

Foreign Labour Migration: Levels and Trends

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Abstract:

This paper is related with foreign labour migration at global, regional and national level. Every day the volume of labour migrants have been increased. The data related with foreign labour migration are not uniform due to various organizations working on it and different methods apply by them. This article is entirely related with secondary sources of information. More specifically, ILO, IOM, UNPD and UN data related with international and regional level and DOFE and MoLESS data are for national level are used to analyze the level and trends of foreign labour migration. Differences in level of development between developed and developing countries as well as lack of proper human resources management policies and high unemployment rate and poverty in developing countries are major cause to increased level and trends of volume of foreign labour migration.

Key Words: Labour Migration, Unemployment, Poverty

Background:

Labour migration is defined as the movement of persons from their home State to another State for the purpose of employment. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines a migrant worker as an “international migrant individual of working age and older who are either employed or unemployed in their current country of residence”. However, there is no universally accepted definition of labour migration. In 2017, 258 Million international migrants are residing in a country other than their country of birth, which represented 3.4 per cent of world’s total population. Similarly, 150.3 Million migrant workers were counted globally in 2015 (IOM, 2018)

This term is a subset of international migrant. The ILO (2018) estimated that 6 of every 10 international migrants were migrant workers in 2017. Only 4 of every 10 migrant workers were women. Around 68 per cent of migrant workers resided in high income countries. Prime-age adults (ages 25-64) dominated the composition of migrant workers (87 per cent).

Today, an estimated 86 million persons are working in a country other than their country of birth. Despite the efforts made to ensure the protection of migrant workers, many migrants continue to experience numerous problems particularly more vulnerable groups, such as female domestic workers, entertainers and lower skilled workers. In countries of origin labour migration can relieve pressure on unemployment and can contribute to development through the channeling of remittances, transfer of know-how, and the creation of business and trade networks. In countries of destination facing labour shortages, orderly and well-managed labour migration can lighten labour scarcity, facilitate mobility, and add to the human capital stock (IOM, 2018).

Nepal’s foreignlabour migration since the early 2000s has been unprecedented increased. In 1993/94 the number of labour approvals by issued by Department of Foreign Employment (DOFE) was 3,605, in 2003/04 reached 106,660, in 2013/14 peaked 5,19,638 and in 2018/19 decreased and remained 236208 (MOLESS, 2020). These number are expect labor migrants to India, as we know between Nepal and India there is open border and according to 1950s Peace and Friendship treaty there is no need of passport and Visa. It is estimated that about 5 to 7 million Nepalese are currently in India(Bhattari, 2007).

Objectives:

The objective of this paper is to introduce the situation of foreign labour migration at national, regional and global level. The article also has aim to highlight the major determinants of foreign labour migration including use of remittances among migrant's households.

Data and Method:

The article is based on secondary sources of information. Relevant data sources of IOM, ILO and national and regional published literature related to the objectives of this paper have been used.

Global Scenario:

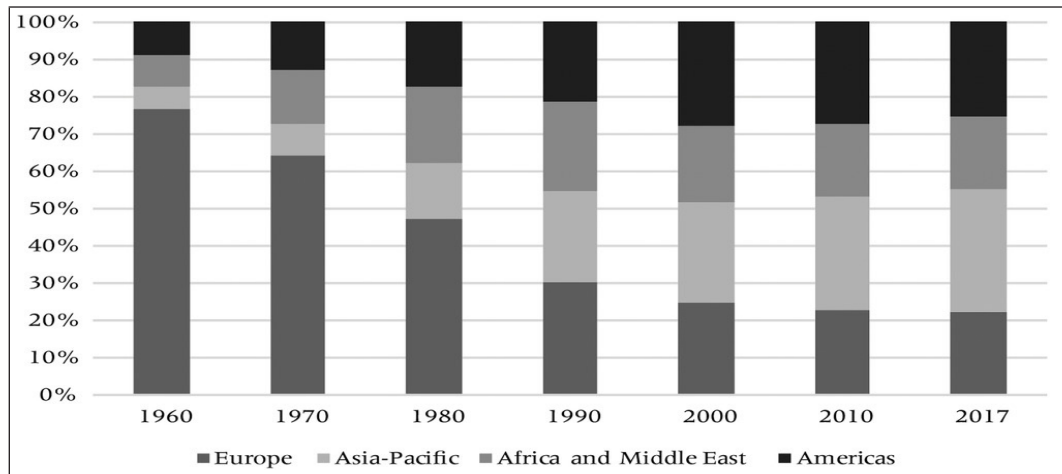
Each year millions of women and men leave their homes and cross national borders in search of greater security for themselves and their families. "Throughout human history, migration has been a courageous expression of the individual's will to overcome adversity and to live a better life" (UN, 2006). Many migrants are motivated by the quest for higher wages and better opportunities, responding to the demand for their skills abroad, but many others are forced to migrate because of famine, natural disasters, violent conflict, persecution or simply a lack of decent work in their home country. The Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) describes the driving forces in international migration in terms of "3Ds": development, demography and democracy (GCIM, 2005). The United Nations Population Division (UNDESA) estimates that the world's stock of migrants, defined as persons residing outside their country of birth or citizenship, will be 214 million in 2010. Thus, even though the percentage of the global population who migrate internationally is small (as noted above, about 3 per cent per year), the total number is large – and it has more than doubled since 1980, when it stood at 102 million. The UN figures show the largest increase for 1990, reflecting the break-up of the USSR into a number of independent countries, which added about 27 million people to the total international migrant stock. It should be noted, however, that many of those in the former USSR did not actually move, and some part of the statistical increase is accounted for by the fact that they were within newly defined national borders. This contributed to the growing share of migrants in the world population from 2.3 per cent in 1975 to 3.1 per cent in 2010 (UNDESA, 2009). Out of the total number, 60 per cent were estimated to live in developed regions. International migrants represent between 7 per cent and 20 per cent of the population in most Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, while the share is much higher in the Gulf States. The large majority of these people are migrants for employment and their families.

Regional Scenario:

It is interesting to note that the distribution of migrants by origin is more or less equally divided between three types of movement. Contrary to popular belief, international migration from poor, developing countries ("the South") to rich, developed countries ("the North") represents little more than a third of the global total. South–South migration between developing countries represents almost the same proportion, and North–North migration between developed countries represents a little less than a third (UNDESA, 2009). Most South–North migration is headed for Europe and the United States, while North–North migration mainly takes place within Europe and across the Atlantic. As noted, however, considerable migration for employment is also taking place between developing countries. According to a recent World Bank estimate, about half of all migrants from developing countries reside in other developing countries, and almost 80 per cent of South–South migration takes place between contiguous countries (Ratha and Shaw, 2007). For example, there have been large movements of workers from Burkina Faso to Côte d'Ivoire, from Egypt to Jordan, from Haiti to the Dominican Republic, from Indonesia to Malaysia, and from neighboring

countries to Argentina. Many countries are both sources of and destinations for migrants. Canada, for example, is a traditional destination for migrants, but Canada also sends significant numbers of people, particularly the highly skilled, to the United States. Similar phenomena have emerged in Asia. For example, Thailand receives many low-skilled immigrants from Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Myanmar, and also sends its own workers to other countries, including Israel, the Republic of Korea and Taiwan (China).

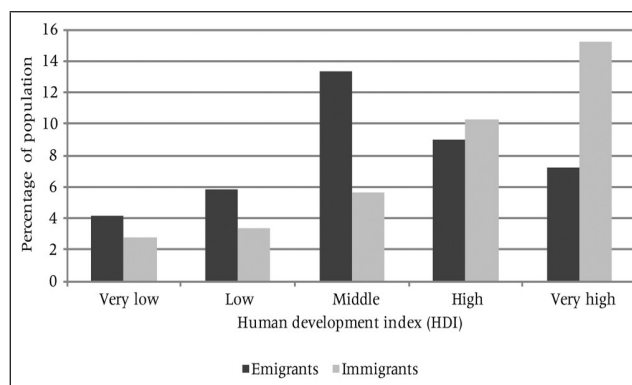
Fig 1: Regional origins of inter-continental migrants, 1960–2017



Source: De Hass et al, 2019

From the above fig (1) Europeans made up 76 percent of all long-distance migrants in 1960, this percentage decreased to 22 percent in 2017, coinciding with increasing long-distance migration from other world regions, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. In 1960, an estimated 8 percent of emigrants from Asia had moved outside the region; in 2017 this share had soared to 58 percent. When countries achieve higher development levels emigration decrease alongside increasing immigration, leading to their transformation from net emigration to net immigration countries.

Fig 2: Levels of development and migration patterns

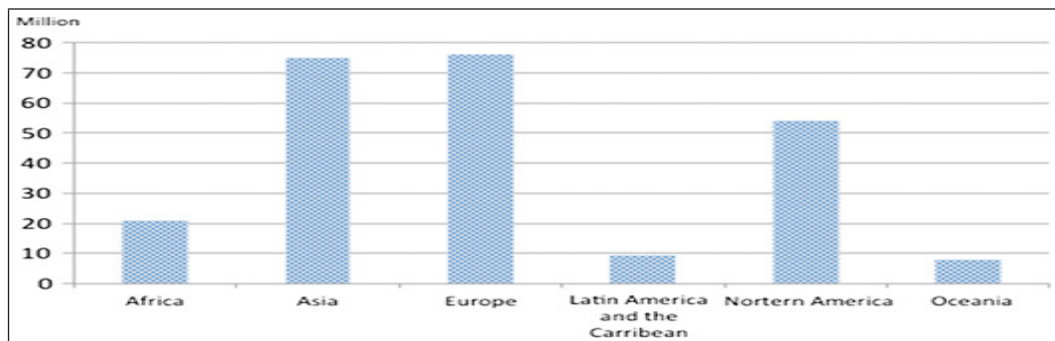


Source: De Hass et al, 2019

The above fig (2) reflects that the volume of emigrants have increased up to with those countries

of middle level of human development index. Similarly in those countries with high and very high level of human development index the volume of immigrants are high. It helps to conclude that the volume and direction of emigrants and immigrants are determined by human development index of a particular country.

Fig: 3 Region wise share of Volume of International migrants by region of residence, 2015.



Source: UN DESA, 2015.

National Scenario:

Widening disparities in income, wealth, human rights and security across countries serve as push factors towards migration. Migration in search of work has increasingly become a livelihood strategy for both women and men because of the lack of opportunities for full employment and decent work in many developing countries. At the same time, the proliferation of skill-intensive economic sectors, increased demand for skilled workers, reluctance of local workers to accept certain low-skilled jobs, and demographic trends such as population decline and population ageing in major destination countries act as strong pull factors. A growing number of nations are involved with migration as countries of origin, destination or transit, or all three. The majority of migrants move in search of employment, taking their families with them; it is estimated that there will be 214 million international migrants in the world in 2010 (UNDESA, 2009). Almost half of international migrants are women, most of whom are now migrating on their own, rather than primarily as family members of other migrants.

Migrant workers’ remittance is a strong source of foreign exchange earnings for Nepal. Workers remittance is now consider as a backbone of our economy. The value of foreign remittance from migrant laborers could be equivalent to 25 percent of official gross domestic product. Since last few years remittance income is playing a vital role for the foreign currency earnings and favorable impact on balance of payment situation, to reduce the number of people in the country below poverty line and ultimately to the economic growth of the nation(Panthee, 2012).

One of Nepal’s major exports is labor, and most rural households now depend on at least one member’s earnings from employment away from home and often from foreign (Seddon, 2005).It is estimated that 30 percent of Nepal’s total human resources remain outside the periphery of the Nepali state and among the Nepali migrants working overseas, 75 percent are unskilled.The number of working age Nepalese currently unemployed is estimated at 2.5 million. The labour participation rate stands at 83.4 percent. Of Nepal’s total population, at least 30 percent is either unemployed or underemployed (i.e. people who are seasonally or partially employed) and 400,000 people are entering labor market every year. In this context, the Three Years Plan has placed emphasis on:

(a) increasing employment opportunities within the country, (b) protecting the rights of workers, (c) initiating reforms in labor law and administration to increase production and productivity, (d) promote decent, safe and productive foreign employment, (e) increase access of youth, women, indigenous people, people with disability, Madhesi, Dalits, conflict affected people as well as disadvantaged and poor people to productive employment, and (f) ensure social security to workers including elimination of worst forms of child labour as per international commitments (Adhikari et al., 2011).

Government of Nepal has been made different acts, regulation, and conducted other necessary steps to make the foreign employment reliable, safety, and systematic. Nepal Government has only registered the total annual income and heads of foreign labor concerned migrants but not carried out any field survey to explore its impacts on economic, social, political, cultural aspects and so on.

There are certain undesirable factors in the place of origin, which stimulates or compels the individual to migrate to the other places, and likewise, there are certain desirable factors in the destination that attracts the migrants. In these words, the former factors are 'push' factors and the latter are the 'pull' factors causing the events of migration. Moreover according to him, the distance between the origins determines the volume of migration between place of origin and destination. Higher the distance, lower the volume of migration and vice versa (Revenstein, 1885). It is a cross-cultural and historical phenomenon that people migrate to contribute to their livelihoods. Due to poverty, unemployment, declining natural resources and, lately, the Maoist insurgency, labor out migration has become an increasingly important livelihood strategy in Nepal (Thieme, 2006).

Labour migration has maintained steady and strong trends among the Nepali youths. Some 1.2 million Nepali migrant workers left for overseas for foreign employment in the last five years since Nepal was transformed from a Hindu monarchy to the world's youngest federal democratic republic. This steady growth is mainly because the 3.5 percent economic growth rate has not been able to absorb some 400,000 new entrants in the labour market annually. Many youths do not see any future for them in the country despite the tall promises the politicians had made during the Jana Andolan II (People's movement led by major political parties and civil society against autocratic king's rule to establish Nepal as a federal democratic republic state) in April 2006. The number of Nepali men and women migrating overseas for foreign employment had declined in fiscal year 2008-09 because of the global economic meltdown but has picked up again in the subsequent months. Elusive political stability, frequent closure and strikes and reluctance of businessmen to invest in Nepal and closure of many industries that provided jobs and income opportunities were blamed for such a situation (Adhikari et al., 2011).

Poverty, unemployment and declining natural resources are major reasons why international labor migration is an increasingly important source of income. Migration to the neighboring country India has a longstanding history, while migration to the Gulf and Tiger States, Europe, or USA only commenced about 15 years ago. There is little documentation of the movements of migrant workers and their remittances and national census data has been criticized to understate migration numbers (Seddon et al., 2001).

The processes or institutions involved in international labor migration (accumulation of information, decision, preparation, financing money) are crucial. These processes influence the propensity to migrate and the potential contribution of labor migration to the livelihood of people. Without denying the importance of incentives from potential receiving countries (pull factors) and limited possibilities in the countries of origin (push factors), it has to be emphasized that these factors are translated through how migration occurs and the assets and demands (Bhandari, 2003).

The most important feature of the labor emigration is migrants' remittances along with all other potential material and immaterial benefits to the households left behind and to the entire sending nations. On the positive side, out-migration brings about improvements to the well-being of migrants and their families, reduction of poverty in the sending regions, much needed capital in the form of money and goods, a safety net for households, increasing local savings and investment, and alleviation of unemployment and underemployment pressures (Aslan, 2008). On the basis of data provided by the Department of Foreign Employment, the number of workers going to foreign for employment increased by 76,930 (35.4 percent) to 2,94,094 people in 2009/10 compared to 217,164 people in 2008/09 (DOFE, 2011). It is estimated that about 5 to 7 million Nepalese are currently in India (Bhattari, 2007).

Conclusions:

Foreign labor migration has been one of the major issue in current world. Variation in level of development and population growth rate between develop and developing counties including high rate of unemployment rate and lack of priority on human resource management in poor countries like Nepal, the volume and trends of foreign labour migration has been increasing. There is no availability of reliable sources of data related with labor migration between Nepal and India due to existing open border between Nepal and India and lack of proper and strict border management policies. Creation of employment opportunities and proper use of human resources within our country has been one of the important and priority need. Remittances from foreign labour migration is being helpful to address immediate need of our country and people. At the same time it need to realize the increased dependency with labour receiving countries which can create negative impacts at households, community and national level gradually.

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