

## A study on migrant workers in Tamilnadu

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### Abstract

This study analyses the conditions and challenges faced by migrant workers in the Tiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu, India. It highlights the socio-economic factors driving interstate migration, including economic inequalities, urbanization, and lack of employment opportunities. The research reveals that a significant number of migrant workers, primarily from states like Odisha, Bihar, and Jharkhand, are employed in the construction and manufacturing sectors, often under poor working conditions and low wages. The study employs secondary data from the Inter-State Migrant Workers (Regulation of Conditions of Employment and Service) Act,<sup>6</sup> 1979, and other sources to assess the demographics, employment sectors, and living conditions of these workers. Key findings indicate that while Tiruvallur offers diverse employment opportunities, migrant workers face numerous challenges, including exploitation, lack of legal protection, and inadequate access to basic amenities. The study emphasizes the need for improved policies and support systems to safeguard the rights and welfare of migrant workers, advocating for collaboration between government, NGOs, and the community to enhance their living and working conditions.

**Key words :** Interstate migrant, Economic situation, Causes of migration, Tiruvallur, Migrant worker contributions by departments.

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India's interstate migration is driven by economic inequalities and urbanization, with Tamil Nadu having over 34.87 lakh migrants in 2011, predominantly workers, including a significant number of women. Migration impacts 45.6 million people, with female migrants outnumbering males. Immigrant women face higher unemployment due to language, qualification recognition, discrimination, and childcare barriers. In Tiruvallur district, migrant workers from states like Bihar, Odisha, and Assam, often from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, face low wages, long hours, and inadequate living conditions in construction and manufacturing. Many belong to marginalized communities and lack access to education and land rights in their home regions. These workers often lack basic amenities and reside in cramped, unsanitary accommodation, affecting their health. They are also exposed to exploitation. Initiatives like the Mobile Migrant Workers Facilitation Center in Tiruvallur aim to inform migrant workers about their rights and government schemes.

*Objectives :*

- (a) To know about in-migrant workers in Tamil Nadu from other states of India.
- (b) Analyzing the contribution of registered migrant workers sector-wise in Tiruvallur district.

*Statements of the problem :*

Workers migrate from their homes due to poor economic growth, limited farming land, caste discrimination, and a lack of jobs and fair wages. Many migrant workers have recently moved to India, particularly to Tiruvallur,

which offers various job opportunities but lacks facilities, job stability, and safe working environments. Issues like missing contracts, weak organization, low bargaining power, no legal protections, and inadequate welfare measures need attention, leaving workers vulnerable to mistreatment and lacking legal support.

*Scope and significance of the study :*

The socio-economic conditions of inter-state migrants are to be understood; their livelihood and economic development are to be ensured. Therefore, it is a fundamental duty to understand their basic needs and ensure their social security. Furthermore, when people move from one place to another, it is necessary to ensure that their needs are met and basic facilities are available. It is the duty of the states to ensure the benefits, employment and economic cooperation provided to them.

*Overview of Reviewed literature and Research Gap :*

The literature on Interstate migration of people from one place to another due to social development, economic development, marriage, education, natural disasters, political changes, etc. The study Interstate migrant workers in India, analyzing demographic trends, socio-economic motivations, employment, and living situations. It also evaluated the legal protections provided by the Interstate Migrant Workers Act,<sup>6</sup> 1979, and the difficulties encountered, especially within the informal sector. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing structural weaknesses, causing widespread return migration, joblessness, and hardship. The study recommends an integrated,

rights-based policy approach to mitigate economic and social vulnerabilities, which includes reinforcing legislation, enhancing social welfare initiatives, and establishing up-to-date data collection systems. Kumar, Manoj, *et.al.*<sup>4</sup> have studied the living realities of interstate migrant workers in India, focusing on demographic patterns, socio-economic drivers, occupations and living conditions. It assesses legal protections under the Interstate Migrant Workers Act,<sup>6</sup> 1979, and its challenges, particularly in the informal sector. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted structural weaknesses, leading to large-scale reverse migration, unemployment and human suffering. The study advocates for an integrated, rights-based policy framework to address economic and social vulnerabilities, including strengthening laws, expanding social welfare programmes and developing real-time data systems. Alvarado, *et.al.*,<sup>1</sup> have studied the business migration is a significant form of labour migration, primarily involving intra-corporate transferees, service providers, and business visitors. This type of migration is facilitated by trade agreements and national laws, allowing migrants to temporarily stay in their home countries and maintain their employment contracts. This understudied migration, which accounts for almost half of all regulated labour migration within Switzerland, is strongly associated with trade and investment relations and multinational corporations. In contrast, trade agreements that facilitate this type of labour migration have no formal effect.<sup>3</sup> This research examines the challenges faced by interstate migrant workers in India, focusing on their migration, job sectors, obstacles, legal safeguards, and government efforts. Despite the Interstate Migrant Workers Act of 1979,

enforcement remains patchy, and many workers remain uninformed. The study emphasizes the need for reliable data and research to influence policy choices and improve the lives of these workers<sup>6</sup>.

Secondary data of a descriptive and analytical nature are collected for the purpose of the study only and are taken from the data of workers registered in the Department of Labour as per the Inter-State Migrant Workers (Regulation of Conditions of Employment and Service) Act, 1979 - Online Portal Registration till Oct 2025, and are also collected from newspapers, magazines, and websites. It examines the people who have migrated to Tamil Nadu from other states and where the majority of the displaced people have migrated by district in Tamil Nadu, as well as the reasons and opportunities for this.

*In migrant workers in Tamilnadu from various state of India:*

Migrant workers from other states have been welcomed into Tamil Nadu and are still registered in the Inter-State Migrant Portal (MIS). The table-1 below shows that the highest numbers of people are from Odisha (23.40%), Bihar (20.62%), Jharkhand (16.42%), West Bengal (16.00%), Uttar Pradesh (7.39%), Assam (7.34%), respectively. Tamil Nadu is a developed state in India. It is a district that generates or provides high income in all types of employment opportunities. Tamil Nadu is also a social security and economic development state. Most of the migrant workers who have come to Tamil Nadu from North India are registered in the MIS portal. The state and district administrations are taking awareness measures for those who have not

Table-1. In-migrant workers in Tamil Nadu from various state of India.

S. No	State	Migrant Workers	Percentage
1	Odisha	298312	23.40%
2	Bihar	262947	20.62%
3	Jharkhand	209289	16.42%
4	West Bengal	204007	16.00%
5	Uttar Pradesh	94279	7.39%
6	Assam	93602	7.34%
7	Others	112540	8.83%
	Total	1274976	100.00%

*Source* : Tiruvallur District labour Department Govt. of Tamil Nadu. (<https://labour.tn.gov.in/ism/users/login>).

registered and ensuring their safety. They also inform them of the privileges and powers that can be obtained through it.

*District wise in-migrant workers of Tamil Nadu :*

Table-2 shows the number of migrant workers from various states coming to Tamil Nadu for employment and other needs such as education, marriage, etc. Tamil Nadu has consistently achieved growth rates of 8% or more since 2021-22. The state's progressive social policies, strong infrastructure facilities and large skilled workforce have helped it establish itself on a high economic growth trajectory. Tamil Nadu's economic growth is spread evenly across several urban centres, with cities like Coimbatore, Madurai, Tirupur, Tiruchirappalli and Salem contributing significantly to the state's economy. The services sector contributed 53.63% to the state's Gross State Value Added (GSVA), followed by the secondary sector (33.37%) and the primary sector (13%). The state has set a

target of achieving a \$1 trillion economy by 2030 through strategic planning to address challenges such as climate change, demographic shifts, technological disruptions and changing employment landscapes.

Tamil Nadu also plays a major role in India's agricultural sector, with the country's manufacturing contributing 11.90% of the country's GDP, and leading in the number of factories. Tamil Nadu is also a major hub for textiles, leather goods and electronics manufacturing, with 33.31% of its workforce engaged in industrial activities in 2023-24. The service sector is diverse, encompassing trade, repair, hotels and restaurants, transportation, storage, communication, financial services, real estate and more. The state is known for its IT and IT-related services, education, healthcare, finance, tourism, and hospitality and entertainment industries. The state ranks among the top three states in several social indicators, including low infant mortality, birth rate and poverty levels.

Table-2. District wise in-migrant workers of Tamil Nadu

S.No	District	In migrant workers	Percentage
1	Tirupur	206332	17.75
2	Kancheepuram	157407	13.54
3	Coimbatore	128990	11.09
4	Chennai	115904	9.97
5	Tiruvallur	95580	8.22
6	Other	458479	39.43

Source: Tiruvallur District labour Department Govt. of Tamil Nadu. (<https://labour.tn.gov.in/ism/users/login>).

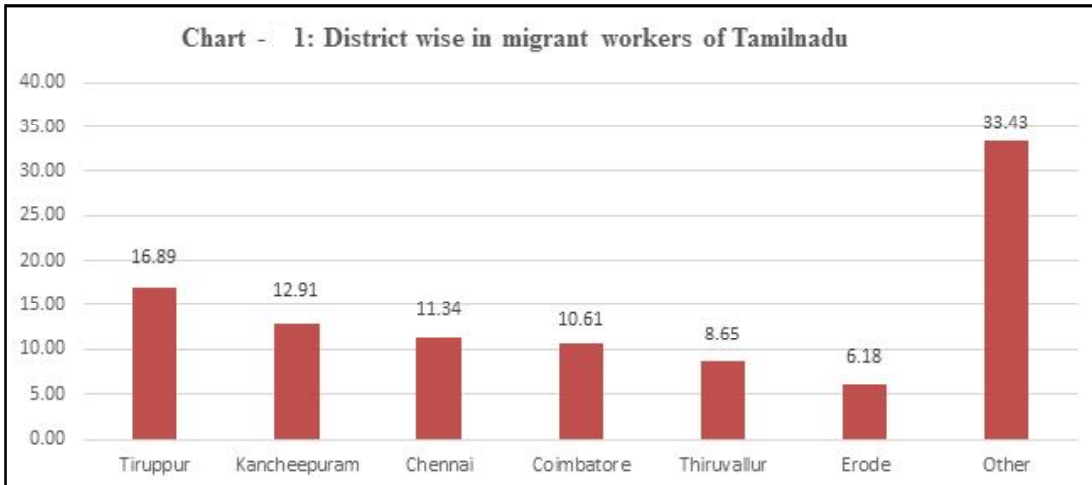


Chart 1 shows the highest numbers are in Tirupur district (16.89%), Kanchipuram (12.91%), Chennai (11.34%), Coimbatore (10.61%), Tiruvallur (8.65%), and Erode (6.8%). These data clearly show the reason for migration of people. In these mentioned districts, a large number of industrial developments, service sectors, and agriculture sectors are seen to be developing. Moreover, especially in the Tiruvallur district, the industrial and service sectors are highly developed, and at the same time, the transport facilities are easy due to its proximity to Chennai. Tiruvallur

district is an urban and semi-urban area, which makes it a good place to live and socially safe, and the basic facilities and basic needs of the migrant people are provided and monitored by the respective district administration.

*Migrant people are attracted to the district of Tiruvallur for various reasons, some of which are :*

The district offers a variety of employment opportunities, especially in the industrial and agricultural sectors. The

proximity of the city of Tiruvallur to Chennai makes it an attractive destination for those seeking better employment opportunities and facilities. The development of the district's infrastructure, including transport networks and industrial parks, contributes to its growth. The economic growth and industrialization of Tiruvallur creates a demand for labour, which attracts migrants from other areas. Industries such as automobiles, textiles and other manufacturing industries, building and infrastructure projects, agriculture and allied activities, hospitality, transportation and other service-oriented industries.

*In-Migrant worker contributions by departments:*

Table-3. In-Migrant worker contributions by Departments

S. no	Department	Numbers of Registration
1	Construction	45983
2	Catering establishment	1478
3	Shop and establishment saloons	3
4	Shop establishment retail outlets	744
5	Shop and establishment others	912
6	Factories textiles	734
7	Factories manufacturing	38399
8	Factories others	7964
9	Self-employment	132
10	Plantation	0
11	Shop and establishment housekeeping	70
12	Shop establishment security	327
13	Motor transport	19

14	Beedi and cigar	1
15	Poultry	1
16	Agriculture	1
17	Local authority (corporation municipality, and town panchayath)	1
18	Hospital sectors	0
19	Schools	7
20	Colleges	73
21	Agricultural related work	11
22	Others	14527
	Total	111387

*Source:* Tiruvallur District labour Department Govt. of Tamil Nadu. (<https://labour.tn.gov.in/ism/users/login>).

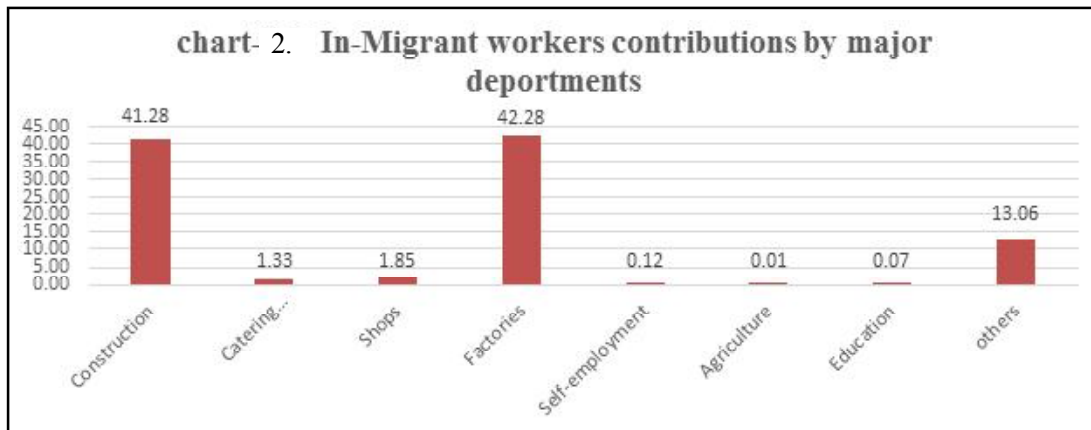
Table - 3 shows the number of sectors from which people migrated to Tamil Nadu, especially in the Tiruvallur district. At the same time, it also shows the growth and contribution of construction, agriculture, industry, and service sectors in this district. There is a high number of employment opportunities and related industries in this district. Furthermore, since it is a district close to Chennai, people migrate easily due to transportation facilities, and they easily connect with their own states and other states.

Table-4. shows the number of people who have migrated to Tamil Nadu, especially to Tiruvallur district, and it is also explained in which sectors they are most prevalent, especially in the construction sector (41.28%) and the industrial sector (42.28%), where they are found in large numbers. They are also found in other sectors, for example, in the informal sector, as daily wage workers and domestic workers (13.06%) their contribution

Table-4. In-Migrant worker contributions by major Departments.

S.No	Departments	Numbers of Registration	Percentage
1	Construction	45983	41.28%
2	Catering establishment	1478	1.33%
3	Shops	2056	1.85%
4	Factories	47097	42.28%
5	Self-employment	132	0.12%
6	Agriculture	11	0.01%
7	Education	80	0.07%
8	others	14550	13.06%
	Total	111387	100.00%

Source: Tiruvallur District labour Department Govt. of Tamil Nadu. (<https://labour.tn.gov.in/ism/users/login>).



is also high, but it is found that they work for low wages in the same sector. According to them, the income they get in their home state is more than what they earn here.

Furthermore, with better living conditions and basic amenities, migrant street vendors and those in the informal sector contribute to the local economy by providing goods and services in public places, which leads to their economic development. Migrant workers are able to send the money they earn

back to their families in their home states, which also helps improve, the economic situation of their own families. This leads to the economic development of their future generations and to their access to education, social security, health care, and basic amenities.

Migration presents advantages and difficulties, impacting economies, social structures, and the environment. Many young migrants, mostly between 20 and 35 years old, wait at the Dr. MGR Chennai Central railway

station for jobs, primarily in brick kilns. They often face challenges such as illiteracy, language barriers, exploitation, low wages, and inadequate access to government benefits and healthcare. Over 300,000 migrant workers from western Odisha have moved to Tiruvallur district, where around 150,000 to 200,000 work annually in brick kilns, often under poor conditions. The district administration has intervened to rescue and repatriate workers employed illegally without proper wages or safety.

To improve conditions, governments should promote legal protections for migrant workers through various media. Contractors need to register these workers and provide essential information to authorities. Measures to reduce corruption, such as maintaining transparent payment records and keeping mandatory bank accounts, are necessary. Migrants should have recognized identity documents and register with local panchayats before migrating. The One Nation, One Ration Card system can help ensure they receive subsidized rations. State governments should maintain an online registry of workers linked to Aadhaar cards and support mandatory life and health insurance for migrants. Awareness programs about available assistance should be promoted through district labour officers and NGOs.

Migrant workers are the engine of a country's economic growth, as they are engaged in all kinds of basic jobs, and are forced to work long hours, while receiving low wages. They are subjected to abuse by middlemen, vendors, employers, local governments, etc. They are forced to live and work in deplorable conditions. Collaboration between the central

and state governments is essential for this transformation.

It is our duty to ensure a safe and healthy working environment and to provide them with essential services, including health, education, and social security. In addition, the government, NGOs, and the public must work together to raise awareness about their rights and entitlements, empower migrant workers to assert their rights, and foster social cohesion and community engagement to reduce social isolation and marginalization.

#### *Limitations of the study :*

This study has analysed the migrant people across the district based on the online portal records registered under the Tamil Nadu Inter-State Migrant Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979—up to May 2025.

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#### **Conflict of interest :**

The author states that there are no

conflicts of interest related to this research's publication. Without institutional or financial assistance from public, commercial, or non-profit organizations, the study was carried out on its own.

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