

# Survey on the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Returnee Migrant Women Workers in Nepal



In collaboration with:



**WOREC**



Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women



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## Executive Summary

Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE), Nepal has issued 4,792,209 labour permits to Nepalis – unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled – going for foreign employment until fiscal year 2019/20. In this figure, the women migrant workers accounted for 2,36,688 labour permits issued (Economic Survey, 2020). Due to COVID-19 outbreak since December 2019, migrant workers started returning to Nepal after January 2020 when some host countries, like Qatar, Kuwait, Dubai began nationwide lockdown, while the Government of Nepal was reluctant to evacuate its migrant workers from the destination countries. This survey was carried out with an attempt to explore how pandemic has affected the employment and income generating opportunities of both returnee and non-returnee migrant workers.

The survey with returnee women migrant workers enquired on issues related to wage theft, their impressions of quarantine shelters in Nepal, if there has been any change in their status with their family and friends as a returnee at times of stigma attached pandemic, considering they may not be in an earning capacity. Their views on how they see themselves benefitting from government's plans related to employment opportunities and mental well-being of their family members were also explored. In-depth interviews with all 25 respondents from six districts - Morang Udaypur, Terathum, Dang, Doti and Kailali – respectively representing Provinces 1, 5 and 7. The interviews were conducted in Nepali language. The same applied to non-returnee women migrant workers who participated in the survey through Facebook messenger.

Two set of separate survey questionnaires were prepared for these two groups of respondents. Both of the questionnaires focused on i) their reason of return to Nepal in the context of COVID-19, ii) response to their return at the government and social level, iii) their financial prospects and employment opportunities in future, and iv) their knowledge to government policies on reintegration programme/package for returnee migrant workers in Nepal.

Nepal's nation-wide lock down effective 24 March 2020 due to which 25 interviews with the returnee women migrant workers were also conducted over telephone and use of social media applications like facebook messenger, WhatsApp, etc. This limited the tone of survey findings as presented in this report which might have been otherwise, if the interviews were made in person.

The survey findings confirm that personal, social, financial and political aspects of women migrant workers have always been subjected to public scrutiny of Nepali society deeply entrenched in patriarchal norms and values. Some of the key findings are as outlined below:

**On a personal front**, all of the 25 returnee women migrant workers claimed that they made a conscious decision to return to Nepal because of the pandemic. The respondents who had returned to Nepal as early as October-November 2019 had returned on their own. Only one had returned in June 2020 in the government chartered flight to Nepal from Kuwait.

These respondents returning in between January and March 2020 had either left their jobs or were laid off by their employers. One respondent coming in June 2020 returned from her country of employment in an extended leave provision and was receiving half wage.

Three out of the five non-returnee migrant women workers consulted with their family and decided to stay back. Two respondents could not come back since their country of employment suspended flights before their flight date.

**Social Status** of returnee women migrant workers was tied to their family relationships, mainly with their husbands who were either deceased or alive but separated. Larger part of their remittance goes towards maintenance of their household, in case of married women, their husband played a larger role in how the money would be spent. In case of unmarried single respondents, fathers were the key user of income sent by the respondents. The Married but single (divorcee, widow) respondents were staying with their maternal parents or siblings who were the caretakers of their children.

**Stigma** attached to the pandemic on their return affected only one of the respondents who did not communicate with anyone outside of her immediate family. Rest of the respondents felt a varying degree of passive aggression in their neighborhood, that subsided after they were tested negative during their 2-week-long stay in quarantine shelters.

**Financial Situation** of the returnee migrant workers in Nepal and women migrant workers in countries of employment is different. Returnee migrant workers have little or no savings of their own to sail through uncertain times brought by pandemic.

The uncertainty around their employment opportunities was the biggest worry. Therefore, at present, they are willing to work as daily labour even for a half wage. Being underpaid is not an issue for the returnee women migrant workers. Same views were expressed by non-returnee

women migrant workers who are being paid half wage by their employing companies. They are hopeful that their companies will compensate for this once situation normalizes.

The respondents with small scale business in destination country or home country expect their business to be negatively impacted by the pandemic.

**Wage theft** had been there for two of the twenty-five returnee women migrant workers who had not been paid the same amount as mentioned in their work contract. One of them had not even received any increment during her 2-year-employment.

Placement agency were also found to be extorting money from the women migrant workers. Every month, one of the respondent's placement agency would take 2000/- INR from her as placement fee.

**Working Hours** had increased for the non-returnee women workers as in case of Oman. However, for the ones in Kuwait and Baharain, the work was on call basis. One of the respondents in Kuwait works in her company's online customer service which is lesser than her working hours.

**Employment opportunities in future** is uncertain as pointed out by all of the respondents. They stated that it is due to them being either unskilled or semi-skilled labour, their level of education, and their age. The respondents' highest level of education was higher secondary dropout and lowest is basic literacy.

The respondents especially the unskilled and semi-skilled are worried of their financial up keeping, and are oblivious to government policies related to skill upgrade training and employment opportunities including loans on subsidized rate. However, when informed of these available means, they were still sceptic about their access to such government facilities and benefits from it. For many migrant workers foreign employment still remains a lucrative option than working in Nepal.

Self-employment is an option that they would like to seek, however, they are equally skeptic of government's policies on subsidized loan schemes, entrepreneurial grants, skills based trainings, and employment funds.

**Quarantine shelters** set up by the government lacked not only the adequate infrastructure to deal with COVID-19 issues but also other common health related issues, such as drinking water, medicines for diarrhea, fever, etc. This survey's respondents who had stayed in quarantine



shelters of their respective districts did confirm mismanagement.

This survey's Dalit respondents, were not subjected to discrimination since they had come months before these shelters had been set up and lock down was enforced.

Though hurt and mindful of social stigma attached to their timing of return, they are unfazed by it and question rather the intent and double standard of the society, including their family members who benefit from their remittance.

**Federal Government Package/Programmes** such as Prime Minister's Employment Program, Small Farmer's Credit, Youth and Small Entrepreneur Self Employment Fund and Private Sector were unknown to all of the respondents. They were skeptic that such schemes will be accessible to them. Forty seven percentage (47%) of the survey respondents are keen to work in Nepal if such schemes are availed to them.

Foreign Employment Board (FEB) is developing migrant worker and their families focused guidelines specifically to address their needs at times of pandemics like COVID-19. Additionally, the board has already introduced repatriation guidelines which holds recruitment agencies and employing companies responsible to cover evacuation costs of the migrant works in such situations. The guideline with this provision is being opposed by the recruitment agencies on the ground that they were not consulted while drafting the guidelines, and also they are not in a position to cover such costs. The objective of the recommendations made below have been made with an aspiration to ensure the rights of women migrant workers, mainly the returnees are ensured at all times irrespective of perceived normal times and age of 'new normal' induced by situations such as COVID-19 pandemic. The basis of these recommendations are conversations with the respondents, review of media reports, statements, and participation in consulting webinars on concerns of migrant workers' rights and their advocates/lobbyists with the government.

#### **Government of Nepal's policy on Women Migrant Workers:**

Since the 1990s, Government of Nepal has backtracked on mobility of Nepali women seeking foreign employment, reality of which have shown that women become more vulnerable to human trafficking and irregular labour market. The present COVID-19 crisis has also reflected how they can be denied return to their home country. Therefore, this survey would like to support the advocacy of migrant rights community and women rights movement in Nepal that such restrictive policies are not an answer to protect women migrant workers. The government should introduce policies that allows women to opt for foreign employment with dignity and safety.

**Employment Schemes of the Government** has budgeted 1.474 trillion<sup>1</sup> in fiscal year 2020/21 among which employment generating, conducting training programme, and availing small financial grants for self-employment are the key focused areas. This will be availed for all Nepali citizens through Prime Minister's Employment Program, Small Farmers Credit, Youth and Small Entrepreneur Self Employment Fund and Private Sectors. Therefore, this survey calls for a concrete laid out implementation plan from the government on how returnee migrant workers, especially the returnee women migrant workers will benefit from this. This implementation plan should also include a dedicated detailed information dissemination plan which will ensure that none of the returnee women migrant worker will be left out.

**Nepal's present three-tier administrative structure** – local, province and federal – can serve the migrant workers and their families only through proper data analysis. Therefore, Government of Nepal has to use its quantitative data available with its line Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security to identify and explore areas through which skills and knowledge of returnee women migrant workers can be absorbed for a financially sustained dignified life. This can only be done through the best practice of consulting with right holders, i.e., returnee women migrant workers and their families while introducing any policies. Such policies should also consider how non-implementing agencies can be held accountable should there be absence of effective implementation of these policies and programmes. These consultations should also include returnee migrant workers who were on irregular working status in their countries of employment and have now returned to Nepal. They should not be excluded from benefiting from any of the government policies and programmes implemented to benefit returnee migrant women workers.

**Identified Areas of Support** outlined in this survey is the expression of 30 respondents (25 returnees migrant woman worker and 5 non returnee woman migrant workers) and it covers their concerns related to finance, social security and mental health. The government and its line agencies should consider these indicated areas and plan implementation and execution of its policies accordingly.

**Comprehensive Technical Assistance** should be provided by the government to set up businesses for returnee women migrant workers seeking self-employment opportunities. Considering this reality, the government should provide basic financial literacy skills including

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<sup>1</sup> a) Factsheet published on 14 July 2020, Centre for Social Change;

b) <https://risingnepaldaily.com/main-news/fm-khatiwada-unveils-rs-147-trillion-budget-for-fy-202021>

taxation training for the self-starters. This should also include promotion of their service in larger entrepreneurial scene, investment and saving of their earnings, etc.

**Foreign Employment Board** has plans to introduce guidelines<sup>2</sup> focused on COVID-19 and its impact on migrant workers and their families. Therefore, migrant rights community especially those who work for the rights of women migrant workers need to see if this guideline has feminist lens or not.

Foreign Employment Board's proposed pilot reintegration programme in pipeline for migrant workers should be prepared in consultation with migrant rights community and women migrant workers and their families themselves. It should also address how the above mentioned implementing agencies and announced budget can be availed by returnee migrant workers, especially returnee women migrant workers keeping in mind how diverse this group can be in terms of socio-cultural background.

This survey brings the attention of the government and migrant rights community that returnee women migrant workers, irrespective of her migration employment status with Department of Labour – Ministry of Employment, Labour and Social Security, should also benefit from this fund, especially in context such as COVID19.

Consultation with returnee women migrant workers, especially with the ones who were given amnesty by Kuwait government on the reasons behind their undocumented and irregular stay. This will be helpful in understanding their choices, situations they have to live in which will be a good reference for the Government of Nepal to revisit its agreement with the countries of employment on employment policies benefiting Nepali women opting for foreign employment opportunities.

**Psycho-Social Counselling**, though not raised by any of the respondents, the survey conversations with the respondents indicate that they are in need of a counsellor who can walk through with their anxiety and stress induced by the pandemic, strained relationship with the family members, and uncertainty around their financial wellbeing.

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<sup>2</sup>till this report was prepared, the guideline was still in preparatory phase

**Ratification of UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families** has to be the priority of Nepal Government as urged by the migrant rights groups since the last decade. The government's initial stand on evacuation of migrant workers from their countries of employment at the time of pandemic has shown how critical it is for a labour export country like Nepal to ratify this convention so that migrant rights community as well as government bodies and recruitment agencies including employing companies are clear about their roles.

# Chapter 1 : Overview of Study

## 1.1 Background

With the outbreak of COVID-19 virus in December 2019, the pandemic has affected all aspects of human life including the world of work. The emergency situation has accelerated globally and many countries have imposed the full and partial lockdown. Due to this lock down 2.7 billion workers (81%) of the world's workforce has already been severely affected . According to the ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work, economic sectors like smaller enterprises are facing losses and millions of workers are vulnerable to income loss, temporary reductions in working time and their jobs are at higher risk<sup>4</sup> . The pandemic is affecting all differently- the migrant workers are among the worst hit because their ability to access their jobs in the countries of destination as well as their ability to return home is being restricted<sup>5</sup> .

Labour migration is one of the key features of the Nepali economy as the country has received 8.79 billion in fiscal year 2018/2019 accounting for 28% of GDP for that year.<sup>6</sup> The Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE) in Nepal issued 4,792,209 labour permits to Nepalis going for foreign employment, out of which, 2,36,688 labour permits were issued for women migrant workers and 45,55,521 were issued for men migrant workers until the Fiscal Year 2019/20. The composition of skilled labour is 1.5%, semi-skilled 24% and rest 74.5% are unskilled labour<sup>7</sup> . This number does not include the migrant workers migrated to India and through irregular channels. In the lumpsum top destination countries for Nepali migrant workers remain to be Qatar, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Kuwait<sup>8</sup>. But for Nepali women migrant workers, top destination countries remains to be UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Malaysia and Oman<sup>9</sup> .

<sup>3</sup>ILO Monitor,'COVID-19 and the world of work. Second edition Updated estimates and analysis' (ILO, 2020) [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_740877.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_740877.pdf)

<sup>4</sup>ILO Monitor,'COVID-19 and the world of work. Second edition Updated estimates and analysis' (ILO, 2020) [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_740877.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_740877.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>ILO Monitor,'COVID-19 and the world of work. Second edition Updated estimates and analysis' (ILO, 2020) [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_740877.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_740877.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>MOLESS, 'Nepal Migration Labour Report 2020' (MOLESS, 2020) <https://moless.gov.np/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Migration-Report-2020-English.pdf>

<sup>7</sup>Ministry of Finance, Economic Survey 2019/20, p. 71, [https://mof.gov.np/uploads/document/file/Economic\\_Survey\\_2076-77.pdf](https://mof.gov.np/uploads/document/file/Economic_Survey_2076-77.pdf)

<sup>8</sup>MOLESS, 'Nepal Migration Labour Report 2020' (MOLESS, 2020) <https://moless.gov.np/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Migration-Report-2020-English.pdf>

<sup>9</sup>Ministry of Finance, Economic Survey 2019/20, p. 72, [https://mof.gov.np/uploads/document/file/Economic\\_Survey\\_2076-77.pdf](https://mof.gov.np/uploads/document/file/Economic_Survey_2076-77.pdf)

media have reported that there is an increase in the transmission of the virus in these Nepali workers in the countries of destinations especially in the Gulf countries. Further, it has also been reported that the access to healthcare has become a major concern for those Nepali workers in the Gulf. Various socio-economic implications including violations of labour and human rights have been reported in several media reports and have been confirmed by stakeholders providing direct services. This crisis has led to unprecedented employment reduction and declining work hours<sup>10</sup> globally, including these major migrant receiving countries. Migrant workers are the one who are always excluded from social protection and wage protection mechanism and usually the primary bearer of economic shocks. As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, Nepali migrant workers have faced reduced work hours<sup>11</sup>, non-payments/partial payment of wages, have been forced to take unpaid leave with inadequate access to basic necessities such as health care, proper food and jobs<sup>12</sup>. Additionally, it has been reported that the living and working conditions of migrant workers are not decent and unhealthy as they are often made to live in overcrowded, unsanitary spaces making them more vulnerable to contamination<sup>13</sup>. In some destination countries, smaller factories are still operating during this situation where workers are reportedly being made to work without adequate protective measure<sup>14</sup>.

On the other hand, women migrant domestic workers are particularly vulnerable where country's pre-existing policy of restriction to their mobility, working for excessive hours, no paid leave, delay or withheld wages and in some cases physical abuse is likely to be worsened under the given circumstances<sup>15</sup>. Various reports have stated that there are many undocumented workers from Nepal and in this given situation they are at the higher risk because they do not have access or unwillingness to access support services in fear of retaliation. It has also been reported that over deportation of workers prior to international travel bans being enforced, and hundreds more

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<sup>10</sup>ILO Monitor; COVID-19 and the world of work. Second edition Updated estimates and analysis' (ILO, 2020) [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_740877.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_740877.pdf)

<sup>11</sup>Chandan Kumar Mandal, 'As Malaysia enforces complete lockdown, Nepali workers struggle with reduced working hours,' The Kathmandu Post, 19 March 2020, <https://tkpo.st/3a4kMaq>

<sup>12</sup>Chandan Kumar Mandal, 'Protect migrant workers and marginalised groups affected due to Covid-19 restrictions, Amnesty International appeals,' The Kathmandu Post, 3 April 2020, <https://tkpo.st/2yocooi>

<sup>13</sup>Chandan Kumar Mandal, 'Nepalis in Qatar live in overcrowded and squalid conditions even during pandemic,' The Kathmandu Post, 26 March 2020, ' <https://tkpo.st/2Uja8HD>

<sup>14</sup>Roshan Sedhai, 'Peril overload for Nepali migrant workers' The Record, 21 March 2020 <https://www.recordnepal.com/wire/features/peril-overload-for-nepali-migrant-workers/> ; Chandan Kumar Mandal, 'Nepali workers forced to work even under lockdown in Malaysia,' The Kathmandu Post, 23 March 2020, <https://tkpo.st/3bg7UhN>

<sup>15</sup>Rothna Begum, 'Domestic workers in Middle East risk abuse amid COVID-19 crisis,' ALJAZEERA, 4 Apr 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/domestic-workers-middle-east-risk-abuse-covid-19-crisis-200404152201409.html>

stranded in pre-deportation detention centers, which are overcrowded and unhygienic, in countries of destination<sup>16</sup>. According to the various media reports, it has been pictured that many Nepali migrant workers are planning to return home because of uncertainty in terms of both job and food security in addition to fear about getting contaminated by the COVID-19 virus<sup>17</sup>.

## 1.2 Hypothesis

Pandemic COVID-19 has shut the world since January 2020 affecting the quality of life of every human being in every aspect. The shutdown of the world, though, done primarily for health related reasons, is dictating choice of individuals which has a direct impact on their lives as they continue to explore ways to outlive the lockdown. The alarming unequal divide across class, caste, race, gender, sex, origin, is a stark reminder of how this pandemic will determine the level of existence for all of us living at this time of human civilization. Additionally, this is also a crude reminder of prejudices, biases, insecurities and power that operates a human mind against one another. Therefore, the hypothesis of this survey was that socio-economic status of returnee migrant workers will be affected the most during this pandemic when limited understanding and zero preparedness combined with unwillingness to address pandemic through systemic approach prevailed over health, economic and social aspects of entire Nepali citizens.

This survey would be able to

- a) Identify what choices do returnee migrant women workers have while the country tries to engage in battling COVID-19 with limited resources within its research,
- b) Look into government's policy and decision around COVID-19 and how it has affected the returnee women migrant workers, including psychological stress that families of women migrant workers who have been denied to return to Nepal,
- c) Identify impacts on their livelihood and status in the society tied to the implanted assumptions of migrant workers being the transmitters of COVID-19 will be the main priority.

## 1.3 Methodology:

Nepal Government announced a nationwide lockdown on 24 March 2020. However, panic around COVID-19 pandemic in the world had started as early as December 2019 and Nepalese working abroad had already began to return to Nepal as early as October 2019. This

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<sup>16</sup>Roshan Sedhai, 'Take us home: detained workers' plea to Nepal from Qatar,' The Record, 8 April 2020, <https://www.recordnepal.com/covid19/take-us-home-detained-workers-plea-to-nepal-from-qatar/>

<sup>17</sup>Chandan Kumar Mandal, 'Nepalis in Qatar live in overcrowded and squalid conditions even during pandemic,' The Kathmandu Post, 26 March 2020, <https://tkpo.st/2Uja8HD>

was also owing to the fact that Nepal's two largely celebrated national festivals, primarily by Hindus, fall in October-November stretch. After the countries like Qatar, Kuwait, Dubai began to go for nationwide lockdown as early as January, Nepali migrant workers working in those countries were faced with the choice of either continuing to stay where they were, or return to their countries. Nepal had, however, no plans to evacuate its migrant workers working in their respective countries of employment. Government of Nepal made several announcements related to evacuation or facilitating safe passage for migrant workers willing to return home beginning second week of May 2020. It also included bringing back migrant workers irregularly staying and working in Middle East countries, mainly Qatar<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, against this backdrop, this survey had two distinct set of returnee women migrant workers as its survey intended group. The first group was the returnee women migrant workers who had recently returned to Nepal from October 2019 onwards. The second group was the returnee women migrant workers who chose to stay back in their employing countries. Two set of separate survey questionnaires were prepared for these two groups of interviewees. Both of these questionnaires was focused on i) their reason of return to Nepal in the context of COVID-19, ii) response to their return in both government and social level, iii) their financial prospects and employment opportunities in future, and iv) their knowledge to government policies on reintegration programme/package for returnee migrant workers in Nepal.

WOREC Nepal and Action-Aid Nepal office identified the respondents from Morang, Udaypur, Kailali, Dang, Doti and Tehrathum. Two separate orientation meetings<sup>19</sup> with each of the organization's staff in the district were held where the objective, timeline, identification of respondents for survey were discussed including the level of support that consultant will need while contacting these respondents for the interview.

Due to nation-wide lock down, this survey was conducted over the telephone for the returnee women migrant workers. Facebook messenger was used to interview women migrant workers in their employing countries. The language of the interview was Nepali. Surveyor took the consent of the respondents. Surveyor would read out the consent form for them to listen and the respondent would give their consent.

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Himalayan News Service, 'Govt plans to evacuate over 35,000 illegal migrants,' The Himalayan Times, 04 May 2020, <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/govt-plans-to-evacuate-over-35000-illegal-migrants/>

Orientation for WOREC team was on 29 May 2020 and Action Aid Nepal team was on 10 June 2020. These meetings were arranged and facilitated by designated programme officers of respective organizations.



### **1.3.1 Sample Size**

WOREC identified four districts – Morang, Udaypur, Dang and Kailali – for survey and Action Aid Nepal identified two districts – Doti and Tehrathum. These six districts were identified based on these organizations' work on migrant workers. These six districts represent Province 1 (Morang, Udaypur and Tehrathum), Province 5 (Dang) and Province 7 (Doti and Kailali).

The target was to talk to as many returnee women migrant as we can till June 2020. The minimum set target was five returnee women migrant workers and five migrant workers who were still in their countries of employment from each district. By 21 June, total number of identified women to participate in the survey was 50. This has been outlined in table 1 below. This list comprised of returnee women migrant workers, and family members of women migrant workers who did not return to Nepal. Family members of non-returnee women migrant workers from Morang district only had consented to participated in survey. The Surveyors able to reach 25 respondents from returnees and 5 respondents from their countries of employment. Their numbers however were unreachable when surveyor tried to contact them.

**Table 1: Number of Identified Returnee Women Migrant Workers Participating in Survey**

S.No	Province/ District	Identified for Survey	Returnee Migrant Workers	Family Member of Non- returnees	Survey Respondents (in %)	Remarks
1	Morang, Province 1	12	9	3	16	Six other identified returnee migrant workers and family members identified to participate in survey were unreachable.
2	Udaypur, Province 1	3	3	0	8	One respondent denied that she was a migrant worker.
3	Terathum, Province 1	11	11	0	16	Rest unreachable
4	Dang, Province 5	13	13	0	24	One denied to be interviewed, Rest unreachable
5	Doti, Province 7	6	6	0	24	Staff themselves interviewed the respondents due to respondent's requests.
6	Kailali, Province 7	5	5	0	12	Rest unreachable
<b>Total</b>		<b>50</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Virtual Survey 2020

As outlined in table 2, ten non-returnee woman migrant workers working in South Korea, Malaysia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Israel and Cyprus through informal channels. Five of them gave an in-depth interview, one agreed to provide informal information only which was largely based on her interaction with other Nepali workers who had not returned to Nepal, and four declined to participate in the survey citing that everything related to their employment condition and COVID-19 was well. Those who became the respondents were from Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain and Malaysia. One who had agreed to be the respondent got infected with COVID-19 and went on quarantine. Those who declined to respond were from South Korea, Cyprus, and Israel.

**Table 2: Number Of Non-returnee Women Migrant Workers Participating in Survey**

S.No	Country	Identified	Respondent (in %)	Profession	Remarks
1	Kuwait	2	40	Sales Person, Cleaner	
2	Qatar	1	0	Cleaner	Became infected with COVID-19 and could not participate
3	Bahrain	1	20	Office assistant	
4	Oman	1	0	Receptionist	Informal interview. Did not agree to in-depth interview.
6	Cyprus	1	0	Care giver	Declined
7	Israel	1	0	Care giver	Declined
8	Malaysia	2	40	Factory Worker	
9	South Korea	1	0	Factory worker	Declined
<b>Total</b>		<b>12</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>5 In-depth interview, 1 - only information update</b>

Source: Virtual Survey 2020

Hence, the survey sample size became 30 respondents. Returnee migrant women workers are 25 and migrant women workers in their country of employment is 5. One respondent from Oman engaged in informal conversation instead of interview, therefore, while this information has been used in survey, she is not counted as respondent.

#### 1.4 Limitations of Survey

**Communications** with the survey respondents was telephonic and over Facebook messenger because of national lock down. This posed communication challenge which was realized only when the interviews were conducted. Main problem was absence of personal physical interface which was a compromised state of mind and trust for the respondents. They had

been contacted and briefed by community level staff of WOREC and Action Aid, yet, when the surveyor would contact them, absence of previous personal connection seemed to have prevented them from comfortable sharing. Therefore, this telephonic survey may not have been as effective as in person-to-person survey would have been.

Other limitation posed by this form of survey was that some of these identified individuals did not answer the phone. Some of their numbers were also unreachable. This was an awkward situation for district staff because the consent had been taken by them prior to surveyor calling these identified returnee women migrant workers as respondents to the survey. Surveyor's determination to talk to them also led to loss of time and communication with the staff to identify others instead of these cases where phones were unreachable and unanswered.

**Confidentiality** of the survey could not be ascertained in all survey interviews because most of them felt that their family members should be around while speaking to the surveyor. This also limited telling of their true understanding or sharing of their experiences as freely as it might have been if this was a one-to-one or focused group survey meetings. Two interviews were conducted in the presence of district staff because they had come to her place to speak to the surveyor out of discomfort to speak in their homes.

**Uninformed about Government Policies.** Government of Nepal has expressed interest to absorb knowledge, skills and experience of returnee migrant workers, however, this is still in consultation phase and has not reached to the community level. Therefore, returnee migrant women workers were not as indicative or specific in terms of sharing their expectations on how these government policies, when introduced, can benefit them. Two of the non-returnee woman migrant workers stuck in country of their employment, however, were skeptic if the government would actually do anything for them. "testo garla jasto lagdaina", meaning 'we don't think government would do this'<sup>20</sup>.

**Bureaucratic restrictions** prevented the surveyor to speak with returnee migrant women workers who were evacuated by the chartered flight of Nepal Government were placed in self quarantine shelters set up by different organizations like, Women in Human Rights (WHR) and AMKAS (Apravasi Mahila Kaamdaar Samuha). The surveyor's attempt to hold a focused group discussion with these returnees were faced with bureaucratic hurdles as they were under security protocol of Nepal Army, and Nepal Army has not responded to the request till date.

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<sup>20</sup>Joint interview of women migrant workers stuck in Malaysia due to lockdown in Malaysia. Both of them are set to return to Nepal once international flights in both countries operate.

Surveyor too did not pursue it further because initial districts for survey were being surveyed. According to AMKAS, the COVID Coordination Management Committee (CCMC) was focused on getting the returnees to reach their respective addresses in Nepal. None of the returnee women migrant workers were consulted on their departure from Kathmandu. In fact, one worker's request to stay in Kathmandu and seek medical services was denied.

**Nation-wide lock down** imposed by Government of Nepal from 24March 2020 as a response to COVID-19 and its preparedness to address it largely affected the movement of local staff to source documentation being documented by different levels of governance. The survey could obtain only a draft format of record keeping from Tehrathum district. See Annex 2. Therefore, an adequate fact check and interpretive analysis of survey could not be done as envisioned while undertaking the survey.

## Chapter 2: Demographic Findings of Survey Respondents

This survey had aimed to talk to three different groups of respondents, i.e., returnee women migrant workers, non-returnee women migrant workers, and families of non-returnee women migrant workers. Therefore, survey demography has been categorized accordingly.

### 2.1 Returnee Migrant Women Demography

Returnee women migrant workers were the primary interest group of the survey. The respondents were identified depending on their arrival time frame to Nepal from countries they were working in. These women have returned as early as one year before the onset of COVID-19 pandemic and as late as June 2020 arriving in government chartered flight. This selection had been done with an aim to understand the level and nature of stigma against returnee women migrant workers and their financial condition.

#### 2.1.1 Documentation with the Government

Since 1990s, Government of Nepal has introduced travel restrictions<sup>21</sup> on returnee women migrant workers from time to time. The reasons cited for these restrictions are safety and security of women, and if married, their children's psychosocial welfare. The main concern expressed by the Government is related to Nepali migrant women workers as domestic workers being sexually exploited in their countries of employment. Nepali women from going to work as domestic help in countries like India, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Dubai, etc. Iraq, Syria, Lebanon are countries that Nepalese are banned to travel for employment purposes. However, recruitment agents fly them to these countries via third country passage, mainly India increasing their vulnerability of being trafficked of their return.

Government of Nepal requires Nepalese going abroad for foreign employment to obtain labour permits from Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MoLESS). These migrant workers who obtain labour permits are considered documented migrant workers and they are required to contribute to welfare fund of Foreign Employment Fund which is used to provide rescue, evacuation of migrant workers, and bringing back dead bodies of documented migrant workers. Those who travel to their countries of employment are considered undocumented and

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<sup>25</sup>ILO (2015) 'No easy exit—migration bans affecting women from Nepal,' International Labour Organization, pp. 1–54

government uses it as an excuse to not facilitate their evacuation, rescue. This was true even in COVID-19 context.

Both seasonal migrant workers and domestic workers who go to India for employment are undocumented. Only 4% respondents were required to show their citizenship as well as marriage registration paper in Indian border side to determine that they were not being trafficked.

Out of all returnee migrant women workers (survey respondents), undocumented migrant women workers were 64%. Among 64% of undocumented respondent 44% of them were seasonal migrant workers to India, and 20% respondents had gone to Kuwait. Only 36% respondents were documented migrant women workers.

4% of the respondents had working visa for Kuwait, however, they were flown to Saudi Arabia and made to work for two years at Saudi Arabia only. They did not go to Kuwait at all. They returned Nepal from Saudi Arabia only. They are unable to tell how their travel to and from Saudi Arabia been facilitated while on working visa of Kuwait which they neither entered not exited. They are aware of how dangerous this status was for them.

**Table 3: Documentation of Returnee Women Migrant Workers Survey Respondents**

S.No	Province/ District	Survey Respondents (in %)	Country of Employment (Documented)	Country of Employment (Undocumented)			Remarks
			Middle East (in%)	India (in %)	Middle East (in %)	Third Country Passage (in %)	
1	Morang, Province 1	16	4	0	12	12	India, Sri Lanka
2	Udaypur, Province 1	8	0	8	0	0	Cross border labour migration
3	Terathum, Province 1	16	8	0	8	8	India
4	Dang, Province 5	24	24	0	0	0	Nepal
5	Doti, Province 7	24	0	24	0	0	Cross border labour migration
6	Kailai, Province 7	12	0	12	0	0	Cross border labour migration
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>	

Source: Virtual Survey 2020

### 2.1.2 Reasons of their return

The reasons of their return depended on where they had gone for migrant workers. Those who had gone for seasonal migratory work in India had returned for field work at home, i.e., harvesting of wheat, take care of family members – one had a sick daughter and parents-in-laws. 4% of respondents had returned from Dubai on their annual leave. Respondents from



Doti had come around the time COVID-19 crisis was spreading. 4% of the respondents came because the respondents were pregnant and their company has given their extended period of maternity leave considering pandemic crisis. Only 4% of respondents arrived in June in Kuwait government's chartered flight.

### 2.1.3 Country of Employment

Out of all respondents, 56% of respondents had gone to Middle East countries while 44% respondents worked in India. The popular destination of the survey respondents is Kuwait and Qatar. (Table 4 to be described)

**Table 4: Country of Employment of Respondents**

S.No	Province/District	Number (in %)	India (in %)	Middle East Countries (in %)	Remarks
1	Morang, Province 1	16	0	16	Kuwait, Qatar
2	Udaypur, Province 1	8	8	0	
3	Terathum, Province 1	16	0	16	Kuwait, Israel, Dubai
4	Dang, Province 5	24		24	Malaysia, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar
5	Doti, Province 7	24	24	0	
6	Kailai, Province 7	12	12	0	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>56</b>	

Source: Virtual Survey 2020

### 2.1.4 Employment Type

Out of all respondents, 64% are domestic workers, 24% worked in company as cleaner, messenger and electrician, 8% worked as farming hand and 4% worked as a daily wage labour. Respondent working as daily wage labour worked in India.

**Table 5: Employment Types of Respondents**

S.No.	Province/District	Survey Respondents (in %)	Employment Type			
			Domestic (in %)	Company (in %)	Agriculture and Farming (in %)	Daily Wage (in %)
1	Morang, Province 1	16	12	4	0	0
2	Udaypur, Province 1	8	8	0	0	0
3	Terathum, Province 1	16	8	4	4	0
4	Dang, Province 5	24	8	16	0	0
5	Kailali, Province 7	12	4	0	4	4
6	Doti, Province 7	24	24	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>

Source: Virtual Survey 2020

### 2.1.5 Wage Theft

Out of all respondents, 56% respondents had gone to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Israel, and Dubai for foreign employment. Only 12% of them were not paid the same amount as stated in the work contract or verbally told by the recruitment agency. Out of 8% of these respondents 4% had gone to their country of employment (Saudi Arabia) had not been shown the work contract by their recruiting agent. They did not receive the salary promised to them which was two hundred lesser than promised. The promised amount was 800 Saudi Riyal but they received only 600 Saudi Riyal for two years. There was no increment throughout her employment period.

The other 4% respondent's salary was 800 Saudi Riyal though they had been promised 1000 Kuwaiti Dinar. But the respondent never went to Kuwait and rather was made to work in Saudi Arabia. They worked as a domestic workers in Saudi Arabia.

Another 4 % respondent who worked as domestic worker in India was promised 15000 INR per month. However, the respondent would get only 13000 INR. The placement agency would deduct 2000 INR from their salary every month as their placement charge.

Only 4% of respondents had returned after lockdown was called on by Kuwait and Nepal Government. Prior to that the respondents were working in a Company. The respondent

received half salary in March and April 2020. They did not receive anything after they came to government shelter run by Kuwait government to shelter migrant workers in Kuwait awaiting their return to home country.

### 2.1.6 Ethnicity Composition

Different surveys, studies conducted on Nepali migrant workers over the last decade affirm that most of them are from ethnic and marginalized community. This survey's respondents also represent ethnic groups from province one, five and seven. Eight indigenous respondents are Tharu, Limbu, Magar and Urab. Eleven respondents are Bishwakarma, Nepali, Bhool, etc. Six BCTDS (Brahmin, Chhetri, Thakuri, Dasnami and Sanyasi) are Brahmin and Chhetri.

**Table 6: Ethnic Composition of Respondents**

S.No	Province/District	Number (in %)	Indigenous (in %)	Dalit (in %)	BCTDS (in %)
1	Morang, Province 1	16	8	8	0
2	Udaypur, Province 1	8	0		8
3	Terathum, Province 1	16	8	4	4
4	Dang, Province 5	24	8	8	8
5	Doti, Province 7	24	0	20	4
6	Kailai, Province 7	12	8	4	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>24</b>

Source: Virtual Survey 2020

### 2.1.7 Age Group

The survey respondents were mostly in their twenties. 68% of the respondents in their twenties, 20% in thirties and 8 % in their forties. Only 4% of respondent from Kailali, a married seasonal migrant worker to India was below 20.

**Table 7: Age Group of the Respondents**

S.No	Province/District	Number (in %)	Age			
			Below 20	20-30	30-40	40-50
1	Morang, Province 1	16	-	8	8	-
2	Udaypur, Province 1	8		8		
3	Terathum, Province 1	16		8	4	4
4	Dang, Province 5	24		12	8	4
5	Doti, Province 7	24		24		
6	Kailai, Province 7	12	4	8		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>8</b>

Source: Virtual Survey 2020

### 2.1.8 Marital Status

Nepali women migrant workers are both married and single women. In 2017, Government of Nepal restricted mother of young children from going abroad as migrant workers, which was petitioned by migrant rights community citing this provision is against woman's right to employment, and right to freedom of mobility. Seventeen out of twenty-five respondents are married and living with their husband and families while there are two widows and two divorcees. Both of these widows and divorcees live with their maternal family members.

Marital status of women migrant workers also indicates whether or not they have financial independence and their status in their family.

**Table 8: Marital Status of Respondents**

S.No.	Province/District	Survey Respondents	Marital Status	
			Single	Married
1	Morang, Province 1	16	4 unmarried 4 separated	8
2	Udaypur, Province 1	8	-	8
3	Terathum, Province 1	16	4 widow 4 unmarried 4 divorcee	4
4	Dang, Province 5	24	4 widow 4 divorcee	16
5	Kailali, Province 7	12	-	12
6	Doti, Province 7	24	-	24
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>68</b>

Source: Virtual Survey 2020

**2.1.9 Education Status**

None of the all respondents have university education. 4% are literate who can read and write their name, while 52% have completed their primary level education, 36% have completed secondary and 8% of them have studied till higher education.

**Table 9: Education Status of Respondents**

S.No.	Province/ District	Survey Respondents (in %)	Educational Status			
			Literate	Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary
1	Morang, Province 1	16		8	8	0
2	Udaypur, Province 1	8	0	8	0	
3	Terathum, Province 1	16	0	4	8	4
4	Dang, Province 5	24	0	16	8	0
5	Kailali, Province 7	12	4	8	0	0
6	Doti, Province 7	24		8	12	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>8</b>

Source: Virtual Survey 2020

## 2.2 Non-Returnee Migrant Women Workers in Country of Employment

The survey also aimed to identify Nepali women migrant workers in their countries of employment with an objective to find out the reason behind their continued stay in those countries despite of COVID-19 pandemic onset, their living and working conditions in this context, and to know what the future employment prospects holds for them. The surveyor had five in-depth interview with five Nepali women migrant workers working in Malaysia, Kuwait, and Bahrain; and an informal conversation with one from Bahrain. She did not wish to have an in-depth interview but did share her observation.

40% of respondents in their early twenties are unmarried. Rest of the 60% are married out of which 40% are separated from their husbands. All of them have completed secondary education at the least and were pursuing higher secondary education when they left for foreign employment.

All of the respondents are documented migrant workers. All of them have gone for foreign employment for more than two times. Only 20% of them were undocumented when they had first gone to country of her employment.

**Table 10: Education Status of Non- returnee Women Migrant Workers**

S.No	Country	Respondent %	Age	Education	Marital Status	Remarks
1	Kuwait	20	30-40,	1 Higher Secondary	Married	
		20	40-50	1 Secondary	Separated,	
3	Bahrain	20		Secondary	Separated,	
8	Malaysia	40	20-30	Higher secondary	unmarried	
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>				

Source: Virtual Survey 2020

### 2.2.1 Reasons behind Staying Back and Psychological Stress on Family

40% of the all respondents were all set to come back to Nepal. Their tickets had already been bought by the Company after these they did not wish to renew their work contract. However, three days before their flight time, the country wide lockdown was called and all international flights were suspended, therefore, these 40% are in their country of employment and are waiting for commercial flights to resume. Their Company has provided them with lodging and food facility and have told them that they will be sent home once commercial flights will resume. They had been contacted by Embassy of Nepal to know if they were willing to pay the airfare to Nepal which they declined because it was triple times more than normal fare and they cannot afford it. They are in regular touch with their families through social media apps, i.e., viber and their families also agree that they should come back when commercial flights operate.

The other 40% respondents felt that they were better staying in their countries of employment because their families had told them about how chaotic scenario is in Nepal related to COVID-19 management. They were of the opinion that at least here in their countries of employment, their health risks are not compromised and expenses will be covered by the respective country's government, if they test COVID-19 positive.

One of the respondents does not want to return because she has already completed 3 years of work in her Company which has a gratuity provision for its employees who complete 5 years with it. So, she did not want to break her employment contract. She has emotional conflict with her family who takes care of her daughter as their own, therefore, she does not think that presence or absence will make any difference to her family including her daughter. Therefore, she chose to stay back.

### **2.2.2 COVID-19 Risk Management in Countries of Employment**

All respondents are aware of COVID-19 management taken up by the governments of countries of their employment. Only two respondents from Malaysia were not aware whether or not Government of Malaysia will take care of their medical state if they become COVID-19 positive. Both of them are factory workers of a reputed global electronic company who will be taking care of them till they return to Nepal despite of their present employment status. These 40% respondents were already set to return to Nepal after the completion of their 2-year work contract with this Company.

Rest of the 60% of respondents were well informed of COVID-19 management related government policies of their respective countries of employment. They knew that if they tested COVID-19 positive, the government will be cover their medical expenses.

### **2.2.3 Wage Theft**

All respondents are employed with the Company which had been paying them their salary and other facilities on a regular basis prior to COVID-19 pandemic. Their monthly financial stipend would include their basic salary, financial incentives and lodging and food stipends. However, with COVID-19 context, it has changed.

Till March 2020, sixty percent of the respondents had received their salary according to their work contract. Post March, only one of the respondents has been receiving basic salary and she is working from home. According to her, only financial incentives depending on the volume of sales that a sales staff would make in a month has been stopped now which is understandable since “we will not be able to meet the sales target now to receive those incentives.” She was also happy to tell us that her Company is one of the well-paying Companies which have not laid off any staff to her knowledge because of lockdown affecting business.

Forty percent of respondents have not received any financial help and both of them have not raised it with their Company. They are hopeful that they will be paid by their companies once the situation returns to normal. While one said “We all are going through difficult times so they will definitely consider this when things become normal again. In the past, they have been generous, that is why I have not raised it with them” the other did not know if Company is responsible to continue paying her salary if the work contract has not been cancelled and she is working on a call basis.

Forty percent of the respondents who are staying in their country of employment only due to suspension of international flights, are being provided with accommodation and food by the



Company with whom they had recently completed their 2-year work-contract and had decided not to renew the work contract. During their employment period, they had been paid regularly and there had been no issues of wage theft.

**Table 11: Wage Theft of Non-returnee Respondents**

S.No	Country	Respondent	Profession	Salary	Other Incentives
1	Kuwait	20	Cleaner	Paid till March 2020	financial incentives suspended, and rent and food stipend unpaid
		20	Sales Person	Basic salary paid	
3	Bahrain	20	Office assistant	Paid till March 2020	
8	Malaysia	40	Factory workers	Paid till February 2020	Stuck in Malaysia due to lockdown
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>			

Source: Virtual Survey 2020

### 2.2.4 Health and Safety Hazards

Only 20% of these respondents were in regular contact with their Company. The respondent works from home and therefore is assigned to update daily sales inventory, and provide customer service to online buyers. The Company is slowly assigning the staff to come back to the store, however, the respondent has not been asked till the time of interview.

20% of the respondents employed with cleaning company, however, have not been provided with safety gears such as mask, sanitizer, etc. while being assigned with work schedule. It is the sole responsibility of the workers themselves.

Another respondent informed us that she has been called to work after a week and was unsure what kind of safety and health measures has been taken by her company.

## Chapter 3: Interpretive Analysis of the Survey

This section will explore the socio-economic impact on Nepali migrant women workers who have returned to Nepal or are staying in their country of employment. The survey has clustered different issues identified by its 30 respondents into a) family and social kinship, b) economic implications, c) State-level support.

### 3.1 Family and Social Kinship for Returnee Women Migrant Workers

COVID-19's socio-economic impact on returnee women migrant workers are on many different levels. This is not the same for these two groups of women, i.e., those who returned and those who chose to stay back and not return. However, some of the issues shared by our respondents related to stigma on migrant workers as transmitters of COVID-19 and exclusion, perception around single (unmarried) young returnee women as being promiscuous in their countries of employment due to insensitive social media videos, mostly YouTube and online news portals, psychological as well as physical harassment and violence against them from their family members, mainly husbands because they are not earning now, and strained family relationship, are true to both of these groups.

Out of all respondents, 13.33 percent respondents were unmarried and 86.67 percent respondents were married. Out of 86.67 percent respondents, 16.67 percent respondents were separated or divorced and 6.67 percent respondents were widow.

The married respondents who are not separated or divorced send their earning to their husbands irrespective of how sincere and responsible the husband is. 4% of the respondent were unhappy to know that their husband had gambled and drank their earnings that used to be sent by her. The respondent found out that this habit prolonged her paying back debt of one lakh Nepali Rupees that she had taken to pay her recruitment agency. It was clear that their husbands were the financial managers of these women's earning. These women's income would cover not only their monthly expenses but also their children's education and parents-in-law's medical treatment. Most of them did not have savings.

One respondent has completely lost touch with her husband for the last ten years. Her son is pursuing university degree. Another respondent's husband had run away with her income of three

years. She does not have children. One respondent's husband married another woman when she was working in her country of employment. She does not have custody of her children. One respondent left her husband before leaving for foreign employment. She too does not have her child's custody. These women have support from their maternal family. They send their earning to one of their maternal family members, especially mother. Only one respondent has a saving.

Another respondent has had a turbulent family life which was the reason behind her opting for employment opportunity as a migrant labour. However, she has returned amidst pandemic crisis and she is already pessimist about her life would be now in uncertainty of income source and volatile relationship with her husband.

### **3.2 Family and Social Kinship for Women Migrant Workers in Countries of Employment**

40 % of the all respondents in their country of employment are divorcee; 20 % are married and with husband and 40 % of them are unmarried. These divorcees have their maternal family members taking care of their child. While one of them has good contact with her child, the other does not have any direct contact with her child. One of our respondent clearly mentioned that she is more relaxed in her country of employment than in Nepal because you are not interacting daily with certain family members who have negative attitude towards her parenting style of her daughter. The married one has a husband taking care of her child who is in his pre-teens.

In terms of social status, non-returnee women migrant workers are better off than those who have returned to Nepal. Two out of six non-returnee women migrant workers were active in Nepali diaspora in their respective countries of employment. They are active members of Non Residential Nepali (NRN) community and also hold positions within their ethnic cultural associations. This is not the case with women who have returned to Nepal irrespective of their arrival time frame.

#### **3.2.1 Psychosocial Impact on Family**

Survey had initially seen family members of non-returnee women migrant workers as respondents to assess how pandemic context has affected them when their family member (non-returnee woman migrant worker) are not with them and is living in different country. However, only one district (Morang) had the willing family members to participate in the survey, yet, their contact phones went unanswered when contacted. This has already been explained in the limitation section of this report.

When this issue was raised in interview with non-returnee woman migrant workers, three of them were in regular contact with the family in Nepal. Their family members are in positive role

and are assuring them not to worry and to take care of them. One of the six did not feel the need because her family was with her. Another of the six did not seem to be bothered with it.

### **3.3 Social Antagonism against Migrant Women Workers as COVID-19 Transmitters**

Only 8% of the survey respondents had returned to Nepal in between the time frame of March-June 2020, out of who, 4% had returned in March and the other returned in June. The respondent who returned in March stayed in her maternal house for 3 months and did not interact with any others besides her family members. She confined herself in this way due to the antagonism she and her family felt in her neighborhood because she was seen as a possible carrier of COVID-19. Her arrival had been on the first week of March and government had not yet set up quarantine shelter. Suggestions on self-isolation was floating so she did not go to any quarantine shelter and has not been tested too. At the time of interview, she was more relaxed and said that antagonism has disappeared.

The respondent who arrived in June spoke to us within four days of her arrival at her home. She had stayed in holding centers in central, province and local regions where PCR testing was done twice for her. She was staying with her family at the time of her interview and was unaware of any antagonism targeted towards her.

### **3.4 False Social Media Reporting on Migrant Women Workers**

Nepali social media, especially YouTube and Facebook was used to spread news on arrival of Nepali women migrant workers focusing on their reported pregnancy and their supposed sexual relationship with men in countries of their employment<sup>22</sup>.

Three of the respondents are worried how this kind of reporting will affect them. One of the respondents was accusatory towards women who might have engaged in relationships with men in their countries of employment, however, two of them pointed out that only women should not be called out. They indicated their willingness to talk about it in public if need arises to call out men who are equally responsible in exploiting migrant women workers in countries of employment.

68 % of respondents had taken the loan from money lender at higher interest rate up to 36% per annum. These 68 % had gone to work in Dubai, Qatar and Kuwait. The other 25% respondents are seasonal migrant workers who go to India and therefore did not have to pay agent's fee which did not require them to take loans.

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<sup>22</sup>94 pregnant women arrived in Nepal from Dubai and their situation's live video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPMTwsSAXFo>

Three of the five non-returnee women migrant workers had paid recruitment agent's fee on their own. They were already working and earning here in Nepal before leaving for foreign employment abroad. Two of the five respondents had taken the loan from their relatives on zero interest.

### 3.5 Government Policies

As per survey question about future opportunities and employment, 43% of the respondents want to go for foreign employment again. 10% of the respondents have not thought yet what to do in future. *Jahile hola tyehi bela sochaula* meaning it will be thought of when it comes by was their answer not wanting to discuss future prospects. About 47% of respondents are thinking of doing something in Nepal, like agriculture, livestock and business. They are looking for self-employment.

As per our respondents' response, surveyors asked about the government's plans and policies and their expectations towards government. According to survey 84 % of respondents haven't heard about the government's migrant returnees' employment generation program. And 16% have heard but it is not clear. About 10% have heard about the prime minister Employment program only. The surveyors asked what kind of support they need from the government to those who want to stay in Nepal. The respondents' response was to support in business as seed money and they are seeking partial investment for their business. The government should create employment according to the place where and what it is needed. And also they are seeking employment in Nepal so they can stay with their family. For this, in depth consultation with migrant workers and their families is needed.

Additionally, government policies on women migrant workers and prospective of foreign employment should be formulated around the fact that restrictive policies based on welfare approach has proved to be counterproductive and therefore, should, be based on rights perspective. Nepali women going for foreign employment through third party passage are aware of dangers to some extent, yet, they are choosing that option. Therefore, government needs to study this 'choice' to combat with human trafficking of Nepali women and provide them safe passage to foreign employment, when they opt for it.

**Table 12: Timeline of Government Restrictions Imposed on Migration of Nepali Women for Work**

Conditions Imposed on Women's Migration for Work	Month/Year
Requirement for female migrants to get re-approval from the government for continuation of foreign employment after returning home for the holidays or other reasons.	March 2003
Requirement that women obtain prior approval to migrate from both their local government and their family.	May 2003
Ban imposed on embarking to Gulf countries and Malaysia.	September 2008
Ban imposed on migration to Lebanon.	November 2009
Lifting of ban on migration to Gulf countries for all women, and new protection measures put in place.	December 2010
Ban lifted for Nepali women to migrate for work to any country in the world as per Foreign Employment Regulation 2064, 2008.	May 2011
Ban imposed on women less than 30 years of age from migrating as domestic workers to the Arab States.	August 2012
Ban on all women migrating as domestic workers (worldwide) except for those who have already obtained a visa.	Mid-April 2014
Total ban on women migrating as domestic workers.	September 2014
Lifting of total ban on migration of women for domestic work; new age ban of 24 years of age and new protection measures put in place.	April 2015
Ban on women to go as domestic worker in Gulf Countries	2017
Ban on women with young children to go for foreign employment	August 2017
Lifts the ban on re-entry of migrant domestic workers	September, 2019

Source: ILO, 2015<sup>23</sup> and Restrictive Labour Migration Policy on Nepalese Women and Consequences<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup>ILO (2015) 'No easy exit—migration bans affecting women from Nepal,' International Labour Organization, pp. 1–54, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms\\_428686.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_428686.pdf)

<sup>24</sup>Pyakuryal UP (2018), 'Restrictive Labour Migration Policy on Nepalese Women and Consequences', *Sociology and Anthropology* 6(8): 650-656, 2018

## Chapter 4 : Interpretive Analysis of the Survey

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Despite of the limitations stated above, the survey came up with information which are categorized as following:

**a) Personal Decision:** Most of the respondents had made conscious decision to return to Nepal during pandemic. Most of them had been to Nepal during October-November for holidays and could not go back to their destination countries due to lock down which was imposed on those countries, i.e., Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain. Those who returned in between January and March were the ones who were either laid off or quit their jobs to return to Nepal when the countries they were working prepared for the lock down.

Those who stayed back in the countries also made this decision in consultation with their family. Only one of the respondents has decided by herself to not return. Her decision was based on the fact that she is only two years away from earning her claim to provident fund of her company provided to migrant workers and she wants to come back with that money only.

Women migrant workers in Cyprus, South Korea and Israel declined to take part in survey citing that all is well in Cyprus and they are not worried about COVID-19 pandemic since the government is prepared.

**b) COVID-19 Management in Governance Level:**

Reportedly, these quarantine shelters except for the ones set up by AMKAS and WHR, lack security measures and sensitivity to address the needs of woman in quarantine shelters. The reported rape incident in Kailali quarantine shelter also indicated that there was no proper lock in her room.

On 15 June 2020, Supreme Court of Nepal ordered Government of Nepal to evacuate migrant Nepali workers from their employing countries, mainly gulf countries, and specifically stated that they should not be asked to pay for this evacuation service. However, there were media reports of these migrant workers being given the option of living in self quarantine in hotels listed by the government which had various price range. The other choice was for them to stay

in quarantine shelter at their respective home districts. The respondents, especially, those who were returning did not wish to stay at the hotels listed in Kathmandu mainly because of the price they had to pay.

The other concerns of migrant rights community in Nepal was identification and evacuation of undocumented women migrant workers. This line of work was largely facilitated by NRN community in Dubai, Bahrain and Qatar. Organizations like AMKAS, WHR, PNCC, and G-FONT are liaising with Nepali diplomatic envoys in these countries to bring these women migrant workers. This number of undocumented women workers who got evacuated due to migrant rights community's advocacy pressure with the government need to be collected, consolidated and segregated to understand a comprehensive picture of COVID-19's impact on women migrant workers, especially for those who returned to Nepal.

A video<sup>25</sup> went viral in social media where returnee women migrant workers who were pregnant share how their travel to their districts from Kathmandu, was not facilitated by the government bodies, and also how they did not receive any basic services, including medical services despite of their condition. Additionally, their faces were made visible in the video breaching their right to confidentiality.

Based on media reports that caste based untouchability practice – a criminal offence under Caste Based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offence and Punishment) Act 2011 – was being practiced even in quarantine centers. They were being denied the quarantine shelter. This survey's Dalit respondents, though were not subjected to this kind of treatment since they had come months before these shelters had been set up and lock down was enforced.

**c) Social Impacts of COVID-19:** Government of Nepal was unprepared to address COVID-19 pandemic situation in Nepal. Therefore, since the beginning, official communication from the government for public consumption on COVID-19 has been subjected to criticism. One of such criticism was the portrayal of returnee migrant workers as transmitters of COVID-19. This was not limited to only returnee migrant workers but anyone who was returning to Nepal from abroad. This unclear and confusion communication without proper guidelines on self-isolation,

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<sup>25</sup>94 pregnant women arrived in Nepal from Dubai and their situation's live video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPMTwsSAXFo>



quarantine shelters, etc. led to autonomous 'creative' initiative of local governance, such as, hoisting red flag in the houses of people who have returned from abroad, mainly migrant worker. A young adolescent girl who had come from France via Qatar was tested of being COVID-19 positive and therefore she was led to being trolled in social media which was encouraged further by the tweet of English daily editor, Subash Ghimire – The Republica – in Nepal. The absence of contact tracing of people who were in the same flight with her was criticized and active media reporting on this oversight fueled fear and contempt for anyone returning to Nepal. Additionally, the government's denial of entry to Nepal for its citizens who were working in India and wanted to return to Nepal created a furor in the country which was divided into two factions. One faction made an outcry against this decision while another group supported this decision. Individuals who entered Nepal via different alleys and swimming in the river bordering Nepal and India were detained by the police. Such chaos, uproar and confusion will surely affect returnee women migrant workers.

Our respondents who were working as domestic worker in India were also at first subjected to fear and isolation in their community which however resolved after they tested negative during medical examination in quarantine shelter. Some of the respondents who tested positive, despite of their earlier consent to speak with us, did not answer our phone and became unreachable for survey interviews. This would not have happened had the government's communication been clear and accurate from the beginning. None of the individuals would have chosen to give falsified personal information of their address in Nepal as well as refusal to speak to surveyors like us who are actually carrying out this work to map the reality with an objective to lobby with the government for better COVID-19 response during and after the lockdown, especially absorbing the skills and experience of returnee women migrant workers through its policies.

According to AMKAS and WHR, Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare has a verified number and official record of returnee women who are pregnant. The Ministry however stated that they are still in the process of collecting data which will be made available only after its segregation. According to AMKAS and WHR, these women came from Kuwait and Dubai. AMKAS stated that 19 returnee's pregnant migrant workers are from Province 3 and they were in Dubai with their husbands. It strongly stated that these pregnancy is not the result of 'promiscuous' behavior as hinted in media. WHR stated that it sheltered 10 pregnant women who had arrived from Kuwait out of which nine pregnancies were marital and they have returned to their home districts.

Some of them were expecting to terminate their pregnancy once they reached Nepal, however, it took three months for the government to get them to Nepal and therefore this option is

nonviable and irregular for them. Therefore, those who were single have opted to not return to their home districts after arriving in Kathmandu. Stigma around single parenting, especially when you are 'unmarried' will have a long-term consequences for both the mother and child. Issues related to citizenship for children born out of such condition became one of the major concerns of migrant workers' rights groups when Nepal's parliamentary committee on good governance passed citizenship amendment bill 2020 which denies women's right to confer descent based citizenship to her children if the father is a foreigner. Media report of these women was not received with empathy. Their suffering has just begun. However, none of our respondents of the survey are subjected to this kind of situation. Yet, the single and unmarried returnee women migrant workers we interviewed are acutely aware of the stigma of being a migrant worker and returning to Nepal during pandemic. Therefore, it is possible that there will be unwillingness among these women to speak with most of the researchers/surveyors/reporters in future which is a serious setback for any work undertaken to assess impacts of COVID-19 of which social impact is one aspect.

**d) Economic Impacts of COVID-19:** Once the pandemic started, and countries began to impose partial and full lock down, women migrant workers began to face financial constraints and it differed from the nature of their work, employer and countries they were working in.

The women migrant workers who were working in companies have varied experience depending on the country that they are working and also employment policy of the company they are employed in. Women migrant workers in the Middle East countries (Qatar and Kuwait) were asked to work from home and minimum wage was provided to them. On the other hand, some were asked to stay at home and wage has not been given to them but their rent is taken care of. In Bahrain, women domestic workers could return to Nepal but on their own cost. Women who are employed in cleaning company and money transfers were either subjected to stay at home with no indication of them being paid; or were made to work for double hours with no provision for overtime payment and leave. The rationale behind is that they are short staffed at the moment. Those who have not been paid any wage while being asked to stay at home are of the opinion that they will be eventually paid back. The surveyor was told that they will not initiate any conversation on being paid even if they are staying at home while on prevalent work contract because a) they trust their company which has been considerate in the past, and they will not receive it anyway even if they ask for it since the company has been silent about it. In fact, it was made clear to the surveyor that this issue had not crossed their mind.

An informal chat with one of them also pointed out that domestic workers who chose to stay back are in no better condition than theirs in terms of payment and longer working hours. However, in

Malaysia, two migrant women workers working in a factory as machine operators had not renewed their contract with the company and were waiting for their flight date to Nepal when Malaysian government imposed the lockdown in March 2020. They have been provided with accommodation and food facility by Panasonic, with whom they had chosen not to renew the contract.

One migrant women worker in Kuwait runs a small-scale frozen food service of Nepali cuisine. She used to run this service in addition to her full time employment as a salesperson in a furniture company. Lockdown and return of Nepali workers to Nepal has affected her business.

Those who returned to Nepal had no money on them except to meet basic needs. Most of them used to send their salary to Nepal on a regular basis. So after coming back to Nepal, they are relying on their family to cover their expenses including basic personal expenses. They do not find it comfortable that they have to ask money from their parents, or husbands. This financial dependency is a concerning issue for young returnee women migrant workers. Most of the married women felt that their family has not made judicious use of money that was sent to them.

Most of the women who had come way a year or two years before pandemic have financial problems and are working as daily labour in construction sites which are now at halt due to lock down in pandemic times. This has created difficult situation for their daily subsistence and are willing to undertake any kind of job offered to them, even if it means less payment as opposed to what they would have been paid before lock down. Considering present situation, being underpaid is not an issue for them since they are looking for basic survival only for now.

Some of them have small farming terraces where they can grow vegetables and small amount of cash crops such as corn. However, these produce will not find the market as in earlier days because they will have to walk to the market since there is no public transportation and they cannot afford to reserve the vehicles to transport their produce to sell in the market. So, one of them was clearly demotivated to continue working in their vegetable patches also.

**e) Employment Opportunities in Future:** All of them are clear that their working opportunities is not going to be as same as before. Age and literacy are major factors that determine whether they can find jobs or not. Most of the middle aged returnee women migrant workers are unsure if they can find anything better than construction work or cleaning jobs. The young ones are unsure of what their job prospects would be and did not want to delve much into it right now. *"let this pandemic be over and we will see. But we know that we will not be able to go abroad for work at least for another two years"* is the attitude of young ones while the middle aged women are *"we will work any that will come our way"*.

**f) Government Package/Programmes:** Government of Nepal has expressed its intention to formulate policy to absorb skills and experience of returnee migrant workers, however, our survey respondents were unaware of this probability. Age and literacy/education are major factors that determined their response to access these government package, programmes when introduced. The middle aged ones are keen to be able to use such facilities and expect support from organizations who are in touch with them, for e.g., respondents from Dang were looking up to district staff of WOREC to be informed and connected. The young ones are skeptical that anything in favor of their interest would be introduced. However, if such programmes complement their interest then they might consider it. But without knowing in what form the policy would come, they did not want to answer based on a hypothesis that it will address their needs. While the middle aged ones have no problem with packages being formulated around agriculture, or agro business, it might not appeal to the younger ones since some of them have studied up to 12th standard and are interested in other forms of occupational opportunities.

The government should create employment according to the place where and what it is needed. And also they are seeking employment in Nepal so they can stay with their family.

## Chapter 5: Recommendations and Way Forward

Review of media reports, statements, and participation in consulting webinars on concerns of migrant workers' rights and their advocates/lobbyists with the government, the following recommendations can be made to ensure rightful welfare of returnee migrant workers:

### **a) Government of Nepal's policy on Migrant Workers:**

All three tiers of government – local, province and federal – have a total amount of 1.474 trillion employment generating or training programmes related to income generation have been budgeted for Nepali fiscal year of 2020/21, it is not yet clear how this will be translated into policy guidelines related to reintegration of migrant workers in Nepal. The government stated that this budget will be availed to all its citizens through its 753 units with an aim to provide 200,000 jobs in present fiscal year. Prime Minister's Employment Program, Small Farmers Credit, Youth and Small Entrepreneur Self Employment Fund and Private Sectors are the identified implementers of this plan, however, this is generic and returnee migrant workers will have to compete with the rest of the population in the country to be the beneficiary. Therefore, Foreign Employment Board's proposed pilot reintegration programme in pipeline for migrant workers should be able to address how these identified actors and announced budget can be availed by returnee migrant workers, especially returnee women migrant workers keeping in mind how diverse this group can be in terms of socio-cultural background.

The Government of Nepal has to use its quantitative data available with its line Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security to identify and explore areas through which skills and knowledge of returnee women migrant workers can be absorbed to address their employment related concerns. Any policies being drafted with regards to this aspect needs to be consulted with the right holders bearing in mind how the government bodies in all levels, local, province and federal – can be held accountable for effective implementation of these policies and programmes. Therefore, Nepal's present three-tier administrative structure – local, province and federal – can serve the migrant workers and their families only through proper data analysis.

**b) Foreign Employment Board** has plans to introduce guidelines focused on COVID-19 and its impact on migrant workers and their families. Therefore, migrant rights community especially

those who work for the rights of women migrant workers need to see if this guideline has feminist lens or not.

Reportedly, Foreign Employment Fund has six billion Nepali rupees. This amount is the accrued amount of labour fee that is paid by every outgoing migrant worker while obtaining labour permit. This fund is used for repatriation, evacuation, rescue of the migrant workers from their destination countries, to bring the dead bodies of migrant workers, and also to provide financial help to family members of the deceased migrant worker. However, this fund can only be used by legally documented migrant workers whose records are kept by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security Nepal. This fund should be used to provide financial incentive to the returnees, especially returnee women migrant workers who returned due to pandemic and have no other means of income.

Financial situation, psychological state of returnee women migrant workers need to be adequately assessed to provide these incentives. The government is coming with the repatriation plan and it explicitly mentions using welfare fund money for repatriating those who have contributed to the fund. The problem with this is all the domestic workers who have travelled via India and other routes and who are in dire need of support from the government right now won't be able to get benefitted from this scheme as they have not contributed in the fund. This is high time to make the government understand that the restrictive policies they have put forward will have negative repercussions in the long run and the current crisis situation will be a good example to illustrate. Therefore, mobility restriction is not an option at all to protect women domestic migrant workers. This should be lifted immediately.

**c) Consultation with right holders,** i.e., returnee women migrant workers need to be conducted to understand how they envision their future in Nepal. Right now, discussions on the kind of support they need is being decided in Kathmandu by the stakeholders who have the best interest of these returnee migrant women, but no consultation can be complete without having in-depth focused discussion with the right holders, returnee migrant workers. Limitations of this survey and its findings have already shown how resource exhaustive and challenging it can be to communicate with these returnee women migrant workers on their future in a backdrop of pandemic and inadequate government measures to ease out lives of its people in Nepal.

This survey has also indicated how they require clear, correct and concise information to even think about what possibilities they have, their choices to shape their future. The agency of returnee migrant workers cannot be ignored or coopted by migrant rights organizations consultants who are mostly relying on second tier of information that they receive. Listening

in some of the webinars made it clear that some of the stakeholders are yet to understand the rights based approach to consultation with the right holders. Government of Nepal, bilateral organizations, UN Agencies and I/NGOs working on migrant workers' rights issues must comply to this while they work collectively to formulate policy or introduce programmes targeting returnee migrant workers in mandatory modality of free, prior, informed consent has to be conducted with the actual right holders, i.e., returnee migrant women workers.

These consultations should include undocumented returnee migrant workers who have returned to Nepal. They should not be excluded from benefiting from any of the government policies and programmes implemented to benefit returnee migrant women workers.

Consultation with returnee women migrant workers, especially with the ones who were given amnesty by Kuwait government on the reasons behind their undocumented and irregular stay. This will be helpful in understanding their choices, situations they have to live in which will be a good reference for the Government of Nepal to revisit its agreement with the countries of employment on employment policies benefiting Nepali women opting for foreign employment opportunities.

**d) Identified Areas of Support** through this survey done with 30 respondents (25 returnee's migrant women worker and 5 non returnee women migrant workers) are indicative of some of the areas where they will require support. This covers mandatory financial support, social security and mental health related issues to both the returnees as well as their families. Along with employment opportunities, or financial support for their startups, they should be provided with basic financial literacy skills through which they can step up their earning towards profit yielding savings or investment. The government needs to take into consideration that these returnee women migrant workers have to cover the monthly expenses of up to 15000/- Nepali rupees a month which is excluding their children's educational fees.

**e) Comprehensive Technical Assistance** to set up businesses for those seeking self-employment opportunities should not be limited to vocational skills training but also include assistance to understand Nepal's complicated tax system and its incentives, promotion of their service in the larger entrepreneurial scene, investment and saving of their earnings, etc.

Though none of the survey respondents acknowledged that they are in need of psychosocial counselling, the conversations with the respondents especially around their financial needs indicate a level of stress and anxiety which has increased due to pandemic and their strained relationship with their husbands, household responsibilities and care work of their sick family

members. This is a lot of expectations which is topped by the expectation to earn also. Their desperation, anxiety need to be viewed through both objective and subjective lens and with competent aide of psycho social counselor.

**e) Ratification of UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families**

has to be the priority of Nepal Government as urged by the migrant rights groups since the last decade. Continuous lobby advocacy has to be made to the government by the rights groups across the human rights community since the ratification of this convention will further strengthen existing government policies on the rights of migrant workers and their families, to introduce rights based approach to address the issues of migrant workers and their families, and to hold government accountable of its responsibility to migrant workers and their families in all kinds of situation, considering how public interest litigation had to be filed, this time, against Nepal Government to ensure that it evacuates Nepali migrant workers willing to return to Nepal from middle east.



# Annex 1

## Survey Questionnaire on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on Returnee Women Migrant Workers in Nepal

### Personal Information:

Name: .....

Ethnicity: .....

Age: .....

Marital Status: .....

Family size: .....

Province: .....

District: .....

Mobile number: .....

Landline number: .....

Facebook ID: .....

Email: .....

Interview Date: .....

Interview By: .....

**General Information on their migrant employment:**

1. Which foreign country did you go to work as?
2. What did you work there as?
3. How long did you stay there?
4. What was your salary?
5. Did you go via recruitment agency in Nepal? If yes, were you flown from Kathmandu?
6. Before flying to destination country, did you
  - a) attend the orientation course,
  - b) do medical examination or insurance,
  - c) obtain labour permit,
  - d) receive contract paper
7. How much did you have to pay to recruitment agency/agent?
8. How did you source this money to pay the recruitment agency/agent? Who paid for your return ticket?
9. Why did you return to Nepal? **Leave company/pregnancy**
  - a) expiration of work contract
  - b) forced to leave
  - c) detention
  - d) other reasons (explain)
10. When did you return to Nepal?
  - a) Before December 2019
  - b) Between December 2019 to March 2020

**If answer is 'a' then continue from question number 11 and if answer is 'b' then start from question number 17**

11. What are you doing now? Is she working? Do you have income source? How much do you earn?
12. When you were working abroad, who did you send money to? When your returned, did you feel that your earning was used wisely? (was the loan paid back - if they had loan, were you able to build house, buy land? Do you have savings?)
13. What do you know about government's policy to provide employment opportunities to migrant returnees? Will you be interested to benefit from there? What kind of support do you expect from the government?

14. Have you received any government COVID-19 relief package? (depends on respondents economic condition)

15. Do you plan to go for foreign employment after COVID-19?

16. In case the return is due to COVID-19, who made this decision?

- a) you, yourself
- b) employer
- c) your family
- d) others

17. Would you please share with us your situation in destination country when COVID-19 lockdown was imposed by the government in the country you were working? *(Here, we will have to look how they were informed about isolation, lockdown, whether or not they had options, was Nepali envoy present to facilitate their travel back to Nepal? Were they given any severance pay by their employer? How long did it take for them to come back? Did they face any challenges - money, support, etc?)*

18. When did you arrive in Nepal, where did you get information on self-quarantine and quarantine?

- a) immigration
- b) family
- c) Nepali envoy in their destination country
- d) others

19. What did you do after this?

20. Were you welcomed in your family/neighborhood/district/province? What was the experience?

21. How will you earn your income now? How has COVID-19 affected your employment opportunities in future? Do you plan to go for foreign employment after COVID-19?

22. What do you know about government's policy to provide employment opportunities to migrant returnees? Will you be interested to benefit from there? What kind of support do you expect from the government?

23. Is there anything you would like to ask us?

**Survey Questionnaire on socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on non-returnee migrant women workers in destination countries**

**Personal Information:**

Name: .....

Ethnicity: .....

Age: .....

Marital Status: .....

Family size: .....

Province: .....

District: .....

Mobile number: .....

Landline number: .....

Facebook ID: .....

Email: .....

Interview Date: .....

Interview By: .....

**General Information on their migrant employment:**

1. Which foreign country have you gone?
2. What did you work there as?
3. How long did you stay there?
4. What was her salary?
5. Did you go via recruitment agency in Nepal? If yes, was you flown from Kathmandu? If not from where?
6. Before flying to destination country, did you
  - a) attend the orientation course, b) do medical examination, and
  - c) obtain labor permit?
7. How much did you have to pay to recruitment agency/agent?
8. How did they source this money to pay the manpower agency/agent?
9. What is COVID-19 related situation in their destination country?
10. Why have they not returned to Nepal?
  - a) employer                      b) family                      c) others
11. Can you tell us about how are you working in the current situation? Look for issues related to security, health and sanitation, food and accommodation, salary, and working hours? Security, health and sanitation should be of both personal and professional space.
12. If they want to return to Nepal, do they know who will facilitate their travel? Who will pay for their return ticket? Will their employers provide them with severance pay?
13. Is there anyone who they know have returned to Nepal? Are they in contact? What have they told them about situation in Nepal?
14. How does you think COVID-19 will affect her employment opportunities in future?
15. Is there anything that you would like to ask us?

## Annex 2

### List of Migrant Workers from Laligurans Municipality-9

S.No	Ward	Female	Male	Total
1	Ward no. 1	4	115	119
2	Ward no. 2			106
3	Ward no. 3			111
4	Ward no. 4	4	123	126
5	Ward no. 5	5	177	182
6	Ward no. 6	13	167	180
7	Ward no. 7	4	87	91
8	Ward no. 8			
9	Ward no. 9			173
	<b>Total</b>			<b>915</b>

## Annex 3

### **Consent Form for Survey on the Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Returnee Migrant Women Workers in Nepal**

I, the undersigned, understand that WOREC NEPAL is conducting a survey on Socio-Economic Impact of Covid-19 on Returnee Migrant Workers in Nepal.

I have agreed to participate in this survey. I completely understand that information shared by me with the surveyor, including my personal details will not be disclosed to any third party and used in any promotional material without my prior consent.

Respondent's Name:

Contact Number:

Surveyor's Name:

Contact number:

Email:



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