



Geography

Educational out-migration from the Northeast India: New insights from NSS-MIS (2020-21)

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Abstract

Migration of students for further studies is increasingly important in internal migration too. While students can be potential human capital, their educational migration can be considered an important part of capital formation, in which the Northeast region (NER) of India is lagging behind. The proportional size of educational migration was significantly large in the Northeast states as compared to the all India average. This study is an attempt to explore the recent situation of educational out-migration and associated characteristics in the NER based on the sample data from Multiple Indicator Survey of NSS 78th Round (2020-21). The study uses descriptive statistics as well as logistic regression model (LRM) to analyse the given data. The findings of the present study reveal that the previous trend of high educational out-migration from this region still persists specially in inter-state migration. There are also significant variables for this migration like age, educational attainment, economic status; which provide strong net effects on the probabilities of educational out-migration in the region.

Keywords: Migration, Education, Students, Northeast region (NER).



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Introduction:

In migration studies, it is crucial to examine the social, economic, political, demographic and environmental aspects that eventually influence an individual to consciously relocate. Movement of people in large enough numbers to alter the population's size, growth, distribution, composition and other features ultimately raises concerns. Thus, migration as one of the components of population dynamics has become a wide field of study where it is more convenient to

study its parts separately. For example, there are various prominent streams of migration under intense research like labour migration, stress migration, student migration abroad and so on. Educational migration or student migration is one subset of internal migration which is more or less omnipresent yet under-explored in India (Chandrasekhar & Sharma, 2014; Padhan, 2016, 2017 & 2023; Kumar, 2020; Singh et. al., 2022; Bhattar, 2023; Meitei et al., 2025). It is reported that internal educational migration gets less attention as compared to its international

counterparts, despite its sizeable volume and due significance from socio-economic and demographic perspectives.

The places of origin and places of destination of the migrants are concerned areas of study in migration studies. The Northeast region (NER) of India is one such important area of study, which acts as a major origin of both employment and educational out-migrants in the inter-state migrant flows during the last few decades (Lyndem & De, 2004; Shimray & Usha, 2009; NESC&H, 2011; McDuie-Ra, 2012). Whereas the share of educational migrants in inter-state migration stock is meagre at the national level, it is reported to be considerably large in respect of the Northeast states of India (Mistri & Sardar, 2022). This is the rationale behind the present study on the recent situation and characteristics associated with educational out-migration from the Northeast region of India. This study intends to fill the gap of recent situation in this migration stream, which is absent in the few studies undertaken due to delay of the Census 2021 among other reasons (Chyrmang, 2011; Longkumer, 2015; Lusome & Bhagat, 2020; Sarkar, 2020; Mistri & Sardar, 2022; Rahul & Rulu, 2023).

Literature Review:

Previous researches highlighted that most of the North-East states have recorded relatively high out-migration rate since 1981 Census (Chyrmang, 2011). Among the streams of inter-state migration, educational out-migration proportionately stands out much higher in these states as compared to the national average, which is only about 1.4 percent in 2011 Census. In fact, the Northeast states mostly recorded double digit percentages of educational out-migrants as per Census 2001 and 2011 (Mistri & Sardar, 2022). It is as late as the 2011 Census and the 64th round of the NSS (2007-08) that maximum of the existing literatures consult such secondary sources of data on educational migration. For example, Chandrasekhar and Sharma (2014) examined the relationship between employment migration and internal migration for education in India using data from the 64th round of the NSS. According

to their study, human capital is lost in traditionally underdeveloped regions like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, and Rajasthan while it is gained in areas with better employment prospects, like as Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Karnataka. Padhan (2016, 2017) uses NSS data from the 49th round (1992–93) to the 64th round (2007–08) to investigate the demographic trends and socio-economic factors influencing educational mobility in India. His work reveals higher occurrence of educational migration in short distances (intra-district and inter-district) in 2007-08. An overview of internal student migration in India is provided by Singh et al. (2022) using data from the Censuses of 2001 and 2011, as well as the NSS 64th cycle (2007–08), which is backed up by some primary field survey data. Their research suggests that female students' relocation reflects a more localized form of inter-district mobility. Lately, Meitei et al. (2025) attempted to study the most recent trends and patterns of educational migration in India by incorporating the MIS (2020-21) dataset at the national level. Their study found the stock of educational migrants in India to have grown from 5.4 million in 2011 to an estimated 7.7 million in 2021.

There are a few studies on educational migration which focus on the Northeast region of India. Shimray & Devi (2009), Chyrmang (2011) and Mistri & Sardar (2022) focus on the migration of students from the Northeast region of India based on Census data of the period 1991-2011. Their studies examined the changing trends and patterns of student migration from the region. It was reported in one of these researches that, in comparison to the national average, most of the Northeast states sent relatively higher proportion of educational out-migrants in their respective inter-state migration stock as of 2011 Census (Mistri & Sardar, 2022, p.46). A sample survey research on the migration of college students from Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram to Shillong was conducted by Longkumer (2015). In the study, major reasons of student out-migration are found to be poor educational facilities at hometown and absence of good colleges at the place of origin; whereas they are better educational facilities,

favourable climate & environment, and exposure to other cultures at the place of destination.

Objective:

The aim and object of this research is to study the recent patterns and associated characteristics of educational out-migration from the Northeast region (NER) of India. The NER is constituted by the eight states of India viz. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya and Sikkim (see Fig.3 & 4).

Materials and Methods:

This study is entirely based on the secondary data provided by the Multiple Indicator Survey (MIS) conducted under the National Sample Survey (NSS) 78th Round during 2020-2021. While the Census 2021 has been delayed till now, the NSS sample data remain as the sole reliable and updated source of information on migration in India. One merit of this dataset is that it provides unit-level data availing personal or household information, thus facilitating micro-scale and inferential analyses. Another merit of this dataset is the availability of wide range of information on migration of household members.

Within the MIS dataset contains 21,718 samples who are migrants by change of last usual place of residence (LUPR) in the Northeast states. A migrant is defined as a household member whose LUPR is different from the place of enumeration at the time of survey; and LUPR is referred to the place where the household member stayed continuously for 6 months or more before coming to the present place of enumeration (NSSO, 2023). However, duration of stay post migration is not available with this dataset. Out of the 21,718 migrants, 1523 samples are educational migrants.

This study uses descriptive statistical methods to analyse various aspects and patterns of educational migration in the Northeast India. Spearman's Rank correlation coefficients are used to identify the ordinal or nominal (categorical) variables which are significantly associated with educational migration. Further, this study also employs logistic regression model (LRM) to estimate the net effects of associated factors on educational out-migration in this region. Binary

logistic regression is adopted here because the dependent variable i.e. educational migration, being dichotomous has only two possible outcomes viz. migrant and non-migrant. Based on previous literature and availability of data, 12 independent variables are put into the regression model (see Table-1).

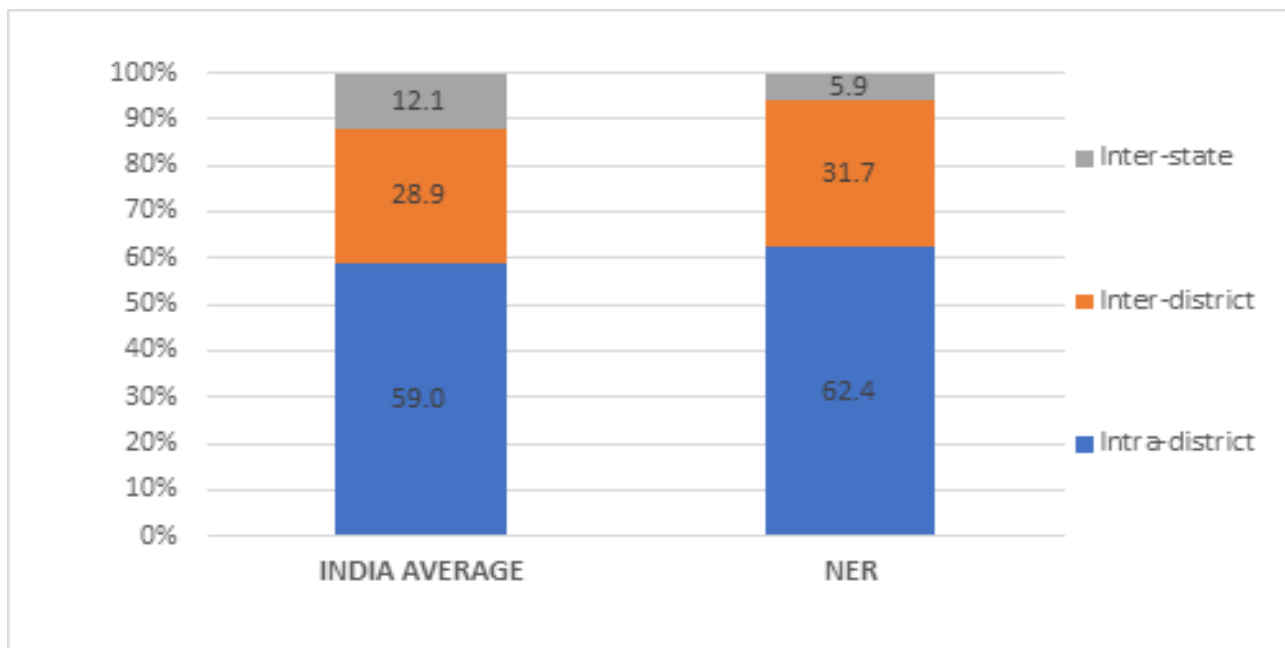
Limitations:

This study faces certain limitations regarding the use of data sources. One limitation of the MIS dataset is that being sample data, the findings from the analysis of this data are only estimated figures. Also, the relative standard error of the sample is relatively higher in case of smaller states like the Northeast states (NSSO, 2023). In order to minimize the effect of this error on the findings of this study, analyses are mostly done for the Northeast region as a whole instead of individual states. Regarding the logistic regression analysis, both intra-state and inter-state educational out-migrants are put into the model since the sample size of inter-state educational out-migrants for the region is too small for reliable results.

Findings & Discussions

A brief overview of the prevailing situation of internal migration in the Northeast region as compared to that of India as a whole shall be beneficial in further course of this study. According to MIS (2020-21), prevalence of internal migrants is estimated to be 18.5 percent in the NER against the all-India average of 28.9 percent in 2021. These figures suggest decrease in mobility in India as compared to 37 percent in 2011 Census. There are chances of underestimation of migrants in the MIS. Besides, the Covid-19 nationwide lockdown and unlock phases which began in March, 2020 ultimately slowed down the momentum of internal migration throughout the country to some extent.

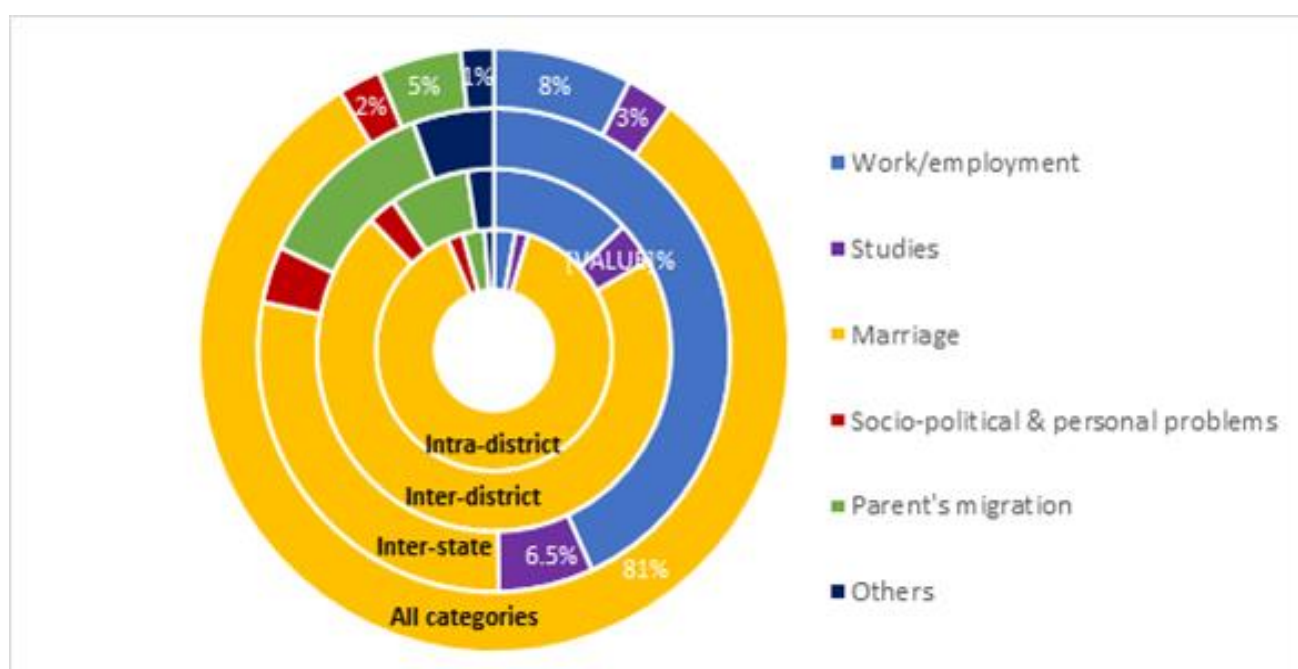
As shown in Fig.1, the internal migrants in the NER move over various distance categories in different proportions which are roughly similar to the all-India pattern. A big chunk of the migrants (62.4 percent) in the region confines movement within their respective district boundaries. There is less share of inter-state migrants (5.9 percent) found in the region hinting that the region weakly attracts in-migrants over long distances.

Fig.-1: Distance categories of internal migration in NER (2021)

Data source: Multiple Indicator Survey, NSS 78th Round (2020-21)

There are 19 different reasons of migration recorded through the MIS (NSSO, 2023). For the sake of clarity, these reasons have been clubbed together into 6 classes viz. marriage, work/employment, parent's migration, socio-political & personal problems, studies and other reasons. It is found that major share (81 percent) of the internal migrants in NER is accounted for marriage reason, which mostly occurs in short distance migration i.e. intra-district and inter-district (see Fig.2). Work/employment is another important reason of migration specially in inter-

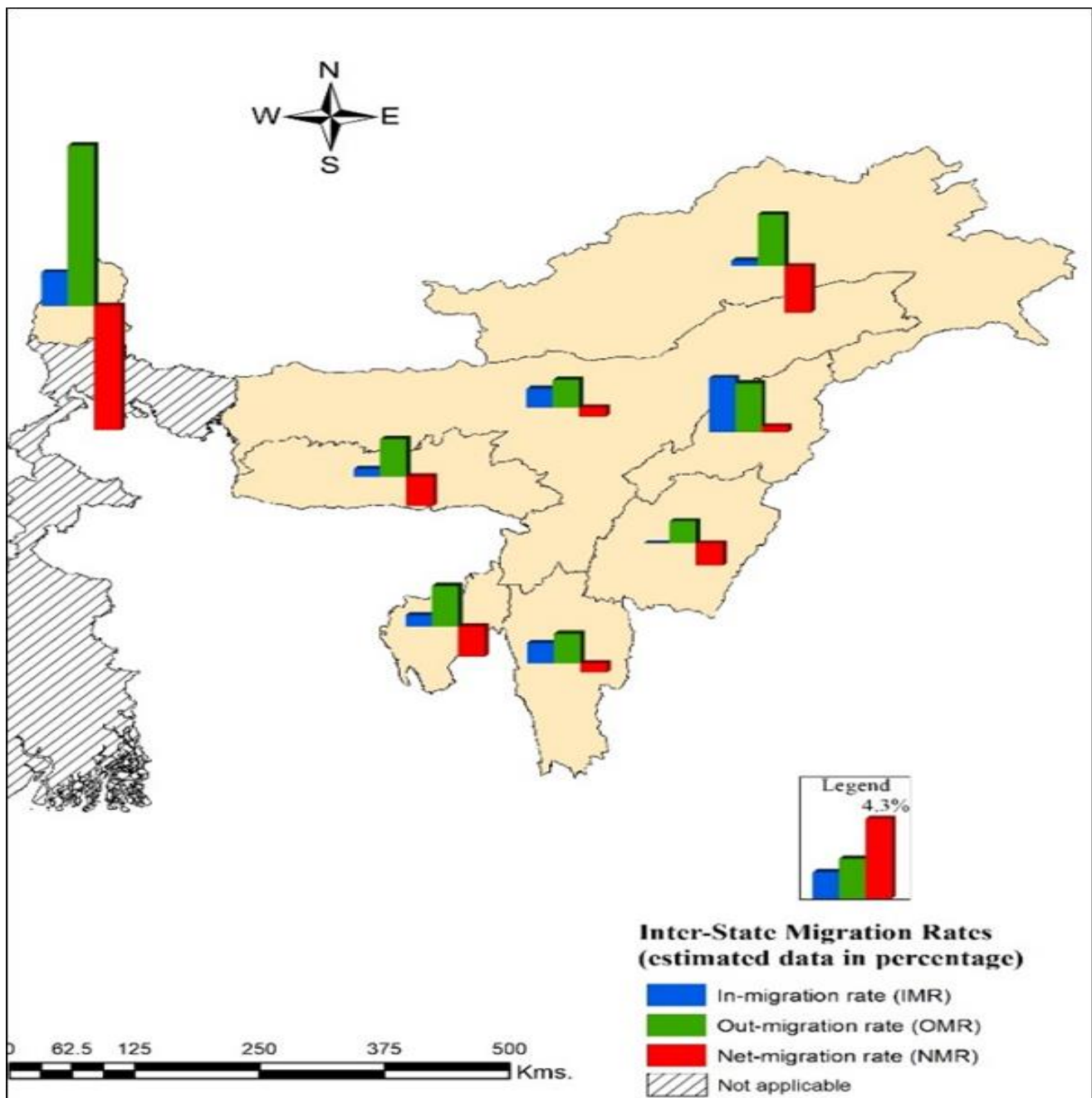
state movement. Among the other reasons, migration for studies accounts for about 3 percent of all internal migrants in NER, which is a little higher than that of the national average i.e. 2.3 percent. Further, migration for studies among inter-state migrants in the NER is found to be 6.5 percent while this reason of migration accounts for only 2.1 percent of inter-state migrants in India. Migration for studies i.e. educational migration in the NER reveals a unique pattern deviated from the all-India scenario as far as inter-state migration flows are concerned.

Fig.-2: Reasons of Internal migration in NER by Distance categories (2021)

Data source: Multiple Indicator Survey, NSS 78th Round (2020-21)

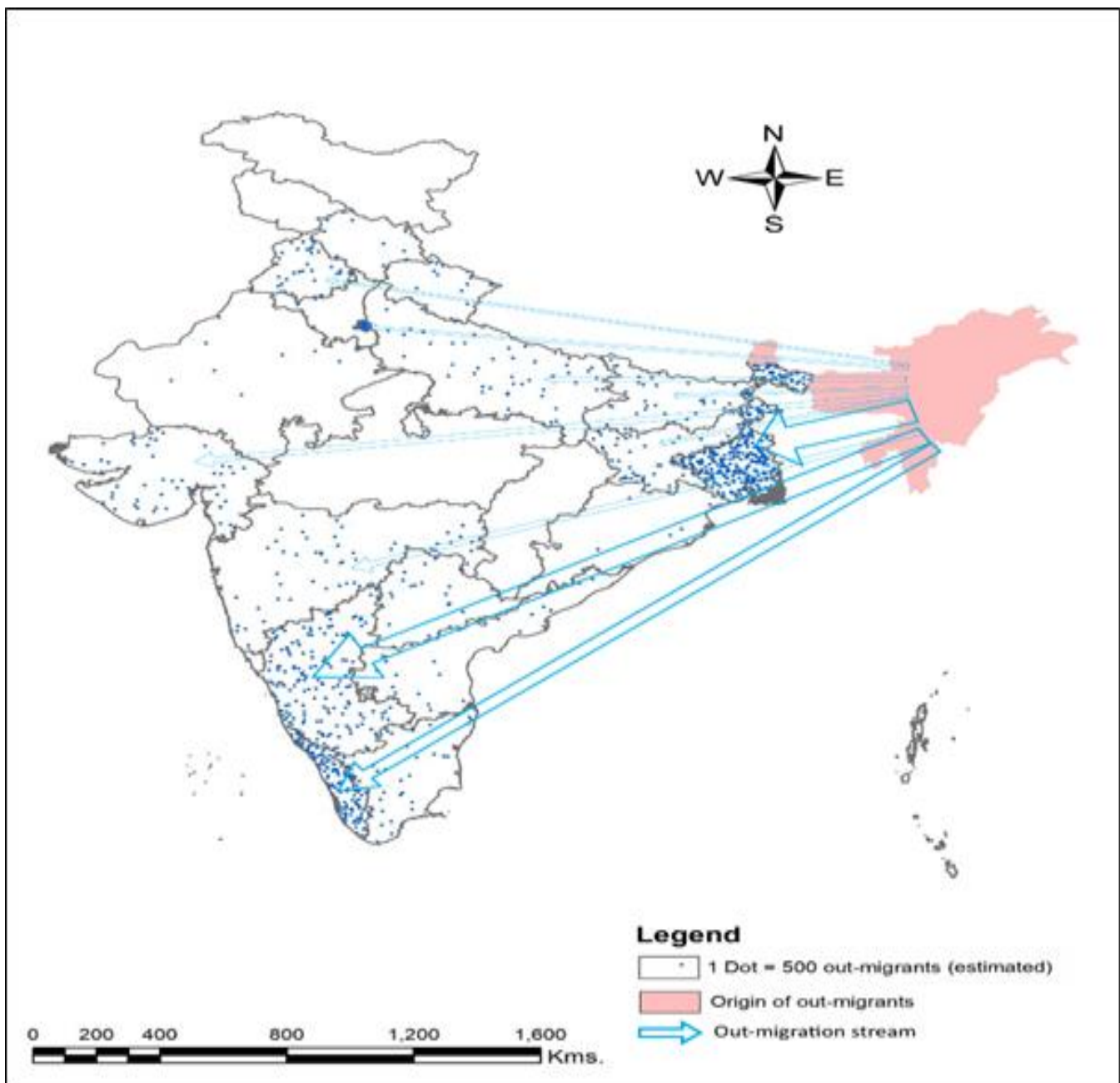
Since migration for studies or education seems to be more conspicuous in long distance migration (as shown in Fig.2), it is worthwhile to have a prior glance of the inter-state migration flows in the NER irrespective of reasons. Based on the estimates of migration rates, it is seen that all the Northeast states except Nagaland have indicated negative net migration rates in 2021 (see Fig.3). It implies that there are more out-migrants from these states than in-migrants into them. This finding has reaffirmed the trend of growing out-migration experienced in the region since the 1980s (Chyrmang, 2011; Kundu & Saraswati, 2012). Now, it should be kept in mind that these in-migration and out-migration occur within the NER as well as beyond it. As far as rural-urban distribution of out-migrants is concerned, nearly 67 percent of these out-migrants are urban bound. The urban bound out-migration streams are mostly explained by reasons of work/employment, studies and accompaniment to parent's migration. Their favourite destinations are in the states of West Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Delhi, which altogether receive 78 percent of all out-migrants from the NER (see Fig. 4)¹.

Fig.-3: Inter-state Migration in Northeast India (2021)



Data source: Multiple Indicator Survey, NSS 78th Round (2020-21)

¹ The authors could not show the destinations of educational out-migrants from NER due to limitation of small sample available with MIS (2020-21).

Fig.- 4: Destinations & Distribution of out-migrants from the NER (2021)

Data source: Multiple Indicator Survey, NSS 78th Round (2020-21)

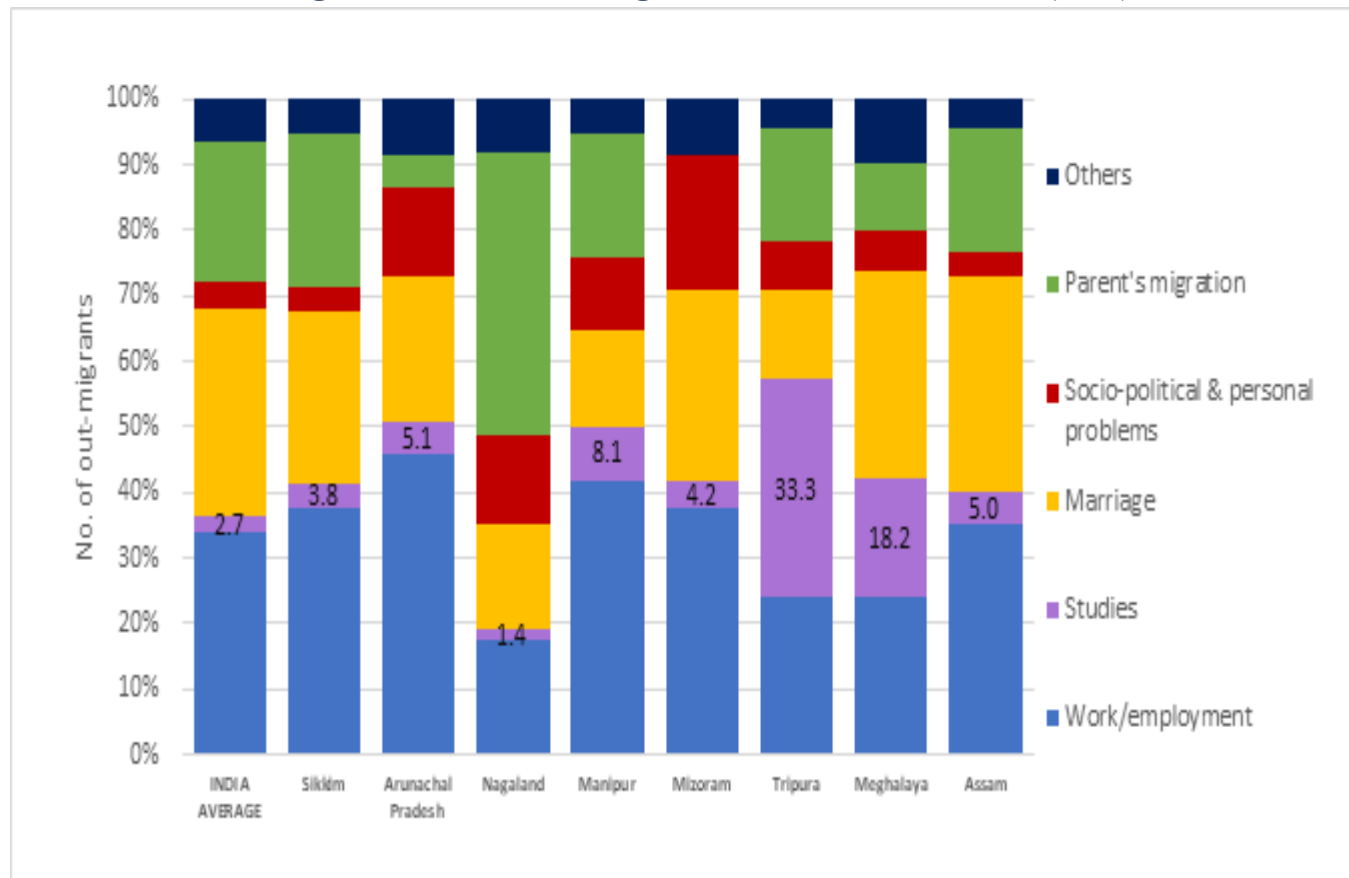
Major reasons of out-migration from the Northeast states are work/employment, marriage and accompaniment to parent's migration, which are in similar composition with that of all India scenario according to MIS (2020-21). Besides this, two other reasons i.e. studies and socio-political reasons indicate such patterns as deviated from the national pattern. Percentage decomposition of the out-migrants by reasons shows that educational out-migrants constitute significant share among others in most of the Northeast states (see Fig. 5). Except for Nagaland, all the regional states have higher percentage of

educational out-migrants in comparison to all-India average i.e. 2.7 percent. For the NER as a whole, the average composition of these out-migrants is 9.5 percent. Mention may be made of Tripura, Meghalaya, Manipur and Assam having 33.3, 18.2, 8.1 and 5 percentages of educational out-migrants respectively. These findings are in line with those observed from Census 2011 and 2001 although there are certain temporal and spatial variations observed. For example, as per Census 2011, such states like Manipur(19.2%), Mizoram(16.3%), Arunachal Pradesh(15.1%) and Sikkim(12.9%) had higher composition of

educational out-migrants while the national average was only 2.5 percent. It is also found that 87.2 percent of the total educational out-migrants of the Northeast states are urban bound. It is because those student out-migrants are often

destined for big cities in mainland India, where wide range of premier institutes along with availability of luxurious modern amenities attract the young migrants (Longkumer, 2015; Padhan, 2023).

Fig.-5: Reasons of Out-migration from Northeast states (2021)



Data Source: NSS 78th Round 2020-21, Schedule 5.1 (Multiple Indicator Survey).

This study finds significant positive correlations between educational migration and some other variables like age, educational attainment, type of current residence, land possessed, monthly per-capita consumer expenditure (MPCE), mass-media access and broadband access in the NER. On the other hand, educational migration in the region is found to have negative correlations with marital status, financial indebtedness, household size and social group. All these associated variables have small correlation coefficients (i.e. $r < 0.05$).

The results of logistic regression model for educational migration in the NER and its associated characteristics are shown in Table-1. The odd ratios of this model indicate the net

effects of independent variables on the probability of occurrence of educational migration in the region. The model has a good fit of all the control variables as indicated by Hosmer & Lemeshow test statistic ($p\text{-value} > 0.05$). As per Cox & Snell and Nagelkerke R-square statistic, this model can explain 65 to 87 percent of all the observations combined. Except gender and broadband access variables, all other control variables in the model viz. place of residence, age, marital status, educational attainment, financial indebtedness, household size, social group, land holdings possessed, monthly per-capita consumer expenditure (MPCE) and mass-media are found to be significantly associated with educational migration.

Table-1: Logistic Regression model (LRM) estimates of the net effects of variables associated with educational migration in NER

Variables	Categories & codings	Wald test p-values	Odd Ratios
Dependent variable			
Educational migrant	Yes (1); N = 845		
	No (0); N = 14423		
Independent variables			
Place of residence	Rural [®] (0)		
	Urban (1)	.000	.687
Gender	Female [®] (0)		
	Male (1)	.259	.914
Age		.000	1.211
Marital status	Married [®] (0)		
	Unmarried (1)	.000	.047
Educational attainment	Below secondary level [®] (0)		
	Secondary level (1)	.383	1.120
	Higher secondary level (2)	.005	1.502
	Above Hr. sec. level (3)	.000	3.346
Indebtedness	Yes [®] (0)		
	No (1)	.000	.187
Household size		.000	.671
Social group	SC & ST [®] (0)		
	OBC (1)	.000	.318
	Others (2)	.000	.295
Land holdings	0.00 – 1.01 ha. [®] (0)		
	1.01 – 2.01 ha. (1)	.078	1.264
	2.01 – 3.01 ha. (2)	.000	2.702
	3.01 – 4.01 ha. (3)	.000	2.223
	4.01 & above (4)	.000	10.217
MPCE Quartile classes	Rs.0 – 1645/- [®] (0)		
	Rs.1645 – 2013/- (1)	.000	.481
	Rs.2013 – 2862/- (2)	.176	1.185
	Rs.2862 - above (3)	.000	2.625
Mass-media access	No [®] (0)		
	Yes (1)	.001	.644
Broadband access	No [®] (0)		
	Yes (1)	.856	1.018
Statistics	Cox & Snell R square		.658
	Nagelkerke R square		.877
	Hosmer & Lemeshow Test	.086	13.830
	N		15,268

Data source: NSS 78th Round 2020-21, Schedule 5.1 (Multiple Indicator Survey)

[®] Reference category

The odds of migration for education increase by 21 percent for every unit increase in age while holding other variables constant. While age bracket of 10 – 30 years of age was put into the analysis, this finding predicts two-fold increase in migration within a 10 years' gap (i.e. $21\% \times 10 = 210\%$). Educational attainment is found to be a good predictor variable of migration. For example, individuals with educational level above higher secondary are 2.3 times more likely to migrate for educational reason as compared to those with educational level below secondary level, while holding other variables constant. Land holding possessed and MPCE are two proxy variables for economic status or standard of living. In this analysis, both of them indicate strong positive effects on migration. For instance, persons having larger land holdings are more and more likely to migrate for education than those with smaller holdings. This factor has such strong effects on the outcome variable that a person with 4.01 ha. of land is 9.2 times more chances of migration than another with less than 1.01 ha. of land. Similarly, higher MPCE indicates higher probabilities of educational migration. These findings are also supported by previous study on educational migration in India (Padhan, 2016).

There are some other covariates of educational migration in the NER with mild net effects. For instance, household size of an individual affects his or her probability of migration in such a way that the probability decreases by 32 percent for every unit (member) of household size increases. Urban residents are also less likely to migrate than rural residents. Regarding social group belongings, OBC and General category are also less likely to migrate in comparison with SC & ST people. This pattern is contradictory to the trend in mainland India. However, in the NER, SC & ST category people are not only dominant in numbers but also comparatively better uplifted and advanced in the society.

Besides the personal and household factors discussed above, there are certain push factors of educational out-migration from the NER. Although the present research could not

incorporate the role of such factors due to the limitation of data, some previous researches have thrown some light on it. Mistri and Sardar (2022) pointed out the relevance of socio-political unrest, unemployment, slow economic growth and lack of quality education lingering in the region and ultimately compelling the bulk of students to move out in search for better options.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Proportion of educational migrants among the total stock of internal migrants in the Northeast region is significantly higher than that of all India average. Specially in case of inter-state migration, educational migrants account for 6.5 percent which is nearly three times of the national level of 2.1 percent in 2020-21. Prior researches in this area also conform to this trend of migration during the past period. During the intercensal periods of 1991 and 2011, interstate educational migration in the region witnessed almost double magnitude (6.1% to 6.9%) of the all India average (Mistri & Sardar, 2022). Hence, it can be concluded that the trend of high educational out-migration from the NER still continues with minor fluctuations. 87.2 percent of the total educational out-migrants of the region are urban bound because the student migrants prefer big metropolitan cities like Delhi, Bengaluru, Kolkata etc. where premier institutional facilities as well as the fancy lifestyle amenities are both available (Remesh, 2012; McDuié-Ra, 2012; Marchang, 2016).

Among the associated factors of educational migration in the NER, some of them like age, educational attainment, land possessed, MPCE have strong and significant net effects on the outcome variable. It can be predicted in the case of this region that students in higher age level upto the ceiling of 30 years of age, reading in higher classes, belonging to households of better economic status but of smaller size are altogether more likely to migrate for further studies through intra-state or inter-state distances, while controlling for place of residence, gender, marital status, indebtedness, social group, mass-media and broadband access. Nowadays, educational out-migration is an expensive venture in which the

student migrants have to incur comparatively higher amount of expenses on travel costs, various academic fees, accommodation, consumption of foods and other personal utilities at their respective places of destination (Padhan, 2016).

Any policy and program related to the concerns of student migrants should be based on the fundamental doctrine of Right to Education. In other words, students need to be availed maximum benefits of quality education irrespective of migrants or not because they are the subset of future labour force. It is recommended to improve various parameters of educational development from grassroot to tertiary levels in the Northeast region so that the quality of learning environment is more attractive and less repulsive to students. Such environment shall facilitate students from marginal backgrounds, who cannot afford to out-migrate long distances for education.

Disclosure

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest of any kind whatsoever concerning this research.

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