



Brief on Work in Freedom Programme in Nepal

» Women and girls on the move in Nepal

For many in Nepal, migration is an important alternative to the realities of home. People move long distances in pursuit of jobs for varying reasons ranging from economic aspirations or loss of habitat resulting from processes of economic transformation, poverty, climate change or gender based violence. While some migrate internally, many also migrate abroad. For women and girls, especially of indigenous, dalit or low-income backgrounds, the experience of further impoverishment and discrimination makes migration a viable option. While many are able to improve their livelihoods in cities at home or abroad, many also face deception by unscrupulous labour recruiters or exploitation by employers – practices that amount to forced labour.

The Work in Freedom programme adopts an integrated and targeted approach to reduce vulnerability to trafficking of women and girls in South Asian countries of origin (Bangladesh, India and Nepal) and in selected destination countries (India, Jordan and Lebanon). It expects to reach at least 150,000 women and girls including 80,000 from Nepal by 2018.

» Mobility by choice

The programme consists of tailored interventions to support more informed and prepared migration both by directly targeting migrants and by working with groups and institutions that work with migrants.



On the one hand interventions strengthen both migrants and aspiring migrants' understanding of their own rights in the context of patriarchy, mobility and work. This includes building women's capacity to assert their rights in likely situations of potential disempowerment such as access to entitlements, relations with relatives, labour recruiters, agents of different types, border officials, employers and other stakeholders. From another angle the programme strengthens the capacity of local and regional groups and institutions to better guarantee labour mobility and livelihood options.

The Work in Freedom Programme works in close coordination with the Ministry of Labour and partners with central trade unions, District Development Committees and partner organisations such as WOREC in Morang, POURAKHI in Dolakha, ABC Nepal in Rupandehi and People Forum in Chitwan.

More than 67,000 women in Nepal have already benefited from interventions such as door to door visits, orientation sessions, referral services, pre-decision counseling sessions, street drama, life skill training and other outreach initiatives to promote more informed migration and livelihood choices. The programme builds-on, rather than adds-on, community groups, structures and programmes that support women's empowerment, employment and social protection.



Fair recruitment to decent jobs

In Nepal, the pathways to jobs in domestic and garment work within the region or to the Middle East are intersected by various agents or contractors in an environment shaped by multiple rules and practices determining the mobility of aspiring workers. The fluidity and segmentation of labour supply chains are such that none of the key stakeholders such as labour recruiters, regulators and even employers can guarantee on their own, a fair migration outcome for any worker. In spite of strong public calls to protect migrating women from the pitfalls of trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery, in practice the presumed responsibility of ensuring fair migration outcomes is eroded among multiple formal and informal stakeholders.



Migrants therefore face multiple risks and challenges in their efforts to find jobs such as paying exorbitant fees, taking out high-interest loans ahead of their departure that can lead them into debt bondage, transit through India at a high cost, deception about the nature and conditions of work, having contracts substituted by less favourable ones on arrival, having passports confiscated, being subject to illegal wage deductions, threats or physical violence.

Work in Freedom works with employers, with labour recruiters, workers and regulators both in the places of origin and destination of migrant workers, to support better regulation and practices of recruitment. It reviews laws and regulations on foreign employment and recruitment, and it also tests and assesses recruitment practices. It also works with migrant rights organizations and trade unions to increase accountability in the recruitment process.

The Work in Freedom programme has engaged the Ministry of Labour, trade unions and the National Association of Foreign Employment Agencies in improving regulations and practices of recruitment. Following advocacy and technical guidance by the Work in Freedom programme, the government of Nepal introduced a free visa and free ticket policy for the GCC countries and Malaysia.

Law and policies for dignity and decent work for migrant garment and domestic workers

While the programme provides technical inputs in destination countries to improve laws, policies and practices that affect the safety and dignity of migrant workers, the programme also provides technical guidance on laws, policies and administrative practices in Nepal. At the request of the Government of Nepal, the Work in Freedom Programme has provided technical guidance on the Foreign Employment Act, Guidelines for Migrant Domestic Workers and the Free Ticket Free Visa Policy. ILO has reviewed these laws and regulations, organized consultations with social partners and given feedback to the Government. Following the presentation of its study *No Easy Exit, Migration Bans affecting Women from Nepal (ILO, 2015)*, the Government of Nepal introduced migrant domestic workers guidelines and reduced the ban of women migrating from 30 to 24 years of age. Further policy advocacy will focus on ensuring that a more enabling institutional and legal framework to uphold the rights of women migrant workers is in place for women departing from Nepal, with a particular focus on domestic work (e.g. implementation of the Domestic Workers Guidelines), and linking women empowerment and community interventions to the national employment and social protection policy framework.



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