

# Migration in Nepal: a lighthearted social perspective

## Abstract

Due to socioeconomic goals, historical trends, and international influences, migration significantly alters Nepalese society. The societal and economic effects of migration are examined in this paper, with particular attention paid to shifting family dynamics, changing romantic relationships, and the reliance on remittances. The article examines how migration affects Nepal's national development with a combination of comedy and perceptive anecdotes, ranging from supporting rural communities to igniting discussions about brain drain and societal stereotypes. A thorough picture of migration as a force affecting Nepalese life is presented by combining statistical facts with cultural tales.

**Keywords:** migration, nepal, social change, remittances, brain gain, family dynamics

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**Shubhechha Ghimire**

MPhil/PhD Scholar, Rautahat, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

**Correspondence:** Shubhechha Ghimire, MPhil/PhD Scholar, Rautahat, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

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## Introduction

Nepal's socioeconomic environment has always been entwined with migration, which has a huge impact on its societal and cultural aspects. A closer examination reveals a dynamic process characterized by both opportunities and problems, despite the media's tendency to depict migration as a crisis that will leave a nation "empty." This review provides a detailed understanding of migration's significance in Nepalese society by examining it from historical viewpoints, societal implications, and statistical evidence.

## Findings and discussion

### Historical perspectives on Nepalese migration

Nepal has a long history of migration, with notable movements taking place throughout the Rana era and the years after the Sugauli Treaty in 1816. According to historical records, Nepali laborers, artists, and soldiers migrated to Tibet, India, and Burma in response to political events and economic possibilities.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the British accepted Nepalis as a "martial race" following the British-Nepal War and enlisted them in the army. Since there were severe limitations on international travel during the Panchayat era, obtaining a passport was challenging. After 1990, when migration laws were liberalized, the number of Nepalis looking for work overseas skyrocketed.<sup>2</sup>

### The never-ending movement cycle

Nepal's socioeconomic fabric has historically included migration, which presents both opportunities and challenges. When viewed from a societal viewpoint, migration brings humor, resilience, and revolutionary changes, in contrast to the simplistic narrative that the country is "emptying out."

### An overview of migration trends in statistics

66,835 of the 1.674 million Nepalis who migrated overseas in 2024 did so to settle down permanently. For 856,422 people, employment was the primary reason for migration.<sup>3</sup> Remittances, which account for around 25% of GDP, are essential to maintaining Nepal's economy.<sup>4</sup>

### Not only deserted airports

Large crowds at Tribhuvan International Airport are frequently featured in Nepali social media posts. The humorous reality, however, is that at least five family members get together for heartfelt farewells

for each departing traveler. Security guards remark that these events are more about making sure there are spectacular welcomes and farewells than they are about migration. Migration profoundly alters community dynamics and family structures. Women who are left behind frequently take on more responsibility, which can result in societal pressures as well as empowerment. Tribhuvan International Airport frequently hosts heartfelt farewells and happy reunions, which are playfully highlighted by the phenomena of "airport crowds".<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, remittances have changed rural economies, allowing many families to have better access to healthcare, education, and living standards.<sup>6</sup> But problems still exist, such as the socioeconomic consequences of extended family separations and the exploitation of foreign labor.<sup>4</sup>

### Influence from parents and neighbors: the "look at them" syndrome

Despite the pandemic-related reduction in previous years, more than 112,593 people received no-objection certificates (NOC) to study abroad in the fiscal year 2023–2024.<sup>7</sup> The causes of this trend touch on ingrained societal pressures in addition to Nepal's limited educational options. Parents frequently use phrases like "Look at him, same age as you, already settled abroad!" to encourage their kids to pursue education overseas. The chorus is joined by neighbors who gloat, "Her daughter is so proud because she already sends money home!" You should too. Studying abroad is not only an educational choice in this cutthroat climate, but it is also a status symbol.

Students are traveling overseas in large numbers these days, whether for better opportunities or just for show. Exams appear to serve more as a means of admission to international universities than as a measure of academic achievement in Nepal, which makes it difficult for colleges and universities to meet their seat quotas.

### Migration, family, and love: changing dynamics

According to the 2021 National Census, women who are single and have been separated, divorced, widowed, or have remained unmarried after the age of 35 make up 7.3% of Nepal's population.<sup>8</sup> Women whose husbands remarried overseas after moving for work are also included in this statistic (MOHP, 2022). The increase in overseas work has brought about a considerable change in the dynamics of families and couples. Social presumptions can arise when wives spend a long amount of time overseas. "She must be having an affair; her husband

is away!” is one of the many stories and gossip around her. Given the biological and emotional requirements of people who are separated by distance, some of these presumptions might be accurate. However, these accusations are frequently unfounded and motivated by societal bias.

However, some husbands choose to leave their home country to provide a better life for their family, only to be accused of adultery when they return. Long-term separation stress and unfulfilled needs might occasionally cause both partners to have extramarital affairs, which raises the divorce rate. In addition to complicating relationship dynamics, migration has spawned romantic tales. An endless number of anecdotes have been told at family get-togethers because of the flourishing cross-border romances, especially with Indian neighbors. Thus, migration has become a source of both tragic events and touching stories.<sup>9</sup>

### Remittances: a double-edged sword?

According to data released by Nepal Rastra Bank, remittances by mid-January 2024 reached NPR 122 billion for the month of Poush alone. On average, remittances have exceeded NPR 100 billion this year, showing a modest 4.1% increase compared to a 22.2% surge last year. In US dollar terms, remittances grew by only 1.1%, reaching USD 558 million, down from a 19.5% increase in the previous year. Even though remittances clearly support many people and make a substantial contribution to Nepal’s economy, it begs the question: should the nation be proud of its excessive reliance on foreign aid? Remittances frequently represent a bittersweet beginning for the families left behind—a means of starting again without their loved ones. Remittances are occasionally viewed as “love letters with banknotes” from absent spouses in amusing social discourse, which helps to ease the tension in even the tensest relationships. But depending too much on remittances is not a sustainable long-term answer. Critics frequently joke, “If money could buy happiness, half of Nepal would already be blissfully content.”

### Brain gain or brain drain?

The recent launch of the Brain Gain Center is a prime example of initiatives to leverage the knowledge of accomplished Nepalis outside. The fact that returning scholars may return with strange grievances about missing tasty dal bhat (lentil soup) while overseas, in addition to their knowledge, is amusing.<sup>2</sup> Although it has historically been worried about brain drain, Nepal today sees the opportunity to use the talents and expertise of returnees to further its own development.

### A world village

In actuality, the “migration crisis” may not be as serious as is often depicted. Indian teenagers can be found fixing cars in Kathmandu, much as Nepalis travel to Korea and the Gulf for employment. It’s

humorous that everyone seems to be looking for better opportunities, and it’s a two-way street.<sup>10</sup>

### Migration stories and adaptability

Despite worries about an “emptying country,” the humor and resiliency of society are noteworthy. The idea that busy airports are emblems of mass migration ignores the reality that many migrants return with improved financial and skill levels.<sup>11</sup>

### Conclusion

In Nepal, migration is a dynamic force that promotes economic resilience and societal change rather than being a disaster. Greater community cohesiveness and sustainable development can be achieved by embracing the opportunities and difficulties it offers.

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### Conflicts of Interest

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