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Migration Crisis in Northeast India: Challenges and Implications of In-Migrant Laborers

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Abstract

The Northeast region (NER) grapples with deeply rooted socio-economic and political crises, including border disputes, illegal immigration, ethnic conflicts, insurgencies, and recurrent humanitarian crises. Notwithstanding these circumstances, the influx of in-migrants in the region keeps accelerating. The study questions why migration is often oversimplified and why its nuanced implications are overlooked. It delves into the dynamics between indigenous and in-migrant populations. Historical-structural theories view migration as an exploitation mechanism that benefits the affluent and elites. Therefore, the study showed a similar trend in the region, particularly in the state of Nagaland. Irrespective of the sectors, the in-migrant laborers are often exploited and face terrible challenges in their daily lives, usually becoming soft targets and victims of ethnic, economic, social, and political crises. Considering the prevailing economic and labor conditions, adopting an exclusionary approach towards in-migrants would be detrimental because the destination state lacks a labor force capable of intensive physical activity, providing low-cost labor, and facilitating job flexibility across various sectors. Thus, the protracted neglect and failure to recognize migration issues as a deeply embedded 'factor of tensions' would further exacerbate the migration crisis in the region.

Keywords

Crisis, India, In-migrants, Labor Market, Migration, Natives, Northeastern Region, Nagaland

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Introduction

The Northeast region (NER) of India has been experiencing a substantial influx of 'in-migrants'³, originating from neighboring countries and other parts of India. Census data from the past three decades (1991, 2001, and 2011) showed that the proportion of immigrants in NER has been considerably higher compared to other parts of the country. Notably, the states of Assam and Tripura have experienced a substantial demographic shift, swamped by immigrant populations. Today, in the region, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Nagaland have experienced a considerable influx of migrants, reflecting the dynamic and evolving nature of migration phenomena.

Although in-migration has become increasingly significant in the NER, research has predominantly focused on out-migration, thereby overlooking the complexities and challenges concerning in-migration. Furthermore, the critical issue of legal and illegal immigration has been further complicated by the absence of reliable migration data and limited central and state-level intervention to address the escalating tensions. As a result, migration governance has become increasingly complex and challenging, often concealed in the gaze of legislation to prevent political disturbances.

Migration is a long-standing issue for the region, however, its prolonged neglect is also due to the perception that it has more urgent problems to solve, such as

insurgencies, ethnic conflicts, corruption, etc. Also, a lack of reliable migration data and region- or state-specific analyses to contextualize the migration crisis has aggravated the region's socio-economic and political problems.

The study, therefore, contextualizes the 'migration crisis' in Northeast India, critically examining the factors contributing to the intensification of tensions. The study described 'migration crisis' as a situation where large-scale or rapid movements of people surpass the adaptive capacities of both in-migrants and host communities, threatening lives, safety, health, livelihoods, social cohesion, and governance. Migrants often face increased vulnerabilities, including insecure employment, discrimination, limited services, and exposure to violence. At the same time, host communities may experience pressures on socio-economic and political stability, which can escalate tensions if not addressed. These crises occur when combined risks exceed coping strategies and policy frameworks, requiring coordinated, evidence-based responses that protect rights, promote cohesion, and sustain livelihoods for both the parties (Martin et al., 2014; Menjívar, Ruiz, & Ness, 2018)⁴ It specifically focuses on the labor market- the interactions between in-migrant laborers and the natives of the destination state. Furthermore, it highlights the growing sense of nativism and insecurity among the native inhabitants, particularly in three major districts of Nagaland- Dimapur, Chumukedima, and Niuland- where a substantial influx of

³ In the study, an *in-migrant* refers to a person who belongs to other states of India or countries (including both the internal migrant and immigrant-legal and illegal) and not from NER states. Specifically, in Nagaland, *In-migrants* are defined as individuals belonging to other states or countries irrespective of their legal standing. In short, In-migrants are not natives of Nagaland. The definitions provided in the

paper do not mean to imply or create any new legal categories.

⁴ associated with a wide range of phenomena. They can be triggered by conflicts, failures of political and economic management, epidemics and pandemics, environmental hazards, terrorism, global financial cycles, as well as complex emergencies (McAuliffe & Khadria, 2020, p. 6).

migrants has been observed. Subsequently, the paper discussed the key findings related to the spatial distribution of in-migrant laborers, recruitment patterns, labor market competition, feminization of labor migration, native discontent, the socio-economic implications of migration, and the challenges and vulnerabilities encountered by in-migrant workers.

Methodology

This study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, integrating ethnographic inquiry with qualitative and secondary quantitative analyses to investigate the dynamics of in-migration in Northeast India.

The exploratory phase, driven by ethnographic fieldwork, provided the necessary contextual depth to interpret patterns emerging from secondary quantitative indicators, including census and survey data. This ethnographic orientation allowed for prolonged engagement in natural settings, aligning

with anthropological traditions that prioritize participant observation. As a result, the study captured not only labour-market processes but also the everyday lived experiences often overlooked in official statistics, thereby illuminating various dimensions of migrant issues.

Study Locations and Rationale for Selection: Fieldwork was conducted in three purposively selected districts of Nagaland: Dimapur, Chumukedima, and Niuland. These districts were chosen due to their high rates of in-migration and distinct socio-economic and political positions. Their uniqueness stems from the absence of the Inner Line Permit (ILP), which facilitates smoother movement for in-migrants within and around these areas. Dimapur serves as the state's urban commercial hub, Chumukedima serves as a peri-urban transitional economy, and Niuland showcases rural and cross-border migration flows.

Table 1.1 District-wise Characteristics and Rationale for Selection

<i>District</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Rationale for Selection</i>
<i>Dimapur</i>	Urban commercial hub with diversified and competitive labour markets	Captures urban, high-demand, and gender-differentiated employment dynamics
<i>Chumukedima</i>	Peri-urban area with agricultural, domestic, and small-scale industrial employment, like a brick-kiln	Illustrates transitional labour markets and migrant-indigenous interactions
<i>Niuland</i>	Border district with rural and cross-border migration flows	Represents urban-rural migration and mobility shaped by border proximity

Sampling Strategy and Participants: A combination of systematic random sampling within migrant settlements and purposive sampling of stakeholders ensured diversity in terms of rural-urban setting, position, occupation, and migration pattern. Employers, contractors, village leaders, and NGO representatives were included for their local perspectives on migration governance.

Data Collection Procedures: Primary data collection started from January and ended in late October 2023. The fieldwork entailed prolonged participant observation in migrant residential colonies, construction sites, agricultural fields, and work environments.

Table 1.2 Sample Compositions

<i>Participant Category</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Gender Composition</i>	<i>Key Characteristics</i>
<i>In-migrant labourers</i>	90	Male & Female (45/45)	Mostly from Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Rajasthan, etc.
<i>Indigenous labourers</i>	50	45 males + 5 females	Local laborers from host communities
<i>Employers (contractors, middlemen)</i>	15	Predominantly Male	Mostly migrants who manage labour recruitment
<i>Village and community leaders</i>	10	All male	Provide governance perspectives on migration
<i>NGO representatives</i>	4	Female	Engaged in migrant welfare and advocacy

Table 1.3 Data Collection Timeline

<i>Phases</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
Phase 1: Preliminary Engagement	Site selection, stakeholder consultations, pilot interviews	January – February 2022
Phase 2: Ethnographic Fieldwork	Participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions; mostly seasonal migrants, employers....	October- December 2022
Phase 3: Fieldwork and analysis	Focus on Urban areas, domestic workers, construction laborers, local authorities, and revisiting the field.	March-June 2023

Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders captured insights on migrant communities, policy implementation, and local community perceptions. Using flexible, category-specific interview guides, these interviews showed contextual factors such as historical migration trends, recruitment practices, and in-migrant-native relationship dynamics. Qualitative data were thematically examined, while quantitative data from the census and surveys supported the ethnographic findings.

The Study's Limitations: The study acknowledges several methodological limitations. The sensitive nature of migration research, particularly regarding undocumented status, may have impacted participants' willingness to share complete information. Snowball sampling, while helpful for accessing hidden populations, could have introduced selection bias toward more connected migrants. Language

barriers, despite the use of interpreters, might have resulted in lost nuances in translation. Focusing on Nagaland allows for deeper exploration but limits the generalizability of findings to other states in Northeast India with different migration dynamics. Nonetheless, the ethnographic engagement offers valuable insights into migrants' lives and experiences.

Ethical Considerations: Acknowledging the sensitive and challenging circumstances faced by many migrants, we implemented rigorous ethical measures. Written consent was acquired from stakeholders in formal positions, while verbal consent was obtained from migrant and indigenous workers to address literacy barriers and concerns regarding documentation. Consent was given in preferred languages with the assistance of interpreters. We maintained strict confidentiality by anonymizing personal identifiers and field notes.

Migration Dynamics

Despite the substantial contributions of in-migrants, which include providing cheap labor, importing skills and techniques, meeting labor demand, expanding the domestic market, and stimulating economic growth in the destination state, they are often considered unwelcome intruders, especially when their numbers increase and they occupy certain key positions. Rather than acknowledging the positive contribution of migration, people usually perceive it as a disruptive process that affects every dimension of social existence and develops complex 'internal dynamics' (Haas, Castles, & Miller, 2020, p. 44). The migration issue affects governments, the private sector, local communities, and countless individuals (Appleby, 2020).

Northeast India hosts two primary categories of in-migrants: internal migrants and immigrants, irrespective of their legal status. However, like in other countries, in-migrants often face blame for crises within their destination states; they overburden government and social services, steal jobs from citizens, threaten national security, and influence cultural dynamics (Vega & Steigenga, 2013).⁵ Since the 1980s, the perception of immigrants, particularly those who are unauthorized, has been seen as a threat to national security, which justifies the implementation of stringent enforcement measures at borders and within nations (Bourbeau, 2011; Gerard, 2014).

Many local governments have responded to these threats by enacting ordinances designed to make everyday life difficult for immigrants, with the hope that they will "self-deport." (Vega & Steigenga, 2013, p. 4).

Therefore, due to the ineffectiveness of labor laws and labor union intervention, low-skilled/low-wage temporary contract-laborers remain in highly vulnerable and exploitable situations. In this context, the interplay between migrant agencies, migration drivers, and their governance becomes significant (Carling Collins, 2017; Carling & Schewel, 2018; Triandafyllidou, 2019, 2020, 2022).

Despite the historical understanding of migration as a human trajectory, many realized its transformative role in reshaping the lives of both migrants and native populations. Migration not only affects individuals and groups of migrants but also influences the social and environmental dynamics of destination states. However, one cannot deny that there is a growing consensus that human migration trends will continue and remain mixed, with flows of labor, family, and other categories of migrants intermingled (UNHCR 2007; Migration Observation 2011; Kysel, 2016). Despite this realization, internal and international migration data remain limited and inadequate (Bell, 2003).

Since its independence, India has also witnessed more than 40 million migrants compelled by natural disasters, armed conflicts, civil unrest, persecution, and large-scale development initiatives (Tumbe, 2018, p. 34). As the most populous country, India also has the largest number of international migrants, estimated at 17.5 million (McAuliffe & Khadria, 2020). Likewise, India also grapples with its large number of Internal migrants, estimated at 455 million (Census of India 2011). Migration across states and districts within the states in India

⁵ According to polls by popular news organizations in the United States, Fox News/Opinion Dynamics Poll 2010. (Vega & Steigenga, 2013, p. 4)

has increased significantly (Sengupta, 2012). Post-reform India has experienced migration of different types (Sengupta, 2013). Therefore, various perspectives have prompted numerous research attempts, such as understanding migration reports (Shanti, 2006; Banerji & Saraswati Raju, 2009; Indrani et al., 2014; Kundu & Ray, 2012), the migration pattern (Skeldon, 1986; Bhagat, 2010; Srivastava, 1979; Malhotra, 1974), the migration streams (Bose, 1967; Skeldon, 1986), and the gender perspective (Gulati, 1983, 1993; Lingam, 1998; Vijay, 2005).

Bauer and Zimmermann note that the push-pull framework seems attractive because of its apparent ability to incorporate all major factors affecting migration decision-making (1998:103). However, push-pull models are inadequate because they often assume that demographic, environmental, political, and economic factors "cause" migration, ignoring the role of other factors (Haas et al. Miller 2020, 45). Economist Stark (1978; 1991) underscored the significance of social factors, emphasizing that families or households typically make migration decisions rather than isolated individuals. Deborah (2011) highlights the role of brokerage and power, while Pattenden (2011) highlights the role of state resources.

Contextualizing the Migration Crisis in Northeast India

India, the most populous country in the world, is also the largest source of international migrants, with approximately 17.5 million (IOM, 2019). According 2011 Census of India, there are an estimated 455 million internal migrants. The Northeast region (NER) of India, which encompasses eight states: Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Sikkim, stands as one of South

Asia's last land frontiers. This region experiences significant migration from across the broader subcontinent, partly due to its highly sensitive international borders, which comprise roughly 40 percent (over 5,200 km) of India's frontier with Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar, and Nepal. The 2011 Census indicated that the Northeast region recorded around 14.9 million migrants, representing nearly 33% of its total population. This significant increase of around 5 million from the 2001 Census (Lusome & Bhagat, 2020, p. 1128) not only reflects broader national trends but also shows the region's unique demographic and migration pressure, which are factors of considerable importance.

Immigration Issue: Baruah noted, 'too frequently, the demographic change in the NE region has been understood primarily through the perspective of what migration researchers call 'push factor' However, it is important to bring in the 'pull factors' as well, the economic transformation and process of class differentiation in these states that have provided significant economic opportunities to new immigrants, which may be hidden from the gaze of the law.' (2005, 194). Following the partition of India in 1947 and the Bangladesh War of Independence in 1971, the number of internally displaced persons and refugees in India reached approximately 10 million (Tumbe, 2018, p. 34). Migration carries multifaceted and multi-layered forms of issues for a particular receiving region and a country in general, and such is experienced by the NER, where immigrants and refugees from neighboring countries, especially Bangladesh, have been accelerating. During the immediate post-independence period of India from 1947-1950, about 20 lakh refugees entered into undivided Assam (later, six Northeast states were carved out of Assam

between 1963-1987), where the state had to provide shelter to around 3,00,000. Consequently, the differences between the Central government and the state of Assam sharpened over the question of the Influx of Muslim peasants into Assam from newly created East Pakistan (Misra, 2014, pp. 22-24). For instance, in 1961, Assam's Chief Minister Gopinath Bordoloi was pressured by the Central Government of India to accept 600,000 Bengali refugees from Bangladesh (Bhaumik, 2009, p. 115). The US Committee for Refugees, in its report (2000) estimated that there were 157,000 displaced persons in Northeast India (Baruah, 2005, p. 185). Political crises, civil unrest, and economic instability aggravated the migration phenomenon to a greater extent. De argued that 'Poverty and unemployment coupled with high population growth forced some people almost every day to desert Bangladesh for Economic survival' (2005, 88).

Before India's independence, the British colonial administration implemented the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act of 1873 to safeguard colonial interests. The act restricted the free movement of people within designated regions, aiming to prevent the intermingling of 'outsiders' with indigenous populations, particularly between the settled plains and the hills. As a result, it reinforced the socio-economic and political divides and escalated mutual insecurity. The act covered those geographical regions of erstwhile Assam, now Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Nagaland. This regulation laid the

foundation for what is now known as the Inner Line Permit System (ILPS).

Following independence in 1947 and particularly following the economic liberalization of the 1990s, the migration dynamics within Northeast India underwent profound transformations. The post-colonial period was marked by various drivers of migration, including partition-induced displacement, agrarian distress, and development-induced displacement. Notably, the construction of the Kaptai Dam in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of present-day Bangladesh submerged vast areas of Hajong and Chakma settlements, compelling their migration to the Northeast, particularly to Arunachal Pradesh. Such displacements have historically ignited ethnic tensions and fierce land disputes between local inhabitants and in-migrants (Bhaumik, 2009).⁶

After India's independence in 1947, efforts were made to foster national integration; however, persistent political unrest occurred in states such as Assam, Mizoram, and Nagaland, where insurgent groups sought autonomy and sovereignty, exacerbating the social, economic, and political crises. Despite ongoing unrest, economic interdependence deepened as Northeastern youth sought opportunities elsewhere because regions like the Northeastern states have significantly worse employment outcomes (Mazumdar & Sarkar, 2008).⁷ In-migrant laborers occupied the region's growing labor demand, reflecting the ongoing industrialization, infrastructure, and expansion of services. Therefore, the migration trend is not slowing

⁶ Bhaumik, S. (2009). *Troubled periphery: Crisis of India's North East* (pp. 147-165). New delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd.

⁷Employment outcomes vary significantly by region: North Eastern states, Bihar, parts of UP, Jammu and Kashmir,

Arunachal Pradesh, coastal Orissa, Goa, and Pondicherry show worse outcomes, while Western and Southern states perform better (Mazumdar & Sarkar, 2008, p. 93)

down; it has shown signs of increasing in the 1990s (Mazumdar & Sarkar, 2008, p. 94).

The era following the economic reforms 1990s further exacerbated these trends, intensifying the region's reliance on migrant labor. The transformation of Northeast India's labor market reflects increasing segmentation, where in-migrant laborers are absorbed into low-wage and informal sectors. This pattern, viewed through the lens of historical-structural migration theory, the underlying logic of dependency and inequality, where economic elites, such as farm and factory owners, profit from substantial inflows of migrant labor, continues to be quite prevalent, albeit in a rapidly changing socio-political landscape. Therefore, the pre-liberalization era's mix of restriction and necessity gave way to intensified commodification of labor,

demonstrating both transformations and persistent historical structures in the region's migration pattern and economy.

Internal Migration: The 2011 Census indicates that there are 454 million migrants in India, determined by their places of residence. In other words, 37 percent of Indians are Internal migrants. The Economic Survey 2016-17 indicates that interstate labor mobility averaged 5-6 million between 2001 and 2011, which resulted in an interstate migrant population of 60 million and an interdistrict migrant population of up to 80 million (Rajan & M, 2020, p. 6). As stated in Imran Khan's examination of the trends and patterns of internal labor migration in India from 1983 to 2007-2008, Rajan and M (2020) also observed that female labor migration is growing.

Table 2 In-migration from Other Indian States/UTs and Countries to the Northeast Region

States	Total Population in 1991 Census	In-migration from other States in the 2001 Census	In-migration from other Countries in the 2001 Census	Total Population in 2001 Census	In-migration from other States in the 2011 Census	In-migration from other Countries in 2011 Census
Nagaland	1209546	33594	1752	1990036	53311	2235
Arunachal Pradesh	864558	71789	2931	1097968	64201	1858
Sikkim	404457	22519	7655	540851	32334	6331
Manipur	1837149	4529	182	2166788	7309	671
Mizoram	689756	22599	8436	888573	20969	7527
Tripura	2757205	40262	11246	3199203	41532	10848
Meghalaya	1774778	33710	1154	2318822	46022	2136
Assam	22414322	121803	5053	26655528	148892	11508
North-East Region	31953771	178808	38409	38857769	210542	43114

Source: Computed from Census of India 1991, 2001, and 2011 (Mistri, 2022, p. 407).

The Northeast region receives more in-migrants than out-migrants (Rajan & Chyrmang, 2016), that 42 percent of migrants have originated from other countries, and another 42 percent of migrants to the region

have originated from the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Sikkim, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The remaining regions have accounted for only 16 percent of migrants to Northeast India⁸.

⁸ For analysis, the study divided the states and UT into six regions: North India, West India, Central India, South India,

East India, and Northeast India (Lusome & Bhagat, 2020, p. 1131).

The study also observed that the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Meghalaya have experienced a substantial influx of migrants from other states (Lusome & Bhagat, 2020, p. 1129). For a more detailed

understanding, the study incorporates the work of Mistri (2022), which presents the Net Balance of Intercensal (0-9 years) Migration, 1991-2011, as illustrated above.

Table 3 Sex Ratio (Female/Male) of Migrants, Place of Last Residence, 2011

State	Population	Interstate Within NE	Interstate Rest of India	Immigrants
Nagaland	931	824	625	732
Assam	958	1510	949	1158
Manipur	985	1637	730	1119
Meghalaya	989	1149	870	911
Mizoram	976	753	494	1135
Arunachal P	938	875	631	823
Tripura	960	1518	780	1043
Northeast	960	1127	866	1063
India	943	1273		1185

Source: Computed from Table D-2, Census of India 2011 (Lusome & Bhagat, 2020, p. 1130).

The migration balance represents the difference between the inflow and outflow of migrants in a specific area in a certain period. A negative net migration indicates that people are leaving the area through out-migration. The positive net migration indicates that there is population growth through in-migration. According to the intercensal (0-9 years) migration, the region has a negative migration balance in the 2001 and 2011 censuses. Considering state-wise, according to the 2011 census, Manipur and Assam had a negative migration balance. Net migration was negative in 2001 for Nagaland (-1.37 percent) and Mizoram (-0.10 percent), but in the 2011 census, it became significantly positive (Mistri, 2022, p. 406). Table 3 presents the sex-wise distribution of migrants in the Northeast states by migration streams.⁹

The national figure shows feminization of migration irrespective of the streams of migration. There are 2120 female migrants

for each 1000 male migrants in the country. However, compared to the country average, there is less dominance of female migration in the Northeast region.

Escalating Tensions amid Substantial In-migrants Influx: Nagaland Case

Nagaland, formally recognized as the 16th State of the Indian Union in 1963, holds a distinctive cultural and geographic position within Northeast India. Celebrated for its ethnic diversity and rich tribal heritage, the State remains predominantly agrarian, with most households involved in subsistence agriculture. In recent years, Nagaland has demonstrated promising potential in horticulture, particularly in cultivating pineapple, oranges, ginger, turmeric, and the renowned Naga King chili. However, this potential is constrained by structural economic challenges, limited industrial development, high unemployment rates, substantial in-migration, and demographic imbalances.

⁹ The sex ratio is calculated as the number of female migrants per 1000 male migrants.

Table 4 provides further details on the state's characteristics, study district profiles, as well

as the Rural-Urban and Sex Ratios according to the 2011 census.

Table 4 Population by State/District, Rural-Urban, and Sex Ratio (2011 Census)

State & District	Rural/Urban	Person	Male	Female	Sex Ratio (Female per 1000 males)
Nagaland	Total	19,78,502	10,24,64	9,53,853	931
	Rural	14,07,536	7,25,472	6,82,064	940
	Urban	5,70,966	2,99,177	2,71,789	908
Dimapur	Total	3,78,811	1,97,394	1,81,417	919
	Rural	1,80,942	93,057	87,507	937
	Urban	1,97,869	1,03,959	93,910	903

Source: Nagaland Statistical Handbook 2024 (Directorate of Economics & Statistics, p. 8).

Note: The study specifically referenced Dimapur in the table, as Chumukedima and Niuland Districts are included within Dimapur according to the 2011 Census. The district had a total population of 378,811, comprising 52.11 percent males and 47.89 percent females. The urban population accounted for 52.23 percent, while the rural population made up 47.77 percent. In terms of the sex ratio (females per 1,000 males), it was 903 in urban areas and 937 in rural areas (Directorate of Census Operation, Nagaland, 2011, pp. 8-9).

Demographic Imbalance and Political Crisis: Five out of seven states (before the inclusion of Sikkim) in the North-east-Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh have been directly affected by the out-migrations from Bangladesh. Assam, being the immediate abode for many immigrants, was severely affected, which led to class and ethnic conflicts and communal riots. The Muslim Population of Assam has shown a rise of 77.42 percent in 1991 from what it was in 1971; this demographic change escalated tensions and speculations among the citizens. A quote from an editor of Assam Daily wrote in the Sentinel, "Assam's abnormal growth of population between 1961-91 (105 percent) and the astounding growth in the number of voters in the state between 1962-91 (140 percent) cannot be attributed to any other factor but large-scale illegal immigration." (Sentinel 1998; De 2005, 67). A significant demographic imbalance was felt when the Bengali immigrants swamped Tripura's indigenous tribal population. From 1981 to 1991, the population of Tripura state increased by 77.19 percent, which was the highest among all Northeastern states affected by infiltration (De 2005, 165).

Ethnic tensions between the Assamese and the 'Bengali-Hindus and Muslims' became more intense during the imposition of the Assamese language in 1972-1973 and the hunting of 'foreigners' starting from 1985. As a result, a mass exodus of Bengali-Hindus and Muslims, especially the lower-caste peasants, fled to West Bengal and Barak Valley in the Northeast region. It was also observed that 'Nearly 1,50,000 were allowed to settle down in the disputed border region of Assam and Nagaland to prevent encroachment and forced settlements by Naga tribes who were continuously pushing westwards' (Bhaumik, 2009, pp. 130-33). Bhaumik, in his book, highlighted that Nagaland government sources estimate the population of the Semiyas: a group comprising individuals referred to locally as "Miyas" (primarily Muslims, many of whom have intermarried with the indigenous Sema community) now numbers at least 80,000-100,000. However, it's crucial to note that there are no official statistical reports, leaving a significant gap in our understanding of the situation. In contrast, some intelligence agencies sometimes place their number at 2,50,000 to 3,00,000. Nagaland's former governor, Shyamal

Dutta, and his one-time colleagues in the Intelligence Bureau (of which he was the chief) see the Semiyas as a major threat to Nagaland's demography, a possible source of future tension (2009, p. 134).

Demographic concerns are particularly pronounced in districts such as Niuland, Chumukedima, and Dimapur Sadar, all of which were formerly part of the larger Dimapur district. According to the District Census Handbook (Directorate of Census Operations, Nagaland, 2011, pp. 8-9), Dimapur is noted for its highly heterogeneous population, often referred to

as a 'Mini India' due to its diverse demographic composition. Approximately 50 percent of its residents are migrants, comprising various non-native communities. Among these are significant populations of Bengalis, Assamese, Nepalese, Biharis, Marwaris, Punjabis, Tamils, and Keralites. Coupled with Bhaumik's (2009) observations about the increasing presence of Semiyas, these demographic shifts raise concerns among state actors regarding the socio-political and cultural implications of large-scale in-migration, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas of Nagaland.

Table 5 District-wise Population Projections for Dimapur, Chumukedima, and Niuland (2021-2030)

Year	Undivided Dimapur (Dimapur Sadar, Chumukedima, Niuland) Population as per the 2011 Census	Dimapur Population post creation of new districts, after summation of the respective habitation in the district	Chumukedima Population post creation of new districts, after summation of the respective habitation in the district	Niuland Population post creation of new districts, after summation of the respective habitation in the district
2011	378811	204319	132,432	42,060
2021		226,367	146,723	46,599
2022		228,536	148,128	47,045
2023		230,601	149,467	47,470
2024		232,666	150,806	47,895
2025		234,835	152,211	48,342
2026		236,900	153,550	48,767
2027		238,759	154,755	49,150
2028		240,721	156,027	49,554
2029		242,580	157,231	49,936
2030		244,439	158,436	50,319

Source: Nagaland Statistical Handbook 2024 (Directorate of Economics & Statistics, 2024, p. 11).

Rajan and Chyrmang (2020) noted that the North-East region (NER) receives more in-migrants than out-migrants. Considering the projected population in the North East 2020, they observed that Assam, Tripura, and Nagaland could face a new challenge with a

phenomenal rise in population density. This poses new challenges for the region, where the increase in population is also caused by regular and irregular migration despite the existence of the Illegal Migration Determination by Tribunal (IMDT) Act in

Assam and an Inner Line Permit (Rajan & Chyrmang, 2016, p. 119). Implementing the Inner Line Permit System (ILPS) in Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Nagaland has yielded mixed outcomes. While the system has somewhat restricted the influx and settlement of non-indigenous individuals in these states, its effectiveness remains limited in certain border areas such as Dimapur in Nagaland. In Dimapur, significant populations of migrants from Bangladesh and Nepal have settled, raising concerns among the local residents about the potential demographic imbalance if such migration continues unchecked (Nair, 2017, p. 535).¹⁰

Economic Crisis: The NER is predominantly characterized by hilly terrain, encompassing three-fourths of its geographical expanse (Singha & Singh, 2016). The agricultural sector of NER typically depends on subsistence farming rather than commercialization. The challenges emerge from the difficult terrain, insufficient support from central and state governments, and occupational disparities in the region. The migrants and 'Denizens'¹¹ have become significantly integrated into the economies of the NER, albeit frequently in informal ways, despite the entry obstacles they encounter, such as the ILP and the Sixth Schedule. The immigrants and non-tribal denizens- Nepalis, Biharis, and Bengalis- still managed to hold onto some land and become settled cultivators. Baruah viewed, 'these denizens typically are better adapted to cultivate these lands because they bring with them some cash, agricultural implements, and their prior experience in settled cultivation' (2005, 194).

Nagaland began its first phase of economic planning in the 1960s. During the initial period, the economy was primarily based on traditional agriculture, which was the main occupation, with 89.55 percent of the working population engaged (Government of Nagaland, 1973), utilizing primitive production techniques (Jamir, 2016, p. 202). Agriculture is still one of the major economic activities, dominated by the traditional method of shifting cultivation at the subsistence level.

Rajan and Chyrmang, in their study, indicated that the largest contribution of Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) among all the NE states comes from Agriculture and the service sector. Although agriculture's contribution to the state domestic product is declining across all the NER, only Nagaland's share from agriculture and industry is increasing (2016, 158). However, regarding employment opportunities for its native population, the state of Nagaland is not coping well with its agricultural and industrial activities compared to other states, such as Assam, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh, which have their own native labor forces. This is mainly due to Indigenous subsistence farming, a diminished number of native labor forces, minimal machinery, and, most importantly, inadequate support from the government. Moreover, the native working-age youths neither engaged themselves as laborers nor held the position of contractors, managers, team leaders, or intermediaries in the labor market due to the nature of the intensive work. As a result, the labor market becomes increasingly accessible to immigrants.

¹⁰ The Indian Express, March 9, 2015 (Nair, 2017, p. 535)

¹¹ Denizen' is not a contemporary legal category; the term goes back to the power of denization that British monarchs once had to grant some aliens some of the

privileges of natural-born subjects. Denizens, for instance, could buy land but could not inherit it (for further explanation, see Baruah 2005, 208).

The nature of demand for laborers has changed in recent times, especially in the labor market in sectors such as agriculture, construction, brick factories, manufacturing industries, and domestic services, where in-migrant laborers are becoming predominant. Today, substantial migrant labor forces reside within and around the peripheries of Nagaland Districts, mainly in Dimapur,

Chumukedima, and Niuland. As shown in Figure 2, according to the 2011 census, the workers in Dimapur sub-district are distributed into four categories of economic activities: 16.20 percent are cultivators, 5.94 percent are agricultural laborers, 3.35 percent are household Industry workers, and 74.51 percent are other workers- shown in Figure 6.

Table 6 Distribution of Workers into Four Categories of Economic Activity in Dimapur Sub-District, 2011

Sr. No	Dimapur Sub-district	Total Population	Total Workers (main+ Marginal workers)	Category of Workers			
				Cultivators (%)	Agricultural Labourers (%)	Household Industry Workers (%)	Other Workers (%)
1	Dimapur Sadar	169613	61962	1.73	1.11	3.48	93.68
2	Chumukedima	125400	53071	13.78	5.58	4.03	76.61
3	Medzipheema	24149	11214	31.83	13.14	1.21	53.83
4	Dhansiripara	17362	6783	59.27	8.34	3.88	28.51
5	Kuhoboto	12519	5363	33.82	10.26	2.54	53.38
6	Niuland	11876	5209	52.70	18.85	0.73	27.72
7	Aquahnaqua	9193	4062	62.53	10.81	2.51	24.15
8	Nihokhu	8699	3686	39.20	36.03	2.85	21.92
<i>Total Dimapur Population</i>		<i>378811</i>	<i>151350</i>	<i>16.20</i>	<i>5.94</i>	<i>3.35</i>	<i>74.51</i>

Source: Census of India 2011 (Nagaland), Series-14, Part XII-A, District Census Handbook (Dimapur District), Directorate of Census Operations, Nagaland, 2011, 48.¹²

In the contemporary era of globalization, it is evident that in-migrants predominantly occupy these economic activities, except for public service roles within the fourth category. The presence of in-migrant in the state predates the establishment of Nagaland in 1963. However, its exponential growth

and labor market monopoly over the past few decades have surprised and worried many of its native people. As a result, the Northeast region—and the state of Nagaland in particular—is witnessing the sensitive interplay of insecurity and nativism, which has emerged as a critical aspect of the

¹² Although the Census (2011) showed Chumukedima and Niuland as sub-districts of Dimapur, our study considers Chumukedima and Niuland as separate districts following their official establishment as districts in December 2021.

Note: Main Worker: A person who worked in any economically productive activity for six months or more in the year preceding the enumeration date. Marginal Worker: A person who worked in any economic activity for fewer than six months of the reference period (i.e., the year before

enumeration). Other worker (OW): A person who engaged in some economic activity during the reference period but not as a cultivator, agricultural laborers, or household industry. 'OW' also includes government servants, municipal employees, teachers, factory workers, plantation workers, trade, commerce, business, transport, banking, mining, construction, political or social workers, priests, and entertainment artists. ((Directorate et al. 2011, 19-20).

economic and political dynamics. This perspective reflects the region's deep-rooted tension caused by the migration phenomenon and its inadequate governance.

Nativism and Insecurity: Impact on In-migrants

The region is plagued by several factors that perpetuate deprivations and human rights violations, particularly faced by in-migrant laborers. Despite acknowledging the significant contributions in both formal and informal sectors to meet the labor-market demand and provide a considerable cheap labor workforce in the region, migrants are disproportionately targeted in various conflicts and crises. A stark example of this is the series of attacks on Hindi-speaking migrant workers across five districts of Upper Assam- Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Golaghat, and Dhemaji. Additionally, the tragic blast in Guwahati in 2006 stands as a grim reminder, claiming the lives of 14 Hindi-speaking individuals and leaving over 50 injured. Unofficial figures suggest a much higher death toll, with estimates reaching 71, while official government sources cite 62 casualties during the crisis (Misra 2014, pp. 209-10). A visibly tense situation prevailed in Assam on the question of identifying and deporting illegal Bangladeshi migrants who were clandestinely staying in Assam. Clashes of political ideologies and interpretations became the talk of the people, as political parties, insurgent groups, civil society, and student bodies grappled with the issue. It reached the point where politicians were so engrossed in building vote banks. The

students and other civil societies firmly held the conservative approach, but with no formal or international legal standings.

Moreover, the insurgents became aggressively violent in asserting their ideologies. The rise of Insurgencies in NER, such as NSCN-IM and NSCN-K in the 1980s, the Mizo National Front in the 1960s, the 1990s All-Tripura Tiger Force and the National Liberation Force of Tripura, and the formation of the United Liberation Front of Asom in 1979 were all part and partial of socio-economic and political forces which led to prolonged bitter armed-conflicts with the Indian national military forces. The formation of the so-called 'political groups' in the region (usually called insurgent groups by the other regions) also contributed to the sensitization of ethnocentrism, nativism, and economic and political consciousness of the indigenous population in the NER, provoking the intensity to expel the foreigners (immigrants) from the region. Misra, in his book, discussed some of the instances carried out by the ULFA where the migrants, in general, and migrant laborers, in particular, were attacked and displaced. Such incidents were: in September 2006, 'all Indians living in the North-east' were asked to pay taxes. They also declared that 'illegal migrants' from the rest of India had threatened the very existence of the Assamese people by occupying the political and economic space of the region.¹³ 'Assam, the ULFA stated, was being turned into a 'Mini-Rajasthan' and a 'mini-Bihar' by migrants and that the rights of the indigenous people were being seriously compromised' (Misra, 2014, p. 211). Another example of such instances was the demand

¹³ In September 2006, the ULFA commander, Paresh Baruah, warned 'all Indians living in the north-east' that they would have to pay taxes to the outfit, while it expected the

indigenous people to come forward voluntarily and aid in its struggle for a sovereign Assam (Misra 2014, 211).

for the Bodo homeland in Assam that led to the displacement of East Bengali Muslims and Hindus, Nepalis, and Santhals. The Reangs- displaced in Mizoram, and the Chakmas- displaced in Arunachal Pradesh (Baruah, 2005, p. 201).

The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) also persistently spearheaded the expulsion of many illegal immigrants from Assam and proposed electoral reforms. However, they achieved limited success, and the events generated heated political controversy in Assam (De 2005).

Baruah (2005) noted that 'there are informal ways in which denizens acquired de facto property rights that are likely to become de jure rights in the future'. However, the socio-economic transition in recent times created more ethnic tensions and complications. For instance, based on a survey carried out in some parts of the Karbi Anglong district of Assam, the denizens, whom the indigenous Karbi people refer to as Biharis (though not all are from Bihar), have acquired informal control over what is formally designated as public lands. These denizens, who have consolidated a 'considerable amount of economic and political power' in Karbi Anglong, are now seeking a formal change in the status of those lands and formal land titles (Mass 2002, pp. 11-13; Baruah 2005, 194-5). It is a long-standing issue that occasionally escalates into tensions. On February 15, 2024, there were fresh clashes between the Karbi Students' Association (KSA) and Bihari Youths, injuring 11 and arresting 17, when the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council carried out a move to

evict 10,000 people belonging to the Bihar community.¹⁴

Similar experiences are brewing in Nagaland. When the in-migrants expand their influence in the socio-economic and political spectrums, the sense of insecurity among the natives begins to develop. The in-migrants, irrespective of their legal standing, are considered intruders who cripple the native economy, taking away the natives' jobs, farms, and human resources.

Implementing the Inner Line Permit (ILP) is the only legal element that regulates the movement of non-indigenous inhabitants into the four applicable states. The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) asserted that 'the lack of stringent implementation of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations (BERF) 1873 has made the Naga homeland a safe haven for illegal immigrants. The scenario of an overwhelming population inhabiting the state with questionable identities is considered a major threat to the identity, culture, and survival of the society, resulting in societal destruction.¹⁵ Therefore, the Northeast has been continuously affected by protracted conflicts; also, it has gradually shifted towards internal feuds-multiplication of ethnicities, strident ethno-nationalistic assertions over land and resources, and articulations of grievances in terms of the 'others,' leading to ethnic cleansing and extermination of smaller communities or politically weaker sections in the society (Singha & Singh, 2016, p. 16). Taking into account the above discussions, in the near future, seemingly, there can be a structural adjustment within the state where

¹⁴ The Hindu (2024) 10000 people in Assam face eviction from tribal council lands, February 23. Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/10000-people-in-assam-face-eviction-from-tribal-council-lands/article67878373.ece>.

¹⁵ The Morung Express (2024) NSF for a robust mechanism to deal with illegal Immigration, February 27. Available at: <https://morungexpress.com/nsf-for-robust-mechanism-to-deal-with-illegal-immigration>.

provisions for the migrant community could take place. This could result in a newer version of the economic and political paradigm.

Findings and Discussion

During our fieldwork, we have interacted with various stakeholders—factory owners, managers, contractors, caretakers, colony and village chairmen. The study provided additional insights into the increasing influx of in-migrant laborers from various states entering Nagaland. In addition to the study of Lusome and Bhagat (2020) that argued primarily people from the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Sikkim, and Andaman & Nicobar Islands migrate to the NER, our study found that Nagaland also receives a noticeable number of in-migrants working in informal sectors who hail from the states of Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Rajasthan, among others.

Diversity and Distribution of In-migrant Laborers: The three districts—Dimapur, Chumukedima, and Niuland—chosen for the study share territorial boundaries with the state of Assam, where land and immigration issues are highly discussed. We found that 'not all neighboring settlers or in-migrants in the state are illegal immigrants. The influx in the city has become so dense that neither legal migrants nor illegal immigrants confine themselves to one specific area based on their religion, ethnicity, or place of origin. This dispersion is driven by factors such as job scarcity and unemployment faced by the migrants in the city, especially in urban spaces. The scattering of migrants can also be attributed to the migrant's skills, experiences, and potential (like physical strength or health status). For instance, the story of Ajay, a 48-year-old native of Bihar who relocated to Dimapur in his early 30s as

a rickshaw puller upon his arrival, but when this option was curtailed due to the city's traffic regulation, which stopped rickshaws from entering the main-town area, he was left helpless, which compelled him to work as a construction laborer. However, the instability of these occupations forced him to seek alternative means of livelihood. Presently, he works in a brick factory in Zukihe village, that requires less physicality and strength. Examining Ajay's trajectory provides insight into the economic avenues accessible to migrants despite the modest income they offer. By tracing the journey of changing destinations and types of work, we understand how migrants expand their opportunities through associational and broader social networks. These include the practice of migrants recommending their familiar locales to family and relatives, broadening their horizons, and facilitating smoother transitions.

Upon examining the increase in in-migrant populations in the host city, we realized that it is essential to consider not only the movement itself but also the infrastructural elements, transportation, communication, and types of migration, for instance, brick kiln laborers are primarily seasonal migrants originating from Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttarakhand. Likewise, construction laborers predominantly consist of migrant workers originating from Assam.

Recruitment and Preference for In-migrant Laborers by Employers: In conversations with Prakash, proprietor of the brick factory in Lhotovi village, and Kisan, proprietor of two brick factories in Zukihe village, we gained valuable insights into migration dynamics. When asked about the recruitment process, contract terms and conditions, wages, migration patterns, and facilities for in-migrant workers, several key

points emerged; Prakash highlighted that most of his labor force primarily hails from Assam, specifically Nagaon and Barpeta Districts, as well as from Bihar. These in-migrants are recruited through intermediaries, often senior workers with direct contact with potential laborers. The majority of these laborers are seasonal migrants. However, a notable subset of laborers chooses to remain during the off-season, even during the closure of the factories, because these migrant laborers are often from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and have no land or property in their place of origin. Recognizing the circumstances, Prakash allows them to stay on the factory premises. During this off-season at the factories, they engage in various other forms of labor, such as agricultural work, construction, or domestic tasks in Dimapur and its surrounding areas. Therefore, the arrangement and employment opportunities (though minimal) help the migrants sustain themselves even during the factory shutdown.

Kisan shared many similarities with Prakash; however, he pointed out several differences, such as the preference for labor recruitment based on place of origin, transportation, and accommodation. He said that most of his labor force hails from Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, and Assam. For a season contract, he ensures free transportation for his laborers to the destination and origin (both sides). When we asked why he recruits from distant places despite the availability of laborers within Dimapur and nearby states (Assam) willing to work at a cheaper rate, Kumar responded with a nod and a smile, stating, "Sometimes, work quality and reliability matter." He prefers his present workers for their

proficiency, trustworthiness, and a lesser degree of leaving the factory midway, especially during the rainy season (from May to October). Kisan also noted some fights and quarrels when the factory mixed different communities or people from various places of origin. Thus, the study revealed that the growth of migrant workers in the city is influenced not only by economic reasons and 'push factors' from the place of origin but also by pull factors such as transportation facilities, social networks, and communication, and the trust and reliability established between middlemen, migrant workers, and employers, as articulated by Kisan.

Dimapur has become a hotspot for migrant laborers, asserting dominance across almost every labor-intensive sector. As a result, many indigenous migrants of intra-district, inter-district, and intra-state struggle to secure employment and earn their daily wages. This situation has spurred intense competition in the job market, leading to tough negotiations over wages and contracts for various tasks. Native laborers frequently find themselves disadvantaged, unable to match the low-cost labor offered by in-migrant workers. This leads to the ongoing exclusion of indigenous laborers, who continue to struggle to secure even their daily wages from their fellow native employers.

Labor-Market Competition Between Locals and In-Migrant Laborers: The study provides additional insights into the increase in the number of in-migrant laborers, which is driven not only by economic reasons but also by multiple factors. For instance, in brick factories, as discussed earlier, every factory owner employs different migrant labor forces based on their places of origin and their social and

cultural identity. This recruitment process is primarily designed to prevent internal chaos within the workplace. In addition, the study revealed that most laborers in almost all sectors are in-migrants and not locals, and only a handful of locals were found as caretakers. The locals mainly held jobs as caretakers because it helped maintain the locals and the sector relationship; also, recruiting the locals acted as security in tackling any local goons' aggression or any form of illegal taxation (mainly from numerous insurgent groups). Many migrants and even local employers often exhibit hesitance to hire indigenous individuals due to perceptions of them being boastful, impolite, and lacking in adherence to workplace norms such as punctuality, diligence, regularity, and reliability. This argument is not solely from the migrant employers but is also confirmed by most native employers and ordinary citizens, who state that the relationship between the migrants and natives does not go along very well. Employers' apprehension also stems from past experiences with Indigenous employees who frequently depart after short periods of work; this raises doubts about their reliability and dependability in the eyes of employers.

Much like in-migrant laborers, many native individuals experience limited livelihood options, forcing them to depend on labor-intensive work. Many of these local workers possess valuable skills and experience across various sectors. However, they express concerns that the increasing influx of in-migrant workers, heightened labor competition, and more selective hiring practices have profoundly impacted their participation in the labor market. Employers often prefer in-migrants over native laborers, which has led to greater segmentation and social distancing between the two groups.

This bias discourages native workers from pursuing daily wage opportunities at laborer pick-up points, resulting in a noticeable decline in their job-seeking activity. Over time, this exclusion has reduced the presence of skilled indigenous workers within the labor force, limiting their chances of advancing to roles such as middlemen, contractors, supervisors, or managers. Moreover, the underrepresentation of indigenous people in leadership positions further reinforces their marginalisation, as labour recruitment continues to be influenced by identity markers such as race, religion, culture, and community. When we interviewed Along, a local laborer at the construction site, while fixing the doors and windows, we asked him how he and the locals search for work. He said, 'I live nearby; the owner knows I do this work.' When we asked about the difference in job search behavior between the migrants and local laborers, he also added, 'Most of the Nagas (laborers) do not go to Kharmahal and Railgate (two main places in Dimapur where workers are concentrated waiting for employers to clinch their daily wages). This is the reason why many of the locals only get work occasionally. He also said, 'These days, it all depends on connection with the contractors.'

Faizan, a contractor in the construction sector, was interviewed while looking after work at Purana Bazaar, Dimapur. When we inquired about employing local and migrant laborers, he replied, 'I have been doing this work for more than 10 years, but I have never encountered a Naga (laborer) come looking for work in this sector.' Considering the two sides of Along and Faizan, one can also understand that the locals' job search behavior is not as intensive as that of the migrants, and they do not have good relationships with the in-migrant contractors

or managers to secure jobs like the in-migrant workers.

Feminization of Migration and Women Laborers' Dynamics: While examining the growth of the in-migrant population in Nagaland, it is also imperative to look at the feminization of migration, especially those belonging to the laborforce. Most of the studies, including the Census and NSSO reports, reveal that the main factor in women's migration is due to marriage. However, it fails to provide insights into what awaits women next as they embark and prolong their stay living in precarious economic conditions in the destination state. Our study revealed that these in-migrant women who initially follow their husbands without the prospects of working eventually end up working as laborers due to economic constraints; as a result, even their children follow the trend of this occupation due to a lack of education and skills for other organized occupations. It extends their stay in the host city to a greater degree. There are also numerous reasons why the studies showed that the labor market in Dimapur city has many deserted women laborers (left by their husbands). The reasons behind the husband leaving the wife are multifaceted; however, they are predominantly due to having multiple wives, abuse of drugs, alcoholism, etc. The study showed that these women were entangled by not only economic reasons but also suffered social-political deprivation where they had no support from their family and were no longer welcome back home due to the large number of children; simultaneously, they remained deprived in almost all aspects in the destination state. The complicated hardships keep these women stranded and

unable to change occupations and places. This is also one of the main reasons the in-migrant women's labor force continues to accelerate in Nagaland.

Discontentment of the Natives: Looking at the border regions of Nagaland and Assam, there were numerous critical problems where the locals could not control the influx of migrants from the bordering areas of Assam. In an interview with Akivi, one of the Chairmen of a village in Niuland District that shares a border with Assam, when we asked about his take on migrant presence under his village jurisdiction, he said, 'There cannot be any strict restriction on the movement of the people because India has such a diversified nature where our fellow Nagas also migrate to other parts of the country, just as our fellow in-migrants move into our land. We accept migrants as long as they are not a threat, meaning if they do not bring illegal immigrants, illegal business, robbery, illegal property inheritance, or communal conflict. Our village is the last village of Dimapur that shares a boundary with Assam. The significant influx of migrants from Assam concerns security and maintaining law and order.'¹⁶

There are numerous instances where village authorities are unable to monitor the entry of all migrant populations, leading to tensions. This is because whenever any untoward incident occurs with locals or informed migrants (registered migrants or those under the village authority's knowledge), misunderstandings also arise in the villages in neighboring states. Therefore, the Chairman emphasized that the government's mechanisms to monitor the entry and exit of migrants in border areas require special attention. In addition, for

¹⁶ Field notes from the second phase, Nagaland, October 2022.

economic reasons and the mentality to retain autonomy and foster livelihood options for the native population at present and in the future, there has been casual conversation (though not formally or legally introduced) among the native people to discourage the influx of in-migrants, during an interview with Kheto, the chairman of a village in Niuland District highlighted several reasons for locals' apprehensions. He pointed out that intermarriage between the locals and migrants has escalated concerns significantly, making the locals anxious as it extends beyond mere temporary residency. The authorities and their local citizens faced substantial and intricate responsibilities, including transferring property to non-local families, which further complicates the situation.

Kheto also shared his opinion on the merits and demerits of the migrants' presence in the village, noting that migrants provide labor to agriculture, factories (primarily in brick-making), and domestic tasks. However, he lamented that the in-migrants gradually monopolized employment opportunities, leaving locals marginalized in the labor market. This issue extends beyond mere employment; it signifies a detachment of locals from traditional occupations, exacerbating the erosion of skills, experiences, interests, and innovations in farming.

Indigenous elders are not the only ones feeling this apprehension today; youths and students are also raising questions and seeking solutions. Consequently, the Naga

Students' Federation has strongly condemned the lack of effectiveness in implementing the ILP in the state. Thereby, they are leading the movement for stringent ILP regulations. The Nagaland Tribune wrote:

The Federation further stated that the "overwhelming population of people with questionable identities" poses a significant threat to the identity, culture, and survival of the Nagas, with the potential to "plunge our society into a situation wherein we could become a minority in our land."¹⁷

Local News (HornbillTV, November 14, 2023) recently aired a notable report titled "Dimapur new worry: the unchecked influx of daily workers." It stated that a lack of regulation has increased the influx of migrant workers from Assam. There is a concern; every day, workers from Assam ply around the city; this concern encouraged Hornbill TV to discuss the matter. The reporter asked a local laborer in an interview segment if they face job deprivation due to the presence of non-local migrant workers. The local labor highlighted a prevailing sentiment of marginalization of local laborers; he said, 'Currently, securing daily wage work in Nagaland presents significant challenges. If we (the locals) think about it, even our native employers do not call the local laborers. Many 'plain people' (in-migrant workers) take the labor work and thrive, whereas many of us cannot even provide for our family's basic livelihood, struggling for survival.'¹⁸

¹⁷ Nagaland Tribune (2023), NSF directs units to conduct a census on 'outsiders' in their jurisdiction, appeals govt for practical implementations of ILP, April 25. Available at: <https://nagalandtribune.in/nsf-directs-units-to-conduct-census-on-outsiders-in-their-jurisdiction-appeals-govt-for-effective-implementation-of-ilp>.

¹⁸HornbillTV (2023) Dimapur new worry: Unchecked Influx of Daily workers. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIQUPkRaXX8/> [Youtube] (November 14, 2023). Translated by the author.

Migration Impacts and Challenges of In-migrant Laborers

It would be wrong to accept that in-migrants are always responsible for any threats, intrusion, or monopoly unless one grasps the social, economic, and political motives of the government, organization, or individual. Looking at the case of the Northeast region, migrants are also exploited for economic and political benefit in conflict zones and bordering states. For example, from an economic perspective, it is believed that most of the tea laborers were brought to Assam during the British colonial period of the 1860s from present-day Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, West Bengal, and Andhra Pradesh (Misra, 2014, pp. 274-75). From a political viewpoint, just as Bhaumik put it, those Bengalis-Hindus and Muslims who were pushed out of Assam were used as protective buffers against Naga expansionism to protect its territorial integrity (Bhaumik 2009, 130,133)¹⁹.

There were some instances where the in-migrants enjoyed advantages over the locals. For instance, during the study, one of the chairmen from Nuland District of Nagaland highlighted a case where the government allocated tractors directly to in-migrant cultivators without consulting the landowners. When landowners (locals) require these tractors for their work, they must borrow them from the in-migrants, often at a cost. This scenario highlights discontentment with the economic polarization caused by in-migrants in the destination state.

Given the NER states with its limited resources and the status of minorities among

the minorities in the country, ethnocentrism remains prevalent; thereby, many locals believe that restricting the influx of immigrants appears to be the most viable alternative for addressing these challenges. For example, Bhaumik suggested that migration from other Indian states be discouraged to prevent large-scale displacement in conflict-prone areas such as the Northeast. A stringent national labor policy is required to protect indigenous populations, allowing workers from other states only if local skills are unavailable (2009, 134). However, in a practical sense, enforcing strict restrictions on the influx of in-migrant laborers is improbable, particularly in regions with heavy industrial activity, factories, and infrastructural development, as numerous labor-intensive sectors largely depend on these labor forces. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the 'reverse migration' of in-migrant laborers returning to their places of origin led to widespread labor shortages, halting numerous construction and development projects in and around Dimapur. Additionally, in areas such as Nuland and Chumukedima, brick manufacturers are predominantly operated by in-migrants as proprietors or workers. Therefore, it highlights their vital contribution as providers of low-cost labor and as catalysts for local development. Consequently, enforcing restrictions without an adequate legal system would not only contravene the constitutional assurance of 'freedom of movement across the nation but would also impede many ongoing developmental activities that require labor participation in the destination state.

¹⁹ "Indeed, the same administration that was pushing these Bengalis-both Hindu and Muslims-out of Assam was willing to use them as a protective buffer against Naga expansion

so that Assam's territorial boundaries, constantly under a challenge from aggressive neighboring tribal groups, could be preserved" (Bhaumik 2009, 130, 133).

Vulnerability of In-Migrant Laborers: There were numerous occasions when laborers were looked down upon because of their inferior occupation, as Misra (2014) referred to Adivasis' struggle in Assam. He pointed out an incident on November 24, 2007, on the streets of Guwahati, where the stripping of the Adivasi girl took place. Though the incident was not seen as an Assamese-Adivasi clash, many see it as the ultimate expression of prejudices and class hatred, as well as a mindset that views tea garden workers as inferior human beings. This attitude is particularly prevalent since migrants are seen as 'other'. There were no severe tensions between in-migrants and the natives during the initial years, particularly when the number of migrants was minimal. However, this was achieved because active management prevented tea workers from mingling with the Indigenous Assamese people (Misra, 2014, p. 275).

This segregation of natives and migrants is very much present even in today's context. It is seen that when the in-migrants hold certain economic and political positions within the native circle, it often triggers the feeling of natives being under threat. Such instances are not new to the NER, just as Bhaumik argued regarding Mizoram, where the Mizos, who once considered themselves ethnic cousins of the Chins from Burma, now oppose Chin migration. It is seen that all major Mizo parties, including the MNF, which led the separatist movement for 20 years for the cause of 'Greater Mizoram', now consider Chins as unwelcome intruders for economic reasons. The reasons are primarily economic, as the region's

resources are scarce, and the agrarian economy cannot support a larger populace (2009, 149). Similar instances tend to occur even in Nagaland districts, namely Dimapur, Nuland, and Chumukedima, where demographic imbalance and economic and political tensions were felt. A notable illustration took place on April 19, 2023, when the DC of Dimapur ordered an extension of the ILP system in the entire Dimapur district, around '1.5 lakh non-tribal people were left with an uncertain future,' said the General Secretary of Citizens' Rights Preservation Committee (CRPC) Assam²⁰. It is evident that Migrants, especially the labor force, often fall into precarious positions, vulnerable to heightened tensions and social exclusion.

The study revealed fewer legitimate ILP cardholders than permits issued by some insurgent organizations. These organizations mandate that all migrants possess permit (as identity proof) issued by them. According to the study, most migrants are at the mercy of insurgencies because the state does not intervene to counteract the arbitrary actions of some insurgent personnel. As a result, migrant groups faced obstacles in obtaining even the most basic kind of freedom of movement within the NER, even when they possessed legitimate travel licenses like the ILP. On numerous occasions, insurgent personnel would stop migrants on their way to or from work or while they were traveling to verify that in-migrant had obtained the permit they issued. When migrants were discovered without the card, some insurgents would impose fines on them arbitrarily and

²⁰ The Times of India (2023) Assam NGO demands withdrawal of ILP from Nagaland's Dimapur Dist, April 24. Available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/assam-ngo-demands-withdrawal-of-ilp-from-nagalands-dimapur-dist/articleshow/99719149.cms>.

demand that they purchase the card immediately. These actions were reportedly carried out by those in power who abused their authority and sought personal financial gain. Therefore, the majority of in-migrants in Nagaland, especially those on the peripheries, experience these problems, leading to multiple forms of physical assault, harassment, and human rights violations. This crisis is not an isolated issue, as similar activities were notable even in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, and Assam. This underscores not only the arbitrary nature of insurgents against the in-migrants but also shows how the states in NER have disregarded the issue of migration and migrants' experiences.

The labor market polarization caused by in-migration is another aspect that has further intensified the native discontent, especially amid rising local unemployment. The study revealed a growing indigenous awareness of the long-term socio-economic consequences, exacerbated by governmental negligence. As the issue has become more sensitive, the risk of evictions, displacement, and hostility toward in-migrant laborers may escalate.

What is concerning is the blatant neglect of the migration phenomenon and its implications on the lives of migrant laborers, where mostly women and children suffer the brunt of any tensions or conflicts, as discussed earlier. The concern for the in-migrant laborers stems from several factors such as lack of legal documents, administrative hurdles, internal communal tensions, biased nature in the selection of labor force, and absence of social security measures for the migrants.

The study showed a prevalent sense of fear and insecurity among both native residents

and in-migrants. Native participants, particularly village, ward, and colony authorities, as well as local laborers, shared concerns about real and practical crises linked to the presence of in-migrants. For instance, Kheto highlighted issues such as the economic dominance of migrants, the effects of intermarriage, and the transfer of properties to non-locals. Problems such as theft, robberies, illegal businesses, communal tensions, and an increase in crime often go unaddressed. Additionally, sensitive border issues exist where government intervention is lacking. The presence of commuting migrants, who travel between Assam and Nagaland for employment, business, and marketing, has also intensified fears, as there is little regulation of these migrants, an issue recognized by local authorities.

The residential segregation of migrant workers, who typically live in isolated or enclosed areas or are concentrated within a single ward or colony, leads to a separation from the native population, particularly the Nagas. This segregation is often strategic for in-migrant laborers, as it offers low-cost living and a sense of safety and security, along with stronger social bonds among migrants. However, these separated settlements are associated with socio-cultural, political, and identity crises, which heighten the differences between migrants and natives. As a result, this separation fosters exclusion, making trust and cooperation difficult. For example, many in-migrants hold contracts and serve as middlemen in the labor market, often hiring their own labor force because they are more accessible and cost effective. This practice attracts more workers to the state and encourage migrants to bring their family members, given the high demand for their

labor. Consequently, this dynamic creates a sense of marginalization for local residents within the labor market, leading to frustration among the native population due to the influx of in-migrants, regardless of their occupations. This situation diminishes opportunities for mutual benefit and exacerbates the state's demographic, economic, and political challenges.

From a humanitarian perspective, the situation is even more concerning, as a significant number of in-migrant workers, regardless of their legal status, often find themselves stranded and remain in precarious situations whenever migration issues arise in the state. Although civil society groups, media reporters, and regional and native political parties, particularly from the opposition, raise concerns about the migration crisis, the issue remains largely unaddressed and unrecognized in terms of effective migration governance. This neglect contributes to a crisis that often results in a bitter or unfriendly relationship between in-migrants and native residents.

Conclusion

India, characterized by its large population and diversity, promotes freedom of movement as enshrined in Article 19 of the constitution; nevertheless, due to the lack of migration governance and labor laws, the in-migrant laborers are often left with precarious positions, facing lawlessness and human rights infringements across the country. The study revealed numerous instances of economic and political exploitation by employers (natives and in-migrants) who capitalized on the predicament of laborers.

Northeast studies often overlook the ongoing impacts of the large, unregulated

influx of migrants, which has aggravated identity crises and fuels conflicts between in-migrants and natives. This unregulated migration heightens existing ethnic, armed, socio-economic, and political tensions, posing a severe threat to peaceful coexistence. Indigenous apprehensions are not only economic but also socio-political, with concerns about intermarriage, property transfer, and land allotment for the migrants, creating a sense of insecurity.

It is imperative to point out that migration governance needs special focus, which entails various measures such as the formal registration of in-migrant laborers, provision of social security, establishment of helplines, access to primary medical care, implementation of awareness programs regarding rights, and fostering a conducive, friendly environment for both in-migrants and the local populace. Without formal regulatory bodies focusing on specific areas such as colonies, villages, wards, towns, or districts, the influx of in-migrants would exacerbate the existing crisis. The significance of addressing the challenges faced by both in-migrants and natives lies in numerous merits, including safeguarding territorial integrity, empowering unemployed youths, and responsibly managing the influx of migrants on humanitarian grounds. Therefore, policymakers must develop comprehensive strategies that address the needs of both native labor forces and in-migrants to foster social cohesion and economic growth. By acknowledging the complexities of migration issues and implementing inclusive policies, the NER can work towards a more sustainable and harmonious future.

Recommendations

- ***Understanding Migration Experiences:*** Policymakers must recognize that migration is a complex phenomenon shaped by socio-economic, cultural, and sectoral dynamics. Understanding the diverse experiences of migrants requires a nuanced approach that considers different migration streams, including rural-to-urban and urban-to-rural movements, as well as formal and informal employment. Analyzing disaggregated data across sectors and migration types is crucial for developing effective, context-specific policies. Factors such as family background and workplace conditions significantly influence each migrant's experience. A systematic categorization reflecting sectoral divisions is essential to grasp the diversity and commonalities of these experiences, ultimately informing more equitable policy design.
- ***Classifying Migration Types:*** It is important to categorize and comprehend the various types of migration, such as circular, commuting, seasonal, and permanent. Each type has its own unique characteristics, challenges, and implications. By recognizing these distinctions, policymakers can better tailor their strategies to meet the specific needs and concerns.
- ***Balancing Migration in Transitional Nagaland:*** Nagaland's evolution from a relatively isolated, traditional economy to a more interconnected and diverse society has been influenced by socio-political changes and broader economic liberalization trends. This transformation has led to a gradual move away from ethnocentrism towards a more varied economy, highlighting the need for appropriate and context-sensitive migration policies that can adapt to the requirements of a dynamic and interdependent economy. Therefore, addressing the issue of migration through inclusive and responsive governance is essential in today's context.
- ***Data-Driven Policies:*** The study highlights that simply establishing regulatory frameworks like the Inner Line Permit (ILP) is not enough to tackle the complexities of migration. Effective governance relies on comprehensive quantitative and qualitative research that examines the diverse facets of migration. Additionally, simplifying legal and administrative procedures is crucial, as many migrant laborers, especially those with low literacy and illiterates, are often troubled by bureaucratic demands for documentation. Streamlining these processes can enhance compliance and foster greater inclusion within the regulatory framework.
- ***Adapting Inclusive Models:*** Effectively addressing in-migration requires an inclusive, community-driven approach. Policy planning must engage grassroots workers, employers, local leaders, women's groups, student organizations, and ethnic support systems. Involving diverse stakeholders enhances the legitimacy of migration governance. By creating a platform for dialogue and support, the initiative eased tensions around in-migrants and empowered day laborers through formal recognition. This model offers insights for Northeast India, where the complexities of migration demand collaborative, locally rooted solutions.

- **Fair Wages and Awareness Programs:** Implementing fair wage structures, encompassing compensation for overtime and performance-based incentives, is crucial for alleviating workplace exploitation. Additionally, targeted awareness programs should be established to educate migrants about their legal rights and available support systems, empowering them to make informed decisions and reducing their vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation.
- **Simplifying Legal Procedures:** To enhance the effectiveness of migration governance, it is essential to adopt more inclusive and informed strategies. Bylander (2019) challenges the notion that legal migration channels inherently provide protection, pointing out that many migrants face bureaucratic obstacles and exploitation. He advocates for eliminating intermediaries, simplifying documentation processes, allowing migrants the freedom to change employers, and supporting their collective bargaining rights. These measures are particularly critical in contexts where low literacy or illiteracy, combined with limited access to legal resources, impede migrants' engagement. Providing language assistance and streamlining procedures can promote greater participation and compliance within migration governance.
- **Strategic Mechanisms:** Effective migration management requires coordinated strategies that address immediate and long-term challenges. Key measures include formal registration of migrants, establishment of labor

unions, and awareness programs to enhance coordination among migrants, state authorities, and civil society. Furthermore, collaboration with international organizations and neighboring countries can significantly improve the effectiveness of policy interventions. Cross-border cooperation is essential for tackling the root causes of migration and for developing sustainable, rights-based solutions that benefit both migrant populations and host communities.

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