

Lessons from prospective migrant women’s participation in the Work in Freedom community intervention activities in Nepal

This brief offers research findings from prospective women migrants in Morang, Chitwan and Rupandehi, three districts of the Work in Freedom (WiF) intervention in Nepal. It presents findings on prospective migrant women’s migration plans and their participation in the WiF community-based training. The WiF pre-decision training includes both migration-related advice and other information on employment opportunities in Nepal, gender equality and rights, and workers’ rights (see Box 1).

BOX 1: Work in Freedom community-based activities

Community orientation (up to four hours):

Focus on gender equality, employment, workers’ rights and safe migration.

Two-day pre-decision-making training:

Expands on equality and rights, discusses employment opportunities in Nepal, points to be considered before deciding on migration including costs and benefits, migration preparations; common potential problems, skills training and emergency contact details.

BACKGROUND

Over the past decade, increasing numbers of women from Nepal have been seeking employment opportunities abroad. While it is difficult to estimate the magnitude of women’s migration, primarily because of the informal channels that many use to migrate, official figures suggest that the number of women migrants is on the rise. According to government records, between 1985 and 2001 only 161 women had migrated for foreign employment. In contrast, the past few years have seen a sharp increase in labour migration by women, from 10,416 labour permits issued to women in 2010/11 to 21,421 in 2014/15.¹

Most Nepali women migrant workers are employed as domestic workers, although women are increasingly also engaged in care work, the service sector and factories.² Reports about exploitation and abuse of these workers, particularly domestic workers, in destination counties and in Nepal prior to their migration are common. A number of interventions have been implemented in Nepal to promote safer migration particularly among women.^{3,4}

Data sources

This brief draws on findings from surveys we conducted among prospective migrant women in Morang, Chitwan and Rupandehi who were identified by the WiF implementing partners. Data included follow-up telephone surveys (n=188) and qualitative follow-up interviews with six (6) women who attended the WiF two-day pre-decision-making training. The post-training

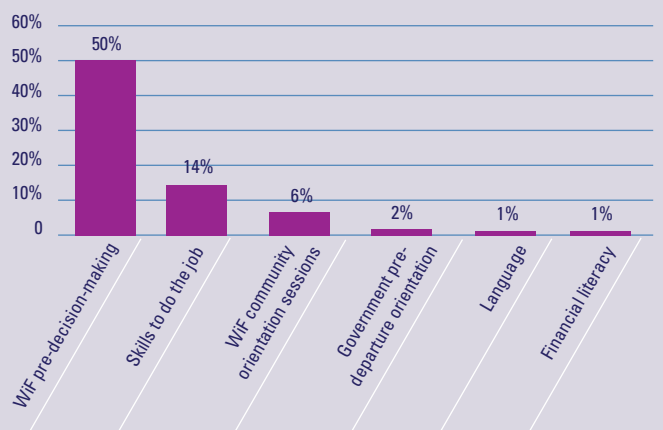
qualitative interviews explored women’s perceptions of the usefulness of the training and information they received.

What were women’s migration intentions and participation in trainings?

Among the 188 women interviewed in the follow-up surveys, one-third (n=58) reported they no longer planned to migrate, one-third (n=58) still intended to go and 15% (n=27) had already arrived at their destination.

Only about half of the women (55%) reported having attended some form of training for work (either in Nepal or abroad). Among these women, 50% had attended the WiF two-day pre-decision-making training, 14% attended skills training and 6% participated in the community

FIGURE 1: Types of programmes attended (n=188)



orientation sessions. Only a small minority attended the pre-departure orientation, language training and financial literacy training. Among those who attended the WiF two-day training, 12% (n=11) reported that they changed their mind about migrating as a result of the training.

Women’s experiences of the WiF two-day pre-decision-making training

Women who attended the two-day pre-decision-making training reported high-levels of satisfaction particularly in helping them understand what was needed for migration and how to stay safe. Women identified the most important thing learned from the training as knowing which documents are required for migration, followed by understanding the proper route to follow (flying out of Kathmandu airport and not travelling via India). Women found the contact information of both government and non-government organisations provided at the trainings, to whom they could reach out in case of problems, to be very useful.

Women wanted to understand more about their work abroad, such as what their actual work would involve, and to gain some language and technical skills. Women mostly migrating for domestic work are required to attend the 30-day skills training. However, there is no equivalent training for those migrating for work in other sectors. Both prospective migrants and those who had already migrated were concerned about whether they would be able to perform well in their jobs.

Women placed substantial trust in the trainers. In the qualitative interviews, women talked about getting the trainer’s and/or the implementing partner organisation’s

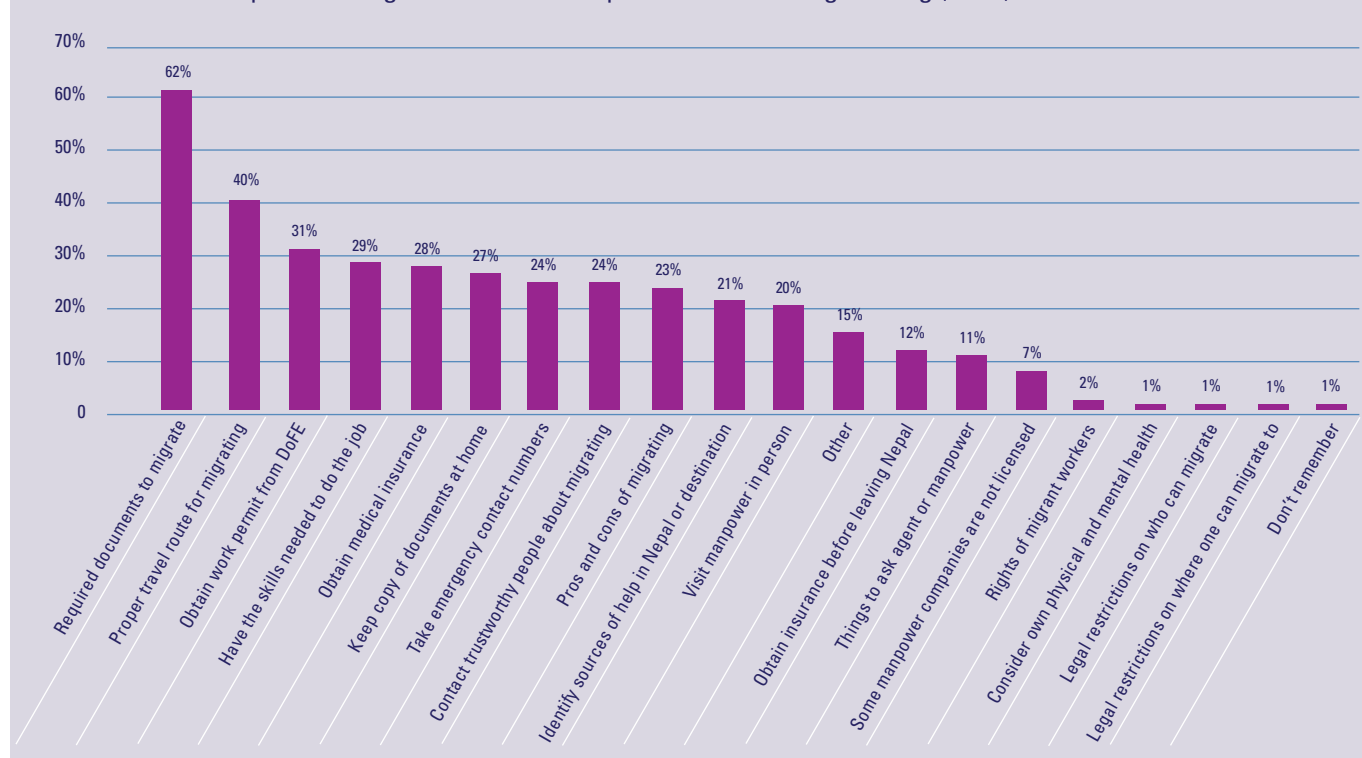
phone number, saying that they felt more secure knowing they would be rescued, if needed. This raises issues about how and what information is disseminated by trainers, as well as women’s understanding and expectations of the role of the trainer or organisation.

Women were asked specifically about the trainers and the delivery of the training and commented on their willingness to respond to their questions and concerns readily. Women appreciated the first-hand experiences of other women returnee migrant workers, which suggests that there are opportunities to engage returnees to collaborate with migrant organisations.

Strengthening community linkages to support prospective migrant women

The training provided a forum for women to share knowledge and receive information from their peers, including discussing the pros and cons of various destinations for work. In some ways, this points to the inclusion of peer-to-peer activities so that first-time migrants can speak with returnee women who have had previous labour migration experience. However, findings from SWIFT simultaneously indicate that returnee workers do not necessarily have accurate or up-to-date administrative information about labour migration processes, documents and regulations. For example, findings from the SWIFT prospective migrants’ survey suggest that returnee women were not better informed than first-time prospective migrants on key aspects of their living and working conditions, or on their rights and responsibilities as migrant workers.⁵ Returnees appear to be well-positioned to share practical and emotional aspects of migration and working abroad.

FIGURE 2: Most important thing learned from WiF pre-decision-making training (n=94)



Women's suggestions on future trainings

When asked about the content of the training, women suggested that they would like more information on the practical aspects of migration, such as how to secure the required documents, in addition to details about which documents are needed. Although this information is covered in the WiF training, perhaps it would be useful to provide a handout so women can recall the information when it is most needed.

Women suggested increasing the training period beyond two days and offering follow-up sessions rather than one-off trainings. This would allow women time to process the information received in one session and return with questions in the follow-up session. However, some women reported that they were unable to attend the two-days in full, which raises questions about the value of adding days to the training. Women also reported forgetting some of the information given at the training, which may be due, in part, to the potential lag time between starting the migration process and their actual departure.

LESSONS FOR FUTURE PRE-MIGRATION TRAINING

Language training and vocations skills. Language training and practical vocational skills appear to be in significant demand among prospective migrants. Some elements of these are covered in the government-mandated pre-departure orientation, which, for domestic workers, requires a 30-day training course. However, pre-migration training modules could be stronger if they included additional referral information for rapid language training or skills training for other types of common overseas employment sectors (e.g. textiles, care-giving), which are currently not mandated by the government.

Reliable and realistic emergency contact. Training sessions should provide overseas and local emergency assistance information with correct and reliable contact details. Moreover, women should be forewarned that there are often challenges to seeking help once outside the country. They should be told about likely limitations of specific organisations and governmental entities. Women should not be given a false sense of security or led to believe that assistance is always quickly available. Trainers themselves also need to be clear on these points.

Training timing and content. Programmes should consider offering a more targeted training for those identified as likely to migrate following this initial two-day pre-decision-making training. Such training programmes should cover the types of information that women need when they begin to engage in the migration process. Because migration planning and processes can take place over many months, it may be most effective to offer this to people who are more likely to migrate soon.

Building networks. Trainings can offer opportunities for participants to link up and form networks for support and information after the training. Programmes should try to facilitate future communications between migrating women (sharing contact details, informal meetings with the WiF peer educator or other staff, online communication options). This may help fill information gaps for guidance that may otherwise be forgotten by the time women make migration plans.

Information needs among returnee and first-time migrants. For information sessions, the programme must be careful not to assume that returnee migrants are well aware of what is required to migrate. Many returnees will have similar information needs as first-time migrants. However, to understand participants' needs, it is important to consult with returnees to learn their specific challenges when trying to re-migrate and to identify convenient ways to reach out to this group, who may not believe they need the same training that is provided to first-time migrants.

ENDNOTES

1. Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE). (2016). *Labour Migration for Employment, A Status Report for Nepal: 2014/2015*. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal.
2. Bhadra, C. (2008). International Labour Migration of Nepalese Women: The Impact of their Remittances on Poverty Reduction. *Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade Working Paper Series*, No. 44, September 2007 (Revised January 2008). Available at: www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/AWP%20No.%2044.pdf Accessed 5 Jan. 2017.
3. ILO. (2016). *Work in Freedom. Reducing vulnerability to trafficking of women and girls in South Asia and the Middle East. Supporting informed migration, fair recruitment and decent work*. Available at: www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-new_delhi/documents/publication/wcms_526175.pdf Accessed 15 March 2017.
4. UN Women. (2013). *Empowerment of women migrant workers of Nepal. Sustaining the gains of foreign labour migration through the protection of migrant workers' rights*. Available at: <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2014/1/-/media/BE8885BCB283442182087CD31E5BA302.ashx> Accessed 31 March 2017.
5. Abramsky T, Mak J, Zimmerman C, Kiss L, Sijapati B. *Migration planning among female prospective labour migrants from Nepal: a comparison of first-time and repeat-migrants*. (Under review)

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.

