

## 17. MIGRATION

17.1 Migration from Kerala to the other states in India and to countries outside has now become so rampant that its impact is felt in every aspect of life in the State. This is a relatively recent development, having peaked up during the past quarter of a century. Kerala had remained till about the 1940s basically a non-migrating population.

17.2 After World War II and with the Indian Independence in 1947, migration became a way of life to many of the educated youths of the State. At first, migration was almost entirely confined to states within India, but in more recent times migration to countries outside India has grown rapidly. At present emigration has become all-pervasive in the economic and social life in the State and outpaced migration within India. Almost all families in Kerala are affected by migration to the Gulf region in one way or another. Migration is affecting every facet of life in Kerala, economic, social, demographic, political and even religious.

17.3 Migration has been the single most dynamic factor in the otherwise dreary development scenario of Kerala in the last quarter of the last century. Migration has contributed more to poverty alleviation and reduction in unemployment in Kerala than any other factor. As a result of migration, the proportion of population under the poverty line has declined by 12 per cent. The number of unemployed persons – estimated to be only about 13 lakhs in 1998 as against 37 lakhs reported the Kerala Employment Exchanges – has declined by over 30 per cent. Kerala is becoming too much depended on migration for employment, subsistence, housing, household amenities, institution building, and many other developmental activities. Migration has caused nearly a million married women in Kerala to live away from their husbands

17.4 Migration is an unconventional form of development. Unconventional or not, as far as Kerala is concerned, migration is undoubtedly its most productive “industry”, “employing” nearly 2 million persons directly and 7-8 million family members indirectly. Its spin-off effects extend to every facet of life in Kerala, and even outside Kerala to the producers of consumer goods and construction materials all over India. It is the least capital-intensive of undertakings with a minimum of environmental hazards but subject to a very high degree of international competition. Migrants’ remittances in 2000 was about Rs 14000 crores, about 23 percent of the state’s GDP, and 10 times what the state had received by way of budget support from the Central Government. It was about fourteen times the export earnings from the state’s seafood industries (Rs 1000 crore approximately) and 20 times that from export of spices from the state (Rs 570 crore approximately), the two most acclaimed export sectors in Kerala. Like most other industries in the state, migration is facing problems. Migration deserves as much, if not more, nurture than any other industrial sector in the state. It requires continuous technical up-gradation as all other industries do.

17.5 Kerala Migrants fall into four categories: **emigrants (emi)** or usual residents of a household who had migrated out of Kerala and were living outside India; **return emigrants (rem)** or usual members of a household who had returned to Kerala after

living outside India for a year or more; or for a lesser period, if the stay outside was for the purpose of studies or looking for a job; **out-migrants (omi)** or usual residents of a household who migrated out of Kerala and were living outside Kerala but within India and **return out-migrants (rom)** or usual members of a household who had returned to Kerala after living outside Kerala but within India for a year or more; or for a lesser period, if the stay was for the purpose of studies or looking for a job.

17.6 Table 17.1 gives the volume of migration by four types for the districts and for the State as a whole. At the state level, there were 3.75 million migrants. With an estimated 6.35 million households in 1998, this number works out to about 60 migrants for every 100 households. Some households have more than one migrant, and, therefore, the figure 60 percent does not imply that that 60 percent of the households have a migrant each. In fact, the percent of households with at least one migrant is much less.

**Table 17.1: Migration Estimates by Districts**

Districts	Rem	Emi	Rom	Omi	Emi +Omi	Rem +Rom	All
Thiruvananthapuram	118,878	130,705	95,709	58,282	188,987	214,587	403,574
Kollam	74,106	102,977	83,759	71,300	174,278	157,864	332,142
Pathanamthitta	54,537	97,505	52,034	86,485	183,989	106,571	290,560
Alappuzha	34,572	62,870	160,481	89,523	152,393	195,053	347,446
Kottayam	18,164	35,494	49,220	37,722	73,216	67,383	140,599
Idukki	5,017	7,390	7,546	9,128	16,518	12,564	29,081
Ernakulam	45,028	103,750	45,272	34,205	137,955	90,300	228,255
Thrissur	116,788	161,102	193,238	85,663	246,765	310,026	556,791
Palakkad	39,238	116,062	117,891	73,220	189,282	157,129	346,411
Malappuram	123,750	296,710	26,655	23,823	320,532	150,405	470,937
Kozhikode	60,9101	16,026	50,211	28,340	144,366	111,121	255,486
Wayanad	3,327	4,552	20,436	2,618	7,170	23,763	30,933
Kannur	28,263	88,065	34,176	46,015	134,080	62,440	196,520
Kasargode	16,667	38,747	22,198	45,371	84,119	38,865	122,984
KERALA	739,245	1,361,954	958,826	691,695	2,053,649	1,698,071	3,751,720

17.7 The number of migrants varies considerably from district to district. The largest number of migrants was in Thrissur District with 557 thousand persons. The neighbouring district, Malappuram is not far behind with 471 thousand. Thiruvananthapuram comes third with 404 thousand. The lowest number was in Idukki with only 29 thousand migrants. Wayanad had a marginally high number, 31 thousand migrants.

17.8 An overall measure of the impact of migration on the Kerala households is given by Migration Prevalence Rate (MRP) which is the ratio of the sum of all the four types of migrants (emi+omi+rem+rom) in an area (district, taluk, etc) to the number of households in the area. Thrissur district loses its first rank to Pathanamthitta district when migration

rates are considered. In this district, the total number of migrants is almost the same as the number of households, the MPR being 99 percent. On the other hand, the two hilly districts of Idukki and Wyanad have very small migration prevalence rates of 12 percent and 20 per cent respectively. Pathanamthitta, Thrissur, Malappuram, Alappuzha, Palakkad and Thiruvananthapuram have MPRs higher than the state average (of 59 per cent); all the remaining districts have less than the average.

17.9 Till about the end of 1960s, out-migration was the principal component of migration from the State. But since then emigration has overtaken out-migration. As noted earlier, the estimated total number of emigrants from the State in 1998 is 1,362 thousand.

**Table 17.2: Estimated Number of Annual Emigrants and Outmigrants 1980-1998**

Year	EMI	OMI
Before 1980	35038	17830
1980	11679	10452
1981	31794	26438
1982	33741	15986
1983	40878	23979
1984	25954	9223
1985	38932	16601
1986	42825	21519
1987	22061	9223
1988	77863	38735
1989	28550	17830
1990	89542	42424
1991	49313	22134
1992	85649	38735
1993	113550	44883
1994	112253	60254
1995	128474	48572
1996	145993	85463
1997	155726	73781
1998*	92138	67832
Total	1361954	691694

- The data for 1998 are only for part of the year.

17.10 Until now, emigration from the state has been on a fast track, each year sending out more emigrants from the state than it did in the previous year. Table 17.2 gives the number of emigrants by year of emigration as estimated from the present study, show that the number of emigrants increased very rapidly in recent years, from 313 thousand in 1988-92 to 692 thousand in 1993-97, an increase of 120 percent. These numbers support the earlier finding that emigration from Kerala has more than doubled since the Kuwaiti war of 1990-91.

17.11 Data on the stock of Indian migrants in West Asian countries supplied by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India, support the prevailing impression of a very large increase in the number of emigrants from India in recent years. The number of emigrant workers from India has increased from about 0.5 million in 1979 to 1.2 million in 1990 and to about 2.8 million in 1996. They are underestimates because of attrition caused by return migration and deaths. In the circumstances, it may be confidently stated that emigration from Kerala has indeed accelerated considerably since the Kuwaiti War of 1990-91. Even when the number of return emigrants are added to the number of emigrants each year, the steep increase of emigrants persists.

17.12 The Arab countries of the Middle East were the destination of nearly 95 percent of the emigrants from Kerala. Saudi Arabia alone accounted for nearly forty percent, in 1998. The next destination is the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Outside the Arab world, the principal destination was the United States of America and it accounts for 2.2 percent of the total (Table 17.3). The country of destination of emigrants varies with the district of their origin. For example, about 38 percent of the emigrants went to Saudi Arabia; but as much as 57 percent of the emigrants from Malappuram, 51 percent from Kottayam and 50 percent from Ernakulam went to this destination. On the other hand, only 23 percent of the Pathanamthitta emigrants chose Saudi Arabia as their destination. For emigration from Pathanamthitta and Idukki, a major destination was the USA.

**Table 17.3: Countries of Destination of Emigration**

Country	Emigrants	
	Percent	Numbers (in thousand)
Saudi Arabia	38.1	519
United Arab Emirates	29.7	405
Muscat	8.0	109
Baharin	5.7	77
Kuwait	5.1	69
Quatar	4.7	64
Oman	2.4	33
USA	2.2	30
Others	1.8	57
Total	100	1,363