



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Factors Associated with Occupational Changes among Foreign Labour Migrants and Returnees in Nepal

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Submitted: 15 December 2025; Reviewed: 7 April 2026; Revised: 15 April 2026; Accepted: 7 May 2026

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/paj.v9i1.94499>

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Abstract

Foreign labour migration has become one of the most crucial issues for economic prosperity in low-income societies worldwide. Migration-induced occupational changes are important determinants of socioeconomic progress among foreign labour migrants. This research investigates the determinants of occupational change among foreign labour migrants from the Gandarva, Majhi, and Kumal communities in Kaski, Nepal. The paper aims to ascertain the socio-economic determinants of occupational change and to compare occupational changes among migrant households. A mixed-method research design was employed, combining quantitative (n=121) and qualitative data (n=33) from migrants' and returnees' households. Due to the limited number of households among migrants and returnees in these communities, a census method was used including every household. Age, education, migration duration, remittance savings, and conditions in destination countries were employed as independent variables for occupational change. Multinomial logistic regression analysis revealed that age, migration duration, remittance savings, and the condition of the destination country had a significant influence on occupational change. Older migrants were more likely to move from unskilled to other occupations, while the length of migration and remittance savings had a positive impact on occupational mobility. Structural obstacles within destination countries discouraged career advancement. Elderly migrants were also more likely to return to unskilled work, while the duration of migration and remittance savings reduced the chances of downward mobility. The study recognises the interaction of demographic, economic, and contextual factors in shaping migrants' occupational change. This indicates a need for policy interventions enabling financial literacy, skill development, and systematic remittance utilisation to optimise the economic benefits of migration.

Keywords: foreign labour migration, remittance, occupational change, traditional

Introduction

Foreign labour migration (FLM) is one of the major global phenomena characterised by cross-border people's mobility for employment and livelihood purposes. It is a function of different push and pull factors: poverty and destitution, unemployment, and political instability in countries of origin are on the supply side, while labour shortages and higher wage rates are on the demand side (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2021). FLM is usually temporary, and migrants return home once they complete their work contract. In most regions, however, FLM takes on a different character, ranging from low-skilled labour migration in sectors like construction, domestic work, and agriculture to high-skilled migration in health-care, engineering, and information technology sectors (Jeff et al., 2007). The globalisation of labour markets has further intensified FLM, making it one of the most significant elements of the global economy.

The number of foreign labour migrants has been increasing rapidly for the last couple of decades. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2021), there were around 169 million international migrant workers worldwide in 2019. This accounts for almost five per cent of the total workforce. In the context of overseas labour migration, Asia is the largest source region, accounting for 41 per cent of the world's migrant workers, followed by Europe with 23 per cent and the Americas with 18 per cent (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2021). The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are the main destination for low-skilled migrants, where more than 35 million migrant workers are employed in areas like construction, hospitality, and domestic work (UNDP, 2020). The remittances sent by foreign labour migrants are major components of the economies of their

homelands, contributing much to poverty reduction and economic development. Global remittances reached \$647 billion in 2022, with low-and middle-income countries receiving more than \$500 billion (Abba Yadou et al., 2024). Although there are significant economic benefits, FLM has often been associated with issues including the exploitation of migrant workers, safety issues at workplaces, and social exclusion, mainly for low-skilled migrants (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2021).

Foreign Labour Migration in Nepal

Nepal has been one of the major sending countries for foreign labour migration, where a considerable section of its population depends on overseas employment for their livelihood. Data from the Department of Foreign Employment (DOFE) show that over 4.5 million Nepali workers have migrated abroad for employment since the early 2000s, with the majority migrating to Gulf countries such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security [MoLESS], 2023). FLM has been a cornerstone of Nepal's economy, with remittances contributing approximately 23 per cent of the country's GDP in 2022 (World Bank, 2024). However, recent years have seen an increase in female migration, particularly for domestic work, raising concerns about gender-specific vulnerabilities and exploitation (MoLESS, 2023).

The higher dependence on FLM has led to important socio-economic changes in Nepal, including shifts in occupational patterns, household dynamics, and community structures. While remittances have contributed to higher household incomes and increased investment in education and healthcare, they have also made people dependent on foreign employment, potentially constraining domestic economic development. Byanjanakar and Shakha (2021) note that understanding the variables

affecting FLM and its implications for changes in occupation and livelihood is an important input for designing appropriate policies to meet the challenges emerging from migration and its effect on left-behind families.

Migration has become increasingly common and has been on the rise worldwide in recent decades as a part of human life. As of 2019, the international migrant worker population of 169 million constitutes 4.9 per cent of the global labour force, of which 41.5 per cent are women migrant workers (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2021). Nepal has not been an exception, as there is a long history of migration from Nepal in the form of pilgrims, political refugees, and soldiers (Shattuck et al., 2019). Historically, Nepal has been experiencing foreign labour migration in the form of the Lahure culture (Gurung, 2012), which has now diversified and expanded to many countries worldwide. The significant flow of labour migration has now shifted from Indian destinations to the Gulf countries, Malaysia, and developed countries (Adhikari et al., 2023). Labour migration has become an essential part of livelihood in recent decades for the aspirants of foreign migration who find no or limited employment opportunities with decent payments (Mak et al., 2021). Nepali youths have been migrating abroad for a better livelihood (Khatriwada, 2023). Persistent economic hardship and subsistence-level living conditions have pushed many individuals to leave their homeland for improved living standards for their families.

Foreign labour migration has been a defining feature of the socio-economic landscape in Nepal, as millions of Nepali workers have sought work opportunities abroad. While FLM, on the one hand, has contributed to poverty alleviation and improved household outcomes through remittances, it has also led to significant occupational and livelihood changes among migrant workers and their families, on the other hand. Thus, while there is a growing

literature related to FLM, few studies have focused on the socio-economic factors that drive occupational changes among foreign labour migrants in Nepal. In addition, the role of remittances in shaping key household outcomes such as income, education, and asset accumulation remains underexplored in Nepalese communities. There is also a lack of comparison in how different communities undergo changes in occupation and livelihood owing to FLM.

This paper attempts to fill these gaps by analysing the factors associated with occupational and livelihood changes among foreign labour migrants in Nepal. The major focus is on the socio-economic drivers of occupational shifts, assessing the impact of remittances on household outcomes, and comparing various communities to provide insights for concerned stakeholders aiming at improving the well-being of migrant workers and their families'

Marginalised and indigenous populations have been given less attention within broader migration discourse. These populations are often characterised by poverty, discrimination, and limited access to resources, and they face significant challenges during migration. They are often underrepresented in migration discourse and excluded from the equitable opportunities within the migration process (International Organisation for Migration [IOM], 2005). However, the receiving countries tend to favour migrants with specific skills and capacities (Wotherspoon, 2018).

Marginalised groups defined by gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and intersectionality (World Bank, 2023) face challenges in different stages of migration, including pre-departure, transit, and destination stages. Limited access to resources, opportunities, and information increases their vulnerability, exposing them to a higher risk of exploitation. The situation is more pervasive among marginalised communities where people depend on manual work for daily wages (International Organisation for Migration [IOM], 2019).

Foreign labour migration has remained a livelihood strategy in subsistence farming communities globally. One of the essential considerations of the impact of such migration is its effect on agricultural production and livelihood resilience among migration-associated families (Gautam, 2017). The effect of foreign labour migration on livelihood, in general, has been studied by various scholars (Gautam, 2017; Karki Nepal et al., 2022; Maharjan et al., 2021; Khatiwada, 2021; Mishra & Kunwar, 2020; Rai, 2018). However, similar context needs exploration, particularly for marginalised populations, specifically for occupational change, which this study tries to address. This study focuses on foreign labour migrants from three communities of the Kaski district: *Gandarva*, *Majhi*, and *Kumal*. These communities have minimal representation (less than one per cent of the population) nationally (National Statistics Office, 2023b) and are considered among indigenous populations (National Statistics Office, 2023a).

The study addresses how remittances have influenced key household outcomes, including income, health, and asset accumulation, through foreign labour migration. Moreover, it assesses the occupational (traditional) changes experienced by foreign labour migrant families from the selected communities.

Methods

Using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design, this study ensured methodological rigour, allowing triangulation of data and hence providing a more nuanced understanding of how migration impacts occupational and livelihood changes in marginalised communities.

The study employed primary data from members of marginalised communities, mainly *Gandarvas* (Panta, 2021), *Majhis* or *Jalaris* (Gurung et al., 2012), and *Kumals* residing in Kaski district of Gandaki

Province. The sampling unit was the family in which at least one family member was absent in the last twelve months due to foreign labour migration. The selection of these communities offers ethnic, occupational, and socio-economic diversity, thereby enriching the comprehensiveness and representativeness of marginalised labour migrants in Nepal (Adhikari et al., 2023).

The sample size for the quantitative data component was based on households that had at least one member absent within the previous year of the survey period as an overseas labour migrant. Preliminary piloting identified a total of 121 individuals associated with foreign labour migration, including both current migrants abroad (n=68) and returnees (n=53). Since the maximum number of possible households was 121, a census of all identified households was conducted in the selected communities. Moreover, for the qualitative component, each community had one focus group discussion, with 8 participants involved. Likewise, two families from each community were selected for in-depth interviews.

Variables and Hypotheses

The independent variables include socio-demographic, economic, and migration-related characteristics. The socio-demographic variables include age, sex, marital status, education, and family type. The economic variables are pre-migration occupation and remittance savings. Likewise, the migration-related characteristics include destination choice and duration of migration. The dependent variable is occupational change following the migration of a household member for overseas employment. For the purpose of analysing the data with multinomial logistic regression, the dependent variable is grouped into three categories: no change in occupation, change in occupation from traditional to other occupations, and change in occupation from other to traditional

occupations. Traditional occupations refer to those historically practised by these specific communities across generations, while other occupations denote non-traditional forms of employment. No change in occupation indicates that the pre-migration occupational status remained unchanged even after migration.

The model for the factors associated with occupational change is,

$$\text{Occupational Change} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{age}) + \beta_2 (\text{education}) + \beta_3 (\text{migration duration}) + \beta_4 (\text{remittance savings}) + \beta_5 (\text{destination country}) + \varepsilon$$

The following hypotheses were tested for quantitative analysis of the data:

H_0 = age, education, migration duration, remittance saving, and destination country have no significant effect on occupation change among migrants.

H_1 = at least one of the independent variables significantly influences occupational change.

Ethical Considerations

Written consent was obtained from the participants/respondents before the collection of data, with prior information provided to the participants about the research objectives. Also, the information collected from the respondents is used for research purposes only. Data privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality have been considered strictly as per the Statistics Act of Nepal 2079.

Results

Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics

This section discusses the distribution of respondents (n = 121) according to selected demographic and socio-economic characteristics (Table 1).

The age distribution of the respondents ranges from below 25 years to 45 years and above, with a mean age of 33.22 years (SD = 4.7). Most of the respondents, 37.2 per cent, were between 25–30 years old, while

29.8 per cent fell within the age group of 30–35 years. About 7.4 per cent were 45 years and above. This implies that the majority of the respondents were in early to mid-adulthood, which is considered a stage of active labour market participation and migration decision-making.

The sample comprises a much larger proportion of males (81%) compared with females (19%). The distribution suggests that migration is male-dominated in this context. This reflects broader gendered patterns of labour migration, where the probability of men migrating for employment opportunities is higher than that of women.

Among the respondents, 83.5 per cent were married, while 16.5 per cent were single. This indicates that family and marital responsibilities are major driving forces in the migration decision of the study population. Married individuals migrate to secure livelihoods for their households.

Kumal is the largest ethnic group among the surveyed population, with a share of 49.6 per cent, followed by Gandarva with 25.6 per cent and Majhi with 24.8 per cent. The higher representations of Kumal respondents may be related to traditional livelihood practices and economic conditions that might push them to migrate. The distribution shows the need for further analysis of caste-based migration and its socio-economic implications.

The highest number of respondents, before migration, was unemployed, standing at 35.5 per cent, indicating that a lack of job opportunities in their place of origin may have been one of the significant push factors for migration. Other prevalent occupations included agriculture (24.0 %) and business (13.2 %), suggesting that although some of them were employed, these occupations were insufficient to sustain their livelihoods. Smaller groups included daily wage labourers at 10.7 per cent, and people engaged in traditional occupations at 9.9 per cent. This indicates that economic insecurity and the lack of

livelihood opportunities might be a critical driver for migration.

A majority of the respondents reported no formal education at all, amounting to 56.2 per cent, followed by 28.1 per cent who had basic level education. Only 13.2 per cent reported secondary education, and a small proportion (2.5 %) reached a bachelor's degree or above (Table 1).

From a literacy perspective, 56.2 per cent are illiterate, and 43.8 per cent are literate. The high prevalence of illiteracy further demonstrates the socio-economic disadvantages facing the study population, which limits their ability to access better livelihood opportunities and health services. While 42.5 per cent of respondents were insured, 57.5 per cent had no health insurance. The fairly low health insurance coverage indicates that financial vulnerability could be experienced in the use of health care services.

The foreign labour migrants' data revealed that 35.5 per cent of the respondents were unemployed before migration, implying that migration is largely an economic necessity. Of those employed, 24.0 per cent were engaged in traditional occupations, while 13.2 per cent were in their own small businesses, 10.7 per cent in agriculture, and 9.9 per cent were service-related.

More than half of the respondents were from a nuclear family, 40.0 per cent from a joint family, and 6.7 per cent from an extended family. The predominance of nuclear family systems might indicate a shift away from traditional family structure, which could also affect migration patterns due to reduced reliance on wider family support networks.

The socio-economic characteristics of respondents indicate striking structural constraints on the migration decision. High illiteracy and low education exclude access to skilled work, while mass unemployment and financial insecurity are the main push factors for migration.

Table 1
Distribution of Respondents by Selected Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics

General Characteristics	n=121	
	Number	Per cent
Age		
Below 25 Years	3	2.5
25-29 Years	45	37.2
30-34 Years	36	29.8
35-39 Years	22	18.2
40-44 Years	6	5.0
45 Years and above	9	7.4
Mean \pm SD	33.22 \pm 4.7	
Sex		
Female	23	19
Male	98	81
Marital Status		
Single	20	16.5
Married	101	83.5
Caste/ Ethnicity		
Gandarva	31	25.6
Majhi	30	24.8
Kumal	60	49.6
Pre-migration Occupation		
Agriculture	29	24.0
Daily wages	13	10.7
Business	16	13.2
Traditional	12	9.9
Unemployed	43	35.5
Other	8	6.6
Literacy Status		
Illiterate	68	56.2
Literate	53	43.8
Education		
No formal education	68	56.2
Basic Level	34	28.1
Secondary level	16	13.2
Bachelor's degree or above	3	2.5
Had Health Insurance		
Yes	51	42.5
No	69	57.5
Occupation		
Traditional	29	24.0
Agriculture	13	10.7
Business	16	13.2
Service	12	9.9
Other	8	6.6
Unemployed	43	35.5
Family Type		
Nuclear	64	53.3
Joint	48	40.0
Extended	8	6.7

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Migration-related Characteristics of the Respondents

The distribution of respondents by migration-related characteristics is discussed in this section. These characteristics include the duration of migration, country of destination, purpose of migration, type of job, and monthly average income, giving the details on migratory patterns and the economic outcomes thereafter (Table 2).

In all, 62.8 per cent of the respondents have been migrants for 5–10 years, while 33.1 per cent have migrated within the last five years. Only 4.1 per cent have been migrants for more than ten years. This indicates that the overwhelming majority of the respondents are relatively recent migrants, suggesting an increasing trend in migration over the past decade. The preponderance of medium-term migration (5–10 years) may reflect economic pressures that keep migrants abroad for an extended period to support their families.

Countries receiving the highest percentage of migrants were the Gulf countries at 53.7 per cent, followed by Malaysia at 42.1 per cent, while other countries received just 4.1 per cent of the migrants. This pattern reflects broader trends in labour migration from Nepal, where GCC countries and Malaysia continue to serve as major destinations for Nepali migrant workers due to employment opportunities for low-skilled and unskilled labour. The high concentration of migrants in these regions provides the need for policies to ensure better working conditions and protection mechanisms for Nepali workers abroad.

Economic reasons are dominant, propelled by 68.6 per cent of the total respondents. This reveals that migration is a livelihood strategy for people seeking better job opportunities. Additionally, 26.4 per cent of the respondents mentioned educational dropout as a cause for migration, suggesting that limited educational attainment restricts local employment opportunities and necessitates seeking employment abroad.

The remaining small share of respondents cited bad family situations (3.3%) or political factors (1.7%) as a reason for their migration, indicating that economic drivers are greater than social and political factors that influence decisions to migrate.

A majority of respondents were employed in the manufacturing sector (60.3%), followed by construction (36.4%). A small portion (3.3%) worked in agriculture, including farming and plantation work, fisheries, and forestry. Manufacturing and construction jobs are dominant, which means that the majority of the migrants are engaged in manual or low-skilled labour, reflecting limited employment opportunities available in the destination country. This indicates that skill enhancement programs are very crucial in improving the labour and income aspects of migrant workers.

Income-wise, 40.5 per cent of respondents earned between Rs. 20,000–30,000 per month, and 27.3 per cent had below Rs. 20,000. Others had between Rs. 30,000 - Rs. 40,000, at 25.6 per cent, and just 6.6 per cent said they earned more than Rs. 40,000. These figures suggest that while migration is a source of income, wages for an appreciable number of workers are still relatively low. The concern of respondents in lower to middle incomes indicates limited savings potential and constrained economic mobility among migrant workers.

The migration-related characteristics of the respondents indicate that economic factors are central to driving migration. The dominance of the Gulf countries and Malaysia as destinations is consistent with the wider national trends in migration. Most migrants are concentrated in low-skill employment sectors, and their earnings are concentrated in the low-wage brackets. These findings highlight the importance of policies aimed at enhancing skills training, improving labour protection, and assuring better economic returns for migrant workers.

Table 2
Distribution of Respondents by Migrants' Characteristics

Migration-related Characteristics		N	Per cent
Duration of Migration	Less than 5 years	40	33.1
	5-10 years	76	62.8
	More than 10 years	5	4.1
Destination country	Gulf countries	65	53.7
	Malaysia	51	42.1
	Other countries	5	4.1
The main reason for migration	Economic	83	68.6
	Educational Dropout	32	26.4
	Bad family situation	4	3.3
Type of Employment	Political factors	2	1.7
	Manufacturing	73	60.3
	Construction	44	36.4
Average Monthly Income	Agriculture (farming, plantation, fishery, forestry)	4	3.3
	Less than Rs. 20,000	33	27.3
	Rs. 20,000-30,000	49	40.5
	Rs. 30,000-40,000	31	25.6
	Rs. 40,000 or More	8	6.6

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Migration Drivers

The main reasons for migration among foreign labour migrants are economic, which this study also confirms for the study population. Almost seven in every ten migrants reported that they migrated because of the lack of local employment opportunities. Approximately one in four migrants reported migrating after dropping out of education due to their families' inability to support continued schooling. However, very few of the respondents reported having migrated due to family problems and political conflicts in their communities.

Choice of the Destination

Prospective migrants typically engage in a deliberate decision-making process before selecting a destination country for labour migration. This choice is not random; it is shaped by certain motivational factors - such as economic opportunities,

employment conditions, social networks, migration policies, and perceived quality of life - which collectively influence migrants to evaluate and identify the most appropriate and advantageous destination available to them.

The data revealed that the most significant factor for choosing the destination is satisfactory wages (35.5%), followed by the destinations with employment opportunities that do not require any special training (24.8%), and job and visa access from friends/family members (24.8%). However, every tenth respondent made the selection of the destination based on the affordability cost to reach there, and a small proportion (3.3%) chose the countries of destination because they could not afford to go to other countries despite their interest. The data indicate that economic motivation is dominant in making destination choices, while network and accessibility are equally important in making destination choices.

Income of Migrants

The average monthly income of migrants was reported to be Rs. 27,343 with a standard deviation of 8,357 and a standard error of 760. The average monthly income ranged from a minimum of Rs. 13,500 to a maximum of Rs. 47,500. The majority (40.5%) of the respondents earned between Rs. 20,000 and Rs. 30,000. The proportion having a monthly salary of under Rs. 20,000 was 27.3 per cent, and those earning between Rs. 30,000 and Rs. 40,000 were 25.6 per cent. Only a small proportion (6.6%) received the highest salary, i.e. Rs. 40,000 or more.

The remuneration received by migrant workers for labour performed under often precarious conditions abroad remains disproportionately low relative to their efforts. Consequently, such earnings are frequently inadequate to satisfy their individual aspirations and the socio-economic needs of their households.

This is what the focus group participants reflected on during informal conversations among themselves. Therefore, policy interventions, including bilateral agreements with labour-receiving countries, are necessary to ensure fair wages based on job categories.

Remittance Usage

Remittances are the major source of family expenditure in Nepali societies. Both the productive and unproductive sectors receive a significant share of remittances in Nepal.

The respondents reported that nearly half of the remittances (44.6%) are spent on daily consumption, followed by education (25.6%), savings (17.4%), investment in land property (6.6%), and health (5.9%). The distribution of remittances in these communities indicates that everyday household expenses such as food, clothing, and utility bills are the utmost priorities. A significant proportion has been allocated for education in these communities, reflecting the long-term family prospects. Savings

indicate an effort to build financial security for future needs and risk management. Moreover, a small proportion is spent on the healthcare of the family members and investment in land and property.

Main Sources of Income after Migration

Migrants' families are largely reliant on remittances (36.4%) in these communities, as it accounts for the largest share of household income, indicating the substantial dependence on the earnings sent by the migrants abroad. Income from the family business (24.8%) is the second largest source of family income among the respondents.

The respondents' families' income includes income generated by other family members (12.4%), income from agricultural produce (11.6%), and income from other sources (14.9%), such as pensions, financial assistance, and income from unspecified sources. The results reveal that the remittances alone contribute more than other single income sources. The notable contribution of family businesses indicates that many families successfully invested remittances in entrepreneurial activities for self-dependence. However, the lowest share of income from agricultural activities shows that migrant families have shifted from agricultural practices to non-agricultural activities for income-generating activities in these communities.

Factors Associated with Occupational Changes

The likelihood ratio chi-square test assesses the overall significance of the model. The difference between the intercept-only model (-2 Log Likelihood = 136.654) and the final model (-2 Log Likelihood = 132.920) is 3.734 with 10 degrees of freedom (df), yielding a significance value of 0.052 (Table 3). While this result is slightly above the conventional significance threshold ($p < 0.05$), it suggests a marginally significant improvement in model fit (Table not shown).

Moreover, the Pearson chi-square statistic (105.181, $p = 0.449$) indicates that the model fits the data well, as the p -value is 0.449, which is above 0.05. This suggests that the model does not significantly deviate from observed data and is an appropriate fit for explaining occupational change among migrants (Table not shown).

Similarly, the likelihood ratio tests shown in Table 3 evaluate each predictor's contribution to the model by comparing the full model with reduced models from which a single variable is excluded at a time. The results indicate that age ($\chi^2 =$

1.735, $p = 0.040$), length of migration ($\chi^2 = 0.133$, $p = 0.036$), savings on remittance ($\chi^2 = 0.134$, $p = 0.035$), and destination country ($\chi^2 = 1.001$, $p = 0.036$) are influential factors on occupational change among migrants. Education ($\chi^2 = 0.556$, $p = 0.057$) is slightly significant, suggesting a weaker but significant association. In general, these findings show that factors related to financial stability, time abroad, and destination country conditions play an influential part in determining migrants' occupational trajectories.

Table 3

Determinants of Migrants' Occupational Changes (based on Log Likelihood Method)

Effect	-2 Log Likelihood of Reduced Model	Likelihood Ratio Tests		
		Chi-Squared	df	Sig.
Intercept	133.101	.181	2	.014
Age Group	134.655	1.735	2	.040
Education	133.476	.556	2	.057
Migration Duration	133.053	.133	2	.036
Remittance Savings	133.054	.134	2	.035
Destination	133.921	1.001	2	.036

Note. The chi-squared statistic is the difference in -2 log-likelihoods between the final model and a reduced model. The reduced model is formed by omitting an effect from the final model. The null hypothesis is that all parameters of that effect are 0.

The parameter estimates provide insights into the direction and strength of the relationship between independent variables and occupational change. The results in Table 4 indicate the influence of age, education, migration duration, remittance savings, and destination country on the likelihood of migrants transitioning from one occupation to another.

Occupational Change from Traditional/ Unskilled to Other Occupations

Older migrants are more likely to change from unskilled or traditional employment to other types of employment ($\beta = 0.457$, $p = 0.032$, Odds Ratio-[OR]=1.579), indicating that accumulated skills and experience contribute to upward mobility. Similarly,

increased education is also positively associated with changes in occupation ($\beta = 0.149$, $p = 0.053$, OR = 1.161), although the significance is marginal (Table 4).

Length of migration is also important in occupational change, as longer duration overseas increases the likelihood of occupational change ($\beta = 0.095$, $p = 0.048$, OR = 1.099). In addition, economic security, as indicated by remittance savings, has a marginal positive influence on the likelihood of occupational change ($\beta = 0.084$, $p = 0.046$, OR = 1.087). However, the destination country appears to have a suppressive effect ($\beta = -0.202$, $p = 0.051$, OR = 0.817), meaning that structural labour market constraints in some countries may deter migrants from flowing into better

occupations.

Occupational Change from Other Occupations to Traditional/Unskilled Work

Conversely, older migrants are also more likely to transition back to traditional or unskilled work ($\beta = 0.503$, $p = 0.051$, OR = 1.653), which is likely to show struggles like work insecurity or reduced physical abilities. Education attempts to decrease the prospect of occupational downward mobility ($\beta = -0.146$, $p = 0.080$, OR = 0.864), although a statistically significant influence does not exist.

Migration duration negatively impacts downward occupational mobility ($\beta = -0.144$, $p = 0.042$, OR = 0.866), where the increased duration of experience in foreign

labour markets is capable of discouraging migrants from falling back into unskilled jobs. However, higher remittance savings act as a buffer against downward mobility ($\beta = -0.042$, $p = 0.045$, OR = 0.959), further reinforcing the influence of economic stability in career progression. Destination countries are also significantly involved ($\beta = -0.765$, $p = 0.034$, OR = 0.465) to the extent that a few destination countries provide better protection against downward mobility through job or policy security.

These findings collectively highlight the complex interplay among demographic, economic, and situational influences in the production of migrants' careers.

Table 4

Factors Associated with Occupational Change

Occupational Change ^a		B	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B)	
								Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Changed (From Tradition/Unemployed to Others)	Intercept	-.373	1.337	.078	1	.081			
	Age Group	.457	.358	1.623	1	.032	1.579	.782	3.186
	Education	.149	.251	.352	1	.053	1.161	.709	1.900
	Migration Duration	.095	.371	.065	1	.048	1.099	.532	2.272
	Remittance Savings	.084	.258	.105	1	.046	1.087	.656	1.802
	Destination	-.202	.339	.355	1	.051	.817	.421	1.587
Changed (Others to Tradition/Unemployed)	Intercept	-1.153	3.011	.147	1	.072			
	Age Group	.503	.768	.428	1	.051	1.653	.367	7.444
	Education	-.146	.600	.060	1	.080	.864	.266	2.800
	Migration Duration	-.144	.825	.030	1	.042	.866	.172	4.361
	Remittance Savings	-.042	.574	.005	1	.045	.959	.312	2.953
	Destination	-.765	.860	.790	1	.034	.465	.086	2.514

Note. ^aThe reference category is: No change in occupation.

The results indicate a marginally significant improvement in model fit, with a chi-square of 3.734 ($p = 0.052$). Although this result is slightly above the conventional significance level, the Pearson chi-square statistic (105.181, $p = 0.449$) suggests that the model fits the data well. Moreover, likelihood ratio tests identify the main predictors of occupation change among

migrants. Such predictors include age, migration duration, remittance savings and destination country, which are statistically significant predictors. Education is also marginally significant, implying a weak but meaningful relationship with occupational change.

Older migrants are more likely to move from unskilled or traditional occupations to

other forms of employment than younger migrants due to accumulated skills and experiences. Higher education and longer migration duration also benefit occupational change, but economic security, in the form of remittance savings, is only a facilitating factor. Some destination countries, however, have structural labour constraints that hold occupational mobility at bay. Conversely, older migrants also have a higher likelihood of returning to unskilled jobs, possibly due to job insecurity or declining physical ability. Education and migration duration reduce the risks of downward mobility, while remittance savings and conditions in the receiving country act as cushions to shield against occupational decline.

Regarding the role of experience and age, one participant mentioned, "As I got older, my experience was worth more. I could transition from manual labour to a role where I could oversee projects. It's not age; it's what you've learned along the way."

However, the young participants have their own different opinions. A participant [IDIK_02]¹ stated:

The majority of my colleagues prefer urban employment in business sectors and service fields to traditional occupations. We only migrate overseas for tertiary education to experience a higher income and a luxurious lifestyle. However, my preference for gaining skills through training in modern occupations, such as electricians, plumbers, and mechanics, with the guarantee of guaranteed income opportunities, is different. In this manner, they will enjoy profitable jobs or small businesses in the

nation. The other perspective that I believe in is the need to prioritise giving employment opportunities to community people. I believe that we must sell our community to alleviate economic hardships. My opinion is that our community needs skills and training that we can use, and this would suit people who want to stay in the country.

As there are many challenges in the destination countries for the foreign labour migrants, one participant expressed, "I've been here for years, but the employment scene is tough. Even with my qualifications, I'm up against obstacles because I'm not from around here. It's frustrating when you know you have the skills but cannot get the job."

A participant perceived remittances as a cushion and stated, "The remittances that I put aside were useful in times of hardship when I was without a job. It's not the solution for career advancement, but it provides one with security."

Migration duration and adjustment were key to one of the participants [FGDM_05]. He mentioned, "The longer I remained, the better I understood how things worked around here. It took some time, but soon I was able to move into a role more suited to my skills. Patience and persistence are key."

These excerpts emphasise the complex interdependence of demographic, economic, and contextual determinants affecting migrants' career progression. Education, age, migration duration, economic status, and destination country significantly influence occupational change, though their effects vary across upward and downward mobility. This reveals the need for targeted policies that promote skill acquisition, economic security, and labour market integration to advance migrants' career progress and stability.

¹ Participants from the qualitative data collection have been assigned some codes. For instance, [IDIG_01] refers to the in-depth interview participant number one from *Gandarva* community. Similarly, [FGDK_05] would refer to the fifth participant from *Kumal* community in focused group discussion. And thus, [IDIM_02] means the second participant of the in-depth interview from *Majhi/Jalari* community. The codes for all participants might not be mentioned as the common themes from more than one participant have been blended for the convenience in presenting the information.

Discussion

The results align with the existing global and regional literature on the socio-economic implications of foreign labour migration and remittance inflows. Most migrants were found to be young males from rural backgrounds with limited education, which is consistent with the trend of migration in developing economies. According to Adhikari and Hobley (2015), the main causes of rural-to-urban migration in Nepal include a lack of employment opportunities, low wages, and economic hardship. This is similar to the South Asian context as well (Mumu et al., 2023; Waseem & Talpur, 2021).

Remittances play a crucial role in reducing poverty in developing nations (World Bank, 2023). In Nepal, where remittances contribute approximately 26.5 per cent of GDP, they are an essential component of household economic strategies (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2022). However, the study also indicates that women constitute a small proportion of migrants, reflecting restrictive government policies that limit female mobility for foreign employment (Rajapakse, 2023). Studies in South Asia confirm that such restrictions on female labour migration lead to higher vulnerability, informality, and exploitative working conditions (Kaur, 2010).

Economic necessity remains the primary driver of migration, with households seeking better income prospects abroad. This is consistent with the neo-classical economic theory of migration, which suggests that wage differentials between origin and destination countries motivate migration (Harris & Todaro, 1970).

A significant number of migrants reported educational dropouts as a contributing factor to their migration decision. This trend is corroborated by research from Bangladesh, which found that many young men abandon schooling in favour of migration due to limited domestic

opportunities (Waseem & Talpur, 2021; Yasin et al., 2024). Furthermore, family instability and political factors were also noted as minor but relevant migration drivers, aligning with findings from other developing nations experiencing social and economic instability (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009).

Likewise, foreign employment has reduced agricultural dependence, with the majority of migrant households moving away from agriculture to small businesses and service-sector jobs. This indeed reflects a wider pattern in South Asia, where migration-induced livelihood diversification has transformed rural economies (Steinbrink & Niedenführ, 2020; Withers et al., 2023).

However, the departure of working-age males has created labour shortages in agriculture, affecting productivity in Nepal's rural areas (Maharjan et al., 2021). Similar trends have been observed in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, where out-migration has led to the "feminisation of agriculture", with women taking on greater responsibilities in farming (Jimenez Atochero, 2024).

Furthermore, not all families have benefited from migration, as job loss abroad, illness, or failure to find gainful employment in destination countries has plunged many into economic distress (De Haas, 2023). This further points out the risks of over-reliance on remittances and requires government policies to enhance economic resilience and reintegration of returnee migrants (Kaur, 2010).

Gender dynamics also enter the fray, as female respondents are more prone to report that nutritional status deteriorates. The reason could also be related to intra-household inequalities in the distribution of available resources, a concern raised in gender studies about internal migration and remittances: women and children may be assigned lower priority when it comes to food distribution, as suggested by Kabeer (2016).

A relatively large proportion of investment is required in house

improvements, resulting in improved conditions for many households. It has been a well-mentioned trend in the literature that most remittances are utilised in the construction or renovation of a house, leading to improved quality of housing, as mentioned by Lokshin et al. (2010). Accordingly, households with higher levels of education and households belonging to a particular ethnic group have been more prone to investment in housing infrastructure. This indicates that socio-cultural factors and awareness lead to greater investment. However, not all households, especially those with lower levels of educational attainment, experience significant improvements in housing. This could be due to a lack of financial literacy or other important financial demands that limit the ability to invest in housing.

The findings point to the importance of specific policies that ensure the full benefits of remittances. The households receiving remittances can be enabled through financial literacy programs to manage funds in ways that improve the chances of health, education, and housing investments. Some community programs may also address gender disparities at the level of intra-household resources.

The migrant workers experience significant occupational changes when they work abroad. A majority of the participants reported that with advancing age, they shifted from unskilled or traditional occupations to more skilled occupations based on their experience and skills acquired over time. This shift was not uniform among all migrants, however. Others faced structural barriers in host countries that limited their occupational mobility, while others were favoured by education and longer migration durations, which facilitated career advancement. Despite these barriers, the majority of migrants were satisfied with their career advancement, attributing the importance of persistence and adaptability in occupational achievement.

Female migrants in particular faced

particular challenges, including gender biases and household responsibilities. In spite of all these obstacles, they claimed the importance of education in enhancing their career opportunities. Some of the women said that taking local courses helped them to better settle in the job market as well as get a better job. However, they did say they feared downward mobility, especially after childbearing interruptions. Generally, while occupational changes promised growth, they also underlined the importance of support policies and infrastructure to facilitate migrants to surmount systemic barriers.

Occupational and livelihood patterns have changed significantly in migrant families. Results show that agricultural engagement has declined, with fewer households depending on farming as their main occupation. Many returnee migrants have turned to small businesses, trade, or self-employment after overseas employment. Other households remain dependent on remittances and do not manage to establish continuing sources of income beyond migration. Improvement in housing and infrastructure is revealed among migrant families, though at times economic instability or loss of jobs in the overseas labour markets results in setbacks. Moreover, it is evident that while migration provides immediate financial relief, it does not necessarily translate into long-term economic security. Households with better financial planning and investment strategies experience more sustainable livelihood improvements than households dependent on remittance incomes.

Conclusion

The findings reveal that the migrants tend to shift from traditional or unskilled labour to more skilled occupations in the host countries, although transitions are determined by factors such as education, migration duration and structural barriers in the host country labour market. Female

migrants face gender discrimination and household responsibilities; however, they also benefit from education in upgrading their career prospects. Foreign experience has enabled a shift from subsistence agriculture to small business or self-employment for the majority of returnee migrants. However, for some households, remittances have led to dependency without generating sustainable income sources.

In general, the study emphasises the dual role of foreign labour migration. Though it is an essential survival strategy for poor households in poverty alleviation and the enhancement of household well-being, its long-term potential for economic security is only partially realised. Policymakers need to create favourable conditions for productive remittance investments and support migrants through training programs and reintegration policies, thereby maximising the developmental migration.

Implications and Limitations

Foreign labour migration has become a major driver of socio-economic change by contributing towards poverty reduction and improved household well-being. It supports livelihood enhancement through better economic opportunities, entrepreneurship development, and shifts among new occupations among the family members left behind. Due to the limited literature on occupational changes among foreign labour migrants from socio-economically marginalised communities, it is essential to better understand the factors driving such changes and their broader implications for development and inequality. This study has some limitations. It is based on the data collected from specific communities – Gandarva, Kumal and Majhi in Kaski District of Gandaki Province, which may not fully represent the diversity of the experiences across other communities in Nepal and limit the generalisability of the findings at the national level. Furthermore, the study focuses only on overseas migration, and it does not include other

forms of migrants, such as student migrants and permanent settlement abroad.

Acknowledgment

We would like to thank everyone who helped directly and indirectly in the preparation of this article. We are grateful for the anonymous reviewers for the constructive feedback to bring the initial manuscript into the present article.

Funding Statement

This article is the part of research supported by the research grant from the International Organisation for Migration-Nepal (IOM-Nepal).

Availability of Data and Materials

Data used in this article are safely stored and will be made available from the corresponding author upon special request.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in relation to this manuscript.

Ethical Compliance

This study involved human participants for the interviews on their lived experiences. Written consent from every participant was taken prior to the interviews. This study, however, used no human biological data or tissue. Prior ethical approval was received from the Ethical Review Board, Office of the Rector, Research Directorate, Tribhuvan University (ERBTU-081-009). We declare that the study was conducted in accordance with accepted ethical standards strictly adhering to the Statistics Act of Nepal 2079.

Consent for Publication

"Not applicable"

Plagiarism and AI Use

The manuscript is free from plagiarism and improper use of AI-generated content. The use of language supporting tool was limited to language support and has not replaced original scholarly contribution.

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