



Between Livelihood and Dependency: Trends, Drivers, and Socio-Economic Implications of Labor Migration from Besisahar Municipality to the Gulf Countries

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Abstract

Background: Labour migration to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries has become a primary livelihood strategy for many households in Nepal. While national-level data on remittances is available, there is a significant lack of localized studies examining the specific drivers and socio-economic consequences of this migration pattern.

Objectives: This study aims to explore the socio-demographic profile, causal factors, and socio-economic impacts of labour migration from Besisahar Municipality, Lamjung, to GCC countries.

Methods: A descriptive mixed-method design was employed. Data were collected from 30 migrant households using surveys, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group discussion. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling method to ensure they had firsthand experience with migration to the GCC. The data collection period was from January to March 2025. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results: The majority of migrants were working-class adults aged 20-40 years (66.6%) and had low to moderate education levels (66.6% with Grade 10 or below). The largest shares of migrants were employed in the construction industry (33.3%), manufacturing (26.7%), and domestic work (20.0%). Employment scarcity at home was identified as the main driver for migration (40.0%), rather than a simple desire for employment. Perceptions regarding the effectiveness of migrant work were moderately positive (mean: 4.13/5.00). However, there was a neutral/mixed feeling regarding the overall increase in migration (mean: 3.00/5.00).

Conclusion: Migration to GCC countries is framed as a structurally determined coping mechanism for economic survival rather than a purely voluntary choice. While it provides



immediate economic relief, it creates a long-term dependency on remittances for the household unit.

Keywords: Labor migration, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), remittance dependency, household livelihood, Besisahar Municipality

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Nepalese labour migration to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE) is one of the most important socio-economic phenomena of the modern era of Nepal. Since the political liberalization of 1990 and the subsequent Maoist insurgency (1996-2006), this movement has grown exponentially and is now an integral part of the national economy. Remittances are an important financial flow whose share in GDP is consistently about 23-27%, which has significantly contributed to poverty alleviation, consumption smoothing and asset accumulation among Nepalese households (World Bank, 2025; Shivakoti, 2023). This movement began to formalize with the Foreign Employment Act (1985) and the influx of the oil economies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and their continued demand for low-cost, flexible labour in construction, manufacturing, hospitality and domestic industries (Government of Nepal, 2007).

In the past, migration from Nepal was mostly towards India due to the open border and cultural similarities. The contemporary tendency towards the Gulf destinations, however, is a qualitative change: migration has become temporary, contractual, and heavily mediated by private recruitment agencies, and is governed by the vulnerabilities of the kafala (sponsorship) system that makes a worker's legal status a function of a single employer (Valenta, 2022). This system does not only limit migration within the receiving states, but also sets a framework of exploitation possibilities such as confiscation of passports, wage theft and limited mobility (Amnesty International, 2016).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Remittances are well documented at the macro level, but little is known about the local dynamics of remittances, especially in semi-urban municipalities like Besisahar. The literature often sees migration as a simple economic reaction to poverty or a difference in earnings. This economic lens masks pertinent details, including the distinct structural obstacles that are encountered by different groups of migrants, the heterogeneous impacts on migrants' households at home, and the mixed sentiments of migrants' communities regarding migration as a normalized social practice.

The Municipality of Besisahar, the district headquarters of Lamjung, is a case in point. It has a population of 38,232, a fairly large working class population (15-64 years: 25,777) and a mixed economy with agriculture, small business and services (Besisahar Municipality, 2021). The municipality provides a unique environment for exploring the relationship between domestic job shortages and overseas demand for labour, creating chronic net out-migration.



Although a lot of studies have focused on remittance flows and macro-economic impact of labour migration from Nepal (Shivakoti, 2023; World Bank, 2025), few studies have attempted to understand the inward and outward migration dynamics at the local level in selected municipalities. While there are many studies on the national policy level (MoLESS, 2020) or the individual health outcome level (Paudyal et al. 2023), there is a lack of understanding of the interactions between structural constraints, household decision making and perceptions at the community level in semi-urban settings. This study aims to fill this gap by conducting a local, empirical-based analysis of drivers and impacts of migration in Besisahar Municipality.

1.3 Research Objectives

To explore the trend and status (socio-demographic and occupational profile) of labour migration from Besisahar Municipality to the G.C.C countries.

To interpret the major determinants of this migration and its local socio-economic consequences for household and employment situation in the Municipality.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study has several implications. Socially, it connects macro-level theories of migration (push and pull, structural and network) with the lived experiences at the micro-level, revealing the interplay of structural constraints and household agency. It serves as evidence that is relevant to Besisahar Municipality for the formulation of Youth Employment Programs, Awareness Campaigns on Migration Safety, and Returnee Reintegration Programs. Last, it promotes systematic, evidence-based documentation from the field, which moves beyond economic framings of migration governance, and brings social and human costs into the academic and policy debate.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

This study is confined with Besisahar Municipality specifically to the labour migration towards the GCC countries. It uses a purposive sample of 30 households/individuals who are first-hand participants in this migration pathway. The results therefore are not statistically representative of the municipality as a whole, and are only analytically useful to give contextual information. The study will not use inferential statistics and statements are provisional and not generalizable.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This research is based on a synthetic theoretical model that merges several aspects of migration decision-making processes.

The first approach is that of Everett Lee's (1966) Push-Pull Theory, which outlines factors at the origin (unemployment and poverty), at the destination (higher wages and demand for labour) and intervening barriers, as well as personal factors. This model provides preliminary clues to understanding why some people from Besisahar are migrating more than others.

Second, the study draws on the theoretical frameworks of the Historical-Structuralism approach and World-Systems Theory (HST and WST, respectively; Massey et al., 1993; Wallerstein, 1974), which see migration not as a matter of free individual choice but rather as



the result of the differential economic and political power of actors in global capitalism. The peripheral countries such as Nepal are linked to the world economy in a manner that is detrimental to their livelihoods and creates a reserve labour force for the core and semi-peripheral countries, including GCC countries. In this view, labor is more of a product of the periphery than part of its solution, and a source of underdevelopment instead of development. Third, the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) approach changes the unit of analysis from the person to the household. NELM suggests that migration is not just about maximizing income, but also involves an overall risk diversification strategy, coping with market failures (including lack of credit or crop insurance), and collectively family goals other than simply increasing income (de Haas, 2010). This nuanced view is important to recognize the use of remittances goes beyond individual development to a group's goals such as consumption, debt repayment, and education, among others.

Lastly, Cumulative Causation Theory (Myrdal, 1957 as cited in de Haas, 2007) sheds light on the self-sustaining aspect of migration. Social and economic changes created at the points of origin by each migration event tend to make the next migration more likely – establishing networks, encouraging remittance spending, naturalizing migration. This model reflects the status quo in communities such as Besisahar in which migration has become a life course 'norm'.

2.2 Previous Empirical Reviews

The importance of GCC countries for Nepalese labour migration has been traditionally recognized in the literature. More than 85-90% of the formal labour permits have been issued for Malaysia and GCC countries since the early 2000s (GIZ & ILO, 2015; MoLESS, 2020). The most common pull factors that were identified include poverty, unemployment, political instability, the poor viability of farming due to the Maoist insurgency and natural disasters (Shivakoti, 2023). On the demand side, the construction industry is booming in Qatar and UAE thanks to oil, and has created a demand for cheap, disposable labor (Valenta, 2022).

The consequences are a lot mixed. The remittances have been proven to alleviate national poverty and enhance the education, health and housing spending of emigrant households (Shrestha, 2017; World Bank, 2025). These economic benefits come with severe human costs, though. Migrant conditions continue to be precarious, with high heat exposure, critical conditions, and social isolation leading to documented physical and mental health crises (Paudyal et al., 2023). The kafala system allows for the widespread practice of contract substitution, wage theft and forced labour. While there is a ban on recruitment fees in Nepal, migrants are still required to pay significant fees, often under high-interest loans, which can push them into debt bondage and often result in re-migration cycles (Amnesty International, 2019).

2.3 Policy Review and Gaps

Nepal's foreign employment policy framework is based on the Foreign Employment Act (2007), Foreign Employment Rules (2008) and institutions such as the Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE) which are required to manage and oversee recruitment processes, pre-departure orientation, and welfare of the foreign workers (Government of Nepal, 2007). The



Free Visa, Free Ticket" policy (2015) aims to pass on recruitment expenses to the employers. But there is a critical disconnect between policy and enforcement. Recruitment agency monitoring is inadequate and the legal framework is not well equipped to tackle abuses related to the kafala system in destination countries (MoLESS, 2020). Whilst the abolition of exit visas following Qatar's hosting of the World Cup in 2022 is positive, the underlying fundamental of sponsor-worker dependency is not sufficiently tackled, and domestic workers continue to be subjected to little protection. (ILO, 2023)

2.4 Knowledge Gap

Research has focused on the overall remittances and the macroeconomic impacts of labour migration from Nepal (Shivakoti 2023; World Bank 2025), but not much attention has been paid to the localized migration processes in the concerned municipalities. Previous research has mainly centered on national policy frameworks (MoLESS, 2020) or the individual-level health outcomes (Paudyal et al., 2023), which is why there is a gap in the understanding of the interaction between structural constraints, household decision-making and community-level perceptions in semi-urban settings. This study focuses on this void and attempts to fill it by using an empirical and localized study on drivers and consequences of migration in Besisahar Municipality.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study is descriptive mixed method. The descriptive element systemically characterizes the socio-demographic and occupational profile of the sample. Mixed-method approach involves a survey, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) to capture both quantitative and qualitative data to understand the drivers and impacts of migration.

3.2 Study Area and Population

The study was carried out in the Besisahar Municipality of Lamjung District. The 2021 Census numbers the municipality with 11 wards and a total population of 38,232 persons (17,879 male and 20,353 female). Working-age population (15-64 years: 25,777) is a sign of labour market pressure. The local economy has a mix of agricultural, small scale trading, services and construction activities, with greater dependence on consumption from remittances. The target population included households and individuals with first-hand experiences of labor migration to the countries in the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in the municipality.

3.3 Sampling and Justification of Sample Size

A purposive sampling technique was used. The sample consisted of 30 cases of returnee migrants, family members of current migrants, and informed household members who were able to provide accurate information about migrants' experiences. This non-probabilistic approach is suitable for in-depth, specific sociological research that aims at explanations, but not statistically generalizable estimates.

The sample size was determined as 30 using the qualitative requirement of data saturation, that is, when new interviews were not providing any new information (Guest et al., 2006). This



sample size was similar to the studies of migration at a local level in Nepal (i.e., Paudyal et al., 2023) and was deemed sufficient to meet the descriptive and exploratory goals of the study. This number of participants was adequate for the purpose of the study, which was qualitative in nature and aimed at in-depth understanding and themes. The sample size was manageable for the study's purpose, which was qualitative in nature with focus on in-depth understanding and themes, within the resources provided.

3.4 Data Collection

The data was gathered from January to March, 2025. Four tools of data collection were used: Survey schedule: Data for simple demographic and occupation data collection.

Semi-structured interview guide: To collect migration history, decision-making process and perceived impacts.

Focus group discussions (FGDs): with local stakeholders – teachers, local officials, and community leaders

Observation notes: Details of labour market situation in the local area

Thirty individuals, including 15 returnee migrants, 10 family members of current migrants and five key informants (local government officials and community leaders), were interviewed using a semi-structured interview method. Two focus group discussions were also held with 6-8 participants, comprising returnee migrants, family members and community stakeholders. The interview guides covered topics such as migration history, decision making processes, employment in the destination countries, remittance use, and impacts on household and community.

The secondary data sources were the municipal profile, national reports on labour migration and peer-reviewed literature. Ethical issues were informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation and anonymising personal information in reporting.

3.5 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentages, and mean scores of the ordinal scale attitude items were used to analyze the quantitative data from the survey (n=30). Interviews and FGDs were asked for qualitative data, which were subjected to thematic analysis and the responses coded and categorized under research themes.

4. Results

This section summarizes the pertinent aspects of a socio-demographic and occupational profile.

Results indicate a concentrated migration pattern. As reflected in Table 1, the sample of migrants was predominantly the working age group (66.6%) with the age group of 20-40 years having the highest proportion of migrants (33.3%) and 20-30 years having the second highest proportion (33.3%). Since the study was based on the experience of household migration and not national approval data, the sample was divided equally by sex (50% male and 50% female).

Table 1: Age Distribution of Sampled Migrants

Age Group	Number	Percent
20-30	10	33.3
30-40	10	33.3
40-50	5	16.7
50-60	5	16.7
Total	30	100.0

As indicated in Table 2, 66.6% of migrants attained their highest education to Grade 10 or less while 33.3% were illiterate. This is in line with the GCC demand for low skilled workers in the labor market. The economic pull is indicated from the monthly income profile as given in Table 3 which shows the modal category as Rs. 70,000–80,000 (30.0%) and a significant proportion (23.3%) earning above Rs. Wages of 90,000, which are hard to obtain in the local economy. The highest level of sectoral concentration (Table 4) is found in construction (33.3%), manufacturing/factory work (26.7%) and hospitality/services and domestic work (20.0% each).

Table 2: Educational Attainment

Education Level	Number	Percent
Illiterate	10	33.3
Below Grade	10	33.3
Higher Secondary (10+2)	10	33.3
Total	30	100.0

Table 3: Monthly Income of Sampled Migrants

Income Level (Rs.)	Number	Percent
Up to 60,000	8	26.7
70,000-80,000	9	30.0
80,000-90,000	6	20.0
Above 90,000	7	23.3
Total	30	100.0

Table 4: Sectoral Employment in GCC Countries

Sector of work	Number	Percent
Construction	10	33.3
Manufacturing/Factory	8	26.7
Hospitality & Services	6	20.0
Domestic Work	6	20.0
Total	30	100.0



4.2 Factors Driving Migration

The causes are reported in Table 5. "Employment opportunities" is the most important (40.0%) and "Better living conditions" is the second most important (20.0%) driver. Qualitative interviews show that the issue is less one's absence from the job market and more about the quality of that absence, with local employment opportunities being characterized as non-regular, earning low wages, and providing little opportunity for social mobility. Respondents who refer to 'Family ties/marriage' (16.7%) and 'Educational facilities' (10.0%) are referring to social networks and aspirations on children's futures.

Table 5: Reported Causes of Labor Migration

Cause	Number	Percent
Employment Opportunities	6	40.0
Better living conditions	5	20.0
Family ties/marriage	3	16.0
Educational facilities	2	10.0
Business opportunities	2	6.7
Easy to get work	2	6.7
Total	30	100.0

4.3 Local Employment Conditions, Livelihoods and Perceptions

Through thematic analysis of the qualitative data five drivers of local job scarcity were identified that were inter-related: economic downturn, labour market saturation, structural change/shrinking of traditional jobs, skills mismatch and lack of governance of enterprise support at local level.

The attitude data (Table 6) show ambivalent attitudes of the community. The mean score for "Migration is increasing" (3.00 on a 1-5 scale) reflects both an opinion that migration is a reality and a norm for some, but not all, while others hold a mixed opinion. Migrants' positive perception of contribution to the local community is moderately positive (mean 3.47). Most importantly, the extent to which migrants were perceived as willing to work and being effective, was rated with the highest mean score (4.13), suggesting that the community consensus was that the issue was not migrants willingness to work but lack of employment opportunities within the community.

Table 6: Mean Attitude Scores on Migration Perceptions

Attitude Statement	Mean Score (1-5)	Interpretation
Migration is increasing	3.00	Divided/Ambivalent
Migration contribute positively to locality	3.47	Moderately Positive
Migrants have high work effectiveness	4.13	Strongly Positive



4.4 Gender-Differentiated Patterns

The gendered distribution of occupations, with women more likely to be in domestic occupations (20.0%) and men more likely to be in construction (33.3%) and manufacturing (26.7%) occupations, is indicative of gendered characteristics in the GCC labor market (Valenta, 2022). Such segmentation places women migrants in specific situations of vulnerability that fall outside the scope of current policy frameworks, such as isolation, absence of legal protection and greater risk of abuse. Gender norms appear to influence migration decisions in Besisahar as revealed by the qualitative data, where migration of women is dependent on family approval and marital status. There are also differences in the way remittances are used, with female headed households more likely to spend money on children's education and health care, and male headed households more likely to use the money to build houses and pay off debt.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Integration

The results of this study support the application of a synthetic theoretical approach as opposed to any one model. The highest percentage among the drivers (40%) is "employment opportunities", which supports the push-pull model (Lee, 1966) in which there is a strong pull effect of the higher pays in the GCC, and a strong push effect of the weak demand of local labour market. But there is more to "better living conditions" and "family ties" than economies, and they have meaning in NELM: migration is not simply about maximizing utilities for the individual, but is also a means of advancing collective goals like education for children, better housing, and higher social status.

It is important to note that there is also some qualitative evidence that confirms the structuralist and world-systems perspective (Massey et al., 1993). The uneven distribution of Besisahar migrants across different jobs in the GCC countries, in which they are concentrated in vulnerable and low skilled jobs, is an indication of Nepal's position in the global capitalism in which it is the provider of cheap labour for core and oil-rich capitalist countries. Local employment gaps – “economic slowdown” and “structural change” – demonstrate the process of underdevelopment and global market integration going on at the same time.

The results for migrants' productivity at work (mean: 4.13) indicate there was a strong consensus that migrants were effective workers, which suggests that the aversion to work by migrants is not simply a cultural phenomenon. Though Besisahar migrants are seen as hardworking and skillful, the problem is the mismatch in the structural availability of these skills and opportunities from the local community. The ambivalence for more migration (mean: 3.00) is a community phenomenon of cumulative causation (de Haas, 2007): whilst remittance is a short term relief and visible consumption (housing, school fees), each migration act further ties local economy to foreign funds, the local labour force to remittance work, and normalizes family separation. Migration serves as a remedy as well as a symptom of structural municipal failure.



5.2 Triangulation of Findings

The quantitative results were systematically triangulated with the qualitative results. The results of the survey regarding employment scarcity as the major reason (40.0%) was supported by the narratives of the interviews, which confirmed the condition of employment in the area was 'irregular', 'poorly paid' and 'lacking dignity'. Appreciation for the migration's contribution to development and concerns about community disintegration were elaborated during the FGDs, in the context of the ambivalent mean score on migration increase (3.00). The positive agreement around migrant work effectiveness (4.13) was also mirrored in qualitative reports which alluded to migrants' eagerness to work hard where there is opportunity. This triangulation further solidifies results and shows the complex community attitude towards migration; it is acknowledged as a necessary, but not desirable condition.

5.3 Reintegration Challenges

The results of the qualitative data showed that there were significant reintegration obstacles for returnee migrants. Key informants reported challenges such as psychological adjustment, social stigma of failed migration and the lack of a suitable economic opportunity of reinvestment of savings. It was difficult for returnees to find meaningful jobs in Besisahar and many felt re-migration was inevitable. This result, although not measured, reflects the necessity of formal reintegration support mechanisms, which are not often considered in migration policy.

5.4 Implications for Sociology

This study contributes to migration sociology by depicting the effects of macro-structural factors (global capitalism, kafala system) in the meso-level (households, local labour markets, and social networks) on individual outcomes. It breaks free from oppositional discourses on migration as 'good' or 'bad', showing instead that migration is a sensible reaction to structurally limited decisions. An analytical element, "ambivalent normalization", whereby society accepts a process it does not fully support, is a significant one that helps to explain migration-dependent communities.

5.5 Ethical Considerations

This study was ethically approved by the proper IRB. Informed consent was obtained, confidentiality was ensured and participants were volunteer. All reporting has been anonymized. The participants were made aware that they have the option of leaving at any point without giving any reason and without facing any consequences.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study finds that there is no simple, easy or inevitable relationship between labor migration from Besisahar Municipality to the GCC countries and prosperity or destruction. It is a survival strategy which is dependent on the structure. The average migrant is a low-skilled (low education), working-age adult (20-40 years), working in a precarious sector in the GCC (domestic workers, construction, manufacturing), with the primary



motivation of a lack of quality local employment. While remittances are also an important source of household income, migration comes with its own social and emotional costs, such as family separation, adverse labour market effects in the home country from labour shortages, and reliance on external markets.

The research directly meets both its objectives: (1) to give an empirical characterization of migrants and their employment profiles, and (2) to show that the main reason for migration is scarcity of work, which leads to multifaceted and contested local outcomes. One of the most important contributions is the discovery that migration governance does not just need to be safer procedures for migration. A failure to invest in economic diversification, skill appropriate job creation and structural changes in global labour regimes that allow exploitation will result in foreign labour migration continuing to be an instrument of economic coercion for youths in Besisahar and many other municipalities in Nepal.

6.1 Recommendations

For Besisahar Municipality:

- i) Incorporate migration (thinking) into municipal planning processes
- ii) Create ward-level data registers for monitoring migration, documenting skills, and profiling returnees.
- iii) Implement formal reintegration support programmes such as counseling and support to develop enterprises.
- IV) Develop local job creation programmes focusing on growth sectors.

For Provincial and Federal Governments:

- I) Improve implementation of the "Free Visa, Free Ticket" program
- ii) Invest in bilateral labor agreements with GCC countries with legally binding protections, especially for domestic workers.
- iii) Help local economies diversify and develop new skills directly related to market opportunities.
- iv) Improve monitoring and accountability measures at recruitment agencies.

For Future Research:

- i) Carry out representative household surveys in Besisahar for large-scale, longitudinal mixed methods study
- ii) Conduct a systematic analysis of the migration corridors and reintegration experiences of migrants between men and women.
- iii) Discuss the psychological and social consequences of multiple migration cycles on families and communities over the duration of the migration cycle.
- IV) Explore success of reintegration efforts in the conservation of returnee livelihoods.

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