



# At 58%, migrant workers dominate fisheries sector as natives keep away

Lack of interest due to low income, depleting resources and uncertainty by climate issues

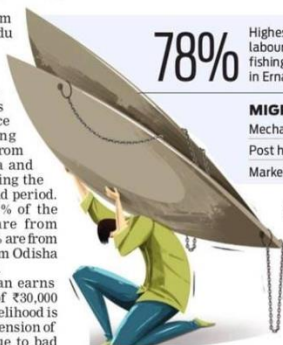
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THE marine fisheries work force of Kerala is dominated by migrant labourers and the representation of Kerala fishermen is recording a steady decline as youngsters are sailing away from the traditional sector, says a study by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI). The new generation of traditional fishermen are not interested in pursuing livelihood in the sector due to low income, depleting resources and uncertainty caused by climate-related issues.

According to the study, around 58% of the workforce in the fisheries sector are migrant workers. About 55 to 60% of the workers in the mechanised fishing boats are migrant labourers. In the post harvest processing sector around 50% are migrants while the marketing sector also has 40% workers from other states. The study found that Munambam harbour in Ernakulam district has the highest concentration of migrant labourers in Kerala's mechanised fishing sector, accounting for 78%.

While workers from Colachel in Tamil Nadu dominated the work force of mechanised fishing boats till 2020, they prefer to operate from harbours in their native place now. An increasing number of workers from West Bengal, Odisha and Assam started entering the field in the post Covid period. Presently, around 43% of the migrant workers are from Tamil Nadu while 31% are from West Bengal, 13% from Odisha and 10% from Assam.

"A native fisherman earns an average income of ₹30,000 per month, but the livelihood is often affected by suspension of fishing operation due to bad weather. Native workers in the marketing sector earn an average income of ₹28,000 while that of post harvest workers is around ₹20,000. While a migrant fisherman earns a monthly wage of ₹25,000, migrants in marketing and post harvest sector earn an average income of ₹14,000 and ₹11,000 respectively. There is uncertainty about the future of the sector as youngsters are migrating to other sec-



78%

Highest concentration of migrant labourers in Kerala's mechanised fishing sector at Munambam harbour in Ernakulam district

## MIGRANT WORKFORCE

Mechanised fishing boats : 55 to 60%

Post harvest processing sector: 50%

Marketing sector: 40%

have 16 crew members of which 10 or more are migrant labourers. Children of native fishermen prefer jobs in other sectors. The families are ready to spent more on education of their wards," said Gireesh a boat owner at Munambam.

"Despite their dominance, migrant workers remain highly vulnerable, facing exploitation, health risks and lack of social security," the study found.

Meanwhile, a workshop organised by the CMFRI proposed urgent policy interventions for fisher labour welfare, including better housing, health coverage, education support, and livelihood diversification measures.

tors in search of better earnings and job security," said CMFRI principal scientist Shyam S Salim who piloted the study.

"There are around 600 mechanised boats operating from Munambam harbour of which 400 are deep-sea fishing vessels. These vessels undertake long fishing trips which extend to more than 10 days. The boats