



# Migrant Labour Skills in the Megacity of India: A Study of Labour Supply from Northeast and Demand in Bengaluru for Enhancing Employability

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## Background

Labour migration from India's Northeast (NE) to the megacity of Bengaluru, where wage offer and formal jobs concentration are higher, was primarily through chain migration and social networks (Marchang, 2017) and most migrants were educated having some skills for employment (Usha & Shimray, 2010; Marchang, 2017). As per IOM (2015), migration is an urban affair because of slow and uneven economic growth among other reasons. Migration may address labour and skills shortages by making labour migrants more employable. Incidentally, social networks were extensively used by both job seekers and employers (Cingano & Rosolia, 2012). The unemployment spell was shortened when a larger proportion of contacts through social networks are currently employed (Cingano & Rosolia, 2012). It depends on the nature of the job search, aspiration, and level of education (Visaria, 1998). The longer it is, the harder it becomes to find a job (Schmitt & Jones, 2012) whereby long-term unemployed lowers job aspiration (Mitra & Verick, 2013) as labour employability deteriorated. Labour employability includes skills, attitude, flexibility, ability and competency among others of the employees and their interaction with the employers in the labour market (Arrow, 1971; Cai, 2013; Likhitar, 2016). Employers measure the employability of labour on the level of educational qualification (Cai, 2013). Labourers keep on switching from one job to another to attain wage growth (Even & Macpherson, 2003) and to obtain their aspired job. Presumably, Northeast migrant workers, having labour employability skills such as job search flexibility, keep on changing their job for wage growth. However, employers keep on changing the workforce regularly for maintaining a low wage bill (Papola, 1968) remains applicable in the absence of a job agreement system between the worker and employer causing job insecurity and job mobility. Hence, this policy brief suggests the means to enhance labour employability through

acquired skills for work, nature of job search, job satisfaction, job switch or mobility, and various labour employability attributes of the migrant workers and the required skills of the employers. In this context, the specific objectives are: (i) to study the labour employability skills and associated issues, challenges and prospects of Northeast migrant labourers in Bengaluru; and (ii) to study the attributes of labour employability of the migrant workers and employers.

## Data and Method

The study primarily used field data, due to the non-availability of secondary data, on employability skills, qualification, education quality, training, job search, job preference, job aspirations, waiting period for a job, job security, job satisfaction, issues related to work and environment, unemployability, long-term unemployment and others and labour market interaction of the Northeast migrant labour force (employed and unemployed). Using different sets of semi-structured questionnaires for the currently employed and unemployed, the primary field data was collected through a field survey in Bengaluru during August and September 2018 with a reference period of one year preceding the survey date. Using a semi-structure questionnaire primary data on the traits of labour employability was also collected from the employers (recruiters). The employers or recruiters are those who either directly employ a worker or involve in the recruitment of workers in the establishment or business owners. A personal interview method was adopted to collect the data.

A mixed-method of sampling technique was adopted due to difficulty in locating, reaching and identifying the employed and unemployed people of NE in Bengaluru. The sample includes current migrant workers and unemployed (currently seeking work) from NE in Bengaluru. Using simple random sampling and Goodman's (1961) snowball

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sampling technique, 255 currently employed and 35 currently unemployed migrants from NE were drawn as samples. Over 150 samples of the 255 employed samples were randomly drawn from various workplaces (salons, malls, restaurants, music institutions, and educational institutions), residences, and NE community functions, meetings and Churches; and 15 out of 35 currently unemployed were randomly selected. And the rest samples of employed and unemployed were drawn following the snowball sampling technique. With great difficulties in finding, locating, meeting and convincing others to participate in the survey, only 16 employers and recruiters were surveyed at their offices. Among these respondents, few were from NE who own spas, salons, restaurants and others and the majority were non-NE people.

A simple statistical result of the traits and associating features of labour employability of the migrant labour (supply) and employer (demand) were descriptively analysed. Based on the key findings, a few policy measures are suggested.

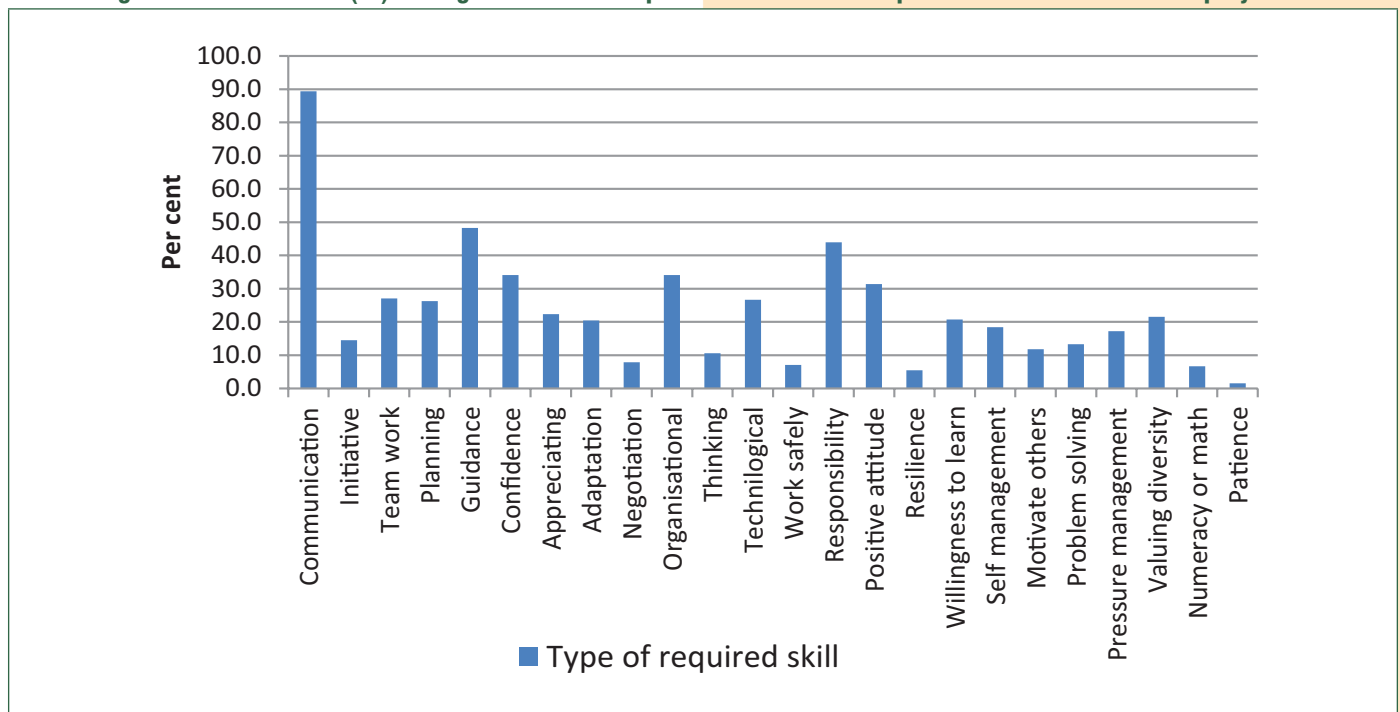
### Key Findings

Northeast migrants in Bengaluru incline to work or were relatively more employable as their participation was prominent in retail, corporate, IT, BPO, spa, airlines, educational institutions, security service, restaurants, hospitals, banks, etc. They keep on changing their job owing to job insecurity or job dissatisfaction which is one of the challenges to finding stable employment. Most migrant workers do not wait for a long period to get their present jobs mainly because of social networking in the job search processes. Average waiting period for a job

was two months due to skill possession, flexibility in seeking and choosing a job, and economic pressure. Most workers were employed in the private sector owing to the adequate availability of employment opportunities in it. It also indicates that labour employability is a major issue and challenge considering the involvement of longer time and greater cost of job waiting in the public sector. Workers tend to change their job owing to job insecurity, working environment, remuneration, work timing and other issues. Flexibility in choosing a job and labour employability was a prominent reason essentially for intra-job change or mobility.

Workers mostly felt that communication was the foremost and most common skill required for their current employment followed by the skill of guidance, responsibility, etc (Figure 1). Concurrently, many workers opined that multiple skills were required to have and maintain their job. Labour employability was attributed to intrinsic skills such as communication, professionalism or organisational as well as by exogenous factors such as job satisfaction, remuneration, working environment etc. The prospect to continue in the same job depends on these exogenous factors. Labour was found employable and enhanced its employability after the labour was tried and tested on the job. Most workers wanted to upskill through training to raise labour productivity and employability for better future job prospects and to achieve their aspired job. The issues and challenges of labour employability can be addressed through the development of adequate skills from education and training by aligning to skills demand.

**Figure 1: Distribution (%) of migrant workers' opinions on various required skills for current employment**



Source: Plotted by the author based on Field Survey Data, Bengaluru (2018).

Currently unemployed, with or without previous work experience, most did not seek a specific job showing their flexibility and openness in job expectations. Among the unemployed having job experience, communication was the most common skill that was required for their recent jobs. For most of them, multiple skills, similar for the workers, were required owing to the heterogeneity of the nature of work, differences in the capacity of work performance and diversity of work experience. Workplace issues, wage issues, the supply of skills and their demand among other attributes to their labour employability.

There was some disparity between labour's supply of skills and the employer's demand for necessary skills. Employers mostly prefer to employ experienced workers who have employable skills than a fresher in which employers may spend money and time on the job training. Employers mainly demanded communication skills followed by a willingness to learn, self-motivation, flexibility, confidence, professionalism, etc from the job seekers. Many employers have raised the educational qualification of the workers to be employable. Employers do not discriminate against workers based on regions that open the job prospect for NE migrants in Bengaluru. Employees change their job primarily for seeking a more remunerative job which implies the employer's inability to meet the worker's remuneration expectation at the market rate.

## **Policy Recommendations**

The following policy suggestions are recommended based on the study's findings to enhance labour employability.

### ***Create Adequate Job Opportunities***

The availability of diverse employment opportunities in Bengaluru has attracted people from NE India. Henceforth Bengaluru can create a more safe, more accommodative and more conducive environment for migrant workers for enhancing livelihood conditions and to contribute to its economy in the long run. Concurrently, formulate a policy to generate adequate educational and employment opportunities in NE India, similar to Bengaluru, to tap and retain human resources as well as to attract migrants to it.

### ***Pursue Industry-Linked Educational Interest***

Converge and select education of interest and choice towards professional and technology-oriented courses rather than pursuing conventional arts subjects to enhance labour employability. Simultaneously, promote and adopt English medium education to enhance employability, particularly in the corporate sector. Impart and acquire greater skill-embedded educational qualifications to enhance labour employability and to improve earnings. Hence, it is important to link and bridge the educational syllabus with the skills demanded by industry to enhance labour employability.

### ***Build a Strong Social Network for Job Search***

Workers may require building a strong social network to gather and access adequate and symmetric labour market information from various job vacancy announcements or advertisement platforms or sources for convenient job search and to shorten the job waiting period.

### ***Institute Job Search Flexibility***

Job hunters may create flexibility in job search while seeking or selecting job avenues to get a job more conveniently and easily. The unemployed may need to seek multiple job options if their acquired education or training was too general and theoretical with less practical consideration for a specific job. The unemployed may avoid overexpectation of salary by setting a reasonable reservation wage depending on their possessed job skills, existing wage level, and prevailing labour supply absorption capacity of the labour market.

### ***Consider Job of Private as Good as Government***

The unemployed may give equal weight and importance to the private-sector organised job considering its incentives including social security for health or retirement benefit as to government job.

### ***Consider Job Switch for Wage Growth***

Job switch, particularly intra-occupational change owing to labour employability, may be envisaged and encouraged for salary growth or career development, particularly in the private sector. But workers may avoid inter-occupational change as an individual grows older.

### ***Avert Job Breaks and Long-Term Unemployment***

Workers may need to identify and locate an industry or establishment that demands already possessed labour skills to shorten the period of unemployment. Avoid long-term unemployment to avert difficulty in getting a job by trading down salary or job expectation. Workers may choose to continuously engage in a job if once employed or entered the labour market, which will upskill their labour intrinsic skills and enhances labour employability.

### ***Advertise Job Vacancy Widely***

Employers need to widely advertise job vacancy information by mentioning the salary to reduce job information asymmetry and encourage job applicants.

### ***Try and Test Labour Skills through Apprenticeship***

Employers shall try and test the skills of labour to discover the unexplored skills of labour through internship or apprenticeship provision. They may need to absorb freshers as interns, trainees or apprentices to develop, equip and demonstrate practical employable skills.

### **Create a Conducive Workplace and Pay Prevailing Wage**

Employers may create a secure and friendly working environment, based on worker's feedback and experiences, to retain the workers. They may provide the prevailing standard salary or wage structure for the workers depending on their experience and qualification to retain them. Eliminate workplace and remuneration issues and challenges through the adoption of adequate, proper and practical policy measures for labour retention and employability. To identify and address such issues create an effective feedback system and platform to discuss labour issues in confidence, and establish an effective grievance redressal system for addressing workers' issues. To retain workers and promote labour employability ensure the cordial professional relationship between workers, co-workers, employers and trainers.

### **Provide Extensive Skill Training and Internship Programmes**

Educational institutions and industries may provide extensive skill development training, provide on-the-job training, and promote compulsory internships and apprenticeships after graduation to enhance labour employability. Impart or provide extensive aforementioned skills training in education to enhance labour employability. Government need to promote and make compulsory internship and apprenticeship after graduation to expose, experiment and experience work and thereby enhance the prospect of labour employability.

### **Bridge Educational Syllabus with Industrial Skill Requirement**

Link and bridge, and continuously update the skills required by the industry or establishment with the educational syllabus by restructuring to reduce the existing skill mismatch of labour supply and demand.

### **Provide up-to-date Technology Driven On-the-job Training**

Provide on-the-job training at regular intervals to upgrade and upskill labour with the change in technology and mode of operation of industry, and thereby enhance labour employability.

### **Expect Existing Job and Wage**

For labour employability, people need to expect jobs and salaries based on their qualifications and experiences, and the existing wage or labour market reality.

### **Enter a Job Contract Agreement before Joining Work for Job Security**

The government may formulate a policy to enter a job contract agreement on terms and conditions of employment between

employers and the employees before joining work to eliminate job insecurity among the workers of the registered establishments in the private sector as in the public sector.

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## **Acknowledgement**

This policy brief is extracted from the research project "North-East Migrants in Bangalore: Employability Issues, Challenges and Prospects" (2020) sponsored by the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bengaluru.

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