Indian Public Policy Review 2025, 6(1): 01-54
https://doi.org/10.55763/ippr.2025.06.01.001

IPPR

400 Million Dreams!

Examining volume and directions of domestic migration in India using novel high frequency data

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Abstract

Movement of people is a fundamental economic activity having significant influence on public policy. Typically, studies on migration have relied either on the decennial Census or on irregular Surveys. By the time Census data is published, typically 6-7 years after collection, it is already dated. Moreover, Census data – though comprehensive and granular – captures a stock of migrants rather than dynamic, seasonal trends. This paper seeks to address this gap by harnessing three high frequency and granular datasets – Indian Railway Unreserved Ticketing System (UTS) data on passenger volumes; mobile telephone roaming data from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI); and district level banking data, to provide near-real time insights into migration flows. Our findings indicate that overall domestic migration in India has slowed. Since Census 2011, the number of migrants has reduced by about 11.78%, to ~40 Crore and the migration rate (percentage of migrants in the population) reduced to 28.88%. We hypothesize that this is on account of improved conditions and opportunities at the places of origin. Further, spatial trends in migration appear to be in line with gravity models of migration, with short distance migration accounting for the largest share. We go on to identify popular destinations, major origin districts, and build dyads of popular migration routes.

Keywords: Transportation Economics, Migration, Urban Economics

JEL Codes: J61; O15; R23; R30

Publication Date: 23 March 2025

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# We would like to acknowledge Advay Misra, a student of Sanskriti School, New Delhi for his contribution in analysis and visualization of data used in this paper.

1. Introduction

Migration is amongst the most studied phenomena in the social sciences (Leloup, 1996). As complex as it is dynamic, migration has demographic, economic, sociological, spatial, legal, behavioural, cultural and a myriad other dimensions (Lech, 2020).

Given the relatively easier availability of cross border immigration/emigration figures, coupled with data on international travel and remittances, the study of international migration, legal or otherwise, has received substantial scholastic and research attention.

On the other hand, tracking domestic movement of people can be significantly more difficult (Obeng-Odoom, 2021). In the Indian context, the primary data source that most domestic migration research relies on is the decennial population Census (Chandrasekhar and Sharma, 2022).

Although there are other data sources such as surveys carried out from time to time – for example, the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI) *Migration in India 2020-21 Report* (2022) or the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (MoHUPA) *Report of the Working Group On Migration (2017)* – tracking the volume, direction and trends in migration on a regular basis remains a challenge.

The primary reason for this is time lag between data collection, collation, publication, and eventual analysis – by which time the trends may have changed significantly. This paper seeks to address this issue, by making use of novel high-frequency and granular datasets to develop a model to examine the trends in domestic movement of people on a more regular basis.

We also explore related topics such as the impact on urbanization - especially the growth of cities, commuter zones, and popular movement dyads. Further, given that most migration is borne out of a desire for better opportunities and is seen as having an impact in improving incomes (Chetty and Hendren, 2016), we also make an attempt to discern the extent of impact that out-migration has in the places of origin.

This paper also works as a companion piece for our previous work titled "*India on the Move: An examination of the volume and direction of internal trade in India*" which used Goods and Services Tax (GST) data to examine the volume and direction of the flow of goods within the states of India. (Debroy and Misra, 2023).

2. Hitting a moving target: Tracking people on the move!

On account of its coverage, sheer volume, and richness of data, there can hardly be a more comprehensive dataset than the decennial Censuses for tracking population and migration trends. We base our preliminary findings on the last Census i.e. the 2011 Census and the data tables published subsequently (2011).

However, in order to get a more updated insight and to develop a high-frequency indicator of the movement of people, we use a massive dataset (with more than a billion data points): *Unreserved Ticket bookings* sourced from the Indian Railways, Centre for Railway Information Systems (CRIS)[1].

Amongst the many systems that CRIS runs is the *Unreserved Ticketing System (UTS)*. On an average, the system serves over 21 million passengers, issuing over 8 million tickets across 100 variations [concessional, seasonal, etc.] and involving revenue in excess of Rs. 500 Million – every day (CRIS n.d.).

The UTS is the backbone that serves passengers using the *Unreserved* or *General* Tickets – typically the most affordable tickets on the Indian Railways network. We analyse this large and high frequency dataset, which gives interesting insights into the movement of people within the country.

While it is rich and nuanced, the dataset is not without its limitations – for example it has Station-Station dyads and not City-City dyads – therefore we use it with certain caveats. The details of the dataset and the model used to analyse it for migration patterns is discussed in the Section titled, "*Using high frequency railway reservation data to track migration".* The model builds on and extends some of the metrics discussed in the 2016-17 edition of the Economic Survey[2] (2017).

The other major dataset we use is the monthly Telecom Subscriptions Reports, published by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)[3]. This publicly available dataset contains the number of Active Wireless Subscribers (or Visitor Location Register (VLR) Data) listed according to their respective *telecom circles* (service areas defined by the Department of Telecommunications)[4].

There are 22 *Telecom Circles* in the country, out of which, the cities of Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata are each defined as telecom circles. Therefore tracking the Visiting (Roaming) Telecom Subscribers can give a sense of the number of people coming into or '*visiting*' the aforesaid three cities. An analysis of movement of people using telecom data, in the backdrop of the pandemic, was attempted by Nizam, Sivakumar & Irudaya Rajan. (2022)

However, the major drawback in using TRAI/VLR data is that the dataset does not help build dyads i.e. who is travelling from where? Moreover, a home or visiting subscriber is defined with regard to the place where the Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) data is procured. This may not be the place of origin of our putative traveller. However, this dataset does help us understand seasonal trends in movements of people for certain cities. We discuss our methodology and findings in Section titled, "*Using Roaming to track trends in Migration*".

We move on to examine the impact of outward migration on the places of origin. This is done by analysis of publicly available banking data published by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)[5] and disaggregated at the District level.

Further, we use publicly available Geospatial Datasets, both for visualizing the movement of people as well as for examining the impact of migration. This is an area that is rapidly evolving, with newer

and more innovative applications of high resolution satellite imagery and earth observation data coming out by the day.

In the interest of brevity and in order to maintain our focus on the analysis and interpretation of the data on hand, discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of migration and of previous work in the area has been kept to a minimum. There are however, many excellent resources that comprehensively cover these areas, and also have references to other outstanding academic work on the topic. (Chandrasekhar and Sharma, 2022) and (Farwick, 2009)

3. The questions we ask/the answers we seek

In the study of migration the questions are typically broadly clubbed into four broad groups – who migrates (gender, age, professions); from where and to where do they migrate (between/within cities, from rural to urban); why do they migrate; and what are the economic benefits/ consequences of this migration (for the migrants, the geographies that they migrate to, and the place that they migrate from).

The following frameworks provide a theoretical underpinning of study of the phenomenon of migration:

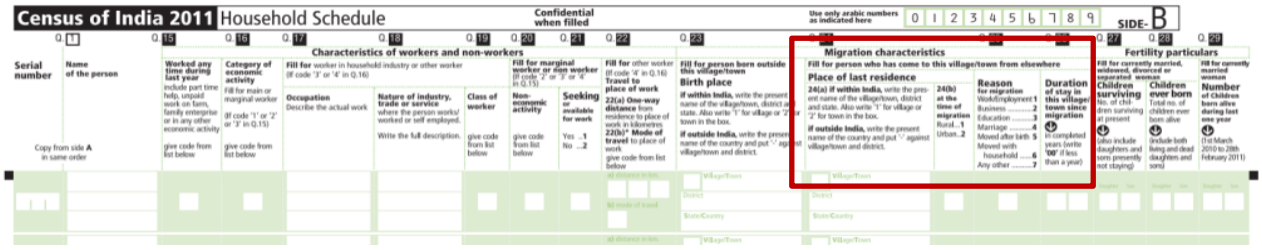
> Ravenstein's *Theory of Human Migration* (1880s that proposed a set of *9 observations*. Among these are that every migration causes a return/counter migration; migrants who move long distances primarily do so for economic reasons; rural residents tend to be more migratory than their urban counterparts; working-age males are more likely to migrate as compared to other demographic subsets (Ravenstein, 1885), and that migration often happens gradually – a process he referred to as *step-migration*.
>
> Sir Arthur Lewis' *Dual Sector model*, or the *Lewis model* (1954), which proposed that over time labour shifts from traditional primary sectors such as agriculture, typically characterized by low productivity, low wages, and labour intensity, to the modern industrial sector, which has higher marginal productivity, better wages and, at least initially, a greater demand for labour (Lewis, 1954).
>
> John R. Harris and Michael Todaro's *Harris–Todaro* model (1970) which holds that migration is based on expected income differentials between rural and urban areas rather than actual wage differentials. This implies that rural-urban migration in a context of high urban unemployment can be economically rational if expected urban income exceeds expected rural income. (Harris and Todaro, 1970)

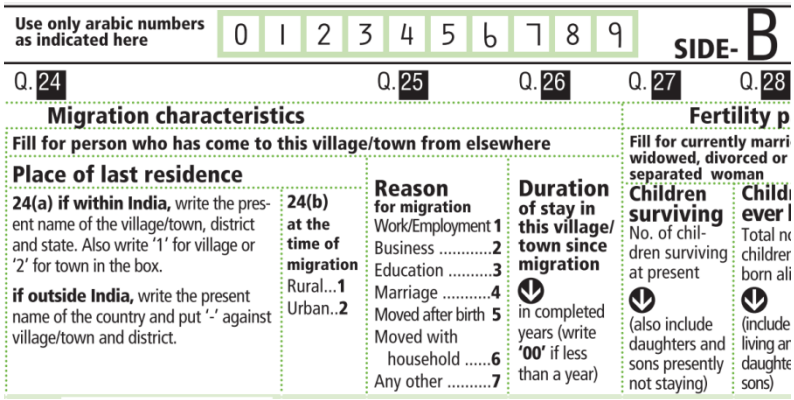
4. Indians on the Move: Where we were in 2011

Before we begin taking a deeper dive into answering the above questions and examining the volume and directions in domestic migration in India, it would be useful to see where we stood at the time of the last decennial Census i.e. in 2011.

Questions that implicitly capture migration status or behaviour have long been a part of the Census Questionnaire. However, at least since 1961, there have also been direct and specific questions on Migration in the Censuses. In the 2011 Census, *Question 24-26* in the *Household Schedule* captured the metrics related to migration (Figure 1).

Fig. 1: 2011 Census Household Schedule [Side B: Questions related to Migration highlighted]





The analysis of the collated Census Data is subsequently published as Census Tables (2011). Details regarding *Migrants by Place of Last Residence, Age, Sex, Reason for Migration and Duration of Residence* is published as Table D5 [*PC11_D05*].

For Census purposes, *Migration* is of two types – by *Birth place* and by place of *last usual place of residence* (*ibid*). When a person is enumerated in the Census at a place other than her/his place of birth, she/he is considered a migrant by *place of birth*. On the other hand, a person is considered to be a migrant by place of last residence, if their last usual place of residence (UPR), at any time in the past, was different from the present place of enumeration (MoSPI, 2022).

Here the *Usual Place of Residence* (UPR) of a person is defined as the place (village/town) where the person has been staying continuously for at least six months. Even if a person was not staying in the village/town continuously for six months but was found to be staying there during the

enumeration with an intention to stay there continuously for six months or more then that place is defined as being his/her UPR. (MoSPI, 2022)

With that in mind, the Census D5 table lists the **total number of migrants** in the country with segregation by **Rural/Urban origin** and **reason for movement**. The same is captured in Table 1.

Table 1: Migration statistics as per Census, 2011

	Persons	Male	Female
Population of India	**1210854977**	**623270258**	**587584719**
Total Migrants	**455787621**	**146145967**	**309641654**
Migrants from Rural Areas	295114410	73522596	221591814
Migrants from Urban Areas	106355920	45962228	60393692
Migration for Work/Employment	41422917	35016700	6406217
Migration for Business	3590487	2683144	907343
Migration for Economic Reasons	45013404	37699844	7313560
Migration for Economic Reasons [moved within last one year]	3364993	2662350	702643
Participation in Labour Force (% of Population)	39.79	53.26	25.51
Total Workforce	481799195	331953739	149892862
% of Migrants in Workforce	**9.34**	**11.36**	**4.88**
% of Total Migrants who have moved within last one year	**7.48**	**7.06**	**9.61**

Population Figures as per Census 2011; Labour Force Participation Rates as per MoSPI Data

From the above we get an idea of the total number of migrants, as well as those migrating on account of economic reasons (i.e., those stating that they are moving for *Work/Employment* or *Business*). As per Census 2011, the total number of persons migrating on account of economic reasons are 4,50,13,404 (*Males* - 3,76,99,844 and *Females* - 73,13,560). The corresponding figures stood at 3.27 Crore as per Census 2001 and 2.6 Crore as per Census 1991. (2017)

Therefore in the period 1991 to 2001 the compounded annual growth rate of the number of migrants was 2.7%. This increased to 3.7% in the period 2001 to 2011. Interestingly, in the period 1991 to 2001, India's workforce grew from 3.17 Crore to 4.02 Crore [an annual average growth of 2.6%], whereas in the period 2001 to 2011, the workforce grew from 4.02 Crore to 4.82 Crore [an annual average growth of 1.99%]. Therefore it is evident that, between 1991 and 2011, the share of migrants in the workforce increased steadily.

Census Data also makes it evident that percentage of migrants in the total workforce increased from 8.15% in 2001 to 9.34% in 2011. We delve deeper into migration figures and take a look at the migration statistics as captured by Census, 2001 (Table 2).

Table 2: Migration statistics as per Census, 2001

	Persons	Male	Female
Population of India	**1,02,70,15,247**	**53,12,77,078**	**49,57,38,169**
Total Migrants	**31,45,41,350**	**9,33,61,809**	**22,11,79,541**
Rural Migrants	22,66,67,548	5,22,46,555	17,44,20,993
Urban Migrants	5,04,74,068	2,15,32,764	2,89,41,304
Migration for Work/Employment	2,99,04,442	2,62,29,666	36,74,776
Migration for Business	28,26,874	23,82,559	4,44,315
Migration for Economic Reasons	3,27,31,316	2,86,12,225	41,19,091
Migration for Economic Reasons [moved within last one year]	22,13,720	16,83,506	5,30,214
Participation in Labour Force (% of Population)	39.10	51.7	25.6
Total Workforce	40,15,62,962	27,46,70,249	12,69,08,971
% of Migrants in Workforce	**8.15**	**10.42**	**3.25**
% of Total Migrants who have moved within last one year	**6.76**	**5.88**	**12.87**

Population Figures as per Census 2001[6]; Labour Force Participation Rates as per MoSPI Data[7]

The above discussion is an indicator of the increasing numbers of people migrating for economic reasons, as well as the increase in the share of migrants in the workforce. A quick look on the directions of the movement, as per Census 2011, is at Appendix A.

We visualize the movement between States using the DS-0000-D02-MDDS India Table from Census, 2011 for the data (Table 3). It may be recalled that using Goods & Services Tax (GST) data we had earlier carried out a similar exercise for the domestic movement of goods in the country (Debroy and Misra, 2023).

Given the width of Table 3, it is split into two parts. RTO Codes are used to denote States. The rows represent the origin states whereas the columns are the destinations. Accordingly, the total at the end of the rows denote the total out-migration from the respective States in the Rows.

Similarly, the totals in the columns are the total in-migrants into the respective States in the columns. As per Census 2011, the total number of migrants [*all reasons; all lengths of stay; all ages*] stood at **45,57,87,621.**

Some important takeaways from Table 3 are:

- Just five states – Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal together account for about 48% of the total outbound migrants. This includes within-State migrants as well.
- Similarly, just five states – Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu together account for about 48% of all incoming migrants. This includes within-State migrants as well.

- With the exception of Assam we see little outward migration from most states of the Northeast. Even when there is outward migration it is typically to neighbouring states.
- Most migrants tend to move close to their origin states. We need to keep in mind that these are total migrants, which would include migration on account of marriage.
- With the exception of Delhi, there is little out-migration from most of the Union Territories.
- Similarly, we see little out-migration from the hill states.
- As per Census 2011, there were a total of 54,91,194 migrants who indicated their last place of residence as being outside of India. Out of these, more than a third were resident in West Bengal. Other states with significant international immigrants were Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Punjab.

5. Tracking Indians on the Move

While Censuses are typically conducted once in ten years, migration is a continuous phenomenon. There are a number of reasons why we would like to track migration, on a more regular basis.

As per Census 2011, the percentage of migrants [for economic reasons] in the total workforce stood at a little over 45 Million [9.34% of the total workforce; up from 8.15% from Census, 2001. However, there have been alternative estimates which have placed the number and proportion of migrants in the workforce at a significantly higher level.

For example, a paper titled, "*Migration and Human Development in India*" (Deshingkar and Akter, 2009), used field evidence from employing sectors to synthesize that there were over 100 million migrants. The authors averred that the Census tends to understate the levels of migration since it does not take into account circular migration and therefore intra-year/seasonal movements are not adequately captured.

Further, presently Census Data on the reasons for migration is captured as one of the following:

- Work/Employment
- Business
- Education
- Marriage
- Moved after Birth
- Moved with household

It may be noted that while the reason for the migration may have been on account of *Marriage* or *Moved with household*, however at the destination it is possible that some of these individuals would now be in the workforce. This would be especially true for women, who are often enumerated as having moved on account of marriage.

Economic Survey 2016-17 (Ministry of Finance, 2017), had also discussed this issue, and had gone on to estimate that the workforce is likely to exceed 500 Million by 2016, with about 100 Million [20%] constituting migrants. We would get a clearer picture in the next decennial Census.

Further, an updated sense of the numbers and location of migrants helps in targeting social sector welfare programmes; in planning urban infrastructure as well as understanding the impact of migration in the places of origin. In order to address the issue of more updated numbers, we look towards some novel datasets viz. Railway Reservations Data; Data on Telecom Mobility, Geospatial data and data on banking transactions from the RBI.

Each of these datasets have their own advantages and shortcomings and admittedly they would not be as comprehensive as the decennial Census, however our attempt here is to discern trends in the inter-decennial period and to build on the data captured in the Census.

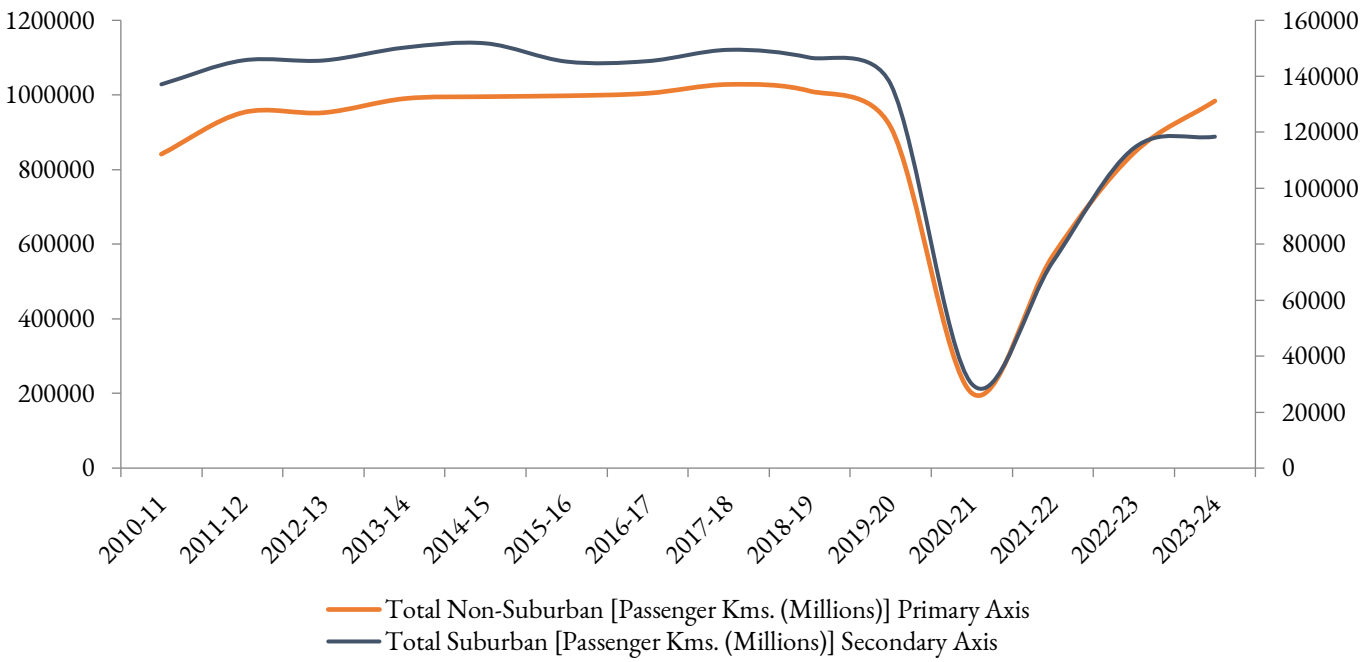
6. You can hear the whistle blow, a hundred miles:

Using high frequency railway reservation data to track migration.

With an estimated passenger volume close to a 1,000 Billion Passenger-Kilometres[8,9] over the last decade, the Indian Railways remains a popular mode of transport for passengers travelling across cities/states, especially those travelling longer distances. The total number of passengers carried by the Railways in 2023-24 stood at 6,843 Million (Ministry of Railways 2024). This includes **3,852 Million Suburban passengers** and **2,991 Million non-Suburban passengers**. Indian Railways defines **suburban services** as those being **up to 150 Kms.** from the origin[10]. In order to maintain uniformity, we continue to use this distance as our basis for further analysis.

We use publicly available data sourced from the Rail Budget and from the Annual Reports (Ministry of Railways, 2024) of the Indian Railways to get a sense of how passenger volumes have moved since the last Census in 2011. The trend in passenger volumes [*in Passenger-Kms.*] since 2011, shown separately for non-suburban passenger volume [*Red Line; primary axis*] and suburban passenger volume [*Blue Line; secondary axis*] is as under [Figure 2].

Fig. 2: Indian Railways Passenger Nos. and Volume (in Passenger Kms. Millions); All Classes; All Gauges



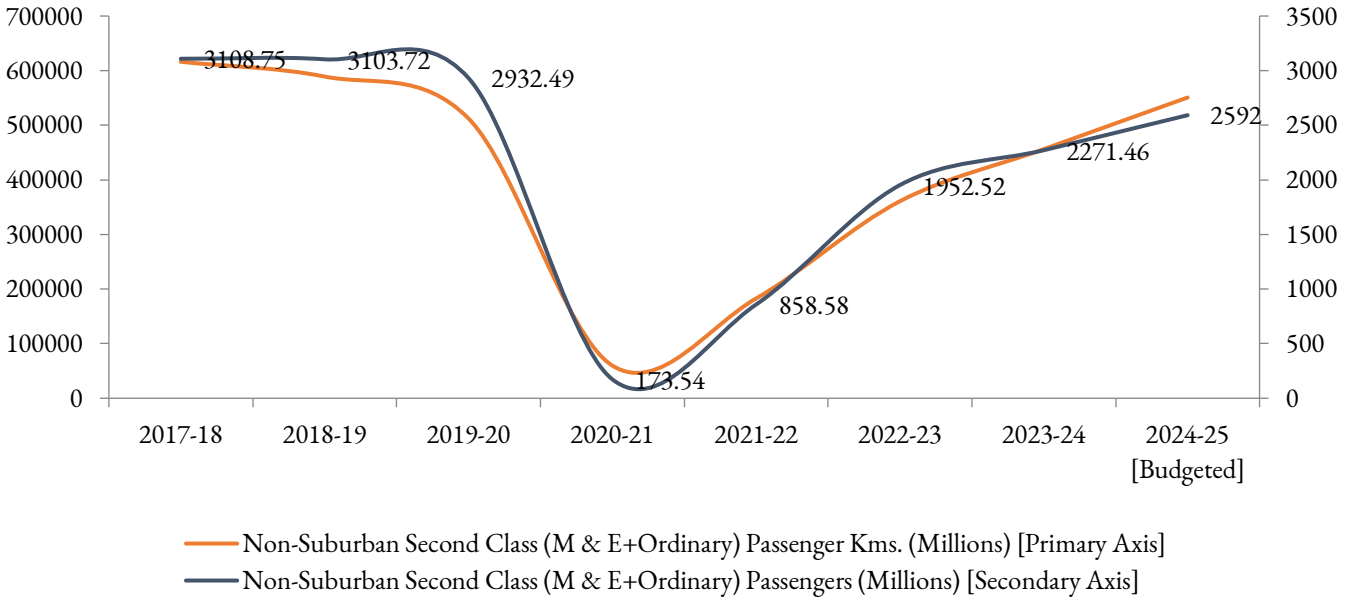
We can see that barring the years 2019-20 and 2020-21 [Covid years], the trend in passenger volume (especially for non-suburban travel) has shown a consistent upward trend, and has since bounced back to near pre-Covid levels.

In the absence of a high frequency, granular dataset to track migration, we propose to track the movement of people on Indian Railways In particular we use data from the Indian Railways (IR) *Unreserved Ticketing System* (UTS), which is used to book unreserved tickets. In particular, we propose to use data for unreserved tickets booked on the Indian Railway (IR) network as a marker of trends in the movement of migrants.

Unreserved Second Class (*Mail & Express/Ordinary*) tickets are the cheapest class of tickets (Ministry of Railways, 2019) on the IR network. Unreserved tickets are required for boarding a train, but typically do not guarantee a seat. We use these tickets as a proxy for blue collar migrants, primarily on account of their price.

We look at the total passenger volumes and numbers for Non-suburban, Second Class (*Mail & Express and Ordinary Trains*) for the period 2017-18 to 2024-25 [Budgeted] (Ministry of Railways, 2017-2025) The results are plotted as under [Figure 3].

Fig. 3: Passenger Numbers and Volumes; II Class (*Mail & Express and Ordinary*) [Non-suburban]



From above, we note that the number of non-suburban, second class passengers has reduced from 3,108 million in 2017-18 to 2,592 million in 2024-25 [Budgeted]. In the same period, the second class passenger volume has also reduced from 6,16,202 Million Passenger Kms. to 5,50,814 Million Passenger Kms.

It is instructive to note that while second class passenger numbers have reduced by 16.62% in the period 2017-18 to 2024-25 [Budgeted]; however the passenger volumes [passenger kms.] has reduced only by 10.6%.

Since passenger volumes are computed as the number *of journeys* x *mean kilometric distance*, the divergence between the two could indicate relatively longer journeys being undertaken by fewer passengers.

For the purposes of this paper we have used UTS II Class ticket bookings. These, as we saw above, are the cheapest tickets on the IR network, and are noted as being most preferred by blue collar migrants (Ministry of Finance, 2017). Given the geographic spread and density of the IR network, this forms a robust mechanism to track trends in domestic migration.

Prior to beginning our examination, we run a regression between the 2012 non-Suburban, UTS II Class passengers destined to each State and compare that with the State-wise number of total migrants enumerated in Census (2011) The regression results are in Table 4.

Table 4: Regression results comparing State-wise UTS II Class Non-Suburban Passengers and numbers of Migrants as per Census 2011

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.930293275
R Square	0.865445578
Adjusted R Square	0.86046208
Standard Error	6090151.032
Observations	29

ANOVA

	df	*SS*	*MS*	*F*	*Significance F*
Regression	1	6.44112E+15	6.44112E+15	173.6623009	2.82775E-13
Residual	27	1.00143E+15	3.70899E+13		
Total	28	7.44255E+15			

	Coefficients	*Standard Error*	*t Stat*	*P-value*	*Lower 95%*	*Upper 95%*	*Lower 95.0%*	*Upper 95.0%*
Intercept	1074038.7	1581964.829	0.678927041	0.502962775	-2171885.013	4319962.413	-2171885.013	4319962.413
X Variable 1	0.607612158	0.046107723	13.17809929	2.82775E-13	0.513006924	0.702217392	0.513006924	0.702217392

From the above, it is seen that state-wise railway passenger data is a robust predictor of the actual migrants. That said, we would like to highlight certain limitations.

- Firstly, all railways data is recorded from Station to Station, therefore the actual origin and destinations may not always be captured accurately. This is more so if there are multiple stations in or around a major urban centre, or if a station serves a large catchment area. (For example, some passengers travelling to Thane may eventually be headed to Mumbai. Or, it may be that passengers taking a train from Prayagraj may actually be residing outside the district.)
- Secondly, since the data captures passenger numbers (i.e. journeys), Circular Migration/Short term migration or travel around festival/marriage seasons would inflate the figures. Therefore the data would need to be used with some caution. Thirdly, the data does not capture details such as age, gender, reasons for migrating etc.
- Thirdly, there is a possibility that new lines/services/trains may have been since have been added or discontinued which might have a bearing on the figures.

In general, while the data is useful for discerning trends, routes, changes in directions, hotspots for origin/destination etc., it has limited utility for use as absolute figures.

Data on number of tickets booked on the unreserved ticketing system from the Indian Railways Centre for Railway Information Systems (CRIS)[11] was used to conduct this analysis. This data captures the month and year of travel, the place (district) of origin of the journey and the place (district) of destination as well as the number of passengers travelling on the route. We query the dataset looking for answers to the following questions:

- What have been the overall trends in migration, as indicated by unreserved train travel moved since the 2011 Census
- Which are the top origin districts for in-/out-migration
- Origins for Cities (Districts) with the maximum migrant in-flows
- Destinations for Places (Districts) with the maximum migrant out-flows
- Top District and State Routes
- Seasonal trends in flow of railway traffic

We also attempt to delve into the trends in sub-urbanization of Indian Cities. In particular, we explore the number of people travelling in the suburban zone for major cities in India. We use the same definition of *suburban* as the Indian Railways i.e. places within 150 kms. of the origin (Ministry of Railways, 2017). This is done in order to maintain continuity and comparability.

In order to account for sub-urban movement, each City (District) is geocoded and distanced between city/district pairs are computed using the *Haversine Formula* (Kettle, 2017):

$\text{hav}\,\theta = \text{hav}(\Delta\varphi) + \cos(\varphi_1) \cdot \cos(\varphi_2) \cdot \text{hav}(\Delta\lambda)$

where

- φ_1, φ_2 are the latitude of point 1 and latitude of point 2;
- λ_1, λ_2 are the longitude of point 1 and longitude of point 2;
- $\Delta\varphi = \varphi_2 - \varphi_1, \Delta\lambda = \lambda_2 - \lambda_1$

The distance calculated here is the *orthodromic* or spherical distance, which in some cases might differ from the actual road distances. However, for uniformity of application, we use the above to compute distances and use the 150 km mark for segregating suburban and non-suburban travel. For the purposes of this paper, we define '*passenger*', as a *UTS II Class, non-Suburban passenger*, unless otherwise qualified.

We begin by taking a look at **State-wise** migration. Table 5 depicts States which were the top destinations in 2023 along with the percentage of total passengers destined to those States. The figures include intra-State non-suburban travellers as well.

For comparison, the state-wise percentage of total passengers as well as the number of Statewise in-migrants enumerated as per Census, 2011 is also included.

Table 5: Top Destinations for Passengers; 2023/2012; UTS II Class Non-Suburban Passengers and Statewise in-migrants as per Census, 2011 [including intra-State Migrants]

STATES TO	% of Total Passengers 2023	% of Total Passengers 2012	Statewise In-migrants [Census 2011]	% of Total In-Migrants [Census 2011]
UTTAR PRADESH	12.68	13.16	56452083	12.39
MAHARASHTRA	10.74	12.34	57376776	12.59
WEST BENGAL	7.33	5.00	33448472	7.34
RAJASTHAN	7.19	6.17	22071482	4.84
MADHYA PRADESH	6.75	6.89	24735119	5.43
BIHAR	6.54	6.47	27244869	5.98
KARNATAKA	6.36	5.84	26463170	5.81
TAMIL NADU	6.08	5.89	31274107	6.86
ANDHRA PRADESH	5.73	6.64	38360644	8.42
DELHI	5.16	5.38	7224514	1.59
GUJARAT	5.10	6.00	26898286	5.90
TELANGANA	3.60	3.79		0.00
HARYANA	2.93	2.90	10585460	2.32
KERALA	2.89	2.55	17863419	3.92
ODISHA	2.57	2.33	15421793	3.38
PUNJAB	2.27	2.53	13735616	3.01
JHARKHAND	2.19	2.26	9659702	2.12
CHHATTISGARH	1.15	1.44	8888075	1.95
ASSAM	0.94	0.75	10644234	2.34
UTTARAKHAND	0.73	0.78	4317454	0.95
JAMMU AND KASHMIR	0.42	0.41	2809629	0.62
CHANDIGARH	0.28	0.19	678188	0.15
GOA	0.18	0.14	1140690	0.25
NAGALAND	0.07	0.08	549618	0.12
HIMACHAL PRADESH	0.04	0.05	2647067	0.58
TRIPURA	0.04	0.03	1299623	0.29
PUDUCHERRY	0.03	0.02	712401	0.16
ARUNACHAL PRADESH	0.00	0.00	630831	0.14
MEGHALAYA	0.00	0.00	759554	0.17
		TOTAL In-migrants [Census, 2011]	455787621	

Source: IR UTS Data; Census 2011; DS-0000-D03-MDDS; Migrants within the State/UT by place of last residence, duration of residence and reason of migration – 2011[12]

From the above we can see the following:

- The composition of the top five States attracting migrants has changed. West Bengal and Rajasthan are the new entrants, while Andhra Pradesh and Bihar are now ranked a notch lower.
- Even amongst the top five, the percentage of passengers headed to the respective States has reduced. This could be on account of an overall reduction in the migration rate, or it could indicate a greater spatial spread of outward movement of passengers.
- West Bengal, Rajasthan and Karnataka are the States showing the maximum amount of growth in percentage share of the arriving passengers. Similarly, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh are States where the percentage share of total migrants has reduced.
- As regards, the quality of IR UTS II Class Passenger data, it may be noted that as a percentage of the total numbers, the railway data closely corresponds to the data captured as part of the Census 2011 exercise in most cases. (The passenger arrivals and Census enumerated migrants in Delhi do show a deviation. This may be on account of Delhi being used as a transit station.)

We may note that the above figures include *all* non-suburban arriving passengers/migrants, irrespective of the state of their origin. Therefore the figures above include those who might be arriving or migrating from within the respective State as well.

We move on to attempt a comprehensive perspective on the percentage of passengers arriving and departing from each State. Table 6 captures the percentage of arrivals in each State [columns] from other states [rows] in the year 2023. For example, we can see that Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, and Telangana are the major origin states for arrivals in **Maharashtra**. Similarly, for **Delhi**, the major origin states are Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Madhya Pradesh.

In the same vein, Table 7 captures the state-wise percentage of destinations [States in columns] for outbound UTS II Class non-suburban travellers from each origin [States in rows]. We can see that the major destinations for UTS II Class travellers heading out from **Uttar Pradesh** are Delhi, Bihar, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana. Major Destinations for UTS II Class non-suburban travellers heading out from **Bihar** are Delhi, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Jharkhand.

We now take a look at the ten most popular **State-to-State Routes**. This is based on passenger movements in 2023. Here intra-State and suburban movement is excluded.

Table 8: Top Ten State-to-State Routes [2023]

State From	State To
Uttar Pradesh	Delhi
Gujarat	Maharashtra
Telangana	Andhra Pradesh
Bihar	Delhi
Bihar	West Bengal
Bihar	Uttar Pradesh
Uttar Pradesh	Maharashtra
Bihar	Maharashtra
Andhra Pradesh	Karnataka
Jharkhand	Bihar

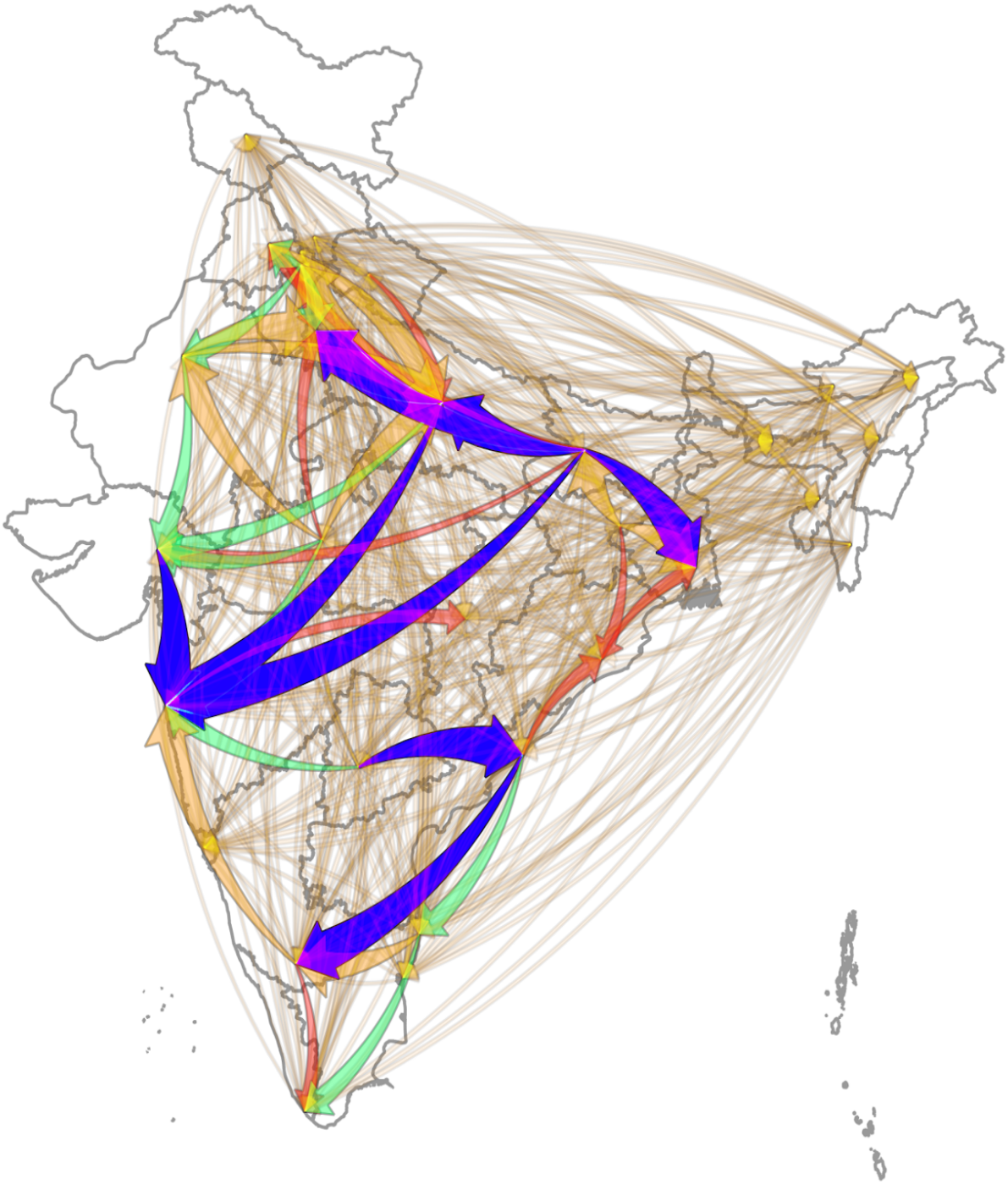
For better visualization, we map State-to-State routes [Figure 5]. As above, intra-State and suburban movement is excluded.

Another visualization of the above is a chord diagram [Figure 4]. The size of the arcs indicates the proportional size of the movements in the respective States [RTO Codes are used to denote States]. Both inter-State as well as intra-State movements are depicted.

Fig. 4: Predicted Inter-State and Intra-State Movement [2023]

Data: UTS II Class IR Passengers [Non-Suburban], 2023
Data includes both inter-State and intra-State movement

Fig. 5: State-to-State Predicted Migration Routes [2023]



Basemap: India States Shapefile [ADM1]; Data: UTS II Class IR Passengers, 2023
Intra-State and suburban movement is excluded

We now take a look at the month-on-month changes in the total number of non-suburban as well as suburban passenger movement, from January 2012 to December 2023. The figures are indexed, with January 2012 set at 100. Figure 6 tracks the monthly trends in movement of non-suburban UTS II Class passengers.

Fig. 6: Trends in movement of non-suburban UTS II Class passengers; Jan, 2012 indexed at 100

[Jan, 2012 to Dec, 2023]

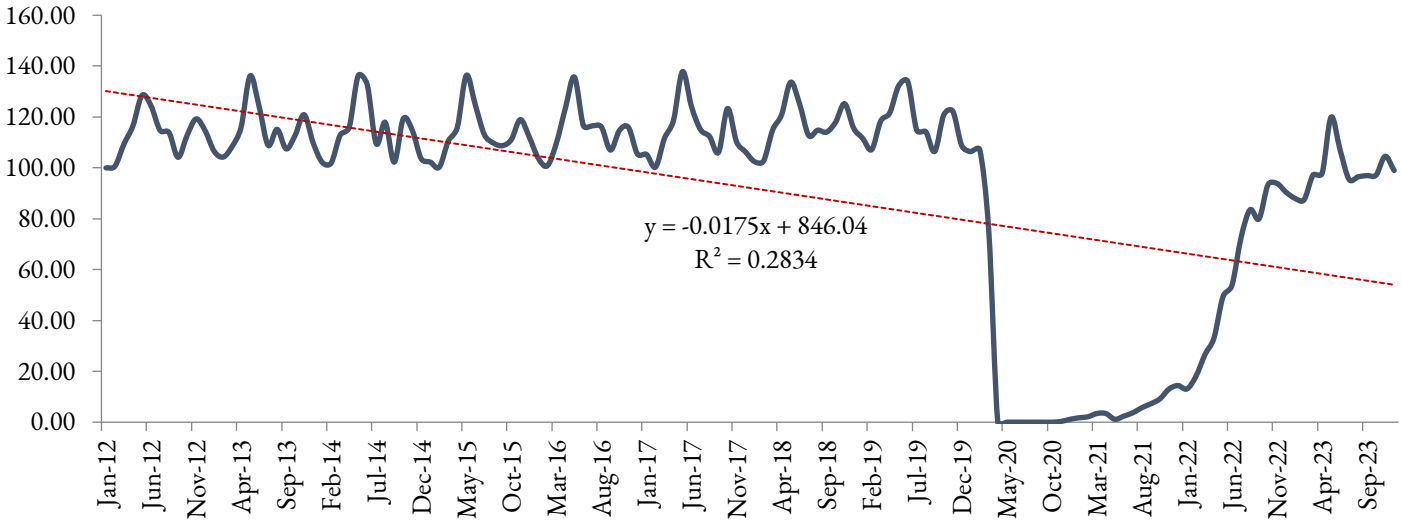


Figure 7 indicates a distinct seasonality of movements, with May-June being the high months and November-December witnessing secondary highs. These are perhaps months where most migrant labour travel back to their places of origin. A secondary high in winter time is perhaps indicative of travel around the festival/marriage season. January, on the other hand, appears to be the month of lowest travel.

However, the seasonal rhythms appear to have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. We can clearly see April-May 2020 as a month which saw passenger movements plummeting to nil as the Covid-19 related lockdown brought regular rail movement to a standstill. While the numbers have steadily come up once the Covid-19 related restrictions were lifted, the level of movement is yet to reach pre-pandemic levels.

Even prior to the pandemic related lockdowns, there were signs of the passenger movement showing little growth, however after the pandemic, even the high months i.e. Apr-May are at a distinctly lower level as compared to the corresponding period before the pandemic - passenger levels for May 2023 being 6.67% lower than the corresponding number for May 2012.

A reduction in the overall levels of migration is indicated on the basis of passenger movement data. The overall non-suburban UTS II Class passenger numbers in 2023 are about 11.78% lower than the corresponding numbers in 2012. In this period, India's population has grown by 14.98%, from 121,08,54,977 in 2011 (National Commission on Population, 2019) to an estimated 139,23,29,000 in 2023 [13].

Moreover, as per Census (2011), the number of migrants [*all persons, all reasons, all durations*] were enumerated as 45,57,87,621. Therefore, the migration rate, based on Census 2011, stood at 37.64%. Analysing corresponding trends in railway passenger movement, we hypothesize that the migration rate has since reduced to 28.878% of the population [as of 2023].

Consequently, we estimate the number of migrants in the country, as of 2023, to be 40,20,90,396. We eagerly look forward to next round of the Census to verify our estimates!

There is considerable academic literature indicating that when an economy grows and the benefits of this growth are broadly distributed, rural/semi-urban areas – typically areas of out-migration – also tend to grow. This leads to a broader spread of economic opportunities, and is seen as reducing the incentive to migrate to urban centres (Jia et al. 2022).

Further, it is seen that multiple factors – improved infrastructure (roads, education, healthcare, public transport), social security nets, and localized economic growth that creates jobs closer to rural areas – together allow people to remain in their hometowns, or to migrate shorter distances (Ratha, Mohapatra, and Scheja 2011)

Indicators of such developments are seen in India in the period since the last Census i.e. from 2011 to 2023.

- For example, *completed road length* under the *Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana* (PMGSY)[14], increased from 3,25,576.26 kms. in 2011-12 to 12,47,459.42 kms in FY 2022-23 (an increase of 283%)[15].
- Similarly, 2,64,87,910 houses have been completed under the *Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin* (PMAY-G)[16] in the period 2014 to 2024[17].
- Under the *Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana* (DDUGJY), launched in December 2014, as on 31.03.2019, all households in India have been reported as electrified[18].
- Similarly, as of August 14th, 2024, the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) [launched on August 15th, 2019] has successfully provided tap water connections to 11.82 crore additional rural households, bringing the total coverage to more than 15.07 crore households, which accounts for 77.98% of all rural households in India. For context, at the time of its inception, only 3.23 crore (17%) of rural households had tap water connections[19].
- Similarly, as of April 2024, 95.15% villages have access to internet with 3G/4G mobile connectivity[20]. (2024)

Cumulatively, these developments have led to 24.82 crore Indians escaping Multidimensional Poverty in last 9 years. (NITI Aayog, 2024)

7. Minding the Data Gap:

Using Railway Reservations to Track Migration at the District Level

In addition to being high frequency, an important feature of Railway reservation data is its granularity. Using the data we delve deeper to get a sense of the originating and destination districts.

As noted above, however, these are start and end points of train journeys, and passengers may not be residents of that particular district, such as when the catchment area of the station of origin extends beyond the district where the Station is located. Similarly, there is a fair possibility that the district/station where the journey terminates might not necessarily be the final destination for the migrants.

As in the case of States, we use district-wise railway passenger data as an indicator of trends rather than of actual numbers.

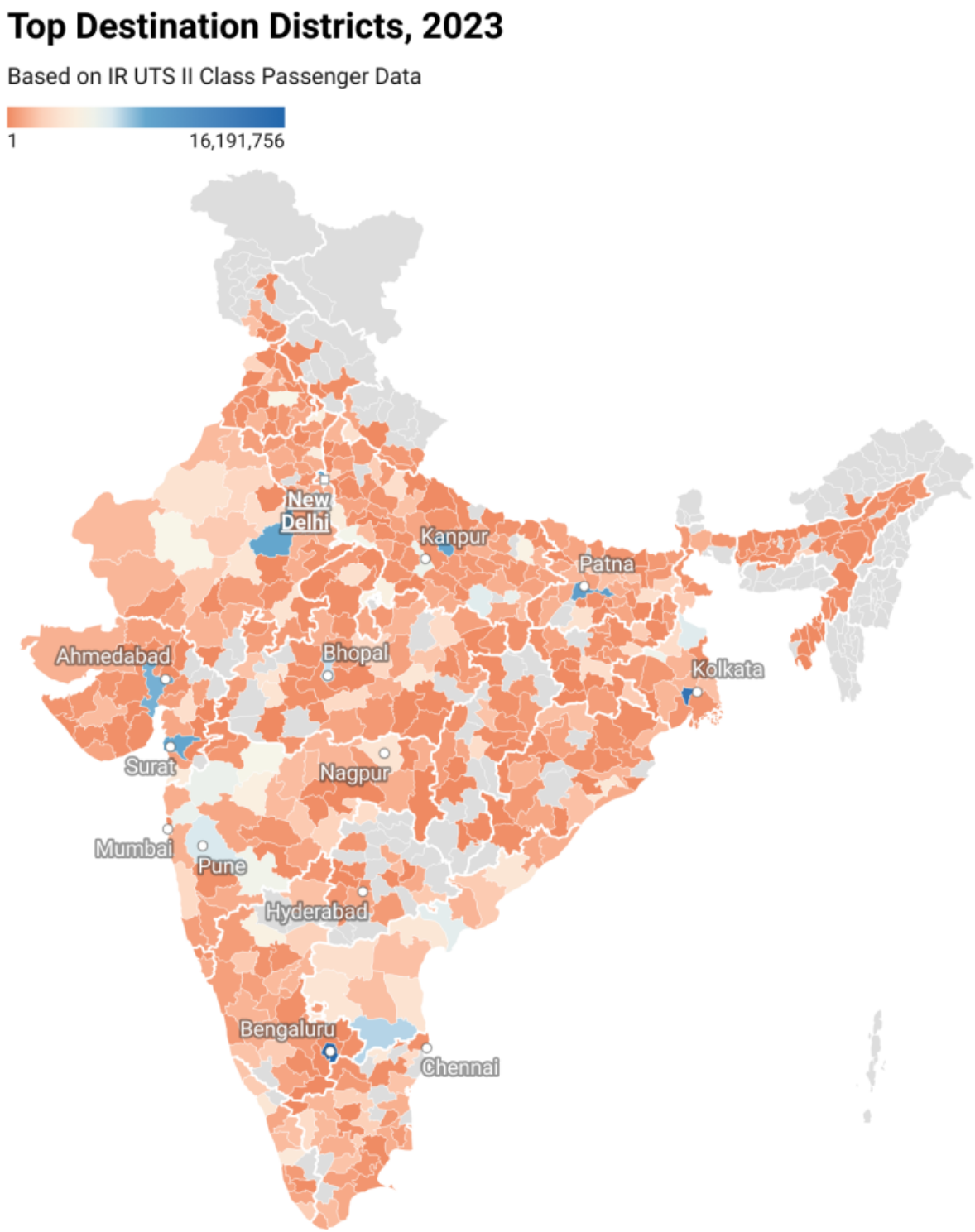
The following are the districts which were the top destinations for non-suburban [150+ km.] travel in 2012 as well as in 2023 (Table 9). While the order of the districts might have changed, the composition of the top ten stays constant.

Table 9: Top ten destination districts for non-suburban UTS II Class Passengers [2012, 2023]; All Origins

2012	2023
Mumbai	Mumbai
Central Delhi	Bengaluru Urban
Howrah	Howrah
Bengaluru Urban	Central Delhi
North Delhi	Hyderabad
Hyderabad	Chennai
Chennai	Patna
Surat	North Delhi
Lucknow	Lucknow
Patna	Surat

We map the top destination districts [2023] for predicted in-migration [Figure 7]. We see that the top destination districts are the major urban agglomerations viz. Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Kolkata etc. Given the relative geographic size of Mumbai City and the districts of Delhi, the two cities are not as prominent in the map [Figure 7].

Fig. 7: Top destination Districts [Non-Suburban, 2023]



Similarly, the following are the districts which were the top originating districts for non-suburban [150+ km] travel in 2012 as well as in 2023 (Table 10). Here we see some new source districts feature in 2023 (that were not there in 2012).

Table 10: Top ten source districts for non-suburban UTS II Class Passengers [2012, 2023]; All Destinations

2012	2023
Valsad	Valsad
Patna	Chittoor
Paschim Bardhaman	Paschim Bardhaman
Chittoor	Agra
Agra	Guntur
Guntur	Villupuram
Spsr Nellore	Saharsa
Mumbai	Moradabad
Prayagraj	Prayagraj
Bhagalpur	Murshidabad

While Valsad remains the top source district, however being 193 kms from Mumbai there is likelihood that this travel is actually daily suburban travel. However, for sake of completeness we include Valsad in the above list.

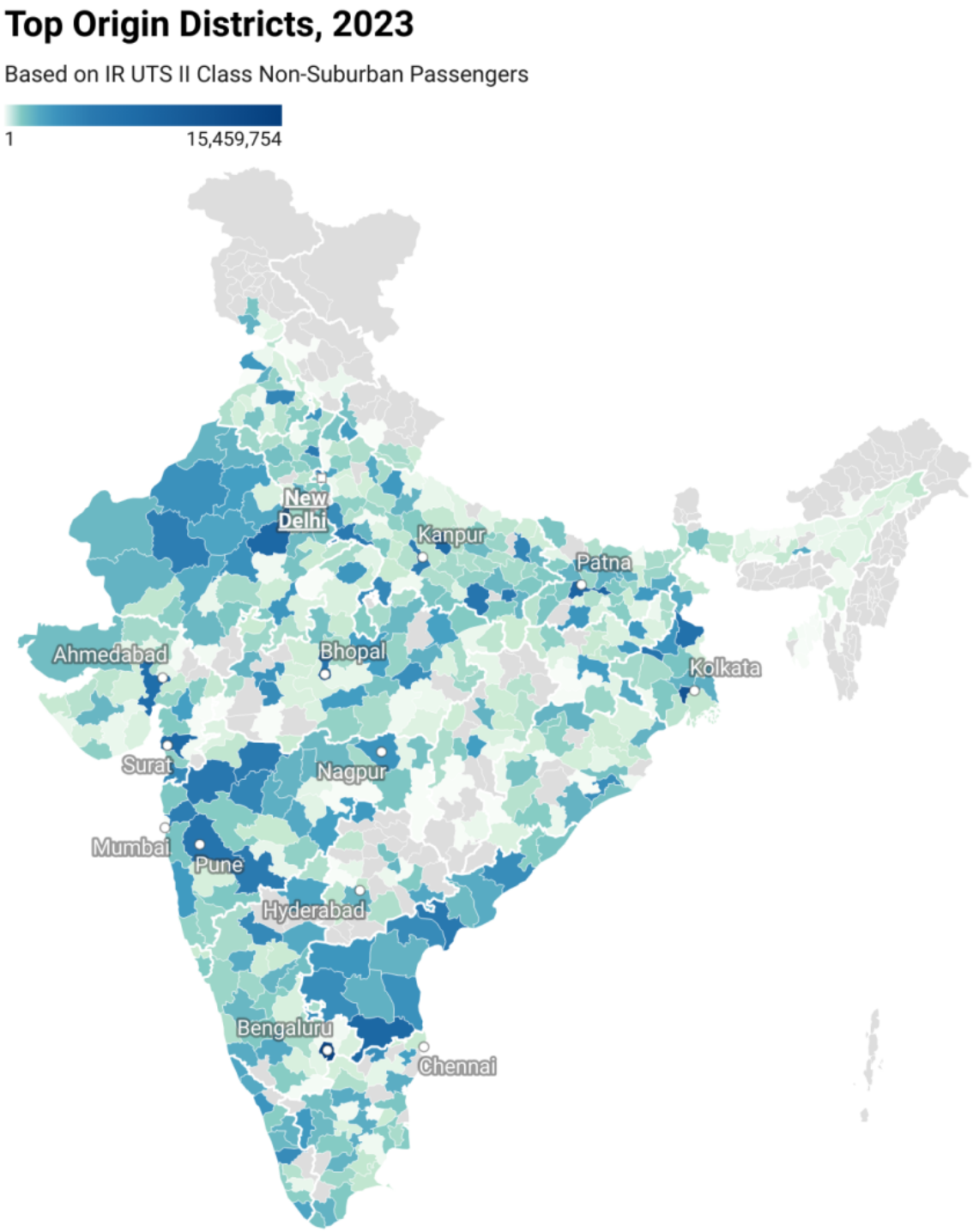
We map the top origin districts [2023] for predicted out migration [Figure 8]. We see that the top origin districts are coalesced around major urban agglomerations viz. Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Kolkata etc. This is not only in line with gravity models of migration, (Tobler, 1975) but also a tentative confirmation of priors i.e short-distance migration accounts for the largest share of migrants, (Singh and Biradar, 2022) and distance has a negative effect on labour flows. (Ministry of Finance, 2017)

Similarly, the top ten routes for passenger movement, at the district level, is at Table 11.

Table 11: Top ten routes for non-suburban UTS II Class Passengers [District Level, 2023]

From	To
Murshidabad	Kolkata
Paschim Bardhaman	Howrah
Valsad	Mumbai
Chittoor	Bengaluru Urban
Surat	Mumbai
Birbhum	Howrah
Vellore	Bengaluru Urban
Hassan	Bengaluru Urban
Nashik	Mumbai

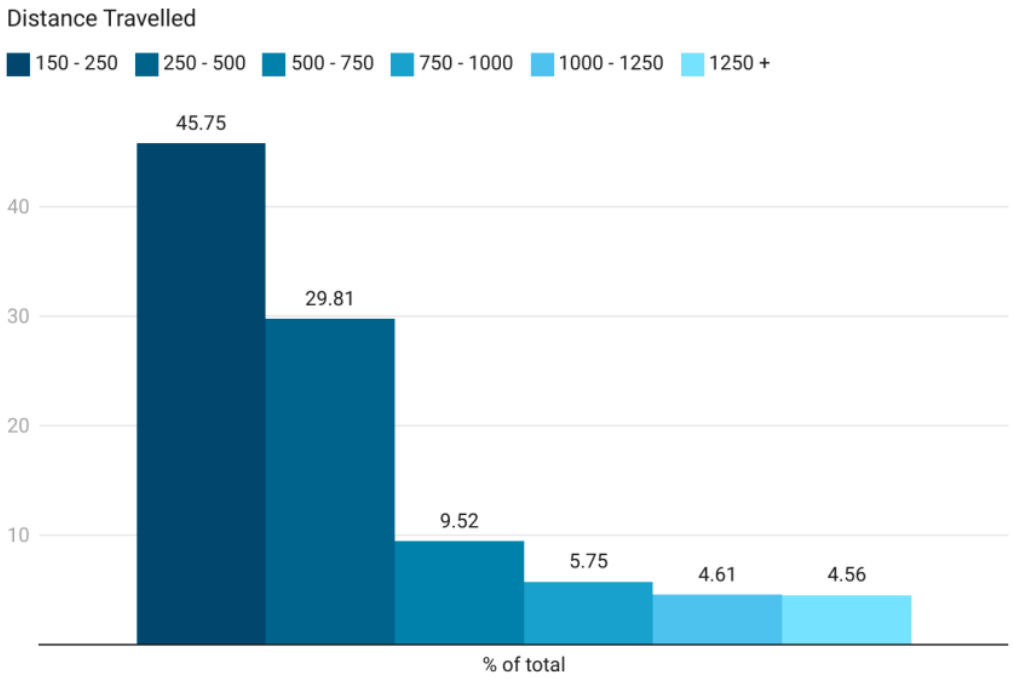
Fig. 8: Top origin Districts [Non-Suburban, 2023]



It is interesting to note that that a majority [>75%] of our predicted migration flows are within 500 kms of the origin (Figure 9). This is in line with gravity models, as well as Ravenstein's *Theory of Human Migration*. (Ravenstein, 1885)

Figure 9: Percentage Distribution of passenger numbers by distance travelled (km)

[Non-Suburban, 2023]



Before we move on the next section, we quickly visualize the district-to-district movement on a map (Figure 10). Given the sheer number of connections, the map is admittedly somewhat busy! The blue lines denote the highest amount of non-suburban travel, and are clustered around Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, and Kolkata. As earlier, flows to Delhi are split amongst the districts of Delhi, and therefore do not show up as Blue lines.

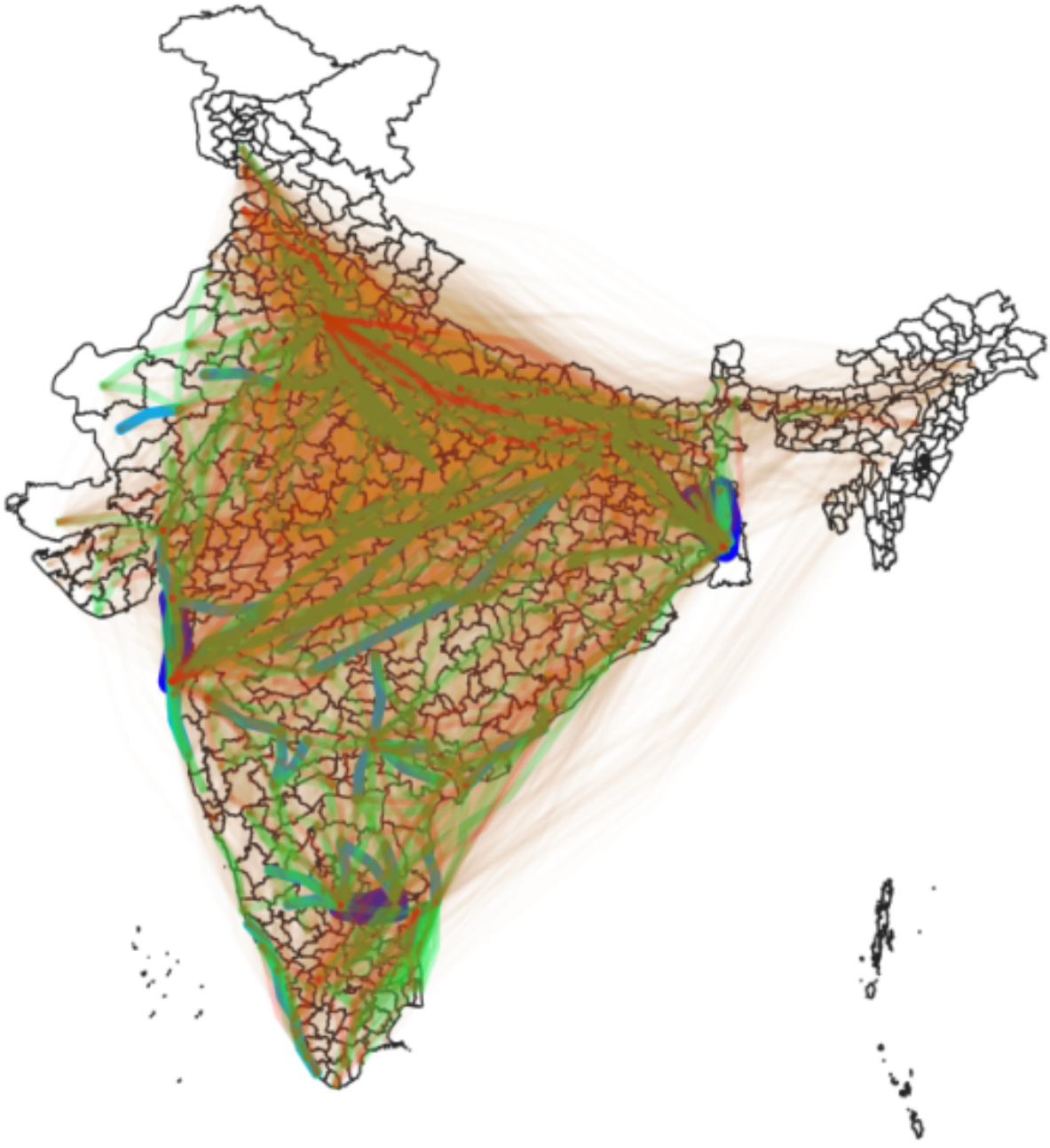
We extend the above model to examine the districts of origin for predicted migration to Delhi (Table 12A). The districts are ranked by their respective percentage contribution to the total non-suburban arrivals in Delhi.

Table 12A: Top source districts for non-suburban UTS II Class Passengers [2012, 2023]; Destination Delhi [All Districts]

2012		2023	
Origin District	% Of Total	Origin District	% Of Total
Agra	5.18	Agra	4.54
Patna	3.07	Patna	2.90
Moradabad	2.45	Kanpur Nagar	2.01
Kanpur Nagar	2.27	Jhansi	1.97
Jhansi	2.24	Bareilly	1.80
Bareilly	2.18	Jaipur	1.75
Darbhanga	2.02	Haridwar	1.69
Gorakhpur	1.98	Moradabad	1.69
Jaipur	1.70	Dausa	1.66
Muzaffarpur	1.57	Ludhiana	1.58

From the above, we can see that districts like Dausa and Ludhiana now feature in the top ten origin districts for predicted migration into Delhi. However, in the period 2012 to 2023, the relative weightage of the top ten districts to the total has reduced. This is perhaps an indicator of a greater spatial spread of the origins of migration.

Fig. 10: District -to-District Predicted Migration Routes [2023]



Basemap: India Districts Shapefile [ADM2]; Data: UTS II Class IR Passengers, 2023
Intra-District and suburban movement is excluded

Using the same model, we take a look at the figures for Mumbai (Table 12B). In the case of Mumbai, we note that the relative weights of the origin districts have changed from 2012 to 2023, and here too the share of the top ten in the total has reduced; also, there is one new entrant.

Table 12B: Top source districts for non-suburban UTS II Class Passengers [2012, 2023]; Destination Mumbai

2012		2023	
Origin District	% Of Total	Origin District	% Of Total
Valsad	15.93	Valsad	13.49
Nashik	11.98	Surat	10.02
Surat	11.35	Nashik	8.75
Gorakhpur	3.39	Ratnagiri	4.92
Varanasi	3.14	Varanasi	2.77
Navsari	2.73	Gorakhpur	2.45
Ahmadabad	2.56	Ahmadabad	2.45
Lucknow	2.07	Prayagraj	2.01
Solapur	1.73	Navsari	1.76
Vadodara	1.73	Sindhudurg	1.73

We also take quick look at some of the routes showing the biggest increases and decreases in the period between 2012 and 2023. The district-to-district routes showing the greatest increases are summarized in Table 13. Similarly, district-to-district routes showing the greatest decreases are summarized in Table 14.

Table 13: Top 10 District-to-District Routes showing the greatest increase in predicted migration between 2012 and 2023

Routes
Murshidabad-Kolkata
Ratnagiri-Thane
Ratnagiri-Mumbai
Kolkata-Murshidabad
Bengaluru Urban-Hassan
Hassan-Bengaluru Urban
Ratnagiri-Raigad
Agra-Central Delhi
Panipat-South Delhi
Saharsa-Patna

Table 14: Top 10 District-to-District Routes showing the greatest decrease in predicted migration between 2012 and 2023

ROUTES
SPSR NELLORE-CHITTOOR
CHITTOOR-BENGALURU URBAN
BENGALURU URBAN-VELLORE
NASHIK-JALGAON
MUMBAI-NASHIK
MUMBAI-SURAT
PASCHIM BARDHAMAN-HOWRAH
PUNE-SOLAPUR
NASHIK-MUMBAI
VALSAD-MUMBAI

8. "I just called to say..."

Using *Roaming* to track trends in Migration

Not only are Indians mobile; increasingly, more of them are on the mobile! India is home to the second-largest telecommunication network [measured by number of phone connections] in the world, (World Bank, n.d.) and the second-highest number of internet users (International Telecommunications Union, n.d.). Overall wireless Tele-density (National Commission on Population, 2019) – Number of wireless telephone subscribers per 100 people – in India for the month of April, 2024 stood at 83.31%, with wireless Tele-density for Urban areas at 127.12%, and that for Rural areas at 59.12% (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, 2012).

As on 30th of April, 2024, India's total Wireless Subscribers stood at 1166.96 Million, with Rural subscribers accounting for 533.42 Million [45.71%] and Urban Subscribers making up 633.53 Million [54.29%].

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) publishes monthly statistical reports regarding the telecom sector in the country. Included in this monthly report are the figures for subscribers in the *Visitor Location Register* (VLR). Under the Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) standards, the *Visitor Location Register* (VLR) is a database of Mobile Stations (Mobile Devices) that have roamed in the jurisdiction of the Mobile Switching Centre (MSC) it serves.

Each Mobile Device (Base Transceiver Station) is served by exactly one VLR, and a subscriber can be present in only one VLR at a time. This system is used by Cellular Service Providers to keep track of home and visiting (roaming) subscribers. Therefore, tracking the VLR subscribers could be a useful proxy for the number of subscribers roaming/visiting the home location. (It is useful that the telecom

circles in India typically correlate with state boundaries, with the cities of Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata[21] being distinct telecom circles.)

This helps us track the trends in the number of cellular devices/mobile phones '*visiting*' the respective cities. A similar approach was been used to understand interstate migration during the COVID-19 Pandemic (Nizam, Sivakumar, and Rajan, 2022).

While using telecom data is a useful measure for understanding trends in movement of people, however, there are a number of caveats. Firstly, we cannot build a dyad, as there is no information in public domain of the home location of a roaming mobile subscriber. As a result it is difficult to correlate origins/destinations.

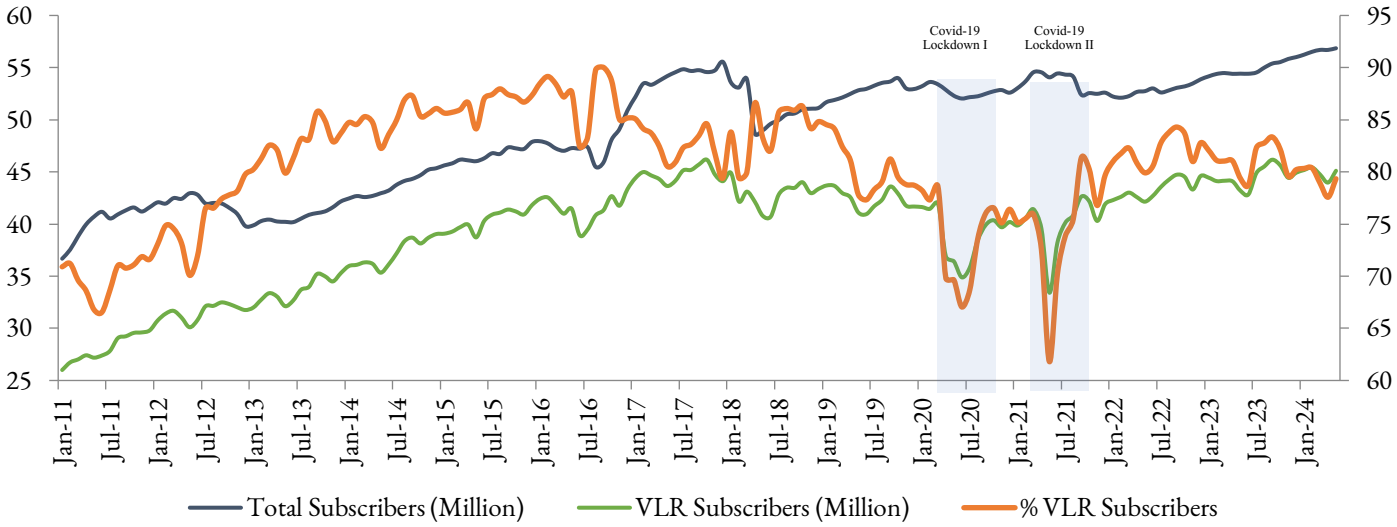
Secondly, a number of migrants – even blue collar migrants – may not have obtained their mobile connections at their place of origin, that is, they may only obtain mobile connections after having reached their destination. These too will not be reflected in the roaming numbers. There may also be other factors (such as festivals, marriages etc.) which might lead to temporary spikes or troughs in the inflow/outflow of people. This would be reflected in the data on the number of subscribers on roaming.

However, despite these caveats, TRAI telecom data is a high-frequency, publicly-available dataset which can help in discerning trends in the number of mobile subscribers, and can act a useful proxy for the movement of migrants. Keeping that in mind, we take a look at the trends in VLR subscribers, expressed as a percentage of total subscribers.

We begin by taking a look at the three telecom service areas contiguous with cities viz. Delhi, Mumbai & Kolkata. Starting with Delhi, we track the trends in total number of wireless subscribers, total number of VLR Subscribers (in-*roamers*) (both on left axis) and VLR Subscribers as a percentage of total subscribers (right axis), for a period from January 2011 to May 2024, using historical TRAI Monthly Subscription Data[22] (Figure 11).

The two shaded areas correspond to the two Covid-19 lockdown periods viz. April-June 2020 and April-July 2021, (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2020) which saw large numbers of migrant workers moving back to their places of origin. (Mitra and Shrivastav, 2024) Given that in this period there was little other movement/travel, it is reasonable to assume that this movement is reflective of movement of migrants.

Fig. 11: Monthly trends of Total Wireless Subscribers; Total VLR Subscribers (both Left Axis); % of VLR Subscribers (Right Axis) for Delhi; January 2011 to May 2024



It is evident that as compared to the first lockdown (April - June 2020), the second lockdown (April - June 2021) saw a more pronounced drop in the percentage of VLR Subscribers (in-roamers). Looking at the absolute numbers, comparing the number of VLR Subscribers in May 2019 [the month-year prior to the peak levels of the Pandemic in Delhi] to the number at the peak of the lockdown (i.e. May 2021,) we note a reduction of 7.69 Million. Similarly, the reduction in the number of in-roamers in May 2020 as against VLR Subscribers in May 2019 stood at 4.68 Million.

It is instructive to note that while the percentage of VLR Subscribers (in-roamers) quickly bounced back post the pandemic, the growth in the total numbers appears to have slowed.

We now go on to use Telecom Data for analysing seasonal trends in the movement of people. We do this by tracking the trends in the deviations in the VLR Subscribers as a percentage of the Total Subscribers from the average percentage of VLR Subscribers in that year.

We do this to account for internal seasonality and smoothen for growth/de-growth between years. Looking at seasonal trends since January 2011 (Figure 12), we can see that December-January and August-September are the months with the highest inflows, whereas May-June and October-November are the months with the highest outflows in Delhi.

Undertaking a similar exercise for the city of Mumbai, we see that the first lockdown (April - June 2020) witnessed a bigger drop in the percentage of VLR Subscribers (in-roamers) as compared to the second lockdown (April - June 2021) (Figure 13).

Fig. 12: Monthly Deviation from the Avg. Annual % of VLR Subscribers - Delhi, [2011 - 2024]

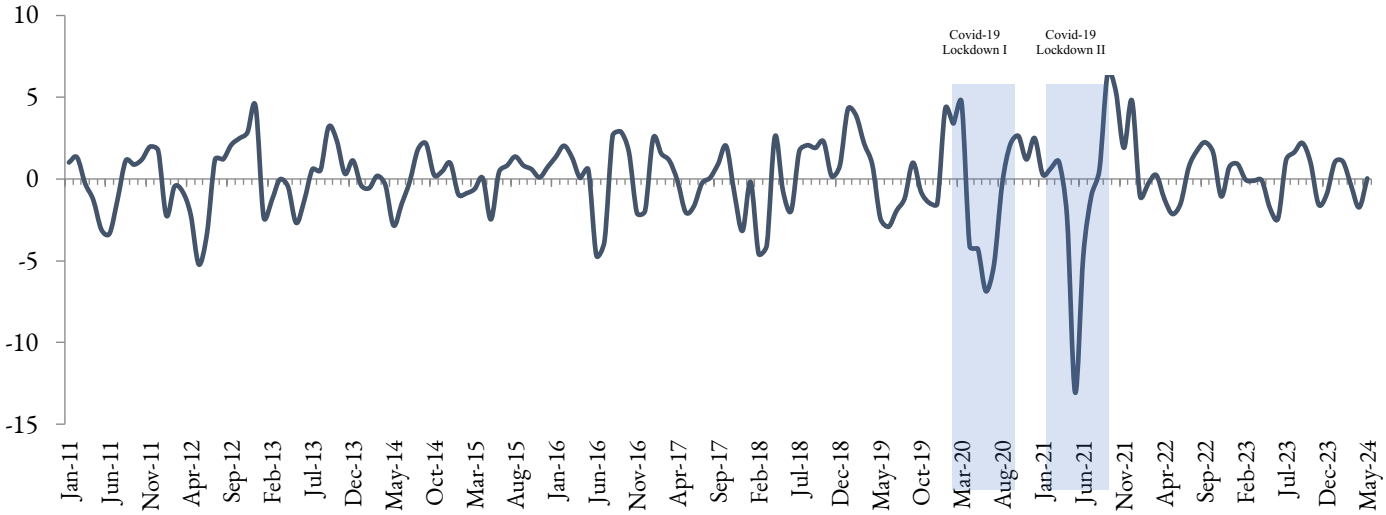
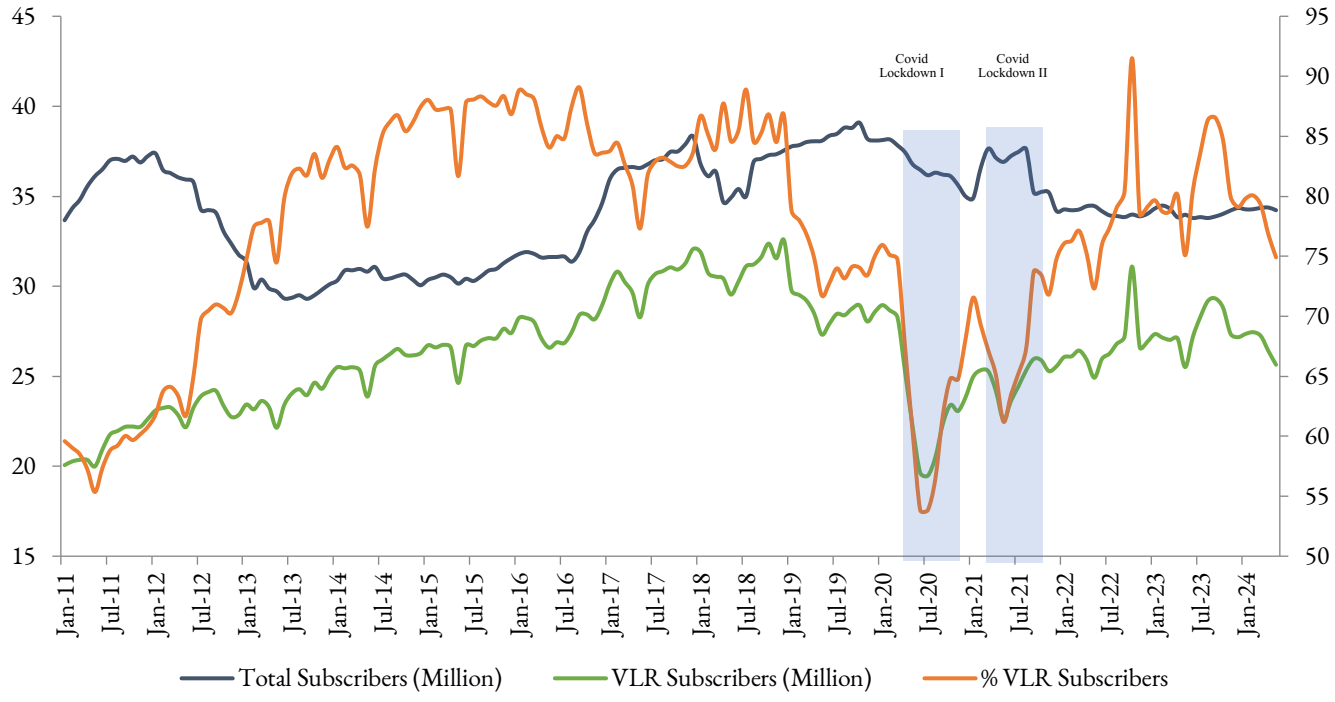


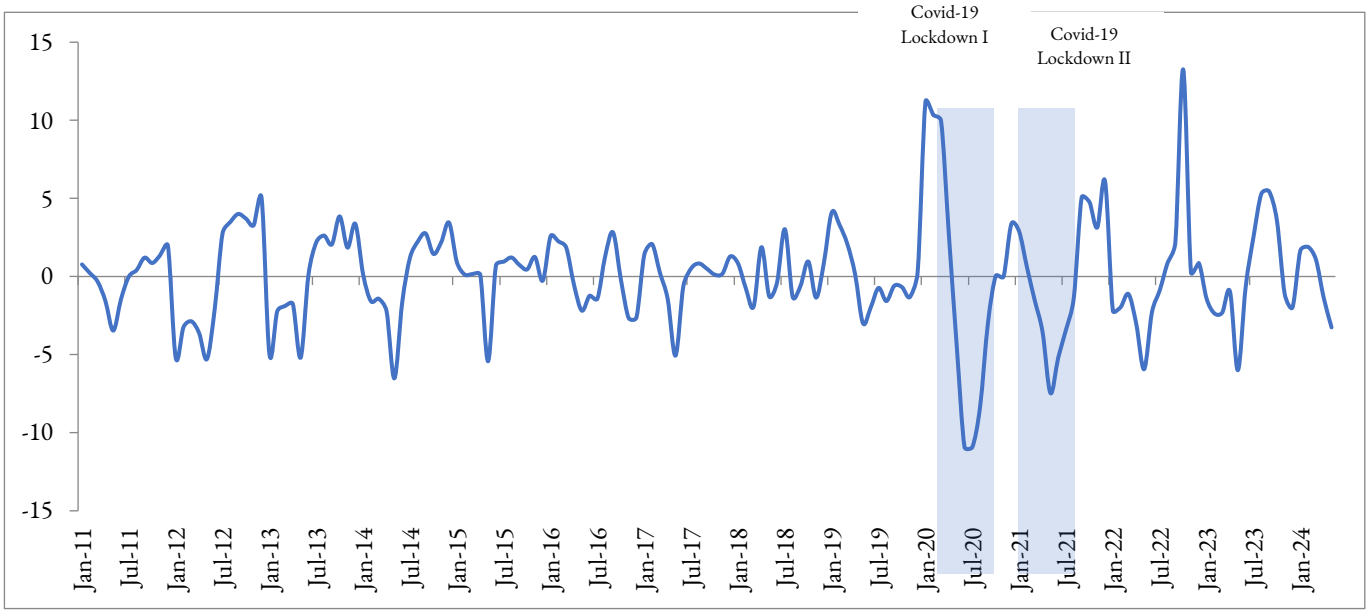
Fig. 13: Monthly trends of Total Wireless Subscribers; Total VLR Subscribers (both Left Axis); % of VLR Subscribers (Right Axis) for Mumbai; January 2011 to May 2024



Looking at the absolute numbers, we again compare the number of VLR Subscribers in July 2019 [the month-year prior to the peak levels of the Pandemic in Mumbai] to the number at the peak of the lockdown in Mumbai (i.e. July 2020), and note a reduction of **8.99 Million**. Similarly, the reduction in the number of *in-roamers* in the second lockdown in July 2021, as against VLR Subscribers in July 2019, was **4.02 Million**.

We now proceed to look at the trends in deviations in the VLR Subscribers as a percentage of the Total Subscribers from the average percentage of VLR Subscribers in that year (Figure 14).

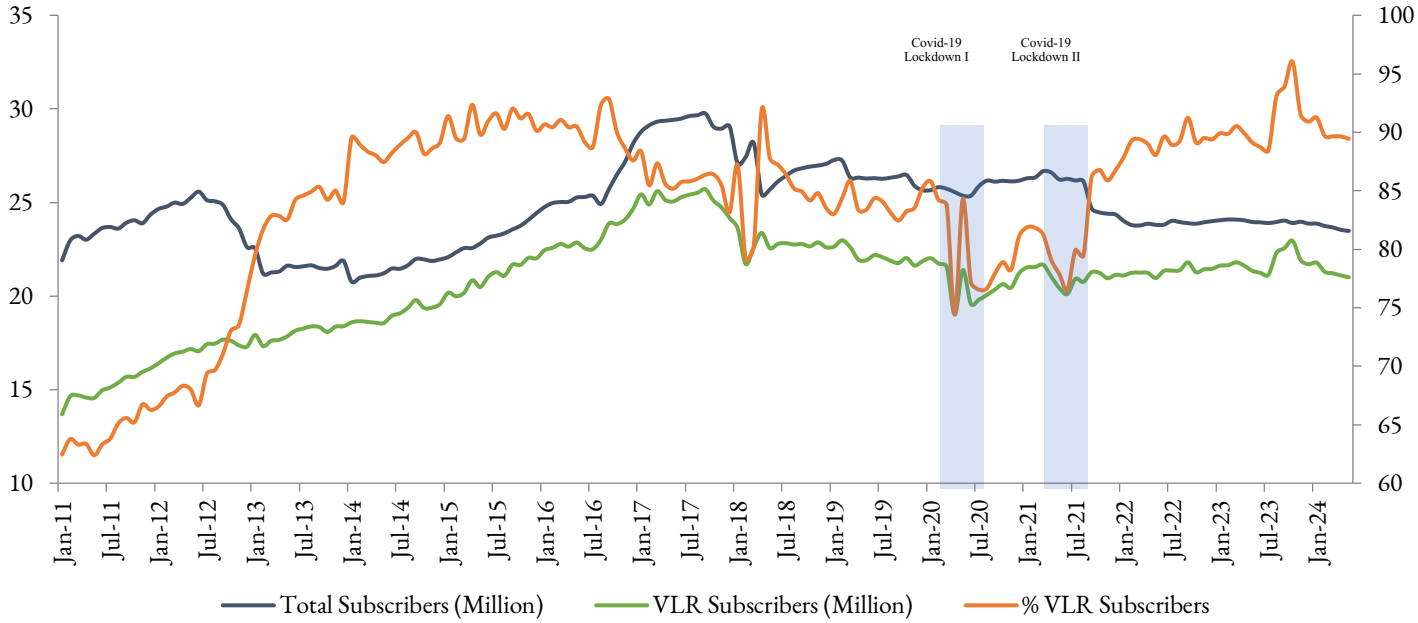
Fig. 14: Monthly Deviation from the Avg. Annual % of VLR Subscribers - Mumbai, [2011 - 2024]



From the seasonal trend, we can see that December-January and September-October are the months with the highest inflows, whereas May-June and January-February are the months with the highest outflows in Mumbai (Figure 8).

Moving on to the city of Kolkata, while we can see a drop in the percentage of VLR Subscribers in the months April - June 2020 (first lockdown) and April - June 2021 (second lockdown), the reduction is far lesser than in Mumbai or Delhi (Figure 15).

Fig. 15: Monthly trends of Total Wireless Subscribers; Total VLR Subscribers (both Left Axis); % of VLR Subscribers (Right Axis) for Kolkata; January 2011 to May 2024



In terms of absolute numbers, comparing the number of VLR Subscribers (*in-roamers*) in June 2019 [the month-year prior to the peak levels of the Pandemic in Kolkata] to the number at the peak of the lockdown in Kolkata (i.e. June 2020), there is a reduction of about 2.6 Million. Similarly, the reduction in the number of VLR Subscribers (*in-roamers*) in the second lockdown in June 2021, as against VLR Subscribers in July 2019, was about 2.08 Million.

Looking at the seasonal trends in the numbers of VLR Subscribers, we see September-November as the months with higher VLR Subscribers (*in-roamers*) i.e higher inflows. On the other hand, the months of June-July were the months of higher outflows.

We now look take a quick look at the other side, i.e. the trends in in-flows and out-flows at the origin. Since there is no data in public domain that could be used to build origin-destination pairs, we take a look at the movement trends in two regions (corresponding to telecom circles) which have been noted for higher outflow of migrants (Ministry of Finance, 2017) viz/ Uttar Pradesh (East) and Bihar. We begin by looking at data from Uttar Pradesh (East) (Figure 17).

Fig. 16: Monthly Deviation from the Avg. Annual % of VLR Subscribers [Kolkata, 2011 - 2024]

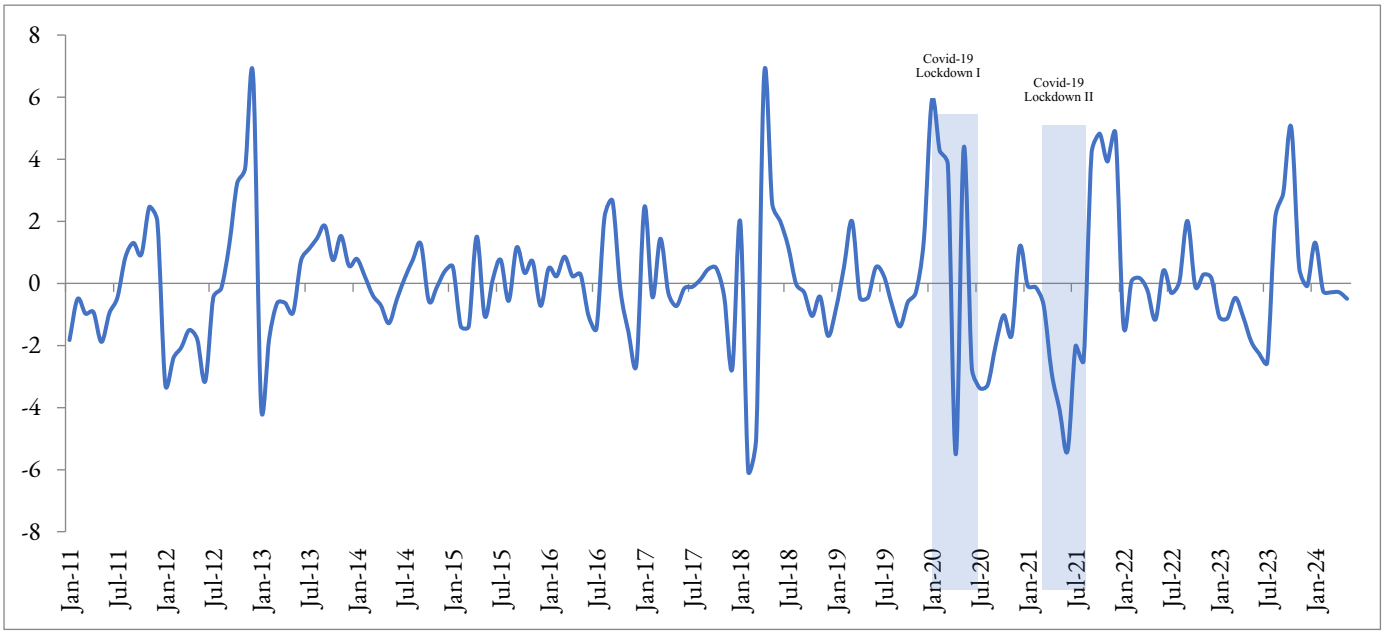
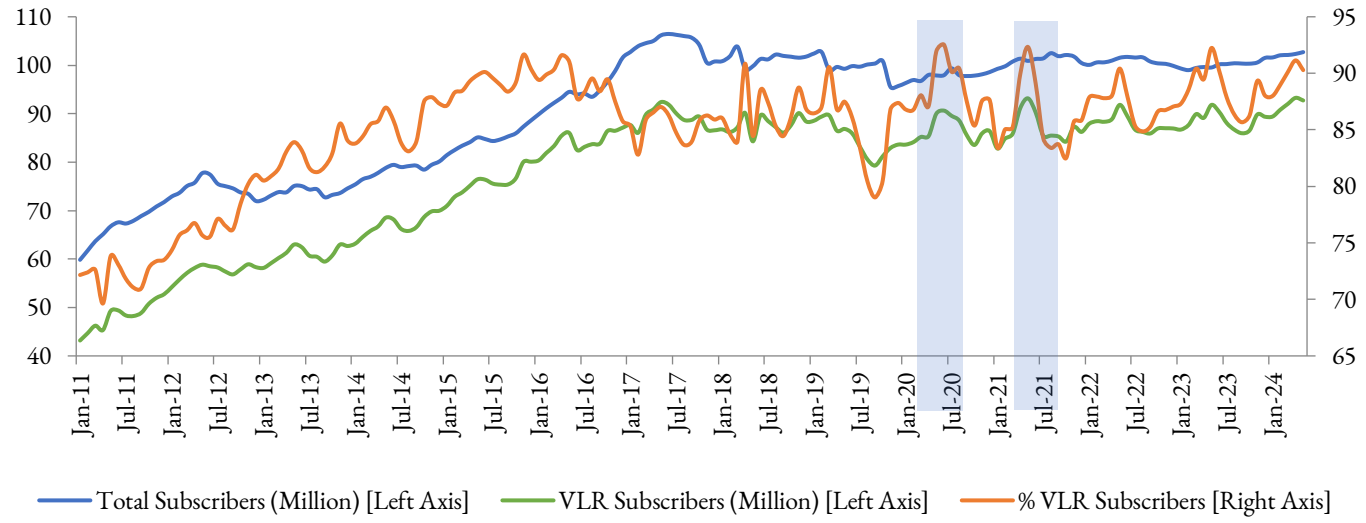
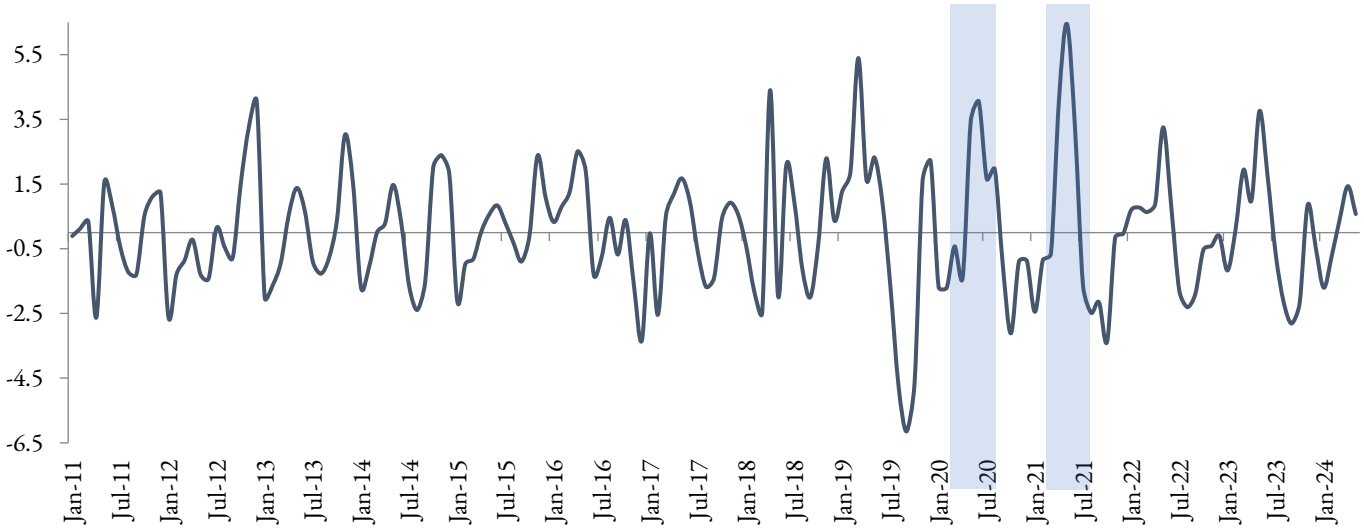


Fig. 17: Monthly trends of Total Wireless Subscribers; Total VLR Subscribers (both Left Axis); % of VLR Subscribers (Right Axis) for UP (East); January 2011 to May 2024



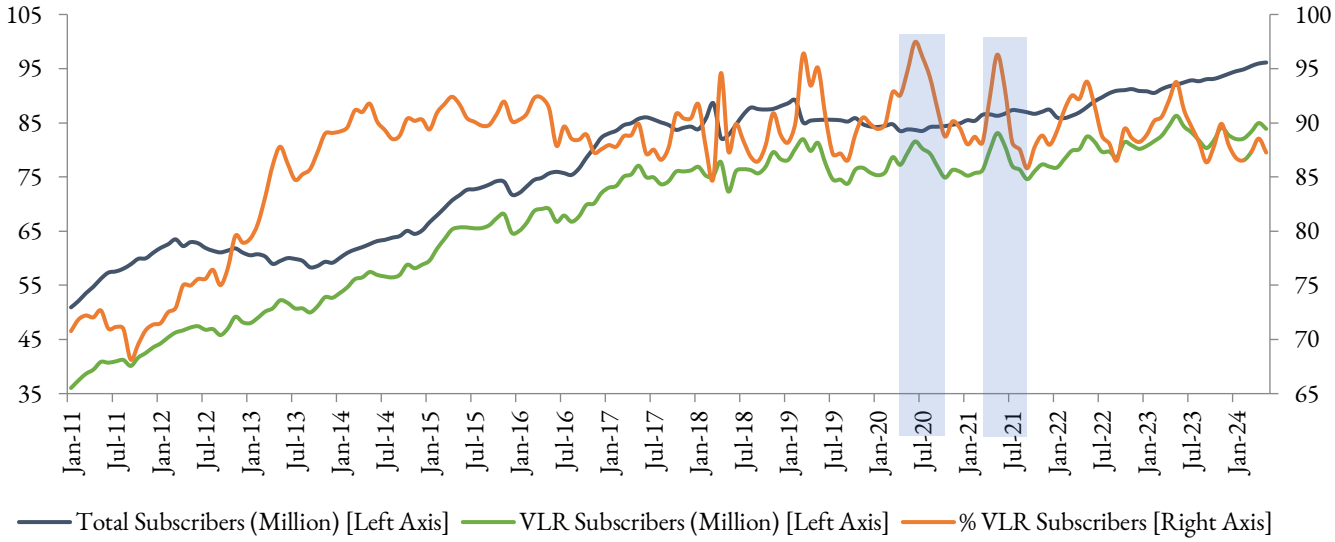
From the above we see that in the period of the two lockdowns, the percentage of in-roamers has shown a substantial increase, indicating a higher than usual return of migrants. Looking at seasonality of movements, we see that the months of highest inflows are April-May and December-January, and the highest outflows are seen in the months of August-September. (Figure 18).

Fig. 18: Monthly Deviation from the Avg. Annual % of VLR Subscribers [UP East, 2011 - 2024]



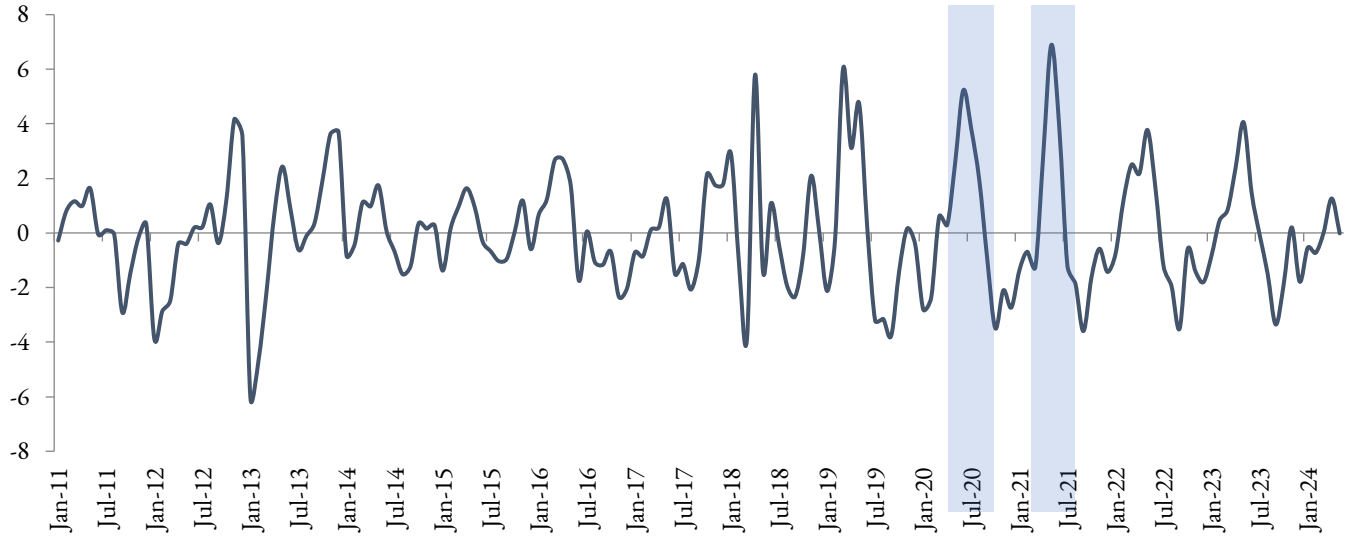
Similar trends for the state of Bihar are at Figure 19.

Fig. 19: Monthly trends of Total Wireless Subscribers; Total VLR Subscribers (both Left Axis); % of VLR Subscribers (Right Axis) for Bihar; January 2011 to May 2024



Here also we can see a higher than usual in-flow of VLR Subscribers (*in-roamers*) in the period corresponding to the Covid-19 Lockdowns (shaded regions in Fig. 20). Looking at the seasonal movement of VLR Subscribers for Bihar (Figure 20), we can see that the months of highest inflow are April-May, and the month with higher-than-average annual percentage of VLR Subscribers is September.

Fig. 20: Monthly Deviation from the Avg. Annual % of VLR Subscribers [Bihar, 2011 - 2024]



The above analysis is an attempt to discern trends in the movement of people using publicly available telecom data. Given a number of constraints, this data has limited applicability for aggregate numbers and for building origin-destination dyads; however, low months in the destinations seem to correspond to high months in the sources. Typically, the summer months of April-June and the winter (festival?) months of September-November are seen as months of maximum movement.

9. Wheels on the bus go round and round...

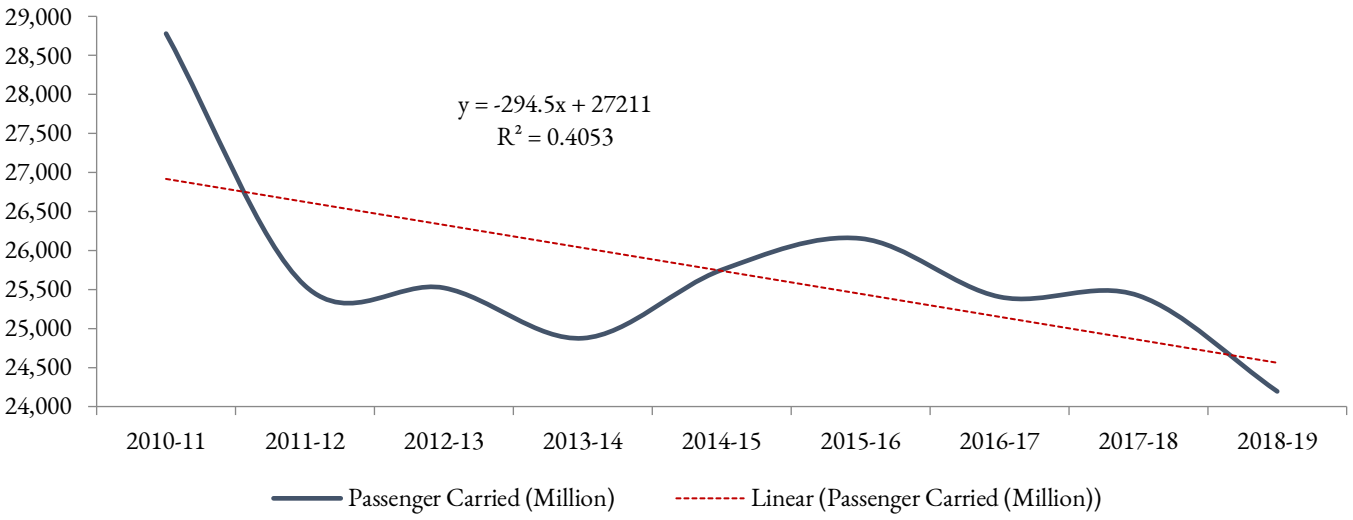
Before we move on to examining the effects of migration on the respective places of origin, we take a quick look at trends in travel by the buses – the other popular mode of inter-city public transport.

Here we make use of data from the *Review of the Performance of State Road Transport Undertakings* (SRTUs) published by the Transport Research Wing of the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH). (Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, n.d.) Tracking the number of passengers carried from 2010-11 to 2018-19 [the last year for which data is available on the MoRTH website], shows a downward trend. It may be kept in view that the figure is of passengers carried or journeys performed, in other words an individual undertaking multiple journeys will be counted multiple times.

Therefore, looking at the trends in passenger numbers travelling in buses does not indicate any significant shift away from Railways to buses. However, there may be variations from State to State.

Fig. 21: Passengers Carried by State Road Transportation Corporations

[Millions, 2010-11 to 2018-19]



10. "Show me the money!"

Evaluating the impact of migrant remittances

Having taken a look at the directions, volumes and seasonal variations of internal migration, we now turn our gaze in the other direction i.e. the impact that migration has at the place of origin, primarily on account of flow of remittances.

Migration of labour has been viewed as a critical component of economic growth and development. It enables the equalization of capital and labour across an economy, incentivizing movement of labour from areas of surplus labour, and movement of capital from areas of surplus capital. (Kone et al. 2018)

Recent trends have indicated that there has been a significant level of migration from rural to urban areas; however, for most rural migrants, there continues to be significant attachment to the place of origin (Bhagat, 2010). Moreover, labour remittances have been noted to be significant contribution to rural household income. (Deshingkar, 2008) Previous studies have shown that remittances received from out-migrants have a significant impact on the socio-economic development in the areas of origin. (Das, Saha, and Chouhan, 2020)

Most prior studies have depended on data from the Census or Surveys for this analysis. Use of such static and non-frequent data sources impairs the analysis of the economic impact of migrants in the place of origin. District-level economic/income data, at regular intervals, and with uniformity across districts, is not always publicly available. In order to address this issue, we use banking data published by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). In particular, we use the District-wise Deposits of Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) [*Statement No. 4B*] from the RBI Quarterly Statistics on Deposits and Credit of Scheduled Commercial Banks (Reserve Bank of India, n.d.).

This data is granular to the level of districts, and is available at a quarterly interval. The data contains Savings/Capital and Term Deposit account balances in the reporting period.

11. The Debroy-Misra Index of Endogenous Prosperity (DMIEP)

A metric to measure prosperity based on endogenous economic activity

Tracking the economic impact of domestic migration at the place of origin can be a challenge, especially in the absence of domestic remittance data. Some studies have made use of primary survey data, (Das, Saha, and Chouhan, 2020) sample surveys such as the MoSPI, Household Consumption Expenditure Survey, (MoSPI, 2024) or All India Debt & Investment Survey (NSO MoSPI, 2021) for data on ownership of assets etc. However, the challenge has been how to control for endogenous economic activity, i.e. economic growth on account of activities undertaken within the area under observation.

By themselves, savings account balances are a good indicator of income and prosperity; however, increases/decreases in saving account balances could be on account of endogenous economic activity (arising within the district) as well as from transfers [remittances] from other districts.

In order to account for this and to isolate the impact of transfers [remittances] from other districts, instead of looking at saving account balances as such, we analyse the ratio of saving account balances to current account balances. This is because a current account is typically operated by businesses, and offers features that a saving bank account does not.

This gives us a sense of remittances/savings from outside the district. This is qualified with the caveat that there is still a likelihood of income growth from non-formal sectors, such as agriculture or trades, which may not be reflected against a current account.

The ratio of savings account to current account balances captures the relative size of cumulative saving account balances as compared to the cumulative current account balances in the district. A ratio of 1 would therefore indicate that the savings account balances and current account balances are comparable.

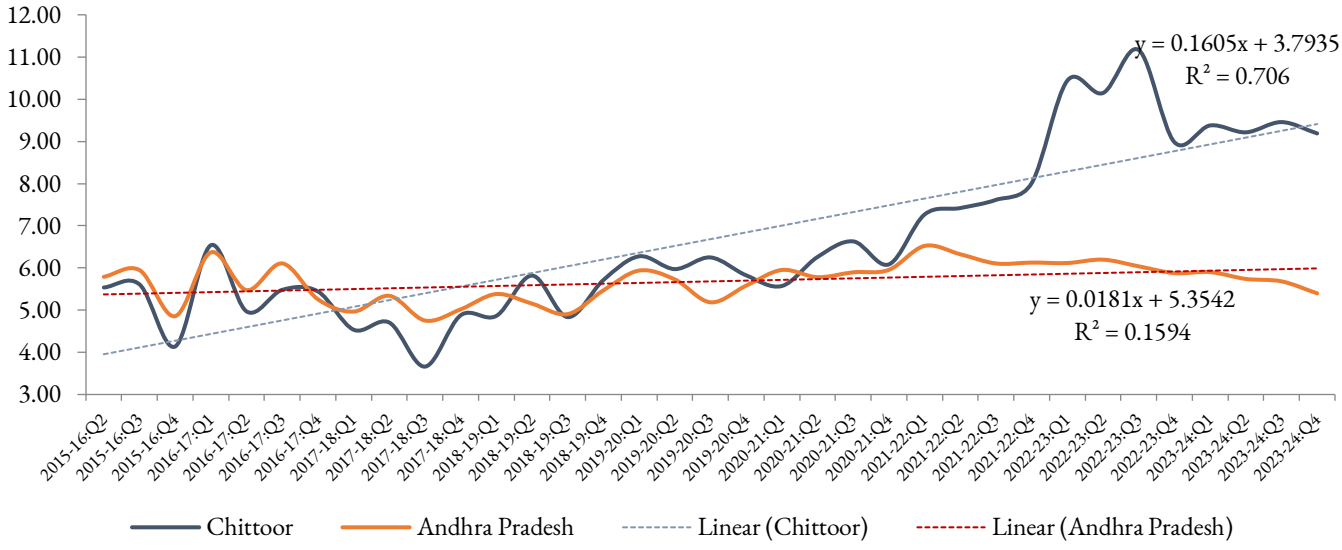
Ratios less than one indicate higher current account balances (a proxy for economic activity in the district) and ratios greater than one indicate higher saving account balances. High ratios for a district are therefore be an indicator of remittances from outside the district since current account balances (a proxy for economic activity in the district) are relatively low.

We see that **districts/cities with greater economic activity** such as Mumbai [0.56], Delhi [2.24], Bangalore [2.21], Chennai [2.08] have a relatively lower ratio [average ratio from 2017-18 to 2022-23]. The **median value** for the **all-India ratio was 3.72**.

We begin by taking a look at the trends in select districts for out-migration (as identified in Economic Survey 2016-17). (Ministry of Finance, 2017) We compare our results against the corresponding ratio of savings to current account deposits for the respective States for context.

We begin by taking a look at Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh, a district noted for high outward migration (Figure 22). We can see that the saving bank deposits have shown a significant uptick post the 2020-21 Q4, broadly corresponding to the Covid-19 lockdown period.

Fig. 22: Trends in Ratio of Quarterly Savings Account Balances and Current Account Balances in for the District of Chittoor and State of Andhra Pradesh [2015-16 to 2023-24]



This is an indicator of the transfer deposits [remittances] increasing in the district at a far higher rate than the rest of the State, especially in the post-Covid period.

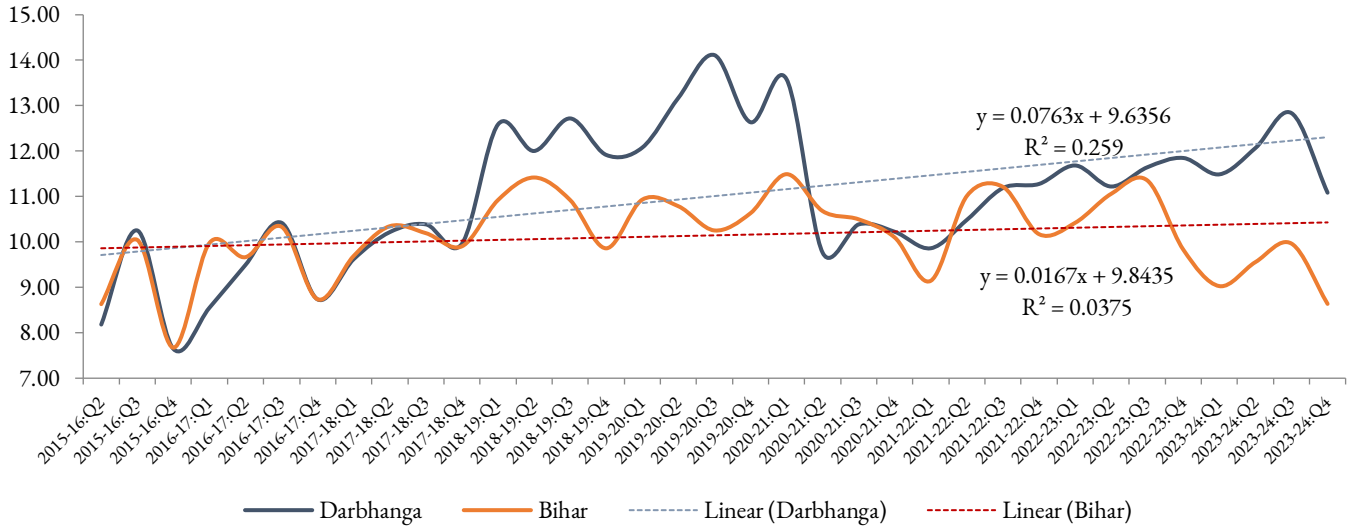
Similarly, we look at the trends in Darbhanga and compare it to average trends for the State of Bihar (Figure 23). It may be noted that Bihar's average ratio of Savings Deposits to Current Account Deposits for the period 2015-16 to 2023-24 is 10.14 which is significantly higher than the all India figures of 3.6 across the same period.

Even when compared against these already high figures, we can see the ratio for Darbhanga has remained higher than the State average.

In order to scope a more macro-level view, we look at the average ratio of Savings Account Deposits to Current Account Deposits from 2017-18 to 2022-23, for all districts in the country.

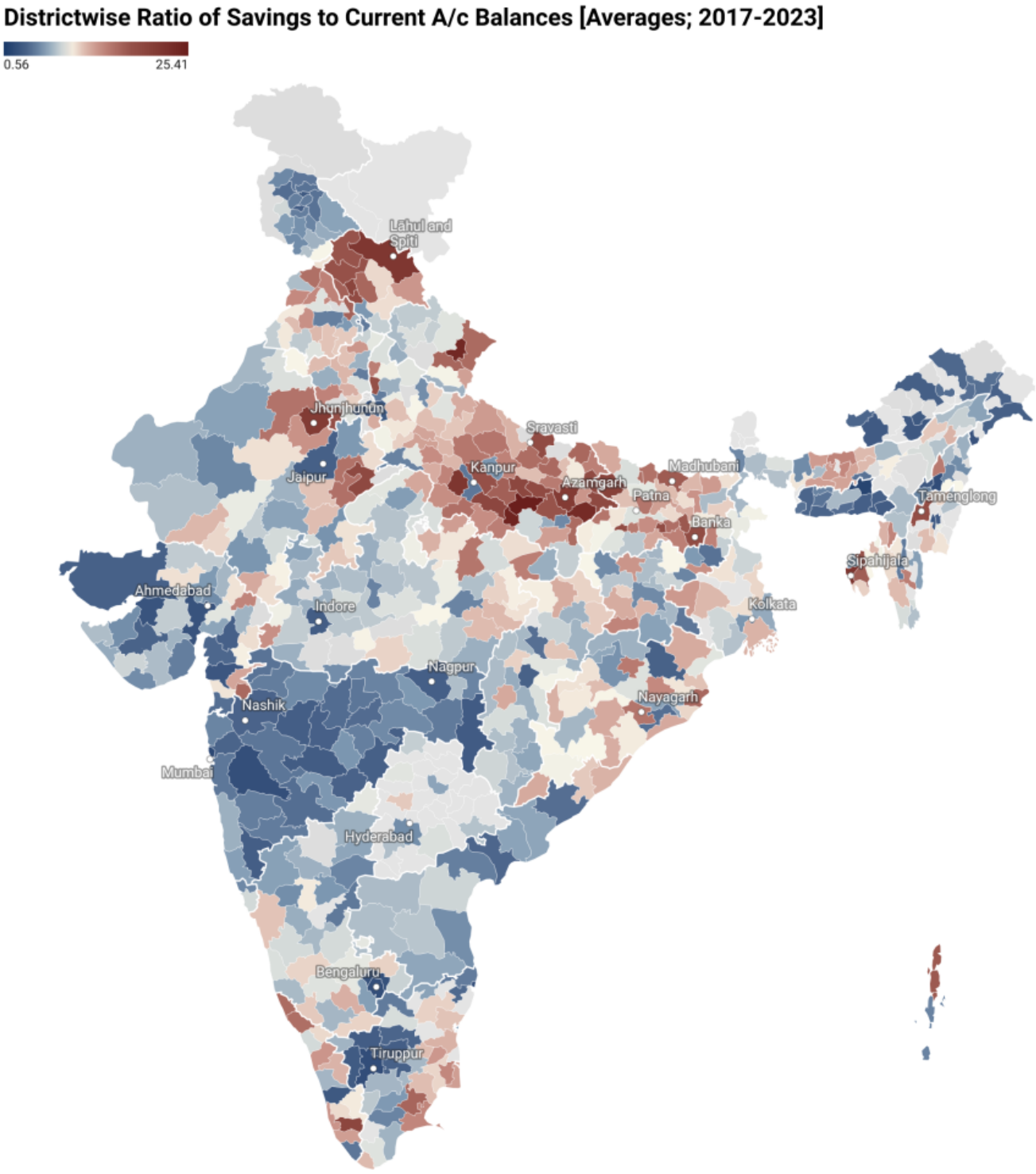
The districts/cities with low savings-to-current account ratios are typically places with high levels of economic activity, which often act as a magnet for migration. (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 2019) On the other hand, cities with relatively higher savings to current account balances are seen as having limited economic activity.

Fig. 23: Trends in Ratio of Quarterly Savings Account Balances and Current Account Balances in for the District of Darbhanga and State of Bihar [2015-16 to 2023-24]



A district level map of the average ratio of Savings Account Deposits to Current Account Deposits from 2017-18 to 2022-23 is Figure 24. We might add here that not all districts with a high DMIEP ratio would be witnessing out-migration; however districts with high out-migrations are likely to see a growth in saving account deposits.

Fig. 24: District-wise ratio of Savings to Current Account Deposits [avg.; 2017-18 to 2022-23]



12. Conclusion

While we study its economics and geography, migration is essentially a journey of hope, of dreams and aspirations and of the unyielding human pursuit of a better tomorrow. Understanding the patterns and the ebbs and flow of migration helps us gain a better understanding of how many are

moving, from where and to where are they moving, when is it that they move, and what the impacts of this move might be.

This paper is an attempt to address the issue of timeliness of availability of data for analysing trends in domestic migration, especially that of blue-collar migration. While the decennial Census provides comprehensive and granular migration data, there remains a significant lag by the time the data can be analysed. Household surveys capturing data on domestic migration are restricted by the size of their dataset, and have limited use in studying source-destination dyads, seasonal trends, event study on trends in migration etc.

In this paper, we use high-frequency, granular data from multiple sources to address the above issues. Our primary data sources are data from the Indian Railways Unreserved Ticketing System (IR-UTS) and data from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) on Visitor Location Register (VLR) roaming subscribers.

Further, in order to track the impact of out-migration on the originating districts, we use publicly-available, district-level, quarterly banking data published by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to construct an index to isolate and track effects of remittances originating from outside of the district. This is intended as a quick proxy for examining the economic impact of out-migration in the source districts.

In addition to migration we also explore related topics, such as the impact on urbanization - especially the growth of cities, commuter zones, and popular movement dyads. Further, given that most migration is borne out of a desire for better opportunities, and is seen as having an impact in improving incomes, we attempt to discern the extent of impact that out-migration has in the places of origin.

The highlights from our study are as under:

- Overall domestic migration in India is slowing. We estimate the overall **number of migrants** in the country, as of **2023**, to be **40,20,90,396**. This is about 11.78% lower as compared to the number of migrants enumerated as per Census 2011 [45,57,87,621]. Consequently, the migration rate which stood at **37.64%** as per Census, 2011 is estimated to have since **reduced to 28.88%** of the population.
- We hypothesize that this is on account of **availability of improved services**. such as education, health, infrastructure, and **connectivity**, as well as **improved economic opportunities** in or near in major sources of migration, and is an indicator of overall economic growth.
- Looking at the spatial dimensions of travel, the top origin districts are coalesced around major urban agglomerations, viz. Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Kolkata etc. Not only is this in line with **gravity models of migration**, but also a tentative confirmation of priors, i.e. **short-distance migration** accounts for the largest share of migrants, and **distance has a negative effect** on labour flows.

- The composition of the top five recipient States attracting migrants [all migrants including intra-State migrants] has changed. West Bengal and Rajasthan are the new entrants, while Andhra Pradesh and Bihar are now ranked a notch lower.
- Even amongst the top five recipient States the percentage of predicted migrants headed to the respective States has reduced. This could be on account of an overall reduction in the migration rate, or could indicate a greater spatial spread in the outward movement of passengers.
- West Bengal, Rajasthan, and Karnataka are the States showing the maximum amount of growth in percentage share of the arriving passengers. Similarly, **Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh** are States where the percentage **share of total migrants has reduced**.
- Mumbai, Bengaluru Urban, Howrah, Central Delhi, and Hyderabad are the districts attracting **most migrant arrivals**, while Valsad, Chittoor, Paschim Bardhaman, Agra, Guntur, Villupuram and Saharsa are the **top origin districts.**
- We use the data to identify **popular State-to-State** and **district-to-district dyads**. At the State level, *Uttar Pradesh - Delhi*; *Gujarat - Maharashtra*; *Telangana - Andhra Pradesh,* and *Bihar - Delhi* emerge as the primary dyads of movement.
- At the district level, *Murshidabad - Kolkata*; *Paschim Bardhaman - Howrah*; *Valsad - Mumbai*; *Chittoor - Bengaluru Urban,* and *Surat - Mumbai* are the most popular routes for migration between districts. This has implications for urban planning as well as for planning of transportation networks.
- We make use of TRAI roaming data to identify the seasonality of movement of migration. We find that **April-June** are the high months for movement with **November-December** witnessing secondary highs. These are perhaps months where most migrant labour travel back to their places of origin. A secondary high in winter time is perhaps indicative of travel around the festival/marriage season. January, on the other hand, appears to be the month of lowest travel.
- Even prior to the pandemic related lockdowns, there were signs of the passenger movement showing little growth, however after the pandemic, even the high months (i.e. Apr-May) are at a **distinctly lower level** as compared to the corresponding period before the pandemic - passenger levels for May 2023 being **6.67% lower** than the corresponding number for May 2012.
- Further, it is interesting to note that that a **majority** [>75%] of our predicted migration flows are **within 500 kms of the origin** (Figure 10). This is in line with gravity models, and theories such as Ravenstein's Theory of Human Migration.

Having made the above observations regarding domestic migration in India, we do acknowledge the challenges in being able to completely capture the spatial-temporal trends of a phenomenon as complex as migration. While our methods can give a general idea about the trends, we eagerly await the decennial Census to check the accuracy of our findings.

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World Bank. n.d. “Mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 people).” Accessed March 19, 2025. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.CEL.SETS.P2.

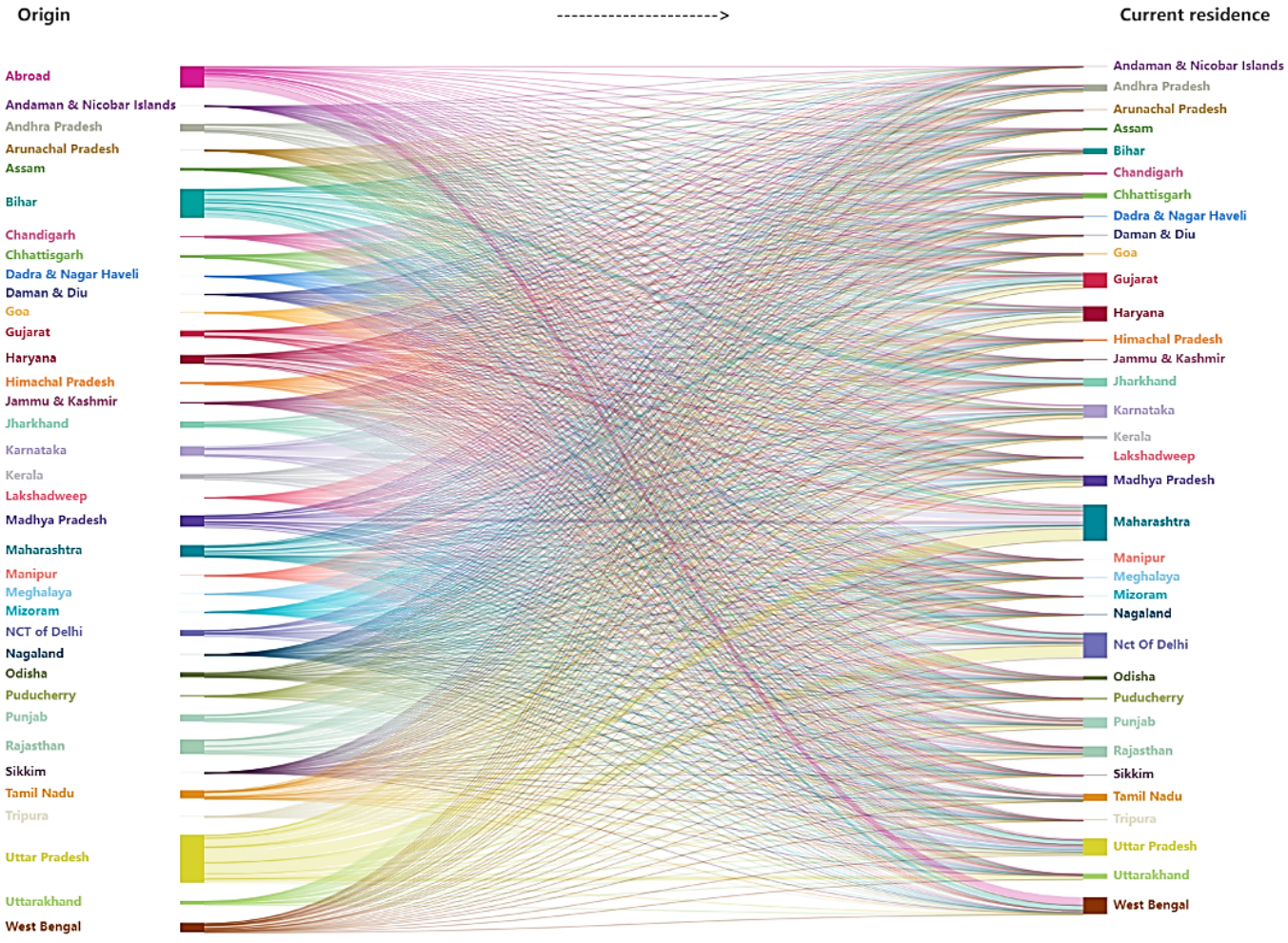
Appendix A

Trends and patterns of the migration as per Census 2011

We begin by capturing the State-to-State movement of migrants (Figure A1). In the figure, the states on the left hand side are the origin states while those on the right are the recipient/destination states. The relative thickness of the lines indicates the volume of movement.

Fig. A1: Migrant population by State/UT of origin and State of Current Residence

Source: Census, 2011



Above figures are for Total Persons; All durations of stay

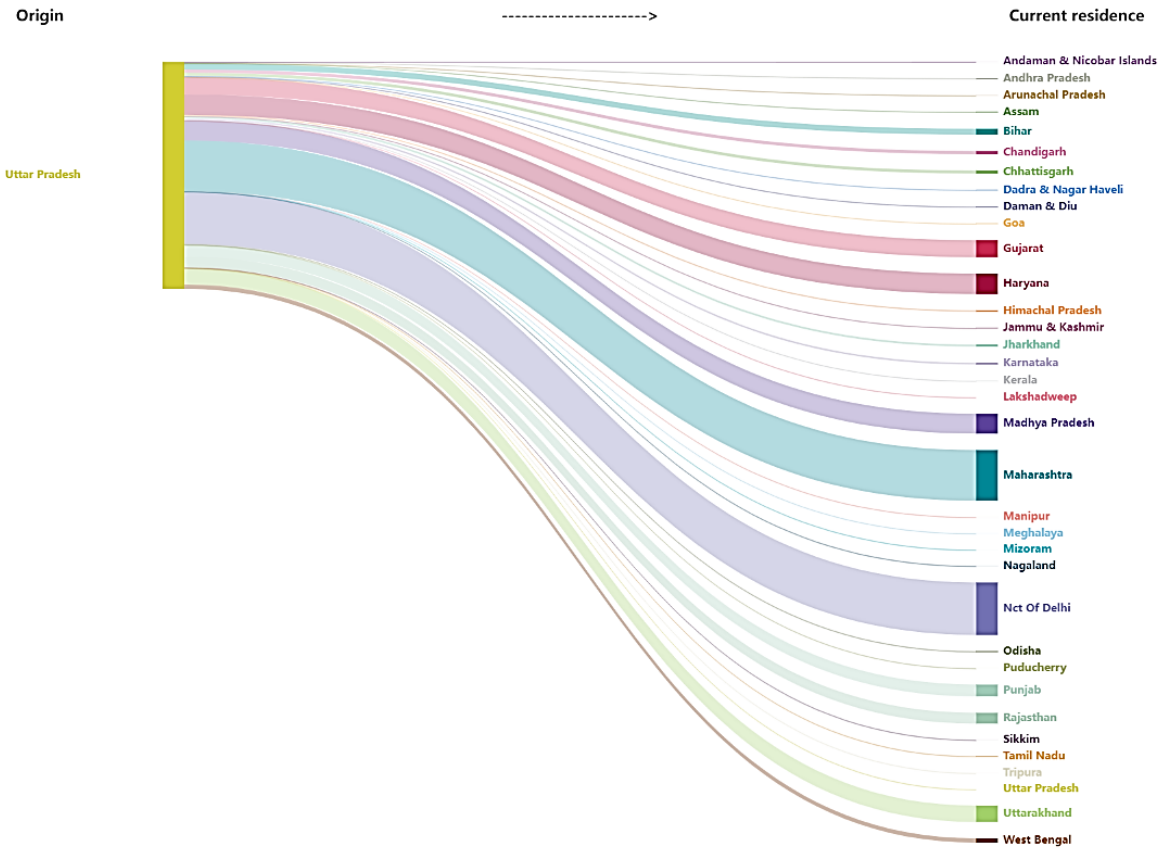
While, the above figure is far too dense for meaningful analysis, however there are a few important takeaways – the left (origin) side clearly indicates that the primary sources/**origin States** for inter-State migration are Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh (MP), Maharashtra, and 'Abroad'. Similarly, the major **destination States** for inter-State migration are Maharashtra, Delhi, Gujarat, West Bengal and Haryana.

The Census Tables have granular details of the exact numbers of migrants, along with parameters such as gender, duration of residence at the destination, educational attainment etc. Since the focus of the instant paper is more on the recent trends in migration, we refrain from going into too great a detail on the 2011 Census migration patterns.

However, for context, we take a quick look at the direction and volume of migration from the primary origin States. It needs to be kept in mind that these are total migrations i.e. due to all causes. The out migrations from select origin States and from Abroad are Figure A2 – E2.

Fig. A2: Migrant population by State of origin – Uttar Pradesh and State of Current Residence

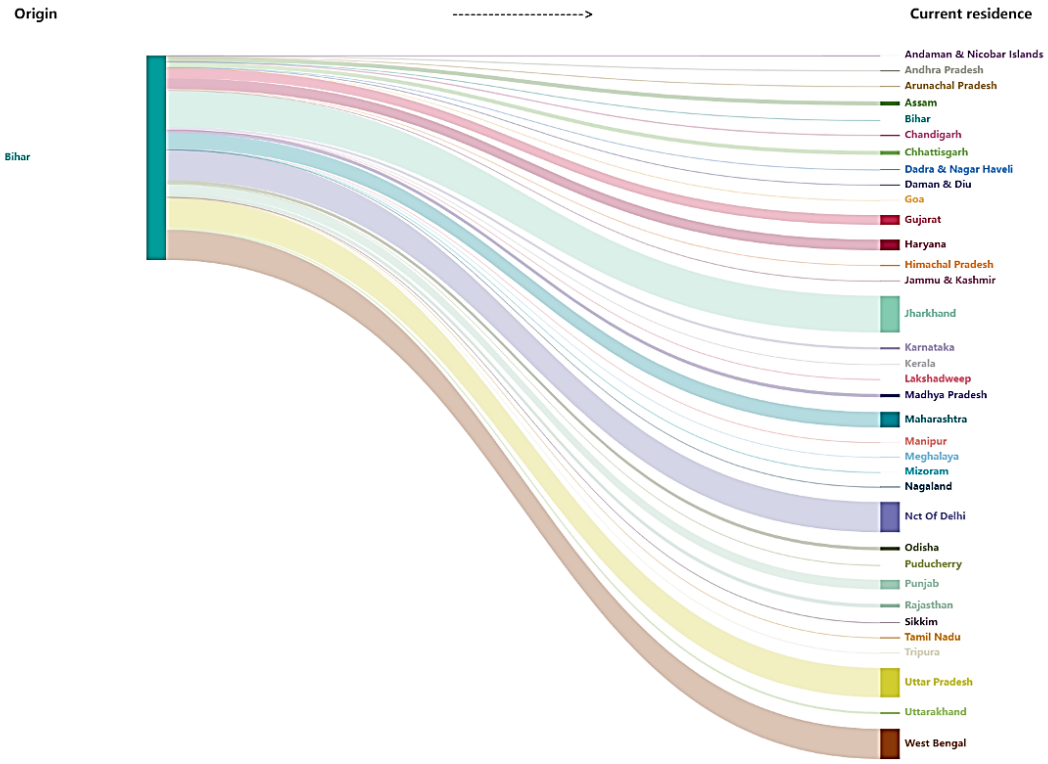
Source: Census, 2011



Above figures are for Total Persons; All durations of stay

Fig. B2: Migrant population by State of origin – Bihar and State of Current Residence

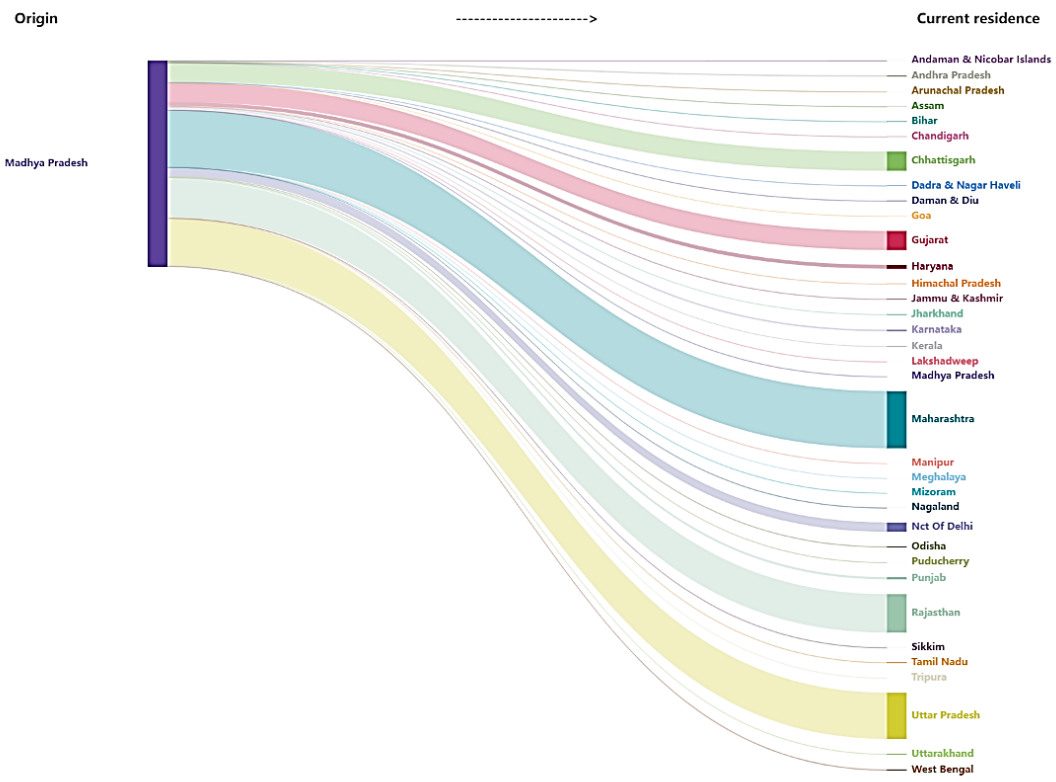
Source: Census, 2011



Above figures are for Total Persons; All durations of stay

Fig. C2: Migrant population by State of origin – Rajasthan and State of Current Residence

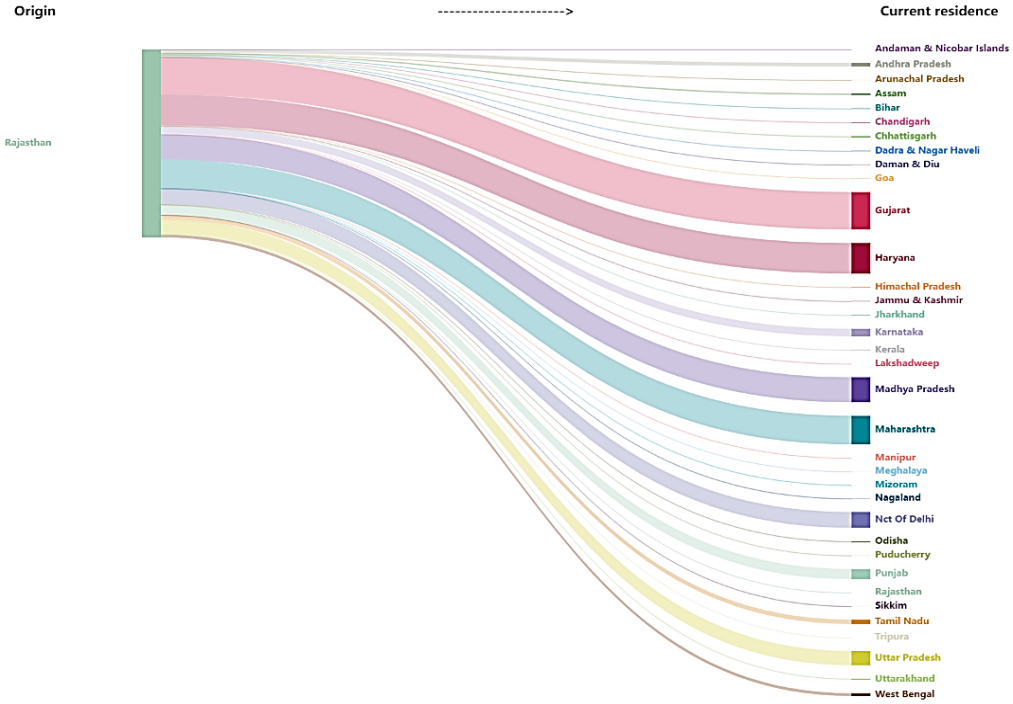
Source: Census, 2011



Above figures are for Total Persons; All durations of stay

Fig. D2: Migrant population by origin – Madhya Pradesh and State of Current Residence

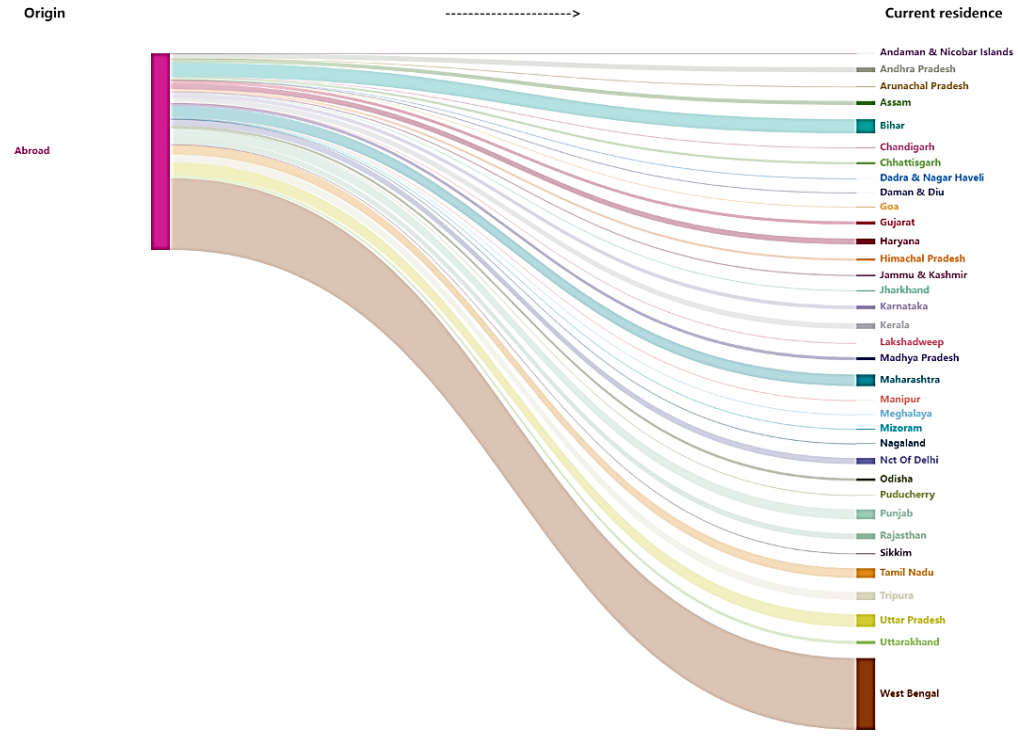
Source: Census, 2011



Above figures are for Total Persons; All durations of stay

Fig. E2: Migrant population by origin – Abroad and State of Current Residence

Source: Census, 2011



Above figures are for Total Persons; All durations of stay

Based on the above, the popular Source-Destination pairs along with number of persons moving between them [as per Census, 2011] is summarized below [Table 1].

Table 1: Top 30 Source and Destination State Pairs with total number of Migrants, Census 2011

Origin State	Destination State	Total Migrants
Uttar Pradesh	State - NCT OF DELHI (07)	28,54,297
Uttar Pradesh	State - MAHARASHTRA (27)	27,54,706
Karnataka	State - MAHARASHTRA (27)	13,99,591
Bihar	State - JHARKHAND (20)	13,36,048
Uttar Pradesh	State - HARYANA (06)	11,13,535
Bihar	State - NCT OF DELHI (07)	11,06,629
Bihar	State - WEST BENGAL (19)	11,03,757
Uttar Pradesh	State - MADHYA PRADESH (23)	10,90,881
Bihar	State - UTTAR PRADESH (09)	10,72,739
Gujarat	State - MAHARASHTRA (27)	9,83,653
Maharashtra	State - GUJARAT (24)	9,71,975
Uttar Pradesh	State - GUJARAT (24)	9,29,411
Andhra Pradesh	State - KARNATAKA (29)	8,90,697
Uttar Pradesh	State - UTTARAKHAND (05)	8,90,663
Madhya Pradesh	State - MAHARASHTRA (27)	8,24,624
Rajasthan	State - GUJARAT (24)	7,47,445
Tamil Nadu	State - KARNATAKA (29)	7,36,821
Madhya Pradesh	State - UTTAR PRADESH (09)	6,68,537
Haryana	State - NCT OF DELHI (07)	6,66,331
Uttar Pradesh	State - PUNJAB (03)	6,49,557
Rajasthan	State - HARYANA (06)	6,11,160
Maharashtra	State - KARNATAKA (29)	5,86,864
Uttar Pradesh	State - RAJASTHAN (08)	5,85,982
Rajasthan	State - MAHARASHTRA (27)	5,70,233
Bihar	State - MAHARASHTRA (27)	5,68,667
NCT of Delhi	State - UTTAR PRADESH (09)	5,66,210
Madhya Pradesh	State - RAJASTHAN (08)	5,54,058
Haryana	State - PUNJAB (03)	5,45,584
Punjab	State - HARYANA (06)	5,38,328
Haryana	State - RAJASTHAN (08)	5,33,963

Source: Census, 2011 [Table DS-0000-D03-MDDS]
Figures are Total Migrants; All Reasons; All Durations; States names are as per Census Codes

While, the above captures all migrants – irrespective of the reason for migrating, we also look at the numbers for migrants moving for economic reasons i.e. for reasons stated as *Work/Employment* or *Business*. The top 30 routes for movement for economic reasons is Table 2.

Table 2: Top 30 Source and Destination Pairs for Migrants moving for Economic Reasons

Origin State	Destination State	Migrants for Economic Reasons [Work/Employment or Business]
Uttar Pradesh	State - MAHARASHTRA (27)	11,36,753
Uttar Pradesh	State - NCT OF DELHI (07)	9,19,207
Bihar	State - NCT OF DELHI (07)	4,10,601
Uttar Pradesh	State - GUJARAT (24)	3,74,311
Bihar	State - WEST BENGAL (19)	3,15,180
Uttar Pradesh	State - HARYANA (06)	3,07,409
Bihar	State - JHARKHAND (20)	3,06,335
Karnataka	State - MAHARASHTRA (27)	2,89,474
Bihar	State - MAHARASHTRA (27)	2,68,628
Uttar Pradesh	State - PUNJAB (03)	2,35,894
Tamil Nadu	State - KARNATAKA (29)	2,21,881
Andhra Pradesh	State - KARNATAKA (29)	2,13,578
Uttar Pradesh	State - UTTARAKHAND (05)	2,09,047
Rajasthan	State - GUJARAT (24)	2,04,967
Maharashtra	State - GUJARAT (24)	2,01,991
Madhya Pradesh	State - MAHARASHTRA (27)	1,95,855
Gujarat	State - MAHARASHTRA (27)	1,93,065
Uttar Pradesh	State - MADHYA PRADESH (23)	1,81,027
Rajasthan	State - MAHARASHTRA (27)	1,80,959
Bihar	State - UTTAR PRADESH (09)	1,68,222
Haryana	State - NCT OF DELHI (07)	1,41,792
Uttar Pradesh	State - RAJASTHAN (08)	1,10,512
NCT of Delhi	State - UTTAR PRADESH (09)	87,778
Rajasthan	State - HARYANA (06)	66,919
NCT of Delhi	State - HARYANA (06)	66,599
Punjab	State - HARYANA (06)	65,423
Jharkhand	State - WEST BENGAL (19)	63,504
Maharashtra	State - MADHYA PRADESH (23)	61,348
Madhya Pradesh	State - RAJASTHAN (08)	61,303
Maharashtra	State - KARNATAKA (29)	60,207

Source: Census, 2011 [Table DS-0000-D03-MDDS]
Figures are Total Migrants; Economic Reasons; All Durations; States names are as per Census Codes

Notes

[1] Established in 1986, the Centre for Railway Information Systems (CRIS) is an organization under Ministry of Railways tasking with developing/maintaining software for key functional areas of the Indian Railways. CRIS secure file transfer communication dated 13.02.2024 and 03.05.2024 are referred. See https://cris.org.in/loadpage?page=proUTS

[2] https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/budget2017-2018/es2016-17/echapter.pdf

[3] See https://trai.gov.in/release-publication/reports/telecom-subscriptions-reports

[4] See https://dot.gov.in/sites/default/files/list%20of%20unifiedaccess%20licensees_0.pdf?download=1

[5] See https://website.rbi.org.in/web/rbi/publications/chapters?category=24928085

[6] https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/budget_archive/es2001-02/chapt2002/chap107.pdf

[7] https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/national_data_bank/census_data_pro/Work_Participation_rate_Census%202001.pdf

[8] Railway Statistics Synopsis 2020 (Statistics for 2019)" (PDF). International Union of Railways

[9] *Number of journeys x mean kilometric distance*; https://indianrailways.gov.in/railwayboard/uploads/directorate/stat_econ/yearbook10-11/Passenger_business.pdf

[10] See Lok Sabha PAC 69th Report (2016-17); Suburban Train Services In Indian Railways; https://eparlib.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/65704/1/16_Public_Accounts_69.pdf

[11] CRIS secure file transfer communication dated 13.02.2024 and 03.05.2024 refers

[12] Census 2011; DS-0000-D03-MDDS; Migrants within the State/UT by place of last residence, duration of residence and reason of migration – 2011

[13] Lok Sabha Unstarred Q. No. 890; Answered on 25th July, 2023; *https://sansad.in/getFile/loksabhaquestions/annex/1712/AU890.pdf?source=pqals*

[14] Launched on 25th December, 2000 the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana is a scheme aimed at providing all-weather access to eligible unconnected habitations; https://omms.nic.in/ReferenceDocs/PMGSY_Guidelines.pdf

[15] Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) Dashboard; *https://omms.nic.in/dbweb/Home/TimeSeries*

[16] Launched on 20th November 2016, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Rural (PMAY – Rural) aims to provide housing for the poorest segments of society with the beneficaries being selected by a three stage process. https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2074713#:~:text=Under%20the%20Pradhan%20Mantri%20Awas,of%20millions%20of%20rural%20families

[17] https://rhreporting.nic.in/netiay/PhysicalProgressReport/YearWsHsCompSchemePhaseWise_InterimRpt.aspx

[18] https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1883918

[19] https://pib.gov.in/PressNoteDetails.aspx?NoteId=152025&ModuleId=3&reg=3&lang=1

[20] https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2040566

[21] https://dot.gov.in/sites/default/files/list%20of%20unifiedaccess%20licensees_0.pdf?download=1

[22] TRAI Monthly Reports; https://trai.gov.in/release-publication/reports/telecom-subscriptions-reports?field_start_date_value%5Bvalue%5D=&page=16