

# **Is Replacement Migration a Viable Solution to the Ageing Population of Kerala? A Critical Assessment**

## **Introduction**

The phenomenon or the concept of replacement migration is of recent origin. Over the last century, the innovations and developments in the fields of health, infrastructure, education etc. have invariably affected the fertility and mortality rates of countries around the world. These changes in the vital demographic parameters culminated in the decline of fertility and increasing life expectancy, leading to demographic transition which inevitably leads to an ageing population and a falling potential support ratio. This imminent decline along with ageing populations in some countries or regions of the world generated a widespread apprehension among the intellectuals on the lack of enough working age population of these countries. At this juncture, the issue or the puzzle of maintaining population stability is solved by adjusting migration flows to bolster future population size and age distribution patterns, which is termed as replacement migration.

When it comes to India, replacement migration has been documented in the state of Kerala where the deficiencies in labour force left behind by the workers leaving for the Gulf countries and also due to the decline in working population as a result of demographic transition are compensated by migrants from the other states. The recent reports estimate the number of migrants to be around 3.5 million, which constitutes about 10 percent of the state's population. When we look at replacement migration in elsewhere in the world, it can be observed that in most of the cases the process was evolved either out of demographic transition or due to labour migration. On these margins, the case of Kerala attains a much more peculiar and significant character as the phenomena in the state was an outcome of these two processes.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Kerala is one of the states in India which is undergoing the phenomenon of demographic transition since the 1970s. The 2011 Census revealed that 60+ age group constitutes about 12.6% of the state's total population as against 8.6% that of India and it is estimated that by 2041 this share would increase to 20.8%. Estimates also project that by 2061, the proportion of the elderly would constitute 40% of Kerala's population of which, 6.7% would be in 60-69 age group; 23.8% in 70-79 age group; and 9.1% in the age group of 80 years and above.

These changes in the population structure have brought in significant implications on the socio-economic and cultural milieu of the state. As a result, the state is currently experiencing the phenomenon of replacement migration whereby the shortage of labour borne out of demographic transition, ageing population and out-migration are met by labourers from other parts of the country. This continuous and ever increasing influx of migrant workers has already started creating turbulences in different spheres of Kerala, thereby putting its multidimensional perspectives at stake making the study to be very pertinent. Thus, the phenomenon of ageing and replacement migration assumes a great necessity in viewing it from not only demographic and economic point of view but also from other empirical angles transcending social, cultural and political spheres.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Given the above background, the present study intends to unfurl the origin, process and growth of replacement migration by highlighting through the specific context of the emerging issues in the state of Kerala and also tries to unveil the consequences emerging out of it on the State's demographic, economic and socio-cultural fabric. The stated objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1) To elucidate the trends and patterns of demographic transition experienced in the state of Kerala;
- 2) To identify the reasons that are responsible for the evolution of replacement migration in the state of Kerala;
- 3) To identify the consequences of ageing and replacement migration on the demographic, economic and socio-cultural milieu of the state.

### **Methodology**

The study is an amalgamation of both primary and secondary methods of data collection. The study makes use of data from Census Commission of India, Population Reference Bureau and other secondary sources. Also, in order to capture the ground realities, it incorporates a field element, whereby the interviews are conducted with various stakeholders like academicians, labour market experts, government officials etc. to analyse the impact and implications emerging out of the ageing population and labour in-migration in the state. The study also

incorporates the views of inter-state migrants working in the state and the migrant samples were selected on the basis of the purposive sampling method. Selection of samples was made in such a

way that it encompassed maximum heterogeneity in terms of the socio-economic parameters, demographic features, the state of origin, nature of jobs, etc.

## **Conclusion**

The recent population trends across the countries of the world throw up new questions and challenges to deal with. Some countries are in their last phase of demographic transition, whereas some are at the beginning similarly, some regions of the world are under the threat of population decline whereas some other parts under the threat of population explosion. This imbalance in resources especially human capital has given the process of migration a new meaning and dimension in this globalized world. And one such newly evolved forms of migration is termed as replacement migration.

Replacement migration was conceived as a solution to the demographic problems faced by developed countries like population ageing and decline in working population. But, the question that comes into the picture is whether this process is a viable solution to these demographic issues. Based on this analysis, it can be said that replacement migration can be considered as a short-term measure to tackle the shortage of labour force in the market, but it can never be a permanently viable solution. Over the long run, it may result in political, cultural and social tensions in society. The increasing social and cultural diversity of populations may contribute to the proliferation of multi-variant communities which may result endanger the social cohesion, finally leading to the fragmentation of the society on the basis of their ideologies, culture, race, language, etc. Substitution and replacement in the labour market as a result of uncontrolled migration flows have the potential to affect not only the native workers but also may destabilize the labour market. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore that the formulation of labour market preferences and their exercise are also shaped by the legal framework that determines migrant's status and consequent rights. But for the long-term benefit of the society, the policy makers should consider this issue with utmost importance, whereby it is possible to mitigate the negative impacts caused by population decline and replacement migration.