

Demography India

A Journal of Indian Association of Study of Population
Journal Homepage: <https://demographyindia.iasp.ac.in/>



Migration into Major Urban Systems of North East India: Analyzing Streams, Flows, Reasons and Consequences

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Abstract

Migration plays a pivotal role in shaping the demographic, economic, and socio-cultural landscapes of urban systems of North East India. Migration has significantly contributed to urban growth and transformation, driven by economic opportunities and education. This study examines migration patterns in major urban systems of Northeast India between 2001 and 2011, focusing on migration rates, gender composition, streams and flows, and socioeconomic impacts. Using Census data, the study analyzes migration patterns across 11 Class-I Urban Agglomerations, employing comparative metrics and analytical tools, including percentage share, growth rates, and sex ratio. Visual representations such as data tables, charts, and ArcGIS maps illustrate migration flows and regional patterns. The results reveal rapid migration-driven urban growth, with Guwahati emerging as the dominant regional hub, while smaller and capital cities such as Gangtok and Aizawl recorded disproportionately high migration rates. Urban expansion is increasingly sustained by short-distance, intra-regional migration, alongside a marked rise in urban-urban mobility and a clear feminization of migration. Inter-state migration flows are primarily sourced from within Northeast and Eastern India, highlighting strengthening regional integration. Migration motives have shifted from household relocation towards work- and marriage-related mobility, with cities displaying functional specialization as employment, business, or education centres. While migration has contributed significantly to urban economic expansion and cultural diversity, it has simultaneously intensified pressure on housing, infrastructure, labour markets, and urban ecosystems, and heightened social tensions in culturally sensitive cities. The study underscores the need for region-specific, inclusive urban policies that integrate migration management with infrastructure planning, labour protection, housing provision, and environmental sustainability.

Keywords

Inter-state Migration, Migration Stocks, North East India, Reasons for Migration, Streams and Flows.

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Introduction

Migration shapes any region's demographic, economic, and socio-cultural dynamics. In the context of North East India, a geographically and culturally distinct area, migration has profoundly impacted the development of its major urban systems. In this study, the term urban system refers to a hierarchically and functionally interconnected set of urban centres, including metropolitan cities, regional cities, and emerging towns, linked through migration, economic activities, and service functions. Analyzing migration stocks, streams, and flows provides critical insights into the patterns and characteristics of population movement in this region. Migration into urban systems is influenced by various factors, including economic opportunities, educational facilities, and socio-political stability (Das, 2020).

Migration is a fundamental demographic process shaping population redistribution, urban growth, and regional development. Theoretical explanations of migration are commonly rooted in push-pull theory, which attributes population movement to disparities in economic opportunities, employment, education, and living conditions between origin and destination areas (Lee, 1966). At the destination level, particularly in urban systems, migration is understood as a response to the concentration of economic activities, administrative functions, and service facilities (Todaro, 1969; Kundu, 2009).

In the Indian context, internal migration has been extensively analysed using census-based approaches that define migrants either by place of birth or last place of residence. The present study adopts the last place of residence criterion, as it more accurately

captures recent migration flows and reflects mobility directly associated with economic and social motivations (Bhagat, 2017). This definition is particularly relevant for urban systems, where short- and medium-term movements significantly influence demographic composition and urban dynamics.

The analysis is based on secondary data from the Census of India, 2001 and 2011, which provide comprehensive information on migration stocks, streams, and reasons for migration at the urban level. Using this framework, the study examines migration as a destination-oriented process, focusing on in-migration into major urban systems, rather than on urbanization dynamics or natural population increase.

The North Eastern region's unique geographical location and socio-political landscape also shape the migration process, characterized by inter-state and international migration flows. These migratory flows have brought opportunities and challenges, impacting urban infrastructure, labor markets, and cultural dynamics. For instance, the cities have experienced significant growth in migrant populations, with Guwahati (Census, 2011). This rapid urbanization has resulted in socioeconomic transformations and posed challenges, such as housing shortages, environmental degradation, and social tensions (Sharma, 2020).

The study focuses on the characteristics, streams, and reasons of migration into major urban systems of North East India, and examines its consequences primarily through a synthesis of secondary literature rather than measuring migration-led urbanization at the regional scale. Understanding the reasons for migration is

essential to address these movements' consequences comprehensively. This study examines the stocks, streams, and flows of migration into North East India's urban systems and their socioeconomic and environmental outcomes while highlighting policy implications for sustainable urban development.

Review of Literature

Migration has long been recognised as a crucial component of population redistribution and urban growth in India. Classical studies view migration as an outcome of spatial inequalities in employment opportunities, income, and access to services between rural and urban areas (Lee, 1966; Todaro, 1969). In the Indian context, rural-urban migration has been closely associated with processes of urban expansion, labour market restructuring, and demographic transformation (Kundu, 2009; Bhagat, 2017).

At the national level, several studies using Census data have examined migration streams, rates, and reasons for migration. Bhagat (2010) and Kundu and Saraswati (2012) analysed internal migration patterns and highlighted the dominance of economic reasons in male migration and marriage-related migration among females. Singh and Yadav (2015) further observed that migration in India is increasingly directed towards urban centres due to employment diversification and educational opportunities. However, these studies largely present macro-level patterns, with limited focus on specific urban systems, particularly in the North Eastern Region (NER).

Studies focusing on urbanization in India often examine the contribution of migration

to urban growth, distinguishing between natural increase, reclassification, and net migration (Kundu, 2014; Bhagat & Mohanty, 2009). While such studies are valuable, their emphasis is on urbanization dynamics at the regional or national scale, rather than on migration into individual urban centres and its implications for urban systems.

In contrast, literature on migration in North East India is relatively limited and fragmented. Existing studies have primarily focused on inter-state migration, ethnic dimensions, border issues, and political sensitivities (Goswami, 2014; Baruah, 2003). Some researchers have examined migration in relation to conflict, insurgency, and cross-border movement (Datta, 2016), while others have analysed urban growth in select cities such as Guwahati and Imphal (Das & Mili, 2012; Devi, 2018). These studies indicate that urban centres in NE India act as key destinations due to administrative concentration, educational institutions, and service-sector employment.

However, very few studies systematically analyse migration *into major urban systems* of NE India by integrating: migration streams and flows, reasons for migration, and consequences for urban systems. Most existing works either: focus on urban growth without disaggregating migration characteristics, or discuss consequences of migration in a generalised manner, without linking them specifically to urban destinations.

Moreover, studies addressing the consequences of migration – such as housing pressure, infrastructure stress, informal employment, and service delivery challenges – are often based on broader urban studies and are not region-specific (Kundu, 2009; Bhagat, 2017). There remains

a lack of synthesis that contextualises these consequences specifically for the urban systems of NE India, where geographical isolation, limited infrastructure, and administrative concentration intensify migration impacts.

Research Gap and Need for the Present Study

From the above review, it is evident that:

1. There is a scarcity of destination-based migration studies focusing on major urban systems of North East India.
2. Existing studies either emphasise urbanization processes or migration patterns, but rarely integrate streams, flows, reasons, and consequences in a single analytical framework.
3. The consequences of migration on urban systems in NE India are underexplored and mostly inferred from national-level studies.

The present study addresses this gap by focusing explicitly on migration into major urban centres of NE India, analysing migration streams, flows, and reasons using Census data, and examining consequences through a structured synthesis of secondary literature. By adopting an urban system-centric approach, the study differs from earlier works that focus primarily on regional urbanization or generalized migration trends.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are to understand the migration rate, stocks of migrants, and their gender composition in major urban systems of North East India

from 2001 to 2011. It further seeks to examine the migration streams and flows into major urban systems of North East India from 2001 to 2011, while also exploring the underlying reasons for migration and assess its socioeconomic and demographic consequences.

Study Region

The North East India includes eight states of the Union, viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura. It is the easternmost part of the country, located between the longitudes 88.01°E and 97.41°E and the latitudes 21.94°N and 29.47°N. The North Eastern Region (NER) has less than 4% of the population, about 8% of the nation's area. Assam has 68% of the region's population, while Tripura's next most populous state has 8%. The average density of the population is 175 persons per km² (NEC Yearbook, 2024).

Materials and Methods

The main data source for this study is the Census of India. According to the 2001 and 2011 censuses, Northeast India had 11 Class-I Urban Agglomerations (UAs) or towns in 2001, which increased to 13 in 2011. These towns are regarded as the major urban centers or cities in Northeast India for the respective years. Migration data, including types, streams, flows and reasons in these cities, were gathered from the Census of India for both 2001 and 2011. To maintain consistency in the comparison between the two census years, only the 11 towns classified as Class-I UAs in 2001 and 2011 were included in the analysis. For regional analysis and comparative purposes (Lusome & Bhagat, 2020), India is divided into six zones: (i) Northern India, which includes Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Rajasthan,

Delhi, and Chandigarh; (ii) Western India, comprising Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Lakshadweep; (iii) Central India, consisting of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh; (iv) Southern India, which includes Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Puducherry; (v) Eastern India, comprising Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands; and (vi) Northeastern India.

In this study, migration streams and migration flows are analytically distinguished to improve conceptual clarity. Migration streams refer to the structural direction and type of population movement into major urban systems—specifically rural-urban and urban-urban migration. These streams represent the pathways or corridors through which migration occurs. In contrast, migration flows denote the magnitude, intensity, and proportional distribution of migrants. Thus, while streams describe how and from where migration is occurring, flows capture how much migration is taking place. The consequences of migration are not empirically estimated from census data due to data limitations; instead, they are assessed through a systematic review of region-specific and national studies on urban impacts of migration.

Various formulas have been used in the study, which include the following:

To calculate the percentage share of a specific category to a total, the following formula is used:

$$\text{Percentage Share} = \left(\frac{\text{Part}}{\text{Total}} \right) \times 100$$

Where *part* = specific value for which to find the percentage share.

Total = overall value or sum that the part is being compared.

This formula has been used to find percentage shares of various types, streams, and flows of migration and various reasons for migration. Additionally, it is used in migration rate, in which migration rate equals total migrants divided by total populations. To calculate the growth rate, the following formula is used:

$$\text{Growth Rate} = \left(\frac{\text{Value at End of Period} - \text{Value at Start of Period}}{\text{Value at Start of Period}} \right) \times 100$$

Where *value at the end of the period* = value at the end of the measuring period.

Value at Start of Period = value at the beginning of the period.

This formula has been used to find growth rates of various types and streams of migration and various reasons for migration to assess change over time.

The sex ratio is a demographic measure that indicates the relative number of females to males. It is typically expressed as the number of females per 1,000 males. The formula to calculate the sex ratio is:

$$\text{Sex Ratio} = \left(\frac{\text{Number of Females}}{\text{Number of Males}} \right) \times 1000$$

Where *Number of Females* = total number of females in the population.

Number of Males = total number of males in the population.

The paper incorporates 7 data tables to support the analysis. Four clustered column charts illustrate growth rates by type, stream, reasons for migration, and the sex ratio of migrants. Additionally, two stacked column charts and double-clustered column combination charts depict inter-state

migration growth and urban growth in major cities. A doughnut chart visualizes the sub-categories of migration streams. Finally, two maps, created using ArcGIS software, display migration patterns from various regions of India, including the northeastern states.

Results and Discussions

Migration Rate, Stocks of Migrants and their Gender Composition in Major Urban Systems of North East India from 2001 to 2011

Figure 1 provides an overview of the total number of migrants, migration rates, and the percentage share of various types of migration into the major cities of North East India for the years 2001 and 2011. In 2001, these cities collectively received 9.16 lakh

migrants, accounting for 34.28% of their total population. By 2011, this number had increased to 15.45 lakh, representing 42.31% of the population. In 2001, Guwahati recorded the highest number of migrants, totalling 3.78 lakh, followed by Aizawl with 1.10 lakh. Nagaon reported the lowest migrant population at 29,246. By 2011, Guwahati remained the leading host city for migrants, with a total of 5.87 lakh, followed by Agartala (1.62 lakh) and Aizawl (1.52 lakh). Shillong registered the smallest migrant population, with 43,478 individuals. In 2001, Aizawl recorded the highest migration rate at 48.43%, followed closely by Guwahati at 46.24%, while Imphal had the lowest rate at just 13.51%. By 2011, Gangtok (61.98%) and Guwahati (61.06%) had the highest migration rates, with Shillong showing the lowest rate at 12.26%.

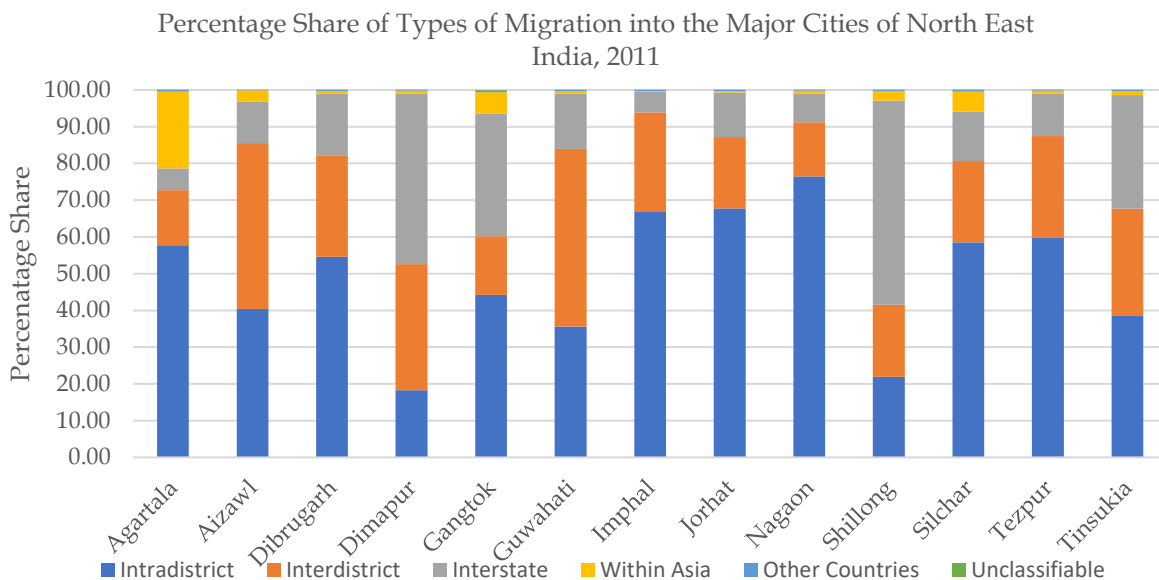


Figure 1 Types of Migration into the Major Cities of North East India, 2011

In 2001, migration into the major cities of Northeast India was predominantly driven by intra-district migration, accounting for 40.83% of the total, followed by inter-district migration (33.89%), inter-state migration (20.51%), migration from Asian countries (4.76%), and from non-Asian countries

(0.02%). Intra-district migration varied significantly, ranging from 31.76% in Tinsukia to 65.32% in Jorhat. For inter-district migration, the share ranged from 13.72% in Agartala to 46.34% in Imphal. Inter-state migration was highest in Shillong at 50.01% and lowest in Agartala at 7.58%.

Agartala, the capital of Tripura, also had the highest percentage of international migrants, predominantly from Asian countries, at 30.3%. By 2011, intra-district migration continued to dominate, increasing to 45.30%, followed by inter-district (34.30%), inter-state (16.54%), migration from Asian countries (3.54%), and from non-Asian countries (0.29%). Figure 1 shows that intra-

district migration ranged from 76.48% in Nagaon to 18.26% in Dimapur. For inter-district migration, the share ranged from 48.34% in Guwahati to 14.67% in Nagaon. Inter-state migration was again highest in Shillong at 55.58% and lowest in Imphal at 5.64%. Agartala once more hosted the highest percentage of international migrants from Asian countries, with 20.87%.

Table 1 Growth Rate (%) of Types of Migration into Major Cities of NE India, 2001-2011

Cities	Increase in Migrants	Migration Growth Rate	Intra-District	Inter-District	Inter-state	From Asia	From Non-Asia
Agartala	97,349	148.60	196.49	171.74	94.66	71.28	14440
Aizawl	41,729	37.74	40.50	48.45	3.97	18.71	1069
Dibrugarh	27,675	70.41	132.82	22.30	48.77	-46.46	6700
Guwahati	2,08,990	55.19	53.93	74.62	19.01	-30.95	1912
Imphal	37,187	92.93	193.88	11.87	18.30	-4.97	1800
Jorhat	23,415	46.01	51.50	46.36	19.43	0.00	6350
Nagaon	33,274	113.77	186.76	36.06	1.54	-48.23	8400
Shillong	-27,299	-38.57	-58.34	-14.02	-31.73	-55.28	250
Silchar	20,900	35.69	52.31	56.12	13.89	-41.57	5257
Tezpur	19,021	58.07	133.76	67.09	-41.56	-38.54	575
Tinsukia	16,180	40.38	70.81	29.41	29.44	-51.18	2317
Total	4,98,421	54.39	76.44	59.96	8.08	15.74	2157

Source: Computed by author from Census of India, 2001 & 2011

Table 1 highlights the migration growth rates for major cities in North East India across various types of migration. Between 2001 and 2011, the region's major cities collectively gained 4.98 lakh migrants. The overall migration growth rate during this period was 54.39%, though growth varied significantly by migration category. Intra-district migration saw a growth rate of 76.44%, while inter-district migration increased by 59.96%. Inter-state migration, however, recorded a much lower growth rate of 8.08%, and migration from other Asian countries increased by 15.74%.

During this period, Guwahati experienced the most enormous influx of migrants, with

an increase of 208,990 people, while Tinsukia saw the smallest increase, with 16,180 migrants. Agartala recorded the highest percentage growth at 148.6%, whereas Silchar saw the lowest at 35.69%. Shillong, in contrast, witnessed a decline in migrant numbers, losing 27,299 people, corresponding to a negative growth rate of -38.57%. This decline was evident across most migration categories, except for migrants from non-Asian countries, signalling a halt in urban growth and a shrinking urban character for Shillong. For intra-district migration, Agartala again led with a growth rate of 196.49%, while Aizawl recorded the smallest increase at 40.5%. Regarding inter-

district migration, Agartala posted a growth rate of 171.74%, with Imphal trailing at 11.87%. Agartala also led in inter-state migration with a growth rate of 94.66%, while Nagaon had the lowest at 1.54%. Tezpur saw a significant negative growth rate of -41.56%. Most major cities in NE India experienced negative growth in international migrants, except for southern cities like Agartala, which saw a considerable increase of 71.28%, and Aizawl. Table 1 shows that Agartala had the highest migration growth rate across all categories. In contrast, Silchar and Aizawl recorded the lowest growth rates across the various migration categories. Shillong was the only city to experience negative growth in every migration category, while Tezpur registered a negative growth rate, specifically in inter-state migration.

The region has experienced a massive influx of immigrants from neighbouring countries. According to recent studies, nearly 4 lakh people were international migrants in various cities in North East India (Rahul & Rulu, 2023). Illegal immigration, particularly from Bangladesh, has exacerbated the region's population dynamics, diminishing the proportion of Indigenous people (Banati, 2015). Migration from present-day Bangladesh has profoundly impacted the demographic profile of Assam and Tripura (Bhaumik, 2005; Baruah, 2005; Sharma, 2012). This migration has altered the socioeconomic fabric of areas adjoining Bangladesh (Nath et al., 2012; Sharma, 2015; Das, 2016). Furthermore, interior regions such as Nagaland and Manipur have been affected due to migration corridors through major cities like Guwahati and Silchar (Singh, 2009; Singh, 2016). The contentious issue of illegal migration from Bangladesh led to the adoption of the Citizenship Amendment Bill by the Indian Parliament in

2019 (Bhowmik, 2021). Illegal migration from Myanmar has significantly impacted Manipur, particularly Imphal, where migrants contribute to population imbalances, unemployment, and welfare burdens (Singh, 2016; Devi & Islam, 2012). As of 30 June 2022, there were an estimated 10.86 lakh Myanmar refugees in neighboring countries, with 49,600 refugees entering Manipur and Mizoram by December 2022 (UNHCR, 2022). The Myanmar conflict has intensified security concerns along the India-Myanmar border due to geographic proximity and socioeconomic ties (Atchareeya et al., 2023).

Migration has driven significant population shifts, particularly in cities like Agartala, where non-tribal settlements have altered demographics, fuelling ethnic tensions (Ali, 2011). Cultural disparities and historical grievances among tribal communities have exacerbated conflicts, highlighting migration as a major driver of regional violence. In Gangtok, most migrants arrived in 2011 seeking employment in sectors like tourism, further altering the city's demographic profile (Rai & Singh, 2022). The region also faces significant internal displacement caused by natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, floods, erosion, drought, and climate change), ethnic and religious violence, language conflicts, and development-driven policies (Phukan, 2013). Displacement has affected various ethnic and religious groups, including conflicts within tribal communities such as the Brus and Mizos in Mizoram and the Nagas, Kukis, and Paites in Manipur (Ali, 1998; Phanjoubam, 2007). The marginalized indigenous populations face challenges in maintaining their land-man ratio, which has been a critical factor in ongoing ethnic conflicts (Bhowmik, 2021). In Guwahati,

migrants predominantly engage in petty work within the informal sector, yet their standard of living often remains stagnant (Hazarika, 2016). Insufficient rural investment in Assam has adversely affected livelihoods, driving rural-to-urban migration. High rural population growth

further strains resources, leading to labor surpluses that fuel migration (Sharma & Nath, 2021). The increasing population density in Guwahati has contributed to the formation of slum pockets, the growth of the informal sector, and deteriorating living conditions (Choudhury, 2024).

Table 2 Sex Ratio of Migrants into Major Cities of NE India, 2001 & 2011

Year	Cities	Overall Migrants	Intra-District	Inter-District	Inter-State	From Asia	From Non-Asia
2001	Agartala	1032	1091	1102	988	928	667
	Aizawl	914	998	1023	489	1122	1667
	Dibrugarh	853	786	1068	637	913	-
	Guwahati	772	785	805	682	799	661
	Imphal	1244	1116	1514	821	692	429
	Jorhat	861	874	1200	517	661	-
	Nagaon	991	1003	1346	638	864	-
	Shillong	906	1033	1209	786	640	647
	Silchar	1035	1079	1214	827	909	750
	Tezpur	1060	950	1164	1139	923	1400
	Tinsukia	759	758	1062	540	843	500
Total	873	905	953	695	896	688	
2011	Agartala	1236	1320	1371	1079	1001	1151
	Aizawl	1032	1085	1084	665	1288	1338
	Dibrugarh	1128	1030	1704	783	1161	1230
	Dimapur	917	912	1080	818	764	554
	Gangtok	967	980	1065	948	752	1000
	Guwahati	951	912	1013	857	910	933
	Imphal	1601	1564	1930	902	977	2725
	Jorhat	1111	1109	1598	627	1146	955
	Nagaon	1236	1174	1980	907	1000	1073
	Shillong	1081	1296	1480	912	872	1333
	Silchar	1120	1094	1291	1008	1043	1259
Tezpur	1227	1234	1436	830	1072	1025	
Tinsukia	1022	1102	1452	668	1026	1014	
Total	1060	1092	1149	837	998	1064	

- Not applicable due to no female migrant

Source: Computed by author from Census of India, 2001 & 2011

Table 2 presents the sex ratio of migrants in the major cities of North East India for 2001 and 2011. In 2001, the overall sex ratio among migrants in North East India was 873 females per 1,000 males, indicating that migration into these cities was male-dominated. Breaking it down by migration categories, intra-district migration had a sex

ratio of 905, inter-district migration had 953, inter-state migration had 695, migration from other Asian countries had 896, and from non-Asian countries, the sex ratio was 688. Among the major cities in 2001, Imphal recorded the highest sex ratio of 1,244 females per 1,000 males, while the lowest ratio was observed in Tinsukia at 759, closely

followed by Guwahati at 772. Only four cities—Imphal, Tezpur, Silchar, and Agartala—had a sex ratio greater than 1,000. Regarding intra-district migration, four cities also recorded a sex ratio higher than 1,000, except Guwahati. For inter-state migration and migration from other Asian countries, all cities had a sex ratio below 1,000, except for Tezpur (inter-state) and Aizawl (Asian countries).

By 2011, the overall sex ratio among migrants in North East India had shifted to 1,060 females per 1,000 males, indicating a shift to female-dominated migration. This year, intra-district migration had a sex ratio of 1,092, inter-district migration had 1,149, inter-state migration had 837, and migration from other Asian countries had 998. Migration from non-Asian countries showed a sex ratio of 1,064. Imphal again had the highest sex ratio in 2011, at 1,601 females per 1,000 males, while Dimapur recorded the lowest at 917. Only three cities—Dimapur, Guwahati, and Gangtok—had a sex ratio below 1,000. In intra-district migration, three cities had a sex ratio below 1,000, whereas all cities had a sex ratio above 1,000 for inter-district migration. For inter-state migration, most cities had a sex ratio above 1,000, except Agartala and Silchar. Regarding migration from other Asian countries, five cities had a sex ratio below 1,000. Table 2 illustrates the change in the sex ratio of migrants from 2001 to 2011. All cities saw an increase in the sex ratio during this period, with the most significant rise occurring in Tinsukia, which saw an increase of 357 females per 1,000 males, while the smallest increase was recorded in Shillong, at 137.

Migration Streams and Flows into Major Urban Systems of North East India from 2001 to 2011

Several studies (Davis, 1951; Chatterjee, 1977; Premi, 1990; Zachariah, 1964; Srivastava, 2011; Bell et al., 2015; Kone et al., 2018) found that the intensity of interstate migration in India was low but pointed out the fact that it is a significant component of labor mobility. Table 3 presents data on inter-state migration into major cities of Northeast India for 2001 and 2011, highlighting the absolute growth and annual growth rates. Among the cities, Guwahati received the highest number of inter-state migrants, with 74,303 in 2001 and 88,430 in 2011. In contrast, Imphal saw the fewest migrants, with only 3,683 in 2001 and 4,357 in 2011. Shillong also experienced significant migration, with 35,396 migrants in 2001, though this dropped to 24,166 in 2011. Guwahati saw the most significant increase in absolute growth, adding 14,127 migrants over the decade, while Nagaon had the smallest growth, with just 75 new migrants. Conversely, both Shillong and Tezpur experienced declines, with decreases of 11,230 and 4,250 migrants, respectively. Looking at percentage changes, Agartala recorded the highest growth rate, with a 9.47% increase in migrants whereas Nagaon saw a modest 0.15% rise. However, Tezpur and Shillong experienced percentage declines, with rates of -4.16% and -3.17%, respectively. The inter-migrants in Imphal city were mainly engaged as businessmen, semi-skilled or unskilled laborers eager to take any job and prepared to adjust to any circumstances. At the same time, native people were reluctant to take up blue-collar jobs the migrants took (Bharadwaj, 2020).

Table 3 Intercensal Inter-state Migration Growth and Annual Growth Rate (%), 2001-2011

Cities	Inter-state Migrants			
	2001	2011	Growth	Annual Growth Rate
Agartala	4963	9661	4698	9.47
Aizawl	16536	17193	657	0.40
Dibrugarh	7603	11311	3708	4.88
Guwahati	74303	88430	14127	1.90
Imphal	3683	4357	674	1.83
Jorhat	7495	8951	1456	1.94
Nagaon	4866	4941	75	0.15
Shillong	35396	24166	-11230	-3.17
Silchar	9402	10708	1306	1.39
Tezpur	10226	5,976	-4250	-4.16
Tinsukia	13438	17394	3956	2.94
Total	187911	203088	15177	9.47

Source: Computed by author from Census of India, 2001 & 2011

Economic insecurity in the region's rural areas resulted in increasing rural-urban migration. Capital towns and cities have absorbed and accommodated most of the rural-urban streams of migration (Saitluanga, 2020). Rural outmigration is the shifting of the population from rural areas to the cities either willingly or forcefully to improve their lifestyle (Debnath et al., 2017). Male migration (age group 15-25) rate is greater from rural to urban areas due to educational and employment opportunities (Nath & Choudhury, 1995). A large part of rural-to-urban migration into Itanagar can be explained in terms of push factors, owing to the lack of diversification of the agrarian economy, and pull factors, owing to the demand for highly skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workforce required for all round development (Mandal et al., 2022).

Figure 2 illustrates the rural-urban and urban-urban migration streams into major cities of Northeast India, with their percentage breakdowns across intra-district, inter-district, and inter-state categories for 2001 and 2011. In 2001, Guwahati recorded the highest influx of migrants from rural (220,714) and urban (75,098) areas. In

contrast, Tezpur and Nagaon saw the lowest rural (13,728) and urban (4,424) migrant streams, respectively. Within the rural-urban migration stream in 2001, Agartala had the highest share of intra-district migrants (65.58%), Imphal led in inter-district migration (51.19%), and Shillong dominated the inter-state category (48.80%). On the other hand, Tinsukia recorded the lowest share of intra-district migrants (28.16%), Nagaon had the smallest inter-district share (18.90%), and Agartala the lowest inter-state share (9.24%). For the urban-urban migration stream in 2001, apart from Agartala (58.25%) and Aizawl (38.59%), no city reported significant intra-district migration. Imphal led in inter-district migration (72.69%), while Shillong had the highest inter-state migration share (88.47%). Conversely, Shillong saw the lowest inter-district share (11.53%), and Aizawl recorded the lowest intra-district share (23.49%). In 2011, Guwahati again received the most significant number of migrants from both rural (256,402) and urban (284,286) areas, while Tezpur and Nagaon had the most minuscule rural (19,548) and urban (11,291) streams, respectively. In the rural-urban stream for 2011, Nagaon had the highest

percentage of intra-district migrants (71.95%), Guwahati led in inter-district migration (70.24%), and Dimapur saw the most inter-state migration (56.06%). In contrast, Dimapur had the lowest intra-district share (6.74%), Nagaon had the smallest inter-district share (16.72%), and Agartala had the lowest inter-state share (5.37%). For the urban-urban migration stream in 2011, Nagaon recorded the highest intra-district share (78.62%), Tinsukia led in inter-district migration (35.99%), and Shillong had the highest inter-state migration share (71.12%). On the lower end, Shillong saw the smallest intra-district (18.68%) and inter-district (10.20%) shares, while Imphal had the lowest inter-state share (4.53%). A rise in a country's urbanization

level could be caused by migration from rural to urban areas or faster population growth in urban areas than in rural areas (Zhang & Song, 2003). The population redistribution process might be restructuring agricultural production, implying the decline in on-farm employment and the migration of young people from rural areas to towns and cities (Fielding, 1989). Mechanization in agriculture has displaced many unskilled or low-skilled migrants, often from marginalized groups, increasing rural-to-urban migration and impacting informal jobs, urban housing, slum growth, education, healthcare, and urban poverty and inequality (Parida & Raman, 2020).

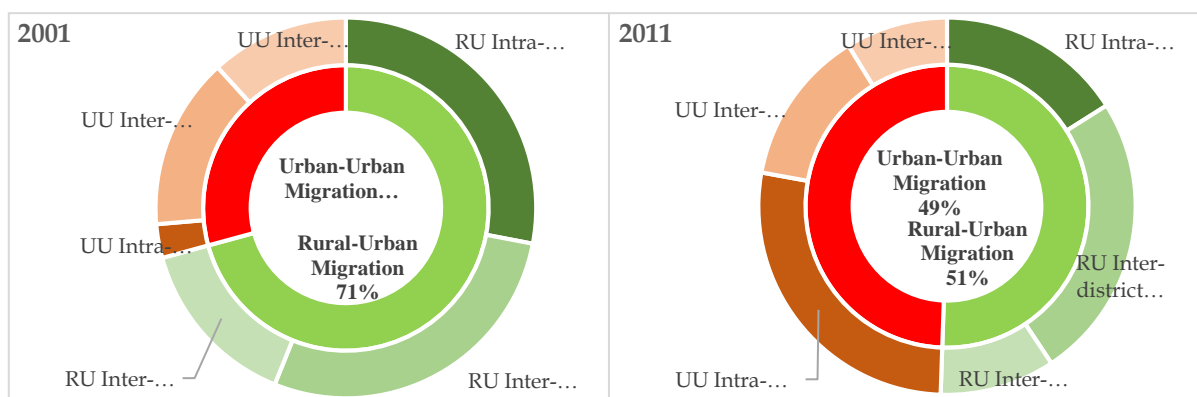


Figure 2 Streams of Migration, 2001 & 2011

In 2001, the major cities of Northeast India received a total of 463,570 migrants (70.77%) from rural areas and 191,489 migrants (29.23%) from urban areas of India, showing a significant disparity between rural-urban and urban-urban migration, as illustrated in Figure 5. Rural-urban migration outpaced urban-urban migration significantly. Of the rural-urban migrants, 183,494 (28.01%) were intra-district, 183,995 (28.09%) were inter-district, and 96,081 (14.67%) were inter-state. For urban-urban migrants, 18,770 (2.87%) were intra-district, 95,628 (14.60%) were

inter-district, and 77,091 (11.77%) were inter-state. By 2011, the major cities received 673,611 migrants (50.54%) from rural areas and 659,257 migrants (49.46%) from urban areas of India, indicating a near-equal balance between the two streams. Among the rural-urban migrants, 213,797 (16.04%) were intra-district, 328,140 (24.62%) were inter-district, and 131,674 (9.88%) were inter-state. For urban-urban migrants, 364,212 (27.33%) were intra-district, 178,346 (13.38%) were inter-district, and 116,699 (8.76%) were inter-state.

Table 4 highlights the growth rates of inter-state migration streams and their relative percentage to city population in Northeast India between 2001 and 2011. The rural-urban migration growth rate during this period was 45.31%. In contrast, urban-urban migration saw a significantly higher growth rate of 244.28%, more than five times the rate of rural-urban migration. Among the cities, Agartala experienced the highest growth in rural-urban migration, with an impressive

257.11% increase, while Guwahati recorded the lowest growth at 16.17%. Shillong experienced a decline in rural-urban migration, with a decrease of -24.98%. For urban-urban migration, Nagaon saw the highest growth rate at a remarkable 673.76%, while Aizawl had the lowest growth at 30.75%. Shillong faced a decline, with a 17.88% decrease in urban-urban migration during the same period.

Table 4 Growth Rates (%) of Streams of Inter-state Migration into Major Cities of NE India, 2001-2011

Cities	Rural-Urban Migration GR	Urban-Urban Migration GR	Rural-Urban Migration as % of the City Population			Urban-Urban Migration as % of the City Population		
			2001	2011	GR	2001	2011	GR
Agartala	257.11	337.44	6.98	16.80	140.60	4.02	11.84	194.71
Aizawl	31.21	30.75	29.33	29.94	2.08	14.15	14.39	1.72
Dibrugarh	18.65	259.49	12.71	13.45	5.86	7.05	22.60	220.73
Guwahati	16.17	278.55	26.96	26.64	-1.16	9.17	29.54	222.09
Imphal	27.43	577.22	5.18	4.67	-9.85	2.13	10.21	379.10
Jorhat	29.14	379.03	18.58	20.91	12.55	4.37	18.23	317.48
Nagaon	44.82	673.76	12.59	15.14	20.21	3.59	23.05	542.29
Shillong	-24.98	-17.88	11.24	6.36	-43.40	7.52	4.66	-38.04
Silchar	52.27	278.20	10.76	13.16	22.35	5.22	15.85	203.88
Tezpur	151.11	41.63	13.03	33.63	158.15	7.57	11.02	45.60
Tinsukia	17.98	194.66	18.69	18.86	0.93	8.57	21.61	152.07
Total	45.31	244.28	17.34	20.14	16.16	7.16	19.71	175.21

GR-Growth Rate

Source: Computed by author from Census of India, 2001 & 2011

The growth rate of rural-urban migration relative to city population was 16.16%, while urban-urban migration grew by an impressive 175.21%, over ten times higher than rural-urban migration. Among the cities, Tezpur saw the highest rural-urban migration growth at 158.45%, whereas Tinsukia had the lowest at 0.93%. Notably, Shillong, Imphal, and Guwahati experienced declines in rural-urban migration. Nagaon recorded the highest growth for urban-urban migration, with a staggering 542.29%, while Aizawl saw the lowest growth at 1.72%. Shillong experienced a decline in this

category. Table 4 shows that the growth rates of rural-urban migration and its percentage relative to the city population were generally lower. However, Agartala and Tezpur stood out with the highest growth rates in rural-urban migration, while Tinsukia led in the percentage of rural-urban migration relative to the city population. In contrast, urban-urban migration and its percentage of city population generally exhibited higher growth rates. Notably, Shillong and Tezpur had the lowest growth rates in urban-urban migration and the percentage of rural-urban migration relative to city population.

Table 5 Percentage Share of Inter-state Migration from Different Regions of India into NE Major Cities, 2001 & 2011

Year	Cities	Total	Central India	Northern India	Western India	Southern India	Eastern India	North East India
2001	Agartala	4,963	7.03	8.68	0.97	2.34	45.21	35.76
	Aizawl	16,536	2.10	3.04	0.74	2.26	12.27	79.58
	Dibrugarh	7,603	13.21	8.31	0.61	1.47	62.79	13.61
	Guwahati	74,303	7.19	13.08	0.98	3.31	57.86	17.59
	Imphal	3,683	7.63	16.05	0.79	2.58	27.23	45.72
	Jorhat	7,495	10.05	20.63	2.13	3.12	54.06	10.01
	Nagaon	4,866	13.87	16.38	0.45	0.60	61.90	6.80
	Shillong	35,396	4.17	8.42	0.82	2.71	27.10	56.78
	Silchar	9,402	4.25	12.11	1.16	3.23	34.50	44.74
	Tezpur	10,226	16.86	26.34	5.23	7.87	36.79	6.90
	Tinsukia	13,438	10.81	9.88	0.53	2.02	69.24	7.52
Total	1,87,911	7.35	11.90	1.15	3.07	45.77	30.77	
2011	Agartala	9,661	5.12	6.50	2.45	2.99	41.81	41.12
	Aizawl	17,193	2.16	2.75	0.51	2.06	9.89	82.63
	Dibrugarh	11,311	13.20	7.27	0.72	0.95	67.39	10.46
	Dimapur	31,829	3.74	5.80	0.29	1.67	30.41	58.09
	Gangtok	20,753	3.87	6.32	0.65	1.34	82.71	5.11
	Guwahati	88,430	6.10	14.10	1.14	2.49	54.55	21.62
	Imphal	4,357	10.14	18.87	0.69	2.20	34.84	33.26
	Jorhat	8,951	6.61	27.71	2.73	1.32	52.35	9.28
	Nagaon	4,941	9.82	17.39	0.69	1.28	60.11	10.73
	Shillong	24,166	3.33	6.21	0.51	1.51	27.68	60.76
	Silchar	10,708	3.80	11.37	0.92	1.01	28.33	54.57
Tezpur	5,976	4.57	13.91	0.74	1.20	65.24	14.34	
Tinsukia	17,394	10.00	8.82	0.30	0.68	71.65	8.54	
Total	2,03,088	5.67	10.48	0.89	1.84	48.39	32.74	

Source: Computed by author from Census of India, 2001 & 2011

Table 5 presents the percentage distribution of inter-state migration flows into major cities of Northeast India from various source regions for 2001 and 2011. In 2001, Guwahati received the highest number of inter-state migrants (74,303), followed by Shillong (35,396), while Imphal had the fewest (3,683) and closely trailed by Nagaon (4,866) and Agartala (4,963). Altogether, the major cities of Northeast India saw a total of 187,911 inter-state migrants from across the country. The largest share of migrants, 45.77%, came from Eastern India, 30.77% from Northeast India, 11.90% from Northern India, and 7.35% from Central India. Migration from Western and Southern India remained

minimal, contributing just 1.15% and 3.07%, respectively. Most cities recorded their highest percentage of inter-state migrants from Eastern India, though four cities—Aizawl, Shillong, Imphal, and Silchar—received the largest share from Northeast India. Most cities saw migration from either Eastern or Northeast India for the second-largest share. However, three cities—Tezpur, Jorhat, and Nagaon—had their second-largest share from Northern India, while Tinsukia saw the second-highest percentage from Central India. Notably, Jorhat and Tezpur had relatively low numbers of migrants from Eastern and Northeast India. Regarding the smallest

percentage of migrants, all cities had their lowest share from Western India. The second-smallest share generally came from Southern India, with two exceptions: Tezpur and Aizawl, where the pattern differed slightly.

By 2011, Guwahati had the highest number of inter-state migrants (88,430), followed by Dimapur (31,829), while Imphal had the fewest (4,357), and closely followed by Nagaon (4,941). The total number of inter-state migrants in major north eastern cities increased to 203,088. As of 2001, the largest share of migrants, 48.39%, came from Eastern India, followed by 32.74% from Northeast India, 10.48% from Northern India, and 5.67% from Central India. Migration from Western and Southern India remained low, contributing only 0.89% and 1.84%, respectively. Most cities continued to

receive their highest percentage of inter-state migrants from Eastern India. However, four cities – Aizawl, Shillong, Dimapur, and Silchar – saw the most significant share coming from Northeast India. For the second-largest share, cities generally received migrants from Eastern, Northeast, or Northern India. Dibrugarh was an exception, with its second-largest share coming from Central India. Nagaon, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, and Gangtok attracted relatively fewer migrants from both Eastern and Northeast India. In 2001, all cities recorded their smallest percentage of migrants from Western India. The second-smallest share typically came from Southern India, except for Jorhat, where the shares from Western and Southern India were reversed.

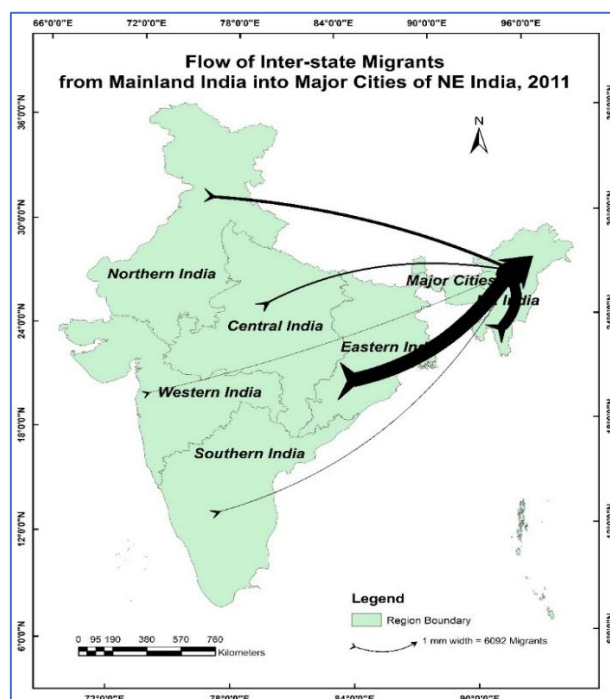


Figure 3 Flow of Inter-State Migration from Mainland India into Major Cities of NE India, 2011

The main push factor leading to the migration of North East people is the lack of educational infrastructure with limited choice of education, followed by unemployment opportunities in the region,

which are badly affected by sociopolitical unrest and communal conflict among heterogeneous communities of the region (Lalrampuii, 2016). In Northeast India, factors such as the displacement of labor, the

introduction of new labor displacing technology, disasters due to floods, earthquakes and landslides, social and ethnic conflicts, and traditional, social, and tribal hierarchy are also responsible for increased migration (Upadhyay, 2008). These factors reduce livelihood security and employment stability in rural and peri-urban areas, thereby compelling affected

populations to migrate towards urban centres in search of alternative income opportunities, safety, and access to services. Each reason structures a pattern of migration that does not necessarily imply upward social mobility. They are meant to be survival strategies for labor (Standing, 1985 and Vijay, 2022).

Table 6 Percentage Share of Inter-state Migration within Northeast States, 2001 & 2011

Year	Cities	Total	AP	Assam	Manipur	Meghalaya	Mizoram	Nagaland	Sikkim	Tripura
2001	Agartala	1,775	1.63	84.34	3.83	7.77	0.85	1.41	0.17	-
	Aizawl	13,160	1.30	51.20	27.49	11.77	-	2.37	0.17	5.69
	Dibrugarh	1,035	20.97	-	5.80	22.13	0.68	8.02	0.58	41.84
	Guwahati	13,070	4.89	-	7.51	57.38	1.43	6.42	0.59	21.78
	Imphal	1,684	2.32	56.95	-	7.66	5.40	10.27	0.71	16.69
	Jorhat	750	12.27	-	12.93	12.40	2.00	19.20	0.93	40.27
	Nagaon	331	6.95	-	3.93	35.65	0	14.20	0	39.27
	Shillong	20,097	1.33	64.77	13.04	-	5.98	5.67	0.28	8.94
	Silchar	4,206	2.50	-	8.42	22.37	5.92	5.40	0.19	55.21
	Tezpur	706	32.72	-	16.29	23.09	3.97	10.76	0.99	12.18
	Tinsukia	1,010	19.41	-	5.05	14.06	0.30	7.43	0.69	53.07
Total	57,824	3.47	38.41	13.80	19.02	3.11	5.43	0.36	16.40	
2011	Agartala	3,973	2.87	79.21	4.15	8.73	1.18	3.60	0.25	-
	Aizawl	14,207	0.86	42.46	36.02	12.21	-	1.98	0.18	6.29
	Dibrugarh	1,183	26.54	-	4.90	16.57	0.85	11.83	0.34	38.97
	Dimapur	18,491	0.52	80.03	9.18	1.37	0.43	-	0.14	8.33
	Gangtok	1,061	6.13	54.01	17.34	11.78	1.60	6.50	-	2.64
	Guwahati	19,115	7.06	-	9.79	54.05	1.41	7.86	0.36	19.48
	Imphal	1,449	1.17	70.67	-	3.93	3.24	7.52	0.48	12.97
	Jorhat	831	13.48	-	8.30	15.52	1.20	25.87	0.60	35.02
	Nagaon	530	6.98	-	6.23	31.13	0.00	20.75	0.19	34.72
	Shillong	14,683	1.81	74.43	7.63	-	2.32	3.80	0.29	9.71
	Silchar	5,843	2.89	-	9.46	22.97	6.37	5.75	0.12	52.44
	Tezpur	857	43.99	-	6.30	27.54	1.40	8.40	0.93	11.44
	Tinsukia	1,486	38.43	-	2.69	10.09	0.07	10.03	0.47	38.22
Total	83,709	4.31	43.61	13.10	18.00	1.44	4.40	0.25	14.89	

- Not applicable'; AP-Arunachal Pradesh

Source: Computed by author from Census of India, 2001 & 2011

Table 6 presents the percentage distribution of inter-state migration into major cities of Northeast India from other states within the region in 2001 and 2011. In 2001, Shillong received the highest number of inter-state migrants (20,097) from Northeast states,

followed by Aizawl (13,160) and Guwahati (13,070). Nagaon recorded the fewest migrants (331), followed by Tezpur (706) and Jorhat (750). In total, 57,824 migrants moved to these cities from within the Northeast. The most significant proportion came from

Assam (38.41%), followed by Meghalaya (19.02%), Tripura (16.40%), Manipur (13.80%), and Nagaland (5.43%). Migration from Sikkim, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh remained low, contributing just 0.36%, 3.11%, and 3.47%, respectively. Cities in Assam (except Guwahati and Tezpur) saw their most significant share of migrants coming from Tripura. Meanwhile, Guwahati and Tezpur received the most migrants from Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. Other major cities—Agartala, Shillong, Imphal,

and Aizawl—received the highest influx from Assam. Regarding the second-largest share of migrants, most cities saw arrivals from Meghalaya, followed by Tripura and Manipur. Interestingly, Aizawl, Shillong, and Tezpur had relatively low numbers of migrants from both Assam and Tripura. Across all cities, Sikkim accounted for the smallest share of migrants, with Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh contributing the lowest numbers.

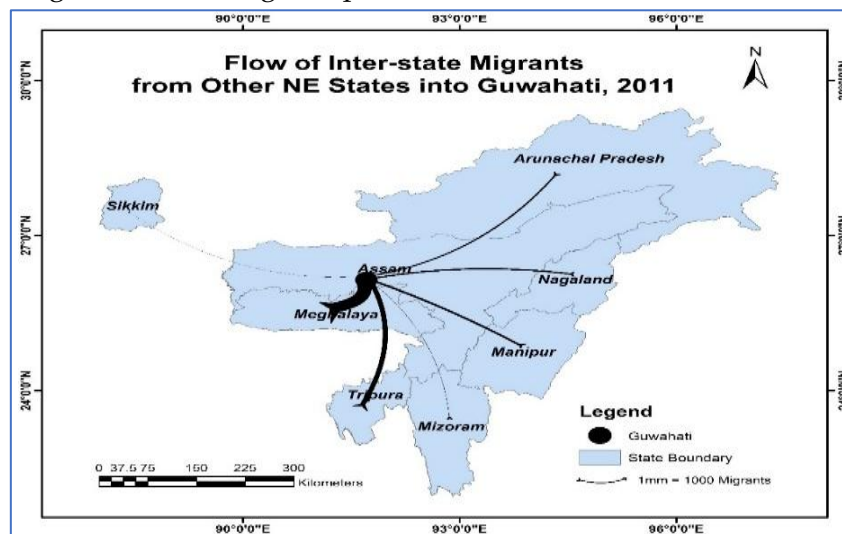


Figure 4 Flow of Inter-state Migrants from Other NE States into Guwahati, 2011

Reasons for Migration and Socioeconomic and Demographic Consequences of Migration

By 2011, Guwahati had become the top destination for inter-state migrants within the region, receiving 19,115 migrants, closely followed by Dimapur (18,491). Nagaon continued to have the fewest migrants (530), followed by Jorhat (831) and Tezpur (857).

Overall, 83,709 migrants moved to these cities. The most significant proportion again came from Assam (43.61%), followed by Meghalaya (18.00%), Tripura (14.89%), and Manipur (13.10%). Migration from Sikkim, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland remained relatively low, at 0.25%, 1.44%, 4.31%, and 4.40%, respectively. In

2011, most cities in Assam (except Guwahati, Tezpur, and Tinsukia) continued to receive the largest share of migrants from Tripura. Guwahati attracted the highest number of migrants from Meghalaya, while Tezpur and Tinsukia drew the most from Arunachal Pradesh. Among other key cities—Dimapur, Agartala, Shillong, Imphal, Gangtok, and Aizawl—most migrants came from Assam. For the second-largest share, cities generally saw migrants from Meghalaya and Tripura, followed by Manipur. Tezpur and Tinsukia experienced relatively low migration from Assam, Tripura, and Meghalaya. Sikkim again contributed the smallest percentage of migrants, with Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh as the lowest contributors.

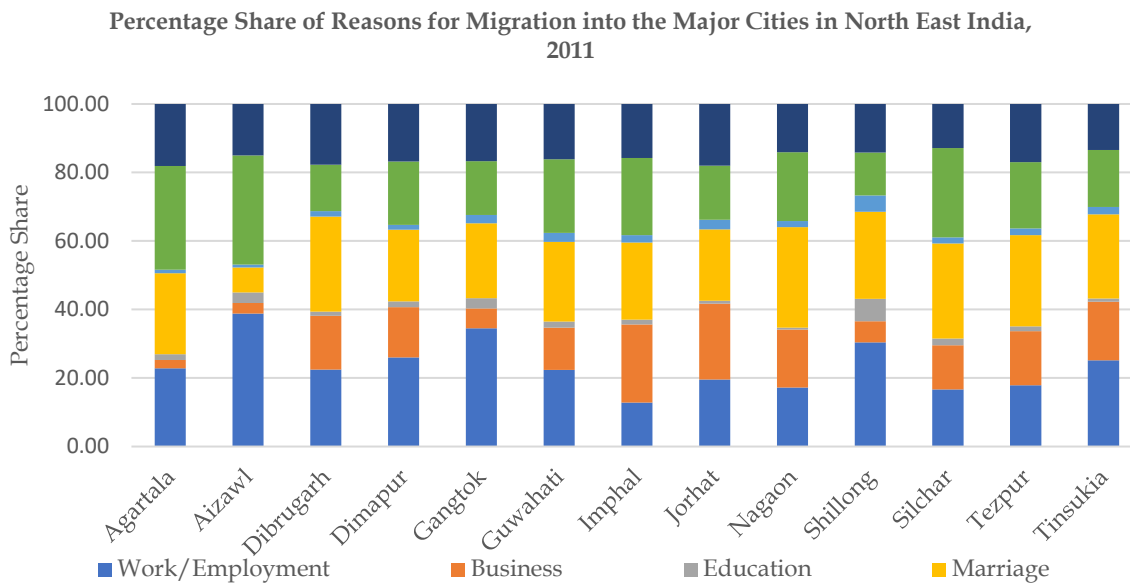


Figure 5 Reasons for migration into the Major Cities in North East India, 2011

Figure 5 presents the percentage distribution of reasons for inter-state migration into major cities of Northeast India for the years 2001 and 2011. In 2001, 23.25% of migrants moved for work or employment, 22.49% relocated with their household, and 21.20% migrated for other reasons. The percentages for migration due to moving after birth, education, business, and marriage were relatively low, accounting for 1.54%, 3.25%, 13.14%, and 15.14%, respectively. Most inter-state migration to these cities was driven by household relocation and other reasons, followed by migration for work or employment. Migration due to moving after birth and education had the most minor shares. Notably, Aizawl saw the highest share of inter-state migrants moving for work, with 46.11% of its total. Tinsukia led in business-related migration at 25.12%, closely followed by Nagaon at 24.87%. Nagaon and Dibrugarh topped the list for marriage-related migration with 21.95% and 21.44%, respectively. Tezpur had the highest percentage of migrants relocating with their households, while Shillong received the

largest share of migrants (8.78%) moving for educational purposes.

In 2011, 25.19% of migrants moved into the major cities of NE India for work or employment, 22.58% for marriage, 20.09% relocated with their household, and 15.86% migrated for other reasons. Migration for education, moving after birth, and business accounted for smaller percentages, at 2.28%, 2.32%, and 11.68%, respectively. Most inter-state migration to these cities was driven by work, employment, and marriage. Household relocation and marriage comprised the second largest share, while migration for education and moving after birth had the most minor shares. Notably, Aizawl had the highest share of inter-state migrants moving for work, with 38.78%, followed by Gangtok at 34.55%. Imphal and Jorhat led in business-related migration, with 22.75% and 22.11% respectively. Nagaon topped the list for marriage-related migration at 29.33%, closely followed by Silchar and Dibrugarh. Aizawl and Agartala had the highest percentage of migrants relocating with their household, at 31.79%

and 30.35%, respectively. Lastly, Shillong received the largest share of migrants (6.55%) moving for educational purposes. The majority of students from Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram reported that studying in Shillong was better than their hometown as they perceived that educational facilities in Shillong are far better than their home colleges, and this was an important factor motivating their decision to come and study in Shillong (Longkumer, 2015). Researchers often overlook female outmigration, associating it mainly with marriage. Premi (1980) noted that rural women migrate more for short distances, while medium and long-distance migrations target urban areas. Women have recently migrated for education, jobs, and informal sectors. In Meghalaya's matrilineal society, marriage-related outmigration has minimal impact, resulting in low female migration (Debnath & Ray, 2017). Overall, the analysis indicates a clear shift in the drivers of inter-state migration into major urban centres of North East India between 2001 and 2011, with work/employment and marriage emerging as the dominant motives, while household relocation continues to play a significant supporting role. City-specific variations further reveal the functional diversity of urban centres, with some cities attracting migrants primarily for employment and business, and others for education or family-related reasons. These patterns underscore the role of major urban systems as economic, educational, and social nodes within the region, shaping differentiated migration responses across time and space.

Table 7 presents the growth rates of various reasons for inter-state migration into major

cities of Northeast India between 2001 and 2011. Migration due to moving after birth recorded a significant growth of 72.01%, followed by migration for marriage at 63.44%, while work/employment-related migration saw a more modest increase of 12.06%. In contrast, migration for education, business, moving with households, and others experienced negative growth rates of -23.27%, -2.80%, -0.09%, and -20.27%, respectively. Among the cities, Agartala showed the highest growth in several categories: marriage (125.23%), moving with households (113.70%), and others (70.84%). It also recorded the second-highest growth in work/employment-related migration at 86.55%. On the other hand, Imphal had the highest growth in business-related migration (147.13%) and migration moved after birth (933.33%). Tinsukia led in education-related migration with a remarkable growth rate of 264.44%. Jorhat recorded the second-highest growth in migration due to marriage (125.03%) but saw the steepest decline in education-related migration at -54.97%. Shillong experienced the most significant drop in work/employment-related migration (-28.78 %) and had the lowest growth in migration due to marriage (5.04%). Nagaon had the sharpest decline in business-related migration (-30.99%) and the smallest increase in migration due to birth (3.53%). Lastly, Tezpur saw the most significant losses in migration related to moving with households (-71.44%) and others (-70.83%). Table 7 illustrates that most cities experienced higher growth rates in migration due to marriage and moving after birth. In contrast, migration related to education and other reasons generally showed a negative growth trend.

Table 7 Growth Rate (%) of Reasons for Inter-state Migration into Major Cities of NE India, 2001-2011

Cities	Work/ Employment	Business	Education	Marriage	Moved after birth	Moved with household	Others
Agartala	86.55	12.86	56.60	128.23	31.94	113.70	70.84
Aizawl	-12.55	29.83	-22.71	31.37	19.85	15.73	28.88
Dibrugarh	86.69	11.08	9.30	92.39	125.93	31.76	22.07
Guwahati	31.61	-13.07	18.47	79.02	63.72	10.61	-6.71
Imphal	-25.60	147.13	5.08	87.21	933.33	43.86	-45.29
Jorhat	35.52	18.08	-54.97	125.03	193.18	-10.36	-13.62
Nagaon	19.55	-30.99	0.00	35.67	3.53	9.00	-18.19
Shillong	-28.78	0.96	-49.02	5.04	89.47	-49.67	-57.35
Silchar	-10.84	30.43	-21.72	66.74	21.88	29.60	-30.34
Tezpur	44.78	21.47	-32.54	63.08	38.37	-71.44	-70.83
Tinsukia	65.09	-11.91	264.44	81.59	95.34	19.40	-2.51
Total	12.06	-2.80	-23.27	63.44	72.01	-0.09	-20.27

Source: Computed by author from Census of India, 2001 & 2011

Socioeconomic and Demographic Consequences of Migration into Major Cities of North East India

Migration into the major cities of Northeast India, such as Guwahati, Agartala, and Aizawl, has resulted in significant socioeconomic transformations. These consequences can be broadly categorized into economic growth, urban infrastructure pressure, social diversity, and cultural challenges. Migration has fueled economic activities in cities like Guwahati by increasing the labor force and enhancing economic output. Migrants often take up construction, trade, and informal jobs, contributing to urban development (Das, 2020). However, this influx also creates challenges, such as wage suppression in low-skilled jobs and competition for employment, particularly among local youth (Choudhury & Saikia, 2019). The rapid rise in the migrant population has strained urban infrastructure, leading to housing, transportation, and public utilities challenges. Cities like Guwahati face issues such as unplanned settlements and slum proliferation, which are exacerbating sanitation and waste management problems (Borah, 2018). The lack of affordable housing

often pushes migrants into informal housing arrangements, impacting their quality of life. Migration has increased social diversity in Northeast India's cities, fostering cross-cultural exchanges and enriching urban life. However, it has also led to tensions, particularly when local populations perceive migrants as threatening their cultural identity and employment opportunities (Sarma, 2021). Such dynamics often give rise to social fragmentation and occasional conflicts. Migrants often bring distinct languages, customs, and traditions, creating cultural enrichment and challenging social cohesion. In cities like Aizawl, where indigenous identity is deeply rooted, the influx of migrants has sometimes led to cultural tensions (Zuala, 2020). Addressing these socioeconomic consequences requires comprehensive urban planning and inclusive policies. Efforts to improve urban infrastructure, create affordable housing, and foster social integration are crucial for mitigating the negative impacts of migration. Additionally, vocational training programs for local youth can reduce employment-related tensions.

Migration has significantly influenced the demographic composition of the major cities in Northeast India, including Guwahati, Aizawl, Agartala, and Shillong. These cities have experienced substantial population growth due to both intra-regional and inter-regional migration flows. This trend has had profound implications for the region's population dynamics, urban infrastructure, and cultural composition. The migration-driven population increase in cities like Guwahati has led to urban sprawl and the expansion of informal settlements. For instance, Guwahati witnessed a sharp rise in its migrant population, growing from 378,657 in 2001 to 587,647 in 2011 (Census of India, 2011). This influx has intensified pressure on housing, healthcare, and public utilities, resulting in socioeconomic challenges for urban planners and policymakers. Migration has introduced diverse cultural practices, languages, and traditions to these cities, enriching their social fabric. However, this diversity also challenges social integration, as new migrant communities may face cultural and linguistic barriers. For example, Shillong, with its relatively minor migrant population (43,478 in 2011), has experienced tensions between indigenous groups and migrants over resource allocation and cultural preservation (Das, 2016). Migrants often contribute significantly to the labor force, particularly in construction, retail, and transportation. In cities like Agartala and Aizawl, migrant workers have supported urban economic growth but also face issues of marginalization and exploitation in informal labor markets (Singh & Devi, 2019). The rapid population increase due to migration has exacerbated environmental stress in these urban areas. In Guwahati, for instance, the rise in population density has led to deforestation and the encroachment of

wetlands, contributing to frequent urban flooding and ecological degradation (Sharma, 2020). The demographic consequences of migration into major cities of Northeast India are multi-faceted, influencing urban growth, cultural dynamics, economic activities, and environmental sustainability. Addressing these challenges requires holistic urban planning, inclusive policies, and efforts to foster cultural harmony.

Conclusion

Migration has emerged as a defining force shaping the urban and regional transformation of Northeast India, reflecting both structural vulnerabilities and adaptive responses to uneven development. The dominance of intra-district and rural-urban migration underscores persistent rural distress, limited livelihood diversification, and the growing centrality of a few urban nodes as economic and administrative magnets. At the same time, selective declines in migration to certain towns indicate uneven urban trajectories and differentiated capacities to absorb population inflows.

The migration system of the region is characterized less by upward socioeconomic mobility and more by survival-oriented movements, shaped by employment insecurity, environmental stress, and sociopolitical instability. The prominence of work-, marriage-, and household-related migration, alongside the rapid increase in post-birth and marriage-driven mobility, highlights the strong demographic and social dimensions of population movement. Gendered patterns of migration further reveal a gradual transition, with women increasingly participating in education- and employment-related mobility beyond traditional marital relocation.

While migration has contributed to labor market expansion, economic dynamism, and cultural diversification in major urban centers, it has simultaneously intensified pressures on housing, infrastructure, public services, and urban governance. In border and conflict-sensitive states, migration—both internal and cross-border—has amplified concerns related to resource competition, ethnic identity, and social cohesion. These dynamics position migration as a critical planning and political issue rather than a purely demographic process.

Addressing the challenges arising from migration in Northeast India requires a multi-scalar policy approach that integrates balanced regional development, strengthened rural livelihoods, and inclusive urban planning. Enhancing educational and employment opportunities in peripheral regions, improving urban infrastructure and service delivery, and promoting social integration mechanisms are essential to ensure that migration contributes to equitable and sustainable urbanization rather than deepening existing spatial and social disparities.

Limitations of the Study

This study primarily relies on Census of India data for 2001 and 2011, which provide robust and comparable information on migration stocks, streams, reasons for migration, and spatial patterns across major urban centers of Northeast India. However, the census framework offers limited variables for directly assessing the socio-economic consequences of migration, such as labor market outcomes, living conditions,

social integration, or access to urban services. As a result, the analysis of migration impacts could not be empirically derived from the census datasets alone.

Consequently, the discussion of migration consequences draws on relevant secondary literature to contextualize and interpret the census-based findings. While this approach strengthens the explanatory dimension of the study, it limits the extent to which direct empirical comparisons can be made between the observed census trends (2001–2011) and the impacts discussed in prior studies. The paper therefore emphasizes descriptive and structural analysis of migration patterns, while using secondary sources primarily as an interpretative framework rather than as a basis for statistical validation.

Future research could address this limitation by integrating census data with primary surveys, longitudinal household data, or city-level socio-economic indicators to enable a more rigorous assessment of the consequences of migration. Such mixed-method approaches would enhance analytical depth and allow for stronger causal linkages between migration patterns and urban socio-economic outcomes in Northeast India.

Acknowledgement

The authors sincerely thank the anonymous referee(s) for their careful reading of the manuscript and for their constructive and insightful comments. The suggestions provided have significantly helped in improving the clarity, analytical depth, and overall quality of the paper.

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