COVID-19 Pandemic and Exodus of Keralite Emigrant Workers from GCC Countries: Causes of Return, Activity Status of Returnees and Economic Impact

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 pandemic has resulted an exodus of Keralite emigrant workers from GCC countries to Kerala. The study based on a sample of 404 return emigrants belonged to the districts viz. Kannur, Kozhikode, Malappuram, Pathanamthitta and Thiruvananthapuram, examines causes of return, activity status of return emigrant workers prior and after return and impact on return on emigrant households and local labour market. Of the total sample returnees 54 percent returned on leave but stranded in Kerala, 32 percent returned due to closure of companies and business units, 9 percent due to reduction in salary and non-renewal of work permit and 6 percent due to other reasons. The households which used to receive sizeable amount as remittances from the emigrant workers on regular basis lost their source of income and pushed them to acute economic distress. Due to return, most of the sample return emigrant workers became unemployed and remained without any income and faced high uncertainty to find employment. The local labour market experienced excess supply of labour force, increase in unemployment rate and created gloomy prospect for remigration of returned emigrant workers and fresh migrants**.** The return emigrant workers feel that the labour market situation and prospects of getting regular and remunerative jobs are bleak in Kerala and they have a strong preference for remigration to secure a regular job, assured monthly income and to achieve economic stability of their families.

Key Words: COVID-19, return emigration, causes of return, activity status, impact on households, impact on local labour market.

JEL Classification: E24, F22, F24, J60, J61, G51

PART I

1. Introduction

India is the global leader of migration, having the largest number of migrants living abroad and receiving the largest amount of international remittances in the World[1]. Of the total stock of Indian emigrants, major share (53.5 percent) is in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, viz. United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain. In order to contain the spread of COVID-19, all GCC countries had implemented lockdowns, shutting down borders, halting international flights, other international travel controls, imposition of curfews and ban on mobility beyond borders since March 2020. The COVID-19 disruption, fall in global oil demand, fall in oil prices had led to recession, large loss of employment and fall in outward remittances from GCC countries. The disruption in mobility and international migration resulted in an exodus of Indian migrants from GCC countries. According to an estimate of Government of India, 55.93 lakh Indian emigrants returned to India from foreign countries as per India's repatriation mission, Vande Bharath Mission up to 30th April 2021[2]. Of these, 40.24 lakh or 71.9 percent returned from GCC countries. Of the total Indian returnees, the number returned to Kerala was 14.10 lakh or 25.2 percent. A sizeable share of emigrants returned from GCC countries to Kerala have lost their jobs and unable to go back to the country of return. This has resulted in stoppage of remittances received by lakhs of migrant households on a regular basis and pushed them to acute economic distress in Kerala. This has also created negative economic consequences in the localities and local labour market having concentration of emigrant households in Kerala. This is the context of the study.

Impact of COVID-19

A review of research on impact of COVID-19 on international labour migration shows that most of the studies pertain to the aggregate labour or economic impact of a region or country and done by World Organisations. The World Migration Report 2022 gives an analysis of inter connection between migration and mobility with COVID-19 travel restrictions in the World. The report also provides an account of the recent changes in migration due to COVID-19 crisis in six regions in the World, viz. Africa; Asia; Europe; Latin America and the Caribbean; North America and Oceania (IOM UN 2021).

Four issues of migration and development brief published by the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD), between April 2020 and November 2021 give regional and global trends in migration, the remittances, emerging issues and critical problems in the context of COVID-19 disruption in the early and subsequent phases of the spread of the pandemic. (KNOMAD 2020a; KNOMAD 2020b; KNOMAD 2021a; KNOMAD 2021b). Regarding the impact of COVID-19 the studies arrived at the following major conclusions. COVID-19 affected all host and origin countries and there has been widespread use of remote work and online delivery service shifted to digital. Countries implemented fiscal stimulus, packages viz. cash transfers and support to business. There has been significant return migration and no new migration. The most affected workers are front line workers and those employed in tourism and hospitality sectors. And transit migration increased as many host countries implemented strict travel bans and border closures.

The COVID-19 pandemic disruption, weakening global oil demand and fall in oil prices had severely affected the GCC economies, the foreign migrant workers and remittances sent. It is estimated that the COVID-19 induced recession resulted in a loss of 33 lakh full time jobs and a fall in outward remittances by 20 percent or US dollar 110 lakhs in GCC countries in 2020 (World Bank Group 2021). This huge loss in employment in GCC countries is the major cause for the exodus of Indian emigrant workers from GCC countries in 2020.

A study using the data on the incidence of five major pandemic events: SARS in 2003, H1N1 in 2009, MERS in 2012, Ebola in 2014, Zika in 2016, came to the conclusion that the COVID-19 has resulted in a persistent decline in the level of percapita Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with long lasting effect on income inequality and increase in the number of people living in absolute poverty of about 750 lakh people (IMF 2021). Another study on impact of COVID-19 on international migration and remittances project substantial drop in remittances in Asia (more than $31.4 billion) in 2020 and this sudden stop in remittances could push many households depending on remittances to economic distress and poverty in the region (ADB 2020).

According to an assessment of the World Bank, the impact of COVID-19 during the year 2020 was severe in many fronts. The major impacts were, increase in the incidence of debt and debt distress among countries, steep drop in global remittances, increase in return migration and slowdown of new migration, distress of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and closure of many of them, school closures affecting 1.5 billion children and youth, large fall in household spending and consumption expenditure. The adverse social impact identified are lack of access to digital connectivity to poor people and backward countries; reversal of women's and girls' decade long gains in human capital and economic empowerment; loss of jobs of women at a faster rate than men; and increased vulnerability to global food insecurity (Paul Blake, Divyanshi Wadhwa 2020). A preliminary study on the impact of lockdown in rural areas in India, suggest that it disrupted the lives of large number of rural households, increased rural poverty, created food insecurity and loss of income (Pratap C Mohanty, Jipson John Jaimon 2021).

Support to Distressed Migrants

In order to face the unprecedented crisis faced by the migrants the KNOMAD presented the following policy suggestions.(KNOMAD 2020b).(i) Support to stranded migrants in host or transit countries: Facilitate evacuation of stranded migrants, grant temporary protected status to foreign nationals, support informal businesses employing migrant workers, and protect migrants from abuse or wage theft by unscrupulous employers. (ii) Extension of cash transfer programs to support internal and international migrants in host countries: Support social services and provide cash transfers to migrants' families left behind in the origin countries. (iii) Provision of access to health care, housing, and education for migrant workers in host countries and their families back home in origin countries. (iv) Support to returning migrants in resettling, finding jobs, or opening businesses in origin countries. (v) Support to remittance infrastructure: Declare remittance services as essential; subsidize the cost of sending money to reduce the burden of remittance fees, incentivize online and mobile money transfers mitigate factors that prevent customers or service providers of digital remittances from accessing banking services.

How to limit the Economic Damage

An important question is how long it will take to recover from the COVID-19 crisis? According to a study based on the evidence from the experience of the 2007-08 global financial crisis the least developed countries (LDCs) and small island development states (SIDS) had not recovered to the level of pre-crisis rate even after five years of the crisis. And based on the regression analysis, it is projected that growth of per capita income in LDCs and SIDS may need about 4 to 5 years to be able to return to pre-crisis level (UNDESA 2020).

In this context the following suggestions are presented to limit economic damage of future pandemics. First, countries should strive to reduce dependency on a single economic sector such as over reliance on tourism sector or oil production. Second, good governance, low debt burdens and strong macroeconomic fundamentals. Third, setting up or expanding social protection systems as economic resilience against future shocks or as an automatic stabilizer. Fourth, balancing the trade-offs between health and economic concerns. Fifth, the pandemic has illustrated the need for accurate, reliable and timely data are critical for economic analysis that can inform policy decisions. (UNDESA 2021).

Economic Impact of Emigration in Kerala

The economic impact of Gulf migration on Kerala is a topic which attracted considerable attention from economists and demographers (Prakash B.A. 1978; Gopinathan Nair P.R. 1989). A hypothesis put forward in one of the studies is that "Since the mid-1970s, the factor which had the greatest impact on Kerala's economy especially on labour market, consumption, savings, investment, poverty, income distribution and economic growth has been the Gulf migration and migrant remittances" (Prakash B.A.1998). Based on a state wide migration survey, another study arrived at a similar conclusion. To quote, "migration has provided the single most dynamic factor in the otherwise dismal scenario of Kerala in the last quarter of 20th century. Migration has contributed more to poverty alleviation and reduction in employment in Kerala than any other factor" (Zachariah K. C, E. T. Mathew and S.IrudayaRajan2000). The subsequent Kerala migration surveys conducted in 2003, 2008 and 2013 have substantiated the initial prognosis of the impact of migration on development in Kerala (Zachariah K. C, and S.IrudayaRajan2015). These evidences suggest that since the mid-1970's, the factor which had given the greatest, impact on Kerala's Development has been migration to Gulf and continuous receipt of large amount of migrant remittances. And COVID-19 pandemic induced crisis in 2020 and 2021, the exodus of large number of Keralite emigrant workers and fall in future prospects of migration to Gulf had created a major setback on the economic wellbeing of lakhs of migrant households and overall economic development of Kerala.

Return Emigrant Survey 2021

A return emigrant survey was conducted in 2021, using Computer Assisted Telephonic Interviewing (CATI) method to study the category of Keralite return emigrants, their employment and duration of stay in the destination country, cost incurred for emigration and last return, process of return, wage theft experienced by them, remittances sent, future plan of returnees etc. (S. Irudaya Rajan and Balasubrahmanyam Pattah 2021). Though the study gives a lot of insights on many facets of return emigration due to COVID-19 crisis, cause of return, their activity status in host countries and remittances sent, it fails to address their activity status after return and the economic distress they face. The other limitations of the study are the following. First, the data was collected through telephonic interview and the investigators do not get an opportunity to see the person, the house in which he lives, the nature of the area, assets possessed, etc, and make an assessment of the economic background of the return emigrant. Second, the sample of the study covers all return emigrants including those distressed emigrants due to COVID-19 crisis and other categories. Third, the study has not examined the impact of return on loss of employment, loss of income of the returnees and their households and the impact on the local labour market. In our study, in addition to the activity status of returnees prior to return, we examine the activity status after the return and the impact on the return on the loss of employment, loss of income, economic distress of migrant households and impact on local labour market. In the place of CATI method, we use a direct interview of sample returnees at their houses based on an interview schedule.

Issues and Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented disruption in mobility, international labour migration and pushed migrant origin and destination countries into deep recession, large scale loss of employment and loss of income. In addition to COVID-19 pandemic, the fall in global oil demand and fall in oil prices have pushed the GCC countries to deep recession, large scale closure of business and industrial units and loss of employment. A category of international migrants who was forced to return in large numbers were contract category of Indian emigrant workers from GCC countries.

Due to these developments large number of Keralite emigrants working in GCC countries, lost their jobs and were forced to return to Kerala. Of the returnees, a good number will have little chance to go back or get their previous jobs. A large number of Keralite emigrants, who returned from GCC countries prior to the spread of the COVID-19 and after on leave, could not return due to their prolonged stay in Kerala, closure of the units in which they worked and denial of jobs by the employers. The GCC countries had been following migration policies to reduce the size of unskilled and low skilled categories of migrant workers prior to spread of COVID-19. And they use the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity to reduce the size of foreign workers.

Prior to the spread of the pandemic, the return emigrant workers had regular jobs, regular income and they used to send remittances on a regular basis to their families to meet their household expenditure. Due to the regular receipt of remittances, emigrant households enjoyed financial stability and security. The return of the emigrants have suddenly stopped the flow of remittances and shattered the finances of the households. The returnees are faced with a situation of either finding a job in the local labour market (mostly as casual labourer or self-employed) or remigrate to a foreign country incurring substantial cost. The loss of remittances received on a regular basis, lack of other sources of income, or income earning assets have pushed many returnee households to economic distress. The fall in income has substantially reduced the demand for many consumer goods and services and contractions in economic activities in local areas. The entry of returnees in the local labour market have created excess supply of labour, reduction in hours of the work of the existing workers and increased unemployment rate in the local labour market. In this context the objectives of the study are the following.

Objectives of the Study

1) To examine activity status, category of jobs, wage earned, remittance sent, country of residence of the return emigrant workers prior to return from GCC countries.
2) To study causes of return, country of return, period of return, the place to which returned, their activity status after the return and issues in remigration.
3) To find out impact of return of emigrant workers on emigrant households and local labour market.

In order to explain the broad changes taking place due to the exodus of Keralite emigrant workers from GCC countries due to COVID-19 and pandemic induced disruption, we present the following hypotheses.

> "Due to COVID-19 pandemic and related disruption, the contract category of Keralite emigrant workers employed in GCC countries, who used to send sizeable amounts as remittances to their households on a regular basis, forced to return to Kerala due to loss of jobs and other disruption, those returned on leave were unable to return and the return emigrant households experienced total loss of remittances and acute economic distress"

> "Due to return, most of the return emigrant workers became unemployed, remain without income, faced high uncertainty to find employment and the local labour market experienced excess supply of labour force, increase in unemployment rate and gloomy prospect for remigration of returned emigrant workers and fresh migration"

> "The return emigrant workers feel that the labour market situation and prospects of getting regular and remunerative jobs are bleak in Kerala and they have a strong preference for remigration to secure a regular job, assured monthly income and to achieve economic stability of their families"

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

International Labour Organisation's (ILO) definitions of different types of migrants[3]

International migration is distinct from international travel and consequently more than movement must be involved. Citizenship, purpose of stay as defined by the receiving state and the fact that a person has actually moved from one country to another are three key factors allowing identification and characterization of international migrants.

Foreigners are persons who are admitted by a country other than their own citizens with the right to free movement, special purposes, settle there, do work, engage in economic activities, seek asylum etc. Foreigners admitted for special purposes are foreign students, foreign trainees and foreign retirees.

Migrants with the right to free movement are persons who have the right to enter, stay and work within the territory of a state other than their own by virtue of an agreement or treaty concluded between their state of citizenship and the state in which they reside.

Settlers are persons who are granted the right to stay indefinitely in the territory of a country other than their own and to enjoy the same social and economic rights as the citizens of that country. Settlers are usually accorded the opportunity to become naturalized citizens of the receiving state once minimum requirements have been met.

Migrant workers are persons admitted by a country other than their own for the explicit purpose of exercising an economic activity. The categories of migrant workers are contract, seasonal, project tied, temporary, established and highly skilled.

Contract migrant workers are persons working in a country other than their own under contractual arrangements that set limits on the period of employment and on the specific job held by the migrant. Once admitted, contract migrant workers are not allowed to change jobs and are expected to leave the country of employment upon completion of their contract, irrespective of whether the work they do continues or not.

Economic Impact of Settlement and Contract Migration

The economic impact on contract migration is much different in origin country of migrants compared to settlement type of migration. In settlement migration, migrant workers migrate with their family members and settle in the foreign country. They usually spend their entire savings in the foreign country and their native country is not benefited much from the migration. Settled migrant workers are not affected by the pandemic disruption.

On the other hand contract migration is temporary migration and return is an essential part of the migration. Usually during the stay in foreign country, the migrant workers leave their families behind in their home country. In order to support their family, the migrants send remittances on a regular basis which is spent by the households. The economic impact of this spending will be substantial on domestic economies of labour exporting countries or migrant origin countries.

Kerala being a state which heavily relies on migration to the Gulf and remittance from the migrant workers, the large scale return of emigrant workers will result in loss of employment to lakhs of migrant workers, loss of wage and income, fall in remittance, economic distress of emigrant households and push areas or districts having large concentration of migrant households to deep recession.

Micro and Macroeconomic Effects of Remittances

The World Bank based on global experience of international migration from developing countries to high income countries has arrived at some generalizations about the economic implications of remittances and migration of countries of origin and destination (World Bank 2006). Based on it, we present the micro and macroeconomic effects of remittances in countries of origin. International migration can generate substantial welfare gains for migrants and their families and for the countries involved (countries of origin and destination). The money that migrants send home—remittances—is an important source of extra income for migrants' families and for developing countries. But migration is a complex phenomenon and involves substantial cost such as transportation, fees charged by recruitment agencies, fees to obtain a visa and work permit, maintenance while searching for work, forgone earnings, the need to study foreign language, acquire specific skills and the pain of being separated from family and familiar surroundings. Migration generates economic benefits for origin countries, the largest being remittances which include workers remittances, compensation of employees and migrant transfers sent through banking channels and other informal channels. The World Bank estimated that unrecorded flows of remittances through informal channels may be about 50 percent of recorded flows (World Bank 2006).

The major impact of remittance flows at the micro level i.e., on recipient households is the following. (1) The receipt of remittances increases the income levels of the households and reduce poverty, (2) it increases the household consumption on food, clothing, other items of consumption, housing amenities, possessions of household durables, motor vehicles etc., (3) help smooth household consumption by responding positively to adverse shock (for example, crop failure, job loss or health crisis), (4) ease working capital constraints on farm and small-scale entrepreneurs, (5) lead to increased household expenditure in areas considered to be important for development, particularly education, health and entrepreneurship, (6) remittances may ease credit constraints due to stable stream of remittance income and make households more credit worthy to avail credit from formal sector financial institutions, (7) remittances often encourage entrepreneurship and investment in real estate, business, industrial and other activities of migrants and members of households and (8) remittances promote investment in higher education especially on costly professional courses of the members of the households. The evidences presented above suggest that remittances play multifaceted roles in poverty reduction, consumption smoothing, and investment, with the balance of roles varying by time and place.

For some recipient countries, remittances are large enough to have broader macroeconomic effects. High levels (or large increases) in remittance flows can be expected to have direct repercussions on foreign exchange rates, domestic interest rates, and the balance of payments, and indirect repercussions on macro variables. Because of their relative stability and targeting (directly to households), they may bring some additional benefits. However, as the experience with and analysis of natural resource booms have shown, large inflows can also have some undesirable side effects. Remittances may move counter cyclically relative to the economic cycle of the recipient country. Remittances may rise when the recipient economy suffers a downturn in activity or macroeconomic shocks due to financial crisis, natural disaster, or political conflict, because migrants may send more funds during hard times to help their families and friends.

Remittances can improve a country's creditworthiness and thereby enhance its access to international capital markets. Remittance securitization can help countries raise external financing. Several banks in developing countries (for instance, Brazil) have been able to raise relatively cheap and long-term financing from international capital markets via securitization of future remittance flows. Large remittance inflows can lead to exchange rate appreciation and lower export competitiveness, a situation not desirable for a developing economy. Moreover, as remittances tend to be relatively stable and persistent over long periods, the "Dutch disease" effects of remittances are less of a concern than similar effects of natural resource windfalls and other cyclical flows.

Unlike oil windfalls, remittance inflows do not weaken institutional capacity. Natural resource windfalls—oil rents, for example—often foster weak institutions because they allow the authorities to pursue arbitrary, costly, and inefficient policies. In contrast, remittances are widely dispersed, the great bulk of them are allocated in small amounts, and for the most part, remittances avoid the government "middleman." Hence the expectation is that they can avoid the negative effects of natural resource windfalls on poverty, growth, and institutional capacity.

COVID-19, a Great Disrupter of International Migration

COVID-19 has proved to be a great disrupter, negatively impacting migrants throughout the international migration cycle, starting with departure from countries of origin, entry into transit and destination countries, stay in transit and destination countries, and the return to countries of origin[4]. Five types of disruption are identified. (1) Migrants have been unable to depart on planned migration journeys, such as for work, study or family reunion. (2) Migrants (including refugees and asylum seekers) have been increasingly unable to enter transit and destination countries, as restrictions have been progressively implemented and/or strengthened. The shortage of migrant workers in turn result in curtailment of production of goods and services, fall in transport and trade, disruption in supply chains and international air transport. (3) Impact on migrants have been profound, especially for the most vulnerable in societies, who are without access to social protection and health care, and have also faced job loss, xenophobic racism and the risk of immigration detention, while being unable to return home. (4) Border-closure announcements in some countries caused mass return to native or origin countries for fear of being stranded without income or access to social protection. The inability to return has resulted in large numbers of migrants being stranded around the world. (5) The measures which led to forced immobility which acted to slow or even stop migration are as follows: (a) border restrictions/closures; (b) travel restrictions; (c) visa programme disruption; (d) quarantine measures; and (e) no/limited flights.

The pandemic has imposed forced immobility, quarantine related mobility restrictions, excluded informal and low paid emigrant workers from social welfare benefits, resorted to wage theft of the contract migrant and other informal categories of workers, shifted remittance sending from informal to formal channels, speeded up digitalisation process and related technologies, disrupted long standing migration patterns and processes and loss in faith of migration as a means for attaining material improvement of low skilled categories of migrant workers.

Among the migrant workers, the contract worker is the category which is worst affected due to the COVID-19 disruption. The workers are treated as temporary workers for practically all purposes by employers and governments in host countries. They are most vulnerable category of workers compared to others. Majority of the contract migrants are in the category of low skill or unskilled, do not earn non-wage benefits or other labour benefits and employed in informal sector jobs. They are not eligible for social protection measures meant for citizens of the country. And all of the migrant workers in GCC countries belonged to contract workers category.

Data Source

Both secondary and primary data are used for the study. Migration, labourand economic data of Kerala government agencies, research institutions, Government of India, World Organisations such as United Nations (UN), International Organisation of Migration (IOM), Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) and World Bank have been used for the study. Besides this, we have conducted a sample survey of return emigrants in six gramapanchayats and five municipalities belonging to five districts of Kerala. The sample consists of return emigrant workers who returned to Kerala prior to the spread of COVID-19 on leave and was unable to return due to COVID-19 disruptions and denial of jobs by employers or closure of units and those forced to return to Kerala after the spread of COVID-19 due to pandemic disruptions, loss of jobs and unable to return at the time of survey.

The sampling procedure followed is as follows. First, we have identified the districts which have the largest number of return emigrants viz. Malappuram, Kozhikode and Kannur, based on Department of Non Resident Keralites Affairs (NORKA) data on return emigrants[5]. Second, we have selected two districts having smaller number of return emigrants in the southern region viz. Pathanamthitta and Thiruvananthapuram to find out the difference in intensity of impact of return. Third, the gramapanchayats and municipalities in each district are selected based on the information collected from local bodies about the availability of return emigrants. Six gramapanchayats and five municipalities are selected from nine taluks belonging to five districts for the survey (Table 1). Of the total 306 wards in the eleven local bodies, sample returnees were selected from 102 wards, who returned to Kerala between December 2019 and July 2021 (Table 2). Our investigators met the return emigrants at their residence, conducted interviews based on an interview schedule from 404 sample return emigrant workers during the period between July 2021 and November 2021. Due to lockdown and other restrictions we have faced serious difficulties in data collection.

Table 1
Distribution of sample districts, Taluks and number of local bodies

No	District	Taluk	Grama Panchayat (GPs)	Municipality (Ms)	Total GPs and Ms
1	Kannur	Thalassery	2	-	2
2	Kozhikode	Koyilandy	1	1	2
		Vatakara	1	-	1
3	Malappuram	Tirurangadi	1	-	1
		Eranad	-	1	1
		Kondotty	-	1	1
4	Pathanamthitta	Thiruvalla	1	-	1
		Kozhencherry	-	1	1
5	Thiruvananthapuram	Varkala	-	1	1
Total		**9**	**6**	**5**	**11**

Table 2
Distribution of sample GramaPanchayats (GPs) and Municipalities (Ms)

No	District	GPs and Ms	Total Wards	Number of Sample Wards	Number of sample return emigrant households
1	Kannur	Kottayam (GP)	14	6	40
		Vengad (GP)	21	9	46
		Sub Total	**35**	**15**	**86**
2	Kozhikode	Koyilandy (M)	44	13	48
		Thiruvallur (GP)	23	8	36
		Keezhariyur (GP)	13	6	27
		Sub Total	**80**	**27**	**111**
3	Malappuram	Peruvallur (GP)	19	8	42
		Manjeri (M)	50	14	57
		Kondotty (M)	40	11	47
		Sub Total	**109**	**33**	**146**
4	Pathanamthitta	Koipuram (GP)	17	8	21
		Pathanamthitta (M)	32	11	23
		Sub Total	**49**	**19**	**44**
5	Thiruvananthapuram	**Varkala (M)**	**33**	**8**	**17**
Total		**11**	**306**	**102**	**404**

The paper is presented in two parts. In the first part we present sections viz. (1) Introduction and (2) Indian and Keralite emigrants in GCC countries and exodus of emigrants. In the second part we present findings of a survey of return emigrants. Under this part the sections are (3) Activity status of Keralite return emigrant workers prior to return, (4) Causes of return, (5) Activity status of return emigrant workers after return, (6) Impact of return on emigrant households, (7) Impact on local labour market, (8) Bleak labour market and remigration and (7) Conclusions and policy suggestions.

2. Indian and Keralite Emigrants in GCC Countries and Exodus of Emigrants

India has the largest number of migrants living abroad and the recipient of largest amount of international remittance in the world. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) gives rough estimates about the global stock of emigrants and country wise emigrants. According to world migration report 2022 the total stock of international migrants in the world was estimated as 2805.9 lakh in 2020[6]. The total stock of Indian emigrants was estimated as 178.6 lakh or 6.4 percent of the global migrants. Of the total global remittance of United States Dollar (USD) 702 billion in 2020, the remittance received in India was USD 83.15 billion. Remittance is financial or in-kind transactions made directly to families or communities in their countries of origin. Among the total Indian emigrants of 178.6 lakh, 95.6 lakh or 53.5 percent were in GCC countries (Table 3). The GCC countries are United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain.

Table 3
Stock of Indian migrants in the World and GCC countries at mid-year

Year	Number		Share of GCC (%)
	World	GCC Countries	
1990	66,19,431	19,55,742	29.5
1995	71,53,439	22,90,500	32.0
2000	79,28,051	27,39,088	34.5
2005	95,88,533	37,13,359	38.7
2010	1,32,21,963	64,42,475	48.7
2015	1,58,85,657	82,52,572	51.9
2020	1,78,69,492	95,68,590	53.5

Source: United Nations, Population Division
https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock

The growth in Indian emigrants in GCC countries during the last three decades gives the following trends (Table 4). (1) There had been a continuous growth of Indian emigrants in GCC countries during the last three decades. (2) The decade which witnessed the highest rate of growth of migration is between 2000 and 2010. (3) The data suggest that the global financial crisis of 2008 had not affected the Indian migration to Gulf. (4) But the share of females to total migrants registered a decline during the period.

Table 4
Stock of Indian Emigrants in GCC Countries

Year	Number			Share of female to total (%)
	Total	Male	Female	
1990	19,55,742	14,02,456	5,53,286	28.3
1995	22,90,500	16,54,966	6,35,534	27.7
2000	27,39,088	19,87,886	7,51,202	27.4
2005	37,13,359	27,66,243	9,47,116	25.5
2010	64,42,475	49,47,084	14,95,391	23.2
2015	82,52,572	63,15,670	19,36,902	23.5
2020	95,68,590	73,11,033	22,57,557	23.6
	Growth Rate (%)			
1990	-	-	-	-
1995	17.1	18.0	14.9	-
2000	19.6	20.1	18.2	-
2005	35.6	39.2	26.1	-
2010	73.5	78.8	57.9	-
2015	28.1	27.7	29.5	-
2020	15.9	15.8	16.6	-

Source: United Nations, Population Division
https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock

The total stock of emigrants in six GCC countries was estimated as 308.1 lakh in mid-year 2020. Of the total stock of emigrants in GCC countries, the share of Indian emigrants was estimated as 31.1 percent (Table 5). The share of Indian emigrants among the total emigrants in UAE was 39.8 percent, Kuwait 37 percent, Qatar 31.5 percent, Bahrain 39 percent and Oman 58 percent. Saudi Arabia had the lowest share of Indian emigrants (18.6 percent).

Table 5
India's share in total stock of emigrants in GCC countries, mid-year 2020

No	GCC Countries	Stock of Indian emigrants in GCC countries		
		Total	**Male**	**Female**
1	United Arab Emirates	34,71,300	26,66,029	8,05,271
2	Saudi Arabia	25,02,337	17,41,093	7,61,244
3	Oman	13,75,667	12,04,672	1,70,995
4	Kuwait	11,52,175	8,12,171	3,40,004
5	Qatar	7,02,013	6,04,194	97,819
6	Bahrain	3,65,098	2,82,874	82,224
Total		**95,68,590**	**73,11,033**	**22,57,557**
		Share of stock Indian emigrants to total stock of emigrants in GCC		
		Total	**Male**	**Female**
1	United Arab Emirates	39.8	41.5	35.1
2	Saudi Arabia	18.6	18.9	17.8
3	Oman	58.0	60.7	44.0
4	Kuwait	37.0	39.4	32.5
5	Qatar	31.5	32.8	25.5
6	Bahrain	39.0	40.7	34.0
	Total	**31.1**	**32.9**	**26.3**

Source: United Nations, Population Division
https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock

Factors Contributed to Return of Emigrant Workers from GCC Countries

A major factor other than COVID-19 disruption affected the return of emigrants and fall in migrant remittance from GCC countries in 2020 was the weak oil price. A steep fall in oil prices in GCC countries in 2020, had adversely affected economic activities, resulted in large scale loss of employment of foreign workers and exodus of emigrant workers from GCC countries. A more structural factor in the case of Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries has been the shift in their employment policies in favour of native born workers[7].

To cope with the fiscal crunch and prepare for a future with lower oil prices, governments of the GCC countries are encouraging their own citizens to replace migrants. Bahrain cut the number of flexi-permits from 47,000 in 2020 to 24,000 in 2021[8]. The Kuwaiti cabinet has tasked its Manpower Authority with getting another 1,00,000 citizens to work in the private sector within four years to reduce the state's public sector wage bill, which accounts for approximately 60 percent of the government's budget[9]. From the above facts we can conclude that all the GCC countries are perusing migration policy to discourage the migration of unskilled and less skilled category of migrants, promote indigenisation of labour with an objective to give jobs to native born citizens.

Saudi Arabia's Iqama (Resident Permit)

Prior to COVID-19 crisis in 2020, Saudi Arabia had been pursuing indigenisation policy vigorously. A "Nation Without Violators Campaign," initiated in Saudi Arabia in 2018, was intended to encourage illegal expatriates to leave the country, without requiring payment of penalties. It is estimated that over 10 lakh expatriates departed the country from February 2018 to June 2020[10]. Saudi Arabia has almost doubled the resident permit fee within three years from 2018 and 2020, to discourage local employers from hiring foreign workers.

Iqama is a resident permit required for the migrant workers to enable free movement in their place of work to be obtained by employers. Saudi Arabia has again revised norms of renewal of Iqama from January 1, 2022[11]. According to the norms for renewal of Iqama the following items are required viz. (1) a valid health insurance policy, (2) payment of work permit fee (Maktab amal fee), (3) expatriate resident dependent fee and (4) Iqama issuance and renewal fee. The monthly work permit fee per person is Saudi Riyal (SR) 800 and for one year SR 9600. Expatriate dependent fee is SR 400 per month per dependent and for one year SR4800. Iqama issuance and renewal fee per person for one year is SR650. Thus the annual fee of a single migrant worker who lives without family has to pay a sum of SR10,250 or Rs 2,05,870 per year excluding the cost of insurance policy. The returnees from Saudi Arabia told us that in addition to it they have to pay a monthly amount to the sponsor as his fee. If we include all the items the total average financial burden of an emigrant worker will come about SR 12,000 (Rs 2,40,953) per year. According to Saudi Labour Law it is the responsibility of the employer to pay the above levies. But in actual practice, the entire amount is paid from the wage of the migrant worker.

Thus the policy of Saudi government is to extract a major share of the wage or income of the emigrant worker in the name of exploitative levies. Failure to renew an Iqama will result in an SR500 first time penalty and SR1000 second time penalty. In addition, the holder of an Iqama will face a fine and deportation in the event of third time expiry. Small business with fewer than nine employees including a full time Saudi employer are exempted from paying the expatriate fee for two employees. But exemptions in payment of work permit fee is given to house drivers, home workers and other domestic workers.

Stock of Keralite Emigrants in GCC Countries and Exodus of Emigrants

Two estimates are available about the stock of Keralite emigrants in Gulf countries during the decade 2010's. First, the Department of Economics and Statistics (DES) conducted a census of Non-Resident Keralites (NRK) and estimated the total emigrants comprises of emigrant workers and their dependents as 12.8 lakh in 2013 (Table 6). According to it, the largest share of Keralite emigrants live in UAE, followed by Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. The census estimated that, of the total emigrants, 90 percent were emigrant workers and 10 percent dependents. A notable finding of the census was that of the total Keralite emigrant workers in Gulf countries, the share of male workers was 95 percent and female 5 percent. The census also gives an estimate of the district wise number of emigrants. According to it, one fifth of the emigrants belonged to Malappuram district (Table 7). The other districts having sizeable number of emigrants were Kannur, Kozhikode and Thrissur. The above four districts accounted for half of the total emigrants. This census estimate can be considered as the most reliable and comprehensive one which provide a realistic picture about the stock of international migrants from Kerala.

Table 6
Total Keralite emigrants in Gulf countries: DES Census 2013

No	Country	Number of emigrant workers	Number of dependents	Total emigrants	Share (%)
1	Saudi Arabia	4,21,313	28,916	4,50,229	31.6
2	United Arab Emirates	5,07,087	66,202	5,73,289	40.2
3	Kuwait	91,780	14,353	1,06,133	7.4
4	Oman	89,238	10,733	99,971	7.0
5	Qatar	1,13,395	12,108	1,25,503	8.8
6	Bahrain	61,408	8,890	70,298	4.9
7	Iraq	763	32	795	0.1
8	Iran	473	49	522	0.0
Total		**12,85,457**	**1,41,283**	**14,26,740**	**100.0**
Total (%)		**90.1**	**9.9**	**100.0**	**-**

Source: Government of Kerala (2013)

Table 7
District wise distribution of Keralite emigrants: DES Census 2013

No	District	Number of emigrants*	Share (%)
1	Kasaragod	60,908	4.3
2	Kannur	1,50,750	10.6
3	Wayanad	15,248	1.1
4	Kozhikode	1,54,233	10.8
5	Malappuram	2,86,586	20.1
6	Palakkad	84,058	5.9
7	Thrissur	1,57,534	11.0
8	Ernakulam	70,294	4.9
9	Idukki	8,227	0.6
10	Kottayam	56,374	4.0
11	Alappuzha	80,832	5.7
12	Pathanamthitta	78,732	5.5
13	Kollam	1,14,140	8.0
14	Thiruvananthapuram	1,08,824	7.6
Total		**14,26,740**	**100.0**

*Total emigrants consist of emigrant workers and dependents
Source: Government of Kerala (2013)

Second, the two estimates on Keralite emigrants based on migration surveys in 2013 and 2018. The migration survey of 2013, based on large scale sample survey of households had estimated the total stock of Keralite emigrants in Gulf as 20.7 lakh in 2013 (Table 8). According to the survey, UAE had the largest number of Keralite emigrants followed by Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar. If we compare this estimate with DES census 2013, we can find considerable difference in the stock of emigrants. Usually different estimates may differ, due to difference in definitions and methodology followed for estimation. But the difference in the case of these two estimates is very large and no explanations are offered for this.

Table 8
Country of Residence of Keralite Emigrants

No	Destination	2013	2018	Increase/ Decrease (%)	Emigrants in 2018 (Share %)
1	UAE	8,98,962	8,30,254	-7.6	39.1
2	Saudi Arabia	5,22,282	4,87,484	-6.7	23.0
3	Oman	1,89,224	1,82,168	-3.7	8.6
4	Kuwait	1,83,329	1,27,120	-30.7	6.0
5	Bahrain	1,49,729	81,153	-45.8	3.8
6	Qatar	1,06,107	1,85,573	74.9	8.7
7	Other West Asia	21,221	0	-	0.0
Subtotal, Gulf Countries		**20,70,854**	**18,93,752**	**-8.6**	**89.2**
8	USA	69,559	46,535	-33.1	2.2
9	Canada	11,200	15,323	36.9	0.7
10	United Kingdom	38,316	38,023	-0.8	1.8
11	Singapore	8,842	12,485	41.2	0.6
12	Malaysia	9,432	11,350	20.3	0.5
13	Australia/New Zealand	38,316	30,078	-21.5	1.4
14	Other Countries	1,53,855	74,341	-51.7	3.5
Subtotal		**3,29,520**	**2,28,135**	**-30.8**	**10.8**
Total		**24,00,375**	**21,21,887**	**-11.6**	**100.0**

Source: Irudaya Rajan, S. and Zachariah, K C (2019)

Another migration survey using the same definitions and methodology had estimated the total Keralite emigrants in Gulf countries as 18.9 lakh in 2018 (Table 8). The survey found that there had been a decline in the stock of Keralite emigrants in Gulf between 2013 and 2018. The survey concluded that there had been a fall in the total stock of Keralite emigrant by 8.6 percent between 2013 and 2018.

A Rough Estimate of Keralite Emigrants in GCC Countries in 2020

For a realistic estimate of Keralite emigrants in GCC countries we have to consider the following points. (1) The UN DESA migration estimate about the total stock of Indian emigrants in GCC countries. (2) The growth of Indian emigrants in GCC countries during the last one decade. (3) Growth of Indian emigrants in individual GCC countries. (4) Change in the share of Keralite emigrants in the total stock of Indian emigrants in GCC countries. (5) The number of Keralite emigrants returned from the GCC countries due to the pandemic disruption. If we consider the above points, the total Keralite emigrants in GCC countries will likely to be in the range of 25 to 30 percent of the total stock of Indian emigrants in the midyear 2020. The UN DESA has estimated the total stock of

Indian emigrants in GCC countries as 95.7 lakh in mid-year 2020. Based on the above points we estimate that the total Keralite emigrants in GCC countries may be in the range between 23.9 lakh and 28.7 lakh in mid-year 2020.

Estimate of Remittances Received in Kerala

Estimate on inward remittances to Kerala suggests that Kerala has been receiving huge amounts as remittances from Keralite emigrant workers especially from contract emigrant workers from the GCC countries. According to Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) inward remittances survey 2016-17, the remittances sent by skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled Indian emigrants from foreign countries to India was USD 69 billion in 2017 (RBI 2018). The money is sent through authorised dealers such as banks and non-resident exchange houses. Of the total inward remittances to India, Kerala received the largest share, 19 percent (USD 13.11 billion). This means that Kerala had received an amount of Rs 85,092 crore sent by Keralite emigrants, mostly from the GCC countries in 2017. In addition to this, money and assets are transferred through informal channels in cash or kind (transport of consumer durables, gold, other items when the emigrant/relative/friend return to Kerala). If we assume the remittances through informal channels as 20 percent of the total remittances sent through formal channel, the actual amount of remittances will be Rs 1,02,110 crore in 2017. And the amount to remittances was somewhat nearer to the total expenditure of government of Kerala during the financial year 2017-18 (Rs. 1,10,238 crore).

It may be noted that of the total inward remittance of USD 69 billion to India in 2017, 53 percent originated from GCC countries viz. UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman. The RBI survey indicates that 59.2 percent of the remittances were used for family maintenance (i.e. consumption) 20 percent for deposit in banks, 8.3 percent for investment and 12.6 percent for other purposes. This evidence suggests that the Indian emigrant workers belong to the category of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled send remittances mainly to meet their household expenditure.

Exodus of Indian Emigrants from GCC Countries

Due to the spread of COVID-19 pandemic and related disruption, a large number of Indian emigrants returned from GCC countries since March 2020. The returnees used different ways to return to India such as normal flights from GCC countries to India, special flights, chartered flights organised by emigrants or their organisations and circular routes to reach India due to COVID-19 travel restrictions imposed in some countries. Government of India also organised an evacuation mission viz. Vande Bharat Mission to bring back the stranded Indian emigrants from foreign countries. According to an estimate of government of India 55.93 lakh Indians returned from foreign countries up to 30^{th} April 2021 through the mission. Of the total Indian returnees, the number returned to Kerala was 14.10 lakh or 25.2 percent.

According to NORKA, 14.7 lakh Keralites returned to Kerala due to COVID-19 disruption till June 22, 2021 (Table 9). Of them, 59 percent returned from UAE, 11.7 percent from Saudi Arabia, 9.7 percent from Qatar and 9.1 percent from Oman. It is reported that loss of jobs and expiry of visa are cited as the major reasons for the return. Of the total returnees 91 percent returned due to these two reasons (Table 10). A district wise distribution of returnees show that 17.9 percent returned to Malappuram, 11.7 percent to Kozhikode and 11.1 percent to Kannur. These three districts account for 41 percent of total returnees (Table 11). We do not have data about the returnees who went back to the host countries.

Table 9
Number of Non Resident Keralites (NRKs) returned due to COVID-19 crisis, till June 22, 2021

No	Country	Number of return emigrants	Share (%)
1	United Arab Emirates	8,72,303	59.3
2	Saudi Arabia	1,72,016	11.7
3	Qatar	1,42,458	9.7
4	Bahrain	43,194	2.9
5	Kuwait	51,170	3.5
6	Oman	1,34,087	9.1
7	Other Countries	56,209	3.8
Total		**14,71,437**	**100.0**

*Source:*Non Residents Keralite Affairs Department (NORKA)

Table 10
Reasons for the return of NRK

No	Reasons	Number of return emigrants	Share (%)
1	Loss of jobs	10,51,272	71.4
2	Visa expiry and others	2,91,581	19.8
3	Children below 10 years	81,883	5.6
4	Senior citizen	30,341	2.1
5	Pregnant women	13,501	0.9
6	Spouse of pregnant women	2,859	0.2
Total		**14,71,437**	**100.0**

*Source:*Non Residents Keralite Affairs Department NORKA

Table 11
Destination districts of the NRKs returned due to COVID-19 crisis

No	District	Number of return emigrants	Share (%)
1	Malappuram	2,62,678	17.9
2	Kozhikode	1,72,112	11.7
3	Kannur	1,64,024	11.1
4	Thrissur	1,18,503	8.1
5	Thiruvananthapuram	1,16,531	7.9
6	Kollam	1,01,125	6.9
7	Ernakulam	87,075	5.9
8	Palakkad	76,871	5.2
9	Kasaragod	62,886	4.3
10	Alappuzha	54,367	3.7
11	Pathanamthitta	53,777	3.7
12	Kottayam	42,573	2.9
13	Wayanad	18,310	1.2
14	Idukki	9,823	0.7
15	Not mentioned	1,30,782	8.9
Total		**14,71,437**	**100.0**

Source: Non Residents Keralite Affairs Department NORKA

PART II

A Survey of Return Emigrant Workers: Findings

In order to study the causes of return, activity status of return emigrant workers, prior and after return and its impact on emigrant households and local labour market, we conducted a sample survey of 404 return emigrant workers in five districts. The findings of the survey are presented in the following sections.

3. Activity Status of Return Emigrant Workers Prior to Return

Except two, all the sample return emigrant workers returned from GCC countries, viz. Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain. (Table 12). Among the two persons, one returned from Afghanistan and another from China. Of the total returnees, 50 percent returned from Saudi Arabia, 19 percent from UAE, 11 percent from Qatar, 7 percent each from Oman and Bahrain and 6 percent from Kuwait.

Table 12
Country in which sample return emigrant workers worked prior to return

No	Country	Number of sample return emigrant workers	Share (%)
1	Saudi Arabia	200	49.5
2	United Arab Emirates	76	18.8
3	Oman	29	7.2
4	Kuwait	25	6.2
5	Qatar	45	11.1
6	Bahrain	27	6.7
7	Afghanistan & China	2	0.5
Total		**404**	**100.0**

An age wise distribution of the sample return emigrant workers showed that 9 percent belonged to the age group of below 30 years. Another 37.1 percent belonged to the age group of 31-40 and 33 percent belonged to the age group of 41-50 (Table 13). This indicates that nearly 79 percent of the returnees are in the age group below 50, who belong to working age group and require jobs.

Table 13
Age wise distribution of sample return emigrant workers

Age group (Years)	Number of total return emigrants	Share (%)	Number of married return emigrants	Number of unmarried return emigrants
Below 30	37	9.2	23	14
31-40	150	37.1	143	7
41-50	133	32.9	131	2
51-60	73	18.1	73	0
Above 60	11	2.7	11	0
Total	**404**	**100.0**	**381**	**23**

A person having an educational qualification of Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) is considered as an educated category person for public sector jobs in Kerala and educated persons mostly prefer white collar jobs. A classification of the return emigrants showed that 80 percent are educated category, having an educational qualification of SSLC and above (Table 14). Nearly 6 percent had a general degree. Thus the returnees mostly belong to the educated category of labour force (SSLC and above) and prefer white collar jobs compared to manual category of jobs, which are not available in the local labour market of Kerala. Compared to the category of Keralite workers migrated to GCC countries during 1980s and 1990s, more emigrants belonged to the educated category. A notable aspect is only 20 percent have an educational qualification below SSLC and put in the category of non-educated.

Table 14
Educational status of sample return emigrant workers

No	Category	Number	Share (%)
1	Below SSLC	81	20.1
2	SSLC	187	46.3
3	Plus two	112	27.7
4	General Degree	23	5.7
5	Professional Degree	1	0.2
6	Vocational Course	0	0.0
Total		**404**	**100.0**

Occupation of Return Emigrants Prior to Return

We have classified the occupation of the return emigrants using the framework of national classification of occupation of India 2015 (NCO-2015) (Government of India 2016). According to it, a “job” has been defined as a set of tasks and duties performed by one person and an "occupation" as a set of jobs whose tasks and duties are of a similar nature. "Skill" has been defined as the ability to carry out the tasks and duties of a given job, which encompasses two dimensions viz. (1) Skill Level: A function that describes the range of the tasks and duties involved and (2) Skill Specialization: Shows the field of knowledge required, the tools and machinery used, the materials worked on, and the kinds of goods and services produced. NCO-2015 has classified skill level into four related to the educational requirements viz. (1) with primary education, (2) with secondary education, (3) with first university degree and (4) with post graduate university degree. Skill level 2 typically involves the performance of tasks such as operating a machinery and electronic equipment, driving vehicles, maintenance and repair of electrical and mechanical equipment, and manipulation, ordering, and storage information.

Based on the NCO-2015 classification, we have classified the occupation of the return emigrant workers prior to return into 18 categories (Table 15). Of the total jobs, 30 percent worked as shop sales persons and other sales workers. Nearly 13 percent worked as drivers of motor vehicles. The third major category is cleaners and helpers in houses, hotels, and offices (8.2percent). The other major category of workers are waiters and bartenders; mining, manufacturing and construction supervisors; painters and builders; and cooks. If we use the skill level classification, nearly 40 percent worked in skill level 1, such as sales; cleaners and helpers; and mining and construction labourers. But a noticeable aspect is that only a small percent of workers work as manual labourers or construction workers.

The data on the jobs of the return emigrants prior to return also give an idea about the loss of jobs in GCC countries due to the spread of the COVID-19 and its disruption. The sector which witnessed severe loss of jobs was shop and other business units engaged in sales. The second category of activities which are affected are operation of motor vehicles such as car, van etc. Closure of hotels also resulted in the loss jobs of waiters, bar tenders, cooks, travel attenders etc. Another sector which incurred severe loss of employment was manufacturing and construction.

Table 15
Occupation in which five or more sample return emigrant workers worked prior to return

No	Group of National Classification of Occupation 2015 (India)		Number of sample return emigrant workers	Percentage
	Group No.	Occupation		
1	122	Sales, Marketing and Development Managers	7	1.7
2	312	Mining, Manufacturing and Construction Supervisors	24	5.9
3	441	Other Clerical Support Workers	5	1.2
4	511	Travel Attendants, Conductors and Guides	8	2.0
5	512	Cooks	13	3.2
6	513	Waiters and Bartenders	28	6.9
7	522	Shop Salespersons	113	28.0
8	524	Other Sales Workers	9	2.2
9	622	Fishery Workers, Hunters and Trappers	10	2.5
10	711	Building Frames and Related Trades Workers	6	1.5
11	713	Painters, Builders, Structure Cleaners and Related Trades Workers	14	3.5
12	723	Machinery Mechanics and Repairers	9	2.2
13	741	Electrical Equipment Installers and Repairers	10	2.5
14	813	Chemical and Photographic Products Plant and Machine Operators	5	1.2
15	832	Car, Van and Motorcycle Drivers	52	12.9
16	911	Domestic, Hotel and Office Cleaners and Helpers	33	8.2
17	931	Mining and Construction Labourers	5	1.2
18		Others	53	13.1
Total			**404**	**100.0**

We have classified the sector wise employment of return emigrant workers for each GCC country. It is found that the sector which provided the largest share of employment in GCC countries was trade and repairs. The sectors viz. transport, construction and industry account for second, third and fourth position respectively. The other sectors which provided sizeable employment were hotels and restaurants, domestic services, business services and public administration. The country wise sectoral share of returned emigrant workers prior to return, are given in Table 16. The Table also gives an account of the country wise loss of employment due to COVID-19 and its disruption. The survey results show that the largest loss in employment occurred in trade and repair sector. The second sector witness loss of employment was transport. The other sectors which witnessed substantial loss in employment were construction, hotels and restaurants, domestic workers and business services.

Table 16
Sectors in which sample return emigrant workers employed prior to return
(Percentage)

No	Sectors	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Oman	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others*	Total
1	Industry	9.5	14.5	3.4	12.0	4.4	3.7	50.0	9.4
2	Construction	11.0	11.8	31.0	8.0	8.9	14.8	-	12.4
3	Trade and repairs	35.0	31.6	41.4	24.0	37.8	44.4	-	34.9
4	Hotels and restaurants	8.5	14.5	3.4	8.0	8.9	7.4	-	9.2
5	Transport	17.0	6.6	3.4	24.0	22.2	7.4	-	14.4
6	Business services	4.0	3.9	3.4	-	4.4	7.4	-	4.0
7	Public administration	0.0	7.9	3.4	-	2.2	-	-	2.0
8	Health	0.5	0.0	-	4.0	-	-	-	0.5
9	Education	1.0	1.3	-	4.0	-	-	-	1.0
10	Worker in homes (domestic services)	8.5	5.3	6.9	16.0	6.7	7.4	-	7.9
11	Own business and trade	2.0	0.0	-	-	2.2	3.7	50.0	1.7
12	Others	3.0	2.6	3.4	-	2.2	3.7	-	2.7
Total		**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

*Afghanistan & China

Wage and Non-wage Benefits

The sample return emigrant workers informed about the range of wage they received per month in the GCC countries prior to their return. Based on this, we have classified the country wise monthly wage range of the return emigrants. Of the total sample emigrants, 6 percent get a wage equivalent to less than Rs. 20,000 per month. Nearly one fourth reported that they earn a monthly income or wage ranging between Rs. 20,000 to Rs 30,000 a month. Majority of the return emigrants (59 percent) told us that they receive a monthly wage ranging between Rs 30,000 to Rs 50,000. The emigrants who got the highest range of wage (above Rs 50,000) account only 11 percent of the total emigrants. UAE and Kuwait are the two countries from which some emigrants received a wage more than Rs 50,000 per month. The Table 17 gives the country wise and month wise amount of wage received by the Keralite return emigrants in GCC countries.

Table 17
Monthly wage/income earned by sample return emigrant workers prior to return

No	Monthly wage/income per person (Rs)	Number							Total
		Saudi Arabia	UAE	Oman	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others*	
1	₹10,001 to 15,000	1	0	-	1	1	-	-	3
2	₹15,001 to 20,000	9	5	3	1	1	1	-	20
3	₹20,001 to 30,000	39	21	6	5	12	14	-	97
4	₹30,001 to 50,000	134	35	19	12	28	10	1	239
5	Above ₹50,000	17	15	1	6	3	2	1	45
Total		**200**	**76**	**29**	**25**	**45**	**27**	**2**	**404**
		Percentage							
1	₹10,001 to 15,000	0.5	-	-	4.0	2.2	-	-	0.7
2	₹15,001 to 20,000	4.5	6.6	10.3	4.0	2.2	3.7	-	5.0
3	₹20,001 to 30,000	19.5	27.6	20.7	20.0	26.7	51.9	-	24.0
4	₹30,001 to 50,000	67.0	46.1	65.5	48.0	62.2	37.0	0.5	59.2
5	Above ₹50,000	8.5	19.7	3.4	24.0	6.7	7.4	0.5	11.1
Total		**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

*Afghanistan & China

A disturbing aspect is that, out of the total 404 sample returnees only 181 received any one of the items of non-wage benefits. The only major item of non-wage benefit received by the workers in GCC countries is free or subsidised accommodation in labour or worker camps. The data supplied by the sample returnees suggest that the employers in GCC countries are not giving free air ticket to return home, medical benefits or bonus to the workers. Only one person received free air ticket to return home, one person free medical benefits and 5 person bonus. This indicates that the workers will have to spent money for travel to work place, stay, return to native country during vacation and meet expenses for medical treatment. A highly exploitative, labour system is prevailing in Gulf countries and they are exploited at all levels.

All the migrant workers are treated as temporary contract workers. Usually the migrant workers are forced to change the terms in the contract after reaching the host country. As the contract is written in Arabic, the worker cannot understand the terms of the contract. Only the wage and non-wage benefits as stipulated in the contract are given to workers only by reputed companies, big business units and public sector organisations. Severe restrictions are imposed to bring their wives and children to the host country. They have to renew the work permit and resident permit frequently. It is reported that the cost for renewal of work permit and resident permit, is to be borne by the workers in most of the GCC countries. Only a few companies or business units meet the cost of renewal of these permits in GCC countries. In Saudi Arabia where sponsorship system is ruthlessly implemented, the migrant worker will have to give an amount to the sponsor every month for getting permission to do work for others.

Remittance Sent

The sample return emigrant workers told us that, they used to send remittance mostly on a regular basis to their families in Kerala to meet household expenditure. It is reported that 30 percent sent an average monthly amount below Rs 12,000 to their families (Table 18). Another 48 percent told us that they used to send an amount ranging between Rs 12,000 and Rs 20,000 per month. Thus monthly remittance sent by 78 percent of the sample emigrants can be put in the category of small or medium range and there is little chance for them to make much saving. Among the total sample returnees only 22 percent sent a monthly amount of Rs 20,000 and above. An important point mentioned by almost all the sample return emigrants is that they were able to send an assured amount to their families for meeting their household expenditure due to the emigration. And they said that their families had a secured financial position prior to the return. This financial stability was shattered due to the return.

Table 18
Average monthly remittance sent
by sample return emigrant workers prior to return

No	Remittance sent per person (Rs)	Number							Total
		Saudi Arabia	UAE	Oman	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others*	
1	Below ₹5,000	2	0	-	-	2	-	-	4
2	₹5,001 to 8,000	15	11	4	2	6	2	-	40
3	₹8,001 to 12,000	38	15	6	3	7	8	-	77
4	₹12,001 to 20,000	112	27	14	9	20	12	-	194
5	Above ₹20,000	33	23	5	10	10	5	2	88
Total		**200**	**76**	**29**	**24**	**45**	**27**	**2**	**403**
		Percentage							
1	Below ₹5,000	1.0	-	-	-	4.4	-	-	1.0
2	₹5,001 to 8,000	7.5	14.5	13.8	8.3	13.3	7.4	-	9.9
3	₹8,001 to 12,000	19.0	19.7	20.7	12.5	15.6	29.6	-	19.1
4	₹12,001 to 20,000	56.0	35.5	48.3	37.5	44.4	44.4	-	48.1
5	Above ₹20,000	16.5	30.3	17.2	41.7	22.2	18.5	100.0	21.8
Total		**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

*Afghanistan & China

Based on the data of remittance supplied by the return emigrants, we have estimated the lower and upper range of the amount of remittance received by the sample return emigrant households. On an average a household at the lowest range of remittance received an amount of Rs. 1.47 lakh and upper range Rs 2.32 lakh per year (Table 19). This means that the return migrant households might have received an amount ranging between Rs. 591 lakh and Rs. 934 lakh a year. The economic consequence of the return of 404 emigrants is the loss in this amount of remittance to their families.

Table 19

Estimated lower and upper limit of remittance sent by 403 sample return emigrant workers prior to return

Estimated limit	Monthly remittance (Rs in lakh)	Yearly remittance (Rs in lakh)	Monthly Amount per household (Rs)	Annual Amount per household (Rs in lakh)
Lower	49.24	590.92	12,219	1.47
Upper	77.84	934.08	19,315	2.32

Number of Years Worked Prior to Return

The survey findings on the emigration experience of return emigrants such as countries in which they worked, the number of years worked etc. is given below (Table 20). Of the total 404 sample return emigrant workers, 402 returned from GCC countries. Of the total sample returnees, 52.5 percent worked more than 10 years in the GCC countries. Majority of the returnees from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain had more than 10 years of work experience in GCC countries. Thus major share of the sample return emigrants who returned due to COVID-19 pandemic disruption were Keralite emigrant workers who had long years of work experience in the GCC countries (more than 10 years). A noticeable aspect is that another 33 percent of the sample returnees had work experience ranged between 5 to 10 years. These findings suggest that COVID-19 disruption have abruptly ended the working career of a large number of Keralite emigrants in the GCC countries.

Table 20

Number of years worked in foreign country prior to return

No	Number of years	Number of sample return emigrants							Total
		Saudi Arabia	UAE	Oman	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others*	
1	Below one year	-	1.3	-	4.0	-	-	-	0.5
2	1-2 year	-	5.3	3.4	-	4.4	-	-	1.7
3	3-4 year	12.0	17.1	13.8	4.0	15.6	3.7	50.0	12.6
4	5-6 year	14.0	17.1	6.9	4.0	13.3	11.1	-	13.1
5	7-8 year	12.0	17.1	27.6	16.0	17.8	11.1	50.0	15.1
6	9-10 year	4.5	2.6	6.9	16.0	2.2	-	-	4.5
7	Above 10 year	57.5	39.5	41.4	56.0	46.7	74.1	-	52.5
	Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

*Afghanistan & China

4. Causes of Return

Return Due to Loss of Jobs

In this section, we present major causes of return based on the information supplied by the sample return emigrant workers. The returnees have identified five major causes of return, viz. (1) closure of secondary and tertiary sector units in which they worked, (2) reduction in salary, (3) non-renewal of work permit, (4) return to home or origin country by availing leave and (5) voluntary return. Closure of shops, restaurants, service units, industrial and construction activities due to spread of COVID-19 and pandemic induced disruption were major causes of return. It is reported that nearly one third of the sample return emigrants returned to Kerala due to the closure of units or business in which they worked (Table 21). A country wise breakup of the cause of return shows that 52 percent returned from Bahrain due to this reason. Nearly one third of the returnees from countries such as UAE and Kuwait returned due to this reason.

Reduction in salary and non-renewal of work permit are the other important causes for the return of sample return emigrant workers. The economic recession in GCC countries had resulted in losses of production and service units forcing them to reduce the cost of production. In this context, many of the distressed units implemented measures like reduction in salary to sustain the units. Some of the return emigrants told us that fifty percent reduction in wages was effected in some units (UAE). This substantial cut in salary and difficulties in living with meager amount of salary, forced emigrant workers to return to Kerala.

Due to the pandemic induced crisis, some of the GCC countries followed a policy of non-renewal of work permit. Saudi Arabia used this opportunity to deny renewal of work permit in the case of 12 sample return emigrants. Thus 40.6 percent sample return emigrants were forced to return to Kerala either due to closure of units in which they worked, reduction in salary and non-renewal of work permit.

Table 21
Causes of return of sample return emigrant workers

No	Causes of return	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Oman	Kuwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Others*	Total
		Number							
1	Loss of job due to closure of company/ business units	53	26	8	9	19	14	-	129
2	Reduction in salary	3	7	4	-	1	1	-	16
3	Non-renewal of work permit	12	4	1	2	-	-	-	19
4	Leave	117	36	15	13	24	12	2	219
5	Voluntary	14	3	1	1	1	-	-	20
6	COVID-19 pandemic fear	1	0	-	-	-	-	-	1
Total		**200**	**76**	**29**	**25**	**45**	**27**	**2**	**404**
		Percentage							
1	Loss of job due to closure of company/ business units	26.5	34.2	27.6	36.0	42.2	51.9	-	31.9
2	Reduction in salary	1.5	9.2	13.8	-	2.2	3.7	-	4.0
3	Non-renewal of work permit	6.0	5.3	3.5	8.0	-	-	-	4.7
4	Leave	58.5	47.4	51.7	52.0	53.3	44.4	100.0	54.2
5	Voluntary	7.0	3.9	3.5	4.0	2.2	-	-	5.0
6	COVID-19 pandemic fear	0.5	0	-	-	-	-	-	0.2
Total		**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

*Afghanistan & China

Returned on Leave but Stranded in Kerala

A major finding of our study is that most of the emigrant workers returned to Kerala on leave from GCC countries were not able to return and were stranded in Kerala. A good number of emigrant workers availed eligible leave and returned to Kerala prior to the spread of pandemic and imposition of travel restrictions. But they were stranded in Kerala due to unanticipated developments such as sudden spread of COVID-19 pandemic, mobility and travel disruption and denial of employers to rejoin duty and closure of the units in which they worked.

The prolonged stoppage of international flights between the destination countries and India also contributed to this. The abnormal increase in the air ticket fare, the additional cost associated with quarantine requirements in five star hotels, need to travel through circular routes to reach the GCC countries due to travel restrictions had resulted in substantial increase in cost of travel. Many returnees find it difficult to afford the extra cost of travel. As the returnees were not able to return to their host countries on the stipulated time, their visa period expired and they were denied permission of entry. For instance, as per the rules in Saudi Arabia, an emigrant worker who failed to return within the stipulated time won't be allowed to enter Saudi Arabia for a period of 3 years.

The difference in vaccination policy perused in India and individual GCC countries also created much difficulty for the return emigrants. As per COVID-19 regulations, a person returning to GCC countries need to possess a certificate of vaccination. The vaccination duration of 3 months between two vaccinations, non-recognition of Indian Covaxin in GCC countries, stipulation of giving priority for those who took vaccine in GCC countries had created serious difficulties for Keralite returnees. The non-recognition of Covishield for entry in the initial phase had prevented the sample emigrants to enter the GCC countries. Those who returned by availing leave were not allowed to go to host countries due to refusal of visa renewal by employers.

In the vacancies arose due to the return of emigrant workers on leave, the employers in GCC countries resorted to the practice of recruiting emigrants available in GCC countries belonged to Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nepal etc, who were prepared to work at low wages. The employers in GCC countries used this opportunity to replace the Keralite emigrants to reduce the wage cost. The employers also recruited migrant workers who remained in the GCC countries during COVID-19 pandemic disruption. For instance a good number of migrant workers from Philippines, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Egypt were not returned to their origin countries during the crisis period.

The abnormal increase in fee to GCC countries especially in Saudi Arabia to renew work permit and resident permit also discouraged the return of Keralite emigrant workers. It is reported by the sample returnees that the amount required for renewal of Iqama is 12,000 Saudi Riyal or about Rs. 2.40 lakh per year in Saudi Arabia. The government of Saudi Arabia deliberately implemented this measure as part of Nitaqat program to reduce the number of foreign workers. Denial of renewal of health insurance is another method used to send back the emigrant workers in Saudi Arabia. As per labour regulation in Saudi Arabia, emigrant workers have to take health insurance. But insurance companies in Saudi Arabia deny renewal of health insurance of emigrant workers, having an age of 35 and above, saying that it is not profitable for the companies to give insurance to older people. This is also cited as a reason for not permitting the emigrant workers to rejoin after the leave period. Among the returnees from GCC countries, the worst affected category is those who returned from Saudi Arabia. In our sample of 404 return emigrant workers, 50 percent returned from Saudi Arabia.

Period of Return

The period of the return of the sample return emigrant workers is classified into four. First period is the pre-pandemic period between December 2019 and February 2020, when no restrictions were there for mobility or international travel. Of the total sample of 404 return emigrants 17.1 percent retuned during the period (Table 22). Second period is the peak period of COVID-19 mobility and international travel restrictions i.e. between March 2020 and July 2020. During this period 31.4 percent returned and the largest number returned from Saudi Arabia. During the third period between August 2020 and December 2020, when there were some relaxations in mobility or international travel was implemented, 29.2 percent of sample returnees returned. Another 22.3 percent returned during the last period between January 2021 and July 2021. A country wise return of sample emigrants indicate that the country from which the largest number returned in all the four periods was Saudi Arabia. Of the total returnees, only four lived in GCC countries with their families. Two persons lived with family in UAE and another two lived in Bahrain. When they returned they brought their families with them. Thus a major destination country from which nearly half of the sample returnees returned due to COVID-19 disruption, changing labour market situation, changing migration policy etc. was Saudi Arabia.

Table 22
Period of return of sample return emigrant workers: country wise (Number)

No	Name of country	Between Dec 2019 and Feb 2020	Between Mar 2020 and July 2020	Between Aug 2020 and Dec 2020	Between Jan 2021 and July 2021	Total
1	Saudi Arabia	24	73	58	45	200
2	United Arab Emirates	10	24	23	19	76
3	Oman	5	6	10	8	29
4	Kuwait	6	7	5	7	25
5	Qatar	14	11	15	5	45
6	Bahrain	9	6	7	5	27
7	Afghanistan & China	1	0	0	1	2
Total		**69**	**127**	**118**	**90**	**404**
Total (%)		**17.1**	**31.4**	**29.2**	**22.3**	**100.0**

The emigration process from Kerala to GCC countries may be put in the category of chain migration. Chain migration is the social process by which migrants from a particular area follow others from that area to a particular destination. The chain migration is defined as “a movement in which prospective migrants learn of opportunities are provided with the transportation, and have initial accommodation and employment arranged by means of primary social relationships with previous migrants.”

Majority of the return emigrants returned from Saudi Arabia belonged to Malappuram district (Table 23). Similarly, largest number of return emigrants returned from United Arab Emirates belonged to Kannur district. Of the 45 return emigrants from Qatar, 35 belonged to Kozhikode district. Similar is the case of returnees from Bahrain. This suggests a close relationship between the origin place of the emigrants and destination country of emigrants.

Table 23
Distribution of sample return emigrant workers by their native districts (Number)

No	Country of return	Kannur	Malappuram	Pathanamthitta	Kozhikode	Thiruvananthapuram	Total
1	Saudi Arabia	33	126	23	14	4	200
2	United Arab Emirates	31	8	12	17	8	76
3	Oman	11	4	4	8	2	29
4	Kuwait	5	3	5	11	1	25
5	Qatar	6	2	-	35	2	45
6	Bahrain	-	2	-	25	0	27
7	Afghanistan & China	-	1	-	1	0	2
Total		**86**	**146**	**44**	**111**	**17**	**404**
Total (%)		**21.3**	**36.1**	**10.9**	**27.5**	**4.2**	**100.0**

Rough Estimate about the Returnee Keralites Emigrants Who Remained in Kerala

According to NORKA the total number of Keralite emigrants returned due to the COVID-19 crisis till June 22, 2021 was 14.71 lakh. Based on the number of sample returnees belonging to each GCC country in our survey, the information supplied by the returnees about the prospects of return to the host country and our assessment about the prospects of return of each returnee interviewed, we have made a rough estimate about the number of returnees who remain in Kerala. According to our assessment of the above total returnees of 14.71 lakh, around 77 percent has already returned and around 23 percent remain in Kerala. The share of returnees from Saudi Arabia who remain in Kerala is around 80 percent. The percentage of return emigrants who remain in Kerala from other GCC countries are as follows. UAE 10 percent, Qatar 40 percent, Bahrain 30 percent, Kuwait 20 percent and Oman 20 percent. We estimate that, of the total 14.71 lakh Keralites who returned to Kerala due to COVID-19 induced crisis, the returnees who remain in Kerala will be around 3.32 lakhs.

5. Activity Status of Return Emigrant Workers After Return

A main issue is what is the activity status of sample returnees after return to their native place in Kerala? Another issue is what is the amount of remittances the household received and the current income of those who work in the local area after return. The activity status of the return emigrants is classified into three viz. (1) employed, (2) unemployed and (3) not in labour force. Employed are defined as persons who engage in remunerative or income earning activities, at least a few hours in any one of the days in the previous week of the survey. The unemployed is a person who remained without any income earning work or activities throughout the previous week of the survey, but seeking or available for work.

The important impact of the return is that 71 percent of sample return emigrant workers remained unemployed without any income from work at the time of the survey (Table 24). Among the returnees in Kannur, Malappuram and Pathanamthitta districts more than 75 percent remained unemployed. Of the unemployed nearly 78 percent belong to the age below 50 and are in the active working group (Table 25).

Table 24
Activity status of sample return emigrant workers after return

No	District	Number			
		Employed	**Unemployed**	**Not in labour force**	**Total**
1	Kannur	10	75	1	86
2	Kozhikode	53	57	1	111
3	Malappuram	33	113	-	146
4	Pathanamthitta	11	33	-	44
5	Thiruvananthapuram	9	8	-	17
	Total	**116**	**286**	**2**	**404**
		Percentage			
1	Kannur	11.6	87.2	1.2	100.0
2	Kozhikode	47.7	51.4	0.9	100.0
3	Malappuram	22.6	77.4	-	100.0
4	Pathanamthitta	25.0	75.0	-	100.0
5	Thiruvananthapuram	52.9	47.1	-	100.0
	Total	**28.7**	**70.8**	**0.5**	**100.0**

Table 25
Current activity status of sample return emigrant workers: Age wise

Age group (Years)	Employed	Unemployed	Employed (%)	Unemployed (%)
Below 25	3	6	2.6	2.1
26-30	10	18	8.6	6.3
31-35	14	41	12.1	14.3
36-40	20	74	17.2	25.9
41-45	33	50	28.4	17.5
46-50	16	34	13.8	11.9
51-55	13	40	11.2	14.0
56-60	5	14	4.3	4.9
Above 60	2	9	1.7	3.1
Total	**116**	**286**	**100.0**	**100.0**

On the other hand, of the total sample returnees, 116 are working as casual labourers and are engaged in self-employment (Table 26). Among them 90 are working as casual labour and 26 engaged in self-employment. The casual work is highly irregular and a worker may get 6-10 days of work per month at the maximum. With an average wage of Rs. 690 per day[12], a male worker may get a wage for 6 days is Rs. 4140 and a wage for 10 days is Rs. 6900 per month. This is in contrast to Rs. 12,219 and Rs. 19,315 received per month as remittances by a household (Table 19). This indicates that compared to the net remittances received by the household, the wage earned by the casual workers was in the range of 34 percent to 36 percent.

Table 26
Category of employment of sample return emigrant workers

No	District	Number		
		Self-employment	**Casual labour**	**Total**
1	Kannur	5	5	10
2	Kozhikode	9	44	53
3	Malappuram	10	23	33
4	Pathanamthitta	-	11	11
5	Thiruvananthapuram	2	7	9
	Total	**26**	**90**	**116**
		Percentage		
1	Kannur	50.0	50.0	100.0
2	Kozhikode	17.0	83.0	100.0
3	Malappuram	30.3	69.7	100.0
4	Pathanamthitta	-	100.0	100.0
5	Thiruvananthapuram	22.2	77.8	100.0
	Total	**22.4**	**77.6**	**100.0**

Among the 26 sample return emigrants, who engaged in self-employment, 18 are engaged in own business and small trade and 8 autorikshaw owner cum drivers (Table 27). The informants have not given the income earned from their self-employment. Thus the survey findings suggest that due to unemployment of 71 percent of the return emigrants, these households are pushed to acute economic distress.

Table 27
Category of self-employment of sample return emigrant workers

No	District	Number		
		Own business and trade	Autorikshaw	Total
1	Kannur	2	3	5
2	Kozhikode	5	4	9
3	Malappuram	9	1	10
4	Pathanamthitta	-	-	-
5	Thiruvananthapuram	2	-	2
	Total	**18**	**8**	**26**
		Percentage		
1	Kannur	40.0	60.0	100.0
2	Kozhikode	55.6	44.4	100.0
3	Malappuram	90.0	10.0	100.0
4	Pathanamthitta	-	-	-
5	Thiruvananthapuram	100.0	-	100.0
	Total	**69.2**	**30.8**	**100.0**

6. Impact of Return on Emigrant Households

A core issue is how the return emigration affected the receipt of remittances, poverty, debt, consumption level of the return households. This section examines these aspects.

Loss of Remittances Shattered the Finances of Returnee Households

The sample returnees told us that their households have somewhat of a sound financial situation prior to the return of them. The return emigrant workers had been sending remittances on a monthly or regular basis to their households. They used to send an average monthly remittances ranging below Rs 5000 and above Rs 20,000 (Table 18). These households had received an annual amount ranging between Rs 1.47 lakh and Rs 2.32 lakh (Table 19). Due to the return of emigrant workers, the flow of regular remittances had stopped in 404 households. This is a great loss for the households who mainly relied on the remittances for meeting their household expenditure. This loss of remittances have shattered the finances of all the sample returnee households.

Population in the Returnee Households

We have collected data about the urban and rural distribution of returnee households, the total population in the households and its break up into children below 6 years, return emigrant workers and others. In the sample of returnee households 47.5

percent belong to urban area or municipalities and the rest belong to rural area or gramapanchayats (Table 28). In three districts viz. Kozhikode, Malappuram and Pathanamthitta, our sample households comprise both rural and urban households.

Table 28
Distribution of sample returnee households: Urban and rural

No	District	Number			Percentage		
		Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
1	Kannur	-	86	86	-	100.0	100.0
2	Kozhikode	48	63	111	43.2	56.8	100.0
3	Malappuram	104	42	146	71.2	28.8	100.0
4	Pathanamthitta	23	21	44	52.3	47.7	100.0
5	Thiruvananthapuram	17	-	17	100.0	-	100.0
	Total	**192**	**212**	**404**	**47.5**	**52.5**	**100.0**

The total number of persons in the sample return emigrant households is estimated as 1859 and the average number of persons per household is 4.6 (Table 29). The average number of persons per household in the returnee households in Malappuram district is found the highest (5.2). Of the total population in the sample returnee households, 21.7 percent were return emigrants, 20.4 percent housewives, 5.1 percent children below 6 years, 8 percent old people and the rest, others.

Table 29
Number of persons per sample returnee households

No	District	Children below six years	Return emigrant workers	Others	Total No. of persons	Average no. of persons per household
1	Kannur	32	86	259	377	4.4
2	Kozhikode	18	111	345	474	4.3
3	Malappuram	33	146	572	751	5.2
4	Pathanamthitta	7	44	132	183	4.2
5	Thiruvananthapuram	4	17	53	74	4.4
	Total	**94**	**404**	**1,361**	**1,859**	**4.6**

Below the Poverty Line Households (BPL)

In order to find the economic situation of households, we have collected the data on the category of ration cards. Of the total sample returnee households, 21 percent belonged to the BPL[13] (Table 30).Among the sample returnee households in northern Kerala, the share of BPL households is found high in Malappuram district. Some of the return emigrants told us that they have changed the above the poverty line (APL) cards to BPL after returning from foreign countries. This indicates that the return of emigrants and loss of remittances have already converted the sample households to BPL category. Conversion of APL to BPL is a very difficult process and norms other than income such as plinth area of the house, type of motor car etc. are also used. It is likely that majority of the sample returnee households will become BPL households, if the returnee emigrants won't get a chance to return.

Table 30
Category of ration card of sample returnee households

No	District	Number			
		Non-Priority (APL)	Priority (BPL)	Nil	Total sample households
1	Kannur	68	14	4	86
2	Kozhikode	85	21	5	111
3	Malappuram	109	34	3	146
4	Pathanamthitta	40	4	-	44
5	Thiruvananthapuram	6	10	1	17
	Total	**308**	**83**	**13**	**404**
		Percentage			
1	Kannur	79.1	16.3	4.6	100.0
2	Kozhikode	76.6	18.9	4.5	100.0
3	Malappuram	74.7	23.3	2.0	100.0
4	Pathanamthitta	90.9	9.1	-	100.0
5	Thiruvananthapuram	35.3	58.8	5.9	100.0
	Total	**76.2**	**20.6**	**3.2**	**100.0**

Asset Possessed by the Returnee Households

Regarding possession of land, we feel that the returnees have given underestimated figures. It is reported that 78 percent of the households possessed land and 22 percent did not possess any land (Table 31). The area of land possessed ranged between below 10 cents and above 40 cents. It is reported that 57 percent possessed an area less than 10 cent, 39 percent, 11 to 20 cents and 4 percent, above 20 cents.

Table 31
Possession of land of sample returnee households

No	District	Number		
		Possessed land	Not possessed land	Total
1	Kannur	61	25	86
2	Kozhikode	80	31	111
3	Malappuram	129	17	146
4	Pathanamthitta	40	4	44
5	Thiruvananthapuram	4	13	17
	Total	**314**	**90**	**404**
		Percentage		
1	Kannur	70.9	29.1	100.0
2	Kozhikode	72.1	27.9	100.0
3	Malappuram	88.4	11.6	100.0
4	Pathanamthitta	90.9	9.1	100.0
5	Thiruvananthapuram	23.5	76.5	100.0
	Total	**77.7**	**22.3**	**100.0**

In our interview with the return emigrant workers, we collected data about the ownership of the house in which the return emigrant live. Of the total houses, the return emigrant own 63.4 percent, parents of the return emigrants own 34.9 percent and rest is rented houses (Table 32).

Table 32
Ownership of house of sample returnee households

No	District	Number			
		Returned emigrants	Parent of the emigrant	Rented house	Total
1	Kannur	47	36	3	86
2	Kozhikode	76	34	1	111
3	Malappuram	95	48	3	146
4	Pathanamthitta	34	10	-	44
5	Thiruvananthapuram	4	13	-	17
	Total	**256**	**141**	**7**	**404**
		Percentage			
1	Kannur	54.6	41.9	3.5	100.0
2	Kozhikode	68.5	30.6	0.9	100.0
3	Malappuram	65.1	32.9	2.0	100.0
4	Pathanamthitta	77.3	22.7	-	100.0
5	Thiruvananthapuram	23.5	76.5	-	100.0
	Total	**63.4**	**34.9**	**1.7**	**100.0**

Data on possession of motor vehicles by sample return households show that 367 returnee households possessed motor vehicles (91 percent) and 37 returnee households did not possess any motor vehicle (9 percent). A higher share (above 93 percent) of the returnee households have motor vehicles in Kannur and Malappuram districts, compared to others. We have also collected the type of motor vehicles possessed by 367 returnee households. Of the total motor vehicles of 439, two wheelers account for 80.2 percent, car 17.8 percent and autorikshaw 1.8 percent (Table 33). All the motor vehicles are used for travel of the members of the households except the 8 autorikshaws and one mini bus. The 8 autorikshaws both new and old were purchased by the returnee emigrants after their return and operated by them. The only income earning asset of the these returnees are the autorikshaws and one mini bus.

Table 33
Category of motor vehicles possessed by 367 returnee households

No	District	Number				
		Two wheeler	Car	Autorikshaw	Mini bus	Total
1	Kannur	67	37	3	-	107
2	Kozhikode	95	14	4	-	113
3	Malappuram	137	11	1	-	149
4	Pathanamthitta	39	15	-	-	54
5	Thiruvananthapuram	14	1	-	1	16
	Total	**352**	**78**	**8**	**1**	**439**
		Percentage				
1	Kannur	62.6	34.6	2.8	-	100.0
2	Kozhikode	84.1	12.4	3.5	-	100.0
3	Malappuram	91.9	7.4	0.7	-	100.0
4	Pathanamthitta	72.2	27.8	-	-	100.0
5	Thiruvananthapuram	87.5	6.3	-	6.3	100.0
	Total	**80.2**	**17.8**	**1.8**	**0.2**	**100.0**

Debt of the Households

Data on the debt of the households show that of the 404 households, 398 have borrowed money and have debt. Only six households belonged to Kozhikode district told us that they do not have debt. Data is also collected about source of borrowing. It is reported that 76 percent of the households borrowed only from banks (Table 34). Another 20.6 percent borrowed from banks, relatives and friends. On the other hand 3.5 percent borrowed from banks and money lenders. The major purpose of borrowing was construction of house, purchase of vehicles and purchase of land. Other reasons for borrowings are medical treatment, education of children and other purposes. It is reported that the amount of debt ranged between 2 to 14 lakhs.

Table 34
Source of borrowing of sample return emigrant households

No	District	Number			
		Banks only	**Banks, relatives and friends**	**Banks and money lenders**	**Total**
1	Kannur	76	6	4	86
2	Kozhikode	97	6	2	105
3	Malappuram	83	58	5	146
4	Pathanamthitta	31	10	3	44
5	Thiruvananthapuram	15	2	-	17
	Total	**302**	**82**	**14**	**398**
		Percentage			
1	Kannur	88.4	7.0	4.6	100.0
2	Kozhikode	92.4	5.7	1.9	100.0
3	Malappuram	56.8	39.7	3.5	100.0
4	Pathanamthitta	70.5	22.7	6.8	100.0
5	Thiruvananthapuram	88.2	11.8	-	100.0
	Total	**75.9**	**20.6**	**3.5**	**100.0**

Due to the return and loss of receipt of remittances, the sample of returned households become indebted and majority may find it difficult to repay the loans. This has forced the households to effect a cut in expenditure on consumption items such as food, consumer durables, clothing etc. Lack of income may also force the households to curtail expenditure on items such as education of children, health care of older people etc.

7. Impact on Local Labour Market

In the context of large scale return of emigrant workers, an important question is what is the impact of the return on local labour market? In practice, the definition of a local labour market is established on the assumption that its key characteristic is that the bulk of area's population habitually seek employment there and that local employers recruit most of their labour from that area. The area of local labour market comprises of an area of local government in which the returnee lives (GramaPanchayat or Municipality) and its surrounding places or the places accessible from the residence of the returnees. The data collected from the sample return emigrants show that the employment structure in the local labour market is characterized by casual and self-employment with very few regular employments. According to our sample survey, 78 percent of the returnees worked as casual labourers and the rest were engaged in self-employment in the local labour market (Table 26). Jobs having regular nature or monthly wages are scarce and no sample return emigrant is able to get it. Due to this nature of labour market, workers migrate to foreign countries, especially to GCC countries to secure regular and remunerative jobs, which provide them reasonably good savings.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption arising due to it have the following impact on the local labour market. (1) The COVID-19 pandemic induced crisis and the fall in remittance of the migrant workers have resulted in recession reducing secondary and tertiary sector jobs and increase in unemployment rate. (2) Return emigrant workers due to loss of jobs are stranded in Kerala due to travel related restrictions, began to seek jobs in local labour market and added to the work force. (3) There has been an increase in excess supply of labour force of all categories resulting in increase in unemployment rate. (4) These impacts have severely restricted the occupational and geographical labour mobility and emigration of the prospective emigrants. \

We may examine the change in local labour market prior and after the return of migrant workers. The COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption created due to it have created severe adverse effect in the local labour market in several ways. The pandemic has resulted in contraction of secondary and tertiary sector investment, production and employment in rural and urban areas in Kerala. The fall in remittance from the emigrant workers and large scale return of them has aggravated the situation. We have estimated the number of employed and unemployed persons excluding the sample return emigrant workers. We find that of the 404 returnee households, 91 had an employed person and the total number of employed was 102 (Table 35). Of the total 404 sample households, 170 households have unemployed persons and the total number was 187. This is the employment and unemployment situation of the returnee households excluding sample returnees.

Table 35
Households having employed and unemployed persons excluding sample return emigrant workers

Name of District	Number of household having employed persons	Number of employed persons	Number of household having unemployed persons	Number of unemployed persons
Kannur	9	11	48	51
Kozhikode	22	26	37	37
Malappuram	48	53	69	81
Pathanamthitta	10	10	8	9
Thiruvananthapuram	2	2	8	9
Total	**91**	**102**	**170**	**187**

Let us examine the impact of the return emigrant workers in the local labour market. Though 404 emigrant workers returned, the number of sample emigrant workers entered in the local labour market was 116. As a result of this, the total workers in the sample households increased from 102 persons to 218, an increase of 114 percent (Table 36). Thus a major impact on the local labour market is steep increase in additional workers, who were formerly migrant workers resulting in sharing the existing amount of work available. The data suggests that the growth in the number of employed persons was high in Thiruvananthapuram, Kozhikode and Pathanamthitta districts.

Table 36
Increase in employed persons due to returnees become workers

No.	District	Employed persons other than sample return emigrant workers	Sample return emigrant workers become workers	Total number of employed persons	Growth Rate (%)
1	Kannur	11	10	21	90.9
2	Kozhikode	26	53	79	203.8
3	Malappuram	53	33	86	62.3
4	Pathanamthitta	10	11	21	110.0
5	Thiruvananthapuram	2	9	11	450.0
	Total	**102**	**116**	**218**	**113.7**

Another impact is the increase in unemployment rate. Of the total returnees of 404, 286 persons remained as unemployed and added to the stock of unemployed persons (Table 37). And the total stock of unemployed persons increased to 153 percent due to the return of sample emigrant workers. And there was a spurt in excess supply labour force of all categories resulting in abnormal increase in unemployment rate. These developments in the labour market have severely restricted the occupational and geographical labour mobility and emigration of the prospective emigrants.

Table 37
Increase in unemployed persons due to return of sample emigrant workers

No.	District	Unemployed persons in the sample households	Unemployed persons added due to return of emigrant workers	Total number of unemployed persons	Growth Rate (%)
1	Kannur	51	75	126	147.1
2	Kozhikode	37	57	94	154.1
3	Malappuram	81	113	194	139.5
4	Pathanamthitta	9	33	42	366.7
5	Thiruvananthapuram	9	8	17	88.9
	Total	**187**	**286**	**473**	**152.9**

8. Bleak Labour Market and Remigration

A major finding of the survey is on the views of the return emigrants about the labour market situation prevailing in Kerala. The returnees firmly believe that the labour market situation and prospects of regular and remunerative jobs are bleak in Kerala. The returnees, who had regular jobs and earning monthly wages in GCC countries prior to return, are frustrated in the new labour situation in Kerala. They believe that remigration is a better option than finding a job in their locality. Regarding our question on the issue, 88 percent of the sample returnees told us that remigration is a better option than finding a job in Kerala (Table 38). 96 percent of the returnees from Kuwait, 93 percent from Oman and 92 percent from Saudi Arabia are of the firm view that remigration is a better option than finding a job in Kerala (Table 39). They have a strong preference for the remigration because they feel that through emigration, they can get a regular job, assured monthly income, assured monthly savings, and assured monthly or periodical remittance to their family and economic stability of their families.

The returnees told us that for remigration they prefer the country from which they returned. There are two reasons for this. First, the emigration from Kerala to GCC countries has the characteristics of chain migration. Friends, relatives and social networks promote the migration from a particular area or district to a foreign destination. Second, people prefer to migrate to a foreign country for which they have knowledge about accommodation available, social practices, rules and regulations, labour conditions problems related to work etc. We have asked the sample return emigrants about the source of fund for meeting expense of remigration. Majority of the sample returnees (57 percent) told us that they wish to borrow money from banks for meeting the expenses of remigration (Table 40). On the other hand, 41 percent of the sample returnees told us that they plan to meet the expenditure from their own fund.

Table 38
Views of sample return emigrant workerson remigration

No.	District	Remigration a better option than finding a job in Kerala (Number)	Total sample return emigrant workers	% to total
1	Kannur	77	86	89.5
2	Kozhikode	87	111	78.4
3	Malappuram	134	146	91.8
4	Pathanamthitta	44	44	100.0
5	Thiruvananthapuram	14	17	82.4
	Total	**356**	**404**	**88.1**

Table 39
Views of sample return emigrant workerson remigration by country of return

No	Country of return	Remigration a better option than finding a job in Kerala (Number)	No of sample return emigrant Workers	% to total
1	Saudi Arabia	185	200	92.5
2	United Arab Emirates	65	76	85.5
3	Oman	27	29	93.1
4	Kuwait	24	25	96.0
5	Qatar	35	45	77.8
6	Bahrain	20	27	74.1
7	Afghanistan & China	-	2	0.0
Total		**356**	**404**	**88.1**

Table 40
Source of fund for remigration

No	Source	Number of sample return emigrant workers	Percentage
1	Your own fund	146	41.0
2	Borrowed from relatives	6	1.7
3	Borrowed from banks	204	57.3
Total		**356**	**100.0**

9. Conclusions and Policy Suggestions

Conclusions

India is the global leader of international migration with the largest number of emigrants and the largest recipient of international remittances in the world. Of the total stock of Indian emigrants in the world, the share of GCC countries is 53 percent. During the last three decades (1990-2020), there had been a continuous increase in the total stock of Indian emigrants in the GCC countries. The COVID-19 pandemic disruption in GCC countries had resulted in unprecedented exodus of Indian emigrants from GCC countries. The factors other than COVID-19 disruption affected the exodus of migrant workers are steep fall in oil prices due to the COVID-19 crisis and the shift in the migration policies of GCC countries to promote indigenization of labour and discourage unskilled and less skilled category of foreign migrant workers. The migration policy of Saudi Arabia relating to indigenization of labour and enhancing the fee of resident permit and work permit to abnormal level, and using COVID-19 disruption as an opportunity to cut down the stock of migrant workers have also contributed to the exodus of emigrant workers.The UN DESA has estimated that the total stock of Indian emigrant in GCC countries as 95.7 lakh in mid-year 2020. Available evidence suggests that the share of Keralites will be in the range of 25 to 30 percent of the total stock of Indian emigrants in GCC countries in mid-year 2020 (23.2 lakh and 28.7 lakh).

Major findings of the survey on activity status of 404 sample return emigrants prior to return are given below. Of the total sample returnees, 50 percent returned from Saudi Arabia, 19 percent from UAE, 11 percent from Qatar, 7 percent each from Oman and Bahrain and 6 percent from Kuwait. A notable aspect is that nearly half belong to the age group of below 41 years. Nearly 80 percent of the returnees belong to educated category having an education qualification of SSLC or above. Major share of returnees worked as shop sale persons followed by drivers of motor vehicles, cleaners and helpers, waiters and bartenders, construction supervisors etc. Except the free or subsidized accommodation in labour or worker camps, the returnees had not received other non-wage benefits.

We have presented three hypotheses to explain the broad changes due to exodus of Keralite emigrant workers. And the findings of the survey of 404 return emigrants support these hypotheses. **"Due to COVID-19 pandemic and related disruption, the contract category of Keralite emigrant workers employed in GCC countries, who used to send sizeable amounts as remittances to their households on regular basis, forced to return to Kerala due to loss of jobs and other disruption, those returned on leave were unable to return and the return emigrant households experienced total loss of remittances and acute economic distress".**The survey findings indicate that nearly half of the sample returnees used to send an average monthly amount ranging between Rs 12,000 and 20,000 to their homes. About 22 percent sent an amount more than 20,000 per month. It is estimated that the average amount received by the sample returnee households as remittance range between Rs 1.47 lakh and Rs. 2.32 lakh per year. The situation was drastically changed by the spread of COVID-19, pandemic induced disruption, economic recession and loss of jobs of Keralite emigrant workers and their exodus to Kerala. This has resulted in loss of a sizeable amount of remittances received by the households on regular basis and pushed them to acute economic distress.

An important finding of the study is that majority of sample returnees (54.2 percent) returned on leave but were stranded in Kerala. Of the total returnees, one third returned prior to imposition of lockdowns and travel restrictions. The cause of return of one third of returnees was loss of jobs due to closure of companies and business units. The other reasons are reduction in salary, non-renewal of work permit and voluntary return. The inability of return emigrants who availed leave to return within the stipulated date, the disruption in international travel, the difference in vaccination policies followed by India and individual GCC countries, filling the vacancies arose due to return of Keralite emigrants on leave with emigrants from other countries, large increase in fee for renewal of work permit and resident permit, deliberate policy perused by Saudi government for curtailing the number of foreign workers etc. have led to large scale return of emigrants.

According to our assessment of the total returnees of 14.71 lakh, around 77 percent has already returned and around 23 percent remain in Kerala. The share of returnees from

Saudi Arabia who remain in Kerala is around 80 percent. We estimate that, of the total 14.71 lakh Keralites who returned to Kerala due to COVID-19 induced crisis, the returnees who remain in Kerala will be around 3.32 lakhs.

"Due to return, most of the emigrant workers became unemployed, remain without income and faced high uncertainty to find employment". The survey findings on activity status of returnees after return, show that of the total returnees, 70.8 percent were unemployed and 28.7 percent employed and 0.5 percent not in labour force. The share of unemployed was found very high among the sample return emigrants belonging to Kannur, Malappuram and Pathanamthitta districts. Among the unemployed, return emigrants nearly half belong to the age up to 40 years.

The sample returnees told us that their households have a somewhat sound financial situation prior to their return due to receipt of remittance regularly. The return of the sample emigrants have resulted in total loss of the remittance and shattered the finances of all sample returnee households. More than one fifth of the returnee households belonged to poor households or BPL households. The return of emigrants has pushed a good number of households to BPL category. The households do not have land to earn an income from agricultural activities. It is reported that 57 percent of the households possessed an area of land less than 10 cents. The ownership of the house of the returnee households belong to the return emigrants and parent of the emigrant. And 63 percent of the houses are owned by returned emigrant. The possession of motor vehicles shows that the 91 percent of households has either a two wheeler or a car. Except six households all the households borrowed money and have debt. The major purpose of borrowing are construction of house, purchase of vehicle and purchase of land. The households will find it difficult to repay the borrowing due to the loss of remittances.

"The local labour market experienced excess supply of labour force, increase in unemployment rate and created gloomy prospect for remigration of returned emigrant workers and fresh migration". An addition of workers (return emigrants) to the local labour market has created an excess supply of labour force. The local labour market also experiences a spurt in unemployment rate of secondary and tertiary sector. It also created a gloomy prospect for remigration of returned emigrant workers and fresh migrants.

"The return emigrant workers feel that the labour market situation and prospects of getting regular and remunerative jobs are bleak in Kerala and they have a strong preference for remigration to secure a regular job, assured monthly

income and to achieve economic stability of their families". The returnees firmly believe that the labour market situation and prospects of regular and remunerative jobs are bleak in Kerala. The returnees, who had regular jobs and earning monthly wages in GCC countries prior to return, are frustrated in the new labour situation in Kerala. They feel that remigration is a better option than finding a job in their locality.

Policy Suggestions

The policy measures suggested by the KNOMAD to support the distressed migrants due to COVID-19 crisis are presented in the introduction of the paper. But here our main issue is to provide support to the return emigrants and their households facing acute economic distress. Taking into consideration the findings of our survey and peculiar problems faced by return emigrants and their households, we present the following suggestions. The policy focus should aim to give credit support to returnees to remigrate, give relief and support to the distressed households and provide assistance to find gainful employment.

1) **Bank loans for remigration.** Provide loans up to Rs two lakhs through banks and other financial institutions for those who wish to remigrate. Government may give an interest subsidy for the loan for one year.
2) **Provide credit support to the returnees** to find self-employment, start small business, engage in remunerative activities in agriculture, livestock or purchase motor vehicles or capital items to make an earning. An interest free loan up to Rs 5 lakh may be given through banks and other financial institutions. Interest subsidy may be given for one year.
3) **NORKA loan scheme to be continued.** The current loan scheme meant for providing assistance of NORKA may be continued for those who avail a loan of more than Rs 5 lakh.
4) **Change APL ration card to BPL.** In the case of returnee households who have APL ration card and who face acute distress and satisfy the norms of BPL ration cards can be given BPL ration cards. They may also be given other assistance eligible for BPL households.
5) **Three districts with large number of returnees.** Of the total returnees, 41 percent belonged to the three districts viz. Malappuram, Kozhikode and Kannur. In giving the benefits mentioned above, priority should be given to the returnees belonging to the above three districts.

6) **Anti-recession package for 3 districts.** As the three districts are worst affected due to the return from the Gulf, the government may implement an anti-recession package to revive the district economies. More allocation of plan and development funds may be allocated to the districts through government departments and local governments.

7) **Pension to return emigrants who are suffering from chronic diseases.** An emigrant worker who worked in the foreign country for three years and was forced to return to the native country due to major accident involving physical disability or due to chronic diseases like cancer, stroke, heart attack, kidney failure etc. may be given a monthly pension of Rs 1,500 till his death. This benefit should be given on the basis of the report of the Medical Board of the state government.

8) **Promotion of investment of emigrants and return emigrants.** (a) Encourage industrial investment in small scale industry by giving units in the industrial parks to emigrants. (b) Industries Department should help the prospective investors by providing viable project proposals and other assistance for starting the units. (c) Single window clearance for starting industrial units. (d) The small scale units started by the return emigrants may be exempted from taxes levied by State government and Central government. and (e) Encourage the collaborative investment proposals of the return emigrants and others.

9) **Employment policy of state.** According to this survey the basic objective of the Keralite emigrant workers who migrate to Gulf, is to find a regular job, assured monthly income, assured monthly savings, assured remittance and achieve economic prosperity of their families. The education, labour, employment, fiscal, investment and credit policies of the state should aim to achieve regular and remunerative employment to the unemployed labour force. A favourable investment climate is to be created for the growth of secondary and tertiary units which employ sizeable number of regular workers. All government departments, semi government organisations and local governments shall follow conducive policies to achieve this.

10) **Assessment of labour market changes in GCC countries.** Of the total stock of Indian emigrants in the World, the share of GCC countries is 53 percent. Currently all the GCC countries have been following policies of indigenisation of labour to reduce the stock of foreign migrant workers, which adversely affect the

interest of Indian emigrants. Constant assessment of changes in labour market and changing demand for Indian migrant workers in GCC are crucial for India. And the government of India should take steps to conduct studies to assess the changes in labour market in GCC countries, the future skill requirement, the categories of emigrants likely to be returned and the measures need for smooth emigration.

Notes

[1]According to World Migration Report 2022, the total stock of international migrants in the World was 2805.9 lakh in 2020. The stock of Indian emigrants was estimated as 178.6 lakh or 6.4 percent of total stock of global migrants. According to World Migration Report 2022, the total global remittance was USD 702 billion in 2020. India received a sum of USD 83.15 billion or 11.8 percent (IOM UN 2021).

[2]According to a LokSabha unstarred question No. 234 dated on 04/08/2021, the number of repatriated Indians under Vande Bharat Mission up to 30 April, 2021 was 55,93,431. Of this, the number of Keralites was 14,10,275.

[3] For a discussion on ILO's definitions of different types of migrants see: International Labour Organisation (1997). International Migration statistics: Guidelines for improving data collection systems. Geneva: ILO, Chapter 2.

[4] For a discussion on COVID-19 disruption in international migration. See: International Organisation for Migration (UN migration) (2022). World Migration Report 2022. Geneva: IOMUN. Chapter 5.

[5] According to NORKA, the total number of emigrants returned due to COVID-19 crisis up to June 22, 2021 in Malappuram district was 2.62 lakh, Kozhikode district 1.72 lakh and Kannur 1.64 lakh. See also Table 11.

[6] International Organisation for Migration (UN migration) (2022). World Migration Report 2022. Geneva: IOMUN. Page 23.

[7] The Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) (2020). Phase II: COVID-19 Crisis through a Migration Lens, Migration and Development Brief 33 October 2020. Washington, DC:KNOMAD-World Bank. Page 10.

[8] The Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) (2021). Recovery: COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens, Migration and Development Brief 35. November 2021. Washington, DC:KNOMAD-World Bank. Page 57.

[9] Ibid. Page 57.

[10] Ibid. Page 51.

[11] ksaexpacts.com

https://ksaexpats.com/check-iqama-fees-in-saudi-arabia/

[12]According to PLFS annual report 2019-20, average wage earnings per day from casual labour work (for male worker) other than public work in CWS for Kerala in April-June 2020 was Rs. 690.09. See: Kerala State Planning Board (2022). Economic Review 2021, Vol. 1, page 337.

[13]BPL or Priority households: The following categories are excluded from the priority ration cards or BPL cards. All staff in government, public sector and cooperatives; service pensioners; income tax payers; persons having income more than 25,000 per month; ownership of more than one acre land; having house or flat with a plinth area of more than 1000 sq.km; a four wheel motor car for own use and any one of the family member getting more than Rs. 25000 per month from foreign job or private job.

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