



**Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA)
International Coordination Council (ICC)
Department of Foreign Employment and Welfare
of NRNs**

**Whitepaper on Nepali Migrants in
Foreign Employment**

2021

**By Dr. Badri KC
Vice-President, NRNA-ICC
Head of Department-Foreign Employment
and Welfare of NRNs
August 2021**

Acknowledgements

This whitepaper is a strategic document of NRNA to work and advocate for the rights and benefits of Nepali migrant workers and also the welfare of NRN's. The document is being prepared at a time when the entire world has witnessed an unprecedented change in the human mobility due to the COVID-19 pandemic. So, its impacts are colossal globally and in Nepal. Against this backdrop, this whitepaper is primarily focused on identifying the real picture of Nepal's current migration situation, the sufferings of Nepalis in the destination countries, possible measures of reintegration, expectations from the government and NRNA's own roles, among others.

The Department of Foreign Employment and Welfare of NRN's gratefully extends its sincere thanks to NRNA President Kumar Panta, ICC and NCC team members, concerned government stakeholders, employment expert Dr Ganesh Gurung, former Secretary of Government of Nepal Purna Chandra Bhattarai, Dr Puru Shrestha, Rameshwor Nepal, Neha Choudhary (National Project Coordinator, ILO), Labour migration expert Madhu Pandit, Chiranjivi Baral, Mahendra Subedi, Rajesh Rana, Rajendra Kumar Raut, Shangita Awale and other concerned team members for their invaluable inputs in the preparation of this whitepaper. This document would not have been materialized without their support and feedback.

Table of Contents

Executive summary	4
1. Background	9
2. Objectives.....	11
2.1. General objective.....	11
2.2 Specific objectives.....	11
2.3 Methodology	12
3. Nepal’s labour migration trend before, during and after COVID-19	12
3.1 Trend before COVID-19.....	12
3.2. During COVID-19.....	14
3.3. After COVID-19	16
4. Major sectors of job losses	17
5. Women and domestic migrant workers	18
6. Social security for migrants.....	20
7. Skill.....	22
8. Vulnerabilities and NRNA’s roles.....	23
9. Comparative advantages of NRNA	24
10. New destinations and Africa	25
11. Reintegration.....	26
12 Migration policies	27
13. Conclusion	28
14. Recommendations.....	29
14.1. With focus on COVID-19.....	29
14.2. General.....	31
14.3. Others.....	31

Executive Summary

Foreign employment has become a key socioeconomic pillar and viable livelihood option for millions of Nepali youths who are unable to find work within the country. Absence of employment and decent working conditions at home and comparatively higher wage abroad has led out-migration of a large number of lower middle-class youth from Nepal. The government data reveal that more than 368,000 Nepalis received labour permits in 2019/20 amid mobility restrictions in wake of COVID-19. However, the number of Nepali migrants going abroad has sharply reduced in the first 10 months of FY 2020/21 as a total of 44,800 Nepalis left for Saudi Arabia, 47,000 to Qatar, 45,800 to UAE, 5,100 to Malaysia and 4,500 to Bahrain.

Official data show that the number of Nepali migrants is around 3 million in major countries of destination. But, there is a huge gap in government data and the exact number of Nepali migrants in the destination countries. The official number does not include Nepalis migrating to the destination countries through irregular channels and those going there in tourist visa. Different studies reveal that a large number of women use Indian airports to fly the Gulf countries due to restrictive migration policies. Likewise, the number of Nepalis working in India is not included in the official records.

Despite pains, sufferings, humiliations, exploitations and ‘inhumane’ treatment, Nepal's migrant workers are deemed as the “cash cows” for Nepal's economy. Nepal has received remittance equal to around 24 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) and the remittance has remained one of the key sources of income. The Nepal Rastra Bank stated that Nepal received a total of Rs 879 billion in remittance in fiscal year 2018/19 and Rs 875 billion in fiscal 2019/20, and Rs 961 billion in the first 11 months of the fiscal year 2020/21. The hard-earned by the migrant is the ‘blood money’ that comes out of exploitations, sufferings and hardships.

There are so many issues in the field of migration including social cost of migration, high recruitment costs, fraudulent activities of the recruiting agencies, poor information dissemination mechanism, labour rights violation, poor working condition of migrants, health of migrants, 'suspicious deaths', sufferings of women domestic migrants and others. Besides getting infected from COVID-19, the migrants' sufferings have become more severe after the pandemic as they have lost their jobs, are laid off and are staying in unpaid leaves. Those who are still at work have faced a reduction in work hours, in pay or both. During this time, the undocumented migrant

workers, domestic workers and whose contractual period has finished are at the receiving end. Even in some cases, migrants are facing a sharp rise in xenophobic prejudice. As outsiders, they are targeted for causing the spread of coronavirus. The undocumented migrants are more prone to exploitation, violence and intimidation. As the domestic workers are not recognized by the labour laws, a large number of Nepalis, especially women, have gone through mental, physical and financial stresses. Undocumented workers are severely affected and some of them are in detention centres too. The government measures to ensure health care and other remedies to such vulnerable groups seem insufficient.

The number of women migrant workers is increasing and so is their vulnerability. The age bar restriction on women obliges them to opt for irregular channels to reach the destination countries. The government's ban on women migrant workers in the Gulf countries under the age of 24 is sheer violation of human rights of right to work and freedom of movement as guaranteed by the Constitution of Nepal. To escape the government's restrictive policies, the women migrant use the Indian airports and other irregular channels to migrate to the Gulf countries. Civil society leaders argue that the women migrants working as domestic help are assaulted, tortured and sexually abused and exploited. They even give birth to unwanted child and such children are regarded as stateless children.

Nepali migrant workers have not only suffered for lack of access to health care, increased risk at workplace, loss of employment and reduction in salary but also dead bodies of some Nepali workers who died in the countries of destination are stranded there for long. This has exposed serious flaw on the part of government and concerned agencies' intervention. But on the other, the families of those dead people are anxiously waiting for the repatriation of the dead bodies of their dear ones.

It is too early to claim the pattern of labour migration in the post-COVID period but Nepali migrants' journey to the Gulf countries will be determined by Nepal government's reintegration measures at home. Secondly, the containment of the pandemic, oil prices in Gulf countries, economic recovery packages in the destination countries as well as their labour market policies shall be decisive. According to experts, Nepalis working in hospitality sector, swimming pool, supermarket, parlours and other public entities lost the highest number of jobs. Likewise, migrants who are still employed have faced a reduction in work hours or pay or both.

This is to say that the migrant workers' vulnerability has increased and they are in need of special social protection and welfare schemes. After the outbreak of COVID-19, more migrant are returning home and reintegration of those migrants is becoming more challenging owing to limited employment opportunities and poor economic recovery packages. The government has allocated Rs 12 billion to provide employment opportunities to 200,000 people under the Prime Minister Employment Programme and Rs 400 million is allocated for training targeting the youths, returnee migrants and labourers who have lost their employment in the country to develop their capacity and skills on handicraft, plumbing, electric repairs, electronic, cook, craftsmanship, mason, carpentry, sewing and cutting, beautician, hair cutting, and vehicle and mobile repairs. The government's announcement to provide soft loan up to one million rupees, Prime Minister Employment Fund and programmes unveiled for the skill development of youth are too insufficient and won't be sufficient for social protection of migrants. In the destination countries, the migrant workers are suffering from illness, road mishaps and other accidents but they are left stranded having no money for their treatment.

Of the migrants, almost all Nepali migrant workers are unskilled and low-skilled. This paints a bleak picture on Nepal's foreign labour migration because vulnerability and skills are inversely proportionate. The Foreign Employment Act has mentioned that any worker going for foreign employment which requires skillful training must acquire such training from the institute recognized by the Government of Nepal but there has been a huge gap in between the policy and reality because skill is one of the least prioritized issues. Migrants equipped with high skill can make good income and contribute to the country at large.

Amid the tough time, NRNA extended the best possible supports to the migrants in the destination countries. It forged partnership with International Labour Organization (ILO) and other organizations also to help Nepali workers. NRNA's support remained remarkable in rescuing migrants affected from COVID-19, those who were laid off and other vulnerable groups. Similarly, NRNA supported migrant workers by providing them with food and shelter, counseling, outreach, PCR test, air ticket, documentation support and some migrant workers were helped to find out new jobs. It also provided transportation support to the Nepali migrant workers from Kathmandu to their home upon return from the countries of destination in the wake of COVID-19. This all became possible given its global outreach. As a global Diaspora organization, the NRNA can negotiate with different other agencies and institutions to promote the issues the demands of Nepali migrants.

Considering the national and international context, COVID-19 pandemic, global economic recovery and Nepal's shifting demographic composition due to absent of huge number of adult population at home, the government, private sector and stakeholders are suggested the given below recommendation to act.

- Being the sole custodian of its citizens, the government should take entire responsibility to protect Nepali migrant workers, their rights and dignity in the destination countries;
- The government agencies should immediately take stock of the COVID patients receiving treatment in hospitals in different countries and take diplomatic moves for their proper medication and treatment;
- Due to COVID-19, Nepali migrant workers have faced many professional challenges including reduced or non-payment of wages, denial of other entitlements and workplace discrimination. The government officials and diplomatic missions should provide migrant workers with access to legal remedies to fight against unfair treatment;
- As many migrants have expressed their desire to return home due to COVID-19, the government should expedite the process for Nepalis' repatriation in collaboration with the NRNA;
- Skill is one of important areas for sustainable reintegration of migrants and also a tool to making good income in the destination countries. The government should conduct the migrants' skills-mapping for the best utilization of their skills;
- Common efforts should be taken to rescue and support the undocumented migrants, women, physically challenged migrants and other vulnerable groups. The government is expected to pay special attention regarding the protection of stateless children borne by Nepali women migrant workers in the destination countries;
- The government should create an advocacy group to educate citizens about the entire gamut of foreign employment;

-
- The government should review its restrictive policy in regard to women migrant workers. The age specific ban imposed on women migrant workers in certain countries and profession is against the basic principle of human rights;
 - The returnee migrants should be encouraged to small and micro enterprises (SMEs), startups and social entrepreneurship. Partnership between the government, NRNA and FNCCI can ensure good result in this regard;
 - The migrants should have an access to Nepal's social security fund, their shares should be ensured in the projects of national pride and they should be brought on board the contribution-based pension scheme;
 - Prompt, safe and dignified return of migrant workers in need of rescue should be included in the BLAs and MoUs between Nepal and the host countries. Timely changes are expected in the BLAs and MoUs to address such needs. The agendas of social security, health insurance, life insurance and migrants' protection should be mentioned in the MoU/BLAs;
 - Diplomatic missions should be strengthened with sufficient funds and human resources. The embassies of Nepal in host countries should have women labour attaché.

1. Background

Foreign employment has become a viable livelihood option for millions of Nepalis who are unable to find work within the country. Absence of employment and decent working conditions at home and comparatively higher wage abroad has led out-migration of lower middle-class youth from Nepal. The Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE), which is a key state body dealing with foreign migration has issued over 4 million labour approvals between 2008/09 and 2018/19.¹ Despite the mobility restrictions ensued by the COVID-19, a total of 368,344 people have taken labour permits in 2019/20.² However, this number does not include Nepalis who migrate to India for work or travel through irregular channels for foreign employment due to restrictive migration policies in the context of women migrant workers.

The Government of Nepal has officially issued institutional labour permits for the foreign employment in 110 destination countries. The Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security (MoLESS) data show that the number of migrant workers currently at work in foreign countries ranges from 2.4 to 3 million and in 2018/19 the major countries of destination for Nepali migrant workers included Qatar (31.8%), United Arab Emirates (26.5%), Saudi Arabia (19.5%), and Kuwait (6.8%).³ However, analysts put the total number of migrant workers including those undocumented ones as high as 6 million. This is because a huge number of Nepalis opt for land routes and other countries' airports (especially Indian airports) to reach in the countries of destination. Despite information dissemination, a huge number of potential migrants opt for irregular channels and their issues are unheard of in most of the cases.

It is to mention that undocumented migrants are more prone to exploitation, violence and intimidation. Despite pains, sufferings, humiliations, exploitations and 'inhumane' treatment, Nepal's migrant workers are deemed as the "cash cows" for Nepal's economy. The remittance received from the migrant workers alone is equivalent to 25.4% of the GDP of Nepal⁴, which has contributed mainly to reduce poverty in household level. However, the proportion of remittance to GDP is varied in the recent years and different agencies put their diverse figures. According to the

¹ Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (2020), *Nepal Labour Migration Report 2020*. Kathmandu: Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security.

² Database of Department of Foreign Employment. Accessed 16 March, 2021. This data is the total of new and re-entry categories.

³ Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (2020). *Nepal Labour Migration Report 2020*. Kathmandu: Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security.

⁴ International Organization for Migration (2019). *Migration in Nepal: A Country Profile 2019*. Kathmandu: IOM.

World Bank, remittance ratio was 24% to GDP in 2020. The Nepal Rastra Bank stated that Nepal received a total of NPR 879 billion in remittance in FY 2018/19 and NPR 875 billion in FY 2019/20, and whopping NPR 870.94 billion in the first 11 months of the FY 2020/21.

Being a wide social and economic agenda of the country for almost three decades on, foreign migration is still an unresolved issue; the vulnerabilities have not reduced and rights of the migrants are not protected. There are public concerns on the part of recruitment costs, skills of the migrants, migrants' complaints on recruiting agencies, information dissemination mechanism, remittance cost, labour rights violation of migrant workers in countries of destination, including of women migrant workers and so on. The other issues include pre-departure training, safety and security of women migrants, use of irregular channel, working condition of migrants in the countries of destination, health of migrants, 'suspicious deaths' of migrants, sufferings of women domestic migrants and others. With the education system largely unable to provide youth with foundational skills needed to succeed in employment, many cannot transition from school to work and leave the country for foreign employment.⁵ Migration is seen in many cases a result of economic problems directly linked to employment and income.⁶

Despite the government's efforts in making foreign employment safe, secured and dignified, issues of trafficking in persons, involvement of local intermediaries, incidences of fraud, extortion and exploitation of migrants are massively reported. Such upheavals indicate that steps of the government have remained insufficient and ineffective. This scenario somehow depicts the poor indicators of Nepal's migration governance. Migration of Nepali youths to Afghanistan and Iraq could also be attributed to a part of poor migration governance as a large number of youth have been working there as security guards amid their security threats. The migrant workers have failed to secure acceptable labor standards and basic labor rights such as formal contracts that specify the minimum wage, timely payments, acceptable labor conditions, and health benefits.

With the outbreak of COVID-19, many migrant workers have experienced job losses, are laid off and have been staying in unpaid leaves. Those who are still at work have faced a reduction in work hours, in pay or both. The global pandemic has created serious problems for undocumented migrant workers, domestic workers, workers whose contractual period has finished, and those who

⁵National Planning Commission/United Nations Development Fund (2020). *Nepal Human Development Report 2020*. National Planning Commission/United Nations Development Fund, Kathmandu.

⁶ International Organization for Migration (2020). *Status of Nepali Migrant Workers in Relation to COVID-19*. International Organization for Migration, Kathmandu.

were already in an exploitative situation during the migration process.⁷ In such a context, foreign labour migration is severely affected with the raging COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, in some Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, prioritization of the locals has had serious impacts on Nepali migrant workers. For instance, *Omanization*⁸ is being gradually implemented in Oman's key sectors and Oman is no more recruiting outsiders in those sectors.

Migrant workers are coming back to Nepal's labour market which prior to the pandemic was unable to absorb around 500,000 new labour market entrants. In the changing context, the labour market has already experienced shocks due to the pandemic. This has created challenges in generating domestic employment opportunities and to reintegrate the returnee migrants while utilizing their skills and expertise back home. The unexpected returns forced migrants to face situations where opportunities to access decent jobs may even be more limited and other restriction measures, as well as challenging economic situation in general, thus creating enormous difficulties for returnees in meeting basic needs for themselves and their families.⁹

In such a situation, it is imperative to understand the issues and challenges that Nepali migrant workers are facing, creating a base for advocacy to make labour migration safe, secured and dignified. This Whitepaper shall help NRNA to lobby with the Government of Nepal and concerned authorities for the welfare of the Nepali migrant workers.

2. Objectives

2.1. General objective

The overarching objective of the assignment is to develop a Whitepaper focusing on the issues and challenges faced by the Nepalis migrant workers and offer practicable recommendations.

2.2 Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the Whitepaper are:

- To analyze the situation of foreign labour migration in Nepal after COVID-19;

⁷ National Human Rights Commission (2020). *COVID-19 Mahamarima Nepali Aprabasi Shramikharuko Adhikar Adhyayan Pratibedan 2077*. Kathmandu: National Human Rights Commission.

⁸ *Omanization* is a new practice in Oman's enterprises and companies that obliges the employers to hire minimum 40 percent of the total employees from the local people.

⁹ Available from <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/policy-areas/reintegration/lang--en/index.htm>

- To explore the issues and challenges faced by Nepali migrant workers after COVID-19; and
- To identify the areas in which NRNA can provide supports to the Nepali migrant workers hit by COVID-19.

2.3 Methodology

This assignment was completed in a month, from 15 May to 15 June 2021. The study was conducted on the basis of qualitative approach, which was further supported through intensive desk review. Expert consultations, focus group discussions, key informant interviews and stakeholder discussions were held through virtual ways. Most of the qualitative data were received through virtual means, as meeting them in person was not likely for health reasons due to spread of COVID-19. The respondents were selected in consultation with the NRNA based on their expertise in the field of foreign employment. In addition, the data were collected from the returnee migrants, who were reintegrated back home in their society. Data were also collected from secondary sources. For the qualitative information, separate sets of questionnaires were prepared for different groups. The checklists covered the questions to collect information related to the migrant workers' status, comparative advantages of NRNA, issues of social security, possible partnership of NRNA with government and other agencies, challenges of current migrant workers, towards reintegration, and so on. Then, the qualitative information was analyzed under different sub-topics.

3. Nepal's labour migration trend before, during and after COVID-19

3.1 Trend before COVID-19

Nepal's formal labor migration is believed to have begun in 1814-1816, after the Nepal-British India war. A total of 4,650 Nepalis youngsters were recruited to the British armed forces as a British-Gurkha regiment after the conclusion of the war and signing of the Treaty of Sugauli in 1816.¹⁰ It is believed that some 100,000 Nepali youth served the British force in the World War-I. After the advent of democracy in Nepal in 1950 and independence in India in 1947, hordes of

¹⁰ Laxman Singh Kunwar, *Emigration of Nepalese People and Its Impact*, Economic Journal of Development Issues Vol. 19 & 20 No. 1-2 (2015).

Nepalis made drove to India taking ‘advantage’ of Nepal-India open border. During the mid-1980s and with the economic globalization in 1990s as well as shift in Nepal’s policy, economic migration to the Gulf States took shape and it was further spurred by the oil boom and infrastructure development campaign there. From the mid-1980s, Nepalis started to migrate to the Gulf States and Malaysia for work. The Gulf States were experiencing rapid economic growth, while Nepal’s agricultural production and economic opportunities were declining.¹¹ However, until Nepal restored democracy in 1990 and the subsequent liberal economy, India was the only major destination for Nepalis for their economic migration. At present, Nepalis migrate to Gulf countries, Malaysia and other destinations to avert the economic woes and earn a decent life for the families back home.

As a major labour sending country, foreign labour migration is a common livelihood strategy for almost half of its people. Migration and remittances have been the backbone for Nepal for over a decade. Remittances have lifted households out of poverty and enabled them to invest in productive assets, including education and health care. In normal times, remittances provided income to families of migrant workers across Nepal, more so in western Nepal, where remittances account for 21 percent of household income. About half of the households have at least one migrant, of which 23 percent are domestic migrants and 32 percent are international migrants.¹² Contrary to most predictions that remittances Nepali workers send back home would fall with the COVID-19 crisis, the inflow increased compared to 2019. However, the number of Nepali workers going abroad has declined drastically due to COVID-19. In FY 2018/2019, the DoFE issued 236,211 labour permits, a sharp decline from FY 2017/2018 when 354,082 labour permits were issued.

According to the Nepal Labour Migration Report 2020 (MoLESS), five countries alone (Malaysia, Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) employed more than 92 percent of Nepali migrant workers in FY 2017/2018. However, the share of these countries declined to 88 percent for FY 2018/2019.

¹¹ Migration in Nepal: A Country Profile, IOM, 2019.

¹² Rapid Assessment of Socio-Economic Impact of Covid-19 in Nepal, UNDP, Kathmandu, 2020.

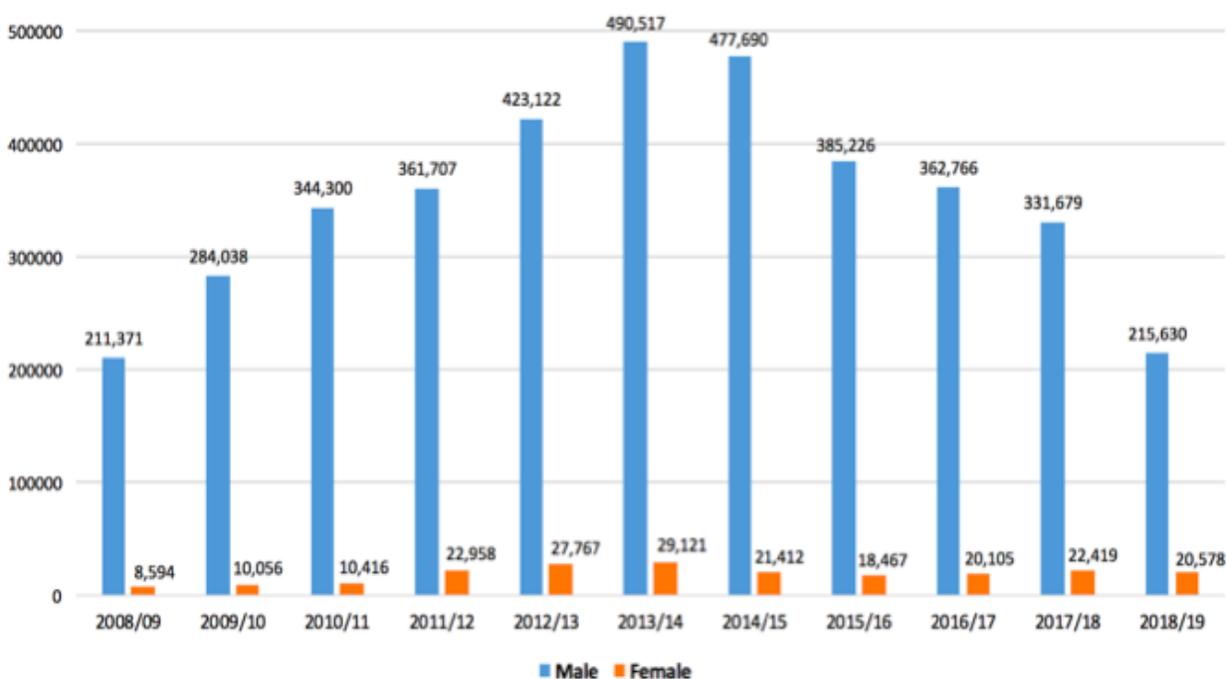


Figure 1: Total number of labor permits issued by the Department of Foreign Employment¹³

3.2. During COVID-19

The pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on economies, businesses, and workers, and in Asia as well as some other regions, migrant workers have been among the most affected.¹⁴ After the nationwide lockdown since March 22, 2020, all the international flights were suspended for months while the DoFE stopped issuing labour permits to the aspirant migrants. As an immediate response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Government of Nepal stopped issuance of labour permits for those seeking to go for foreign employment from 23 February 2020 till further notice. In the first 10 months of the current fiscal year, a total of 44,800 Nepalis left for Saudi Arabia, 47,000 to Qatar, 45,800 to UAE, 5,100 to Malaysia and 4,500 to Bahrain¹⁵.

More sufferings of migrant workers came to the fore after the outbreak of COVID-19. Their income is reduced; rescue is postponed; sufferings range from psychological to physical and mental whereas many of the migrants' health conditions deteriorated in the countries of

¹³ Received from Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE).

¹⁴ Labor Migration in Asia Impacts of the Covid-19 Crisis and the Post-Pandemic Future (Available from: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/690751/adbi-book-labor-migration-asia-impacts-covid-19-crisis-post-pandemic-future.pdf>)

¹⁵ Available from <https://nagariknews.nagariknetwork.com/economy/568351-1625533247.html>

destination. Nepali migrant's conditions can be different on the basis of destination countries but the pandemic has added much woe to their life. Migrants are facing a sharp rise in xenophobic prejudice. As outsiders, they are an easy target for fear and anxiety generated by the pandemic and they are even being blamed as agent for spread of coronavirus. This prejudice is both overt – verbal abuse, physical violence – and covert, expressed in differing levels of COVID-19 testing and treatment for migrants versus native residents, harsher mobility restrictions, and segregation in cramped, unhygienic housing away from the general population.¹⁶

Nepali migrant workers have suffered miserably for lack of access to health services, increased risk at workplace, loss of employment and reduction in salary and many other issues. As international flights remained suspended, the bodies of the Nepali workers who died abroad remain stuck in the countries of destination. But failure of the government to seek an alternative option to bring back the dead bodies home to respect and protect the right of the families to cremate the body of their loved ones as per their tradition and culture (even many buried in the destination countries itself), the families have been deprived of performing death rituals. In some cases, as the family members were not informed by the government authorities soon after the death or cremation of the bodies abroad, it led to increased uncertainty among the families on when to begin the rituals.¹⁷

The experts and NRNA ICC members stated that COVID-19 has not only impacted the migrant workers there but the hiring process too. In some countries, the employers have even deducted the basic wages for workers, contributing to the increased number of undocumented Nepali workers. After the first wave of COVID-19, the number of Nepalis going in visit visa has sharply increased especially in United Arab Emirates (UAE). As a result, the number of Nepalis living in shelter is increasing of late. Similarly, Nepali workers who are rendered jobless due to COVID-19 are going through mental stress and some have even committed suicide while gang fights among Nepalis are quite common. According to NRNA officials, the number of undocumented workers is appalling. There are as high as 70,000 undocumented women migrants in Saudi Arabia, a respondent claimed adding that NRNA is also keeping the records of those undocumented workers. Till mid-May, the number of undocumented workers in Kuwait has decreased to 3,000 but the number could go further up if housemaids were counted. As the domestic workers are not recognized by the labour

¹⁶ Available from <https://migrationdataportal.org/blog/5-key-global-trends-covid-19-and-migration>

¹⁷ Rights of Migrant Workers in the Clutches of COVID-19 Pandemic Study Report, NHRC, Lalitpur (2020).

laws, a large number of Nepalis, especially women, have gone through mental, physical and financial stresses. Undocumented workers are severely affected and some of them are in detention centres too. The government measures to ensure health care and other remedies to such vulnerable groups seem insufficient. Such people are also in need of psychosocial counseling.

3.3. After COVID-19

Global human mobility has halted with the overall impact of COVID-19, hitting people on the move hard.¹⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic has had serious repercussions on Nepal's foreign employment, as the potential migrants have not become able to advance their journey while many are coming home after losing jobs. Similarly, a total of 486 Nepalis lost their lives in foreign countries due to COVID-19 while the number of COVID patients reached 127,934 till July 31, according to NRNA data set. According to media reports, some 1,500 to 2,000 migrants have been stuck in each destination country. Likewise, a large number of dead bodies remain stuck in destination countries after the COVID-19 and administrative issues to repatriate the dead bodies. The Supreme Court on 15 June 2020 ordered repatriation of Nepali migrant workers for free and the Repatriation Guideline has been promulgated. However, rescue operations could not take place time also due to limited human resources in the diplomatic missions.

It is truly uncertain whether the labour migration pattern will continue in the same manner or change its course because the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a massive change in the entire world. Basically, two things are likely to determine the future prospects of out-migration, especially in Gulf countries. The first is the reintegration of returnee migrants in Nepal. The socio-economic reintegration of returnee migrants is very crucial and their successful reintegration shall not only contribute to Nepal's national economy but also reduce the number of Nepalis going abroad.

The second is demand side, and the demand for Nepali migrants in Gulf States and Malaysia depends on the containment of the COVID-19 pandemic, oil prices, the status of companies manufacturing health equipment and the destination countries' nationalization of labour market. The wave of migration occurs pretty much two to three years after the major event shakes people, and that's because of the time that it takes to garner resources and make a decision whether to risk

¹⁸ "Migrants essential to recovery of global development post COVID-19" (Available from: <https://www.undp.org/press-releases/migrants-essential-recovery-global-development-post-covid-19>)

it staying here or risk it and leave.¹⁹ According to the respondents, there is a huge shortage of workers in many sectors in the Gulf countries which indicates that opportunities could remain in future. In these countries, the workers in the construction sector have not suffered much unlike in the hospitality sector

However, the NRNA ICC members and experts interviewed for this paper hinted at possible decline in Nepal's overseas migration in the post-COVID-19 era. Behind the declining trend, they argued that delay in mega infrastructure development projects in Nepal's major destination countries will have serious impact resulting in decrease in the number of overseas migrants. At the same time, Nepal will see influx of returnee migrants including the undocumented ones. But, most importantly, the Nepal's migration pattern relies on the government policies in the post-COVID-19 years.

4. Major sectors of job losses

During the period of COVID-19, Nepali migrant workers in the country of destination had lots of sufferings. The issues include poor government facilitation, non-payment of wages, lack of proper health care, poor status of vulnerable groups including those of undocumented, women, domestic workers and others, discriminatory practices by the employers in the host countries, increased level of anxiety due to job insecurity, lack of information and uncertain future leading to their mental stress. According to the experts, NRNA representatives, KII interviews and other sources, hospitality sector, swimming pool, supermarket, workers in parlours and housemaids lost the highest number of jobs in GCC and Malaysia. Similarly, women working in the hospitality sector and also as home maids are the ones who are severely affected from COVID-19. Most of the respondents interviewed for this paper said the migrants are affected by COVID-19 both in countries of destination and at home. The current migrants experienced job losses and were laid off and on unpaid leave. Many migrants who are still at work have faced a reduction in work hours or pay or both. Some of the respondents from countries of destination reported that their contracts were not renewed. This has further worsened women migrant workers' vulnerability. Many of those unemployed still had to support themselves or received supports from friends, relatives or

¹⁹ "COVID-19 and Migration: Current Impacts and Future Trends" (Available from creativeassociatesinternational.com/stories/migration-stories/covid-19-and-migration-current-impacts-and-future-trends/)

welfare agencies.²⁰ Whilst it was recognized that many countries of destination have introduced healthcare coverage for all migrant workers regardless of their legal status, there are concerns over discriminatory behaviour regarding migrant workers' access to healthcare. While recognizing that several employers have taken preventive measures to protect their workers from risk of infection, concerns have been raised about the working and living conditions of majority of migrant workers in countries of destination which are often overcrowded and unsanitary.²¹

Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies (NAFEA) estimates that proportion of job in loss for Nepali workers in key countries of destination is as follows: 30 per cent jobs in the United Arab of Emirates and Malaysia, 20 per cent in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, 15 per cent in Kuwait, 12 per cent in Bahrain, and 10 percent in Oman.²² However, the experts and NRNA ICC members who were asked about the situation in Qatar shared that there is a high demand for workers in Qatar even during the time of COVID-19 and the cases of unemployment, joblessness and layoff are not reported. Instead, the workers are provided with minimum 1,800 Qatari Riyal in wages. And, the workers in UAE and Qatar are inoculated for free.

5. Women and domestic migrant workers

The number of women migrant is increasing in the recent years and the countries of destination too have been diverse unlike the past. However, in terms of gender distribution, most of the migrants to the Gulf and Malaysia tend to be men. Labour migration from Nepal is a predominantly male phenomenon with the share of female migrant workers accounting for a little above 5 per cent in the last decade.²³ The share of female workers was around 8.5 per cent in 2018/19. The Ministry of Finance stated that the number of women migrant workers is 236,688 women out of 4,792,209 total migrants so far and studies estimate that 90% of undocumented workers are women. According to the Nepal Migration Report 2020, the districts with the highest share of women migrant workers are Jhapa, Sindhupalchowk, Makawanpur, Morang, Kathmandu,

²⁰ Status of Nepali Migrant Workers in Relation to COVID-19, IOM, Kathmandu, 2020.

²¹ "Nepalis in Qatar live in overcrowded and squalid conditions even during pandemic." (The Kathmandu Post, 2020). Available at: <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2020/03/26/nepalis-in-qatar-live-in-overcrowded-and-squalidconditions-even-during-pandemic>

²² At least 500,000 migrant workers want to return home at the earliest, says report." <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2020/05/21/at-least-500-000-migrant-workers-want-to-return-home-at-the-earliest-says-report>

²³ Ministry of Labour and Employment and Social Security, *Nepal Labour Migration Report 2020*, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Kathmandu (2020).

Kavrepalanchowk, Ilam, Nuwakot, Sunsari and Chitwan and these ten districts account for over 50 per cent of the total women migrant workers.

The foreign employment registration process in Nepal is often gender-blind and does not account for the intensive stigma surrounding women labour migration. Consequently, those women who are legally able to access the labour permit application process still risk criticism or reproach from families, communities and administrative officials.²⁴ Similarly, it is restrictive governance in regard to women migrant workers that compels them to opt for irregular channels. The Government of Nepal has issued a directive by imposing a ban on women under the age of 24 if they are going Gulf nations as domestic work. Domestic workers are given permission to work in countries where Nepal has signed bilateral labour agreement. Such a restrictive policy is deemed violation of basic human rights of right to work and freedom of movement as the Article 18 (3) of the Constitution of Nepal guarantees the right to equality and right against discrimination on grounds of sex. Similarly, Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights mentions that: “Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state, and everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country”. Moreover, Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights specifies that “everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment”.

Although the Parliamentary Committee on Industry, Commerce, Labour and Consumer Welfare on 29 September 2020 issued a decree to the government to ease the ban²⁵, the effectiveness of its implementation has become a matter of concern. Also, it is important that the government’s act of restricting women from their right to mobility is against the letter and spirit of the Constitution of Nepal. As the citizen’s right to equality, the Article 18 (3) of the Constitution of Nepal states that “The State shall not discriminate citizens on grounds of origin, religion, race, caste, tribe, sex, economic condition, language, region, ideology or on similar other grounds.”²⁶ Likewise, Foreign Employment Act, 2007 mentions that “While sending worker for foreign Employment, the worker shall not be discriminated on the basis of gender”.²⁷

²⁴ Mark McCarthy (2021). *A comprehensive analysis of policies and frameworks governing foreign employment for Nepali women migrant workers and migrant domestic workers*. ILO Country Office for Nepal, Kathmandu

²⁵ Available from <https://radiokantipur.com/575/2020/09/29/1601387857>

²⁶ The Constitution of Nepal, 2015

²⁷ Foreign Employment Act, 2007

Women migrant are over-represented in the domestic work which is a sector rife with decent work deficit. They face various work-related problems, which are often related to exploitation. The global pandemic has put the women domestic workers at risk of violence.²⁸ Emerging data suggests that conditions for women migrant workers have further deteriorated as a result of COVID-19. Given such harsh condition, a large number of women suffer from one or the other forms of health problems. Women migrant domestic workers often live inside the homes of their employers. They clean, cook, take care of children and/or elderly family members. Because these workers lack legal protection, there are effectively no limits to the number of hours they may be asked to work per day without paid sick leave or annual leave, and no maternity leave. The women migrants working under such harsh condition have complained on denial of salary, sleep deprivation, passport confiscation, and forced confinement. Women are even restricted contacting their family members. Civil society leaders argue that the women migrants working as domestic help are assaulted, tortured and sexually abused and exploited. They even give birth to unwanted child and such children are regarded as stateless children.

In the guise of migration, trafficking in person from Nepal is taking place by luring people of good jobs. The government officials and experts argue that women and girls from the rural areas are more vulnerable in this regard. Despite tighter policies and many institutions in place, trafficking in persons is taking as this crime is considered notoriously profitable for the traffickers. Taking advantages of some loopholes in laws and existing social conditions, the heinous crime is taking the shape like that of a bush fire despite the aggressive steps of the governmental, non-governmental and international community to curb this translational organized crime. After the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019 and its rapid spread until recently, many innocent people have been pushed to traffickers' hands. And, women have suffered badly.

6. Social security for migrants

In the current volatile world, the migrant workers' vulnerability has furthered deepened, indicating that the migrant workers need more social protection and welfare schemes. Likewise, the undocumented migrants and the migrants with low skills need more social protection for their decent life. Since the migrants contribute to their society and the country at large by sending remittance back home and by gaining skills, the government has some social and economic

²⁸ National Human Rights Commission (2020). Rights of Migrant Workers in the Clutches of COVID-19 Pandemic. Kathmandu: National Human Rights Commission.

obligations to such population. The government has unveiled a policy to provide soft loan up to one million rupees to the returnee migrant workers²⁹. But, officials of the Nepal Rastra Bank said that out of 20,000 applicants meager 782 business proposals were approved for the soft loan.

Migrant workers are always a vulnerable group given the context that their job is affected by multiple factors. But, the Government of Nepal and its line agencies involved in the cycle of out-migration are very less concerned about both the health insurance and life insurance of the migrants. In many cases, Nepalis have suffered badly for lack of money to get treatment and other health care services and their families are left in a very miserable condition due to lack of health insurance and life insurance schemes of the migrants. Personal health condition and skills of the migrant workers, laws of the host countries, performance (business) of the employers as well as the global context determine their job security.

The Government of Nepal is working to bring all the migrant workers under the ambit of employees provident fund meant to make the foreign employment more productive and ensure social security to the migrants in the long run. However, the legal and policy provisions remain unclear for its implementation and it is yet to see how Nepalis residing abroad and migrants would be brought on board of such scheme.

As part of social security scheme for the migrant workers, the NRNA has also set up a fund to support the vulnerable migrant workers when they are in difficulties after falling sick or getting injured and even when they are laid off and turned empty-handed and left stranded having no money to buy ticket for homecoming. Lack of access to social services and portability of social rights for migrants not only raises concern about vulnerabilities of migrants, but also creates distortions in labor markets and in migration decisions. If migrants do not fully benefit from social security contributions or tax contributions because the associated benefits are not accessible or not portable, they might prefer to avoid contributions and work informally or underreport earnings.³⁰ Nepalis migrants are likely to benefit hugely and their reintegration efforts would remain sustainable given that Nepal explore the possibilities of including migrants to the contributory social security system at home and emphasize for social security in the destination countries.

²⁹ Available from <https://www.karobardaily.com/news/12355>

³⁰ Avato J., Koettl J., and R. Sabates-Wheeler. (2009). *Definitions, Good Practices, and Global Estimates on the Status of Social Protection for International Migrants*, World Bank, Washington DC.

7. Skill

Of the migrants, almost three-fourths are unskilled. Most male Nepali migrant workers are employed in low-skilled sectors, such as construction and manufacturing, whereas the majority of female migrants are engaged in domestic work which is a sector rife with decent work deficit. Among the Nepali migrants, 1.5 per cent of them are skilled, 24 per cent are semi-skilled and 74.5 per cent are unskilled.³¹ This paints a bleak picture on Nepal's foreign labour migration because vulnerability and skills are inversely proportionate.

The Foreign Employment Act has mentioned that any worker going for foreign employment which requires skillful training must acquire such training from the institute recognized by the Government of Nepal. Likewise, Nepal's Foreign Employment Policy has envisioned "to develop skilled human resources having competitive capacity for maximize benefits from foreign employment"³² but there has been a huge gap in between the policy and reality because skill is one of the least prioritised issue. In order to develop skilled human resources having competitive capacity for maximize benefits of foreign employment, the Foreign Employment Policy has aimed at conducting study and analysis of trends of international labour market to enhance capacity of potential migrants for providing skill and knowledge as per demand. It also calls for development of skill-based training programmes as per demand by international labour market through Professional Training and Skill Development Centers at local level. The Foreign Employment Policy mentions for collaboration with Center for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) and other related institutions to provide various trainings and also improve skill composition of workers including languages of destination countries.

In general, Nepali migrants have moderate skill but optimum loyalty to the works. In such a circumstance, migrants equipped with high skill can result in good income and contribution to the country at large. This is because there a direct relation between the skills and payment the migrants make in country of destinations, and high skill always pays high salary. There is a high demand for skilled workers and Nepal can explore such areas.

³¹Ministry of Finance (2020). *Economic Survey 2019/2020*. Ministry of Finance, Kathmandu.

³² Foreign Employment Policy, 2012

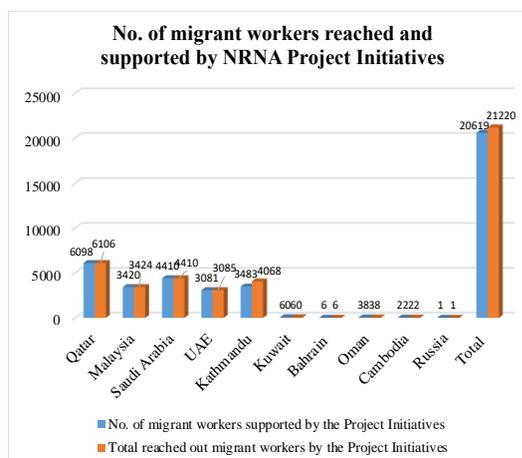
8. Vulnerabilities and NRNA's roles

Since its inception, NRNA is in the forefront to extend its support to the needy migrants in countries of destination. NRNA's initiatives have been further proactive in this regard after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. NRNA forged partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to help Nepali workers stranded in different parts of the globe due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It also received financial assistance to help the Nepali migrant workers affected by COVID-19. Nepali workers in the destination countries were targeted while the support of the NRNA was in helping the migrant in their repatriation.

According to the Ministry of Health and Population, there were 791,910 positive cases with 10,150 deaths in Nepal due to the pandemic until August 10. Similarly, until August 10, 2021, a total of 506,459 people arrived home through rescue and scheduled flights, among which a significant proportion is of migrant workers.³³ Through its NRNA COVID-19 Response to Nepali Migrant Workers: Relief and Repatriation Project, the NRNA as of June 2021 reached out to 21,220 and the details supports are listed in the below graph.

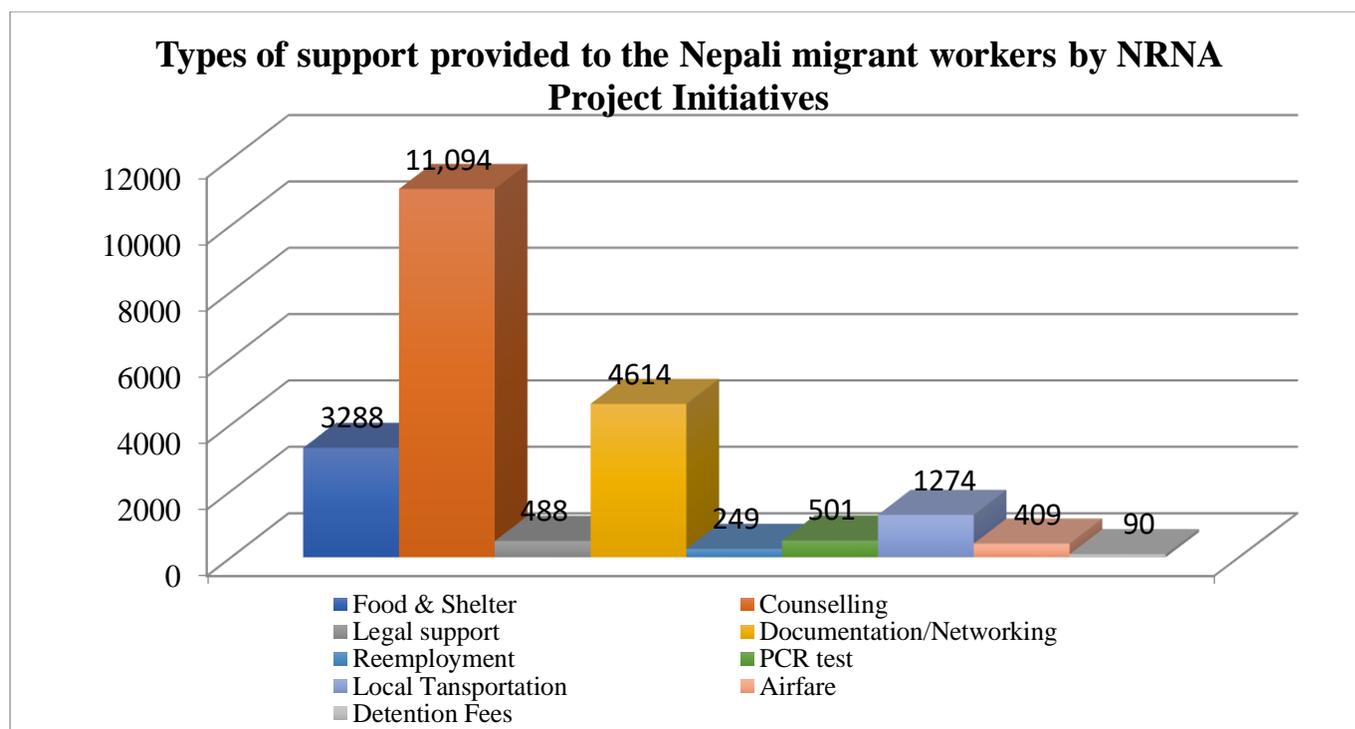
Support Provided to the Nepali Migrant Workers:

So far, 21,220 Nepali Migrant workers are reached out, out of which 20,619 migrant workers received different types of support (such as food and shelter, counseling, outreach, PCR test, partial air ticket, documentation support etc.)



³³ The data accessed on August 7 from

https://ccmc.gov.np/ccmc2/ccmc_update/No.of%20Nepali%20Repatriated%202078.04.23.pdf



NRNA also conducted a skill mapping of Nepali migrants and categorized them in accordance to their professions in their respective destination countries. Their work was categorized into unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled labor. Furthermore, the NRNA provided transportation support to the Nepali migrant workers from Kathmandu to their home upon return from the countries of destination in the wake of COVID-19. Most importantly, the NRNA has been rescuing Nepali migrant workers including those trafficking survivors, injured, jobless and the stateless children and help them keep in shelter home. In such a circumstance, NRNA has served as the best friend to the needy Nepali migrants.

9. Comparative advantages of NRNA

As a global Diaspora organization, the NRNA has a larger social, political and economic connection and it can supplement to ensure access to service delivery. In many destination countries, NRNA is registered as a social club and it can negotiate with different other agencies and institutions to back the demands of Nepali migrants. Similarly, it has a wide network spread in almost all the countries where Nepalis are working and residing. The Foreign Employment Policy has recognized the role of NRNA stating that human rights activist, NGOs, international organization and networks along with NRNs shall be mobilized against discrimination and exploitation with foreign employees and to protect their basic human rights. It has also mentioned

that non-residential Nepalis, particularly where there aren't Nepali missions, shall be mobilized to support legal remedies, emergency support and rescue of Nepali workers.

NRNA has an advantage of working with FNCCI and other private sector's umbrella organizations to finalize modalities for startup businesses and prepare a labour bank so that the returnees can get jobs in Nepal while the employers too can find the employees in a more accessible way. The NRNA can develop the reintegration national guideline and support the MoLESS in this regard. Being its global outreach, the NRNA can develop a network of migrants and work in tandem with the migrants and diplomatic missions as their bridge. The NRNA can assist the Embassy of Nepal in the receiving countries to provide some supports including the health professionals to support the undocumented workers, provide psychosocial counseling and repatriate. Similarly, NRNA representatives can locate and repatriate the dead bodies of Nepalis. The Government of Nepal, NRNA and insurance companies can work together to repatriate the Nepali workers stranded in the destination countries.

10. New destinations and Africa

Migration is a never stopping phenomenon. Looking for safe and lucrative destinations is always positive for migrants. In the post-COVID-19 period, new destinations are likely to emerge while the existing destinations could shrink. New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Japan, Israel and some other European countries could serve as the new destinations for Nepalis in the upcoming decades. However, Nepal's success lies whether or not the country is prepared for sending semi-skilled and skilled human resources.

The number of Nepalis in Africa is not that much big in size but Nepalis are residing and working in almost 40 African countries. In Africa, the issue of documentation of Nepalis is an alarming issue. More issues are of Nepali women working in Kenya and Tanzania and most of them are residing and working in tourist visa. As they travel via Indian routes, their mobility is also limited once they land in the African destination countries. For them, getting formal approval for work is unlikely and also the absence of Nepal's diplomatic mission there has pushed them to further difficulties.

11. Reintegration

Many migrants have returned during this pandemic, which calls for their socio-political, economic and cultural reintegration into society. The services related to social and economic reintegration of migrant workers are either limited or inaccessible. The Constitution of Nepal has stated that every citizen shall have the right to employment and the terms and conditions of employment and unemployment benefit shall be as provided in the Federal law.

The Foreign Employment Policy 2012 envisions the strategy for the reintegration of the returnee migrant workers. The policy promises to utilize the earnings of the foreign employment in the development of the country while introducing the welfare scheme for the family of migrant workers. However, reintegration has been looked through the skills and financial capital frame contributing to the labour market needs, the social aspect being completely ignored.

In addition to the financial capital, migrant workers bring back the social, cultural, and human capitals. If they are utilized adequately, the capitals brought by the migrants can contribute in sustainable development of the country. And, the returnees need effective social and economic reintegration package as well as the returnees should be utilized as trainers for orientations and skill trainings. The returnees upon their arrival need psycho-social counseling as a part of their reintegration. As a party state to the Global Compact for the Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, Nepal has committed to facilitate the migrant workers in dignified return, repatriation and reintegration in Objective 21. But the government and nongovernment actors have failed to address their own commitment as anticipated.³⁴

A study shows that 70 per cent of the people who have returned due to COVID-19 are unaware of what kind of support the country provides for them, which has left a majority of returnees in a state of confusion and economic uncertainty, resulting in the 80 per cent of returnee migrant workers wanting to engage in self-employment in the informal sector (IOM/NIDS, 2020).³⁵ National Budget for FY 2021/2022 has allocated Rs 12 billion to provide employment opportunities to 200,000 people under the Prime Minister Employment Programme. Similarly, Rs 400 million is allocated for training aimed at youths, returnee migrants and labourers who have lost their employment in the country to develop their capacity and skills on handicraft, plumbing, electric

³⁴ UNDP SDG brochure. Available at: <https://www.np.undp.org/content/nepal/en/home/library/sustainable-development-goals-national-report---nepal/sdgs-brochure.html>

³⁵https://nepal.iom.int/sites/nepal/files/publication/Rapid_Phone_Survey_Report.pdf

repairs, electronic, cook, craftsmanship, mason, carpentry, sewing and cutting, beautician, hair cutting, and vehicle and mobile repairs.³⁶ However, the budget has no specific package for the reintegration of returnee migrants as such.³⁷

12 Migration policies

The Constitution of Nepal is the key legal document that primarily recognises the domain of migration in Nepal and includes several provisions relevant to migration. Provisions on citizenship, citizens' right to freely move, the right not to be trafficked, make foreign employment free from exploitation and to guarantee the rights of migrant workers and mobilisation of the capital and skills of returning migrant are included in the Constitution. The Constitution of Nepal in its Directive Principles, Policies and Obligations of the State mentions to regulate and manage the sector in order to make foreign employment free from exploitation, safe and systematic and to guarantee employment and rights of the labours, and to encourage to mobilize the capital, skills, technology and experience gained from foreign employment in productive sectors in the country.³⁸ Article 33 (1) of the Constitution of Nepal has the provision of citizen's right to employment stating that every citizen shall have the right to employment.

Likewise, the Fifteenth Plan of the National Planning Commission has laid emphasis on management and regulation of migration sector while planning to ensure opportunity to benefit from economic opportunities without needing to migrate for foreign employment.

Similarly, the Local Government Operation Act 2017 has stated that the local governments can provide financial literacy and skill training for the labour force going abroad. However, the National Population Policy 2014 has stated that out-migration of productive human resources has impacted agricultural productivity and has changed the demography of rural area by leaving only women, children and senior citizens behind.

Furthermore, the Immigration Act 1992 and the Immigration Rules 1994, the Immigration Procedures 2008, the Foreign Employment Act 2007, the Foreign Employment Rules 2008, the Foreign Employment Policy 2012 and the Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act

³⁶ Budget speech of FY 2021/22. Available from [https://mof.gov.np/uploads/document/file/Budget%20Speech%20\(Final\)%20Full_20210530100738.pdf](https://mof.gov.np/uploads/document/file/Budget%20Speech%20(Final)%20Full_20210530100738.pdf)

³⁷ The concern was shared by the presenter and participants during an interaction organized by POURAKHI Nepal and National Network for Safe Migration on 4 June 2021

³⁸ Constitution of Nepal, 2015

2007 and its Rules 2008 are the key legal framework to guide Nepal's foreign migration sector. Such legal frameworks have stated that foreign employment shall be developed as tool for transfer new skill and technology while recognising the foreign employment returnees as development partners for national development through utilization of their skill and savings.

13. Conclusion

Overseas migration for employment has become an integral part for livelihood of more than half of the countries' entire household. Owing to insufficient employment opportunities, almost half of the 400,000 workforce that enters into Nepal labour market leaves for foreign employment every year. The number of women migrant workers is also on the rise in the recent years. This is the reality of our country. However, the number of overseas goers has plummeted sharply in 2020 due to global pandemic of COVID-19 that brought the human mobility to a complete halt across the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the entire global citizens as the human mobility has been restricted in different parts of the world at different time. In this situation, migrant workers have become more vulnerable to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has constrained both their ability to access their places of work in the countries of destination as well as their ability to return to their countries of origin.

More than 4 million³⁹ Nepalis residing in different parts of the world have been equally affected by the pandemic. In the wake of COVID-19, Nepali migrant workers in the destination countries are either losing jobs, or are laid off, reduced working hours and difficulties in health care due to closure or non-functioning of the businesses in the countries of destination.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to be pervasive in remittance inflow, job creation, infrastructure development and so on. Though the remittance inflow in Nepal has increased even after the outbreak of COVID-19, chances remain slim for the continuous growth of remittance inflow in upcoming years. Despite a huge decrease in the number of migrants in the destination countries, the present increment in remittance is considered due to increased value of US Dollar, use of formal channel to remit the migrants' money and the current migrant workers in some destination countries have earned more due to high-demand for workers as many countries have not hired the workers after the outbreak of the pandemic. This indicates that remittance money is likely to decrease anytime soon. This raises serious concerns at both the national and family

³⁹ The number of Nepali migrants stated here has not included Nepali working in India.

level in Nepal. In order to address the possible woes in this field, sustainable reintegration scheme and best utilization of skills of the migrants learned abroad could be viable option for the decent of the returnee migrants.

Frequent bans and restrictions in the name of protection of women migrant workers and domestic workers are not the long-term solutions. Such restrictive policies have not reduced the vulnerabilities of the women rather it has been intensified as the migrants have chose various other ways to migrate abroad. A long-term policy is realized to address the issue. Instead of the bans and restrictions, more focus is expected on creating and promoting decent working conditions for women in the country so that they take migration as a choice not a compulsion. Skills training before departure can be made more effective and the language of the receiving countries of destination, particularly both in the Arabic or English languages by making it easier for women migrant workers to communicate with their employers and to get equipped with domestic skills for a modern household.

14. Recommendations

14.1. With focus on COVID-19

- i. The Government of Nepal is the sole custodian of its citizens wherever Nepalis are working or residing. So, it is the government's key responsibility to protect Nepali migrant workers in this difficult time of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ii. The Government of Nepal should take stock of Nepali migrant workers hospitalized in different hospitals in different countries and lobby for their proper medication and treatment as well graceful homecoming. NRNA should cooperate with the government agencies and officials to figure out such number worldwide.
- iii. The Government of Nepal should provide migrant workers with access to legal remedies for unfair treatment (reduced or non-payment of wages, denial of other entitlements & workplace discrimination). To do so, Nepal's diplomatic missions could consider working with other organizations like NRNA, civil society actor and workers' organization working on the same.

- iv. As many migrants have expressed their desire to return home due to COVID-19, the government should expedite the process for Nepalis' homecoming and the NRNA should coordinate among the agencies, institutions and Nepal's diplomatic missions to repatriate Nepalis.
- v. The Government of Nepal should conduct the migrants' skills-mapping for the best utilization of their skills, which in the long run will be helpful for the reintegration of migrants. The NRNA should also develop a network of returnee migrants to map their skills, to link them up for the entrepreneurship development, channelize the government's programmes targeted to the returnee migrations and promote their sustainable social-economic and political reintegration.
- vi. In order to ensure productive utilization of remittance and promote savings of the migrants, the Government of Nepal should ensure the policy and implementation of the contribution-based pension scheme for the migrant workers through Provident Employment Fund.
- vii. In the time of crisis caused due to COVID-19, the Government of Nepal should concentrate its focus for the rescue and support to the undocumented migrants, women, physically challenged ones and other migrants who are made vulnerable in the country of destination. The government is expected to pay special attention to the stateless children borne by Nepali women migrant workers in the destination countries.
- viii. The injured migrant workers should be provided with a separate identity card upon their repatriation. Likewise, the families of those who died during foreign employment should be enlisted to provide special incentives and opportunities from the state.
- ix. The Government of Nepal and NRNA should cooperate to establish training institutes to enhance skills of the migrants to meet the country specific demand for migrant workers and ensuring language training to the potential migrant workers from the districts concerned.
- x. NRNA should maintain regular communication with migrants; help disseminate objective information about the concerned government's plans, policies and announcement unveiled for the employees with focus on COVID-19.

14.2. General

- i. NRNA should cooperate with the Government of Nepal to establish an effective structure to disseminate information to support the potential migrants for their self-decision through informed choices by creating awareness on safe migration process, and opportunities, risks and alternatives and economic literacy associated.
- ii. NRNA should expand the information and counseling centres to ensure proactive information about foreign employment. In doing so, massive awareness raising and educating people at community level about pros and cons of foreign employment is needed.
- iii. Creating an advocacy group to educate citizens about the current foreign employment, policy, legislation, enforcement, massive investment in vocational education, create opportunities for youth, encourage foreign investment, education in values and patriotism is imperative.
- iv. NRNA should identify and implement the special investment scheme targeting the migrant workers for the optimum use of remittances in the productive sector. NRNA Investment Fund could be a best model for this.
- v. NRNA should run special programme for entrepreneurship development of returnee migrants through utilization of their skills. Likewise, programmes for financial literacy by targeting the returnee migrants and their family members are recommended.
- vi. The Government of Nepal should review its restrictive policy in regard to women migrant workers. The age specific ban imposed on women migrant workers in certain country and profession is against the basic principle of human rights. Rather, women migrants have opted for other routes and irregular channel to reach the destination countries, which has made women migrants further vulnerable. As a result of this policy, the number of undocumented women migrants in the destination countries has increased. Beside lifting ban on the women's mobility, the government should empower the diplomatic missions and also depute women labour attaché.

14.3. Others

- i. Special programme for reintegration and entrepreneurship development along with the psychosocial counseling to the returnee women migrants to ensure their rights to dignified life is highly imperative.

- ii. Returnees of foreign employment should be encouraged to incorporate agencies that provide trainings and develop entrepreneurship, capital formation and investment. Likewise, psycho-social counseling centres and rehabilitation centres are required for the sustainable reintegration of the returnees.
- iii. The returnee migrants should be linked to small and micro enterprises (SMEs) so as to facilitate in their reintegration process upon their arrival back home. In doing so, the government, NRNA and FNCCI can work together on skills, collateral-free soft loan, market access for value chain.
- iv. Migration governance of Nepal is often criticised for lack of prompt service delivery and transparency. There must be timely changes in the laws and policies relating to migration and migrant workers as well as the working modality of this sector should be massively changed making it paperless. The migration governance should be shaped in such a way that the in-person meeting of recruiting agents and aspirant migrants should be avoided by promoting paperless and cashless recruitment process. Involvement of migrant workers and civil society should be ensured in drafting the migration policies.
- v. The migrants should have an access to Nepal's social security fund, their share should be ensured in the projects of national pride and the returnees should be given employment opportunities based on their skills in such projects. That would be win-win cooperation for both the government and the returnee migrants. If this is implemented, the projects will have sufficient investment fund and the returnees will have a decent job at home.
- vi. In addition to MoU provisions that are in place, the government should lay emphasis for policy implementation of providing more social security schemes to the migrants. The contribution-based social security should be made available to all migrants. And, the Social Security Fund as an institution should take a lead role in providing pension to the returned migrants.
- vii. A permanent mechanism should be instituted to oversee the areas of social security provision and pension scheme to the migrant workers. Such mechanism comprising the stakeholders should monitor, evaluate and coordinate among the line agencies.

- viii. In order to bring the undocumented workers including the domestic workers from the destination countries, the Nepali diplomatic missions in the receiving countries should initiate the process to issue labour permit and renewal of the labour permit. This will help bring the Nepali workers in government's official data, collect revenue, maintain good governance and reduce the costs of the migrant workers as well.
- ix. Foreign Employment Tribunal should be well-equipped with adequate resources. Its capacity enhancement is deemed necessary by providing migration related training and capacity development programmes.
- x. Further research and study are needed to make foreign employment sector safe, organized and dignified. Nepal Policy Research Institute, National Planning Commission (NPC) and universities should be encouraged to do research on Nepal's foreign migration.
- xi. The Government of Nepal should ink BLAs and MoUs with the major destination countries. Migrant workers should be sent in line with the provisions stated in the BLAs and MoUs. The BLAs and MoUs must incorporate the issues of skilled workers, induction training, health insurance and life insurance to Nepali migrant workers in the destination countries.
- xii. A joint technical committee should be formed to monitor, implement and facilitate international labour agreement, BLAs and MoUs with major destination countries.
- xiii. Prompt, safe and dignified return of migrant workers in need of rescue should be included in the BLAs and MoUs between Nepal and the host countries. The existing BLAs and MoUs should be revised to address such needs.
- xiv. Undocumented workers are severely affected and some of them are even in detention and shelter home. The government should send health professionals for their health care. And, women and stateless children should be provided with special care and protection.
- xv. The NRNA should work as a bridge of workers and diplomatic missions in the destination countries and should work in the area of philanthropic areas including setting up a charity fund, training development centre and skills promotion and testing centre.

- xvi. The government and NRNA should work for the safety net for the migrant workers and coordination between the government and NRNA is likely in this area. Similarly, cooperation is imperative in policy formulation and programmes implementation. The NRNA can develop the Reintegration National Guideline and support the MoLESS and Foreign Employment Board in this regard.
- xvii. NRNA and FNCCI could work together to finalize some modality for startup businesses and prepare a concept of labour bank so that the returnee can get jobs in Nepal while the employers too can find the employees in a hassle-free manner.
- xviii. Mainstreaming the experiences, skill and capitals of the NRNs and Nepali Diaspora for national development should be basic tasks of the government. Government's investment in capacity building and human capital (Vocational Training) is deemed necessary. This will be a double win whether the skilled ones remain at home and opt for overseas migration.
- xix. The Government of Nepal and NRNA should cooperate to keep records of Nepali migrant workers the in destination countries. This will help maintain data of migrants including those undocumented ones.
- xx. Provisions should be unveiled for mandatory training targeting the recruiting company on the issues of human rights, improper solicitation of young people for foreign employment, rights of migrant workers and responsibility of recruiting company, international labor laws and other related topics.
- xxi. Authority of diplomatic missions should be expanded in rescuing migrant workers. A 24-hour SMS hotline service can be set up to strengthen a communication channel between victims, victims' families and rescuing authority.
- xxii. Diplomatic missions should be strengthened with sufficient funds and human resources, and given the authority to rescue migrants and trafficking survivors.
- xxiii. In the destination countries lacking the presence of Nepal's diplomatic mission (e.g. Jordan), the government can make efforts to enter into cooperation agreements, increase stronger diplomatic ties with neighboring countries and strengthen mobilization of Nepali Diaspora.

- xxiv. Engagement of the private sector in preparation of labor laws as well as offering of tax incentive to the private sector for employing Nepali workers could make a big difference to employ youth entering into the job market.
- xxv. The Government of Nepal should plan to entirely stop out-migration of unskilled labour force by 2025 and act accordingly.

NRNA Foreign Employment White Paper Drafting Committee

SN	Name	Position	Organization
Advisory Committee			
1	Purna Chandra Bhatarai	Past DG	DoFE, Nepal Government
2	Rameshwor Nepal	South Asia Director	Equidem Research
3	Dr. Ganesh Gurung	Member	Policy Research Academy
4	Madhu Bilas Pandit	Former Chief	Office of Labour, Nepal Government
5	Govind Mani Bhurtel	Past Spokesperson	MOLESS, Nepal Government
6	Neha Chaudhary	National Project Coordinator FAIR	ILO
7	Dr. Puru Shrestha	Member	NRNA High Level Committee on COVID
8	Ekanath Khatiwada	Chair	NRNA Foundation Steering Committee
9	TB Karki	Advisor	NRNA
10	Hikmat Thapa	Advisor	NRNA
Coordinator			
1	Dr. Badri KC	Vice-President	NRNA
Member			
1	Dr. Hem Raj Sharma	General Secretary	NRNA
2	Rajendra Kumar Sharma	Secretary	NRNA
3	DB Chhetri	Spokesperson	NRNA
4	Bhoma Devi Limbu	Women Coordinator	NRNA
5	Himal Gurung	Youth coordinator	NRNA
6	Yasmin Begam	ICC member	Saudi Arabia
7	Dr. Prabha Basnet	NRN	Korea South
8	Hom Karki	Journalist	Nepal
9	Deepak Shrestha	Past President	Oman
10	Laxmi Giri	President	NCC Bahrain
11	Pitambar Bhattarai	GS	NCC Canada
12	Pradip Neupane	President	NCC China
13	Lal Kaji Gurung	President	NCC Iraq
14	Milan Chantyal	President	NCC Ireland
15	Shanta Adhikari Gyawali	President	NCC Israel
16	Suraj Dumre	President	NCC Kenya
17	Yagya Raj Subedi	President	NCC Korea South
18	Sujan K.C.	President	NCC Kuwait
19	Ashok Thapa	President	NCC Lebanon
20	Radhika Gurung	President	NCC Hong Kong

21	Purna Bahadur Gurung	President	NCC Macau
22	Deepak Pokharel	President	NCC Malawi
23	Hari Bhattarai	President	NCC Malaysia
24	Ramesh Rai	President	NCC Madagascar
25	S.B. Chetry	President	NCC Myanmar
26	Roshan Thapa	President	NCC Nigeria
27	Sewanta Purja Pun	President	NCC Oman
28	Mohamed Muktada Musalman	President	NCC Qatar
29	Tej Bahadur Thapa Chhetri	President	NCC Saudi Arabia
30	Ram Prasad Panta	President	NCC Seychelles
31	Dr. Pushpa Raj Bhattarai	President	NCC South Africa
32	Binod Bahadur Deuja Chhetri	President	NCC Taiwan
33	Puspa Raj Bhattarai	President	NCC Tanzania
34	Assajita Awale	President	NCC Thailand
35	Prakash Koirala	President	NCC UAE
36	Binod Thapa	President	NCC Uganda
37	Bidur Khanal	President	NCC Zambia
38	Chiranjibi Baral	Independent Consultant	Executive Director NIDS

Foreign Employment Department Steering Committee				
S.N.	Position	Name	Country	Designation
1	Head of Department	Dr. Badri K.C.	Russia	Vice-President
2	Chair, Social Welfare of Migrant Workers Committee	R. K. Sharma	Qatar	Secretary
3	Chair, Cooperation with Gurkhas Taskforce	Chandra Gurung	UK	Chair, Committee
4	Chair, Continuation of Nepalese Citizenship Taskforce	Sonam Lama	USA	Vice-President
5	Chair, NRNA Global Nepali Diaspora Integration Committee	Khagendra Chhetry	USA	Chair, Committee
6	Member	Ajaya Kumar Yadav	Oman	ICC Member
7	Member	Bishwa Bikram Rai	Malaysia	ICC Member
8	Member	Dayanedhi Sapkota	UK	ICC Member
9	Member	Deepak Sharma	Australia	ICC Member
10	Member	Hom Nath Gautam	USA	ICC Member
11	Member	Hom Nath Sharma	Qatar	ICC Member
12	Member	Lal Prasad Pun	Bahrain	ICC Member
13	Member	Lila Devi Gurung	UK	ICC Member
14	Member	Navin BK	China	ICC Member
15	Member	Nawa Raj Pokharel	Romania	ICC Member
16	Member	Raju KC	UAE	ICC Member
17	Member	Yam Lal Dhakal (Raju)	New Zealand	ICC Member
18	Member	Ashok K.C.	Australia	ICC Member
19	Member	Sagar Ghimire	Myanmar	ICC Member
20	Member	Prabin Gurung	Qatar	RC Middle East
21	Member	Shanti Devi Adhikari	Macau	ICC Member
22	Member	Mahendra Jung Shah	Malaysia	ICC Member
23	Member	Nabin Paudel	UAE	ICC Member
24	Member	Purushottam Bohora	USA	ICC Member

NRNA Migrant Workers Welfare Committee (2019-2021)			
S. N.	Position	Name	Country
1	Advisor	Bishnu Prasad Gaire	Nepal
2	Advisor	Gobinda Mani Bhurtyal	Nepal
3	Advisor	Purna Chandra Bhattarai	Nepal
4	Advisor	Rameshor Nepal	Nepal
5	Advisor	Shishir Bhatta	USA
1	Chair	Rajendra Kumar Sharma	Qatar
2	Co-Chair, Americas	Mahesh Khadka	USA
3	Co-Chair, Asia Pacific	Bhawani Panta	Japan
4	Co-Chair, Europe	Rajesh Pathak	UK
5	Co-Chair, Middle East	Rajendra John Aryal	Saudi Arabia
6	Co-Chair, Oceania	Swatantra Pratap Shah	Australia
7	Member	Bikram Bhattarai	UK
8	Member	Binod Neupane	Belgium
9	Member	Buddhi Oli	Canada
10	Member	Ghanshyam Bhattarai	USA
11	Member	Ishwor Kuinkel	Australia
12	Member	Jitendra Kumar Shrestha	Netherlands
13	Member	Kanchan KC	USA
14	Member	Laxman Khanal	UAE
15	Member	Madan Adhikari	UAE
16	Member	Mahesh Regmi	USA
17	Member	Mana Murti Bhurtyal, Dr	Russia
18	Member	Nanda Dhungana	Qatar
19	Member	Ram Chandra Gurung	UK
20	Member	Ramesh Poudel	Australia

NRNA Foreign Employment Relief Fund Committee (2019-2021)			
S.N.	Position	Name	Country
1	Chair	Dr. Badri K.C.	Russia
2	Co-chair, Americas Region	Ram C Pokharel	USA
3	Co-chair, Middle East Region	Deepak Shrestha	Oman
4	Co-chair, Europe Region	Kuber Karki	Portugal
5	Co-chair, Oceania Region	Dharmaraj Adhikari	Australia
6	Co-chair, Asia Pacific Region	Khagendra Neupane	Malaysia
7	Co-chair, Africa Region	Krishna Dutta Bhatta	Kenya
8	Member	Babu Raja Sinha	USA
9	Member	Bijay Phuyal	Australia
10	Member	Dinesh Thapa	Denmark
11	Member	Laxmi Giri	Baharain
12	Member	Nabin Baskota	Korea
13	Member	Netra Bandhu Pokhrel	USA
14	Member	Radhika Gurung	Hong Kong
15	Member	Ramesh Bhandari	Saudi Arabia
16	Member	Ramesh shrestha	UAE
17	Member	Roshan Shrestha	Ghana
18	Member	Subash Malla	Cyprus
19	Member	Sudarshan Thapa	Macau
20	Member	Sujan KC	Kuwait
21	Member	Tej Katuwal	Qatar

NRNA Continuation of Nepalese Citizenship Taskforce (2019-2021)			
S.N.	Position	Name	Country
1	Advisor	Ram P. Thapa	Germany
2	Advisor	Khagendra GC	USA
3	Advisor	Damar Ghale	UK
4	Advisor	Ramesh Pandey	Australia
5	Advisor	Sagar Ghimire	Myanmar
1	Chair	Sonam Lama	USA
2	Co-chair	Shiva Rai	USA
3	Member	Bharat Pokharel	Australia
4	Member	Birendra Singh Karki	Denmark
5	Member	Bishnu Prasad Bastola	Netherlands
6	Member	Bishnu Ranamagar	USA
7	Member	Govind Belbase	UK
8	Member	Kanchha Gurung	Thailand
9	Member	Kul B Karki	Kenya
10	Member	Lok Nath Tiwari	USA
11	Member	Nabaraj Koirala	Ireland
12	Member	Narayan Gurung	USA
13	Member	Poonam Gurung	UK
14	Member	Purna Chandra Baniya	USA
15	Member	Rabindra Acharya	Canada
16	Member	Mahendra Poudel	Portugal
17	Member	Sher B Sunar	UK
18	Member	Shiva Ram Bhandari	France
19	Member	Shivamani Bhurtyal	Russia
20	Member	Tekraj Niroula	Russia
21	Nepal Coordinator	Saroj Dahal	Nepal
Advisory Council			
1	Advisor	Surendra Shrestha	UK
2	Member	Surya Prasad Sharma	USA

Cooperation with Gurkhas Taskforce (2019-2021)			
S.N.	Position	Name	Country
1	Advisor	Lacchya Bdr Gurung, Cllr	UK
2	Advisor	Dhan Bdr Gurung	UK
3	Advisor	Man B Gurung	UK
4	Advisor	Prakash Pun	Hong Kong
5	Advisor	Trilok Gurung	Hong Kong
1	Chair	Chandra Bdr Gurung, Hon Lt	UK
2	Co-chair	Yog Kumar Phagami	UK
3	Member	Balkrishna Gurung	UK
4	Member	Biswasdip Tigela	UK
5	Member	Dilip Singh Gurung	Hong Kong
6	Member	Durga Gurung	Hong Kong
7	Member	Gopal Rai	Canada
8	Member	Hari Gurung	UK
9	Member	Kaji Sherpa, Lt	UK
10	Member	Kamal Gurung	UK
11	Member	Krishna Bdr Gurung, Maj	UK
12	Member	Krishna Thapa Magar, WO2	UK
13	Member	Min Bdr Gurung	UK
14	Member	Prem Gaha Magar	UK
15	Member	Raju Gurung, Capt	UK
16	Member	Shri Limbu, Lt	UK
17	Member	Yam Rana, Lt Col	UK

NRNA Global Nepali Diaspora Mainstream Integration Committee (2019-2021)			
S.N.	Position	Name	Country
1	Advisor	Darshan Rauniyar	USA
2	Advisor	Harry Bhandari	USA
3	Advisor	Lachhya Gurung	UK
4	Advisor	Mahendra Lamsal	Australia
5	Advisor	Sanjita Pradhan	USA
1	Chair	Khagendra GC	USA
2	Co-chair, Americas	Bala Ghimire	USA
3	Co-chair, Asia Pacific	Kul Prasad Gurung	Hong Kong
4	Co-chair, Europe	Dr Jagannath Sharma	UK
5	Co-chair, Oceania	Moni Limbu	Australia
6	Member Secretary	Purushottam Dhakal	USA
7	Member (Next Generation Mainstream Integration - Coordination)	Amit Shah	USA
8	Member	Bhakta Thapa	USA
9	Member	Bijaya Thapa	UK
10	Member	Jigyan Thapa	Japan
11	Member	Jubi Gauchan	USA
12	Member (Social Integration - Coordination)	Khadka Bahadur KC	Belgium
13	Member	Mitra Kafle	Canada
14	Member (Mainstream Integration - Coordination)	Niraj Shrestha	Australia
15	Member (Language, Literature and Culture Integration - Coordination)	Padam Bishwokarma	USA
16	Member	Pradip Dhakal	USA
17	Member	Pravin Ghimire	USA
18	Member (Mainstream Integration - Coordination)	Rajen Thapa	USA
19	Member (Media and Integration - Coordination)	Rameshor Bhandari	USA
20	Member	Shailesh Kumar Karmacharya	New Zealand
21	Member	Smita Malla	Norway