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## Avinash Kumar



*Avinash Kumar has completed his Ph.D. in International Investment Law from the Dept. of Law & Governance, Central University of South Bihar. His research work is on "International Investment Agreement and State's right to regulate Foreign Investment." He qualified UGC-NET and has been selected for the prestigious ICSSR Doctoral Fellowship. He is an alumnus of the Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. Formerly he has been elected as Students Union President of Law Centre-1, University of Delhi. Moreover, he completed his LL.M. from the University of Delhi (2014-16), dissertation on "Cross-border Merger & Acquisition"; LL.B. from the University of Delhi (2011-14), and B.A. (Hons.) from Maharaja Agrasen College, University of Delhi. He has also obtained P.G. Diploma in IPR from the Indian Society of International Law, New Delhi. He has qualified UGC – NET examination and has been awarded ICSSR – Doctoral Fellowship. He has published six-plus articles and presented 9 plus papers in national and international seminars/conferences. He participated in several workshops on research methodology and teaching and learning.*

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**“A SOCIO-LEGAL STUDY ON THE POSITION OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE INTER-STATE MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE PLYWOOD SECTOR OF PERUMBAVOOR MUNICIPALITY, KERALA.”**

AUTHORED BY - AAYISHA NOORIYA

B.Com LL.B, LL.M (Criminal Justice And Human Rights)

2023-2025

Pondicherry University

**ABSTRACT**

Labour migration in India has become a major socio-economic phenomenon, particularly in states like Kerala, where inter-state migrant workers are concentrated. This research critically examines the socio-legal position of inter-state migrant workers employed in the plywood sector of Perumbavoor Municipality in Ernakulam district, Kerala. However, the existing legal frameworks at international and national level and various welfare schemes by the Government of Kerala, these workers still continue to face challenges like limited access to social security benefits, lack of legal awareness, related to poor working conditions, wage disparities. The study adopts an empirical non-doctrinal approach, combining qualitative field data collected from migrant workers through interviews and survey responses with secondary data from legal documents, government reports, and other literature. Findings shows that inadequate implementation of labour laws and poor enforcement mechanisms worsens the vulnerabilities of migrant workers. The study highlights the need for stronger legal enforcement, awareness campaigns, and policy reforms to bridge the gap between legislative protections and the lived realities of migrant workers. The research aims to contribute to policy discussions on migrant labour rights and suggest sustainable measures for ensuring their social and legal well-being.

**Keywords:** *Labour Migration, Inter-State Migrant Workers, Socio-Legal, Plywood Industry, Kerala.*

## I-INTRODUCTION

Human existence throughout history is characterized by a constant interplay between movement and settlement seeking better opportunities, security, and improved living conditions. Over the centuries, the progression of human development itself is deeply intertwined migration which has been a fundamental aspect of social and economic transformations. Labour migration, in particular, has emerged as a critical phenomenon of migration in the modern globalized economy fuelled by industrialization and urbanization where migrant workers, especially those in low- skilled and informal sectors often relocate themselves to pursue economic securities contributing to increased productivity and national income.

India has a long history of migration where the country has witnessed rapid economic development. While historically, migration was less prevalent within internal labour market of India, economic disparities, employment opportunities, and social inequalities have intensified migration patterns in recent decades. India has consistently been one of the largest sources of international labour migrants. According to data from the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, there were approximately 18 million Indian nationals living and working abroad in 2020<sup>1</sup>. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, have been significant destinations for Indian migrant workers, particularly in sectors such as construction, healthcare, and domestic work<sup>2</sup>. Yet regional disparities and systemic challenges continue to force workers to leave their native places in search of employment opportunities in urban and industrial hubs where internal migration playing a significant role in workforce distribution. The introduction of Railways in India in 1853 during British colonial administration is a pivotal component for significant interregional travel in the country. Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Delhi, and Ahmedabad<sup>3</sup> have accelerated growth in population and size compared to smaller cities, which continue to draw a greater influx of individuals from across the nation.

The legal framework of India provides several provisions for the protection of the migrant

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<sup>1</sup> Indian Ministry of External Affairs, Report on Overseas Indian Population, (2020), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Khan, A. & Arokkiaraj, H., "Challenges of Reverse Migration in India: A Comparative Study of Internal and International Migrant Workers in the Post-COVID Economy", Comparative Migration Studies, Vol. 9(1) (2021), p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> Ruquia K. Hussain, Railways and Labour Migration in Colonial India (1881–1921), (2019) 80 Proc. Ind. Hist. Cong. 600.

workers. The Constitution of India, through its Preamble<sup>4</sup>, Fundamental Rights<sup>5</sup>, and Directive Principles of State Policy<sup>6</sup> (DPSP), guarantees essential rights such as the right to equality, the right to life and personal liberty, the right to livelihood, and to the protection against exploitation. Constitution provision of Article 38<sup>7</sup> provides for socio-economic justice to all citizens. In view of the exploitation and vulnerability of the interstate migrant workers, “The Inter State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979”<sup>8</sup> was adopted by the Parliament of India.

The migration patterns and their socio-economic impacts have greatly influenced the culture and political dynamics in Kerala. Migration, both local and foreign, has been a key factor in the development of Kerala since its establishment in 1956. Keralites have a 100% literacy rate, hence they migrate to other countries, especially the Gulf, following a surge in oil prices, for decades to find work as the opening up of Gulf economies to foreign labour in the 1970s, resulted in a significant shift in migration from Kerala from internal to international. Kerala established trading relations with the West and the Middle East as early as 3000 B.C. No other state relies heavily on remittances. It highlights Keralites' centuries-old emigration.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most prominent examples of inter-state migration in India is the movement of workers towards Kerala, a state known for its high demand for labour in industries such as construction, manufacturing, and domestic work. Over the past few decades, Kerala has become a major destination for migrant labourers, primarily from states such as Odisha, West Bengal, Assam, and Bihar. Migrant workers have played an indispensable role in sustaining economic growth in Kerala, yet they often face significant challenges, including inadequate living conditions, wage disparities, limited social security, and legal vulnerabilities.

Perumbavoor Municipality, situated in the industrial heart of Ernakulam district, Kerala, India, operates as a hub for local industry and migrant labour, forming the basis of its economic strength. This municipality, surrounded by large forests and booming markets, offers a plywood sector that has significantly shaped its economic identity and attracted migrant workers from multiple states throughout India. These workers contribute a variety of cultural

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<sup>4</sup> The Constitution of India, Preamble.

<sup>5</sup> The Constitution of India, Part III, Art, 12-35.

<sup>6</sup> The Constitution of India, Part IV, Art, 36-51.

<sup>7</sup> The Constitution of India, Art. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Act 30 of 1979.

<sup>9</sup> Nikhil, *The Gulf Migration and Kerala's Economy* 45 (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2018).

backgrounds, economic desires, and personal experiences that greatly impact the social and economic dynamics of Perumbavoor.

The industrial growth of Perumbavoor primarily depends on the contributions of migrant workers, whose presence is crucial for supporting the labour-intensive manufacturing processes of the plywood industry. However, though their work pushes one of most significant sectors in Kerala, their daily experiences are often undermined by vulnerabilities. In response to these concerns, local authorities in Perumbavoor, along with the state-level establishments, have increasingly highlighted the significance of protecting the rights and welfare of this important yet marginalised sector. This has led to several government initiatives and welfare measures aimed at improving the socio-economic welfare of migrant workers and securing their proper place within the regional development framework.

This research paper gives the key data obtained from empirical field study conducted among migrant workers, highlighting their working conditions, economic circumstances, and social realities. The empirical data aims to investigate migration and labour rights in the plywood industry of Perumbavoor, Kerala.

### **1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To conduct an empirical field study by collecting primary data from inter-state migrant workers in Plywood sector of Perumbavoor Municipality, Kerala.
- To analyse their socio-economic conditions, employment patterns, legal awareness and access to welfare measures.
- To assess the measures and welfare programmes undertaken by the Kerala government for migrant workers.
- To summarize the key findings on the socio-legal status of migrant workers in plywood companies of Perumbavoor Municipality.
- To suggest legal remedies and policy reforms to strengthen the protection and welfare of migrant workers.

### **1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- What is the level of awareness amongst migrant workers regarding their legal rights, state sponsored welfare schemes and policy safeguards?

- What socio-legal challenges and vulnerabilities migrants face in the plywood sector?

### **1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a socio-legal approach, integrating both empirical and doctrinal research methods to analyse the position of migrant workers within the plywood sector of Perumbavoor Municipality, Kerala. The research employs a descriptive and analytical framework, combining qualitative and quantitative data.

To capture the lived experiences of migrant workers, empirical study with primary data was collected through survey, interview schedule technique involving structured questionnaire and qualitative interactions responses from workers employed in five different plywood companies in Perumbavoor. Primary responses collected from 50 migrant workers as respondents. Sample size is 50 and collected using random sampling method. The responses collected were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively to identify trends and key perspectives on the subject. These first-hand narratives provide insights into their working and living conditions.

### **1.4 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

- The study is limited to a specific geographic region, Perumbavoor Municipality in Ernakulam District, Kerala, India and it is only limited to the plywood sector.
- Although plywood sector is a major employer of migrant labourers in this region, the findings may not fully represent the conditions of migrant workers who are employed in other industries or regions of Kerala.
- The number of migrant workers surveyed is relatively small. The sample size of participants is limited to 50 while sufficient for qualitative observations, may not accurately represent the experiences of all migrant workers in the labour-intensive plywood companies of the state.
- The language barrier between the researcher and the migrant workers was one of the major obstacles faced during the field study. In-depth conversations and data collection were made more difficult by knowing that, despite Hindi being the primary language of communication, many respondents have their own local language, making Hindi their second language. They are also unfamiliar with legal languages.
- The study is primarily limited to the socio-legal aspects of migrant labour, such as legal awareness, working conditions, and access to welfare schemes.

- Due to practical constraints, the selection of participants was not entirely random, leading to potential sampling bias. Workers willing to participate in the surveys may have different experiences from those who chose not to participate, potentially affecting the representation of the overall migrant worker population.

### **1.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

This study has been approved by the Institutional Human Ethics Committee (IHEC), Pondicherry University vide letter no. **PU/RR/IHEC/2025** dated **26-03-2025**.

## **II-REPRESENTATION OF DATA**

This empirical study aims at examining the socio-legal status of migrant workers in the plywood industry in Perumbavoor Municipality, Kerala. To achieve this purpose, an empirical study was undertaken to collect primary data from the migrant workers involved in this essential sector of the economy. The research employs both doctrinal and empirical methods. The doctrinal research analyses the legal framework governing migrant labourers under current national labour laws, while the empirical aspect came from fieldwork done at plywood enterprises located in Perumbavoor Municipality, Kerala. The researcher has focused on the employment and living situations, migration patterns and welfare issues faced by migrant workers. The researcher designed a structured interview schedule and conducted upon migrant workers in the plywood industry.

This study involved the selection of 50 migrant workers using random sampling method. The respondents are 10 migrant workers from each of five plywood manufacturing enterprises in Perumbavoor. So, the sample size of the study is 50 respondents. Following are the companies:

- Modern plywood company
- Shalimar spins
- Kannapuram veneers
- Western woods plywoods
- Simna matches

The collected data examines various socio-economic and legal aspects of life of workers, including wages, working hours, housing situations, access to welfare measures and experiences with employment rights and labour laws. The empirical data presented in this chapter only focused on the major data collected through direct interviews with the selected

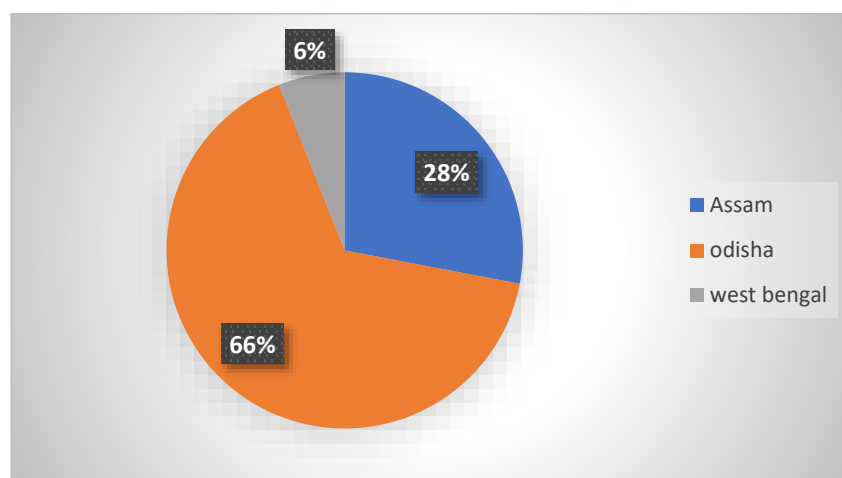
respondents. The finding of this empirical study serves as vital for evaluating the effective implementation of rights and safeguards provided by national labour laws and different state-initiated programs and policies for the migrant workers in the Perumbavoor plywood industry. A complete study of the data obtained by the researcher has been undertaken. To represent the collected data, tables have been created. The tables, bar graphs and pie charts are used for the graphical representation of data as needed and are generated. The percentage of all responses will be assessed. Observation of the researcher can be used to transform numerical data into more qualitative conclusions. Researcher, aims to present this analysis briefly; hence, this chapter is broken down into segments:

- Tabular representation expressing data in figures and percentages.
- Graphical representation of comparative data using bar graphs, pie charts etc.
- Inferences from the numerical data to describe in order to convert it into qualitative data.
- Observations of the researcher.

### Part-1 Demographic profile of migrant workers

- Native state of respondents

Native state	Responses	Percentage
Assam	14	28.00%
Odisha	33	66.00%
West Bengal	3	6.00%
Total	50	100.00%

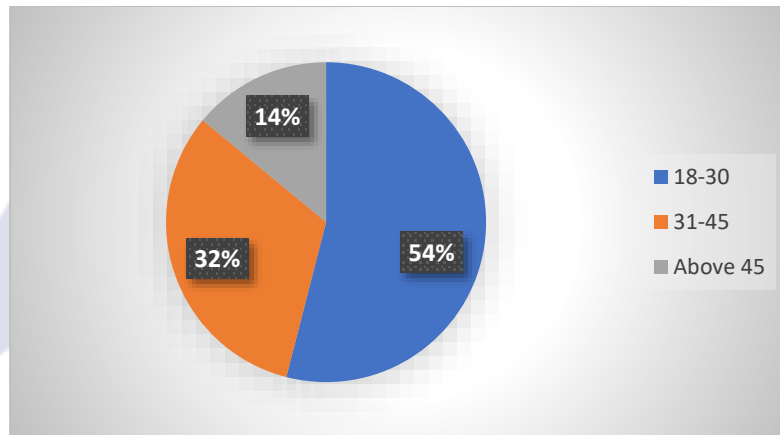


**Inference:**

The chart illustrates that the native states of origin of migrant workers in the Perumbavoor plywood industry. A large majority, **66%, from Odisha**, followed by **28% from Assam**, and a smaller group, **6% from West Bengal**. This highlights Odisha as the predominant state contributing to the migrant workforce in this sector.

- Age of respondents

Age	Responses	Percentage
18-30	27	54.00%
31-45	16	32.00%
Above 45	7	14.00%
total	50	100.00%



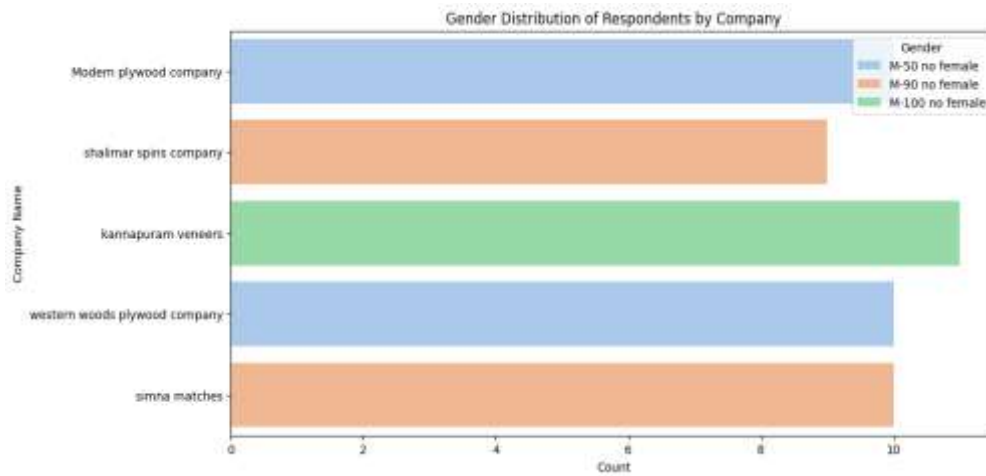
**Inference:**

The pie chart visually represents the **age distribution** of the respondents. The largest segment blue segment indicates that **18-30-year-olds** dominate the sample at **54%**. The green segment shows **31-45-year-olds** making up **32%**, while the red segment illustrates the **Above 45** group at **14%**. This visual makes it clear that younger respondents (under 30) form the majority of migrant workers. of younger migrant workers within the plywood industry in Perumbavoor.

- Gender

Company name	male	percentage
Modern plywood	50	100%
Shalimar spins	90	100%
Kannapuram veneers	100	100%

Westernwoods plywood	90	100%
Simna matches	90	100%

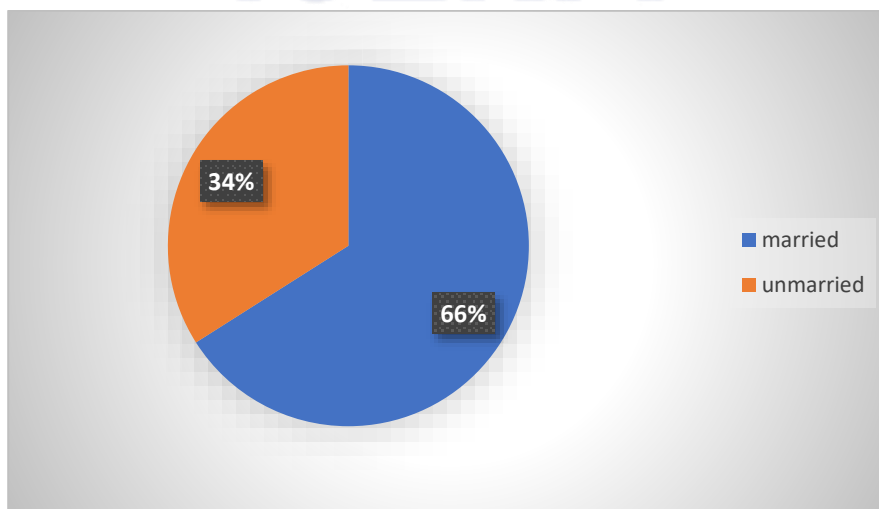


**Inference:**

All surveyed companies employ **100% male** workers in their workforce. The data indicates a male-dominated workforce in the plywood sector, with no gender diversity in employment.

- Marital status

Marital status	Responses	Percentage
married	33	66.00%
unmarried	17	34.00%
total	50	100.00%

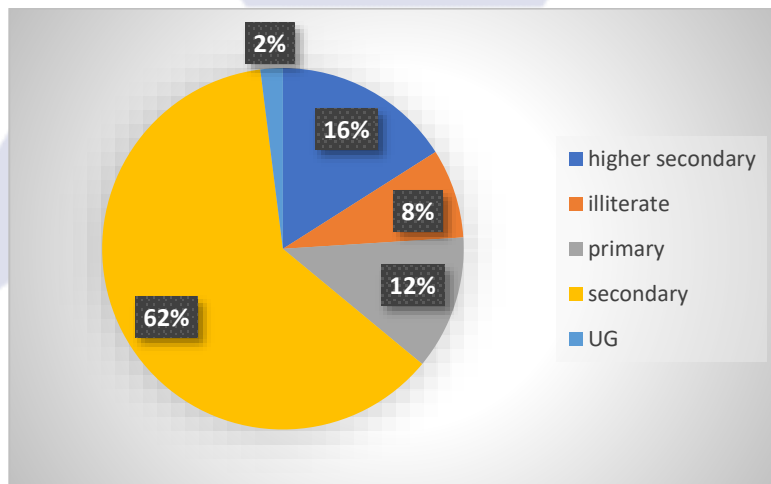


**Inference:**

The pie chart displays the **marital status** of migrant workers. The majority, **66%**, are **married**, while **34%** are **unmarried**. This indicates that a significant proportion of the workforce has familial responsibilities, which could drive their migration and employment choices.

- Educational qualification

Educational qualification	Responses	Percentage
higher secondary	8	16.00%
illiterate	4	8.00%
primary	6	12.00%
secondary	31	62.00%
UG	1	2.00%
total	50	100.00%



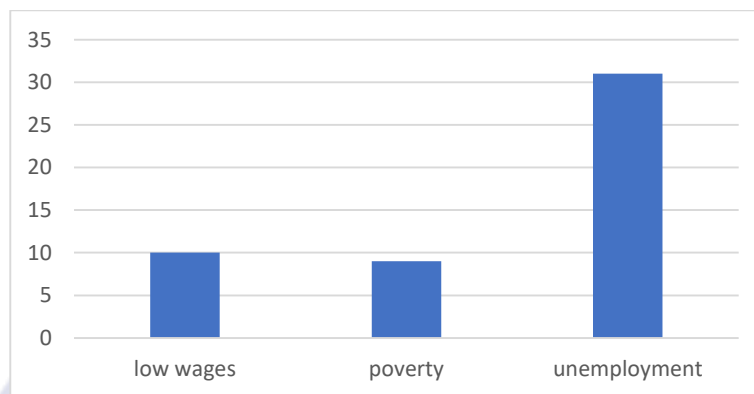
**Inference:**

The pie chart shows that the majority of the migrant workers have completed **secondary education (62%)**, suggesting that most respondents have attained at least a foundational level of schooling, followed by a smaller portion **higher secondary education (16%)**. The presence of **illiterate workers (8%)** and those with only **primary education (12%)** points to socio-economic vulnerabilities within the migrant labour pool. Lastly, **only 2%** have attained an **undergraduate (UG)** degree represent a minority who may be overqualified for manual labour.

**Part- 2 Migration Details**

- Reason for migration

reason for migration	Responses	percentage
low wages	10	20.00%
poverty	9	18.00%
unemployment	31	62.00%
total	50	100.00%

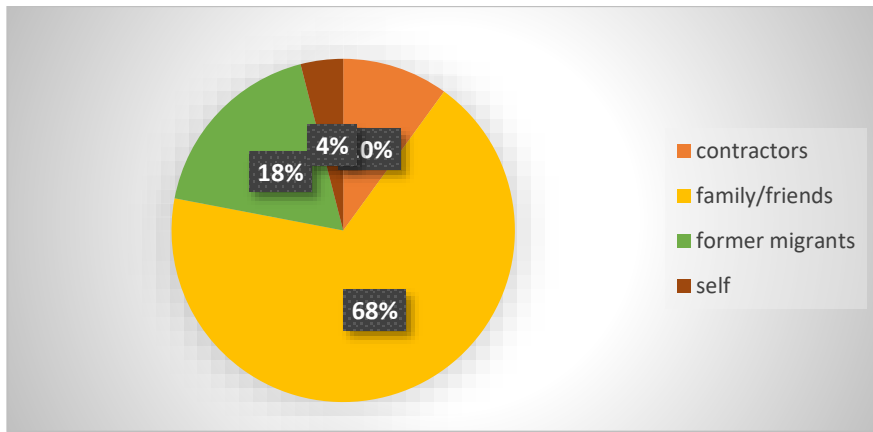


**Inference:**

The data clearly demonstrates that **unemployment (62%)** is the leading cause of migration to Kerala. The **20%, low wages** indicate that even when jobs existed, they did not offer sufficient income to sustain basic living needs. **Poverty (18%)** highlights deep-rooted economic deprivation forcing people to migrate. The significant gap between unemployment and low wages highlights that most respondents had no access to job opportunities in their native regions.

- Channel for migration

Channel for migration	Responses	Percentage
contractors	5	10.00%
family/friends	34	68.00%
former migrants	9	18.00%
self	2	4.00%
total	50	100.00%

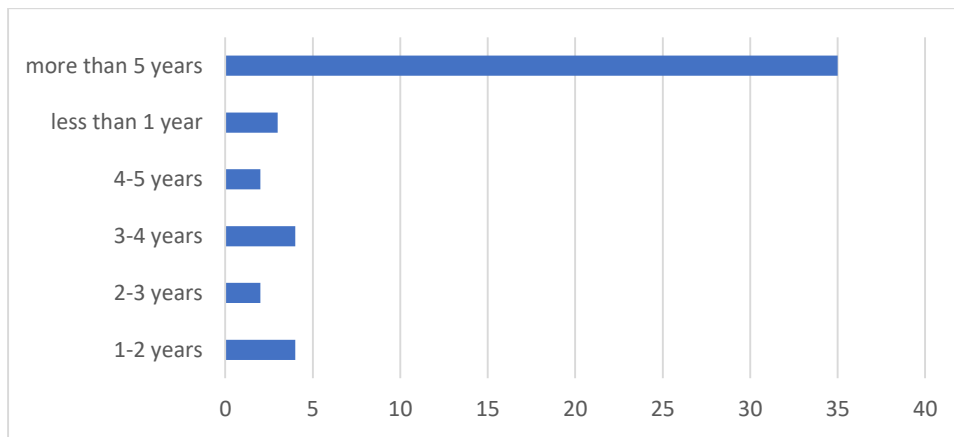


**Inference:**

The data clearly shows that **family and friends (68%)** are the primary channels through which migrant workers arrived in Kerala. Interestingly, **former migrants (18%)**, people who had already worked in Kerala and facilitated new migration, also played a notable role, showcasing the concept of **circular migration** or **peer influence**. **Contractors (10%)** highlight a **semi-formal recruitment process**, where labour intermediaries recruit to the plywood companies. The **self-migrated group (4%)** represents those who took independent initiatives, either through personal exploration or without external help.

- Duration of stay in Kerala

duration of stay	responses	percentage
1-2 years	4	8.00%
2-3 years	2	4.00%
3-4 years	4	8.00%
4-5 years	2	4.00%
less than 1 year	3	6.00%
more than 5 years	35	70.00%
total	50	100.00%



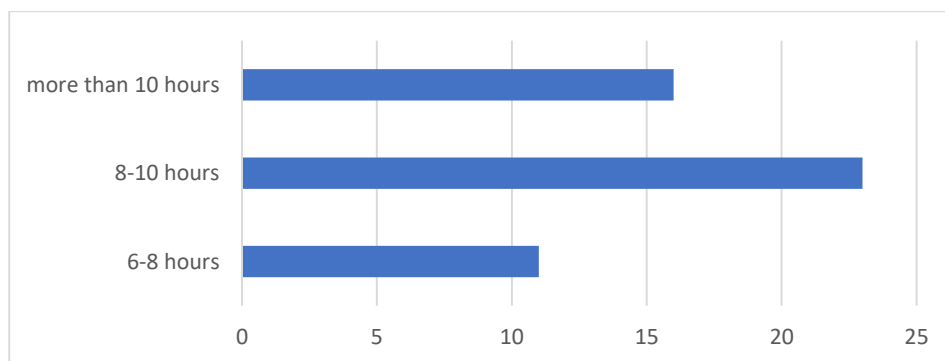
**Inference:**

The data suggests that a majority of migrant workers are long-term residents. A significant **majority (70%)** of migrant workers have stayed in Kerala for **more than five years**, whereas smaller proportion (**8%**) have been in the state for **1-2 years**, while **6%** have stayed for **less than a year**, reflecting recent migration. **8%** of workers have stayed for **3-4 years**, and **4%** each in the **2-3 years** and **4-5 years** categories.

**Part-3 Employment profile of migrant workers**

- Working hours

hours of work	Responses	percentage
6-8 hours	11	22.00%
8-10 hours	23	46.00%
more than 10 hours	16	32.00%
total	50	100.00%

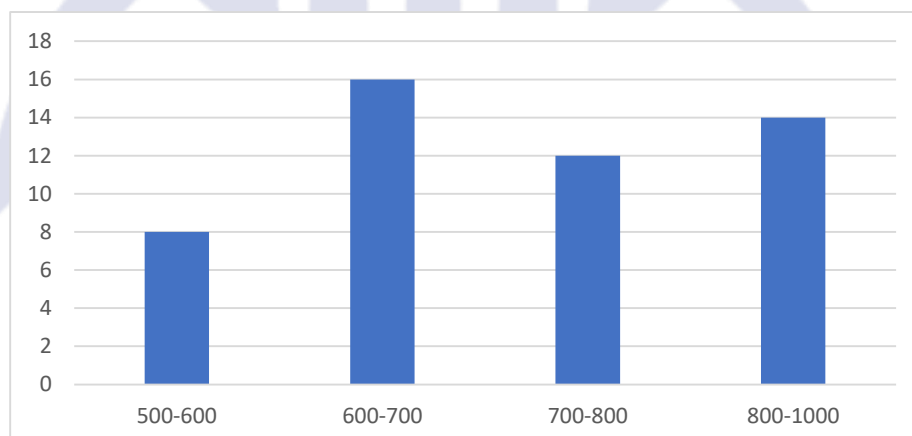


**Inference:**

The data shows nearly **half of the migrant workers (46%)** are working the expected **8 to 10 hours** typical of the plywood industry. However, **32%** of the respondents work for **more than 10 hours**, indicating a significant reliance on **extended shifts**. Meanwhile, **22%** of workers operate on a **6–8-hour shift**.

- Income levels

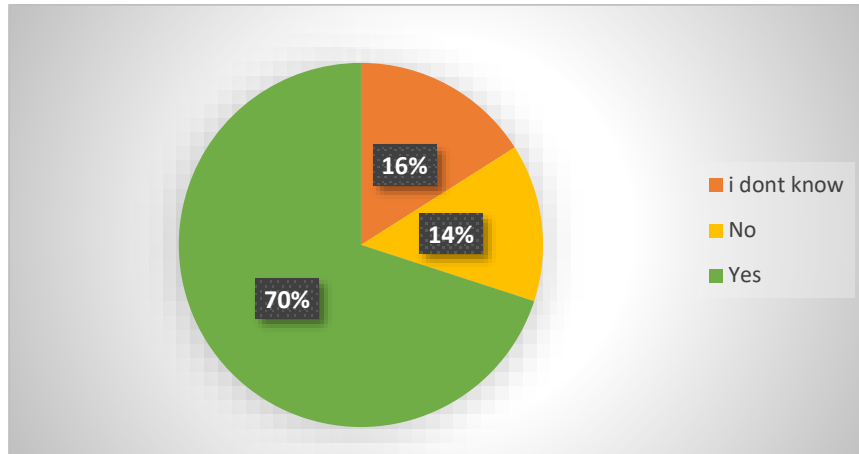
wages per day	Responses	Percentage
500-600	8	16.00%
600-700	16	32.00%
700-800	12	24.00%
800-1000	14	28.00%
total	50	100.00%

**Inference:**

The most common wage bracket is **₹600 - ₹700**, accounting for **32%** of the respondents. The second largest group earns between **₹800 - ₹1000** daily (**28%**), indicating that a substantial portion of the workers are able to secure relatively higher wages. **24%** of workers fall into the **₹700 - ₹800** wage group. **16%** are earning at the lower end, between **₹500 - ₹600** per day. The wage structure shows a **wage dispersion** where most workers (**84%**) earn **between ₹600 and ₹1000 per day**, with fewer workers (**16%**) at the lower wage range.

- Equality in wage payment

equality in wage payment	Responses	Percentage
I don't know	8	16.00%
No	7	14.00%
Yes	35	70.00%
total	50	100.00%

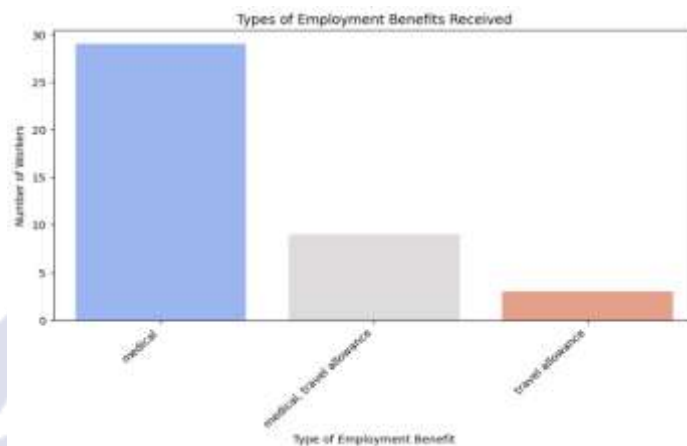
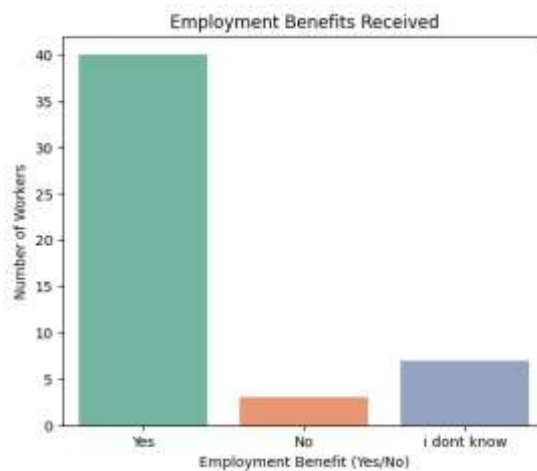


**Inference:**

The data clearly shows that **70%** of the respondents feel that **there is equality in wage payment** among workers in their workplace. **14%** believe that **wage inequality** exists in the company in wage allocation. **16%** of respondents answered "**I don't know**", indicating a section of workers may either be **unaware of co-workers' wages** or are indifferent to the issue.

- Employment benefit

employment benefit from company	Responses	Percentage	type of benefit	Responses
I don't know	7	14.00%	medical	29
No	3	6.00%	medical, travel allowance	9
Yes	40	80.00%	travel allowance	3
Total	50	100%	Total	41



**Inference:**

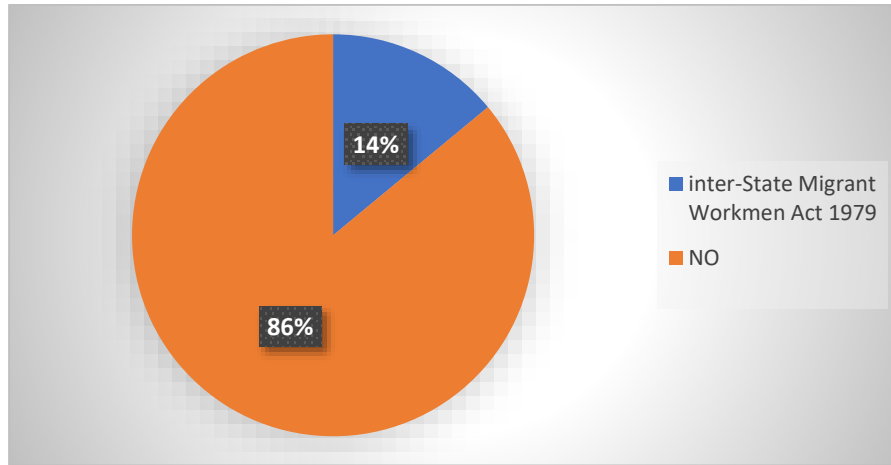
From the data, large majority of workers in the five companies, **80%**, confirmed that they receive some form of **employment benefits** from their company **6%** of respondents reported that they **do not receive any benefits**. **14%** of respondents expressed **uncertainty** by responding “**I don’t know**,” indicating a knowledge gap regarding employment benefits. The **majority (29 out of 41)** of respondents receive medical benefits as their primary form of workplace support. A smaller portion (**9 respondents**) receive both medical benefits and travel allowance, indicating a limited provision of multiple benefits. **Only 3 respondents** receive **travel allowance** alone.

**Part-4 Socio-Legal position**

- Legal Awareness

Legal awareness	Responses	Percentage
Yes, Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979	7	14.00%

No	43	86.00%
total	50	100.00%

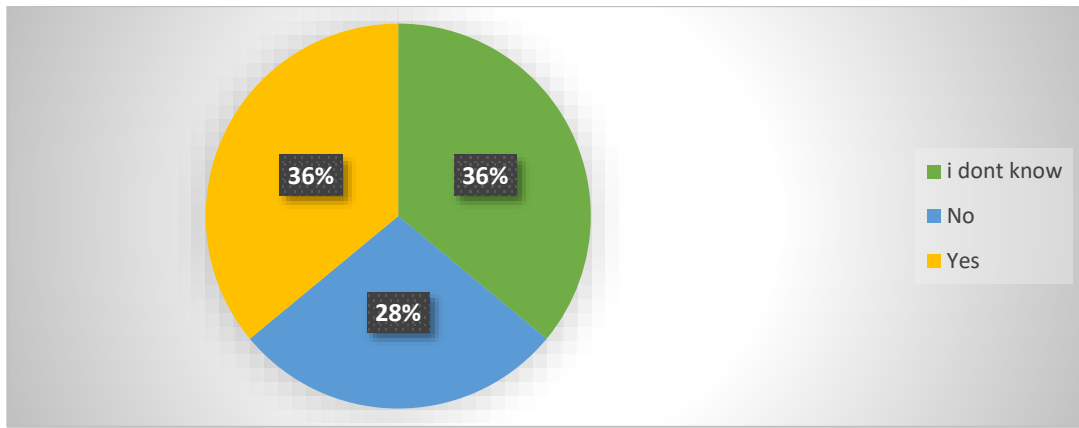


**Inference:**

The data shows that a significant **majority (86%)** of the migrant workers surveyed in the companies in Perumbavoor Municipality are not aware of **the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979**, which is a crucial labour law specifically designed to safeguard their rights and working conditions. **Only 14%** of the respondents indicated **legal awareness**. The lack of awareness of such an important legal framework raises serious concerns about the information gap and limited access to labour rights education among migrant workers in this sector.

- Grievance Redressal Mechanism

Grievance Redressal Mechanism	Responses	Percentage
I don't know	18	36.00%
No	14	28.00%
Yes	18	36.00%
total	50	100.00%

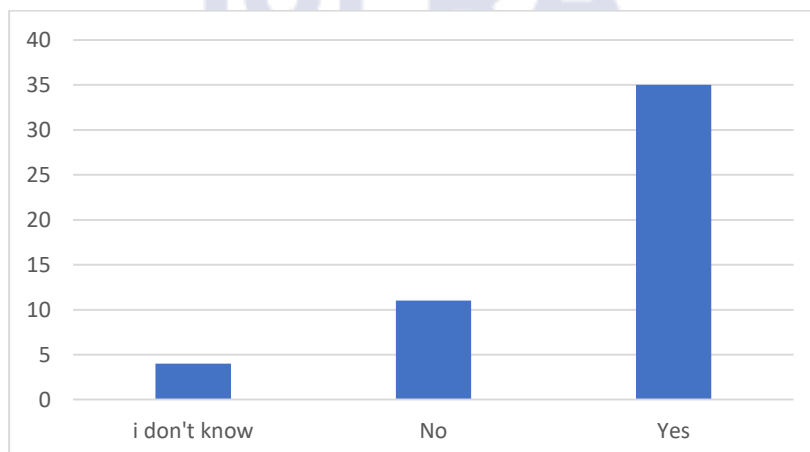


**Inference:**

The data indicates that only **36% of migrant workers** reported the existence of a grievance redressal mechanism at their workplace, while an equal proportion of **36% were unaware** of any such system. Another **28% clearly indicated the absence** of such mechanisms. This reflects a situation where over **64% of workers either lack access to or awareness about proper grievance channels.**

- Inspection

Inspection	Responses	percentage
I don't know	4	11.43%
No	11	31.43%
Yes	35	100.00%

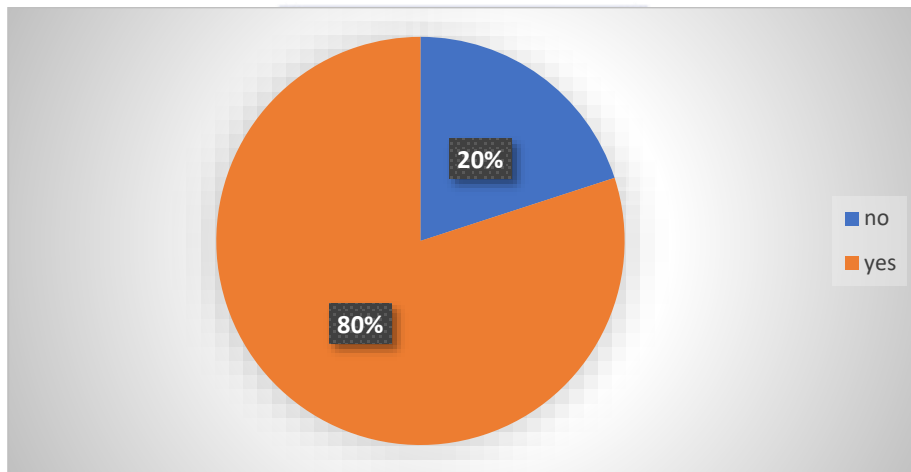


**Inference:**

The data shows that **57.14% of migrant workers** confirmed the occurrence of inspections at their workplace, while **31.43% stated there were no inspections**, and **11.43% were unaware** of such practices.

- Voting participation

voting participation	Responses	percentage
no	10	20.00%
yes	40	80.00%
total	50	100.00%



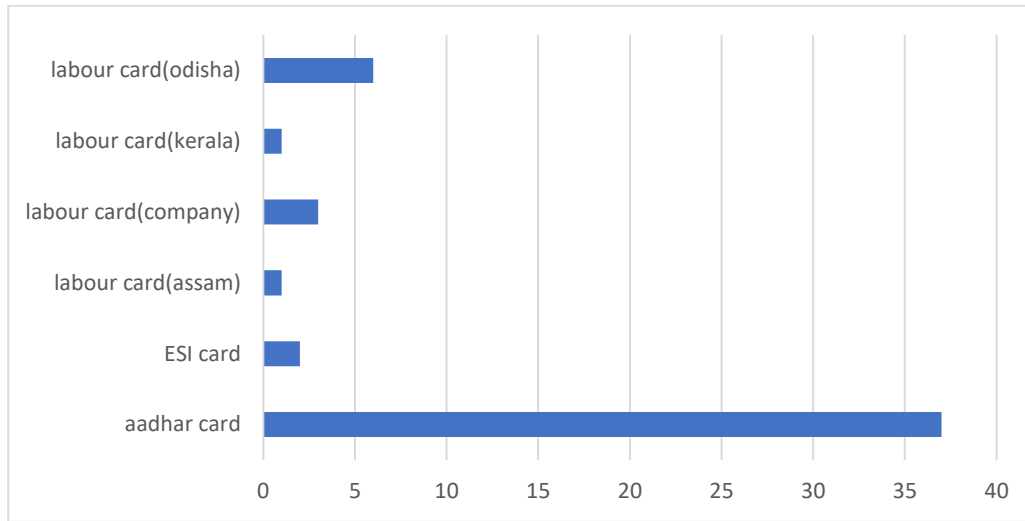
**Inference:**

A significant majority of migrant workers, **80%**, reported **participating** in elections to cast their votes in their home states, whereas **20% non-participation** stated they do not engage in voting.

- Registered government ID

Registered Government ID	Responses	Percentage
Aadhar card	37	74.00%
ESI card	2	4.00%
labour card(Assam)	1	2.00%
labour card (company)	3	6.00%
labour card (Kerala)	1	2.00%

labour card (Odisha)	6	12.00%
total	50	100.00%



**Inference:**

From the chart, (74%) of migrant workers possess an **Aadhar card**, which serves as a national identity document. Some workers have **Labour Cards**, but they are fragmented across different jurisdictions (**Assam 2 %**, **Odisha 12 %**, **Kerala 2 %**, and **company 6%**), **ESI cards** are held by only **4%** of respondents, indicating limited engagement with formal health insurance schemes.

**2.1 OBSERVATIONS OF THE RESEARCHER**

Field study undertaken by the researcher on migrant workers in the plywood industry of Perumbavoor Municipality unearthed an intricate web of socio-economic patterns, legal vulnerabilities, and human resilience. These workers, who have journeyed from distant states like Assam, Odisha, and West Bengal, form an indispensable part of plywood industry in Kerala. Through engaging with 50 migrant workers, this research uncovers both the visible and hidden layers of their lived realities. This section captures my firsthand observations, blending numerical findings with narratives that reflect their socio-legal positioning.

- Majority of the migrant workforce is drawn primarily from Odisha, followed by Assam and West Bengal. Migration to Kerala is largely driven by informal social networks, such as friends and family, reflecting a clear pattern of chain migration. The entire workforce consists of male workers only, female migrant workers do not get a space for work in the plywood companies as the work is heavily physical labour. Many

described their migration as a survival tactic rather than a choice, motivated by the urgent need to sustain their families amidst economic hardship.

- Workers are predominantly aged between 18 and 30 years. Most of them are unmarried and have completed secondary-level education, indicating limited formal educational attainment within this group. The majority of migrant workers in plywood sector have been residing in the state for over five years, with some employed in this industry for more than a decade.
- All migrant workers are employed in unskilled and physically demanding roles such as loading, peeling, cutting, drying, pressing, taping, and finishing within the plywood sector. Their jobs are labour-intensive and lack formal employment contracts, giving workers the flexibility to leave their positions at will. Most workers exceed the standard 8-hour workday, and some regularly work beyond 10 hours, although they do receive additional payment for overtime, this compensation is informal and varies according to the discretion of the employer.
- Workers are paid on a weekly basis, while few get daily wages typically ranging from ₹600 to ₹1000, the majority earning between ₹700 and ₹800 per day. Compared to wages available in their home states, this income is considered significantly higher and serves as a key factor motivating their migration to Kerala. The prospect of better earnings and regular payment has encouraged many workers to remain in Kerala and continue working in the plywood sector.
- A key concern revealed by the study is the widespread lack of legal awareness among the migrant workers. While a few respondents had a general understanding that labour laws exist in the nation, none could identify ISMW Act, 1979 or specific protections under the act, or related legal provisions. Workers were unaware of main rights under the act such as displacement allowances, statutory wage rates, regulated working hours, and holiday rights.
- Most migrant workers reside in company-provided accommodations that offer basic facilities such as water, electricity, sanitation, food provisions, and safety measures. These amenities are considered higher to those available in their home states, contributing to workers' overall satisfaction with their living conditions. A smaller group of workers lives with their families in rented housing and benefits from access to nearby infrastructure, including Anganawadis for their children's education. Overall, workers expressed contentment with both their living and workplace environments, noting that their essential needs are consistently met.

- Despite legal provisions mandating formal grievance redressal mechanisms, companies lack such structures. Instead, workers depend on informal communication channels with managers or the principal employer (Malik) to address grievances. While these relationships are direct and amicable, the absence of formal mechanisms reduces transparency and accountability.
- Although workers reported that labour authorities and police conduct periodic inspections at their workplaces. A majority presence of inspections indicates that, at least superficially, there is some regulatory oversight in the Perumbavoor plywood sector.
- Most respondents were unfamiliar not even heard of the key welfare schemes and programmes. Despite many workers having resided in Kerala for more than eight years, this prolonged stay has not translated into greater awareness or access to these welfare measures.
- All migrant workers only possess only Aadhaar cards as their primary form of identification, providing them with a basic level of official documentation. However, only a small minority hold labour cards, which may be issued by their home state governments, the GOK, or directly by their employers. It points towards a **lack of uniformity** in the documentation process. There is a clear demand among workers for these labour identification documents or cards.
- Migrants remain detached from political processes in Kerala, highlighting their temporary and non-integrated status within the socio-political landscape of Kerala. Their civic engagement is confined to their place of origin, with little to no involvement in local political activities or decision-making processes in Kerala.
- Migrant workers expressed that they feel safe and socially accepted in Kerala, consistently reporting no incidents of discrimination, intimidation, or bullying, either at their workplaces or within the broader community. Many highlighted the welcoming and hospitable nature of both the local population and their employers. Kerala's reputation for low crime rates and the cultural emphasis on tolerance may contribute to this perception. Despite this positive environment, social integration with the local Malayali community remains limited. Most workers tend to form close-relation groups based on shared cultural and linguistic backgrounds, which restricts deeper engagement with local society.

- Migrant workers identified several key challenges affecting their daily lives in Kerala. Language barriers emerged as a major obstacle, limiting both their social integration and ease of communication in the workplace and local community. Additionally, cultural differences, especially related to food preferences, posed difficulties in their adaptation to the local environment. The relatively high cost of living in Kerala, compared to their home states, was another common concern, as it impacts their ability to save and remit funds. Emotional hardship is also prevalent, with many workers expressing feelings of loneliness and homesickness due to prolonged separation from their families, as most live alone without immediate family support.
- Despite the challenges they face, migrant workers prefer to continue working in Kerala, largely due to the higher wages and steady employment opportunities that are often unavailable in their home states. They hold a favourable view of Kerala, commending its hospitable community, strong governance, and well-developed infrastructure. Workers also appreciate the state's emphasis on education, technological advancement, and social development. Additionally, employers are perceived as kind and accommodating. However, despite these positive aspects, significant gaps remain in terms of legal awareness, formal grievance redressal mechanisms, and social integration. The findings highlight the urgent need for focused interventions aimed at improving the socio-legal status of migrant workers in the plywood sector of Perumbavoor.

The data collected and the narratives gathered reflect a workforce caught between opportunity and vulnerability. While the plywood sector of Perumbavoor offers migrants employment and relative economic security compared to their home states, it simultaneously exposes them to legal and social marginalization.

### **III- FINDINGS, CONCLUSION &SUGGESTIONS**

#### **3.1 FINDINGS**

The research findings, observations, and empirical study conducted on migrant workers in the plywood sector of Perumbavoor municipality offers significance insights to labourers working and living circumstances problem social-economic-legal issues that influence their livelihoods this section presents The research, grounded in the experiences of 50 migrant workers from 5 different plywood companies reveals a nuanced but concerning picture of their position within labour ecosystem of Kerala. The primary discoveries emphasizing the significant factors that impact migrant workers within this particular environment on inter-state migrant workers.

### Migration Patterns and Causes

- The overwhelming majority of respondents migrated due to unemployment in their native states, while poverty and low wages also emerged as significant push factors. These statistics align with the stories shared during field interactions, where most workers expressed how diminishing employment opportunities back home forced them to venture to Kerala.
- When asked about who facilitated their migration, a dominant 68% revealed that family and friends acted as key intermediaries. This underlines the strong reliance on informal social networks, where social- relations play a vital role in navigating the complexities of relocation. Former migrants (18%) and contractors (10%) also played a role, while a small number (4%) migrated independently. These channels of migration is a continuing pattern of chain migration within certain communities, indicating that migration decisions are seldom individual but deeply social.

### Employment Profile and Work Conditions

- The employment profile of these workers paints a vivid picture of labour intensity and precarious work conditions. A striking 46% reported working 8-10 hours daily, and an additional 32% endure more than 10 hours of labour, far exceeding the legal norms prescribed by labour laws. Only 22% work within the standard 6-8 hours framework. Field conversations revealed that extended working hours often lack corresponding overtime benefits, hinting at exploitative labour practices embedded in the plywood companies.
- Wage patterns showed that 32% of workers earn between ₹600-700 per day, while others fall into varying brackets ranging from ₹500-1000. Alarmingly, even workers earning ₹800-1000 reported inconsistent payments due to irregular workloads and absence of formal contracts. The disparity between wages and the cost of living in Kerala surfaced as a recurring concern. Many shared that after deducting expenses for food, accommodation, and remittances, they are left with minimal disposable income.
- It is worth noting that while 70% of respondents acknowledged the existence of wage equality between migrant and local workers, a significant minority (14%) felt discriminated against. This discrepancy points to the existence of both formal compliance and informal biases within the industry, where some workers perceive unequal treatment despite laws advocating for wage parity.

### Legal Awareness and Protection

- Perhaps the most critical finding relates to the awareness of labour laws and grievance mechanisms of workers. A staggering 86% admitted having no knowledge of the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979, which is designed specifically to protect their rights. Only 14% had even heard of this legislation. This legal vacuum contributes to a lack of bargaining power and leaves migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation.
- Further, 36% of respondents were unaware of grievance redressal mechanisms, while another 28% stated outright that no such mechanisms exist at their workplaces. Field dialogues revealed that many workers equate reporting grievances with the fear of retaliation, including wage cuts or job loss. However, a small group (36%) were aware of some form of redressal, mostly informal or employer-driven rather than legally mandated bodies.
- In terms of inspections, 35 workers (70%) confirmed witnessing some form of workplace inspections. However, the significant share of workers who report no inspections or who are unaware of them highlights potential inconsistencies in monitoring and enforcement across the sector. The high percentage of positive responses could imply that inspections are conducted but might not always be effective in addressing or preventing violations.
- 80% of workers reported receiving some employment benefits from their companies. These included accommodation and food allowances, though these benefits were often basic and inconsistent across different firms. The data implies partial corporate responsibility but also highlights the absence of comprehensive statutory benefits.

### Absence of Awareness on Government Schemes

- Perhaps the most startling revelation was that none of the workers interacted were aware of any government welfare programs applicable to them. This total absence of awareness underscores a severe disconnect between policy intent and field-level implementation. Despite the presence of centrally sponsored schemes aimed at migrant labour welfare, this knowledge gap leaves workers dependent on informal networks and employer goodwill.
- Raising concerns about how workplace disputes and rights violations are addressed within the companies. Such a split distribution points to both inadequate communication by employers and the fragmented nature of grievance resolution

frameworks, especially in informal sectors where contractor-based employment is common.

- The political engagement of these workers is 80% reported and they continue to participate in elections back home. This reflects strong ties to their native states and limited political assimilation in Kerala, where most are not enrolled as voters. This suggests that despite their physical relocation to Kerala for employment, a large proportion of migrant workers maintain political ties to their native regions.
- Most respondents (74%) possessed an Aadhaar card, while a smaller fraction held labour cards from various jurisdictions (Assam, Odisha, Kerala). However, only 4% reported having an ESI card, indicating limited access to formal social security schemes. The lack of comprehensive documentation weakens their legal standing and bars them from availing several welfare benefits

The social integration of migrant workers within Perumbavoor remains nuanced. The findings underscore a dual reality while plywood sector of Kerala offers better wages, safer living conditions, and a comparatively inclusive environment, migrant workers remain legally vulnerable and socially marginalized. The partial implementation of labour protections and the reliance on informal employer-worker relationships perpetuate this precariousness.

### Socio-Legal Interpretation

The research findings clearly indicate multiple breaches of labour laws and statutory obligations under various national and state-level labour legislations applicable to inter-state migrant workers in India, particularly under the (ISMW Act), the Factories Act, 1948, and Minimum Wages Act, 1948. The violations are as follows:

1. Excessive Working Hours: The ISMW Act, 1979, read with the Factories Act, limits working hours to 8 hours per day, beyond which overtime regulations apply. The prevalence of work shifts extending beyond 10 hours, as recorded in the study, directly violates these provisions and undermines the health and safety standards guaranteed under labour laws.
2. Non-payment of Displacement Allowance: The ISMW Act mandates that interstate migrants are entitled to a displacement allowance to compensate for the hardship of migration. The absence of this allowance for workers constitutes a breach of Section 14 of the Act.
3. Lack of Free Employment Benefits: Section 15 of the ISMW Act requires employers to provide free accommodation, medical facilities, and protective clothing where

applicable. The limited or discretionary provision of travel and medical allowances instead of formal employment benefits indicates partial compliance and contravenes the workers' statutory entitlements.

4. Legal Unawareness: Unawareness about minimum wages, overtime pay, and contract laws, rights and other benefit leads to extreme labour exploitation.
5. Absence of Grievance Redressal Mechanisms: As per the ISMW Act and relevant state labour regulations, every industrial establishment employing inter-state migrants is required to set up grievance redressal and complaint mechanisms. The absence of such institutional mechanisms and reliance on informal employer-worker communication violates procedural labour rights and weakens workers' access to justice.
6. No Trade Union or Worker Associations: The lack of trade union membership or independent worker associations hampers the workers' collective bargaining power, contradicting the objectives of the Trade Unions Act, 1926, which protects workers' rights to unionize for better working conditions and dispute resolution.
7. Gender Disparity: The complete exclusion of women from the workforce in the plywood sector may not directly violate statutory mandates, but it raises concerns under the broader constitutional principles of equality under Constitution of India and gender-inclusive labour policies advocated by the Ministry of Labour and Employment.
8. Irregular and Discretionary Overtime Payment: The Factories Act and Minimum Wages Act stipulate that overtime work must be compensated at prescribed statutory rates. The discretionary and inconsistent payment for overtime work noted in the study violates these provisions.
9. Inequality in Payment System: Any disparity in wage payment without justification is a violation of the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, and contradicts the principle of "equal pay for equal work" upheld by the Supreme Court of India.
10. Lack of Labour-Specific Documentation: While most workers possess Aadhaar cards, the absence of labour cards or other formal employment documentation prevents workers from accessing entitlements under state-specific labour welfare funds, such as the Kerala Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme, thus breaching their right to social security as provided under Articles 41 and 43 of the Indian Constitution.

### **3.2 CONCLUSION**

The present research on inter-state migrant workers in the plywood sector of Perumbavoor Municipality offers a critical insight into the intersection of labour, law, and human rights in

contemporary India. Migrant workers, who predominantly hail from the economically backward states of Odisha, Assam, and West Bengal, are indispensable to the plywood industry of Kerala, yet their presence is marked by structural exclusion and socio-legal marginalization. Despite Kerala has progressive image as a labour-friendly and welfare-oriented state, the reality for migrant workers tells a different story. While the workers contribute significantly to the economic vitality in the industrial ecosystem of Perumbavoor, they remain entrenched in informal labour arrangements that lack formal contracts, procedural guarantees, and institutional safeguards. This research highlights that these workers, despite being long-term residents in Kerala, are subjected to precarious employment structures that undermine their basic rights to fair labour conditions and legal protection. This research in analysed the doctrinal study putting out several theories, understanding concept, factors, types, challenges, effects of labour migration as a topic of study globally.

At the core of these findings lies a grave violation of both constitutional guarantees and international human rights commitments, as the very individuals these laws aim to protect are unable to access their rightful benefits. The failure to translate legal provisions into tangible protections for migrant workers exposes a significant gap between legislative intent and implementation, ultimately depriving them of their basic human rights as enshrined in national and international legal frameworks. both international and national human rights standards remain unfulfilled because the intended beneficiaries of these laws are not receiving their guaranteed protections. Internationally, India is a signatory to the UDHR, ICCPR, ICESCR and the Constitution of India guarantees fundamental rights in the Part III. The failure to implement these safeguards effectively denies migrant workers their basic human rights, reinforcing structural inequalities and deepening their socio-economic vulnerability.

A deeply alarming aspect of this research is the pervasive legal illiteracy among migrant workers. Despite prolonged residency in Kerala, most workers remain unaware of their legal entitlements under both national labour laws and state-level welfare programs. Workers lack critical knowledge of displacement allowances, prescribed working hours, and statutory benefits under programs such as the Apna Ghar housing scheme, the Awaaz health insurance scheme, and the Kerala Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme. This legal vacuum fundamentally weakens their ability to seek redress, assert their rights, or engage with institutional frameworks meant to protect them.

This unawareness is not a mere educational shortcoming but a structural failure rooted in weak implementation mechanisms, language barriers, and the absence of proactive state intervention. The failure of labour departments, employers, and civil society to effectively disseminate legal and welfare information to migrant workers represents a clear breach of the duty of the state to protect the rights of all workers within its jurisdiction.

While workers reported satisfaction with basic living conditions, including access to water, sanitation, electricity, and employer-provided housing, this contentment must be seen in context. Such satisfaction is relative, reflecting the stark deprivation in their home states rather than the adequacy of their living standards in Kerala. Furthermore, the absence of meaningful social integration with the local community reinforces the idea that while overt discrimination may be minimal, cultural assimilation is still a challenge.

Socio-economic and legal frameworks of Kerala require urgent reform to bridge the gap between law in books and law in action. The current regulatory model, while progressive in principle, lacks the grassroots mechanisms and institutional accountability needed to protect the rights of migrant workers. Weak inspections, administrative formalism, and the absence of localized grievance bodies further enable the persistence of informal labour practices.

In conclusion, this study makes it evident that labour migration is not simply an economic phenomenon but a deeply embedded socio-legal challenge. The lived experiences of migrant workers in plywood sector of Perumbavoor reflect systemic inequities in access to justice, socio-political inclusion, and the realization of fundamental labour rights. The findings reinforce the urgent necessity for a comprehensive rights-based approach to labour governance, one that centres human dignity, legal empowerment, and institutional accountability.

Addressing these issues requires a multi-pronged strategy. First, the state must prioritize the legal literacy of migrant workers through community-based awareness programs and multilingual legal aid services. Second, it is imperative to strengthen labour inspections and formalize grievance redressal mechanisms at the factory level. Third, the formation of trade unions and worker associations must be actively supported to ensure collective bargaining power. Finally, greater efforts must be made to integrate migrant workers into social and civic spheres of Kerala, promoting an inclusive society where all labourers are treated as full and equal members.

Ultimately, the human rights lens adopted in this research underscores that the well-being of migrant workers is not merely a matter of economic security but an essential component of justice, equality, and fraternity. Without immediate and sustained reforms, inter-state migrant workers will remain economic contributors to industrial development of Kerala, yet marginalized from its legal protections and social fabric.

### **3.3 SUGGESTIONS**

The following suggestions address key areas such as legal awareness, documentation, workplace rights, social inclusion, and legislative reforms to create a more just and equitable labour environment in Kerala.

#### 1. Strengthening Legal Awareness and Access to Benefits

- **Mandatory Awareness Programs for Migrants:** Upon arrival and registration with labour departments or local police stations, migrant workers should receive structured legal awareness programs. These sessions must be conducted at periodic intervals by labour officials, KELSA or DLSA, NGOs, local administration-based collaboration with local bodies at panchayat, village and Municipality levels involving members like Asha workers to educate workers about their rights, workplace protections, and available government welfare schemes to ensure wider outreach.
- **Employer-Led Legal Training:** Companies should be required to hold regular legal orientation programs, making workers aware of their employment rights, grievance redressal mechanisms, and labour laws applicable to them.

#### 2. Enhancing Labour Documentation and Welfare Accessibility

- **Strict Implementation of Labour Documentation:** The labour department must enforce mandatory registration of all migrant workers, ensuring that they receive labour-specific identification such as labour cards. Such documentation can determine whether there is any illegal migration from adjacent countries, primarily Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal. This documentation must be associated with social security and welfare programs.
- **Simplified Registration Processes:** Digital platforms and mobile registration units introduced by state like Guest App, Aditi portal shall be expanded more to simplify registration to ensure that every migrant worker is documented and receives government allowances.

### 3. Institutionalizing Grievance Redressal Mechanisms

- **Establishing Formal Grievance Committees:** Employers shall be strictly mandated to establish formal grievance redressal mechanisms in accordance with labour legislation or the ISMW Act. This stringent enforcement motivates workers to utilise the forum to address their workplace issues inside a legally safeguarded context. These forums need to operate transparently with representation from workers.
- **Accessible Labour Help Desks:** The government can set up dedicated help desks in industrial zones, to offer socio-legal aid and counsel and guidance on personal and professional issues of concern.

### 4. Legislative Reforms and Policy Enhancements

- **State-Specific Law for Migrant Workers:** Kerala should implement state-level laws targeted to the requirements of migrant workers, encompassing wage security, housing rights, healthcare access, and safeguards against exploitation. The Kerala Migrant Workers (Conditions of Service and Compulsory Registration) Social Security Bill must be enacted promptly. The state must accelerate the passage of pending labour laws and concerning migrant workers to provide them with a comprehensive legal framework
- **Strengthening Policy Monitoring Mechanisms:** Independent monitoring committees shall be set up under the legislation to evaluate the effectiveness of migrant worker policies and recommend necessary improvements.

### 5. Promoting Collective Representation and Worker Associations

- **Company-Facilitated Worker Committees:** Employers should be mandated to establish internal worker councils to promote dialogue between migrant employees and management, ensuring their concerns are formally addressed.
- **Legal Recognition of Migrant Worker Associations:** The state should recognize and provide legal backing to associations formed by migrant workers, ensuring they have representation in policymaking and labour negotiations.

### 6. Improving Social and Cultural Integration

- **Language and Cultural Training:** Government and companies can introduce language programs to help migrants learn Malayalam, reducing communication barriers and aiding in their integration into society.

- **Community Engagement Initiatives:** Local communities can actively engage with migrant populations educating society and local people on the importance of migrant labour and promoting harmony between migrant and native populations through social and cultural events, fostering inclusivity and mutual respect.

#### 7. Strengthening Welfare Measures and Corporate Responsibility

- **Joint Implementation of Welfare Programs:** Government welfare schemes should be implemented in collaboration with employers specifically in Plywood Sector, ensuring that benefits such as health insurance, housing, and financial assistance under various state schemes reach the intended workers.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives:** Companies employing migrant workers should allocate CSR funds for worker welfare, including improving living conditions, healthcare access, and workplace safety measures.

By adopting these comprehensive measures, Kerala can ensure that migrant workers are not only contributors to the state's economy but also valued members of its workforce, enjoying dignity, legal protection, and equal opportunities.





*Working and Living Conditions of Migrant workers in the Plywood Companies, Kerala.*

