

# Push and Pull Factors of Women Labour Migration in India

<sup>1</sup> Rekha. <sup>2</sup>Jayavanth Nayak

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Dept. of Economics, University College Mangalore

<sup>2</sup>Professor and Research Guide, University College Mangalore

**ABSTRACT:** This study examines the push and pull factors influencing women labour migration in India, a critical yet underexplored dimension of migration studies. Drawing entirely on secondary data from sources such as the Census of India, NSSO, and PLFS, the research identifies poverty, unemployment, low wages, agricultural distress, and gender-based discrimination as major push factors, while marriage, better employment opportunities, higher wages, improved living standards, and family relocation emerge as key pull factors. Findings reveal that marriage remains the dominant reason for female migration, though economic migration is rising, especially into informal urban sectors such as domestic work, garments, and services. The paper also highlights the multiple challenges women face during and after migration, including economic exploitation, unsafe travel, poor living conditions, lack of legal protection, health issues, and social isolation. The study underscores the need for gender-sensitive policies, stronger enforcement of labour rights, improved rural employment, and accessible welfare schemes to transform migration from a coping mechanism into an avenue for women's empowerment and socio-economic mobility.

**Keywords:** Women, Migration, Pull and Push Factors, India.

## INTRODUCTION

Migration is one of the most significant socio-economic phenomena shaping societies worldwide. It influences the lives of individuals, families, and communities and plays a vital role in the economic development of both origin and destination regions. Among the various categories of migrants, women labour migrants form a crucial yet often overlooked segment. Their migration patterns are driven by a complex interplay of economic, social, cultural, and familial factors. Understanding these factors is important because women face unique challenges and vulnerabilities in the migration process, making the study of their experiences and motivations an essential area of research. The reasons for migration are broadly divided into push and pull factors. Push factors refer to the adverse conditions in the place of origin that compel individuals to leave, such as poverty, lack of job opportunities, low wages, poor living standards, social discrimination, and limited access to resources. Pull factors, on the other hand, represent the opportunities available at the destination, including better wages, more employment opportunities, improved living conditions, and social or family networks that support migration. Analysing these factors provides insights into whether migration among women labourers is primarily a survival strategy or a means of seeking better prospects.

Research on women's labour migration is particularly important because female migrants are more vulnerable to exploitation and marginalisation compared to their male counterparts. They are often employed in low-paid, insecure jobs in the informal sector and face gender-based discrimination at the workplace. Many also experience difficulties in accessing basic services like healthcare, housing, and social security at their destinations. Social norms and family responsibilities often exacerbate these challenges, limiting their ability to benefit fully from migration.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Women labour migration in India has emerged as a significant socio-economic phenomenon, influenced by a complex interplay of push and pull factors. While migration has long been a livelihood strategy, globalization, urbanization, and changing labour market demands have reshaped its patterns, especially for women. Existing literature reveals that women migrate for diverse reasons, including marriage, employment, education, and family relocation, with marriage often dominating official statistics. However, studies also point to growing economic migration among women, driven by rural poverty, unemployment, low wages, and lack of infrastructure, contrasted with better job opportunities, higher incomes, and improved facilities in urban centres. Research further highlights the challenges women face post-migration, such as informal employment, poor housing, health risks, and social exclusion, raising questions about the extent to which migration fosters empowerment and socio-economic mobility. Reviewing existing studies helps to identify trends, gaps, and policy needs, forming a foundation for understanding the gender-specific dynamics of labour migration in India.

Acharya & Reddy's article examines internal migration in India, finding employment, marriage, education, and family relocation as key causes. Male migration is mainly for work, while female migration is mostly marriage-related. Rural-urban flows dominate, driven by poverty and lack of infrastructure in villages and better opportunities in cities. While migration brings remittances and skills, it also causes overcrowding, poor housing, and informal employment, prompting the need for balanced development, rural job creation, and better urban infrastructure. (Acharya & Reddy, 2016)

This article by Dr. K. Visalakshi examines female labour migration in India, noting that while globalization and gender-specific labour demand have increased women's migration, marriage remains the primary reason for mobility. Using NSSO 55th round data, it identifies three types—autonomous, relay, and family migration—and shows interstate and rural-urban variations, with Haryana, Punjab, and Maharashtra attracting the most migrants. Employment-related migration is low, but women's labour force participation often rises after migration. The study highlights challenges like low wages, poor conditions, lack of protection, and invisibility in labour data, concluding that female migration can aid poverty reduction and personal growth but requires stronger policies on infrastructure, social security, and rights. (Dr. K. Visalakshi, 2016)

This article by Dr. Anju Bala examines migration in India, outlining its definitions, causes, trends, and effects. Using census data

(1881–2011), it shows male migration is largely for employment, while female migration is mainly due to marriage. Key push factors include rural unemployment, low wages, and poor amenities; pull factors include better jobs and facilities in cities. The paper highlights demographic, social, economic, and environmental impacts, such as brain drain, slum growth, and urban overcrowding. It reviews government schemes like MGNREGA and PURA, recommending improved rural employment, amenities, and safe migration measures to reduce pressure on cities. **(Anju Bala, 2017)**

This article by Sanyal examines women's migration in India, noting marriage as the main cause, followed by employment, education, and family relocation, with rural-to-rural migration most common. Women migrants are largely in informal, low-paid work, shaped by socio-cultural norms and economic need, often facing exploitation and poor conditions. While migration can support livelihoods and social change, the study stresses the need for gender-sensitive policies, legal protection, skills training, and better living conditions to empower women migrants. **(Sanyal, 2018)**

P. Kavitha and Dr. A. Valliammai's article analyzes labour migration in India, linking it to regional disparities, wage gaps, and socio-economic inequality. Male migration is mostly for work, while female migration is often marriage-related. Industrial growth attracts rural labour into informal, low-paid jobs, leading to poor housing, health risks, and limited education access. While migration boosts incomes and skills, it also fuels exploitation and urban overcrowding, prompting the need for balanced development, social protection, and better working conditions. **(Kavitha & Valliammai, 2020)**

This article by Hossain Saruk studies internal migration in India, focusing on Tamil Nadu, and finds employment, education, and marriage as key drivers. Using census data, it shows how rural distress pushes people out while urban opportunities pull them in, creating rural–urban, rural–rural, and urban–urban flows. Migration boosts labour markets and incomes but also causes urban overcrowding and infrastructure strain. The study calls for balanced regional development, skill training, and inclusive urban planning to harness benefits while reducing negative impacts. **(Hossain, 2023)**

Chetan Kumar Sharma & Pal, article examines labour migration in India, highlighting unemployment and rural poverty as key push factors, and urban job opportunities as pull factors. Male migration is mainly for work, while female migration is often marriage-related. Migration brings remittances and skills but also causes urban overcrowding and poor living conditions, calling for balanced development, rural job creation, and better urban infrastructure. **(Chetan Kumar Sharma & Pal, 2024)**

## RESEARCH GAP

Although several studies have examined women labour migration in India covering its types, causes, patterns, and socio-economic impacts most research remains fragmented, focusing on either general migration trends or using male-dominated data, with women's specific push and pull factors often treated as secondary to marriage-related mobility. The literature highlights economic necessity, rural distress, wage differentials, and urban employment opportunities as drivers, but few studies deeply explore how these interact with gender norms, education, skill levels, and regional disparities to shape women's migration decisions. Moreover, while post-migration challenges such as exploitation, informal employment, poor housing, and lack of social protection are acknowledged, there is limited empirical evidence on how these factors affect women's empowerment, autonomy, and long-term socio-economic mobility. The reliance on secondary datasets like the NSSO often obscures micro-level dynamics, such as decision-making power, intra-household negotiations, and the role of networks. There is also a gap in understanding sector-specific labour demand for women, the impact of migration on their health and safety, and the effectiveness of existing policies in addressing these issues. Thus, comprehensive, gender-sensitive, and regionally comparative studies—incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data are needed to fully capture the complexity of push and pull factors influencing women labour migration in India.

## OBJECTIVES

The following are the major objectives of the Study

1. To identify and analyse the major push and pull factors influencing the migration of women labourers from their place of origin to their destination.
2. To understand the challenges and vulnerabilities faced by women labour migrants during and after migration.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is based entirely on secondary data sources to examine the push and pull factors influencing women's labour migration. Data is collected from reliable published sources such as the Census of India, National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) reports, Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), government labour department records, and research reports from national and international organisations. These sources provide comprehensive information on reasons for migration, demographic characteristics, occupational patterns, and socio-economic conditions of women migrants. The collected data is organised and classified according to push and pull factors. Percentage and frequency analysis is used to interpret the data and identify the relative significance of each factor.

**DISCUSSION**

**TABLE NO: 1 PUSH AND PULL FACTORS OF WOMEN LABOUR MIGRATION IN INDIA**

Sources	Push Factor	Pull factor	Key Percentage of Women Migrants
Census of India (2011)	- Lack of employment at origin - Poverty/economic distress - Displacement - Family issues (divorce/separation)	-Marriage (major) - Employment opportunities - Accompanying family - Better education and living standards	- Marriage: 70% of total female migrants. - Employment-related migration:2.7% (among all women migrants) - Accompanying family:22%
NSSO 64th Round Migration Report (2007-2008)	Poverty, low wages, landlessness, and agricultural distress	Employment opportunities in urban informal sectors, family relocation	Among female migrants: 79.3% married migration; 82.8% overall due to marriage; remaining small share of employment-related
PLFS 2022-23	- High rural female unemployment - Seasonal nature of farm work - Gender wage gap and discrimination	- Informal urban jobs (domestic work, garments, hospitality, services) - Urban self-employment - Social networks	- Urban employment-related migration (women):31% - Marriage/family related:58% (urban and rural combined)

Source: 64<sup>th</sup> NSSO Round Migration Report Census Report PLFS Report 2022-23

**CHALLENGES AND VULNERABILITIES FACED BY WOMEN LABOUR MIGRANTS DURING AND AFTER MIGRATION**

**I. DURING MIGRATION**

- 1. Economic Challenges:** During migration, women labourers face severe economic insecurity. Most of them travel with very little money, making them dependent on contractors or middlemen who often exploit them financially. Wage advances taken before migration can trap them in debt, forcing them to work under bonded-like conditions. Additionally, they are often unaware of the wages they will receive at the destination, leading to exploitation and non-payment.
- 2. Unsafe Travel and Exploitation:** The journey itself is unsafe for migrant women. They often travel in overcrowded and unhygienic transport with limited facilities. Women are highly vulnerable to physical abuse, harassment, and even human trafficking during transit, especially when travelling alone or with children.
- 3. Lack Of Legal Protection:** Many women migrating for work do not have valid identity cards or migration permits. This makes them vulnerable at checkpoints and dependent on intermediaries for travel arrangements. Without documentation, they have no legal protection against abuse during the journey.
- 4. Social And Emotional Stress:** Leaving their homes and families behind creates emotional distress. Migrant women often suffer from anxiety about their safety and the well-being of family members left behind, especially children. The lack of social support during transit makes them feel isolated and vulnerable.

**II. AFTER MIGRATION**

- 1. Economic Challenges:** After arriving at the destination, migrant women usually find work in low-paid and unorganised sectors such as domestic work, agriculture, construction, and factories. Wage discrimination is common, and they are often paid less than male workers for the same work. Jobs are unstable and they may be dismissed at any time without notice or compensation.
- 2. Poor Living Conditions:** Migrant women labourers typically live in slums, temporary shelters, or overcrowded rooms that lack sanitation, drinking water, and electricity. They face exploitation by landlords who charge high rents or evict them without notice. These poor living conditions increase the risk of disease and negatively affect their physical and mental health.
- 3. Unsafe and Exploitative Working Conditions:** Workplaces often lack basic safety measures. Migrant women are made to work long hours without proper breaks or overtime pay. They are vulnerable to harassment and abuse by employers, but most cases go unreported due to fear of losing their jobs.
- 4. Health And Nutrition Issues:** Migrant women labourers struggle to access healthcare services due to a lack of identity documents and awareness. They often work in hazardous conditions without proper health protection. Malnutrition is common because their irregular income prevents them from affording a balanced diet. Reproductive health issues are also widespread as they are unable to take maternity leave or access medical care.

**5. Social and Cultural Challenges:** After migration, women face social isolation because they are cut off from their native communities. They often face stigma and discrimination as outsiders at the destination. Gender-based violence is a serious concern, including sexual harassment at the workplace and domestic violence.

**6. Legal and Documentation Barriers:** A lack of legal documents like Aadhaar, voter ID, or ration cards at the destination makes it difficult for migrant women to access welfare schemes and food subsidies. Without legal awareness, they are unable to seek justice when exploited by employers, landlords, or contractors.

**7. Family-Related Vulnerabilities:** Balancing work and family responsibilities becomes even more difficult after migration. Many women are forced to leave their children behind, leading to emotional distress. Those who migrate with children struggle to access childcare and education facilities. Frequent relocation often disrupts children's schooling and increases dropout rates.

## CONCLUSION

Women labour migration is a critical yet under-researched dimension of the larger migration discourse in India. This study has shown that the push factors, such as poverty, lack of employment opportunities, and social pressures at the place of origin, often compel women to migrate, while pull factors such as marriage, family relocation, and better livelihood prospects draw them to new destinations. However, the journey of migrant women does not end with relocation; they continue to face a multitude of challenges and vulnerabilities both during and after migration. From economic exploitation and poor working conditions to inadequate housing, health issues, social isolation, and legal exclusion, their struggles are multidimensional and deeply rooted in structural inequalities. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that integrates gender-sensitive policies, stronger enforcement of labour rights, and improved access to welfare schemes and healthcare facilities. Ensuring proper documentation, safe working conditions, and affordable housing can go a long way in improving the lives of women migrant labourers. Moreover, enhancing awareness about their rights and creating social support networks at destinations can help reduce their vulnerabilities. Migration, if supported by the right policy framework, can transform from a coping strategy to an opportunity for empowerment. It is therefore imperative for governments, civil society, and other stakeholders to recognise the significant contributions of women migrant labourers and ensure that their rights, dignity, and aspirations are protected and promoted.

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