



Centre for Social Change

सामाजिक परिवर्तन केन्द्र

Coverage of
Foreign Labour Migration
in Nepali Mainstream Media

Annual
Media Monitoring
Report
2018



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We are pleased to publish our second report on the coverage of foreign labor migration in Nepali media.

Nepali mainstream media, over the past one and half decades have given emphasis on the consistent coverage of news related to foreign labor migration, which ranges from the problems faced by migrant workers to the government's attempts to ensure safe and better-managed migration. However, a consolidated analysis how both print and digital media have covered such news and what has been the impacts of those news for strengthening labor migration governance in the country is lacking. Under that pretext, Center for Social Change (CSC) have produced this report with a general objective of analyzing the changing dynamics of foreign labor migration in Nepal with respect to the attempts made in its governance over the period of 2018. This report is further focused on to identify the volume, trends, and patterns of foreign labor migration as reported by the selected Nepali media, and eventually understand the dynamics and direction of foreign labor migration in the context of Nepal.

It would not be possible to publish this report without strong support given by a number of individuals. First of all, I would like to thank our three researchers Ms. Prashamsha Simkhada, Ms. Reshma Basnet, and Ms. Sarita Barma for their hard work and dedication to collect and synthesize the data obtained through media monitoring. I also would like express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Anuj Tiwari, Mr. Aakash Gautam, Ms. Kalpana Rana Magar, Ms. Prasiddhi Shrestha, Mr. Pawan Roy, and Mr. Anish Khatri for their valuable support while preparing this report.

Prakash Bhattarai, PhD
Research Leader

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Overview and Motivation:	1
Findings:	1
1. Introduction	3
2. Objectives	4
3. Methodology	4
4. Key Findings	5
4.1. An overview of news coverage on foreign labor migration	5
4.2. News coverage during different phases of migration	6
4.3. Differences in coverage in Nepali and English news outlets	7
4.4. Comparing the online and print media coverage	8
4.5. Comparing the public and private media coverage	8
4.6. Thematic news coverage	9
4.7. Theme based highlights and findings	9
5. Conclusion and Recommendations	13
Recommendations to the Government of Nepal:	14
Recommendations to Nepali Media	16

Overview and Motivation:

- Labor migration from Nepal has been growing over the years. With it, the discourse surrounding labor migration has been growing and evolving in the mainstream news media. Despite these changes over the past decade and a half, there are few and limited consolidated analysis of how both print and digital media have covered such news and what impact such coverage has had towards strengthening labor migration governance in the country. To fill in the gap, the Center for Social Change (CSC) has produced this report. Our objective is to analyze the changing dynamics of foreign labor migration in Nepal with respect to the attempts made in its governance during 2018. We also aim to understand the media's coverage of the lived experiences of the people who have been impacted, either directly or indirectly, by labor migration.
- This report is based on the analysis of news covered on foreign labor migration from January to December 2018. Ten mainstream Nepali news portals were randomly selected. Of those, four were print media in Nepali, four were in English, and two were online portals. The four Nepali national dailies were Gorkhapatra, Kantipur, Nagarik Dainik and Annapurna Post. Similarly, four English dailies were The Rising Nepal, The Kathmandu Post, Republica and The Himalayan Times while rest two online portals were Onlinekhabar.com and Setopati.com.

Findings:

- We find that in the 10 dailies covered 1,018 articles related to foreign labor migration. Out of those, 216 news was related to issues before migrating (pre-migration), 319 were related to issues faced during migration, 95 news articles covered issues after migration (post-migration), 169 other articles covered issues faced across all three phases, and the remaining 219 news articles were based on various other issues.
- Based on a comprehensive analysis of trends and patterns of news coverages, CSC has come up with 14 different categories under which most of the news related to foreign labor migration are featured. These categories include: (1) States services to migrant workers and member of their families, (2) Function and efficiencies of government agencies, (3) Migration policies, (4) Recruitment agencies, (5) Fraud cases, (6) Women-specific issues, (7) Human trafficking, (8) Problems faced by migrant workers, (9) Death of migrant workers, (10) Re-integration challenges, (11) Success stories, (12) Remittance, (13) Cost of labor migration, and (14) Others/Miscellaneous.
- Issues related to migration policies were covered the most by the news media with a total of 207 news out of 1018. The media seemed to highlight bilateral agreements of Nepal with popular labor migration destination countries like Malaysia, South Korea and Qatar. The media also followed on the news related to the implementation of those policies.
- There was significant coverage related to the Government of Nepal's (GoN) efforts on policy formulation and implementation. However, the analysis of the articles suggests that GoN is yet to figure out effective policies in addressing the ban on domestic workers (where the majority of them

are women), regular mental health check-up of returnee migrant workers, family reunions, and more importantly, on the effective use of remittance money into productive sectors. Although GoN had planned to attract migrant workers to buy treasury bills, and invest in productive sectors, there was hardly any news on its implementation.

- One particular issue stands out: news media seem to not provide sufficient coverage related to the cost – economic, social, and emotional – of labor migration despite tangentially mentioning the issue in many articles. Only 50 out of 1018 news articles covered issues of cost.
- Foreign labor migration is an issue that affects all of us in Nepal. In order to ensure a secure, better-managed, and fruitful labor migration and support mechanism, all three tiers of government, media and the public need to work together. Through this report, we particularly want to raise attention on the media coverage and argue that the media should enhance its position as an analytic watchdog of the government while consistently and fairly informing public about matters related to different phases of foreign labor migration. If not, challenges associated with foreign labor migration will remain bleak for a long period of time.
- This report indicates the preference of Nepali media to highlight some particular issues related to foreign labor migration. For example, majority of the news coverage (37.3 percent) in the Nepali media is on the government's responses to foreign labor migration through policy and programmatic interventions such as the government opening online permit system and signing the bilateral agreements with various migration destination countries. These predominantly disseminate a positive message regarding the government's contribution to ensuring safe and secure foreign labor migration. The media's role in the coverage of such issue demonstrates that they are keeping the government accountable and is praiseworthy but the media has been limited in taking a critical look at some of the issues.
- Our findings suggest that the Nepali media lack a critical perspective and hence have been limited in highlighting the problems faced by Nepali migrant workers despite GoN's policy and programmatic attempts to address those issues. Likewise, limited news coverage is especially pronounced on post-migration issues such as re-integration challenges and the overall costs of labor migration. For example, only five news articles covered issues of re-integration challenges across ten monitored media during the entire year. Similarly, while there is a widespread belief that returnee migrants are still not able to invest their earnings and skills, we found no such investigative reporting in the media regarding factors or issues that continue to hinder returnees from joining initiating livelihood-generating ventures.

1. INTRODUCTION

Amidst the transition of governance, a significant proportion of Nepal's population continues to rely on foreign employment opportunities. According to the Economic Survey 2018-19 conducted by the Ministry of Finance of Nepal, more than four million Nepali were reported to be licensed migrant workers where little more than 3.8 million of them were male and more than 175 thousand were female. According to the World Bank report 2018, Nepal received remittance worth USD 8,064 million in 2018, and ranked amongst one of the top 20 remittance recipient countries in the world. Various studies suggest deeply prevalent poverty, limited employment opportunity, growing income inequality, limited access to skill-building opportunities, and inefficiency in governance have contributed to a growing trend of foreign labor migration. The Nepal Labor Force Study 2017 posits that majority of Nepali migrant workers are between the ages of 15 to 34 years (Labor Migration for Employment Status, 2017). Given these contexts, foreign labor migration is becoming an issue of concern for both academia and policymaking world to understand its deeper dynamics and impact on the different segments of the society.

Unlike other actors, Nepali mainstream media, over the past one and half decade, have given emphasis on the consistent coverage of news related to foreign labor migration, which ranges from the problems faced by migrant workers to government's attempts to ensure safe and better managed migration. However, a consolidated analysis how both print and digital media have covered such news and what has been the impacts of those news for strengthening labor migration governance in the country is lacking. In this regard, Centre for Social Change (CSC) has been involved in an annual media monitoring task since 2017 through which it aims to provide a holistic and summative understanding of media's role to highlight the core issues relating to foreign labor migration. This task also aimed to provide some critical perspectives on Nepali media's abilities and efficiencies to cover foreign labor migration issue. It is expected that such analysis will contribute to generate knowledge for public consumption regarding the dynamics and direction of Nepal's foreign labor migration. It can also be of a great reference to policymakers to come up with appropriate interventions for strengthening Nepal's labor migration governance.

CSC had published its first media monitoring report in 2018 with the analysis of news coverage of 2017. This report is the continuation of previous work in a more improved version with the analysis of media coverage relating to foreign labor migration published in 2018 in ten selected news outlets.

The reason CSC decided to get involved in the media monitoring is due to increased media's influence in shaping public perception and serving as one the greatest tools to bring forth changes in society through advocacy. Inclusive public opinions and articles, regular follow up on a phenomenon, and satires through means of cartoons have been widely utilized to caution the concerned authorities on the particular subject matter. It has also urged the public to speak against or for the issue. Through advocacy and awareness, media has held an influence in policymaking, including change for the melioration of the society. This same approach can be implemented to bring positive changes in the case of foreign labor migration.

In a country where governmental and non-governmental research institutions and think tanks are weak in influencing national policymaking process, media has served as a bridge between people and policymakers with the flow of investigative information for an informed policymaking process. Similarly, the role of Nepali mainstream media to provide feedbacks on policies can be highly valuable in the context of strengthening and improving migration governance in Nepal. The mainstream Nepali media has adopted their strong reporting bit over the past few years, and in this regard, a close look of Nepali media from foreign labor migration point of view can be considered as an important task to be done to support the evidence-based policymaking in Nepal. In this backdrop, CSC has adopted media monitoring as one of the effective instrument to evaluate the progress as well as understand the initiatives particularly taken by the Government of Nepal (GoN) in addressing the problems associated with foreign labor migration through policy and programmatic interventions. This report further focused on to identify the volume, trends, and patterns of foreign labor migration as reported by the selected Nepali media.

2. OBJECTIVES

The general objective of the report is to analyze the changing dynamics of foreign labor migration in Nepal with respect to the attempts made in its governance over an interval of a year. The specific objective is to assess the stronghold of labor migration as a relevant issue among various mainstream media of Nepal, and trace the changes occurring in foreign labor migration of Nepal.

3. METHODOLOGY

This report is based on the analysis of news covered on foreign labor migration from January to December 2018. Ten mainstream Nepali news outlets were randomly selected; out of which four of the print media in Nepali, four in English and two online portals. The four Nepali national dailies are Gorkhapatra, Kantipur, Nagarik Dainik, and Annapurna Post. Similarly, four English dailies are The Rising Nepal, The Kathmandu Post, Republica, and The Himalayan Times while rest two online portals are Onlinekhabar.com and Setopati.com.

Although there were many news sources to follow to understand the dynamics of coverage of foreign labor migration, CSC has included only ten news portals randomly selected for monitoring purpose. In terms of print media, the selection was straight forward, as they are the widely followed news sources in Nepal and beyond. However, for online portals, there are plenty. It was quite a challenge to pick only two. The CSC team did go through other portals and observed that most of the news were cited from some other sources, and at time even from the print media that CSC had selected to monitor. Likewise, due to

time and resources constraints other dailies and online media are excluded from the monitoring process and report is limited to ten above news outlets only. On top of that, this year's report is continuation of last year's report, where CSC has monitored the same news outlets. There are few online portals such as Ujjayloonline.com and deshparadesh.com, which covers extensively on foreign labour migration have been excluded from the monitoring process.

The media monitoring on foreign labor migration has been conducted to find out both prioritized and ignored themes and the theme selection was based on in-house expert meeting. Fourteen different themes covered under this analysis are: States services to migrant workers and members of their families, Function and efficiencies of government agencies, Migration policies, Recruitment agencies, Fraud cases, Women specific, Human trafficking, Problems faced by migrant workers, Death of migrant workers, Re-integration challenges, Success stories, Remittance, Cost of labor migration, and others.

CSC appointed three researchers to go through the selected newspapers and news portals on a daily basis to put together different news in the defined thematic categories, highlight the key points raised in each news source for understanding the latest trends, patterns and dynamics of foreign labor migration in Nepal. CSC wished to incorporate automated system to web-scraping of relevant news, but as the scope of the study was to cover eight print media, dedicated researchers had to dig all the news manually.

4. KEY FINDINGS

Annual media monitoring provides some useful information on the current scenario of foreign labor migration. This section starts with an overview of news covered in the year 2018. Then covered news are also analyzed under various categories such as English versus Nepali, online versus print, government versus private media and so on. Likewise, this section also highlights information about thematic news coverage.

4.1 An overview of news coverage on foreign labor migration

In the year 2018, the total number of news coverage on foreign labor migration by ten selected news outlets is 1,018.

While analyzing the news outlet specific coverage, Kantipur Daily remains on the top with 196 news coverage, followed by Onlinekhabar with 144 such coverage. Likewise, Annapurna Post, The Kathmandu Post, Gorkhapatra, Nagarik, and Republica have covered 132, 122, 100, 84 and 72 news respectively. Setopati, The Rising Nepal and The Himalayan Times had the least coverage of news on foreign labor migration. These news outlets covered 64, 56, and 48 news respectively.

Coming to the trend of news coverage throughout the year, the first quarter of the year (January-March) comprises the highest news coverage with 26.33 percent of the total news. The second quarter (April- June) comprises 24.8 percent of the total news coverage. There was a slight increase in the third

quarter (July-September) with 25.4 percent while the coverage was least in the fourth quarter (October-December) with 23.5 percent. Overall, there was no significant fluctuation in terms of news coverage from one quarter to another.

4.2 News coverage during different phases of migration

The study team has mainly looked at the coverage of news in the pre, during and post migration phase. A special category named ‘across’ has also been observed under which news and articles that transcended multiple stages of migration has been recorded. The following graph shows the distribution of news coverage by different media outlets at these different phases of migration;

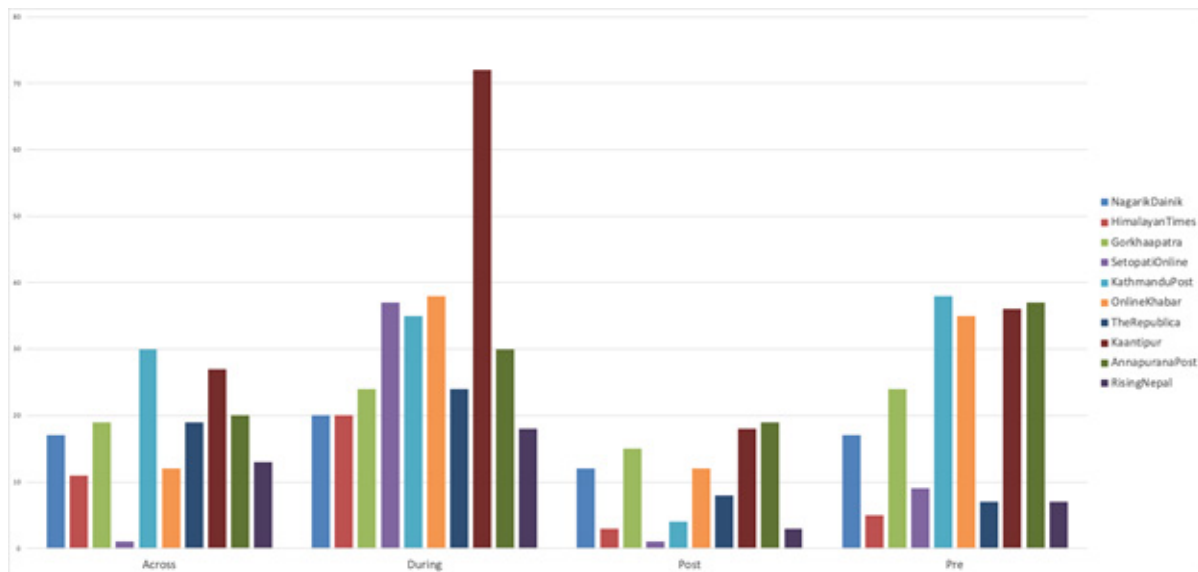


Figure 1: Phase wise coverage of news

While analyzing the news coverage during different phases of migration, out of total 1018 news recorded in 2018, 216 news are focused on pre-migration, 319 on during migration, 95 news on post-migration, 169 news on entire migration cycle, and the rest 219 are related to various issues on foreign labor migration. The graph above demonstrates that the news on ‘during-migration’ process is found to be the highest priority for most of the media. News regarding pre-migration are featured with second priority and ‘across’ as the third priority. However, there is limited coverage of ‘post-migration’ issues.

Although it is not reflected in the chart, collected data reflects that The Kathmandu Post followed by Annapurna Post, Setopati, and Kantipur have covered the most number of news on ‘pre-migration.’ Kantipur, Onlinekhabar, Setopati and The Kathmandu Post have actively covered ‘during migration’ related news with 72, 38, 37, and 35 news respectively. There is less coverage of ‘post-migration’ related news into those newspapers.

Reporting of fraudulent cases have dominated the ‘pre-migration’ category. Critics of the government policies and the problems faced by migrant workers in the destination countries have dominated the ‘during migration’ category. The ‘post-migration’ category have mostly covered success stories of returnees, but fails to expose the problems faced by returnee migrants, which the study team is considered as a critical issue of concern.

4.3 Differences in coverage in Nepali and English news outlets

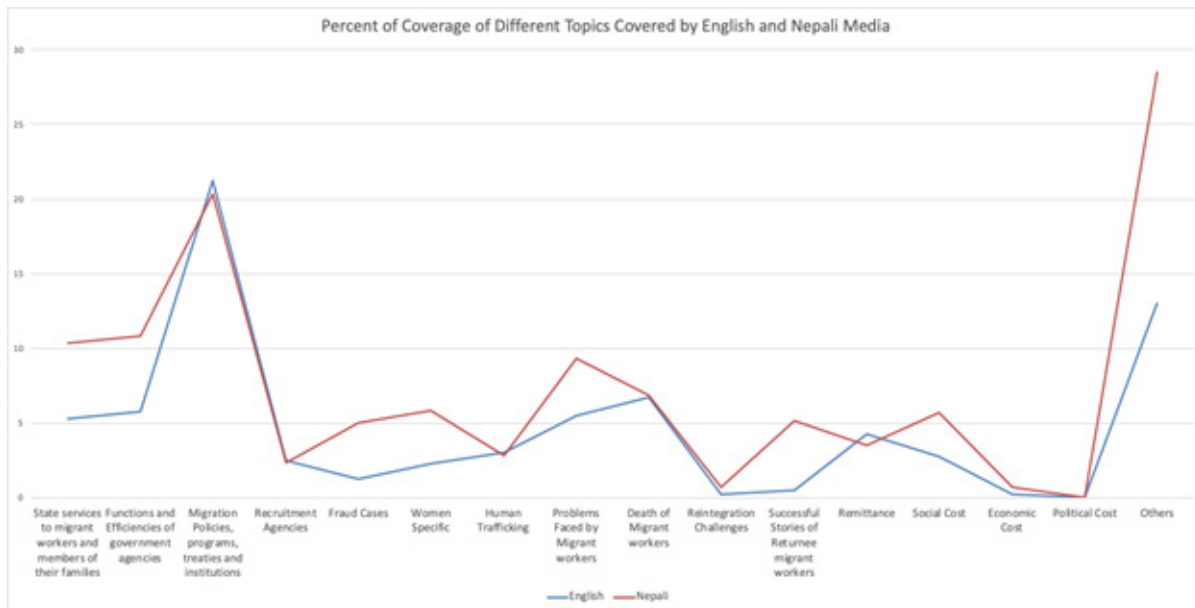


Figure 2: Coverage in Nepali and English news outlets

Among the 10 news outlets selected for the study, six of them are in Nepali and four of them are in English. Although this is not an equal number, while in proportion, news outlets published in Nepali language are found more efficient than English language based outlets in covering the foreign labor migration related news. A total of 720 news (about 71 percent of the total news covered) have been covered by news outlets published in Nepali language, whereas English media have covered only 298 (about 29 percent) news. Among them, Kantipur is the most significant in covering the news (196 out of 720). Among the selected English news outlet, The Kathmandu Post held active news coverage (122 out of 298) followed by Republica (72 out of 298) while The Himalayan Times's coverage was the least. Although both Nepali and English media have their praiseworthy contribution in creating daily news market fairly competitive, English media are more city centric and have particular reader than the general audience which Nepali news outlets can attract easily.

4.4 Comparing the online and print media coverage

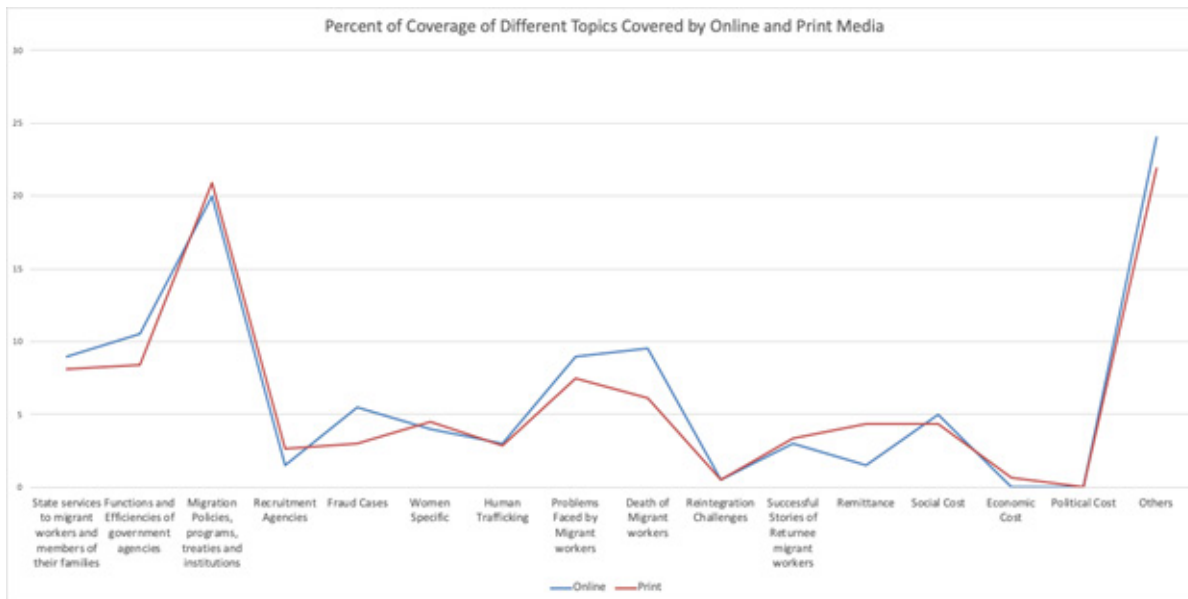


Figure 3: online vs print media coverage of migration news

Among ten news outlets monitored, eight belonged to print media, who covered altogether 810 news (79.57%) in 2018, while rest two: OnlineKhabar and Setopati, the online news portal, together covered 208 news (20.43%) related to foreign labor migration. In average, the coverage of news both in print and online media is more or less the same. However, computing with proportionate representation in news coverage throughout 2018 by two different types of media, online was found to be little more significant with 104 news in average while print media has just covered 101 news in average. Comparatively, news coverage of online media has been reduced by approximately 2 percent than 2017 which accounted 22.42 percent. But, print media increased its coverage by 2 percent approximately than the previous year which was 77.58 percent.

4.5 Comparing the public and private media coverage

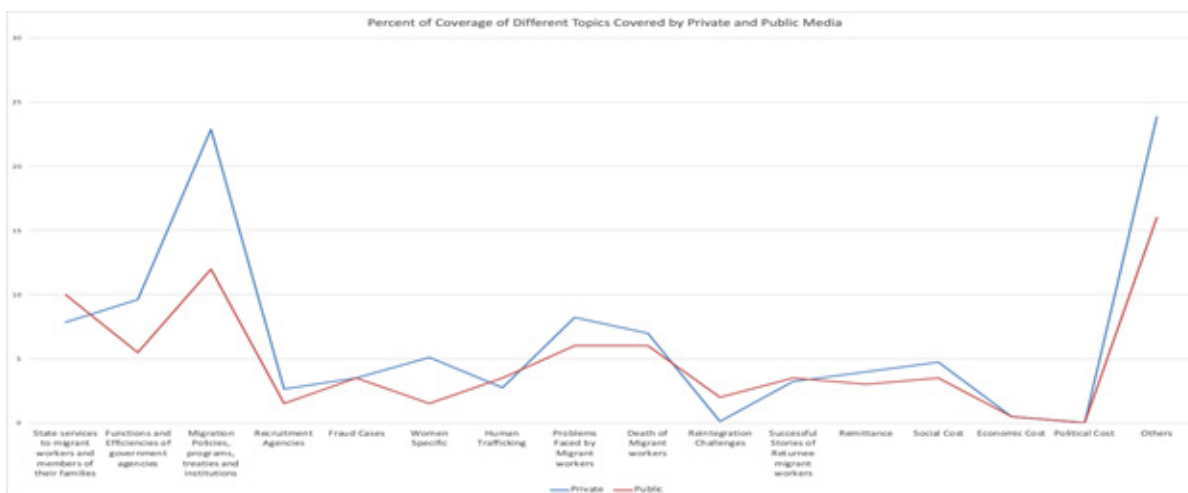


Figure 4: public vs. private media coverage on foreign labor migration

In 2018, privately owned media are found to be more functional and active in news coverage on foreign labor migration than the government owned media. Privately owned media (Kantipur, The Himalayan Times, Kathmandu Post, Nagarik, Onlinekhabar, Setopati, Annapurna Post, and Republica) altogether have covered 862 news (84.67 percent) of total 1018 news, while The Rising Nepal and Gorkhapatra are government owned media, which have covered 156 news altogether (15.32 percent).

As compared to 2017, there has been a slight increase (approximately by 1 percent) in the news coverage by government owned media on foreign labor migration related issues. In the previous year, it was 14.50 percent, which now increased as 15.32 percent. Extending and revising the bilateral contracts and MOU with some of the labor receiving countries like South Korea, Japan and Malaysia might be the possible factors for attracting the government owned media to cover more foreign labor migration issues.

4.6 Thematic news coverage

News coverage on foreign labor migration have been studied under fourteen thematic categories, which includes a) states services to migrant workers and members of their families, b) function and efficiencies of government agencies, c) migration policies, d) recruitment agencies, e) fraud cases, f) women specific, g) human trafficking, h) problems faced by migrant workers, i) death of migrant workers, j) re-integration challenges, k) success stories, l) remittance, m) cost of labor migration and n) others. Among these categories, category of 'others' had the highest number of news with 223 news of total 1018 news (21.90 percent) followed by 'migration policies, treaties and institutions' has shared 207 news (20.33 percent). The 're-integration challenges' category has shared the least news coverage with just 5 news out of the total 1018 news.

The news coverage based on themes were studied on four quarters: first quarter (January-March), second quarter (April-June), third quarter (July-September) and fourth quarter (October-December). The news coverage on 'others' category is found highest in the first quarter (65) and then gradually decreased in the second (59), third (52) and the fourth (47). However, news on 'migration policies' marked gradual rise in the first two quarters with 33 and 36 news respectively. It increased sharply in the third quarter with 71 while it decreased in the last quarter (47). Likewise, fraud and women specific news coverage was high in the first and third quarter and relatively low in the second and third quarter. But, the 'cost of labor migration' and problems faced by migrant workers' coverage was more in second quarter than rest three quarters. 'Human trafficking' and 'Success stories' remained with an average coverage. However, news related to 'recruitment agencies' and 'remittance' remained higher in the first quarter and then there was a dramatic rise and fall. Similar to this, news coverage on 'reintegration challenges' remained absent in the first and third quarter as well as very minimum in the second and last quarter.

4.7 Theme based highlights and findings

This media monitoring task has provided an important picture of pressing issues related to foreign labor migration, which also clearly demonstrate where policy interventions are needed. This section provides an overview of theme based highlights emerged through media monitoring process.

Migration policies, programs, treaties, and institutions remained one of the highest covered topics in Nepali media in 2018. A total of 207 news out of the 1,018 was under this topic, and The Kathmandu Post remained the leading newspaper to cover the relevant news. This newspaper has highlighted this topic over many others and reported particularly on bilateral agreements signed between Nepal and key

labor receiving countries such as Malaysia, South Korea, and Qatar. Majority of the news/articles have demonstrated the efforts made by the GON to create some mutual understandings with labor receiving countries, so that could guarantee the welfare and rights of Nepali migrant workers. Some of the news covered under this category have also highlighted the existing implementation status of the new policies as well as bilateral agreements.

This monitoring found a total of 88 news (out of 1018) covered under the *functions and efficiencies of government agencies*. The Annapurna Post seemed to have the highest coverage on this topic. Majority of the news coverage have particularly focused on the implications of the new regulation and policies of the government on various issues relating to foreign labor migration such as the provisions around medical check-up of aspiring migrants, delivery of information, rescue operation of migrants in crisis, and the monitoring role of the Department of Foreign Employment of the GON. For instance, a news covered under the theme of ‘Labor Permits from All Seven Provinces’ (Kantipur, 10 April 2018, p. 10) depicted the easy access of permit system from different reliable areas. Likewise, another news on the theme of ‘Monitoring of Manpower Agencies’ (Annapurna Post, 13 March 2018, p. 19) reflected that government has concentrated its efforts on regulating the recruitment agencies and its services for safe and better managed foreign labor migration. In sum, news coverage conducted under this topic tended to show a trend where the government is making attempts to improve its efficiency regarding responses to certain mishaps and hazards. This monitoring also showed the government’s efforts in informing Nepali citizens regarding the advantages and disadvantages of labor migration and also rescuing the stranded migrant workers. On the other hand, however, the government took no such visible actions against fraudsters and agents who held partial responsibility for the problems faced.

A total of 83 news (out of 1018) are related to *state services to migrant workers and members of their families* covered within 10 selected news outlets, with *Kantipur* having the highest number of its coverage. Among the news covered, some of them were focused on government’s efforts towards rescuing women from work places in the destination countries when they encountered serious trouble (for example, Kantipur on 7 March 2018 in its page number 2 covered a news titled under “11 Women rescued from Oman”). This news also indicates government’s growing sincerity to take care of Nepali migrant workers under risk in the country of destination.

Another common news under this category was also about government’s efforts to make the pre-migration processes more systematic. One such news was about government’s new initiative on integrated information system on foreign labor migration, which Kantipur Daily covered on 11 September 2018 under the title “Consolidated Information on Foreign Migration” (p. 19). These news reports - most of which was reported in the first two quarters of the year rather than the last two- showed that the GON is focusing many of their policies towards the welfare of migrant workers and the member of their families with actions like establishing four government committees to strengthen migration governance and demanding individual labor approval. These government actions seemed to have the overall trend of taking precautionary measures to guarantee the physical and economic safety of migrant workers. However, on the practical side of the matter, the government frequently seemed to avoid responsibility to hold certain institutions accountable for their actions.

Problems faced by migrant workers was another category observed through media monitoring. In 2018, monitored news outlets covered 78 news under this category and they generally have provided a real picture regarding the problems faced by Nepali migrant workers and violation of their rights due to being ignorant and unskilled. As a result, they struggle to obtain decent jobs and also have to undergo several

miseries physically, mentally and economically and resulting to untimely death. Issues such as lack of access to vocational and occupational training and access to information about working environment, technology, and culture, and language barrier have been exposed by the most of the news coverage.

Death of Nepali migrant workers in the country of destination was another category observed through media monitoring. A total of 68 news are being covered under this topic in 2018. Poor housing as well as working environment are reported as major causes of deaths of Nepali migrant workers in the country of destinations. Deaths due to suicide, cardiac attacks, and work field related accidents are reported higher in Gulf countries. In some cases, the deaths of Nepali migrant workers are found very suspicious, which often created miserable socio-economic as well as psychological impacts on their families. For example, the unexpected death of Durga Bahadur Khatri Saudi Arabia left the whole village grief-stricken. His death was declared as a natural death which his family does not believe (Republica, 11 October, pg. 4).

Cost of labor migration was another important category of scrutiny and a total of 50 news are found among the 1018 news. These news are mostly focused on the social cost (45 news out of 50) than the economic and political cost of migration. The coverage of news on this category indicates that Nepalese society and family should be ready to pay the high social cost of foreign labor migration, as many of these news are about the impacts of labor migration at societal level. Most of the news under this category highlights that women, children, spouse and elderly members in the family are highly impacted by foreign labor migration. It has depleted the family structure and societal value with divorces cases, polygamy, family fragmentation, and disputes. Also it reflects miserable realities of ‘zero gain and uncertainty of future’ of foreign employment when sent money has no output. News like, “foreign labor migration increased divorces cases in Nepal” (Setopati, 03 November) reflects a sad reality of foreign employment when sent money has no output and ruined the family structure as well.

Women in foreign labor migration was found to be another prominent issue scrutinized under the media monitoring. Out of the 44 news covered under the *women specific* category, Kantipur daily, by itself has covered 19 such news. Most news covered under this category highlights the fraudulent behaviors of recruitment agencies towards women. Women, especially those who are illiterate and unskilled are constantly cheated by agencies. As a response, the GON is taking initiatives to prevent the trafficking of women wherever possible. However, such actions are limited due to Nepal’s open border with India and many cases were reported on circumventing of Nepali law, when one travels via India. The illegal nature of this action also makes it more difficult for women to receive proper aid. News covered under this category also highlighted the fact that government policies have failed to adequately address the problems faced by women who were motivated to go for foreign employment. As a result, frequency of women going abroad through undocumented and illegal way is in increasing trend. For instance, the existing government policy prohibits Nepali women to go for domestic work related employment in specific Gulf countries, but the tendency of going to those countries through different channels has been increased in the past (The Rising Nepal, 22 December 2018, p. 6). Women who returned home on periodic leave from their work from Gulf countries are facing problems to go back to continue their work. As a result, there are cases where women are not returning home for several years, which has adversely impacted on their family reunion and further contributed to other social problems such as divorce, separation, as well as mental health issues.

Women and girls are the biggest targets of human trafficking with a great threat that comes from the processes of modernization and globalization. Both the media and the government have made attempts to prevent such activities. Rescue efforts are common in the India-Nepal border with the help of the

police. Most of the news coverage highlighted the issue of open border to India has become an easy transit for traffickers reflecting lack of strict and mechanized government action. Increased third-country trafficking of Nepali girls and women via Nepal-India open border and other countries such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka can be considered as an alarming picture to address the new dynamics and dimensions of human trafficking. News reports have shown a trend of agents deceiving women and girls into being trafficked by initially showing them a false picture of what they can help the individuals achieve.

Remittance remained another important category of media monitoring under which 38 news are recorded in 2018 from the 10 selected news outlets. Covered news analyzes the gap between the remittance received and saving resulting to the problem in Balance of Payment (BOP) of Nepal. It shows that money is being utilized for daily requirements only and not for any productive purposes. As a result, the state's economic growth is still stagnant and no growth in economic opportunities. There is no particular mechanism to administer the problem. Likewise, Nepal is sending large number of revenue to host countries that depletes its BOP. This issue became dominant in most of the news coverage. For instance, there was a news in Republica titled under "Despite remittance growth, the country's balance of payment position worsened in the second of FY 2018/19" (Republica, 31 Oct, pg.8).

Fraud cases remained another category of media monitoring under which 35 news have been covered. Dream of obtaining high wages and greater opportunities have often lured illiterate and unskilled workers into jobs which they were not rightly informed about. A news covered in Nagarik Daily on 22 December 2018 highlighted that 12 youth from Sunsari and Morang sought help from the government, as they were cheated by fraudster in the name of sending them for good foreign employment opportunities. This kind of fraud committed by agencies were mainly targeted towards people outside and further away from Kathmandu. While on the other hand, such news also proved that safe migration related information and awareness raising programs conducted by NGOs and government have not reached out to the target groups, which eventually supported individuals involved in fraudulent activities.

Media Monitoring team has recorded a total of 33 news in 2018 under the category of *success stories*. Majority of such coverage have prioritized the successful enterprises run by returnee migrants in the home country or hometown and their contribution to nation building through the best utilization of acquired skills and earned money during foreign employment. News report shows that returnee migrants are mostly engaged in agro-business. The Annapurna Post daily on 6 October, 2018 covered a news of Rameshwor Basi, who as a returnee from the Gulf, started vegetable farming and expanded his business spending 40 lakhs in infrastructures (Annapurna Post, 06 October 2018). Similar news are covered from other news outlets as well.

There has been only 24 news coverage on *recruitment agencies* category during the entire year in 2018. *Republica* and *Kantipur* had the most coverage on this topic with 6 news in each. One crucial news highlighted under this category remained the government's decision to cancel the registration of 197 recruitment agencies who are proven to be involved in fraudulent cases or the exploitation of migrant workers (*Gorkhapatra*, 21 June 2018, p. 17). Likewise, other news under under this theme have claimed that recruitment agencies may have been more responsible if the government had sanctioned negative reinforcements against those who had been fraudulent. The media itself seemed to have a motive of discouraging fraudulent actions of agencies.

Reintegration challenges of returnee migrant workers was another category of media monitoring under which only 5 news were covered in the monitored news portal in 2018. Covered news suggest that government lack a proper plan and programs to collaborate with returnee migrants for their adequate reintegration. As a result, returnee migrants are facing a number of social, cultural and economic challenges that eventually push them to return for foreign employment. For instance, a news published in Gorkhapatra daily on 05 May 2018 highlights that returnee migrants from Gulf countries are in dilemma to invest their income into business, as they lack necessary information regarding the process of setting up a company and doing business. Situation of the country has further demotivated them to work here after returning from abroad (Gorkhapatra, 05 May, pg. 2).

The category *others* consist 223 news covered by ten different media in 2018. Covered news specially analyzed the impact of bilateral agreements and treaties with different labor receiving countries. Such news are also focused on analyzing the causes of second-generation migration and their impacts on the development processes of Nepal. Other news under this category are also focused on migration facts and figures. For instance, The Kathmandu Post on 2 April 2019 covered a news that 82000 Nepalese applied online for the proficiency in Korean Language Test” (The Kathmandu Post, 02 April, pg. 01).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report indicates the preference of Nepali media to highlight some particular issues related to foreign labor migration. For example, majority of the news coverage (37.3 percent) in the Nepali media are on government’s responses to foreign labor migration through policy and programmatic interventions. Government opening online permit system, signing the bilateral agreements with various labor receiving countries, government-to-government talks with labors receiving countries, and devising strict regulations over manpower agencies are some of the issues covered in the Nepali media, which disseminates a positive message on government’s contribution to ensure safe, secure and better managed foreign labor migration. Nepali media’s role on highlighting these issues is praiseworthy, as it demonstrates that they are closely watching the activities of the government, and exposing such information for public consumptions. However, Nepali media have failed to report many other critical issues, especially post-migration related such as re-integration challenges and the costs of labor migration. While Nepali media has highlighted degrading social and familial structures and physical and mental miseries of migrant workers in the destination countries, only 5 news related to re-integration challenges have been reported across ten monitored media during the entire year. Since there is a widespread believe that returnee migrants are still not able to invest their earnings and skills in their home country. However, there is no such investigative reporting found in the media regarding the factors behind the lack of favorable entrepreneurship environment for returnee migrants and its consequences.

Similarly, Nepali media have covered some news and articles on the success stories but failed to present the failure stories of returnee migrant workers and the consequences of those failures. Nepali media also lack some critical perspectives regarding the reasons behind the problems faced by Nepali migrant workers despite government’s policy and programmatic attempts to address those issues. Also, few

coverage of fraudulent cases has put forth a question, whether fraudulent cases have decreased or media have failed to report them? While the functions of government and policies on foreign labor migration certainly have progressed over the past few years, it is still far from being efficient. The government hasn't been able to punish or control individuals/institutions involved in fraudulent cases and trafficking (especially women and girls) via India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and other transit countries.

Overall, findings of the media monitoring task has conveyed a message that despite introducing a number of policies and programs on foreign labor migration, the major problems and challenges associated with it have not stopped or addressed in an adequate manner. Problems which migrant workers are encountered since the last two decades are more or less the same. Some significant changes observed in the past few years is about an improved insurance provisions through which migrants and members of their families are able to claim compensations in the case of death and disability of migrants in the destination countries. Another important improvement observed in the past few years is related to document verification and labor permit issuing system, which may be the factors behind slight decrease in fraudulent practices. However, overall, the findings of the media monitoring task suggest that despite introducing a number of policies and programs on foreign labor migration, the majority of the problems and challenges associated with it have not been adequately addressed. Issues such as the cost of recruitments, awareness and outreach on safe migration, and provisions for financial literacy are yet to be addressed effectively. Similarly, death of migrant workers in the destination countries due to poor working and housing conditions and road accidents have increased significantly over the years and yet we found no strong response from the government addressing this issue.

Based on our analysis, we make a number of recommendations to the government and the media:

Recommendations to the Government of Nepal:

- We find that the GoN has made limited efforts in tracking and monitoring the implemented policies. In this regard, we recommend that the GoN, particularly the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security, should develop an indicator-based tracking system through which they can measure the progress on the implementation of policies and programs as well as the functioning status of different institutions responsible for the management and regulation of foreign labor migration. Results obtained through the proposed tracking system should be disseminated among the public on a regular basis.
- Similarly, there is a need for a periodic review of the implementation status of bilateral agreements made by the GoN. Thus, we recommend that the GoN should proactively engage in the periodic review of bilateral agreements and negotiate with labor migrant-receiving countries to adjust those agreements as per the changed context. Likewise, more inter-state cooperation (both formal and informal) is needed to protect migrant workers, especially those who are unskilled and/or are engaged in hazardous sectors in the destination countries.
- Over the past few years, the GoN has increased its support to migrant workers and their family members. However, the existing services are not sufficient to address their psychosocial needs. Thus, we recommend the GoN to implement an extensive psychosocial support program focusing on migrant workers who are in need in the destination countries and their family members in the home country. Provision of comprehensive psychosocial support programs would contribute to

reducing the social cost of labor migration. The government can encourage the non-governmental organizations and donor community to extend their supports in this matter.

- Although there are some provisions for compensations through insurance scheme in case of death and disability of migrant workers, it has been found to be insufficient. We recommend that the GoN initiate a more comprehensive welfare fund to provide long term health and education support to the migrants and their families.
- Workplace and health-related problems faced by Nepali migrant workers regardless of their status have been a common and unresolved concern for a significant period of time, and our media monitoring report reveals the same. We recommend that GoN carry out a detailed study in major destination countries for identifying the problems and formulating a bilaterally-agreed solution to address the common problems faced by migrant workers.
- Female migrant workers are at a position of greater vulnerability. However, there are no specific policies or programs that ensure women's safety and security in destination countries. In fact, the existing policy that restricts women working in specific GCC countries has promoted irregular and illegal migration to those countries and thereby placed female migrant workers at a greater vulnerability. The need is for a more sensitive and holistic approach; one that does not curb their rights to work but rather takes a supporting and caring measure to empower people before, during and after migration. These steps have to be at different levels: low-level ones such as hiring women staff members in embassies and as counselors in those embassies to higher-level policies such as lifting restrictions and establishing emergency helplines in destination countries.
- This report also reveals a growing trend of human trafficking being disguised as labor migration. We recommend the GoN to take some preventive as well as curative measures to mitigate this issue. We strongly believe in the need for greater awareness among aspirant migrants. There is also a need for effective coordination between various ministries, the police, and existing anti-trafficking NGOs to tackle trafficking effectively. Likewise, effective document verification process, tight screening at the airports, strong vigilance in border checkpoints, and integration of strong anti-trafficking component in the existing Foreign Employment Act could help in addressing the problem of labor migration driven human trafficking.
- The GoN has to play a facilitative role in simplifying remittance transfer procedures to incentivize people in using legal financial institutions for transfer. Simultaneously, it is necessary to discourage the use of informal channels of remittances. More importantly, comprehensive financial literacy programs for aspirants, migrants and their family is necessary.
- This report places urgency to empower aspirants and migrants particularly to protect from fraud. We strongly recommend information dissemination campaigns to aware the aspirant migrants about actual legal proceedings of moving to another country. We also recommend that the records of licensed recruitment agencies and blacklisted agencies should be made available to the public and aspirants should be encouraged to use the information. Likewise, enforcing regulations and periodic evaluations of recruitment agencies to ensure they are complying to the legal process and enforcing penalties on those that fail is recommended.

- Furthermore, there is a need for a comprehensive study that understands the challenges and provides opportunities to returnee migrants so that they can be better reintegrated. We believe that setting up provisions for vocational training, financial and legal support, and psycho-social counseling would go a long way in enriching the human capital.
- Finally, the issues are multi-dimensional and complex. GoN alone cannot tackle it all so we recommended that it form an executive network with provincial and local governments as well as with non-government sectors and development partners to implement the given recommendations.

Recommendations to Nepali Media:

- The media has the responsibility to enforce accountability upon the government and other stakeholders. The media also has the responsibility to inform the public and ensure greater transparency in the entire labor migration process. We laud the effort the media has placed in creating an environment of accountability. We recommend the media to go further and probe diverse stakeholders and provide critical analysis of this complex situation. In this regard, we see a need for more investigative reporting, going beyond what is on the surface, and pushing all the stakeholders to be accountable. Investigative reporting on issues around reintegration challenges, cost of labor migration, and implementation status of bilateral agreements are few that should be taken into consideration in the coming years.



Centre for Social Change

सामाजिक परिवर्तन केन्द्र

Published by

Centre for Social Change

New Baneswor-10, Kathmandu, Nepal

Website: www.socialchange.org.np

Email: nepal.socialchange@gmail.com

August 2019