

Ernakulam

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Labour Migration to Kerala



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The commercial capital of Kerala, Ernakulam district has been one of the most important destinations for migrant workers in Kerala.



Ernakulam is the commercial capital of Kerala and has been one of the most important destinations for migrant workers from all over India. Petroleum refining, construction, plywood, fishing, furniture, textiles and wearing apparel, mining and quarrying, food processing, cement manufacturing, building and maintenance of ships and boats, information technology, healthcare, hospitality, transportation¹, storage, wholesale and retail and communication are some of the key industrial sectors in the district. Almost all industries in the district engage migrant workers directly or indirectly. Hospitality industry in Kochi, furniture sector in Nellikuzhi, textile/apparel units in Kizhakkambalam, cement factories on Willingdon Island, fishing in Thoppumpady, Munambam and Vypin, rice mills in Kalady, plywood sector in Perumbavoor as well as industrial units in Airapuram, Angamaly, South Vazhakkulam, Edathala, Edayar, Binanipuram, Nellad and Kalamassery are some of the major clusters in the district that engage migrant workers heavily. Construction and hospitality sectors found all over the district also engage migrant workers.

Migrant workers can be found in every nook and corner of the district. Workers from Tamil Nadu have been historically present in the construction and fishing sectors. They continue to be one of the major groups engaged in footloose labour in the district. Now workers from most of the states known for outward labour migration can be found in Ernakulam. Young men and women from several states work in shops, petrol pumps, restaurants, malls and even hospitals. They include workers from West Bengal, Odisha, Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, Manipur, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. Migrant men and women from Kota district of Rajasthan sell utilities on the road at the busy traffic junctions in Kochi city. Several migrants from Odisha and West Bengal work as gardeners in Kochi city. Young men from Baramulla district in Jammu and Kashmir were also found working

in a Kochi restaurant. Granite quarries and crusher units spread out in the district depend on migrant workers. Cheenikkuzhy, Pettamala, Thiruvaniyoor, Koothattukulam, Parakkadav, Karukutty, Puliyanam, Mookkannoor and Malayattoor are some of the locations of these quarries. Workers from Assam, Odisha and West Bengal can be found in Cheenikkuzhy and Ayyampuzha. Nagaon-Ernakulam and Murshidabad-Ernakulam are two of the longest migration corridors that have emerged in India in the past two decades. Labourers from Bangladesh and Nepal also work in the district. Kochi, Perumbavoor, Binanipuram, Kalamassery, Nellikuzhi and Kaloore are the residential pockets of migrant workers with families. Men and women were found living on the street too at Kaloore in Kochi. Sunday markets for migrant workers function in Perumbavoor and Ambalamugal where one can even get products from the native places of these workers. One of the churches in Perumbavoor has an Odiya service on Sundays.

There are several schools in the district with significant number of children of migrant workers during the academic year 2016-2017. All the students in the Government Lower Primary School, Pallilankara, near Kalamassery, were children of inter-state migrant workers. More than 100 migrant students, predominantly from West Bengal and Assam, were found enrolled at Government Upper Primary School Kandanthara. Government High School, Binanipuram has more than 60 students, particularly from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. About 25 children of migrant workers, predominantly from Saharanpur, study in Government High School, Nellikuzhi. A nursery school for children of migrant workers has been functioning on the premises of the Keenpuram industrial estate at South Vazhakkulam for several years now. More than ten children of workers from Odisha have been enrolled here. Half of the kids enrolled at the Thandirikkal colony Anganwadi in Binanipuram are children of migrant workers.



Craftsmen from Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh, globally renowned for wood carving, work in the furniture industry in Nellikuzhy, Kothamangalam.

Savanan R. S.

Construction

Ernakulam is one of the major construction hubs in the state. Most of the large scale constructions are concentrated within or near the Kochi urban agglomeration. Kochi Metro Rail, Expansion of Kochi Refinery, Expansion of Kochi International Airport, LNG Terminal at Puthuvype and Infopark Kochi are some of the major constructions commissioned by the government. Construction of an international convention centre at Bolgatty Island, several apartments, and other buildings are also progressing in Kochi. All these major as well as minor constructions depend heavily on migrant workers. Migrant workers from Tamil Nadu have been present in the construction sector in Kochi for decades and continue to be one of the major groups at the minor construction sites in the city. There are contractors from Tamil Nadu who undertake concreting work on contract from local builders. Men and women from Tamil Nadu work in the construction sector. Dindigul, Theni, Tiruchirappalli, Salem, Madurai, Dharmapuri and Ariyalur are some of the reported source districts in Tamil Nadu. Natives of Anantapur district in Andhra Pradesh, Murshidabad, Jalpaiguri, Nadia and Malda districts in West Bengal, Patna and Muzaffarpur in Bihar, Morigaon and Nagaon districts of Assam, as well as Rayagada district in Odisha can be found working in the minor construction sector. Major constructions engage workers, predominantly from northern and eastern India. Expansion of Kochi Refinery gave employment to more than 10,000 workers during 2016-17. Workers from Ballia and Gorakhpur districts in Uttar Pradesh, and Buxar, Muzaffarpur and Purnia districts in Bihar can be found at the site. There are also workers from Assam and West Bengal.

Large scale infrastructure companies engaged in the construction of Kochi Metro Rail, Kochi International Airport

and Infopark Kochi have been employing workers from Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal and several other states, recruiting them from source areas through a network of intermediaries. Workers on the minor construction sites are either recruited from the local labour *nakas* or have been working with the local contractors as informal employees.

Marine Fishing

Ernakulam is a major hub of fishing activity in Kerala and the marine fishing sector depends heavily on migrant workers. Munambam, Vypin and Cochin harbour are the major fish landing centres in the district. Migrant workers are primarily engaged in the trawler boats that spend several days on a single fishing trip. Traditional fishers from Kanyakumari district in Tamil Nadu are the largest group among migrant workers in the sector. In addition to fishers from Tamil Nadu, there are also traditional fishers from Odisha, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh working here. Migrants from Assam can also be found working on the boats despite having no prior experience. Cuttack, Puri, Jajpur and Nayagarh are the source districts of migrant workers from Odisha. Workers from South 24 Parganas, Murshidabad and Malda in West Bengal and Nagaon in Assam can also be found. Most of the workers said they lived on the boats.

Men from Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh were found working in the Cochin harbour loading and unloading fish and ice. Migrant fisher families from Hunsur in Mysuru district were found engaged in inland fishing in their coracles in Chittoor, Vaduthala and Thoppumpady areas in Ernakulam district. These families live in shacks near the water bodies. A group of 30 members were found camping adjacent to the Thoppumpady Bridge on the Willingdon Island.

Plywood

Plywood industry is concentrated in Kunnathunadu taluk with Perumbavoor as its nerve centre. The economy of Perumbavoor depends on the timber industry which is literally run by migrant workers. There are hundreds of units that produce veneer, plywood and block boards, located mainly in Vengola, Rayamangalam, Vazhakkulam and Asamanoor panchayats and in the Perumbavoor municipality. Except quality control, most of the skilled and unskilled work is carried out by migrant workers. Workers, mainly from Odisha, West Bengal and Assam are engaged in the plywood industry as informal employees. Skilled work such as setting and pressing the veneer layers at high temperature and pressure is generally done by workers from Assam. Work is also outsourced to a migrant contractor on piece rate by the factory owner. The contractor engages workers through his social network. Most workers are young single men. However, migrant women are also employed in some factories for unskilled work such as clipping veneer layers. The single men are provided free accommodation on the factory premises. The estimated number of workers in this sector is about 72,000. Kandhamal, Dhenkanal, Kendrapara and Kalahandi in Odisha; Nagaon, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar and Lakhimpur in Assam, and Murshidabad, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar in West Bengal are some of the districts of origin of the migrant workers in the sector.

Textile and Wearing Apparel

The textile and apparel sector units in Ernakulam district are clustered in Kizhakkambalam. There are also units in other parts of the district including the Kalamassery industrial park. The sector employs migrant workers, predominantly women and girls, from Odisha, Jharkhand and northeastern states. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya are the states from where these workers hail. Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal are some of the other source states. Workers from other states are generally sourced through an initiative of the National Skill Development Corporation, as reported. The migrant workers are also provided accommodation.

Balangir, Malkangiri, Sundargarh, Kandhamal, Ganjam, Nabarangpur and Rayagada are some of the districts from where

Odiya workers come to work in the sector. Lohardaga, Godda, Ranchi, Sahibganj, Gumla, Khunti, Simdega, Pakur and West Singhbhum are some of the source districts in Jharkhand. Sivasagar, Karbi Anglong, Udalguri, Tinsukia, Karimganj, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur, Baksa, Barpeta, Golaghat and Kamrup are some of the districts in Assam from where workers come.

Furniture

In Nellikuzhi, near Kothamangalam, there is a cluster of wooden furniture and related industries. There are numerous furniture outlets at Nellikuzhi on the Aluva-Munnar Road. Craftsmen from Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh, globally renowned for wood carving, work in the furniture industry. There are also a few workers from Uttarakhand state which shares its border with Saharanpur. A sizeable proportion of these highly skilled workers are Muslims and they have been working in Nellikuzhi for several years. Several of them are entrepreneurs who run their own workshops in rented premises. The local furniture outlets provide these entrepreneurs wood and take the product back paying labour charges. Many of them live in Nellikuzhi along with their families. About 25 children from such migrant families were found studying in Government High School Nellikuzhi during the academic year 2016-2017.

Hospitality and Healthcare

Hotels ranging from international brands with five-star facility to street food shops engage migrant workers. Both migrant men and women work in the sector with majority being men. Workers from northeastern Indian states and Nepal are generally engaged in the lobby, restaurants and housekeeping sections of the luxury hotels. Workers from Darjeeling district in West Bengal can also be found. Workers from other states are generally engaged in other low-skilled work where there is limited customer interaction, for example cleaning the plates. One of the popular vegetarian joints in Kochi has staff members from Manipur who have been working there for several years.

Several hospitals in the district also engage migrant workers as housekeeping staff and attendants. Men and women from Tripura and several northeastern states, and men from Odisha can be found working in multi-speciality hospitals in the district.



Ernakulam district has some of the oldest labour *nakas* in the state. Kaloor and Kadavanthra are two of them.



An estimated 1,50,000 workers live in the panchayats surrounding Perumbavoor municipal corporation including Vazhakkulam, Vengola, Rayamangalam, Okkal, Kanjoor, Asamannoor and Mudakkuzha.

Labour Nakas

Ernakulam district has some of the oldest labour *nakas* in the state. Men and women from Tamil Nadu have been present seeking work at Kaloor and Kadavanthra junctions in Kochi city for more than two decades. Thevara and Vazhakkala are two other labour *nakas* in Kochi. Tamil workers are available seeking work at Vathuruthy also. In addition to workers from Tamil Nadu, workers from Anantapur in Andhra Pradesh as well as Muzaffarpur and Patna in Bihar can be found seeking work at the major *nakas* in the city.

Now most towns in the district have a labour *naka*. In Angamaly workers assemble at the junction where M.C. Road meets the National Highway. The *naka* at Kalady is in front of the open stage where M.C. Road meets the Malayattoor - Aluva Road. The Perumbavoor labour *naka* is in front of the Excise Range Office near the Gandhi Circle. Muvattupuzha, Koothattukulam, Kothamangalam and Pukkattupady are some of the other towns with labour *nakas*. Men and women from Tamil Nadu are almost universally available at the *nakas*. Bengali speaking men constitute the other dominant group at the *nakas*. The composition of other workers changes from place to place. While workers from West Bengal are not significantly present in Kochi city *nakas*, in Perumbavoor they form the majority. In Pattimattom not very far from Perumbavoor, workers from Nagaon and Morigaon districts in Assam are found in large numbers.

Residential Pockets

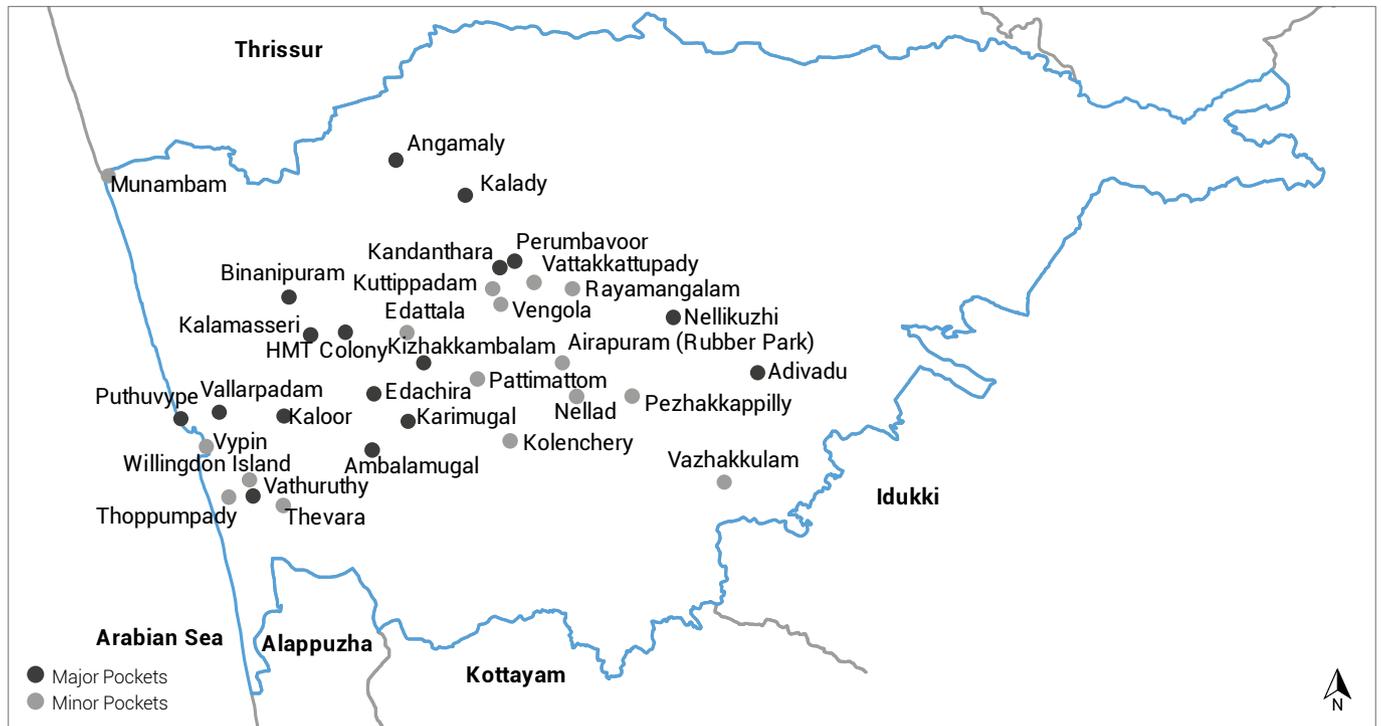
Ernakulam district has some of the largest residential pockets of migrant workers in the state. Vathuruthy on Willingdon Island is the oldest and the largest residential cluster of workers from Tamil Nadu in the district. Now workers from other states also live in Vathuruthy. Tamil migrants in Kochi are concentrated in Vazhakkala,

Kaloor, Kalamassery and Pathalam, in addition to Vathuruthy. The Ambalamugal-Karimugal stretch near Kochi Refinery is another large residential area of migrant workers, particularly skilled and unskilled workers from states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. There are also workers from Jharkhand, West Bengal, Assam and other states. Several *pukka* as well as *kutcha* structures house migrant workers along the labyrinth of lanes near the Kochi Refinery including Kuzhikkad-Puthenkurizu Road. Multi-storied buildings in front of the Fact Kochi Division gate and at Karimugal junction also house workers engaged in the mega expansion of the refinery. *Naka* based workers also live in Karimugal. Residential facilities for migrants can be seen up to Padathikkara on the Karimugal-Pallikkara Road. Luka Colony at Edachira is one of the largest temporary housing facilities for workers from north India engaged in the construction of buildings in the Infopark area. The Kochi Metro Rail workers are housed at H.M.T. Colony and near the L.N.G. Terminal in Puthuvype. Binanipuram is another residential pocket of migrant workers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Families from Chapra, Patna and Katihar districts in Bihar, and Bhadohi and Lucknow districts in Uttar Pradesh can be found here.

Another major residential pocket of migrant workers is Kandanthara near Perumbavoor. Although the popular perception is that migrants are concentrated in Perumbavoor municipal corporation limits, a recent enumeration found only about 1,700 migrant workers residing within the limits of the municipal corporation, which includes 69 families.² An estimated 1,50,000 workers live in the panchayats surrounding Perumbavoor municipal corporation including Vazhakkulam, Vengola, Rayamangalam,

2. Kerala State Literacy Mission Authority. (2017). *Survey Report on Migrant Labourers at Perumbavoor Municipality*. Thiruvananthapuram, India: Kerala State Literacy Mission Authority.

Migrant Pockets in Ernakulam District, 2016-17



Indicative map, not to scale

Okkal, Kanjoor, Asamannoor and Mudakkuzha. Most of them are from Murshidabad in West Bengal, Nagaon in Assam and from several districts of Tamil Nadu, Odisha and Bihar. While workers engaged by the industries live on the factory premises, those who are engaged in construction live in rented facilities. Kandanthara, Vattakkattupady and Kuttippadam are such areas where the workers from West Bengal and Assam, including families are clustered. More than 100 children of migrant workers, predominantly from West Bengal and Assam, were found enrolled in Government Upper Primary School, Kandanthara during the academic year 2016-17.

Adivadu near Kothamangalam is another residential pocket of Bengali speaking workers, mostly single men from West Bengal and Assam. Nellikuzhi is a residential hub of workers in the furniture sector from Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh. Mekkalady in Kalady, TB Road near the Angamaly mosque, Pezhakkappilly in Muvattupuzha,

Rubber Park at Airapuram, Pattimattom, Manjappetty and Mudickal are some of the other residential areas of workers from West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Kizhakkambalam is a residential pocket of female migrant workers from eastern Indian states who work in the textiles and apparel sector.

Workers from Anantapur at the Kadavanthra *naka* in Kochi reported Udaya colony as their place of stay. Thevara in Kochi city is also an area where migrants from most of the states can be seen. Gardeners from Odisha and West Bengal live with their families near Champakkara Canal in Maradu. Several workers from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh were found sleeping on the pavements at Kaloor junction on the Kaloor-Kadavanthra Road as well as inside the Kaloor bus stand. Approximately 80 men and women were found sleeping on the pavements in Kaloor.



Sunday markets for migrant workers function in Perumbavoor and Ambalamugal where one can even get products from the native places of these workers.

Migrant fisher families from Hunsur in Mysuru district were found engaged in inland fishing in their coracles in Chittoor, Vaduthala and Thoppumpady areas in Ernakulam district.



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Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development

CMID is an independent non-profit think tank devoted to migration and inclusive development, advocating for and promoting the social inclusion of migrants. CMID provides evidence informed solutions for mainstreaming inter-state migrant workers in India. This district brief was prepared based on a qualitative research undertaken by the authors across the 14 districts in Kerala during November 2016–May 2017. The study was funded by Thummarukudy Foundation. CMID also acknowledges the fellowship provided to the authors by Aajeevika Bureau during the period January to June 2017.



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