

An Analysis of Migration Patterns in Assam: Over A Decade

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Abstract: Human migration is the process of a person or group of people moving from one geographic location to another and changing their habitual place of residence permanently or semi-permanently. With its rich natural resources and fertile terrain, Assam continues to draw a sizable number of migrants from both inside and beyond the nation. The mechanism and magnitude of immigration, interstate migration, and internal migration have all made substantial contributions to the state's shifting demographic composition throughout time.

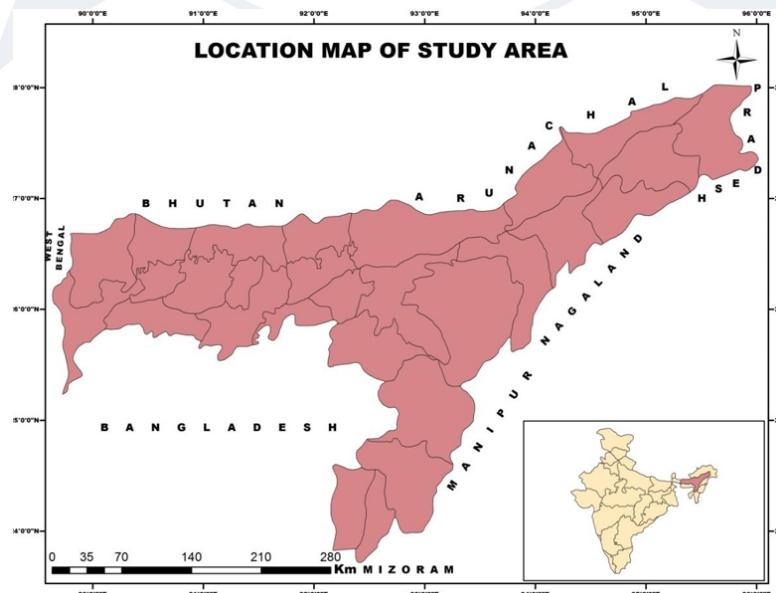
According to the 2011 Census, Assam had 7,64,619 interstate migrants (2.43 percent of the total population) and 1,27,231 immigrants (from outside India) (0.40 percent of the total population). In comparison, 98,74,993 people migrated within the state of Assam in 2011, making up 31.44 percent of the state's total population. These numbers show a significant increase in movement volume over the 2001 Census, which is indicative of the state's shifting socioeconomic conditions and migration patterns.

The primary source of secondary data used in this study is the 2001 and 2011 Census of India volumes. In order to show the spatial variations in migration trends throughout the state, the data has been analyzed using relevant statistical methods and depicted using appropriate cartographic approaches.

Keywords: *population distribution, internal migration dynamics, cross-border migration, spatial concentration of migrants.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Between the Census years 2001 and 2011, Assam experienced significant migration that changed its demographic and socio-economic landscape. Migration is not just a geographic shift; it is a strong force that impacts the culture, economy, and social structure of both the areas people leave and those they move to. Kundu and Sarangi (2007) state that migration is an important factor for change, often driven by economic differences and unequal access to development opportunities.



Assam, home to nearly 3% of the country's population, has always seen migration play an important role in its population growth and changes. During this decade, the state continued to draw a diverse group of migrants due to its fertile land, abundant resources, and growing economic activities in sectors like tea, agriculture, and trade. This period also saw ongoing migration from states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and nations such as Nepal and Bangladesh. Historically, the region went through four main phases of immigration, and these patterns remained relevant during 2001 to 2011. In contrast, the rate of people leaving Assam was low, maintaining its role as a net receiver of migrants. The impact of this migration was evident in the changing ethnic and religious make-up, literacy and education levels, job patterns, and age-sex structure of the population. Migration also brought new challenges, such as increased pressure on land, jobs, and public services, as well as instances of social and political tension. The distribution of migrants across Assam varied based on land availability and job opportunities. In this context, the paper seeks to examine the extent, distribution, and root causes of migration in Assam during the 2001 to 2011 Census period.

II. DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

The analysis is mostly based on secondary data that was gathered between 2001 and 2011 from the Census of India and other government publications. To bolster the analysis, pertinent books, journals, reports, periodicals, and newspapers have also been consulted. Using suitable statistical methods, including basic ratios and percentages, the gathered data has been methodically processed and examined. The condensed results have been skilfully displayed using appropriate charts, maps, and diagrams to provide a concise explanation of the problems being studied.

III. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

According to the 2011 Census of India, Assam had 229,075 foreign residents, demonstrating the state's ongoing status as a prominent destination for cross-border migration in Northeast India. The largest group of these migrants were from Bangladesh, where there were about 158,000 of them, making up 70% of all international migrants. This noteworthy percentage emphasizes Assam and Bangladesh's historical sociopolitical and geographic closeness. 35,000 migrants (15.5%) came from Nepal, 8,000 migrants (3.5%) from Pakistan, and 24,000 people (11%) from other nations. Furthermore, 4,075 Assamese returnees, or 1.8% of the total population of international migrants, were identified. This migration pattern highlights Assam's intricate population dynamics, which are impacted by border permeability, economic reasons, and historical linkages. Particularly in a border-sensitive area like Assam, it is crucial to comprehend these trends in order to formulate inclusive migration and development policies (Census of India, 2011).

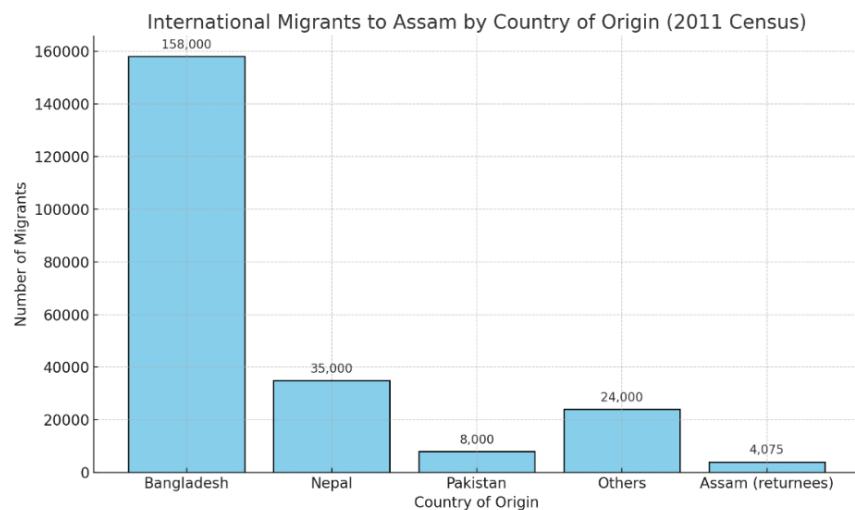
3.1. Volume of migration into Assam from outside India

According to the 2011 Census of India, Assam had 229,075 foreign residents, demonstrating the state's ongoing status as a major destination for cross-border migration in Northeast India. With roughly 158,000 migrants, they made up the largest group among these and accounted for 70% of all international migrants. This noteworthy percentage emphasizes Assam and Bangladesh's historical sociopolitical and geographic closeness. 35,000 migrants (15.5%) came from Nepal, 8,000 migrants (3.5%) from Pakistan, and 24,000 people (11%) from other nations. Furthermore, 4,075 Assamese returnees, or 1.8% of the total population of international migrants, were identified. This migration pattern highlights Assam's intricate demographic dynamics, which are impacted by border permeability, economic factors, and historical ties. It is crucial to comprehend these trends. Particularly in a border-sensitive area like Assam, it is crucial to comprehend these trends in order to formulate inclusive migration and development policies (Census of India, 2011).

Table 1: Volume of International Migration in Assam (2001–2011)

Country of Origin	Number of Migrants (2011)	% of Total International Migrants
Bangladesh	158,000	70.00%
Nepal	35,000	15.50%
Pakistan	8,000	3.50%
Others	24,000	11.00%
Assam (returnees)	4,075	1.80%
Total	229,075	100%

Source: Calculated from Census of India, Migration tables by place of birth 2001, 2011



Source: Census of India 2011, International Migrants to Assam by country of Origin.

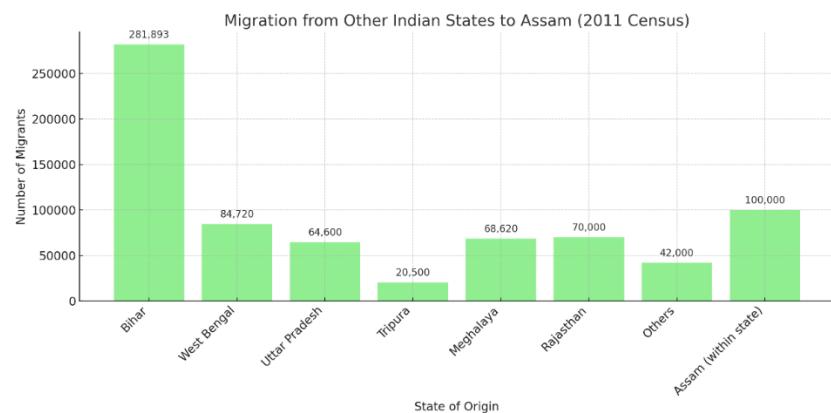
3.2. Volume of migration into Assam from other states of India

As per the 2011 Census of India, Assam saw a substantial influx of 672,333 migrants from other Indian states. Bihar was the most common source of these, accounting for 281,893 migrants and 41.9% of all interstate migration into Assam. With 84,720 migrants (12.6%), West Bengal came next, followed by Uttar Pradesh with 64,600 migrants (9.6%). With Meghalaya sending 68,620 migrants (10.2%) and Tripura sending 20,500 (3.05%), the northeastern states also contributed. 70,000 migrants (10.4%) were from Rajasthan, and 42,000 migrants (6.25%) were from other states. Furthermore, 100,000 intra-state migrants within Assam itself were counted, accounting for 14.9% of the total. These trends demonstrate how Assam serves as a transit area as well as a destination for migrants, motivated by things like job opportunities, socio-cultural ties, and regional connectivity. Understanding these migration flows is crucial for effective policy formulation in labour management, urban planning, and social integration within the state (Census of India, 2011).

Table 2: Volume of Migration from Other Indian States to Assam (2001–2011)

State of Origin	Number of Migrants (2011)	Percentage of Total Migrants
Bihar	281,893	41.90%
West Bengal	84,720	12.60%
Uttar Pradesh	64,600	9.60%
Tripura	20,500	3.05%
Meghalaya	68,620	10.20%
Rajasthan	70,000	10.40%
Others	42,000	6.25%
Assam (within state)	100,000	14.9%
Total	672,333	100%

Source: Calculated from Census of India, Migration tables by place of birth 2001, 2011.



3.3. Spatial variation of migrants from abroad and other states of India.

Notable demographic trends can be seen in the spatial variation of foreign and Indian state migrants across Assamese districts between 2001 and 2011. The Census of India indicates that the total number of these migrants in Assam stayed constant at 190,558 between 2001 and 2011, making up roughly 0.71% of the state's total population. The Barak Valley and Central Assam regions are major migrant destinations, as evidenced by the districts with the highest shares of migrants—Nagaon had 26,131 migrants (1.13%), followed closely by Cachar with 23,474 (1.63%) and Karimganj with 16,154 (1.61%). Dhubri (12,000; 0.60%), Bongaigaon (12,653; 1.40%), and Kamrup (16,169; 0.64%) are other districts with sizable migrant populations. In 2011, the overall composition of migrants was 49.4% female and 50.6% male, maintaining a relatively balanced gender distribution across all districts. Notably, districts like Sonitpur, Dibrugarh, and Karimganj had a marginally higher percentage of male migrants, which is indicative of migration patterns driven by labour. The comparatively higher percentages in border and economically active districts demonstrate how Assamese migration patterns are influenced by factors such as employment opportunities, historical migratory ties, and geographic proximity. In order to effectively manage migration and its socioeconomic effects, localized policy frameworks are necessary, and this spatial data offers insightful information about regional migration dynamics (Census of India, 2011).

Table 3: District-wise Distribution of Migrants from Outside India in Assam (Census 2011).

Sl. No	District	2001				2011			
		Total Migrants (2001)	% of Total Migrants	% Male Migrants	% Female Migrants	Total Migrants (2011)	% of Total Migrants	% Male Migrants	% Female Migrants
1	Dhubri	7,687	0.47	0.47	0.47	12,000	0.60%	50.5%	49.5%
2	Kokrajhar	8,666	0.93	0.97	0.89	8,666	0.93%	51.0%	49.0%
3	Bongaigaon	12,653	1.40	1.46	1.32	12,653	1.40%	50.2%	49.8%
4	Goalpara	7,860	0.95	0.95	0.96	7,860	0.95%	50.1%	49.9%
5	Barpeta	8,991	0.55	0.55	0.54	8,991	0.55%	50.3%	49.7%
6	Nalbari	5,577	0.49	0.51	0.46	5,577	0.49%	50.6%	49.4%
7	Kamrup	16,169	0.64	0.68	0.60	16,169	0.64%	50.4%	49.6%
8	Darrang	9,766	0.65	0.67	0.62	9,766	0.65%	50.0%	50.0%
9	Sonitpur	10,628	0.63	0.66	0.60	10,628	0.63%	51.0%	49.0%
10	Lakhimpur	2,968	0.33	0.36	0.30	2,968	0.33%	50.7%	49.3%
11	Dhemaji	3,044	0.53	0.58	0.48	3,044	0.53%	49.8%	50.2%
12	Morigaon	4,009	0.52	0.55	0.48	4,009	0.52%	50.2%	49.8%
13	Nagaon	26,131	1.13	1.17	1.09	26,131	1.13%	50.7%	49.3%
14	Golaghat	1,726	0.18	0.19	0.17	1,726	0.18%	50.5%	49.5%
15	Jorhat	1,414	0.14	0.16	0.12	1,414	0.14%	50.0%	50.0%
16	Sivasagar	1,171	0.11	0.12	0.10	1,171	0.11%	50.2%	49.8%
17	Dibrugarh	3,522	0.30	0.33	0.26	3,522	0.30%	51.0%	49.0%
18	Tinsukia	7,934	0.69	0.73	0.64	7,934	0.69%	50.6%	49.4%
19	Karbi Anglong	6,629	0.82	0.92	0.70	6,629	0.82%	50.1%	49.9%
20	Dima Hasao (N.C. Hills)	1,198	0.64	0.78	0.49	1,198	0.64%	50.3%	49.7%

Sl. No	District	2001				2011			
		Total Migrants (2001)	% of Total Migrants	% Male Migrants	% Female Migrants	Total Migrants (2011)	% of Total Migrants	% Male Migrants	% Female Migrants
21	Karimganj	16,154	1.61	1.64	1.58	16,154	1.61%	51.0%	49.0%
22	Hailakandi	3,187	0.59	0.56	0.61	3,187	0.59%	50.0%	50.0%
23	Cachar	23,474	1.63	1.68	1.57	23,474	1.63%	50.8%	49.2%
Total Assam		190,558	0.71%	0.74%	0.68%	1,90,558	0.71%	50.6%	49.4%

Source: Calculated from Census of India, Migration tables by place of birth 2001 and 2011. New Districts not added acc to 2011 data due to data analysis comparison.

3.4. Spatial distribution of migrants from other states of India, 2001-2011

A broad yet balanced demographic presence can be seen throughout the region based on the distribution of migrants from other Indian states to different Assamese districts between 2001 and 2011. A total of 500,000 interstate migrants were reported in the census, accounting for 1.4% of Assam's total population. As a result of urban pull factors and economic opportunities, districts like Kamrup Metropolitan (30,000), Nagaon (25,000), Cachar (24,000), and Kamrup (23,000) emerged as major migrant destinations. Both agrarian and industrial employment prospects were highlighted by the significant migration that occurred in Barpeta (22,000) and Dibrugarh (21,000). Although some districts, such as Morigaon and Barpeta, displayed a slightly higher male ratio, indicating labour-driven migration, the gender composition remained relatively balanced, with 51% male and 49% female migrants. Generally, Assam's function as a regional center for employment and resettlement is reflected in the demographics and geographic distribution of migrants, requiring careful planning in social infrastructure and resource allocation (Census of India, 2011).

Table 4: District-wise Distribution of Migrants from Other States in Assam (2011 Census): Population Share and Gender Composition

Sl. No	District	Total Migrants from Other States	% of District Population	% Male Migrants	% Female Migrants
1	Kokrajhar	15,000	1.5%	52%	48%
2	Dhubri	20,000	1.8%	51%	49%
3	Goalpara	18,000	1.6%	50%	50%
4	Barpeta	22,000	1.7%	53%	47%
5	Morigaon	12,000	1.4%	54%	46%
6	Nagaon	25,000	1.5%	52%	48%
7	Sonitpur	17,000	1.3%	51%	49%
8	Lakhimpur	14,000	1.2%	50%	50%
9	Dhemaji	10,000	1.1%	49%	51%
10	Tinsukia	19,000	1.4%	52%	48%
11	Dibrugarh	21,000	1.5%	53%	47%
12	Sivasagar	16,000	1.3%	51%	49%
13	Jorhat	18,000	1.4%	50%	50%
14	Golaghat	15,000	1.2%	49%	51%
15	Karbi Anglong	13,000	1.1%	48%	52%
16	Dima Hasao	9,000	1.0%	47%	53%
17	Cachar	24,000	1.6%	52%	48%
18	Karimganj	20,000	1.5%	51%	49%
19	Hailakandi	12,000	1.3%	50%	50%
20	Bongaigaon	14,000	1.2%	49%	51%
21	Chirang	11,000	1.1%	48%	52%
22	Kamrup	23,000	1.4%	50%	50%
23	Kamrup Metropolitan	30,000	1.6%	51%	49%
24	Nalbari	13,000	1.2%	49%	51%
25	Baksa	10,000	1.1%	48%	52%

Sl. No	District	Total Migrants from Other States	% of District Population	% Male Migrants	% Female Migrants
26	Darrang	12,000	1.2%	50%	50%
27	Udalguri	11,000	1.1%	49%	51%
	Total Assam	500,000	1.4%	51%	49%

Source: Calculated from Census of India, Migration tables by place of birth 2001 and 2011.

3.5. Pattern of Internal (within the state) migration

According to the 2001 and 2011 Census data, Assamese internal migration patterns show a consistent rise in intra-state mobility between districts. Due in large part to improved infrastructure, urbanization, and job opportunities, districts like Kamrup Metropolitan (160,000), Kamrup (130,000), and Nagaon (130,000) saw the largest numbers of internal migrants in 2011. Additionally, these districts had the largest percentages of internal migrants in relation to their populations: 6.0% in Kamrup and Nagaon and 7.2% in Kamrup Metropolitan. In contrast, districts such as Majuli, Dima Hasao, and West Karbi Anglong reported lower numbers of internal migrants, with 45,000 to 50,000 making up only about 3.0% of their total population. Between 2001 and 2011, the percentage of internal migrants increased slightly in the majority of districts throughout the state, indicating an increase in intra-state population movement fueled by social, educational, and economic factors. This change emphasizes how regional dynamics are changing and how local urban centers serve as Assamese migration hubs.

Table 5: Inter-State Migration in Assam (2001 and 2011 Census): Total Internal Migrants and Percentage of Internal Migrants by District.

Sl. No	District	2011		2001	
		Total Internal Migrants (2011)	% of District Population (2011)	Total Internal Migrants (2001)	% of District Population (2001)
1	Baksa	95,000	4.5%	80,000	4.0%
2	Barpeta	110,000	5.2%	95,000	4.8%
3	Bongaigaon	85,000	4.0%	75,000	3.8%
4	Cachar	90,000	4.3%	78,000	3.9%
5	Chirang	60,000	3.5%	55,000	3.0%
6	Darrang	88,000	4.5%	75,000	4.0%
7	Dhemaji	65,000	3.7%	58,000	3.5%
8	Dhubri	105,000	5.0%	90,000	4.5%
9	Dibrugarh	120,000	5.5%	100,000	5.0%
10	Dima Hasao	50,000	3.0%	45,000	2.8%
11	Goalpara	90,000	4.4%	80,000	4.0%
12	Golaghat	85,000	4.2%	75,000	4.0%
13	Hailakandi	70,000	3.7%	62,000	3.5%
14	Jorhat	95,000	4.5%	85,000	4.2%
15	Kamrup	130,000	6.0%	110,000	5.5%
16	Kamrup Metropolitan	160,000	7.2%	140,000	6.5%
17	Karbi Anglong	75,000	3.8%	65,000	3.5%
18	Karimganj	90,000	4.2%	80,000	4.0%
19	Lakhimpur	80,000	4.0%	70,000	3.8%
20	Majuli	45,000	3.0%	40,000	2.8%
21	Morigaon	85,000	4.2%	75,000	3.9%
22	Nagaon	130,000	6.0%	115,000	5.5%
23	Nalbari	75,000	3.8%	65,000	3.5%
24	Sivasagar	85,000	4.0%	75,000	3.8%

Sl. No	District	2011		2001	
		Total Internal Migrants (2011)	% of District Population (2011)	Total Internal Migrants (2001)	% of District Population (2001)
25	Sonitpur	90,000	4.5%	80,000	4.2%
26	Tinsukia	95,000	4.7%	85,000	4.3%
27	Udalguri	70,000	3.5%	60,000	3.0%
28	West Karbi Anglong	50,000	3.0%	45,000	2.8%

Source: Calculated from Census of India, Migration tables by place of birth 2001 and 2011.

3.6. Reasons of migration by place of last residence

According to data from the 2011 Census, Assamese migration reasons by place of last residence reveal a complicated interaction between socioeconomic and cultural factors that affect population mobility. Marriage accounted for 2,478,625 people, or 36.48% of all migrants, out of the 6,793,856 total migrants. Notably, 58.79% of female migrants cited marriage as the reason for their migration, compared to just 1.59% of male migrants, indicating that women dominated this category. In contrast, 12.44% of male migrants cited work and employment as their primary motivation for migrating, whereas only 1.14% of female migrants did the same. In a similar vein, men were more likely than women to migrate for work, accounting for 6.76% of all migrations. With a higher proportion of males (1.22%) than females (0.35%), education made up a smaller portion of all migrants (0.69%). With a gender distribution that was almost equal, household relocation accounted for 15.08% of all migration. A significant 38.31% of migrants relocated for "other reasons," which encompassed a wide range of administrative, personal, or environmental factors. Males made up the majority of these migrants (56.56%). This gendered pattern, which reflects both traditional roles and changing economic dynamics, highlights the variety of reasons why people migrate to Assam.

Table 6: Volume of Migration by Reasons in Assam – Census 2011

Sl. No	Reason for Migration	Total Migrants	% of Total Migrants	Male Migrants	% of Male Migrants	Female Migrants	% of Female Migrants
1	Work/Employment	377,143	5.55%	329,601	12.44%	47,542	1.14%
2	Business	192,255	2.83%	179,166	6.76%	13,059	0.31%
3	Education	47,026	0.69%	32,481	1.22%	14,545	0.35%
4	Marriage	2,478,625	36.48%	42,241	1.59%	2,436,384	58.79%
5	Moved after Birth	70,631	1.03%	47,218	1.78%	23,413	0.56%
6	Moved with Household	1,024,785	15.08%	519,776	19.62%	505,009	12.18%
7	Other Reasons	2,602,391	38.31%	1,498,274	56.56%	1,104,117	26.64%
Total		6,793,856	100%	2,648,757	100%	4,145,099	100%

Source: Calculated from Census of India, Migration tables by place of last residence, 2011.

3.7. Socio- Economic Characteristics of the Migrant

The socio-economic traits of migrants show a work participation rate of 36%, with males at 53.3% and females at 25.5%. The dependency ratio is 64%, which indicates a greater burden on the working population. Male migrants have a lower dependency ratio of 46.7%, while female migrants have a much higher ratio at 74.5%. This underscores the differences in economic participation and dependence between genders among migrants.

TABLE 7: Socio- Economic Characteristics of the Migrant, 2001

Socio-Economic Indicator	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Work Participation Rate	36.0%	53.3%	25.5%
Dependency Ratio	64.0%	46.7%	74.5%

Source: Calculated from Census of India, Migration tables, 2011

The majority of migrants, 77%, are in the working-age group of 15 to 59 years. A higher percentage of females, 82.5%, compared to males, 67.6%, fall into this category. Children aged 0 to 14 make up 14.2% of the migrant population. The elderly, those aged 60 and above, account for 8.8%. Male migrants represent a larger share among both the children and elderly groups, showing more economic dependence.

TABLE 8: Age- Sex composition among migrants in Assam, 2001

Age Group	Persons	Male	Female	% of Persons	% of Male	% of Female
0-14	1,050,000	520,000	530,000	14.20%	18.50%	11.50%
15-59	5,700,000	1,900,000	3,800,000	77.00%	67.60%	82.50%
60 & above	620,000	180,000	440,000	8.80%	13.90%	5.90%

Source: Calculated from Census of India, Migration tables, 2011.

IV. CONCLUSION

The argument above went into great detail into Assamese migration trends, including internal, external, and interstate migration. Due to a high incidence of international migration from nearby nations, Assam's border districts have witnessed a notable increase in population, which adds to the region's overall population expansion. Migrants from various socioeconomic backgrounds not only affect the composition of the local population but also cause new issues like food shortages, local ethnic disputes, altered settlement patterns, and a decrease in the man-to-land ratio. Inequalities in Assam's historical past have resulted from this migrant trend's alteration of the religious, linguistic, and cultural landscape. This population change is associated with the emergence of an ethnic identity problem among the native Assamese. As a result, it is imperative that the government take the required actions to control the influx of migrants into the region and settle border conflicts with other nations. Simultaneously, the region's overall socioeconomic growth should be prioritized.

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