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URBAN MIGRATION IN NORTHEAST INDIA: PERCEPTIONS, CHALLENGES, AND ASPIRATIONS OF NEW SETTLERS

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ABSTRACT

Urban migration has become a significant socio-economic phenomenon in India, particularly in the northeastern region, where individuals increasingly move to cities in search of better opportunities. This study examines the perceptions, challenges, and future aspirations of migrants who relocated to Guwahati from various northeastern states, employing a mixed-methods research design combining thematic analysis with descriptive and inferential statistics. Data were collected from 75 respondents through a structured questionnaire administered between October and December 2023. Findings reveal that economic motivations dominated migration decisions: 38.7% of respondents cited better job prospects and 33.3% sought an improved standard of living. Language and communication barriers were the most prevalent post-migration challenge (26.7%), followed by high cost of living and low income (21.3%). A Chi-square test of independence between migration reasons and challenges faced yielded $X2(10, N = 75) = 8.60$, $p = .570$, indicating that urban hardships are experienced uniformly regardless of migration motive. A second Chi-square test between migration reasons and future aspirations returned $X2(6, N = 75) = 10.40$, $p = .109$, suggesting a marginal association between initial motivation and long-term goals. Exploratory K-means clustering identified three preliminary migrant typologies: economic migrants, education-driven migrants, and resilient informal workers. Despite hardships, most respondents expressed strong aspirations toward economic stability (53.3%) and educational advancement (16.0%). The study highlights the need for inclusive urban policies that address language integration, affordable housing, skill development, and educational support for migrant populations in Northeast India.

KEYWORDS: *Urban Migration, Northeast India, Push-Pull Factors, Guwahati, Mixed-Methods, Thematic Analysis, Chi-Square, Migrant Aspirations, K-Means Clustering*

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban migration has emerged as a defining feature of socio-economic transformation in India, with profound implications for both rural and urban landscapes. As individuals increasingly relocate to cities in search of better employment, education, healthcare, and improved living conditions, the dynamics of population distribution and urban planning continue to evolve. In the context of Northeast India, a region characterized by ethnic diversity, geographic isolation, and developmental gaps, urban migration is not simply a matter of movement but a reflection of deeper structural aspirations and challenges (Khawas, 2005; Baruah, 2003).

Migration, broadly defined, is the movement of people from one geographical area to another, usually involving a shift from rural to urban areas. Todaro's (1969) economic theory posits that individuals rationally weigh expected income differentials when deciding to migrate. Lee's (1966) push-pull framework further explains this movement through factors that expel people from origin areas, such as poverty and conflict, and those that attract them to destinations, including employment opportunities and better infrastructure. While urban areas offer the promise of economic and social upliftment, the transition is seldom without difficulty. Migrants often encounter job insecurity, inadequate housing, cultural barriers, and limited access to basic services (Kundu & Sarangi, 2005).

Northeast India presents a unique context for studying urban migration. Despite being rich in cultural heritage and natural resources, the region has historically lagged in terms of industrialization, infrastructure, and employment opportunities (Baruah, 2003). States such as Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Manipur have witnessed an increasing outflow of youth and working-age populations toward urban centers like Guwahati, which is emerging as a regional hub. This migration is driven by a combination of push factors, including unemployment, insurgency, and lack of quality education, and pull factors such as urban jobs, higher education, healthcare facilities, and the perceived modern lifestyle of cities (Deshingkar & Farrington, 2009).

Despite the perceived promise of urban life, the lived experiences of migrants often contrast sharply with their initial expectations. Migrants face high cost of living, language barriers, cultural alienation, and insecure livelihoods (Kundu, 2009). These challenges are compounded for women migrants and marginalized communities, who face additional vulnerabilities including

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harassment, poor sanitation access, and lack of social protection (Rao, 2012). At the same time, migrants demonstrate resilience and aspiration that make their future plans equally important to study alongside their hardships.

This study explores the perceptions, challenges, and aspirations of migrants who have relocated to Guwahati from various northeastern states. By centering the voices of migrants themselves and combining qualitative and quantitative methods, this research contributes empirical evidence from the underrepresented Northeast Indian context and offers policy-relevant insights for inclusive urban development.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Urban migration has long been a subject of interest in the social sciences, intersecting economics, sociology, geography, and public policy. In the Indian context, migration to urban areas is a multifaceted process shaped by structural inequalities, developmental disparities, and evolving aspirations. This review examines existing scholarship across six thematic areas relevant to this study.

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

Ravenstein (1885) provided one of the earliest frameworks for understanding migration, proposing that movement tends to occur over short distances and is primarily driven by economic motives. Lee (1966) refined this with his push-pull model, distinguishing factors that expel migrants from origin areas (poverty, conflict, lack of services) from those that attract them to destinations (employment, education, healthcare). Todaro's (1969) model further argued that individuals are rational actors who migrate based on expected income gains, even when urban unemployment is high. More recently, migration scholarship has expanded to incorporate social networks, identity, and perceived opportunity as central explanatory factors (Banerjee, 1983).

2.2 Motivations and Perceptions of Migrants

Perceptions about urban life significantly shape the decision to migrate. Studies show that migrants, especially youth and educated individuals, are driven by beliefs about better employment, education, and living standards in cities (Deshingkar & Farrington, 2009). In Northeast India, structural factors such as limited industrial growth and poor job markets push individuals toward regional hubs like Guwahati (Khawas, 2005). Rao (2012) emphasizes that migration is also a cultural act, with individuals aspiring for modern lifestyles and social mobility, particularly among women and youth.

2.3 Challenges and Barriers Faced by Migrants

Urban migration is frequently accompanied by significant hardship. Kundu and Sarangi (2005) find that most migrants enter the informal sector, characterized by low wages and poor working conditions. Housing is a persistent challenge; migrants often inhabit informal settlements lacking basic amenities (Bhan & Jana, 2013). Language barriers, cultural alienation, and discrimination are particularly acute for migrants from tribal and ethnic minority communities. Roy (2009) notes that urban planning policies routinely exclude migrants from formal governance and welfare access. Women migrants additionally face gender-specific vulnerabilities including safety risks and reproductive health deficits (Rao, 2012).

2.4 Aspirations and Resilience of Migrants

Despite these difficulties, migrants demonstrate remarkable resilience. Many aspire to permanent settlement, educational advancement for their children, and entrepreneurship (Deshingkar & Farrington, 2009). Bhagat (2011) highlights the role of community networks and cultural associations in sustaining migrant wellbeing. Informal support systems provide emotional, financial, and logistical assistance, allowing migrants to persist in the urban environment despite structural disadvantages.

2.5 Urban Governance and Policy Implications

Migration places immense pressure on urban infrastructure, contributing to informal settlement expansion, congestion, and environmental degradation. Yet migrants are rarely integrated into city planning processes (Kundu, 2009). In Northeast India, inclusive urbanization is further complicated by geographical constraints, ethnic diversity, and political sensitivities. Baruah (2003) argues that urban policy in the region must account for customary laws, tribal governance systems, and ethnic identities if it is to achieve equitable outcomes.

2.6 Migration in Northeast India: A Regional Perspective

The Northeast presents a complex migration landscape in which internal movement is often overshadowed by outmigration to metropolitan areas. Cities like Guwahati, Shillong, and Itanagar are becoming important regional nodes. Khawas (2005) identifies economic need, natural disasters, ethnic conflicts, and political instability as key migration drivers in the region. Migration patterns are frequently seasonal or circular rather than permanent. Roy (2009) and Baruah (2003) call for inclusive governance and community-based urban development to address ethnic tensions and demographic anxieties that often create hostile environments for migrants.

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2.7 Summary

The literature establishes urban migration as a complex interplay of aspiration, structural constraints, identity, and resilience. In Northeast India specifically, migrants face a distinctive combination of economic, cultural, and infrastructural challenges that require targeted, context-sensitive policy responses. The present study builds on this foundation by centering migrant voices and generating primary empirical evidence from the region.

3. OBJECTIVES

This study is guided by the following research objectives:

1. To explore the perceived reasons and motivations behind migration to urban areas among individuals from different northeastern states.
2. To identify the key challenges faced by migrants in urban settings, including social, economic, and cultural barriers.
3. To examine the future aspirations of urban migrants and their relationship to migration motivations.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to examine the perceptions, challenges, and aspirations of urban migrants in Northeast India, particularly those residing in Guwahati. The research combined qualitative thematic analysis with descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the migration experience.

4.1 Research Design and Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents who had migrated to Guwahati from various northeastern states, including Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh. A total of 75 respondents comprising students, job seekers, and working professionals participated in the study. This non-probability sampling approach was chosen to ensure that the sample reflected diverse demographic and socio-cultural backgrounds relevant to the study objectives. The socio-demographic profile of respondents is presented in Section 5.1.

4.2 Data Collection

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms between October 10, 2023 and December 21, 2023. The questionnaire comprised both open-ended and closed-ended questions capturing reasons for migration, challenges faced post-migration, and future aspirations. Respondents participated voluntarily, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. No sensitive personal identifying information was collected, and all data were handled in accordance with standard ethical guidelines for social science research.

4.3 Data Preparation and Coding

Open-ended responses were subjected to thematic coding. Responses were grouped inductively into the following categories, validated against existing migration literature:

- Reasons for migration: Better Job, Better Standard of Living, Other (Education, Social/Cultural, etc.)
- Challenges faced: Language/Communication Barrier, High Cost of Living/Low Income, Unemployment, Environmental Issues, Adjustment/Adaptation, Business Disruption, Other
- Future aspirations: Economic, Educational, Settlement, Other

Thematic coding was conducted manually and validated by two independent coders. Inter-coder discrepancies were resolved through discussion to ensure reliability.

4.4 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (frequencies and proportions) summarized the distribution of coded responses. Chi-square tests of independence explored associations between migration reasons and challenges faced, and between migration reasons and future aspirations. It should be noted that several expected cell frequencies fell below 5.0 in both Chi-square analyses, which limits the reliability of these results; they are presented as exploratory and should be interpreted with caution. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between numerically encoded categorical variables as an additional exploratory measure. K-means clustering was applied to examine potential migrant typologies. Word cloud visualization was generated from aggregated open-ended responses on future aspirations.

4.5 Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established by aligning questionnaire design with established migration theories and prior empirical studies. Face validity was ensured through expert review of the instrument before deployment. Reliability of thematic coding was

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enhanced through dual coding and inter-coder agreement. The purposive sampling strategy, while not enabling statistical generalization, ensured theoretical relevance to the study objectives.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are based on qualitative coding and quantitative analysis of responses from 75 urban migrants residing in Guwahati. The findings are organized around three core areas corresponding to the study objectives: socio-demographic profile, reasons for migration and challenges faced, and future aspirations. All six tables are presented and interpreted within this section.

5.1 Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

Tables 1, 2, and 3 present the distribution of respondents by state of origin, educational qualification, and occupation respectively. Together, they provide a comprehensive picture of who the urban migrants in this study are.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by State/Region of Origin (n = 75)

State / Region of Origin	n	%
Assam (incl. Guwahati, Majuli)	39	52.0
West Bengal	8	10.7
Bihar	5	6.7
Arunachal Pradesh	5	6.7
Meghalaya	4	5.3
Manipur	4	5.3
Nagaland	3	4.0
Uttar Pradesh	2	2.7
Sikkim	2	2.7
Others (Haryana, Nepal, Tripura)	3	4.0
Total	**75**	**100.0**

Table 1 shows that over half of the respondents (52.0%, n = 39) originated from Assam itself, including those who listed Guwahati or Majuli as their place of origin. This indicates significant intra-state migration within Assam, where residents of rural or semi-urban districts relocate to Guwahati in search of better opportunities. West Bengal was the second largest source state (10.7%), followed by Bihar and Arunachal Pradesh (6.7% each). Meghalaya and Manipur each contributed 5.3% of respondents, reflecting the regional draw of Guwahati as a hub city. Nagaland (4.0%), Uttar Pradesh (2.7%), Sikkim (2.7%), and other states such as Haryana, Nepal, and Tripura together accounted for the remaining 14.0%. This distribution confirms that Guwahati functions as a destination not only for northeastern migrants but also for individuals from other parts of India, particularly those engaged in transportation and informal trade.

Table 2: Educational Qualification of Respondents (n = 75)

Educational Qualification	n	%
Graduation	25	33.3
Higher Secondary	19	25.3
Matriculation	17	22.7
Post Graduation	8	10.7
Other	6	8.0
Total	**75**	**100.0**

Table 2 reveals that the sample was predominantly educated, with graduates forming the largest group (33.3%, n = 25), followed by higher secondary certificate holders (25.3%) and those with matriculation-level education (22.7%). Post-graduates accounted for 10.7% of respondents. Taken together, 91.3% of respondents had completed at least matriculation. This educational profile challenges stereotypical assumptions that urban migration is primarily driven by uneducated or unskilled individuals. Instead, it suggests that educated youth are migrating to Guwahati precisely because their qualifications are not matched by employment opportunities in their home regions, a finding consistent with Todaro's (1969) model of skilled urban migration. The 8.0% classified as 'Other' includes respondents with professional or vocational qualifications not captured by the standard categories.

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Table 3: Occupation of Respondents (n = 75)

Occupation	n	%
Student	9	12.0
Private Job Holder	15	20.0
Shop Keeper	14	18.7
Other / Informal Worker	15	20.0
Government Job Holder	8	10.7
Auto / Taxi / Bus Driver	7	9.3
Rickshaw Driver	5	6.7
Street Vendor	2	2.7
Total	**75**	**100.0**

Table 3 highlights the occupational diversity of the migrant sample. Private job holders and other/informal workers each accounted for 20.0% of respondents, and shop keepers formed a substantial group at 18.7%. Students constituted 12.0% of the sample, underscoring the role of education as a migration driver. Government job holders represented 10.7%, while transportation workers (auto/taxi/bus drivers at 9.3% and rickshaw drivers at 6.7%) and street vendors (2.7%) represent the informal sector. The combined informal and semi-formal workforce (shop keepers, informal workers, transportation workers, and street vendors) accounts for approximately 57.4% of respondents, which corroborates Kundu and Sarangi's (2005) finding that most urban migrants are absorbed into informal or low-wage employment. The separation of students (12.0%) from the general 'Other' category is analytically important, as their aspirations and challenges differ substantially from those of employed migrants.

5.2 Reasons for Migration

Table 4 presents the frequency distribution of primary reasons for migration. Respondents were asked to identify the most important reason they relocated to Guwahati.

Table 4: Reasons for Migration (n = 75)

Reason for Migration	n	%
Better Job	29	38.7
Better Standard of Living	25	33.3
Other (Education, Social, Cultural, etc.)	21	28.0
Total	**75**	**100.0**

As Table 4 shows, the search for better job opportunities was the single most cited motivation for migration (38.7%, n = 29), followed closely by the desire for a better standard of living (33.3%, n = 25). Combined, these two economic categories account for 72.0% of all migration decisions, providing strong empirical support for Todaro's (1969) model of income-differential-driven migration. The remaining 28.0% cited other reasons including higher education, family relocation, and social or cultural factors, reflecting the multidimensional nature of migration decisions. Respondents described their motivations in the following ways:

"Get a better job" (Male respondent, 25 years, Assam)

"For higher studies and better hospitality" (Female respondent, 23 years, Arunachal Pradesh)

"Better standard of living and a stable source of income" (Male respondent, 25 years, Assam)

These responses affirm that economic aspiration and educational ambition are the two dominant migration drivers, with younger and more educated respondents more likely to cite educational motivations.

5.3 Challenges Faced Post-Migration

Table 5 presents the categorized distribution of challenges reported by respondents after relocating to Guwahati.

Table 5: Challenges Faced Post-Migration (n = 75)

Challenge Category	n	%
Language / Communication Barrier	20	26.7
High Cost of Living / Low Income	16	21.3
Other (Social Isolation, Housing, etc.)	19	25.3
Environmental Issues (Climate, Water)	7	9.3
Adjustment / Adaptation	6	8.0
Unemployment / Job Search	4	5.3
Business Disruption	3	4.0
Total	**75**	**100.0**

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Table 5 reveals that language and communication barriers were the most commonly reported post-migration challenge, affecting 26.7% (n = 20) of respondents. This is particularly significant given that the majority of non-Assamese respondents from states such as Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, and West Bengal reported difficulty communicating in Assamese, the dominant local language. High cost of living and low income followed at 21.3% (n = 16), confirming the economic strain that characterizes life in a rapidly growing urban center. A broad category of other challenges, including social isolation, difficulty finding rental housing, and absence of family support, accounted for 25.3% of responses. Environmental issues such as heat, air pollution, and water scarcity were noted by 9.3% of respondents, while adjustment and adaptation difficulties were reported by 8.0%. Unemployment and job search difficulties (5.3%) and business disruption (4.0%) were less frequently cited but are noteworthy for specific migrant subgroups. Respondents described their experiences as follows:

> *"The problem I faced during my migration is the language and also the absence of family support and adaptability"* (Male respondent, 42 years, Haryana)
>
> *"Difficulty in living because of food, people and language"* (Female respondent, 27 years, Meghalaya)
>
> *"Very low income. It is very hard to find jobs in a big city, so education is very important"* (Male respondent, 36 years, Guwahati)
>
> *"Due to the flyover, our shop got abandoned. They broke it for construction and it created many problems for our survival"* (Female respondent, Assam, Shop Keeper)

A Chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine whether the nature of challenges varied by migration reason. The test returned $X2(10, N = 75) = 8.60$, $p = .570$, indicating no statistically significant association between migration reasons and the type of challenge experienced. This finding suggests that urban hardships are experienced broadly and uniformly across all migrant types, regardless of why they originally relocated. In other words, whether a migrant came for a job or for education, the challenges they face in the city are largely the same. It should be noted, however, that several expected cell frequencies fell below 5.0 (minimum = 1.12), which limits the statistical reliability of this result and calls for replication in a larger sample.

5.4 Future Aspirations of Migrants

Table 6 presents the distribution of future aspiration categories derived from thematic coding of open-ended responses about respondents' plans and goals.

Table 6: Future Aspirations of Respondents (n = 75)

Aspiration Category	n	%
Economic (Income, Employment, Business)	40	53.3
Educational (Further Studies, Qualifications)	12	16.0
Settlement (Long-term Urban Residence)	5	6.7
Other (Cultural, Religious, Personal Goals)	18	24.0
Total	**75**	**100.0**

Table 6 shows that economic aspirations dominated future plans, with 53.3% (n = 40) of respondents expressing goals related to income growth, better employment, or business development. This is consistent with the economic motivations that drove initial migration and reflects Bhagat's (2011) observation that migrants maintain a sustained orientation toward upward mobility. Educational aspirations were the second most common category (16.0%, n = 12), indicating that a significant portion of the sample, particularly students and younger migrants, view Guwahati as a stepping stone to further qualifications rather than a final destination. Only 6.7% (n = 5) expressed a desire for long-term settlement in the city, suggesting that most migrants retain the possibility of return migration once personal goals are achieved. The 'Other' category (24.0%) captured diverse personal ambitions including cultural, religious, and creative goals. Verbatim responses illustrate this variety:

> *"I want to do my higher qualification MSc in Mumbai"* (Female respondent, 23 years, Arunachal Pradesh)
>
> *"Earn more income"* (Male respondent, 60 years, Manipur)
>
> *"Planning to stay here in Assam"* (Female respondent, 25 years, Assam)
>
> *"Planning for more goals which can be done through hard work"* (Male respondent, 36 years, Guwahati)
>
> *"To build a church"* (Male respondent, 40 years, Nagaland)

A Chi-square test between migration reason and future aspiration category yielded $X2(6, N = 75) = 10.40$, $p = .109$. While this result does not meet the conventional threshold for statistical significance ($p < .05$), the p-value approaches it and suggests a marginal association between initial migration motivation and long-term aspirations. Respondents who migrated primarily for economic reasons

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were more likely to express economic aspirations, while those who migrated for education more often cited educational goals. This pattern implies that policy support for longer-term aspirations may need to be differentiated by migrant type. As with the previous test, expected cell frequencies fell below 5.0 in several cells (minimum = 1.40), and findings should be considered exploratory pending replication with a larger sample.

5.5 Word Cloud Analysis of Future Aspirations

A word cloud was generated from the aggregated open-ended responses on future aspirations (Figure 1). The most prominent terms, which appeared with the highest frequency, included 'income', 'education', 'study', 'better job', 'settle', and 'life'. These high-frequency terms align directly with the thematic coding results in Table 6, validating the quantitative findings through visual representation. Less frequent but notable terms such as 'church', 'travel', and 'music' confirm that a subset of migrants holds cultural, religious, or personal aspirations that extend beyond material improvement. The word cloud thus provides both confirmatory and complementary evidence: it corroborates the dominance of economic and educational aspirations while revealing the full diversity of migrant futures in a single accessible visual.

Figure 1: Word Cloud of Future Aspirations

5.6 Correlation and Exploratory Clustering Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between numerically encoded migration reason and challenge categories as an exploratory measure. The resulting correlation was negligible (r = -0.005), confirming the absence of any linear relationship between migration motivation and the type of challenge experienced post-migration. This finding corroborates the Chi-square result in Section 5.3: challenges are distributed uniformly across all migrant types and cannot be predicted from migration motivation alone.

Table 7: Pearson Correlation Matrix Between Encoded Variable Pairs (n = 75)

Variable Pair	Pearson r	p-value	Interpretation
Migration Reason vs. Challenge Category	-0.139	.236	Negligible, non-significant
Migration Reason vs. Future Aspiration	0.224	.053	Weak positive, marginal
Challenge Category vs. Future Aspiration	-0.107	.359	Negligible, non-significant

Table 7 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients between the three numerically encoded variable pairs. The correlation between migration reason and challenge category was negligible and non-significant (r = -0.139, p = .236), confirming that the type of challenge a migrant faces is not predictable from their migration motivation. Similarly, the correlation between challenge category and future aspiration was negligible (r = -0.107, p = .359). Notably, the correlation between migration reason and future aspiration was weak but positive and approached statistical significance (r = 0.224, p = .053), suggesting a tentative directional relationship: migrants who came for job-related reasons are somewhat more likely to express economic aspirations, while those who migrated for other reasons (including education) tend toward educational or personal goals. This finding aligns with the marginal Chi-square result reported in Section 5.4 and warrants investigation in future research with larger samples.

K-means clustering was applied exploratorily to identify latent migrant typologies based on coded reason, challenge, and aspiration categories. Preliminary analysis identified three distinct clusters. The first cluster, labelled Economic Migrants, comprised

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respondents who migrated for job-related reasons, faced high cost of living as their primary challenge, and expressed income-oriented aspirations. The second cluster, Education-Driven Migrants, was characterized by educational migration motivations, adjustment difficulties, and aspirations toward further qualifications. The third cluster, Resilient Informal Workers, included migrants in transportation and street vending occupations who faced language barriers and environmental challenges while aspiring toward gradual economic improvement. These typologies are preliminary given the small sample size and require validation in future research with a larger, probability-based sample. Nonetheless, they offer a useful conceptual framework for designing differentiated policy interventions.

Table 8: K-means Cluster Profiles -- Preliminary Migrant Typologies (3-Cluster Solution, n = 75)

Cluster	Typology Label	n	%	Dominant Reason	Dominant Challenge	Dominant Aspiration
1	Settlement-Oriented Migrants	19	25.3	Better Standard of Living (47%)	Other/Social Challenges (42%)	Other/Settlement Goals (68%)
2	Economic Strivers	21	28.0	Better Standard of Living (38%)	High Cost / Low Income (48%)	Economic Goals (57%)
3	Job-Seeking Migrants	35	46.7	Better Job (54%)	Language/Communication (43%)	Economic Goals (80%)
Total		**75**	**100.0**			

Table 8 summarizes the three migrant typologies identified through K-means clustering. Cluster 3 (Job-Seeking Migrants) is the largest group (46.7%, n = 35), characterized by a dominant motivation to find better employment. This group reported language and communication barriers as the leading challenge, and 80% expressed economic aspirations for their future. Their profile is consistent with Todaro's (1969) rational economic migrant. Cluster 2 (Economic Strivers, 28.0%, n = 21) also sought improved living standards but was most affected by high cost of living and low income, with the majority (57%) focused on economic advancement. Cluster 1 (Settlement-Oriented Migrants, 25.3%, n = 19) is the most heterogeneous group, motivated primarily by standard-of-living aspirations and facing general social challenges. Uniquely, 68% of this cluster expressed non-economic or settlement-oriented goals, including long-term urban residence and cultural or religious pursuits, suggesting a deeper process of urban integration and identity negotiation as described by Bhagat (2011). Together, the three typologies demonstrate that although urban challenges are broadly shared, the motivational profiles and aspirational orientations of migrants differ in ways that have implications for differentiated policy design.

5.7 Summary of Key Patterns

Table 9: Summary of Key Statistical Findings

Key Pattern	Indicator / Test	Statistic / Value
Economic motivations dominate migration	% citing job or standard of living	72.0% (n = 54)
Language barrier is most prevalent challenge	% citing language/communication	26.7% (n = 20)
High cost of living is second challenge	% citing cost/income	21.3% (n = 16)
Challenges are uniform across migrant types	Chi-square: Reason vs. Challenge	X2(10, N=75) = 8.60, p = .570
Economic goals dominate aspirations	% citing economic future plans	53.3% (n = 40)
Marginal link: motivation to aspiration	Chi-square: Reason vs. Aspiration	X2(6, N=75) = 10.40, p = .109
Weak positive correlation: reason to aspiration	Pearson r: Reason vs. Aspiration	r = 0.224, p = .053
No correlation: reason to challenge	Pearson r: Reason vs. Challenge	r = -0.139, p = .236
Three migrant typologies identified	K-means clustering (3-cluster solution)	Clusters: 46.7% / 28.0% / 25.3%

Table 9 consolidates the key statistical findings from this study into a single reference point. Four overarching patterns are confirmed by the data. First, economic motivations account for 72.0% of all migration decisions, establishing economic aspiration as the dominant driver of urban migration in this sample. Second, urban challenges are experienced uniformly across migrant types: the Chi-square test (X2(10) = 8.60, p = .570) and the negligible Pearson correlation (r = -0.139, p = .236) both confirm that challenge type cannot be predicted from migration motivation. Third, future aspirations are predominantly economic (53.3%), but show a marginal link to initial motivation through both the Chi-square result (p = .109) and the Pearson correlation (r = 0.224, p = .053), suggesting that policy support for aspirations may benefit from being tailored to migrant type. Fourth, K-means clustering identifies three preliminary typologies, Job-Seeking Migrants (46.7%), Economic Strivers (28.0%), and Settlement-Oriented Migrants (25.3%), that provide a practical framework for designing differentiated urban policy interventions.

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The analysis reveals four consistent patterns across the dataset. First, economic motivations dominate migration decisions (72.0% of respondents). Second, urban hardships, particularly language barriers (26.7%) and high cost of living (21.3%), are experienced uniformly across all migrant groups regardless of migration motivation ($X2(10) = 8.60$, $p = .570$). Third, future aspirations are predominantly economic (53.3%), with a marginal association between initial motivation and long-term goals ($X2(6) = 10.40$, $p = .109$). Fourth, despite structural challenges, migrants exhibit consistent resilience, adaptability, and forward-looking orientation throughout their urban experience.

6. LIMITATIONS

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the sample of 75 respondents was drawn from a single urban center using purposive non-probability sampling, which limits the statistical generalizability of findings to the broader Northeast Indian migrant population. Second, both Chi-square analyses were constrained by expected cell frequencies below 5.0 (minimum = 1.12 and 1.40 respectively), reducing statistical reliability; future studies should use larger samples or collapse categories to meet this assumption. Third, reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, particularly in responses about aspirations and challenges. Fourth, the cross-sectional design captures a single point in time; longitudinal research would reveal how migrant experiences and aspirations evolve. Fifth, the study did not collect data from non-migrants, limiting causal inference about migration's effects. Finally, selection bias inherent in purposive sampling may have over-represented more accessible or articulate migrant groups.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for policymakers, urban planners, and researchers:

- **Language and Cultural Integration Programs:** Given that language barriers were the most frequently reported challenge (26.7%), municipal authorities should provide targeted Assamese language support programs for non-Assamese migrants. Cultural orientation workshops can further ease social integration.
- **Affordable Housing and Basic Services:** Urban local bodies should prioritize affordable rental housing schemes and improved access to sanitation, clean water, and healthcare for migrant populations, particularly those in informal settlements.
- **Skill Development and Livelihood Support:** Vocational training programs tailored to the skill profiles of informal workers, including transportation workers, street vendors, and shop keepers, would improve livelihood security and income levels.
- **Educational Support Mechanisms:** Migrants who relocate for educational purposes would benefit from structured academic counseling, scholarship access, and affordable student accommodation. Universities in Guwahati should develop dedicated support systems for out-of-state students.
- **Policy Inclusion and Migrant Representation:** Urban planning and policy formulation processes should systematically incorporate migrant voices. Migrant advisory panels or community liaisons can facilitate meaningful participation in governance.
- **Longitudinal and Large-Scale Research:** Future studies should adopt a longitudinal design with probability-based sampling across multiple northeastern cities to enable robust generalization, valid inferential statistics, and comparative analysis of migrant subgroups over time.

8. CONCLUSION

This study examined the perceptions, challenges, and aspirations of 75 urban migrants from Northeast India residing in Guwahati through a mixed-methods approach. The findings confirm that economic motivations are the primary drivers of migration, with 72.0% of respondents citing better job prospects or improved living standards as their principal reason for relocating. Language barriers and high cost of living emerged as the most prevalent post-migration challenges, experienced uniformly across all migrant types regardless of initial motivation ($X2(10) = 8.60$, $p = .570$). Future aspirations were predominantly economic (53.3%), though educational, settlement, and cultural goals were also represented, reflecting the diversity of the migrant experience.

A key contribution of this study is its demonstration that while challenges are shared across migrant types, aspirations are more varied and may be partially shaped by original migration motivation ($X2(6) = 10.40$, $p = .109$). Exploratory K-means clustering identified three preliminary migrant typologies, namely economic migrants, education-driven migrants, and resilient informal workers, which offer a framework for designing differentiated policy interventions.

The study contributes primary empirical evidence from the underrepresented Northeast Indian urban migration context and underscores the need for inclusive, data-driven urban governance. Language integration programs, affordable housing, skill development, and educational support are identified as priority areas. With appropriate institutional support, urban migration can become a vehicle for regional development and individual advancement rather than a source of vulnerability and exclusion.

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