

Interstate Migrant Workers in Kerala: An Assessment of Welfare Measures in the State of Kerala

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In recent years, Kerala has witnessed a large-scale inflow of migrant labourers from different parts of the country. They are mainly from West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. Higher wages for unskilled labour in the state, enormous opportunities for employment, and a shortage of local labour resulted in the massive influx of migrant labour. Kerala state has been a front runner among India's states in initiating social security schemes for different vulnerable sections of society. Moreover, the state of Kerala ranked top in the IMPEX Ranking, 2019. IMPEX ranking was developed by the Mumbai-based research non-profit India Migration Now (IMN). It sought to measure the integration of the interstate migrants and compare all the states of India based on their migrant integration policies and migrant-friendly policy regime, but they are still under the purview of vulnerable groups. Better education standards as Kerala's labour force are moving out of the country for better employment opportunities; the in-migrant labourers are an inevitable part of our economy today. The contribution of migrant workers to the economy is enormous but remains down in return for their security and well-being. The Kerala government proactively supported the migrant labourers during the Covid-19 pandemic-related lockdown. It provided transport for the migrant workers, gave food through the community kitchen, and provided access to shelter. Even though the programme has its drawbacks and limitations, this paper makes an attempt to analyse the effectiveness of welfare measures and problems faced by migrant labourers in general and during the pandemic.

Keywords: Migration, in-migration, out-migration, labour, Apna Ghar, Aawaz, COVID-19

Ahead of the demographic transition in Indian states, Kerala has evolved as one of the most appealing destinations for migrant workers from other parts of India. The state offers the most acceptable wage rates for workers in the unorganised sector in the country compared to most other states. Interstate migrant workers have become a vital part of the state's economy. According to the economist Amirullah Khan, "Most social security measures are targeted for workers in the organised sector. There is no political lobby for providing minimum social security to workers in the unorganised sector, who contribute significantly to economic growth." (Das, 2007). Historical evidence suggests that interregional migration has been almost a

permanent feature of Indian society. A host of factors such as differences in land fertility, natural calamities such as droughts and floods and war and communal clashes lead to regional migration in historical times. However, such migration was mainly confined to nearby areas because the lack of mass transportation facilities was a significant constraint to the wholesale movement of people. The Railways introduced in India in 1853 during British colonial rule can be considered the most crucial factor that supports the large-scale interregional migration in India. Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Delhi, and Ahmedabad grow in terms of population and size much faster than smaller cities, which still attract more people from all over the country.

This paper examines the effectiveness of the welfare measures put in place by the state government and identifies the major problems during the covid-19 pandemic related lockdown. This is an analytical study that used secondary data. The major secondary data source includes the Census of India and the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). Census of India identified migrants based on both places of origin and place of last residence criteria. In comparison, NSSO uses only the place of last residence criteria. CAGR and AAGR were used to calculate the trends and growth rate of the interstate migrant population in Kerala. The study also utilises all the available secondary data published by various central and state government agencies.

Migration in Kerala: Recent Trends

The migration scenario in Kerala, both out-migration and in-migration, is unique and divergent from all Indian patterns. It would appear that the migration scenario in Kerala has been primarily shaped by the distinctive development experience of the state, internationally known as the Kerala model of development. By the 1980s, Kerala had achieved a sharp reduction in the incidence of poverty despite a slower economic growth rate and many other states of the several factors contributing to reaching the major land reforms and demographic changes. The development strategy, broadly described as the Kerala model, profoundly impacted the state's labour market. Two critical factors played a decisive role in the context, such as workers' political mobilisation and their collective bargaining practice. Interstate Migration of workers is regulated by the legal provisions of the state Labour Department, but such rules apply when labourers are recruited and employed by contractors. It has been optimistic that in the case of early Tamil migrant workers, there was a mechanism of labour control where a job became a contract, assembled a small group of about 12 workers, supervised them and paid them. However, this system ensures regular work for the workers and, to that extent, some security. Kerala has several progressive laws to ensure better wages and working conditions for workers, but in reality, reports in the print media suggest that the wages paid to migrant workers are substantially lower than those paid to their local counterparts. Problems related to transport, boarding and lodging facilities, the local community and alien culture and difficulties in keeping in touch with their kith and kins are some of the hardships faced by the migrants anywhere.

Estimate of Migrant Workers

A developing country like India with considerable regional disparities in general migration maybe even more relevant than interstate worker migration in terms of the numbers of people involved, possibly even regarding remittance volumes.

India's latest government data on migration show that the hugely important phenomenon of migration has increased since 2001 by nearly 7%. The percentage of people who were divided as migrants is 37.64% of the population of 455 million, compared with 30% of 307 million people of the total population of 1028 million people in India in the 2001 census. It is pertinent to mention that nearly 12% of migrants in the 2011 census wherein a state migrant about 54 million people (Office of the Registrar General and Census Commission, 2011). Out of this, 23 million made nearly 50% had moved for work and employment. Kerala witnessed a massive influx of labour migrants from the Far East, and North Eastern states, namely, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal, Odisha, and a few are also from Manipur (Kumar, 2011). According to the Gulati Institute of finance and taxation report by Narayana, Kerala has a migrant labour population of 2.5 million, calculated to increase to 4.8 million in the next ten years. West Bengal carries the most significant share with about 20% of the stock and migrant Labour force (Narayana, 2013).

TABLE 1:Percentage Growth Of Interstate Migrant Population In Kerala

<i>YEAR</i>	<i>% OF INTER STATE MIGRANT POPULATION</i>	<i>AAGR</i>
2014-15	41.18	
2015-16	48.37	17%
2016-17	48.1	-1%
2017-18	54.19	13%
2018-19	63.61	17%
CAGR	9%	

The total number of interstate migrant workers is estimated using both total employment and share of migrant workers' information. To calculate the growth pattern of ISM workers, the Compound Annual Growth Rate and Annual Average Growth Rate are used. For CAGR, the following formula used for calculation:

$$\text{CAGR} = \left[\frac{V_{\text{final}}}{V_{\text{begin}}} \right]^{1/t-1}$$

CAGR=Compound annual growth rate

V begin=beginning value

V Final=final value

T=time in year.

Along with the annual growth rate estimated for determining long-term trends. It provides an idea about the direction wherein the growth rate is moving. For analysing the AAGR, the following formula is used:

$$\text{AAGR} = \frac{\text{GRa} + \text{GRb} + \dots + \text{GRn}}{N}$$

The GRA= growth rate in a year

N=No.of people

As per the data, the year-wise distribution of ISM workers shows the overall increasing trend of the migrant population, except in the year 2016-17. There is a

negative growth rate of ISM workers population in the year 2016-17. Although, the Compound Annual Growth Rate of other state migrant workers in Kerala was 9 per cent (see table no:1). The graphical representation here is as follows;

FIGURE 1. Percentage of Interstate Migrant Population in Kerala

Source: Economic Review 2019, Kerala State Planning Board

Legal Provisions: Article 246 of the Indian Constitution indicates the bifurcation of powers to make laws between Union and State governments. Parliament has exclusive powers to make laws concerning matters given in List 1 of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. List II includes items under the jurisdiction of states, and List III (Concurrent List) includes items where both the union and state Governments can exercise power. Apart from the national level initiatives, the state government of Kerala has initiated many legal support and measures for the upliftment of the migrant population in the state. The transformative changes in labour codes are expected to impact labour reforms and many organizations in every sector. The government aims at the new laws to reduce complexities, enhance ease of compliance, guide more accountability and transparency, and support employers and workers.

The Code on Social Security, 2020

The Social Security Code, 2020 was enacted to amend and consolidate the laws connecting to social security and protection to extend social security to all employees and workers in the organised or unorganised sector. The social security code has restored the demanding enactments includes Employment Exchanges Compulsory Notification of Vacancies Act, 1959; Maternity Benefit Act, 1961; Payment of Gratuity Act 1972; Cine-workers Welfare Fund Act, 1981; Building & Other Construction Workers Welfare Cess Act, 1996; Employees Compensation Act, 1923; Employees State Insurance Act, 1948; Employees Provident Fund & Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952; Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008 (Garg, 2021). Labour is constituted under the concurrent list of the Indian Constitution. Hence, both Parliament and state legislatures can make laws regulating labour. The Central Government has asserted that there are over 100 states and the 40 Central laws regulating the various aspects of labour such as working conditions, social security, resolution of industrial disputes, and wages. (Ministry of Labour and Employment,

n.d.) The Second National Commission on Labour (2002) revealed the existing legislation complex, with outmoded provisions and uncertain definitions. To enhance ease of conformity and ensure consistency in labour laws, it recommended consolidating the central labour laws into broader groups (Ministry of Labour and Employment, n.d.) such as; industrial relations, wages, social security, safety, and welfare and working conditions.

Comprehensive Definition of 'Employee' The code aims to engulf the maximum number of employees and workers. It gives a wide definition of employee, which incorporates supervisory, managerial, and administrative capabilities and contract labour. Although, the code distinguishes between employees based on wages ceiling and their scheduled employment for determining their eligibility for various social security benefits. However, the code looks to guarantee social security to a wide range of employees.

Social Security Contribution for Inter-state Migrant Workers Under the code, the extent of inter-state migrant workers has broadened to encompass those workers who walk from one state for employment in an establishment in a destination state. Subsequently change their establishment within the said destination state, according to an agreement or other employment (Choudhary, 2020) arrangements. Moreover, inter-state migrant workers have also been incorporated in the definition of contract labour; they would qualify as an employee under the code and receive definite benefits as employees. Hence, going forward, employers need to provide social security inter-state migrant workers at par with their other employees.

Registration of establishment under the code The code ultimately defines 'establishments' to mean, amongst others, places such as factories, motor transport undertakings, and newspaper establishments, where industry, trade, business, manufacture, or occupation is carried on. Every establishment covered by the code will need to obtain a registration.

Enhance social security contributions The definition of wages under the code comprehensively lists the included and excluded components. In addition to that, it provides that if the aggregate of the excluded components exceeds 50% of an employee's total remuneration, the amount that exceeds one-half will be deemed to be wages. Subsequently, at least 50% of the total remuneration would need to be considered 'wages' to calculate social security contributions. (Choudhary, 2020)

Statutory acceptance to gig and platform workers and aggregators The first and foremost legislation formally grants the gig economy and widens social security coverage to them. It guarantees statutory acceptance of paid work arrangements outside the traditional employer-employee relationships by introducing gig workers, including platform workers.

Social security coverage for gig workers The code gives the registration of gig workers, certain social security funds for them, and the articulation of social security connected to life, health, disability cover, maternity benefits, old age protection, education, housing, and provident fund customised their requirements. On the other hand, set down the coverage of gig workers and their families under the ESI framework. The Code is expanded to incorporate inter-state migrant workers, film industry workers, platform workers, and construction workers. The three categories included unorganised workers, gig workers, and platform workers.

It has increased the coverage and widened the advantages of all workers in the organised/unorganised sectors. The code seeks to expand coverage through compulsory registration of all types of workers, including gig workers and platform workers. It also expanded coverage by including the unorganised sector, interstate migrant workers, contract employees, and fixed-term employees. The code extends the scope to cover fixed-term contract workers eligible for gratuity; only permanent employees were covered earlier. Penal provisions in failure to pay gratuity to employees or pay the contributions are incorporated. According to this code, all data has to be maintained electronically. It enhances the exchange of data among various stakeholders/funds set up by the government, ensures compliance, and facilitates governance. The invariability in deciding wages for social security benefits is another highlight of the code, given the uncertainty in the current regulations. Hence, the code on social security, 2020 is distinctly a step in the proper direction from the perspective of ease of compliance and being universal. It engulfs a large portion of our working population (Gupta, 2020). A regulating body to separately direct this code would be favourable to observing the welfare of workers, and it can better mark the efficacy of schemes. The CSS,2020 expands the provisions of the law to more areas, it has stopped utilising an opportunity to universalise social sector benefits.

The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 (IR Code)

IR Code is a broader perspective to safeguard workers' rights to assemble unions, decrease the trituration between the employers and workers, and guarantee regulations to settle industrial disputes. The code repealed the following labour acts; (Taparia, 2020) Trade Union Act, 1926, the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946, the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947. The code was selected to protect the rights of employers and employees by providing easy labour reforms and to enhance the facility of doing business. The principal aim of the code is to understand industrial peace and harmony as the proper way of resolving industrial disputes and to enhance the progress of the industry by bringing about the existence of harmony and the amicable relationship between employers and workers. The breadth of coverage has extended to cover all employers, including managerial, supervisory, and administrative staff that are excepted from the ambit of the Industrial Disputes Act. The term 'employer' extended to cover all employers, including contractors and legal representatives of deceased employers who were not a part of the said term under the Industrial Disputes Act. Likewise, the term 'worker' also includes persons employed in supervisory work and even includes working journalists, sales, and promotion employees. Moreover, the term 'workers' were replaced with 'workman' used in the Industrial Disputes Act itself (Sharma, 2020).

The code manages the areas such as; registration of trade union, cancellation of a trade union, alteration of the name of a trade union, formation of work committee, incorporation of a registered trade union, recognition of negotiating union, preparation of standing order, register of the standing order, the constitution of the industrial tribunal, illegal strikes and lockouts, the procedure for retrenchment and re-employment of dealth worker, remuneration to workers in case of transfer of establishment, prohibition of layoff, closure of an industrial establishment. The new code enhances the better management of trade unions. It has prescribed that any

trade union must have at least the subscription of ten per cent workmen or hundred workmen employed in an industrial establishment, whatever is less to be registered and recognized. The code also accepted trade unions as the sole negotiating union or the negotiating council. The tribunal also adjudicated disputes between trade unions and their constituent workers. However, the IR Code gives an interval for business by raising the threshold for the standing orders and takes some credible initiatives on the dispute redressal side; the important provisions concerning layoffs, lockouts, or retrenchment remain largely the same and, therefore, continue to be controlled (Sharma, 2020). IRC, 2020 where the approach limits for granting standing orders on work hours, wage rates, worker classification, holidays, wage days, termination of employment and grievance redressal mechanism by establishments have been raised from 100 workers to 300 workers. (New Labour Codes and Their Loopholes, 2020). Moreover, setbacks for labour require a fourteen-day notice period before a strike or lockout, which has a limited validity of sixty days.

The Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code, 2020

The Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code, 2020 (OSHW Code) is one of the three new labour codes that amalgamate the bulk of labour legislations in India and streamline labour compliance besides extending the social security net for workers. The code encompasses 633 provisions of 13 central labour laws into one single code with 143 provisions. The code consolidates the acts includes; the Factories Act, 1948, Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970, The Mines Act, 1952, Dock Workers (Safety, Health, & Welfare) Act, 1986, and Building & Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Services) Act, 1996, The Plantation Labour Act, 1951, Inter-state Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment & Conditions of Service) Act, 1979. (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2019), Working Journalist and other Newspaper Employee (Conditions of Service and Miscellaneous Provision) Act, 1955 (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2019), Cine Workers & Cinema Theatre Workers Act, 1981, the Motor Transport Workers Act, 1961, the Sales Promotion Employees (Conditions of Services) Act, 1976, Beedi & Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966 (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2019). The code applies to all establishments. The term “establishment” incorporates any business carried out in which ten or more workers are employed. The term “worker” replaces “workman,” as explained in IR Code, 2020. “Worker” in general refers to blue-collar workers and as a person employed to do technical, operational, clerical or supervisory, manual, or skilled/unskilled work but excludes, among others, those employed in a supervisory capacity earning at least INR 18000 per month. Even though the coverage of the OSH Code is based on the number of workers employed, specific provisions of the OSH Code consider all employees of the establishment.

Registration To amalgamate the different registration needs under various laws, the one registration system introduced OSH Code. It applies to all establishments and has to register electronically with the officer appointed by the appropriate government.

ompulsory appointment letter The OSH Code requires establishments to issue a letter of appointment to every employee. The suitable government will prescribe

the content and form of the appointment letter, and for private entities, the state government will prescribe it.

Work Hours Presently, working hours are balanced by different statutes, depending on the enterprise's nature and location. Working hours are prescribed as nine hours per day and eighteen hours per week under the factories act. Nevertheless, OSH Code specifies uniform working hours that apply to all establishments. Remarkably, no worker may be required or permitted to work for more than eight hours a day.

Contract Labour The CLRA regulates the work of contract labour. The CLRA pertains to the establishments with twenty or more contract labour; and contract labour contributors who employed twenty or more contract labour on any day of the past twelve months. Furthermore, under the OSH Code, an establishment must not use contract labour in their significant entities, the underlying subject exemptions such as the average working of the establishment is such that the activity is ordinarily done through a contractor, and the occupation is such that they do not need full-time workers for the central portion of work hours in a day or more extended periods. The OSHWCC, 2020 also suffers from some significant drawbacks. Maternity benefits can only be claimed if the worker puts in a minimum of eighty days of employment before her delivery. OSHWCC has been doubled and raised to 20 workers in the case of establishments with power and 40 workers not using power. Moreover, the new law provisions do not go for a judicial precognition hearing controversy, which once again puts the workers at a disadvantage.

Effectiveness of State Welfare Measures "The idea that most people do not move or are fixed at a specific location might be appealing, but strong mobility is an inherent characteristic of all populations. The less specific policies or other factors limiting or controlling that movement are in place. Nevertheless, some people appear to move more than others and in different ways from others, which appears to be closely linked with the level of development in each country, linked with the distribution of the population in each country. Even though all the difficulties with the measurement of internal migration are sketched, considerable development has been created towards the construction of analytical representation that permits the comparison of patterns across space" (State Planning Board, 2020).

Kerala is the first Indian state to approve a social security measure for migrant workers (Srivastava, 2020). The states concerned with the welfare of interstate migrant workers are reflected in how they constituted a working group on labour migration and the 13th five-year plan deliberations. The state also arranged several national and state-level considerations on the problems faced by the workers in the state. The fourth Administrative Reforms Commission evaluated the implementation of the welfare schemes for migrant workers as a priority. Various departments take several measures to include migrant workers; the department of education 2008 has been increased in promotion of inclusive education for children of migrant workers. Kudumbasree, the state's initiative for women empowerment and poverty eradication, has initiated the first to bring migrant women into its fold. In addition to the HIV prevention interventions, the Department of Health and Family Welfare, through National Health Mission, has introduced link workers in 2022 to enhance access to healthcare for migrant families. From January 2020, the Civil Supplies Department has started interstate portability benefits to workers from select States, the states such as West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, from where over 80% of the workers come (Government of Kerala, 2020).

Interstate Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme 2010

Under the interstate migrant workers Welfare scheme, a separate fund was created under the Kerala Building and other construction workers Welfare board for the welfare of migrant workers. A worker in the age group of 18 to 60 years can enrol under the scheme after completing one month from his/her arrival in the state, paying a renewable annual membership fee of rupees 30. The Government of Kerala contributes a sum equal to 3 times the annual receipts through membership to the fund, and a matching contribution is also earmarked from the Kerala Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board. The scheme directs every employer in the state who engages in the state migrant workers to ensure that such workers are registered.

TABLE 2. Benefits, Package and Eligibility

<i>No.</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Package and Eligibility</i>
1	Compensation to the family upon the death of the worker	Rs2 lakhs for those who enrolled and Rs 25000 to those who not enrolled
2	Relief benefit	Rs10000 competition during membership period for temporary disability of not less than 6-month duration due to work-related accidents.
3	Treatment benefit	Rupees 25000 for treatment of members for fatal diseases that requires five or more days without hospitalisation.
4	Terminal benefit	Rupees 25000 to 50000 for those who exit from labour market after a minimum of five years and enrolment under the scheme
5	Body repatriation	Maximum of rupees 50000 for body repatriation of a migrant worker who die in Kerala irrespective of enrolment.
6	Education scholarships	An annual scholarship of rupees 1000 to 3000 for the education of children of migrant workers enrolled
7	Maternity benefits	Rupees 15000 for Maternity related expenses

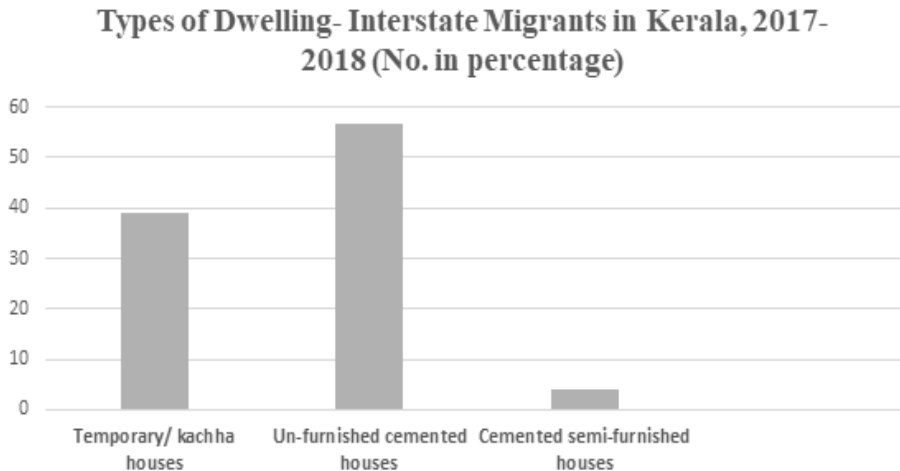
Source: Labour Commissionerate (GoK, 2019): Welfare to Rights: Implementation of Select Legislations: A Review. Administrative Reforms Commission (GoK, 2018).

Apna Ghar Housing Scheme

The Apna Ghar migrant housing project was initiated in 2019 with the intention of guaranteeing cheap rental housing to migrant workers in the state. Equipped with dormitory-style rooms, cooking and dining facilities, drying areas, and toilets, this migration hotel is accessible to the migrant workers at a subsidised rent through their employer. A bed can benefit migrant workers at rupees 1000 per month (Desai, 2019). It started first in the Palakkad district, which can accommodate 620 male

interstate migrant workers in a ground plus three-floor hotel complex at KINFRA Integrated Industrial and Textile Park, Kanjikodu Palakkad. The hotel provides shared residential rooms with bunk beds, indoor bathrooms, toilets, cloth washing and drying areas, kitchens, and mess areas. The hotel started operations on March 1, 2019. However, the same plan is expected soon across Kerala. The Chart represents the living condition of ISM workers one year before implementing the Apna Ghar programme.

FIGURE 2. Types of Dwelling- Interstate Migrants in Kerala from 2017 to 2018.



Source: Migrant Employee Survey, State Planning Board (Government of Kerala).

The data on types of migrant workers are staying in impoverished quality houses in Kerala. About 39 per cent of the total population stays in temporary and kaccha houses, while about 57 per cent live in un-furnished houses. Around 4 per cent of the total migrants are living in somehow better-quality houses. This is a significant problem to look into immediate action. Even after implementing the Apna Ghar Programme (2019), the interstate migrant workers, particularly in the construction sector, experience pathetic living conditions even today. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic directly affected many sectors, the labour force, and even the proper implementation of many programmes. It also made it challenging to collect data on the moving population of migrants while experiencing the pandemic.

Aawaz Insurance Scheme

AAWAZ Health Insurance is a state government programme started by the Government of Kerala to guarantee health insurance and accidental death coverage for interstate migrant workers living in the state. This is the first of its kind scheme intended for migrant labourers working in a state in India. The Kerala government announced this scheme in November 2017. The first step of the registration process started in December 2017. The government currently intends to identify and provide coverage for about five lakhs state labourers staying in Kerala by the end of 2017. Aawaz Health Insurance Scheme can be assisted by migrant labourers between the age of 18 years and 60 years. During the time of enrolment, labourers must issue their fingerprint, iris, and other work-related proof. Following the submission of

these details, the AAWAZ insurance card will be issued to the worker. According to the government, interstate migrant labourers working in hotels, other industries, and footwear can obtain this insurance card by enrolling in the scheme. The first data collection step for the Insurance Scheme was over in December 2017. The trial run of the enrolment program commenced on June 1, 2018. The official data collected in 2013 indicates that about 25 migrant workers in the state with 2.35 lakh added every year. This project is monitored by the District Labour officers of the respective districts and advertised throughout the state in multiple languages, including Hindi, Oriya, and Bengali. Moreover, registration camps were established in over 200 localities across the state to recognise and give coverage to interstate migrant labourers. After getting registered, the Smart Card provided by the government will have the recipient's photo, name, and address. The present health status of migrant workers is a major worry; some diseases such as Malaria are said to have returned to Kerala due to migrant workers in the state. However, complaint redressal cells will be started in different locations across the state to ensure the smooth functioning of the program.

As noted, the Government of Kerala has worries related to the health condition of migrant workers in the state. Upgrading the health of migrant workers is also expected to improve the health condition of other residents. The government has allocated over rupees 10 crores for the schemes so far, and it is currently searching for insurance companies to provide this service. See the table to understand the enrollment details of the districts of Kerala in the year 2021.

TABLE 2: Aawaz Enrolment Details (up to 13/07/2021)

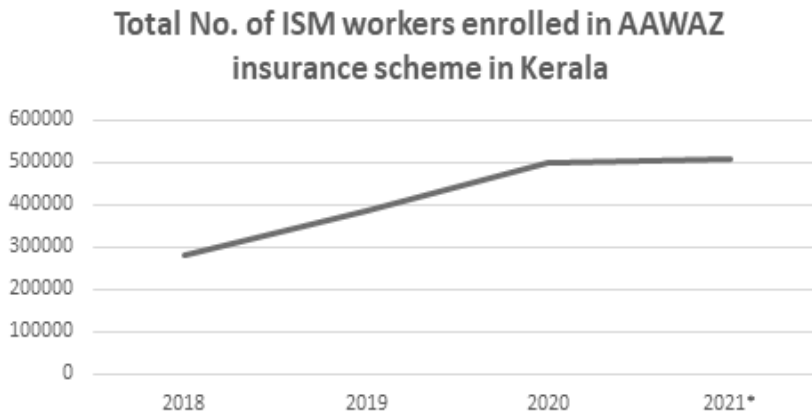
<i>District</i>	<i>Awaz card printed</i>
Trivandrum	61552
Kollam	24849
Pathanamthitta	24059
Alappuzha	36926
Idukki	19551
Kottayam	32908
Ernakulam	112654
Thrissur	41900
Palakkad	24694
Malappuram	29856
Kozhikode	44363
Wayanad	11558
Kannur	28723
Kasargod	15858
Total	509451

Source: Labour Office, Trivandrum

TABLE 3: Total No. of ISM workers enrolled in AAWAZ insurance scheme in Kerala

		AAGR
2017	NA	
2018	281370	
2019	387050	38%
2020	498973	29%
2021*	509451	2%
CAGR	16%	

Source: Kerala State Planning Board

FIGURE 3. Total Number of ISM Workers enrolled in AAWAZ Insurance Scheme in Kerala

The data shows that the overall number of registered ISM workers has a positive growth rate. *In every year, the number of enrolled people is increasing, but as per the available data in the year 2021 (the date represents the registered ISM workers up to July 2021), there is no drastic increase in the number. Due to Covid-19 pandemic-related lockdown and subsequent restrictions imposed and registration was stopped in March 2020, many workers have migrated to their native States by special trains.

The Economic Review 2020 by the State Planning Board revealed that based on the migration survey 2018, migration from other states to Kerala for employment and other purposes is increasing continuously. As of the Kerala migration survey 2018, it is estimated that there are close to 30 lakh Indian migrants in Kerala from the states of West Bengal, Odisha, Assam, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh. One of the causes for the migration of such workers is the high wage rates provided even in the unorganised sector of Kerala. However, the number of workers registering for the AAWAZ insurance scheme is much less than the numbers estimated by the studies and surveys. Migrant workers in Kerala have not benefited from the immense social capital gained by the trade unions in Kerala. Even in 2020, more than 90 per cent of

the ISM workers were not part of any trade union, depriving them of their collective bargaining power (CMID, 2020). Differential wage rates and the role of influential labour unions in sustaining wage difference and labour segmentation have generated a deep divide in the workforce of Kerala (Aleyamma, 2017). In Kerala, most workers are unorganised and do not enjoy the benefits of welfare measures includes; Employees State Insurance (ESI), Provident Fund (PF), or pension. They are engaged directly or through agents through vocal arrangements without other arrangements and are paid in cash (Peter, 2020).

COVID-19 Pandemic and Migrants

On March 24, 2020, to contain the virus, a strict nationwide lockdown was imposed by India with immediate sealing of the inter-state borders within four hours of its announcement. This shocked the unprepared migrant workers. Due to the COVID-19 induced lockdown, the working class, especially the low-income migrant workers, have been the worst affected (Pandey, 2020). It was clear evidence of policy lapses in handling migrant workers during the covid-19 pandemic. Even though all states give limited economic security, they do not provide any social security to migrant workers; it is clear that adequate measures are not yet taken to provide social protection to them. Moreover, their access to existing government schemes is poor; it is a matter of grave concern that existing systems related to interstate migrant workers are not effectively implemented. Exposed vulnerabilities of interstate migrant workers, exposed policy lapses in handling interstate migrant workers, host States with limited economic security but no social security, social protection and health rights inadequate measures, access to government schemes is poor; existing laws are not effectively implemented are the significant lockdown effects.

After the lockdown announcement in March 2020, a shutdown of factories, houses, other business industries, small factories, and construction sites was closed. Many migrant workers were rendered vulnerable without their daily wages or access to food and essential services. It has resulted in many migrants returning to their original states, such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh, after losing their work in the wake of the national lockdown. We have seen a mass movement of migrant workers back to their native villages highlighting the difficulties accompanying other lockdowns. They could not continue in cities and amid inflationary times due to sudden disruption in supply chains of essential commodities and commodities scarcities. Migrant labourers in many states are up in arms for the lack of facilities given to them, including transport to their states; the more than 3.5 lakh 'guest workers' in 19,764 camps in Kerala have no complaints and are waiting for the dangers of the pandemic to pass (Economic Times, 2020). The labour department reveals that, to provide basic needs like drinking water and cooking facilities. Milk is supplied to the camp through the state-run Milma. Along with that, food from the community kitchen has also been provided to the workers. The state government has also issued posters, making announcements and video messages in various languages, including Assamese, Oriya, Hindi, and Bengali, to sensitise the guest worker on the deadly COVID-19 and the importance of social media distancing.

While the rest of the state struggled to address the distressed migrant workers during the National Lockdown to arrest the covid-19 pandemic, Kerala ensured food and shelter to workers through a decentralised response. The state, which is

still known as the remittance economy where migration from Kerala directly or indirectly affects every household in the state, is also known for the welfare of interstate migrant workers it receives. In an outbreak of lockdown, one of the most affected sections of the population was undoubtedly the migrant workers. During the period, there were no economic activities, causing the loss of jobs and income. Consequently, some of them even faced eviction and were thrown onto the streets. There were approximately 5 lakh migrant workers on the lockdown in Kerala. Consequently, ISM workers who lost their jobs and income were identified as 434280 by the department of labour and sheltered in 21556 camps all over the state; food, water, and recreational facilities like television and indoor game were provided to them in the camps. As per the Economic Review 2020 of the state Planning Board, with the intervention from the Labour Department, no guest workers were deprived of food and water and other adequate physical amenities. Building owners had been warned strictly against any full evictions. The Kerala model of migration management has been lauded by many; Kerala as a state has set an example for its systematic and organised labour welfare initiative. The state has a well-organised labour welfare ecosystem with better minimum wages model accommodation and social security scheme provisions. However, how much do the ISM workers benefit through the programmes?

Conclusion

The major new social security initiative at the National level is the portability of the public distribution system. Portable social security number new code on social security bill of comprehensive data of inter-state migrant workers one nation one ration card-e-pos device. Social security ID for inter-state migrant workers, code on wages, social security code in labour Ministry of Government of India coordinates the state governments. Inter-state migrant workers are a politically invisible section of society. They are not a political constituency area in the host state or the home state with no bargaining power. It is an invisible section; however, it has become visible during the covid-19 lockdown period as a contrast. Kerala has put forth many welfare schemes and measures during the covid-19 period, even though most internal migrant labourers are deprived of health rights and social protection. So, the compulsory registration of interstate migrant labourers is essential to formalise their labour in Kerala. Monitoring the measures and enforcement of these welfare schemes is very important. Moreover, the portability of the social protection system is beneficial when the moving population across the country.

The term guest workers have recently been used in the Kerala government after the covid-19 pandemic. Social exploitation and health-related issues have become the primary concern of the state government after the incidents of the covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic also helped the state Government identify the significant drawbacks of the legal measures taken by the government and the primary paramount concern to the proper implementation of the programs. Kerala's experience in encouraging the welfare of migrant workers, the state offers essential lessons for the inclusion of migrant workers in India. The institutional mechanism should be evolved at the state, district, and LSG levels to ensure synergy. It is an idea to have a nodal agency with dedicated resources at the state level to plan, facilitate and monitor the welfare of migrant workers and their families.

The problem is not implementing the law, welfare measures, and migrant-friendly policies in the state or the central government, but the problem is the extent to which migrant labourers get the benefits. For example, there are around 40 lakhs interstate migrant labourers in Kerala state, but only five lakhs people are registered under the AAWAZ scheme, so the remaining population is excluded from getting the same benefit. After the Apna Ghar programme initiation, the people still live in unfurnished houses in order with pathetic living conditions. The program started a few years back in Kerala, particularly the Palakkad district, but after completing this programme at Kanjikodu, there has been no progress in the programme and not yet initiated to implement it across Kerala. Indeed, the lack of awareness of migrant labourers is the primary reason for vulnerability. Similarly, the educational background of the trade union leaders and unfamiliarity with the languages creates a communication gap with ISM workers that also affects the migrant populations.

However, educating the trade union leaders to create awareness among the agents and trade union leaders in Kerala and the interstate migrant labourers is essential. Giving them political education and enhancing their participation in the political process can reduce many social and economic problems and difficulties. They are a politically disadvantaged group. They are considered not a vote bank, so they do not have any political party or trade union affiliation. Subsequently, there is no collective bargaining, so they do not have the proper wage rate that the native people are getting. Giving them political space can help solve the economic problem, positively affecting their living standards.

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