



## Are past experiences of forced labour associated with future migration intentions and planning?

Over the past decade, Nepali women’s participation in foreign employment has increased considerably. Data from then-Department of Labour and Employment Promotion<sup>i</sup> indicate that between 1985 and 2001, only 161 women migrated for foreign employment.<sup>1</sup> However, migration began to rise in absolute terms each year after the mid-2000s (except in 2014/15, possibly related the earthquakes in April 2015) (See, Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

**FIGURE 1:** Number of labour permits issued to women



Source: DoFE, Labour Migration for Employment, A Status Report for Nepal: 2014/2015

The increase in female migration from Nepal may be attributed to the changing global labour market and household structures, which have resulted in differential impacts on women in sending and receiving countries. For instance, in receiving countries, women’s entry into the labour force, particularly in East and Southeast Asian countries, and the changing family structures and lifestyle changes in the Gulf countries have created demands for migrant domestic workers.<sup>3,4,5,6</sup> At the same time, in Nepal, growing numbers of women have been entering the labour market<sup>7,8</sup> and migration abroad is an extension of women’s search for job opportunities.<sup>9</sup> By 2015, nearly 60% of migrant

women had migrated to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.<sup>ii,iii,10</sup> Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the number of women migrants from Nepal is relatively small compared to men, accounting for approximately 4–6% of the total migrant population over the past decade.<sup>11</sup> Importantly, however, several studies indicate significantly higher numbers of women are migrating irregularly. For instance, a report by Amnesty International estimated that the actual number of women migrants from Nepal is approximately 30% of total migrants.<sup>12</sup> Others have suggested that 90% of irregular migrant workers from Nepal were women.<sup>13</sup> The reasons for such large numbers of women migrating irregularly are manifold but chief among them have been the restrictions on the legal migration of women.<sup>14,15,16</sup>

Amidst growing female migration, there has been increasing recognition of situations of forced labour, which often include, for example, violence, intimidation, confiscation of identity papers or debt accumulation<sup>17</sup> and the range of consequences of extreme forms of exploitation – including long lasting physical and mental health problems.<sup>18,19,20</sup> Those designing pre-migration programmes often acknowledge the potential role of returnee migrants in lesson-sharing with prospective migrants<sup>21</sup> – through, for example, the establishment of migrant networks or returnee-led activities. However, recent SWiFT evidence suggests that returnees have important experiences to share but may not have sufficiently detailed practical or procedural migration knowledge to support planning processes among prospective migrants.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, there has been extremely little to no understanding of how female returnees’ migration experiences affect their future migration decision-making.

Available evidence suggests that repeat migrants are at significant risk of exploitation, even if they have been previously exploited. For example, a recent study among Nepali male returnees found that 65% of those

i. The Department of Labour and Employment Promotion has now been renamed the Department of Foreign Employment.

ii. The GCC countries consist of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman.

iii. An estimated 80% of women migrant workers in the Gulf are engaged in domestic work within private homes or caring for children or elderly family members while others were employed in hotels, restaurants, beauty parlours, catering and manufacturing, as well as health and medical facilities within Asia and beyond (ILO, 2015: 2-3).

who had migrated more than once had experienced forced labour during their most recent migration.<sup>23</sup>

This briefing note considers how past experiences of migration-related exploitation among female returnee migrants might influence their re-migration decision-making.

## Past forced labour experiences and remigration intentions

Among the 653 women who completed the returnee survey, 122 (23%) reported that they intended to migrate again, with a further 26 (5%) saying they didn't know whether they would migrate again. We cross-tabulated their remigration intentions against their experiences (or not) of forced labour during their most recent migration to examine associations between experiences and future migration intentions. Results are presented in Figure 2.

There does not appear to be a relationship between past experiences of forced labour and remigration intentions. In other words, women do not necessarily seem to be deterred from re-migrating because they had previous migration experiences that they considered bad or abusive. A slightly lower percentage of those who had experienced forced labour (mostly driven by 'experience of work and life under duress') reported definitely intending to re-migrate, compared to those who had no forced labour experience, the difference was very small and wholly attributable to a greater percentage in this group who were uncertain whether they would migrate again. The extremely high prevalence of forced labour (89%) also hinders interpretation of this result. Findings from SWIFT in Bangladesh suggest that many women who reported

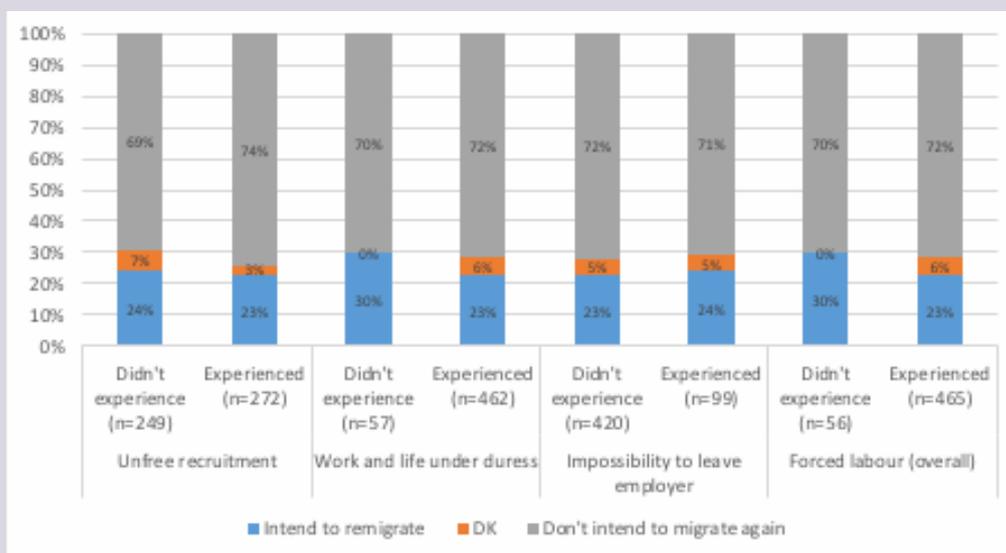
negative migration experiences during their first migration experience explained that they believe they are now aware of what to expect from their job and are thus more prepared to re-migrate.<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting that many of these women in Bangladesh were referring to negative experiences that involved sexual coercion or abuse.

## Past forced labour experience and prospective migration planning

In the SWIFT Nepal study, 104 of the returnee women also completed a survey designed for prospective migrants, with the aim of being able to make comparisons between first-time and more experienced labour migrants. For the returnee women, we merged their data and prospective migrant data to explore how forced labour experiences during their most recent migration might be related to subsequent prospective migration planning. We limited this analysis to simple cross tabulation because of the small sample size and high prevalence of forced labour experiences among returnee women, which precluded more complex analysis. For the same reason, we present results in a descriptive narrative form rather than presenting the statistical significance of associations.

Those with forced labour experiences appear to have less knowledge than those without forced labour experiences about the documents required to migrate legally outside of Nepal for work. They cite fewer of the necessary documents overall, as well as being less likely to have knowledge of each of the individual documents (e.g. work contract, labour permit, etc). They are also less likely to be aware of the pre-departure training programme that it is compulsory to attend before migrating outside of Nepal for work.

**FIGURE 2:** Remigration intentions according to forced labour experiences during most recent migration



**TABLE 1:** Prospective destination and work sector according to past forced labour experiences during most recent migration

	No unfree recruitment	Unfree recruitment	No work and life under duress	Work and life under duress	No impossibility to leave employer	Impossibility to leave employer	No forced labour (overall)	Forced labour (overall)
Planning to go to same destination as a previous migration	14/45 (31%)	20/54 (37%)	3/10 (30%)	31/89 (35%)	28/77 (36%)	6/22 (27%)	3/10 (30%)	31/89 (35%)
Planning to work in the same sector as a previous migration	19/45 (42%)	21/54 (39%)	5/10 (50%)	35/89 (39%)	30/77 (39%)	10/22 (45%)	5/10 (50%)	35/89 (39%)

Past experiences of forced labour do not appear to be related to whether or not a respondent decides to return to a destination or sector in which they have worked during a previous migration.

They are also less likely to be aware of the pre-departure training programme that it is compulsory to attend before migrating outside of Nepal for work.

## Migration-related knowledge and awareness

Those with forced labour experiences appear to have less knowledge than those without forced labour experiences about the documents required to migrate legally outside of Nepal for work. They cite fewer of the necessary documents overall, as well as being less likely to have knowledge of each of the individual documents (e.g. work contract, labour permit, etc).

## Migration planning

Those with past forced labour experiences were more likely than those without to say that they had contacted or planned to use a broker/agent/manpower company for their prospective migration.

Past forced labour experiences did not appear to be related in any systematic way to respondents' plans to take a mobile phone with them to their destination, or which contact details they planned to take with them.

**TABLE 2:** Migration-related knowledge and awareness according to past forced labour experiences during most recent migration

	No unfree recruitment	Unfree recruitment	No work and life under duress	Work and life under duress	No impossibility to leave employer	Impossibility to leave employer	No forced labour (overall)	Forced labour (overall)
Number of documents cited as necessary (of 10 needed) to legally migrate for work Mean (sd) Median (IQR)	3.74 (1.73) 4 (2-5)	3.31 (1.76) 3 (2-5)	4.30 (1.89) 4.5 (3-6)	3.43 (1.73) 3 (2-4)	3.73 (1.70) 4 (2-5)	2.79 (1.77) 2.5 (1.5-3.5)	4.09 (1.92) 4 (2-6)	3.43 (1.73) 3 (2-4)
Aware of pre-departure training	15/46 (33%)	10/58 (17%)	5/10 (50%)	20/93 (22%)	22/79 (28%)	3/24 (13%)	5/11 (45%)	20/93 (22%)
Plan to use a broker	31/46 (67%)	47/57 (82%)	6/10 (60%)	71/92 (77%)	58/79 (73%)	19/23 (83%)	7/11 (64%)	71/92 (77%)

**TABLE 3: Migration planning according to past forced labour experiences during most recent migration**

	No unfree recruitment	Unfree recruitment	No work and life under duress	Work and life under duress	No impossibility to leave employer	Impossibility to leave employer	No forced labour (overall)	Forced labour (overall)
Plan to use a broker	31/46 (67%)	47/57 (82%)	6/10 (60%)	71/92 (77%)	58/79 (73%)	19/23 (83%)	7/11 (64%)	71/92 (77%)
Plan to take a mobile	38/46 (83%)	52/57 (91%)	10/10 (100%)	79/92 (86%)	72/79 (91%)	17/23 (74%)	11/11 (100%)	79/92 (86%)

Plan to take contact details for:

Family and friends at destination	17/29 (59%)	14/47 (30%)	3/7 (43%)	28/69 (41%)	29/58 (50%)	2/18 (11%)	3/7 (43%)	28/69 (41%)
Broker in Nepal	15/29 (52%)	26/47 (55%)	0/7 (0%)	41/69 (59%)	33/58 (57%)	8/18 (44%)	0/7 (0%)	41/69 (59%)
Local groups	8/29 (28%)	6/47 (13%)	1/7 (14%)	13/69 (19%)	10/58 (17%)	4/18 (22%)	1/7 (14%)	13/69 (19%)

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

Amidst increasing donor investments in community-based programming to help female labour migrants reduce their risks of exploitation and abuse,<sup>25</sup> evidence on migration planning processes is increasing. However, we still have relatively little understanding of the migration planning processes, both for first-time and for repeat migrants. Moreover, our evidence-base is still scant on how negative labour migration experiences might influence future migration and what we need to know for pre-migration support to both returnee and first-time migrants. For instance, although evidence highlights significant risks of trafficking and forced labour among repeat migrants,<sup>26</sup> there seems to be implicit assumptions that women with negative experiences will not want to re-migrate. Yet, for those women who opt to migrate again, their previous experience will help them know what to expect and perhaps be better equipped to manage adversity. Our findings suggest that past exploitative experiences or elements of forced labour will not necessarily deter women from re-migrating. And, importantly, just because women have migrated once, they may not be more informed about practical migration planning processes. Our findings indicate that returnee migrants should not be excluded from pre-migration information programmes because even those with negative experiences are likely to consider re-migrating. Moreover, women who report previously having migrated, particularly those who cite elements of forced labour, may not be any better informed about pre-migration planning needs than first-time migrants. However, returned migrants are very likely to be able to offer descriptions of their experiences,

help set expectations about work conditions, individual emotional responses and risk around various forms of abuse, especially sexual abuse.

## MAIN FINDINGS

- Approximately one-quarter of women who migrated and experienced forced labour are likely to have plans to re-migrate.
- Women who have exploitative experiences, such as unfree recruitment or work and life under duress, may plan to re-migrate to the same location or for a job in the same sector.
- Women reporting experiences of forced labour appear to know less about what is needed (i.e., documents) to migrate legally outside Nepal compared to those not reporting forced labour.

## PROGRAMME CONSIDERATIONS

- Design intervention communications and recruitment strategies to recognise the particular needs and challenges of returnee migrants.
- Ensure content of pre-migration interventions for returnee migrants recognises their need for practical migration planning information, including about necessary documents, considerations around labour brokers, mobile phone use and planning for return home from abroad.
- Formulate programmes to offer returnee migrants safe and sensitive opportunities to share descriptions of their work- and living-related conditions to help set expectations among first-time migrants.

## ENDNOTES

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