

# Push and Pull Factors Guiding Indian Migration to Western Nations: A Cross-Sectional Investigation

Narayanan Namboothiri G\*, Asna P, Aswani S, Avanthika A, Aysha Azeem, Aysha Moonam Kandathil, Aysha Nabeela VP, Azeem Ali VP

**Introduction:** Global migration has risen markedly, reaching about 304 million people in 2024, with India as the leading country of origin. Increasing numbers of Indian youth migrate to Western countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany, driven by economic constraints, limited domestic opportunities, and aspirations for better education, employment, and quality of life. However, focused evidence on their migration determinants and post-migration challenges remains limited. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the major push and pull factors influencing migration from India to Western countries and to evaluate the challenges experienced by migrants in host nations.

**Methodology:** A cross-sectional study was conducted among 200 Kerala migrants aged 15 to 40 years residing in Western countries between May 2024 and May 2025. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. Data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire assessing socio-demographic details, push and pull factors, and post-migration challenges, with determinants categorized using Yi classification. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26, and ethical approval and informed consent were obtained.

**Results:** Among 200 participants, 49% were aged 18–25 years with equal gender distribution (50% each); 63% held professional degrees, and 62% were unskilled workers. The United Kingdom (23%) and Canada (19%) were the most preferred destinations. Low wages (45%) and unemployment (41%) were major economic push factors, while quality of life (47%) and improved living standards (39%) were key pull determinants; corruption (36%) also contributed. Based on Yi's classification, 53.5% migrated mainly due to push factors. Common post-migration challenges included language barriers (53%), workplace adjustment issues (43%), discrimination (31%), high cost of living (35%), and lack of government support (64%).

**Conclusion:** Migration in this cohort was predominantly driven by push factors such as economic insecurity, unemployment, and governance-related concerns, while pull factors, including better living conditions and quality of life, reinforced decisions. Economic disparities, social aspirations, and political instability collectively shaped migration motives. Post-migration challenges, including language barriers, workplace adjustment difficulties, discrimination, and high living costs, highlighted the need for economic reforms at origin and stronger integration support in destination countries.

## Introduction

Migration has emerged as a major global phenomenon shaping both individual lives and societal structures. Over recent decades, increasing numbers of people have moved abroad in pursuit of economic advancement and personal development.<sup>1</sup> Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the global migrant population was estimated at approximately 272 million, and this figure has likely risen further in subsequent years. According to estimates from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) Population Division, the number of

international migrants worldwide reached approximately 304 million in 2024, almost doubling from about 154 million recorded in 1990. Despite this substantial rise in absolute numbers, migrants account for only 3.7% of the global population, reflecting a gradual increase from 2.9% in 1990. Women represent nearly half of the global migrant population, constituting 48% of all international migrants.<sup>2-4</sup> Economic aspirations, improved employment prospects, and better living standards have been key contributors to this trend. The United Kingdom has witnessed a substantial increase in Indian immigrants,

Department of Community Medicine, MES Medical College, Perinthalmanna, Kerala, India

**Correspondence to:** Narayanan Namboothiri G, Department of Community Medicine, MES Medical College, Perinthalmanna, Kerala, India. E-mail: narayanang1990@gmail.com

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reaching 253,000 by 2023, alongside a rise in annual net migration from 607,000 to 672,000 in the same period. Europe continues to remain a major destination for skilled migrants. In 2024, India continued to be the leading country of origin for international migrants, with more than 18.5 million Indians residing overseas. Migration among young people is largely influenced by educational and employment opportunities, with over 7.6 lakh Indian students pursuing higher education abroad, mainly in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany, according to Ministry of External Affairs data.<sup>3-5</sup>

Migration of Indian youth to Western countries is influenced by multiple push and pull determinants. Key push factors include economic instability, limited domestic employment opportunities, social pressures, and constraints in career advancement and higher education. Conversely, pull factors include access to improved standards of living, better professional opportunities, advanced educational systems, technological advancement, and perceptions of more inclusive and supportive social environments.<sup>6,7</sup> These determinants collectively motivate young individuals to migrate in pursuit of an enhanced quality of life and professional fulfillment. The movement of skilled youth has broader implications for both source and destination countries, influencing economic productivity, workforce dynamics, and sociocultural interactions.<sup>5-8</sup>

Despite its growing significance, youth migration to Western nations remains insufficiently explored within migration research, with existing literature largely focusing on general migration patterns or specific demographic categories. Comprehensive examination of the motivations, decision-making processes, and lived experiences of young migrants is limited. Understanding the outcomes of migration and its wider social, economic, and cultural implications for individuals, families, and communities is essential to capture the full scope of this demographic shift. Such evidence is necessary to clarify both the potential benefits and the challenges associated with migration and to inform policies aimed at managing its consequences.<sup>7-10</sup>

Against this background, the present study was undertaken with a clear scientific rationale to systematically examine the factors influencing migration from India to Western countries and to evaluate the challenges encountered by migrants in host nations. The novelty of this research lies in its integrated assessment of both push and pull determinants alongside the

experiential outcomes of migration, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of migration dynamics among Indian youth.<sup>9-13</sup> By generating empirical evidence on decision-making processes, social and economic drivers, and post-migration experiences to support targeted policy and strategic interventions, the present study aimed to assess the major factors influencing migration from India to Western countries and the challenges experienced by migrants in host nations.

## Methodology

### *Study Design, Setting, Duration*

The current cross-sectional study was conducted among individuals aged 15 to 40 years who had migrated from Kerala, India, to Western countries. The study was carried out in Kerala, India, from 03/05/2024 to 02/05/2025, spanning a period of one year.

### *Study population and Sample size*

The study participants consisted of individuals aged between 15 and 40 years who had migrated from Kerala to Western countries. Participants who provided informed consent and were willing to participate were included in the study. Individuals who were preparing to migrate and those who were unable to comprehend the questionnaire were excluded from the study.

Considering similarities in study population and methodology, the sample size was calculated based on a study conducted by Md Imran Khan *et al.*,<sup>7</sup> in which 41% of the study population migrated to Western countries predominantly due to push factors. The sample size was estimated using the formula  $n = 4pq/d^2$ , where  $p = 41%$ ,  $q = 100 - p = 59%$ , and  $d$  (absolute error) was taken as 7%. The calculated minimum sample size was 197.46, which was rounded to 200. Therefore, a total of 200 individuals were included in the study. Convenience sampling was utilized to recruit eligible participants within the specified age group. Convenience sampling was employed due to the geographically dispersed nature of the target population across multiple Western countries and the absence of a centralized sampling frame. This approach facilitated the feasible recruitment of eligible participants within the study period through accessible migrant networks.

### *Method of data collection and ethical considerations*

A total of 240 eligible individuals were approached for participation, of whom 200 completed the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 83.3%. The semi-structured questionnaire was developed based on previously

validated tools<sup>7,11-15</sup> and was subjected to content validation by experts in community medicine and public health. A pilot study was conducted among 20 participants to assess clarity and reliability, and necessary modifications were made prior to final data collection. The Final questionnaire comprised three sections: the first section collected socio-demographic details of the participants; the second section assessed push and pull factors influencing migration among individuals aged 15 to 40 years, including 20 push factors and 20 pull factors (under three domains: economical, social, and political) adapted from a validated questionnaire used by Md Imran Khan *et al.*<sup>7</sup> and the third section explored challenges experienced by migrants in Western countries, which were analyzed descriptively. Migration determinants were categorized using the following criteria[7]

- $Y_i = \text{Number of pull options chosen} / \text{Total number of reasons chosen}$
- $Y_i = 0 \rightarrow \text{Only push}$
- $0 < Y_i < 0.5 \rightarrow \text{Mainly push}$
- $Y_i = 0.5 \rightarrow \text{Both push and pull}$
- $0.5 < Y_i < 1 \rightarrow \text{Mainly pull}$
- $Y_i = 1 \rightarrow \text{Only pull}$

Data were collected through interviews using a predesigned semi-structured questionnaire administered via Google Form among individuals aged 15 to 40 years residing in Western countries. The study population comprised migrants originating from Kerala, India, who were currently residing in Western countries. Although the study was coordinated from Kerala, data collection was conducted online using Google Forms to enable participation from geographically dispersed respondents. Initial contacts were obtained through friends and family networks, and additional participants were recruited through referrals from migrants residing in the same locations. All participants were contacted directly, and the questionnaire was administered only after obtaining informed consent, ensuring clarity in the study setting and recruitment process.

The collected data were broken down into percentages and cross-tabulated for several variables. Version 26 of the SPSS software was used for the analysis. Categorical variables were expressed as frequency and percentage, and results were presented using descriptive statistics.

All study participants were assured complete confidentiality and anonymity, with their involvement being entirely voluntary. Prior to participation, potential

participants received comprehensive information about the study's nature and objectives, and their written informed consent was duly obtained. The study adhered to ethical standards, which are in line with the Helsinki Declaration, securing clearance from the Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC) of MES Medical College and Hospital, Perinthalmanna, Kerala, India, with reference number CM/04/MES/2024 before its initiation.

## Results

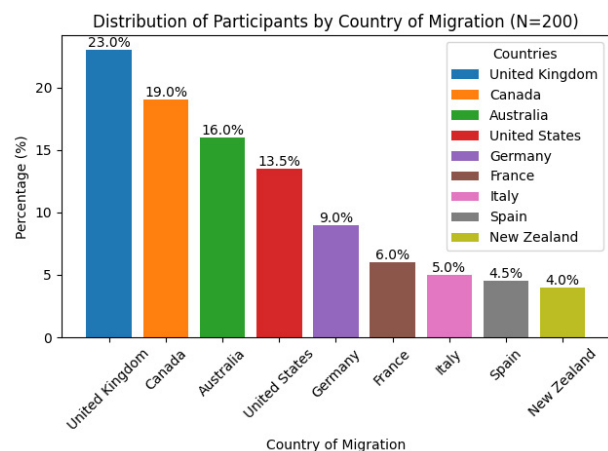
### *Sociodemographic features (n=200)*

Among the 200 participants, nearly half were aged 18–25 years (49%), followed by 25–30 years (26%). Gender distribution was equal (50% males and 50% females). Most participants possessed a professional degree (63%), and 62% were unskilled workers. Regarding family profile, 37% belonged to nuclear families, 33% to joint families, and 30% to three-generation families. The majority were married (65%), with 57% residing with their family and 43% living away (Table 1).

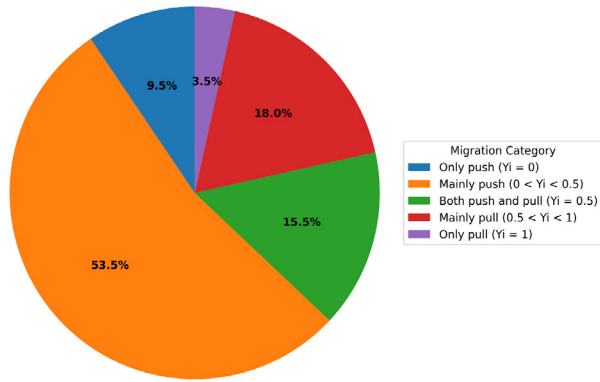
The majority of participants had migrated to the United Kingdom (23%), followed by Canada (19%) and Australia (16%). A smaller proportion migrated to the United States (13.5%), Germany (9%), France (6%), Italy (5%), Spain (4.5%), and New Zealand (4%), indicating a higher preference for English-speaking Western countries among the study population (Figure 1).

### *The push and pull factors: Economic, Social, and Political domains (n=200)*

Economic factors played a prominent role in influencing migration decisions. Among the push factors, low wages (45%) and unemployment (41%) were the most commonly reported reasons, followed by lack of support from the



**Figure 1:** Distribution of participants according to country of migration (N = 200)



**Figure 2:** Distribution of migration determinants based on Yi classification (N = 200)

government (36%) and poverty (28%). On the pull side, improved living standards (39%) and prospects for higher wages (38%) emerged as the leading determinants, along with better job opportunities (35%). This pattern suggests that economic insecurity at the place of origin, combined with expectations of financial stability abroad, strongly motivated migration (Table 2).

Social determinants also contributed substantially to migration. Social insecurity (25%) and inadequate education systems (23%) were the major social push factors, whereas poor medical care (21%) and population growth (20%) were reported to a lesser extent. In contrast, quality of life (47%) was the most influential social pull factor, followed by freedom from discrimination (26%) and better medical care (24%). These findings indicate that migrants were influenced not only by material conditions but also by perceived improvements in social well-being and societal environment (Table 3).

Political factors showed a moderate yet significant influence. Corruption (36%) and poor governance (32%) were the leading political push factors, while inequality (22%) and human rights abuse (19%) were also reported. Among political pull factors, safety and security (31%) ranked highest, followed by democracy (28%) and human civil rights (27%). Overall, political instability and governance-related concerns at the origin, combined with expectations of stability and institutional protection in destination countries, contributed to migration decisions (Table 4).

**Migration determinants in our study (n=200)**

The distribution of migration determinants based on Yi classification showed that the majority of participants migrated mainly due to push factors (53.5%), while 15.5% reported both push and pull factors influencing their

**Table 1:** Sociodemographic characteristics of study participants (N = 200)

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Age group</b>		
18–25 years	98	49
25–30 years	52	26
30–40 years	14	7
≥40 years	36	18
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	100	50
Female	100	50
<b>Educational status</b>		
Professional degree	126	63
Graduate	48	24
Diploma/intermediate	16	8
High school or below	10	5
<b>Occupational status</b>		
Unskilled worker	124	62
Professional	28	14
Skilled worker	24	12
Semi-skilled worker	14	7
Student	10	5
<b>Type of family</b>		
Nuclear family	74	37
Joint family	66	33
Three generation family	60	30
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	130	65
Unmarried	70	35
<b>Residing with family</b>		
Yes	114	57
No	86	43

migration. A smaller proportion migrated mainly due to pull factors (18%), whereas 9.5% were influenced solely by push factors, and only 3.5% migrated exclusively due to pull factors. These findings indicate that push factors were the predominant drivers of migration among the study population, although pull factors also contributed to migration decisions to a considerable extent (Figure 2).

**Challenges faced by Indian migrants in Western countries (n=200)**

Indian migrants reported several challenges following migration to Western countries. The most commonly

**Table 2:** Economic push and pull factors influencing migration (N=200, multiple responses)

Variable	Percentage (%)
<b>Economic push factors</b>	
Poverty	28
Unemployment	41
Low wages	45
Lack of basic health services	19
Lack of basic education	14
Lack of support from government	36
<b>Economic pull factors</b>	
Prospects for higher wages	38
Improved living standards	39
Personal development	27
Job opportunities	35
Good welfare standards	22
Labor demands	16

reported difficulty was forming social connections due to language barriers (53%), followed by challenges in adjusting to different workplace cultures and norms (43%). Experiences of racism and discrimination, particularly in obtaining employment and promotions, were reported by a considerable proportion of participants (31%). Financial challenges were also prominent, with many migrants reporting a high cost of living compared to their home country (35%). A majority of participants stated that they did not receive support from the Indian

**Table 3:** Social push and pull factors influencing migration (N=200, multiple responses)

Variable	Percentage (%)
<b>Social push factors</b>	
Discrimination	18
Poor medical care	21
Social insecurity	25
Inadequate education system	23
Population growth	20
<b>Social pull factors</b>	
Family reunification	15
Ethnic homeland	9
Freedom from discrimination	26
Better medical care	24
Quality of life	47

**Table 4:** Political push and pull factors influencing migration (N=200, multiple responses)

Variable	Percentage (%)
<b>Political push factors</b>	
Inequality	22
Restrictions on religious freedom and marriage	11
Conflicts	17
Corruption	36
Poor governance	32
Human rights abuse	19
Terrorism	8
<b>Political pull factors</b>	
Welfare state benefits	20
Democracy	28
Political freedom	23
Safety and security	31
Political stability	25
Human civil rights	27
International alliances and partnerships	14
Protection of minority rights	18

government (64%). To cope with feelings of isolation and homesickness, most migrants maintained regular contact with family and friends in their home country (43%), highlighting the importance of social support systems in adapting to the new environment.

## Discussion

The findings of the present study, demonstrating the predominance of push-driven migration (53.5%), were consistent with the observations of Md Imran Khan *et al.*<sup>7</sup>, who reported that 41% of migrants moved mainly due to push factors, indicating the dominant influence of adverse conditions at the place of origin. This similarity suggests that structural constraints such as unemployment and economic insecurity continue to act as primary triggers for migration across different settings. Likewise, the role of economic constraints such as low wages and unemployment observed in the present study aligned with the results of Pooja Krishna *et al.*[16], who identified low wages, seasonal unemployment, and indebtedness as major push factors, indicating that financial instability remains a consistent and decisive determinant influencing migration decisions. Similarly, the importance of employment-related motivations in

the current study corresponded with the findings of Nancy *et al.*,<sup>17</sup> highlighting that work-related factors are central to migration behaviour, particularly among economically active populations. Further, the influence of socio-political and economic conditions observed in the present study was comparable with the findings of Ravi Raman *et al.*,<sup>18</sup> suggesting that migration is shaped by a combination of economic necessity and broader systemic factors such as governance and social environment. In addition, the contribution of improved living standards and quality of life as pull factors in the present study was consistent with Sharma *et al.*,<sup>19</sup> indicating that aspirational factors and perceived social mobility act as reinforcing drivers alongside push determinants. Collectively, these findings reflect that migration is driven by an interplay of compulsion and aspiration, where adverse conditions initiate movement and perceived opportunities sustain migration decisions.

The predominance of mainly push-driven migration in the present study (53.5%) was comparable with Sulaiman and Bhagat,<sup>5</sup> who reported that employment insecurity and limited opportunities in Kerala significantly increased youth migration intentions, suggesting that local labour market constraints continue to act as strong initiating factors for migration. The preference for the United Kingdom (23%) and Canada (19%) aligned with Irudaya Rajan and Wadhawan *et al.*,<sup>9</sup> indicating that established academic pathways and post-study employment opportunities play a key role in destination selection among migrants. Similarly, the importance of quality of life (47%) and improved living standards (39%) as pull determinants corresponded with Sharma and Peng *et al.*,<sup>6</sup> reflecting that aspirations for socio-economic mobility and long-term settlement significantly reinforce migration decisions. Additionally, the high proportion of participants with professional education (63%) was consistent with Skariah and Sivarenjini *et al.*,<sup>8</sup> suggesting that migration is largely driven by individuals seeking to optimise returns on educational investment in a global labour market. Together, these findings indicate that migration decisions are shaped by a combination of structural push factors and aspirational pull factors, where constraints at origin initiate migration and perceived opportunities in destination countries sustain it.

The higher proportion of migrants influenced mainly by push factors in the present study (53.5%) was comparable to the post-pandemic observations of Jo Joseph *et al.*[20] and Srivastava *et al.*,<sup>21</sup> who identified employment

insecurity and adverse socio-political conditions as major drivers of youth migration, suggesting that worsening economic and governance conditions following the pandemic have intensified outward migration pressures. Similarly, Simpson *et al.*,<sup>22</sup> described migration as a multidimensional process shaped by income differentials, unemployment, inequality, and political instability, indicating that the combined influence of economic, social, and political determinants observed in the present study reflects a complex and interconnected decision-making process rather than a single-factor effect. The concentration of migrants in the 18 to 25 years age group (49%) was comparable to Batra *et al.*,<sup>23</sup> who reported a predominance of young emigrants, suggesting that early-career individuals are more responsive to employment and income-related push factors while simultaneously seeking improved living conditions. In contrast, Urbanski *et al.*<sup>24</sup> reported a stronger pull-driven migration pattern in European settings, indicating that migration dynamics may vary across regions depending on the relative strength of opportunities in destination countries versus constraints in origin settings. Furthermore, the influence of corruption (36%) and poor governance (32%) in the present study corresponded with Noor Ul Ain,<sup>25</sup> suggesting that institutional deficiencies and lack of trust in governance systems significantly contribute to migration decisions. Likewise, the strong economic push factors observed in the present study, including low wages (45%) and unemployment (41%), aligned with Khalid *et al.*,<sup>26</sup> indicating that economic determinants remain the most consistent and statistically significant drivers of migration across different contexts. Overall, these findings suggest that migration among youth is shaped by a dynamic interaction between structural constraints and perceived opportunities, with the relative dominance of push or pull factors varying across socio-economic and geographic contexts.

The high proportion of participants reporting language-related social isolation (53%) and workplace adjustment difficulties (43%) in the present study corresponds with the findings of Joseph *et al.*<sup>27</sup> and Yoganadhan *et al.*,<sup>28</sup> suggesting that communication barriers and cultural adaptation remain fundamental challenges affecting early integration and social connectivity among migrants. Similarly, the impact of discrimination on employment and promotion opportunities (31%) parallels the observations of Kirmayer *et al.*,<sup>29</sup> indicating that social acceptance within the host community plays a critical role in determining

occupational mobility and overall integration outcomes. The workplace and cultural adaptation difficulties observed in the present study (43%) were also comparable to the academic and social adjustment challenges described by Wu *et al.*,<sup>30</sup> implying that adjustment stressors are consistent across both educational and occupational settings and reflect broader acculturation challenges. Furthermore, the psychosocial strain and social disconnection reported by participants align with the multidimensional effects of migration on identity, work, and well-being highlighted by Bennett *et al.*,<sup>31</sup> suggesting that migration impacts extend beyond economic factors to include mental and social well-being. In addition, the lack of perceived institutional support (64%) corresponded with the systemic gaps described by Wamique Shahab *et al.*,<sup>32</sup> indicating that inadequate policy support and structural barriers may hinder effective integration of migrants. Taken together, these findings suggest that post-migration challenges are multifactorial, involving linguistic, social, occupational, and systemic dimensions that collectively influence the adaptation and well-being of migrants in host countries.

## Conclusion

The findings indicated that migration in this cohort was predominantly driven by push factors, especially economic insecurity, limited employment opportunities, and governance-related concerns, while pull factors such as better living conditions, institutional stability, and social well-being reinforced decisions. Economic disparities and labor market imbalances appeared to be central drivers, consistent with migration theory. Social aspirations, including improved quality of life, healthcare access, and freedom from discrimination, demonstrated the multidimensional nature of migration motives. Political instability, corruption, and reduced institutional trust further contributed to outward mobility. Post-migration challenges such as language barriers, workplace adjustment issues, discrimination, and high living costs reflected integration and acculturation stress. Taken together, migration was shaped by interacting structural and aspirational factors, highlighting the need for economic and governance reforms at origin and stronger integration and anti-discrimination support in destination countries.

## Limitations

This study had certain limitations. The cross-sectional design precluded causal inferences. Convenience

sampling through personal networks and online platforms may have introduced selection bias and limited generalizability. Self-reported responses were subject to recall and social desirability bias. Additionally, inclusion of only Kerala migrants aged 15 to 40 years in selected Western countries may restrict broader extrapolation.

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