

# What do we know about labour migration in Dolakha, Nepal?

**This briefing note offers new evidence on labour migration in Dolakha, a district in the Central Development Region of Nepal. This study is part of a larger programme of research on labour migration and forced labour from Nepal. Evidence includes key characteristics of migrant households and returnee migrants, including local prevalence of labour migration, and findings on remittances, mobile phone use, common work sectors and reported injuries. Study results suggest priority intervention target groups and insights for programmes and policies to support safer migration and reduce the risk of migration-related abuses, including forced labour and human trafficking.**

## BACKGROUND

Labour migration is an important source of household and national income in Nepal, with remittances estimated to represent over 30% of Nepal's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2016.<sup>i</sup> According to the Nepal Living Standards Survey, 53% of Nepali households had at least one member absent in 2010/2011, of whom 33% were believed to be living outside the country.<sup>ii</sup> Current projections suggest that levels of migration will continue to increase.<sup>iii</sup> This survey sought to learn about household demographics and migration in Dolakha in order to inform interventions designed to help prospective migrants make safe migration choices for employment that is free from exploitation and abuse. Specifically, the survey results are intended to inform the International Labour Organization's Work in Freedom Programme.

## SURVEY

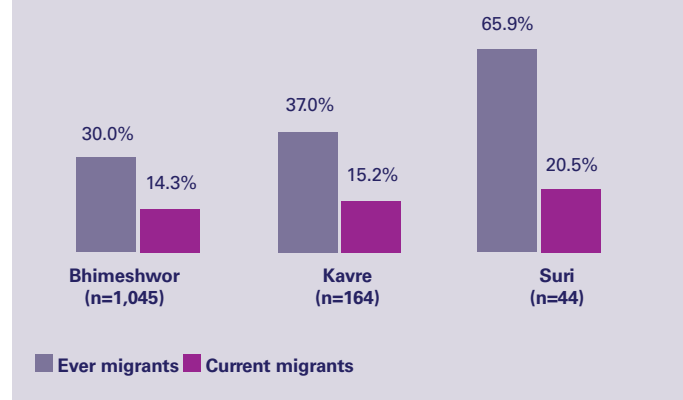
A household census was conducted among 1,253 households in Dolakha (Bhimeshwor-1, n=1,045; Kavre-3, n=164; and Suri-6, n=44) to learn about migration patterns in Dolakha. Within these households, demographic and migration information on 5,961 individuals were collected. Households represent a

range of castes/ethnic groups, the most common being Chhetree, Brahman-Hill and Newar. Kavre is the survey site with the highest concentration of people from the Dalit caste (14%).

## How prevalent is labour migration in Dolakha?

- One-third of households had at least one member who had ever migrated outside of Nepal for work.
- 15% of households had at least one member currently working abroad.
- 7% of household heads reported that a member of their household intended to migrate in the next six months.

**FIGURE 1:** Labour migration among households, by site, n=1,253

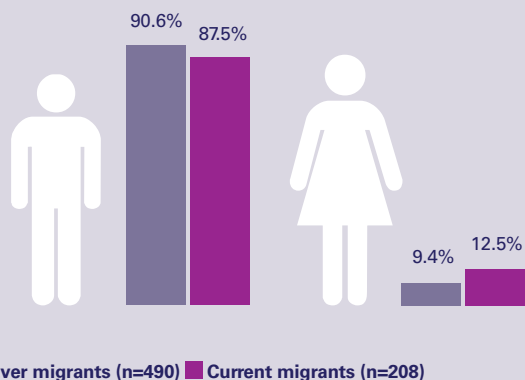


## Who is most likely to migrate?

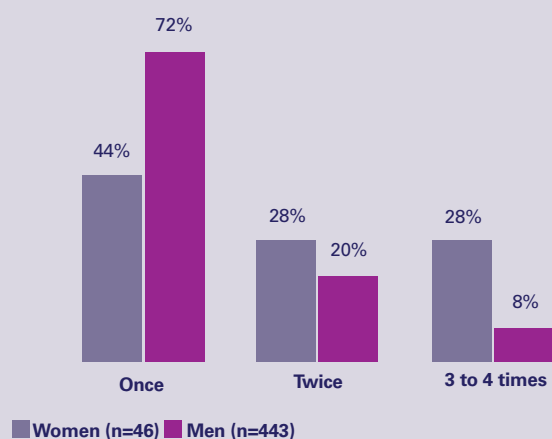
Men were more likely than women to have migrated for work (21% versus 2%). Among male household members, the highest proportion of current labour migrants were aged 19–44 years (12%), and the highest proportion of prospective migrants were between ages 19–24 years old (7%). Labour migration was most common among men whose highest level of education was primary school (14%), closely followed by secondary or higher secondary (10%). Migration was also much more common among married men (9% current migrants) than it was among unmarried men (7% current migrants).

While levels of labour migration were low among women, it is interesting to note that 65% of women who reported ever having migrated were younger than 30 years of age. This has, at times, been the minimum age set by policies aiming to protect women from exploitative migration experiences. Additionally, among individuals who had migrated, women were more likely than men to migrate multiple times (56% of female migrants versus 28% of male migrants).

**FIGURE 2:** Labour migration by sex of migrant



**FIGURE 3:** Number of previous labour migrations among ever migrated individuals, by sex



**TABLE 1:** Migration history, among ever migrants, by sex, n (%)

	Men (n=443)	Women (n=46)	Total (n=489)
<b>Destination (multiple options)</b>			
Malaysia	166 (37.4)	5 (10.9)	171 (32.1)
India	126 (28.4)	6 (13.0)	132 (24.8)
Saudi Arabia	56 (12.6)	1 (2.2)	57 (11.6)
United Arab Emirates (UAE)	40 (9.0)	5 (10.9)	46 (9.4)
Qatar	40 (9.0)	2 (4.4)	42 (8.6)
Kuwait	14 (3.2)	8 (17.4)	22 (4.5)
Lebanon	2 (0.5)	8 (17.4)	10 (2.0)
Other low-middle income*	18 (4.1)	1 (2.2)	19 (3.9)
Other high income*	19 (4.3)	10 (21.7)	29 (5.9)
<b>Work at destination (multiple options)</b>			
Factory	102 (23.0)	4 (8.7)	106 (21.6)
Security	45 (10.1)	1 (2.2)	46 (9.4)
Labour/porter	45 (10.1)	0	45 (9.2)
Restaurant/hospitality	41 (9.2)	2 (4.4)	43 (8.8)
Domestic worker	19 (4.3)	24 (52.2)	43 (8.8)
Construction	38 (8.6)	0	38 (7.7)
Retail	30 (6.8)	2 (4.4)	32 (6.5)
Transportation	31 (7.0)	0	31 (6.3)
Office work	18 (4.1)	2 (4.4)	20 (4.1)
Cleaner	14 (3.2)	1 (2.2)	15 (3.1)
Other	127 (28.6)	4 (8.7)	131 (26.7)
Don't know	52 (11.7)	4 (8.7)	57 (11.6)

\*According to World Bank Classifications, 2012. Low-middle income countries = Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey. High-income countries = Bahrain, Belgium, Cyprus, Japan, South Korea, Oman, Portugal, UK, USA.

## Where do people go and what sectors do they work in?

Common work destinations for men were Malaysia (37%); India (28%); and Saudi Arabia (13%). For women, common destinations included: Kuwait (17%); Lebanon (17%); India (13%); Malaysia (11%); and United Arab Emirates (11%). One-quarter of men worked or had worked in factories, one in ten in security, one in ten as porters, 9% in restaurants and 9% in construction. Over half of women (52%) worked or had worked as domestic workers.

## How many households with current migrants are receiving remittances?

Approximately 80% of the surveyed households with at least one current migrant were receiving remittances. About two-thirds of all households surveyed reported outstanding household debt (averaging 200,000 Nepali Rupees; approximately 2,000 USD), so it is not surprising that debt repayment was among the most commonly reported uses for remittances (by approximately two-thirds of households in rural areas and just over a third in Bhimeswor). Other common uses of remittances included basic household expenses (food and clothing), education and healthcare.

## Are migrants staying in contact with families?

Over 82% of households reported contact within the past week with their family member who migrated. Contact was more regular with male migrants than female migrants. Nearly all (98%) who kept in touch reported using mobile phones.

## Do workers receive the pay they expect?

Based on interviews with household heads, 61% of current migrant workers were receiving the amount they expected to be paid. Nearly one-quarter of workers were not. However, 14% of household heads reported not knowing whether their family member was being paid the correct salary.

## How many workers report being injured?

Almost one in ten workers (all men) told their family that they had sustained minor injuries, and four individuals (three men and one woman) reported a serious injury. These are likely to be conservative estimates of the true prevalence of injuries, as 12% of household heads reported not knowing if family members abroad were injured. Moreover, it is likely that migrants did not report medical problems to their families, especially if injuries were perceived as minor.

TABLE 2: Current migrants' situation abroad, by sex, as reported by household head, n (%)

	Men (n=182)	Women (n=26)	Total (n=208)
<b>Last contact with any household member</b>			
Never	2 (1.1)	2 (7.7)	4 (1.9)
Past week	151 (83.0)	20 (76.9)	171 (82.2)
Past month	23 (12.6)	3 (11.5)	26 (12.5)
Past 6 months	6 (3.3)	1 (3.9)	7 (3.4)
<b>Frequency of contact</b>			
Never	2 (1.1)	2 (7.7)	4 (1.9)
Daily	50 (27.5)	3 (11.5)	53 (25.5)
At least once per week	89 (48.9)	12 (46.2)	101 (48.6)
At least once per month	34 (18.7)	8 (30.8)	42 (20.2)
At least once per year	7 (3.9)	1 (3.9)	8 (3.9)
<b>Type of contact (multiple options allowed)</b>			
Mobile phone	178 (98.3)	22 (91.7)	200 (97.6)
Internet, applications or groups	22 (12.2)	6 (25.0)	28 (13.7)
Other	4 (2.2)	1 (4.2)	5 (2.4)
<b>Correct salary paid</b>			
No	46 (26.3)	5 (20.0)	51 (24.6)
Yes	112 (61.5)	15 (60.0)	127 (61.4)
Don't know	24 (13.2)	5 (20.0)	29 (14.0)
<b>Any injuries experienced</b>			
None	143 (78.6)	20 (76.9)	163 (78.4)
Minor injury	16 (8.8)	0	16 (7.7)
Serious injury	3 (1.7)	1 (3.9)	4 (1.9)
Don't know	20 (11.0)	5 (19.2)	25 (12.0)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

These findings offer several valuable insights for pre-migration interventions in Dolakha.

➤ **Target interventions:** Programmes would benefit from tailoring activities to suit different populations:

- Labour migration in Dolakha is particularly high among Thami- and Sherpa-speaking individuals;
- Labour migration is most common among young married men, and among those whose highest level of education is primary school;
- Women who have already migrated for work once are very likely to migrate again;
- Most female migrants are under 30 years old at the time they migrate, despite age-bans to limit female migration<sup>iv</sup>, making young women an important group for information and support. Because of legislative age-bans, interventions will need to identify effective ways to reach migrant women. They will need to make returnees feel safe to share their migration experiences and encourage prospective migrants to disclose their migration intentions.

TABLE 3: Summary of age-bans in Nepal<sup>iv</sup>

Sept 2008	All women's migration to Gulf countries and Malaysia for low skilled work restricted
Nov 2009	Ban imposed on women's migration to Lebanon
Dec 2010	Ban on migration to Gulf countries and Malaysia for all women lifted
Aug 2012	New ban on women under 30 years old from migrating to the Arab States for domestic work
July 2014	Age ban temporarily expanded to women of all ages from migrating for low-skilled work, regardless of the country of destination
Sept 2014	Total ban on women migrating as domestic workers
April 2015	Regular migration channels opened for women migrant domestic workers, 24 years of age and older, wishing to work in certain destination countries in the Arab States and South-East Asia

➤ **Increase awareness about financial planning and financial literacy, including debt management:**

A large proportion of households in the study reported outstanding debts, with remittances often used to service these debts, especially in rural areas.

- Pre-migration interventions should address debt – as a driver and consequence of migration.
- Pre-migration interventions should include financial planning and financial literacy activities to help prospective migrants manage their money. Where possible, other household members should be included in information sessions to help families manage debt and plan ahead for using remittances.

➤ **Offer language training:** Pre-migration interventions should consider offering language training for prospective migrants and/or strengthening connections with language training institutions, especially for instruction in Malay and Arabic.

➤ **Strategise around mobile phone usage:** The majority of migrants are able to stay in touch by mobile phone. Programmes should work with returnees and phone providers to develop strategies for migrants to use phones to foster migrant networks and access information, resources or assistance before departure and at destination. At the same time, it is necessary to recognise that migrants who are most at risk of exploitation may not be able to use mobile phones and will need other ways to reach assistance, such as local contacts in a destination country.

➤ **Tap into local resources:** Returnee migrants have substantial knowledge and experience that can benefit prospective migrants. Pre-departure interventions should draw on learning from returnees' experiences – both positive and negative – in order to offer prospective migrants diverse perspectives, which may help them make more informed choices.

➤ **Provide guidance to resources at destination:** Migrant workers need easy ways to access information and support options at destination locations, including contact with other migrants and their consulates. Information about medical resources may be particularly important given the reports of injuries.

➤ **Understand differences between first and second migration experiences:** As many experienced migrants opt to re-migrate, it will be important to learn how previous migration experiences influence future migration planning and outcomes for individuals, households and communities.

These findings represent patterns in the region where the research was conducted. They may not be generalisable to other communities in Nepal or elsewhere and, in particular, may not be generalisable among female labour migrants given the small numbers identified in this study. However, based on reports about migrant workers in other locations, many of these findings are consistent with the experiences of those elsewhere.

### ENDNOTES

- World Bank. Nepal Development Update. Remittances at Risk. May 2016
- Central Bureau of Statistics, Nepal Living Standards Survey reports, 1995/96, 2003/04, 2010/11.
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### Acknowledgements

SWIFT Evaluation in Nepal is led by LSHTM, in collaboration with the Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility, Social Science Baha, Kathmandu, Nepal.

This brief was supported by UKaid from the Department for International Development. However, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the department's official policies.

