

# The emerging issues of immigrant labourers in the construction sector of Kerala

T. C. Shamna<sup>1</sup>, K C Baiju<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Scholar, <sup>2</sup>Head of the Department, Department of Economics, Central University of Kerala, Kasaragod-671316, India  
shamnamadhavancuk@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>, kcbucuk2012@gmail.com<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

**Background/Objectives:** The present study is focused on the economic and non-economic issues and the challenges confronted by the immigrant workers in the construction sector of Kerala. It also discusses the extent of protection measures available to the immigrant construction workers in the study area.

**Methods/Statistical analysis:** The study used both the qualitative and quantitative data from 150 samples of the immigrant workers in the rural and urban areas of Kannur district and also analyzed twenty of local workers for comparing the employment, work, and availing social security provisions to the immigrant workers in the construction sector of Kerala. The qualitative method, Likert scale used for measuring the level of satisfaction of the immigrant workers in term of their working and living conditions.

**Findings:** The qualitative method, Likert scale mentions that majority of the workers are dissatisfied with their existing living and working conditions. Study collected data from immigrant construction workers, contractors and supervisors for the problems in discussion. The problems faced by the immigrant workers in the domain of income, employment, wage and living conditions, the working conditions, health related issues and the prevailing social security benefits to the immigrant workers.

**Improvements/Applications:** An understanding of the problems and issues confronted by the immigrant workers in the construction sector of Kerala will provide further scope for the area under study.

**Keywords:** Immigrant Labourers, Construction Sector, Contractors, Supervisors, social security

## 1. Introduction

Migration is not purely a personal matter and is a chain of development from individuals to households, communities and ultimately countries. Growing disparities in wealth, income, human securities, human rights and demographic trends across the countries are all exerting upward pressure on migration. The migrants consider the various labour market opportunities available to them in the rural and urban sectors and choose the one that maximizes their expected gains from migration. This premise can be extended to interstate migration and immigration between states and within the state.

Immigration, interstate migration and immigration have become a common phenomenon in India and among Indian states. The internal migrants who migrated for employment related or economic reasons in India was reported to be 29.45 million in 2001. The 64<sup>th</sup> round of NSSO [1] registered that 68.7% of the economic migrants in India went to urban destinations. A striking thing to be noted is that the incidence of migration was on the highest in one of the booming sectors namely the construction sector.

From the point of view of developing countries the two notions, deprivation and vulnerability are closely interlinked which has necessitated a broader notion of social security. Discussion on social security policy frame work gets significance in the context of globalization and the enlarging casualisation of labour resulting in the burgeoning unorganized sector [2]. Social protection defined by the ILO "as the set of public measures that a society provides for its members to protect them against economic and social distress caused by the absence or a substantial reduction of income from work as a result of various contingencies, sickness, maternity, employment, injury, unemployment,

invalidity, old age or death of the bread winner". Thus the measures of social security and social protection which are interchangeably used to play a crucial role in reducing one or more dimensions of deprivations and vulnerability.

As a regional economy, Kerala also experiences the burgeoning of informal sector in the employment scenario. Dynamics of labour market in Kerala is having a strong bearing upon its history of immigration and out migration. Unique development experience of Kerala has its own influence on the labour market of the state. The conventional labour market of Kerala is highly politically conscientised and trade unionized one. This helped a lot in explaining the paradox of high wages co-existing with high levels of unemployment in the state. Its development experience leverages high human development indices with a relatively less growth of the productive sector of the economy [3, 4].

The regional economy, Kerala witnesses a large inflow of immigrant labourers from different parts of the country especially from the states like West Bengal, Assam, Chathisghat, Bihar, Odhisha, Tamil Nadu etc. Majority of them, belong to the unskilled or semiskilled category of workers and mainly work in the Construction sector which experiences relative shortage of labour supply in the domestic labour market. A robust data base on the number of migrant labourers working in Kerala is absent. Even then some pilot studies and media reports have revealed that more than twenty five lakhs of immigrant labourers hailing from different parts of India are working in the unorganized sector, construction in particular as against the official record of 36,841 immigrant labourers in the state [5].

The international, national and the region specific studies exhibit various information about the immigrant workers and their related issues. However, the researcher identified that the problems of the immigrant workers at macro level are different from that of the micro level migration. Exhaustive studies on wage, income and employment conditions of the immigrant labourers in Kerala appeared to be inadequate. However, it is inferred that, higher wages for the unskilled labourers in the state, large opportunity for employment, shortage of local labourers have helped the current trend of immigration to the state. As there exists significant difference between the rural and urban sectors of Kerala, in the problems faced by the labourers, a study on social security of immigrants in the construction sector in rural and urban sectors of Kerala does fetch much socio-economic importance. Therefore, the study remains a potential area of research which has strong bearing upon income, employment and the composition of the labour markets of the state economy. The data base and the relevant inputs required to address the challenges, issues and opportunities involved in the process of immigration in the state economy become an added importance for the study, as majority of the immigrants in Kerala do not have any official registration in the office records of the labour office or elsewhere in the state. On the paucity of the reliable data base about the immigrant workers in Kerala, the policymakers are incapable to analyze problems scientifically and place it before the govt. Hence a comprehensive policy suggestion for the welfare of the immigrant labourers in the regional economy and the construction sector particularly is lacking. This inturn causes so many issues and challenges to the social protection of these immigrant labourers in the domain of their income, employment, working and living conditions. This is to be argued in the context that unorganized workers do not have a steady employment, secured or sustainable income and are not covered by social security protection [6]. As the number and magnitude of immigrant workers in economic activities of Kerala become visible, construction sector in particular, a micro level study on the issues faced by the immigrant workers in the construction sector of Kerala with special reference to Kannur District, Kerala becomes significant.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Descriptive survey method is used to collect Quantitative as well as qualitative data, from primary and secondary sources. Among the districts, Kannur district (2<sup>th</sup> position) is one which has higher incidence of immigrant workers hailing from different states working in the construction sector of Kerala. The present study has selected Kannur district in Kerala, India as the study area. Special care has been taken for the selection of sample area and the sample units which can ensure high incidence of immigration where construction sector is flourishing. Agreeing with this criterion, study area was delimited to two wards representing one each from the rural and urban segments of the labour market. Due representation for the rural and urban composition has been made by selecting one ward each from Chambilode Gramapanchayath (ward 17) and Kannur Municipality (Kannothumbal 8<sup>th</sup> ward). These two respective wards have high concentration of immigrant workers hailing from different states with registered and non-

registered status in the domestic labour market. Each ward representing rural and urban has more than 250 immigrant labourers with more than one year period of stay. Thirty percentage of the immigrant ie. 75 sample units randomly as representative sample from each ward constituting 150 immigrants give the total sample size of the study. Study also collected 10 labourers each belong to local workers from the construction sector of the selected wards for analyzing the prevailing unequal distribution of wage, nature of employment and availability of social security benefits.

## 2.1 Statistical analysis

In order to make an assessment on the level of satisfaction on working and living conditions of the immigrant workers in the construction sector of Kerala, the study used the qualitative tool, Likert scale. The primary data has been collected through questionnaires, discussions and interview.

## 2.2 Profile of the Study area

The study area, Kannur district, came into existence in January 1957 as one of the 14 administrative districts of Kerala, is located in the Northern part of Kerala state, spread between the Lakshadweep Sea and Western Ghats [7] (Table 1).

Table 1. Relevant Characteristics of the study area

District	Kannur
Area (in sq.m)	2,966
Population	25,25,637 (Male:11,84,012 ) (Female: 13,41,625)
Density of population	812
PCI (in Rs.)	17260
Literacy rate	95.41 (Male 97.54, Female 93.57 )
Work Participation Rate (%)	31.8
Total Registered construction workers	115878
Total immigrants	36841
Total Registered in-migrant Construction workers	4584

Source: 2011Census Report, Economic Review 2014, Construction Welfare Board, Kannur 2015.

Of the total workers population in the state, 7.46% comes from Kannur district with a work participation rate 31.8% on par with the state at 32% [8]. Workers linked to major occupations in the district are cultivators, agricultural labourers, workers in household industry and a broad category termed as 'other worker's. The 'other workers' are prominent both at 74% and 78% respectively for state and the district. This gives the inference that the 'other worker' constitutes the major supply side of labour force at the local level. The selected study area in the district, 'Kannothonchal ward 8' of Kannur municipality and 'wards 17' of Chambilode Grama Panchayath have registered a work participation rate almost agreeing with the district averages where the composition of 'other workers' in the labour market remain significant. The local development authorities and the recent media reports uphold the view that the local labour market is witnessing an unprecedented inflow of immigrant labourers to the local labour market and become indispensable factor in the economic activities of the locality especially in the semi and unskilled segments of the local labour market [9]. These immigrant workers are mainly associated with tourism, hotel industry, domestic work and construction. The Labour officials in the district are of the view that the immigrant workers active presence is quite evident in one of the booming sectors of the district economy, namely construction. The present micro level study mainly focuses on the issues and challenges involved in the social security questions and the provisions available thereon to the immigrant workers who are mainly engaged in the construction sector.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Profile of immigrant workers in construction sector of the study area

The emerging issues and the social protective measures of the immigrant labourers can be discussed and evaluated only after understanding their income, wage, employment and other living conditions at the destination. Thus a bird's eye view on the profile of immigrant labourers in the study area is attempted based on the primary data.

It (Table 2) is observed that majority of the immigrant labourers are coming from different states including Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Chathisghat, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Orissa and Himachal Pradesh. Sample size (N= 150) consists of sample units of 75 each representing the urban and the rural segments of the study area. In respect of urban immigration, larger proportion of the immigration is taking place from West Bengal (62%) followed by Bihar (13%), Assam (7%), Tamil Nadu (10%), Himachal Pradesh (2%), Jharkhand (2%), Chathisghat (2%), Orissa (1%), Madhya Pradesh (1%) etc. It is clearly observed that the proportion of female immigration is very restrictive and is confined only to the rural segment of the labour market i.e. 15 women only from a single state, Tamil Nadu. The migration pattern of the sample size reveals that the immigrant labourers are mainly male and their purpose behind migration is specifically in search of better income and employment. It is also inferred that they are expected to return back to their home state after a given period of stay at the destination. Another striking characteristic of this pattern is that three fourth of the total migrants in both the sectors belonging to the two Northern states namely West Bengal (62%) and Bihar (13%) having some implications on the existing wage, income and employment conditions of the respective states of origin and destination.

Table 2. Distribution of Sample population (N=150) by states of origin

Particulars	Urban (75 Sample size)			Rural (75 Sample size)			Rural Urban
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Assam	8 (10.67)	-	8(10.67)	3(4.0)	-	3(4.0)	11(7.33)
West Bengal	65(86.67)	-	65(86.67)	28 (37.33)	-	28(37.33)	93 (62.0)
Tamil Nadu	-	-	-	9 (12.0)	6 (8.0)	15 (20.0)	15 (10.0)
Chathisgaht	-	-	-	3 (4.0)	-	3 (4.0)	3 (2.27)
Bihar	1 (1.33)	-	1 (1.33)	18 (24.0)	-	18 (24.0)	19(12.67)
Madhya Pradesh	1 (1.33)	-	1 (1.33)	-	-	-	1 (0.89)
Jharkhant	-	-	-	3 (4.0)	-	3 (4.0)	3 (2.0)
Orissa	-	-	-	2 (2.67)	-	2 (2.67)	2 (1.33)
Himachal Pradesh	-	-	-	3 (4.0)	-	3 (4.0)	3 (2.0)
<b>Total</b>	<b>75 (100)</b>		<b>75 (100)</b>	<b>69 (92.00)</b>	<b>6 (8.0)</b>	<b>75 (100)</b>	<b>150 (100)</b>

Source: Primary survey 2015; Figures in the parenthesis are the respective percentages

#### 3.2 Wage level of immigrant workers in the study area

The micro level study reveals that the foremost immediate reason that has attracted labourers from the rest of the country to Kerala remains the significant wage difference prevailing in the state compared to other states in India [10]. The migrant's remittances and their role in the development process of the source country is crucial at this juncture [11]. This is fully substantiated by the pattern of in migration taking place in the state from other states where three fourth of the immigrants are coming only from two states, West Bengal (62%), Bihar (13%) having the lowest reported wage rate i.e. Rs 180 per day which is even less than that of the wage rate protected by minimum wage legislation in Kerala i.e. Rs. 305/. That means when a migrant from the West Bengal & Bihar reaches Kerala he is virtually gaining 70 % increase in his daily wage which can cause substantial impact on the income, expenditure and living conditions of the migrant and his family, thanks to the paradox of high unemployment co-existing with high real wages prevailing in the state. This wage most often remains greater than that of their 'reservation wage' or even beyond a 'mark up' over their 'expected wage' [12]. Hence they began to treat Kerala as their destination of economic fortune and nicknamed the region as their 'Middle East or Gulf' within in India where as the people of Kerala believe 'Gulf countries' as of their economic fortune (Table 3).

Table 3. Wage level of inmigrant workers in the study area compared to the state of origin

Place of origin	Details of urban Inmigration (%)			Details of rural Inmigration (%)		
	Wage at origin/ (In Rs.)	Wage at destination	Wage difference in %	Wage at origin	Wage at destination	Wage difference in %
Assam	250	650	61.54	350	600	41.67
West Bengal	180	650	72.30	180	600	70.0
Tamil Nadu	-	-	-	400	650	38.46
Chathisghat	-	-	-	250	600	58.33
Bihar	180	650	72.30	180	600	70.0
Madhya Pradesh	280	600	53.33	-	-	-
Jharkhand	-	-	-	150	600	75.0
Orissa	-	-	-	280	600	53.33
Himachal Pradesh	-	-	-	300	650	53.85

Source: Primary survey 2015

Even though, there is some discrepancy in the wage rates between urban and rural sectors in Kerala that does not prevent the migrant to enjoy the differential gain in his wage received at destination. However, it is reported that certain areas of exploitation prevails in the domain of daily wages to local labourers and the migrant labourers, duration of work, reduction of the leisure time in work schedule, imposition of work requiring high physical exertion to the migrant labour etc. It is also responded that each migrant has to give a weekly commission amount Rs. 20 per head to the recruiting agent as majority of the migrants reached Kerala through the agents.

### 3.3 Employment status and average wage rate of inmigrant and local labourers

The investigator examines the employment status of inmigrant workers at the state of origin and it is revealing that majority of the inmigrant workers did not have matching previous work experience in their respective states of origin to the type of work he is presently required to do in the state of destination [13]. Majority of them were closely associated with agricultural operations (36%) or not engaged in any activity (11%) or put in the broad category of other workers (11%). However, 42% of them worked as helpers in their state of origin. Contrary to this track record, more than 61% of the inmigrant workers are doing the role of helpers in the construction sector at destination.

Only 20% of them are working as either carpenters or masons which require some extra skill to deliver (Table 4). Thus the analysis reveals that the existence of mismatch between experience and the assigned work of the inmigrants in the destination. It also explains the buoyancy of the labour market in the destination towards inmigrant labourers, unskilled labour market in particular. The availing information of wage rate (Table 4) from the contractors, supervisors and labourers of the inmigrant as well as the local workers in the construction sector of Kerala, it is revealed that wage rate is unequally distributed among the inmigrant and local workers for the same nature of work.

Table 4. Employment status and average wage rate of inmigrant/local labourers in the construction sector of Kerala

Employment	Inmigrant workers			Average wage rate of inmigrant workers in Rural and urban area (In Rs.)	Average wage rate of Local workers in Rural and urban area (In Rs.)
	Urban (%)	Rural (%)	Total (%)		
Mason	12(16)	10(13.33)	22(29.33)	600	800
Mechanic	1(1.33)	-	1(0.67)	650	750
Carpenter foreman	17(22.67)	-	17(11.33)	600	700
Helper	45(60)	57(76)	102(68)	600	700
Road Tarring Worker	-	8(10.67)	8(5.33)	650	700
<b>Total</b>	<b>75(100)</b>	<b>75(100)</b>	<b>150(100)</b>		

### 3.4. Problems faced by the immigrant workers in the destination state, Kerala

The shortage of local workers in Kerala and the attractive wage rates led to overflow of immigrant workers to the labour market of Kerala. It is reported that the immigrant labourers have to face discrimination regarding wage rate, payment of wages, duration of working hours, health hazards and providing social security. A detailed discussion on the issues related to work, employment and living conditions of the immigrant labourers at the construction sector of the destination state are described in the table 5.

Table 5. Problems faced by the immigrant workers in the destination state, Kerala

Issues	Rural	Urban	Total
low paid job	50 (66.67)	21 (28)	71(47.33)
Works requiring higher physical efforts	65 (86.67)	32 (42.67)	97(64.67)
lack of sanitation facilities in the work sites	75 (100)	29 (38.67)	104(69.33)
lack of accommodation facilities	25 (33.33)	25 (33.33)	50(33.33)
wage discrimination	20 (26.67)	39 (52)	59(39.33)
Overtime work with low wage rate	25 (33.33)	13 (17.33)	38(25.33)
Reluctant attitude of the local people	63 (84)	70 (93.33)	133(88.67)
language barriers	17(22.67)	-	17(11.33)
health related issues	24 (32)	12 (16)	36(24)

Source: Primary data survey, 2015

As one gets into deeper analyses, one could see that there is an array of issues and problems confronted by the immigrant labourers engaged in the construction sector of Kerala namely, low paid job, Works requiring higher physical efforts, lack of sanitation facilities in the work sites, lack of accommodation facilities, wage discrimination, Overtime work with low wage rate, Reluctant attitude of the local people, language barriers and health related issues. Lack of sanitation facilities at worksites as well as the place of stay becomes a menacing issue for leading a meaningful life to the immigrant workers at destination.

From the field work, the investigator identified that the immigrant workers were exploited by the agents and the employers for the payments of their wages in the earlier times of their migration. The immigrant workers have an identity card bearing a certificate with a photograph issued by the panchayath and the village office from their origin state. The immigrant workers have to give bribes to the agents for getting the identity card. There are series of episodes revealing the absence of availing social security benefit consequent on injury, death and physically handicapped during the work at sites. Most of the employees in the construction sector are overtime workers. Labour laws insisting to offer double of the daily wage whereas, the workers actually get only single shift's wage rate instead for the overtime work done. For instance, the immigrant workers get an amount worth of Rs. 600 for eight hours work and in the case of overtime work ie. 16 hours work for Rs. 1800 wherein, the workers get only Rs. 1200 per day. The labour union opined that many of the contractors in Kerala do not provide the minimum wages to the immigrant workers. Therefore, the contractors are much gained by utilizing the hardworking work with overtime and positive attitude towards work of the immigrants who engage in the construction sector [14].

The immigrant workers are opined that as compared to their origin state, the cost of living is higher at the destination state Kerala. For instance they got Rice and Atta for Rs. 15 per a Kilogram at their origin state, where in Kerala they have to pay an amount of Rs. 35 and Rs. 25 respectively. Also the immigrant workers are spending the major portion of their wage to Railways as travel expenditure and the Thattukada for refreshment in Kerala than in the form of remittances to their origin state. Another emerging issue with the presence of the immigrant workers in Kerala is criminal issues. It is also revealed that some of the immigrants did have track record of crime at their origin state and hence they migrated to the destination state Kerala for giving implications to the law and order of the destination state. Similar to that the absence of the maintenance of registration recorded with details on immigrants becomes a larger challenge in the arena of data base of the immigrants as well as policy formulations for the same.

The legal Counsel, Rajagiri outreach Suraksha minor project manager reported that those epidemics which were under control in the past are getting back to the region with extra vigor where the immigrants are said to be the main carriers of the disease having larger threat for the existing health scenario of Kerala. The labour department conducts

their enquiry in 747 of the labour camps in Thrissur district, Kerala with a single time where, 455 of the immigrant workers are diagnosed with positive blood report of leprosy and Malaria and some of the workers have the diseases of HIV and AIDS. The state, Govt. of Kerala bears the socio - economic burden with the presence of the immigrant workers in the state in terms of the eradication of communicable disease and the criminal offences of the workers. In 2013, Kozhikode health centers conducted a Leprosy detected camps and it found that 19 labourers have the diseases, Leprosy among them 17 of the workers are interstate migrant workers. The living and health conditions are reported to be another problems faced by the immigrant workers in the state, Kerala. Prakash, the economist and the fifth finance commission Chairman, opined that the problems of the immigrant workers from Kerala are to be taken as a serious issue as a burgeoning of their numbers.

Azhagappan, an immigrant worker from Tamil Nadu reported that the higher wage rate and the easiness for getting the employment opportunities at the construction sector of Kerala mainly attracted the immigrant workers to the destination state, Kerala. According to him, he did not get any social security benefits from the Building and other Construction Welfare Board because he is ignorant about the process of registration and the contractors have the reluctant attitude towards the registration with the construction welfare board. It is reported that he did not satisfy with the given living conditions, working conditions and the environment. The worker is accommodated at a single congested rented room, near to the construction sites where another immigrant workers are also shared the same room making living hazardous. At the work sites, he complained that the contractors did not provide the overtime wage rate, employment protection measures and practice inequitable distribution of wages between immigrant and local workers.

### 3.5 Working & living conditions of the immigrant labourers

The satisfaction level of the immigrant labourers regarding the working and living conditions is analysed using the likert scale. The working condition is analyzed in terms of the nature of work, exploitation at the work place, work schedule, risk factors, wage discrimination etc. The living condition is assessed in terms of quality of the room, access and availability of clean water, bathroom facilities, hygienic situation of the living place and number of persons in a room (Table 6).

Table 6. Working & living conditions of the immigrant labourers using Likert scale

Rural			Urban		
Scores	Working conditions (Number of responses (%))	Living conditions (Number of responses (%))	Scores	Working conditions (Number of responses (%))	Living conditions (Number of responses (%))
Strongly satisfied	-	-	Strongly satisfied	-	-
Satisfied	14 (28.6)	7(14.29)	Satisfied	-	-
No response	6 (12.24)	4 (8.16)	No response	8 (16.33)	15 (30.61)
Dissatisfied	29 (59.18)	35 (71.43)	Dissatisfied	41 (83.67)	34 (69.39)
Strongly dissatisfied	-	3 (6.122)	Strongly dissatisfied	-	-

Source: Estimated from primary data survey, 2015

Study estimated the likert scale and finds that the opinion of the working & living conditions of the immigrant labourers at the rural and urban areas of the destination state, Kerala. It reveals that majority of migrants in urban area ie. 83.67 % and 69.39 % in the rural area are dissatisfied with their working & living conditions in terms of the long duration of work, physical hazardous jobs, inequality of the prevailing wage level etc (Table 6). 59.18 % of the rural population registers dissatisfaction over their working conditions whereas only 28.6 % of the workers are satisfied with their prevailing working condition at the construction sector of Kannur district. As the satisfaction level of the immigrant workers lies below the set value of likert scale, 147, the living and working conditions of the immigrant workers in the study area are well below satisfactory level. In other words, the living and working conditions of the migrant workers in the construction sector of Kerala are poor in situation. While one looks into the satisfaction level of the immigrant workers at the construction sector, it is surprising to see that the estimated satisfaction level in the urban sector is zero where as there is a better level of satisfaction observed in the rural sector

explaining the need for further enquiry into the causative variables resulting in the asymmetry in the level of satisfaction. The assessment of the level of satisfactions among the immigrant workers in the construction sector of Kerala is revealing the varying in nature and it is raised to the needs for social security system prevailed in the construction sector of Kerala.

### **3.6 Social Security System to the immigrant Construction workers**

There are large number of statutes, laws and rules that have streamlined the labour regulatory frame work in India. The labour regulations are both at central and state levels. The laws and regulations are related to the conditions of work, wages and remuneration, employment security and industrial relations and social security enabling welfare of workers in the informal sector. One of the notable initiatives in regulating the conditions of work and provisions of a measure of social security relates to the groups of construction workers who form one of the largest segments of workers in the unorganized sector.

The foregoing discussions on the socio economic conditions of the immigrant labourers reveal that there is significant presence of immigrant labourers from the rest of the country to Kerala and their active involvement in the booming sectors of the regional economy opens new phase of social security system for the unorganized/ informal immigrant workers in Kerala. These measures should address both 'deficiency and adversity'. The adversity arises out of various contingencies such as absence of social security cover for ill health, accidents, death and old age which fall under the category of protective social security. The Govt. of India had set up a National Commission for Enterprises in the unorganized sector, 2006 [10] to study and recommend social security system for labour in the informal sector. Construction sector belongs to the unorganized sector, where almost all the workers are 'wage workers'.

The ILO Convention No.167 provides the health and safety measures for the construction workers. The unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008, provides for registration of unorganized workers to help in formulating social security schemes. The contract labour (Regulations and Abolition) Act 1970 is applicable to all over India, it regulates the employment of contract labour and prohibits its use in certain circumstances. The act is applied to every establishment in which twenty or more workmen are employed or were employed on any day of the preceding twelve months as contract labour. Different aspects of employment like condition of work, social security, job security and industrial relations are deemed to be parts of social contract and generally accepted and honored both by workers and employers. Interstate migrant workmen (Regulation of Employment and conditions of service) Act, 1979 aims to safeguard the terms and conditions of workers who have been recruited by a contractor from other states for the work assigned in the state of destination. The building and other construction workers Act, 1996, envisaged safeguarding the employment, working conditions, health and the rightful social security claims of the building and other construction workers. The Act also aims to safeguard construction workers safety, ensure the provision of health and welfare measures. It ensures to provide health and safety measures for the construction workers in conformity with ILO Convention No.167. The minimum Wages Act 1948 concerns large number of workers than any other labour regulations. According to minimum wage Act of the Govt., Central or State has to fix minimum wage in accordance with the types of employment. Under this law, statutory minimum wages may vary across different employments and within a particular employment, across different skill levels. The Act is also designed such that the statutory minimum wages may vary from state to state and within a State from region to region. It reveals that rural areas have a lower statutory minimum wage as compared to urban areas. The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 prevent discrimination on wage payments on the grounds of gender. The Act provides for payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers for the "same work or work of similar nature". The Employees State Insurance Act, 1948 is often called the pioneering step by the state in providing social insurance for workers in the country. It aims to provide certain benefits to employees in case of sickness, maternity and employment related injury and disabilities and related matters.



### 3.7 Labour Welfare initiatives in Kerala

In 1990, the Govt. of Kerala introduced 'Kerala Construction Workers Welfare Fund' and extended it to construction workers and Quarry workers. The scheme identified construction workers are those employed as masons, carpenters, bricklayers, excluding supervisory function arise like engineers whereas quarry workers are those engaged in stone crushing excluding the supervisory workers. The main source of fund for the scheme are from Govt., 10 % of initial members contribution, 11% of construction cost and yearly contribution made by the contractors (as Rs. 100 to 1000 ) and Rs. 10, Rs. 15, & Rs. 25 each from employers and employees in accordance with the nature of their contract and work. The scheme provide pension, Accidental death benefits, marriage benefits, medical benefits, housing and educational allowance to the workers<sup>1</sup>. The Kerala minimum wages Rules 1958, Kerala labour welfare fund Act 1975, Kerala interstate migrant work man Rules 1983 etc. are the other labour legislations in Kerala. For providing social security nets to unorganized daily wage workers, Govt. of Kerala introduced 'Daily waged Employees distress Relief Fund Scheme in 2007- 08'.

In this context, Kerala now a days witness multifaceted discussions/debates on the social security system prevailing in the state for migrant workers working in the unorganised sector and the need for new policy initiatives. As everyone knows, Kerala Govt. in response to sustained public action has been providing a range of promotional and protective forms of social security, albeit in a limited measure, which cover an overwhelming majority of the population, especially those in the poor households [15]. At present, 23 Welfare Boards are functioning in Kerala for the different categories unorganized informal workers. They cover a wide range of occupations and have to be seen as an important institutional arrangement for providing a measure of social security to the informal workers. Even though the state has a Welfare fund for construction workers with coverage of 10, 70900 construction workers in the state, it did not have looked into the social security question of the burgeoning of immigrant workers in the state, construction in particular. In pursuance of this, Govt. of Kerala has introduced the "Kerala Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme 2010". This scheme would come under Kerala Building and Other construction Workers Welfare Board. Under this scheme, a migrant labourer is defined 'as one who is born outside Kerala but born and brought up in India where he is migrating and staying in Kerala in search of employment as well working under an employer/ contractor or by self". These persons are put under the rules & regulations of Kerala Labour Welfare Fund.

In this scheme, every migrant worker shall be eligible for registration subject to the following conditions:

- He should have completed 18 years of age but not crossed the age 60 years.
- A self declaration confirms that he is a migrant with one month duration of stay completed as migrant labour in destination.
- Every registered worker shall be eligible for national minimum social security benefits only if payments of regular contributions have been made.
- Each registered person is eligible to get an identity card.

For the execution of the scheme a district level committee has been constituted as registering authority for the 'Kerala Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme 2010' where the district Labour Office shall be the convener (Table 7). Educational grants and health insurance are also provided to the children of the registered members in accordance with the norms insisted.

### 3.8 Out Reach of Social security Benefits among the immigrant and local workers

The data regarding the outreach and the service delivery issues of this scheme has been evolved mainly through qualitative approach namely focused group discussion, interview and comments from the stake holders. It is surprising to see that out of the reported 28115 immigrants in Kannur district, the official data reveals that only 4584 migrants have got the registration in the scheme (See Table 1). Of the registered, only 5 persons availed the eligible benefits offered under the scheme in the district for the year 2013-14. Where, the present study revealed that all the sample respondents of local workers have the knowledge and eligibility of availing benefits from the Building and other Construction Welfare Boards. the 65 % of the local workers in the rural areas and 90 % of the workers from

urban areas did not availing the social security benefits because the local workers responded that the workers did not apply for the benefits and some of them are did not take an interest for availing the benefits (Table 8). In the study area, three persons of the 5 registered in the district happened to respond to the queries. The inquisitiveness to know the reasons for not availing the benefits by the inmigrant laboureres results in the following summary.

Table 7. Benefits provided by 'Kerala Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme 2010'

Social Security	Beneficiaries	Amount (in Rs.)
Pension security	Payment of pension to family members after the death of the member.	50,000
Accident security	Immediate assistance to members of the fund in case of accidents/ Job injury.	10,000
Medical security	Provide medical expenses to the chronic diseases of the registered members. Medical expenses to the in-patient in-migrant labourers up to more than two days.	10,000 2,000
Terminal benefit	Those who completed 5 years in the destination at construction field and then permanently getting back to origin.	Minimum 1,000 Maximum 15,000
Funeral benefit	Financial assistance for the funeral expenses to the members.	3,000 to 10,000
Educational benefit	Financial assistance to the education of member's children.	400-1500

Source: Kerala Building & other construction welfare board, Kannur District, GOK 2010.

Table. 8 Reasons for not availing the benefit by the sample respondents

Reasons	Inmigrant workers		Local workers	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Awarness	43 (57.33)	18 (24)	10(100)	10(100)
Eligibility	23(30.67)	37 (49.33)	10(100)	10(100)
Accessibility	26 (34.67)	-	6 (60)	8 (80)
Availing	-	3(0.4)	7 (70)	8 (80)
Ignorance	32 (42.67)	57 (76)	-	-

Source: Primary survey, 2015

It is understood that even though the Govt. has introduced target group specific social security schemes to the migrant workers, the reach out of the scheme is dismal (Table 8). The composite reasons for this institutional failure in service delivery and governance that can be viewed from the demand side as: awareness, eligibility, accessibility and ignorance. Of which ignorance, lack of awareness and clarity with respect to eligibility and Accessibility among the inmigrants can be listed as reasons for not availing the scheme in the order of significance. On the supply side, the study attempted to have interface with the functionaries, it is reported that visibility of the scheme through communication, social interaction are lacking. At the same time, they informed that the authority has decided to take concerted effort to initiate a campaign to make the scheme visible among the migrant workers. Recently, the State Minister for Labour Welfare himself has initiated the Registration campaign of migrant labourers in the state by traveling along with them in the train in which they used to reach their work sites [9]. Meanwhile certain response from the inmigrant workers on the rating of the quality of service by the "Kerala Migrant Workers social security welfare scheme" is not encouraging. They have rated the service they receive as 'poor' or 'extremely poor' rather than 'average', 'good' or 'excellent'. This itself shows that the service delivery and governance in ensuring Social security benefits to the migrant workers in Kerala is yet to reach its set standard. As part of the social security of the migrant workers getting public attention, the major political parties in the state have taken initiatives to launch separate trade union/ political associations for the migrant workers named as 'Migrant Workers Union'.

## 4. Conclusion

With the stated objectives, the investigator found that the economic and non-economic issues confronted by the immigrant workers in the construction sector of Kerala can be revealed that majority of the immigrant workers are experiencing low paid jobs, wage discrimination as compared to local workers, Overtime work with low wage rate and reluctant attitude of the local people at the construction sites of Kerala. The workers did not get minimum wage rate, compelled to do larger duration of work, incurring higher living expenditure are the dovetailing of the economic problems in the construction sector. On the other hand, the non-economic aspects issues faced by the workers are Works requiring higher physical efforts, lack of sanitation facilities in the work sites, lack of accommodation facilities and exploitation by the agents. Where, utilizing the hard working attitude of the immigrant workers by the native people, criminal issues, language barriers and health related issues and lack of social security benefits etc are added to the non-economic issues of the immigrant workers in the construction sector. The absence of the accurate identity card and the process of the registration about the immigrant workers in the construction sector of Kerala are faced the identity issues among the immigrant workers. The researcher understood that the Govt. has introduced target group specific social security schemes to the immigrant workers but the outreach of the scheme is appeared to be dismal. The composite reasons for this institutional failure in service delivery and governance that can be viewed from the demand side as: awareness, eligibility, accessibility and ignorance. Of which ignorance, lack of awareness and clarity with respect to eligibility and Accessibility among the immigrants can be listed as reasons for not availing the scheme in the order of significance.

To sum up, one could see that the immigration to Kerala from the rest of the country is registering a significant sphere in the socio political economy of the state. It becomes an indispensable factor in states development initiatives as well as in the labour market. There are certain issues in the domain: income, employment, wage and living conditions of the migrant workers which remain unaddressed and hence inflicting capability deprivation and adversity to the informal migrant wage workers. Even though Kerala has initiated the social security scheme to the welfare of migrants, its visibility and outreach with the regard to the target groups are dismal. The study finds the need for professional systems for the management of funds and for strengthening the delivery mechanisms. Then only, the immigrant labourers large in numbers flocking together at different labour pockets across the state in the early morning every day and gets disbursed to work sites sooner and later in the evening seen moving through the streets and shopping centres (a routine sight of the Keralite) carry good memories of Kerala, nicknamed as 'Gods Own Country' to the rest of the country. The legacy of Kerala in achieving a 'right based approach to human development' may be disseminated through new initiatives and hence an 'inclusionary growth approach' to the capability deprived and vulnerable can be ensured.

## 5. References

1. Government of India. NSSO Round Report. 64<sup>th</sup> edn. Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation: New Delhi, 2007-08.
2. K. C. Baiju. Social security as a human right: experience of a region with high social development. *ISDA Journal Studies in Development and Administration*. 2006; (1 & 2), 181-222.
3. M.A. Oommen. The acute unemployment problem of kerala: some exploratory hypothesis. *IASSI Quarterly*. 1992; 10(1), 422-446.
4. B.A. Prakash. Educated Unemployment in Kerala: Some Observations based on a Field Study. Center for Development Studies, Thiruvanthapuram. 1988. Working paper (224).
5. R. Nagarajan. Social security of informal sector workers in coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*. 2010; 53(2), 359-380.
6. Government of Kerala. Economic Review. State Planning Board publication: Thiruvanthapuram. Kerala, 2014, 56-62.
7. Ghuman, Ranjith Singh. Development Paradigm and Social Security for Workers: The Global and Indian Scenario. *The Indian Journal of labour Economics*. 2012; 55(1), 77-110.
8. Government of Kerala. Kerala Building & other construction welfare board, Kannur District, 2010.
9. The Hindu, March 2012.

10. Government of India. National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS): Social Security for Unorganized Workers. 2006.
11. M. Aijaz. An assessment of developmental potential of remittances inflow in India. *Indian Journal of Economics and Development*. 2015; 3 (1), 137-141.
12. G. Gopikkuttan. Housing Boom in Kerala, Causes and Consequences. Ph.D. thesis. University of Kerala. Thiruvanthapuram. 1988.
13. K.P. Kannan. State and Union intervention in rural labour: A Study of Kerala. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*. 1995; 38(3), 42-64.
14. T. N. Krishnan. Wages, Output and employment in international labour markets in an agrarian economy. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 1991; 26 (26), 113-146.
15. V. Prakash. In- Migration of Workers to Kerala: An enquiry into causes and consequences, GK- Publi.: Kochi, 2011.

*The Publication fee is defrayed by Indian Society for Education and Environment ([www.iseeadyar.org](http://www.iseeadyar.org))*

***Cite this article as:***

T.C.Shamna, K.C. Baiju. The emerging issues of immigrant labourers in the construction sector of Kerala. *Indian Journal of Economics and Development*. Vol 4 (2), February 2016.