

## General Article

# Migration and HIV in Nepal

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### Abstract

*Nepal has been experiencing an increasing volume of internal and international migration as well as an increasing incidence of the reported statistics of Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV). There was a well established migration stream from western to eastern along the hills before 1950s. Thereafter, the migration stream changed from the highlands to the lowlands after 1950s with a success of malaria eradication programme in tarai (lowlands) region. In contrast, the recent migration stream seems a reverse direction from the lowlands to the highlands in accordance with the census figure of 2011. The flow of migration direction (south-north) is generally figured out to political disorder/strike in the tarai region, however, further research is needed to find out reasons of directional change in inter-regional migration. Likewise, proportion of people emigrating to India has remarkably declined to 37 percent in the 2011 census while comparing the former 2001 census in which more than 75 percent of emigrants had made their destination to India. Nepalese emigrants are more likely to have greater economic opportunities in other countries rather than in India these days. Prevalence of HIV and AIDS [Acquired Immuno-deficiency Syndrome] has been increasing over the years, irrespective of migration direction and destination at both internal and international levels.*

**Keywords:** Emigration; HIV; immigration; interregional migration

### Introduction

Nepal has been experiencing an increasing volume of internal migration after the control of endemic malaria in the tarai and inner tarai valleys since late 1950s (Gurung, 1989; Subedi 1988). Similarly, the government of Nepal emphasized on emigration after the introduction of democracy in the country in 1990 to lessen the burden of late adolescents and youths

in the country with reference to their job demands (KC, 2004). Migrant population both inside and outside the country is also highly vulnerable to HIV and AIDS (KC 2004; Nepal, 2007). With an increasing volume of internal and international migration, there is accelerating HIV and AIDS incidence in Nepal over the years. The registered statistics of Nepal depicts that there are more than 25 thousands people living with HIV in Nepal (NCASC, 2015). The figure of people living with HIV (PLHIV) in the country is expected to be higher than the registered statistics as there are still such PLHIV who do not want to disclose their HIV status in Nepal (Neupane & Mishra, 2014). The purpose of this paper is to analyse internal and international migration for the last few decades as well as HIV situation of the country. First, this paper reviews historical phenomena of internal migration and directions of migration streams within the country before 1950s as well as after the success of malaria eradication programme in the tarai areas. Secondly, this paper focuses on international movement of people throughout the history of Nepal in general, and an attempt will be made to analyse both immigration and emigration after 1950s. Finally, this paper analyses epidemiologic data of HIV and AIDS in Nepal in the changing context of migration implications.

### **Data and Methods**

This paper has followed various data sources from Nepalese migration history to population censuses and organizational information, especially with regard to internal and international migration as well as information on HIV. This paper focuses on general patterns of internal and international migration and the epidemic of HIV and AIDS in Nepal. In the context of dearth of literature dealing with migration and the epidemic of HIV, this is expected to provide some general and broad picture of internal and international migration in Nepal before 1950s based on the historical manuscript. This paper focuses on volumes and patterns of internal and international migration from 1950s onwards based on the various censuses data, and their implications on increasing trends of HIV in Nepal from the late 1980s onwards with HIV discovery (diagnosis). A matrix form is used to analyse internal migration data at the regional level. The epidemic of HIV is classified by age and sex, to some extent from the data obtained in

the government department, namely, National Centre for HIV and AIDS (NCASC). This paper is mainly based on the descriptive analysis in view of absolute dearth of required data for depth analysis of migration and the epidemic of HIV and AIDS.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Internal Migration**

Migration in Nepal is not a new phenomenon. It has occurred throughout history. Early migration flows in Nepal were mainly from west to east along the hills. The attraction was the wet fertile lands in the eastern hills of the country (Subedi 1988; Gurung, 1989). Since the 1950s, the direction of the flow has changed and the dominant direction has remained towards southern part of Nepal, from highlands to the lowlands. In contrast to the direction (highlands-lowlands), the first time in Nepal in the 2011 census, migration direction changed from the lowlands to highlands (See Table 1). Heavy rainfall together with flood in 1954 made the hilly people's lives extremely miserable. The natural calamities compelled the then Nepal Government think of resettlement programme with a view to migrate the hilly people into the lowlands. The heavy flood of 1954 also made the life difficult in the hills (Gurung, 1989). The then Government realized that it would be prudent to encourage the hill people to settle in other parts of the country, especially in the tarai region. The malaria infested tarai region seemed to be only the place to settle the hill people. In its first economic development plan of 1956-61, the Government launched a programme to eradicate malaria and settle the people in Chitwan, one of the inner tarai areas (Gurung 1989). The dense forests of the other tarai areas were also gradually cleared and combined with the malaria eradication program and the government settled the hill people there. Nepal has experienced an increasing volume of internal migration since the introduction of first development plan.

The direction of heavy migration flow had been from the hills and mountains to the tarai till the 2001 census and the 2011 census showed the reverse direction from the lowlands to the highlands. A visible reason behind the reverse direction of interregional migration may be disorder in the tarai region, however, further research is needed to investigate the

main reasons of the reverse direction in contrast to the earlier flow of the highlands to the lowlands. Table 1 provides data on the volume and net-migration of inter-regional migration during the period 1971-2011. The number of the inter-regional migrants increased from 445,128 in 1971 to 2088,170 persons in 2011.

**Table 1**  
**Inter-regional Migrants by Ecological Regions, 1971-2011**

Place of Origin	Place of Destination			Total	Out-migration (%)	Net-migration
	Mountain	Hill	Tarai			
<b>1971</b>						
Mountain	-	15667	33990	49657	11.1	-39959
Hill	9258	-	376074	385332	86.6	-359966
Tarai	440	9699	-	10139	2.3	+399925
Total	9698	25366	410064	445128	100.0	
In-migration (%)	2.2	5.7	92.1	100.0		
<b>1981</b>						
Mountain	-	134254	162832	297086	31.9	-261467
Hill	33423	-	561211	594634	64.0	-424711
Tarai	2196	35669	-	37865	4.1	+686178
Total	35619	169923	724043	929585	100.0	
In-migration (%)	3.8	18.3	77.9	100.0		
<b>1991</b>						
Mountain	-	76,503	121,826	198,329	16.1	- 161655
Hill	32,003	-	895,888	927,891	75.5	- 753923
Tarai	4,671	97,465	-	102,136	8.3	+ 915578
Total	36,674	173,968	1,017,714	1,228,356	100.0	
In-migration (%)	3.0	14.2	82.9	100		
<b>2001</b>						
Mountain	-	125,597	169,825	295,422	17.1	- 255103
Hill	33,896	-	1,157,035	1,190,930	68.9	- 830759
Tarai	6,424	234,574	-	240,998	14.0	+ 1085862
Total	40,319	360,171	1,326,860	1,727,350	100.0	
In-migration (%)	2.3	20.9	76.8	100.0		
<b>2011</b>						
Mountain	-	37,672	7,497	45,169	2.2	+349132
Hill	213,714	-	375,101	588,815	28.2	+722456
Tarai	180,587	1273,599	-	1454,186	69.6	-1071588
Total	394,301	1311,271	382,598	2088,170	100.0	
In-migration (%)	18.9	62.8	18.3	100.0		

Note: Inter-zonal migration refers to migration occurring between ecological zones namely Mountain (16 districts), Hill (39 districts) and Tarai (20 districts).

Source: Respective Population Censuses

Note: - indicates number of persons migrated to the same region.

### International Migration

Observing the history of population movement in Nepal, the gradual increase in the population size in Nepal could be attributed to immigration from India, Tibet, China, and Mongolia (Subedi, 1988). The present ethnic groups located in the mountains and the hills indicate that the ancestors of many ethnic groups such as Magars, Gurungs, Tamangs and other Mongoloid groups came from Tibet, China and Mongolia, north of Nepal in different times in history (Table 2). Other ethnic groups like the Pahadi people, the high class Hindus as Brahman, Malla, and Shah pushed by a Muslim invasion in north India, entered western Nepal and moved towards the east along the hills (Subedi, 1988). Frequent invasions in the neighbouring countries have given rise to immigration and increased population size in the country. The people belonging to Kirats and Newars who were destined to Kathmandu Valley are still not clear of their place of origin (See Table 2). To some extent, emigration to Tibet and China from Nepal is also evident in the history of Nepal, particularly of Nepali professionals and artists. The spread of Buddhism in Tibet was associated with emigration from Nepal.

**Table 2**  
**Historic Population Movement in Nepal with Reference to Selected Communities and/or Ethnic Groups**

Immigration to Nepal			
Communities or Ethnic Groups	Approximate Period of Movement	Place of Origin	Destination
First Settlers of Kathmandu Valley	1500 B.C.- 1000 B. C.	Tibet/China	Kathmandu Valley
Kirats and Newars ? Mongoloid People	7 <sup>th</sup> and 11 <sup>th</sup> Century	Mongolia	Mountains/Hills
Sherpas	Around 1550	Tibet	Central Hills
Tibetans	1700s	Vaisali (India)	
Licchavis	2 <sup>nd</sup> Century		
Pahadi People (Hill People)	1000 B. C. – A. D. 1850	Kumaon, Garhwal (India)	Western Hills
High Class Hindus	11 <sup>th</sup> and 12 <sup>th</sup> Century	Northwestern Hills of India	Western Hills

Malla Group	12 <sup>th</sup> Century	South India	Kathmandu Valley
Shah Group	14 <sup>th</sup> Century	Chittor (India)	Kathmandu Valley
<b>Emigration from Nepal</b>			
Nepali Professionals	7 <sup>th</sup> Century	Kathmandu Valley	Lhasa (Tibet)
Nepali Artists	13 <sup>th</sup> Century	Kathmandu Valley	Tibet and China

Source: Subedi 1988, p. 33

Since early 1950s, the Nepal China border became restricted with the requirement of visa for the people of the two countries to travel (Kansakar, 2003). As Nepal-India border is bounded by the plain area of the tarai in the south, travel between the two countries can be made easily from all directions and from almost all locations in the south. Historically Nepal-India border had and has remained as open and free border for both the people of Nepal and India. Table 3 presents number of absentee population from Nepal in the different censuses from 1952/54 to the latest census 2011. There is constant increase in the number of absentees from Nepal to other countries from the 1952/54 census to the 2011 census. The absentees from Nepal were 198,120 in 1952/54. This increased to 192,1429 in 2011. The overwhelming majority of absentees were males, more than 80 percent in each census.

**Table 3**  
**Absentee Population by Sex, Nepal, 1952/54 -2011**

Year	Male	Percent	Female	Percent	Total
1952/54	173,619	87.6	24,501	12.4	198,120
1981	328,448	81.5	74,529	18.5	402,977
1991	548,002	83.2	118,288	18.0	658,290
2001	679,489	89.2	82,712	10.9	762,181
2011	168,4029	87.6	237,400	12.4	192,1429*

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, 1987; Kansakar, 2003; and the respective censuses

Note: \*the figure obtained reduced not stated figure of 65 absentees from Nepal.

Overwhelming majority of emigrants used to go to India till the 2001 census. In 1981, 93.1 percent of the total emigrants had gone to India (Table 4). In 1991, this proportion decreased to 89.2 percent although the absolute number increased. Although there seems further decrease in the

proportional share of emigrants in India, there is still evident that India has been as prime destination of Nepalese emigrants till 2001. Of all the emigrants, 77.3 percent were destined to India according to population census 2001. But the proportion of people migrating to India declined remarkably in the 2011 census (37.6 percent) though the absolute figure has been continually increasing in the latest census as well. The reason behind the sharp decline in the relative figure in emigrating towards India is the overwhelming majority of people who emigrate to other Asian countries, including more developed countries (i.e. Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States of America etc.) these days for better economic opportunities.

The net migrants at the international level seem negative sign indicating that there are more emigrants than immigrants in Nepal. This is important to note that the significant number of absentees are also moving to other countries. Therefore, this proportion of absentees has been decreasing towards India over the previous years. More importantly, this proportional decrease has taken place despite increase in the absolute number of Nepalese emigrants moving to India. This change is partly explained by increase in the number of people going to West Asia, i. e. Gulf countries, and other regions of the world, especially in United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Taking into consideration of past experiences, latest census, and the flow of people for contemporary foreign labor migration from Nepal shows the following general characteristics of migrants and migration regions. Largest proportion of labor migrants was destined to India as the 2001 census and the former censuses. This figure decreased to 37 percent in the 2011 census. High level of seasonality is apparent especially in agricultural work in India (Nepal, 2007). A significant number of migrants are destined to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Hong Kong, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and Japan. Migration largely takes place through the manpower companies and individual efforts. Emigrants moving to other countries except Asian countries are normally selective by higher education and class. They are often accompanied by their families. Their destinations are often United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

**Table 4**

**Emigration, Immigration, and Net-migration of Nepal, 1981- 2011**

Description	1981		1991		2001		2011	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
to India	375,196	93.1	587,243	89.2	589,050	77.3	722255	37.6
to Other countries	27,781	6.9	71,047	10.8	173,131	22.7	1178926	61.3
Not stated	-		-		-		20312	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>402,977</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>658,290</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>762,181</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1921493</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Immigrants	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
from India	222,278	95.0	418,982	95.3	583,600	96	449149	95.6
from Other Countries	11,761	5.0	20,506	4.7	24,492	4	20430	4.4
Total Immigrants	234039	100	439,488	100	608,092	100	469,579	100.0
<b>Total Net Migrants</b>	<b>-168938</b>		<b>-218802</b>		<b>-154089</b>		<b>-1451,914</b>	

Source: Respective Population Censuses

**HIV in Nepal**

The history of HIV in Nepal can be traced back to 1988. Since then, reported statistics show that the number of PLHIV has been increasing significantly, especially from 1996 (Joshi et al., 2004). As of July 2015, there were 26,702 reported cases across the country (National Centre for AIDS and STD [Sexually Transmitted Disease] Control, 2015). Among the total reported cases of PLHIV, there were 16,705 males, 9,938 females and 59 transgendered people. However, the estimated number of PLHIV across the country is considered to be nearly forty thousands in 2015 (National Centre for AIDS and STD Control, 2015). The difference in the figures of reported and estimated cases of HIV and AIDS is that a significant number of PLHIV conceal their HIV status in family and society (Beine, 2002; Neupane & Mishra, 2014). HIV prevalence in Nepal is a gendered phenomenon, with more than three-fifths of the total reported PLHIV being male. This is probably due to both the dominant volume of temporary labour male migration in the country and poor investigation of HIV and AIDS among females (National Centre for AIDS and STD Control, 2015; New Era, 2009). The epidemic of HIV and AIDS in Nepal is attributed mostly to heterosexual transmission, although there is also evidence of males having sex with

males (MSM) contributing to the epidemic (National Centre for AIDS and STD Control, 2013; Nepal, 2007). HIV is spreading rapidly, especially in the adult young age group and middle aged people 20-49 years, around 85 percent of the total reported cases. AIDS is now one of the major causes of death within this age group. In Nepal, as in most Asian countries, the epidemic of HIV and AIDS is centred around particular high-risk groups, seasonal labour migrants, sex workers and their partners, MSM and injecting drug users (Ministry of Health and Population, 2007; National Centre for AIDS and STD Control, 2015).

The cumulative HIV and AIDS cases from 1991 and onwards are given below (Table 5). By 1996, the proportion of males and females remained almost same though number of females living with HIV was somewhat higher compared with males. After 1996, the number of males with HIV/AIDS increased tremendously, more than doubled in the survey years of 2001 and 2006. As of July 2015, among the people with cumulative HIV and AIDS reported cases, more than three-fifths of PLHIV are males, and 29 percent females. From 2001 onwards, relative figure of females living with HIV also increased remarkably and reached 37 percent among the total PLHIV. The reason behind this is more likely to happen that many females were HIV infected by their husband with family reunion, especially from those emigrants who were HIV infected in their abroad stay (Aryal, Tiwari, Thapa & Pandey, 2011). Migration, irrespective of internal and international migration, contributes to share of HIV cases in a greater extent than any other figures while grouping PLHIV into various categories including labour migration (National Centre for AIDS and STD Control, 2012).

**Table 5**  
**Distribution of Population Living with HIV/AIDS, Nepal, 1991-2015**

Description	1991		1996		2001		2006		2015	
	Number	Percent								
Gender										
Male	17	45.9	236	49.2	1535	72.0	5431	70.9	16705	62.6
Female	20	54.1	244	50.8	596	28.0	2232	29.1	9938	37.2
Transgender	-		-		-		-		59	2.2
Total	37	100.0	480	100.0	2131	100.0	7663	100.0	26643	100.0

Source: Department of Health (DOH), 2004/2005, and National Centre for AIDS/STD Control, 2006 & 2015.

Table 6 shows that most of PLHIV, both males and females, were HIV infected

in the age group 20-39 years than any other age groups. It is well known that migration is selective process with age as it occurs mostly at young adult and middle 20-39 years aged people, even in Nepalese migration for both internal and international labor migration (New Era, 2009).

**Table 6**  
**Cumulative HIV and AIDS Cases by Age Groups, 2006 and 2015**

		2006						
Gender	Age Group	0-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Male	Number	163	229	2219	2169	547	104	5431
	Percent	3.0	4.2	40.9	39.9	10.1	1.9	100.0
Female	Number	95	220	1029	676	179	33	2232
	Percent	4.3	9.9	46.1	30.3	8.0	1.5	100.0
Total	Number	258	449	3248	2845	726	137	7663
	Percent	3.4	5.9	42.4	37.1	9.5	1.8	100.0
		2015						
Gender	Age Group	0-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Male	Number	930	627	4949	6583	2723	893	16705
	Percent	5.6	3.8	29.6	39.4	16.3	5.3	100.0
Female	Number	608	596	3496	3507	1313	418	9938
	Percent	6.1	6.0	35.2	35.3	13.2	4.2	100.0
Third	Number	-	5	25	18	8	3	59
Gender	Percent	-	8.4	42.3	30.5	13.6	5.1	100.0
Total	Number	1538	1228	8470	10108	4044	1314	26702
	Percent	5.8	4.6	31.7	37.9	15.1	4.9	100.0

### Conclusion

Nepal has been experiencing a continuous increase in the volumes of internal and international migration since the last fifty years. The analysis of international migration demonstrates that the number of emigrants is significantly larger than the immigrants. From the 1988 onwards, number of people living with HIV has been increasing tremendously, and this increase seems significantly higher in the recent years than in the past. Although this paper is not concentrated on the direct relationship between migration and the epidemic of HIV in Nepal due to an extreme dearth of data, it is clear that epidemic of HIV and AIDS is also increasing rapidly with an increasing volume of both internal and international migration in Nepal. As stated above in the analysis of this study, there is need for further research on investigating reasons behind the reverse direction of

the lowland to the highlands so that issues of internal migrants can be addressed in time. Furthermore, it would be important to conduct research on patterns of internal and international migration as well as their relation on HIV and AIDS in Nepal at regional level. There is also an urgent need for research so as to get an in-depth understanding of the relation between migration and the epidemic of HIV and AIDS.

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