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Executive Summary

There exists two major schools of thought regarding the efficacy of migration related policies. The first category consists of authors who can be called as migration policy optimists. They are optimistic about the ability of migration related policies to affect migration. The second category consists of authors who are referred as migration policy pessimists. They are pessimistic about the ability of policies to affect migration. Migration policy pessimists contend that migration is influenced by various factors in origins and destinations. These cannot be brought under absolute regulatory regime by means of policies. Therefore, changes in migration policies often cannot effectively control migration. The author attempts to assess the validity of these two schools of thought in the light of some recent migration related policies. The paper tries to illustrate how the changing nature of migration related policies are affecting the validity of the arguments raised by migration policy optimists and pessimists.

Introduction

International migration is a source of livelihood to millions worldwide (IOM, 2022). For countries from which emigration take place in large numbers (origins), emigration is a means to enhance overall economic development of origins in terms of improvement in standard of living and poverty alleviation. (For ex: see Asch, 1994, Abbasi and Irfan (1986), Heller (2015))

But countries to which people emigrate in large numbers (destinations) seems to deal with immigration in a cautious manner. These countries try to maximize the gains and minimize the losses from immigration. This objective is often achieved by means of restrictive immigration policies. These policies try to manage immigration either quantitatively or qualitatively. Such policies can limit the ability of international migration to improve standard of living of people thereby limiting the economic gains from emigration. Due to economic gains from international migration, emigrants try to wither the impact of

these restrictive policies. But on the other hand, destination countries try to increase the effectiveness of such policies. Existence of these two conflicting forces lead to emergence of literature on effectiveness of migration related policies.

Czaika (2015: 3-4) and de Haas/Czaika (2013: 41) categorizes the literature on the impact of migration policies on migration into two.

The first category consists of authors who can be called as *“migration policy optimists”*. They put forth arguments like 1) “borders are under control” (Brochmann & Hammar, 1999), 2) “There is no major migration control crisis”, 3) “The capacity of states to control migration has actually increased” (Broeders & Engbersen, 2007), 4) “policies do have a significant effect on migration” (Hatton, 2009; Ortega & Peri, 2013), 5) Other things remaining the same, immigration policies will reduce migration (Mahía et al, 2010) etc. Thus, migration policy optimists are optimistic about the ability of policies to affect migration.

The second category consists of authors who are referred as “migration policy pessimists”. They make arguments like 1) “There is no guarantee that increasing border control and increasing apprehensions will reduce the migration flow” (Taylor & Filipinski, 2011) 2) “borders are beyond control”, 3) “the ability to control migration has shrunk as the desire to do so has increased” and 4) “little can be done to really cut down on immigration” (Bhagwati, 2003: 99).

Migration policy pessimists contend that migration is mainly influenced by economic factors in origins and destinations. These cannot be brought under absolute regulatory regime by means of policies. Therefore, changes in migration policies often cannot effectively control migration (Czaika and de Haas, 2013: 1). Taylor and Filipinski (2011) pointed out that tighter migration norms only result in postponement of entry. People successfully migrate in subsequent attempts.

The most important economic factor that influence and motivate migration is the economic gain from migrating abroad. Higher wages and consequent higher income abroad are the most important economic gains from emigration (Sjaastad, 1962). This can be considered as the most important economic foundation of migration. The obstacles raised by unfavourable migration related policies are nothing in the wake of such economic gains. Such economic benefits from international migration will continue to motivate migrants to overcome barriers raised by unfavourable migration policies. Existence of these two schools indicate that there are chances for international migration to sustain in the wake of restrictive migration related policies. Given the arguments of pessimists, emigrants have possibilities to withstand and overcome the effects of anti-immigrant policies at destinations and can continue to benefit from migration. In other words, unfavourable migration related policies cannot shake the economic foundation of migration.

But unfortunately, the changing nature of anti-immigrant policies have begun to affect the above mentioned economic foundations of migration. This means that the ability of migrants to withstand and overcome the effects of unfavourable migration policies and to make economic gains from migration is less now. From a theoretical view point, new anti-immigrant policies weaken the arguments of migration policy pessimists. *This is what this paper is trying to argue.* This paper attempts to contribute to literature by arguing that recent evidences (regarding the changing nature of migration policies) give more weight to arguments of optimists than pessimists. (Please note that the word migration in this paper refer to international migration and words pessimism/optimism refer to migration policy optimism/pessimism).

Findings of this paper are not only significant in a theoretical perspective. Practically, this means that migrants will now find it more difficult to withstand and overcome the effects of unfavourable

migration policies and to make economic gains from migration. This will have adverse consequences for stakeholders including migrants and origin communities who depend on emigrants. The findings of the study matter for the management of migration as origin communities and governments must gear up to meet the challenges raised by this emerging scenario.

Materials and Methods

This paper is based on field work conducted in Malappuram district of Kerala, India. India is one of the largest sender of emigrants and one among the largest recipients of inward international remittances sent by them (IOM, 2022). The Indian state of Kerala has a long legacy of emigration. More importantly, emigration from Kerala is studied and researched extensively. In fact, most of the research on international migration from India is based on Kerala (Sasikumar and Hussain 2007). So, the findings of the study can be well generalized in the global context.

The study is focused on two panchayaths (a local self-governing body under Kerala state government and India government) of Malappuram – Munniyoor and Vengara.

Kerala Pravasi Census (KPC13), conducted by Government of Kerala in 2013 is the only census conducted to capture the trends/patterns of migration in Kerala. It is one of the few censuses conducted to capture migration trends and patterns. According to KPC13, Malappuram district of Kerala sends the largest number of emigrants from Kerala. The two panchayaths studied by the author stand first and second position in the number of emigrants from Malappuram. The importance of India in scenario of international migration and predominance of Kerala in discourse of international migration from India is already stated. So, the study conducted in the above mentioned panchayaths of Kerala will be representative of the global migration scenario.

The study was conducted in the backdrop of increasing incidences of restrictive immigration practices in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC or Gulf) countries, the numerically dominant destination of emigrants from Kerala (KPC13).

Hussain (2011: 93) and Rajan and Joseph (2014) mentioned about the significant changes in labour policies of Gulf countries. Gulf countries first followed an open-door policy that encouraged immigrants to work in the booming oil economy of these countries. In the course of time, it led to the natives becoming a demographic minority in Gulf countries. Growth of population, particularly the young population, their high unemployment, heavy dependence on expatriate (immigrant) labour and rise of illegal migration have resulted in considerable resentment and anxiety in the Gulf societies. Various sections of native population in some Gulf countries came out against this state of affairs. Unstable revenues from oil due to fluctuations in prices of the same, massive remittance outflows and reduction of economic role of natives etc. are among the major economic problems faced by Gulf countries. These are considered by the Gulf natives as a threat to economy, political stability and socio-cultural identities of Gulf countries. After 1990s, authorities heeded to these concerns of natives and introduced restrictive immigration policies.

Restrictive immigration policies in Gulf have three objectives: restrictions of immigration to certain categories of work, creation of employment space for nationals¹ and minimize/remove skill mismatch (natives lack requisite skills for labour market). Various steps initiated to achieve the same are explained by authors like Hussain (2011), Rajan and Joseph (2017) and Hertog (2014). The researcher summarizes them in five points as follows. 1) Reserving jobs for natives (by fixing quotas) in various sectors of economy 2) Restricting immigrant employment in jobs

¹ also referred as citizens/natives/locals

and sectors 3) Regulating visas and work permits 4) Restricting occupational mobility of immigrants (i.e.,introducing restrictions in changing job/employer). 5) Imparting vocational and market-oriented education to natives to enable them to compete with immigrants. Available evidence suggests that COVID19 pandemic lead to intensification of anti-immigration policies. (for ex: see Alsahi (2020)).

The objective of the study is to understand whether immigration from Kerala managed to wither the impacts of restrictive immigration policies due to factors identified by pessimists or they are severely affected – in the manner envisaged by optimists. Given the representativeness of the study area to global migration scenario (already stated), the conclusion(s) of the study can be used to comment upon whether migration can sustain in the wake of recent restrictive immigration policies.

The respondents of the study were three hundred sample householdswith emigrants (EMIs) or return emigrants (REMs) (who returned during the last three years) in the above mentioned two panchayaths. In the field survey, information about emigration experiences of EMIs/REMs was collected by means of an interview schedule. Details needed to fill the same were preferably collected from EMI/REM in the households. But in majority of cases, they were abroad and family members having sufficient knowledge about emigration experiences of emigrants/return emigrants provided the required details.

Sample size is determined according to the formula given by Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

$$S = (x^2 NP (1 - P)) / (D^2 (N-1) + x^2 P (1-P))$$

Where

S = The required sample size

x^2 = Table value of chi square for 1 degrees of freedom at the desired confidence level (equal to 3.84 at 5% level)

N = Population size (Total number of emigrant households in the four panchayats that is obtained from KPC13 report)

P = Population proportion (assumed to be 0.5 since this would provide the maximum sample size)

D = Degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (0.04)

Using this formula, the sample size was calculated at 284 and was rounded to 300. Given the representativeness of the study area, this sample is sufficient to answer the research question raised in the study.

These 300 households were divided equally among the two panchyaths identified for survey (Munniyoor, Vengara). Thus 150 households were surveyed in each panchyath. This 150 were equally divided among the wards (territorial subdivisions) of the respective panchayats. The two panchayats covered in the study are having more than twenty wards. So, fifteen wards were selected from each of them on a random basis (using lottery method) and ten households were surveyed in each of these fifteen wards.

The researcher in the first stage identified the district to be surveyed (Malappuram). In second stage he identified two panchayats in this district to conduct the survey. In the third stage wards from these panchayats were selected. This approach is in line with Multistage Sampling technique. Lists of households with emigrants/return emigrants in these wards were prepared with the help of Kudumbasree activists (a self-help group in Kerala) and 10 households were drawn in each ward using lottery method (from the list prepared). The way in which sample households in each ward were selected is in line with systematic sampling technique.

The respondents were asked about the extent to which they are affected by unfavourable immigration policies mentioned earlier. The schedule that was circulated among the respondents was used to collect information about a wide variety of aspects including pre-emigration scenario, the process of emigration, living/working conditions abroad, effect of unfavourable migration related policies, their return from abroad and their life after return. But the author only wishes to highlight a few aspects that emerged from the fieldwork to support the argument made in the introduction of this paper regarding migration policy optimism / pessimism. These aspects are the following.

1. Remittances send by emigrants

The money that emigrants are able to send home as remittances is a proxy of the economic gain they make abroad. Table 1 show the percentage of respondents who (save and) remit various amounts per month. Majority of respondents (30.40%) were able to remit Indian Rupee (INR). 30000-50000 per month. Please note that source of all tables discussed in this paper is the primary data collected by the author.

2. Factors reducing savings of respondents

Respondents are asked to report the factors that reduced their savings abroad. The percentage of respondents who were affected by various factors is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 show that high cost of permit renewal is the major factor that reduced savings of respondents. Let us now look at this aspect in detail.

3. Cost of permit renewal per year (INR)

Table 3 shows that percentage of respondents who managed to renew their permit by paying or not paying various amounts. Majority of respondents paid 1-2 Lakhs rupees per annum for renewal of permit. More than 50% of them paid 1-3 Lakhs for this. *These respondents said that cost of renewing permit was hiked **only recently** by destination governments. **Earlier** only around 25000-50000 INR was required to renew the permit.*

Thus, we have seen that cost of permit renewal is high and naturally, the same play an important role in reduction of savings of immigrants. Let us now look at the effect of this factor in influencing the decision to stay abroad and/or return.

4. Imminent Return Emigration (IRE)

The researcher asked the respondents if they are planning to return immediately (potential or Imminent Return Emigration – IRE). If yes, they were asked to state reasons for the same. Information regarding reasons for imminent return is presented in Table 4. It shows the percentage of respondents who contemplate Imminent Return Emigration (IRE) due to various reasons.

Table 4 shows that 48.9% of the respondents foresee imminent return. Among them, majority (27.29%) plan to return due to high cost of renewing their work permit. Localization is the next single major reason for contemplating imminent return (20.37%).

5. Reason for Return Emigration

Table 4 showed reasons for contemplating potential return. Now let us look at reason for actual return among respondents. This is shown in Table 5 which show the percentage of respondents who returned due to various reasons.

Table 5 shows that localization (20.92%), health problems (12.67%), family related reasons (11.87%) and high cost of permit renewal (11.24%) are the major reasons for return. Thus, localization is the most important reason for REM and only the second most important reason for IRE. Tables 4 and 5 show that though IRE and REM are related phenomenon, their determinants need not be the same. (Note that some respondents might have returned only later due to health/family related reasons. They seem to returned earlier due to unfavourable economic/policy changes. This reduced the percentage of those who returned due to health/family related reasons)

6. Reason for not losing job

The respondents were also asked to state what they think is the reason for themselves/family member not losing their job. The percentage of respondents who gave various reasons for the same are shown in Table 6

Majority of those who do not lose their jobs told that they did not lose their job as they are employed in a destination which do not have anti-immigrant policies.

7. Re Emigration Prospects

Return emigrant respondents were asked if they will re emigrate again. 88.70% told that they will not re emigrate. Reasons for the same is shown in next table; which shows the percentage of respondents who are *not* re emigrating due to various reasons.

Table 7 show that Unfavourable Policies abroad is the main reason that prevent re emigration. Other major reasons include recessionary tendencies abroad and health problems.

Summing Up

The author was so far presenting various facts that are relevant to the study objective. *It is now* time to sum up and conclude. More than half of respondents (55.1 percent) faced *difficulties in renewing their work/stay permit*. Of this 55.1 percent, 39.8 percent hold that high cost of permit renewal is the major difficulty. The remaining (16.3%) cited other reasons. Majority of respondents paid 1-3 Lakhs rupees per annum to renew their permit.

Thus, majority of respondents ***found it difficult to renew their permit due to high cost of the same***. Recall (Table 1) that majority of respondents managed to remit 30000-50000 INR per month i.e., around 3-6 Lakhs INR per year. Spending up to Rs.3 lakhs for permit renewal *alone* means a huge reduction in economic gain from emigration. This is especially true of those whose annual earning is around INR 3 lacs per annum; making it meaningless for them to stay abroad. Respondents said that permit renewal fee was hiked recently by destination governments. They are now (on an average) able to remit 3-6 Lakhs INR per year. But since permit renewal cost is up to 3 Lakhs INR per annum now, they do not think that they will be able to send home the amount they remitted earlier. They are anticipating a significant decline in remittances send by them (and in the economic gain from migration) due to hike in permit fee.

Recall the response that the cost of permit renewal was hiked recently by the respective destination governments. It is genuine to doubt that this policy move is aimed at reducing economic gain of immigrants. About half (48.9 percent) of respondents foresee Imminent Return Emigration (IRE). This 48.9 percent comprises of 27.3 percent who told that high cost of permit renewal is the major problem in permit renewal. More than half of respondents contemplate IRE

and the main reason for same is high cost of permit renewal. Thus, *majority* of respondents foresee imminent return emigration and the *major reason* for the same is high cost of permit renewal (refer table 4). Note that the percentage of those *who plan* return (Table 4) emigration due to this is higher than the percentage of those *who actually* returned due to localization (refer table 5). This means that policies (like increasing the cost of permit renewal) that **directly affect** the economic gain of immigrants have more severe impact on emigrants. **Once** destination governments realize the same, the focus of future anti-immigrant policies may *shift from* imposing quotas for immigrants (this was the original spirit of localization) to reducing their economic gains. There may be chances for immigrants to adapt to quota system by searching for and finding new jobs. *But no such options* are available in policies of the above-mentioned genre. So, if focus of future anti-immigrant policies shifts in this manner, low paid emigrants may find it difficult to survive abroad.

We have seen that most of the scholars who studied the migration-policy nexus either contended that policies have a significant impact on migration (migration policy optimists) or otherwise (migration policy pessimists). Field level evidence basic to the study is weighted more towards arguments of migration policy optimists. The arguments supporting this contention follow.

Majority of respondents who did not lose their jobs maintained that they were unaffected as policies in their destinations were not unfavourable to immigrants (refer table 6). This indirectly confirms the potential of anti-immigrant policies to adversely affect the prospects of immigrants. Anti-immigrant policies were the major reason why return emigrants (REMs) are not planning to re emigrate (refer table 7). Field level evidences proved that policies that restrict immigrant labour in destinations/sectors (like localization initiatives), is a major reason for return

emigration of respondents. This type of policies will continue to remain as a major threat to emigration prospects.

But a *greater threat* can come from a new genre of policies that target the economic foundation of motivation to migrate/stay abroad. The study proves that policy to increase the fee for work/stay permit is the major problem among the respondents. About half of the respondents are contemplating Imminent Return Emigration (IRE). Majority of them are planning the same due to high cost of permit renewal. The policy to increase the fee for permit renewal seems to directly affect the economic gains of immigrants, forcing them to return. There is a difference between policies of this genre and traditional anti-immigrant policies.

Migration policy pessimists argue that traditional anti-immigrant policies cannot alter the socio-economic foundations of migration. So, migration may continue despite unfavourable policies. As pointed out by migration policy pessimists, there are chances for immigrants to overcome the adverse impacts of these policies through coping strategies like changing the job.

But policies like increase in permit fee aim at reducing the economic gains to migrants. **These policies** thereby target the economic foundation of migration: *something not done by* traditional policies. Field level evidence basic to this study shows that immigrants are unable to withstand the impacts of these policies and are returning/planning to return. This shows that coping strategies/mechanisms identified by policy pessimists are *not effective* in the case of these types of policies.

Once governments in destinations **realize** the efficacy of these policies in reducing the number of immigrants, future immigration policy thrust may be on shaking the socioeconomic foundations and **not on** conventional anti-immigration policies like localization. *If that happens,* **no safety** valves/coping strategies identified by migration policy pessimists may become

effective in preventing/reducing the adverse impact of anti-immigrant policies of this genre. This will have grave consequences for emigrants. For e.g.: the survival strategies like change of job to sectors not covered by anti-immigrant policies may not be very much effective. Data collected from field survey furnished evidences in this regard. Earlier immigrants had the option of returning home and re emigrating after finding another job. But majority of return emigrants maintained that they are not re emigrating due to unfavourable policy changes abroad (refer table 7).

Conclusion

This paper was an attempt to assess if migrants are able to overcome the effects of some recent anti-immigrant policies (in the manner envisaged by migration policy pessimists) or are severely affected by these policies (as argued by migration policy optimists). Unfortunately, the findings of the study hint towards weakening of arguments of migration policy pessimists in the light of changing nature of immigration policies. Anti-immigrant policies targeting the *economic foundation* of migration weakened the effects of factors (identified by pessimists) that enabled migrants to overcome the effects of unfavourable policies.

Policy Recommendations

The findings of the study suggest that in future, international migration may find it more difficult to sustain in the wake of anti-immigrant policies of the above-mentioned genre. The study thereby suggests that migration policy optimism may become more prominent in future. In future, migrants may find it difficult to withstand the effects of unfavourable policies and make economic gains from migration. Such a scenario will have adverse effects upon the developmental effects of migration (mentioned in the introductory part of the paper). Given the significance of migration in improving standard of living of people, all stakeholders must strive to devise suitable survival strategies in the wake of changing anti-immigrant policies.

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Table 1 - Average Monthly remittances send by emigrants (INR)

Amount Send as Remittances (INR)	Percentage of
-------------------------------------	------------------

	Respondents
Nothing send*1	0.30
Up to 5000	0.20
5000-10000	0.50
10000-20000	19.20
20000-30000	27.70
30000-50000	30.01
50000-75000	8.60
75000- 100000	6.40
100000-200000	3.60
200000-300000	0.40
300000-500000	0.30
500000-1000000	0.20
Victim of Recruitment Fraud	2.60

*1 refer to zero remittances due to reasons other than recruitment fraud

Table 2 - **Factors reducing savings of respondents**

Factor that reduced saving	Percentage of respondents
-----------------------------------	----------------------------------

None	10.90
High Migration cost	0.30
Irregular job/salary	8.10
Deductions from Salary	9.00
Low wage/income*1	6.10
Low Non-wage Benefits	5.80
Reduction in wage	9.70
No Overtime Benefits	1.50
High Permit renewal cost	30.80
High overall living costs*2	13.60
Waiting for new job contract	0.30
Sudden Return	4.50

(*1 in case of self-employed 2*due to reasons other than permit renewal)

Table 3 - Cost of permit renewal per year (INR)

No cost	Up to 25000 Rs.	25000 to 50000 Rs.	50000 to 1 Lakh Rs.	1 to 2 Lakh Rs.	2 to 3 Lakh Rs.	3 to 5 Lakh Rs.	More than 5 Lakh Rs.
22.10%	8.10%	1.10%	12.00%	34.50%	21.10%	0.60%	0.50%

Table 4 - Reason for Imminent Return of Emigrants

Reason	Percentage of Respondents
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Labour Contract Expired	1.83
Localization*1	20.37
Anti-Immigrant Policies*2	4.48
Other legal issues*3	4.68
Low Salary/No Salary	8.76
Low Economic Gain*4	3.46
High Cost of Work/Stay Permit Renewal	27.29
Unfavourable Working/living Conditions abroad	1.63
Problems in Firm/Firm Closed down	4.28
Recessionary Tendencies abroad*5	7.74
Lack of Work	6.72
Family Related Reasons	2.65
Retirement/Old age/Health Problems	5.49
To Emigrate Again*6	0.61

(*1 by localization the researcher means setting a quota for natives in employment in government/private sector *2 refer to anti-immigrant policies other than localization and high permit renewal fee, *3 means legal issues other than *1/*2, *4 refer to low economic gain from emigration due to reasons other than low salary and anti-immigrant policies like high permit renewal fee, *5 means the respondent contemplate return as he/she senses the possibility of being affected by recession)

Table 5: Reason for Return Emigration (REM)

Reason for REM	Percentage of
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	Respondents
Labour Contract Expired	4.89
Leave Denied	0.01
Lack of career advancement	0.28
Localization*1	20.92
Other legal issues*2	0.94
Victim of Recruitment Fraud	2.60
Low Salary	5.93
No Salary	0.94
Low Economic Gain*3	5.85
High Expenditures Abroad	0.96
High Cost of Permit Renewal	11.24
Recessionary Tendencies abroad*4	6.87
Oil Shock*5	6.24
Firm Closed*6	4.93
Lack of Work*7	0.87
Unfavourable Working Conditions	2.43
Poor Living Conditions	0.94
Health Problems (including old age)	12.67
Family Related Reasons	11.87
Formal Retirement	0.94
Better Prospects Elsewhere/Re emigration	0.20

Source: Primary Data

(*1 localization means setting a quota for natives in employment in government/private sector *2 refer to legal issues other than localization, high cost of work/stay permit renewal and other anti-immigrant policies, *3 refer to low economic gain from emigration due to reasons other than low salary, high expenditures abroad and high cost of permit renewal *4 refer to recessionary tendencies due to non-oil factors *5 Oil shock means problems that are caused to fluctuations in

oil prices like job loss *6 refer to closure of due to reasons other than *5 and *4. *7 refer to lack of work due to reasons other than *4,*5,*6)

Table 6 - Reason for not losing job

Reason	Percentage of Respondents
Had Better Educational qualification	2.30
Had Better Skills	0.60
Had Work Experience	1.40
Good Relationship with employer	1.70
Holds aKey Position in the organization/firm	4.30
Firm ¹ Unaffected by Recession	2.50
Firm Unaffected by un favourable immigration policies	12.00
Destination is not un favourable to immigrants	26.90
Don't Know	15.70
Natives not available to do my job	14.90
Luck factor	17.70

1. Refers to firm where immigrants are employed

Table 7 – Reason for not re emigrating

Reason	Percentage of Respondents
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Inadequate Economic Gains from emigration	8.00
Old Age	11.30
Family Related Reasons	10.10
Health Problems	16.50
Hostile Climate Abroad	0.60
Recession Abroad	21.70
Unfavourable Policies abroad	30.20
Started a business in Kerala/other Indian states	1.90