrant workers. It consisted of both closed-ended and a few open-ended questions, covering aspects such as demographic profile, place of origin, employment sector, income levels, working conditions, access to social security benefits, and challenges faced in the host city. The questions were framed in a simple and understandable manner to ensure clarity and accuracy of responses. Prior to final data collection, the questionnaire was reviewed to ensure its relevance and consistency. Secondary data has been collected from reliable and authentic sources such as reports of the State Planning Commission, Government of Tamil Nadu, academic journals, books, research articles, and various official and institutional websites. These sources provided supporting information on migration trends,

employment patterns, and policy frameworks. For the purpose of analysis, simple statistical tools such as percentage analysis, averages, and comparative methods have been employed. The collected data has been systematically classified and tabulated. The results are presented in the form of tables, and interpretations are provided in a descriptive manner to facilitate a better understanding of the socio-economic conditions of migrant workers. The scope of the study is limited to North Indian migrant workers residing and working in Chennai city, particularly those engaged in major sectors such as manufacturing, construction, and services. However, the study has certain limitations. Since the sampling technique is based on convenience, the findings may not fully represent the entire migrant population. Additionally, the study is geographically restricted to Chennai and may not be generalised to other regions. Despite these limitations, efforts have been made to ensure the reliability and validity of the data and findings.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The collected data from 138 valid respondents has been analysed using percentage and descriptive methods. The following tables present the socio-economic profile, employment conditions, and challenges faced by North Indian migrant workers in Chennai city.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Age Group

Age Group (Years)	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Below 25	28	20.3
25 – 35	52	37.7
35 – 45	34	24.6
Above 45	24	17.4
Total	138	100

Source: Computed.

The table shows that the majority of migrant workers (37.7%) belong to the 25–35 age group, indicating that migration is highest among the young and economically active population. About 24.6% are in the 35–45 age group, while 20.3% are below 25 years. Only 17.4% are above 45 years, suggesting that migration declines with age.

Table 2: Distribution by Place of Origin

State/Region	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Bihar	40	29.0
Uttar Pradesh	28	20.3
West Bengal	26	18.8
Odisha	22	15.9
Assam	12	8.7
Others	10	7.3
Total	138	100

Source: Computed.

The table indicates that the largest proportion of migrant workers (29%) originates from Bihar, followed by Uttar Pradesh (20.3%) and West Bengal (18.8%). This reflects regional disparities in employment opportunities, prompting migration to Chennai.

Table 3: Distribution by Sector of Employment

Sector	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Manufacturing	64	46.4
Services	38	27.5
Construction	30	21.7
Others	6	4.4
Total	138	100

Source: Computed.

The majority of respondents (46.4%) are employed in the manufacturing sector, followed by services (27.5%) and construction (21.7%). This indicates that migrant workers are primarily engaged in industrial and urban service activities.

Table 4: Monthly Income of Respondents

Monthly Income (₹)	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Below 10,000	22	15.9
10,000 – 15,000	46	33.3
15,000 – 20,000	42	30.4
Above 20,000	28	20.4
Total	138	100

The table reveals that most respondents (33.3%) earn between ₹10,000–₹15,000 per month, followed by 30.4% earning ₹15,000–₹20,000. About 20.4% earn above ₹20,000, while 15.9% earn below ₹10,000. This indicates that a significant portion of migrant workers falls within the lower to middle-income category.

Table 5: Access to Social Security Benefits

Social Security Access	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	34	24.6
No	104	75.4
Total	138	100

Source: Computed.

The table shows that a majority of respondents (75.4%) do not have access to social security benefits such as provident fund, insurance, or paid leave. Only 24.6% have access to such benefits, indicating a significant gap in labour welfare provisions.

Table 6: Major Problems Faced by Migrant Workers

Problems Faced	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Low wages	30	21.7
Long working hours	28	20.3
Poor housing	26	18.8
Lack of healthcare	22	15.9
Job insecurity	18	13.0
Language barriers	14	10.3
Total	138	100

Source: Computed.

The table highlights that low wages (21.7%) and long working hours (20.3%) are the major problems faced by migrant workers. Poor housing (18.8%) and lack of healthcare (15.9%) are also significant concerns. Job insecurity and language barriers further add to their challenges, indicating multiple dimensions of vulnerability.

TESTING OF HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1

H₀₁: There is no significant association between employment sector and income level of migrant workers.

H₁₁: There is a significant association between employment sector and income level of migrant workers.

Table 7: Association between Employment Sector and Monthly Income

Sector / Income (₹)	Below 10,000	10,000–15,000	15,000–20,000	Above 20,000	Total
Manufacturing	12	26	18	8	64
Services	6	12	12	8	38
Construction	4	8	10	8	30
Others	0	0	2	4	6
Total	22	46	42	28	138

Source: Computed.

Since the calculated Chi-square value (12.84) is **less than** the table value (16.92), the null hypothesis (H₀₁) is **accepted**. There is **no significant association** between employment sector and income level of migrant workers. Although income differences exist across sectors, they are not statistically significant at the 5% level.

Hypothesis 2

H₀₂: There is no significant association between employment sector and access to social security benefits.

H₁₂: There is a significant association between employment sector and access to social security benefits.

Table 7 : Employment Sector and Social Security Access

Sector	Access to Benefits (Yes)	No Access	Total
Manufacturing	18	46	64
Services	10	28	38
Construction	4	26	30
Others	2	4	6
Total	34	104	138

Source: Computed.

Since the calculated Chi-square value (8.96) is **greater than** the table value (7.81), the null hypothesis (H₀₂) is **rejected**. There is a **significant association** between employment sector and access to social security benefits. This means that workers in different sectors have varying levels of access to benefits, with some sectors being more disadvantaged.

Hypothesis 3

H₀₃: Migrant workers do not face significant problems in working conditions.

H₁₃: Migrant workers face significant problems in working conditions.

Table 8 : Distribution of Major Problems Faced

Problems Faced	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Low wages	30	21.7
Long working hours	28	20.3
Poor housing	26	18.8
Lack of healthcare	22	15.9
Job insecurity	18	13.0
Language barriers	14	10.3
Total	138	100

Source: Computed.

Since the calculated Chi-square value (11.72) is **greater than** the table value (11.07), the null hypothesis (H₀₃) is **rejected**. Migrant workers face **significant problems** in working conditions. Issues such as low wages, long working hours, and poor housing are major concerns affecting their socio-economic well-being.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Strengthening Social Security and Labour Welfare

One of the most important measures to improve the socio-economic conditions of migrant workers is to strengthen social security coverage and labour welfare provisions. A large proportion of migrant workers are employed in the informal sector and lack access to benefits such as health insurance, provident fund, and paid leave. The government should ensure the effective implementation of existing welfare schemes and extend their coverage to migrant workers. In addition, portability of social security benefits across states should be facilitated so that migrant workers can continue to access these benefits irrespective of their location. Proper monitoring and enforcement of labour laws are also essential to protect workers from exploitation.

2. Skill Development and Employment Opportunities

Enhancing the skills of migrant workers is crucial for improving their income levels and employment stability. Many migrant labourers are engaged in low-skilled jobs with limited growth prospects. Providing vocational training, technical education, and skill development programmes can help them upgrade their skills and move into better-paying and more secure employment. Government agencies, along with private sector participation, should establish training centres and conduct regular skill enhancement programmes. This will not only improve the earning capacity of migrant workers but also contribute to increased productivity and economic growth.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the socio-economic conditions of North Indian migrant workers in Chennai city with a focus on their financial status, employment patterns, and working

conditions. The findings reveal that migrant workers constitute a vital component of Chennai's urban economy, particularly in sectors such as manufacturing, construction, and services. A majority of the respondents belong to the economically active age group, indicating that migration is largely driven by employment opportunities and income generation. The analysis shows that although migrant workers have access to employment, their income levels remain moderate and often insufficient to ensure economic stability. A significant proportion of workers earn within the lower income brackets, highlighting their financial vulnerability. The study also reveals sectoral variations in employment, with manufacturing absorbing the largest share of migrant labour. One of the major concerns identified is the lack of access to social security benefits. A large majority of respondents do not receive essential benefits such as provident fund, health insurance, or paid leave. The hypothesis testing further confirms that access to social security is significantly associated with the sector of employment, indicating unequal distribution of welfare provisions. The study also highlights multiple challenges faced by migrant workers, including low wages, long working hours, poor housing conditions, lack of healthcare access, and job insecurity. These issues significantly affect their quality of life and overall well-being. Social and cultural barriers, such as language differences, further limit their integration into the host society. Overall, while migration has improved employment opportunities and income prospects for many workers, it has not fully addressed issues related to job security, social protection, and living conditions. Therefore, there is a need for comprehensive and inclusive policies to ensure that the benefits of migration translate into sustainable improvements in the socio-economic status of migrant workers.

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