Migration Patterns and Rural Transitions in Northeast India

Mapping of Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura



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Migration Patterns and Rural Transitions in Northeast India
(Mapping of Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura)

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgement
List of abbreviations
List of Tables
List of Figures
1. Executive summary 1
2. Introduction 1
2.1 Research questions linked to objectives 3
3. Research methodology 3
3.1 Research design and sampling 3
3.2 Sample Distribution 4
3.3 Survey instrument and respondents 4
3.4 Definitions and units of analysis 5
3.5 Qualitative methods 6
3.6 Data cleaning and analysis 7
3.7 Limitations 8
4. Literature review 8
4.1 Concept of migration 8
4.2 Migration Trends in Northeast India 9
4.3 Covid-19 pandemic and reverse migration 11
5. Research Findings 12
5.1 Demographics of the surveyed sample 12
5.2 Household members profile 15
6. Migration 17
6.1 Migrants Profile 17
6.2 Migration Mapping 18
6.3 Intra-state vs. inter-state migration: Destination states, cities, sectors 19
6.4 Duration and frequency of migration cycles 20
6.5 Nature of Migration 21
6.6 Scale and type: migration (% breakdown, duration in years) 22
6.7 Migration distribution by gender 22
7. Drivers and causes of migration 23
7.1 Reasons for migration (count) 25
7.2 Gendered Migration Dynamics 27
7.3 Finding work by the migrants 28
7.4 Loans and advances taken by the migrants 30
7.5 Trainings received by the migrants 32
8. Feminization and in-formalization of migration 34
8.1 Trends in female migration (% women, age, sector, education profile) 34
8.2 Reason for migration for the female migrants 36
9. Impact of migration on source region 37
9.1 Income and livelihood effects 37
9.1.a. Remittance flows (frequency, amounts, % of household income) 37
9.1.b. Income diversification and household consumption patterns 38
9.2 Gender roles and household dynamics 38
9.2.a. Shift in women's workload and responsibilities 38
10. Working Conditions of Migrant Workers 40
10.1 Social Safety Nets at sector of work 40
10.2 Migrants and Welfare benefits at destination 40
10.3 Workplace Hazard and Protective Measures by migrants across occupational sectors 42

11. Income Analysis of the migrants.....44
11.1 Income Group and sector of work.....44
11.2 Income Group and How they are paid.....45
11.3. Skill Development.....46
11.3.1 Skill trainings received under different sector of work.....46
11.3.2 Income Distribution Across Sector of Work and Nature of Migration.....46
12. Conclusion.....47
12.1 Synthesis of key findings.....47
12.2 Linkages between migration drivers and source area development potential.....47
12.3 Recommendations matrix: linking interventions to migrant profiles.....48
12.4 Skilling and migration outcomes: two tracks.....50
References.....53

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List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full form
ASRLM	Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission
BDO	Block Development Officer
BMC	Block Mission Coordinator
BPM	Block Project Manager
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DAY-NRLM	Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DDU-GKY	Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FPO	Farmer Producer Organisation
HH	Household
KII	Key Informant Interview
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NE	North East
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRLM	National Rural Livelihoods Mission
NSSO	National Sample Survey Office
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PDS	Public Distribution System
PMKVY	Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
Rs	Indian Rupees
RSETI	Rural Self Employment Training Institute
SC	Scheduled Castes
SeSTA	Seven Sisters Development Assistance
SHG	Self-Help Group
ST	Scheduled Tribes
TRLM	Tripura Rural Livelihood Mission
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USA	United States of America

List of Tables

Table 1: Households sampled by state, district and block....4
Table 1a: Definitions of the main categories used in the analysis....6
Table 2: Inter-state and intra-state migration by district....19
Table 3: Source to destination migration mapping....19
Table 4: Year migration began, by age group....22
Table 5: Reasons for migration by gender....23
Table 6: Purpose of loans taken by migrant households....30
Table 7: Land ownership and sector of work....31
Table 8: Relative concentration of landless migrant workers by sector of work....32
Table 9: Sector-wise training received by the migrants....33
Table 10: Profile of women migrants compared with overall migrants....35
Table 11: Main reason for migration among female migrants....36
Table 12: Household members taking over responsibilities after migration....38
Table 13: Role change by presence of female migrant in household....39
Table 14: Sector-wise distribution of respondents accessing social safety net schemes....40
Table 15: Sector-wise Distribution of Employment Benefits Received by Respondents....41
Table 16: Sector-wise income group distribution....44
Table 17: Recommendations matrix by migrant profile, district, gap and scheme....49
Table 18: Training coverage and earnings by sector of work....51
Table 19: Skill training and monthly income (migrants who reported a salary)....51

List of Figures

Fig 1. Frequency of migrants from Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura....10
Fig 2. Frequency of migrant workers returning home during covid-19....12
Fig 3. Social category distribution by district....12
Fig 4. Landholding category distribution by district....13
Fig 5. Migrant's access to the basic services....13
Fig 6. Landholding by size of the land for the migrants....14
Fig 7. Age structure distribution by district....15
Fig 8. Gender representation by district....15
Fig 9. Education distribution by district....16
Fig 10. Sector of work by district....16
Fig 11. Migrants by district....17
Fig 12. Migrant count by district and gender....18
Fig 13. Migration destinations of the migrants....18
Fig 14. Migration flow from Northeast India to other states and abroad....20
Fig 15. Months away per year (seasonal migrants)....21
Fig 16. Nature of migration....21
Fig 17. Reasons for migration....24
Fig 18. Push and pull factors of migration....25
Fig 19. Push factors of migration....26
Fig 20. Pull factors of migration....26
Fig 21. Method of finding work....28
Fig 22. Method of finding work by district....28
Fig 23. Loans and advances taken by the migrants....30
Fig 24. Reasons for migration: male vs female migrants....35
Fig 25. Sectoral distribution of women migrants....36
Fig 26. Remittance behaviour by income category....37
Fig 27. Frequency of remittance sending....38
Fig 28. Sector-wise availability of basic workplace facilities and safety measures....42
Fig 29. Income distribution across sectors....44
Fig 30. Income group by payment type....45
Fig 31. Income distribution across sector of work and nature of migration....46

1. Executive summary

This study examines migration patterns, drivers, and livelihood implications across selected districts of Assam, Meghalaya, and Tripura, based on data collected from 710 households. The study aims to understand the socio-economic conditions shaping migration decisions and to explore how migration relates to rural development opportunities in source regions of the Northeast.

The findings indicate that migration is primarily employment-driven and necessity-based, reflecting limited livelihood opportunities within rural areas. A majority of migrants leave due to push factors such as lack of local employment, insufficient agricultural income, land constraints, and financial pressures. Migration therefore functions as a household survival strategy rather than a purely aspirational choice. Most migrants belong to the prime working-age group and migrate individually, highlighting labour-oriented mobility patterns.

Migration destinations are concentrated in economically developed and urban regions, particularly Karnataka (Bengaluru), Assam (Guwahati) and Tamil Nadu, followed by Kerala, Delhi, Hyderabad and Shillong. Migrants are largely absorbed into construction, manufacturing, service, and general labour sectors, where work is often informal and characterized by long hours and limited workplace protections.

Gender differences are evident in migration dynamics. Male migration is overwhelmingly work-related, while female migration reflects a mix of employment, family-linked movement, and educational motivations. Although women represent a smaller proportion of migrants, their participation signals gradual changes in gender roles and mobility patterns.

Remittances remain a critical outcome of migration, supporting household consumption, education, and debt repayment in source areas. However, dependence on informal recruitment networks and limited access to training highlight persistent vulnerabilities among migrant workers.

The study suggests that migration is closely linked to unrealized development potential within source regions. Strengthening agricultural value chains and promoting local enterprise opportunities can reduce distress migration while enhancing sustainable livelihoods. Skill development can raise migrants' wages and protections, but where it leads to placement in other states it changes the type of migration rather than reducing it (Section 12.4). A balanced policy approach that improves migrant welfare alongside local economic development is essential for transforming migration into a secure and choice-based livelihood strategy.

2. Introduction

Migration has become an increasingly significant dimension of socio-economic transformation in India, particularly in regions characterized by structural underdevelopment and limited livelihood diversification. The Northeastern region of India comprising states such as Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam exhibits distinct migration patterns shaped by geographical isolation, fragile ecological systems, ethnic diversity, borderland dynamics and uneven development trajectories. Despite rich natural resources and strong community-based institutions many backward districts within the region continue to experience declining traditional livelihoods, limited industrialization, poor access to skill training and inadequate employment opportunities in the formal sector.

Migration in Northeast India is both a survival strategy and an aspirational pathway. Seasonal and circular migration to metropolitan centers such as Delhi, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Chennai has increased in recent decades particularly among the youth seeking employment in hospitality, retail, construction, security services, domestic work and other informal sector occupations (Bhagat, 2017). Simultaneously, intra-state and inter-state rural-urban migration patterns reflect growing urbanization pressures within the region itself.

While migration contributes to household income diversification through remittances it also reshapes gender roles, labour availability and socio-cultural dynamics in source communities. Women's participation in migration has increased especially from matrilineal societies such as those in Meghalaya, yet gender vulnerabilities persist at destination areas including job insecurity and limited institutional support (Deshingkar and Akter, 2009).

Given the complexity and distinctiveness of migration in the Northeast there is a need for region specific empirical analysis that systematically examines migration typologies, gender dimensions, occupational patterns, work environments, drivers and socio-economic impacts. This study seeks to address the work environment, drivers and socio-economic impacts. Census of India data and field-based surveys indicate a steady rise in inter-state migration from Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya towards the urban centers of mainland India. The seasonal and short-term migration is particularly prevalent in the region where the agricultural productivity is unstable due to low land holding patterns or fragmented land holdings of the households which is not economically sustainable.

Deshingkar and Akter (2009) emphasize that migration in India often functions as a coping mechanism for rural distress, particularly in areas with agrarian stagnation and limited non-farm employment. They note that seasonal and circular migration is especially prevalent among economically marginalized communities who seek temporary wage employment to supplement agricultural income. However, challenges based on gender specific vulnerabilities, including the working condition status of the migrant workers working in different sectors like construction sites, factories, iron industry, packaging industry or hospitality services often faces problems of working in unsuitable conditions like heat, dust or chemical, wage discriminations or wage thefts, physical abuse or discriminations, long working hours and limited social protection. This study seeks to analyze the patterns, causes and impact of migration from Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam. It further aims to explore the socio-economic factors influencing migration trends in these states. Through this research the study aspires to enhance understanding of regional migration dynamics and the development challenges they entail.

The sectors represent opportunities for localized economic strengthening that may reduce distress-driven migration while enhancing income diversification. At the same time, migration remains socially embedded, shaped by kinship networks, labour intermediaries, and gender norms that influence who migrates and under what conditions. By examining migration patterns alongside household characteristics, employment sectors, and livelihood alternatives, the study seeks to understand how migration interacts with rural transformation processes and how targeted development interventions can create more resilient and inclusive local economies.

Objectives of the study:

- Classify migration patterns-seasonal-permanent; intra/inter-state; rural-urban migration prevalent in selected areas of North East India.
- Analyse gender dynamics of the migrating population.

- Identify primary work sectors drawing migrants. Assess the work environment at the destination areas.
- Examine the causes and drivers of migration.
- Evaluate the impact of migration on source region households, communities and local economies including changes in labor availability, gender roles and consumption and expenditure pattern.
- Propose policy recommendations for skill development, livelihood diversification and improved integration of migrants based on findings from the North East.

2.1 Research questions linked to objectives

Each objective of the study is translated into a research question that the findings chapters set out to answer. The table below shows which chapter answers each question. Each findings chapter opens with its question and closes with a short answer drawn from the evidence it presents.

Objective	Research question	Answered in
Classify patterns	What forms does migration take (duration, distance, destination), and how do they vary by district and household assets?	Ch. 6
Causes and drivers	How do land, debt and local employment shape who migrates, where and for how long?	Ch. 7
Sectors and work environment	How do recruitment channels shape wages, conditions and protections at destination?	Ch. 7.3, 10, 11
Gender dynamics	How does gender shape who migrates, why, into what work, with what entitlements, and what changes for women left behind?	Ch. 8, 9.2
Source-region impact	How do remittances and absence change household income, debt and division of labour?	Ch. 9
Policy	Which local livelihood and skilling pathways could make migration a choice rather than a compulsion, and for whom?	Ch. 12

3. Research methodology

3.1 Research design and sampling

The study uses a mixed-methods design. A structured household survey provides quantitative data on migration patterns, drivers, working conditions and impacts at the source, and focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) add qualitative insight into personal experiences and the institutional context.

Sampling was done in stages. Districts with high out-migration were first identified through secondary research on indicators of backwardness: low Human Development Index scores, high poverty and low urbanisation, poor infrastructure (roads, power, schools and health care), high dependence on agriculture with little industrial or service-sector activity, and frequent seasonal or distress migration driven by floods, land pressure or inadequate social amenities. Within each district, blocks and villages were selected purposively (two blocks per district, prioritising areas where recurring floods, land pressure and inadequate social amenities drive migration, and ten villages per block identified by the field teams; with five households per village, the design provided for 800 households in 160 villages). In practice, the survey covered 15 blocks (Table 1) and, going by the village names recorded, about 177 villages. Within each village, households with at least one migrant member were identified

with the help of village heads and invited to take part. The sample therefore consists entirely of migrant households: households without a migrant member were not surveyed.

In total, 748 household surveys were submitted. After excluding 14 households that did not give consent and 24 blank submissions, 710 households form the analytic sample, with about 100 households per district (about 50 in Nagaon and Ri-Bhoi). These households reported 806 migrant members in the household roster and 770 detailed migration records.

3.2 Sample Distribution

The study sampled households from 8 districts across Assam (Baksa, Dhemaji, Dhubri, Nagaon and Kamrup Rural), Meghalaya (North Garo Hills and Ri-Bhoi), and Tripura (Dhalai). The table lists the districts and corresponding Blocks from which the samples were collected and details the number of households sampled from each block. The district total indicates the aggregate number of samples collected from all the mentioned blocks within the districts.

State	District	Block	Households	District total
Assam	Baksa	Baska	50	101
		Dhamdhama	51	
	Dhemaji	Machkhowa	57	107
		Sissiborgaon	50	
	Dhubri	Chapar	50	106
		South Salmara	56	
	Kamrup Rural	Boko	51	101
		Chamaria	50	
	Nagaon	Kathiatoli	50	50
Meghalaya	North Garo Hills	Bajengdoba	51	103
		Resubelpara	52	
	Ri-Bhoi	Umling	2	52
		Umsning	50	
Tripura	Dhalai	Dumburnagar	49	90
		Raishyabari	41	
Total				**710**

Table 1: Households sampled by state, district and block

Note: Consenting households only. Nagaon and Ri-Bhoi have about half the sample of other districts because only one block was effectively covered in each. In Nagaon, the sampling plan named Pakhimoria and Raha blocks, but all interviews were recorded under Kathiatoli. In Ri-Bhoi, Umling contributed only 2 households, both recorded on an earlier version of the survey form, and all other households are from Umsning.

3.3 Survey instrument and respondents

The household questionnaire was administered in the source villages on Kobo Toolbox by trained enumerators between 7 November and 9 December 2025; 15 enumerators conducted 679 of the 710 interviews (95.6%). It opened with a consent statement, and only households that gave consent were interviewed. The questionnaire was organised in the following modules, which correspond to the analysis in Chapters 5 to 11: location and household profile (state, district, block, village, social category and community); household size by sex and a household roster recording the name, sex, age, education and occupation of each member and whether the member migrates for work; household assets (land owned, total, cultivable and homestead land, and land leased in and out) and access to basic amenities; a migration module completed for each migration (nature of migration, the

number of months away for seasonal migrants, year migration began, type of move and destination, reasons, sector of work, how work was found, mode and amount of pay, skill training and who provided it, and loans or advances taken, with their amount and use); a women's migration module (whether a female member had migrated, the reasons, her sector of work and any problems faced at the destination); and household-level effects (who manages the household and child care, changes in the roles of men and women, and whether remittances are received, with their frequency, amount and use, or how the household manages without them). A final module covered conditions at the destination and future options: access to social protection (PDS, MGNREGA and insurance), employer-provided benefits, workplace hazards and protective measures, awareness of labour rights, whether migrants would prefer to stay back if sufficient local livelihoods were available, and which local options could replace migration. The deployed Kobo form extended the original paper questionnaire by adding pull factors (such as higher wages and better job opportunities) to the list of reasons for migration, inter-district and intra-district options to the type of move, and the questions on pay, working conditions and social protection.

One adult respondent answered for each household. In most households this was a family member who had stayed behind at the source, such as a parent or the spouse of the migrant, because most migrants were away at the time of the survey (the questionnaire did not set a rule for choosing the respondent or record the respondent's relationship to the migrant; matching respondents' names with the household roster identifies the respondent in 444 households, of whom 123, or 17.3% of all 710 households, were themselves migrants and 321 were non-migrant members). Information about migrants, including their earnings, working conditions and problems at the destination, was therefore mostly reported by proxy. Section 3.7 discusses what this means for the findings.

3.4 Definitions and units of analysis

A migrant is defined as a household member who lives or works away from the village for employment, education or family reasons (identified in practice through the roster question "Does the member migrate for work?", answered yes or no by the respondent; no minimum period away was set). No recency window was applied. The year in which migration began ranges from 2010 or earlier to 2025 (Table 4), so the survey covers both recent and long-standing migrants.

Results are reported at three levels, and the denominator is given with each figure: households (710), migrants listed in the household roster (806) and migration records (770). The roster and the migration module were recorded separately and do not match one-to-one; for example, 51 households answered the migration questions without marking any roster member as a migrant. Figures on age, sex and education use the roster; figures on destination, nature of migration, reasons, sector, earnings and training use the migration records. Table 1a defines the main categories used in the analysis.

Term	Definition used in this report
Migration type	
Permanent migrant	Has relocated for work for more than one year.
Seasonal migrant	Migrates for part of the year, typically around six months, and returns home; the number of months away each year was recorded for this group only.
Inter-state	Destination is in a state other than the home state.
Intra-state / inter-district	Destination is within the home state but outside the home district. Because the two answer options overlap in meaning, they are read together.

Term	Definition used in this report
Intra-district	Destination is within the home district.
Reasons for migration (multiple answers allowed)	
Push factor	A reason rooted in conditions at home: no work at the village, no land for farming, loan repayment, natural disasters, loss of property or eviction.
Pull factor	A reason rooted in conditions at the destination: higher wages, better job opportunities, better living conditions, friends or family at the destination, social or community networks, access to health care or education.
Push only / pull only / both	Classifies each migration record by whether it cites only push factors, only pull factors, or at least one of each.
Sector of work	
Agriculture	Farm and allied work at the destination, including plantation and poultry work.
Construction	Building-site work, including masonry and helpers.
Manufacturing	Factory and industrial work, including packaging, garment and processing units.
Service	Hospitality, security, housekeeping and similar service jobs.
Transport	Mainly driving.
Retail business / self-employed	Running a shop or small business, or other own-account work.
Technical	Skilled trades, for example electrical or machine work.
Professional	Jobs requiring formal qualifications, such as nursing and teaching.
General / unclassified labour	Casual or general labour not tied to a specific sector, or work the respondent could not place in a sector.
Not working / not reported	Migrants who were not working at the time of the survey (for example, students) or whose sector was not reported.
Household and income measures	
Landholding	Land owned by the household, in bigha as reported by the respondent, grouped as landless, 0.01–2, 2–5, 5–10 and above 10 bigha. Land was recorded in the units respondents used and converted to the Assam bigha (14,400 sq ft, about 0.33 acre): 1 bigha = 5 katha = 100 lessa; 1 kani (Tripura) = 1.21 bigha; 1 acre = 3.025 bigha; 1 hectare = 7.47 bigha. Answers without a unit were treated as bigha, or as square feet if 100 or more; three answers could not be converted.
Monthly income group	The migrant's reported monthly earnings: up to Rs 10,000; Rs 10,001–20,000; Rs 20,001–30,000; above Rs 30,000.
Remittance-receiving household	A household that reports receiving money from a migrant member, with the frequency recorded.
Skill training	Any formal skill training received before or during migration, such as DDU-GKY, RSETI, driving, security or hospitality courses.
Role change	The household reports that responsibilities were redistributed among remaining members after migration.

Table 1a: Definitions of the main categories used in the analysis

3.5 Qualitative methods

The study design provided for one FGD in each sample village (160 in all), one per district led by the research team and the rest by trained surveyors, with the research team visiting the districts between 10 and 30 November 2025. The FGDs were held with 12 to 15 participants each, drawn from migrant families, self-help group (SHG) members, Panchayat members, Anganwadi workers, Jeevika Sakhis and youth, in the sample villages across all eight districts. The design also provided for 26 KIIs with block and district institutions (16 with BDOs and Block Project Managers, 8 with RSETIs, 1 with the Employment Exchange and 1

with DDU-GKY), alongside interviews with Panchayat members in the study villages. In all, KIIs were held with officials including Block Development Officers and the Labour Inspector, together with other stakeholders from the groups covered by the stakeholder questionnaire: village elders and community and youth leaders; SHG and women's collective members; Panchayat leaders and village heads; block and district administration (BDO, BPM and DC teams); RSETI and Employment Exchange staff; line departments (Agriculture, Labour, Social Welfare, Women and Child Development, and Panchayat and Rural Development); schools, health centres, Anganwadi workers and Jeevika Sakhis; organisations working on migration, livelihoods, women's rights, education and youth; and employers and labour contractors. The FGD guide covered village livelihoods; how migration has changed in recent years and why; who migrates; destinations and types of work, and whether jobs are formal or informal; effects on household income, gender roles, education, health and social cohesion; support available from government and NGOs; and whether young people prefer to stay or migrate, and which local livelihoods could reduce distress migration. The KII questionnaires were tailored to each stakeholder group and shared common sections on migration trends, migrant profiles, work and skills, impacts on families, institutional response and suggestions. FGDs and KIIs were conducted in local languages as needed in the study areas and later translated, recorded with consent through consented audio and notes, and analysed thematically. The qualitative findings are used to explain patterns in the survey data, particularly on working conditions, recruitment and the problems women face at the destination.

3.6 Data cleaning and analysis

Survey data were exported from Kobo Toolbox and cleaned in Excel and Stata. Submissions without consent (14) and blank submissions (24) were removed. Ten households interviewed with an earlier version of the form, which stored some answers in separate tables, were merged into the main data, and 31 households whose member and migration records had no matching household record in the export were excluded because their consent and location could not be confirmed. Four duplicate rows in the women's module were removed. Open-ended answers were standardised: ages given in months were converted to years; pay reported per day or per week was converted to a monthly amount (26 working days or 4.3 weeks a month), and amounts below Rs 1,000 were treated as not reported; the number of months away and the year migration began were read from free-text answers (for example, "3 years" was taken as 2022); destinations were coded to state, with Guwahati and Shillong kept separately; and landholdings were converted to bigha as described in Table 1a. Open-ended occupation answers were grouped into the sector categories in Table 1a by keyword (for example, "mason" or "site work" as construction, "security guard" or "hotel" as service, and "company" or "factory" as manufacturing); answers naming only "labour" or "worker" were classed as general or unclassified labour. The coding was checked against the original answers. Where a question allowed several answers, as for reasons for migration and loan purposes, percentages are calculated on the number of records or borrowers and do not add to 100.

Some comparisons use subsets of the data. Reasons for migration by gender (Table 5) use only households in which all migrants are of the same sex, because in mixed households the survey does not record which reason belongs to which migrant. Income analysis uses the 728 migration records with a reported salary, and the year migration began is analysed by age for the 517 migrants who could be matched to their age (Table 4). The analysis is descriptive, using frequencies, percentages and cross-tabulations; no statistical tests were applied, so differences between small groups should be read as indicative.

3.7 Limitations

The findings should be read with the following limitations in mind.

Purposive sampling. Villages were selected purposively and migrant households were identified with the help of village heads. The results therefore describe migrant households in the selected blocks and are not representative of migrants at district or state level. Households known to village heads may also differ from less visible migrant households.

Proxy reporting. Left-behind family members answered for most migrants, so information about conditions at the destination comes largely from people who did not experience them. This is the most likely explanation for a clear gap in the evidence on women: 60 of the 67 households with a female migrant reported that she faced no problems at the destination, 6 did not know and only 1 reported a problem (Table 10), whereas the FGDs describe harassment, unsafe housing and limited mobility (Section 8.1). The two findings are not contradictory. Family members may not know about, or may not report, problems that women face away from home, so the survey figure should be read as a lower bound and the qualitative evidence given weight. The same caution applies to reports of workplace hazards and abuse in Section 10.3.

Self-reported data. Incomes, loans, remittances and landholdings are self-reported and were not verified against records. Earnings were mostly reported by a family member rather than by the migrant, and although remittance amounts were recorded, total household income was not, so the share of household income that comes from remittances cannot be estimated.

Cross-sectional design. The survey was conducted at a single point in time and covered only migrant households. Without a comparison group of non-migrant households, it cannot establish what migration causes; for example, it cannot show whether migrant households are better or worse off than they would have been without migration. The findings describe associations, not effects.

Classification gaps. A large share of migrants could not be placed in a specific sector: 107 (13.9%) are classified as general or unclassified labour and a further 57 (7.4%) as not working or not reported. Among women, the sector was not specified for 24 of the 67 households (35.8%). Five migration records have no destination. The household roster (147 female migrants in 127 households) and the women's module (67 households) also give different counts of female migration, which suggests that some respondents did not count women who migrated with family or for study.

Recall. Questions about when migration began, and about the circumstances of first migration, rely on memory. Of the 517 migrants whose starting year could be matched to their age, 35 began migrating in 2015 or earlier (Table 4). Recall bias is a particular concern for these earlier migrations, and details such as how work was first found or loans taken before leaving are likely to be less accurate for them.

4. Literature review

4.1 Concept of migration

Migration generally refers to the movement of people from one geographical location to another, either temporarily or permanently. It can occur within national boundaries or across international borders. The world bank (2023) explains migration as an important livelihood strategy that allows individuals and households to diversify income sources and improve living standards. Migration may be voluntary such as movement for employment or

education, or forced due to conflict, environmental disaster or social insecurity. Scholars conceptualize migration through different theoretical lenses. Classical economic theories, particularly the push-pull framework proposed by Lee (1966), explains migration as a response to adverse conditions (push factors) such as unemployment, poverty and environmental stress and attractive opportunities (pull factors) such as better wages, education and improved living conditions. Harris and Todaro's (1970) model further emphasizes rural-urban migration as a rational economic decision influenced by expected income differentials between rural and urban areas.

Three further frameworks help interpret the findings of this study. Xiang and Lindquist (2014) introduce the idea of migration infrastructure, the brokers, networks, regulations, technologies and organisations that make movement possible and shape who moves and on what terms. Work on circular and "footloose" labour in India (Breman, 1996; Srivastava, 2011) and on labour intermediaries (Deshingkar, 2019) shows how contractors and jobbers organise much of this movement, opening access to work while exposing migrants to debt and weak bargaining power. For gender, the matrilineal organisation of Khasi and Garo society, in which descent and property pass through women but authority does not necessarily follow (Nongbri, 2000), is directly relevant to the two Meghalaya districts in the sample. The findings chapters return to each of these frameworks, and to the push-pull, Harris-Todaro and NELM models, using them to interpret specific results.

4.2 Migration Trends in Northeast India

Migration from Northeast India attracted increasing attention due to the region's unique socio-economic and geographical conditions. Studies indicate that limited industrial development, unemployment and lack of education opportunities encourage migration among young people from the region. R.B. Bhagat (2017) observes that migration in economically less developed regions of India functions as a crucial household survival strategy. In such contexts, migration is often not merely an individual choice but a collective family decision aimed at income diversification and risk mitigation. This perspective aligns with the New Economics of Labour Migration (Stark & Bloom, 1985), which conceptualizes migration as a household-level strategy to overcome market failures, unemployment, and income instability. Migration also plays a positive economic role in sustaining household economies through remittances. The World Bank (2023) highlights that remittances form a significant share of household income in many developing regions, enabling families to invest in children's education, healthcare, housing improvements, savings, and loan repayment. In the Northeastern context, remittance flows have been found to enhance consumption capacity and reduce short-term economic vulnerability in source communities.

Research focusing on the Northeast states of Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam show that migration is influenced by both economic and environmental factors. Assam for instance frequently experiences natural calamities like flood or the influence of climate change which often disrupts the agricultural livelihoods; another is that most of the migrants have a very low cultivable landholding pattern which also restricts them to be sustained in their day-to-day life. Similarly, migration from Tripura and Meghalaya is often associated with limited employment opportunities, increasing educational aspirations and urban exposure. Sharma and Chandrashekar (2014) observe that migration from smaller and less industrialized states often occurs due to regional development disparities. In addition, migrants from northeastern states frequently rely on social network and community support while relocating to metropolitan cities.

Despite the economic benefits, migrants from the northeast regions sometimes face identity related challenges, social discrimination and job insecurity in destination areas. Reports from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2022) highlight that migrant's experience vulnerability when they lack access to social protection and institution support systems.

The 2011 census provisional migration data reveals that the internal migration rates i.e. the ratio of migrants and population are relatively low in most of the NE states when compared with the all India figure of 37.5%. People are relatively more mobile in the cities of Bangalore and Delhi. The share of migration from the Northeast for employment in Delhi was larger than in Karnataka which is about 28% and 13% respectively. Migration for employment is predominant for males. Delhi and Karnataka are majorly contributed by the migrants from Northeast states. Meanwhile the NSSO (2010) data shows that net migration rate per 1000 population was negative for Arunachal Pradesh (-20), Assam (-5), Manipur (-30), Meghalaya (-7), Mizoram (-1) and Nagaland (-5) and positive for Sikkim (+16) and Tripura (+17). It led to a negative net migration rate in the Northeast region (-4) suggesting a stronger push factor than pull factor of migration in the region (Marchang, 2017)[1].

Migration patterns derived from data compiled from the census of India 2011 reveal significant spatial linkages between Northeastern states and their major destination regions. Based on the analysis of migration data released by census 2011, below are the destination states for migrants from Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura during 2001-2011. The figure below shows the distribution of migrants reflecting regional economic dependence, labor mobility trends and inter-state connectivity.

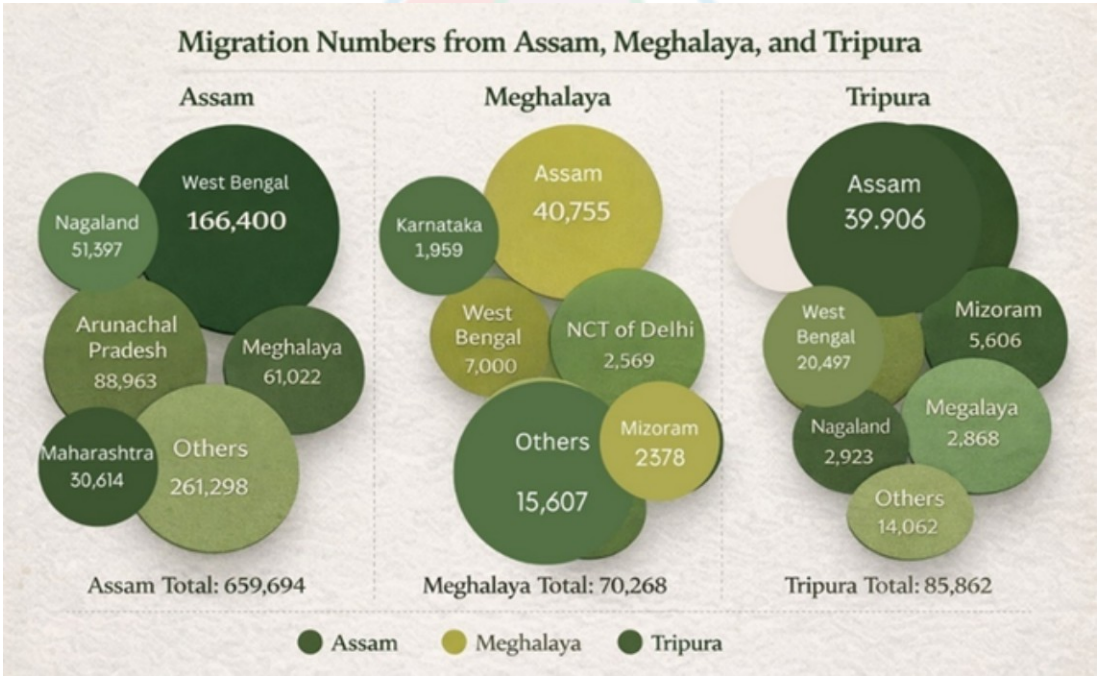


Fig 1. Frequency of migrants from Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura

Source: Incidence of COVID-19 in Relation To inter-state migration in the Northeastern States of India, Jha and Varghese (2024) (Computed from 2011 Census data)

Migration returnee patterns derived from data commuted from the census of India 2011 highlight distinct regional labour mobility trends. Assam emerges as the central economic node within the region, while West Bengal acts as a major external migration corridor. The data also reflects gradual integration of North-Eastern labour into national urban

[1]A negative net migration rate means more people leaving the state than entering (net population loss), while a positive rate means more people enter than leave (net population gain)

economies. However Tripura and Meghalaya display stronger intra-regional migration patterns compared to Assam, which shows broader national migration linkages. This suggests varying degrees of economic integration across North-Eastern states.

4.3 Covid-19 pandemic and reverse migration

Migration from Assam and the wider North-Eastern region has increasingly been discussed in development literature as a reflection of structural livelihood insecurity and uneven regional development. While several studies highlight the scale and patterns of migration using Census data, recent research has expanded the discussion by linking migration with vulnerability during crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The works of Borah (2021) and Jha and Varghese (2024) provide complementary perspectives on migration dynamics by examining both micro-level livelihood distress and macro-level regional migration trends.

Borah (2021) examines distress migration in Assam and argues that labour mobility from the state is largely involuntary and driven by economic compulsion. The study highlights that migrants from Assam predominantly belong to economically vulnerable rural households and migrate due to limited employment opportunities within the state. It is evident that the study by Borah provides important insights into the socio-economic profile of migrants and their vulnerability in urban labour markets. The study demonstrates how migration is closely linked with rural poverty, agrarian distress and lack of diversified employment opportunities. From a researcher's perspective, Borah's work helps in understanding migration as a household survival strategy rather than merely a labour market phenomenon. The study by Jha and Varghese (2024) examines migration patterns from a broader regional and statistical perspective. The study uses Census migration data and COVID-19 case statistics to establish the relationship between interstate migration intensity and pandemic spread across North-Eastern states. The authors highlight that more than one million migrants from the northeast region were working in other parts of India, demonstrating the region's dependence on external labour markets.

Data reported by The Morung Express highlights the scale of reverse migration during the COVID 19 lockdown and its specific implications for the Northeastern region. The article indicates that the northeastern states experienced significant return migration reflecting dependence on external labour markets and limited local employment opportunities. Among the northeastern states, Assam recorded the highest number of return migrants (4,26,441) during the lockdown period. This shows that Assam has the strongest out migration linkages within the region and serves as a major labour sending state. The high volume of returning migrants indicates that a substantial proportion of Assam's workforce is engaged in informal and low skilled employment sectors outside the state. Tripura recorded 34,247 return migrant workers, reflecting moderate levels of interstate migration independence. The return migration shows structural employment limitations and highlighted the need for livelihood diversification within the state economy.

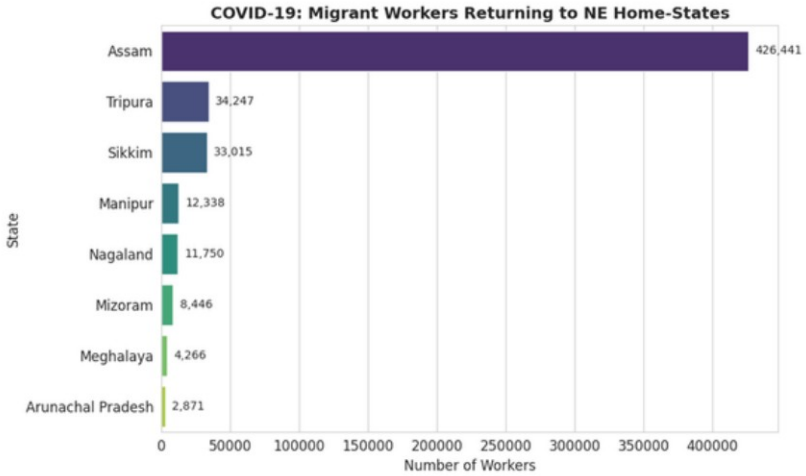


Fig 2. Frequency of migrant workers returning home during covid-19

Source: Ministry of Labour and employment, Government of India, Lok Sabha (2021)

Meghalaya recorded 4,266 return migrant workers, which is relatively lower compared to several other states in the region. This comparatively smaller number suggests that Meghalaya has a lower intensity of interstate labour out-migration when compared to states like Assam or Tripura. However, the return migration still reflects the presence of significant labour mobility from Meghalaya, particularly among youth and service sector workers employed in metropolitan and regional urban centres.

5. Research Findings

5.1 Demographics of the surveyed sample

a. Social Category:

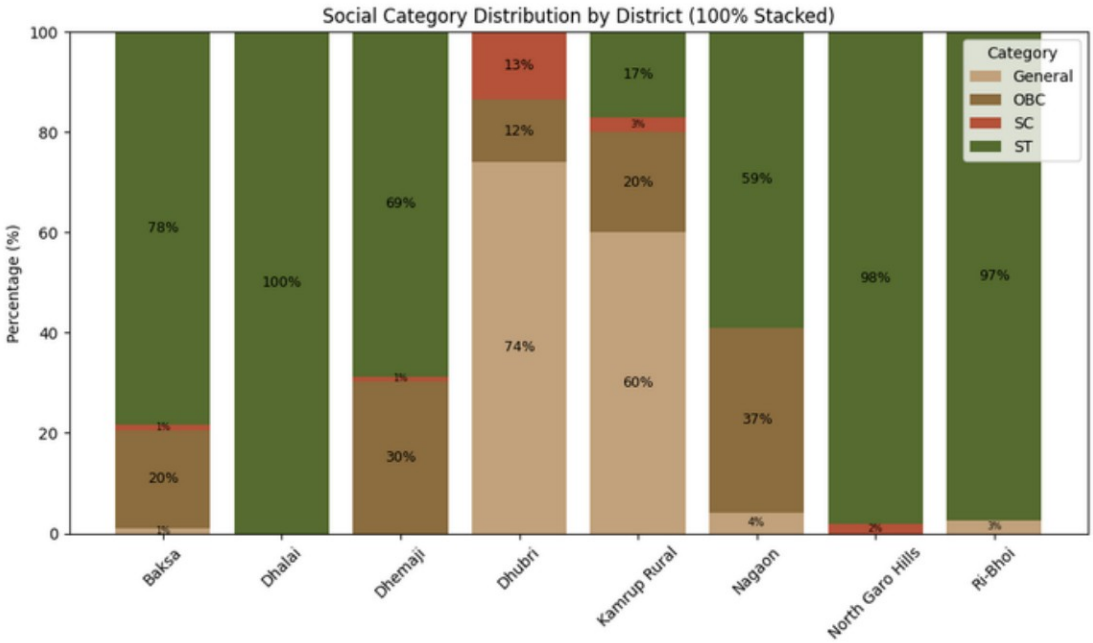


Fig 3. Social category distribution by district

b. Family Size

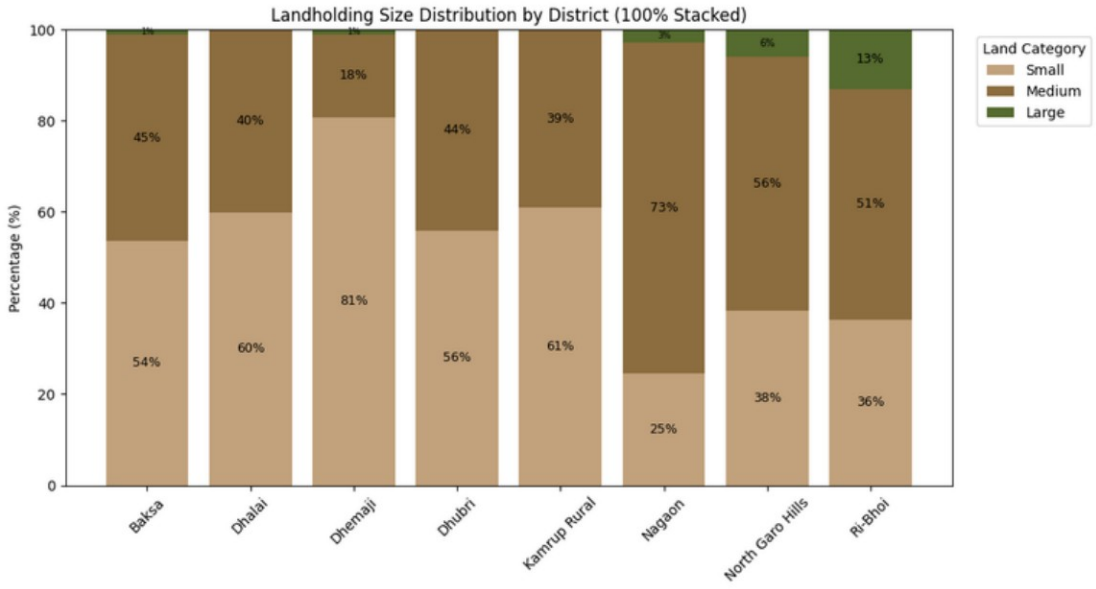


Fig 4. Landholding category distribution by district

c. Household Amenities:

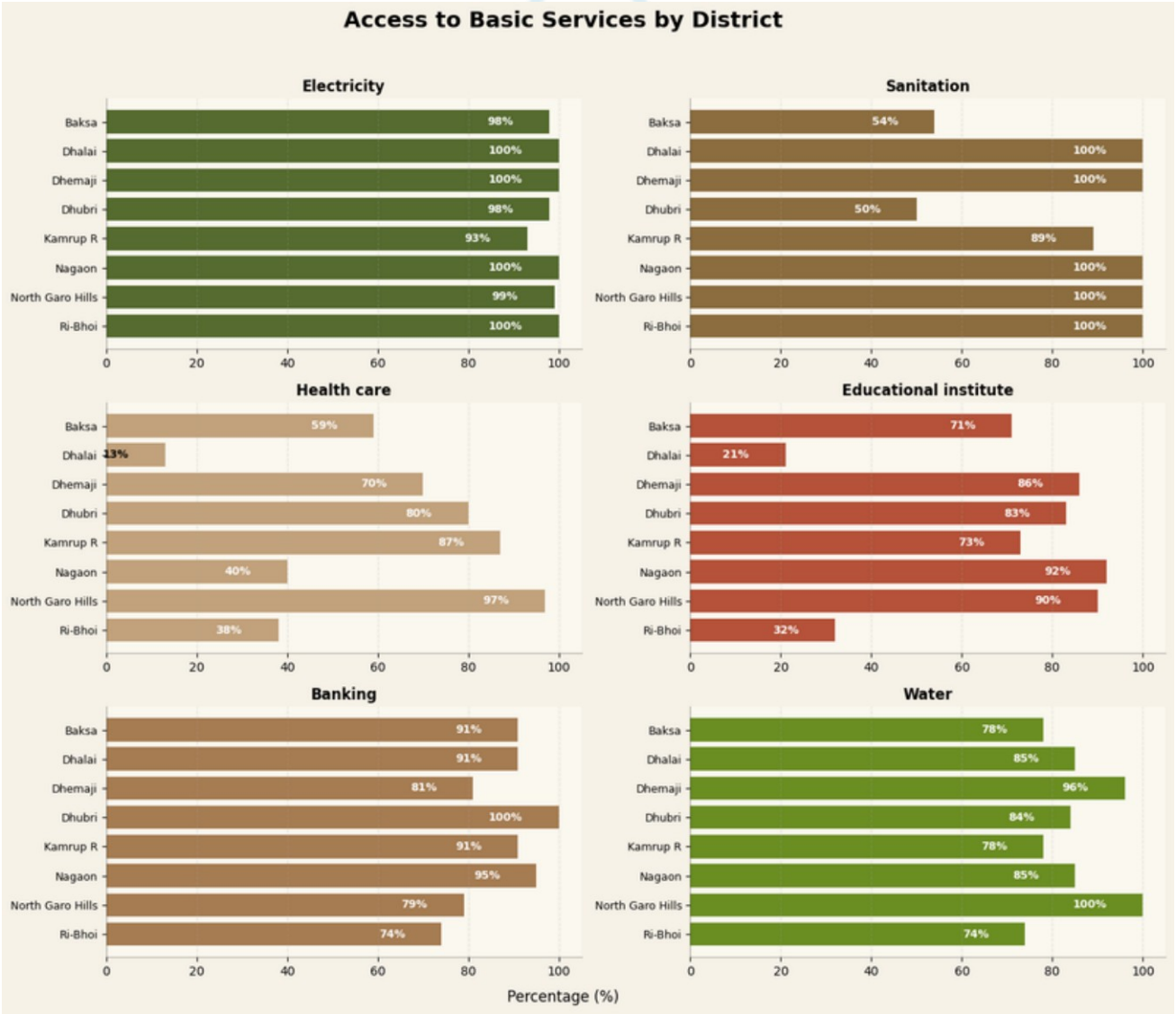


Fig 5. Migrant's access to the basic services

d. Land Distribution:

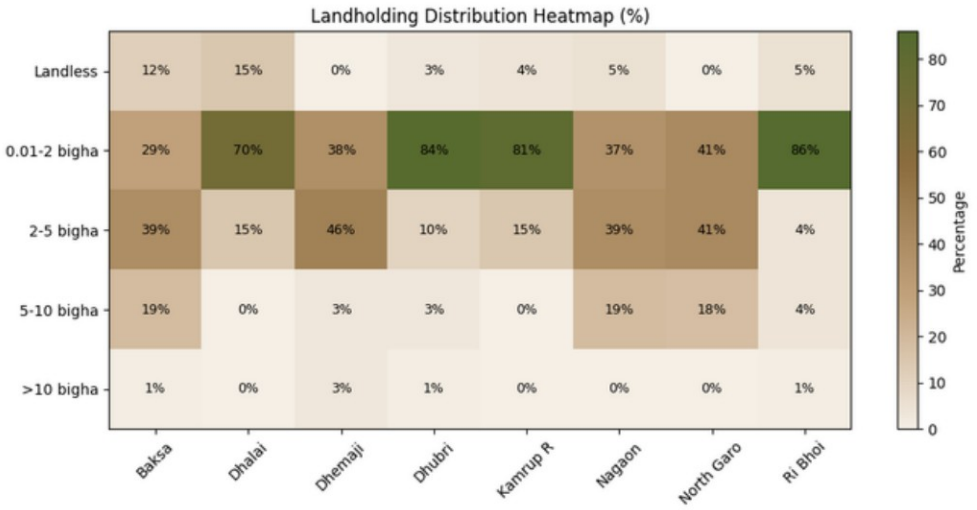


Fig 6. Landholding by size of the land for the migrants

5.2 Household members profile:

a. Age Structure:

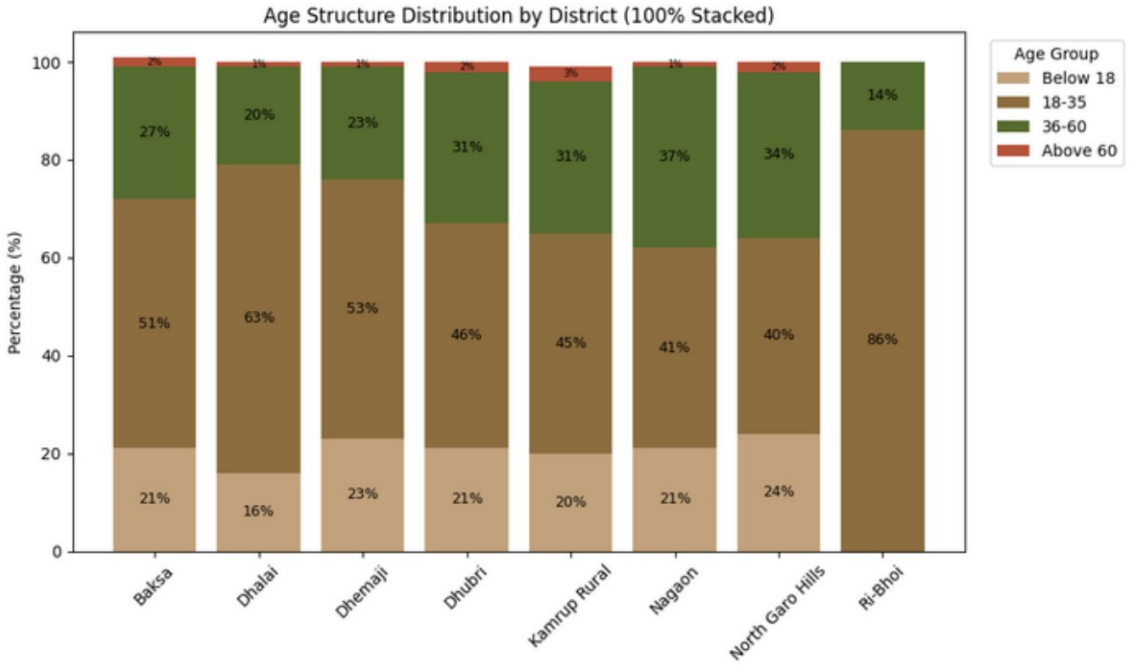


Fig 7. Age structure distribution by district

b. Gender Structure

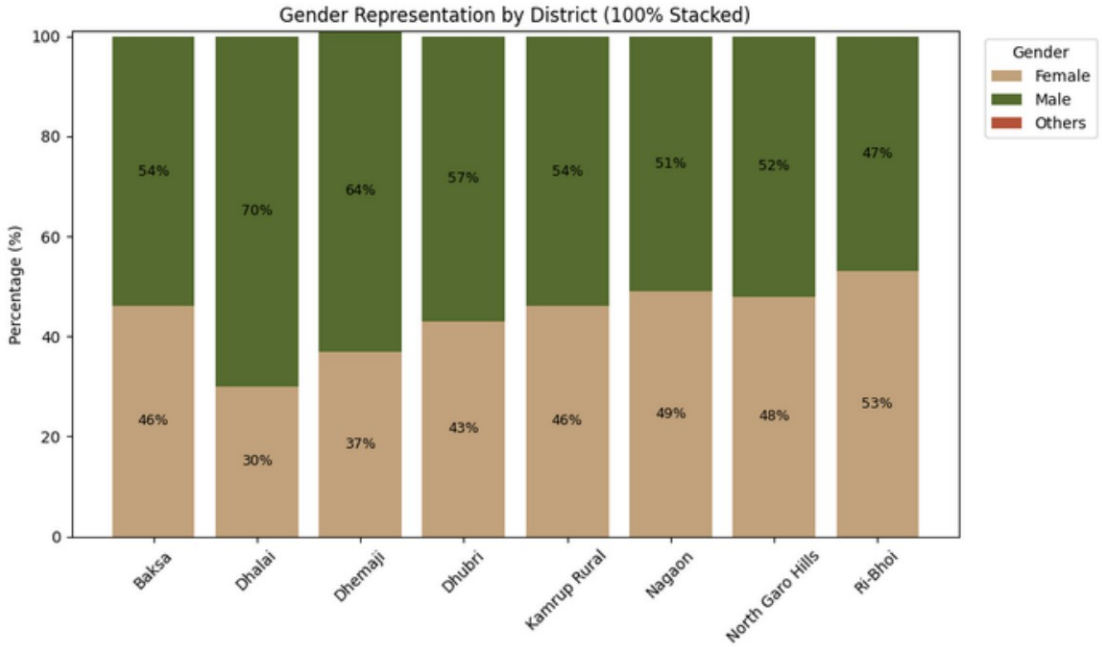


Fig 8. Gender representation by district

c. Education Status

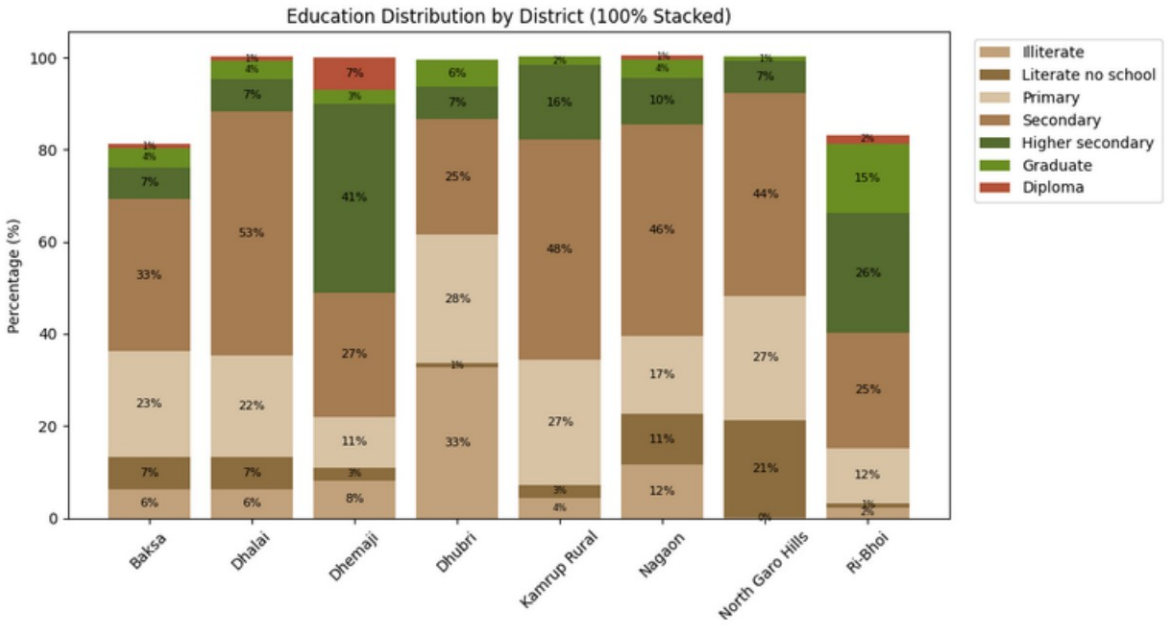


Fig 9. Education distribution by district

d. Sector of Work

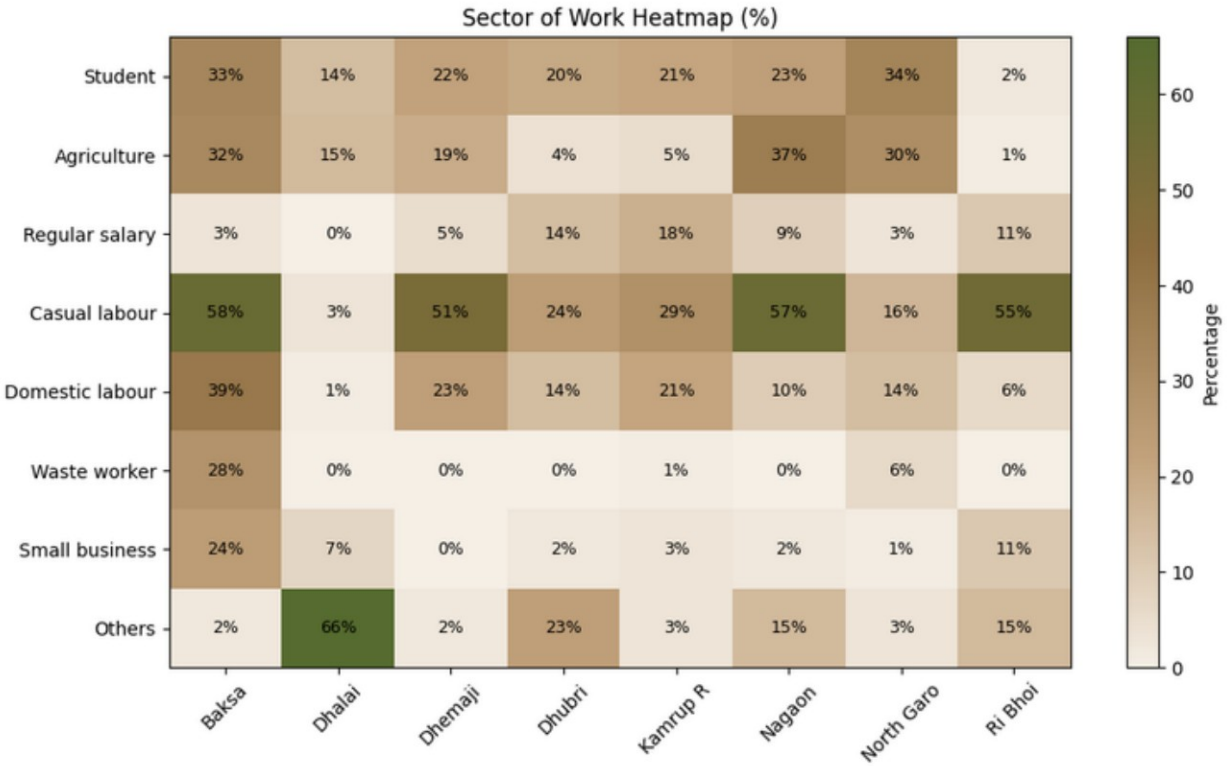


Fig 10. Sector of work by district

6. Migration

What forms does migration take (duration, distance, destination), and how do they vary by district and household assets?

6.1 Migrants Profile:

The table below shows number of migrants per district in the study area of this research. It shows that migration from the surveyed areas is overwhelmingly characterized by single-migrant households. The 710 surveyed households reported 806 migrant members in the household roster, about 1.1 migrants per household. 561 households (79.0%) have exactly one migrant member, 98 (13.8%) have two or more, and 51 (7.2%) did not mark any member as a migrant in the roster even though they answered the migration questions. Multi-migrant households are concentrated in Kamrup Rural (39 of 101 households) and Baksa (22 of 101). Migration is therefore largely an individual rather than a collective household strategy in most districts.

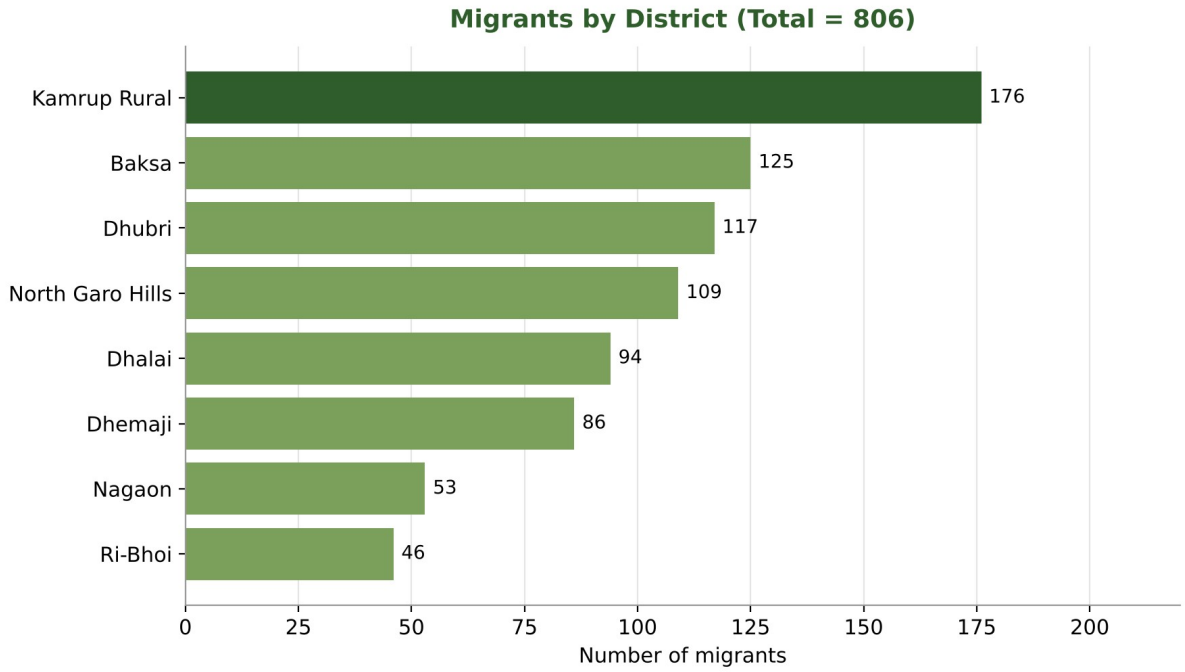
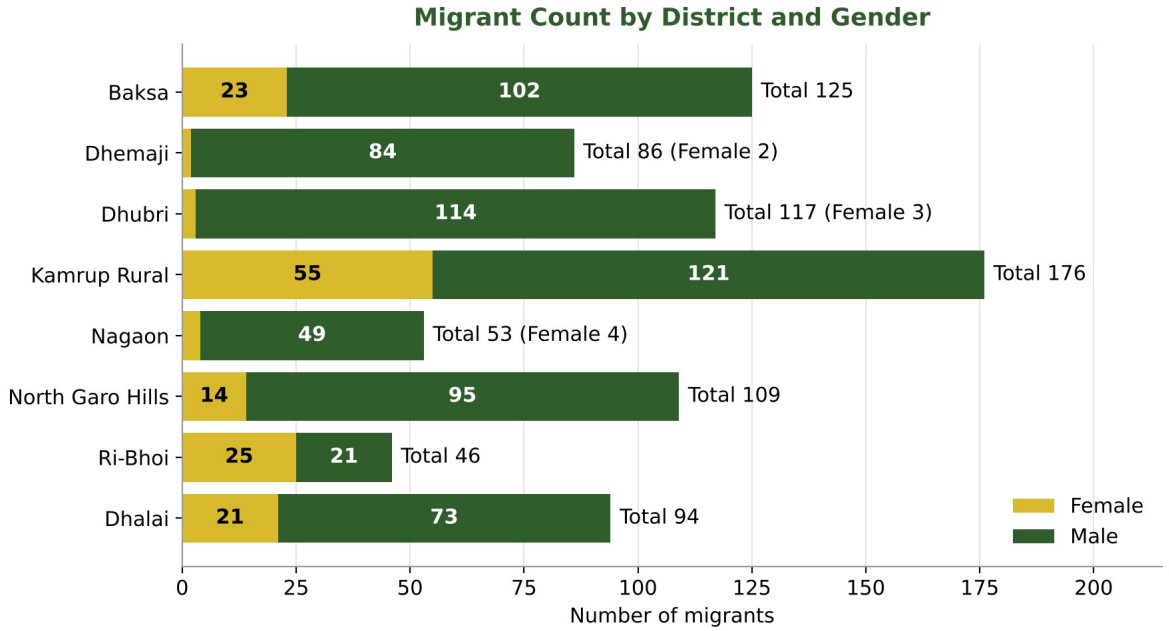


Fig 11. Migrants by district

The district-wise gender distribution reveals a strongly male-dominated migration pattern, with women forming a smaller yet meaningful share in a few locations. Across all districts, out of 806 migrants, 659 are male (81.8%) and 147 are female (18.2%). The findings suggest that women's migration is not evenly spread across the region but is geographically concentrated in districts such as Kamrup Rural (55 women, 31% of the district's migrants) and Ri-Bhoi (25 women, 54%), with smaller numbers in Baksa (23) and Dhalai (21). In contrast, districts like Dhubri (3 women), Nagaon (4) and Dhemaji (2) reflect limited pathways for female mobility. While male migration continues to dominate across all districts, the stronger presence of women migrants in selected areas points toward emerging shifts in gendered migration dynamics.

The table below shows segregation district-wise and gender-wise HH migration:



Total Female: 147 (18.2%) Total Male: 659 (81.8%) Total: 806

Fig 12. Migrant count by district and gender

6.2 Migration Mapping:

Out of the 770 migration records, Bengaluru (Karnataka) accounts for 172 migrants (22.3%), making it the largest destination. This is followed by Guwahati with 133 migrants (17.3%) and Chennai/Tamil Nadu with 104 (13.5%). Kerala records 74 migrants (9.6%), Delhi 43 (5.6%) and Hyderabad 41 (5.3%). Within the Northeast, Shillong has 36 migrants (4.7%) and other places in Assam and Meghalaya a further 83 (10.8%), indicating notable regional mobility. Overall, 53.1% of migration is concentrated in Bengaluru, Guwahati and Chennai/Tamil Nadu, highlighting a strong pull toward major economic and urban centers.

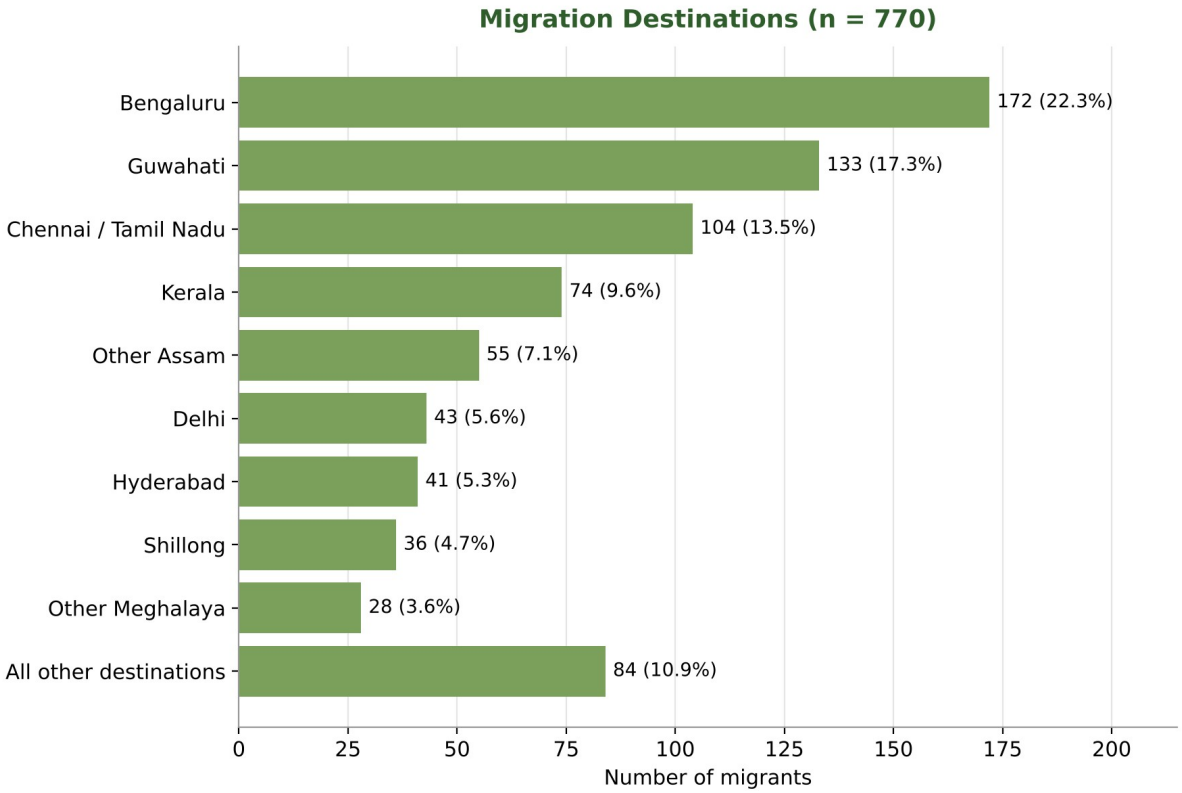


Fig 13. Migration destinations of the migrants

The migration pattern shows a strong concentration toward southern and urban destinations. Karnataka emerges as the largest destination, followed by Guwahati and Tamil Nadu. Kerala, Delhi, and Hyderabad also account for a significant share of migrants. Within the Northeast, Shillong records noticeable movement, indicating regional migration alongside interstate flows. Overall, the trend suggests employment-driven migration primarily toward economically developed states and major urban centers.

6.3 Intra-state vs. inter-state migration: Destination states, cities, sectors

The analysis clearly shows that migration from the study districts is overwhelmingly inter-state in nature. Nearly 64 percent of migrants (491 of 770) move across state boundaries. About 22 percent (173) are recorded as intra-state and 12 percent (95) as inter-district; because these two answer options overlap in meaning, together they show that about 35 percent migrate within their own state. Intra-district migration is marginal (11 migrants, 1.4 percent). This indicates that migration is primarily long-distance and labour-driven rather than short-distance or localized mobility.

District	Inter-state	Intra-state	Inter-district	Intra-district	Total
Baksa	72	25	3	0	100
Dhemaji	104	1	6	0	111
Dhubri	71	4	35	5	115
Kamrup Rural	59	67	18	0	144
Nagaon	41	2	7	1	51
North Garo Hills	78	12	15	0	105
Ri-Bhoi	17	22	10	5	54
Dhalai	49	40	1	0	90
Total	**491**	**173**	**95**	**11**	**770**

Table 2: Inter-state and intra-state migration by district

Source to Destination Migration Mapping:

Destination	Baksa	Dhemaji	Dhubri	Kamrup Rural	Nagaon	N. Garo Hills	Ri-Bhoi	Dhalai	Total
Karnataka	13	38	25	2	9	7	9	69	172
Assam	35	6	43	74	8	14	5	3	188
Tamil Nadu	1	19	2	26	1	43	5	7	104
Kerala	7	37	16	2	2	1	1	8	74
Meghalaya	1	0	19	4	1	24	15	0	64
Delhi	10	0	6	18	0	4	5	0	43
Telangana	0	0	2	14	21	2	1	1	41
Maharashtra	7	2	1	0	0	0	2	1	13
Goa	6	0	0	0	2	2	2	0	12
Arunachal Pradesh	0	8	0	2	0	1	0	0	11
Andhra Pradesh	5	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	9
Other states (11)	12	0	1	1	6	6	5	0	31
Abroad	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	3
Not reported	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	5
Total	**100**	**111**	**115**	**144**	**51**	**105**	**54**	**90**	**770**

Table 3: Source to destination migration mapping



Fig 14. Migration flow from Northeast India to other states and abroad

When this pattern is examined alongside destination concentration, a clear structure emerges. Migration is not randomly dispersed but heavily concentrated in a few key states. Assam (24.4 percent, mostly Guwahati) and Karnataka (22.3 percent) each account for roughly a quarter of total migration, followed by Tamil Nadu at 13.5 percent. Kerala (9.6 percent), Meghalaya (8.3 percent), Delhi (5.6 percent) and Telangana (5.3 percent) also emerge as significant destination hubs.

The dominance of southern states, particularly Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, reinforces the finding that inter-state migration is primarily employment oriented. Major urban and industrial centers such as Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad act as strong labor market pull regions. At the same time, substantial movement toward Assam and Meghalaya reflects intra-regional mobility within the Northeast, suggesting both distress-driven and network-based migration. District-level variation further strengthens this interpretation. Districts such as Dhemaji and Nagaon show overwhelmingly inter-state migration. In contrast, Ri-Bhoi presents a more diversified migration pattern, including intra-state flows, suggesting relatively greater regional economic linkage.

Overall, the combined data suggests that migration in the study area is predominantly inter-state and long-distance, concentrated in a limited number of destination states, largely individual rather than household clustered, except in specific districts such as Kamrup Rural, structured around established migration corridors rather than diffuse movement. This reflects a labour market driven migration system shaped by employment opportunities, network effects and limited local livelihood diversification.

6.4 Duration and frequency of migration cycles

The question on how many months migrants stay away was answered only for seasonal migrants (350 records, of which 3 are permanent migrants). The figure below therefore describes how long seasonal migrants stay away each year.

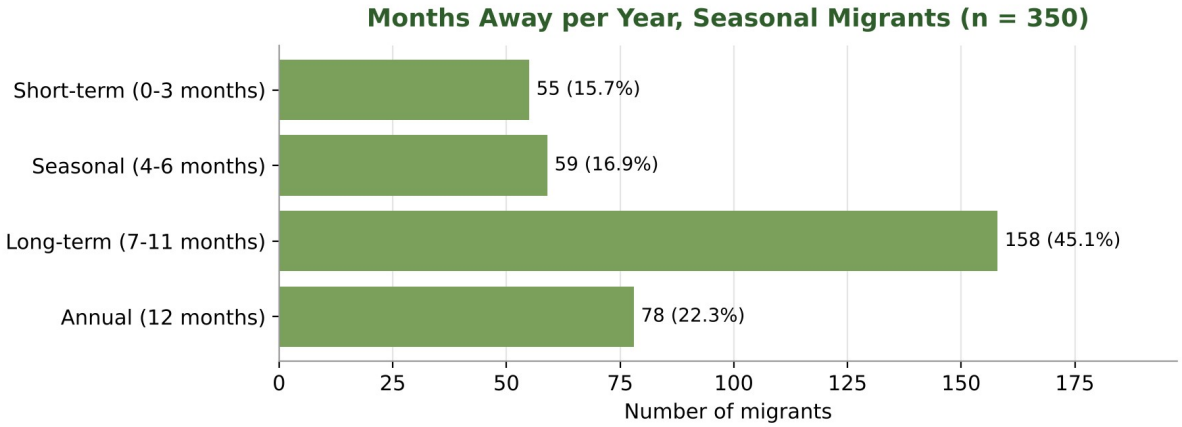


Fig 15. Months away per year (seasonal migrants)

Among seasonal migrants who reported their time away, the most common pattern is a long stay of 7-11 months (158 migrants, 45.1%), followed by full-year absences of 12 months (78, 22.3%). Stays of 4-6 months (59, 16.9%) and short stays of 0-3 months (55, 15.7%) are less common. So although these migrants describe themselves as seasonal, two-thirds of them are away for seven months or more each year. Because the duration question was not asked of permanent migrants, these figures do not conflict with the 53.9% permanent share shown in Fig 16; they describe a different group. Overall, the findings indicate that even seasonal migration in the study area involves long absences from home, shaped by sector-specific labour demand and the nature of employment opportunities available to migrant households.

6.5 Nature of Migration

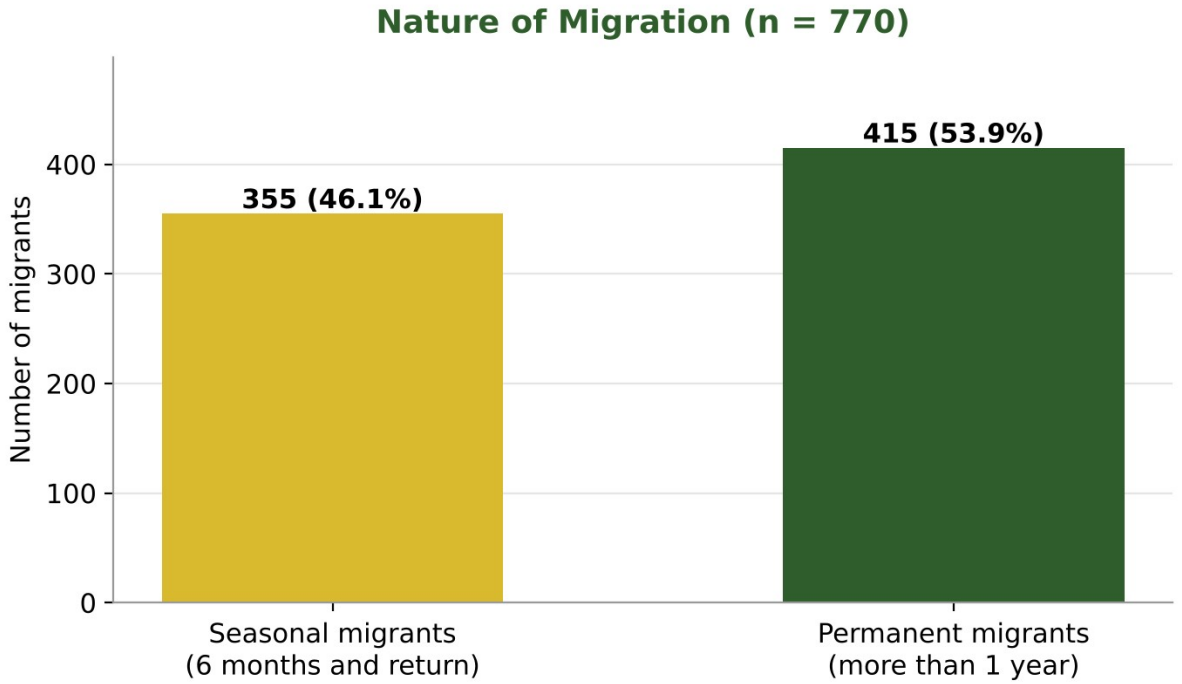


Fig 16. Nature of migration

All 770 migration records in the survey data are classified as either permanent (more than one year) or seasonal (approximately six months with return).

The data shows that migration is predominantly permanent in nature: 415 of the 770 migrants (53.9 percent) are permanent migrants who have relocated for work for more than a year, while 355 (46.1 percent) are seasonal migrants, indicating a strong circular migration

component. This suggests that migration in the study area is not purely short-term distress movement. A majority of migrants are engaged in longer-duration work relocation, pointing toward structural livelihood dependence on external employment markets. At the same time, the substantial share of seasonal migrants, most of whom stay away for seven months or more (Section 6.4), reflects continued attachment to source villages combined with long working spells away. Overall, the migration system combines both semi-permanent employment relocation and circular mobility, reinforcing its role as a sustained household livelihood strategy rather than a temporary coping mechanism.

6.6 Scale and type: migration (% breakdown, duration in years)

Year of Migration:

Age group	2010 or earlier	2011-2015	2016-2020	2021-2025	Total
<=17	0	0	0	4	4
18-24	0	0	9	105	114
25-30	1	4	27	161	193
31-40	4	14	33	89	140
41+	5	7	16	38	66
Total	**10**	**25**	**85**	**397**	**517**

Table 4: Year migration began, by age group (migrants who could be matched to their age, n = 517)

Among the 769 migrants whose age is recorded, migration is concentrated in the prime working-age group of 25-30 years (268 migrants, 34.9%), followed by 31-40 years (194, 25.2%) and young adults aged 18-24 (179, 23.3%), reflecting early entry into migrant employment streams. Children and adolescents form only a small minority (30 migrants, 3.9%), indicating that migration is not typically household relocation but individual labour mobility. Older migrants (41+) account for 98 (12.7%). Across all age groups, most migration began in the 2021-2025 period: 544 of the 723 migrants who reported when they started (75.2%). Overall, migration in the sample is youth driven, concentrated in the 25-40 age range, with a clear surge in movement after 2020, suggesting expanding employment-linked migration networks.

6.7 Migration distribution by gender

Reason (multiple answers)	Male (n=545)	% Male	Female (n=67)	% Female
No work at village	500	91.7%	47	70.1%
No land for farming	145	26.6%	4	6.0%
Loan repayment	74	13.6%	5	7.5%
Natural disasters	3	0.6%	0	0.0%
Loss of property	6	1.1%	1	1.5%
Eviction	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Higher wages	155	28.4%	16	23.9%
Better job opportunities	182	33.4%	29	43.3%
Better living conditions	207	38.0%	27	40.3%
Friends/family at destination	34	6.2%	1	1.5%
Social/community networks	11	2.0%	2	3.0%
Access to health care	4	0.7%	1	1.5%

Education	33	6.1%	5	7.5%
Others	3	0.6%	2	3.0%
Migration records (n)	**545**		**67**	

Table 5: Reasons for migration by gender (multiple answers; households where all migrants are of the same sex)

These cases (others) generally involve health-related movement, personal reasons, temporary relocation due to local disturbances or environmental conditions, skill training, or exploratory migration where respondents could not clearly specify a primary motive.

The table shows the reasons for migration reported for male and female migrants. Respondents could give more than one reason, so the percentages do not add up to 100. The comparison uses households in which all migrants are of the same sex (545 male and 67 female migration records), because in mixed households the survey does not record which reason belongs to which migrant. For male migrants, migration is overwhelmingly driven by lack of work: 91.7% cite no work in the village and 26.6% cite lack of land for farming. This reflects a highly economic and employment-market-oriented pattern of male mobility, where migration is primarily structured around wage earning and livelihood provision.

In contrast, women's migration shows a more mixed profile. Lack of work is still the most common reason, but it is cited by a smaller share of women (70.1%), and very few women cite lack of land (6.0%) or loan repayment (7.5%). Women are more likely than men to cite better job opportunities (43.3% compared with 33.4%) and slightly more likely to cite better living conditions (40.3% compared with 38.0%), indicating that female migration is shaped by opportunity as well as necessity.

The migration module did not offer migrating with family as a reason, but the separate women's module did: in 9 of the 67 households with a female migrant (13.4%) this was the main reason (Table 11). Education is a slightly more common reason for women (7.5%) than for men (6.1%), suggesting that female migration also includes aspirations for learning or skill advancement, even if at small levels.

Overall, the findings reinforce that migration remains deeply gendered: men migrate primarily as economic workers, while women's migration reflects a broader intersection of work, family obligation, and social context. This underscores the need to interpret female migration not simply as a smaller version of male migration, but as a distinct process shaped by different structural and cultural conditions.

Migration from the study districts is mostly long-distance and long-lasting: 64% of migrants cross state boundaries, 53.9% are permanent, and two-thirds of seasonal migrants are away for seven months or more each year, with Bengaluru, Guwahati and Chennai/Tamil Nadu together receiving 53.1% of migrants. The pattern differs sharply by district: Dhemaji and Nagaon send migrants almost entirely out of state, while Kamrup Rural, Ri-Bhoi and Dhalai have large within-state flows, and Kamrup Rural and Baksa account for most multi-migrant households. Variation by household assets is taken up through landholding in Section 7.4, which shows that most migrants come from small and marginal land-owning households rather than landless ones.

7. Drivers and causes of migration

How do land, debt and local employment shape who migrates, where and for how long?

Migration in the surveyed households is largely driven by everyday economic pressures rather than choice alone. For most migrants, leaving home is closely tied to the simple reality

that there is not enough work available locally. In fact, the single most common reason reported was lack of employment in the village, cited by 677 migrants (87.9% of the 770 migration records; respondents could give more than one reason). This shows that migration is often a response to limited rural livelihood options and the inability of villages to provide stable income opportunities.

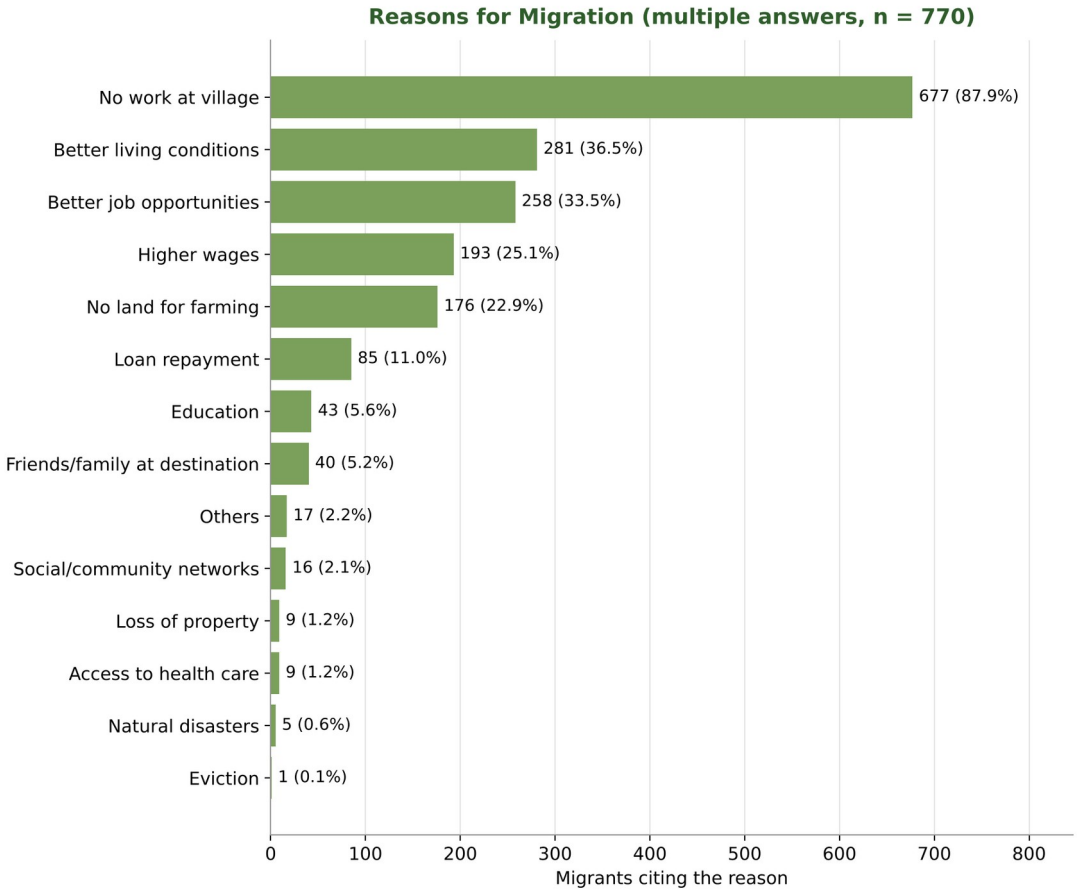


Fig 17. Reasons for migration

Land insecurity also plays a major role, with 176 migrants (22.9%) migrating because they had no land for farming, reflecting how declining access to agricultural resources continues to push people out of rural areas. Financial stress further shapes mobility, as 85 migrants (11.0%) reported migrating to manage loan repayment burdens, suggesting that migration frequently becomes a household strategy for coping with debt. At the same time, many migrants are also drawn by the prospect of a better life: better living conditions (36.5%), better job opportunities (33.5%) and higher wages (25.1%) are each cited by a quarter to a third of migrants, usually alongside a push factor. Education (5.6%), friends or family at the destination (5.2%) and social or community networks (2.1%) are cited less often. Overall, the pattern suggests that migration in this context is primarily necessity-driven, rooted in unemployment, land constraints and economic vulnerability, with the pull of better wages and living conditions reinforcing rather than replacing these pressures.

7.1 Reasons for migration (count)

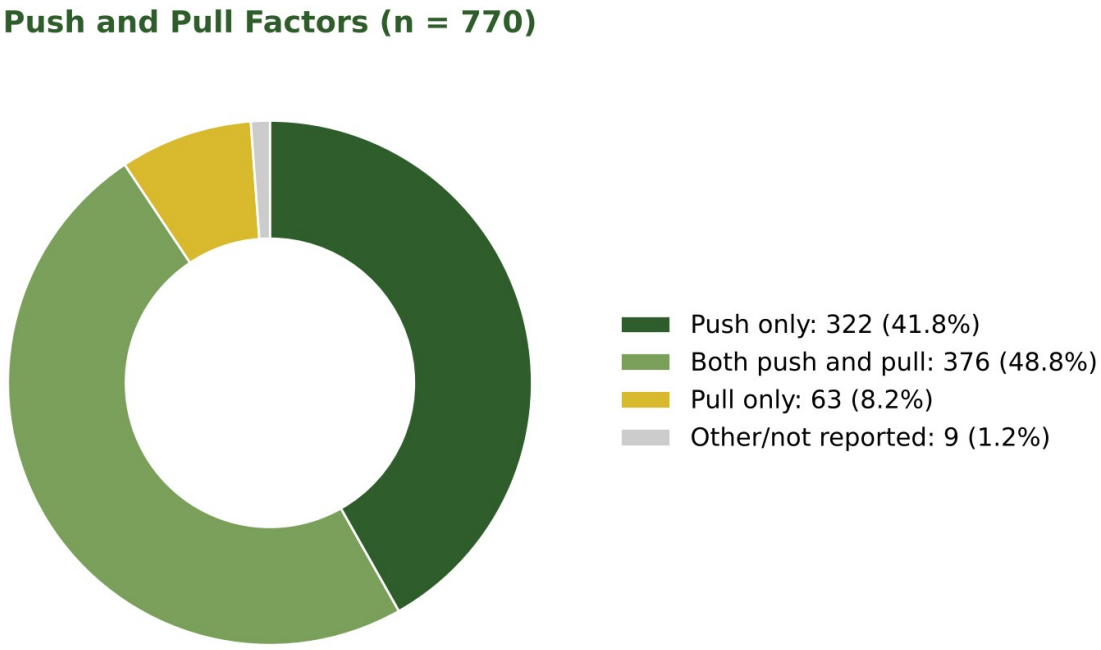


Fig 18. Push and pull factors of migration

Migration in the study area is overwhelmingly shaped by push-driven distress rather than pull-driven opportunity. Out of 770 migration records, 698 (90.6%) cite at least one push factor such as lack of work, lack of land or loan repayment. Of all migrants, 322 (41.8%) cite push factors only and 376 (48.8%) cite both push and pull factors. Only 63 migrants (8.2%) migrated purely because of pull factors such as better employment prospects or improved living conditions elsewhere. This imbalance highlights that migration for most households is not a voluntary choice but a coping strategy driven by structural rural constraints, even where better opportunities elsewhere add to the decision. Overall, the findings suggest that migration is deeply linked to survival and necessity, reflecting the continuing absence of stable local employment and economic security in sending districts.

Lee (1966) argued that a migration decision weighs factors at the place of origin and at the destination together, filtered by intervening obstacles such as distance and cost and by personal circumstances. Because the survey allowed several reasons per migrant, the findings can show this directly rather than placing each migrant in a single push or pull category: 376 migrants (48.8%) cite both push and pull factors, compared with 322 (41.8%) who cite push factors alone and 63 (8.2%) who cite pull factors alone.

The overlap holds for individual reasons too. Since 87.9% of migrants cite no work at the village and 25.1% cite higher wages, at least 13% of all migrants must cite both; the minimum overlap of no work with better living conditions (36.5%) is 24.4%, and with better job opportunities (33.5%) it is 21.4%. These are lower bounds implied by the reported totals; a pairwise cross-tabulation of reasons from the survey data would give the exact figures. Read through Lee, the pattern is not distress versus opportunity but distress that makes a destination's opportunities worth the cost of the journey. His idea of intervening obstacles also explains why networks matter so much (Section 7.3): family and friends at the destination lower the cost and risk of moving.

Table below shows the push factors and the frequency

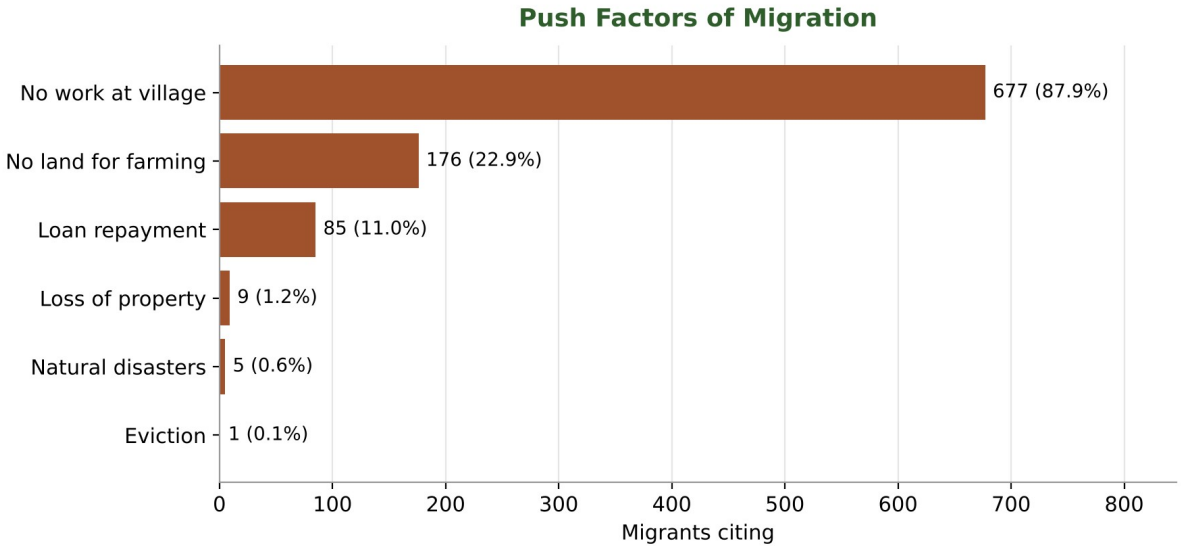


Fig 19. Push factors of migration

The push-factor breakdown clearly shows that migration in the study region is overwhelmingly driven by distress and livelihood insecurity rather than choice. The most dominant trigger is the absence of employment opportunities within villages, with 677 migrants (87.9%) reporting no work at the village as a reason for leaving. This highlights the persistent rural employment gap and the limited availability of stable local income sources. Alongside this, agrarian vulnerability remains a major structural driver, as 176 migrants (22.9%) migrated due to the lack of land for farming, reflecting landlessness and the declining capacity of agriculture to sustain households. Financial stress also emerges as a significant push force, with 85 migrants (11.0%) moving specifically for loan repayment. This indicates that migration is frequently used as a coping mechanism for household debt, where mobility becomes a strategy to meet immediate financial obligations. Although smaller in scale, displacement due to shocks is also visible, with loss of property (9 migrants), natural disasters (5) and eviction (1) also reported, suggesting that environmental or crisis-related disruptions contribute marginally but meaningfully to mobility.

Table below shows the pull factors and the frequency

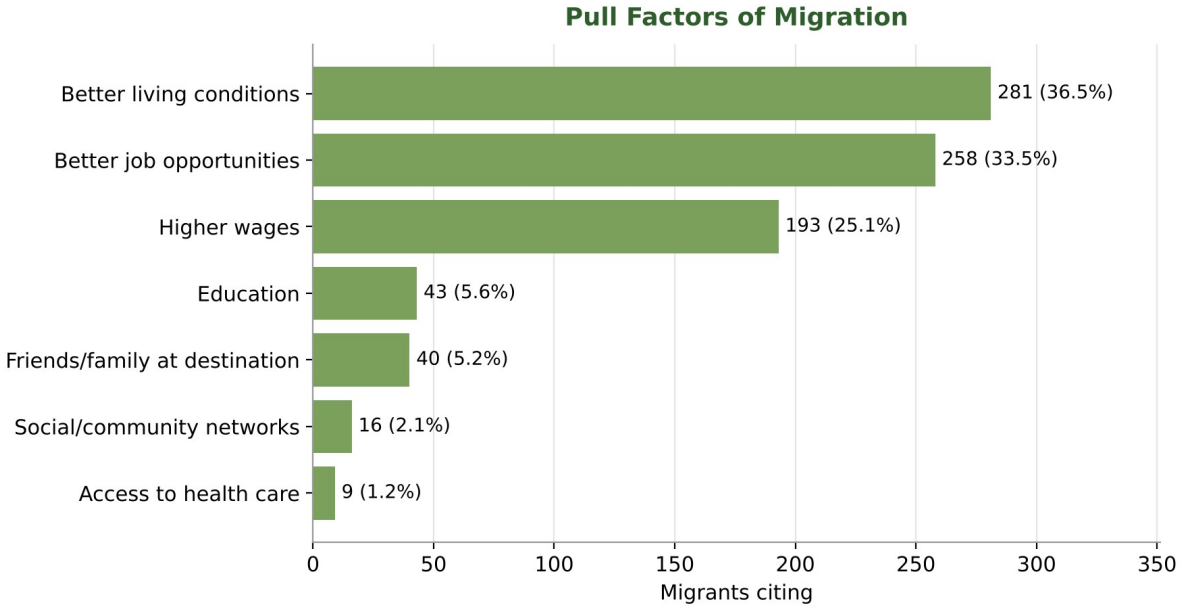


Fig 20. Pull factors of migration

Pull-driven migration accounts for a smaller share of movement compared to distress-led push factors, with 439 migrants (57.0%) citing at least one pull factor, but only 63 (8.2%) for whom pull factors were the only reason. The most frequently cited pull factors are better living conditions (281 migrants), better job opportunities (258) and higher wages (193). Education-related migration (43 migrants) also reflects emerging aspirations among some households, while friends or family at the destination (40), social networks (16) and access to health care (9) play a more limited role. Overall, pull migration in the region is shaped primarily by economic attraction rather than lifestyle mobility, reinforcing that migration is still largely livelihood-oriented.

7.2 Gendered Migration Dynamics

Migration in the study area remains deeply gendered, both in terms of who migrates and why migration occurs. Overall, migration is still largely male-dominated, with women forming a smaller but important share of mobility. Female migration is geographically concentrated in districts such as Kamrup Rural and Ri-Bhoi, suggesting that women's participation in migration is emerging unevenly across the region, shaped by district-specific livelihood structures, cultural norms, and employment accessibility. At the household level, these gendered patterns also translate into shifting responsibilities, where migration often triggers changes in care-giving and domestic roles, reinforcing the gendered burden carried by women who remain behind or migrate under constrained circumstances.

These push-driven dynamics have distinct gender implications. Women's migration, when it occurs, is often shaped not only by employment needs but also by household pressures, care responsibilities, and limited access to secure work sectors. At the same time, remittance patterns show that migrant households depend heavily on regular financial transfers, with most remittances being sent monthly, reinforcing the role of migration as an economic lifeline. Overall, the evidence suggests that migration in this region is embedded within unequal gender relations, where mobility is dominated by men, but its consequences such as household role shifts, economic dependence, and care burdens are strongly borne by women.

North Garo Hills (Garo) and Ri-Bhoi (largely Khasi) are the two matrilineal districts in the sample. In both societies descent and property pass through women: among the Khasi, the youngest daughter (*khadduh*) inherits the ancestral house along with the duty of caring for her parents (Nongbri, 2000), and among the Garo a daughter chosen as heiress (*nokna*) holds a similar position. Matriliny is often assumed to give women more freedom to move. Ri-Bhoi fits that expectation: women are 25 of its 46 migrants (54%), the only district where they form a majority. North Garo Hills does not: women are 14 of its 109 migrants (12.8%), below the sample average of 18.2% (Fig 12).

The contrast suggests that kinship alone does not decide women's mobility. Distance is one likely factor: most of Ri-Bhoi's migration stays within Meghalaya or the region (37 of its 54 migration records are intra-state, inter-district or intra-district), close to Guwahati and Shillong, while North Garo Hills sends most migrants out of state, especially to Tamil Nadu (43 of 105). Nongbri also cautions that matriliny gives women security of residence and property but not necessarily authority, and the heiress's duty to stay means that matrilineal norms may keep some daughters at home as much as they free others to go. These are interpretations rather than tested findings: the survey did not record clan, birth order or inheritance status, which would be needed to test them.

7.3 Finding work by the migrants

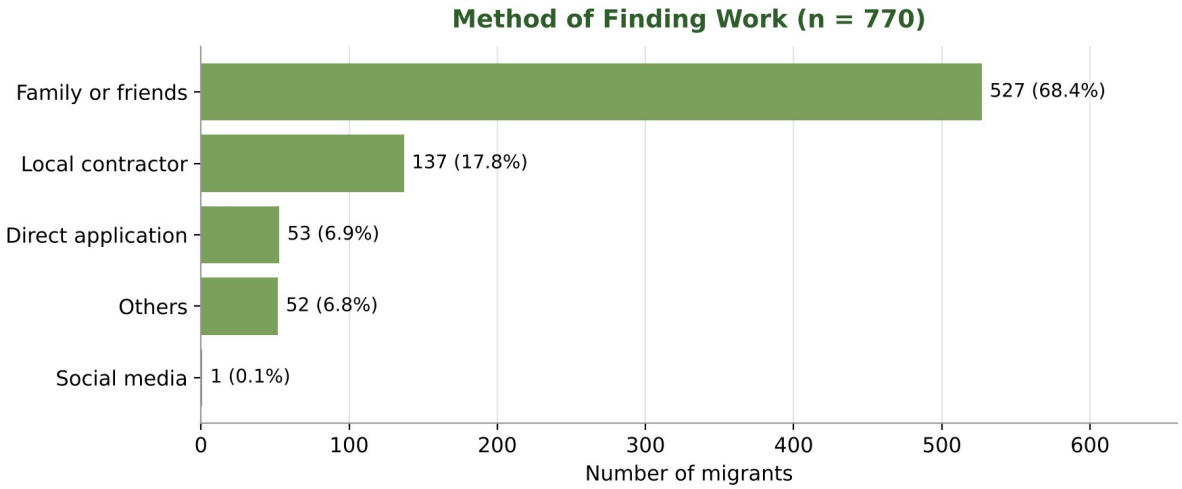


Fig 21. Method of finding work

The table above shows how the migrants actually access labour markets in practice and afterwards were able to settle up on the concerned locations. The data shows that migrant employment is largely accessed through informal channels. A majority of migrants (527 out of 770, 68.4%) found work through family or friends, highlighting the strong role of social networks in shaping migration pathways. Another 17.8% (137 migrants) relied on local contractors, indicating the continued importance of intermediaries in labour recruitment. In contrast, only 6.9% (53 migrants) secured jobs through direct application to employers, suggesting limited access to formal hiring systems. Overall, these patterns underline that migration remains deeply network-driven, with employment opportunities often circulating through personal and contractor-based arrangements rather than regulated labour markets.

Below is the interpretation of the same with districts and no. of migrants mentioned:

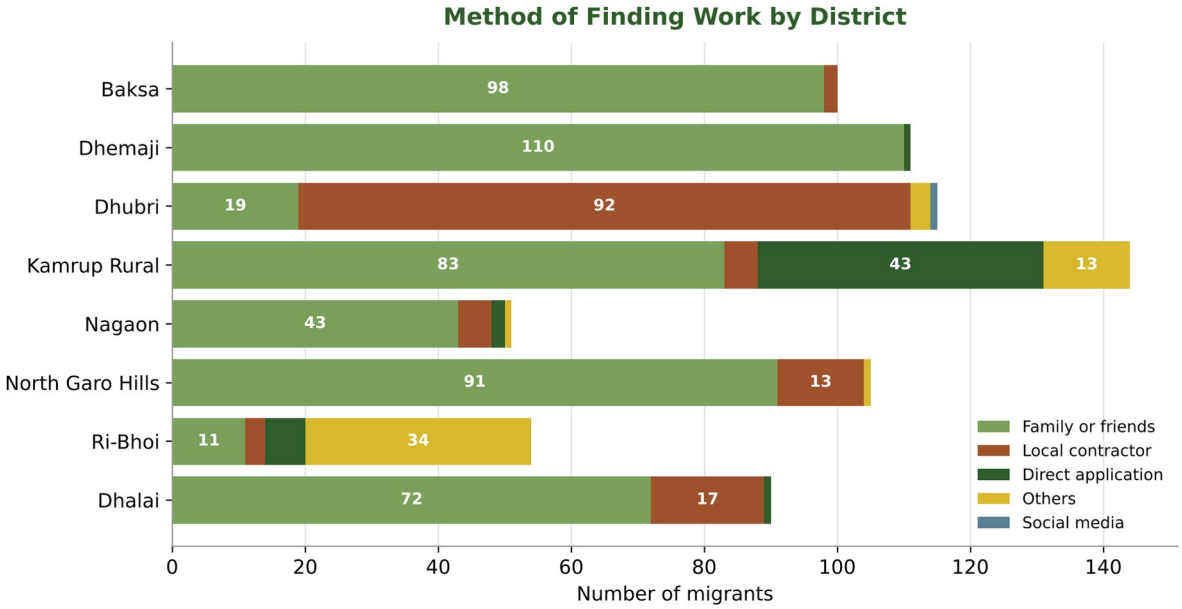


Fig 22. Method of finding work by district

The district-wise distribution highlights that migrants overwhelmingly rely on informal and socially embedded channels to secure employment, but the degree of dependence varies sharply across districts. In Baksa (98 of 100) and Dhemaji (110 of 111), work is almost entirely accessed through family and friends, suggesting well-established community migration

networks that guide job placement. In contrast, Dhubri presents a very different pattern, where the majority of migrants (92 of 115) depend on local contractors, pointing to a more intermediary-driven recruitment structure that may increase vulnerability to exploitation. Kamrup Rural stands out as the most diverse labour-access district, with a notable share of migrants using direct applications (43 of 144 migrants) alongside networks, reflecting comparatively stronger exposure to formal employment channels. Meanwhile, Ri-Bhoi shows an unusually high "Others" category (34 of 54), indicating fragmented or less standardised pathways into work. Overall, the findings confirm that labour migration is not only economically driven but also shaped by district-specific social capital, recruitment systems, and access to formal labour markets, reinforcing the uneven geography of opportunity and risk.

Xiang and Lindquist (2014) use the term *migration infrastructure* for the linked set of actors, institutions and technologies that make mobility possible and shape it. They distinguish five dimensions: commercial (recruiters and brokers), regulatory (state rules, documents and licensing), technological (communication and transport), humanitarian (NGOs and international organisations) and social (migrant networks). The migration infrastructure in the study districts is overwhelmingly social: 68.4% of migrants found work through family or friends and 17.8% through local contractors, while only 6.9% applied directly to employers, and the regulatory dimension is almost absent from how people find work. Each dimension distributes risk differently. Networks lower the cost of moving and pass on information, but they also channel migrants into the same sectors and destinations as those who went before; brokers move people quickly but can take a share of wages and leave workers with little recourse.

Dhubri, where 92 of 115 migrants found work through local contractors, is the clearest case of what Breman (1996) called *footloose labour*: workers who circulate between rural homes and informal urban and industrial jobs, recruited, advanced money and often supervised by labour jobbers. Srivastava (2011) shows that such contracting chains remain central to seasonal and circular migration in India, and Deshingkar (2019) argues that brokers are not simply exploiters: they open access to work that migrants could not otherwise reach, while also shaping them into compliant workers for employers. Dhubri's pattern fits this ambiguity. Contractors bring outside work within reach of households with thin networks, but this is also the channel most associated in the literature with wage deductions, indebtedness and weak bargaining power. Whether Dhubri's contractor-recruited migrants earn less or face worse conditions than network-recruited migrants elsewhere could be tested by cross-tabulating recruitment channel against income (Chapter 11) and workplace problems (Section 10.3).

7.4 Loans and advances taken by the migrants:

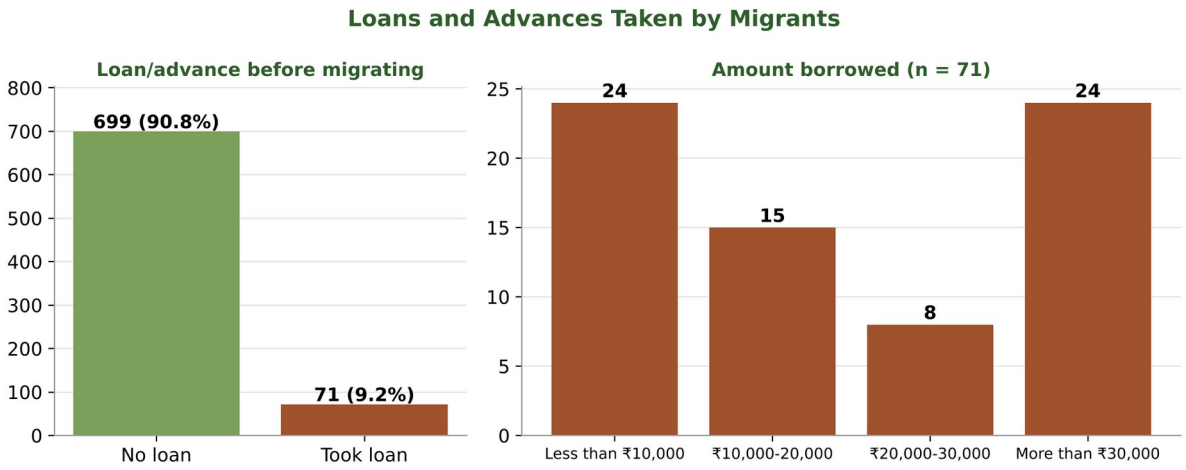


Fig 23. Loans and advances taken by the migrants

This distribution shows that loan-taking is not widespread among migrant households, but it is still significant for a small segment. Out of 770 migration records, a large majority (699, 90.8%) reported no loan or advance before migrating, indicating that most migration decisions are not directly linked to formal borrowing. It suggests that while migration is largely driven by employment stress and livelihood needs rather than debt alone, a subset of households may be using migration as a coping strategy to manage financial burdens, especially larger loans. However, 71 migrants (9.2%) reported having taken a loan or advance, and the amounts vary across brackets. Among those who borrowed, loans of more than Rs 30,000 (24 borrowers) and less than Rs 10,000 (24 borrowers) are equally common, followed by Rs 10,000-20,000 (15) and Rs 20,000-30,000 (8).

Loan purpose (multiple answers)	Borrowers	% of borrowers
Everyday household expenses	40	56.3%
Children education	27	38.0%
Debt repayment	24	33.8%
Medical expenses	21	29.6%
Farming	6	8.5%
Social/religious rituals	5	7.0%
Others	4	5.6%
Total borrowers	**71**	

Table 6: Purpose of loans taken by migrant households (multiple answers)

The loan purpose distribution highlights that borrowing among migrant households is largely driven by immediate needs rather than productive investment. Borrowers could give more than one purpose. The largest share (40 of 71 borrowers, 56.3%) took loans to meet everyday household expenses, indicating that many families rely on credit simply to manage basic consumption. A substantial share also borrowed for children's education (27, 38.0%) and for repaying older debts (24, 33.8%), the latter reflecting cycles of financial vulnerability where households take new loans to settle older obligations. Medical expenses account for 21 borrowers (29.6%), underscoring the burden of health-related shocks in the absence of adequate social protection. Loans for farming (6, 8.5%) and social or religious rituals (5, 7.0%) are less common. Overall, the pattern suggests that credit among migrant households is primarily used as a coping mechanism, although the high share borrowing for children's education shows that some borrowing is also an investment in the next generation.

Out of the 710 households, 679 (95.6%) own land, while 31 (4.4%) are landless. In the landholding size data, 34 households (4.8%) report no land, because a few land-owning households recorded a land size of zero.

Among landowning households, the majority fall into small and marginal categories:

- 0.01-2 bigha: 341 households (48%)
- 2-5 bigha: 241 households (34%)

Together, these account for 82% of all households, indicating that most landowners possess very small plots. Only a limited proportion have larger holdings:

- 5-10 bigha: 11%
- Above 10 bigha: just 2%

Land ownership and the sectors in which household members work:

Sector of work	Landowners	Landless	Total
Agriculture	20	0	20
Construction	62	3	65
Manufacturing	150	5	155
Service	218	7	225
Transport	32	1	33
Retail Business/Self employed	30	0	30
Technical	33	0	33
Professional	40	5	45
General/Unclassified labour	98	9	107
Not working / not reported	52	5	57
Total	**735**	**35**	**770**

Table 7: Land ownership and sector of work

The distribution of migrants across sectors shows that migrants from land-owning households form the vast majority (735 of 770, 95.5%), indicating that migration is largely a strategy for livelihood diversification rather than a result of complete landlessness. Most migrants work in services (225, including hospitality, security and housekeeping) and manufacturing or factory work (155), followed by general or unclassified labour (107) and construction (65). Smaller numbers are in professional jobs (45), technical trades (33), transport (33) and retail or self-employment (30), and very few work in agriculture and allied activities (20) outside their villages. Although landless migrants form a small proportion overall (35), they are mainly found in general labour, services, manufacturing and professional work. Overall, the pattern highlights the growing importance of non-farm employment in supporting rural household incomes.

The distribution of workers across sectors shows that even though a large majority of households own land (735 of 770 migrants), their engagement is predominantly in non-farm sectors such as services (225), manufacturing (155), general labour (107) and construction (65), with very limited participation in agriculture (only 20). When this is viewed alongside landholding size, where most households fall within small and marginal categories (0.01-5 bigha), it becomes clear that land ownership does not translate into sufficient livelihood security. Both landowning and landless households are similarly concentrated in wage-based and migration-linked sectors, indicating that small landholdings are inadequate to sustain income needs, thereby pushing households toward diversified and often informal employment opportunities.

And the frequencies and patterns depending upon the same are

Sector of work	Landless migrants	Landless share of sector	Share of all landless migrants
Agriculture	0	0.0%	0.0%
Construction	3	4.6%	8.6%
Manufacturing	5	3.2%	14.3%
Service	7	3.1%	20.0%
Transport	1	3.0%	2.9%
Retail Business/Self employed	0	0.0%	0.0%
Technical	0	0.0%	0.0%
Professional	5	11.1%	14.3%
General/Unclassified labour	9	8.4%	25.7%
Not working / not reported	5	8.8%	14.3%
Total	**35**	**4.5%**	**100.0%**

Table 8: Relative concentration of landless migrant workers by sector of work

The New Economics of Labour Migration (Stark & Bloom, 1985) treats migration as a decision taken by the household rather than the individual: a way to spread risk across different labour markets and to make up for missing credit and insurance at home. Several of the study's strongest findings fit this view. Most households send one member: 561 of 710 (79.0%) have exactly one migrant and only 13.8% have two or more, which is what a household would do if it wanted one earner in an outside labour market while others stayed with the farm. Holdings are marginal, with 82% of households holding 5 bigha or less, yet 95.5% of migrants come from land-owning households that remain landowners while a member works away. Remittances are regular, with 83.3% of receiving households getting money every month (Section 9.1), as an implicit insurance arrangement between migrant and household would require.

Seen this way, the dominance of land-owning households does not mean that land pressure is unimportant. It suggests that these households are diversifying away from plots too small to support them, rather than being pushed off the land altogether. The theory's emphasis on missing credit is also consistent with the finding that only 9.2% of migrants borrowed before leaving and that most loans paid for household expenses, education, medical costs and old debts rather than for production (Table 6): migration itself becomes the household's source of finance.

7.5 Trainings received by the migrants:

The sector-wise distribution of training reveals that formal skill exposure among migrants remains limited overall. Only 89 of the 770 migrants (11.6%) received any skill training. The lowest training access is seen among general or unclassified labourers, where only 2 out of 107 (1.9%) were trained, highlighting the highly informal and unskilled nature of employment in this group. Agriculture (0 of 20), retail or self-employment (1 of 30) and manufacturing (8 of 155, 5.2%) also show very low coverage, suggesting that workers in these sectors rely mainly on informal learning rather than structured capacity-building.

Sector of work	Trained	Not trained	Total	Training coverage
Agriculture	0	20	20	0.0%
Construction	12	53	65	18.5%

Manufacturing	8	147	155	5.2%
Service	22	203	225	9.8%
Transport	8	25	33	24.2%
Retail Business/Self employed	1	29	30	3.3%
Technical	10	23	33	30.3%
Professional	14	31	45	31.1%
General/Unclassified labour	2	105	107	1.9%
Not working / not reported	12	45	57	21.1%
Total	**89**	**681**	**770**	**11.6%**

Table 9: Sector-wise training received by the migrants

Sectors linked to more skilled or formal employment display better training penetration. Professional workers report the highest coverage (31.1%), followed by technical trades (30.3%), transport (24.2%, mainly driving) and construction (18.5%, mainly masonry). The most common types of training were general skill development programmes, security and home guard training, driving, DDU-GKY courses, hospitality and airline courses, and masonry. Overall, the findings underline a major gap in workforce preparation, with nearly nine in ten migrants entering employment without any formal training, particularly in the largest and most vulnerable groups such as general labour and factory work.

Lack of local work is the dominant driver, cited for 87.9% of migrants, and nine in ten cite at least one push factor; shortage of land for farming (22.9%) and loan repayment (11.0%) add to it, though only 9.2% took a loan or advance before leaving. Land shapes migration through the size of holdings rather than landlessness: 95.5% of migrants come from land-owning households, but 82% of households hold 5 bigha or less, too little to sustain them. These drivers explain who migrates more clearly than where or for how long, which depend more on family networks and contractors (Section 7.3) and on district corridors (Chapter 6).

8. Feminization and in-formalization of migration

How does gender shape who migrates, why, into what work, with what entitlements, and what changes for women left behind?

8.1 Trends in female migration (% women, age, sector, education profile)

The household roster records 147 female migrants (18.2% of the 806 migrants) in 127 of the 710 households (17.9%). In the separate women's migration module, 67 of the 700 households that answered (9.6%) reported that a female member had migrated; this lower figure suggests that some respondents did not count women who migrated with family or for study. Female migrants are slightly younger than migrants overall, with an average age of 27.8 years (middle half aged 23-34.5) compared with 29.7 years (24-35) for all migrants. Female migration is mainly driven by work: in 47 of the 67 households (70.1%) the main reason was work-related, followed by migrating with family (9 households, 13.4%). The female share of 18% confirms low but meaningful female involvement tied to economic pull factors like jobs.

Most female migrants have formal education: 69 (46.9%) studied up to secondary level (class 6-10), 29 (19.7%) to higher secondary, 24 (16.3%) to primary level and 11 (7.5%) hold a graduate, diploma or post-graduate qualification; only 9 (6.1%) are illiterate. This profile is very similar to that of male migrants. In the surveyed areas, women work as labourers, in factories (including broiler, cloth and plastic units), in construction, and in other roles such as nursing, teaching and beauty parlours, while a third of responses did not specify the sector. Female migrants also report more training than men: 21 of the 67 female migration records (31.3%) received skill training, compared with 51 of 545 male records (9.4%) and 11.6% of all migrants. Low overall prevalence underscores migration as an alternative to inadequate local skilling, with programmes like DDU-GKY reaching few.

Beyond typical work-related obstacles, female migrants encounter a unique set of problems at their destination. Many are concentrated in low-paying informal industries, domestic work, and service positions, where job security is scarce and working conditions are frequently uncontrolled. Long hours, salary discrimination, and reliance on employers or middlemen are typical problems. Women report limited mobility, a lack of safe housing, and vulnerability to harassment, making safety and mobility important problems. Their predicament is further exacerbated by their restricted access to social support networks, healthcare, and sanitary facilities. These difficulties show that female migration is characterized by increased vulnerability and limited agency at destination, necessitating tailored support structures, in addition to being influenced by economic necessity.

Low overall training coverage (11.6%) leaves most migrants, including young women (18% of migrants), entering risky sectors without formal skills. The data reinforces household-level insights; bolstering accessible programs (e.g., nursing, DDU-GKY) could diversify opportunities and improve the terms on which young people migrate, although placement-linked training often leads to jobs in other states and so changes migration rather than curbing it (Section 12.4).

Metric	Overall migrants	Women migrants
Number of migrants	806	147 (18.2%)
Households with a migrant	710	127 in roster (17.9%); 67 in women's module
Mean age (years)	29.7	27.8

Middle 50% of ages	24-35 years	23-34.5 years
Secondary (class 6-10)	399 (49.5%)	69 (46.9%)
Higher secondary (class 11-12)	147 (18.2%)	29 (19.7%)
Illiterate	55 (6.8%)	9 (6.1%)
Top sectors	Service (225), manufacturing (155), general labour (107)	General labour (12), manufacturing (11), construction (8)
Received skill training	89 of 770 (11.6%)	21 of 67 (31.3%)
Main reasons for migration	No work at village (87.9%), better living conditions (36.5%)	Work-related (70.1%), migrating with family (13.4%)
Median monthly earning	Rs 15,000	Rs 15,000
Problems faced by women at destination	-	None 60, do not know 6, yes 1 (of 67)

Table 10: Profile of women migrants compared with overall migrants

Note: these responses were mostly given by family members at home rather than by the women themselves, which is the likely reason why so few problems were reported despite the difficulties described in the FGDs. See Section 3.7.

For the income part, the survey data do not show a gap in typical earnings between women and men: among migration records in single-sex households, the median monthly salary is Rs 15,000 for both women (65 reporting) and men (525 reporting). However, women's earnings are spread more widely, and women are concentrated in informal work such as labour and factory jobs that often lack security or benefits. Unequal pay and exploitation in female-heavy fields remain a risk that the survey does not measure directly. Enhanced training and formalization could improve job quality, boosting remittances and household welfare.

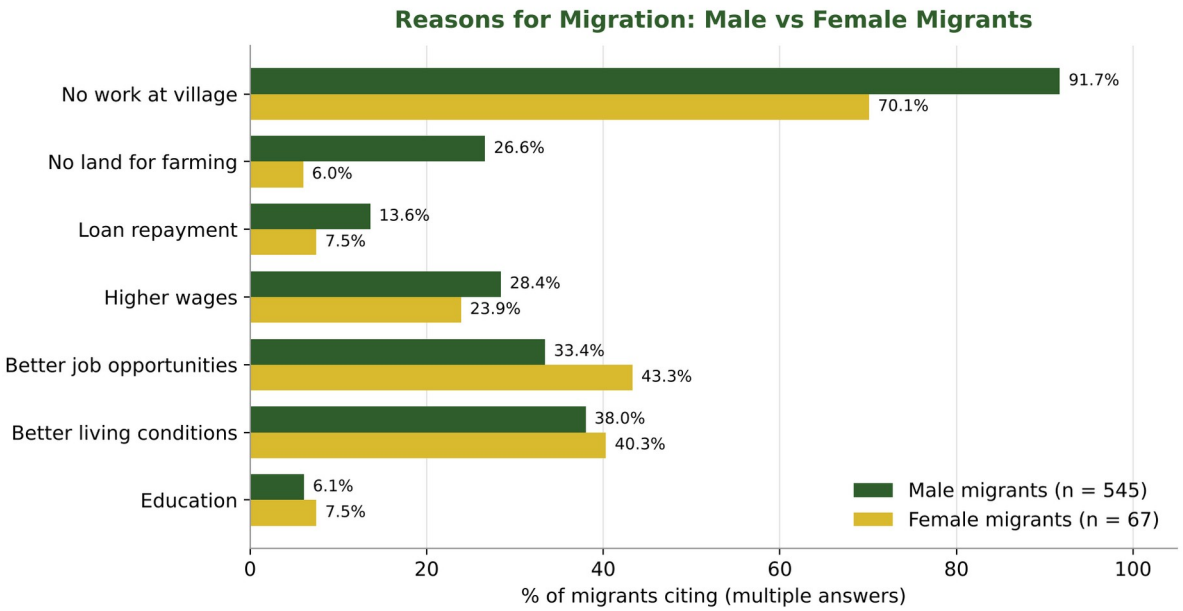


Fig 24. Reasons for migration: male vs female migrants

Sectors in which female migrants are engaged:

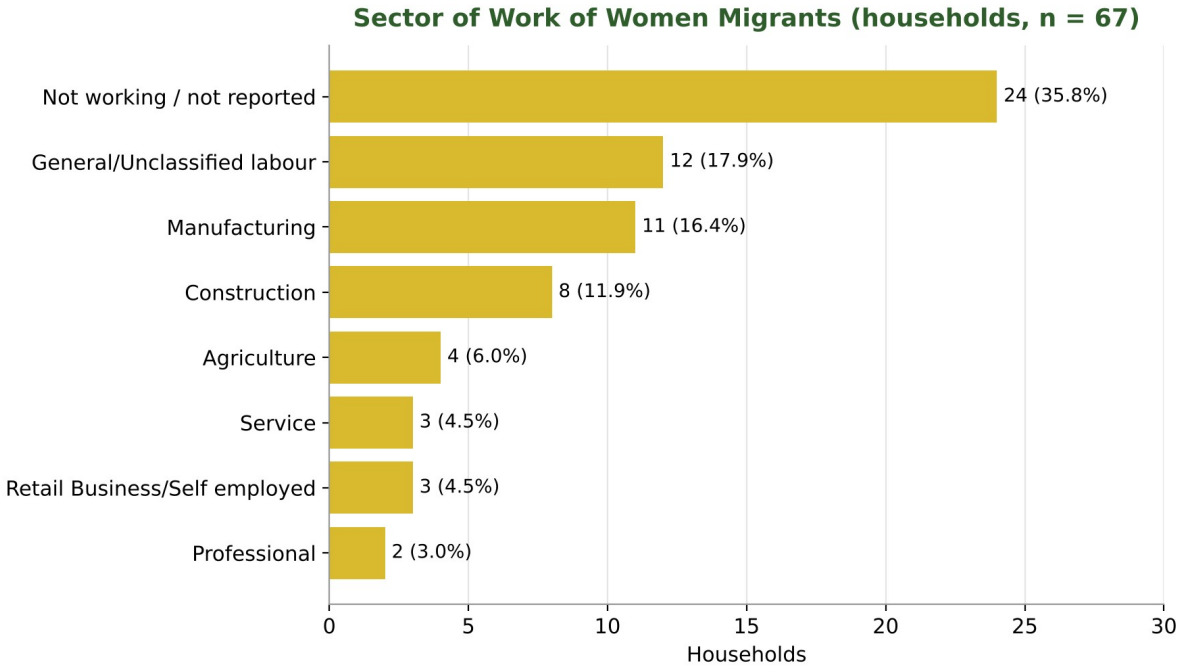


Fig 25. Sectoral distribution of women migrants

Among the 67 households reporting a female migrant, women's work clusters most strongly around general labour (12 households, 17.9%), factory and manufacturing work (11, 16.4%) and construction (8, 11.9%), which together account for 46% of responses.

Smaller numbers work in agriculture and poultry (4, 6.0%), services such as hospitality and beauty (3, 4.5%), retail and small trade (3, 4.5%) and professional roles such as nursing and teaching (2, 3.0%). Notably, a large proportion of cases fall under unspecified or not reported categories (24 households, 35.8%), indicating that many women's occupations are either informally defined, involve multiple activities, or were not clearly documented, reflecting the often precarious and unstructured nature of migration-linked livelihoods.

8.2 Reason for migration for the female migrants:

Main reason	Households	% (out of 67)
Work-related	47	70.1%
Migrating with family	9	13.4%
Other	8	11.9%
Education	3	4.5%
Total	**67**	**100%**

Table 11: Main reason for migration among female migrants (households)

The table above shows that the reasons reported for female migrants point to primarily work-driven mobility. In 47 of the 67 households (70.1%) the main reason was work-related, including better employment opportunities. This highlights that women's migration is increasingly shaped by economic necessity rather than only social or household factors. At the same time, in 9 households (13.4%) women migrated along with their families, reflecting that women's movement is often embedded within broader household migration strategies. Education accounts for 3 households (4.5%), and the remaining 8 (11.9%) gave other reasons. Households could give more than one reason; counting all mentions, 15 households (22.4%) mentioned migrating with family. Overall, the findings reinforce that

women's migration in this sample is largely tied to livelihood pressures and emerging participation in labour mobility, rather than being solely dependent or secondary in nature.

Women are 18.2% of migrants, slightly younger than men (mean age 27.8 years) and similarly educated, and their migration is concentrated in Kamrup Rural and Ri-Bhoi. Most migrate for work (70.1% of households with a female migrant), though family-linked migration matters more than for men, and they work mainly in general labour, factories and construction, with over a third of their occupations unrecorded. Their median earnings match men's at Rs 15,000 and more of them have received training (31.3%), but concentration in informal work leaves their entitlements weak; what changes for women left behind is answered in Section 9.2.

9. Impact of migration on source region

How do remittances and absence change household income, debt and division of labour?

9.1 Income and livelihood effects

9.1.a. Remittance flows (frequency, amounts, % of household income)

The remittance patterns among the migrants who are earning indicate that 90.4% (642 of 710) of migrant households receive remittances from their migrant members. Among these, 83.3 percent (535) receive money monthly, 508 of them only monthly, suggesting structured financial support rather than sporadic transfers. And the income analysis shows that the majority of the migrants earn between ₹10,000 and ₹20,000 per month. Remittance behavior increases with income levels: while 78 percent of households whose highest-earning migrant makes up to ₹10,000 receive remittances, this rises to 97-99 percent where the migrant earns ₹15,000-30,000. Migrants earning above ₹30,000 exhibit universal remittance behavior. Households with no earning recorded for any migrant are not shown. These findings indicate a clear income remittance linkage, where financial capacity significantly determines frequency and regularity of transfers.

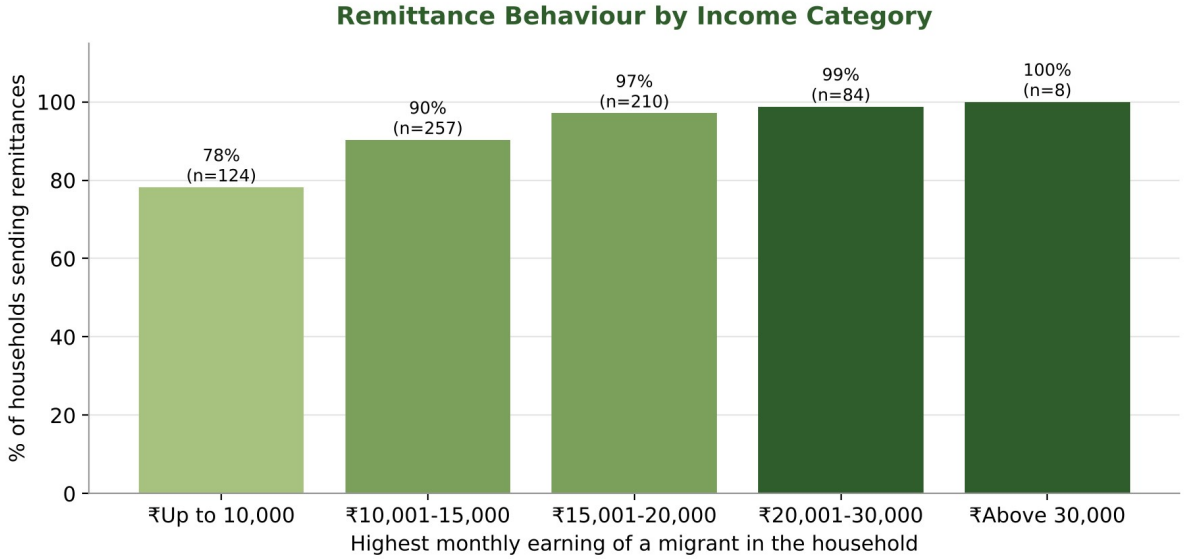


Fig 26. Remittance behaviour by income category

Remittance Frequency (Among Those Who Send)

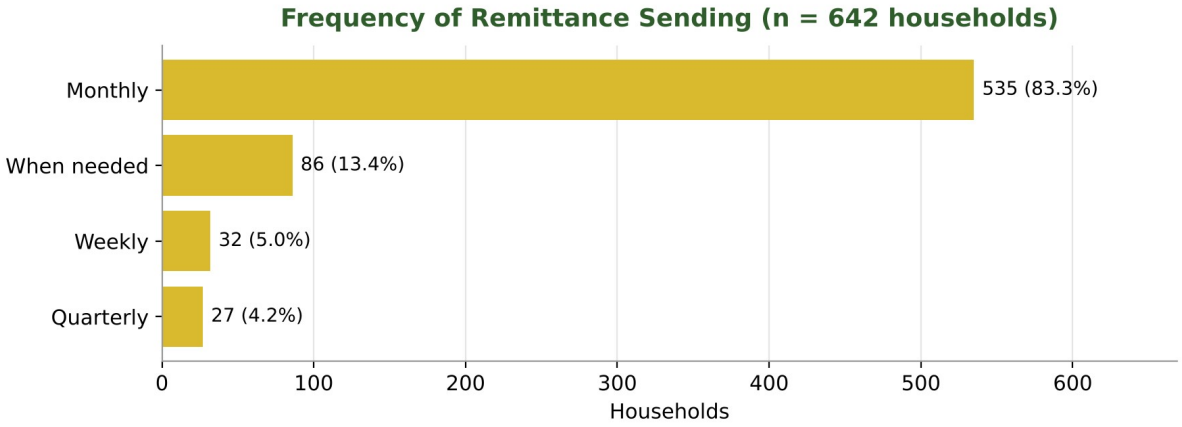


Fig 27. Frequency of remittance sending

9.1.b. Income diversification and household consumption patterns

It has been seen that probability of sending remittance increases with income level. Higher earners show more regular and frequent remittance behaviour.

9.2 Gender roles and household dynamics

9.2.a. Shift in women's workload and responsibilities

Migration does not only reshape livelihoods at the destination but also transforms household responsibilities at the source.

Household member(s) taking over responsibilities	No role change	Role change (Yes)	Total
Parents	288	33	321
Spouse	119	72	191
Spouse + Parents	89	21	110
Others	36	0	36
Extended family + Neighbours/community	16	0	16
Extended family	11	1	12
Neighbours/community	5	0	5
Parents + Older children	4	0	4
Parents + Neighbours/community	2	1	3
Parents + Extended family	3	0	3
Older children	1	1	2
Parents + Extended family + Neighbours/community	2	0	2
Spouse + Extended family	1	0	1
Spouse + Older children	1	0	1
Spouse + Parents + Extended family	1	0	1
Spouse + Parents + Neighbours/community	0	1	1
Spouse + Parents + Older children	1	0	1
Total	**580**	**130**	**710**

Table 12: Household members taking over responsibilities after migration

In reference to the table, overall, 18.3% of households (130 out of 710) reported a clear role change in household responsibilities following migration. The parents emerge as the primary support system: 321 households depend on parents alone, but only 10.3% reported role strain or change whereas spouses show the strongest burden shift: 37.7% of spouse-

managed households (72 of 191) reported role change, indicating higher redistribution of domestic and economic responsibilities.

In addition, extended family and community members play a relatively minor role, suggesting that migration-related adjustments remain concentrated within the immediate family. This pattern highlights the gendered dimensions of migration, where women who remain behind often absorb additional domestic and emotional responsibilities, while women migrants may also rely heavily on parental support networks. Overall, migration reinforces existing care hierarchies, with household burden disproportionately concentrated within immediate family structures rather than community-based support.

Household role change was reported by 18.3% of households. Contrary to expectation, households with a female migrant report role change less often: 8 of 67 such households (11.9%), compared with 120 of 633 households without a female migrant (19.0%).

Female migrant present in household	No role change	Role change (Yes)	Total	% reporting role change
No female migrant	513	120	633	19.0%
Female migrant present	59	8	67	11.9%
Not recorded	8	2	10	20.0%
Total	**580**	**130**	**710**	**18.3%**

Table 13: Role change by presence of female migrant in household

One possible explanation is that most role shifts follow the migration of men, after which spouses, usually women, take on additional responsibilities; when women migrate, the household often already relies on parents or other relatives for care. Female-migrant households form only 9.6% of the households that answered the women's module (67 of 700), so the comparison rests on a small group and would require formal statistical testing before firm conclusions are drawn.

At the household level, migration reflects both necessity and aspiration. Most migrants show a clear willingness to continue working outside their villages, primarily driven by the need for stable income and limited local opportunities. However, their preference is not always to remain migrants permanently. Many express a desire to return and work locally if viable income options are available, especially through agriculture, small businesses, or skill-based work. There is a noticeable inclination toward more secure and better-paying jobs, rather than casual labour, indicating a shift in aspirations. Migrants also show interest in diversifying livelihoods, including engaging in value-added activities or self-employment, if supported with training, market linkages, and infrastructure.

Overall, migration is seen less as a choice and more as a compulsion in the absence of local opportunities, with a strong underlying preference for sustainable and dignified work closer to home.

Remittances are near-universal and regular: 90.4% of households receive them, mostly every month, and the likelihood of receiving them rises with the migrant's earnings. The survey does not record remittance amounts as a share of household income or their use for debt, so these effects can only be inferred from loan purposes (Section 7.4) and migrant earnings (Chapter 11). Absence redistributes work within the immediate family: 18.3% of households report a change in roles, rising to 37.7% where a spouse, usually a woman, takes over, while households with a female migrant report change less often (11.9%).

10. Working Conditions of Migrant Workers

How do recruitment channels shape wages, conditions and protections at destination?

10.1 Social Safety Nets at sector of work

Sector of work	PDS (%)	MGNREGA (%)	Insurance (%)	Migrants
Agriculture	35.0%	30.0%	5.0%	20
Construction	50.8%	15.4%	7.7%	65
Manufacturing	43.2%	20.6%	28.4%	155
Service	24.4%	24.0%	39.1%	225
Transport	36.4%	33.3%	33.3%	33
Retail Business/Self employed	43.3%	43.3%	33.3%	30
Technical	21.2%	21.2%	12.1%	33
Professional	31.1%	28.9%	24.4%	45
General/Unclassified labour	77.6%	72.9%	15.9%	107
Not working / not reported	35.1%	43.9%	26.3%	57
All migrants	**40.4%**	**32.3%**	**26.8%**	**770**

Table 14: Sector-wise Distribution of Respondents Accessing Social Safety Net Schemes

The table shows the level of access to three major support systems Public Distribution System (PDS), MGNREGA and Insurance across different occupational sectors in the Northeast. These are household responses linked to each migrant's sector of work. Workers engaged in general or unclassified labour show the highest participation in welfare programmes: 77.6% are in households with PDS access, 72.9% with MGNREGA and 15.9% with insurance. This indicates that workers in vulnerable and labour-intensive occupations depend more on government support schemes for livelihood security.

In agriculture, 35.0% access PDS and 30.0% MGNREGA, but insurance coverage is only 5.0%. The manufacturing sector shows 43.2% PDS, 20.6% MGNREGA and 28.4% insurance coverage. Technical and professional workers show moderate access to PDS and MGNREGA (21-31%), though participation varies depending on employment stability and income levels.

Construction workers show 50.8% PDS access but low MGNREGA (15.4%) and insurance (7.7%) coverage. In transport, access is fairly even (36.4% PDS, 33.3% MGNREGA and 33.3% insurance). Service workers have the highest insurance coverage (39.1%) but lower PDS (24.4%) and MGNREGA (24.0%) access, while retail and self-employed workers show 43.3% for both PDS and MGNREGA and 33.3% for insurance.

Therefore, the overall data implies that welfare schemes are more accessible to workers in labour-intensive and economically vulnerable sectors, while workers in relatively stable or independent occupations show comparatively lower participation. The uneven and relatively limited insurance coverage across most sectors highlights a significant gap in financial protection against health, accident and livelihood risks.

10.2 Migrants and Welfare benefits at destination

The table represents the distribution of welfare benefits such as housing, medical care, paid leave and ration facilities across different occupational sectors of migrants. The data highlights clear variations in access to welfare provisions depending on the nature of employment.

Sector of work	Housing	Medical care	Paid leave	Ration	Migrants
Agriculture	5	0	0	1	20
Construction	17	2	1	24	65
Manufacturing	60	49	5	56	155
Service	133	66	54	49	225
Transport	14	8	10	9	33
Retail Business/Self employed	4	4	3	3	30
Technical	16	6	6	4	33
Professional	26	20	19	12	45
General/Unclassified labour	79	37	27	88	107
Not working / not reported	17	21	5	8	57
Total	**371**	**213**	**130**	**254**	**770**

Table 15: Sector-wise Distribution of Employment Benefits Received by Respondents

The largest group of migrants works in services (225 of 770), followed by manufacturing (155) and general or unclassified labour (107). Among general labourers, 73.8% received housing support, 34.6% medical care, 25.2% paid leave and 82.2% ration support. This indicates that although many migrants are engaged in informal labour, some level of welfare support is available, mainly in the form of housing and rations.

Migrants working in the service sector also show relatively better access to welfare facilities. In this sector, 59.1% received housing support, 29.3% medical care, 24.0% paid leave and 21.8% ration benefits. This suggests that service sector employment provides comparatively better working conditions and social protection compared to other informal occupations.

The construction sector shows moderate access to welfare support. Around 26.2% received housing facilities, while only 3.1% received medical care and 1.5% paid leave, and 36.9% received ration support. This reflects the temporary and physically demanding nature of construction work where housing is sometimes provided at work sites but other employment benefits remain limited. In terms of construction sites, workers have mentioned that they are often not provided with adequate housing, due to which they usually stay together with other migrant workers from the same place to reduce rental expenses.

In the manufacturing sector 38.7% of migrants received housing, 31.6% medical care, 3.2% paid leave and 36.1% ration support. This indicates relatively better welfare coverage compared to certain informal sectors, possibly due to more structured employment arrangements.

Migrants engaged in agricultural labour show extremely limited welfare coverage, with only 25% receiving housing support (5 of 20), one receiving rations and none receiving medical care or paid leave. This highlights the seasonal and temporary nature of agricultural employment. Similarly, migrants involved in professional, technical, transport and self-employed sectors represent smaller proportions of the sample. Although some migrants in these sectors receive housing and medical benefits, access to paid leave and ration support remains relatively low.

Therefore, it is evident that migrants working in labour-intensive and informal sectors form the largest group and experience uneven access to welfare benefits. Housing remains the most commonly available support across different sectors, while paid leave and ration facilities remain less accessible.

10.3 Workplace Hazard and Protective Measures by migrants across occupational sectors

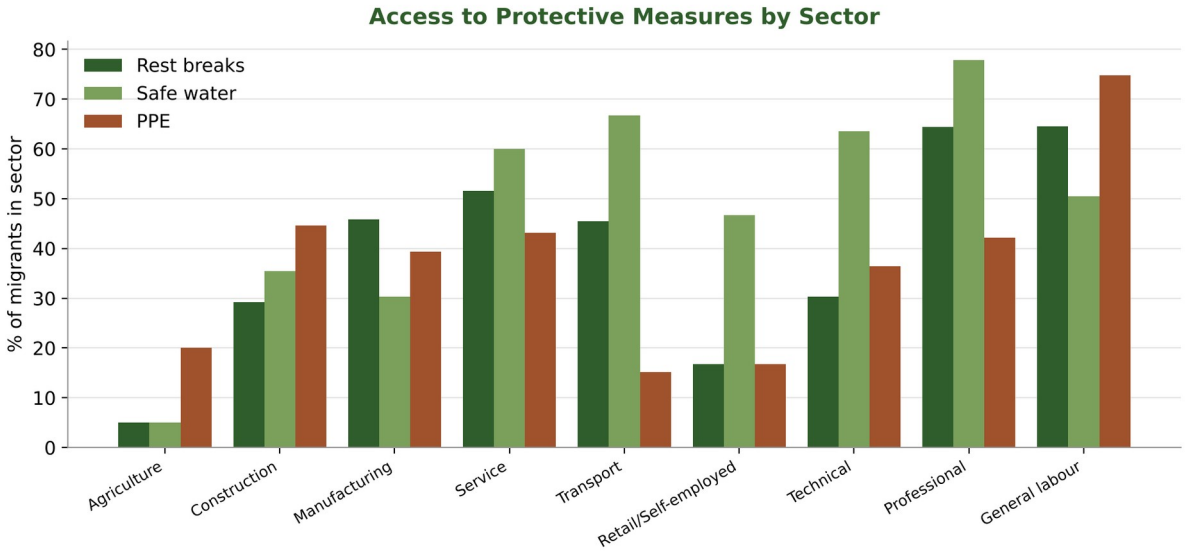


Fig 28. Sector-wise availability of basic workplace facilities and safety measures

Among all reported challenges, long working hours emerge as the most common issue reported for 409 of 770 migrants (53.1%). This indicates that a large proportion of migrant workers are required to work beyond standard working hours, leading to physical exhaustion, reduced productivity and long-term health risks. The problem is most frequently reported in the service sector (100 cases), general and unclassified labour (95) and manufacturing (87). This suggests that migrants engaged in labour-intensive and informal occupations often face high work pressure with limited labour regulation. However, many migrant workers in factory and industrial sectors reported that they voluntarily take extra shifts to earn additional income so that they can manage daily expenses and send higher remittances to support their families.

Harsh working conditions represent the second major challenge, reported for 91 migrants (11.8%). Manufacturing workers reported the highest number of cases (44), followed by construction workers (26). These harsh conditions include exposure to dust, extreme heat, chemical substances, unsafe work environments and lack of proper safety measures, which increase occupational health risks among migrant workers.

The use of unsafe tools was reported in 57 cases (7.4%), mainly in manufacturing (28) and construction (15). This highlights the absence of adequate safety equipment, technical training and workplace monitoring, increasing the risk of injuries among migrant workers engaged in physically demanding and machine-based occupations.

Physical abuse was reported in 59 cases (7.7%), with the highest occurrence among service (18) and manufacturing (17) workers, and smaller instances in other sectors. Although detailed information regarding the nature of abuse is not mentioned in detail but through focus group discussion it has been stated that verbal abuse and dominance of power play and gender discrimination has been common in this sector which negatively affect migrant workers dignity and mental well-being.

Wage theft accounts for 1.7% (13 cases), indicating instances where workers experienced delayed or incomplete wage payments. The issue is primarily reported among service workers (6), followed by professional workers (3). Additionally, other challenges reported issues such as excessive workload, work pressure, network connectivity problems and irregular work schedules. These challenges reflect the unstable and demanding nature of

migrant employment which often disrupts workers personal lives and increases both mental and physical stress.

Access to social protection schemes varies significantly across sectors. General/unclassified labour shows the highest access to PDS (77.6%) and MGNREGA (72.9%), while service workers have the highest insurance coverage (39.1%). Agriculture (5.0%), construction (7.7%) and technical work (12.1%) show the lowest insurance coverage, pointing to gaps in welfare inclusion. Overall, the pattern suggests that scheme access is uneven and closely linked to the nature of work, with informal and vulnerable sectors still facing limited coverage.

Protections at destination are thin and uneven: long working hours are reported for 53.1% of migrants, harsh conditions for 11.8% and physical abuse for 7.7%, while only 130 of 770 migrants receive paid leave and 213 receive medical care. Housing is the most common employer benefit (371 migrants), and insurance reaches 26.8% of migrants' households overall but only 5–8% in agriculture and construction. With 68.4% of migrants finding work through family or friends and 17.8% through contractors (Section 7.3), most enter jobs through informal channels that give them little formal basis to claim protections, although the survey does not compare conditions by recruitment channel.

11. Income Analysis of the migrants

How do recruitment channels shape wages, conditions and protections at destination?

11.1 Income Group and sector of work

The table shows the income distribution from different sectors of work. The income pattern gives a real picture of how most working households are managing their daily lives. A large number of workers are earning in the lower income ranges which mean many families are running their households with limited and often uncertain money. Out of the total sample size about 87% (634 of the 728 migrants who reported a salary) earn up to Rs.20,000 per month. For many families, this income is mostly used for basic needs like food, rent, children's education, travel and medical expenses leaving very little chance to save money or handle emergencies.

Sector of work	Up to 10,000	10,001-20,000	20,001-30,000	Above 30,000	Total
Agriculture	11	9	0	0	20
Construction	19	41	4	0	64
Manufacturing	34	111	9	0	154
Service	20	174	29	1	224
Transport	8	15	7	1	31
Retail Business/Self employed	18	9	3	0	30
Technical	8	18	7	0	33
Professional	6	25	8	6	45
General/Unclassified labour	20	68	16	0	104
Not working / not reported	1	19	3	0	23
Total	**145**	**489**	**86**	**8**	**728**

Table 16: Sector-wise income group distribution (migrants who reported a salary, n = 728)

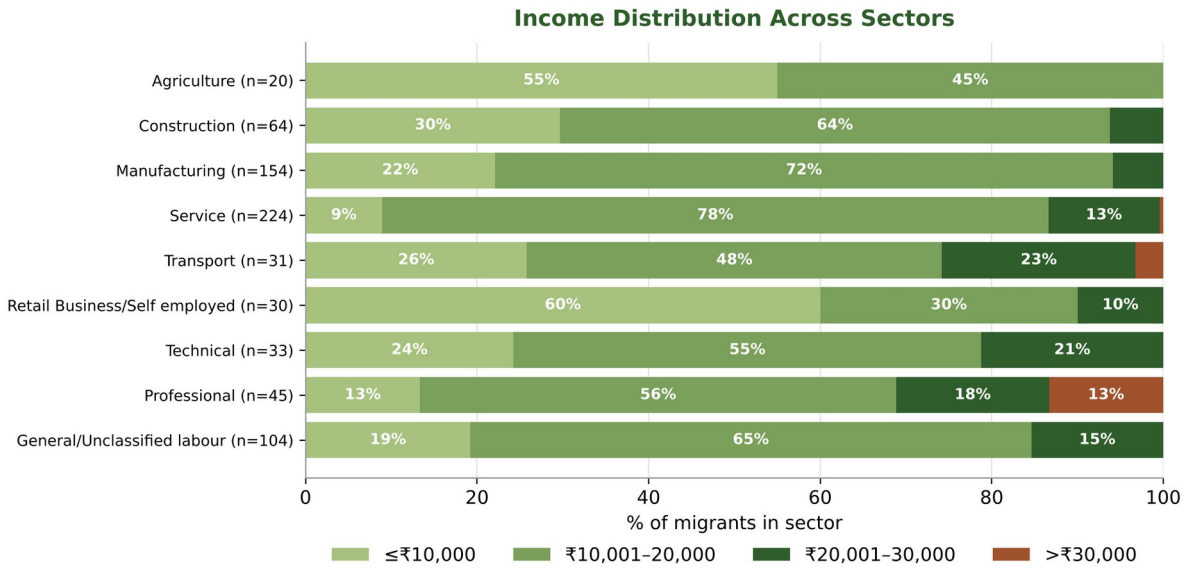


Fig 29. Income distribution across sectors

Most workers across sectors are concentrated in the ₹10,000-20,000 range, showing that this is the typical earning level for the majority. Lower incomes (≤₹10,000) are still quite common, especially in retail and self-employment (60%), agriculture (55%) and construction (30%), reflecting more vulnerable or unstable work. Only a small share moves into the ₹20,000-30,000 bracket, most often in transport (23%), technical (21%) and professional (18%) roles, while earnings above ₹30,000 are rare (8 migrants) and mostly found in professional work (6). Overall, the pattern suggests that despite working across different sectors, most people remain in moderate to low-income brackets with limited upward mobility.

Harris and Todaro (1970) predict that people migrate in response to the expected, not the actual, income gap: the wage at the destination multiplied by the chance of finding work there, compared with what can be earned at home. The gap facing these migrants is large. The median migrant earns Rs 15,000 a month (Table 10), about Rs 575 for each of 26 working days, against notified MGNREGA wage rates for 2025–26 of Rs 256 a day in Assam and Tripura and Rs 272 in Meghalaya (Ministry of Rural Development, 2025). Guaranteed local work was also capped at 100 days per household per year: a migrant earning Rs 10,000 a month for ten months earns nearly four times the Rs 25,600 a household could earn from the full entitlement in Assam. The same notification set rates of Rs 370 in Karnataka and Rs 336 in Tamil Nadu, so wage floors in the two main southern destinations were roughly 25–45% higher than in the source states. This is consistent with, though not proof of, the strong pull these states exert.

The model's account of destination choice cannot be tested fully with the present tables. Table 16 reports income by sector, not by destination, and the survey did not collect local agricultural wage rates by district. Tabulating migrant earnings by destination state and comparing them with district agricultural wages (for example, from the Labour Bureau's *Wage Rates in Rural India* series) would show whether the expected income gap explains why Karnataka and Tamil Nadu draw more migrants than Guwahati, or whether networks (Section 7.3) do more of the work. The local side of the gap is also changing: from 1 July 2026 the rural employment guarantee was replaced by the VB-G RAM G Act, with a notified rate of Rs 300 a day in Assam and a guarantee of 125 days (Ministry of Rural Development, 2026).

11.2 Income Group and How they are paid

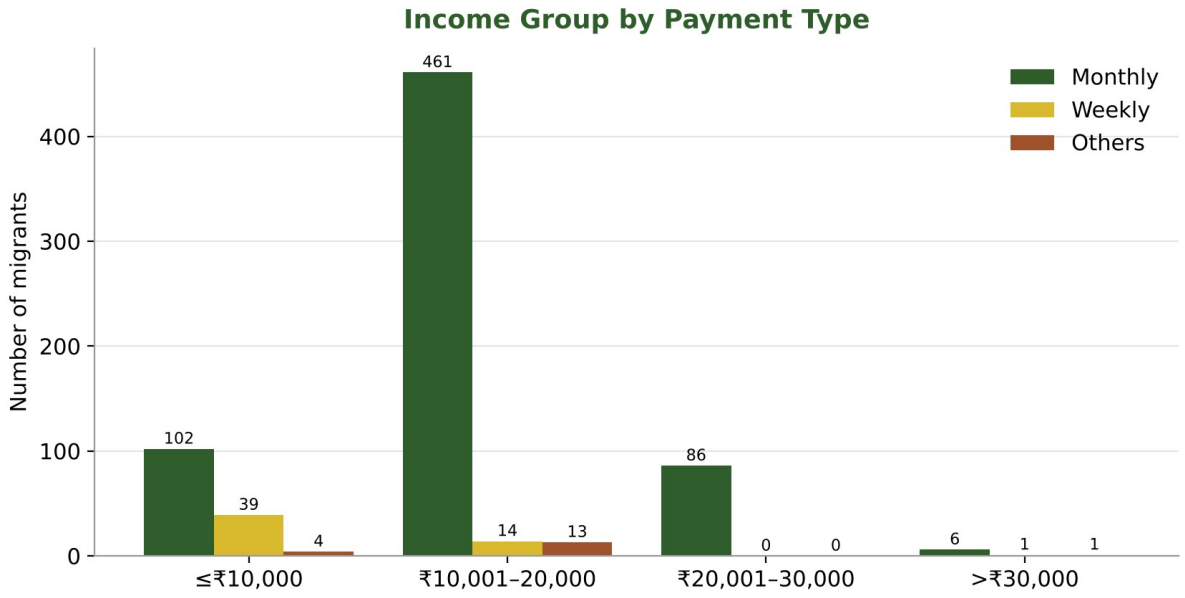


Fig 30. Income group by payment type

The distribution of income groups and payment patterns reflects the employment structure and wage stability among migrant workers. The data shows that most workers fall within the Rs. 10000-Rs. 20000 income bracket with a large proportion receiving monthly payments. This indicates that many migrant workers are engaged in semi-regular employment arrangements where wages are structured but still remain modest, reflecting the nature of informal or contract-based labour systems. A considerable number of workers earning up to Rs.10000 receive wages through mixed payment methods such as monthly, weekly or other irregular modes. This pattern depicts the presence of flexible work arrangements where payment depends on the availability of work or employer practices rather than fixed wage systems. The existence of weekly and other payment methods also reflects the dominance of daily wage and short-term contract labour among migrant workers.

Furthermore, most workers rely on monthly payments as the primary wage system across income categories. This indicates a shift towards slightly structured employment conditions; however, it does not necessarily ensure income security as many workers remain dependent on contractors or middlemen for wage distribution.

11.3. Skill Development

11.3.1 Skill trainings received under different sector of work

Therefore the data indicates that most workers rely on traditional or unskilled labour with very limited formal skill development. The low level of training participation highlights the need for improved access to vocational education and skill building programmes which could enhance employment opportunities and improve level of income.

Suggestions: a. Income Sections:

11.3.2 Income Distribution Across Sector of Work and Nature of Migration:

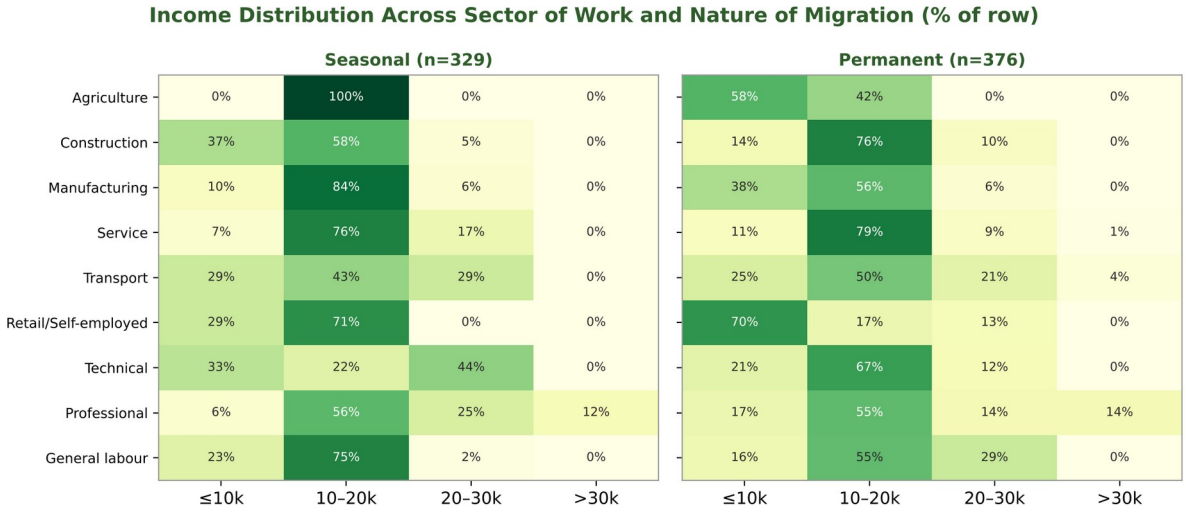


Fig 31. Income distribution across sector of work and nature of migration

Wages are low and tightly bunched: 87% of migrants who reported a salary earn Rs 20,000 a month or less, and only 8 earn above Rs 30,000, mostly in professional work. Most are paid monthly, but lower earners are more often paid weekly or irregularly, and many depend on contractors or middlemen to receive their wages. The survey does not record wages by recruitment channel, so the clearest route to higher pay it shows is skill: the sectors with the most training (professional, technical and transport) are also those with the largest share earning above Rs 20,000.

12. Conclusion

Which local livelihood and skilling pathways could make migration a choice rather than a compulsion, and for whom?

12.1 Synthesis of key findings

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of migration dynamics across selected districts of Assam, Meghalaya, and Tripura, revealing migration as a deeply embedded livelihood strategy shaped primarily by structural economic constraints rather than voluntary mobility. The findings demonstrate that migration from the Northeast is overwhelmingly labour-driven, male-dominated, and necessity-oriented, with most households relying on migration as a means of income stabilization and risk diversification.

The analysis shows that migration is largely individual rather than household-based, with single-migrant households forming the dominant pattern across districts. Inter-state migration constitutes the majority of mobility flows, particularly toward economically developed southern and urban regions such as Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and major metropolitan centers. Migration is strongly concentrated among the prime working-age population (25-30 years), indicating its close linkage with labour market participation.

Gender analysis reveals significant differences in migration motivations. Male migration is overwhelmingly employment-oriented, while female migration reflects a combination of work, family responsibilities, and social factors. Although women represent a smaller share of migrants, their participation signals emerging shifts in gendered mobility patterns, particularly in districts with expanding employment exposure.

Push factors dominate migration decisions: nine in ten migrants cite at least one push factor, and only 8 percent migrate for pull factors alone. Lack of local employment opportunities, land insecurity, and financial stress emerge as the primary drivers, confirming migration as a coping mechanism rooted in rural livelihood vulnerability rather than aspirational relocation.

12.2 Linkages between migration drivers and source area development potential

The findings highlight a strong relationship between migration patterns and structural development gaps in source regions. Limited livelihood diversification, fragmented landholdings, low agricultural productivity, and inadequate access to skill training collectively constrain local economic opportunities. These conditions compel households to depend on external labour markets for survival. However, the dependence on migration also indicates unrealized development potential within source regions. District variations suggest that areas with stronger institutional access, better connectivity, or diversified economic activities exhibit different migration patterns. This implies that targeted local development interventions could reduce distress migration while strengthening sustainable livelihoods within the region.

Strengthening local value chains, especially in agriculture and allied sectors, presents a viable pathway to reduce distress-driven migration.

Potential livelihood activities that can be beneficial for the migrants to not migrate can be:

·Promotion of small-scale agro-processing units such as ginger drying, pickle making, fruit processing, spice grinding, and honey packaging to create value addition at the village level.

· Expansion of horticulture and high-value crop cultivation including GI-linked products, medicinal plants, organic vegetables, arecanut, turmeric, and bamboo-based farming systems.

· Strengthening livestock and allied sectors such as poultry, piggery, goat rearing, fisheries, and backyard dairy activities, particularly for women and smallholder households.

· Development of community-based enterprises including weaving, handicrafts, bamboo crafts, clay products, traditional food processing, and eco-friendly rural products.

· Promotion of eco-tourism, agro-tourism, and homestay-based livelihoods in culturally and ecologically significant regions to generate local service-sector employment.

· Creation of decentralized rural service enterprises such as repair workshops, mobile servicing, transportation support, tailoring, carpentry, and local construction-based skilled work.

· Youth-led entrepreneurship through access to digital platforms, e-commerce linkages, start-up support, and local market incubation initiatives.

· Strengthening women's self-help groups (SHGs) and producer collectives for collective production, marketing, and financial inclusion.

· Expansion of skill development programmes aligned with local economic opportunities including food processing, packaging, digital services, hospitality, electrical work, and rural enterprise management.

· Improving access to institutional credit, storage facilities, market information systems, and local procurement networks to enhance income security and reduce dependency on informal migration channels.

In conclusion, migration in the Northeast region reflects a structural livelihood adaptation shaped by economic necessity, regional inequality, and limited local opportunities. While migration provides critical income support for households, it simultaneously exposes workers to informal labour markets, limited social protection, and occupational vulnerabilities.

Addressing migration challenges therefore requires a dual strategy: improving migrant welfare at destinations while simultaneously strengthening local economic ecosystems, value chains, and employment opportunities within source regions. Sustainable regional development, inclusive skill ecosystems, and diversified rural livelihoods hold the key to reducing distress migration and enabling more secure and dignified mobility pathways.

12.3 Recommendations matrix: linking interventions to migrant profiles

The recommendations above are most useful when each is tied to the migrants it is meant to reach. Table 17 links each recommendation to a migrant profile identified in this study, the districts where that profile is concentrated, the institutional gap the findings point to, an existing scheme or legal provision that can be used, and an intervention model that connects them. The aim is to work through schemes that already exist rather than to create new ones: in most cases the gap is not the absence of a scheme but the absence of a link between the scheme and the migrant.

Migrant profile	Districts	Gap (evidence from this study)	Scheme or lever	Intervention model
Young men recruited by contractors into construction and general labour	Dhubri	Recruitment, terms and wages run through contractors: 92 of 115 Dhubri migrants found work this way. Construction has the weakest benefits of any large sector (3.1% receive medical care, 1.5% paid leave).	Construction workers' welfare board registration; e-Shram; OSH Code 2020 provisions for inter-state migrant workers (appointment letters, annual journey allowance, self-registration), in force since November 2025	Block-level migration resource centre: pre-departure registration, a record of contractor and employer details, and a grievance link to the labour department at the destination
Network-recruited migrants in factory and service work in southern states	Dhemaji; Baksa (out-of-state migrants)	Work is found almost entirely through family and friends (110 of 111 in Dhemaji, 98 of 100 in Baksa). Entitlements stay at home: only 254 of 770 migrants receive rations and 130 paid leave at the destination.	One Nation One Ration Card; Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY portability; e-Shram	Source–destination corridor partnership with an NGO or employer helpdesk in Bengaluru, Chennai or Kerala, using existing networks to spread information on portable entitlements
Women migrants in factory, service and care work, including women with skill training	Kamrup Rural, Ri-Bhoi	Largest concentrations of women migrants (55 and 25). FGDs describe unsafe housing, harassment and limited mobility, which the proxy-reported survey largely misses (Section 3.7). Women are more often trained (31.3%) than men (9.4%).	DDU-GKY post-placement support and tracking; Sakhi Niwas (working women's hostels) under Mission Shakti	Placement tracking for trained women, linked to safe hostel or shared housing at the destination and a helpline contact given before departure
Left-behind women in spouse-managed households	All districts, especially Dhemaji and Dhubri, where migration is almost entirely male	Responsibilities shift to spouses: 37.7% of spouse-managed households report a role change. Remittances are regular (83.3% monthly), but borrowing is mostly for consumption and old debts (Table 6).	State rural livelihood missions under DAY-NRLM (ASRLM in Assam, MSRLS in Meghalaya, TRLM in Tripura); VB-G RAM G, which replaced MGNREGA from July 2026	SHG-based enterprise and financial-literacy package for remittance-receiving households: savings and remittance planning, credit linkage, and work that fits care responsibilities
Marginal landholders who would return if local work paid enough	Nagaon, North Garo Hills, Baksa	82% of households hold 5 bigha or less. Migrants express a wish to return to farm, business or skilled work if incomes were viable, but lack value-chain links, storage and credit.	PM-FME (one district one product); PMEGP; FPO promotion	Agro-processing clusters linked to crops already grown (e.g. ginger, turmeric, arecanut, bamboo), with FPO aggregation and PMEGP credit for returning migrants

Table 17: Recommendations matrix by migrant profile, district, gap and scheme

Three points qualify the matrix. First, the district assignments follow the clearest patterns in the data, such as contractor recruitment in Dhubri, network recruitment in Dhemaji and Baksa, and the concentration of women migrants in Kamrup Rural and Ri-Bhoi; they indicate where to start, not where each profile is found exclusively. The assignment of returning landholders to Nagaon, North Garo Hills and Baksa rests on qualitative evidence

about aspirations and should be confirmed with district-level data before resources are committed.

Second, the policy context has changed since the survey. The four labour codes came into force on 21 November 2025, bringing the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, the Contract Labour Act and the construction workers' law within the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, which widens the definition of inter-state migrant workers to include those who migrate on their own. From 1 July 2026 the VB-G RAM G Act replaced MGNREGA, with higher wage rates and a guarantee of 125 days. Both changes create new entry points, but their value to migrants from these districts depends on registration and awareness at the source, which is what the migration resource centre in the first row is designed to provide.

Third, the interventions reinforce each other. Registration at a block-level resource centre makes portable entitlements and corridor helpdesks usable; placement tracking for women depends on the same records; and SHG-based enterprise support and agro-processing clusters are the local alternatives that, if they earn close to the Rs 10,000–20,000 a month most migrants now earn away from home, can make migration a choice rather than a compulsion.

12.4 Skilling and migration outcomes: two tracks

Earlier sections of this report present skill development as a way to reduce distress migration. That claim needs qualifying. The main placement-linked scheme, DDU-GKY, trains rural youth and places them in formal salaried jobs, often in other states; in a panel study of DDU-GKY trainees from Bihar and Jharkhand, most of those placed in salaried jobs were working outside their home state (Chakravorty et al., 2023). DDU-GKY courses are among the forms of training most often reported by migrants in this study (Section 7.5). Where training leads to a placement outside the state, skilling changes the type of migration, from informal movement organised through networks or contractors towards formal, placement-led movement, rather than reducing it. That can be a good outcome if it raises wages and protections, but it should be described as such and not counted as a reduction in migration. This report therefore proposes two distinct tracks, each with its own aim and measure of success.

Evidence base. The choice between tracks should rest on the relationship between training and earnings. The survey can show this for individual migrants by cross-tabulating training against monthly income group, as set out in Table 19. Trained migrants earn more: 20.7% of those with training earn above Rs 20,000, compared with 11.9% of those without, and their median monthly earning is about Rs 17,800 against Rs 15,000. The sector-level figures point the same way (Table 18, which combines Tables 9 and 16). Sectors with more training tend to have more migrants earning above Rs 20,000: professional, technical and transport work combine the highest training coverage (24–31%) with the largest shares of higher earners (21–31%), while agriculture, retail and general labour have almost no training. Across the nine sectors, the correlation between training coverage and the share earning above Rs 20,000 is about 0.8.

Sector of work	Received skill training (%)	Earning above Rs 20,000 (%)	Earning up to Rs 10,000 (%)
Professional	31.1	31.1	13.3
Technical	30.3	21.2	24.2
Transport	24.2	25.8	25.8

Sector of work	Received skill training (%)	Earning above Rs 20,000 (%)	Earning up to Rs 10,000 (%)
Construction	18.5	6.3	29.7
Service	9.8	13.4	8.9
Manufacturing	5.2	5.8	22.1
Retail business / self-employed	3.3	10.0	60.0
General / unclassified labour	1.9	15.4	19.2
Agriculture	0.0	0.0	55.0
All migrants	**11.6**	**12.9**	**19.9**

Table 18: Training coverage and earnings by sector of work (training from Table 9; income from Table 16, migrants reporting a salary)

Construction is the exception that matters most for policy. Nearly one in five construction migrants has been trained, mainly in masonry, yet only 6.3% earn above Rs 20,000, which suggests that training without recognised certification does little to raise pay. Two cautions apply to the evidence as a whole. Neither the sector-level pattern nor the individual comparison in Table 19 shows that training raises the earnings of individuals, because better-educated workers may be more likely both to obtain training and to enter better-paid sectors. And women, who are more often trained than men (31.3% against 9.4%), have the same median earnings (Rs 15,000), which suggests that training is not yet translating into higher pay for women.

Group	Up to Rs 10,000	Rs 10,001–20,000	Rs 20,001–30,000	Above Rs 30,000	Median (Rs)	n
Received skill training	13	52	13	4	17,800	82
No skill training	132	437	73	4	15,000	646
Trained: construction and manufacturing	7	11	2	0	15,000	20
Trained: women	3	11	2	3	16,000	19
All migrants reporting a salary	145	489	86	8	15,000	728

Table 19: Skill training and monthly income (migrants who reported a salary)

Note: Migrants who reported a salary (n = 728). The groups for trained construction and manufacturing workers and for trained women are small, so their figures should be read as indicative.

Track 1: better migration. For migrants who will continue to work away from home, skilling should aim to raise wages and reduce risk rather than to keep people at home. Three measures follow from the findings. First, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) under PMKVY can certify the skills that construction and factory workers have learned on the job, so that a mason or machine operator can claim a skilled rather than an unskilled wage; construction and manufacturing together account for 220 migrants in this study, of whom only 20 have received any training. Second, safety training, linked to employers' obligations under the OSH Code, responds directly to the hazards reported in Section 10.3, where harsh conditions and unsafe tools are concentrated in manufacturing and construction. Third, certification should be tied to wage outcomes: courses and RPL assessments should be chosen for trades in which certified workers demonstrably earn more at the main destinations, and the migration resource centres and corridor partnerships proposed in Table 17 can carry certificates and placement records with the worker.

Track 2: local livelihoods. For households that would rather earn at home, training should be tied to the value chains identified in Section 12.2 rather than to generic placement. Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETIs), which operate in most districts, and the enterprise programmes of the state rural livelihood missions (ASRLM, MSRLS and TRLM) can train for agro-processing, livestock, handloom, bamboo work and rural services, with credit and market linkages built into the course. This is the track that can reduce migration, but only where the enterprise earns close to what migration pays: most migrants earn Rs 10,000–20,000 a month, and a local alternative that earns much less will not hold them. It is also the track best suited to women in left-behind households and to returning landholders (Table 17, rows 4 and 5).

Tracking placement and retention as the basis for scaling up. Neither track should be expanded on the basis of the number of people trained. The measure of success for Track 1 is whether a trainee is placed, where, at what wage, and whether they are still employed after three, six and twelve months; for Track 2 it is whether the enterprise is still operating, and what it earns, after a year. We propose that the block-level migration resource centre (Table 17) keep a simple record for every trainee covering the scheme and course; placement status and location (home district, elsewhere in the state, or another state); starting wage; employment status at three, six and twelve months; and, for Track 2, enterprise status and monthly income, drawing on the placement data that DDU-GKY and PMKVY already collect and adding follow-up where it is missing. Recording location would show, for the first time, how far skilling in these districts changes migration rather than reducing it. Trades and programmes that show good retention and earnings should be expanded; those that do not should be redesigned before more people are trained. All tracking should be disaggregated by gender, given the evidence that women's training is not yet translating into higher pay.

The pathways with the best fit are those that build on what source households already have: agro-processing, high-value horticulture, livestock and SHG-based enterprises suit the many households with small plots and the women who manage them while men are away. Skilling tied to local demand, with access to credit, storage and markets, suits younger people and the nearly nine in ten migrants who entered work without any training. These options can make migration a choice only if they come close to the Rs 10,000–20,000 a month that most migrants now earn away from home.

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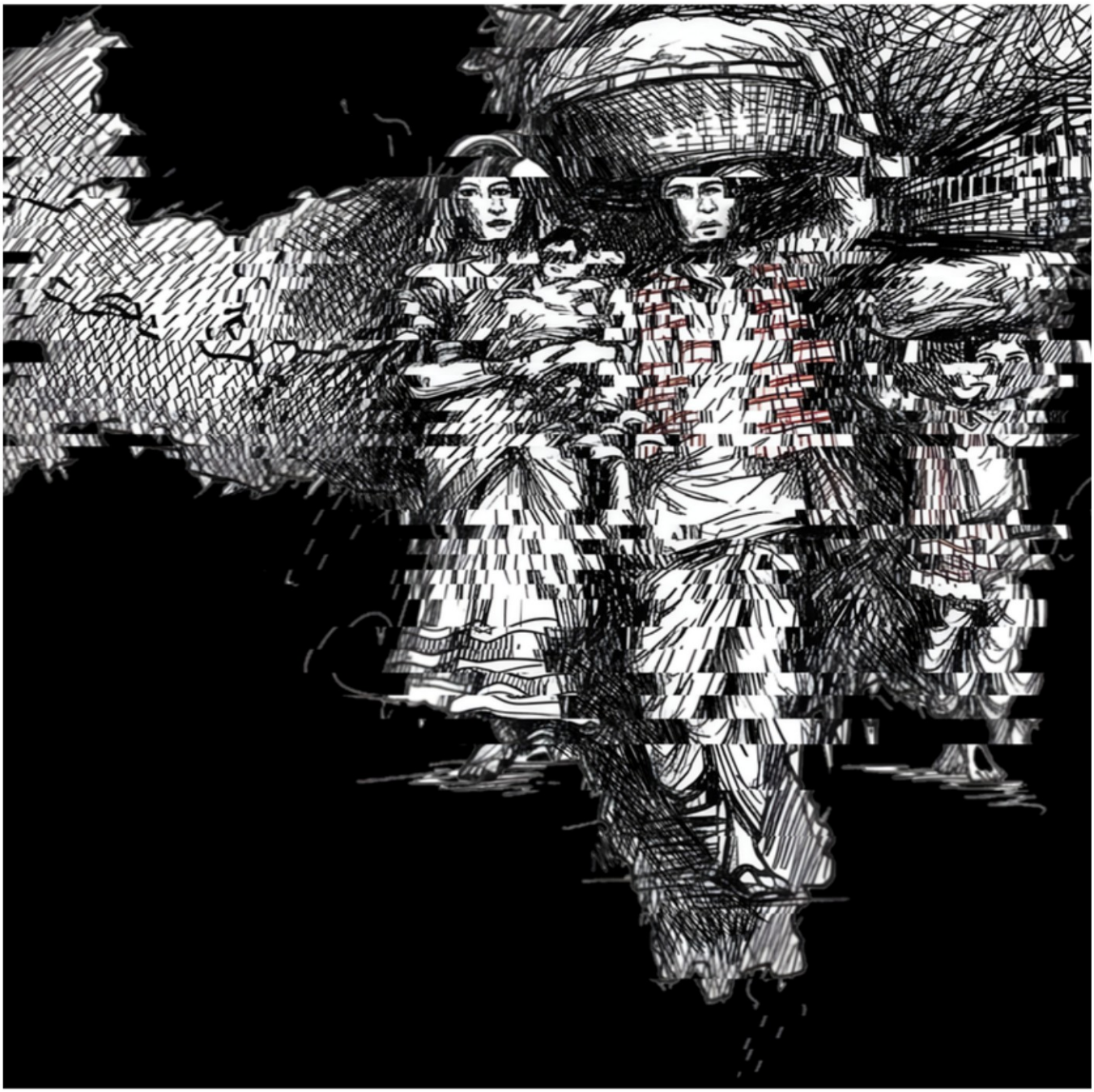
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