



# MAGNITUDE, TRENDS AND PATTERN OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND REMITTANCES IN INDIA AND KERALA: A REVIEW

**Dr. Rafeek V H**

*Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Government College, Kodanchery, Kerala, India*

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## -----ABSTRACT-----

*International migration has become a significant force in shaping economic and social development worldwide. India is one of the largest countries of origin of migrants, and Kerala plays a key role in the migration process due to its long history of connections with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. This article looks at the trends, patterns, and effects of migration and remittances in India and Kerala, focusing on emigration trends, remittance inflows, variations by district and religion, and the socio-economic effects of migration. The study uses secondary data from the World Bank, the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA), Kerala Migration Surveys (KMS), and related reports. The findings show that remittances have greatly helped reduce poverty and improve living standards, housing, education, and overall household well-being in Kerala. However, the benefits of migration are not spread evenly across districts and communities. The article also points out the slowing growth of emigration from Kerala and the changing dynamics of migration after the global economic crisis.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Migration, Remittances, Kerala Migration, GCC Countries, Indian Diaspora, Household Welfare, Gulf Migration*-----

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Migration refers to the temporary or permanent movement of individuals or groups from one geographical region to another for various economic, social, political, or cultural reasons. International migration has become a significant global phenomenon today. It greatly contributes to livelihood strategies, poverty reduction, and socio-economic change, especially in developing countries. Migration plays an important role in improving the living conditions of underprivileged households through remittance transfers. Money sent home by migrants often helps with household consumption, housing, education, health care, and investments. In India, international migration has become a major source of foreign exchange earnings and a driver of economic stability. Among Indian states, Kerala has seen one of the most intense migration processes, particularly to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The migration process in Kerala has affected almost every aspect of social and economic life. Migration and remittances have changed consumption patterns, labor markets, housing conditions, educational goals, and demographic structures. Thus, examining migration and remittances in the context of Kerala is very relevant for understanding regional development and socio-economic change. This article examines the trends, patterns, and impacts of migration and remittances at the global, national, and state levels. It specifically focuses on emigration growth, remittance inflows, variations by district and religion, and the developmental effects of migration.

## 2. GLOBAL TRENDS IN MIGRATION AND REMITTANCES

International migration has reached new heights in recent decades. According to the World Bank (2011), about 215.8 million people, making up around 3.2 percent of the world's population, were living outside their countries of birth. Migration flows show significant South-to-South and North-to-North movements. Many migrants from developing countries move to other developing nations, while those from developed countries primarily migrate between high-income countries.

The main destination countries for migrants include the United States, Russia, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Spain, France, Australia, and India. Key countries of origin are Mexico, India, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines, Turkey, and Ukraine. Remittances are a crucial part of global financial flows. India became the largest recipient of remittances in 2010, receiving about US\$55 billion. Other major countries that receive remittances are China, Mexico, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and France (World Bank, 2011). These remittances play a significant role in reducing poverty, supporting consumption, and fostering economic growth in countries that send out migrants.

### 3. MIGRATION AND REMITTANCES IN INDIA

India is among the top countries sending migrants worldwide. The Indian diaspora includes more than 25 million people living in various regions. After gaining independence in 1947, migration from India increased significantly, especially among skilled professionals moving to developed countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. According to the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (2012), about 4 million Indians lived in North America, while around 2.5 million resided in Europe. Large Indian communities also exist in the Gulf countries, Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific region.

**Table 1. Indian Diaspora in Numbers, 2011**

Countries	Numbers
North America (USA and Canada)	4.0 million
South America (Trinidad & Tobago, Guyana, Surinam, Jamaica etc)	1.6 million
Europe(UK, Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Switzerland etc)	2.5 million
Africa(S. Africa, Mauritius, East African Countries)	2.7 million
Middle East(UAE, Soudi Arabia, Kuwait)	3.6 million
Far east & South East Asia(Malasia, Singapore, Myanmar etc)	5.0 million
Pacific Island (Fiji, Australia, Newzealand)	0.7 million
Srilanka and Nepal	4.9 million
Total	25.0 million

Source: Ministry of Over Seas Indian Affairs, 2012, Government of India

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are a key migration route for Indian workers. Migration to the Gulf region picked up during the 1970s oil boom, creating a huge demand for foreign labor in infrastructure and construction. Indian migrants in the GCC are found in skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled jobs. Among the GCC countries, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) remain the top destinations for Indian migrants. Together, they account for over 60 percent of Indian migrants in the Gulf region. The Indian community in GCC countries in 2011 included about 2 million in Saudi Arabia and 1.7 million in the UAE.

**Table 2 Indian Diaspora in GCC countries 2011**

Name of GCC country	Indian Diaspora
Saudi Arabia	2 million
UAE	1.7 million
Kuwait	0.64 million
Oman	0.7 million
Bahrain	0.35 million
Qatar	0.50 million
Total	5.94 million

Source: Ministry of Overseas Indian Affaires 2012, Government of India

The profile of Indian migrants in the Gulf shows that around 70 percent are in semi-skilled and unskilled roles, while about 30 percent are skilled workers. Remittances from these migrants have become a significant source of foreign exchange for India.

### 4. STATE-WISE VARIATION IN INDIAN EMIGRATION

There are significant differences in migration patterns across India. Kerala has long been a key player in emigration to Gulf countries. In the early days of Gulf migration, Kerala provided a large number of Indian emigrants. However, over the years, other states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Punjab, and Andhra Pradesh have become important sources of migrants. According to the Ministry of External Affairs, Kerala led in emigration until 2009, when Uttar Pradesh surpassed it in the number of emigrants. Several factors led to the decline in Kerala’s share of emigrants. Wage gaps between Kerala and Gulf countries became smaller after the global economic crisis. Also, better living standards and job opportunities in Kerala reduced the reasons for migration. Increased awareness of migration-related scams and exploitation also changed migration trends.

### 5. TRENDS IN REMITTANCES TO INDIA

India has consistently been the world’s largest recipient of remittances. According to the World Bank (2012), India received about US\$64 billion in remittances, making up nearly 4 percent of the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The Gulf region plays a big part in India’s remittance inflows. Between 2006 and 2009, GCC countries accounted for about 27 percent of total remittances to India. During the global economic crisis of 2008–09, remittance flows from the Gulf rose to around 31 percent. Remittances have been essential in supporting



India's balance of payments and foreign exchange reserves. They also help government revenue through visa fees, travel costs, and communication services tied to migration.

## 6. KERALA SCENARIO: MIGRATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

Kerala has attracted significant academic interest due to large-scale migration to the Gulf countries since the 1970s. Migration is now a deep part of Kerala's social and economic fabric. Almost every household in Kerala has been directly or indirectly affected by migration. Migration has greatly improved household income, consumption levels, housing quality, education, and access to health care. According to Zachariah et al. (2002), migration played a major role in changing Kerala's economy and society.

### 6.1 Emigration Trends in Kerala

The number of people leaving Kerala has grown steadily over the years, though the pace of growth has slowed in recent decades.

Table 3 Trends in Kerala Emigration (in lakhs)

Year	EMI	Year	EMI	Year	EMI
1983	2.74	1993	7.54	2003	18.38
1984	2.76	1994	8.19	2004	19.00
1985	3.13	1995	9.57	2005	19.90
1986	3.29	1996	10.62	2006	20.93
1987	3.64	1997	11.78	2007	21.65
1988	4.05	1998	13.60	2008	21.93
1989	4.49	1999	14.12	2009	21.90
1990	5.10	2000	15.01	2010	22.21
1991	5.66	2001	16.00	2011	22.80
1992	6.37	2002	17.17	2014	24.00

Source: Compiled from the Kerala Migration Survey Report, 2014

The Kerala Migration Survey in 2014 estimated about 24 lakh emigrants from Kerala that year, up from 22.8 lakh in 2011 and 21.9 lakh in 2008. Even though the number of emigrants has increased over time, the rate of increase has dropped. Between 1998 and 2003, the number of emigrants rose by about 4.76 lakh, while the increase between 2008 and 2014 fell significantly. The Kerala Migration Survey in 2016 also showed a decline in the number of emigrants between 2011 and 2016. This indicates shifts in migration patterns due to economic changes in both Kerala and the Gulf countries.

## 7. RETURN MIGRATION AND NON-RESIDENT KERALITES

Return migration has become an important part of Kerala's migration experience. The number of return emigrants reached about 12.48 lakh in 2014. Return migrants made up nearly 52 per cent of all emigrants from Kerala. The number of Non-Resident Keralites (NRKs), which includes both emigrants and return migrants, grew from 34.31 lakh in 2011 to 36.10 lakh in 2014. This shows the wide social impact of migration within Kerala society. Return migration creates both opportunities and challenges. While return migrants bring savings, skills, and experiences, they also struggle with reintegration, job insecurity, and financial instability after coming home.

## 8. REMITTANCES TO KERALA: MAGNITUDE, TREND AND PATTERN

The immediate and direct benefit of migration is the huge volume of foreign remittances that flow to Kerala. Part of these remittances goes to households for subsistence and other household expenses, and the rest is used for commercial purposes. In the Kerala migration survey (KMS), a distinction is made between 'household remittances', that is, remittances received by households for subsistence and other household expenses and 'total remittances', that is, household remittances plus remittances received in the state through channels such as banks, the stock market, etc.

### 8.1. Household Remittances in Kerala

Household remittances provide a clear economic benefit of migration. In Kerala, household remittances grew significantly over the years. Household remittances in Kerala in 2014 were estimated at Rs 24,374 crores. Comparable figures were Rs. 15,129 crores for 2011, Rs. 12,511 crores for 2008 and Rs. 7,965 crores for 2003. There was a 20.9 per cent increase in household remittances during 2008-2011. During the same period, the increase in emigration was only 6.2%. Thus, remittance growth outpaced emigrant numbers.

Most remittances went towards household consumption and basic needs. About 81.5 per cent of remittances were regular transfers meant for daily expenses. Other main uses included building houses, buying land, funding education, paying for medical care, and covering marriage costs. The rise in remittances outpaced the increase in emigrant numbers. This shows that migrants are earning more and sending larger amounts home.

### 8.2. District-Wise and Religion-Wise Variation in Remittances

There are significant regional differences in how remittances are distributed within Kerala. Malappuram district received the largest share. In 2011, it received household remittances of around Rs. 2,752 crore, which accounted for 18 per cent of the state's total. The other districts that received large amounts of remittances were Ernakulam (Rs 1,865 crores or 12 per cent), Kannur (Rs 1,566 crores), Thiruvananthapuram (Rs 1,443 crores), etc.

Analysing by religion, Muslims received the largest share of remittances in Kerala. Of the total household remittances of Rs. 15,129 crore in 2011, Muslim households received about Rs. 7,029 crore, accounting for 46.5 per cent of the total. This percentage is significantly higher than the Muslim share in Kerala's overall population. The results show that migration and remittances are more focused among Muslim households compared to other religious groups.

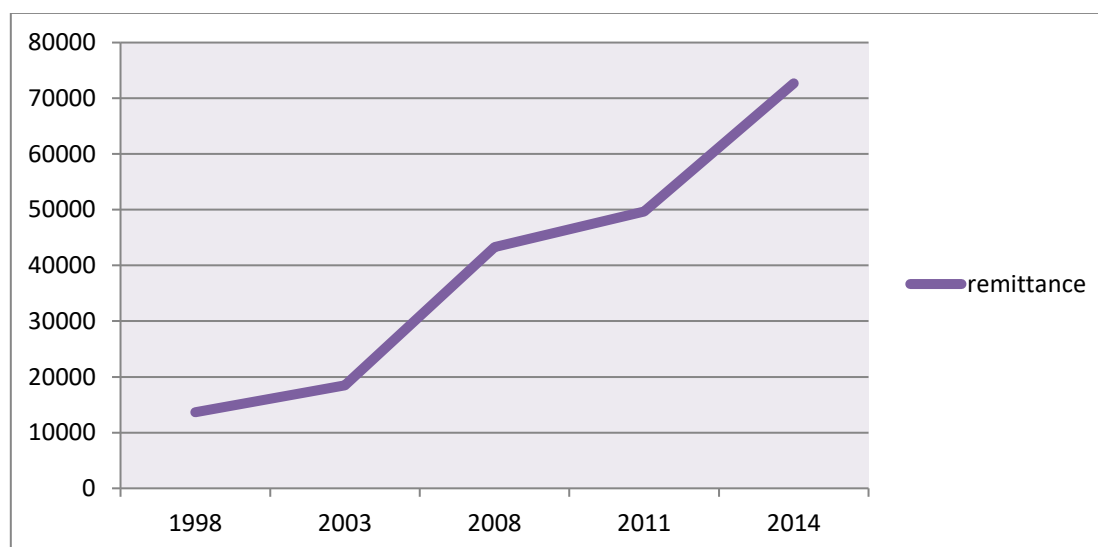
### 8.3. Total Remittances to Kerala

Total remittances to Kerala continued to grow, even as emigration slowed. The Kerala Migration Survey (2014) shows that total remittances rose from Rs. 13,652 crore in 1998 to Rs. 71,142 crore in 2014.

**Table 4. Total remittances to Kerala 1998-2014**

Year	Remittances(Rs)	% increase	Per HH
1998	13652	-	21469
2003	18465	35.3	24444
2008	43288	134.4	57215
2011	49695	14.8	63315
2014	71,142	46.3	86,843

Source: Kerala Migration Survey Report, 2014



While remittances increased by 134 percent during 2003-2008, they grew by just 15 percent during 2008-11. While remittances per household increased from Rs. 24,000 in 2003 to Rs. 57,000 in 2008, the corresponding increase was just Rs. 6,100 between 2008 and 2011, as in Table 3.20.

These numbers highlight the increasing importance of remittances in Kerala's economy. Remittances have become a vital source of household income, savings, investment, and consumption spending.

## 9. CONCLUSION

Migration and remittances have changed the socio-economic landscape of India and Kerala. International migration, especially to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, created significant job opportunities, generated income, and reduced poverty. Kerala became one of the top states in India for sending migrants because



of its long-standing connections to Gulf migration. Remittances significantly improved housing, education, health care, and overall living standards. However, the benefits of migration are not evenly distributed across districts and communities. Recent trends show a decrease in emigration growth from Kerala. This shift is due to changes in the labor market, rising wages in Kerala, and economic shifts in Gulf countries. Still, remittances remain a crucial part of Kerala's economy. Future migration policies should prioritize migrant welfare, skill development, safe migration practices, the reintegration of returning migrants, and the effective use of remittances for sustainable development.

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