

# Demographic Profile and Migration Trends of Youths in Nepal, Census 2021

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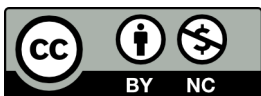
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## Abstract

*Nepal's demographic profile is dynamic, especially regarding youth mobility, with strong implications for sustainable development. The study aims to provide background information on population and migration trends among youth (aged 10-24 years) from the 2021 National Population and Housing Census, examine youth mobility patterns, identify the key drivers of migration, and analyze their implications for human capital formation and rural sustainability. The results show that a significant spatial redistribution of the young population occurs, with higher density in the Tarai lowlands and urban centers. Wage labour is the primary motivation for migration: 65.1% of young migrants move for economic necessity, and this figure rises to around 70% among the 20-24 age group. Educational migration represents 14.2 percent of migration, and 51.7 percent of early adolescents (10–14 years) are migrating with their family unit. Trends show that structural problems in domestic employment are key factors behind youth outmigration. Migration*

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*has immediate economic advantages in terms of remittances but also has long-term consequences for the retention of human capital and rural economic viability. The study suggests that targeted policy measures, including promoting domestic jobs, investing in vocational skills, and strengthening social protection, can effectively help yield Nepal's demographic dividend.*

**Keywords:** demographic analysis, human capital, internal migration, sustainable development, youth migration

## Introduction

Adolescence and youth are important stages of development, as they are marked by significant biological, psychological, and social changes that profoundly influence a person's life path and their contribution to society (Kappenko, 2025). This is a demographic dividend period worldwide, a window of opportunity in which a massive working-age population can fuel unprecedented economic growth. This population group, comprising people aged 10-24 years, is a key element of Nepal's socio-economic situation and future development. Knowing their demographic trends and migration patterns is thus crucial to policy-making and resource allocation, given the unique challenges and opportunities in a developing country setting.

The World Health Organization considers the age range of adolescents (10-19 years) as a distinct group of people that accounts for a significant share of the Nepalese population (Poudel et al., 2025). In addition, the larger youth group, usually extending to 24 years in global systems and 40 years in the Nepal National Youth Policy, comprises young adults who are going through their educational, career-building, and family-building stages. The stage is characterized by a greater sense of autonomy, which leads to a desire to take risks in sexual relations and to make serious life decisions, including migration (Nepal et al., 2023). Therefore, the resulting decisions often compromise spatial mobility, both domestic and international, due to a complex interaction between socio-economic forces and desires to live better lives.

The demographic profile of Nepal shows that the population of adolescents and youth is high, with nearly half residing in the southern Tarai belt and less than 7 percent living in mountainous areas (Bhattarai & Conway, 2020). The unequal distribution along geographic lines highlights the disparities in access to resources and opportunities, which significantly shape their migratory choices. According to the 2021 Census, there has been a remarkable change in residency patterns, with the

urban population growing to 66.17, mainly due to youth migration to urban centers. This population fact, combined with the lack of jobs in the country, often forces many youths to leave agricultural communities in search of employment elsewhere, both locally and internationally (Sunam et al., 2025).

The statistics also indicate that migration is an institutionalized survival strategy for Nepali families, with more than 2.1 million people reported as missing at home, most of them in the youthful age group (National Statistics Office [NSO], 2023). This mobility is not only a reaction to poverty but is increasingly driven by a mismatch between young people's rising literacy levels and the immobility of the local labour market. With education, the vision of the younger generations has shifted toward the service and industrial sectors, which remain concentrated in urban centers and in other countries such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Malaysia (Sharma & Bista, 2025).

The migration situation in Nepal is changing radically. The 2021 Census shows that women's mobility is increasing as young women are pursuing greater economic autonomy and education (NOC, 2024). The resulting shift requires gender-sensitive analysis, as female migrants face heightened risks of protection and social stigma (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2022). Moreover, out-migration led to the feminization of the rural labour force, resulting in teenagers bearing a greater burden at home and fewer mentors (Spangler & Christie, 2020). Within Nepal's federal system, these movements are still justified by the diversification of household incomes and the lack of equal access to education (Sunam et al., 2025).

From a gender perspective in Nepal, migration is a developing phenomenon. Write clearly and link this sentence. Although historical trends were inclined toward male out-migration, the 2021 Census indicates that women's mobility has risen significantly, and it can be assumed that young women are increasingly demanding greater economic independence and higher education (National Statistics Office, 2024). This change requires gender-sensitive research because women migrants are at particular risk of protection and social stigmas (Anjum & Aziz, 2025). Additionally, there has been an effect on the feminization of the rural agricultural labour force, and this has resulted in households left with adolescents who are left behind. In the federal system, these movements are still largely driven by the lack of equal educational opportunities and by strategies to diversify household incomes (Sunam, 2023).

Despite the availability of NPHC 2021 data, gaps remain in the information on the distribution of adolescents and youth aged 10-24 and their experiences with mobility in the post-federalization situation in Nepal (National Statistics Office [NSO], 2023). The current literature pays little attention to the correlation between spatial distribution and youth migration (Shivakoti, 2024). To fill this gap, this paper will investigate the spatial distribution and migration trends of adolescents and youth across ecological zones and Nepal's provinces. The research question that guides the research is as follows: How do processes of distribution and migration among adolescents and youth vary by age, sex, and geography, and what does this tell us about youth in terms of planning and development? The dynamics are also vital for informing the National Youth Policy and for helping Nepal become a middle-income country (UNFPA, 2023).

### **Statement of the problem**

Although Census 2021 data is available, there is little detailed analysis of the spatial distribution of adolescents and youth (10-24 years) and their migration trends at the ecological zone and/or provincial level in Nepal, especially in the post-federal context. Combining age, sex, and geographic dimensions to explain the dynamics of youth mobility is uncommon in existing studies. This deficit prevents evidence-based planning of youth-oriented development policies and regional labour market policies.

### **Objectives of the study**

The spatial distribution of adolescents and youth (10–24 years) across Nepal's ecological zones and provinces, based on Census 2021 data, is examined.

1. To examine the youth migration patterns by age, gender and geographic area.
2. To find out the key drivers and trends of youth migration in Nepal.
3. To evaluate the impact of youth migration on the country's development planning and policy development.

### **Methodology**

The research design used in this study was a cross-sectional, descriptive-analytical study based on secondary data obtained from the National Population

and Housing Census. The census method is suitable for assessing population size, age composition, marital status, internal migration, and foreign absenteeism among adolescents and young people at both national and subnational levels.

The sample population consisted of adolescents (10-19 years) and young people (15-24 years), according to the census. To perform the specific analysis of migration and absenteeism, the 10-24 age group was also aggregated in accordance with census reporting requirements. Census data were used, so no sampling method was implemented. Analysis is done through full enumeration (100 percent population coverage); hence, it is highly reliable and representative with no sampling error.

The research used secondary data sources, primarily from the Central Bureau of Statistics. The research tools were the published census report and thematic tables. These consisted of statistics on population distribution by ecological zone and province, marital status by sex, place of birth, population abroad on absenteeism, destination, and the cause of migration. This was achieved through the use of structured census tables, which ensured consistency and comparability across variables.

The most important variables were age group, sex, ecological zone, province, marital status, and place of birth. Migration-related measures involved the absentee population, receiving countries/regions (e.g., India, the Middle East, ASEAN, Europe), and causes of migration, namely employment, study/training, job seeking, and dependency. These variables are common demographic indicators in population and migration research.

Data processing involved tabulating and classifying census tables systematically. The analysis entailed descriptive and comparative statistical tools, such as totals, percentages, and proportional distribution. Comparative analysis of the 2011 and 2021 data was conducted over time to establish trends, especially in marital status and migration. The data has been rearranged in a clear, unambiguous manner without distorting the original numbers. Since the census is a complete count, there was no use of weighting or calculation methods.

The data used was publicly available aggregated data, and there were no individual-level identifiers. Thus, informed consent and ethical approval were not necessary. The study complied with the Central Bureau of Statistics' data use policies by citing all data sources appropriately.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Results**

This article discusses the demographic profile and migration trends of adolescents and youth in Nepal, based on data from the National Population and Housing Census. Young people and teens make up a large portion of the population and have an important influence on the nation's socio-economic development. The objective of the study will be to examine the population distribution, marital status, and migration patterns by age, sex, and geographic location. It, in particular, aims at determining the difference between internal mobility and international absenteeism among the youth.

### **Distribution of the population of adolescents and young people in space**

The distribution of the adolescent (10–19) and youth (15–24) populations in Nepal by ecological zones and provinces, based on the 2021 Census, is presented in Table 1, showing their population sizes, shares of the total population, and proportions within each age group across different geographic areas.

Table 1 indicates that, according to the 2021 census report, one-fifth of Nepal's total population is adolescents (10-19) and youth (15-24), which is symptomatic of a large youth bulge. The Tarai region is the main center of these age groups, as they are concentrated there, with more than 54 percent of the country's adolescents and youths residing there.

Madhesh Province has the largest total number of youths, but Karnali and Sudurpashchim provinces are the most densely populated, with almost a quarter of their local populations being adolescents. It is also important to note that Bagmati Province has registered an upward trend in the proportion of youth relative to adolescents, which may be attributed to migration to the capital in search of education and employment.

**Table 1**

*Distribution of Adolescent (10–19) and Youth (15–24) Population by Ecological Zone and Province, Nepal, 2021*

| Background characteristics | Adolescent (10-19)    |                             |                                        | Youth (15-24)         |                             |                                   |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|                            | Population aged 10-19 | Percent of total population | Percent of total adolescent population | Population aged 15-24 | Percent of total population | Percent of total youth population |
| Nepal                      | 5,876,269             | 20.1                        | 100                                    | 5,749,464             | 19.7                        | 100                               |
| Ecological Zones           |                       |                             |                                        |                       |                             |                                   |
| Mountain                   | 387,397               | 21.9                        | 6.6                                    | 349,681               | 19.7                        | 6.1                               |
| Hill                       | 2,290,233             | 19.5                        | 39                                     | 2,316,517             | 19.7                        | 40.3                              |
| Tarai                      | 3,198,639             | 20.5                        | 54.4                                   | 3,083,266             | 19.7                        | 53.6                              |
| Provinces                  |                       |                             |                                        |                       |                             |                                   |
| Koshi                      | 936,938               | 18.9                        | 15.9                                   | 933,114               | 18.8                        | 16.2                              |
| Madhesh                    | 1,312,371             | 21.5                        | 22.3                                   | 1,196,853             | 19.6                        | 20.8                              |
| Bagmati                    | 1,081,509             | 17.7                        | 18.4                                   | 1,194,179             | 19.5                        | 20.8                              |
| Gandaki                    | 454,060               | 18.4                        | 7.7                                    | 461,115               | 18.7                        | 8                                 |
| Lumbini                    | 1,063,978             | 20.8                        | 18.1                                   | 1,037,546             | 20.3                        | 18                                |
| Karnali                    | 405,116               | 24                          | 6.9                                    | 368,005               | 21.8                        | 6.4                               |
| Sudurpash-chim             | 622,297               | 23.1                        | 10.6                                   | 558,652               | 20.7                        | 9.7                               |

*Source: NSO, 2024.*

### **Marital Status Among Nepal's Adolescents and Youth**

Table 2 shows the distribution of adolescents and youth in Nepal by marital status and sex in the 2011 and 2021 Censuses. The presentation of patterns of marriage over time shows an increase in the proportion of never-married individuals and a decrease in early marriage among both males and females in adolescent and youth age groups.

According to the National Population and Housing Census data, it is possible to note that the marital status of adolescents (10–19 years) and youth (15-24 years) changed significantly in the last decade.

**Table 2***Marital status of adolescents and youth by sex, NPHC 2011-2021*

|                        | Adolescent |      |           |      | Youth     |      |           |      |
|------------------------|------------|------|-----------|------|-----------|------|-----------|------|
| Sex and marital status | 2011       |      | 2021      |      | 2011      |      | 2021      | %    |
|                        | N          | %    | N         | %    | N         | %    | N         |      |
| <b>Both sexes</b>      |            |      |           |      |           |      |           |      |
| All statuses           | 6,407,404  | 100  | 5,876,269 | 100  | 5,290,051 | 100  | 5,749,464 | 100  |
| Never married          | 5,932,392  | 92.6 | 5,595,239 | 95.2 | 3,445,661 | 65.1 | 4,152,403 | 72.2 |
| Married                | 472,730    | 7.4  | 278,395   | 4.7  | 1,834,200 | 34.7 | 1,582,473 | 27.5 |
| Widow/Widower          | 720        | 0    | 1,386     | 0.0  | 3,794     | 0.1  | 6,312     | 0.1  |
| Divorced/Separated     | 1,562      | 0    | 1,249     | 0.0  | 6,396     | 0.1  | 8,276     | 0.1  |
| <b>Males</b>           |            |      |           |      |           |      |           |      |
| All statuses           | 3,207,821  | 100  | 2,990,477 | 100  | 2,487,172 | 100  | 2,795,541 | 100  |
| Never married          | 3,097,423  | 96.6 | 2,929,367 | 98.0 | 1,943,385 | 78.1 | 2,332,465 | 83.4 |
| Married                | 109,776    | 3.4  | 60,280    | 2.0  | 540,586   | 21.7 | 458,516   | 16.4 |
| Widower                | 166        | 0.0  | 474       | 0.0  | 1,003     | 0.0  | 1,744     | 0.1  |
| Divorced/Separated     | 456        | 0.0  | 356       | 0.0  | 2,198     | 0.1  | 2,816     | 0.1  |
| <b>Females</b>         |            |      |           |      |           |      |           |      |
| All statuses           | 3,199,583  | 100  | 2,885,792 | 100  | 2,802,879 | 100  | 2,953,923 | 100  |
| Never married          | 2,834,969  | 88.6 | 2,665,872 | 92.4 | 1,502,276 | 53.6 | 1,819,938 | 61.6 |
| Married                | 362,954    | 11.3 | 218,115   | 7.6  | 1,293,614 | 46.2 | 1,123,957 | 38   |
| Widow                  | 554        | 0    | 912       | 0    | 2,791     | 0.1  | 4,568     | 0.2  |
| Divorced/Separated     | 1,106      | 0    | 893       | 0    | 4,198     | 0.1  | 5,460     | 0.2  |

*Source: NSO, 2024.*

Table 2 shows that the percentage of adults who had never been married rose among adolescents from 92.6% in 2011 to 95.2% in 2021, indicating a delayed marriage. On the other hand, the number of married adolescents dropped to 4.7 percent out of 7.4 percent, and there was little variation in widowed or divorced/separated. The identical pattern of marital postponement applies to youth: the percentage of never-married youth has increased since 2011 (65.1-72.2) and so has the percentage of married youth (34.7-27.5). This trend is stronger among males: in 2021, 83.4 percent of males aged 15-24 were not married, compared with 78.1 percent in 2011. This trend among youth is slightly lower among females (53.6 to 61.6).

The statistics show that marriage is being postponed among both sexes, especially females, reflecting shifts in social values, prolonged education, and

changing economic prospects. The reason why the percentages of widowed and divorced/separated are low and stable is that these marital outcomes are quite rare among this group of people. All in all, the results indicate a shift in demographics toward later marriage, with implications for family formation, fertility, and youth development in Nepal.

### Place of Birth and Migration Patterns among Adolescents and Youth in Nepal

Table 3 presents the percentage distribution of adolescents and youth in Nepal by Place of birth, ecological zone and provinces using NPHC 2021 data. It shows the share of people born at the same local level, in other local levels within the same district, in other districts, and in foreign countries. This figure illustrates the spatial mobility patterns and the regional variation in youth migration and place-of-birth diversity.

**Table 3**

*Percentage Distribution of Adolescents and Youth by Place of Birth and Background Characteristics, NPHC 2021*

| Background characteristics | Total     | Adolescents (10–19) |                                        |                  |                 | Total     | Youth (15–24)    |                                        |                  |                 |
|----------------------------|-----------|---------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
|                            |           | Same Local level    | Other Local level of the same district | Another district | Foreign country |           | Same Local level | Other Local level of the same district | Another district | Foreign country |
| <b>Nepal</b>               | 5,876,269 | 83.4                | 3.9                                    | 11.6             | 1.1             | 5,749,464 | 72.3             | 7.7                                    | 18.2             | 1.8             |
| <b>Male</b>                | 2,990,477 | 84.1                | 3.3                                    | 11.6             | 1               | 2,795,541 | 79               | 3.8                                    | 16               | 1.3             |
| <b>Female</b>              | 2,885,792 | 82.6                | 4.6                                    | 11.7             | 1.1             | 2,953,923 | 65.9             | 11.4                                   | 20.4             | 2.3             |
| <b>Ecological zones</b>    |           |                     |                                        |                  |                 |           |                  |                                        |                  |                 |
| Mountain                   | 387,397   | 94.1                | 3.7                                    | 2                | 0.2             | 349,681   | 87               | 7.4                                    | 5.2              | 0.3             |
| Hill                       | 2,290,233 | 79.5                | 4.8                                    | 14.8             | 0.9             | 2,316,517 | 67.8             | 7.4                                    | 23.6             | 1.1             |
| Tarai                      | 3,198,639 | 84.8                | 3.3                                    | 10.6             | 1.3             | 3,083,266 | 73.9             | 7.9                                    | 15.7             | 2.5             |
| <b>Provinces</b>           |           |                     |                                        |                  |                 |           |                  |                                        |                  |                 |
| Koshi                      | 936,938   | 83                  | 4.4                                    | 11.5             | 1.1             | 933,114   | 73.8             | 7.6                                    | 16.6             | 1.9             |
| Madhesh                    | 1,312,371 | 93.6                | 2.9                                    | 2.9              | 0.5             | 1,196,853 | 81               | 9.7                                    | 7.2              | 2               |
| Bagmati                    | 1,081,509 | 67.6                | 5.3                                    | 25.9             | 1.2             | 1,194,179 | 55.2             | 6.5                                    | 36.9             | 1.4             |
| Gandaki                    | 454,060   | 77.3                | 6.9                                    | 14.1             | 1.7             | 461,115   | 67.5             | 9.8                                    | 20.6             | 2               |
| Lumbini                    | 1,063,978 | 84.9                | 3                                      | 10.5             | 1.6             | 1,037,546 | 75.6             | 6.4                                    | 15.3             | 2.6             |
| Karnali                    | 405,116   | 91.4                | 3                                      | 5.2              | 0.4             | 368,005   | 84.3             | 6.3                                    | 8.9              | 0.4             |
| Sudurpashchim              | 622,297   | 86.2                | 2.8                                    | 9.8              | 1.2             | 558,652   | 77.4             | 7.2                                    | 14.3             | 1.1             |

*Source: NSO, 2024*

The NPHC 2021 reports that adolescents (10-19) are highly immobile and 83.4 percent make their home in their local place of birth. On the other hand, young people (15-24) exhibit more internal migration, with only 72.3 percent staying in the place of birth and 18.2 percent born in other districts. Among the youth, sex differentials are high; females (20.4) are more mobile than males (16.0), probably because of marriage and work. The ecologically high local birth retention is held in the Mountain region. The highest level of inter-district migration (36.9% among the youth) is in Bagmati Province, which is the pull of the Kathmandu Valley. By contrast, in Madhesh and Karnali Provinces, local concentrations are high, indicating low mobility. These trends show that migration increases most during the period of entering adulthood, driven by sex-specific factors and the underdeveloped regions of Nepal.

### Age-Sex Pattern of Adolescents and Youths Living Abroad in Nepal, 2021

Table 4 shows the number and Percentage of Adolescents and Youth from Nepal Living Abroad by Age Group and Sex, 2021. It shows the distribution of the absentee population across age categories (10–14, 15–19, 20–24), with a higher concentration of migration among older youth, especially males, with almost half of the total young population (10–24) reported to be living outside the country.

**Table 4**

*Number and percentage of adolescents and youth living abroad*

| Age group          | Total absentee | Male      | Female  | total Percent | Male % | Female % |
|--------------------|----------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------|----------|
| Total              | 2,190,592      | 1,799,675 | 390,917 | —             | —      | —        |
| 10–14              | 58,832         | 46,971    | 11,861  | 2.7           | 2.6    | 3.0      |
| 15–19              | 319,596        | 268,221   | 51,375  | 14.6          | 14.9   | 13.1     |
| 20–24              | 655,716        | 535,082   | 120,634 | 29.9          | 29.7   | 30.9     |
| Adolescent (10–19) | 378,428        | 315,192   | 63,236  | 17.3          | 17.5   | 16.2     |
| Youth (15–24)      | 975,312        | 803,303   | 172,009 | 44.5          | 44.6   | 44.0     |
| Young (10–24)      | 1,034,144      | 850,274   | 183,870 | 47.2          | 47.2   | 47.0     |

*Source: NSO, 2024.*

The NPHC 2021 indicates that the young population is central to international migration in Nepal, where 47.2 of the 2.19 million absentees are youth. Migration trends are very age-selective, becoming more pronounced as a person becomes an adult. Although the number of adolescents (10-14) accounts for 2.7% of absentees,

this value increases to 14.6% among absentees aged 15-19 and reaches its maximum at 29.9% in the 20-24 age group.

The statistics show that the most migration-prone period is late youth, which is mostly motivated by employment and education opportunities in other countries. Moreover, there is still a severe gender gap; about 82 percent of all absentees are male. Finally, Nepalese international migration is male-dominated and highly concentrated among the 20- to 24-year-old age group.

### **Patterns of Age-specific Adolescent and Youth Absenteeism Destination, Nepal**

Table 5. Percentage distribution of adolescent and youth absentees by destination country, NPHC 2021. It finds that India remains the main destination, but Middle Eastern countries are also popular, with notable differences by age group, suggesting that younger migrants are more attracted to India, while older youth are increasingly migrating to the Middle East and other international destinations.

**Table 5**

*Percentage distribution of adolescents and youth absentees by country of destination*

| Country of Destination         | Total     | 10–14   | 15–19   | 20–24   | 10–19   | 15–24   |
|--------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Both sexes (=100%)             | 1,034,144 | 58,832  | 319,596 | 655,716 | 378,428 | 975,312 |
|                                |           | Percent |         |         |         |         |
| India                          | 38.5      | 83.1    | 55.6    | 26.2    | 59.9    | 35.8    |
| SAARC except India             | 0.3       | 0.1     | 0.4     | 0.3     | 0.3     | 0.4     |
| ASEAN countries                | 8.8       | 1.2     | 8       | 9.9     | 7       | 9.3     |
| Middle East countries          | 31.7      | 5       | 19.6    | 40.1    | 17.3    | 33.3    |
| Other Asian countries          | 6.0       | 2.3     | 3.4     | 7.7     | 3.3     | 6.3     |
| EU countries                   | 3.0       | 1.5     | 1.8     | 3.7     | 1.7     | 3.1     |
| Other European countries       | 1.9       | 2.4     | 1.9     | 1.9     | 2       | 1.9     |
| North American                 | 3.6       | 3.1     | 3.7     | 3.6     | 3.6     | 3.7     |
| African countries              | 0.2       | 0.1     | 0.1     | 0.2     | 0.1     | 0.2     |
| Pacific Ocean Region countries | 5.5       | 1.1     | 5.1     | 6       | 4.5     | 5.7     |
| Other country                  | 0.2       | 0.1     | 0.1     | 0.2     | 0.1     | 0.2     |
| Not Stated                     | 0.2       | 0.1     | 0.1     | 0.2     | 0.1     | 0.2     |

*Source: NSO, 2024.*

The NPHC 2021 suggests that the destination patterns of Nepalese absentees change dramatically with age. The 10-24 age group (38.5%) is, however, still based

in India, with the younger age groups (83.1% aged 10-14, 55.6% aged 15-19) taking the lead. This is indicative of the open-border policy that allows family-based and informal movement. On the other hand, the Middle East has the highest number of older youth (15-24), with a cohort of 33.300, peaking at 40.100 in the 20-24 age group, mainly due to labour migration. More countries in the Pacific region (5.5) and ASEAN countries (8.8) are becoming more popular among young and older people for studying and securing skilled jobs. In the meantime, Europe and North America have a small and discriminatory share in higher education. Finally, there is a migration from proximity-based movement as an adolescent to opportunity-based international labour migration as an adult.

### Reasons for Absence among Adolescent and Youth Absentees in Nepal

Table 6 presents the percentage distribution of adolescent and youth absentees by reason of absence in Nepal, based on the NPHC 2021. This indicates that the main reason for migration is wage or salary employment, followed by job seeking and education, while dependency migration is especially high among younger adolescents, indicating a clear age-specific transition from dependent mobility to labour-driven migration among older youth.

**Table 6**

*Percentage distribution of adolescents and youth absentees by reason for absence, NPHC 2021*

| Reason for absence | Total     | 10–14      | 15–19   | 20–24   | 10–19   | 15–24   |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Both sexes         | 1,034,144 | 58,832     | 319,596 | 655,716 | 378,428 | 975,312 |
|                    |           | In percent |         |         |         |         |
| Salary/wage, job   | 65.1      | 27.7       | 62.7    | 69.7    | 57.2    | 67.4    |
| Trade/business     | 0.6       | 0.0        | 0.6     | 0.6     | 0.5     | 0.6     |
| Study/training     | 14.2      | 11.1       | 14.8    | 14.2    | 14.2    | 14.4    |
| Seeking job        | 11.1      | 6.3        | 11.7    | 11.2    | 10.9    | 11.4    |
| Dependent          | 7.4       | 51.7       | 8.7     | 2.8     | 15.4    | 4.7     |
| Others             | 0.7       | 2.1        | 0.7     | 0.6     | 1.0     | 0.7     |
| Not stated         | 0.8       | 1.1        | 0.9     | 0.7     | 0.9     | 0.8     |

*Source: NSO, 2024.*

The NPHC 2021 shows that the main cause of absence among Nepalese adolescents and youth is employment, and it has a steep age distribution. Although the 10-14-year age group records the lowest emigration rate of 27.7 percent due to

salary/wage migration, the rate increases to 69.7 percent in the 20-24-year age group. In general, the 15-24 cohort accounts for 67.4 percent of migrants seeking labour, and thus it is the youth's most significant determinant of migration.

Dependency-related absence, on the other hand, is more clustered among younger teens, dropping to 51.7% (ages 10-14) and then to 2.8% (ages 20-24). Training or study is also a stable secondary cause at 14.2%. These results indicate a shift in family-related movement during early adolescence to labour-related movement during early adulthood.

## **Discussion**

Based on the analysis of the 2021 National Population and Housing Census (NPHC), the overall lack of internationalization among Nepalese adolescents and youth (aged 10-24) is fundamentally driven by economic factors (NSO, 2024). Migration triggers differ across age groups, but the main triggers are salary or wage employment, educational pursuits, and job search. These trends are indicative of structural socio-economic issues that have long been present in Nepal, in which a surging youth demographic is now demanding satisfaction in the global labour market rather than the local one (Joshi & Dahal, 2024).

### **The Domination of Economic Motivation**

The Census figures indicate that 65.1 percent of absent teenagers and youths migrate in search of employment that is based on salaries and wages. This economic drive is strongly felt as age advances; the percentage of the population who migrate to work increases by 27.7% to almost 70% in the 10-14 and 20-24 age groups, respectively. The involvement in wage labour among the youth cohort (15-24) is 67.4%. This confirms that labour migration is the prevailing form of international absence, driven by insufficient opportunities in the homeland and the allure of higher incomes in the foreign land. It is also a normalized career path among young men, akin to a survival mechanism (Rai et al., 2024).

### **The NEET Dilemma and the International Context**

Efforts by Nepal's youth to migrate to foreign countries reflect global migration, in which demographic and labour-market forces drive working-age populations out of their native countries (United Nations, 2024). As emphasized by the World Bank (2022), employment remains the main motivating factor of Nepalese outward migration, especially among persons in the Not in Education, Employment,

or Training (NEET) bracket. The high NEET rate in Nepal can be described as a waste of a demographic dividend when human capital is not being used by the local economy (NSO, 2024). As the number of people entering the labour market each year ranges between 400,000 and 500,000 people, the failure of the local market to provide formal-sector jobs has led to a so-called migration culture, where the passage to adulthood is more characterized by a passport than a local appointment letter (ILO, 2021; Islam et al., 2020).

### **Educational Desires and International Training**

Education and training account for 14.2 percent of absenteeism, with this percentage quite consistent across age groups. This is the driver of the second force due to globalization and a sense of irrelevance within domestic higher education. Nepalese young people tend to believe that foreign institutions have greater prestige and that they can go straight into careers abroad (Rao, 2010). Nevertheless, educational migration is often a gateway to long-term residency, leading to brain drain. The census data also indicates that the boundaries between educational and economic migration are becoming more ambiguous, as most students later join the host country's labour market.

### **Dependency and Family Mobility**

The dependent category accounts for 7.4% of absences but shows a different age-related trend. Among the 10–14-year-olds, 51.7 percent are dependents, meaning that younger adolescents migrate as tied migrants who follow their parents or guardians (Adhikari & Shrestha, 2023). This points to the social aspect of mobility, in which family-initiated relocation choices can frequently cost an adolescent his or her local social connectivity and educational path (Mishra, 2024). Finally, the 2021 census highlights an obvious age gradient: dependency-related movement is inherent in early adolescence, whereas a strategic shift towards international labour markets occupies center stage in late adolescence and youth.

Migration based on family ties can also mean a more permanent move to the destination nation than individual labour migration, which is usually circular or temporary (Bhatta, 2025). Such a change in the 2021 census, where young children are living in foreign countries, is a sign that Nepali families are opting to reside in destination countries like the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. This is a significant predictor of Nepal's future population growth and the risk of losing

the second-generation young people, who may feel no attachment to their native country (Karki, 2024). According to scholars, when migration becomes a family settlement rather than individual labour, the probability of remittances returning to the home country is lower because household funds are allocated to integration and long-term expenses in the host country (KC & Sunam, 2022).

### **Job Seeking and Transitional Mobility**

About 11.1 percent of absentees cite seeking a job as the reason behind their absence. This is a dynamic of the transitional labour market, where young people migrate as they actively seek stable employment, a sign of the general uncertainties and waiting times in Nepal's domestic labour market (Joshi & Dahal, 2024). This group will mostly include people shifting into cities such as Kathmandu or the Tarai belt, as well as those shifting across the open border to India. Mobility is almost always informal and prone to vulnerability because youth in this seeking stage can be deprived of legal protections and security systems that support them, compared to those with job contracts in place.

### **Ringling with National Trends and Structural Challenges**

With these tendencies, there are national trends. The 2021 census indicates that the total number of absent people has increased significantly, and the number of migrants absent abroad is 14% higher than in 2011. The leading factor in work is still observed, followed by employment-seeking and educational motives among young people aged 15 to 24 (UNFPA, 2023). Special reports support the view that the root cause of this labour drain is political instability and structural economic issues that drive them to their homeland rather than keeping them there (Paudel, 2024). It is the unbelief in the domestic political process and the slowness of industrialization that serve as strong push factors, complementing the pull factors of the global North and the Gulf states.

### **The Brain drain and policy implications**

The overwhelming wholeness of the employment as a cause of absence has dire consequences for the national policy. It highlights the desperate need for comprehensive domestic employment policies and economic diversification. A large proportion of youth migration may result in a serious labour deficit within the agricultural sector, which remains the largest proportion of the domestic population. Moreover, brain drain is likely to be detrimental to the long-term growth of human

capital, since the most energetic and able members of society are lending their services to the GDP of other countries (Timsina, 2024).

Although remittances offer a critical buffer for the national economy and reduce household poverty, they also create a dependency trap in which the economy is driven by external shocks. There should be a policy change that makes migration a choice rather than an essential need. This involves investing in professional training aligned with the demands of Nepal's new digital and green economies.

The fact that a very high percentage of younger adolescents are dependent and parental absence points to the fact that family separation has social costs, such as mental health and educational issues. To utilize its demographic dividend, Nepal needs to shift from labour export to the use of domestic labour by reforming the labour market and producing education based on skills. The psychosocial effects of youth migration must be addressed to achieve national social cohesion and sustainable development.

## Conclusion

Based on data from the National Population and Housing Census, this paper shows that economic limitations are most likely to encourage migration among adolescents and youth in Nepal, with wage employment as the most significant factor, especially among the 20–24 age group. The results show an increasing trend in labour out-migration, as well as in education-related mobility, which is a consequence of a mismatch between the aspirations of an increasingly educated youthful population and limited domestic opportunities. A significant contribution of migration in terms of remittances is associated with concerns about the loss of human capital, changes in rural labour patterns, and the social effects on left-behind families. To overcome these obstacles, policy responses must aim to create jobs in the country, encourage the development of vocational and digital skills, and enhance social protection mechanisms for migrant families. The need to transform migration from a necessity to an option is crucial for Nepal to tap into its demographic potential and achieve sustainable development.

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