Report on
Consultation and Sharing Program on Study on
Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Nepali Migrant Workers in Post-Covid-19 Pandemic Situation: Process and Challenges
24 November 2022
Kathmandu, Nepal

Background

Many people migrate internationally for work – according to ILO, in 2019, an estimated 169 million migrant workers working in globally.[1] Working abroad, therefore, offers the community living in the countries like Bangladesh and Nepal with underemployment a chance to seek better prospects. The issue of migration remains one of the pertinent issues as Nepali people mostly move to destination countries such as GCC countries and Malaysia. In the fiscal year 2018/19, 236,208 Nepalis[2] went abroad for foreign employment. The novel Coronavirus disease, namely COVID-19, was first identified in late December 2019. But only after three months of its initial outbreak, on 11 March 2020, World Health Organisation (WHO) declared of a 'pandemic' suggesting that the outbreak of the virus would likely spread to most countries, and urged all countries to take precautionary measures for the prevention of its spread.[3] Most governments all over the world, including South Asian countries and key destination countries, have taken serious decisions to control the severity of the spread of the pandemic. These consist of the imposition of nation-wide lockdowns, shutting down borders, limiting people's mobility, travel bans, quarantine and strict social distancing measures, and even curfews. These situations have adversely impacted health and socio-economic lives and brought forth uncertainties.

Various studies have demonstrated that many migrants in the destination countries and those who have returned to their countries due to the impacts of the COVID-19 have been expelled from their jobs and have not been paid their salaries and benefits. Many have been deprived of their right to return and to basic services, including access to health. Some have been subjected to ill-treatment, violence, and forced labour. Many have experienced job loss, non-payment of wages, forced employers to take unpaid leave, reduced wages, confinement in poor living conditions, without testing, or any access to health care. The loss of income due to the pandemic push migrant workers to debt and poverty. Adding to their plight is the lack of employment opportunities back home and support the government in reintegration and rehabilitation. While there is a sense of security returning home during a difficult time, the reality of having no income and the pressure to sustain their livelihood is causing stress to the returnee migrant workers. Due to a lack of support and

[1] https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/labour-migration
[2] https://dofe.gov.np/report.aspx
[3] https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2020/3/who-announces-covid-19-outbreak-a-pandemic

employment opportunities, migrant workers who returned due to the pandemic, are aspiring to return to the destination country for employment. In this context, therefore, SARTUC and MFA are conducting research on the reintegration and rehabilitation process of returnee migrant workers in Nepal.

So, the South Asian Regional Trade Union Council (SARTUC) has conducted a half-day multi-stakeholder consultation meeting on 24 November 2022 in Kathmandu, Nepal to share the draft report with stakeholders on its major findings and recommendations. Furthermore, the multi-stakeholder consultation meeting was very much fruitful to consolidate the ideas, experiences and most importantly, feedback from the participants on the findings and recommendations to the draft report.

OBJECTIVES

- To share the finding of the study on rehabilitation and reintegration of Nepali migrant workers in the post-covid-19 pandemic situation and discuss on its process and challenges.
- To consolidate the findings, and recommendations based on the challenges of reintegration of returnee migrant workers in Nepal.
- To interact on the reintegration of returnees by reviewing and analysing the existing policies and policy gaps on the reintegration of returnees in Nepal.

Opening Session

Mr. Laxman Basnet, General Secretary, SARTUC, welcomed all the participants along with the objectives of the consultation meeting. The Government is the key actor to look into the issues of reintegration and rehabilitation of migrant workers, thus have to provide proper opportunities to migrant workers back home in the host country. Trade unions and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have to work together for the betterment of labour migration governance and to promote workers' rights. The condition of migrant workers has been further exacerbated during and post COVID-19 pandemic thus, studies and researches on the issues of migrant workers are important to analyse the existing policies and policy gaps on the reintegration of returnees in Nepal and to develop the advocacy strategy for the recognition of skills and skill development of prospective migrant workers.

Presentation on Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Nepali Migrant Workers in Post-Covid-19 Pandemic Situation: Process and Challenges

Mr. Uddhav Raj Poudyal, a freelance researcher, shared the draft through presentation with participants on 'Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Nepali Migrant Workers in Post-Covid-19 Pandemic Situation: Process and Challenges'. The objective of the research is to develop the advocacy strategy for the recognition of skills and skill development of prospective migrant workers and the reintegration of returnees by reviewing and analysing the existing policies and policy gaps on the reintegration of returnees in Nepal. The research is based on desk review -

collecting of secondary data through literature reviews including policies, reports (both print and online) and stakeholders' reports and publications as well. He further, elucidated the existing laws, policies, initiatives and gaps in the rehabilitation and reintegration of Nepali migrant workers. The research has identified the policy gaps – psychosocial, social and economic issues; lack of coordination and policy harmonization; lack of database and a few others. Additionally, he discussed the key decision makers and policy formulators; technical advisory and financial supporters; research, information, monitoring and documentation; and advocators and service providers as stakeholders in Nepal. More importantly, he shared major findings of the research – lack of adoption of successful and sustainable reintegration approach; not participatory; not holistic, flexible and support services and many other points as well. Finally, he shared the recommendation for short-term and long-term along with advocacy strategies.

The presentation was followed up by the questions, feedback and comments raised by the participants. Mr. Janak Raj Pandey (NTUC), Mr. Uttam Raj B.K (INTUC), Mr. Som P. Lamichhane (PNCC), Ms. Seema Kumari Shah (WOREC Nepal), Ms. Chandani Rana (NNSM), Mr. Janak B.K (GEFONT), Mr. Krishan Prasad Neupane (NNSM), Mr. Sita Ram Poudel (NTUC), Mr. Tilak Jung Khadka (UNI-APRO) had provided inputs, comments and recommendations to further work on the study paper. The participants suggested the proper implementation of plans and policies regarding labour migration in Nepal where it has been the realization of rehabilitation and rescue policies for migrant workers. The reintegration guideline has been introduced by the government but needs more improvement on it. To maintain records and date, the return form shall be filled by returnee migrant workers in flight or in immigration. The local level has to be more active in maintaining data on migrant workers and returnees so that it would be easier to plan for the reintegration of migrant workers. Participants suggested the local level is the key actor for the planning and data collection for the reintegration of returnees. Additionally, the migration governance and the process of reintegration and rehabilitation shall be looked at from the gender perspective as well because the process and challenges of male and female migration are different. The opportunities for work in the Nepali market are based on demand and supply thus, the government has to work for the increasing the demand for the returnees in local market.

Group Work

The Group work was facilitated by ***Mr. Nilambar Badal***, a freelance researcher, divided the participants into three groups – Trade unionists; CSOs; and researchers. The facilitator provided three topics for discussion to groups – a) The status of rehabilitation and reintegration of migrant workers in Nepal; b) Stakeholders Analysis in addressing rehabilitation and reintegration; and c) Advocacy strategy for the recognition of Skills and Skills Development of Prospective Migrant Workers and Reintegration of Returnees in Nepal. The time of five minutes was allocated to discuss each topic and after the discussion, they had to write down on the chart paper and present their points/issues or recommendations to all.

Presentation by Group CSO

Mr. Manish KC, from POURAKHI Nepal, representing Group CSO made a presentation stressing key points of the group discussion as outlined below:

a) The status of rehabilitation and reintegration of migrant workers in Nepal.
   - No any policies in rehabilitation and rescue.
   - No policies for undocumented migrant workers.
   - Lacking the data recording system.
   - Lacking skill upgrading system.

b) Stakeholders Analysis in addressing rehabilitation and reintegration.
   - Private sectors
   - Return migrants network/right holders.

c) Advocacy strategy for the recognition of Skills and Skills Development of Prospective Migrant Workers and Reintegration of Returnees in Nepal.
   - Social cohesion
   - Linkages with local government
   - Skill development – the employer should be responsible of destination countries.

Presentation by Group Researcher.

Similarly, ***Ms. Samiksha Neupane*** from CESLAM, a research organisation, representing Group Researcher made a presentation stressing key points of the group discussion as outlined below:

a) The status of rehabilitation and reintegration of migrant workers in Nepal.
   - Local level initiatives (application from municipalities); good practice – Dhankuta.
   - Skill mapping as per the interest of need and ability of returnee migrant workers/ skill profiling of individual migrant returnees.
   - Decentralisation of CTEVT services/testing/ access to information/fast track apply.
   - Categorisation of migrant workers.
   - Returnee investment policy is not clear.
   - Who is responsible for proper monitoring and evaluation? – Not clearly defined.
   - The local level can start the registration of returnees.

b) Stakeholders Analysis in addressing rehabilitation and reintegration.
   - Local government/provincial/federal
   - Department of immigration.
   - Different ministries and departments of government in host countries.
   - School, colleges, CTEVT, Department of labour studies, TU.
   - Private sectors/CSOs
   - Financial institutions; banks, cooperatives.

c) Advocacy strategy for the recognition of Skills and Skills Development of Prospective
- Subsidised loan
- Incentives like insurance for dignified work
- Work permit, the certificate as collateral.
- Skill matching as per the demand at the international market.
- Sharing platforms at schools and universities.
- Access to information
- Orientation about the process of reintegration on pre-departure orientation.
- Coordination and collaboration between key stakeholders.
- Use of social media platforms for information dissemination.
- Employment creation/job fair.
- MoU/ Bilateral Agreements (BLAs).
- Social security.

Presentation by Group Trade Union

Lastly, ***Mr. Laxman Adhikari*** from NTUC, a trade union organisation, representing Group Trade Union made a presentation stressing key points of the group discussion as outlined below:

a) The status of rehabilitation and reintegration of migrant workers in Nepal.
- Policy implementation is a weaker part despite the formulation of several policies.
- Lacking the data collection system – impractical.
- The negative perspective of society towards returnee migrants.

b) Stakeholders Analysis in addressing rehabilitation and reintegration.
- Social activists.
- Workers and their groups/networkers.
- Local and provincial government.
- Government bodies.
- Service providers/employers organisations.
- Civil society organisations.
- Trade union organisations.
- Educational and training institutions.

c) Advocacy strategy for the recognition of Skills and Skills Development of Prospective Migrant Workers and Reintegration of Returnees in Nepal.
- Self-reconciliation/knowledge regarding their role/ responsibilities and duties.
- Commitment to applying policies.
- Help desk to manage data system.
- Proper use of remittance.
- Skill test and certification.

- Effective analysis of demand and supply.
- Data collection centre for reintegration.

Way Forward

The way forward session was facilitated by ***Mr. Nilambar Badal***, a freelance researcher, in an interactive way of exploring and brainstorming the issues of reintegration and rehabilitation of Nepali migrant workers and personal contribution towards it where the facilitator had given the task to all the participants to make a commitment from the individual as well as from the institutional level for the improvement in the reintegration and rehabilitation of Nepali migrant workers. All the participants wrote down their commitment to work for the advancement of the situation of returnees in Nepal from the individual as well as institutional level by writing it down in the Meta card (used one for one commitment). Participants committed to exploring and researching more on the issues of reintegration and rehabilitation of returnee migrant workers in Nepal.

Closing Session

During the closing session, a short speech was given by ***Mr. Janak Raj Pandey***, NTUC, centre committed member. He expressed his gratitude to Mr. Uddhav Raj Poudel for his hard work and comprehensive analysis of the rehabilitation and reintegration of Nepali migrant workers in the post-covid-19 pandemic situation. Furthermore, he appreciated all the stakeholders/participants for their active involvement and interaction throughout the consultation meeting. Trade unions, CSOs and researchers have to work together for the advancement of labour migration and workers' rights. A detailed study is important in the post-pandemic era of COVID-19 and the implementation of laws and policies is very essential to improve the condition of labour migrants in both country of destination and in the country of origin. Finally, he thanked SARTUC for the interactive platform that connects key stakeholders - trade unions and CSO for discussion on the issues of reintegration and rehabilitation of Nepali migrant workers.

ANNEX - I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

S. No.	Name of the Participants	Organisation	Phone number	Email id
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ANNEX – II

AGENDA FOR THE CONSULTATION MEETING

Venue: Hotel Himalaya, Kupondole, Lalitpur

Date: 24/11/2022, Thursday

13:30 – 14:00	**Registration**	
14:00 – 14:15	Opening remarks and objectives of the consultation	Mr. Laxman Basnet, GS, SARTUC
14:15 – 14:45	Presentation on Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Nepali Migrant Workers in Post-Covid-19 Pandemic Situation: Process and Challenges	Mr. Uddhav Raj Poudyal
14:45 – 15:30	**Group Work** **Facilitator:** Mr. Nilambar Badal, Freelance Researcher • The status of rehabilitation and reintegration of migrant workers in Nepal. • Stakeholders Analysis in addressing rehabilitation and reintegration. • Advocacy strategy for the recognition of Skills and Skills Development of Prospective Migrant Workers and Reintegration of Returnees in Nepal	
15:30 – 16:00	Presentation and discussion	
16:00 – 16:15	Way forward	Mr. Nilambar Badal, NNSM
16: 15 – 16:30	Closing	Mr. Janak Raj Pandey, NTUC
16:30 onwards	Hi-Tea	