

Research Paper

# Social Sustainability Lies on Connecting Wealthy Living with Healthy Living of Migrants

## - A case of Kottayam District, Kerala State, India

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### Abstract

*Migration has occurred since the dawn of civilization, and it is a phenomenon that causes changes in economic and social living of Migrants moving from their place of origin to another destination towards search of employment for livelihood. But these migrants very often compromise and adjust with the healthy living towards gaining social sustainability. In the last two decades, the State of Kerala, the coastal region of south west part of India has seen a large influx of migrants from all over the country. It is also worth mentioning here that the State has very high literacy rate in India with large scale out-migrants moved to Middle East, Canada, USA, US, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore etc.*

*A major portion of the in-migrants includes unskilled or semi-skilled labourers from the States like Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha etc and a small minority from Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Unlike the common trend of migrating to the urban areas and cities, in Kerala migrants also choose to locate in rural areas based on the job availability. Most of these migrant labourers work in the construction sector, daily wage marginal workers working as agriculture labourers, cleaning staff etc. 'Labour nakas'- (Labour Markets – where the migrant labours assemble in an identified location of the cities and towns) where the migrant labours are hired on a daily basis. On the other hand, these inter- state migrations also brings forward several questions and issues related to social security, health care, housing, and skill management and so on.*

*The authors made an attempt to look at the effects of migration on the social sustainability in terms of their earnings (economic) for livelihood as well as inclusiveness (social) in their neighbourhood living. Many of the migrants live in labour camps where they are access to wealth in terms of money as wage for wealthy living but they lack healthy living which includes access to physical and mental health. It is nightmare for the migrants to get Spatial Access to basic livelihood needs such as health, education, water supply, sanitation and waste disposal facilities. The authors also attempted to view the planning and*

*development initiatives taken by the local and state government towards building healthy living environment of the migrants labours in their residential neighbourhoods in the selected case areas within the Kottayam districts.*

## **Keywords**

*Kerala, migrants, healthy living, social sustainability, livelihood, spatial access*

## **1. Introduction**

Urban migrant households in India constitute diverse character consists of social, economic, cultural, and spatial settings including the physical environment. It is also true to see that there is variation in the households local living scenario is the manifestation of political, institutional and administrative settings of the local area. These two important factors determine the quality of life of the households where they look out for a way of life which are usual and historical. But the Pandemic situation made the way of life of the households including the migrant labours move from the Way of Life (WoL) to Live any Way (LaW). This transformation has an impact on the socio-spatial outlook as well as demand for a change in the mind set of local government in cities, town and villages across the country. The local government efforts towards creating economic activities (Wealthy Living) to the urban migrant as single or family are quiet often ignored or sometimes neglected towards generating social activities (Healthy Living). In line with the Sustainable Development Goal 11 making of sustainable cities and communities it is essential to view that how city local governments envisage making the urban migrants living areas not only making them as wealthy communities but also to build healthy communities.

Local people and local government are spatially proximate but socially less interactive and having economic value base political affiliation. This is due to the fact that the lowest spatial unit of Planning is the Wards in the city at the first level form the bottom. Further at the micro level the spatial units are set to the level of zones or divisions at the second level, municipalities and corporations at city and metropolitan cities at the third level. At the meso level it is the taluks, Blocks and Districts. At the Macro Level it is the State and Country. In this juncture the author argues the fact that the Decentralized system of government as per the 73 (rural) and 74 (urban) constitutions Amendment of India notified during 1990 given power to local government is a land mark change in the governance system. But the wealthy vs. healthy communities are missed in the planning and development agenda of many parts of the states in India especially the migrant population in cities and towns in India.

## **2. Social sustainability and Urban Living- Theory and Practice**

Over past few decades, social sustainability has been increasingly influencing urban policy, housing, and the planning of cities all over the world. Specifically, in recent years, social sustainability has gained increased attention as a fundamental component of sustainable development. However, despite the passage of almost one and a half decades since its first introduction as the third pillar of

sustainable development in a European Council (EC) meeting in 2000, social sustainability is still struggling to find its position in the sustainable development agenda. Since 2000, relatively less consideration has been given to the social dimension of sustainable development in comparison to environmental and economic dimensions (Burton, 2000; Colantonio & Lane, 2007; Drakakis-Smith, 1995), which means that there is still limited understanding of what constitutes social sustainability and how it might be achieved.

One of the most common definitions of social sustainability is to provide sensible and equitable distribution of both physical and social resources for people; physical resources like shelter, food, clean water etc. and social resources such as participation in decision making processes, information, transparency of actions, freedom of speech, etc. For this group of researchers, Social sustainability is associated with decision-making processes and can only be attained if development practice and participatory planning is introduced in the society (e.g. Burton, Jenks, & Williams, 2003; Choguill, 2008; Haapio, 2012). Within the urban literature, social sustainability debates have largely been separated from the environmental discussions. A good example is in the definition presented by Yiftachel and Hedgcock (1993, p. 140) as *“the continuing ability of a city to function as a long-term viable setting for human interaction, communication and cultural development”*. They introduce the socially sustainable city as the one marked by a common sense of belonging, solidarity and vitality among its residents as well as in terms of the collective functioning of society. Affected by the earlier definition of Yiftachel and Hedgcock, Polèse and Stren (2000, p. 15\_16) provide a definition of social sustainability with a special focus on urban environments as *“development (and/or growth) that is compatible with harmonious evolution of civil society, fostering an environment conducive to the compatible cohabitation of culturally and socially diverse groups while at the same time encouraging social integration, with improvements in the quality of life for all segments of the population”*. Their definition emphasises the physical environment (e.g. public spaces, urban design and housing) within the sustainability. They also highlight the importance of the economic (development) and social (social integration, cultural diversity and civil society) dimensions of urban sustainability.

Chiu (2003) refers to social sustainability as improvement and maintenance of the well-being of current and future generations. She identifies three different interpretations of what theorists view social sustainability to encompass. The first of these interpretations is one in which social sustainability is equated with ecological sustainability. This means that in order for an activity to be socially sustainable, it must maintain the current social structure, value and the like, as these constitute social limitations just as the environment contains ecological limitations. The second interpretation is an environment-oriented approach whereby social sustainability refers to *“the social conditions necessary to support ecological sustainability”* (2003, p.224). The third and final one is a people-oriented approach which emphasises social cohesion and inclusion, requiring inequalities in access to resources to be righted.

In 2011, Vallance, Perkins and Dixon continue Chiu’s work by making a clearer distinction between what Chiu calls ‘ecological sustainable development’, ‘social norms’ and ‘equitable distribution of opportunities and resources’. In their study, Vallance et al. (2011) present a tripartite definition of social sustainability as ‘development social sustainability’ with its concerns about inequity and

poverty, 'maintenance social sustainability' which addresses the preservation of socio-cultural practices and patterns in the context of economic and social change, and 'bridge social sustainability' which refers to the behavioural changes in order to achieve bio-physical environmental goals. They argue that these distinctions between the different types of social sustainability are often underestimated, overlooked or ignored in the literature (Vallance et al., 2011). More recently, Chiu's points are reflected by Dempsey, Brown, and Bramley (2012) studies, which have further defined urban social sustainability as "*the continuous ability of a city to function as a viable, long-term setting for cultural development, human interaction and communication*" (2006, p.16). Their analysis of urban social sustainability emphasises two overarching dimensions at the core of the notion of social sustainability as: 'social equity' with particular reference to access to opportunities and services; and 'sustainability of community'. The former dimension is concerned with the notion of social justice, urging the equitable distribution of resources in society in order to provide fair access to local services, housing and jobs. The second concept is linked to the continuing functioning and viability of society as a collective entity.

As is clear from the above, there is no specific definition for social sustainability and each researcher defines the concept with some specific dimensions. There have been very few researchers who have defined social sustainability as an autonomous dimension of sustainable development. As a result, the concept of social sustainability has often been oversimplified or under-theorised in existing theoretical and empirical constructs. Back in 2003, Burton et al. Note that the main reason that the social dimension of sustainability has received such limited attention is because it is hard to define, let alone to quantify. Also, a study by Colantonio and Lane (2007) shows that there is limited literature specifically focusing on social sustainability, while there is much broader literature focusing on the overlapping concepts of social cohesion, social capital, social equity and social inclusion (Haapio, 2012). Yet one decade later, Axelsson et al. (2013) argue that what social sustainability means still remains unclear and needs more investigation.

Overall, while a social dimension of sustainability is extensively accepted, the exact meaning of it has not been very clearly defined or agreed (Vallance et al., 2011). As a multi-dimensional concept, social sustainability is facing an underlying question of 'what does it mean by social dimension of sustainable development?', which has variety of possible answers, with no consensus over the exact definition of the concept (Ancell & Thompson-Fawcett, 2008). For these reasons, it can be concluded that research is urgently required to clarifying the social sustainability concept through identifying its constitutive indicators. The social sustainability as a concept required for understanding the social reality particularly the social wellbeing of the people in general and migrants in particular. The migrants are engaged in some income generation activities at the same time the liability and living environment is a big challenge for the migrants, the receiving community and the local government. So it is essential to approach the work, the wealth part in the city and liveable, the healthy part in the city needs to be considered as very important aspects, in practical sense seen through the social sustainability perspective.

### **3. Migration, Employment and Urban Living- Social Reality**

Urban local environment as neighbourhoods of household living is the micro habitat in cities. These neighbourhoods are residential area either as planned or traditional form accommodates communities of diverse culture. The social living of the households depends on the physical manifestation of places and spaces arranged for carry out their day to day activities of household members including children, adult, women, men, old age, and differently able persons. Urban neighbourhoods undergo changes in the spaces in the house, building, places in the locality and the overall built form. It is evident from the new trends as rebuilt the spaces and activities becomes challenge in terms of urban resilience to the inhabitants and the local civic authorities. The transformation in the house and building spaces, common places and the built form experienced the residential character change towards commercial and other non- residential uses in the neighbourhood. The social and physical impacts of the spatial transformation demands for rebuild the activities as making redevelopment strategies to resolve the conflict between the residential and commercial spaces towards urban resilience. The efforts from civil society organizations to promote people participation in urban planning are also very limited due to a variety of reasons (PRIA, 2008). So, the need to develop an integrated approach towards community centred redevelopment of the urban local neighbourhood becomes herculean task for the city planners of the local government. The participation and involvement of the local community is essential in rebuild the local neighbourhood.

“Housing for All” is conventionally perceived as numerical value i.e, mere numbers as well as for people merely the so called “poor”, but it is for people beyond “poor” also. There are many section of population required house to live. It consists of single persons, student’s population, working women and men, migrants who are self-employed who are in demand for chap and small houses either can buy or rent.

Countrywide lockdown amidst the COVID -19 pandemic has critically dislocated its migrant population. Lacking jobs and money, and with public transportation shut down, millions of migrants were forced to returned back to the native places. In India, the central government imposed the lockdown and closed businesses. Even though the local authorities followed with measures such as creating strict containment zones to close off hotspots, which left millions of migrant workers stranded without money and food, left all poor migrant workers to start walking towards their native places along the highways & railways track. The central/state governments undertook measures to contain the spread of the pandemic, including restrictions on travel and movement through national lockdown, providing shelter & food for migrant welfare.

Housing is more generally as living spaces, refers to the construction and assigned usage of houses or buildings collectively, for the purpose of living. Housing gives children, youth, adult and old age people in many households the opportunity to access to “Utilities and Services” such as water, electricity, and sanitation. Also it is an area access to “Community Facilities” such as places of shop, play, worship, and socializes. Housing helps people to improve and succeed education, employment and maintain their health and well-being, House could be affordable in terms of cost and accessible in terms “utilities and services” as well as “community facilities”. Apart from the quality of housing

stock and tenure status, the provision of basic amenities is an important indicator of habitability conditions. A well-meaning policy is that should aim to improve urban housing in economic terms, not only affordability by increasing households' capacity to borrow loans but also the social and physical aspects of creating liveable house and neighbourhoods. Housing for "ALL" needs a change in terms of view ALL, with a sense "Accessible", "Localized" and "liveable" towards making better urban future.

The desired Way of Living (WoL) should satisfy and accommodate the aspirations of the urban households. A liveable community is one where people "wish to live" in a place where they can find work, shop, socialize and access to entertainment. It is a complex issue when we talk about "wish to live" i.e. something varies between people across gender, age, rural, urban, class and caste. But when it is viewed as community as Spatial, that is "Sense of Place" and it is social i.e. "Sentiments" (Mohamed, Abdul Razak, 2015). The perspective of a residential neighbourhood – a community as sense of place includes the local area or even the entire city. People appreciate the place of living is connected with well-designed transportation system, access to natural areas, parks, trails and proximity to needed services, shopping and jobs. *The house area, streets and community spaces of our cities and towns are an important part of the liveability of the communities.*

Social capital is defined by the OECD as "networks together with. Shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups". In this definition, we can think of networks as real-world links between groups or individuals. Social capital also stresses on the importance of these social networks and relationships and aims to use it in the best possible way for achieving organizational goals. The whole notion of social capital is centred on social relationships and its major elements include social networks, civic engagement, norms of reciprocity, and generalized trust Common types of social capital include: structure and cognitive; bonding, bridging, and linking; strong and weak; and horizontal and vertical. It can be measured and analysed at individual- and collective-levels in terms of social perspective and micro-, meso- and macro-levels in terms of geographic perspective (Bhandari H and Yasunobu K, 2009).

#### 4. Migrant Labour and Employment in Kerala

Migration plays a pivotal role in the economy of the southern Indian state of Kerala. The demographic advancement of Kerala's population, out-migration, high-remittance economy and the change in urbanization pattern has resulted in a situation wherein the state has a diaspora of the size of nearly three million; while for the domestic requirements it depends on a migrant workforce of almost the same size. While these migrants have become an inevitable part of the Kerala society, with their arrival, there have also emerged several challenges as well.

#### 4.1 Labour migration in Kerala over the decades

Employees from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka supplemented native workers in filling the blue-collar labour force demand from 1961 to 1991 in plantations, brick kilns, and jobs that required excavating up ground. By the 1990s, Kochi, Kerala's construction hub and commercial city, had seen a large influx of workers from Tamil Nadu (Benoy Peter, 2017). Migrants from Odisha began arriving to work in the Ernakulam district's timber industry later followed by new influx of labourers from Assam, notably those adepts in plywood manufacturing and migrant labourers from Bihar to work in iron and steel industry of Kanjikode in Palakkad. Migrants from a variety of other states gradually arrived, taking up any type of unskilled labour. While the majority of labour movement was driven by the employees' social networks, multinational businesses also used intermediaries to mobilise labourers from states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and West Bengal to work on their projects in Kerala (Benoy Peter, 2020), thereby creating the longest migration corridor in India. This is inter-regional migration in labour migration and the migrants are called labour migrants or guest workers ('Adithithozhilalikal') in the state of Kerala. This resulted in a number of changes in urbanization as well as other social and economic aspects of society.

Source: Migration Policy Institute, 2014 with additional routes from Kashyap, 2016

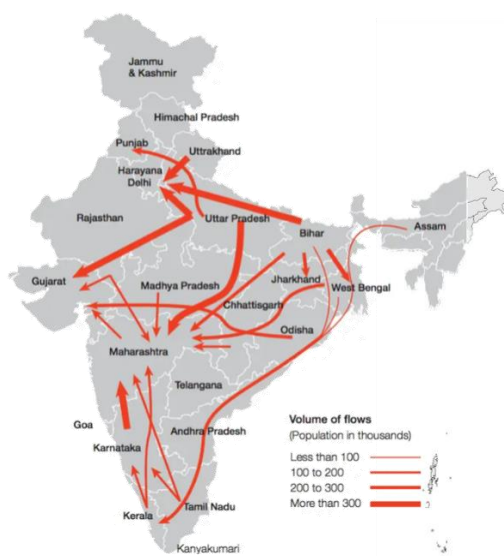


Figure 1 Migration corridor in India (source: (World Economic Forum, 2017))

#### 4.2 Location of migrant labour workers

Studies show that about 21 lakhs migrants in Kerala migrate for a shorter period whereas about 10 lakhs migrants stay for a longer period. Kerala economy increasingly depends on other state domestic migrants (particularly low skilled) due to the large-scale emigration of its natives. Migrants are mainly located in the districts of Kannur, Kozhikode, Palakkad, Ernakulam, Kottayam, Alappuzha and Thiruvananthapuram. *Perumbavoor* in Ernakulam district has the highest number of migrant workers in the state, where migrant labourers work in the plywood industry. This is followed by *Paippad* of Kottayam district.

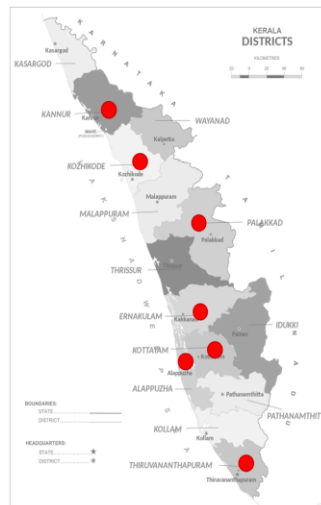


Figure 2 Major location of labour migrants in Kerala (source: (Benoy Peter, 2017))

Unlike the common trend of migrating to the urban areas and cities, in Kerala migrants also choose to locate in rural areas based on the job availability. Labour migrant residential pockets are observed in both urban and rural areas. Most of these labourers work in the construction sector. This is followed by daily wage marginal workers working as agriculture labourers, cleaning staff etc. 'Labour nakas'- where migrants are hired on a daily basis is observed over several locations within the district. On the other hand, this inter- state migration also brings forward several questions and issues related to social security, health care, housing, skill management and so on.

## 5 Migrants and wealthy living situation in Kottayam

The pandemic has affected the lives of people from all the sectors of life. Migrants were discovered to be the most vulnerable members of the working class as a result of the economic downturn. The problem impacted people of all socioeconomic groups, and it revealed the glaring discrepancies in socioeconomic and health-care facilities in the open. One such incident happened in India where thousands of migrants defied lockdown and came on streets of Paippad, in Kottayam district of Kerala. They were demanding travel facilities back to their native states.



Figure 3 Article explaining the migrants' protest at Paippad, March 2020 (source: (staff, 2020))



## 5.1 Migrant workforce in Kottayam district

Kottayam is one of the central districts situated in Kerala state with a greater number of migrant workers i.e., over two hundred thousand' migrants with a share of 19.8 percent of workforce participation. Kottayam district, with high rates of emigration and with several economic sectors is depended on these migrant labourers as the major workforce. Construction, hospitality, agriculture, rubber-based products, and quarrying are among the district's significant economic sectors. Numerous small industrial units can be found in Migrant workers are also employed by the district.

DEMOGRAPHIC LABEL	VALUE
Area	2208 Sq. Km
Population	19,74,551
Density	895 per sq. Km
Sex ratio	1039 per 1000
Literacy rate	97.21 %

**Table No/1 Demographics of Kottayam district (source: Census 2011)**

Labour migrants are found in both urban and rural areas in the district. The place of stay mainly dependent mainly in job opportunities and availability of affordable rentals and access to transportation facilities. Changanassery, Paippad, Chingavanam, Kurichi, Ettumanoor, Pala, Kaduthuruthy, Ponkunnam and Erattupetta are the major settlements housed with considerable amount of migrant population living. More number of migrant labourer settlements (labour camps) are found at Changanassery and Kottayam taluks of Kottayam district. These are near to the major urban and semi-urban areas of the district. To infer major concentration of migrant labour workers observed in and around the urban centres due to job availability and transportation facilities.

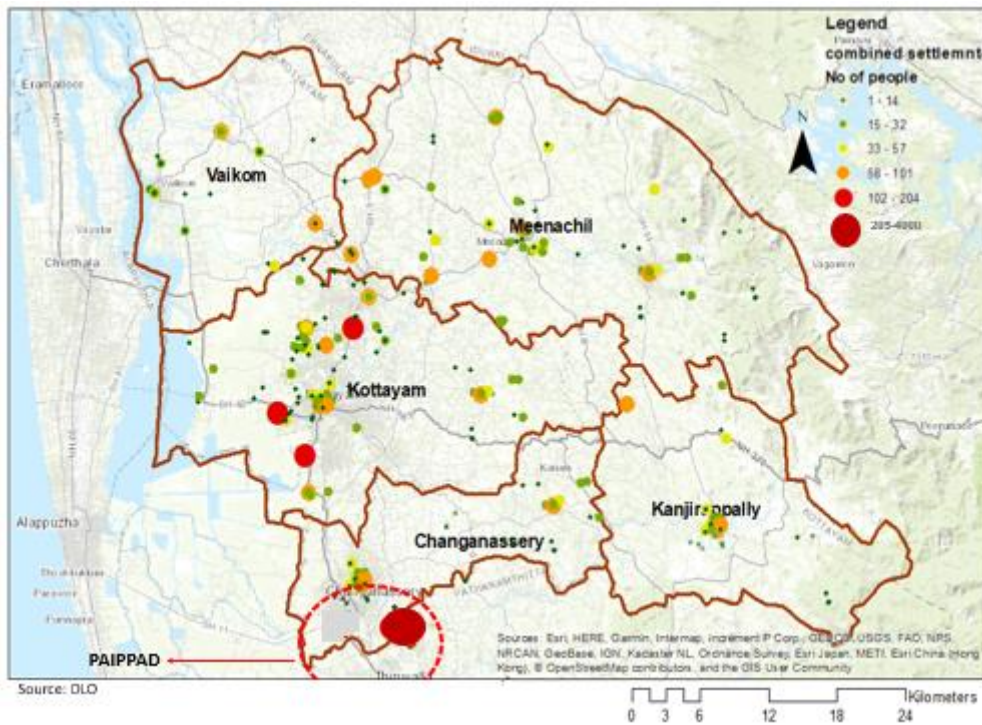


Figure 4 Spatial distribution of migrants in the Kottayam District(Author generated based on data from District Labour Office, Kottayam)

### 5.2 Basic profiling of migrant workforce in Kottayam district

There are many factors influencing migration which are social situations and economic situation of the migrant and his/ her surroundings. The basic profiling of the migrants is an important in migration studies. The five taluks of the district are considered for the basic profiling of the migrants. Native state, age and gender of the migrants are the main topics considered.

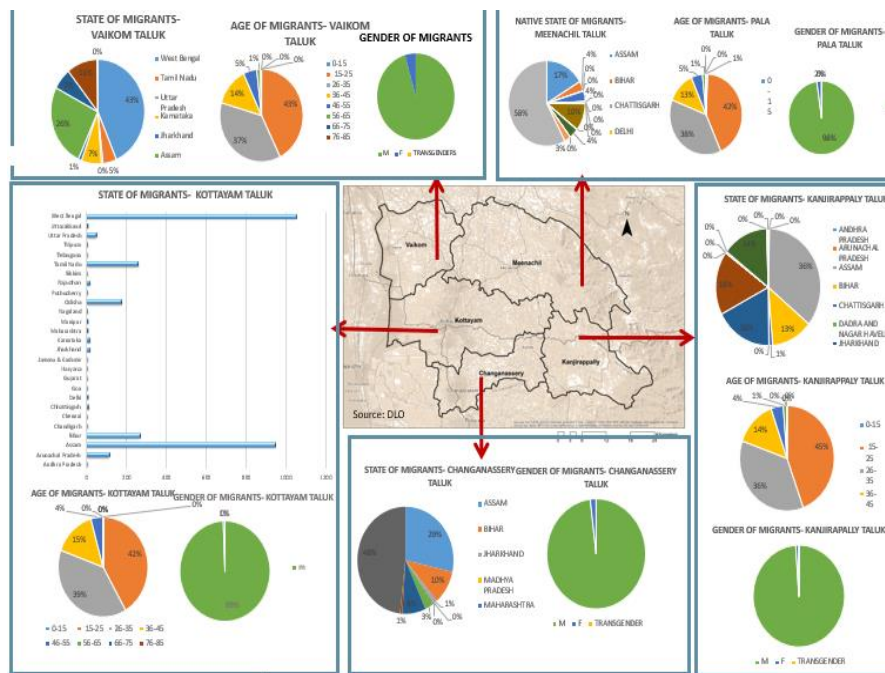
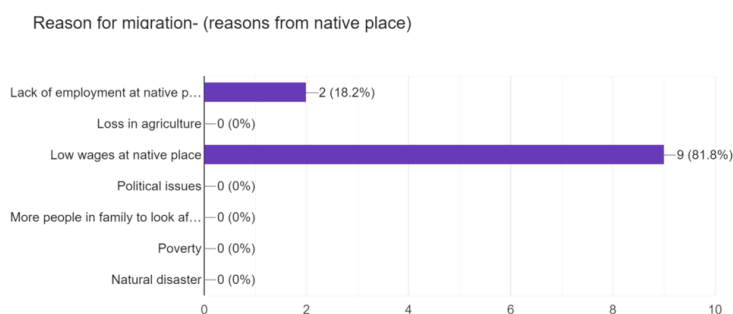


Figure 5 Taluk wise basic profiling of the labourers (source: DLO, Kottayam)

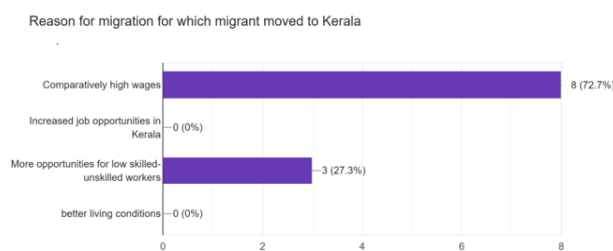
Majority of migrants from West Bengal and are of age group between 15-25, depicting the major workforce to be young men. The number of female migrants and children are comparatively less. This shows that men as single come for work leaving the family behind. Majority of the migrants are school dropouts and working in construction and informal sectors before migration and are low skilled or unskilled workers. They stay back for a period of 10 months on an average in Kerala for work.

### 5.3 Push-pull factors for migration in Kottayam district

People emigrate for a variety of economic, social, and physical reasons, which can usually be divided into push and pull elements. The push factors are those related to the origin area. The pull factors are those that are linked to the destination area. Economic considerations play a big role in all human movements, but they are especially crucial in migration. Factors of attraction includes employment opportunities. On the other hand, the triggering factors are often the supercurrent of the situation. A primary survey was conducted in the district in order to understand the push-pull factors behind migration.



**Figure No.6 Push factors (source; primary survey2022)**



**Figure No.7 Pull factors (source: primary survey2022)**

Low salaries, restricted and irregular employment prospects, failed crops, family debts, and drought have all been key factors in driving many people to leave their homes in Kerala in search of work. Majority of migrants responded that low wage at native place and lack of job opportunities at the native place as the main reasons for migration. Kerala has become one of the most sought-after destinations in the country due to its high wage rates and long-term job opportunities for both skilled and unskilled workers. Political stability, a generally stable social climate, and less discriminatory treatment of migrants in comparison to many other viable destinations all serve as additional draw factors.

Construction sectors the major industry where migrants are engaged in the district. The construction workers are hired by the contractors and work as both informal and formal labourers. It is followed by

major portion engaged in daily wage activities - agriculture labourers, cleaning staff, helpers etc. MSMEs also engage a considerable number of migrant workers.

## **6. Connect wealthy living with healthy living of migrants in Kottayam**

The demand for low skilled and unskilled workers in Kerala has provided vast opportunities for the other state migrants. High wages along with the demand for labour force opened up a huge lot of opportunities in the unorganised sector. This scenario initiated the migration process from Northern and North Eastern part of India to Kerala. Consistent job opportunities, better social and working environment contributed to the scenario. The larger percentage of the wage is being remitted to the families staying back at their native places thereby hiking a larger remittance rate, which improved the economic condition of a the migrant labourers and their families

Migration brings in several social, spatial and economical changes in the migrated region. One such example is Paippad of Changanassery taluk of Kottayam district has the highest concentration of migrant workers in the district of Kottayam. The growth of Paippad to an urban character started along and was accelerated by the onset of labour migration to the region. More job opportunities and proximity to the nearest urban centres of Thiruvalla and Changanassery and travel facilities to Kottayam ignited migrants flow to the region. This led to an increase in the number of rental residential activities and commercial establishments in the region. Locational preferences and accommodation facility at cheap rates and social preferences are the factors that leads to the settling down of migrants at different places.

Labour migrants are accommodated by the contractors or local landlords in rented houses or in temporary shelters in large numbers. Since the rents are less for the shared living, migrants also settle down in these houses most of them often congested and without proper sanitation or waste management facilities. Other expenses are also shared by the group of migrants living together. However, most of the migrants live in congested and unsanitary dwelling units. Some migrants are living in quarters provided by their employer. Single dwelling occupied by a greater number of migrant people.

Major issues identified among the living environment of migrant workers are inadequate floor area per person, congestion, access to adequate water supply, access to toilet facilities, waste management, access to green spaces, participation in cultural activities, access to education. However, intensity of the issue varies from place to place. The housing scenario is the major issue to be focused along with the social condition of migrant workers for a healthy environment.

## **7. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD**

Many of the migrants live in labour camps where they are access to wealth in terms of money as wage but they lack healthy living which includes access to physical and mental health. It is nightmare for the migrants to get spatial access to basic livelihood needs such as health, education, water supply, sanitation and waste disposal facilities. Migrants with employment in cities and towns caters to livelihood opportunities and income generation avenues. But the creating liveable house and neighbourhoods are essential for building healthy living.

One of the major focus areas is about the migrants' housing situation. Affordable housing projects funded by existing government programmes can make a significant difference in the lives of migratory workers. Rental housing facilities can be provided for the migrant workers under Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs), a sub-scheme of the Pradhan Mantri AWAS Yojana-Urban, were launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (PMAY-U) and the Apna Ghar Project that was conceived by Bhavanam Foundation Kerala, Govt. of Kerala. Individual residential units with multiple rooms can be constructed under the project. Existing rental properties also considered under the model. The private

landlords identified, who can ensure safe and proper living condition for the migrants can also be brought under the scheme. Transit housing near construction sites and other work paces can be the solution in such scenario.



**Figure 8. Rental houses under ARHC (Source: Site visit)**

To produce good living it is a prerequisite to make the houses, streets and neighbourhoods attractive for the residences including migrants of diverse social groups, age, gender, occupation, recreation and socialization needs. It is further viewed from the spatial access to work, livelihoods and social networks of the households living in urban neighbourhoods. The spatial distribution of population is an important factor for the planning for infrastructure facilities for households especially children, youth, women and old age in urban and rural contexts. Spatial access is the measure of time and money spent by household towards getting access to social and physical infrastructure facilities such as water, sanitation, health education and socialization. In this regard the location and time travelled becomes the spatial access cost towards getting facilities in a desirable distance and money spents (Mohamed AbdulRazak, 2007). Envisioning social sustainability lies in creation of healthier environment, which would reflect in the holistic development of the migrant labour force.

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