

Nepal India Labor Migration: A Qualitative Study of Migrant Experiences

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Abstract

Introduction: Nepal-India labor movement is based on social, historical and economic links. Nepalis are allowed to work in India in many industries thanks to the open border policy. There are many Nepali migrants in India but qualitative studies on their life and challenges are few.

Methods: Twenty-five semi-structured interviews, three FGDs (6 participants each), and participation observation were conducted at Jamunaha-Rupaidiha border. This qualitative study involved individual interviews with Nepali migrant workers and their families, key informant interviews and focus group discussions in Nepal and India. The sample was selected to achieve diversity in age, gender and occupation. The working conditions, social impacts and causes of migration were identified.

Findings: The key drivers included wage differentials, lack of local employment, and established social networks hamper the migrant workers. Migrants reported that the wage theft, lack of written contracts, and exclusion from social protection schemes further escalates it.

Conclusion: For many Nepalis, labour migration is crucial for household economies. The findings demand bilateral measures between Nepal and India for the protection of migrants, safe transportation and enhancement of support services.

Novelty: This study provides a qualitative evidence on how open border policies create both opportunities and vulnerabilities for Nepali migrants in India's informal sector, with implications for bilateral labor governance.

Keywords: Nepal-India open border, labour migration, cross border mobility, remittances, protection of migrants

Introduction

The open border and historical ties attribute to the transfer of labour from Nepal to India, an ongoing socio-economic phenomenon. They are crucial to sending and receiving communities although there is little qualitative study examining the true realities of Nepali migrants working in India. Research on Nepali labour migration to India has found insecure working circumstances, lack of legal and social protection and complex concerns of gender and culture ([Mak & Roberts, 2021](#)). Informal ways of travel, lack of knowledge of rights and the absence of institutional support mechanisms can compound such vulnerabilities, putting migrants vulnerable to abuse and exclusion. Qualitative studies have explored some of the psychosocial stressors and coping strategies of returnee Nepali migrants, including financial insecurities, contract violations, discrimination and difficulties accessing health and social services (Coping with migration-related stressors among Nepali male labour migrants ([Mak & Roberts, 2021](#))).

The ongoing flow of labor migration between Nepal and India remains a key, but little studied, phenomenon, particularly from the perspective of migrants' lived experiences. Despite common cultural linkages and an open border, there is a dearth of qualitative study on socio-economic and psychological aspects of Nepali migrant workers in India. In a recent study in Sudurpashchim Province, Nepal, the author used a narrative inquiry, in-depth interviews, participant observations, and case studies to understand why migrants migrate to India, how they survive informal and undocumented labor, and how remittances are used for subsistence and not for transformative development purposes ([Bhatt, 2025](#)).

Also, the socio-cultural processes that shape cross-border migration must be studied more closely. Bhatt (2024) explored Nepali and Indian labour migrants and observed variations in caste and ethnic makeup, return visit patterns and educational disparities, all of which influence migrants' integration and their access to social resources ([Bhatt, 2024](#)). While these findings speak to the effect of structural inequalities and social identities on migration experiences, they do not speak directly to the migrants' subjective narratives. Macro-level investigations consider legislative frameworks and economic trends, but the human dimension – how migrants make sense of risk, negotiate belonging and maintain transnational links – remains under-researched. The absence of qualitative data focusing on migrants' voices hampers the creation of policies required to guarantee that their rights and well-being are appropriately protected. If interventions are not based on the daily realities of job, housing, health and identity in host communities they risk being out of sync with the actual needs of migrants. The purpose of this study is to fill this gap by undertaking an in-depth qualitative study of Nepali labor migrants in India, with particular attention to personal narratives, coping techniques and social networks. Methods will involve semi-structured interviews, personal narratives and participant observation across distinct migrant communities paying attention to caste, gender and regional diversity. The purpose is to understand how migrants deal with precarious job situations, negotiate informal labor markets and sustain links with home communities.

The research's focus on migrant experiences adds to a more comprehensive and human-

centered understanding of Nepal–India labor migration. This offers insights to inform more effective and culturally responsive policies, from labour protections and access to social services, to bilateral agreements and community support systems. This study ultimately seeks to link macro-level migration flows to the complex lived realities of migrants in an effort to promote social justice, dignity and resilience of Nepali migrant communities. The study address: (1) What are the primary drivers of labor migration from Nepal to India? What challenges do Nepal migrants face in India? How does migration impact Nepali households? What policies interventions are needed to protect migrant workers?

Literature Review

Labor mobility between India and Nepal is a historical and ongoing issue. It is driven by historical, geographical and socio-economic causes. The open border between the two nations, strengthened by strong political and cultural relations makes the flow of unregistered and seasonal workers, many of them are without adequate paperwork ([Centre for the Study of Labor and Mobility \[CESLAM\] & Foreign Employment Board \[FEB\], 2022](#)). It was predicted in 2017-2018 that one million Nepali workers were employed or seeking jobs in India, although the actual number is likely to be greater due to seasonal and informal migration trends ([CESLAM & FEB, 2022](#)). There are many reasons which make people from Nepal to move to India for work. Economic needs, uneven earnings and lack of domestic employment opportunities still push people to seek employment beyond borders. Circulatory and seasonal migration to India is often a significant part of rural household livelihood plans, notably in the Terai and hill areas (Valenta, 2022). Also, the open-border system allows people to obtain jobs with few legal impediments as social networks and established migratory channels support this movement.

It is also part of the gendered and generational dimensions of labor migration to India. Young male migrants from Nepal's middle hills work seasonally in Indian cities such as Mumbai and Nainital, where they negotiate their present consumption aspirations with precarious labor conditions ([Sharma, 2021](#)). Ethnographic research shows this. These migrants are stigmatized as they come across modern objects and lifestyles, reflecting a complex nexus of economic survival, aspiration and tradition. However, the open-borders regime has significant implications for governance and policy. There's no formal documentation or regulation and Nepali labor migrants in India often face denial of legal protection, social security and labor rights. Despite the volume of movement, the Nepali government doesn't come up with regulations that specifically address the perils faced by Indian-bound laborer ([Shivakoti, 2022](#)). Moreover, this variability of the migration governance framework leads to the marginalization and mistreatment of migrants.

Finally, labor movement between Nepal and India is an integral part of Nepali lives, especially for rural and vulnerable communities. This is the result of free borders, strong migrant networks and underlying economic disparities. Nevertheless, there are no clear norms or mechanisms of protection, and many migrants are at risk. Tackling these impediments requires evidence-based

policy interventions that value the relevance of the corridor and at the same time uphold the rights and welfare of migrants. The free border between Nepal and India is a unique feature in South Asia and is a provision of the 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship which has contributed to the deep-rooted bilateral ties. The porous border, approximately 1,750 kilometers in length, permits inhabitants of each country to traverse freely without visas or passports. This agreement has brought about many benefits in the economic, social and cultural fields which have played a great role in the success and integration of the two nations. Economically, the open border has been a catalyst for cross-border trade and business, a lifeline for landlocked Nepal. Nepal's biggest trading partner is India and the main source of basic items such as fuel, food grains and medicines. The lack of tight border controls facilitates the movement of goods, lowering transaction costs and contributing to lively border markets. This openness also sparks a boom in informal trade which benefits small traders and local economies. The free movement of people and commodities has not only increased the volume of bilateral trade but also provided Nepal access to the large market of India, enhancing Nepal's economic resilience and opportunities for growth ([Adhikari, 2019](#)).

Besides trade, the open border encourages labor movement, which is essential to Nepal's economy. India is home to millions of Nepali residents in diverse sectors, whose remittances constitute a large part of Nepal's GDP. Nepali workers get job easily, without the onerous regulatory hurdles. This supports their families back home and alleviates poverty. This migration is not one way. There are many Indians who trade, do business and work in Nepal but to a smaller amount. The mutual labor mobility promotes interdependence and cross-cultural knowledge and strengthens the bilateral ties ([Khanal & Wagle, 2022](#)).

The open border has socially strengthened familial and communal bonds. Many families have relatives on both sides of the border, and free movement allows them to stay close to each other, attend family gatherings and provide social assistance. Cultural festivals, religious pilgrimages and marriage alliances are prevalent across the border adding to the shared legacy of both the countries. In the past, the border regions have been places of fluid identities, with ethnic groups like as the Madhesi, Tharu and Bhojpuri populations living across national boundaries. This permeability has resulted in harmonic co-existence and mutual respect engendering a sense of family and a shared destiny ([Singh, 2017](#)).

The movement of people from Nepal to India has been one of the most significant events, social, economic and cultural in the context of Nepal-India. Nepal and India have a common history, an open border policy and are experiencing changes in labour dynamics. Indeed, the open border with India and Nepal gives rise to employment and migration opportunities ([Timalsina, 2022](#)). This study examines the economic, social, cultural and political repercussions of this wave of migration. It considers the legal flows of workers as well as the less formal flow including trends in seasonal migration and settlement. [Monteiro \(2022\)](#) revisits the Mincer model of migration, by considering the role of extended family arrangements in Nepal. The study points to the influence of family networks and household structure on the decision to migrate in the context of India where cultural ties and geographic proximity are particularly important. [Bhujel and Raj \(2022\)](#) have interviewed the Nepalese diaspora in India

and suggest that not all Indian Nepalis are a result of the exodus from Nepal. They question epistemological premises, refuse reductionist labels and promote a wider notion of identity and belonging. [Vindegga \(2022\)](#) uses the notion of 'energohistory' to study interactions across the Nepal–India border via the prism of energy trade and labour migration. The study also situates labour mobility in the broader context of geopolitical imbalances and the threat that flows of migrants pose to the sovereignty and state capability of Nepal.

Theoretical Framework

Migration theories assist us know those numerous features which induce human migration. The push-pull hypothesis (Lee, 1966) indicates that migration is caused by 'push' causes that force individuals to migrate from their home countries (e.g. unemployment, conflict etc) and 'pull' factors that attract them to the place of destination (e.g. better jobs, safety etc). This method is focused on the confluence of economic, social and political variables that lead people to leave their homeland to seek opportunities in foreign places. Network theory also points to the part that social relations (family, friends and community members) play in maintaining and fostering migratory streams ([Massey et al., 1993](#)). Such networks lower the costs and hazards of migration, provide migrants with information, resources and support and often create self-perpetuating streams of migrants. The dual labor market hypothesis also incorporates the structure of industrialized economies. It contends that the demand for low trained and low paid labour in rich nations still exists and serves as motivation for migration from less developed countries ([Piore, 1979](#)). In this view migration is understood as a result of human behavior but also of structural needs of the receiving countries and fragmented labor markets. These theories complement each other in providing insights into understanding migration as a dynamic process influenced by macro level causes, social networks and labor market structures.

Methods

This is a qualitative study on cross-border movement and labour migration at the Jamunaha-Rupaidiha border between Nepal and India. Qualitative approaches capture the complexity of cross-border migrants' experiences, views and socio-economic contexts.

Study Site

The Jamunaha-Rupaidiha border, a crucial transit point between Nepal and India, has been examined. This location was selected as a labor migration gateway and a socio-economic center that affects the regional migration trends.

Data Collection

Forty-three participants were selected as a simple size purposively. Semi-structured interviews were administered with 25 Nepali migrants to India whereas three focus group discussion were conducted among 18 participants consisting of each 6 to collect information. Interviews lasted for 45-90 minutes; FGDs lasted for 90-120 minutes. Interviews were collected in Nepali and local dialects (Awadhi, Bhojpuri); questions were translated to English by the researcher.

Data Interpretation

The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, following the six phases defined by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and labeling themes, and producing the final report. Such systematic technique enables systematic and rigorous assessment of qualitative data allowing to uncover meaningful patterns and themes within the dataset ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)).

Ethical

Concerns

All subjects gave informed consent for inclusion prior to study. Privacy assured. Qualitative research of migrant groups was ethical. Ethical approval was obtained from the Department of Political Science, Aligarh Muslim University, India.

Researcher Positionality

As a Nepali researcher studying migration, I acknowledge potential bias towards migrant advocacy. This was addressed through systematic coding and peer debriefing.

Table 1

Demographic Details of Participants

Methods		Sessions	Total Participants	Males	Females
Focus Group	Discussion	3	18	10	8
Semi-structured	Interviews	25	25	15	10
Total		-	43	25	18

The course of fieldwork was run during April 2026.

Results/Thematic Analysis

Economic Drivers of Migration

Economically motivated has always been the mobility over the India-Nepal border at the Rupaidiha-Jamunaha cross-border crossroads. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with India-returnees show a complex interplay of push and pull factors that inform the decision for individuals and families to migrate for work. These perspectives have allowed for a more holistic picture of the role local conditions, economic opportunities and institutional constraints play in shaping migratory decisions.

A prominent point raised in the conversations was the scarcity of livelihood options in the home areas of the returnees. Unemployment, underemployment and low agricultural output were cited as key push factors by several interviewees. Many of the local communities' main activity is agriculture and irregular monsoons, tiny landholdings and lack of access to modern technology have resulted in diminishing yields making livelihood more and more difficult. It is not that people wish to relocate to India, it is a matter of household survival." Income differences between India and Nepal were commonly noted by returnees as a primary

attraction. It is stated that in Indian cities the daily wage is much higher, especially in sectors like construction, hospitality and domestic labour, than what is available locally. Remittances are a vital economic lifeline for families. For many returnees migration was a way to meet fundamental needs, to finance schooling or health care for their children and even to raise funds for social obligations like as weddings or religious celebrations.

Another critical aspect is the open-border policy and the freedom of mobility this entails. The crossing between India and Nepal, unlike other international migration routes, does not require visas or substantial documentation, hence reducing the expenses and hazards associated with transit. "Accessible enough for even the poorest households to find work across the border. There is a natural tendency to emigrate.

Interviews also revealed the phenomenon of seasonal and cyclical migration of border dwellers. Many migrants labor in India during the lean agricultural season and then return home for the planting and harvest, in an annual pattern. These cycles allow households to diversify their income sources and manage the dangers of an agricultural existence. Economics was often a consideration, but returnees also mentioned a range of issues like employment uncertainty, a lack of legal protections and instances of unpaid wages or abuse in India. These risks can be hidden by the drive to generate money rapidly. FGDs revealed the dangers of migration but also the rationale behind this choice for many.

Finally, the economic compulsions of poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment still remain the key causes for migration at the Rupaidiha-Jamunaha border. Returnees' views underline the pressing need for local development, skills building and job creation to lessen economic dependence on migration. As long as these opportunities go unrealized, the economic incentives described will continue to drive cross-border mobility in search of a better living.

Social Networks and Migration Decisions

The migration process of India returnees arriving through Rupaidiha to Jamunaha border point is highly influenced by the complex web of social interactions that bind people, families and communities. Results from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with these migrants reveal that social linkages are not only supportive but also deeply important in shaping migration decisions for leave and return.

The first decision to leave home is not often taken in a vacuum for many migrants. Rather it is typically the result of communal conversations inside households and wider kin groups where information is exchanged, risks appraised and solutions explored. Family members, friends and community elders, they add, are sources of encouragement and warning, sharing tales of success and failure experienced in migration. These stories, shared on local social networks, are significant influencers, sometimes spurring migration with accounts of economic success, at other times discouraging it by highlighting episodes of exploitation or unfulfilled hopes. As for the migratory voyage itself, the presence of social links across the border provides some safety net. Many returnees talked about how they can find work, accommodation or even emotional support through relatives or acquaintances who had migrated before. Such networks reduce the uncertainty of crossing borders, offering practical support, like travel information, links with business, and advice about how to negotiate bureaucratic hurdles. In many situations,

migrants can avoid exploitative agents or dangerous situations because somebody in their network has previously indicated the path forward. The network-based support is more critical for Rupaidiha-Jamunaha area, which is a main artery for cross-border movement with potential as well as risks.

When returning, migrants still heavily depend on their social networks for reintegration. Homecoming is not always a smooth experience, since returnees are sometimes stigmatized, financially unstable or unable to adapt to changed family connections. Again here the support of relatives and community is crucial. social networks help to access local opportunities, in rebuilding livelihoods and providing emotional consolation. In addition, returnees themselves serve as important nodes in the network, sharing fresh knowledge and experience with others, so improving the community's collective understanding of migratory dynamics. The qualitative data from interviews and FGDs further underline the flexibility of these networks. They are not static, but expand, contract and respond to migratory movements and wider socio-economic developments. Negative experiences, such as job loss or exploitation, for example, are swiftly shared across the network, which could decrease excitement for future migration. Or reports of successful reintegration or economic success may encourage new rounds of movement.

In summary, the experiences of the India returnees crossing across the Rupaidiha to Jamunaha border point to the fundamental and diverse role of social networks in the migratory process. They set goals, mitigate risks, smooth transitions and ultimately affect the decision calculus for both migration and return.” This collective expertise and support embedded in these networks is crucial and vital, and thus an integral part of the migratory experience particular to this cross-border situation.

Working Conditions in India

Information on working conditions in India, especially of migrant labourers from adjacent regions, is given by returnees from India crossing the Rupaidiha to Jamunaha border point. Some common themes are highlighted by the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions which point to the experiences of these professionals regarding opportunities and issues. There are plenty of job prospects in the Indian labour market and returnees have said that they are working in sectors including construction, agriculture, hotels and domestic work. But these types of jobs are largely informal, with no written contracts, job security or legal protection. Generally, workers are hired on oral contracts and can be fired and abused at any time. Some participants reported experiences of not being paid and/or of a reduction in their pay without notice. This is part of a broader problem of insecurity in the informal sector. Poor and irregular earnings were also a big concern to the returnees. Several interviewees remarked that the remuneration in India was better than in their home countries, although not always commensurate with the amount or intensity of work done. There were also complaints of discrimination in remuneration on the basis of country, caste or gender and many migrants were paid less than their Indian colleagues for the same job This just added to their financial troubles. Wages were regularly delayed and some workers had to take out loans or advances at excessive rates of interest.

Working hours are long without adequate breaks or overtime pay. Data from interviews and FGDs indicate that working hours are often 10-12 hours daily. Many migrants were employed in strenuous physical labor without any attention to occupational safety and health. Returnees often cited lack of safety equipment, exposure to toxic substances and lack of medical support in case of an accident. Workers also reported living in overcrowded housing with poor sanitation, impacting their general well-being.

Many of the returnees spoke about social exclusion and prejudice. Sometimes the employers or local residents spoke sharp words to describe and harass the migrant workers. They were further entrenched in a marginalized position due to limited access to public services like health and education for their children. Female migrants faced higher rates of harassment and lower salaries for comparable work.

Workers dealing with such challenges demonstrated a lot of resilience and flexibility.” They created support networks with other migrants, sharing resources and exchanging information about safer employers or better job opportunities. “Some of the returnees said they gained valuable skills and experience in the Indian employment sector that they wanted to bring home. The job story in India is tough for returnees at the Rupaidiha to Jamunaha cross border point. Migration offers economic opportunities not found in the country of origin, but also exposes people to considerable risks, exploitation and instability. The stories of these returnees underline the critical need to better regulate and defend the rights of migrant workers and their working and living conditions in India’s informal labour industry.

Legal Vulnerabilities and Protection Gaps

The semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with returnees from India near the border of Rupaidiha – Jamunaha indicated significant legal vulnerabilities and protection deficiencies. The crossing is an important transit route for migrants returning from India to Nepal, and a sign of the region’s expanding mobility and vulnerabilities. Many returnees feel that their legal rights and limits on cross-border mobility were not effectively explained to them. Border guards are said to change their documentation requirements often and apply them arbitrarily, producing confusion, anxiety and distrust. Migrants are also victims of arbitrary decision-making and ill-treatment. For example, many respondents reported unofficial “contributions” or bribes demanded by officials on either side of the border. Misunderstanding of legal procedures can be a channel for corruption and abuse. Gaps in protection are also linked to the absence of coordinated systems of help at the border. Some NGOs and local organizations strive to help but they can only do so much and occasionally they cannot meet the overall requirement. Returnees, particularly women and children, said they felt terrified and unsupported, especially at peak hours or at night when they crossed. Interviews revealed situations in which people were trafficked, with traffickers taking advantage of the lack of official supervision and the absence of safe travel standards. These vulnerabilities are further exacerbated by the lack of redress or grievance channels. Returnees report that when infractions take place there are few channels to seek justice or report about mistreatment. Many are afraid of reprisals or greater persecution if they speak out. The feeling of insecurity is intensified by the assumption that officials on either side of the border

are either complicit in or unconcerned about the welfare of migrants. Concerns have been amplified in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak when emergency measures and travel restrictions have been imposed at times without the knowledge or protection of vulnerable people. Reports indicated that quarantine facilities and basic services were insufficient and at times presented serious health and safety risks for returnees. The results from the interviews and FGDs clearly show that it is vital to improve legal procedures, coordinate the different parties and have proper protective mechanisms at border crossings. These loopholes need to be rectified to protect the rights and well-being of returnees and to make sure cross-border travel does not become another vulnerability.

Impact on Nepali Households

Return of Nepali migrant workers from India through the Rupaidiha-Jamunaha cross-border point had significant ramifications for households in Nepal as recounted by returnees during semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The border is an important route for labour migration but the Covid-19 pandemic and periodic border restrictions led to many Nepalis working in India returning home unexpectedly. The experiences and views of these individuals illuminate the complex impacts on families and communities in Nepal. Most returnees said that the biggest, most immediate effect was a big loss of income. “Remittances from India have been a major part of household economies, helping fund basic needs, education and healthcare and the abrupt halt of wages left many families in economic uncertainty. Interviews within households showed survival entailed cutting costs, selling possessions or taking out loans. Some reported increased stress and worry about their capacity to pay for dependents.

Changes in social dynamics and duties at home were also underlined by returnees. Repatriation of the migrant member to his or her own home had both good and bad consequences on families. Family members emotionally supported and shared household work on the one hand. But there were problems because there were no other economic opportunities in the area and returnees were seeking meaningful jobs in Nepal. FGDs identified frustration with limited options for livelihoods. This in turn could lead to strained relationships amongst families. Another was Reintegration. Many of them had got used to life and work in India and found it difficult to adjust to the local atmosphere. Some faced stigmatization as potential carriers of diseases, especially during the peak of the pandemic, and social exclusion within their own communities. Others spoke about the emotional toll of shifting expectations and the concern about the future with opportunities in India in the air and local prospects low. But the interviews also revealed resilience and adaptation in the face of these adversities. Some households have many sources of income, such as from the farm, a small business, or from daily wage employment. Community support networks were essential in helping families cope, sharing resources and providing emotional comfort.

In essence, the views of Indian returnees at Rupaidiha-Jamunaha border crossing reflect the precariousness of Nepali households dependent on migration and their resistance to a crisis. The results highlight the need for targeted support and long-term livelihood options to assist in the long-term stability of households for returning families.

Policy and Border Governance

Rupaidiha-Jamunaha cross-border crossing between India and Nepal is a vital transit corridor for the returnees especially during crises like COVID-19 epidemic. Policy and border governance at this site is not only about formal regulation, but also about migrant lived experiences as they navigate the border. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with returnees from India reveal a complicated interplay of policy effectiveness, administrative capabilities and humanitarian response at the border. Returnees have reported that although there are official border crossing processes on both sides, the actual application of border rules does not always fulfill the intended purpose. Many of the returnees complained that policies are often not adequately communicated. There is not regular communication of procedural information (e.g. health screening requirements, paperwork processes and quarantine measures). This ambiguity often leads to confusion and delays, rendering the border crossing experience disagreeable and unpredictable.

Further, border governance is considered to be strongly shaped by informal networks and discretion of local officials. Interviewees also raised examples of facilitation or easier passage based on personal relationships or informal payments. This indicates that informal systems of governance co-exist with the formal ones. These practices impact on trust and justice in the perception of border control and they contaminate trust in official processes. Returnees also raised concerns about infrastructure and resources at the border crossing. During mass repatriation, many claimed substandard shelter, sanitation and medical facilities. A frequent topic was the lack of gender-sensitive spaces and child-friendly services as an indication of policy shortcomings with respect to vulnerable populations. The teamwork between Indian and Nepalese officials was also found wanting with several cases of repetitive operations or contradictory instructions, which added to the hardships experienced by the migrants. However, some positive experiences were described, especially where local civil society organizations intervened to provide assistance. There were vital holes in the official processes that were filled by community-based support, which provided stranded refugees with food, drink or temporary shelter. This highlights the prospects for multi-stakeholder cooperation to enhance border governance.

In conclusion, the India returnees' perspectives highlight the importance of more transparent, coordinated and humane border checks at Rupaidiha-Jamunaha. Effective border governance means better infrastructure, stronger cooperation between state and non-state actors, clear communication and de-emphasis on informal practices to provide safer and more dignified cross-border transit. This is consistent with the push-pull hypothesis of migration by Massey et al. (1998) that the migration decision is a function of push variables (e.g. local unemployment) that drive people away from their origin and pull factors (e.g. salary differentials) to move to new places. The information shows how bad conditions at the point of origin and good opportunities at the point of destination work together to influence migration patterns in a real sense.

Discussion

The results are consistent with the prior studies that economic hardship and lack of local employment are the main reasons behind migration ([Adhikari & Hobley, 2015](#); [Thieme & Wyss, 2005](#)). Participants repeatedly recognized remittances as a key source of household income, supporting families and rural economies, which corroborates Seddon, Adhikari and Gurung's (2002) comments regarding the importance of cross-border earnings. Also, participants cited the insecurity and informal nature of jobs in India such as low wages and exploitation as a common factor, which is consistent with the work of Sharma (2013) and [Kansakar \(2003\)](#). Social networks and kinship ties were particularly important for migration and initial settlement, similar to the findings of [Thieme \(2006\)](#) and Sharma et al. (2014). But this research also challenges some of the dominant narratives. Previous studies have tended to emphasize the dominance of male migration ([Sharma et al., 2014](#)) but this study found a significant rise in female migration, notably in the areas of domestic and care labor. This change indicates changing gender roles within migrant movements, a tendency that has been little studied in the past. Furthermore, the importance of the supportive role of migrant networks is highlighted in previous studies ([Thieme, 2006](#)). However, some reported social isolation and lack of help upon arrival, suggesting differences in accessing social capital. Unlike previous research on legal and logistical impediments ([Gartaula et al., 2012](#)), majority of the respondents reported relatively easy border crossing due to the open border policy, however they encountered discrimination and xenophobia in India as documented by [Bhattarai \(2005\)](#). This paper broadly supports much of the existing literature on Nepal-India labor migration, particularly in relation to motivations, remittances and work conditions. But it also uncovers new trends and complexities, particularly in terms of gender relations and the differentiated nature of migrant supportive networks. The findings suggest the need for further research to better understand the changing scene of cross-border labor movement.

Conclusion

This study provides important insights into the dynamics of labor mobility from Nepal to India by exploring the economic, social and political factors that are interrelated and shape this long-standing migratory corridor. The analysis is based on the scholarly literature and current statistics explaining the open border, common history and the varied economic realities that have allowed Nepali laborers to continue migrating to India. The results correspond to the reality in those economic considerations, in particular income differentials and unemployment, remain the main factors for migration. However, the report also points out the existing problems encountered by migrants in India are pay theft, absence of formal job contracts and discrimination in all sorts of forms in the informal sector. The study also highlights the double-edged nature of migration, that remittances have a positive impact on household welfare in Nepal, yet the protracted separation of families can cause considerable emotional and social hardship. The open border has facilitated travel, but it has also engendered a legal gray area for migrants, many of whom are left without clear channels for protection or assistance. Based on

these obstacles, the study makes a case for evidence-based policies that protect rights of migrants and improve migration outcomes. This contribution to knowledge seeks to inform policymakers and scholars interested in promoting safer and more equitable migration for all actors involved and highlights relevant areas for future research (including the gendered experience of migration, the role of technology in migrant recruitment, shifts in migration patterns post COVID-19 and comparative research across border crossings).

Knowledge Contribution

The analysis of labor migration between Nepal and India adds to knowledge by giving richness of analysis of the lived realities of Nepali migrants typically disregarded in quantitative analyses. The research documents the stories of migrants and their social networks, their individual experiences and the problems they face, and the tactics they choose to cope with those challenges, thereby providing an insight of the complex interaction of social dynamics, economic need and vulnerability which influence the experience of migration. The qualitative insights are helpful in understanding the motives and hardships of migrants and are useful for policymakers in formulation of more effective and compassionate migration policies and support systems.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this qualitative study on Nepal-India labor migration, some solutions are made to improve the well-being and rights of Nepali migrant workers: Enhancing the Pre-Departure Orientation The government and non-governmental organizations should have a comprehensive pre-departure orientation programs for prospective migrants. These seminars must educate on legal rights, rules of the destination country, health and safety measures and support services available in India.

There is a need for Nepal and India to work together to establish effective monitoring mechanisms for labour migration. The two countries should sign formal memoranda of agreement to ensure protection of migrant workers' rights, oversee recruitment practices and lay out grievance redressal processes.

Promotion and facilitation of legal and safe migration: Awareness should be raised about the risks of irregular migration. Better information about legal migration can help migrants to adopt more lawful channels, and therefore reduce their exposure to exploitation. Better access to support services: Migrant workers should have better access to support services in both Nepal and India. This includes legal aid, counseling, shelter and health care. Helpdesks or migrant resource centers at major transit hubs and in large destination cities could be useful. Providing Social Protection: Policy should be adopted to provide social protection like health insurance and social security benefits to the Nepali migrants in India. Look at cross border ways to provide coverage no matter where.

Data collection and research: Priority should be given to the ongoing collection of data and further research on trends in labor migration, the problems and the needs of migrants. This will contribute to evidence-based policy making and successful design of interventions.

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