



District Migration Profile

Idukki

Benoy Peter and Vishnu Narendran

Labour Migration to Kerala



Saravani P.S.

The reluctance of younger Tamilians to do low-valued jobs in the recent past has paved the way for migrants from other states entering the Idukki labour market.

Idukki is famous for its plantations, tourist destinations and hydroelectric projects. The district comprises Devikulam, Udumbanchola, Peerumedu and Thodupuzha taluks. Peerumedu and Devikulam taluks are known for the tea plantations while Udumbanchola is popular for cardamom. Munnar and Thekkady are the tourist hot spots in the district. Industrially backward, agriculture is the chief occupation of the people in this district. Plantations and hospitality sectors now depend on labourers from north, central, east and northeast India. Being a district bordering Tamil Nadu state, migration of Tamil labourers has been going on for decades. The reluctance of younger Tamilians to do low-valued jobs in the recent past has paved the way for migrants from other states entering the Idukki labour market. Though the number of youngsters crossing the border for work has come down, Tamil Nadu continues to be a major source state for migrant labourers in Idukki. In addition to Tamil Nadu, migrants from Assam, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Mizoram, Chhattisgarh, Jammu and Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh have been found working in Idukki. People from Nepal also work in the hotel industry here.

Though the intensity of construction-related activities is lesser here compared to other districts, this sector too depends heavily on migrant labour. Major construction activities are taking place in and around Thodupuzha town. Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Assam are the major source states for construction workers in Idukki. The construction of Punalur-Muvattupuzha Highway employs labourers from West Bengal, Odisha, Assam, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

There are also a few cement bricks and paving block units in Thodupuzha, Kattappana and Karimkunnam which run entirely on migrant labour. There are a few spices processing units in the high ranges, a mattress manufacturing unit and a footwear manufacturing

unit in Thodupuzha. All these industries depend heavily on migrant labour.

Plantations

Idukki is the cradle of plantation crops in Kerala. Tea, cardamom, rubber and coffee are the major crops. Though the migrants from northern and eastern Indian states are not skilled enough to work in these plantations, the shortage of labour has been forcing plantation managements to hire them. These plantations also hire people from Tamil Nadu. A significant proportion of Tamil workers commute daily to the plantations in jeeps from their home districts adjacent to Idukki. Unlike many sectors where single male migrants dominate the workforce, the plantation sector has predominantly migrant families. Plantation managements tend to hire families as they are less likely to move on compared to single male labourers. Most of the labourers stay inside the plantations making it difficult to reach out to them for interventions. Because of the large number of migrant families here, there are a significant number of migrant children in the district. The E.K.M. L.P. School at Pasuppara had more than 140 students from Assam, Jharkhand and Bihar enrolled during the academic year 2016-17.

The Peerumedu taluk had mostly migrants from Assam, Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal. Most of the labourers in Udumbanchola taluk are from Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand and Bihar. Mandla and Dindori districts in Madhya Pradesh are a major source area of labourers working in Udumbanchola. Tea plantations in Devikulam taluk have migrant workers mostly from Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Assam. People of the Oraon tribe in Jharkhand constitute a major share of workforce in the tea plantations of Munnar.

Hospitality

Tourism is a major contributor to Idukki's economy. Munnar and Kumily towns have the largest concentration of hotels and resorts. Vagamon, Suryanelli, Idukki and Kanthalloor also have numerous resorts. Most of the hotels and resorts in Idukki engaged migrant workers. Majority of the workers were from states like Assam, West Bengal, Odisha and Mizoram. Nepal is also a source for workers in the hospitality sector. Even small restaurants in the interiors of the district have migrants as labourers.

Labour Nakas

Thodupuzha private bus stand premises, Thodupuzha bypass junction, Karimkunnam junction, Kattapana, Adimali, Nedumkandam and Kanjikuzhi have *nakas*. Mainly people from Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam and Odisha seek work at these *nakas*.

Residential Pockets

Plantation workers mostly utilise accommodation provided by the management within the premises. Thodupuzha, Karimkunnam, Kattapana, Adimali, Nedumkandam, Peerumedu, Kuttikkanam, Munnar, Kumily, Vagamon and Kanjikuzhi are the major towns where migrants can be seen in plenty. But most of them live in scattered locations in rented rooms.

Migrant Pockets in Idukki District, 2016-17



Indicative map, not to scale

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Savarnan P.S.

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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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