

FORMATIVE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH REPORT



2024

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2 ACRONYMS

AHTB	Anti-Human Trafficking Bureau
CKDnt	Chronic Kidney Disease of Non-traditional etiology
CKDu	Chronic Kidney Disease of Unknown origin
DoFE	Department of Foreign Employment
FEB	Foreign Employment Board
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDIs	In-depth Interviews
IDR	Intervention Development Research
ILO	International Labour Organization
JTUCC	Joint Trade Union Coordination Center
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
MoLESS	Ministry of Labour Employment and Social Security
MRCs	Migration Resource Centers
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NHRC	National Human Right Commission
NNSM	National Network for Safe Migration
PDOT	Pre-Departure Orientation Training
PNCC	Pravasi Nepali Coordination Committee
PRAs	Private Recruitment Agencies
UAE	United Arab Emirates

3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nepal Development Society (NeDS) conduct a formative qualitative study to understand the challenges that Nepalese migrants' workers face at each stage of the migration cycle, including pre-departure, transit, destination, and return and possible intervention that will contribute in the development of a scalable intervention model to improve the migration experience of Nepalese workers, under the ENSURE¹ project.

The study conducted 15 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with key migration stakeholders and 38 In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) with returnee migrants (Male 25, Female 13) from 20 districts of Nepal. The study actively ensured diversity in the representation of migrant experiences by employing maximum variation sampling and considering variables such as gender, occupation, ethnicity, country of destination etc. The study assess the migrant workers' experiences across different thematic areas **Pre-departure Recruitment Process**, focusing on knowledge about migration, work permits, risks, and financial preparedness, financial costs, immigration status, and health checks; **Problems Faced in the Destination Country**, addressing challenges such as job dishonor, working conditions, cultural adjustment, and legal issues; Support System in the Destination Country such as governmental, employer, and other mechanisms; and **Return Process**, examining reasons for return, reintegration challenges, financial issues, health status, and redress mechanisms. The study explored the possible intervention to improve the migration journey in each cycle of migration. Thematic data analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's framework, incorporating independent coding and triangulation techniques to enhance the validity and credibility of findings.

Most of the study participants were male (65.8%) with an average age of 33.3 years. The Janajati ethnicity was the largest group (36.8%), with 45% of participants completing secondary education. Gender-based migration patterns were evident, with females primarily migrating to

¹ ENSURE is a four-year project implemented by Nepal Development Society in collaboration with La Isla Network (USA), Johns Hopkins University (USA), and Bournemouth University (UK) with financial support from the U.S. Department of State.

Kuwait for domestic work and males predominantly migrating to Saudi Arabia and Malaysia for construction, driving, and other sectors. Key challenges identified included inadequate pre-departure preparation, such as insufficient training and health screenings, which often led to exploitation by recruitment agencies. In destination countries, migrants experienced unsafe working conditions, frequent contract violations, and limited access to healthcare, further worsening their vulnerability. Upon returning home, migrants struggled with financial instability, poor health, and the social stigma associated with their migration experiences, making successful reintegration difficult and frequently leading to re-migration.

In addition to the returnee migrants' perspectives, KIIs with stakeholders—including government officials, recruitment agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—provided a broader view of systemic issues affecting labor migrants. Key findings from the stakeholder interviews showed the lack of adequate monitoring of recruitment agencies, gaps in legal frameworks, and insufficient support services for migrants. Stakeholders also highlighted the need for comprehensive policy reforms, emphasizing strengthening bilateral agreements between countries of origin and destination and enforcing ethical recruitment practices. Furthermore, the need for capacity-building initiatives to address migrant vulnerabilities and enhance health and welfare services was frequently cited as critical to improving the migrant experience. They address key gaps in pre-departure preparation, workplace safety, healthcare access, and reintegration services.

This report emphasizes the need for a complete support system to improve the migration process for workers from Nepal. It highlights key recommendations across three stages pre-departure, destination, and post-return. At the pre-departure status, all essential information on migration, including legal rights, job responsibilities, clause of contract and destination-specific cultural norms has to be made clear and transparent. Migrants should undergo training on job-related skills and language to ensure smooth transitions abroad. At destination, greater accountability is required from manpower agencies, and it is important to guarantee access to healthcare, safe working conditions, and transparent communication. After return, it is important to offer support through skills training, livelihood opportunities, financial assistance for lost wages, and efforts to

recover debts. These recommendations aim to protect migrant workers, ensure their well-being abroad, and support their successful reintegration into Nepal, fostering long-term development for individuals and communities. These collective actions shall empower Nepali labor migrants, reduce their vulnerability to exploitation, and significantly improve their quality of life, contributing to a more sustainable migration framework.

1 BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Between 2019/20 and 2021/22, more than 1.1 million labour approvals were issued by the Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE) under the Ministry of Labour Employment and Social Security (MoLESS) [1]. Labour Migration has been an integral aspect of the socio-economic status of our country. The Nepali economy is dependent on remittances sent by Nepali youths from abroad. According to April 2023 poverty indicators, the unemployment rate in Nepal is 10.7%. Labour migration has been a common livelihood strategy for low-income households over the recent decades. The World Bank estimates for 2023 show that remittances contributed to 26.2% of Nepal's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) [2].

Despite their contribution to building the economy of the nation, labour migrants are one of the most vulnerable populations exposed to various treacherous conditions such as deception, forced labour, wage theft, poor working conditions and health outcomes etc. The human and labour rights abuses of Nepali labour migrants are widespread. They often face significant challenges at every stage of their journey, during departure, transit, upon arrival in destination countries, and even after returning home. Unfortunately, many endure exploitation and abuse, particularly during the recruitment process. Private recruitment agencies and their agents frequently take advantage of aspiring migrant workers, cheating and extorting them without fear of consequences. Amnesty International's report, "Turning People into Profits," highlights the heavy financial burden faced by Nepali migrant workers. On average, they pay NPR 137,000 (US\$ 1000 as of January 5, 2025) for recruitment—a cost that exceeds the average annual income of a Nepali household. To afford this, many are forced to take out loans with exorbitant interest rates, sometimes as high as 60% per year [3]. This traps them in a cycle of debt and exploitation, making it even harder for them to escape financial hardship.

In 2018-2019 alone, an estimated 35,000 Nepalis were victims of trafficking [4]. Deceptive recruitment practices, contract substitution, lack of freedom of movement, withholding of wages and strenuous labour are common characteristics of trafficking and can contribute to poor health

outcomes including illness, injury, and death. Health conditions such as chronic kidney disease of unknown origin (CKDu) related to heat stress is one of many health outcomes experienced by migrants. Nearly 31% of patients in two large dialysis centers based in Kathmandu are returnee labour migrants, and 50% of these were less than 40 years old. Heat exhaustion, extreme workload, and lack of breaks (rest period) and inadequate hydration are considered as the risk factors for CKDu, and construction workers are mostly exposed to these risk factors [5]. Between 2.1 million-3.5 million Nepalis work abroad, representing 7-12% of the population of the country [6-8]. According to the ILO, migrant workers are more than three times more likely to be in forced labour than non-migrant adult workers [9].

On the other hand, many migrant workers lack access to effective grievance mechanisms, forcing them to endure work rights violations and abuses in silence. Most labour migrants in the destination country are employed in dirty, dangerous, and demanding (3Ds) jobs, where they often face exploitation and abuse. The kafala, or sponsorship system in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries gives private citizens and companies almost total control over the migrant worker's employment and immigration status. This system has become increasingly controversial due to its predisposition to trafficking because of the lack of freedom of movement [10]. On average, 15 Nepali workers die every month in various countries [11], despite these individuals having passed mandatory medical tests and being in good health before departure. Families of the deceased are frequently denied compensation, as many of these deaths are labelled as "natural causes" or vaguely attributed to cardiac arrests [12].

Despite the family having reaped the economic benefits of the migration, there are lots of social and emotional costs associated with it. Migrants and their families face numerous hardships. Social issues like broken relationships, accusations of adultery and negative impact on children and the elderly have not been addressed adequately [13].

Labour migration from Nepal is still dominated by men with women migrant workers accounting for less than 10 per cent of the total labour approvals issued in 2021/22. However, this could be an underestimation for women migrant workers, since a lot of them going for domestic work take

irregular routes using visit visas or third-country routes (e.g., India, UAE) being undocumented because of the restrictions from the Nepal government [13]. This leads to further exploitation and makes them more vulnerable to trafficking.

The Nepal government has established the structural and legal framework for migration issues that includes the MoLESS, DoFE, the Foreign Employment Board (FEB), private recruitment agencies (PRAs) and pre-departure orientation training providers [1]. Unfortunately, there are gaps in the framework allowing migrants to travel abroad without the knowledge to mitigate being a trafficking victim with little assessment of the compliance with these efforts or their efficacy.

1.2 Rationale

There is a paucity of research to inform the creation of needed and effective interventions. This absence can lead to ineffective programming and even harm when programs are created untested against data. Intervention development research addresses this by scientifically identifying the exposures and risks that can be changed in a complex system. By looking into the socioeconomic and health exposures that prompt migration, the selection of the channel used, the experience in destination countries and their impact on the health and socioeconomic condition of individuals, households, and communities while abroad and upon return, we can develop interventions at different stage of the migration journey.

1.3 Objectives

The overall aim of the research is to develop a scalable intervention that can reduce harm to migrants and their communities by assessing the challenges and problems they face when choosing to migrate abroad; the recruitment channels they select and the conditions they face while working abroad and the potential consequences of migration, including the risk of trafficking. This formative qualitative research was conducted to answer the question of the challenges they face in the whole cycle of migration and ways to reduce the risk of trafficking, and labour exploitation and improve the health outcomes of returnee labour migrant.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

As of Nepal's Multilevel Poverty Index (MPI) estimation in 2022, 20.1% of Nepal's population (about 5.96 million people) were considered multi-dimensionally poor, and another 20.2% (around 6.01 million people) were vulnerable to multidimensional poverty [15]. Similarly, Nepal's unemployment rate climbed up from 11.4% in 2017-18 to 12.6% in 2022-23, a 1.2% increase over five years. Youth unemployment is a bigger concern, rising from 7.3% in 1995-96 to 22.7% in 2022-23, highlighting challenges in finding employment opportunities for young people [16]. Overall, in the country, the unemployment rate for the poor is 17.3 %, substantially higher than the 11.7 % for the non-poor [16].

Labour migration has been a key livelihood strategy for low-income households in Nepal. According to the World Bank's 2023 estimates, remittances contributed 26.2% of Nepal's GDP, making it one of the top remittance-receiving countries globally [2]. In FY24, remittance inflows accounted for over a quarter of the GDP [17]. The percentage of households receiving remittances has increased dramatically from 23.4% in 1995/96 to 76.8% in 2022/23, indicating a significant rise in the number of households relying on remittances.

According to the 2021 Census, a total of 2.2 million Nepali is abroad, out of which 81.28% are male and 18.72% are female [18]. In the past years, more and more labour permits have been issued and as of 2020, DoFE has approved labour migration to 110 countries. Labour migration is a phenomenon dominated by men with women accounting for less than 6 percent of the total number of new labour approvals issued between 2008/09 and 2021/22 [1]. However, perhaps indicating what the trend is likely to be in the future, in the three years, 2019/20–2021/22, the proportion of women has consistently been close to 10 percent. That, of course, does not take into account a significant number of migrant workers who would have migrated through irregular channels and thus remain undocumented. As a result, a substantial proportion of migrant workers, particularly women migrant workers, are not included in the Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE) data. The six GCC countries—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—and Malaysia host the vast majority of

Nepali migrant workers. Since 2013/14, these seven countries have consistently employed over 80% of Nepali migrant workers and generated the highest demand for Nepali labour [1].

2.1 Pre-departure Problems

The growing proportion of labour migrants from Nepal has driven a significant rise in recruitment agencies. By 2023, approximately 400,000 labour approvals were processed through PRAs which now number 867 across the country [19]. While the Foreign Employment Act mandates the DoFE to oversee and regulate these agencies, its effectiveness in fulfilling this responsibility remains limited [3].

As of mid-March, of the fiscal year 2023-24, as many as 5,881 complaints have been filed in DoFE. Out of that, 752 complaints have been filed against manpower companies while 5,129 have been filed against the agents or middlemen. Every year the complaints are increasing against PRAs against their unethical and fraudulent recruitment practices [20].

The government introduced the ‘free-visa, free-ticket’ policy in 2015 with the aim of reducing the formal cost of migration significantly, the policy has stipulated that employers have to cover migrant workers’ visa and flight costs to the GCC countries and Malaysia. Furthermore, the policy requires recruitment agencies to charge up to a maximum of NPR 10,000 for their services while other costs related to medical check-up, insurance and pre-departure orientation are to be borne by the workers themselves [3]. The “Free Visa, Free Ticket” Policy does not address the government’s lack of robust screening of recruitment businesses, such as monitoring of record-keeping, workplace practices, or financial and banking transactions [3]. Despite the government attempts to reduce the recruitment costs of GCC countries, PRAs were still found to be charging hefty amounts from the workers in the name of recruitment costs, travel costs etc. [21]. Outside of implementation issues, potential migrants lack information and awareness about how the policy operates. The office of the Auditor General (2075) has claimed that the manpower company has been taking more money from foreign labour migrants in addition to the prescribed fee. Manpower companies have strongly opposed the policy since the beginning. Until now, they

are continuously ignoring and charging huge amounts to foreign labour migrants by giving fake bills in the amount of Rs.10,000 [21].

Amnesty International (2017) estimated that two-thirds of foreign labour migrants paid a huge amount of money for joining jobs. Similarly, an International Labour Organization (ILO) report documented that Nepali workers were found to be paying over NPR 100,000 in recruitment fees and associated costs for migration to Malaysia and the GCC [22]. Recruitment agencies, despite charging huge fees, deliberately provide migrant workers with a receipt that states a lower amount, or the amount legally permitted [23].

It has been over a decade and a half since the pre-departure orientation program was first introduced in Nepal. While no systematic assessment of the effectiveness of the program has been done, available evidence indicates that it has substantial limitations in protecting migrant workers [24]. Training under the Pre-Departure Orientation Training (PDOT) program is provided by private institutions registered with the DoFE, 2022. These institutions are monitored by the FEB, which designs the PDOT curriculum (GoN 2007) and ensures the quality of training. The 12 hours (2 days) PDOT course has been in use since 2021 and is tailored to educate migrants workers with country-specific information (FEB 2021).

However, the PDOT does not cover the undocumented migrants [24]. Also, studies have found that the proportion of female migrants through irregular channels is disproportionately high. The primary reason women choose the unofficial path is to get over travel restrictions that prevent them from working as domestic workers [25]. Poudel and colleagues [25] reported that the majority of migrant workers in their study said they did not attend the mandatory pre-departure training and instead submitted a forged attendance certificate prepared by recruitment agencies.

More concerning, pre-departure information at Migration Resource Centers (MRCs) is given more "forcefully" than voluntarily because potential migrants typically attend these sessions merely to fulfill a passport need and out of no desire [24]. And those who attended the training

found the training was not always relevant or helpful. There are concerns regarding the appropriateness of the training modality and content, and competency of the trainers [24]. Scheduling is one aspect of the PDOT program that has been criticized. Prospective migrant workers receive training after obtaining visas but prior to applying for a labour permit through DoFE (FEB 2019). This means that it comes toward the end of the pre-departure phase and, as a result, the workers do not receive information on key issues including their rights and entitlements by PRAs on time so as to be able to avoid some of the risks they face during this stage of their preparation [24].

Further, the involvement of licensed training centers in malpractices, such as issuing training certificates to migrant workers without conducting the training program, is well known (Mandal 2021). They are reported to issue fake certificates of completion of training to migrant workers in collusion with recruitment agencies [26]. Another recent survey conducted among 1593 migrant workers showed that 20.8% of them did not attend PDOT training at all [23].

Participants expressed concerns towards the agencies that recruit and deploy the migrant workers. They blamed the agencies for sending workers that are medically unfit for work, causing unnecessary burden to both migrants and their families. Some of the recruitment agencies are sending workers with failed medical test reports. When they perform those tests again in the Gulf or Malaysia and if they fail over there, they are bound to return back to Nepal [25].

According to the Foreign Employment Act, every migrant worker must have a written employment contract with their employer in their country of destination that outlines "the terms and conditions of service and remuneration of the worker and the terms to be observed by both parties" [27]. As reported by the migrant workers to Recruitment Advisor in a survey, 19.5% of migrant workers reported not receiving an employment contract, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and unclear terms of employment. Among those, 5% indicated that the contract was in a language they could not understand, making it difficult to verify their rights and responsibilities [23]. In 90% of the cases documented by Amnesty International, migrant workers

had experienced some kind of deception regarding the terms and conditions of their international employment. In order to restrict migrant workers' freedom of movement and compel them to perform tasks for which they had not originally agreed, recruitment agencies frequently employed coercive tactics, such as making false promises regarding pay and working conditions [3]. The principal mechanisms of coercion applied by recruitment agents and agencies were.

- Confiscating migrant workers' passports during recruitment processes.
- Refusing to provide migrant workers contracts or providing these contracts only at the very point of departure.
- Reporting migrant workers' calls for help to the foreign employers accused of abusing and exploiting them.

Furthermore, 20% of returnees interviewed by Amnesty International had quit their jobs and thus deprived their legal right to stay in the country, making them undocumented while trying to flee forced labour. As a result, these workers also were at risk of immigration detention and subject to exploitation. Authorities on both sides of the border have blamed victims for breaking immigration rules and regulations, rather than acknowledging the connection between fraudulent recruitment, labour exploitation, and illegal migrant status [3].

2.2 Problems In Destination Countries

Workplace stressors are those controlled and imposed by the employer. These included contract discrepancies, document confiscation, restrictions of movement particularly in relation to participant's desire to return to Nepal. Workplace stressors encountered included poor or hazardous working conditions, and at the onset, not being noticed arrival at the airport [28]. Another study suggests the continued high prevalence of the occupational health hazards that Nepali migrant workers face, as well as an understanding of the multifaceted challenges that come with their job [29]. Adhikary et al. [30] reported that around one-fifth (17%) of migrant workers had experienced work-related accidents in Malaysia, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. Men reported heavy workloads including difficult work, long working hours, and no days off. Working outdoors, digging roads and other construction work, particularly in the Gulf States,

exposed migrants to immense heat. Those who worked as labourers did not have fixed roles but would be called upon for any number of tasks. Others were actually employed by supply companies that function as middlemen, providing labour to other companies [28]. Several participants reported exposures to chemicals or dust from production of cotton and paper products, due to insufficient or poor-quality protective gear, to machine malfunctions that resulted in injuries. Several men who worked as machine operators had occupational accidents [25]. Poor and overcrowded accommodation and facilities such as rooms with more workers than beds or mattresses were common [28]. Security of both the accommodation and the wider town in which men lived and worked were highlighted in a number of interviews. Many reported thefts in the accommodation, ranging from losing personal belongings such as cash and mobile phones, to communal items such as gas canisters for cooking, as well as physical conflicts within the accommodation. Additionally, many described encounters with locals in town as discriminatory, hostile, and unsafe. This resulted in some reportedly not going out on their days off, or not going out alone, for fear of being robbed. Those who had to travel to and from work without company transportation were fearful of attacks even during the day time [28].

The most common stressors were discrepancies between the agreements signed in Nepal and the actual situation in the destination country. Respondents reported they were offered new contracts to sign that had worse terms and circumstances regarding employment, pay, deductions, working hours, and length of the contract. The contract signed in the destination country was deemed legal [28]. Passports and contracts signed in Nepal were almost always picked up by the employer soon after the employee arrived at the workplace.

Some migrants received a photocopy of their passport, while others received their official identification card only after working for several months. An official form of identification is often required if the police stopped migrants. Not having it or having only a photocopy can be problematic. Passports would only be returned when participants completed their contract. Some men explained that employers used these tactics to prevent them from running away or seeking work elsewhere [28].

Migrant workers reported working outdoors in the open in extreme heat but living in air-conditioned indoor settings with cold temperatures. Participants stated that working and living in these extreme temperature variations was putting a huge strain on their physical health. Another issue is temperature where outside is too hot or 50–55° and inside is cold because of air conditioning use. Some died as they were unable to adjust the temperature difference, they were found dead in their sleep [25]. Another report highlighted health issues among Nepalese migrant workers in the GCC countries and Malaysia, namely those centered on occupational, mental, and sexual health of migrants, and infectious disease, together with health-related issues facing female labour migrants [31].

According to a study to assess the health and mental well-being of Nepalese male construction and factory workers employed in Malaysia, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia; over 13 per cent reported poor or extremely poor health and nearly a quarter reported mental health issues. Whilst age and exercise were significantly associated with health status, poor work environments and perceived health risks were associated with both mental health issues and health status [32]. They reported suffering from loneliness and disorientation, mainly due to their inability to understand the local language [25].

According to a recent report, returned migrant workers account for more than a quarter of all end stage renal disease patients receiving maintenance hemodialysis in Kathmandu. These workers were significantly younger. Exposure to dust, chemicals, aerosols, daily heat, and exhaustion was very commonly reported. These findings implicate heat and environmental exposures as potential risk factors for chronic kidney disease of non-traditional etiology (CKDnt) [33].

Another study reported that 6.5% of patients were migrant workers who had been to foreign countries for work and returned home; the foreign countries were mostly Gulf countries. The mean age in this group of patients was 36.5 years [34]. Participants mentioned that they had limited access to drinking water. Dehydration caused by working in high temperatures was thought to be related to kidney failures in workers [25].

Nepalese female returnee migrant workers reported a prevalence of workplace abuse, torture or maltreatment at the workplace, and physical harm at 37%, 31%, and 11%, respectively [35]. The migrants have been facing sexual violence and the subsequent consequences, including unintended pregnancies. Even male workers had faced sexual exploitation and group sexual abuse. Many females had to return back to Nepal due to unwanted pregnancies [25].

Stranded at the Airport for many men; the stress began immediately upon arrival in the destination country. Workers were not being collected at the airport, or having to wait for up to two days, during which time some encountered problems with the security staff at the airport [25].

Participants reported that the insurance scheme provided by their employer was limited to basic coverage for minor health problems but not for major treatments. If workers die outside of the workplace, it is declared as a ‘natural death’ and insurance companies do not pay compensation. We do not have a system to further explore the reason behind the deaths of Nepali workers. Company will not have additional system to verify the deaths [25]. Language difficulty was mentioned as one of the key barriers in seeking healthcare in destination countries. Participants repeatedly stated that workers were unable to understand the local language and were reluctant to visit health facilities [25].

2.3 Returnee Migrant Status and Policies

There are provisions highlighted for reintegration and mobilization of capital, skills, technology, and experiences from returned migrant workers in the constitution of Nepal 2015, FEA 2007, and Foreign Employment Policy. The Fifteenth Periodic Plan (2019/20–2023/24) has also accorded priority to returnee reintegration. In addition, the Local Governance Operations Act, 2017 mandates local governments to conduct training and reintegration of returnees. Various other sectoral policies—such as the Agricultural Policy, 2004, the Industrial Policy 2011 and the National Youth Policy, 2015—also include provisions relating to reintegration of returnee migrant workers in Nepal. As a party to the GCM, Nepal is expected to invest resources in the reintegration of returnee migrants and take measures towards their reintegration into society

through ‘skills recognition.’ Returnee migrant workers can benefit from three different kinds of reintegration programs under the Reintegration Program (Operation and Management) Directives for Returnee Migrant Workers, 2022 socialization of returnees (family and social reunion, psychosocial counselling, leadership development and social networking); employment (skill testing and certification, skill training, modernization of traditional occupations); and entrepreneurial development (aimed at increasing financial literacy and access, self-employment generating programs, providing grants and concessional loans in coordination with local and provincial governments, facilitating access to market). Ongoing programs targeting returnee labour migrants are Safer Migration Project (SaMi), Reintegration of Returnee Migrant Workers (ReMi) Project, Dakchyata Project, Prime Minister Employment Program and many more [1].

Nepal welcomed back 183,875 returnees in 2020/21, and 450,897 in 2021/22.⁸² However, their sustainable reintegration in the local labour market has remained a challenge. According to the Nepal Labour Force Survey (NLFS) 2017/18, 42.8% of the returnee migrant workers are employed, 13.4% are unemployed and 43.8% are outside the labour force (CBS 2019).

According to a study by the Pravasi Nepali Coordination Committee (PNCC), their reintegration situation after returning to Nepal is not effective. About 37.6% of migrant workers who returned to Nepal from foreign employment are engaged in subsistence agriculture, while 16.5% are unemployed. This reflects the inability of workers to find high-paying jobs upon return, the mismatch of their skills and knowledge in the labour market, and the potential lack of decent work opportunities [36]. Female migrants are stigmatized by the society upon their return home society’s perception is different towards unmarried girls who return from foreign employment. They are blamed and questioned about their virginity and fertility. People perceive that they will not be able to have children [25].

The lack of a reintegration policy for survivors of human trafficking, lack of fund allocation from the government for comprehensive shelter package, lack of sustainable resources for shelters, bleak implementation status of existing laws and legal provisions, passiveness of anti-trafficking committees, etc. are found to be major hindering factors for successful reintegration of survivors of human trafficking [37].

2.4 Gaps in existing literature

The studies have shown that women appear to be largely uninformed about government regulations relating to labour migration. A major gap in information interventions in Nepal is the exclusion of the most vulnerable of all migrants, particularly women [24]. Also, this qualitative research seemed necessary due to the lack of rigorous, peer-reviewed research identifying effective, scalable interventions; systemic mapping of the problem; adequate monitoring and evaluation; and insufficient survivor engagement. There is a lack of research with which to inform the creation of needed and effective interventions. This absence can lead to ineffective programming and even harm when programs are created untested against data. This Intervention Development Research (IDR) addresses this by scientifically identifying the exposures and risks that can be changed in a complex system. Through looking into the socioeconomic and health exposures that prompt migration, the selection of the channel used, the experience in destination countries and their impact on the health and socioeconomic condition for individuals, households, and communities while abroad and upon return, we can develop interventions at specific inflection points.

3 METHODS AND MATERIALS

3.1 Study Design

Formative qualitative research was conducted among the returnee migrant workers. This phase of the research involved (i) key informant interviews (KIIs) with government officials, recruitment agencies, agents/intermediaries, social service providers, and health assessment centers, and (ii) in-depth interviews (IDIs) among the labour migrants who had returned to Nepal within 1 year from the date of interview.

3.2 Study Participants

For IDIs, returnee labour migrants who sought assistance from either of the two NGOs working in the sector of labour migration; PNCC and POURAKHI Nepal were included. The migrants seeking assistance in these organizations are mostly exploited and trafficked. Inclusion criteria for IDIs involved migrants aged 18 to 65 years who had returned from abroad within the last twelve months and had worked abroad mostly in GCC, Malaysia or other parts of Asia for any length of time. The participants for the KIIs included stakeholders working in the sector of migration such as recruitment agencies, agents/intermediaries, National Network for Safe Migration (NNSM), Joint Trade Union Coordination Center (JTUCC), health ministry, civil society organizations, medical centers, labour attaches, Nepal police (Anti-Human Trafficking Bureau), orientation centers, National Human Right Commission (NHRC) and Migration and Human Rights Lawyer .

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

A total of fifty-three participants were interviewed (15 KIIs and 38 IDIs). The interview took place between September 8 and September 29, 2024. Convenience as well as snowball sampling techniques were employed to identify potential IDI participants. Field visit was conducted for the recruitment of the study participants. Support from the PNCC and POURAKHI Nepal (our collaborators in Nepal) also facilitated to identify and recruit the study participants both for the IDIs and KIIs. The potential list of for KIIs was prepared and contacted via phone and email for

the availability for interview. To capture rich data, we included diverse participants in our interviews. We ensured maximum variation in terms of gender, country of destination, working sectors, number of years of experience, level of education and job role within the organization.

3.4 Data Collection Tools and Procedure

The interview guides for IDIs and KIIs were employed for data collection. The tools were designed to capture basic socio-demographic information along with their working sectors, problem and challenges faced by the labour migrants in the whole cycle of migration and potential intervention solution/programs that could be employed to ameliorate their problem. A common interview guide for the different key informants was developed that basically captured their professional experiences regarding migration and human trafficking and thematic working sectors etc. The qualitative expert accordingly interviewed the key informants based on their thematic expertise to collect the rich and varied experience. The tool was also designed to capture information on problems and challenges faced by the labour migrant during the whole cycle of migration and the potential intervention solution, but through their perspective of thematic expertise. The guides were first developed in English and then translated to Nepali language. The translation of tools into the Nepali language was also verified by the expert. The tools were pre-tested with three labour migrants to check the linguistic and cultural appropriateness, intelligibility, and face validity.

The qualitative expert and independent consultant were oriented on the objectives of the research and tools developed for the research. The qualitative expert along with the program staff conducted interviews with the labour migrants and key informants. All the interviews were audio-recorded with participants' written approval.

3.5 Data Management and Analysis

After completion of data collection for both IDI and KII, we followed a series of steps before thematic analysis. The first step involved transcribing verbatim of all the audio-recordings in Nepali and translating them into English language. Independent consultants performed the

transcription and translation. The quality of the translation was verified by the qualitative expert along with program staff of the research project. Braun and Clarke's six steps was followed for thematic analysis [14]. A priori themes were developed based on the overall objective of the research, with new themes emerging from data added to the analysis. In this regard, a codebook was developed in discussions with the study team members. Both a priori and emergent codes were listed in the codebook a priori codes were derived from the study objectives and study guides; emergent codes were identified through reading the transcripts, debriefing and reflections. Each transcript was read and coded independently by two team members. Quotes for each code were examined, and matrices and memos were used to organize and examine the information for patterns and develop emerging interpretations. Rigor and data credibility were ensured through data triangulation between research methods and type of respondent.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

Before conducting the interviews, written informed consent was obtained from all participants. The study's objectives were clearly explained to them, ensuring they fully understood. Participants' confidentiality and privacy were carefully protected throughout the process. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Nepal Health Research Council (Ref No. 32) and the Institutional Review Board of Johns Hopkins University.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC

4.1.1 TOTAL STUDY PARTICIPANTS IN THE ANALYSIS

Initially, 75 study participants were planned to be interviewed (50 IDIs and 25 KIIs) based on the research proposal for the qualitative data collection. However, theoretical saturation was assumed to be achieved after conducting 38 IDIs. We conducted 15 KIIs with a wide range of stakeholders working directly or indirectly in the sector of labour migration. Hence, 53 interviews were included in the analysis.

4.1.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Among the 38 returnee labour migrants who participated in IDIs, the majority were males (65.8%), while 34.2% were females (Table 1). The average age of the participants was 33.3 years (SD = 7.1), with a median age of 33.5 years, ranging from 22 to 55 years.

In terms of ethnicity and caste distribution, Janajatis comprised the largest group (36.8%), followed by Terai/Madhese/Other castes (29.0%). Brahmin/Chhetri and Dalit groups each accounted for 15.8%, while Newars made up 2.6%.

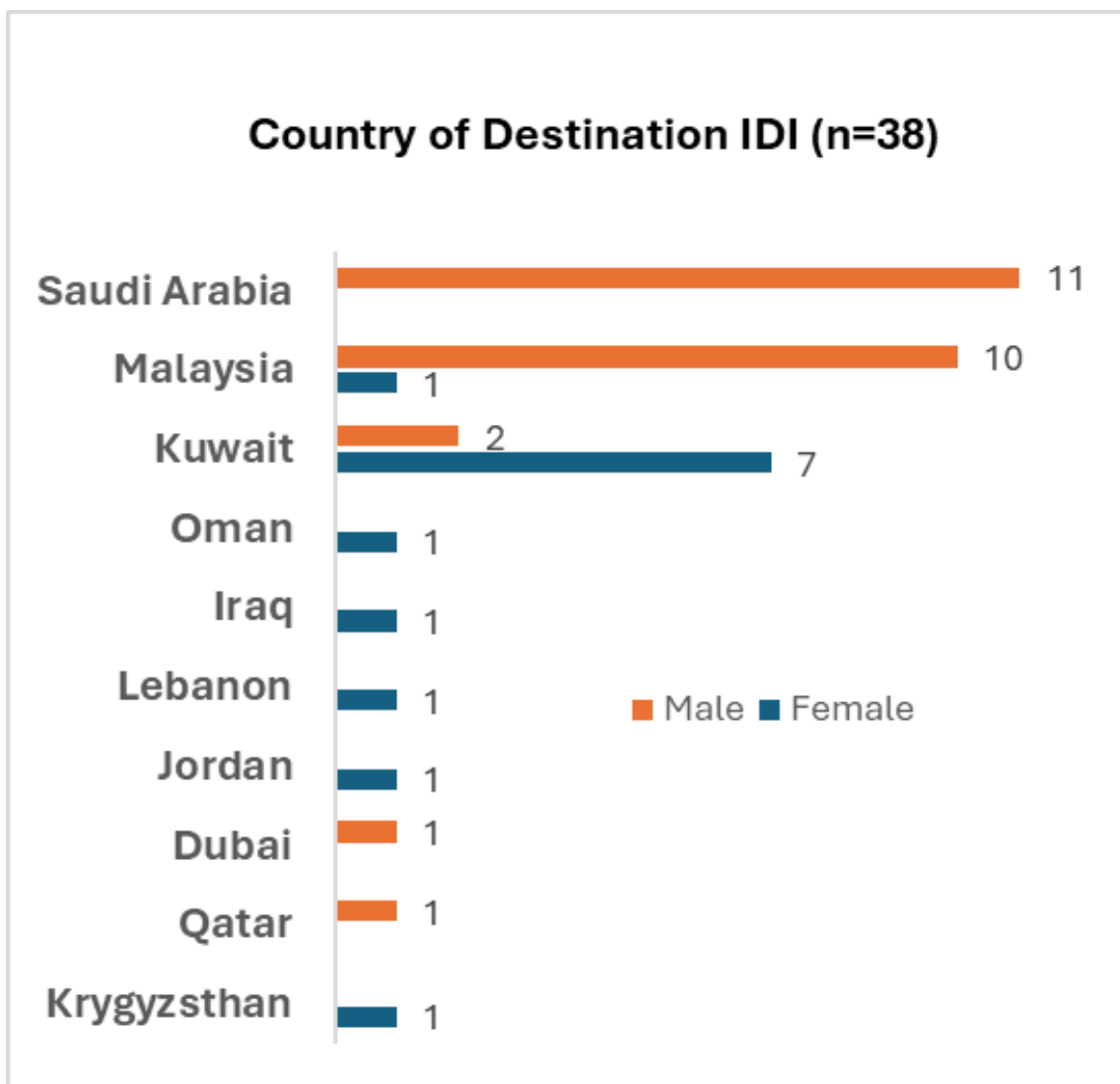
Regarding educational status, nearly 44.7% of the participants had attained secondary-level education, and 26.3% were literate without formal education. A smaller proportion had completed primary education (13.2%), while only 2.6% had attained higher secondary or bachelor-level education. Notably, 10.5% of the participants were illiterate.

The majority of our participants were married (79.0%). A smaller proportion reported living separately from their spouse (10.5%), being unmarried (5.3%), divorced (2.6%), or widowed (2.6%).

Among the 38 returnee labour migrants, destination patterns varied by sex. For female migrants ($n=13$), Kuwait was the most common destination, accounting for 53.9% of female participants. Other countries of destination for females included Iraq, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Malaysia,

and Oman, each representing 7.7% of the female participants. Notably, no females reported migrating to United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, or Saudi Arabia.

For male migrants ($n=25$), Saudi Arabia and Malaysia were the primary destinations, accounting for 44.0% and 40% of male participants. Other countries of destination for males included Kuwait (8.0%), UAE (4.0%) and Qatar (4.0%). No male participants reported migrating to Iraq, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, or Oman.



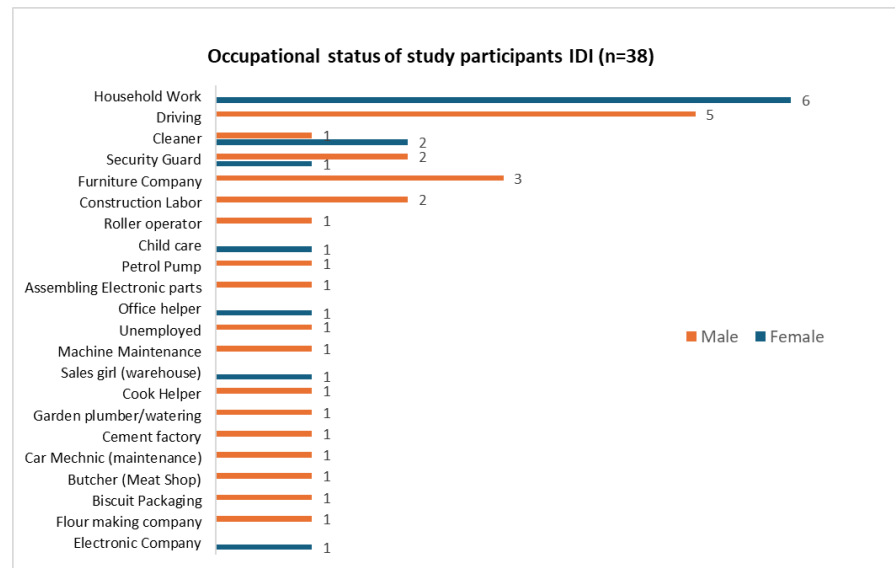
Overall, Malaysia (28.9%), Saudi Arabia (28.9%) and Kuwait (23.7%) were the most frequently reported destinations. Other remaining destinations had smaller proportions of migrants. This

distribution highlights notable gendered preferences in migration destinations, with females predominantly traveling to Kuwait and males to Saudi Arabia and Malaysia.

Table 1 Characteristics of study participants invited for in-depth interview (n=38)

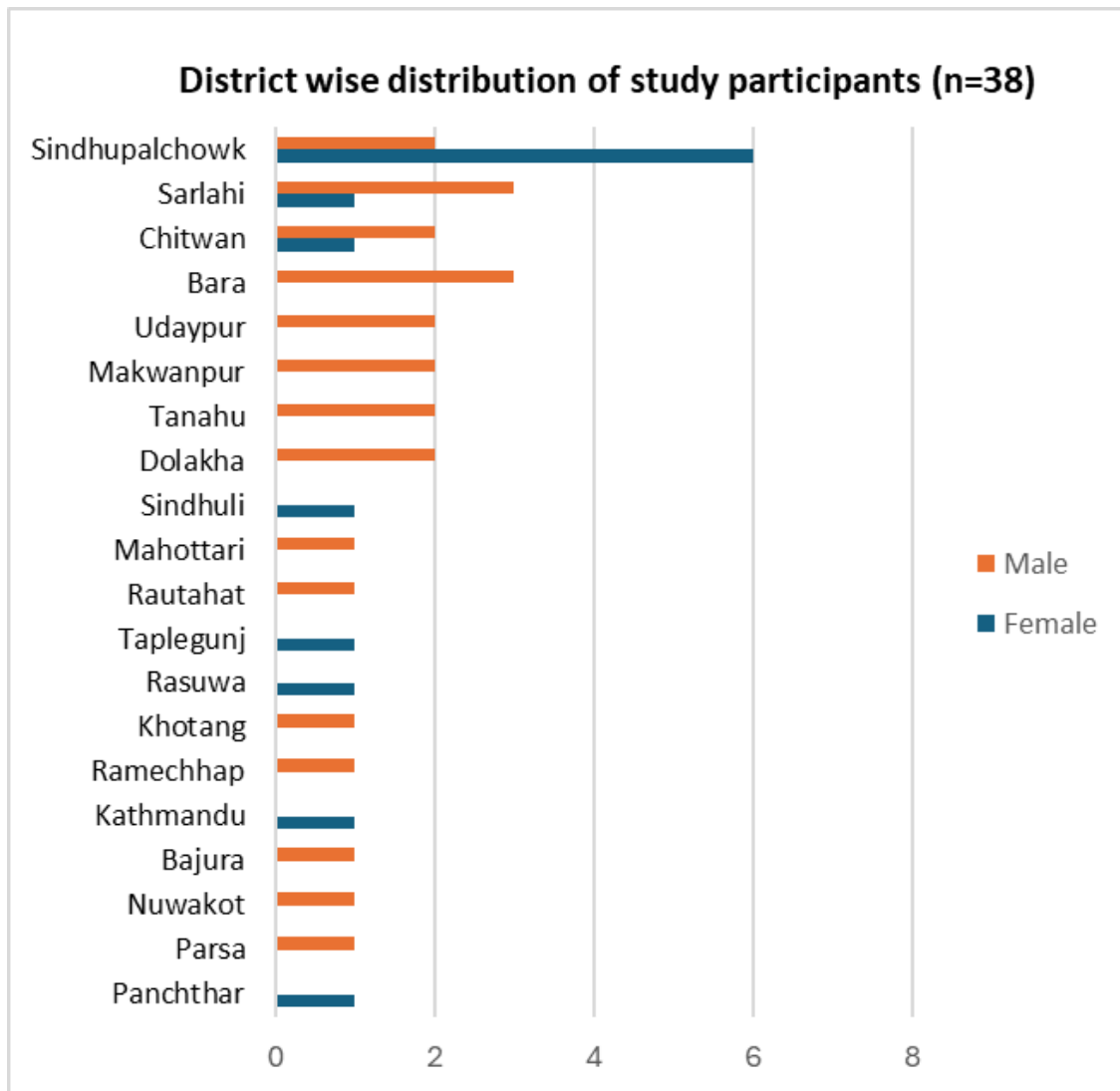
Background Characteristics	Number (N=38)	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	25	65.8
Female	13	34.2
Age (years) Mean (SD)	33.3 (7.1)	
Median (Range)	33.5 (22, 55)	
Ethnicity/Caste		
Janajati	14	36.8
Terai/Madhese/Other Caste	11	29.0
Brahmin/Chhetri	6	15.8
Dalit	6	15.8
Newar	1	2.6
Educational Status		
Illiterate	4	10.5
Literate	10	26.3
Primary Level	5	13.2
Secondary Level	17	44.7
Higher Secondary	1	2.6
Bachelor	1	2.6
Marital Status		
Married	30	79.0
Living Separately	4	10.5
Unmarried	2	5.3
Divorced	1	2.6
Widowed	1	2.6

The occupational patterns among returnee labour migrants differed by gender. Female participants predominantly worked in household roles (46.2%), cleaning jobs (15.4%), and childcare (7.7%), with no engagement in roles such as construction or driving. Male participants reported a broader range of occupations, with driving being the most common (20.0%), followed by furniture making (12.0%) and construction work (8.0%). Other roles included assembly work, biscuit production, and car mechanical work (each 4.0%).

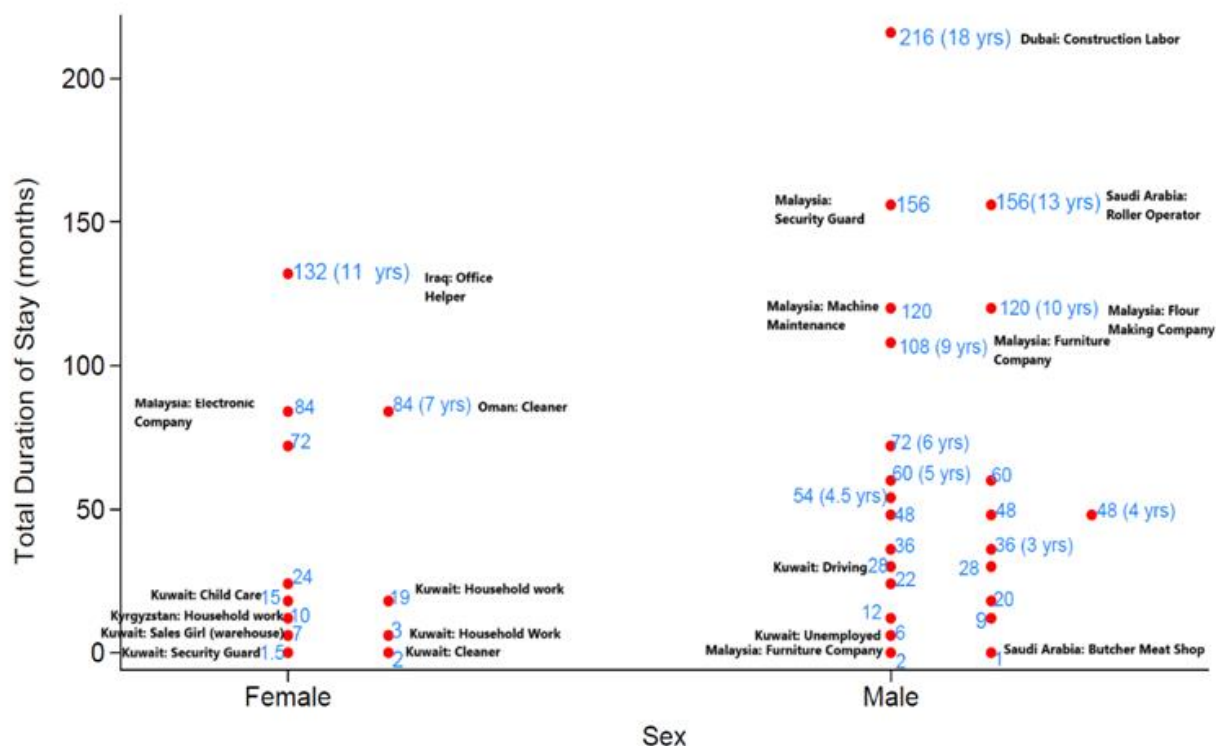


Among females ($n=13$), the majority were from Sindhupalchowk (46.2%), with smaller proportions from Chitwan, Panchthar, Sarlahi, Rasuwa, and Taplejung (7.7% each). Male participants ($n=25$) were distributed across a wider range of districts, with Bara (12.0%) and Sarlahi (12.0%) being the most common places of origin. Other districts with male representation included Chitwan, Dolakha, Makwanpur, and Udaypur (8.0% each). This district-wise distribution highlights notable regional differences, with females primarily originating from Sindhupalchowk and males from diverse districts, mainly from the Terai region.

The duration of stay at the destination country varied significantly between males and females and across different types of occupations/countries of destination.



Female migrants had shorter durations of stay compared to males, with most working in Kuwait in a household work (3–19 months), childcare (15 months), and as security guard (1.5 month) or salesgirls (7 month). Longer stays were observed for some female working in countries like Malaysia (electronic company) and Iraq (office helper), with durations of 7 years and 11 years, respectively.



Male migrants generally stayed abroad for longer durations, with jobs in UAE (Dubai) (construction labour) showing the longest stay of about 18 years. Shorter durations were observed for jobs like driving in Kuwait (28 months or ~2.5 years) and various roles in Saudi Arabia (butcher) or Malaysia (furniture company), ranging between 6 and 60 months (0.5–5 years).

4.1.3 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW

A total of 15 key informants from various professional backgrounds working in the labour migration sector were interviewed. Their professional experience ranged from 2 to 34 years. Key informants from various organization such as Ministry of Health and Population, Anti-Human Trafficking Bureau (AHTB) Nepal Police, recruitment agencies, agent/intermediaries, health assessment centers, labour attaché, human right commission etc. The recruitment of different key informants ensured rich and varied information.

4.2 IDI Findings

Labour migration has been a significant aspect of Nepalese society for decades, and it continues to play a vital role in the country's economy. In recent years, Nepal has seen an increase in the number of people migrating for work, particularly to countries in the GCC, Malaysia, and other parts of Asia. These countries have been key destinations for Nepalese migrant workers; men primarily in construction, driving, roller/machine operator, security guard, factory works and other heavy manual work-related services while female in domestic works and service sectors. Due to the availability of jobs with relatively higher wages, many Nepalese workers migrate to the Gulf countries. However, in the name of labour migration Nepalese youths especially women have been trafficked to the countries like Kuwait, Dubai, Malaysia, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and many other countries. Males usually become victims when they flee contracted employer due to work-related circumstances resulting in undocumented status.

The findings indicate that labour migrants are highly vulnerable to various occupational health hazards and risks as they are often untrained, physically unfit for work (due to being too young or weak), and pressured to work long hours. Despite negative consequences many young individuals are drawn to migration due to the economic hardships within their families and the lack of employment opportunities in the country.

4.3 Reason for Migration or Re-migration

Economic hardship was the primary driver for migration. Almost all of returnee migrants reported that their family economic struggles motivated them to seek foreign employment. Those employed previously in Nepal shared that their monthly salary could barely cover the basic household expenses, leaving no money to save for their children's education. In addition, exorbitant healthcare costs and consequent debt were also the trigger for migration and remigration.

"I couldn't afford for my children in a good school here, so I thought I should go abroad, maybe suffer for a couple of years. My sister had gone abroad and got a good job, and my aunt also suggested it would be good."

-Female, Domestic Worker in Kuwait

“My mother-in-law fell off a tree, and she is still handicapped. We did her treatment, and during the treatment, we had to bear very many expenses. After so much expenses, my husband said that he would go to foreign. He was rejected in the medical. We had no option. The creditors always used to come for the money. After working in Malaysia, I paid back my loan but had more loans for my husband's lung cancer treatment.”

- Female, Factory Worker in Malaysia

-

Female migrants highlighted the lack of support from their husbands and insufficient household income as key factors driving their decision to migrate. Some female migrants were living separately with kids from their husbands. Many participants cited the need to pay off existing debts as a major reason for migrating.

"I have a 1.2 million rupees debt to pay, which was arranged for my daughter's weddings. I am the only breadwinner of the family."

- Male, Security Guard in Malaysia

The reason for migration was also influenced by previously migrated family members and spousal employment. Similarly, several participants noted observing a higher standard of living and better income among family members, relatives, or neighbors who had migrated. This perception of enhanced prosperity played a significant role in motivating them to pursue work opportunities abroad.

“I remigrated from Dubai to Iraq as my husband was having good work in Iraq.”

- Female, Office Helper in Iraq

“I made the decision to migrate as all my family members are migrating. My mother-in-law is in abroad. She has been there for the past 17-18 years. My husband went abroad to earn more and to have a better living as we have kids. So, I decided to go too as my in-laws were doing pretty well in abroad.”

- Female, Domestic Worker in Kuwait

A few participants shared that their parents passed away when they were too young to earn a living. One of the male participants explained that his decision to go abroad was driven largely by financial need, after his father passed away. He decided to migrate with no one to support his family financially.

“My father passed away early, and at a young age, I had to go abroad out of necessity since there was no one to support me financially. It was exceedingly difficult to arrange the money to go, and even after going, things did not turn out as expected.”

-Male, Driver in Malaysia

A few migrants decided to go to GCC due to their unsuccessful business ventures in Nepal. After several attempts at running small businesses like stationery, cosmetic shops, poultry farming, goat farming and jobs, they found that their efforts were not fruitful. Participants who had previously been involved in farming also stated that agriculture was not enough to cover their family expenses. They were unsuccessful, leading them to seek opportunities abroad.

“I decided to go to Malaysia because my house was collapsed in the massive earthquake 2015, leaving my family in hardship meeting the basic needs like food, shelter, and clothing.”

-Male, Worked in Furniture Company in Malaysia

Case story: I went to Dubai when I was unmarried. My siblings were younger, and our economic condition was not so good. So, I have to earn money for my family. After two years I returned home, got married and my husband sent me again to Dubai. He arranged everything. He was in Nepal at that time. I stayed there for two years and three months. Then, he also went to Iraq, and later he called me there. (A female returnee from Iraq, office helper)

4.4 Pre-departure Points of Contact

Personal networks, including family members, relatives, friends, and former migrants in the village, along with social media played a pivotal role in shaping migration decisions. Participants reported that many of their friends/villagers worked as an agent/broker, and they had linked with

manpower companies in Kathmandu or in other cities of Nepal. Some of the brokers were former migrants so people easily believed them. The brokers helped people providing job information, referrals to manpower agencies, assistance with the visa process, and in some cases, direct facilitating visa from their contacts.

Some participants shared their villagers, or former migrants guided them through the migration process, emphasizing the importance of local connections in facilitating migration decisions. One participant highlighted how family recommendations influenced their decision to migrate.

"I was just excited after what my aunt said about the offer."

-Female, Domestic Worker (childcare) in Kuwait

Similarly, other participants shared that they got to know about the migration opportunities through brokers and online advertisements indicating that brokers and digital platforms were key sources of information for certain individuals seeking migration opportunities.

4.5 Lack of Transparency in Financial Transactions

The migrant shared his experience that he paid 160,000 rupees to the manpower through IME but did not receive any receipt or formal documentation of the transaction. Also, many participants reported that recruitment agencies forced them to say paying only NPR 10,000 for the recruitment process.

"If someone asks at the airport, tell them you paid just 10,000 to manpower...."

- Male, Migrant Worker

4.6 Country Preference

The participants selected a specific country to migrate to on the guidance from their contact points. Similarly, the availability of job vacancies or specific requirements at the time of application was the second key factor driving their decision. However, a notable trend is that most female migrants tend to choose Kuwait as their destination. One participant decided to go

to Malaysia because his friends there mentioned that the weather is quite like Nepal, not as hot as in Qatar and Saudi Arabia. One participant chose Jordan, as it was suggested by her friends.

4.7 Experiences During Pre-departure Process

Pre-departure recruitment process varied depending on the manpower/recruitment agency and the specific migration opportunity in countries. In some cases, recruitment companies visited Nepal to conduct in-person interviews and made selections on the spot. In other instances, interviews were held online, and the Nepali manpower agencies managed the entire recruitment process without direct involvement from foreign employers. In that case, the Nepali manpower agencies have outlets in the destination country where they have contacts with individual employers and companies.

Most participants were informed briefly about their jobs or work conditions by their manpower, agent/broker, or point of contact. However, due to limited literacy, most migrants were unable to read or understand the terms of their contract papers. As a result, they relied solely on verbal information provided by their contacts. Some participants were aware of the existence of a work permit contract letter but had never signed one when they migrated. Besides that, many of them were unaware of critical issues such as trafficking risks, workplace hazards, and the availability of medical facilities at their workplace.

"As we were uneducated, we didn't know what was written in the contract. So, I believe what manpower said without any question. "

-Male, Security Guard in Saudi Arabia

The pre-departure recruitment process primarily involved a medical test, PDOT, and visa processing. Approval of the medical test and possession of the PDOT certificate were mandatory for securing a work permit. Some of the migrants received a few hours to 2-days PDOT training and were taught not to consume alcohol in a Muslim country. As a result, all participants underwent medical tests and received certificates of approval. However, almost all of the participants reported not having any major health issues before they left for migration.

The pre-departure orientation program was primarily designed for first-time migrants. It focused on basic information, such as how to behave on a plane, how to use the bathroom, and how to open the bathroom door to avoid getting stuck. There were no specific topics for the safety of women workers. For men, the program included guidance on tasks like working on rooftops, outdoor labour, and cleaning windows while hanging outside. Many participants only received the PDOT certificate upon registration and pay (NPR 1500) for it, which does not necessarily indicate that they completed the full training course. This suggests that the issuance of the PDOT certificate did not always reflect the participants' actual participation in the comprehensive training.

"They charged a thousand-rupee fee for the orientation class but did not provide it and the agent said, 'Your work is done'."

-Male, Carpenter in Malaysia

Many participants did not receive the full pre-departure orientation training. Some participants had only brief orientation sessions, ranging from 10 to 15 minutes at the airport, while others received about two hours of orientation at the manpower office. One participant reported that he had gone through a 2-hour orientation class for 5 days, during which they were taught how to avoid conflicts, work diligently, and follow their supervisor's instructions carefully.

The PDOT sessions that were conducted typically covered basic topics such as road safety regulations, beverage restrictions, and social laws of the destination country. However, there was almost no information provided regarding occupational safety, health hazards and risks, workplace accidents, or potential injuries. When asked about being informed about the job's nature and health risks, a female migrant who went to Kuwait for three years and Oman for four years said,

"The manpower didn't mention that. They just said food, facilities, and salary would be good, and we'd be treated well."

- Female, Domestic Worker in Oman

"They give orientation, but it is not very effective. There will be a class, and we have to pay 700 rupees. It is all about how we should stay, how we should cross the road, and how to go to which work. They tell us such things. I think it will be for one hour or four hours. It will be for one week. I took that orientation while going for the first time, but when I went to Saudi Arabia, I did not attend the orientation at that time. I gave my thumbprint."

- Male, Driver in Saudi Arabia

"I did not take any training. I heard of two-three days of training by manpower. But I could not attend as I was busy and paid 1500 for the certificate."

- Male, Cook Helper in Saudi Arabia

Many participants also acknowledged that their eagerness to leave as soon as possible outweighed their interest in receiving the PDOT.

"The manpower used to provide 35 days training on domestic work. It is compulsory to have training prior to departure. After completion, they provide certificates. Due to my family responsibilities, I took only 3 days training."

- Female, Domestic Worker in Jordan

The pre-departure medical tests typically included a chest X-ray, blood tests, blood pressure (BP) measurement, and urine tests, with some participants also undergoing eye checkups. The cost of these medical check-ups ranged from NPR 2,000 to NPR 10,000, with most participants paying around NPR 5,500. The medical reports were valid for three months, but some manpower agencies insisted on a re-check even when the original report was still valid. Regarding the quality of the medical examination, both migrants and manpower agents reported it as inadequate and not taken seriously. One migrant shared that despite having high blood pressure, he was told not to worry, as it "wouldn't matter." Many participants also admitted that they viewed the medical test as merely a formality, prioritizing their eagerness to leave as quickly as possible

over the examination itself. Additionally, they mentioned that manpower agencies pressured them to undergo medical check-ups at specific test centers.

"I did the medical test. We had to go to the clinic as they had arranged. We could not do the medical somewhere else. They had their own clinic. And they did the medical there in that clinic."

- Male, Security Guard in Malaysia

"The medical exam included a blood test and an X-ray. They also checked my blood pressure including HIV and others. I passed all the medical tests. For test center, I went through the manpower agency."

- Male, Butcher in Saudi Arabia

"I did medical two times; I had paid 4500 one time and 2500 another time."

- Female, Security Guard in Kuwait

Participants reported that some manpower companies in Nepal deceive workers by promising them bright futures, only to send them to supply companies, essentially trafficking them. In contrast, companies that followed a formal recruitment process generally offered competitive salaries, a structured work environment, and benefits such as transportation, lodging, food, and medical insurance. However, several companies deducted the medical costs incurred during emergencies from the migrants' salaries, further impacting their financial well-being.

"It was said to be 1500 basic salary, but when I get there, my main salary ends up being 1300 in the end as they deduct 200 for food from my salary."

- Male, Driver in Saudi Arabia

4.8 Cost for Migration

Despite the policy of free visas and free tickets for labour migrants, migrants are still forced to pay substantial amounts of money to brokers or manpower companies. Migrants are required to pay for pre-departure medical tests, which range from 2,500 to 10,000 rupees. Additionally, the costs for brokers or manpower agencies can vary from 90,000 to 500,000 rupees.

One male participant traveled two trips to Saudi Arabia and one to Africa in search of better opportunities. Even though all three trips were on visa-free tickets, the participant incurred significant costs for the manpower services specifically, he paid NPR 1,20,000 for the first trip to Saudi Arabia, NPR **1,35,000** for the second trip to Saudi Arabia and NPR **1,40,000** for the trip to Africa.

“I paid 4,75,000 exclusives of medical charge of 10,000.”

- Male, Furniture Labour in Malaysia

“All my expenses, including medical and visa fees, amounted to one lakh 40 thousand. In total, I spent two lakh 40 thousand to go there from here.”

- Male, Butcher in Saudi Arabia

Furthermore, migrants spend around 50,000 rupees for travel expenses from their village to Kathmandu, along with lodging, food, and basic clothing. This creates a vicious cycle of poverty. For individuals already struggling with debt and financial hardship, the significant costs associated with migration only deepen their poverty and increase their financial burden. Some returnees are unable to earn enough to cover these migration expenses, leaving them in an even worse situation. This hidden reality of migration highlights the financial strain and challenges many migrants face. However, some of the migrants, especially females working as domestic workers, traveled on a completely free visa and ticket. They did not pay any money to the manpower agency or anyone else.

“I didn’t pay for the visa or ticket. They said it was a free visa, free ticket. The agent gave me 1,000 rupees for the medical and told me to give it to me after the check-up. I wasn’t aware of any other payments.”

-Female, Domestic Worker in Kuwait

“I went on free visa free ticket scheme. I did not spend a single piece of money. Agents did payments of all the medical expenses.”

- Female, Domestic Worker in Kuwait

4.9 Work Experiences in Abroad

The work experience of migrants varied from as short as one day work or one month to several years. Some of them returned shortly after departure due to medical test failure in the destination country, such as a marked chest condition. The migrants typically underwent one or two medical tests in their home country before departure, with similar tests conducted upon arrival in the destination country. Some participants had prior experience working in GCC countries and Malaysia, making them familiar with the language and culture. The nature of work for participants varied, involved in household chores, construction works, driving, welding, agriculture etc. The household chores involved such as childcare, cooking, ironing clothes, cleaning, and washing. The migrants involved in domestic work often had to work under pressure, as they were frequently told to do things quickly and were constantly asked to assist with different tasks. If they could not do much work as the employer expected they would be returned to the recruitment companies. One migrant in Kyrgyzstan mentioned that she worked in three houses during ten months of her stay. Others worked as drivers, welders, gardening, farming, where duties included cutting bamboo, grass, spraying pesticides, transporting date plants, and harvesting fruits. Some participants worked as security guards and office helpers. Working hours varied between 8 to 18 hours a day, with certain roles, such as drivers, housemaids, and security guards, requiring particularly long hours.

"My workplace was good, with tea, coffee, and plenty of water available. The managers were also generally good, though it depended on the individual."

-Female, Security Guard in Kuwait

Some of participants reported a 12-hour work schedule with only one meal break in 12 hours and only one day-off per month. While sick leave was available, the sick employee was still required to work if no replacement was found to cover the shift. They faced significant work pressure, dealing with long working hours, heavy workloads, inadequate medical facilities, and a lack of proper days off. Some shared that they had experienced different food taste and types, such as in Jordan they used butter in every dishes. The participants working as domestics workers explained that they would receive leftover food after others had finished eating. The participants

who worked as domestic workers further shared that their experience was very torturous, most of them were verbally abused and few physically. They struggled to sleep well. In one house, there was constant complaining, which led the participant to decide to leave on their own after working there for one week. Participants who worked in manufacturing industries had experience various occupational health and safety problems including skin infections, mechanical injuries, and body pain.

Similarly, some participants reported that the companies did not provide the salary agreed upon. There were no provisions for social security or any other benefits, such as pension, unemployment insurance, or compensation for injury. The company did not provide social security or health insurance, leaving the migrants vulnerable and without any support. Despite these challenges, some participants described their workplaces as positive, noting a good environment and well-maintained office spaces.

Some migrants shared attending various training programs in destination countries to improve their skills and increase their chances of promotion. One participant started as a mason, responsible for lifting blocks weighing 40 to 50 kg. After completing training in areas such as ring installation and safety, and obtaining certificates, he got promoted. Similarly, another participant who went as a cleaner but upon arrival, was interviewed for English language skills and assigned to a waiter instead of cleaner. Additionally, she was provided a week of training on waiter skills and language skills, particularly in English or Arabic.

“Since I can speak English and little Arabic, after working as a waiter for two years, I was eventually promoted as a receptionist. So, one needs to have a specific skill to find a better job.”

-Female, Waiter in Oman

Other participant (a female domestic worker in Jordan) also shared that her workload was manageable and highlighted that working at home felt safer than working outside the home. She reported having her a separate room for sleeping and she could use the free time of her own

choice to rest or do whatever she likes in her room. She was very satisfied with her job as the employer was particularly good.

Unlike most migrants who lived in sub-standard quarters provided by their employers, one participant (a driver) in Saudi Arabia shared that his accommodation was of standard quality. The facility included two-bed rooms, one kitchen, and one living room.

4.10 Medical Check-up in Destination Country

Migrants reported undergoing a medical check-up upon arrival in every country. Some were forced to return due to failing the medical test. Additionally, certain companies conducted yearly medical check-ups initially but later switched to conducting them every two years. A participant who returned from Saudi Arabia mentioned that the company he worked for as a driver prioritized employee well-being and provided a comprehensive full-body check-up every three months.

“In Malaysia, medical checks are done immediately after arrival and every year. In Saudi Arabia, they only do them once after arrival. They did it to me as well. We were going during the end of Corona, so they did it.”

- Male, Driver in Saudi Arabia

“At first, they did it every year, but later they started doing it every two years.”

- Male, Furniture Worker in Malaysia

4.11 Immigration Status

People want to migrate through easy way rather than going through legal and complete process. Most of the Nepali migrants have extraordinarily little knowledge about safer migration. They were unaware of work permits and their benefits. They want to go sooner and earn more. Some migrants traveled on visit visas, while others had work permit visas. Migrants who traveled on visit visas often passed through Dubai, where they faced long waiting times ranging from hours to days before being sent to the destination countries.

"The boss promised to arrange a visa after a month of work, but it never happened. I worked for 6-7 months without proper documentation."

-Male, Worked in Garment Factory in Malaysia

The participant stated that, they traveled from Nepal to Dubai and then to destination country where someone from a recruitment company used to pick them up. Such migrants stayed at shelters of the recruitment company for about few days to one to two months until they find any work. The participants mentioned that people, including families, would come to see them, and were taken to work for one or two weeks, and if they were liked, they were kept; otherwise, they were sent back. This cycle continued with one domestic worker in Kyrgyzstan and after ten months, the participant fell ill and returned home.

"We went on a visit visa. Agents took us to Dubai on a visit visa. After boarding the plane to Kuwait, we had to throw away the papers from Dubai."

- Female, Domestic Worker from Kuwait.

"I got a VISA for domestic work directly. The employer sent the VISA and paid for the VISA."

- Female, Office Helper in Iraq

Mostly, females traveled to Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Jordan, Iraq in visit visa under conditions that resembled trafficking. However, they were unaware of the different types of visas and the potential consequences associated with them. Furthermore, it was common for their employers to confiscate the migrants' passports.

"I went legally but when I reached there, company took the passport and document at the airport."

- Male, Garment Factory Labour in Malaysia

A few participants went on a visit visa, which was usually valid for 1 to 3 months, and participants had to pay more money to convert the visit visa into a work visa with the expectation of securing a job. Migrants who went through a supply company were often undocumented and had to accept whatever tasks were assigned to them.

“I did not give any interview or medical check-up. I exchanged 200 dollars, about 25,000-26,000 Nepali rupees, at a bank, there was not an issue at the airport.”

-Female, Domestic Worker in Kyrgyzstan

4.12 Problems Faced at Destination Countries

4.12.1 EXPLOITATION AND DECEPTION BY MANPOWER COMPANIES

Many migrants reported finding different jobs, lower salaries, and poor living conditions than what was promised. For example, one migrant was told he was being hired by an electronics company, but upon arrival, he discovered it was a furniture company.

“Agent told me that my basic salary would be 1500 ringgit but paid only 465 ringgits. They also told me that I would be doing photo frame related work, but I ended up working in the production of small parts of ships.”

- Male, Furniture Labour in Malaysia

4.12.2 LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Almost all participants faced the language barriers due to which some migrants could not communicate and thus did not understand much about their work. Even though many migrants had a copy of their work contract, they were unable to read it because the contracts were written in a local language. One participant admitted that he did not read the contract even it was written in Nepali.

“I did not read the contract however it was in Nepali.”

-Male, Furniture Labour in Malaysia

“For the first three months, I had problems. The family was bad, and I could not understand the language. I felt helpless. Even simple things were confusing, and it felt like they were scolding me. After three months, I moved to a second house, and the agent helped me change jobs.”

- Female, Domestic Worker in Lebanon

An important factor is that many migrants cannot read Nepali either, making them vulnerable to various difficulties. They could not even process for justice as they faced difficulty understanding and resolving their issues due to language barriers.

4.12.3 DISHONOR OF THE CONTRACT

Most participants expressed frustration with their employers for dishonoring the terms of their contracts. Some participants were assigned tasks different from what was agreed. One migrant returned from Saudi was initially promised a job in marketing, but it ultimately turned out to be filling oil at a petrol pump. He found the company was different from what he had initially mentioned. When we raised the issue, they responded, 'it has to be this way; the work is fixed.' The document later indicated that the job was at a petrol pump."

"I went there for driving, but they gave me a work at hotel." -Male, Returnee from Kuwait

"The company was a supplier company, and nothing happened that we were told would happen. We were certain that we would get the job within three months, but I stayed unemployed for six months." -Male, Returned without Employment from Kuwait Jail

Many described their work schedules as long and exhausting, leaving them with little time for rest or sleep while others received a salary lower than what was stipulated.

"I would go to bed at 2 AM and had to wake up at 5 AM." -Female, Domestic Worker in Kuwait

Similarly, several participants reported not receiving payment during periods of illness. Some migrants switched jobs within the same country, and some left their contracted employment in search of better earnings. While some found better opportunities, others ended up with even worse conditions. A participant reported that he fled from the company, leaving his passports behind and worked illegal in different companies to pay off a loan in Nepal. These challenging conditions contributed to their overall hardship while working abroad.

4.12.4 POOR LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions were reported not satisfactory. The dormitory accommodations provided by companies were shared with 6 to 10 or even more depending on the size of the room. The rooms,

located in block-style housing, were small; some were dirty and embarrassing. However, the company did provide drinking water and cleaning services. There used to be a few beds, and the rest had to sleep on the floor. Many participants reported that these rooms were extremely dirty, had a foul smell, and were infested with cockroaches, making them unfit for living. They had to share washrooms and laundry services too. Maintaining cleanliness was challenging due to the large number of people as well as time constraints because they had to work for at least 12 hours a day. Other participants said that they had no adequate supply of water for drinking, cleaning, cooking, and bathing.

“There was a house where 150-160 people had to fit. In one room, there would be 4-5 people. There used to be iron bunk beds. All the food was at our expense. We had to manage all our belongings in our bed. We used to cook turn wise. The room was dirty and stinky as we did not have time to clean.” - Male, Worked in Biscuit Factory in Saudi Arabia

“Life in Kuwait was harsh compared to Saudi. Six people shared one room. Shifts were long and irregular, often lasting 18 hours. We could only visit the room every 10–12 days to bathe, spending most nights sleeping in vehicles. Cooking was inconvenient, so we ate whatever was available and took rest in vehicles.” - Male, Driver in Kuwait

Both the rooms and the workplace were equipped with air conditioning otherwise they could not stay inside for even a moment without the AC, as the heat was too hot to work. The migrants mentioned that they would place water in the air conditioner for a couple of hours to cool it down before taking a bath, as the water was too hot to bathe. Workers endured uncomfortable temperatures due to broken AC units and had to pay for repairs themselves. The kitchen was shared among floor mates, with each individual or group cooking their own meals. Migrants involved in driving often cooked, ate, and slept in their vehicles, whether cars or trucks, due to the long travel hours, often lasting 17 to 18 hours for transport services. As a result, they rarely had access to proper meals. Due to the lack of proper meals during the day, the participants had to cook at night, as they did not have time to prepare food during working hours.

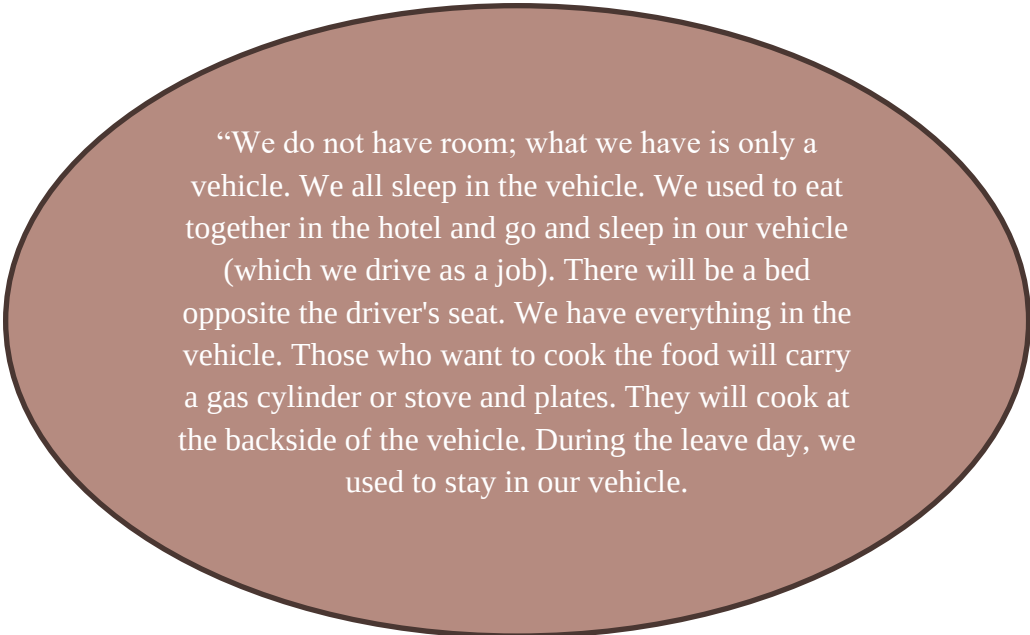
“Life in Kuwait was harsh compared to Saudi. Six people shared one room. Shifts were long and irregular, often lasting 18 hours. We could only visit the room every 10–12 days to bathe,

spending most nights sleeping in vehicles. Cooking was inconvenient, so we ate whatever was available and rested in vehicles.”

- Male, Driver in Kuwait

“Four-five people had a room. The kitchen and restroom needed to be shared with others. Weather was scorching and could not stay outside.”

- Male, Cook Helper in Saudi Arabia



“We do not have room; what we have is only a vehicle. We all sleep in the vehicle. We used to eat together in the hotel and go and sleep in our vehicle (which we drive as a job). There will be a bed opposite the driver's seat. We have everything in the vehicle. Those who want to cook the food will carry a gas cylinder or stove and plates. They will cook at the backside of the vehicle. During the leave day, we used to stay in our vehicle.

The participant who worked as a driver shared that he and his driver colleagues were not provided with accommodation at all, and their vehicles were their accommodation.

4.12.5 PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Some participants fell ill and being hospitalized for weeks to months. Some had high fever because of Malaria resulting in low hemoglobin level in blood and extreme weakness. Some had allergies related to extreme heat. One had seizure, other had nose bleeding several times due to extreme heat while he worked as a roadside cleaner in Saudi. Some domestic workers reported that they experienced some kind of physical and emotional abuse by employers or the managers/supervisors. The domestic worker migrants reported that many employers were coercive. They noted that employers did not tolerate any signs of the migrants not working and

often refused to believe them if they claimed to be unwell. Some migrants could not be able to contact their family in Nepal.

“While working in roadside, I had nose bleeding several times that I had to seek medical help.”

- Male, Working in Biscuit Packaging in Saudi Arabia

“Psychological problems because of not getting job. I did not have any physical health problems.”

- Male, Unemployed in Kuwait

One migrant in Saudi got his health deteriorated, experiencing severe symptoms like nosebleeds and weakness, which were not properly addressed by their employer. Despite assurances of care, the company left him to seek medical help independently. His condition worsened significantly, but the company showed no concern and even threatened him with death if he could not pay 10,000 riyals for his return, claiming they had "invested" in him for work. After months of suffering without adequate care, a Nepali supervisor intervened and helped negotiate his return after the worker paid 2,000 riyals, money sent by his family in Nepal. He was unable to receive proper treatment because hospitals required a witness for intensive care. He never received a clear diagnosis and was forced to continue working long hours as usual, enduring both physical and financial hardship.

“I got sick after three months but continued to work. I was not able to eat anything. I could not eat hot food, nor could I speak. I was also afraid that if I took time off for treatment, they would cut my salary. I worried about how I will send money to my children if they deduct it. I was hospitalized. 10/15 people have collected money to help my treatment.”

– Female, Salesgirl in Kuwait

Some of the migrants are employed on a daily wage basis, where their earnings depend on the amount of work, they complete each day. This system creates immense pressure, as they must work more to earn more. Even when feeling unwell, they are forced to continue working, as their income directly correlates with their productivity. In such conditions, their health and basic rights are overshadowed by the need to earn, becoming secondary priorities. This exploitative

environment treats individuals more like machines than human beings, stripping them of their dignity and well-being.

"They used to tell me, in a coercive manner, that they would 'see me later' and criticized me for talking too much. They also physically assaulted some individuals at the office."

-Male, Gardener Returned from Qatar

The participants also shared that some migrants committed suicide or suffered in silence and even looked for ways to die in the toilet. They said that incidents of suicides and accidental deaths are common due to extreme emotional distress.

"They beat us. Sometimes, the male house employer would come to our room when we were alone."

-Female, Domestic Worker in Kuwait

"Supervisor used to beat us with plastic pipes if anyone interrupts the work."

-Male, Agriculture Worker in Malaysia

A male involved in bamboo grass cutting, spraying pesticide, and carrying dates plant in Malaysia shared his experience of fear being caught by the police while working illegally. In addition, many migrants report feelings of homesickness and a deep feeling of loneliness when they are away from their family.

"The company took my passport right away and only returned it half an hour before I was set to return to Nepal."

-Male, Unemployed Returned from Kuwait Jail

4.12.6 WAGE THEFT

Participants reported being underpaid compared to the salary they were initially informed about. The manpower had told them they would receive a certain amount, but the employer paid them less.

"The salary for the 12-hour shift was 1320 KD, which I thought was less than the real one. The manpower had another separate contract paper with the company which mentioned that the salary for me for the 8-hour shift was 1320 KD instead of the 12-hour shift."

-Male, Security Guard in Kuwait

Participants who worked as drivers reported that if they participated in a road accident and the vehicle was damaged, the employer would deduct the repair costs from their salary. Other participants experienced wage theft by employer failure to pay for their sick periods. Similarly, some of the workers did not get timely salary thus could not send money to their family in Nepal. Participants repeatedly reported that they chose to work illegally, either by leaving their employer or engaging in illicit activities, such as sex trade, due to financial pressures. Migrants often become trapped in harmful habits, and over time, these behaviors can become ingrained as they continue to prioritize money.

"I received my driving license after two months but faced withheld payments. Over seven months, salary was deducted for various reasons, including the license and medical expenses. After seven months, I received only 1,200 Riyals. Unable to send money home for 13 months, they went into debt with growing interest, eventually deciding to run away to find work elsewhere."

- Male, Driver in Saudi Arabia

"I did not get a salary for 31 months. It is fraud. One of a Nepali guy gave me only 200 out of 1800 he took out from my ATM."

- Male, Roller Operator in Saudi Arabia

A participant reported that during the COVID-19 lockdown, American customers increased workers' salaries from 1,000 to 2,000 per person. However, the company only paid the increased amount to Tamil and Chinese workers, while Nepali and Bengali workers were not paid. When

the Nepali and Bengali workers protested, the employer called the police, workers were jailed for one year. Three workers committed suicide. One participant filed a complaint in court and reported the wage theft to PNCC Qatar as they were preparing to return to Nepal. PNCC Qatar offered their support, informing the participant that the process would take some time. During this period, the participant faced severe financial hardship, lacking money for food and a place to stay so he was unable to wait any longer for a response from PNCC and arranged money from a friend to return to Nepal.

My basic salary was said to be 1500, which ended up being 1300 after they deduct 200 for food.

When they said 1500 in my contract, they should give me 1500, right?"

-Male, Driver in Saudi Arabia

In the contrary, some migrants have not encountered major problems so far. In domestic work too migrants found their employers to be kind and incredibly supportive. The participant further explained that she ended up in the hospital for about two months, during which the employer partially paid (300 Kuwaiti dinars) to cover some of the hospital bills but later the employer deducted that one from their salary during the sick leave period.

In an unusual case, the female participant who worked in domestic work in Lebanon stated that second employer helped to retrieve the wage theft from the first employer.

"I hadn't received my salary from the first house, but Madam (my employer) from the second house contacted both the previous house and the agency and asked them to pay my salary, and I got it." - Female, Domestic Worker in Lebanon

One participant who worked at a petrol pump in Saudi Arabia shared that he had to pay the bills for some fraudulent individuals who fled without paying for fuel.

"Ofentimes, local troublemakers would flee without paying for fuel. In such cases, the loss had to be borne by the migrant worker, as the company did not cover such incidents. This added a layer of financial risk to an already demanding job."

-Male, Worked at a Petrol Pump in Saudi Arabia

4.12.7 BETRAYAL IN DESTINATION COUNTRY

One Nepali migrant took 200,000 rupees from several other Nepali migrants who were working on illegal status and wished to return home. Trusting him, the migrants gave him money, but he disappeared after taking the money, leaving the migrants being left in difficulty. One participant who returned from Saudi Arabia shared his experience of being asked to sign a paper written in Arabic after working for seven or eight days. Shortly after, he was taken to the police station and charged with stealing an item from a person whose room he had cleaned.

4.12.8 BUREAUCRATIC HURDLES

Besides all the above challenges faced by migrant workers, there are some bureaucratic hurdles they faced. Despite working for months, they were unable to send money home due to bureaucratic obstacles and wage issues. One petrol pump male worker in Saudi Arabia did not have Iqama due to which he could not send his salary back home. He had to rely on a senior migrant worker heading to Nepal to send his money.

4.12.9 OFFENCES AND IMPRISONMENT

A group of Nepali workers was heavily intoxicated, became verbally abusive, leading to a physical altercation in which one person was injured. The police arrested those involved in the fight, including four others who were not directly part of the conflict. They were arrested and kept in jail for three months. They were allowed to communicate with anyone, further isolating them. One participant was held up during an immigration raid and later jailed for overstaying on a visit visa. He was one of 22 individuals without a visa who were taken to the police station and subsequently imprisoned.

Many participants recalled that Nepalese migrants were indulged in illicit activities such as taking drugs and consuming alcohol (which is restricted in many Gulf countries). If apprehended, they will be imposed with hefty fines and harsh prison terms.

“In Saudi, Nepalese drink alcohol which is prohibited and white drugs. If they are found drinking alcohol, they will be caught and have to pay a fine of 30,000 Riyal and one month in jail. The company will not take them out of jail for those who have been involved in substance

abuse. Many of them participated in police cases. Information on substance abuse and rules on alcohol consumption could be useful in pre-departure orientation training."

- Male, Driver in Saudi Arabia

Some of the participants shared their experience of jail life as a pathetic experience. Since the rooms were underground, they did not even know what time it was because there were no clocks. Hundreds of prisoners were kept together where two people had to share one meal.

"I spent four months in jail, enduring harsh conditions. The food was scarce, and 50 people were forced to sleep in a space designed for 10."

-Male, Garment Worker in Malaysia

One of the migrants became undocumented as he left the contracted job and thus spent nine months in jail. In the jail, he was made to stand in line, naked, in front of both men and women and let him do sit-up punishment. Another imprisoned male who worked in machine maintenance in Malaysia shared that eight people shared a small room, and there was not enough space to sleep. Another participant said the condition in jail was never good. They were provided only two meals a day. They just waited for their turn to go home. He said that they were given very poor-quality rice and vegetables in their meal.

"I wasn't able to call my family. They had no idea whether I was alive or dead. Later, I found out that they had tried searching for me in different ways and also posted missing notes on Facebook."

-Male, Agriculture Worker in Malaysia

"Inspections came unexpectedly, and that's how I got caught and jailed, and they sent me back, banning me in Dubai for the rest of my life."

-Male, Construction Labour in Dubai

Participants shared that their families in Nepal experienced significant stress during their time abroad, especially when they were jailed or in trouble and unable to send money home. One participant mentioned how their parents were deeply upset, questioning why such events

happened and how they ended up imprisoned in a foreign country. Another participant highlighted a case where a person from their village was arrested in a marijuana-related incident and now faces 25 years in jail, further adding to the distress of their family back home.

4.13 Reason for Return

The reasons for the return of migrant workers varied significantly, highlighting a range of personal, financial, and workplace-related challenges. Several workers were forced to return due to medical reasons, including test failures and ongoing health issues such as body pain, stomach discomfort, and general weakness. One participant said that the reason for returning was the extreme heat in Saudi, which made him exceedingly difficult to work and had frequent nosebleeds. Some workers experienced irregular job schedules, which led to inconsistent and reduced pay, further exacerbating financial struggles. In other cases, the company was closed, compelling workers to return. Work pressure aroused over job targets and salary disagreements, prompting some migrant workers to leave the company being undocumented and cases filed against them by the company in return and eventually being apprehended by the police. Some of the arrested deported back to Nepal with bail arrangements facilitated by the Saudi government while others waited years for their family in Nepal took loan and paid the bail.

“I returned because of medical failure. A mark was seen in my chest during test.”

- Female, Cleaner in Electric Shop from Kuwait

“The main reason was that the company didn’t run, and the company wasn’t functioning properly, and I was only receiving 500, 700, or 800 a month, which wasn’t even enough for food”. - Male, Furniture Labour from Malaysia

“The Saudi government gave us bail and the embassy got tickets to get back to Nepal. Embassy gave us tickets and a paper of 24-hour visa.”

- Male, Driver from Saudi Arabia

Additionally, a female migrant chose to return due to discomfort with the workplace environment, particularly issues surrounding gender dynamics and unsafe relationships between

male and female workers. Some migrants also mentioned low salaries and limited savings despite their hard work as contributing factors in their decision to leave.

The participants shared that staying in another country for a long period being away from family was painful, particularly leaving children. They reported that they could only use their mobile phones in the evenings or early in the morning when they had free time. They were unable to communicate with their children as often as they wished, making it difficult to check on their well-being. So, despite a good salary some migrants returned home to live with the family.

"I couldn't stay long in another country. Being away from family as a daughter was very hard, and I kept thinking about how my own children were far from me. Distance creates separation. They even offered me a higher salary to stay, but after four years, I had to return to Nepal to be with my children." - Female, Cleaner in Oman

A male participant returned from Saudi reported a salary dispute as a reason for return, stating that his boss made insulting comments, saying, "People like you, a Nepali, join the company for just 700. I don't care about you; do whatever you want." The participant described that the statement was so humiliating making him no longer wanted to stay. Ultimately, the company decided to send the participant back.

"The company I worked for didn't pay my salary. When I asked for his three months' salary, the employer told me to go back home." - Male, Garden Plumber in Qatar

4.14 Problems Faced for Return

4.14.1 INITIAL STRUGGLES GETTING AIR TICKET AND DELAY IN RETURN

Some of the participants had to pay the employer to return home as they said they had invested in migrants to come there. Some even paid more than a hundred thousand rupees. As a result, they had to have money sent from home to cover the costs of their return. The families sent the money to the recruitment agency or employer or brokers' account from Nepal. Once the payment was made, the migrants had to wait until the ticket was booked. Some of them received easy routes

while others routed through multiple transits in different countries. During the trip they struggled to communicate at the airport and with the airlines' staff.

“I sought support from employer, manpower agency, and also with Nepalese embassy but did not get any solution. With the help of my few co-workers and family back in Nepal, I was repatriated.” - Male, Petrol Pump Worker in Saudi Arabia

In some cases, the police department arranged the return tickets and even accompanied them to the airport. Also, some manpower companies facilitated the return process by applying pressure on the employer to provide the tickets and ensure the migrant's safe return. The participant returning from Kuwait took the help of labour court when employer did not allow him to return back.

“The employer denied granting me a leave. A friend who also returned with the help of the labour court told me about the labour court. He told me that after paying them 10 KD, then they would do the further processing, and we do not have to do anything else. After giving them 10 KD, they made some arrangements such that the company provided me with a ticket and said you have a flight on that day”. - Male, Security Guard in Kuwait

In other cases, the welfare society, or non-governmental organizations (NGO) like Pourakhi and PNCC supported them throughout the return process and even after the return till re-integration.

“PNCC helped me. They sent me money to cover my expenses for food and accommodation while I was waiting to return. After coming here, they helped me with food and a place to stay, and they also paid for the bus fare to get back to my home.”

- Male, Butcher in Saudi Arabia

Several migrants waited for weeks, months and days to get returned. Some migrants did not even know what happened and why there was a delay. Some waited weeks to resolve the ticket issues while the families in Nepal were trying to find a solution. Thus, the return process had caused significant stress and financial strain to both migrants and the families. Despite going through all the processes, migrants faced several problems in the foreign land airports where they did not

find any support to assist to resolve the issue with the flight tickets, food in transits, and many more.

“I talked to my husband and children about my problems, and my husband managed the ticketing. To return, I paid about two lakhs and eleven thousand. My husband managed the debt and deposited the money. That is how I came back.”

- Female, Domestic Worker in Kuwait

4.14.2 STRUGGLING FOR JUSTICE IN DESTINATION COUNTRY

Participants reported that there was a loose network among the Nepali migrants in destination countries which on the need provide social or monetary support to the migrants on problems. They used to collect donations and provide air tickets, foods, or any other assistance to send them to Nepal.

“There was a Magar brother there. I saw him on TikTok, where he had shared his number, so I decided to call him. He offered me help to return.”

-Male, Worked in a Furniture Company in Malaysia

One migrant sought help from the police, who called an ambulance, and took him to hospital but his treatment was inadequate due to a lack of support at the hospital. He tried reaching his supervisor but was repeatedly told to come to the office, which he could not. An Indian coworker, who spoke the local language, also assisted by facilitating communication with the police, as the worker could not speak Arabic.

4.14.3 LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Migrants often call manpower agencies and agents when they face issues such as dishonor of contracts and other problems in destination countries. They hope for support, believing the agencies will ensure their safety and resolve the issues. However, manpower agencies consistently fail to help. One of the participants who worked in furniture company in Malaysia shared his experience that upon his call, the manpower agency responded that their job was just to send him there and he must manage any problem himself. The manpower company even threat the migrants saying that they violated the contract and returned earlier so they have to pay back the manpower. Some manpower companies promised to send representatives to address the issue

which led the participants to believe but that never happened. However, some reported that agents helped to change the employer in destination countries.

“We called the manpower agency and also the agent, explaining the problems, the manpower agency responded that their job was just to send you there and cannot do anything. Whatever problem we have, we will have to manage it ourselves. The manpower agency has not taken any responsibility, so what can I do?”

- Male, Furniture labour in Malaysia

“After four months, I told the agent about my bad experience in the first home, and the agent took me to their office. After that, I changed houses, and it got much better. The first four months were tough.”

- Female, Domestic Worker in Lebanon

4.14.4 SUPPORT FROM NEPALI EMBASSY AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Most migrants reported seeking justice and assistance in their destination countries but faced significant challenges when receiving support from Nepali Embassy. Embassy often said that the issue would be investigated, or that the embassy would consult with the relevant manpower agencies and reassured them not to worry, stating that they had already sent an email to the employer. The migrants waited to see their problem being solved but despite the assurances, no further assistance or follow-up was provided.

“There is a Nepalese embassy, but they, in return, give us trouble. They have a connection with the company, and they tell us to work according to the tenure given. So, we do not go there.”

-Male, Security Guard in Kuwait

“When we tried to talk about our problems, nobody was there to listen. When we called the embassy, sometimes they would say 'tomorrow,' and sometimes the embassy would not even answer the phone. That is how it was.”

-Male, Factory worker in Malaysia

“We called the embassy in Malaysia, and they asked us to submit a formal request with names and passport numbers. We did, and they later asked for the company’s and manpower agency’s contact numbers, which we provided. They said they were in talks with the agency and company but would update us. After two or three days with no progress, the embassy finally told us, ‘Go through the same channel you came from or keep working there. We cannot do anything’.”

- Male, Furniture labour in Malaysia

One participant also received support from the UN organisation for repatriation.

“There was a fine in my name with the police, but I was not able to pay that. Instead, my friend suggested that there was one way from where we could flee, and then we fled from there. I crossed Saudi via a forest route, stayed three days in the forest and went to Oman with the help of local Omanis (by giving money) by walking. I stayed in Oman for eight months. I did not have money to stay here, so I paid money for one month. After that, from home, they sent me three lakh rupees. After one month, the UN organization provided money for food. The UN organization communicated with the manpower, the Nepal Foreign Employment Office, or the Ministry of Labour, who then called the Nepali Embassy in Saudi Arabia to send my passport to Oman. The UN organisation bought a ticket and arranged everything for my return.” - Male, Driver in Saudi Arabia, Repatriated from Oman.

Despite numerous issues, there appeared to be no effective support mechanisms in place to assist migrants, leaving them vulnerable and without proper recourse in times of hardship.

4.14.5 FINANCIAL STRUGGLES AND SUPPORT FOR MIGRANT RETURNEES

Most participants returned due to an unsuccessful migration, thus, many of them still have outstanding loans to repay, while others have taken on additional debt to cover the costs of their return process. They experienced many hardships with low income barely enough to eat. Especially, it is difficult for the female returnees as the Nepali society told them bad and suspected having sexual contacts in the destination country. They did not feel safe and comfortable even after returning to their home country/home. They experienced work pressure, combined with verbal abuse and unpredictable financial security. A few female migrants

reported not going back to their husband's home as the family would never treat them well. So, they were working in Kathmandu even in compromised work conditions instead of going back home.

Case example - II

A migrant worker faced months without a job or salary after arriving in Kuwait. Unable to earn, he reached out to the SaMi (Safer Migration) project at the District Administration Office (DAO) and filed a request for rescue. His case was forwarded to the Foreign Employment Department in Kathmandu, where his sister, with the help of PNCC, filed a complaint requesting either his rescue or job placement. However, no action was taken. The manpower agency blocked all his contact numbers, cutting off communication. The case eventually reached the Foreign Employment Department through the Chief District Office (CDO) and was taken up by NRNA in Kuwait. With their help, the migrant worker arranged for his return ticket, covering part of the cost with the assistance of PNCC. – *Female, Domestic Worker in Kuwait*

4.14.6 REPATRIATION ASSISTANCE AND RETURNEE EXPERIENCES

Some brokers and manpower agencies partially reimbursed the returnee migrants for their expenses. Similarly, some of the participants received airport pick-up services (including midnight arrivals) from NGOs such as POURAKHI and PNCC. These organizations rescued the returnees from the airport to their temporary shelters and arranged their return home from Kathmandu. A few of them stayed longer in the shelter and were provided with food, transportation, and travel expenses to go home. POURAKHI also supported them providing some kind of job. Additionally, PNCC facilitated the repatriation of jailed workers, providing them with air tickets and temporary shelter in Kathmandu. These organizations provided medical check-up of ill returnees and bore treatment cost. One participant filed a complaint at his local police station against the agent for deceit and exploitation. Despite the agent's promise to meet and resolve the issue, no action has been taken, the participant stated.

"The agent said he would come and meet me to clear things up, but he has not done so yet."

-Male, Garment Worker in Malaysia

“After release from the prison, PNCC bought the tickets and brought me over, then came to pick me up at the airport. They brought me to this office from the airport, stayed in the shelter for 1-2 days and provided vehicle expenses for me to travel home.”

- Male, Factory Worker in Malaysia

4.14.7 SOCIETAL STIGMA TOWARDS RETURNEE MIGRANTS

Returnee migrants expressed that Nepali society does not view their return positively. There is a common perception that migrants must have done something wrong, leading to their return by the employer. One participant shared that when women go abroad, they are already aware of how society will judge them. Another participant said that the Nepali society often focus on the earnings of migrants rather than the hard work they put in. Thus, gradually people tend to view life abroad as enjoyable and well to do by only seeing the financial benefits.

“Returning with no skills or employment makes it hard to find work. If I had a skill, it might be easier. But now, I do not have much choice; there is no stable income here and raising and educating the kids is still a challenge.” - Male, Furniture Worker in Malaysia

“After returning, I considered separating. The main problem is his excessive suspicion whenever I go somewhere.” - Female, Domestic Worker in Jordan

4.15 Action Against Manpower or Agent (Redress Mechanism)

Some participants who faced difficulties in the destination countries and returned early without earning reached out to the manpower companies, requesting a refund of the money they had paid. However, most did not receive their money back, with only a few receiving partial payments. One participant took formal action by filing a complaint against the manpower agency at the DoFE. The manpower agencies refunded the money, but first, they blocked his account by bouncing the cheques twice. Although the money was returned, he could not withdraw it because his account had already been blocked.

“I had filed a complaint at the Malangwa village police station against the agent for deceit and exploitation. I told the agent to come forward and explain himself. The agent, a village acquaintance, promised to resolve the issue but has taken no tangible action so far. The agent said he would meet me to clear things up, but he has not done so yet.”

- Male, Garment Factory Worker in Malaysia

4.16 Problem Faced After Return

Most participants were unemployed, without a fixed job or any personal business. They were waiting for better employment opportunities in Nepal. Some were considering starting their own business, while others were thinking about re-migrating. They mentioned that the limited job opportunities in Nepal and the lack of stable income led them to consider re-migration.

“If I plan to go to a foreign country again, then people will give me a loan. But if I ask the same person for a loan to start some business here, then people will start saying the son of that person has many loans, so to spend money he has asked for a loan, then they will not give it.”

- Male, Driver in Saudi Arabia

Some participants reported that, despite working for several years abroad, their economic status remained the same or even worsened. This was due to various challenges they faced, such as being imprisoned and having to pay for bail, losing their jobs when companies suddenly closed without paying their salaries for months or even years, and taking out loans to return home. One participant mentioned buying a piece of land with his earnings, only to have to give it to his wife as part of a divorce settlement. Others spent all their earnings on supporting daily expenses of their families and covering medical expenses. These hardships left many migrants in even worse financial conditions, despite their struggles and efforts while working in the destination country.

“I was in contact with home. Now that I am working here, I stay in touch with home, so it is not too difficult. Work is going well right now. Currently, I am collaborating here with sisters at this organization. I came here and started working too at this organization.”

- Female, Cleaner in Kuwait

4.17 Re-integration and Re-migration Plans

Most returnee migrants were warmly welcomed by their families, who not only accepted them but also supported them in covering the costs associated with the recruitment process, including payments to recruitment agencies, employers, and air tickets for the return journey. A few returnees worked in Kathmandu to earn some money before heading home, allowing them to repay their loans. Some of the participants after return engaged in raising livestock (buffalo), some in agriculture work while some ran small businesses.

“I am engaging in small work as a helper in house construction in the village. Sometimes work is available, and sometimes it is not, that is how it is. If there was work every day, then there would not be a problem. I am still engaging in farming.”

- Male, Factory Worker in Malaysia

Returnee migrants had mixed feelings about re-migration. Some expressed a desire to return to the same country, hoping for a better job, while others were interested in exploring new countries for employment opportunities. They were planning to remigrate due to their poor financial situation and the instability in Nepal, which makes it difficult to start a business or invest personally. Many were looking to migrate to European countries like Poland and UK, where they believe there are better financial opportunities. However, there were also migrants who stated they would never consider going abroad again as they are fearful of potential fraud, and would not recommend foreign employment to others, citing the extremely difficult experiences they had endured.

“I am thinking of migrating again, but my family does not want me to go back. My children disagree, and my mother does not allow it either. But what can I do to sit here? My house will not support me. I am considering going once more because the cost of living here is high, and it is not something that can be managed with just a few rupees.”

- Male, Driver in Saudi Arabia

“I still have intention to go. If I get a good job, I am ready to go elsewhere. But I am not going Saudi because the agents dishonor the agreement.”

- Male, Factory Worker in Saudi Arabia

4.18 Opinions on intervention development and recommendations from IDI Participants

When asked about potential interventions to improve the migration process at various stages, participants had mixed responses. Some were unsure, with comments like "No idea" and "I don't know," while others suggested that providing information through social media could be especially useful for migrants.

Pre-Departure Stage

Provide gender-sensitive migration support, ensuring women are informed about safe job opportunities.

Reduce low-cost labor migration

Improve health screenings and high-quality medical care before departure.

Conduct pre-departure training at the local level, covering destination-specific language, job skills, and socio-cultural norms.

Promote authorized channels for migration to avoid exploitation by unauthorized agents.

Introduce awareness programs in rural areas to educate migrants on rights, work conditions, and decision-making processes.

Destination

Improve occupational safety measures and establish compensation mechanisms for migrants in hazardous work.

Hold manpower agencies accountable for monitoring living conditions, food quality, and worker safety abroad, imposing penalties for malpractices.

Strengthen Nepali embassy roles in addressing migrant grievances, providing reassurance, and monitoring.

Ensure employers provide appropriate medical care, transparent salary policies, and good-quality accommodation and food.

Encourage migrants to accept jobs aligned with their skills and travel only on valid employment visas for security and protection against exploitation.

Post-Return Stage

Provide returning migrants with skills-based training for local and entrepreneurial opportunities to ensure a stable livelihood.

Support returnees pursuing modern agricultural practices or alternative trades like livestock farming, reducing risks from natural threats.

Advocate for government financial support, offering jobs with competitive salaries, and providing free education up to grade 12.

Assist migrants in recovering stolen wages and repaying debts incurred from migration. ensure justice for affected migrants.

Policy and System Recommendations

Promote a balanced and ethical labor migration system that protects workers from exploitation and guarantees fair wages.

Engage in regular dialogue with host countries to monitor companies hiring migrant labor and enforce safety standards.

Develop mobile applications and social media platforms to educate and inform migrants about migration processes and their rights.

4.19 KII Findings

4.19.1 PROBLEMS AT PRE-DEPARTURE

4.19.1.1 INDIVIDUAL

4.19.1.1.1 LACK OF PLANNING AND ARRANGEMENTS

Before the departure, the migrant workers should need to plan their departure, household responsibilities, and know how to go through the labour approval process. However, they are so reliant on the brokers that they miss crucial training and/or preparation.

“Ah... the challenges arise primarily because, when a worker decides to go for foreign employment, they just jump into it without any preparation. Most of our workers trust heavily on a broker or agent, which is why they face challenges.”

- Chair, NGO Focused on Female Migrant Workers

4.19.1.1.2 FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

People from rural areas are economically constrained, thus cannot prevent themselves from undergoing proper medical checks or even traveling to Kathmandu for the procedures. This financial hardship is also leading people to skip essential steps that put them at greater risks later.

“We all see that the number one reason of women to migrate was poverty.”

- Founder – Female Migrant Focused NGO

4.19.1.1.3 EDUCATION LEVEL

While analyzing trafficking patterns by education level reveals, moderately educated individuals (those who completed grades 7-10) are more likely to fall victim to trafficking. Many young people, especially those who score low in exams seek foreign jobs immediately after completing their 12 grade or less, due to limited educational or employment options. This group is neither fully educated nor illiterate, making them vulnerable due to limited job options and often remain unaware of potential risks and may not seek out or engage with necessary information.

“Nowadays, there is a trend for young people to seek foreign jobs as soon as they complete their Plus Two. If they do not pass SEE or if they do not pass with good marks, they often cannot even get admitted to college.”

- Chair, NGO Focused on Female Migrant Workers

“In my village, most of the people fail in 8-9 class then they decide to go foreign anyhow. At that time, they are not matured, and they do not have qualification to do any work. We have weaknesses here. They come to us saying we want to go foreign.”

- Agent, Male

4.19.1.1.4 WOMEN IN DOMESTIC WORK

Those women who face abuse in their homes due to alcohol consumption, gender-based violence, and cultural expectations perceive migration as an escape from such violence. Many women migrate with the hope of improving their children's education, as they were deprived of good education themselves but often end up in precarious domestic work situations. Women in domestic roles often face isolation and potential exploitation, unlike those in factory settings where visibility offers some protection. Some women face significant risks of sexual harassment and exploitation in their workplaces, with little recourse for justice or support. The stigma surrounding these issues complicates their return to their home communities.

“One sister shared with us while doing research that, “We feel safe while working in a factory rather than a house as everyone sees us.” What happens in the case of domestic workers is that once they go inside a certain house then even the police cannot enter inside that house. Their condition inside remains unknown.”

- Executive Committee Member, NNSM

“There are still accusations in society like, who did you sleep with while you were there? Things have improved a bit compared to before, but that stigma still exists. Even if they are accepted in their families, it remains same in society.”

- Chair, NGO Focused on Female Migrant Worker

4.19.1.1.5 MISTRUST AND MISCONCEPTIONS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Most individuals experience widespread misinformation and past experiences leading communities to feel "free" migration programs are traps for trafficking. It is widely believed that the job is not legit unless money is spent. This mistrust is even stronger for women, who face additional scrutiny and concerns about their safety.

In villages, misconceptions spread quickly, especially about women's employment abroad. Even when efforts are made to explain the process transparently, villagers may still rely on rumors, which can discourage potential applicants and harm the reputation of recruitment agencies.

"The workers do not have any trust in the free visa free ticket process. They think that you cannot fly for free. If you pay the money, then you will go for sure. The villagers will not believe you if you tell it is free. In the case of ladies, there exists a misconception that if it is for free then she will be trafficked for sure."

- Head, Recruitment Agency

4.19.1.1.6 UNDOCUMENTED MIGRATION

Undocumented workers are in high number among many of whom have limited knowledge about their rights or the immigration process. The lack of legal documentation makes them vulnerable to exploitation and mistreatment. Due to their lack of documentation, workers often end up working in poor conditions as their employers take advantage of being undocumented. The government's inability to support undocumented workers worsens their vulnerabilities.

"Most companies prefer undocumented workers because it is easier to negotiate with them. They can either be deported or work for less wages. If any injuries occur, the company is not liable for compensation."

- Migration and Human Rights Lawyer

4.19.1.1.7 LACK OF AWARENESS OF LEGAL MIGRATION ROUTES

During the passport application process, applicants are often in a hurry and miss the opportunity to comprehend the information shared. Many workers are unaware whether they migrated legally or illegally. Household workers do not receive labour

agreements, bypassing official requirements through “settings,” especially those headed to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. These types of workers often face contract violations, job mismatches, and problems such as unpaid overtime, inadequate wages, and harsh working conditions.

“And there is a rule that one must compulsorily visit the MRC while making the passport. And there they get counseled where they can get some insights about the issues. And when one goes there, they get some information, but they are in hurry to get the passport, visa, and all and hence many tend to forget the things shared to them in these offices.”

- Executive Committee Member, NNSM

4.19.1.1.8 LACK OF INFORMATION

Many individuals believe that obtaining a job abroad is their sole means of escaping poverty and therefore they are ready to take on a large amount of debt to do so. This desperation often leads to them to take dangerous or unlawful routes, such as tourist visa and become a victim to scams and exploitation resulting in having little option for recovery after being cheated.

“Due to this lack of information, the people are only believing in foreign employment to go abroad and to earn money. Firstly, they do not know about the total information on the expenses to be bore and the things to be done during its process.”

-Executive Member, PDOT Association

Migrant workers especially from the Terai region and hill residence especially Dalit and Marginalized population, are often limited income sources, low educated and are unaware of the medical or visa requirements and become easy targets for exploitation.

“Those from the Terai region, who don’t have any proper source of income, those who are uneducated...and among those people from the hilly area who belong to the Dalit community, from a neglected community, they don’t know anything and mostly remain backward.”

-Lab Technician, Medical Centre

There is a lack of understanding of important aspects of their new lives abroad, including living conditions and job expectations. They are not fully informed about the cost of living, rights and procedures related to working abroad. Although notices and documents are sometimes sent, workers might not get or understand them. Much of the information comes from informal channels, such as family, friends, or unregistered agents which make workers unaware of essential details like the nature of the job or the country to which they are heading. This leads to confusion and a lack of decision-making power regarding their employment.

"The main problem is the lack of information for workers. They do not receive proper and complete information and go abroad without proper decisions.... This information is received by the immigrant workers mainly through family and friends that work in those sectors and the agents (who work in informal manner as the system is not present by law)."

- Executive Committee Member, NNSM

4.19.1.1.9 LANGUAGE BARRIERS AND CONFIDENCE ISSUES

Majority of unskilled workers, who generally have minimal education, struggle with English lowers their confidence and make it harder for them to perform well in interviews. Their poor language skills affect their ability to communicate effectively, which is essential for certain jobs. Due to their lack of confidence, many workers also chose to pay agents to skip interviews, especially when it is conducted online or in English. This can result in high financial costs and poor job matching.

"Migrant workers are confused with information provided through IEC and digital platforms because of diverse language among Nepali workers."

- Executive Committee Member, NNSM

"They say that just pass my interview directly and I will provide you with 1 lakh. That is because they do not have confidence, and they do not know how to speak in English. They have that mindset that they fly as soon as possible by providing the money."

- Head, Recruitment Agency

4.19.1.1.10 LACK OF CERTIFICATION FOR SKILLS

Despite having technical skills (such as electricians, plumbers), many workers do not have formal certification. Employers often require proof of qualifications, and without certificates, their experience is undervalued, which restricts their employment opportunities. This makes it difficult for them to secure jobs that match their skills and poses risks, especially in technical positions where safety is paramount.

“The next problem is that Nepalis have skills such as plumbers, steel fixers, and electricians. They do have experience as well, whenever we ask them, they reply I do have this year of experience, but the problem is they do not have any certificates.”

- Head, Recruitment Agency

4.19.1.2 GOVERNMENT

4.19.1.2.1 GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The government acknowledges the challenges, particularly regarding migrant workers' safety, but it has not prioritized or taken any real steps to address them. Therefore, there is a need for more effective data collection on migrant workers, including those who have returned for better planning and decision-making.

“Perhaps, we do not have any record-keeping system on how many workers entered and exited. Now, they are trying to keep some records.... through immigration and DOFE. We might obtain the numbers if we tally these records. But till now, how many went there and how many returned and how many are in illegal status...we do not know that.” -Ex-labor Attaché, Saudi Arabia

“Even though accurate figures are difficult to obtain, we cannot even provide an approximate number like nearby... Based on that, how many illegal workers are there, and will the government work to bring them onto a legal track? If the government makes a policy decision and says, “By this month, you must all register,” no matter the circumstances you’re in, then that would provide a certain number mapping.” - Under Secretary, NHRC

4.19.1.2.2 LACK OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Migrant workers face challenges due to inconsistent and unstandardized information from various organizations. Moreover, information is predominantly in Nepali which could be difficult for those workers who speak only Maithili or Bhojpuri. In addition, information is increasingly available in digital formats, but workers are not able to access it because of lack of digital literacy and the problem of device used.

“Let’s say, we have 50 organizations working for migration and all 50 distribute 50 types of information. So, now the migrant workers are confused over which one to take it and in some cases, there are language barriers like if someone is from Madesh region, the people there know Mithila or Bhojpuri language but the information in the IEC and digital platforms are in Nepali, and they tend to not understand these in many of the cases.”

-Executive Committee Member, NNSM

4.19.1.2.3 LACK OF UNDERSTANDING AT THE PROVINCIAL LEVEL

The establishment of labour and employment centers locally is essential to handle migrant workers' issues, including processing grievance and offering assistance. However, there is confusion in the provincial/local level government, employers, and workers about the new policies related to foreign employment. Despite efforts from central-level organizations, including trade unions and government departments, there is still a lack of clarity and coordination at the provincial level.

“It is supported by employment coordinator, assistant coordinator and technician in all 753 municipalities across the nation. In many cases, they lack information on updated issues, migration trends, our knowledge sharing and where the information gets lacked.”

- Executive Committee Member, NNSM

4.19.1.2.4 INADEQUATE INVOLVEMENT OF BENEFICIARIES IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The policy- making process does not adequately involve beneficiaries. Their voices are often ignored by policies meant to benefit them, which reduces their applicability and efficacy.

“There seems to be a lack of involvement of beneficiaries while making the policies. If a re-integration policy or any other policy is being made for your benefit, then I will be the one representing you there.”

-Executive Committee Member, NNSM

4.19.1.2.5 INADEQUATE GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND MONITORING

There are many recruitment agencies, and only one department (DoFE) to keep an eye on them. As a result, recruitment processes, including health checkups, skill development, and training, often fail. Despite being managed by listed institutions, the worker's health checkup system contains issues like inadequate equipment and potential medical report manipulation.

“Also, I have heard that even the two days pre-departure orientation training that a person is supposed to receive before going to foreign employment is also not given to that person. Instead, they are provided with the certificate of completion without even going there.”

-Executive Committee Member, NNSM

“There are criteria given to them on which stuff supervision is done. If it is available there then it is okay, but if it is not available there, then, they take the stuff from others for that day, and on the next day the stuff is again sent back to the one from whom they took it. The checking is done, and they are passed, it is like that.”

-Lab Technician, Medical Centre

4.19.1.2.6 GOVERNMENT AND EMBASSY CHALLENGES

Although the government is taking steps to resolve these issues by implementing social security provisions and sending labour attachés to embassies, there are concerns about inefficiency and the shortage of qualified staffs in key positions due to

frequent leadership changes. Nepal's ability to advocate effectively for workers' rights in international negotiations is weakened by nepotism and the hiring of staffs lacking the requisite expertise or skills, which are seen as major barriers to effective implementation.

“When a secretary, DG, or Minister is appointed, it takes 3 to 4 months for he/she to understand and grasp his/her work. As soon as the work rhythm becomes a bit established, the position is replaced with another officer. Now, the new ones have to start from zero again. Therefore, this brings a serious challenge to our governance.”

- Executive Member, JTUCC

4.19.1.2.7 LABOUR LAWS IMPLEMENTATION GAPS

Despite the existence of labour laws, including minimum wage requirements and workplace security standards, they are not being effectively implemented. Frequent staff transfers, lack of sufficient resources, and lack of clarity on the roles of federal and provincial authorities under the new federal system have contributed to inefficiencies of labour administration. This instability has hampered the effective implementation of labour laws.

“....with the introduction of federalism and the new structure of the government, there is a need to reform and restructure the functions of labour administration, which is not happening. There is some confusion about which rights the federation has and which province will obtain what kind of rights.”

- Executive Member, JTUCC

4.19.1.2.8 ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

The ILO plays a crucial role in establishing labour laws and agreements like Convention 143 (related to migrant workers) and Convention 189 (related to domestic workers). In order to influence in promoting the protection of Nepali workers abroad, Nepal is being asked to ratify these conventions. The problem of domestic workers, especially women working in the Gulf, is highlighted, and demands are made to defend their rights, including the guarantee of minimum salaries and protection against violence. Nepal is working on adopting international labour standards,

including ILO conventions on occupational health and safety and business and human rights. However, maintaining consistency in protection is continuously hampered by Nepal's changing leadership and erratic nature of agreements.

“If we cannot implement ILO conventions here, we cannot ask other governments like Malaysia to implement these conventions. After passing Convention 189 here, then only we can request other governments to pass this convention to protect their foreign employees.” -Executive Member, JTUCC

4.19.1.2.9 STRATEGIC FOCUS ON DOMESTIC EMPLOYMENT

The demand for foreign employment is partly contributed by the lack of adequate domestic employment. Domestic employment has not been adequately developed, while foreign employment is increasingly insecure. Creation of sustainable domestic employment is the only way to ease the pressures of foreign migration. This can be achieved through developing infrastructure, improving worker skills, and encouraging returnee migrants to use their foreign experience in business endeavors to support the local economy.

“The next issue is that domestic employment opportunities should be increased. There is this problem of unemployment in every sector. If there is some comfort in the employment here, the pressure automatically decreases in the airport, for example in the airport where only the people who are interested and who have that compulsion to go abroad will be there.” - Executive Member, JTUCC

4.19.1.3 RECRUITMENT MANPOWER/AGENCIES

4.19.1.3.1 HIRING FROM UNTRUSTED MANPOWER COMPANIES

Trusted recruitment companies generally depend on reliable connections with companies in destination countries. However, some companies in destination countries prefer to work with intermediary agencies, which may not always follow ethical recruitment practices. As a result, there may be discrepancies between claimed and actual working conditions, such as poor accommodation, inadequate food, and low wages.

“For those who have paid money, manpower gives commission to agent and agent sells the person to company. There is a business of human buy-and sell. Then we have seen the system of oppressing the victim in destination country.”

-Executive Member, PDOT Association

4.19.1.3.2 EXPLOITATION BY MANPOWER AGENCIES

The recruitment agencies (often referred as "mafia") are essential to the migration process, but they are poorly regulated and frequently exploit workers. While some agencies operate ethically, many fail to follow the proper procedures, which leads to widespread exploitation, working long hours under poor conditions without proper documentation or assistance and mistreatment of migrants. Workers are sometimes placed in roles for which they are underqualified, leading to workplace risks. This occurs when agents bypass standard recruitment processes for additional fees. The government's insufficient monitoring and lack of proper training for agency operators worsen the situation.

Labourers often do not receive complete information regarding expenses, rights, and procedures related to foreign employment. Middlemen exploit this, charging them exorbitant amounts.

“The recruitment agencies lie about the working hours in the company. They say 8 hours of working instead of 10 hours. The people do not even know about the language there. They have cheated and frauded many of our brothers in every nook and corner.”

- Agent, Male

4.19.1.3.3 MISLEADING RECRUITMENT PRACTICES

Despite government efforts to control the recruitment process, the unofficial agents or brokers often operate outside the formal system, sending workers abroad with fake documents or under false promises.

They manipulate the system for their own benefit, creating a parallel, unregulated process that undermines the official recruitment process. They charge high fees far exceeding legal limits, force medical tests to redo, or mislead about visa processes.

The lack of transparency in payments, such as hidden costs in visa and ticket processes, is a widespread problem. Medical centers and agents collaborate in financial agreements, exploiting the workers for profit. Additionally, these agents often guarantee jobs, which cause workers to spend large sums of money, only to find out later that they were deceived.

“While doing medical they hid his disease condition, giving false certificates in various stages. The one who is travelling does not know about it. There comes a syndicate of medicals. We do send them from here, but it is not like that there. They are sent back after they do the medical there in the airport if the report is false.

- Executive Member, NNSM

A “free visa, free ticket” scheme is used to recruit many workers, particularly women who then pay large sums of money up to 2 Lakhs without any documentation. As a result, workers end up in debt even before they leave for foreign employment, creating immense financial pressure, and unable to claim any compensation or file complaints when exploited.

“Villagers do not believe in the free visa free ticket scheme. There is a misconception that if a woman is offered something for free, she is guaranteed to be trafficked.”

- Head, Recruitment Agency

“The countries where the government has declared free visa and free ticket, the maximum fee is up to 10000 but some of the people are even paying 1-2 and even 3 lakhs to go there. But while giving receipts, they only give receipts of 10000 only and make voice records for that for their own proof; these are also a challenge.”

- Executive Committee Member, NNSM

The presence of syndicates within recruitment processes contributes to the ongoing exploitation of workers. In addition, workers rarely receive receipts, and if anything happens to them abroad, they have no evidence to claim their rights. Remittance sent by workers, particularly from the Terai region, often goes through informal channels (like Hundi) rather than formal banks, leading to additional financial risks.

“The most affected area for foreign employment is Madhesh. However, remittance collected from this region is the lowest. The reason for this is that they send money to Bihar. They do not trust banks and accounts and they are mostly frauded by the agents already.”

-Executive Member, PDOT Association

4.19.1.3.4 HARASSMENT BY BROKERS

Many individuals who migrate from Nepal via the Indian route experience harassment from brokers, including sexual harassment. Although they want to go back home, they frequently encounter mistreatment that prevents them from doing so since they lack the proper documentation to obtain services or protection.

“Many who go to India from here face harassment from brokers, including sexual harassment. After going through such experiences, even if they say they want to go home because they have been mistreated, they often can't return. ”

-Chair, NGO Focused on Female Migrants

4.19.1.4 MISSED OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINING

4.19.1.4.1 PREDEPARTURE ORIENTATION TRAINING (PDOT)

The pre-departure orientation and skill training provided in Nepal are inadequate, especially compared to other countries like the Philippines, where workers receive at least three months of training. Many migrant workers, especially those who go to domestic work, end up unprepared for their assigned jobs, leading to exploitation and poor working conditions. The role of MRC is largely ineffective, with few workers aware of its services.

“There may have been in the data but in practice, we have not heard from anyone who told us that they were referred from MRC.”

-Executive Member, PDOT Association

The current two-day training period is insufficient; therefore, it should be at least one month or at least a week for better retention of information. Many workers do not undergo the necessary training. PDOT is often skipped or shortened, especially by those who want to hurry the process and those who migrate illegally. The biometric system, initially intended to ensure workers' proper orientation, is not effectively implemented, leading to loopholes in verification.

"I have heard that the two-days of pre-departure orientation training is often not given. Instead, people are just provided a certificate of completion without attending."

- Executive Committee Member, NNSM

4.19.1.4.2 SKILL-BASED TRAINING

Due to the lack of proper skill-based training, workers can face problems once they get to their destination country, especially for those who go for domestic work. Workers are not well prepared for the demands of their job. A 35-day training course is provided for domestic workers that covers the basics like childcare and household duties, but it does not provide in-depth instruction for managing work conditions or addressing abuse.

"There is a problem of deception which may lead to skill mismatch. Ultimately, workers are supposed to acquire inadequate for some and some are going there as minimum wage labourers."

- Executive Committee Member, NNSM

"Those workers with significant experience may secure better positions, while those lacking experiences may typically end up in roles such as labour."

- Female, Agent

“Women face problems as they do not have any language training, skill training which may irritate the employers. And then, the employers start to exploit them and reach their peak.”

- Founder, Female Migrant Focused NGO

4.19.2 PROBLEMS AT THE DESTINATION COUNTRY

4.19.2.1 INDIVIDUAL

4.19.2.1.1 CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Workers often go to foreign employment without sufficient preparation or familiar with the destination country's culture, language, and work environment. Hence, they experience cultural shock, including living conditions and social interactions. They are often unaware of the difficulties they will encounter and idealize working abroad for financial gain. The shift from rural to urban setting is also challenging, with differences in technology and everyday life.

“Many Nepalis are facing difficulties in Arab countries since they cannot communicate properly due to the language barrier.”

- Migration and Human Rights Lawyer

4.19.2.1.2 BARRIERS TO JUSTICE

It is often difficult to access justice for migrant workers, especially for those who are undocumented or face exploitation by employers. Undocumented workers are not covered by the government welfare fund and there is no clear and transparent procedure for claiming compensation or support.

“So, for migrant workers who are classified as undocumented, the support from the government is limited.”

- Under Secretary, NHRC

In some GCC countries, local laws prevent authorities, including the police, from entering a residence without the homeowner's permission. This poses a significant risk to women, especially domestic workers. They are extremely vulnerable since it is

difficult for them to escape or seek help unless they can notify someone outside If they face exploitation or abuse.

“If you go to a GCC country, according to their national law, even the local police cannot enter a house without the homeowner's permission. Owner is the person who can allow to enter anyone, otherwise it cannot be intervened by the government or state...”

- Under Secretary, NHRC

4.19.2.1.3 LANGUAGE BARRIERS AND CONTRACT DISCREPANCIES

Contracts are often not provided in a language that workers can understand, leading to misunderstandings about the terms of their employment. In some cases, workers are given one contract in Nepal, which is then replaced with another upon arrival, leading to wage discrepancies and unanticipated job duties.

“Nepal struggles with proper negotiation, leading to many Nepalis facing difficulties in Arab countries since they cannot communicate properly due to language barrier.”

-Migration and Human Rights Lawyer

“In some cases, it is a kind obligation for some group of people as the contracts are not in languages that they can understand. By law it should be at least a copy of contract in the local language; Nepali.” - Executive Committee Member, NNSM

4.19.2.1.4 MANIPULATION AND TRUST ISSUES

Women migrants are especially susceptible to exploitation, not only by foreign employers but also by fellow Nepali workers, including agents and brokers. However, these men can take advantage of their vulnerability which makes them susceptible to human trafficking and abuse.

“Once the women escape from their abusers in the house where they worked as housemaid, if they meet any Nepali man on the way, they quickly trust him, feeling as if he is a brother. The man may initially say he will help, but then he takes advantage of her.” - Chair, NGO Focused on Female Migrant Workers

4.19.2.1.5 MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The lack of mental health evaluations is a critical omission. Migrants with mental health issues, especially those with substance abuse problems, are sometimes sent abroad by their families with the hope that the strict environment will improve their behavior. However, these workers face severe challenges upon arrival due to the lack of access to the medication they need, which can lead to crises and even suicide attempts.

“What I realized was that majority of the people who had suffered from mental disorders, or those who had been spoiled from substance abuse in the society, or those who had been problematic character wise, were found to be sent abroad by their parents with the hope that they will be better character wise or corrected from such aberrations.” - Ex-labour Attaché, Saudi Arabia

4.19.2.1.6 WORKER BEHAVIOR AND RETURNED CASES

The behavior of workers, such as alcohol and gambling addiction, often leads to problems after leaving the country. Due to these behaviors workers often sent back to Nepal if they fail to adapt to the work environment or engage in unnecessary arguments.

“People addicted to alcohol and gambling go there. After going there, they do not exactly change their behavior. At that time, they get involved in unnecessary arguments.”

- Focal Person, Recruitment Agency

4.19.2.1.7 EXIT AND DEPORTATION

Workers who are in illegal status or are facing accusations must first clear their legal cases or enter deportation centers before being able to return to Nepal. Although there is some assistance from NGOs or Nepali community the workers must manage their own travel expenses and go through multiple steps. Workers can return home only after receiving an exit visa with no pending legal issues or unpaid dues. Workers who escape from their employers or have legal disputes may face significant hurdles in obtaining an exit visa.

“After the contract is completed or after he enters illegal status sometimes, they give him excuses (aam-maafi) for a certain period. We send the workers back in that excused period but only the ones who do not have any criminal cases can return back.”

- Ex-labour Attaché, Saudi Arabia

“There are various communities, such as the Magar community, Thakali community, Gurung community, and Eastern Nepali community. Each of our Nepali groups has its own community association who sometime assist worker who are in need.”

- Chair, NGO Focused on Female Migrant Workers

4.19.2.2 GOVERNMENT

4.19.2.2.1 LACK OF INFORMATION ON LEGAL AND ILLEGAL WORKERS

There is a lack of reliable information regarding the proportion of migrant workers, especially domestic workers, on how many are in legal versus illegal employment situations. There is a significant lack of data on female migrant workers, including those moved across Gulf regions, making it hard to trace and protect them effectively. Due to the absence of this information, it is difficult for the government to regulate or protect workers properly.

“However, regarding this issue, what the government needs to do is establish a clear distinction between how many domestic workers are legal and how many are illegal. There is no uniform data on this.”

- Under Secretary, NHRC

4.19.2.2.2 NEPAL’S DOMESTIC LEGAL SAFEGUARD

Although Nepal recognizes the right to legal aid and justice as fundamental rights in its constitution, these protections are limited within its borders. The failure to include specific protections for migrant workers within bilateral agreements reflects a gap between domestic rights and external applicability. Due to this gap, migrant workers do not have an enforceable framework that would protect their right to legal assistance or fair treatment abroad. Therefore, migrant workers face challenges when trying to report issues or obtain support abroad.

“We have included the right to justice in the chapter on fundamental rights, but the specific rights of migrant workers are not incorporated in the domestic laws, which should have been included in the bilateral agreements.”

- Migration and Human Rights Lawyer

4.19.2.2.3 ISSUES WITH EMBASSIES AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Many workers do not know how to contact their embassies, and even when they do, embassies often lack the resources, expertise, and support that they need.

“It becomes impossible for 1 labour counsellor and 5-6 staff of the embassy to look after 4-5 lakh workers. Even if 1% of problems come of that then also there will come 4000 problems which is a lot to be managed. Therefore, the capacity of every stakeholder needs to be improvised, both physical and mental capacity.”

- Ex-labour Attaché, Saudi Arabia

The embassy staff may lack the authority or resources to intervene directly in worker-employer disputes, especially countries like Saudi Arabia where domestic laws restrict such actions. In many cases, the embassy has to use covert methods to rescue workers. For instance, the embassy might instruct workers to meet at a specific location, such as a garbage dump, where they can be rescued without being noticed by authorities. This process is risky due to the strict laws prohibiting unrelated men and women from being seen together.

“To rescue them, we need to face such a difficult situation. We ask them, “When can you come out at night?” . They say, “I can come out late at night at 11pm with an excuse of dumping garbage in the container.” So, at 11pm at night, we take a vehicle to rescue them, near to the container where they throw the garbage. Then, when finally, they arrive to that place to throw the garbage, we pick her up from there and they are rescued. But the law of Saudi prohibits a man and a woman who are not related to each other or who do not have a relationship certificate to be seen travelling in the same vehicle also.”

-Ex-labour Attache, Saudi Arabia

Resolving employee grievances, such as unpaid wages is long and bureaucratic. It may take 2-3 months for the authorities to respond and resolve issues. It is challenging to respond immediately, and the embassy's role is often limited to facilitating communication with local authorities.

“But while coordinating with embassy, they tell us that they cannot pay money, we have to manage money. It is exceedingly difficult to communicate with the embassy.

They do not pick up the calls most of the time.”

- Chair, NGO Focused on Female Migrant Workers

4.19.2.2.4 SOCIAL SECURITY ISSUES

Although it is mandatory for workers to register for social security before departure, the system is not functioning effectively. Workers contribute a fee to the Foreign Employment Board for various services, including compensation for accidents or repatriation of deceased workers. It has been criticized that the government does not contribute to these funds to help workers, and they are instead used for things like purchasing cars for embassy staff.

“The role of the government is very low in the labour sector. There is no contribution to social security which we can observe that is almost zero. So, we have not been able to advance the social security of the informal sector.”- Executive Member, JTUCC

4.19.2.2.5 COLOMBO PROCESS AND ABU Dhabi DIALOGUE (ADD)

Both initiatives play essential roles in facilitating a cooperative environment for labour of both sending and receiving countries. The Colombo Process allows countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Though the process offers consultative opportunities, it lacks legally binding authority enforce rights or address grievances effectively. Similarly, the ADD gathers receiving countries to improve labour policies, but it is still a non-binding dialogue with limited regulatory power.

“Migrant sending countries are part of the Colombo Process, which serves as a regional consultative process to negotiate as a collective voice. On the other side, these receiving countries have their own alliance, called the Abu Dhabi Dialogue

(ADD). There are also other consultative processes and protection mechanisms in place to ensure rights.”

- Migration and Human Rights Lawyer

4.19.2.2.6 NEED FOR ENHANCED COUNTRY-SPECIFIC EFFORTS

Although these processes provide a platform for discussion, individual countries, including Nepal, are expected to make additional efforts to protect their workers. However, not all sending countries can actively pursue stronger migrant protections due to limited resources, political constraints, and competing national priorities, especially when host countries' cooperation is unclear.

“There are also other consultative processes and protection mechanisms in place to ensure rights. It appears that country-specific efforts should be made to strengthen and enforce these consultative processes. However, not everyone is in a position to make those efforts.”

- Migration and Human Rights Lawyer

4.19.2.2.7 MISMATCH BETWEEN LEGAL COMMITMENTS AND REALITIES FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

Nepal's commitment to international human rights conventions contrasts with its reluctance to adopt conventions focused on migrant workers. This inconsistency raises ethical questions, especially when the high number of Nepali migrant workers who depend on foreign employment for their livelihoods. Workers are more vulnerable to greater risk and potential right violations when proper protections are not provided, whether through domestic laws or international conventions.

“There are many international human rights conventions. Nepal is a party to almost all of them, but it has not ratified the convention regarding migrant workers.”

- Migration and Human Rights Lawyer

4.19.2.3 WORKPLACE/EMPLOYER

4.19.2.3.1 COMPLEX OUTSOURCING CHAIN

The outsourcing approach adds layers of complexity and potential for misunderstanding, where a primary supplier company allocates workers to various sites or sub-companies. Workers may not always know which company they will end up working for, as they are often assigned to different sites post-arrival.

“In the case of direct company demand, those who pass face-to-face interviews typically do not encounter issues. However, with supply companies, candidates have to pay bribes of 4-5 thousand to pass interviews, and for free visas and tickets, they often end up paying large sums of money, ranging from 1 to 2 lakhs.”

- Recruitment Agent, Female

4.19.2.3.2 COMPANY ACCOUNTABILITY

Although companies claim to follow labour policies, there are often gaps in implementation and monitoring. In some cases, workers are left in substandard conditions without proper health or life insurance, or they face exploitation due to delays in salary payment or lack of access to essential services. While some workers manage to succeed by staying in contact with their employers or agency representatives, others may experience unfavorable treatment, such as withheld passports or exploitative conditions.

“There are many recruitment agencies who are responsible, who are accountable, and who are doing good jobs and are doing process wise. They are working on system. But there are more than them, who are not ethical recruiters.”

- Chair, NGO Focused on Female Migrant Workers

4.19.2.3.3 MEDICAL AND HEALTH ISSUES

Although the workers were generally in good health before departure, they start to experience serious health problems upon reaching the destination countries. Many workers also experience mental health issues as they encountered situations very different from their expectations.

“They had mental problems and health problems after reaching there only. After reaching there, the situation was not like they thought of. So, they started getting health problems.”

- Chair, NGO Focused on Female Migrant Workers

Workers sometimes don't know how to handle extreme working conditions, such as heat exposure, and managing health issues. They frequently suppress medical problems from their employers out of fear of losing their jobs or fear of treatment costs. This creates substantial health risks, as they typically do not have adequate medical support. Many of them endure poor working conditions and experience health issues, like kidney problems and other non-communicable diseases like hypertension, diabetes linked to lifestyle changes, dehydration, poor diet, and overwork, and are unfamiliar with medical facilities in their host countries.

“Nepali workers tend to be quite obedient, which leads them to neglect their health by not eating on time, not drinking enough water, and not taking care of themselves. As a result, they face health problems such as high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney damage, severe headaches, and in some cases, they may even experience blindness.”

- Chair, NGO Focused on Female Migrant Workers

“If someone is under medication, they don't disclose with the doctors while they go for checkup with the fear of rejecting to go abroad.”

- Head, Recruitment Agency

Additionally, they may suffer from sexually transmitted infections, tuberculosis, and other illnesses due to harsh working environments. However, medical insurance often does not cover all health contingencies, particularly for women, which makes them more vulnerable.

The situation is worsened by the widespread use of false medical certificates and inadequate screenings. Access to healthcare is a difficulty for the workers who return home with unidentified diseases. They can also be deported for reasons such as marijuana use, pregnancy, or abnormalities noted in their chest X-rays. Language

barriers and a lack of communication skills hinder their ability to seek medical assistance when they are unwell.

The reproductive health of female victims is often manipulated to meet demand of their employers, with forced contraception, abortion, and suppression of menstruation being painfully common. The use of such practices not only highlights exploitation but also long-term health risks for these women. Deaths are often attributed to "cardiac arrest" or "natural causes," though accidents and lack of proper care are often the real causes.

“If they face sexual harassment, it can lead to pregnancy, and there are no provisions for abortion there. What often happens is that they are made to work until labour pains begin, and then they are taken to the hospital and left there.”

- Chair, NGO Focused on Female Migrant Workers

“They give some women medications to suppress menstruation. Some receive medications to prevent pregnancy. They might even administer injections like that. There are cases where women come back after having babies. And some aborted babies there as. Some have gone to Nepal to do abortion and then returned.”

- High Level Policy Official, AHTB

4.19.2.3.4 PROBLEMS AT THE WORKPLACE

Those who use legal routes are nonetheless frequently taken advantage of. Many workers face contract violations, job mismatches, unpaid overtime, inadequate wages, and harsh working conditions. Some are forced into different roles than what was initially agreed upon, causing further stress and dissatisfaction. Many women go abroad in the hope of finding legal work but often end up in unstable domestic work. They lack the training and support to navigate these roles successfully.

“Strict rules and regulations, longer working hours, and having to work nights long during special festivals create more burdens on them. They cannot sleep properly; they have to work taking painkillers.” - Executive Committee Member, NNSM

Workers in construction roles, especially those with illegal status, face harsh conditions, such as inadequate rest, high-risk job without safety measures, and prolonged stays due to a lack of documentation. As a result, significant issues like the increasing number of accidents, particularly road accidents and workplace injuries often occur. The main cause identified is a lack of safety knowledge, including the use of safety equipment and basic operations like switches or handling chemicals as they lack the training and support to navigate these roles successfully.

“Yes, for example, those working in construction often do not get enough rest and have to work in very high places, with no safety measures in place. When their status is illegal, they face even more problems.”

- Chair, NGO Focused on Female Migrant Workers

4.19.2.3.5 WORKPLACE BULLYING AND GANG CONFLICTS

In workplaces, particularly in Malaysia, Nepali workers encounter bullying and conflicts, including gang fights with workers from other countries, which leads to dangerous working conditions. There are also cases of violence and criminal behavior with an example shared about a Nepali migrant involved in a tragic incident, highlighting the extreme and often unexpected challenges faced.

“Sometimes, Nepali used to fight amongst themselves and end up in the jail. Sometimes they are beyond the social problems that exist in the society.”

- Ex-labour Attache, Saudi Arabia

“In companies also, if there are all other foreigners and only one or two persons from our country, there is this environment of bullying by the foreigners. In Malaysia, there are cases of gang fights. There are gang fights in between Nepali and other countries like Myanmar, Vietnam, and Indonesia.” - Executive Member, PDOT Association

4.19.2.3.6 DOMESTIC WORK CHALLENGES AND LEGAL OVERSIGHT

Domestic workers in Gulf countries like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq face strict demands, with constant supervision and limited freedom, especially when working for individual homeowners. Agents benefit from the selection and “sale” of these workers in a way that violates basic human rights, with agents profiting from these transactions. They run out of with long hours and intense workloads, insufficient food, and overcrowded living conditions. They also frequently rely on painkillers to cope the pain. They cannot even change jobs easily and are often bound to stay in unfavorable work environments and are unaware of their exact whereabouts during this time and end up in situations where they are further exploited.

“Those women who went single, they faced problems. Because they got exploited easily. They got exploited by Nepali brothers rather than by other nationalities.”

-Founder, Female Migrant Focused NGO

4.19.2.3.7 CHALLENGES OF “RUNNING AWAY” FROM COMPANIES

Men often switch employers when dissatisfied, but they lose their legal status, with all official documentation tied to the initial company. As unregistered workers, they face lower pay, excessive work demands, and unpaid wages, resulting in frustration and often resorting to drinking alcohol.

Some workers make excuses about health problems to return home early, even when they are not sick because they are not happy with their work conditions or the employer. Due to the high expenses of hiring new employees, the employer often opposes returning the worker.

“In some cases, manpower agencies claim they do rescue operations. In others, they state that people sometimes pretend to be sick and ill when dissatisfied with the job or they want to return.”

- Under Secretary, NHRC

4.19.2.4 PROBLEMS AT THE POST-RETURN

4.19.2.4.1 SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

Returning migrants often face mental health issues, social stigma, scrutiny from their families and communities, especially if they fail to meet financial expectations or return

empty-handed or unsuccessful. Women are occasionally perceived as having compromised moral character after working abroad. In addition, long separations from families often lead to broken relationships and difficulties in managing finances back home. Those who return without achieving the success they had hoped for frequently experience feelings of shame, isolation and depression are common among. Family typically welcome sons returning without earnings, but they scrutinize daughters-in-law or wives, reflecting persistent gender bias.

“There are still accusations in society like, who did you sleep with while you were there? Things have improved a bit compared to before, it is not as severe, but that stigma still exists. Even if they are accepted in their families, it remains in society.”

-Founder, Female Migrant Focused NGO

“Those who get unsuccessful or return without earning the expected amount return back with a burden. They have invested 2-4 lakhs and not everyone invests their own money. So have stressed how they would be paying back the amount. Another is the social stigma that they have to face, the blame that they have to bear when people think they cannot work, and the company fires them. They start having psychological health issues. They have difficulty in socializing and movement. They tend to isolate themselves and avoid social contact as much as they can due to which they start getting depressed.”

- Executive Committee Member, NNSM

4.19.2.4.2 CHALLENGES IN COMPLAINTS

Those who attempt to report scams face bureaucratic hurdles. Law enforcement often dismisses their complaints, making it difficult for victims to seek justice.

“They are made to sign on blank paper, they do not understand the language and its written, “I won’t draft any complaints anywhere.”

- Executive Committee Member, NNSM

4.19.2.4.3 PREGNANCY AND ABUSE

Some women were unaware of their pregnancy when they left for the destination country, and some even faced abuse. There are cases where women were sexually assaulted by their agents, resulting in unwanted pregnancies. Some women return to Nepal pregnant after enduring harsh conditions, underscoring the severe consequences of their experiences abroad. Pregnant women also face complications regarding citizenship for their children upon returning to Nepal.

“The current issue regarding unwanted pregnancy after coming to Nepal is the vital registration of children. Citizenship-related issues and issues related to birth certificates were also the challenge earlier. That is also for the female workers.”

- Executive Committee Member, NNSM

4.19.2.4.4 REINTEGRATION ISSUES

The process of reintegrating returnee migrants into society is troubled with difficulties. Those who return with health problems or without sufficient support face challenges in rebuilding their lives. The government offers services like loans and training, but these are only available to documented workers.

In addition, most Nepalese migrants are unskilled labourers, return with little or no savings and upon returning, they face limited job prospects in Nepal, due to the country's lack of industry and market opportunities. Government support for market creation and skilled labour reintegration is minimal, leading to a cycle where returning labourers have no productive opportunities within Nepal's weak economy.

“There should be proper reintegration focused guidelines rather than various reintegration projects.”

- Migration and Human Rights Lawyer

“Most Nepalese go for labour and only a few people go for skilled manpower. After the tenure of their work, the labourers return. They are just labourers, and they will not know anything. They went as factory workers and after they return, where would they work?”

Pre-Departure
Establish legal frameworks to reduce illegal migration and risks such as trafficking or smuggling
Conduct awareness campaigns on health risks and necessary screenings for specific conditions prevalent in destination countries.
Train workers in local languages and cultures of destination countries to enhance their adaptability and reduce exploitation
Educate migrants about their rights, employment contracts, and legal recourse mechanisms in host countries.
Focus on occupational safety, emergency contacts, and effective navigation of job-related risks abroad.
Ensure workers are medically fit and fully aware of potential health hazards at their destinations.
Enhance collaboration between the Ministries of Labor, Health, and Industry to ensure streamlined pre-departure services.
Incorporate local communities, particularly women, in planning pre-departure policies and activities to ensure inclusiveness.
Use data from migration mapping to tailor pre-departure policies effectively.
Destination
Strengthen bilateral agreements to ensure better wages, working conditions, and grievance mechanisms for Nepali workers.
Develop a digital mapping system to track Nepali citizens entering foreign countries.
Conduct regular check-ins with migrant workers and maintain communication with their families.
Enhance the capacity of Nepali missions abroad to provide legal aid and translation support.
Strengthen regional processes like the Colombo Process to promote unified standards and protection mechanisms.
Work with host countries to establish clear accountability for employers and manpower agencies.
Advocate for autopsies in case of worker deaths categorized as “natural causes” to ensure transparency and accountability.
Expand telemedicine and in-country health service partnerships for better health coverage.
Strengthen Nepali missions to address health concerns and provide immediate support for medical failures or accidents.
Post Return
Design a proactive, rights-based framework to support the reintegration of returnees
Develop mechanisms for monitoring and grievance reporting for returnees.
Establish reintegration Shelters offering counseling, skills training, and job placement.
Offer skill enhancement and entrepreneurial training for returnees to foster self-reliance.
Set up health desks and mandatory checks at entry points to identify illnesses acquired abroad.
Ensure health checks and treatment accessibility in rural and semi-urban areas.
Link migrant-focused NGOs with hospitals to facilitate healthcare delivery for returning migrants.
Provide post-return counseling to address psychological stress and promote family and community support.
Provide programs that help returning workers channel their earnings into viable local business ventures.
Develop robust social security and pension systems to support aging returnees and their families.
Collect and publish data on migrant welfare, deaths, and exploitation cases to drive effective policy reform.
Establish regional offices for filing complaints or accessing legal services for returnees.
Advocate for budgetary allocations that address the needs of high-migrant areas.

4.20 Suggestions and Recommendations provided by the participants

5 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study shed light on the challenges and problems faced by Nepali migrant workers during the pre-departure phase the issues faced on the recruitment channels they select, issues with the agreements and contracts, problems faced in the destination countries the conditions they face while working abroad, continued high prevalence of the occupational health hazards that Nepali migrant workers face and the potential consequences of migration, including the risk of trafficking, and during the post-return phase the problems and challenges in re-integration as well as various stigmas faced by the returnee migrant workers in their societies. Our findings revealed that despite of the existence of “Free visa- Free ticket” Policy, many workers are paying hefty amounts to the recruitment agencies and agents and have been directing the workers to show a receipt of only 10,000 at the airport. These findings align with the previous literature on the topic [3, 21, 22, 23]. This might imply that due to the desperation of finding employment despite knowing about it, migrant workers refrain from talking about the deception they face with regard to recruitment fees. Also, this might have stemmed from the lack of adequate knowledge on this to the migrant workers. This situation highlights the lack of oversight and monitoring of recruitment practices by the government. Excessive and unlawful recruitment fees leave migrant workers vulnerable to deception and victimization from unscrupulous recruitment. It further pushes migrants and their families into the vicious cycle of debt and exploitation.

Our findings revealed that all participants underwent medical tests and received certificates of approval. Regarding the quality of the medical examination, both migrants and manpower agents reported it as inadequate and not taken seriously. Some of them had to return due to the failure of medical checks upon reaching the destination countries. These findings aligned with the previous findings as well which previously reported that the workers had to return upon arrival to the destination countries due to failed medical tests [25]. Many participants only received the PDOT certificate upon registration and pay for it, which does not necessarily indicate that they completed the full training course. This suggests that the issuance of the PDOT certificate did not always reflect the participants’ actual participation in the comprehensive training. Some of the

participants did not receive the pre-departure orientation training while other participants had received only brief orientation sessions, ranging from 10 to 15 minutes at the airport, while others received about two hours of orientation at the manpower office. Many participants also acknowledged that their eagerness to leave as soon as possible outweighed their interest in receiving the PDOT. Our findings are coherent with previous findings on the topic of PDOT highlighted by other researchers [23, 24, 26]. Many of the respondents reported that they had faced some sort of deception in the salary agreement and working hours' contract which was breached and derailed from what was mentioned in the agreement. A similar finding was also reported previously [3, 28]. Workplace stressors were by far the most reported which included contract discrepancies, job insecurity, long work schedules, workplace abuse, poor working conditions, non-payment of wages, occupational hazards, and restrictions of movement, many of which are indicative of forced labour. These also align with the experiences of other migrant workers in various prior studies [5, 9,10, 25, 28, 29, 30]. However, contrary to that some of the respondents did respond having provided very good workplace conditions and a quality work environment as well. There were even language barriers which hampered communication between employer and employee, and which further exacerbated the obstacles to be faced in the workplace.

Respondents reported feeling ill in the destination country due to poor work conditions like heat stress, nosebleeds, seizures, body pain and psychological stresses as well. These health problems were solely due to workplace conditions because all the workers reported that their medical report fine before leaving for their destination. These findings were consistent with a study that highlighted that adverse working conditions influenced the excess risk of poor health status [25,32]. Some also reported the cases of physical and mental abuse and violence. The employers used to beat them to death and use insulting and de-humanizing phrases with no regard to their right and dignity. There was basic human right violation experienced by some workers. These were the common issues which corroborate with other articles [9, 10, 30, 31, 32, 35]. It is important that employment policies be strengthened for the provision of safe work conditions, fair pay, and the opportunity for voluntary return without penalties.

Most returnee migrants reported having their identification documents (passports) confiscated by employers, which has been a commonly reported problem among migrant workers. Employers reportedly take migrants' documents to prevent migrant workers from escaping and to protect their original recruitment investment. Destination governments should consider ways to lift restrictions on labour market mobility among migrants by providing alternative contractual arrangements, especially for migrants working in the Middle East. Reforming the current kafala system could discourage confiscation of passports, which is often linked to limitations on movement and freedom and foster forced labour.

Regarding post-return problems, we found that few of the returnee labour migrants were stigmatized by the society especially the returnee female migrants by even questioning her character. This finding also supports another similar finding by a preceding study [25]. However, most of them were warmly welcomed by their families. This problem might be due to the prevailing gender norms and roles that account for gender discrimination in our society. Many respondents reported being unemployed after returning as evident from CBS 2019 report and another recent report [36]. Some even expressed their intentions to travel again to the same or different destination countries for work again. This might be because there are limited opportunities for returnee migrant workers in Nepal that link them to income generating opportunities. The lack of a reintegration policy for survivors of human trafficking, lack of fund allocation from the government for shelter package, lack of sustainable resources for shelters, bleak implementation status of existing laws and legal provisions, passiveness of anti-trafficking committees, etc. are found to be major hindering factors for successful reintegration of survivors of human trafficking [37]. The landscape of destination countries for Nepali migrants are beginning to diversify. This can prove to be an opportune time to (re)negotiate agreements and (re)develop new policies that address stressors documented in this and other studies. While for those returning to Nepal to resettle, there is an urgent need to support and address their wellbeing, particularly given the wide range of stressors associated with their migration experiences and the impact on migrants and their families. Although the GoN has introduced a range of re-integration support, there appears to be little that addresses their wellbeing.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

The decision to migrate is primarily driven by the economic conditions, with the aim of improving the family's financial situation. Additionally, the success stories of others in the community play a significant role in influencing this decision. While some manpower companies are performing well, majority of agents and brokers are not viewed as trustworthy. Furthermore, some migrants reported receiving inadequate medical attention or advice during the screening process, highlighting a gap in the support provided to potential migrants.

The companies/employers would take away the migrants' passports as soon as they arrived, leaving them vulnerable and effectively forcing them to work at least until the contract was completed. The workers were assigned various tasks, and many of them were assigned to different job than that of informed or contracted prior departure. Moreover, withholding of salaries for months was commonly reported. Some migrants were paid only one month's salary after a few months, with the remaining salary left uncertain as to when it would be paid. When seeking support, the manpower agencies, agents, and Nepali Embassies tended to assure them but to no avail. Some migrants had to pay to employers (for their prior investment to manpower agencies) when they were about to return to Nepal.

Migrants faced multiple betrays by manpower companies in Nepal, recruitment companies in destination countries, by employers (e.g., change in agreed job, not paid for overtime, no support for illness and health care wage theft or delay). The participant reported significant suffering, blatant breach of promises made by both the agent and employer. They expressed disappointment in not achieving the goals they had hoped for when they first arrived, describing the experience as painful and marked by considerable hardship.

Similarly, some migrants had to pay for mistakes made by others, salary deduction (e.g., in case of accident for drivers), and had to pay penalty to returning home by leaving job. Upon disagreement on contracted work conditions some migrants attempted to change jobs and work

for another company; however, the former employer withheld the release letter, preventing them from securing employment with the new company. Many migrants became undocumented after leaving the job due to work and pay circumstances.

Many participants reported that, despite working for several years abroad, their financial situation remained worsened. This was due to challenges such as imprisonment and bail costs, job loss when companies suddenly closed without paying wages for months or years, and the need to take loans for their return. One participant had to give the land he purchased to his wife after a divorce, while others spent their earnings on supporting their families and medical expenses. These difficulties left many migrants in a worse financial and mental states.

Migrant workers faced the significant lack of support and communication both by the manpower agency and employing individuals or organizations. Despite having a contact number for the police and receiving advice from a coworker to seek their help, the worker faced a language barrier that made it difficult to communicate effectively. Additionally, the failure of the manpower agency to inform the worker about crucial aspects such as labour approvals, health insurance, and legal protections left them vulnerable when health issues arose. When they sought assistance, both the agency and the embassy were uncooperative, with the embassy offering only brief contact and no tangible support. Ultimately, the only support most migrants received came from their family, some received from the social organizations like POURAKHI and PNCC, who helped fight for justice, fund their return, and highlighting support families in crisis.

It is recommended that support networks and organizations be established to work for the welfare of migrants. PNCC Qatar serves as an excellent example, and it is suggested that similar organizations be set up in other countries to provide necessary support and assistance to migrant workers. Migrants have mixed kinds of job satisfaction. Some migrants shared positive experiences regarding their work, particularly in terms of skill development and their status. Several participated in training programs in destination countries to enhance their skills and improve their prospects for promotion. One participant started as a mason, tasked with lifting blocks weighing 40 to 50 kg. After completing training in areas such as ring installation and

safety, and earning certificates, he was promoted. Similarly, another participant, originally hired as a cleaner, was reassigned to a waiter position upon arrival after an interview assessing her English language skills. She was provided with a week of training in waiter duties and language skills, particularly in English and Arabic. These experiences highlight the potential benefits of training and skill development for migrant workers in improving job opportunities and career progression. Returnee migrants had mixed feelings about re-migration. While some hoped to return to the same country for better job prospects, others were seeking European countries for better opportunities. Their decision to remigrate was driven by financial difficulties and the instability in Nepal, which hindered their ability to start a business or make personal investments.

6.2 Recommendation for Intervention Development

- Ensure bilateral agreements enforce fair wages, safe working conditions, and grievance mechanisms through joint reviews.
- Develop a national framework for evaluating migration policies, emphasizing transparency and accountability.
- Enforce the "employer pays" model to reduce migrant costs and penalize recruitment malpractices.
- Ensure quality pre-departure, destination, and reintegration health services for all migrants.
- Conduct pre-departure training and awareness programs at the local level on migration risks and rights.
- Provide skills training and credit access for returning migrants to promote entrepreneurship and job creation.
- Develop gender-inclusive programs to address women's migration challenges and enhance their economic opportunities.
- Establish accessible digital grievance systems and empower embassies to address migrant complaints effectively.

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