

Labour Market Trends and Migration Patterns in West Bengal

MAITREESH GHATAK, TAMOGHNA HALDER

West Bengal presents a puzzle in India's labour market and migration landscape. Its employment rate exceeds the national average, yet this growth has been driven by a rising, market-facing informal sector with falling real earnings. Using data from the e-Shram registry as well as from the Periodic Labour Force Surveys, this paper examines how this labour market pattern shapes migration into and out of the state. Bengali outmigrants in the unorganised sector are less educated than the national migrant pool and disproportionately concentrated in construction and capital goods manufacturing, travelling southward to Kerala and Karnataka through corridors shaped by both wage differentials and migrant networks. Male and female migration streams diverge sharply. Comparing in-migrants and outmigrants reveals a further asymmetry—West Bengal exports less-educated manufacturing and construction workers while receiving more-educated workers in transport and services. Taken together, these patterns point to a labour market reorganising itself around the absence of the industrial base it once had, with no alternative source of employment emerging within the state to take its place.

West Bengal occupies a paradoxical middle position in India's development trajectory. It is the fourth-most populous state, home to roughly 7% of the national population, and by several conventional measures, sits neither among the states that lag far behind, such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (UP), nor among some of the leaders like Karnataka or Tamil Nadu. Its per capita income relative to the national average has declined from 1.35 in 1961 to 0.78 in 2024 in current prices, though in real terms, the fall is less dramatic (Chakraborty et al 2026). Yet, labour market data raises uncomfortable questions. West Bengal's employment rate is higher than the national average and has generally been rising, but its employment growth does not appear to be driven by an expanding formal sector, since the fraction of those who are either employed as regular wage or salaried workers or casual workers has fallen. Rather, one of the main drivers is a rising share of own-account workers, and yet, this is a category whose real earnings have been falling. Moreover, across all categories of employment, earnings have been lower than the national average. Workers are finding work—but increasingly in low-return, market-facing informal arrangements that offer neither stability nor adequate remuneration (State of Working India 2026). For a significant and growing share of West Bengal's workforce, migration into the unorganised labour markets of other states has become a structural response to this deficit.

West Bengal presents a puzzle in India's migration patterns precisely because it does not fit the canonical profile of a large informal migration-sending state. The standard story—poor, young, agrarian states sending workers to richer, more urbanised ones—maps well onto Bihar and UP. West Bengal does not fit any of these profiles to the same degree. Its population is ageing faster than the large northern states. It has a longer industrial history than Jharkhand or Odisha. And yet, it is a consistent net exporter of informal labour, with a migration pattern that is, as we show, more structured and more distinctive than its aggregate net migration figure suggests.

The e-Shram registry, launched in 2021 by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, makes it possible to ask more precise questions about this pattern. With close to 30 crore registered unorganised sector workers and information on the current state of employment and permanent state of residence, e-Shram offers the first large-scale database through which interstate informal migration can be studied at the level of individual worker characteristics—age, education, occupation, gender, and destination. We use this data to build a detailed profile of

The authors thank Jitendra Singh for sharing with them PLFS data and some of the summary statistics from PLFS presented in this paper. They also thank Achin Chakraborty as well as Sukanta Bhattacharya, Rohini Bhattacharya, Urba Chaudhuri, Pushkar Maitra, and S K Ritadhi for helpful comments on the first draft, and Prateet Jain for research assistance with the PLFS data.

Maitreesh Ghatak (*m.ghatak@lse.ac.uk*) is with the London School of Economics. Tamoghna Halder (*tamoghna.halder@apu.edu.in*) is with Azim Premji University, Bengaluru.

West Bengal's informal outmigrants, benchmark them against migrants from the rest of India and from the eastern zone, and examine the profile of workers arriving in West Bengal for comparison.

The findings reveal some specific, and in several respects, surprising features concerning the migration patterns of West Bengal. Bengali migrants in the unorganised sector are less educated than the national informal migrant pool and are concentrated disproportionately in construction and capital goods manufacturing. They travel southward to Kerala and Karnataka—at rates that the geographical proximity logic cannot explain, bypassing more popular all India destinations like Delhi and Gujarat. Within this southward flow, the male and female corridors are strikingly distinct: men go to construction work in Kerala and Bengaluru, and women go to domestic work in Haryana and Delhi. And when we turn the lens inward, West Bengal is not simply losing workers—it is exchanging them, sending out lower-educated construction and manufacturing workers and receiving more educated workers in transport and services—an occupational substitution with an education gradient that signals how the local economy has reorganised around the loss of industries it once had. This leaves us with one implication—is West Bengal suffering from what the larger literature on structural transformation would call premature deindustrialisation?

Our analysis draws on the Harris–Todaro framework (Harris and Todaro 1970) and the new economics of migration (Stark and Bloom 1985) to situate outmigration as a structural response to West Bengal's labour market conditions, and on Munshi's (2003) network model to explain why specific corridors persist beyond what wage differentials alone would predict. Rodrik's (2016) premature deindustrialisation thesis provides a broader backdrop. Rodrik shows that manufacturing's employment and output shares now peak and decline at markedly lower income levels than they did for early industrialisers, blocking off the reallocation of workers into higher-productivity employment before that shift is complete. We extend this lens to West Bengal's experience, where manufacturing contracted from the 1970s without the local labour market developing alternative channels to absorb the workers it displaced. Within the Indian literature, Deshingkar and Akter (2009), the *Economic Survey 2016–17*, and Debroy and Misra (2024) document the scale and spatial structure of internal migration, while Rogaly and Coppard (2003) and Choudhury and Majumdar (2024) provide the West Bengal-specific context.

West Bengal's Labour Market vis-à-vis India

We document West Bengal's labour market performance relative to the all India average across three dimensions: labour force participation, employment structure, and earnings. All indicators use current weekly status (cws) drawn from unit-level Period Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data, from 2017–18 to 2023–24, following Ghatak et al (2024, 2026). Earnings are deflated to real terms using state-specific composite consumer price indices (CPIs), expressed in 2016–17 prices.

Table 1 shows the share of the working-age population (aged 15+) in employment, unemployment, and outside the labour force for West Bengal and at the all India level from 2017–18 to 2023–24. West Bengal's employment rate has been above the national average throughout the period, with the exception of 2019–20, and the gap has widened from 1.1 percentage points in 2017–18 to 2.3 percentage points in 2023–24. Both the unemployment share and the out of labour force share have generally been below the all India average. The rise in West Bengal's employment rate has drawn in people both from the pool of active job-seekers and from those previously outside the labour force entirely.

Table 1: Labour Force Status—West Bengal and All India, CWS

(% of population aged 15+)

Year	West Bengal				All-India			
	Emp	Unemp	OLF	Total	Emp	Unemp	OLF	Total
2017–18	45.2	2.9	51.9	100	44.1	3.5	52.4	100
2018–19	46.5	2.8	50.7	100	44.3	3.5	52.2	100
2019–20	46.1	3.9	50.0	100	46.7	3.8	49.5	100
2020–21	48.1	2.9	49.0	100	47.5	3.4	49.0	100
2021–22	48.7	2.7	48.6	100	48.3	2.9	48.8	100
2022–23	53.5	1.4	45.2	100	51.8	2.3	45.9	100
2023–24	56.0	1.6	42.4	100	53.7	2.4	44.0	100

Emp = Employed; Unemp = Unemployed; OLF = Out of labour force.

Source: Unit-level PLFS data, CWS, age 15+, rural+urban combined.

Table 2 shows the distribution of workers by employment status. In 2023–24, the share of unpaid family helpers in West Bengal (10.38%) is substantially lower than the national average (17.08%), consistent with the state's lower agricultural employment base. The employer share (5.52%) is notably higher than the national data (3.39%). Casual labour (22.66%) exceeds the national figure (18.70%), while the salaried share (21.20%) is marginally below the national average (23.29%).

Table 2: Employment Status Distribution—West Bengal and All India, CWS

(% of workers aged 15+)

Year	West Bengal					All-India				
	OAW	Empl	UHF	Sal	Cas	OAW	Empl	UHF	Sal	Cas
2017–18	36.29	2.13	6.83	23.27	31.48	37.43	1.95	12.35	24.11	24.20
2018–19	39.35	2.29	6.42	23.51	28.43	37.70	2.21	11.66	25.36	23.10
2019–20	39.36	2.78	7.68	23.63	26.54	37.19	2.14	14.87	23.39	22.40
2020–21	38.91	4.16	7.70	20.70	28.53	38.15	2.09	15.62	21.83	22.30
2021–22	38.40	4.97	8.77	22.22	25.64	37.72	2.61	15.11	23.18	21.40
2022–23	39.61	5.03	10.20	21.93	23.22	37.68	3.15	15.94	22.30	20.90
2023–24	40.24	5.52	10.38	21.20	22.66	37.51	3.39	17.08	23.29	18.70

OAW = own-account worker; Empl = employer; UHF = unpaid family helper; Sal = regular wage/salaried; Cas = casual labour (including MGNREGA). Rows sum to 100.

Source: Unit-level PLFS data. CWS, age 15+, rural+urban combined.

Using salaried employment as a broad proxy for the formal sector, West Bengal's informal sector share in 2023–24 is approximately 78.80%, broadly similar to the national average of 76.71%. But aggregate informality shares conceal an important compositional difference. Nationally, informal employment has shifted towards unpaid family helpers—the least mobile and most household-bound category—while West Bengal's informal employment is concentrated in own-account work and casual wage labour, both of which involve active market participation at low and deteriorating returns. The implication is that the state's informality is not of the sheltered

household-enterprise variety that dominates the national picture, but of a more exposed, market-facing kind in which workers must repeatedly seek work or customers at below-average wages.

Table 3 shows average real daily earnings by worker type. West Bengal workers earn less than the national average across all employment categories. The gap is most pronounced for own-account workers: in 2023–24 nationally they earned 34% more than West Bengal (₹207.45/day). Salaried workers nationally earned 14% more than West Bengal (₹425.08/day). Casual labourers nationally earned 8% more than West Bengal (₹269.32/day), the smaller gap partly reflecting the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) wage floors, which compress the West Bengal-all-India differential.

Table 3: Mean Real Daily Earnings by Employment Status—West Bengal and All India (CWS)

Year	West Bengal				All India			
	OAW	Empl	Sal	Cas	OAW	Empl	Sal	Cas
2017–18	223.08	496.77	352.36	207.52	306.92	669.34	500.24	249.12
2018–19	222.10	455.36	355.61	234.21	315.27	716.84	494.09	263.26
2019–20	224.03	441.12	351.69	232.82	285.10	634.71	478.86	254.36
2020–21	209.43	459.42	373.17	232.49	280.32	624.39	479.84	267.82
2021–22	229.66	418.80	383.92	273.97	293.93	638.33	490.51	296.56
2022–23	225.77	538.34	387.12	271.33	300.19	697.16	481.80	301.12
2023–24	207.45	529.48	425.08	269.32	279.04	689.39	484.67	292.07
Average	219.45	486.61	381.11	251.52	292.29	671.15	485.55	278.88

OAW = own-account worker; Empl = employer; Sal = regular wage/salaried; Cas = casual labour. Wages are real values. Unpaid family helpers are excluded.

Source: Unit-level PLFS data; current weekly status (CWS).

The decline in own-account real earnings is not merely a level difference but a deteriorating trend. West Bengal's own-account real earnings fell from ₹223.08 in 2017–18 to ₹207.45 in 2023–24—a real decline of 7.5% relative to the 2023–24 figure—even as the own-account share of employment was rising. The co-movement of a rising own-account share and falling real own-account earnings is the signature of demand-side labour market weakness: workers unable to access wage employment crowd into low-return self-employment, driving down its returns.

Ghatak et al (2024, 2026) establish that at the national level, rising own-account shares with falling real earnings are the signature of distress-driven employment expansion. West Bengal exhibits this pattern in a more acute form. Nationally, distress flows into two residual channels—own-account work and unpaid family helpers. In West Bengal, the latter channel is less operative, given that the state agricultural employment share (36.7%) is 7 percentage points below the national average, and agricultural household enterprises predominantly generate unpaid family helper employment. Distress-driven entrants in the state therefore have essentially one residual: own-account work, with correspondingly more concentrated crowding pressure, helping explain why own-account earnings nationally remain 34% higher than West Bengal's, even after accounting for its lower cost of living.

This distress pattern also has a distinct gender dimension.¹ Unpaid family helper work—smaller residual channel overall—is disproportionately unavailable to women specifically.

Women's unpaid family helper work share in West Bengal is little more than half the national female average (20.5% versus 33.5% in 2023–24), consistent with the state's smaller agricultural base, limiting the household-enterprise work in which unpaid family helper employment is concentrated. Own-account work absorbs this gap—women's own-account work share is well above the national female average (in 2023–24, they were, respectively, 50.6% and 33.8%)—but at earnings that are especially depressed. Women in own-account work earn 37% less than their national counterparts (₹75.5/day versus ₹120.7/day)—a larger shortfall than the aggregate own-account gap reported above—and the state's female-to-male earnings ratio within own-account work (26%) is narrower than the national ratio (35%). Own-account work is thus not a limited option for women in West Bengal, so much as a poorly remunerated one, which helps explain why outmigration into domestic work, as documented later in the paper, becomes an attractive alternative for a specific segment of West Bengal's female workforce.

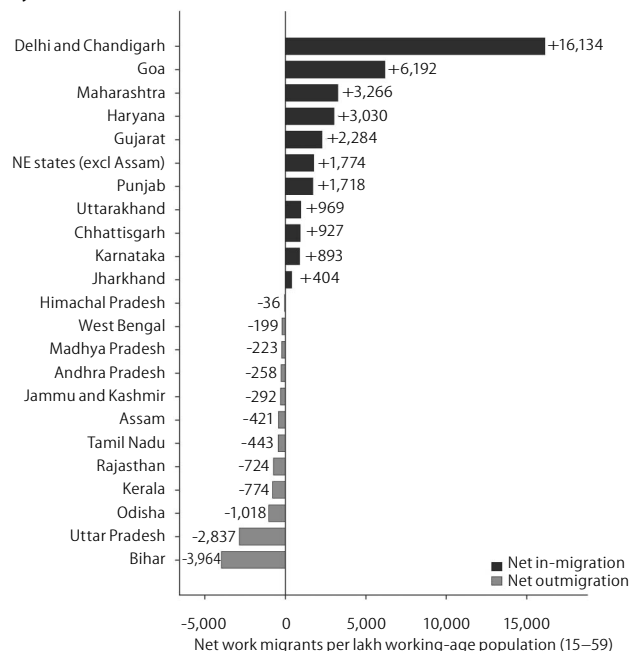
The one feature that cuts against a simple distress narrative is the state's salaried real earnings, which have risen from ₹352.36 to ₹425.08 between 2017–18 and 2023–24—a 21% real increase—while national salaried earnings have been essentially flat. This is consistent with a polarisation of employment quality: a salaried segment that is not growing in share but paying better for those within it, alongside a growing own-account sector paying less. West Bengal's falling unemployment rate should not therefore be read as straightforward welfare improvement. The relevant question is not whether people are finding work but what kind of work they are finding—and the earnings data give a clear answer.

Taken together, the West Bengal data present a sharper and more concentrated version of the national distress pattern: the same mechanism of weak formal labour demand crowding workers into residual low-return employment, but operating through a single channel rather than two, with correspondingly steeper real earnings deterioration.

Migration as a Plausible Pathway

The labour market insights in the previous section raise an immediate question: If formal employment is thin, own-account work is crowded and paying less in real terms, and casual wages are below the national average, what are the options that workers have? The standard answer in the development economics literature is that they migrate. The Harris–Todaro framework, in its simplest form, predicts that workers move when the expected returns at the destination exceed what the origin labour market offers, accounting for the probability of finding work. West Bengal's labour market, as documented above, creates precisely the conditions under which this balance would tip towards workers leaving the state, whether for informal or formal work.

But the decision to migrate in the unorganised sector is rarely a clean wage-maximising calculation. The modern migration literature, beginning with Stark and Bloom (1985), reframes migration as a household strategy—a way to diversify income streams across geographically separated labour markets,

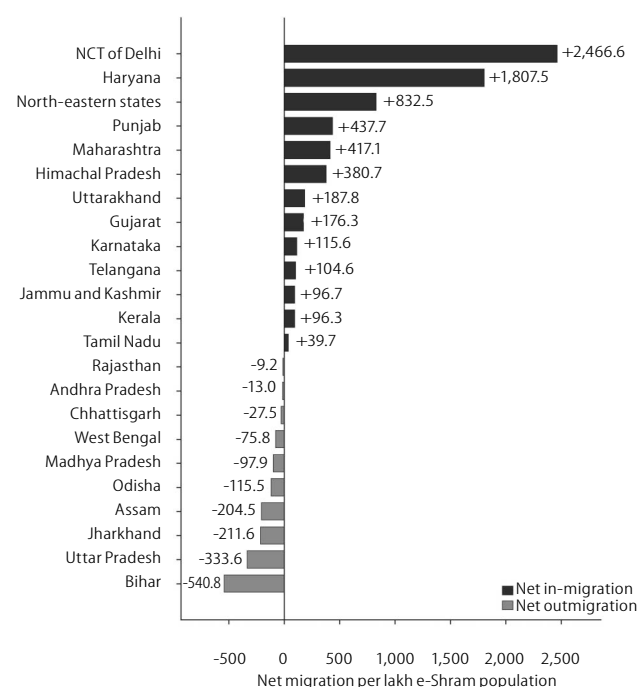
Figure 1: Net Work Migrants per Lakh Working-age Population (15–59), by State

Source: Census of India 2011, D03 table. Interstate migrants, work/employment reason, all durations. Net = in-migrants minus outmigrants. NE states (excl Assam): Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Delhi and Chandigarh combined. Small UTs excluded.

reducing exposure to local shocks. For a household in West Bengal whose primary earner is in own-account work with deteriorating real returns, sending a second member into the informal labour market of another state is rational portfolio management. The structural conditions documented earlier—a formal sector not expanding, an own-account sector paying badly, a casual wage floor compressed by MGNREGA—make this calculus increasingly attractive over time.

This structural logic has an established empirical backdrop. The *Economic Survey 2016–17* showed that annual interstate labour mobility runs at five to nine million people, with poorer states with thinner formal sectors as consistent net senders. Debroy and Misra (2024) confirm Bihar–West Bengal as one of the most active bilateral migration dyads and West Bengal's position as a structurally persistent exporter of informal labour. Choudhury and Majumdar (2024), using PLFS 2020–21, confirm that the eastern region has shifted from net receiver to net sender over the post-liberalisation period, and that socio-economic differentials shape occupational placement at destination.

The 2011 Census provides systematic evidence that West Bengal was already moving in this dimension. Figure 1 presents net migrants per lakh working age population across Indian states from the 2011 Census. West Bengal records a net outmigration of -199 per lakh working age population—modest in absolute terms against Bihar's -3,964 and UP's -2,837, but unambiguously negative, placing West Bengal among the net senders even at a time when its per capita income was closer to the national average than it is today. Karnataka was already a net receiver at +893, and Delhi and Haryana were drawing large net inflows. The spatial pattern—poor and younger

Figure 2: Net Migration per Lakh e-Shram Population (In–Out), by State

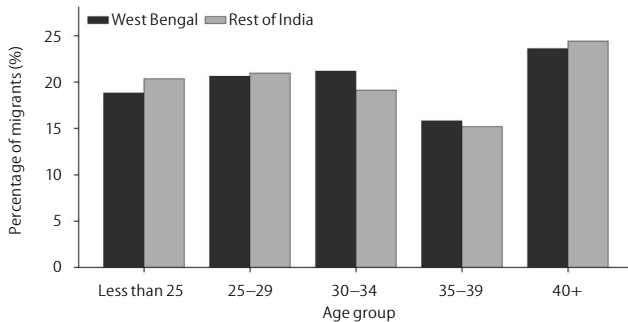
Source: Authors' calculation from e-Shram registry data. Net = in-migrants minus outmigrants per lakh registered e-Shram population.

states sending, richer and older states receiving—is exactly what the State of Working India (2026)² documents as the pan India signature of informal labour market migration.

What is notable about West Bengal's 2011 position is where it is on this distribution. It is not positioned alongside Bihar and UP at the extreme end of net senders but is among states that are mild but consistent net senders. This is consistent with the labour market portrait presented earlier, where West Bengal is not among the poorest of states, but its formal employment base is insufficient to absorb workers at adequate wages, creating a steady pressure towards outmigration that is structural rather than acute.

While PLFS 2020–21 sheds some light on labour migration, it was carried out at a time of massive uncertainties posed by the pandemic, which inevitably caused patterns of migration that are far from the usual. Hence, for reasons explained in the appendix, we use the e-Shram registry for insights on unorganised sector migration. By 2024, when the e-Shram registry was made publicly available (described in the appendix in detail), we can see that the 2011 patterns persist. Figure 2 presents net migration per lakh e-Shram population across states. West Bengal registers -75.8—again modest relative to Bihar (-540.8) and UP (-333.6), which dominate the out-migration end, while the National Capital Territory of Delhi (2466.6) and Haryana (1807.5) lead at the receiving end. West Bengal's position has not changed in character since 2011. It remains a steady, structurally driven exporter of informal labour, distinct from the mass demographic overflow of the large northern states.

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) data adds a further dimension. West Bengal has 67.3 workers per

Figure 3: Age Distribution of Migrants—West Bengal vs Rest of India

Source: e-Shram database.

firm in the organised sector against Maharashtra's 104.4—a sign of smaller, less productive firms and a thinner formal employment base. Even unorganised sector migration, as Figure 2 shows, flows from states that experience low growth in the formal sector to those which experience high growth. West Bengal's formality deficit is, therefore, a possible driver of migration, channelling workers towards states where the organised sector generates sufficient demand to pull unorganised sector workers into spillover informal jobs in construction, manufacturing, and services at wages that West Bengal's own market cannot offer.

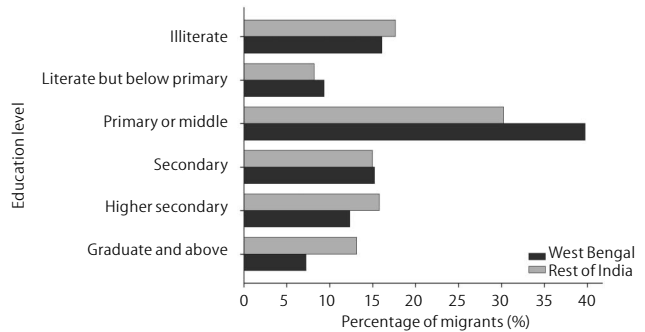
What migration offers workers from West Bengal is not simply a wage premium but access to a different kind of labour market—one where manufacturing and construction activity generates sustained demand for workers West Bengal has in abundance but cannot productively employ at home. The rest of this paper asks who those workers are, where they go, and what they do.

Who Migrates? Profile of Bengali Migrant in Unorganised Sector

Figure 3 presents the age distribution of e-Shram migrants from West Bengal alongside migrants from the rest of India. The two distributions are statistically similar with workers below the age of 30 being over-represented relative to the general workforce as compared to PLFS.³

While the over-representation of youth among unorganised sector migrants is a pan-India feature, the fact that it holds true for West Bengal as well is specifically important. The median age in West Bengal is higher than in UP, Bihar, and Jharkhand. The pan-India migration trends presented in the State of Working India (2026) suggest that migration flows from younger to older states, and given that West Bengal's population is relatively older, one may predict the state to be a net-receiver of migrants. Instead, not only is it a net-sending state, but its migrants look demographically identical to workers leaving much younger states. This points to a larger structural feature of West Bengal's labour market—where migration is not necessarily a mechanism to adjust for the growing pressure of the youth population, but because the local labour market opportunities are insufficient, a broad enough section of the workforce, especially the youth, migrate at rates comparable to the rest of India.

Such a hypothesis is further supported by the educational distribution of the Bengali migrants. Figure 4 plots this

Figure 4: Education Profile of Migrants—West Bengal vs Rest of India

Source: e-Shram database.

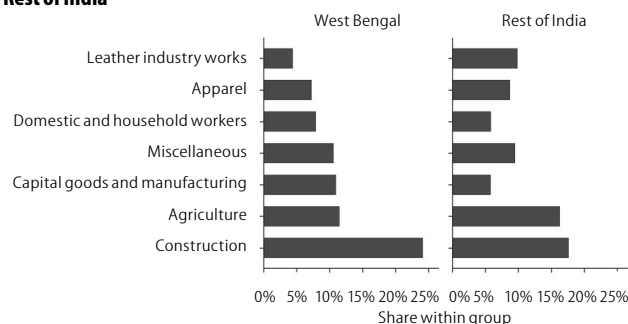
distribution for Bengali migrants against migrants from the rest of India. Bengali migrants are heavily concentrated at the primary-or-middle schooling level, at roughly 40% compared to about 30% for the rest of India. The graduate share is consistently lower, and this holds true for every age cohort.

West Bengal's education profile is uneven across levels rather than uniformly strong or weak. Its literacy rates have historically been above the national average, and attendance and attainment at the secondary level compare favourably as well. But this advantage does not extend to higher education: West Bengal's gross attendance ratio at the post-higher-secondary level was 15.3% (male) and 11.1% (female) in 2017–18, against 20.7% and 15.6% nationally (Chakraborty and Biswas 2026), and more recent Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) data puts West Bengal's higher secondary gross enrolment ratio at 52 against 58 nationally. So, while the state's migrants being less educated than the national migrant pool cannot be attributed to a broadly backward education system, it may partly reflect a genuine, level-specific shortfall in post-secondary attainment rather than selective channelling of the less-educated into migration alone.

Thus, the discrepancy in the educational profile of unorganised sector migrants could reflect a combination of two factors. First, a higher share of graduate youth from the younger states needs to migrate in search of jobs, even if these jobs are in the unorganised sector. West Bengal does not face a similar pressure of the youth population and graduates, therefore, can possibly wait longer or stay unemployed in the local labour market. Second, part of the gap may simply track West Bengal's own weaker post-secondary attainment relative to other states, whose stronger higher-education profiles are reflected in the more educated migrant streams they send.

Beyond the composition of who migrates, a further question is why West Bengal's less-educated workers need to migrate at all rather than finding local work. This implies that West Bengal lacks jobs that would absorb them, and that, even after adjusting for prices, the state's daily casual wage has consistently remained below the national average.⁴ We provide one theoretical and two empirical arguments that support this claim.

Theoretically, one may argue that such low rates of absorption of low-educated workers in the local economy arise from a structural constraint specific to West Bengal. The state's manufacturing

Figure 5: Occupations That Account for ~75% of Migrants—West Bengal vs Rest of India

Source: e-Shram database.

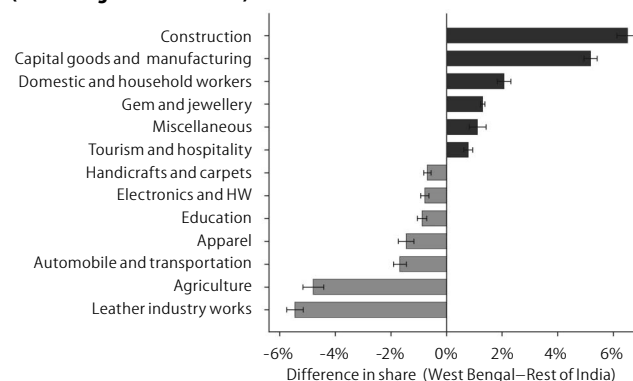
base—once anchored in jute, engineering, and chemicals—contracted sharply from the late 1970s without being replaced by equivalent formal manufacturing or construction activity at home. This is consistent with the broader pattern Rodrik (2016) documents, in which premature deindustrialisation blocks off the reallocation of workers from low-productivity to high-productivity employment before that shift is complete. We extend this argument to West Bengal's case, where the workers left without a local absorption channel are disproportionately those with modest schooling.

Empirically, the EPFO data we noted earlier—West Bengal's 67.3 workers per firm in the organised sector against Maharashtra's 104.4—shows that the deindustrialisation did not come with a rapid transformation into formal, organised modern service sector either. Rather, it came at the cost of losing industrial opportunities that could have paved the way for lower-educated workers to enter highly productive employment. In states where manufacturing and construction have expanded at scale, lower-educated workers find absorption locally. In West Bengal, they do not, and migration becomes the default channel for less educated workers.

The second empirical argument follows from where these workers arrive once they leave—both in terms of destination as well as primary occupation. We provide empirical grounds for this claim in the subsequent sections, by showing that Bengali migrants are disproportionately concentrated in construction and capital goods manufacturing at their destinations, principally located in Kerala and Karnataka, which are precisely the states that have sustained large-scale construction activity over the past two decades. The educational profile of Bengali migrants may thus reflect the specific character of the channel itself, which draws in workers with the skills and credentials aligned with manufacturing and construction-intensive work.

What Do They Do? Occupational Sorting among Bengali Migrants

Figure 5 presents the top occupations of e-Shram migrants from West Bengal and from the rest of India. These cover the set that accounts for roughly 75% of all migrants in both groups. The picture is, at first glance, remarkably similar. Seven of the top 31 occupations recorded in e-Shram are identical across the two groups, featuring construction,

Figure 6: Occupations with Statistically Significant Differences (West Bengal–Rest of India)

Source: e-Shram database. Two-proportion z-test; bars are West Bengal minus Rest of India, with 95% CIs.

agriculture, capital goods and manufacturing, miscellaneous services, domestic and household work, apparel, and leather industry work. In other words, Bengali migrants are not engaging in lines of work that are distinctively different relative to migrants from the rest of India.

This similarity is analytically important and connects directly to the education story from the previous section. The unorganised labour market, by its nature, does not sort workers through formal hiring processes or educational screening. What determines occupational placement in this market is a combination of the destination a worker travels to, the network through which they get there, and the demand structure of the labour market they enter. The fact that Bengali migrants, who are less educated than the national migrant pool, end up in broadly the same occupations as migrants from states with higher graduate shares, tells us that education is not the primary axis of occupational sorting in this market. This is not surprising in a labour market where the overwhelming majority of workers have completed at most secondary school.

Where West Bengal differs is in the proportional distribution within this shared occupational set. Figure 6 presents the statistically significant differences in occupational shares between Bengali migrants and migrants from the rest of India. Two sectors stand out. Bengali migrants are substantially over-represented in construction—the largest gap of any single occupation—and in capital goods and manufacturing. At the other end, they are significantly under-represented in agriculture and leather industry work.

The higher concentration of Bengali migrants in construction and capital goods manufacturing connects to the structural argument made in the previous section about the kind of employment West Bengal's economy has failed to generate. The migrant workers from West Bengal, characterised by lower educational levels, are precisely the workers whom a thriving manufacturing and construction sector would absorb locally. In states where these sectors have expanded, such workers find employment without having to cross state borders. In West Bengal, the collapse of its industrial base from the late 1970s, without a replacement manufacturing or construction boom, left this segment of the workforce without a local labour market to enter.

This is further supported by the fact that we observe under-representation of Bengali migrants in agriculture. West Bengal itself has a reasonably productive agricultural sector, and opportunities for agricultural work, however low-paying, are not absent locally. Thus, what Bengali migrants are perhaps seeking when they leave is precisely the kind of higher paying manufacturing and construction work that the local economy has failed to generate at adequate scale and wage. This stands in contrast with UP and Bihar migrants, who are often represented in agricultural work at destinations such as Punjab, which reflects both the different geographies of these migration streams and the different nature of the push behind them.

Together, Figures 5 and 6 reveal that the Bengali migrant workforce shares the broad occupational set of informal migration nationally, but is channelled disproportionately into the manufacturing and construction-based occupations. This is consistent with a migration stream shaped less by individual occupational search and more by the structure of the specific corridor that Bengali workers travel—a corridor that has, over time, developed a particular sectoral character. This brings us to the next section: Where do they go and how do they get there?

Where Do They Go? Men to the South, Women to the North

Table 4 presents the destination state distribution of Bengali migrants alongside migrants from the rest of India. Maharashtra (15.0%) and Haryana (13.4%) lead, and in both cases, the

Table 4: Top Destination States for Work Migrants—West Bengal and Rest of India (%)

Destination State	West Bengal	Rest of India
Maharashtra	15.0	15.4
Haryana	13.4	14.6
Delhi	10.3	14.3
Gujarat	5.7	10.2
Karnataka	8.5	2.8
Kerala	7.7	—
Bihar	5.8	5.6
Uttar Pradesh	4.3	6.3
Arunachal Pradesh	3.7	2.5
Rajasthan	3.3	—
Punjab	—	4.6
Uttarakhand	—	2.7

“—” indicates destination not among top destinations for that group.

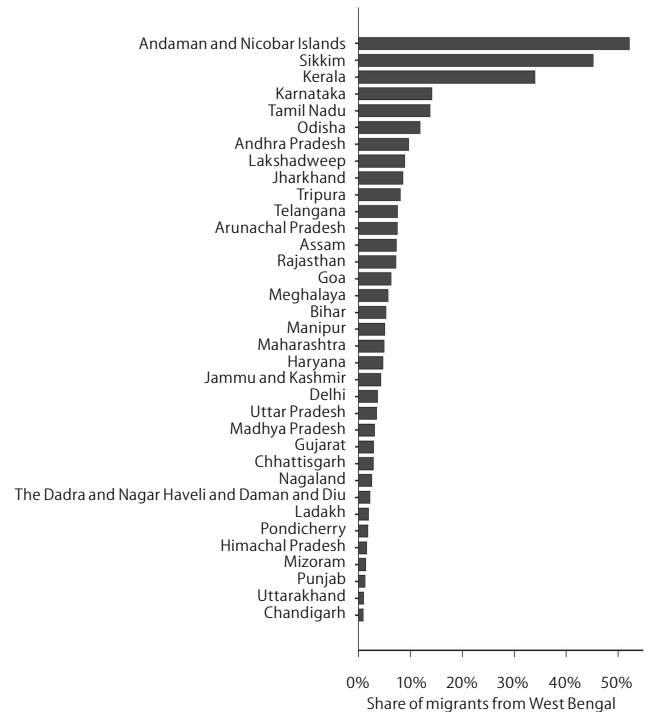
Source: Migration in India 2020–21, PLFS unit-level data.

figures are broadly comparable to the rest of India. Bihar and UP also show similar shares across both groups. These are the dominant poles of India's informal labour market geography and Bengali migrants participate in them in proportion to the national picture.

However, there are several key divergences. Delhi accounts for 10.3% of Bengali migrants compared to 14.3% for the rest of India—a gap of 4 percentage points for what is the single largest destination nationally. Gujarat draws only 5.7% of Bengali migrants against 10.2% for the rest of India. Punjab and Uttarakhand, which together account for over 7% of rest of India migrants, are essentially absent from the Bengali destination profile. On the other hand, Karnataka draws 8.5% of Bengali migrants but only 2.8% of rest of India migrants. Kerala draws 7.7% of Bengali migrants and does not figure as a meaningful destination for migrants from the rest of India at all.

Figure 7, which shows the share of Bengali migrants within each destination state's total in-migrant pool, reinforces this from the receiving end. Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Sikkim top the list, explained by proximity and historical ties.

Figure 7: Share of West Bengal Migrants among All Migrants in Each Destination State



Source: e-Shram database.

But Kerala and Karnataka rank third and fourth, well above what their size or geographic accessibility would predict.

These differences point to a systematic southward flow in Bengali outmigration with no parallel among other major sending states, and one that the standard economic logic of migration cannot fully explain on its own. Delhi and Gujarat are larger labour markets with higher casual wages in manufacturing and construction. If anything, on a simple wage-maximising account, Bengali migrants should be represented there in equal numbers and certainly not under-represented. That they are not flowing to these states at similar rates as the rest of India is the first signal that something other than wage opportunities alone is shaping the geography of Bengali outmigration.

The occupation-by-destination data from the e-Shram registry makes the character of the southward corridor concrete. Of Bengali migrants in Kerala, 67.2% are in construction, making it the highest construction concentration of any major destination state by a significant margin. In Karnataka, the corresponding figure is 40.0%. Together, Kerala and Karnataka absorb 35.6% of all Bengali construction migrants, despite accounting for only 16.2% of total Bengali migrants in the dataset.

The geographic concentration within these states sharpens the picture further. In Karnataka, 85.6% of Bengali migrants are located in Bengaluru Urban district alone, with Bengaluru Rural accounting for another 7.9%. This clearly is not a state-wide dispersal—it is a single corridor, almost certainly tied to Bengaluru's sustained construction and infrastructure expansion over the past two decades. In Kerala, the distribution is somewhat wider: Ernakulam leads at 41.4%, followed by Malappuram (11.1%), Kottayam (8.6%), and Kannur (8.5%),

suggesting a more mature and geographically spread corridor rather than concentration in a single urban area.

The wage data provides one part of the explanation. PLFS 2023 casual wage data shows that in nominal terms, the average of manufacturing and construction daily wages in Kerala stands at ₹665—more than double West Bengal's ₹304.⁵ No other major destination state comes close to this differential. Karnataka's average is ₹341, Maharashtra's ₹316, Gujarat's ₹300, all broadly comparable to West Bengal's own wage floor. The Kerala wage premium is therefore in a different category from other destinations, and for a worker in West Bengal's casual labour market, it represents a compelling case for migration even accounting for the costs of travelling the length of the country.

But the wage differential alone does not explain why Bengali workers go to Kerala rather than, say, Tamil Nadu (₹415) or Telangana (₹471), both of which offer higher combined manufacturing and construction wages than Karnataka and are no further from West Bengal geographically. The wage story accounts for the southward pull in general terms but it may not explain the specific routes. For that, one needs to account for the role of established migration networks.

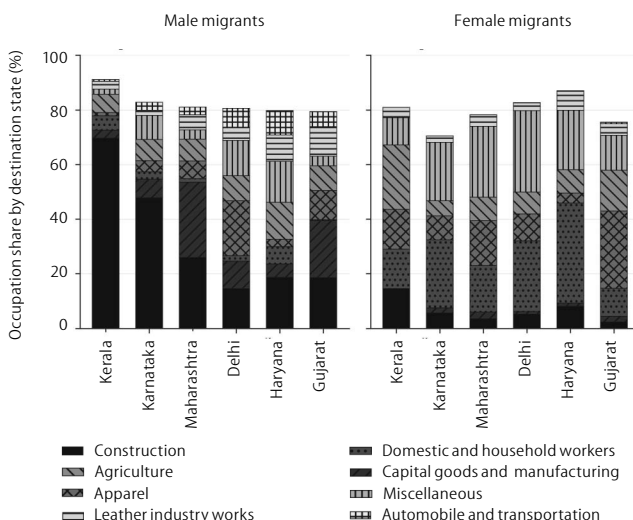
Kerala's construction labour market, from the 1970s onwards, experienced large-scale outmigration to the Gulf, generating sustained domestic construction demand that the local workforce, increasingly drawn towards Gulf employment, could not meet. Bengali workers, with construction-adjacent skills and early network footholds, entered this gap. Once established, the corridor became self-reinforcing through the mechanisms Munshi (2003) formalises: information about contractors, housing, and employment circulates through the network, transition costs fall for subsequent migrants, and employer preferences harden around the origin that the network has been consistently delivering. The corridor persists because the network infrastructure built around it has a life of its own.

The Karnataka corridor, centred almost entirely on Bengaluru, is probably more recent in origin and tied specifically to the city's construction boom. While the wage differential here is smaller with respect to Kerala, Bengaluru also offers relatively better pathways of social mobility via transitions into more white-collar jobs, whether within the unorganised sector (such as in hospitality industries) or a transition altogether to contractual blue-collar work (such as private security guards contracted via agencies).

That wage differentials alone do not drive West Bengal's migration flows comes out further when we look at the migrant patterns to Delhi and Haryana. According to PLFS estimates, both states offer meaningful wage premiums over West Bengal—Delhi's combined manufacturing and construction average is ₹429, Haryana's ₹383. Yet, both underperform relative to their national share of migrants when it comes to Bengali workers. The explanation lies in who is going there and what they are doing.

Figure 8 presents the occupation-by-destination breakdown separately for male and female Bengali migrants. The male panel shows construction dominating Kerala and Karnataka, with Delhi and Haryana showing a dispersed mix of apparel,

Figure 8: Occupation Share by Destination State—Male and Female Migrants



Source: e-Shram database.

miscellaneous services, and construction. The female panel tells a sharply different story, consistent with our observations based on the latest PLFS estimates. Domestic and household work accounts for 36.6% of female Bengali migrants in Haryana and 25.8% in Delhi—the dominant occupation in both states. Construction, which defines the Kerala–Karnataka corridor for male migrants, is largely absent from the female profile in these states.

What emerges is not one migration corridor, but several operating simultaneously. The southward corridor is predominantly male, construction-intensive, and routed through Kerala and Karnataka by a combination of wage pull and network infrastructure. The northern corridor is predominantly female, domestic work-intensive, and concentrated in Delhi and Haryana. The two corridors draw on different segments of Bengal's workforce, point to different destinations, and serve different labour market demands at the receiving end.

Is West Bengal an Exception to the East?

The preceding sections established that Bengali migrants are disproportionately concentrated in construction and capital goods manufacturing, travel southward through specific established networks, and do so in ways that cannot be explained by demographic composition alone. These comparisons, however, were made against the national migrant pool. A further question to ask is whether West Bengal's occupational profile is distinctive even within its own regional neighbours—Bihar, Jharkhand, and Odisha.

We address this through propensity score matching (PSM). The identifying assumption is that conditional on observable characteristics—age, gender, and educational attainment—state of origin is as good as randomly assigned within the pool of migrants who have already decided to leave. We are not attempting to explain the migration decision itself. Within the migrant pool, any residual difference in occupational outcomes between Bengali migrants and their eastern zone peers, after controlling for demographics, reflects state-specific factors: the

network infrastructure, corridor character, and historical labour market specific to West Bengal.

Formally, for each Bengali migrant i , we estimate a propensity score as:

$$\hat{P}(X_i) = P(D_i = 1 | X_i) = \Lambda(\alpha + \beta_1 \text{age}_i + \beta_2 \text{gender}_i + \beta_3 \text{education}_i)$$

where $D_i = 1$ if the migrant is from West Bengal and $\Lambda(\cdot)$ is the logistic function. We then match each Bengali migrant to the nearest neighbour from the rest of the east zone on the estimated propensity score, imposing a caliper of 0.01 to ensure close matches. The estimand of interest is the average treatment effect on the treated (ATT):

$$ATT = E[Y_i(1) - Y_i(0) | D_i = 1]$$

where Y_i is an indicator for a given occupational outcome. Standard errors are computed through bootstrapping with 200 replications. Balance on the matched sample is near-perfect: the matched control group is identical to the treated group on age, gender, and education to three decimal places.

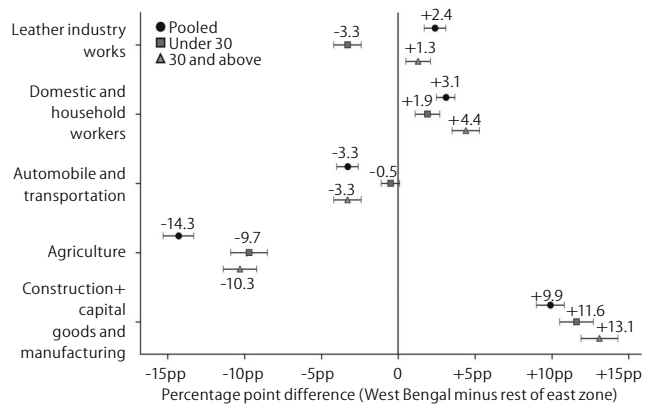
We pool Bihar, Jharkhand, and Odisha as the control group. The gender split across all four states is virtually identical, with approximately 72% male and 28% female, and therefore, we do not stratify by gender. We report results for the pooled sample and separately for migrants below 30 and those aged 30 and above.

Figure 9 reveals that conditional on age, gender, and education, a Bengali migrant is 9.9 percentage points more likely than a demographically identical migrant from the rest of the eastern zone to be working in construction or capital goods manufacturing. The agriculture deficit is even larger at 14.3 percentage points—the single largest effect in the table. Both effects are estimated with high precision and are significant at the 0.1% level.

The age-stratified results sharpen the interpretation. The construction and capital goods premium does not diminish with age—it strengthens from +11.6 percentage points among under-30 migrants to +13.1 percentage points among those aged 30 and above. The agriculture deficit is similarly stable: -9.7 percentage points for under-30 migrants, and -10.3 percentage points for those aged 30 and above. Bengali migrants are systematically less likely to be in agricultural work at destinations than comparable migrants from Bihar, Jharkhand, and Odisha, and this holds equally for young and old workers—a state-specific feature that survives demographic controls. While an empirical explanation of this specific finding lies beyond the scope of this paper, recent evidence (Bhattacharya and Mukherjee 2026) leads us to speculate that this phenomenon relates to West Bengal's agricultural productivity, which is higher than that of the rest of India, and thereby limits the incentive for Bengali migrants to leave the state for agricultural work elsewhere.

The domestic and household work premium is also worth noting, particularly for older migrants (+4.4 percentage points for the 30 and above group). This reflects the female corridor to Delhi and Haryana discussed earlier, and the fact that older Bengali women in the migration stream are more concentrated

Figure 9: Bengali Migrants vs Rest of East Zone—ATT Estimates by Outcome and Age Group



Source: e-Shram database. Nearest-neighbour PSM (caliper 0.01) on age, gender, education; control pool = Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha. Bootstrap SE (200 replications).*** $p < 0.001$.

in domestic work relative to their eastern zone peers than younger ones.

Who Comes to West Bengal and How do They Differ from Those Who Leave?

The e-Shram data allows us to study unorganised sector migrant workers from other states currently employed in West Bengal. In absolute terms, the ratio is roughly 2.3 outmigrants for every in-migrant to West Bengal, consistent with the state's net outmigration pattern. Reading the two profiles alongside each other reveals something that the net migration figure alone obscures. West Bengal, as it turns out in the following analysis, is exchanging a specific kind of worker for a different kind, and the terms of that exchange are not neutral. This is a marked change from West Bengal's historical position as an in-migration destination, when it drew large-scale seasonal labour for agricultural work—over half a million workers a year for rice cultivation alone at the turn of the century (Rogaly et al 2002)—a role that e-Shram shows has since receded well behind transport and automobile-sector in-migration.

Bihar is by far the largest source of immigrants to West Bengal, accounting for 44.6% of all unorganised sector workers arriving from other states. UP (12.9%), Jharkhand (7.2%), Haryana (6.7%), and Maharashtra (5.3%) follow. One interesting observation is that as we documented earlier, West Bengal sends a substantial stream of female domestic workers to Haryana, and Haryana reciprocates by sending workers to West Bengal, predominantly in domestic and household work (33.6% of Haryana in-migrants) and construction (16.6%).

The age profiles of in-migrants and outmigrants are broadly similar—both are youth-heavy, with roughly 38%–39% below the age of 30. The one difference is at the top of the age distribution: in-migrants are somewhat older, with 28.5% aged 40 and above compared to 23.6% for outmigrants. This is partly explained by the Bihar automobile and transportation workers, who are on average 38.2 years old and account for a large share of older male in-migrants concentrated in Kolkata, Howrah, and the industrial belt.

The education profiles, however, are sharply different. Figure 10 shows that in-migrants to West Bengal are substantially more educated than outmigrants. The graduate and above share is more than double, at 15.6% for in-migrants against 7.3% for outmigrants. The higher secondary share is also larger for in-migrants (17.5% versus 12.4%). At the lower end, the primary or middle share is 39.7% for outmigrants but only 28.2% for in-migrants. The difference in mean education scores between the two groups is statistically significant as well. To summarise, West Bengal is sending out workers concentrated at the primary-or-middle schooling level and receiving workers with significantly higher educational attainment on average.

The occupational comparisons presented in Figure 11 show the statistically significant differences in occupational shares between in-migrants and outmigrants. Construction is the starkest contrast, with 24.1% of outmigrants being in construction, as opposed to 12.9% of in-migrants—a statistically significant gap of 11.2 percentage points. Capital goods and manufacturing show a similar pattern: 10.9% of outmigrants against 5.8% of in-migrants. On the other hand, automobile and transportation account for 9.3% of in-migrants but only 3.9% of outmigrants.

The automobile and transportation finding has a specific character. Of all the in-migrant workers in this occupation, 69.5% are from Bihar; they are almost entirely male (99%), and are concentrated in Kolkata (21.7% of all in-migrants), Howrah (11.6%), and Paschim Bardhaman (9.0%)—the old industrial and urban belt. These are almost certainly drivers filling an urban transport labour demand in West Bengal's cities. This is a sharp contrast with what the state is exporting—construction and manufacturing workers travelling southward.

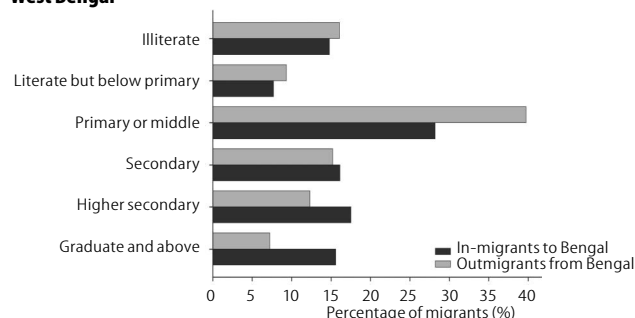
What the in-out comparison reveals is a form of occupational substitution with an education gradient. West Bengal exports lower-educated workers in physically intensive, manufacturing and construction-oriented occupations and receives somewhat more educated workers in transport, agriculture, and services. This is not a simple story of labour shortage being filled from outside. It is a pattern in which the local labour market—having failed to generate enough manufacturing and construction employment to retain its own workforce—is being partially replenished by workers from poorer neighbouring states who are, on average, better educated than those who left, and who fill different occupational slots, indicating that even though both types of migration have economic distress at root—they have very different reasons behind that distress.

Conclusions

This paper set out to understand West Bengal's informal out-migration—who leaves, where they go, what they do, and how this compares to both the national migrant pool and West Bengal's neighbours in the eastern zone using the e-Shram registry, alongside PLFS.

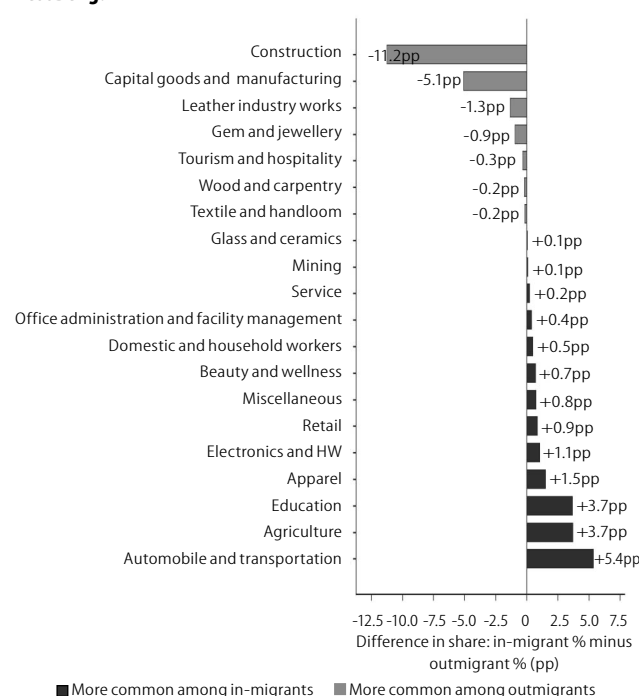
The answers that emerge are as follows. Bengali migrants in the unorganised sector are less educated than the national informal migrant pool, and concentrate more in construction

Figure 10: Education Profile of Migrants—In-migrants vs Outmigrants, West Bengal



Source: e-Shram database.

Figure 11: Occupational Composition—In-migrants vs Outmigrants, West Bengal



Source: e-Shram database. Statistically significant only (two-proportion z-test). n=40,027 outmigrants, n=17,661 in-migrants.

and capital goods manufacturing—precisely the sectors that West Bengal's own economy, having deindustrialised without replacement, cannot generate at adequate scale. They travel south, to Kerala and Karnataka, through corridors whose roots possibly lie in Kerala's Gulf migration era and Bengaluru's construction expansion. While the data does not allow for causal identification, the trends suggest that this migration happens on account of both networks as well as wage differentials in the unorganised sector.

The in-migrant versus outmigrant comparison adds a further layer. West Bengal is exchanging lower-educated construction and manufacturing workers for somewhat more educated workers in transport, agriculture, and services—an occupational substitution with an education component to it, that reflects how the local labour market has reorganised around the absence of the industries it once had.

Together, these findings suggest that West Bengal's out-migration is neither a simple poverty-ridden distress story nor a

demographic overflow story. It is a structural one where the manufacturing base that contracted before the labour market had productive alternatives in place, especially for lower-educated workers.

Two implications follow. For policy, the findings argue against treating migration as necessarily a self-correcting mechanism. The stability of the corridor does not imply it is generating upward mobility—the workers are going to the same physically intensive, potentially seasonal and certainly precarious jobs that could have been easily created within the state's own economy itself. That in turn would have ensured fallback mechanisms, which are more familiar than an unknown geographic territory. Thus, the policy suggestion would be to strengthen focus

on social protection portability—a concern raised as early as Rogaly et al (2001) in the context of migrants' exclusion from housing and welfare entitlements while away from their home state—and skill certification on the one hand, and on the other, local employment generation in manufacturing and construction. Such a focus will address both the workers who migrate and slowly adjust the labour market they leave behind. For research, the e-Shram data represents a substantially under-used asset. The West Bengal case illustrates what state-level disaggregation can reveal that aggregate migration analysis might obscure—and the analytical approach developed here can be extended to other sending states to build a more granular picture of how India's informal labour market operates.

NOTES

- 1 The gender-wise split of the PLFS statistics for West Bengal and the all India for 2023–24 is presented in the appendix, which reports the full series from 2017–18 to 2023–24.
- 2 Figure 2.24 in the report shows that states that are net-recipient of migrants, are richer in net state domestic product per capita than the net-sending states.
- 3 As per the State of Working India (2026) report, the workers registered in e-Shram are on an average younger than their counterparts in PLFS.
- 4 We use daily casual wage since that is the right benchmark for the segment of the unorganised sector labour force studied in this paper.
- 5 When we compare West Bengal and all India earnings over time in the second section, we deflate it to obtain real earnings. The wage comparison in this section are cross-sectional (all figures from PLFS 2023) and are reported in nominal terms. This seems appropriate to understand the decision of a migrant worker comparing wages across destinations at a point in time, although cost of living considerations are not captured by this.

REFERENCES

Bhattacharya, S and A Mukherjee (2026): "Profitability, Productivity, and Organization in West Bengal Agriculture: A Long-run Comparative View," *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 61, No 35.

Chakraborty, T, M Ghatak, P Jain and D Mookherjee (2026): "West Bengal's Relative Economic Trajectory: A Long-run Perspective," *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 61, No 35.

Chakraborty, A and D Biswas (2026): "Human Development Achievements and Challenges in West Bengal," *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 61, No 35.

Choudhury, S and S K Majumdar (2024): "Examining the Socio-economic and Demographic Differentials in Rural Out-migration and Employment Status of Migrant Workers in India," *Demography India*, Vol 53, No 1, pp 12–29.

Debroy, B and D P Misra (2024): "400 Million Dreams! Examining Volume and Directions of Domestic Migration in India Using Novel High Frequency Data," EAC-PM Working Paper Series No WP/35/2024, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, Government of India.

Deshingkar, P and S Akter (2009): "Migration and Human Development in India," Human Development Research Paper 2009/13, United Nations Development Programme.

Ghatak, M, M Jha and J Singh (2024): "Quantity vs Quality: Long-term Trends in Job Creation in the Indian Labour Market," *India Forum*, 31 January.

— (2026): "Rise of Unpaid Family Workers: Evidence on Distress-driven Employment Growth in India," *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 61, No 1.

Government of India (2017): "India on the Move and Churning: New Evidence," *Economic Survey 2016–17*, Ministry of Finance.

Harris, J R and M P Todaro (1970): "Migration, Unemployment and Development: A Two-sector Analysis," *American Economic Review*, Vol 60, No 1, pp 126–42.

Munshi, K (2003): "Networks in the Modern Economy: Mexican Migrants in the US Labor Market," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol 118, No 2, pp 549–99.

Rodrik, D (2016): "Premature Deindustrialisation," *Journal of Economic Growth*, Vol 21, No 1, pp 1–33.

Rogaly, B, J Biswas, D Coppard, A Rafique, K Rana and A Sengupta (2001): "Seasonal Migration, Social Change and Migrants' Rights: Lessons from West Bengal," *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol 36, No 49.

Rogaly, B, D Coppard, A Rafique, K Rana, A Sengupta and J Biswas (2002): "Seasonal Migration and Welfare/Illfare in Eastern India: A Social Analysis," *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol 38, No 5, pp 89–114.

Rogaly, B and D Coppard (2003): "They Used to Go to Eat, Now They Go to Earn": The Changing Meanings of Seasonal Migration from Puruliya District in West Bengal, India," *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol 3, No 3, pp 395–433.

Stark, O and D E Bloom (1985): "The New Economics of Labor Migration," *American Economic Review*, Vol 75, No 2, pp 173–78.

State of Working India (2026): "Youth in the Labour Market: Pathways from Learning to Earning," Centre for Sustainable Employment, Azim Premji University.

Appendix

A.1 Data Description

All PLFS indicators use current weekly status (CWS) from unit-level PLFS data, 2017–18 to 2023–24, following Ghatak et al (2024, 2026). Earnings are deflated using state-specific composite CPIs—CPI-AL (agricultural labourers) and CPI-IW (industrial workers) from the Labour Bureau, averaged over the survey year (July to June)—expressed in 2016–17 prices. West Bengal wages are deflated by West Bengal-specific price indices and all-India wages by the all-India indices.

While we use several rounds of PLFS and present insights from Census 2011 for benchmarking purposes, the primary data source for this paper is the e-Shram registry, launched by the Ministry of Labour and Employment in August 2021. The portal targets unorganised workers—defined as home-based workers, self-employed workers, or wage workers in the unorganised sector, including workers in the organised sector who are not members of the Employees' State Insurance Corporation or EPFO and are not government employees. As of December 2024, approximately 29.77 crore workers (out of an approximate population of 40 crore unorganised sector workers) were registered. Registration is free and

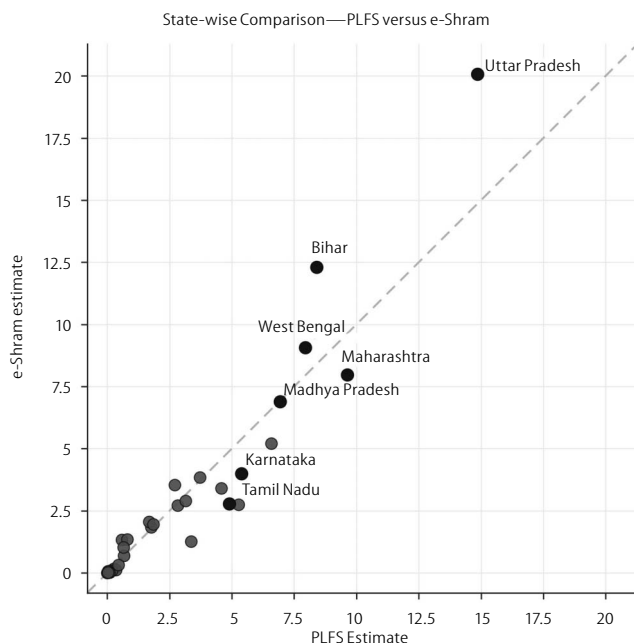
voluntary, available through online self-registration, common service centres, post offices, and state seva kendras.

The registry collects information on gender, age, educational attainment, primary occupation (across 31 categories), current state and district of employment, and permanent state of residence. By comparing the permanent state of residence with the current state of employment, we identify interstate migrants—defined as our "migrant population" throughout the paper. Because e-Shram records state-level permanent residence but not district of origin, we can only comment on interstate migration; intra-state migration, which is likely substantial, remains unobserved.

While the e-Shram registry is by no means a representative survey, a comparison of state-wise shares of informal workers between the PLFS and e-Shram shows broadly consistent rank ordering, with West Bengal close to the 45-degree line (Figure A1). The notable exceptions are UP and Bihar, which are substantially over-represented in e-Shram relative to their PLFS share—a reflection of higher registration rates driven by welfare scheme incentives and the sheer scale of informal labour market participation in these states.

The 2011 Census also provides a useful benchmark for situating the e-Shram patterns in a longer historical frame. Figure 1 presented earlier shows the net-migration trends for migrants per lakh working-age population from the Census Do3 table, covering interstate migrants by work or employment reason. The broad state-level ordering—Bihar and UP as dominant senders, Delhi and Haryana as dominant receivers—is consistent with what the e-Shram data shows a decade later, suggesting that the migration geography captured in e-Shram reflects structural patterns rather than a recent or transient phenomenon.

Figure A1: State-wise Distribution of Unorganised Workforce—PLFS vs e-Shram



Two features of the e-Shram population are worth noting. e-Shram registrants are substantially younger than the general PLFS workforce, and e-Shram migrants are somewhat more educated than either the general PLFS workforce or the overall e-Shram registrant pool. These patterns suggest the e-Shram migrant population skews towards younger, more mobile workers at an active stage of labour market search.

For the West Bengal-specific analysis, we work with two subsets of the e-Shram data: outmigrants from West Bengal, defined as workers whose permanent state is West Bengal but who are currently employed in another state, and in-migrants to West Bengal, defined as workers from other states currently employed in West Bengal. For the eastern zone comparison, we additionally use the full migrant records for Bihar, Jharkhand, and Odisha, which serve as the control group in the propensity score matching exercise.

A.2 Gender-wise Split of PLFS Statistics for West Bengal and All India

Table A.1: Labour Force Status by Gender (Female)—West Bengal and All India, CWS
(% of population aged 15+)

Year	West Bengal				All India			
	Emp	Unemp	OLF	Total	Emp	Unemp	OLF	Total
2017–18	17.9	1.0	81.1	100	19.2	1.5	79.3	100
2018–19	18.6	1.0	80.4	100	19.8	1.6	78.7	100
2019–20	20.7	1.2	78.1	100	24.4	1.7	73.9	100
2020–21	23.0	0.8	76.2	100	25.5	1.6	72.8	100
2021–22	23.2	0.8	76.0	100	25.6	1.3	73.1	100
2022–23	29.5	0.6	69.9	100	30.0	1.3	68.7	100
2023–24	34.1	1.0	64.9	100	33.8	1.5	64.7	100
Total	24.9	0.9	74.2	100	26.4	1.5	72.1	100

Emp = employed; Unemp = unemployed; OLF = out of labour force.
Source: Unit-level PLFS data, CWS, age 15+, rural+urban combined.

Table A2: Labour Force Status by Gender (Male)—West Bengal and All India, CWS
(% of population aged 15+)

Year	West Bengal				All India			
	Emp	Unemp	OLF	Total	Emp	Unemp	OLF	Total
2017–18	72.5	4.7	22.8	100	68.6	5.4	26.0	100
2018–19	74.4	4.6	21.1	100	68.4	5.5	26.2	100
2019–20	71.3	6.6	22.2	100	68.7	5.9	25.3	100
2020–21	73.6	4.9	21.5	100	69.3	5.2	25.5	100
2021–22	73.8	4.5	21.7	100	70.7	4.5	24.8	100
2022–23	77.4	2.1	20.5	100	73.5	3.3	23.2	100
2023–24	78.4	2.2	19.4	100	73.8	3.2	23.0	100
Total	74.8	4.1	21.1	100	70.7	4.6	24.7	100

Emp = employed; Unemp = unemployed; OLF = out of labour force.

Source: Unit-level PLFS data. CWS, age 15+, rural+urban combined.

Table A3: Employment Status Distribution by Gender (Female)—West Bengal and All India, CWS
(% of workers aged 15+)

Year	West Bengal					All India				
	OAW	Empl	UFH	Sal	Cas	OAW	Empl	UFH	Sal	Cas
2017–18	32.37	0.16	13.31	29.88	24.28	20.84	0.52	29.05	24.21	25.38
2018–19	43.37	0.19	13.02	29.61	13.81	24.01	0.58	27.30	25.59	22.52
2019–20	37.06	1.12	17.69	29.22	14.91	22.68	0.55	32.93	21.66	22.17
2020–21	38.28	0.55	16.13	25.53	19.51	24.67	0.38	34.68	19.28	21.00
2021–22	42.10	0.56	20.36	23.31	13.68	27.91	0.65	33.27	19.92	18.24
2022–23	45.54	0.33	23.11	20.38	10.65	30.52	0.61	34.47	18.71	15.69
2023–24	50.57	0.94	20.53	17.80	10.17	33.82	0.65	33.55	18.48	13.50
Total	43.73	0.62	19.07	23.19	13.39	27.85	0.58	32.94	20.28	18.36

OAW = own-account worker; Empl = employer; UFH = unpaid family helper; Sal = regular wage/salaried; Cas = casual labour (including MGNREGA). Rows sum to 100.

Source: Unit-level PLFS data. CWS, age 15+, rural+urban combined.

Table A4: Employment Status Distribution by Gender (Male)—West Bengal and All India, CWS
(% of workers aged 15+)

Year	West Bengal					All India				
	OAW	Empl	UFH	Sal	Cas	OAW	Empl	UFH	Sal	Cas
2017–18	37.26	2.61	5.23	21.65	33.25	41.90	2.34	7.86	24.08	23.82
2018–19	38.36	2.81	4.79	22.01	32.04	41.52	2.67	7.29	25.30	23.22
2019–20	40.00	3.25	4.90	22.08	29.78	42.32	2.70	8.49	24.01	22.50
2020–21	39.10	5.25	5.15	19.24	31.27	42.99	2.71	8.77	22.75	22.77
2021–22	37.29	6.30	5.27	21.89	29.26	41.16	3.29	8.74	24.32	22.49
2022–23	37.37	6.82	5.31	22.52	27.98	40.52	4.16	8.60	23.72	23.00
2023–24	35.61	7.58	5.83	22.73	28.26	39.19	4.64	9.56	25.48	21.13
Total	37.78	5.39	5.24	21.81	29.77	41.23	3.38	8.58	24.27	22.54

OAW = own-account worker; Empl = employer; UFH = unpaid family helper; Sal = regular wage/salaried; Cas = casual labour (including MGNREGA). Rows sum to 100.

Source: Unit-level PLFS data. CWS, age 15+, rural+urban combined.

Table A5: Mean Real Daily Wages for Female Workers—West Bengal and All India

Year	West Bengal				All India			
	OAW	Empl	Sal	Cas	OAW	Empl	Sal	Cas
2017–18	73.56	406.20	224.98	149.66	151.76	415.46	399.73	170.68
2018–19	81.42	379.59	224.80	172.59	148.18	563.86	394.00	179.16
2019–20	74.89	325.29	210.64	210.89	147.65	435.50	387.61	177.82
2020–21	76.47	366.94	209.94	177.31	134.53	447.23	447.71	187.50
2021–22	82.82	344.18	259.25	199.23	134.82	467.94	394.84	210.47
2022–23	81.08	296.54	289.57	192.82	128.81	487.87	390.05	207.48
2023–24	75.47	387.07	266.04	202.37	120.67	441.35	379.46	206.41
Total	78.43	355.93	245.54	190.45	132.88	468.45	386.42	193.97

OAW = own-account worker; Empl = employer; Sal = regular wage/salaried; Cas = casual labour. Unpaid family helpers are excluded.

Source: Unit-level PLFS data. Deflated by Price Indices.

Table A6: Mean Real Daily Wages for Male Workers—West Bengal and All India

Year	West Bengal				All India			
	OAW	Empl	Sal	Cas	OAW	Empl	Sal	Cas
2017–18	255.02	498.14	395.60	217.91	327.71	684.61	527.46	271.65
2018–19	261.36	456.65	399.07	240.77	342.29	726.08	522.39	286.06
2019–20	262.49	452.22	403.65	235.88	311.12	649.18	507.94	281.00
2020–21	248.89	462.38	438.82	242.92	310.39	633.30	513.08	294.45
2021–22	279.68	420.80	423.97	284.52	331.75	650.21	517.97	321.03
2022–23	292.53	542.72	420.54	282.65	351.28	709.32	510.44	326.40
2023–24	291.55	537.41	480.95	280.13	341.39	705.19	519.49	317.03
Total	273.23	491.55	428.60	260.57	331.64	683.80	515.81	304.15

OAW = own-account worker; Empl = employer; Sal = regular wage/salaried; Cas = casual labour. Unpaid family helpers are excluded.

Source: Unit-level PLFS data.