



# Kerala Girl Student Migration Study

Centre for Public Policy Research  
June 2026



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# Acknowledgement

We extend our sincere appreciation to the authors and researchers of this study for their meticulous and dedicated efforts in exploring the landscape of student migration from Kerala. Their work goes beyond statistical analysis, focusing on amplifying the experiences and voices of students to gain deeper insights into the socio-economic and cultural drivers of this phenomenon.

We acknowledge the authors' commitment to a rigorous mixed-methods approach, which involved:

- ▶ Developing a structured 40-question survey to capture nuanced opinions on institutional, educational, and social factors.
- ▶ Conducting a comprehensive 30-week data collection process that engaged a wide array of stakeholders, including educational agencies, coaching institutes, and cultural communities abroad.
- ▶ Designing a comparative study to ensure a focused analysis of the specific challenges and aspirations of migrating students.

The authors have successfully bridged an existing knowledge gap by documenting a trend that is relatively recent compared to the employment-driven migration of the 1980s. Their analysis of the disproportionately large influx of students from Kerala who account for 4% of Indian student migration despite the state's small population share provides a vital foundation for future policy discussions and academic inquiry.

# Study Methodology

This study employs a comprehensive mixed-methods approach to investigate the multifaceted reasons prompting students from Kerala to pursue educational opportunities overseas. It meticulously examines the social, economic, cultural, and financial factors that shape these decisions, with a specific emphasis on amplifying the voices of female students.

## 1. Target Population and Sampling Frame

The study focuses on the disproportionately large influx of students from Kerala, who account for 4% of Indian students migrating abroad despite the state making up only 2.76% of the national population. The sample size was determined to be 190 respondents, categorized into two distinct groups to account for varying perspectives:

- ▶ **Group A (60% weightage):** Individuals who relocated abroad for studies within the past 6-12 months.
- ▶ **Group B (40% weightage):** Individuals who have secured admission and are scheduled to relocate within the next 6-12 months.

A higher weightage was assigned to those already abroad to mitigate the volatility and uncertainty associated with the planning phase. To facilitate a comparative analysis, the sample maintained a specific gender ratio, resulting in 74% female and 26% male respondents.

## 2. Data Collection Instruments

Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire designed based on a literature review and a pilot survey. The instrument was tailored to the respondent's status:

- ▶ **Already Moved:** 40 questions covering current status, pre-migration conditions, influencing factors, post-migration experiences, and demographics.
- ▶ **Planning to Move:** 37 questions covering current status, education-related queries, migration motivations, influencing factors, and demographics.

A pilot run involving discussions and interviews was conducted prior to the full survey to assess feasibility and solicit feedback from respondents.

## 3. Sampling Procedure and Timeline

The study utilized Respondent-Driven Snowball Sampling to collect data from identified strata over a 30-week duration. The data collection process (finalized in November 2024) involved diverse resources, including:

- ▶ International educational agencies and consultancies.
- ▶ Foreign language coaching institutes and cultural communities abroad.
- ▶ Academic stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, and government departments.

# 01 Target Population

## Primary Focus:

- ▶ Female students form the primary focus group to explore increasing trends in female educational migration and gendered dimensions of decision-making
- ▶ Diverse socio-economic, educational, and geographic backgrounds within Kerala
- ▶ Both male and female students included for comparative analysis

# 02 Population Base

**31L**

Indian Students Abroad  
(since 2017)

**4%**

Students from Kerala

**120K**

Estimated Kerala Students  
(Population Base)

Data Source: Union Minister of State for Education, Subhas Sarkar, Lok Sabha (February 2023)

**Inclusion Criteria**

Students currently studying or working in Kerala, families migrated to different Indian states, or students studying elsewhere with families in Kerala.

**Academic Diversity**

Diverse disciplines and levels including undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional courses.

**Migration Status Mix**

Both students currently studying abroad and students preparing to migrate.

## 03 Sample Size & Distribution

**190**

Total Respondents

**Migration Status Distribution**



Already Migrated



Yet to Migrate

**Gender Distribution**



Female Respondents



Male Respondents

*The gender ratio reflects the increasing trend of female migration for higher education while ensuring diverse analytical perspectives through comparative analysis.*

## Questionnaire Design

Structured questionnaires based on extensive literature review and pilot survey insights

**For Students Already Abroad**

5 Sections | 40 Questions

**For Students Planning to Migrate**

5 Sections | 37 Questions

## Pilot Survey & Refinement

Prior to main survey, pilot surveys, discussions, and interviews were conducted to evaluate feasibility, identify potential issues, and incorporate stakeholder feedback. This stage refined content, sequence, and clarity to ensure reliability and validity.

**Sample Survey Methodology**

Respondent-Driven Snowball Sampling  
January 2024 – December 2024

## Data Sources

Students

Educational Agencies

Language Institutes

Cultural Communities

Parents & Teachers

Academics

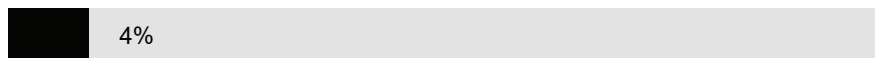
# Survey Findings

## Key Findings Summary

- ▶ This sample is concentrated on girl students with 74% representation
- ▶ UK and Canada dominate as destination countries (57.7% combined)
- ▶ STEM courses remain popular but show shifting trends abroad
- ▶ Loans are primary funding (67%), with family savings playing significant role (24.8%)
- ▶ Self-motivation drives 86% of migration decisions with parental support

## Age Distribution

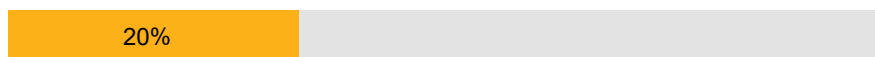
Below 21 Years



21-24 Years

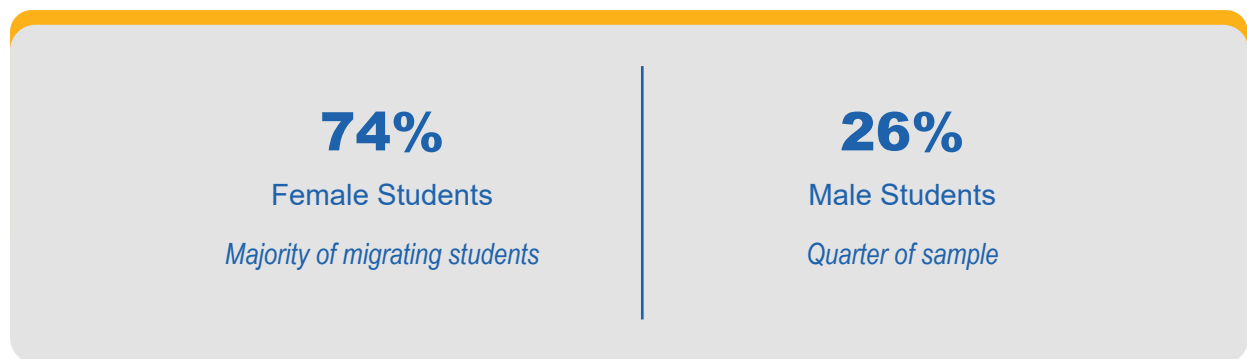


Above 24 Years



3 in 4 students are aged 21–24 years, showing that migration is dominated by postgraduate aspirants.

## Gender Distribution



## Key Insight

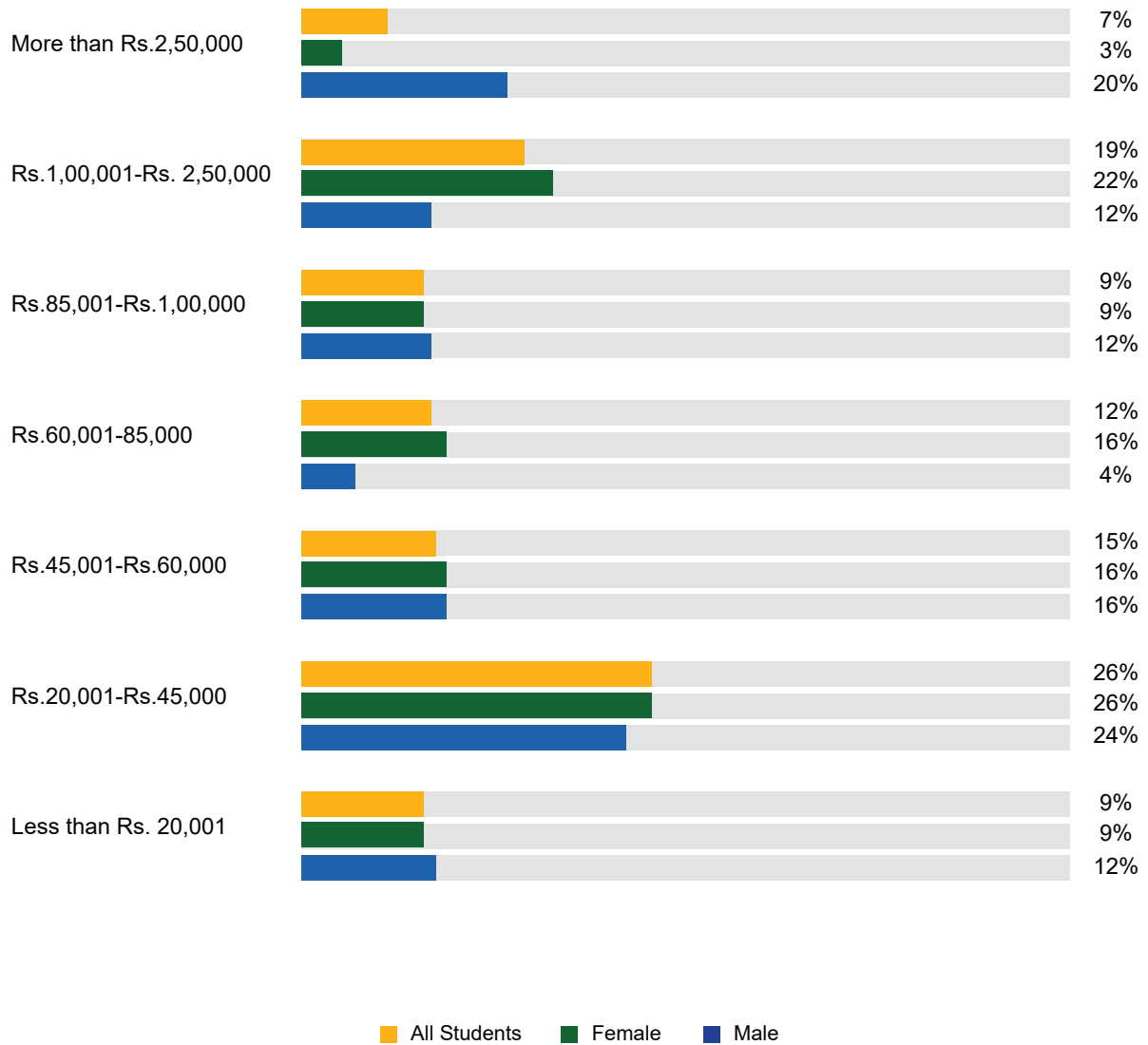
Female students form the majority of student migration, suggesting an increasing trend of female academic mobility. This reflects greater parental support, changing gender norms, and growing awareness of educational and professional opportunities for women abroad.

## Urban Concentration

The concentration in urban and semi-urban districts underscores the role of snowball sampling skewed towards urban centers, influenced by better educational infrastructure and higher access to overseas education consultants. Due to the snowball sampling Eranakulam (48%), Kottayam (13%) and Palakkad (7%) represent majority student migration

# Socio-Economic Profile

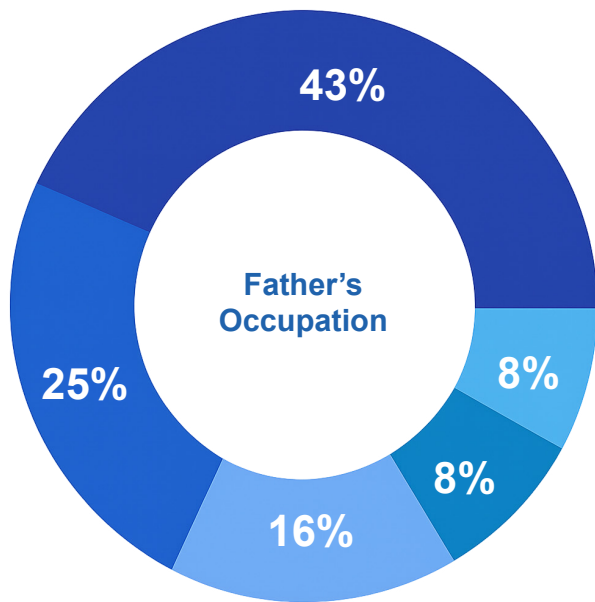
## Household Income Distribution



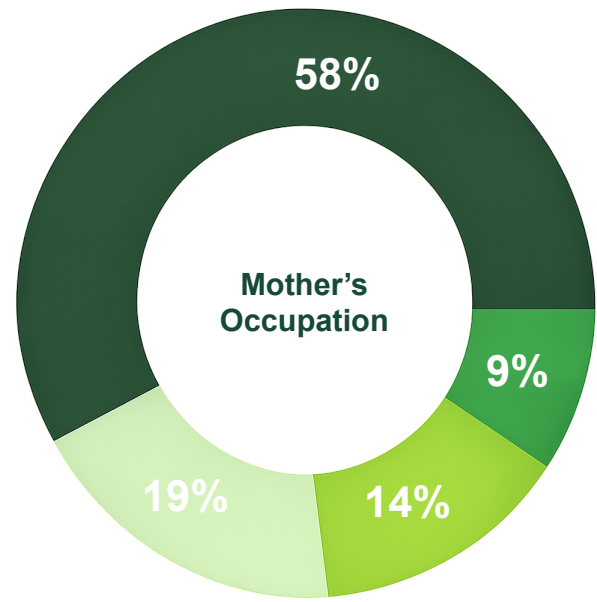
## Income Distribution Insights

- ▶ **Economic Center:** ₹20,001–₹45,000 range represents the concentration across genders (26% overall)
- ▶ **Female Upward Mobility:** Females have disproportionately higher income ₹60,001–₹85,000 (16% vs 4% male) and ₹1,00,000–₹2,50,000 (22% vs 12% male)
- ▶ **Male High-Income Dominance:** Males dominate the top-income category exceeding ₹2,50,000 (20% vs 3% female)
- ▶ **Lower Income:** Limited representation below ₹20,001, slightly higher among males (12% vs 9% female)

# Parental Occupation



■ Formal Employment    ■ Business / Entrepreneurship  
■ Others    ■ Agriculture    ■ Flexible Work



■ Homemaker    ■ Formal Employment  
■ Others    ■ Business

## Insights

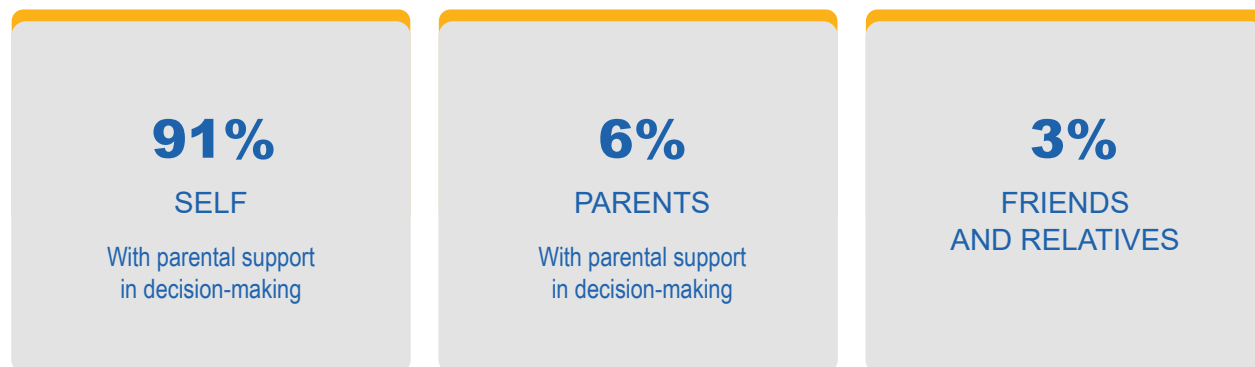
### Fathers

- Formal employment: **43.3%**
- Business/Entrepreneurship: **24.7%**
- Combined total: Nearly **68%** of fathers' occupations

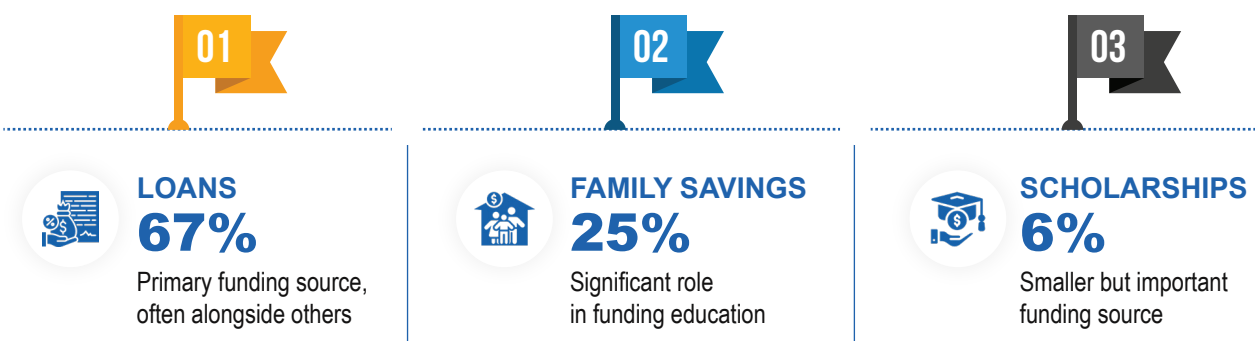
### Mothers

- Homemaker: most common occupation at **57.7%**
- Formal employment: accounts for **18.6%** of mothers

## Motivation & Funding



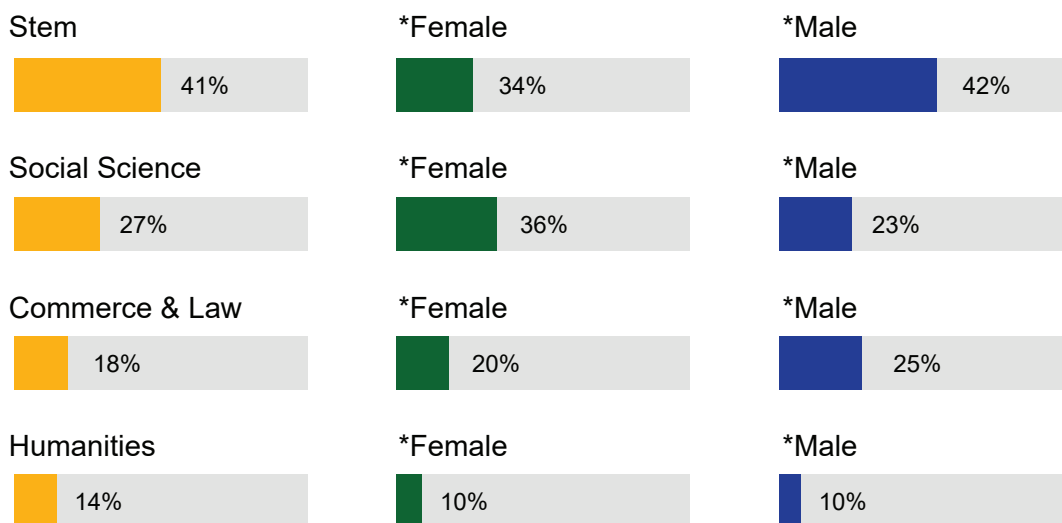
## Top 3 funding sources



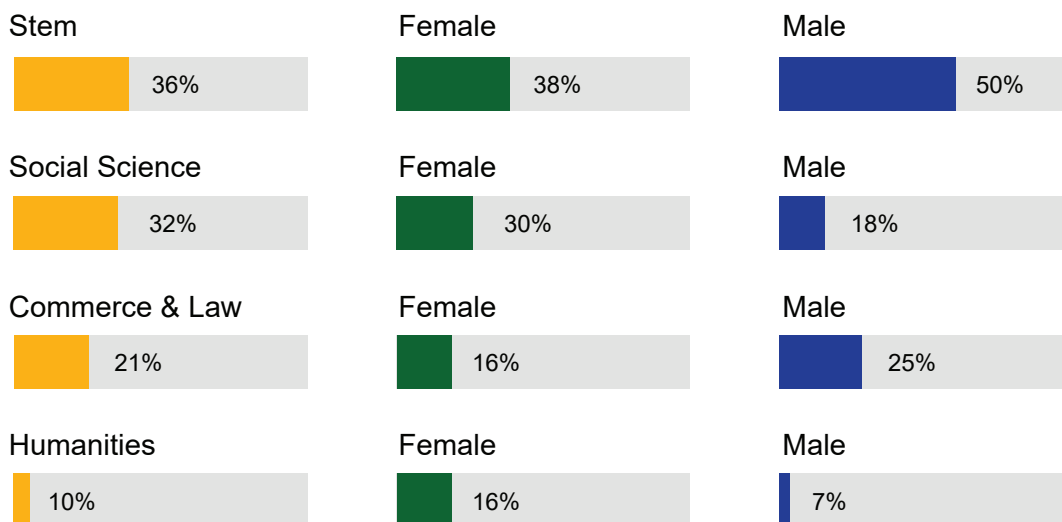
*Note: These funding sources often overlap, with students combining different options to cover their overseas education costs.*

# Educational Background

## Planning to Migrate (n=76)



## Already Migrated (n=114)

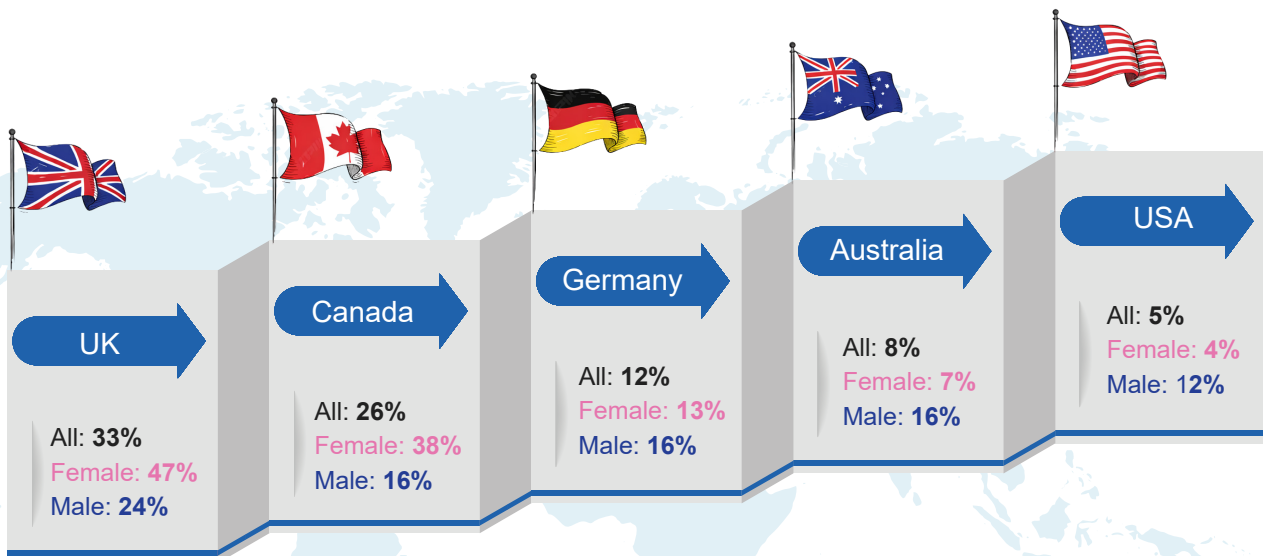


\*Low samples cannot be generalised

## Educational Domain & Gender Trends

- ▶ **Planning to Migrate:** Males show higher preference for STEM (~50% vs ~38% female) and Commerce & Law (~25% vs ~16% female). Females favor Social Science (~30% vs ~18% male) and Humanities (~16% vs ~7% male).
- ▶ **Already Abroad:** Gender patterns persist with males leading in STEM (~42% vs ~34% female) and females dominating Social Science (~36% vs ~22% male).
- ▶ **Overall Trend:** STEM remains the leading domain for both groups. However, among students already abroad, Social Science and Commerce & Law domains show increased representation (32.5% and 21.3% respectively), while STEM share drops to 36.3%.

## Top 5 Destinations of Migration



The UK is the top choice for the students migrating for studies at **33%**, followed by Canada at **25%**, then Germany, Australia and USA.

# Top 3 Extremely Influential Educational Factors

## Male Students



**40%**  
Cite low practical application of courses.



**35%**  
Point to poor quality education & infrastructure.  
Issues with outdated facilities, limited resources, and overall academic standards.



**33%**  
Are concerned about an unhealthy political atmosphere.  
Apprehension regarding campus politics, lack of academic freedom, or instability.



## Female Students



**40%**  
Cite low practical application of courses.



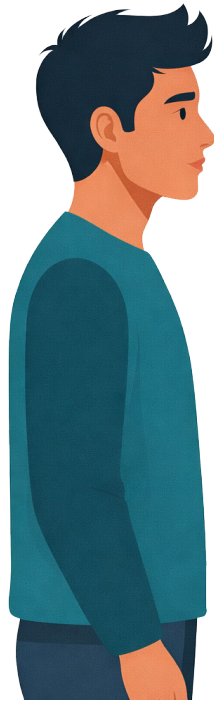
**32%**  
Feel a lack of placements & career support.  
Insufficient guidance, internships, and job opportunities post-graduation.



**30%**  
Find very few courses of interest available.  
Limited options and variety in academic programs aligned with personal interests and career goals.

# Top 3 Extremely Influential Social & Cultural Factors in Migration

## Male Students



**45%** 

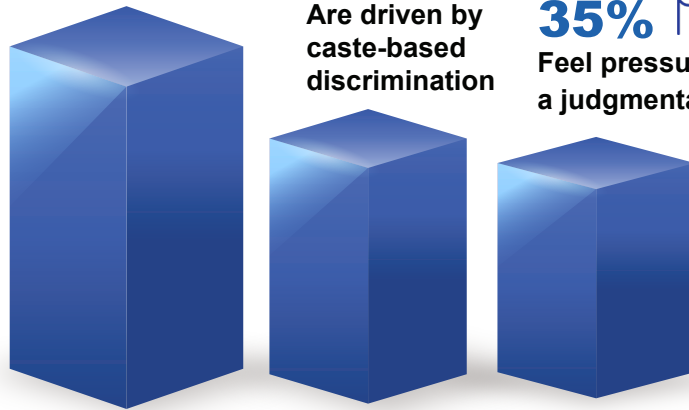
Cite low freedom & independence as their top reason

**38%** 

Are driven by caste-based discrimination

**35%** 

Feel pressured by a judgmental society



## Female Students

**42%** 

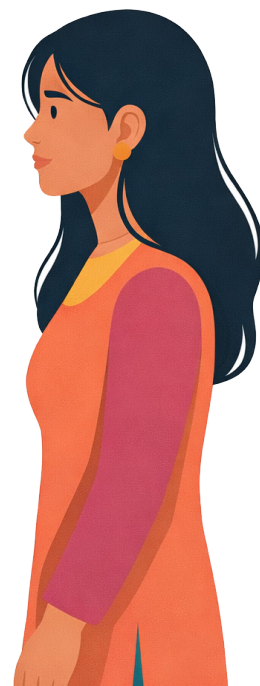
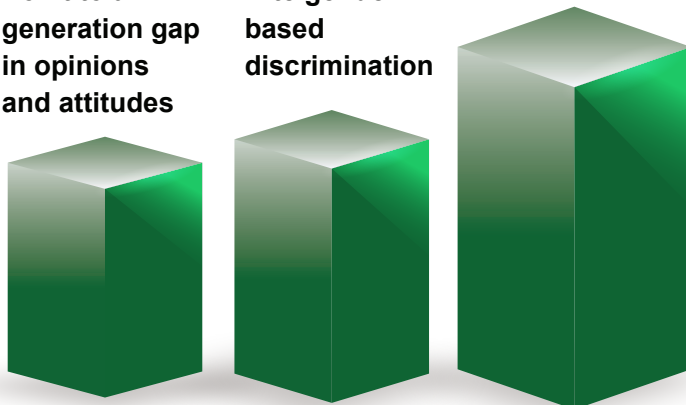
Point to a generation gap in opinions and attitudes

**48%** 

Cite gender based discrimination

**52%** 

Name a judgmental society as their primary factor



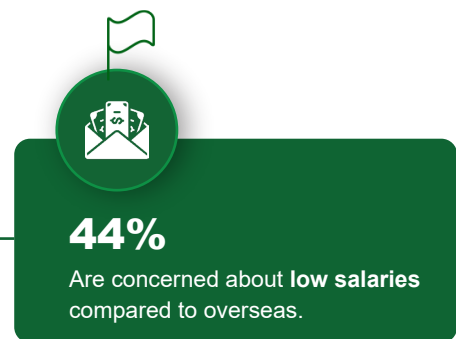
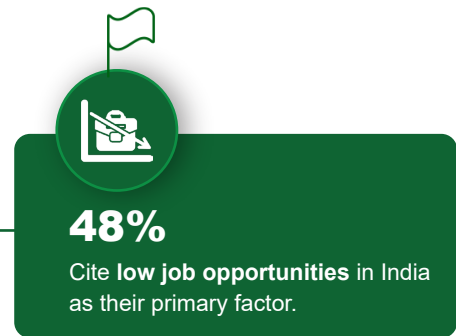
# Top Economic Factors Influencing Students: A Gender Comparison

## Male Students



Economic  
Concerns

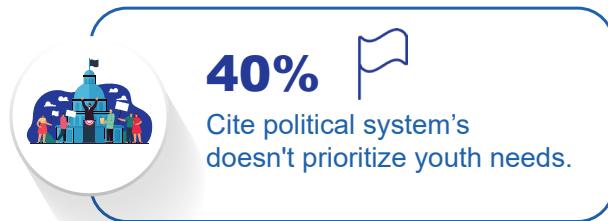
## Female Students



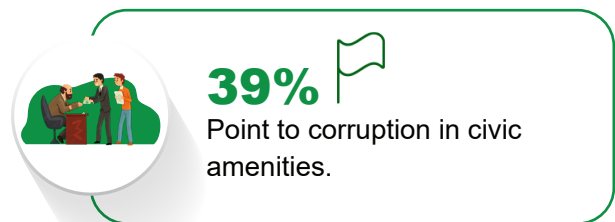
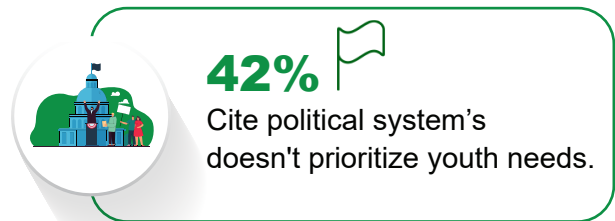
# Students' Top Political Concerns: A Gender Comparison

Comparing the most influential political factors as identified by male and female students, revealing shared priorities.

## Male Students



## Female Students



# Study Conclusion

Kerala's student migration is a multifaceted phenomenon driven by social, economic, educational, and political factors. The study reveals that limited job opportunities, low salaries, lack of infrastructure, societal constraints, and quality of education are major motivators. There is an urgent need for policy interventions to improve higher education quality, create employment opportunities, and retain local talent.





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