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calcutta, india

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## State 2nd in labour migration

### - Bihar contributes 15% emigrants to Gulf nations, more than TN & Kerala

Nishant Sinha and Ramashankar

Bihar is second on the list of states from where most migrant labourers go to other countries, especially in the Gulf, according to latest figures of the Protectorate General of Emigrants (PGoE).

Uttar Pradesh tops the list, prepared by the agency functioning under the ministry of external affairs (MEA), while Bihar is ahead of Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the migration of labourers.

The data for 2016-17 shows Bihar contributes 15 per cent of the total emigrants from India, behind Uttar Pradesh (30 per cent). Kerala - reversing trends seen in the earlier decades - accounts for only 6 per cent.

The high percentage of migration is in spite of a trend in shrinking employment opportunities in the Gulf countries - Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait - because of the slump in oil prices, the PGoE had said. PGoE is the authority responsible for protecting the interest of Indian workers going abroad.

Migration is dependent on a lot of factors, including job availability in the state and its correlation with drought, PGoE has said in explanation of reasons why emigration from the southern states has declined and that from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh has gone up.

"We have found that if there is a drought, there is no job in agriculture or industry and people want to run to a place where they can earn their livelihood and support their family," said M.C. Luther, protector general of emigrants, and joint secretary, MEA. "So, drought and migration are correlated."

According to the data from the Union ministry of overseas affairs, the number of emigrants from Bihar surged from 36,493 in 2006 to 84,000 in 2012. It has now gone up to around 1.5 lakh. However, the labourers have remained limited to a handful of districts, including Gopalganj, Siwan, Madhubani and Purnea.

State labour resources minister Vijay Prakash said: "The government does not have district-wise data on emigrants. However, it is true that people in large numbers go outside in search of jobs. We are going to contact the ministry of external affairs to get the exact figures."

The International Growth Centre in its 2016 report on labour migration from Bihar had said the labourers are less interested in agriculture, which can be substantiated by the fact that most of them are absorbed into building construction, carpentry or masonry work and other types of casual work in the informal sector.

It added that the factors behind migration were manifold - from lack of what was perceived to be dignified employment to the possibilities of enhancing income in destination cities. "In almost all the cases, actual and potential migrants indicated that they knew their migration was temporary," the report said.

"We don't see this (increased migration of labourers from Bihar) as a negative point as these are no distress migration as those occur only within the country," said Shaibal Gupta, member-secretary of the Asian Development Research Institute. "The positive side of Bihar having increased in migration numbers is that it also increases remittances resulting out of high value migration. This was the reason why remittances in Kerala were so high."

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According to the MEA, there are 8.5 million Indian workers in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE, Oman and Bahrain. One estimate by the ministry suggests that these workers send back remittances that make up almost 40 per cent of the total foreign remittances sent to India. Gupta, however, accepted that drought may be one of the factors responsible for migration as pointed out by the PGoE. Bihar has witnessed chronic droughts in the last four years.#

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