

Labour Migration in Odisha: A District-Level Analysis Using PLFS 2020–21

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ABSTRACT

Labour migration has emerged as an important livelihood strategy in Odisha, reflecting spatial disparities in employment opportunities and regional development. Despite its significance, evidence on district-level labour migration patterns within the state remains limited. This study examines labour migration across the 30 districts of Odisha using unit-level data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21. The analysis is restricted to the working-age population (15-64 years) and employs descriptive statistical methods to estimate district-wise migration rates, migration streams, and migration destinations. The findings reveal considerable spatial variation in labour migration across Odisha, with an overall migration rate of 41.68 per cent and slightly higher in urban areas than in rural areas. Districts such as Kandhamal, Baleswar, Koraput, Khordha, and Boudh exhibit relatively high migration rates, whereas Jharsuguda, Debagarh, Sambalpur, and Puri record comparatively lower levels. Rural-to-rural migration is the dominant migration stream, accounting for 70.71 per cent of internal labour migration, while 91.28 per cent of internal migrants move within Odisha, indicating the predominance of intra-state mobility. Although overall migration rates are relatively similar across social groups, rural-urban differences are more pronounced, with STs recording relatively higher migration in rural areas and OBCs in urban areas. Moreover, the share of inter-state migration is relatively higher among ST and OBC migrants. Several districts, including Rayagada, Kalahandi, Subarnapur, Jharsuguda, Sundargarh, Gajapati, Malkangiri, and Koraput, also exhibit relatively high levels of inter-state migration. The study highlights substantial district-level disparities in labour migration and underscores the need for region-specific employment and development policies to strengthen local livelihood opportunities, reduce regional inequalities, and promote balanced labour mobility across Odisha.

Keywords: Labour migration, Internal migration, Migration patterns, District-level analysis Odisha, PLFS 2020–21

JEL Classification Codes: J61, O15, R23

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I. INTRODUCTION

Migration, broadly understood as the movement of people in search of better employment, livelihoods, or living conditions, has long been recognised as an important component of economic and social development (de Haas, 2007; Deshingkar and Akter, 2009; Massey, 2019). In India, internal labour migration reflects persistent regional disparities in employment opportunities and economic development, with millions of workers moving across districts and states each year in search of better livelihoods (Deshingkar and Farrington, 2009; Keshri and Bhagat, 2013; Ray and Dutta, 2019; Srivastava et al., 2020; Banerjee and Das, 2021; Mishra, 2025a). By facilitating labour mobility, migration contributes to labour market adjustment, household income through remittances, reduce poverty, and structural transformation of the economy (Massey and Parrado, 1994; Adams, 2005; de Haas, 2007; Tumbe, 2011; Mishra, 2025a).

However, migration patterns vary considerably across Indian states, reflecting differences in economic development, labour market conditions, and regional inequalities. Odisha presents an important case in this regard. Since the early 2000s, the state has experienced sustained economic growth driven by industrialisation, mining, agriculture, and services, resulting in significant improvements in income, poverty reduction, education, and health (Das et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the benefits of growth have remained uneven across regions and social groups, while the generation of quality employment has lagged behind economic expansion. Consequently, labour migration continues to be an important livelihood strategy, particularly in economically disadvantaged districts (Mishra et al., 2025).

Historically, Odisha has been recognised as one of India's major labour-sending states. Migration has traditionally been associated with poverty, agricultural distress, indebtedness, and limited livelihood opportunities, particularly in the western and southern districts. In recent years, however, migration has become increasingly diversified. Besides distress-driven migration, workers are increasingly migrating to access better employment opportunities in construction, manufacturing, mining, and services. At the same time, Odisha has also emerged as a destination for migrants, reflecting changing labour market dynamics within the state (Parida, 2016; 2020, 2025b; Mishra et al., 2025).

Despite the growing importance of labour migration, evidence on its spatial distribution within Odisha remains limited. Most existing studies examine migration at the national or state level, providing little understanding of district-level variations. Given the substantial differences in economic development, urbanisation, and employment opportunities across districts, analysing migration at the district level is essential for designing targeted employment and regional development policies. Against this backdrop, the present study examines labour migration among the working-age population (15-64 years) across the 30 districts of Odisha using unit-level data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Migration has been widely explained through economic theories that emphasise differences in employment opportunities, wages, and expected income between places of origin and destination. The Harris–Todaro model suggests that migration decisions are influenced by expected income differentials rather than actual wages, while later theories recognise the importance of household strategies, labour market imperfections, and social networks in shaping migration behaviour (Harris & Todaro, 1970; Todaro, 1976; Stark and Bloom, 1985; Massey et al., 1993).

In the Indian context, labour migration is closely associated with regional disparities in economic development and employment opportunities. Previous studies identify Odisha as one of the country's major labour-sending states (Keshri and Bhagat, 2013; Srivastava, 2020; Mishra, 2025b; Mishra et al., 2025), where migration has historically been driven by poverty, agricultural uncertainty, indebtedness, and inadequate local employment (Rao, 1995; Sahu et al., 2004; Parida, 2016; Mishra, 2024; Mishra, 2020, 2025b). Seasonal migration has been particularly common among rural households in western and southern Odisha, with migrants primarily employed in construction, brick kilns, manufacturing, mining, and other informal occupations (Mishra, 2020, 2025b).

Recent evidence suggests that migration from Odisha has become increasingly diversified in terms of destination, occupation, and migrant characteristics. While distress migration remains important, migration motivated by better employment opportunities has also increased, accompanied by the emergence of new migration corridors and greater participation of educated and skilled workers. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the vulnerability of migrant workers and highlighted the need for stronger labour market and social protection policies (Mishra et al., 2020; Mishra et al., 2025).

Previous studies also indicate that migration streams differ considerably across Indian states depending on the level of economic development and urbanisation. At the national level, rural-to-urban migration constitutes the largest share of temporary labour migration, followed by rural-to-rural migration, while urban-to-rural and urban-to-urban migration account for relatively smaller proportions. However, states exhibit distinct migration patterns reflecting differences in labour market conditions and the pace of urbanisation. These findings underscore the importance of examining migration streams at finer spatial scales to understand regional variations in labour mobility (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009; Agarwal, 2016; Sucharita, 2020; Datta, 2023; Rajan et al., 2023).

Although the Census of India and the Periodic Labour Force Survey provide valuable information on migration, district-level analyses of labour migration in Odisha remain scarce. Existing studies have largely focused on migration determinants, household welfare, or migration outcomes, with limited attention to spatial variations across districts. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive district-level analysis of labour migration across the 30 districts of Odisha using recent PLFS microdata.



Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study draws on complementary perspectives on labour migration. The Lewis dual-sector model explains migration as part of structural transformation, involving the movement of surplus labour from the low-productivity traditional agricultural sector to the higher-productivity modern sector (Lewis, 1954). This perspective is particularly useful for interpreting rural-urban migration streams and spatial variations in migration rates.

Building on this perspective, the Harris-Todaro model explains migration in terms of differences in expected earnings and employment opportunities between origin and destination areas (Harris & Todaro, 1970; Todaro, 1976). It provides a basis for interpreting migration streams and destinations, particularly movements towards areas offering relatively better employment opportunities.

In addition, the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) extends the analysis from individual decisions to household strategies, viewing migration as a means of diversifying income and reducing livelihood risks under imperfect labour, credit, and insurance markets (Stark & Bloom, 1985). This perspective helps contextualise regional variations in migration, particularly in areas characterised by uncertain agricultural livelihoods and limited local employment opportunities.

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a conceptual basis for interpreting the district-wise migration rates, migration streams, and migration destinations observed among Odisha's working-age population. Since the study employs descriptive analysis of PLFS data, these theories are used to interpret the observed spatial patterns of migration rather than to test their underlying causal mechanisms.

III. METHODOLOGY

Data Source

The present study is based on the unit-level (microdata) records of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020–21, conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India. The survey covers the reference period from July 2020 to June 2021. Although the PLFS is a nationally representative, the present analysis is restricted to the state of Odisha. The PLFS provides detailed information on demographic and socio-economic characteristics, employment, labour force participation, and migration. The Odisha sample was extracted from the national unit-level dataset to examine district-level patterns of migration. To focus on the working-age population, the analysis is restricted to individuals aged 15-64 years. These data enable an examination of migration patterns across the 30 districts of Odisha.

Definition of Migration

Following the PLFS definition, a person is classified as a migrant if his or her last usual place of residence (UPR) differs from the present place of enumeration. The last usual place of residence refers to the place where the person had ordinarily

lived for at least six months, or intended to stay continuously for six months or more (NSO, 2022).

The migration rate is calculated as:

$$\text{Migration Rate} = \frac{\text{Number of migrants in a specified population group}}{\text{Total population in the same group}} \times 100$$

Analytical Tools

The study employs descriptive statistical methods to examine migration patterns across Odisha. Migration rates are estimated using the survey weights provided in the PLFS to ensure representative district-level estimates. The analysis examines migration by district, place of residence (rural and urban), migration streams, and destination (within and outside the state). The findings are presented through tables and choropleth maps to illustrate the spatial variation in migration across districts. Data management, estimation of migration rates, and descriptive statistical analyses were performed using Stata 17.

IV. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Migration Patterns

Table-1 presents the district-wise migration rates among the working-age population (15-64 years) in Odisha based on the PLFS 2020-21. At the state level, the overall migration rate is 41.68 per cent, indicating that more than two-fifths of the working-age population are migrants according to the PLFS definition.

The results reveal substantial variation across the 30 districts of Odisha. Kandhamal (58.79 per cent) records the highest migration rate, followed by Baleshwar (49.86 per cent), Koraput (48.89 per cent), Khordha (47.94 per cent), Baudh (47.94 per cent), Malkangiri (46.22 per cent), Nuapada (45.89 per cent), Kalahandi (45.35 per cent) and Ganjam (45.00 per cent). In contrast, Jharsuguda (27.23 per cent), Debagarh (27.42 per cent), Sambalpur (28.17 per cent), Puri (31.89 per cent), Gajapati (34.02 per cent) and Sundargarh (34.27 per cent) exhibit comparatively lower migration rates.

Migration patterns also differ by place of residence. At the state level, the migration rate is slightly higher in urban areas (45.25 per cent) than in rural areas (41.02 per cent). In rural areas, the highest migration rates are observed in Kandhamal, Baleshwar, Malkangiri, Koraput, Kalahandi, and Ganjam, whereas Sambalpur, Jharsuguda, Debagarh, Sundargarh, and Puri record the lowest rural migration rates. Urban migration rates show greater variation, with Nayagarh, Balangir, Khordha, Bargarh, and Sundargarh recording the highest migration rates. In contrast, Malkangiri, Nuapada, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, and Puri exhibit comparatively lower urban migration rates. Urban estimates for Debagarh, Gajapati, and Nabarangapur are unavailable because no eligible urban migrant observations were recorded in the analytical sample, while Baudh recorded only urban migrant observations.



These findings demonstrate considerable district-level variation in labour migration across Odisha. Migration rates vary not only across districts but also between rural and urban areas, reflecting differences in employment opportunities, levels of urbanisation, industrial development, and local labour market conditions. Such spatial variation can be interpreted within the theoretical perspectives discussed earlier. From the Lewis (1954) perspective, migration from agriculture-dependent areas may reflect the movement of labour away from traditional rural activities towards non-agricultural employment opportunities. The NELM perspective further suggests that migration may serve as a household strategy to diversify livelihoods in areas characterised by limited local employment opportunities and livelihood uncertainty (Stark & Bloom, 1985). These perspectives may help explain the observed spatial differences in migration, although the descriptive nature of the present analysis does not permit causal relationships to be established. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of district-specific analysis for understanding the spatial dynamics of labour migration within Odisha.

Table-1: Per Cent Distribution of Labour Migrants by District and Place of Residence (Age Group 15-64 Years), Odisha, 2020-21

Districts	Rural	Urban	Total	Districts	Rural	Urban	Total
Anugul	40.49	52.25	41.51	Kandhamal	61.46	49.85	58.79
Balangir	39.11	72.73	41.3	Kendrapara	40.34	46.91	40.8
Baleshwar	48.95	53.87	49.86	Kendujhar	41.63	51.52	43.4
Bargarh	38.26	60.58	39.52	Khordha	41.54	60.64	47.94
Baudh	NA	47.94	47.94	Koraput	47.73	51.5	48.89
Bhadrak	34.88	35.06	34.9	Malkangiri	48.05	20.05	46.22
Cuttack	39.98	38.17	39.38	Mayurbhanj	43.17	51.26	44.06
Debagarh	27.42	NA	27.42	Nabarangapur	41.15	NA	41.15
Dhenkanal	36.78	36.57	36.78	Nayagarh	43.87	75.31	44.76
Gajapati	34.02	NA	34.02	Nuapada	48.45	25.55	45.89
Ganjam	44.68	46.21	45	Puri	31.69	34.63	31.89
Jagatsinghapur	42.86	41.93	42.72	Rayagada	39.51	45.45	40.09
Jajpur	39.95	45.92	40.16	Sambalpur	26.89	29.35	28.17
Jharsuguda	27.13	27.42	27.23	Subarnapur	35.05	49.42	36.19
Kalahandi	45.17	48.88	45.35	Sundargarh	30.47	37.95	34.27
Odisha	41.02	45.25	41.68				

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21), Unit-Level Data

Note: NA indicates that no eligible observations were available in the corresponding district-sector category of the analytical sample. All estimates are based on the PLFS sampling weights.

Migration Streams

Table-2 presents the percentage distribution of internal labour migrants according to migration streams across the 30 districts of Odisha among the working-age population (15-64 years). At the state level, rural-to-rural (R-R) migration is the dominant migration stream, accounting for 70.71 per cent of all labour migrants, followed by urban-to-rural (12.18 per cent), rural-to-urban (11.87 per cent) and urban-to-urban (5.24 per cent) migration.

Table-2: Per Cent Distribution of Labour Migrants by Migration Stream (Age Group 15-64 Years), Odisha, 2020-21

Districts	Rural to Rural	Rural to Urban	Urban to Rural	Urban to Urban	Total
Anugul	78.87	9.09	10.25	1.8	100
Balangir	82.76	7.34	5.8	4.1	100
Baleshwar	61.23	11.19	18.78	8.8	100
Bargarh	72.12	8.63	19.25	NA	100
Baudh	NA	90.42	NA	9.58	100
Bhadrak	85.07	6.07	6.71	2.15	100
Cuttack	58.56	24.86	9.42	7.15	100
Debagarh	100	NA	NA	NA	100
Dhenkanal	85.42	2.24	11.39	0.94	100
Gajapati	95.03	NA	4.97	NA	100
Ganjam	67.15	16.96	11.25	4.64	100
Jagatsinghapur	78.09	11.29	7.28	3.34	100
Jajapur	84.96	4.14	10.9	NA	100
Jharsuguda	61.7	27.61	3.47	7.22	100
Kalahandi	74.48	3.71	20.14	1.68	100
Kandhamal	66.04	13.6	14.51	5.85	100
Kendrapara	91.94	6.52	NA	1.54	100
Kendujhar	68.61	14.2	10.14	7.05	100
Khordha	48.69	26.61	8.63	16.07	100
Koraput	59.01	20.69	8.6	11.7	100
Malkangiri	79.86	2.68	16.89	0.56	100
Mayurbhanj	73.79	5.24	13.45	7.51	100
Nabarangapur	87.8	NA	12.2	NA	100
Nayagarh	70.9	3.82	24.34	0.94	100
Nuapada	74.68	6.22	19.1	NA	100
Puri	85.41	6.94	7.02	0.64	100
Rayagada	66.45	3.81	22.44	7.3	100
Sambalpur	40.64	37.72	5.16	16.49	100
Subarnapur	55.74	5.98	33.42	4.86	100
Sundargarh	40.89	36.16	2.82	20.13	100
Odisha	70.71	11.87	12.18	5.24	100

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21), Unit-Level Data

Note: NA indicates that no eligible observations were available in the corresponding district-sector category of the analytical sample. All estimates are based on the PLFS sampling weights.

Rural-to-rural migration predominates in almost all districts, although its magnitude varies considerably. It is highest in Debagarh (100.00 per cent), followed by Gajapati (95.03 per cent), Kendrapara (91.94 per cent), Nabarangapur (87.80 per cent), Dhenkanal (85.42 per cent), Puri (85.41 per cent), Bhadrak (85.07 per cent) and Jajapur (84.96 per cent). In contrast, relatively lower shares of rural-to-rural migration are observed in Sambalpur (40.64 per cent), Sundargarh (40.89 per cent), Khordha (48.69 per cent), Subarnapur (55.74 per cent) and Cuttack (58.56 per cent).

Rural-to-urban migration is particularly pronounced in Baudh (90.42 per cent), making it a notable exception among all districts. Other districts with relatively higher rural-to-urban migration include Sambalpur (37.72 per cent), Sundargarh (36.16 per cent), Jharsuguda (27.61 per cent), Khordha (26.61 per cent) and Cuttack (24.86 per cent). By contrast, Debagarh, Gajapati and Nabarangapur record no rural-to-urban migration in the analytical sample.

The share of urban-to-rural migration is highest in Subarnapur (33.42 per cent), followed by Nayagarh (24.34 per cent), Rayagada (22.44 per cent), Kalahandi (20.14 per cent), Bargarh (19.25 per cent) and Nuapada (19.10 per cent). Urban-to-urban migration constitutes the smallest migration stream in Odisha, although relatively higher proportions are observed in Sundargarh (20.13 per cent), Sambalpur (16.49 per cent), Khordha (16.07 per cent) and Koraput (11.70 per cent). Several districts, including Bargarh, Debagarh, Jajapur, Gajapati and Nabarangapur, report no urban-to-urban migration in the sample.

The findings indicate that rural-to-rural migration remains the predominant form of internal labour migration across Odisha, suggesting that labour mobility continues to be largely rural-based. Nevertheless, districts with relatively higher levels of urbanisation and industrial development, such as Baudh, Khordha, Cuttack, Sundargarh, Sambalpur and Jharsuguda, exhibit comparatively larger shares of rural-to-urban and urban-to-urban migration, indicating greater labour mobility involving urban areas.

The pattern of migration streams also provides insights into the nature of labour mobility in Odisha. Rural-urban migration is broadly consistent with the structural transformation perspective of Lewis (1954), in which labour moves from predominantly agricultural rural economies towards urban and non-agricultural activities. However, the presence of rural-rural and urban-urban migration indicates that migration cannot be understood solely through a rural-urban structural transformation framework and reflects a more diverse pattern of spatial mobility.

Migration Destination

Table-3 presents the percentage distribution of internal labour migrants according to their destination within Odisha (same state) and outside Odisha (other states). At the state level, 91.28 per cent of labour migrants remain within Odisha, while only 8.72 per cent migrate to other states. This indicates that labour migration in Odisha is predominantly intra-state.

In rural areas, 91.85 per cent of labour migrants move within Odisha compared with 8.15 per cent who migrate to other states. Several districts, including Bhadrak, Jajapur, Dhenkanal, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Kendrapara and Baudh, report either all or nearly all rural labour migrants remaining within the state. In contrast, relatively higher proportions of rural migrants moving to other states are observed in Kalahandi (19.63 per cent), Subarnapur (19.24 per cent), Rayagada (18.91 per cent), Koraput (18.64 per cent), Gajapati (16.88 per cent), Kandhamal (14.60 per cent) and Ganjam (12.74 per cent).

Table-3: Per Cent Distribution of Internal Labour Migrants According to Destination Within and Outside the State by District (Age Group 15-64 Years), Odisha, 2020-21

Districts	Rural		Urban		Total	
	Same State	Other State	Same State	Other State	Same State	Other State
Anugul	99.1	0.9	76.94	23.06	96.69	3.31
Balangir	95.36	4.64	86.99	13.01	94.4	5.6
Baleshwar	90.53	9.47	92.65	7.35	90.96	9.04
Bargarh	89.22	10.78	100	NA	90.15	9.85
Baudh	NA	NA	100	NA	100	NA
Bhadrak	100	NA	100	NA	100	NA
Cuttack	97.59	2.41	91.11	8.89	95.52	4.48
Debagarh	97.01	2.99	NA	NA	97.01	2.99
Dhenkanal	100	NA	100	NA	100	NA
Gajapati	83.12	16.88	NA	NA	83.12	16.88
Ganjam	87.26	12.74	90.82	9.18	88.03	11.97
Jagatsinghapur	99.12	0.88	87.04	12.96	97.35	2.65
Jajapur	100	NA	100	NA	100	NA
Jharsuguda	100	NA	31.21	68.79	76.04	23.96
Kalahandi	80.37	19.63	90.11	9.89	80.89	19.11
Kandhamal	85.4	14.6	100	NA	88.24	11.76
Kendrapara	100	NA	94.08	5.92	99.52	0.48
Kendujhar	96.94	3.06	98.39	1.61	97.25	2.75
Khordha	92.9	7.1	92.19	7.81	92.59	7.41
Koraput	81.36	18.64	93.27	6.73	85.21	14.79
Malkangiri	85.75	14.25	100	NA	86.22	13.78
Mayurbhanj	92.98	7.02	87.99	12.01	92.34	7.66
Nabarangapur	91.24	8.76	NA	NA	91.24	8.76
Nayagarh	87.97	12.03	88.1	11.9	87.98	12.02
Nuapada	95.18	4.82	92.39	7.61	95.01	4.99
Puri	93.69	6.31	100	NA	94.17	5.83
Rayagada	81.09	18.91	69.01	30.99	79.75	20.25
Sambalpur	100	NA	81.85	18.15	90.16	9.84
Subarnapur	80.76	19.24	100	NA	82.84	17.16
Sundargarh	97.52	2.48	70.78	29.22	82.47	17.53
Odisha	91.85	8.15	88.49	11.51	91.28	8.72

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21), Unit-Level Data

Note: NA indicates that no eligible observations were available in the corresponding district-sector category of the analytical sample. All estimates are based on the PLFS sampling weights.

Among urban labour migrants, 88.49 per cent migrate within Odisha, whereas 11.51 per cent move to other states. The proportion of urban migrants moving outside the state is slightly higher than that of rural migrants. Rayagada (30.99 per cent) records the highest proportion of urban migrants moving to other states, followed by Sundargarh (29.22 per cent), Anugul (23.06 per cent), Sambalpur (18.15 per cent) and Khordha (7.81 per cent). Although Jharsuguda also records a high percentage of urban migrants moving outside the state, this estimate should be interpreted cautiously because it is based on a relatively small sample. Conversely, districts such as Bhadrak, Jajapur, Dhenkanal, Puri, Kandhamal,

Baudh, Subarnapur and Malkangiri report that all sampled urban labour migrants remained within Odisha.

Considering all labour migrants, the proportion of migrants remaining within Odisha exceeds 95 per cent in several districts, including Bhadrak, Jajapur, Dhenkanal, Kendrapara, Debagarh, Cuttack, Kendujhar, Anugul and Nuapada. In contrast, relatively higher proportions of migrants moving to other states are observed in Jharsuguda (23.96 per cent), Rayagada (20.25 per cent), Kalahandi (19.11 per cent), Subarnapur (17.16 per cent), Sundargarh (17.53 per cent), Gajapati (16.88 per cent) and Koraput (14.79 per cent). These districts are predominantly located in the southern and western parts of Odisha, where comparatively limited local employment opportunities have historically encouraged migration beyond the state.

Overall, the findings suggest that labour migration in Odisha is overwhelmingly intra-state. Nevertheless, several districts continue to exhibit relatively higher levels of inter-state migration, indicating persistent regional disparities in employment opportunities and livelihood conditions. This pattern is broadly consistent with earlier studies, which suggest that inter-state labour migration is largely influenced by regional disparities in economic development and employment opportunities across states (Srivastava et al., 2020; Rajan et al., 2023). The observed destination pattern can also be interpreted within the Harris-Todaro framework, which emphasises expected differences in employment opportunities and earnings between origin and destination areas (Harris & Todaro, 1970; Todaro, 1976). Accordingly, relatively high levels of inter-state migration in some districts may reflect stronger labour-market linkages with economically more developed destination states offering better employment and earning prospects. However, since the present analysis is descriptive, the PLFS data used here do not permit a direct test of expected income differentials. These findings highlight the importance of district-specific employment strategies aimed at strengthening local labour markets and expanding employment opportunities.

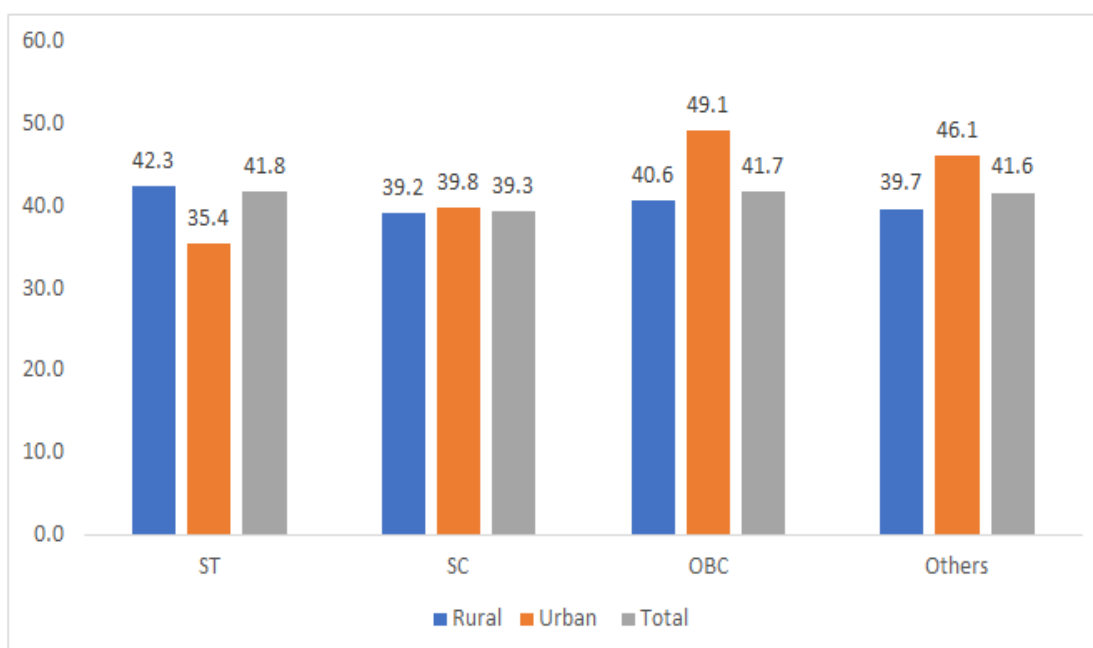
Social Group Wise Patterns of Labour Migration

Social identity is an important dimension of labour migration in India, as access to land, employment opportunities, livelihood resources, and labour markets varies across social groups. Previous studies have shown that migration patterns differ across caste and social groups, with Scheduled Tribes (STs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), and other disadvantaged groups often relying on labour migration as part of their livelihood strategies (Keshri & Bhagat, 2013; Rajan et al., 2023). Rajan et al. (2023), in particular, demonstrate substantial social-group differences in temporary labour migration and highlight the importance of place of residence in shaping these patterns. Against this background, the present study examines variations in migration rates across STs, SCs, OBCs, and Others in rural and urban Odisha.

Figure-1 presents migration rates across social groups by place of residence. At the state level, migration rates are relatively similar across social groups, ranging from 39.3 per cent among SCs to 41.8 per cent among STs. However, greater variation emerges when rural and urban areas are considered separately. In rural areas, STs record the highest migration rate (42.3 per cent), whereas in urban areas, OBCs

exhibit the highest rate (49.1 per cent). Notably, the migration rate among STs is higher in rural areas (42.3 per cent) than in urban areas (35.4 per cent), while the reverse pattern is observed among OBCs and Others. The relatively higher migration rate among rural STs is broadly consistent with Rajan et al. (2023), who highlight the importance of labour mobility among disadvantaged social groups, particularly in rural and tribal contexts. However, their analysis focuses on temporary labour migration, whereas the present estimates are based on the PLFS usual-place-of-residence criterion; therefore, the magnitudes are not directly comparable.

Figure-1: Internal Labour Migration Rates by Social Group and Place of Residence in Odisha, 2020-21



Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21, Unit-Level Data

The destination pattern of internal migrants also differs across social groups. Although same state (intra-state) migration predominates across all groups, ST migrants have the highest share of other state (inter-state) migration (10.73 per cent), followed by OBCs (9.43 per cent), SCs (7.23 per cent), and Others (6.83 per cent). Overall, 91.28 per cent of internal migrants moved within Odisha, compared with 8.72 per cent who migrated across state boundaries (Table-4). The relatively greater inter-state mobility among STs is broadly consistent with the wider evidence reported by Rajan et al. (2023), who highlight the importance of inter-state mobility among temporary labour migrants from disadvantaged groups and less-developed regions of India. From a Harris-Todaro perspective, such inter-state mobility may also be interpreted in relation to spatial differences in expected employment and earning opportunities. Nevertheless, the present descriptive analysis does not directly test the economic or social mechanisms underlying these differences.

Table-4: Distribution of Internal Migrants by Social Group and Migration Destination in Odisha, 2020-21 (%)

Social Group	Same State	Other State	Total
ST	89.27	10.73	100
SC	92.77	7.23	100
OBC	90.57	9.43	100
Others	93.17	6.83	100
Total	91.28	8.72	100

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21), Unit-Level Data

V. CONCLUSION

Labour migration continues to play an important role in shaping regional labour markets and livelihood strategies in Odisha. The findings reveal substantial district-level variation in labour migration across Odisha. At the state level, the overall migration rate is 41.68 per cent, with migration being slightly more prevalent among the urban population than the rural population. District-level migration rates vary considerably across Odisha. Relatively high migration rates are observed in Kandhamal, Koraput, Baleshwar, Khordha, Baudh, Malkangiri, Nuapada, Kalahandi, and Ganjam. In contrast, comparatively low migration rates are observed in Debagarh, Gajapati, Jharsuguda, Puri, Sambalpur, and Sundargarh. These variations indicate considerable spatial heterogeneity in migration across districts of the state.

The analysis further shows that rural-to-rural migration remains the dominant migration stream, accounting for more than two-thirds of all internal labour migrants in Odisha. Nevertheless, districts with relatively higher levels of urbanisation and industrial development, including Baudh, Khordha, Sundargarh, Sambalpur, and Cuttack, exhibit comparatively larger shares of rural-to-urban and urban-to-urban migration, indicating increasing labour mobility involving urban areas. Furthermore, the destination analysis demonstrates that labour migration in Odisha is predominantly intra-state, with more than 91 per cent of labour migrants remaining within the state. However, districts such as Rayagada, Kalahandi, Subarnapur, Jharsuguda, Sundargarh, Gajapati, Malkangiri, and Koraput continue to record relatively higher levels of inter-state migration, suggesting persistent disparities in local employment opportunities.

Overall, the findings underscore that labour migration in Odisha is far from uniform and varies considerably across districts in terms of magnitude, migration streams, and destinations. The analysis further reveals differences across social groups and place of residence. While overall migration rates are relatively similar across STs, SCs, OBCs, and Others, rural-urban differences are more pronounced. STs exhibit relatively higher migration in rural areas, while OBCs and Others show greater migration in urban areas. Intra-state migration remains the dominant form of internal migration across all social groups, although STs and OBCs exhibit relatively greater inter-state mobility. These spatial and social differences may be associated with variations in employment opportunities, urbanisation, industrial development, and local labour market conditions. Consequently, a uniform policy approach may not adequately address the diverse migration dynamics observed across the state.

The study has important policy implications. Strengthening productive employment opportunities in districts with relatively high migration rates, promoting rural non-farm enterprises, enhancing skill development, and encouraging more spatially balanced industrial development could expand livelihood opportunities at the local level while supporting productive labour mobility. At the same time, improving infrastructure, strengthening social protection for migrant workers, and addressing spatial disparities in livelihood opportunities could contribute to more inclusive and balanced development across Odisha. Such measures should also recognise differences in mobility across social groups and rural-urban locations, with particular attention to rural and tribal areas where livelihood opportunities remain limited and labour mobility is relatively more important.

Finally, while the study provides district-level evidence on labour migration in Odisha, it is limited to descriptive analysis based on cross-sectional PLFS data. The findings should therefore be interpreted as spatial patterns and associations rather than causal relationships. Future research could examine the socio-economic determinants and labour market outcomes of migration using multivariate techniques and longitudinal data to provide a deeper understanding of migration dynamics in Odisha.

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