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# Overseas Labour Migration of Nepal: Trends and Patterns

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## Abstract

*This research paper examines the trends, patterns, and diversifications of overseas labour migration from Nepal to different countries worldwide. This study analyzes the changing trends of human resource migration from Nepal around the world. In the same way, it elucidates the causes of migration from Nepal. The study uses quantitative methods to analyze the data. Different census reports show a continuous flow of Nepalese workers, and military personnel abroad over the past 250 years. Due to relatively higher income levels in the Gulf States and Malaysia, the proportion of migrants going to India has drastically declined lately. A rapid migration of Nepalese to Gulf countries and other developed countries took place after 1990. The recent census data exhibit that the trend of migrating overseas to new destinations is increasing and it also reveals that the migrating tendency of males is about four times higher than that of females. Nepal, one of the world's major remittance-receiving developing countries, has gained recognition in recent years for gaining foreign currency from its migrant workers. As a result, Nepal has undergone transformations in the fields of its culture, political ideology, and technology. Therefore, overseas migration has contributed to the socio-economic development of the nation.*

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Keywords: Causes, destination countries, diversification, overseas migrants, pattern, & trend.

## Introduction

Overseas migration refers to the cross-border movement of the people away from the country of which they are citizens into another country or, they are not citizens. Similarly, international migration can be defined as a phenomenon in which people change their country of usual residence, and cross an international border (UNDESA, 1998). The history of overseas from Nepal begins in 1815 with the enrolment of Nepalese in the British Army as "Gurkhas". Nepal has become a familiar name in the discourse surrounding overseas migration. About 261 million Nepali foreign migrant workers live abroad today.

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However, the number is higher according to different sources related to foreign labour migration. This shows that a large proportion of Nepalese households depend upon foreign remittances (CBS, 2021).

Since the 21<sup>st</sup> century, overseas employment has been the biggest concern of Nepali youth. Nepal's greater openness to India is one of its unique features for foreign employment. Despite a lack of data on the topic, cross-border movements are frequent at large scale and have positive and negative impacts. Nepalese people traditionally seek to work in India, but since the mid-1980s, they also began migrating to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Malaysia, contributing to an increase in the number of migrant workers and a sharp increase in recruitment agencies and brokers. One can read that Nepalese labor migrant trends as divided into migration to India as well as migration to other countries. Normally, people in Nepal and India can move around without restrictions (Aryal, 2022). Williams et al. (2020) claim that there are three main streams of Nepali migrants - migrants to India, migrants to GCC, Malaysia, and other countries in Asia, and migrants to developed countries.

Global migration has been on the rise for the past 50 years, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). According to the data, around 84 million people left their place of birth in 1970, while the number increased just more than three times in the year 2020 with an estimated number of 281 billion people on the planet. The outcome indicates that 3.6 percent of the world's population migrates away from their home countries. The distribution of international migrants among the continents reveals that Asia receives somewhat less than Europe, accounting for 30.5 percent of all international migrants, while Europe accounts for 30.9 percent. In a similar vein, 20.9 percent of all international employment comes from Northern America, 9 percent from Africa, 5.3 percent from America and the Caribbean, and 3.3 percent from Oceania (IOM, 2022).

The government of Nepal is still unaware of some crucial issues about foreign migration like how many youths are in foreign lands, in what professions they are involved, what skills and benefits they are gaining, what kind of problems they are facing, how much remittance they are sending, whether the remittance has been properly used or not and so on. The tendency shows that in the near future, every Nepalese household will depend on external remittance. Keeping this fact in mind, the government needs to formulate the appropriate policies to address the contemporary issues of overseas migration.

## **Justification of the Study**

Nepal is a remittance-based country, and there is a significant share of remittances in its gross domestic product. It has crossed the NRRS 1 trillion (USD 8.33 billion) mark

in the final months of the budgetary year 2021/22. It is empiric that there has been an accretion trend of emigrants in the aftermost two decades. The emigrant's share in the total population increased from 3.3 percent in 2001 to 7.4 percent in 2021 (IOM, 2021). Another benefit that Nepal gets from foreign employment is skilled human resources. The number of people who use the skills learned abroad, especially in the agricultural sector, to create jobs in the country is gradually increasing. Generally, in an economically poor country like Nepal, foreign employment is a matter of compulsion for many and a matter of desire for few, but it is making a significant contribution to raising the standard of living of Nepalese remittance-receiving households.

## **Objectives**

The general objective of this study is to examine the trends, patterns, and diversifications of overseas labour migrants from Nepal to other countries. The specific objectives are to analyze the changing trends of overseas labor migration and elucidate its causes.

## **Data and Methodology**

This study is based the quantitative data analysis. Major sources of quantitative data are the International Organization of Migration (IOM), Ministry of Finance (MoF), Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security (MoLESS), Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE), Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) Reports, Population Monograph of Nepal, and Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Nepal. Hence, it follows the quantitative method of approach.

## **Interpretation and Analysis of Data**

### **Current Trends of Overseas Migration**

Over the past two centuries, Nepal has experienced the migrating tendency of her people as labour force to foreign countries. Due to the open border, a large portion was limited only to India in the past. Adhikari et al. (2023) say that in spite of this process, external forces, particularly the British colonial and expansionist regime, contributed to the emigration of Nepalese to other countries. Recent globalization has contributed to the migration of individuals looking for contract work in newly industrializing countries, especially after 1990 because it has made it easier to find workers at low-cost jobs in these countries. This time period also coincides with political change in Nepal. The influence of this external and internal change appears in foreign labour migration. Recent trend shows that there has been a drastic change in Nepalese overseas workers in the destination countries.

The Government of Nepal authorized legal foreign employment in 128 nations in 2019, but Nepalese workers have been spotted in 172 countries. The GCC and Malaysia are

major destinations for Nepalese workers comprising 88 percent of the total foreign labor migrants (Aryal, 2022). The recent studies reveal that the trend of international migration is rapidly increasing in today's highly technocratic world. Therefore, if we provide appropriate skills and training to the Nepalese overseas workers, Nepal will receive more remittance than now.

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**Table-1: Distribution of overseas labor migration from Nepal to the world, from 1941 to 2021.**

Years	Total Population	Absent Population	Absent population in percentage of the total population	Absent population in percentage of the total population (India)	Absent population in percentage of the total population in other countries except India	Absent Population	
						Male (In percent)	Female (In percent)
1941	62,83,649	87,722	1.4	-	-	-	-
1952/54	84,73,478	1,98,120	2.34	-	-	87.6	12.4
1961	97,41,466	3,28,470	3.37	-	-	-	-
1971	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1981	15,425,816	4,02,977	2.61	93.1	6.9	81.5	18.5
1991	19,149,389	6,58,290	3.44	89.2	9.8	83.2	16.8
2001	23,499,115	7,62,181	3.24	77.3	22.7	89.2	10.8
2011	2,64,94,504	19,21,494	7.24	37.6	62.4	87.6	12.4
2021	2,91,92,480	21,69,478	7.43	-	-	81.28	18.72

*Source: CBS, 1941, 1952/54, 1961,1981,1991, 2001, 2011, & 2021.*

The data exhibit that the trend of overseas migrants has increased slightly from 1941 to 1952/54 (i.e.1.4% to 2.34%). Similarly, it shows a little increase in the year 1961 (3.37%). However, the trend decreases in the year 1981 (2.61%). It goes continuously

increasing till 1991 (3.44%). However, the trend seems slightly decreasing in 2001 (3.24%). Likewise, it reveals that the trend of foreign migrants has increased rapidly in the period of 2011 to 2021 (i.e. 7.24% to 7.43%). There are several reasons behind the mass overseas labor migration from Nepal which include unemployment, poverty, lack of employment opportunities, traditional agriculture practices, lack of industrialization, effects of Maoist insurgency, lack of security among the people, low salaries, price increment, lack of opportunities, political instability, and so on. However, different studies exhibit that the number of Nepalese youths who have gone abroad by the informal channel for employment is more than 5 million. In the same way, the results show that the tendency of male overseas migrants is far higher than female migrants from 1941 to the present time.

## **Destination Countries**

Foreign employment is one of the foremost sources of income for Nepalese households. The Government of Nepal allowed Nepalese human resources to work in 128 countries in 2019 (Aryal, 2021). The GCC and Malaysia are the top destinations for Nepalese workers, accounting for 88 percent of all foreign labor migrants. The top five countries that receive Nepalese workers in the fiscal year 2018/19 are Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Malaysia (DoFE, 2018/19).

According to IOM (2021), about 5 million Nepalese migrate each year overseas in search of employment opportunities. Some of the apparent emerging destination countries are the United Kingdom, Cyprus, Australia, Jordan, Poland, Romania, Malta, Croatia, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Portugal, and the new others. These are in accession to accepted countries like Gulf Cooperation Council (CCC) Countries, India, and Malaysia.

## **Discussion**

About a million Nepalese youth leave permanently as workers and students each year seeking employment opportunities. If this situation continues in the context of Nepal, she will have a shortage of human resources in the near future. Kaur (2010) says that international labour migration began in Southeast Asia in the 1970s and onwards. Countries Malaysia and Thailand are major hosts to welcome about 13.5 million migrant workers in the region. The study also reveals that the labour force of Singapore comprises 25 percent of its total workforce from foreign migrants. Sunam et al. (2016) argues that the case of rural Nepal, where over half of the households are occupied in foreign labour migration. It stands as a 'window' to understanding the processes shaping how overseas

migration affects poverty. Recently, different studies have revealed that more than 70 percent of Nepalese households receive foreign remittances.

According to Kunwar (2020), labor migration is a complicated factor as it includes workers, families, communities, and societies, recruiting agencies, middlemen, and employers in the destination country, as well as laws and policies from both the sending and receiving countries. It is exceedingly challenging to establish and implement effective labor migration governance acts and policies in nations like Nepal due to the diversity of interests of the players. We frequently receive reports of victims and situations involving the mistreatment of Nepalese workers both domestically and overseas. Foreign labor migration is now a crucial aspect of Nepalese daily life. One of the appealing job sectors of Nepal's economy has been international labor migration due to a lack of employment options within the nation.

International migration and remittance, according to Karki (2020), are important factors in human resource management and development. In addition to highlighting the flow of remittance status and its contribution to Nepal's gross domestic product, this study assesses the pattern and destination of foreign labor migration from Nepal. However, migration to the Gulf States and Malaysia has significantly grown recently, and women are now migrating in greater numbers in search of employment abroad. Over the course of the census periods, Nepal has seen a tendency that is primarily growing: an absent population. While there is evidence that international labor migration and remittance inflow are rising, the government should seize this chance to develop and execute investment-friendly policies to encourage people to participate in the productive sector and make use of returnees' skills.

Adhikari et al. (2023) argue that the migration of Nepalese youth to European nations, the United Kingdom, Japan, and the Republic of Korea is a rapid trend in destination countries. In addition to earning more money, migrant workers in these nations also enjoy comparatively greater labor and human rights protections. However, due to their relative prosperity and educational levels, these nations are accessible to people from relatively superior economic and social backgrounds. One common route for this kind of movement is student migration.

IOM (2020) claims that about 281 million people lived in other than their native countries around the world in 2020. Among them, Asia holds the world's international migrants just more than 40 percent (around 115 million) in the same year. The study also shows that significant increase in Asian-born migrant populations in Northern America and Europe

for the last two decades. Extra regional migration from Asia to other regions increased especially in Northern America and Europe with more than 46 million in 2020.

Sunam (2020) claims that the remittance village's concept highlights the transnational mobility of rural people as a salient aspect of current dynamics in many parts of the Global South. This is also reshaping rural social, economic, and ecological textures in society. He appraises linear narratives that are too comfortable and implies that new options, including international migration and remittances, offer better methods for the rural poor to escape poverty. It also questions narratives that downplay the significance of land and farming for the rural poor. The study also exhibits that many impoverished people are unable to take advantage of new changes and that doing so frequently leads to greater exposure. He discovers in the remittance village that even those who take advantage of new opportunities can only succeed if at least one household member is actively involved in non-agricultural work.

Having not seen the possibility of employment and future security inside their home country, the youth keep the thought of going abroad to find a job of any kind. Since the education system is not compatible with labor production, many qualified graduates remain unemployed. As a result, the tendency to migrate to foreign countries increases either in the name of higher studies or in the name of job employment. The trend began from rural households to urban ones. Likewise, the tendency to migrate to the Middle East and Malaysia for foreign employment has been shifted from city centers to developed countries around the world.

## **Conclusion**

Labor migration plays an important role in the socio-economic development of Nepal. Nepali workers who have gone abroad have made a great contribution to the development of the country. In the field of foreign employment, Nepalese workers have not only sent remittances to around 172 countries of the world but also have conveyed the knowledge, skills, and experience they have learned in that country to their native country. The problems faced by the Nepalese foreign workers who used to go abroad are a matter of discussion and address in time. The result shows that if Nepal accommodates adapted abilities and training to the Nepalese overseas workers, she will receive more remittances than now.



To sum up, external migrants have been significantly raised because of the varied roles of the migrants like employees, students, businesspersons, tourists, etc. In the same way, the migrating trend has increased as a result of the availability of job opportunities in a wide range of destinations such as UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Israel, Malaysia, and many European and American countries. Due to the scarcity of job opportunities in their homeland, Nepali youth leave their country and resort to a place that is totally different in culture, language, customs, and law. If the trend of Nepal's labor force going abroad continues like this, there will be a shortage of human resources in Nepal after some time.

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