Enhancing Nepal's SDG Framework: The Development of Robust Indicators for Labour Migration Monitoring

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Abstract

Labour migration and remittance inflows are very pivotal component of Nepal's development trajectory, contributing to over 25 percent of its GDP in recent years. This has contributed significantly to household welfare, increasing local, regional and national demands for goods and services, and maintaining national macroeconomic stability. Despite its important contribution, Nepal's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) reporting framework has not yet fully captured the complexity of labour migration, particularly with regard to migrant workers' rights, decent work conditions, recruitment processes, and remittance costs. This paper aims to enhance Nepal's SDG framework by critically reviewing existing labour migration monitoring practices, examining selected regional and international experiences, and proposing a refined set of robust and contextually relevant migration-related indicators. The analysis focuses on four key SDG indicators such as 8.8.1, 8.8.2, 10.7.1, and 10.c.1covering occupational injuries, labour rights compliance, recruitment costs, and remittance costs. Drawing on a study conducted with technical support from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and in collaboration with the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and the National Planning Commission (NPC), the paper assesses data sources, measurement approaches, reporting intervals, and institutional responsibilities associated with each indicator.

The findings reveal substantial variation in how these indicators are defined, measured, and reported, both across countries and within Nepal. The study identifies feasible reporting intervals, appropriate data sources, and pragmatic monitoring arrangements tailored to Nepal's institutional capacity. The paper concludes with actionable recommendations to refine indicator specifications, strengthen coordination among responsible institutions, and improve data systems for SDG reporting. By strengthening its labour migration monitoring framework, Nepal can better track migrant welfare, support informed policy interventions, and meet.

Keywords: *Migration Workers, Labour Migration, Decent Work, Recruitment Costs, Remittance Costs, Migration, Governance, SDG Monitoring.*

1. Introduction

Labour migration has been a central feature of Nepal's socio-economic development for several decades and continuous to shape national development trajectories. Over the past three decades, international migration has intensified, with millions of Nepali workers employed in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Malaysia, India, South Korea, and other destinations. Remittance inflows, contributing over one-quarter of Nepal's gross domestic product (GDP), play a pivotal role in sustaining household consumption, supporting livelihoods, and strengthening national

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foreign exchange reserves. Beyond their economic impact, migrant workers contribute to broader social development outcomes and closely linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, SDG 10 on reducing inequalities, and SDG 17 on data, global partnerships, and monitoring.

Nepal adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, committing to monitor progress on over 480 indicators, including several relevant to labour migration and migrant workers' rights and welfare. Although Nepal has streamlined its SDG indicator framework under the 2030 Agenda from 479 to 301 indicators, migration-related monitoring remains underdeveloped, with persistent gaps in data availability, indicator definitions, measurement frequency, and institutional coordination across agencies.

Despite this commitment, national monitoring systems face challenges in producing timely, reliable, and adequately disaggregated data. Existing datasets often lack sufficient granularity, such as sex, age, ethnicity, disability status, location, administrative unit, or income level. Furthermore, definitions, measurement units, and reporting methodologies for many indicators remain inconsistent, creating gaps between global SDG aspirations and Nepal's operational and institutional capacities.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) plays a critical role in supporting Nepal in efforts to bridge these gaps. Recognizing the contributions of migrant workers to inclusive growth, the ILO provides technical assistance to the Government of Nepal (GoN) in strengthening and implementing SDG monitoring systems. Key initiatives include the Migrant Rights and Decent Work (MIRIDEW) project, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, which aims to strengthen national policies, enhance bilateral and regional migration governance, improve consular support, and facilitate Nepal's engagement in regional and global labour migration dialogues and policy platforms. The ILO also collaborates with the National Planning Commission (NPC) and the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) to support evidence-based reporting and alignment with global SDG targets.

Despite these efforts, operational frameworks for several labour migration-related SDG indicators remain underdeveloped at the national level. Four indicators are particularly relevant to this study: SDG 8.8.1 and 8.8.2, which relate to the protection of labour rights and safe working conditions, and SDG 10.7.1 and 10.c.1, which address migration costs and remittance efficiency for migrant workers. Implementing these indicators at the national level requires defining targets, mapping existing datasets, identifying data gaps, and designing cost-effective and sustainable methods for periodic data collection and reporting.

The NPC's milestone report, Sustainable Development Goals: Status and Roadmap (2016-2030) (2017), underscores the need for a rigorous, data-driven monitoring mechanism for SDG implementation. It elaborates Nepal's commitments to achieving SDG targets and identifies key challenges in tracking progress, including the limited availability of disaggregated data and the lack of standardized measurement frameworks. The report highlights the importance of investing in new surveys, integrating targeted modules into routine statistical censuses, leveraging ICT-enabled

data collection methods, and strengthening national statistical capacity. Additionally, it emphasizes the role of UN agencies and development partners in generating awareness, providing technical assistance, and strengthening SDG integration into planning, programming, and budgeting processes across all tiers of government.

The NPC report further points out that over 100 SDG indicators currently lack clear definitions or nationally available data, particularly for qualitative aspects such as citizens' perceptions of public services, corruption, wellbeing, or human rights issues. Discrepancies between government-recorded data and data compiled by NGOs or ad hoc studies pose additional challenges, particularly for sensitive indicators related to violence, crime, human trafficking, and violations of human rights. These gaps hinder timely and credible reporting, underscoring the need for more structured and coordinated support in data collection and monitoring.

In this context, the study team aims to support the operationalization of four key indicators SDG 8.8.1, 8.8.2, 10.7.1, and 10.c.1 by reviewing their relevance, assessing existing data systems, and proposing a feasible, and cost-effective measurement framework aligned with both national priorities and global SDG standards. The objectives of the study are therefore threefold:

i.   **Review and Adapt Indicators**: Evaluate the relevance and suitability of the four targeted SDG labour migration indicators for Nepal and propose practical, measurable adaptations where needed,

ii. **Benchmark Regional Practices:** Analyze related indicators in countries like India and Bangladesh to inform the design of robust, nationally relevant monitoring frameworks, and

iii. **Develop Monitoring Strategies:** Recommend feasible methods for systematic, periodic data collection, reporting, and dissemination that align with Nepal's current statistical systems and institutional capacity.

Globally, the SDG framework offers a universally accepted structure for measuring progress, which emphasizes data quality, timeliness, and comparability. Research by international think tanks, including the Overseas Development Institute (UK), highlights the critical importance of establishing robust datasets early in the SDG implementation process. For Nepal, this entails addressing data gaps in both quantitative and qualitative indicators, ensuring proper disaggregation, and standardizing definitions, units of measurement, and reporting methodologies.

Operationalizing these indicators will enable the GoN to generate accurate, timely, and internationally credible data on migrant workers' rights, working conditions, recruitment costs, and remittance flows. It will also facilitate informed policy-making, strengthen labour governance, and support Nepal's reporting obligations to global SDG monitoring mechanisms. By mapping existing data sources, identifying gaps, and proposing practical measurement strategies, the study contributes to both national planning priorities and global reporting commitments.

Labour migration is integral to Nepal's socio-economic landscape and closely linked to multiple SDGs. While progress has been made in integrating migration into national development strategies,

significant challenges remain in monitoring and reporting on key indicators. This paper provides a targeted approach to operationalizing four labour migration related SDG indicators, combining national policy needs, global standards, and technical feasibility. The subsequent sections present the rationale, methodology, and detailed assessment of each indicator, followed by recommendations to strengthen Nepal's monitoring and reporting framework, ensuring timely and effective alignment with global SDG commitments.

2. Methodology

This paper employs mixed methods, combining structured assessment, indicator gap analysis, institutional review, and evaluation of data availability and relevance of existing datasets. The approach is designed to align Nepal's labour-migration related SDG indicators with national priorities and global reporting requirements, ensuring feasibility, measurability, and policy relevance.

Indicator Gap Analysis: The assessment begins with a comprehensive review of global SDG migration indicators against Nepal's national context, identifying mismatches in definitions, measurement frequency, feasibility, and data sources. Special attention was given to four key indicators related to decent labour migration -SDG 8.8.1 (frequency rates of occupational injuries), SDG 8.8.2 (compliance with labour rights), SDG 10.7.1 (recruitment costs borne by migrant workers), and SDG 10.c.1 (remittance costs). These indicators were selected based on Nepal's SDG Roadmap (NPC, 2017) and reflect the Government of Nepal's commitments to promoting safe working conditions, protecting labour rights, facilitating orderly migration, and reducing the cost of remittances.

Administrative data, national surveys, migration management systems, and policy documents were reviewed to assess existing data availability and reliability. For example, SDG 8.8.1 relies on the Economic Census (subnational, 10-year frequency), while SDG 10.7.1 and 10.c.1 are monitored through management information systems (MIS) with periodic validation.

Institutional Assessment: It examines the mandates, roles, and capacities of key institutions involved in labour migration and SDG monitoring, including the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MoLESS), the Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE), Nepal Rastra Bank, the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), local governments, and foreign employment agencies. This assessment identifies gaps in data collection, inter-agency coordination, and reporting mechanisms and explores opportunities for strengthening national monitoring systems.

Data Availability and Relevance Assessment: Data were assessed against feasibility criteria such as measurability, validity, potential for disaggregation, resource requirements, and policy usefulness for SDG monitoring and reporting. The study draws on multiple sources, including administrative records, national surveys such as the Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS) population and economic census data, management information systems (MIS) related tomigration and remittances, and existing policy and program reports. These sources were reviewed to assess their coverage, consistency, and suitability for indicator level reporting.

Discrepancies between government data, NGO compilations, and ad hoc studies were critically evaluated to identify the most reliable and cost-effective sources for periodic reporting and to reduce duplication of data efforts.

Methodology employed here is a combination of literature review, comparative analysis, and stakeholder consultations. Key activities included:

i. **Stakeholder Consultations:** Meetings with officials from NPC, ILO Nepal, CBS, MoLESS, and DoFE helped refine the study methodology, assess data availability, and identify alternative options for monitoring the targeted SDG indicators.

ii. **Comparative Review:** The reporting frameworks and measurement practices of over ten Asian countries, including India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Indonesia, were examined to benchmark best practices and inform the adaptation of Nepal's indicators.

iii. **Indicator Refinement:** Based on consultations and comparative review, the study proposed adjustments to the national-level indicators to ensure accuracy, feasibility, and compatibility with international standards.

iv. **Baseline Identification:** Existing data were reviewed to establish baseline values for each of the four targeted indicators, enabling progress tracking and measurement against national and international targets.

v. **Integration into National SDG Framework:** The study developed recommendations for integrating the four indicators into Nepal's overall SDG monitoring and reporting system, facilitating timely and systematic reporting at both national and global levels.

Analytical Approach: Qualitative information from stakeholder feedback, policy documents, and international best practices was triangulated with quantitative data from national surveys, MIS, and administrative records. The methodology is exploratory yet structured, allowing the development of indicators anchored in Nepal's institutional realities while meeting global reporting expectations. This mixed approach ensures that the proposed framework is robust, cost-effective, and operationally feasible within Nepal's institutional context.

Monitoring Framework: It emphasizes a practical monitoring framework with clearly defined responsibilities, data sources, and reporting frequencies for labour migration - related SDG indicators. For example, occupational injury data (SDG 8.8.1) are compiled by CBS at subnational levels every ten years, while labour rights compliance (SDG 8.8.2) is monitored by MoLESS through MIS systems. Recruitment costs and remittance costs (SDG 10.7.1 and 10.c.1) are tracked annually by MoLESS, Ministry of Finance, and Nepal Rastra Bank, enabling more timely reporting and targeted policy interventions. Disaggregation by sex, migrant status, destination country, and administrative units ensures that vulnerable groups, particularly women and precarious workers, are adequately represented in the monitoring system and reflected in SDG reporting outputs.

This monitoring framework responds directly to the gaps identified in the NPC's SDG Roadmap (2022), which highlighted the need for rigorous, data-driven monitoring mechanisms and

the challenges in obtaining disaggregated and standardized and timely data. By combining indicator gap analysis, institutional assessment, and evaluation of data availability, this study provides a feasible framework for operationalizing key labour migration-related SDG indicators in Nepal.

The methodological approach ensures that the proposed framework is actionable, aligned with international standards, and grounded in national institutional realities. It provides the GoN with a practical tool for monitoring progress, supporting evidence-based policymaking, and fulfilling global reporting obligations related to labour migration, decent work, and remittance efficiency under the SDG framework.

3. Result

3.1 Assessment of Nepal's Current SDG Migration Indicators

3.1.1 Fatal and Non-Fatal Occupational Injuries

SDG indicator 8.8.1 measures the frequency of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries per 100,000 workers in the reference group during the reference period, disaggregated by sex and migrant status. It falls under SDG target 8.8, which aims to protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, particularly women migrants and those in precarious employment. The indicator serves as a key measure of the risk associated with occupational hazards, providing insights into the safety conditions of both domestic and overseas Nepali workers.

It is found that occupational injuries vary significantly across destinations. Large numbers of Nepali migrants work in the GCC countries, Malaysia, and South Korea, often in high-risk, physically demanding jobs. Documenting both fatal and non-fatal injuries is critical for understanding existing conditions, identifying root causes, and designing interventions to enhance occupational safety and protect workers' rights.

Fatal and Non-Fatal injury Incidence Rate is a measure of the personal likelihood or risk of having a fatal or a non-fatal occupational injury for each worker in the reference group. The number of occupational injuries expressed per a given number of workers in the reference group is also known as the incidence rate of occupational injuries. The formula adopted in this paper is from the global metadata of SDG indicators which is as follows;

SDG indicator 8.8.1 measures the frequency of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries per 100,000 workers in the reference group during the reference period, disaggregated by sex and migrant status. It falls under SDG target 8.8, which aims to protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, particularly women migrants and those in precarious employment. The indicator serves as a key measure of occupational risk, providing insights into workplace safety conditions for both domestic and migrant workers from Nepal.

Fatal and non-fatal injury incidence rate is a measure of the likelihood or risk of a worker experiencing a fatal or non-fatal occupational injury within a specified reference period. The number of occupational injuries expressed per a given number of workers in the reference group is also referred to as the incidence rate of occupational injuries. The formula adopted in this paper is derived from the global SDG indicator metadata and is consistent with ILO statistical standard.

Nepal's current commitment is to report SDG 8.8.1 at national and subnational levels every ten years using data from the Economic Census, survey, NLFS etc., with NSO as the responsible agency. However, the ten-year interval is considered too long for effective monitoring; reporting every three to four years would be more feasible and policy-relevant. Recent data from the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MoLESS) provide aggregate statistics on migrant worker fatalities and workplace accidents, which can be disaggregated by country and gender for periodic/ interim SDG reporting.

According to *Foreign Employment Board (2020),* migrant worker deaths from Nepal remained high between 2016/17 and 2018/19, peaking in 2017/18. Fatalities due to workplace accidents increased gradually over the period, while deaths from other causes stayed consistently significant. The data also indicate that male migrant deaths rose sharply, whereas female deaths were largely unreported, suggesting either very low incidence or system reporting gasps. Overall, the fact underscores the continuing occupational risks faced by Nepali migrant workers abroad.

3.1. 2 Comparative Measurement Practices in Asia

Measurement practices for SDG 8.8.1 vary considerably across Asian countries due to differences in data sources, levels of disaggregation, and reporting frequency across national statistical system. A review of selected countries illustrates the diversity of approaches adopted to monitor occupational injuries.

India collects annual state-level data on both fatal and non-fatal injuries in factories through the Ministry of Labour and Employment. Bangladesh reports annual frequency rates disaggregated by sex and migrant status via the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments. Pakistan relies on Labour Force Survey data but reports only non-fatal injuries at national and provincial levels due to limited administrative coverage.

The Philippines adopts a more comprehensive approach, using four sub-indicators covering fatal and non-fatal injuries and incidence rates per 100,000 employed persons, reported through ISLE and the Philippine Statistics Authority. In Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Myanmar, data availability remains limited, with Myanmar reporting only non-fatal injuries on an annual basis through administrative records.

Thailand and Cambodia do not report this indicator within their SDG frameworks. These variation across countries high light the importance practices and need for Nepal to adopt a context-specific approach in choosing appropriate data sources, reporting frequency, and disaggregation to generate meaningful and policy-relevant insights.

3.1.3 Indicator 8.8.2: Labour Rights Compliance

SDG indicator 8.8.2 measures national compliance with labour rights, including freedom of association and collective bargaining using ILO textual sources and national legislation. The indicator is qualitative in nature and reflects the extent to which countries have ratified, implemented, and enforced fundamental labour standards in practice.

This indicator is monitored through MIS systems managed by MoLESS. Reporting gaps exist due to incomplete enforcement data, limited sector coverage, and inconsistent disaggregation by sex and migrant status. International practices show that countries such as India and Bangladesh rely on Labour Law compliance audits and periodic inspections to measure compliance, highlighting potential strategies for Nepal to enhance its monitoring frameworks.

3.1.4 Recruitment Costs of Indicators

SDG indicator 10.7.1 measures the recruitment costs borne by migrant workers as a proportion of annual income in destination country. This indicator reflects progress toward promoting orderly, safe and responsible migration by reducing excessive requirement fees and, related expenses.

For Nepali migrant farmers, Nepal currently relies on MIS data from MoLESS, but periodic reporting is constrained by incomplete data on recruitment intermediaries, multiple fee structures, and informal arrangements. Baseline data suggest that costs for Gulf countries, Malaysia, and South Korea are high, with significant variations across destinations.

Regional comparisons indicate that India and Bangladesh periodically collect recruitment cost data using structured surveys of returning migrant workers, which could inform Nepal's monitoring system. Annual reporting is feasible and recommended for timely policy interventions to reduce exploitation.

SDG 10.c.1 measures the proportion of remittance costs relative to the amount remitted, targeting a reduction to below 3 percent by 2030. Nepal's primary data sources include MIS from MoLESS, Ministry of Finance, and Nepal Rastra Bank. While aggregate remittance flows are recorded, cost disaggregation by channel and destination is limited. Enhancing data collection to include formal and informal channels, coupled with periodic reporting, will improve the accuracy and usefulness of this indicator.

3.1.5 Cross-Cutting Observations

The assessment of Nepal's current SDG migration indicators reveals several cross-cutting issues:

1. **Data Gaps:** Incomplete coverage, limited disaggregation, and fragmented reporting systems reduce indicator reliability.

2. **Institutional Coordination**: Overlapping responsibilities and weak integration between central, provincial, and local authorities hinder comprehensive monitoring.

3. **Baseline Limitations:** Existing datasets provide partial insights but often lack disaggregation by sex, destination country, or employment sector.

4. **Periodic Reporting:** Long intervals, such as the ten-year Economic Census, limit the ability to track trends and respond to emerging risks.

5. **International Benchmarking:** Comparative analysis suggests that shorter reporting cycles, structured surveys, and use of MIS systems can improve data quality and policy relevance.

Therefore, Nepal's migration-related SDG indicators require both technical refinement and institutional strengthening. Adapting measurement frameworks, establishing feasible reporting intervals, enhancing data interoperability, and leveraging international best practices are critical steps to ensure accurate, timely, and policy-relevant reporting

3.2 Robust Indicators for Labour Migration Monitoring

Effective monitoring of labour migration in Nepal requires robust indicators that are contextually relevant, methodologically sound, and aligned with global SDG targets. The proposed policy framework is guided by five principles: SDG alignment, feasibility of national data production, policy relevance, gender and social inclusion sensitivity, and comparability over time. Key indicators include the Safe Migration Rate, Recruitment Cost Index, skills-level distribution of migrants, Returnee Reintegration Index, Remittance Utilization Ratio, Migrant Protection Incidents, and occupational safety and labour rights indicators under SDG 8.8. These cover migration channels, costs, skills, reintegration, remittance use, protection mechanisms, and workplace safety. Each indicator is supported by clear definitions, data requirements, computation methods, and feasible data sources, drawing on DoFE databases, labour attaches, financial records, police data, and local government systems.

3.2.1 Occupational Safety: Fatal and Non-Fatal Injuries

SDG 8.8.1 measures the incidence of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries per 100,000 workers, disaggregated by sex and migrant status. For Nepal, this indicator is critical to capturing workplace risks faced both domestically and by Nepali migrant workers abroad, particularly in high-risk destinations such as Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and Korea. Elevated injury and fatality rates among migrant workers reflect unsafe employment practices, hazardous working conditions, and weak regulatory compliance. Systematic monitoring of occupational injuries provides essential evidence for designing targeted interventions to reduce workplace risks, protect labour rights, and strengthen human rights-based approaches to labour migration governance.

The incidence rate is calculated by dividing new fatal or non-fatal injury cases in a reference year by the total number of workers in the reference group, multiplied by 100,000. Nepal currently reports this indicator through the Economic Census every ten years, periodic Nepal Labor Force Survey etc., led by National Statistics, though a reporting cycle of every three to four years is both feasible and more policy-relevant Office (NSO). Data can be compiled from Nepal Police and labour inspections for domestic workers, and from MOLES, the Foreign Employment Board, and Nepali missions abroad for migrants. Regional practices in India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and the Philippines demonstrate that regular, disaggregated monitoring is achievable and effective.

3.2.2 Labour Rights Compliance (SDG 8.8.2)

This indicator measures national compliance with fundamental labour rights, particularly freedom of association and collective bargaining (FACB), drawing on ILO conventions, textual sources, and national legislation. As enabling rights, FACB are essential for social dialogue, decent work, and democratic labour relations. Data collection relies on systematic coding of laws, policies,

and regulatory frameworks against ILO criteria, producing qualitative indicators of compliance. Quantitative measurement remains challenging due to limited policy research capacity and the absence of comprehensive, standardized national datasets, a constraint shared by many Asian countries.

Nepal currently reports this indicator through the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Occupational Safety's MIS, though definitions and specifications remain unclear. Given regional reporting gaps, a periodic qualitative assessment every three to five years is recommended.

Data collection should be integrated into national labour policy research, coordinated by the National Planning Commission and MOLE, with technical collaboration from the ILO to ensure consistency, credibility, and international comparability.

3.2.3 Safe Migration and Skills Distribution Indicators

The Safe Migration Rate measures the proportion of migrant workers using formal and regulated channels, such as DoFE registration, verified employment contracts, and valid visas, helping assess protection against fraud and exploitation. The Skills-Level Distribution indicator classifies migrants into low-, semi-, and high-skilled categories, providing insights for targeted skills development and better alignment with international labour market demand. Data are drawn from the Foreign Employment Board, DoFE, labour attachés, and Nepali embassies in destination countries. Monitoring every three to four years ensures consistency with SDG reporting cycles and supports timely policy adjustments.

3.2.4 Returnee Reintegration and Remittance Utilization

This addresses returnee reintegration and remittance utilization as key dimensions of sustainable labour migration. The Returnee Reintegration Index measures employment status, income stability, and social integration of returnee migrants within 12 months of return, disaggregated by sex and skill level, using survey data and local government employment records. This indicator helps assess the effectiveness of reintegration support and labour market absorption. The Remittance Utilization Ratio examines how remittances are allocated among consumption, savings, and productive investment, drawing on household surveys and banking data. Together, these indicators capture the developmental impact of migration, with monitoring every three to four years enabling meaningful trend analysis and policy refinement.

3.2.5 Migrant Protection, Reintegration, and Reporting Framework

This component tracks migrant protection incidents by recording the number of grievances reported and resolved through institutional mechanisms such as the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Occupational Safety, labour attachés, and the Foreign Employment Board. Grievances are disaggregated by gender, country of employment, and type of complaint, including wage-related issues, contract violations, and workplace injuries. Continuous monitoring with annual data aggregation enables timely identification of systemic risks, assessment of institutional responsiveness, and evidence-based policy interventions to strengthen migrant protection and accountability mechanisms.

The summary table-1 presents the four key SDG labour migration indicators, detailing their definitions, measurement methods, data sources, and recommended reporting intervals. It provides a concise overview to guide consistent monitoring, facilitate data collection, and support evidence-based policy decisions, ensuring Nepal can track progress effectively and align with global SDG reporting standards.

Table 1: Four SDG Labour Migration Indicators, Data Sources, and Reporting Intervals

Indicator	Definition / Focus	Proposed Measurement Method	Data Source(s)	Recommended Reporting Interval	Notes / Remarks
8.8.1	Fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries by sex and migrant status	Periodic assessment of occupational injuries (fatal and serious)	Nepal Police records, household surveys by CBS, employer/ agency records; data on migrant workers in Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia	Every 3 years	Separate reporting for male and female workers; combine domestic and overseas workers for targeted countries
8.8.2	National compliance with labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) by sex and migrant status	Qualitative assessment of legislation and policy; internal monitoring	National legal documents, MOLES and NPC reports, ILO textual sources	Internal reporting; not yet suitable for global comparison	Measurement is currently vague; requires further methodological refinement before standard global reporting
10.7.1	Recruitment costs borne by migrant workers	Targeted primary surveys with unskilled and low-wage migrant workers	Surveys of migrant workers in Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia; stakeholder consultation	Every 3-4 years	Costs recorded in constant USD; survey-based approach recommended rather than administrative MIS data
10.c.1	Remittance costs as a proportion of amount remitted	Calculation of costs for sending fixed remittance amounts (USD 200, USD 500)	World Bank remittance database; small-scale domestic validation surveys	Annually	Indicator specification revised to focus on actual costs rather than proportion of income; validated periodically by MOLES / labor boards

Source: Author's compilation based on various reviewed sources

The broader integration and periodic reporting framework provides a comprehensive, SDG-aligned system for labour migration monitoring in Nepal. It combines administrative records, primary surveys, and qualitative assessments, ensuring disaggregation by gender, skill level, and destination country. Most indicators are reported every three to four years to balance feasibility and trend analysis, while remaining closely linked to policy needs on occupational safety, labour rights, recruitment practices, reintegration, and remittance use. This integrated approach generates actionable insights, supports cross-country benchmarking, and reflects the lived realities of Nepali migrant workers.

3.3 Recruitment and Remittance Costs for Nepalese Workers

3.3.1 Recruitment Costs of Migrant Workers

It focuses on the recruitment costs of Nepali migrant workers under SDG indicator 10.7.1, measured through the Recruitment Cost Index (RCI), defined as the ratio of recruitment costs borne by workers to their monthly income in destination countries. This indicator captures the fairness of migration processes and the financial burden placed on migrants, particularly low-skilled workers. In Nepal, despite the "free-visa, free-ticket" policy introduced in 2015, recruitment costs remain excessively high, with surveys showing payments of NPR 150,000-200,000 for low-skilled jobs in Gulf countries far above the official cap of NPR 10,000. To track this gap, primary surveys of 900-1,000 migrant workers in major destinations such as Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia are proposed every three to four years, with data disaggregated by gender, destination, and skill level.

Building on the assessment of recruitment costs, a systematic monitoring framework is proposed under SDG 10.7.1 to track the financial burden on Nepali migrant workers. The key indicator is recruitment cost as a percentage of monthly income, measured through primary surveys conducted by the Foreign Employment Board (FEB) and the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Occupational Safety (MOLES) every three to four years. Data highlight that intermediaries play a major role in labour migration: 77.8% of workers use recruitment agencies, 30% rely on sub-agents, 11.1% involve family members, 10% use neighbors or friends, and only 1.1% self-manage. Average costs vary by destination, ranging from NPR 120,486 in Qatar to NPR 225,294 in the UAE, with a substantial portion paid to agencies. To mitigate excessive costs, it is recommended that the government review the free-visa policy, enforce transparency, regulate recruitment agencies, and commission periodic surveys to ensure accurate, actionable data for policy and SDG reporting.

3.3.2 Overview of the Indicator10.c.1

Indicator 10.c.1, part of SDG target 10.c under Goal 10, tracks remittance costs as a proportion of the amount sent, highlighting the financial barriers faced by migrant workers. Nepali migrants, primarily employed in unskilled labor roles in Gulf countries (Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia) and Malaysia, often remit small amounts (USD 200-500), which subjects them to disproportionately high transfer costs. While larger remittances benefit from lower relative costs, typical transfers remain expensive, limiting the developmental impact of remittances.

The SDG 10.c target aims to reduce remittance transaction costs to below 3% by 2030 and eliminate high-cost remittance corridors exceeding 5%. This is operationalized in two ways:

First, by monitoring the global average cost of sending USD 200, published quarterly by the World Bank's Remittance Prices Worldwide database covering 365 corridors;

Second, by ensuring that at least three remittance service providers per corridor offer transfers at or below 5%, meeting minimum standards of reliability, accessibility, and quality.

Achieving these targets is critical for enhancing the efficiency and equity of remittances, benefiting both migrants and their families in Nepal.

3.3.3 Nepal's Commitment

Nepal reports SDG indicator 10.c.1 on remittance costs annually, drawing on administrative and financial data managed by the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, and Nepal Rastra Bank. Historical data show a declining trend in remittance costs, from 3.9% in 2015 to 2.7% in 2024, with a target of 2% by 2030. Data are primarily sourced from the World Bank's Remittance Prices Worldwide platform rather than domestic MIS. To ensure consistency and comparability, reporting should standardize remittance amounts at USD 200 and USD 500 and focus on major destination countries, including the Gulf States and Malaysia, mirroring the approach used for recruitment cost monitoring under indicator 10.7.1.

This commitment reflects Nepal's efforts to reduce financial barriers for migrant workers and enhance the developmental impact of remittances.

3.3.4 Regional Practices in Asia

Monitoring of SDG 10.c.1, which tracks remittance costs, varies significantly across Asian countries. India conducts annual measurements of remittance fees for direct bank transfers, reported by the Reserve Bank of India, with sending fees ranging from 0-6.7% and receiving fees from 0-1.5%. Bangladesh and Pakistan report remittance costs annually, though methodologies and coverage differ, with Bangladesh reporting 4.06% in 2015 and 4.48% in 2018, and Pakistan 3.64% in 2018. Sri Lanka and Bhutan have committed to the indicator but lack available data, while the Philippines have the indicator under review. Myanmar reported 7.4% in 2015, whereas Thailand and Cambodia do not report on this indicator.

The World Bank's Remittance Prices Worldwide platform provides a standardized, internationally comparable source for tracking costs and is updated quarterly. Regional practices highlight the importance of harmonized methodologies and periodic reporting to ensure accurate benchmarking. Nepal can leverage these lessons by standardizing remittance measurements, focusing on key corridors, and using international platforms to compare costs, inform policy, and support efforts to reduce financial barriers for migrant workers.

3.3.5 Data Use and Reporting Strategy for Nepal

Monitoring remittance costs is essential to reduce financial burdens on Nepali migrant workers and ensure accurate, comparable reporting under SDG 10.c. Nepal should institutionalize standard reporting specifications, focusing on remittance amounts of USD 200 and USD 500, and major

sending countries such as Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia. Data should primarily come from the World Bank's Remittance Prices Worldwide platform, updated quarterly. Historical trends indicate declining transaction costs, with Qatar and Malaysia showing lower costs than Gulf counterparts. Complementary small-scale surveys every 3-4 years targeting major remittance service providers and low-skilled workers will provide additional, context-specific insights for policy guidance.

This approach allows Nepal to track progress toward the SDG target of reducing transaction costs below 5%, benchmark against global standards, and implement interventions to enhance financial inclusion.

The consolidated framework of table-2 presents a set of robust labour migration indicators tailored for Nepal, integrating verified data and best practices. It serves as a comprehensive guide for monitoring, reporting, and policy-making to improve migrant welfare and track SDG progress effectively

Table 2: Consolidated Framework of Robust Labour Migration Indicators for Nepal

SDG Target & Indicator	Definition	Data Source	Unit of Measurement	Disaggregation	Frequency	Responsible Agency
8.8.1: Frequency of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries	Fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries per 100,000 workers	Domestic: Police HQ, MoHA; Migrant: FEB/MOLES, Nepali Embassies in Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia	Cases per 100,000 workers	Sex (male/female), migrant status, country, skill type	Every 3-4 years	MOLES/FEB & CBS
8.8.2: Level of national compliance with labour rights (FACB)	Compliance with freedom of association and collective bargaining based on ILO textual sources and national legislation	MOLE MIS, ILO collaboration	Qualitative index (coded from legislation)	Sex, migrant status	Every 3-5 years	MOLE/NPC
10.7.1: Recruitment cost borne by employee	Recruitment cost as proportion of monthly income in destination country	Primary survey (FEB/MOLES), household surveys, FGDs	Percentage	Gender, country, skill type	Every 3-4 years	MOLES/FEB
Safe Migration Rate	Share of workers using formal channels (DoFE registration, employment contract, visa verification)	DoFE, Labour Attaches, FEB	Percentage	Sex, skill type, destination	Every 3-4 years	MOLES/FEB

SDG Target & Indicator	Definition	Data Source	Unit of Measurement	Disaggregation	Frequency	Responsible Agency
Skills-Level Distribution of Migrants	Share of workers in low-, semi-, high-skilled categories	DoFE, FEB, Labour Attaches	Percentage	Sex, destination	Every 3-4 years	MOLES/FEB
Returnee Reintegration Index	Employment, income, and social reintegration outcomes within 12 months	Household surveys, local government employment records	Index (0-100)	Sex, skill type, region of origin	Every 3-4 years	MOLES, CBS, Local Gov.
Remittance Utilization Ratio	Proportion of remittances allocated to consumption, savings, investment	Household surveys, banking records	Percentage	Sex, skill type, region	Every 3-4 years	CBS, MOLES
Migrant Protection Incidents	Number of grievances reported and resolved through institutional mechanisms	FEB, MOLES, Labour Attachés	Number of cases	Sex, country, type of grievance	Continuous; annual aggregation	MOLES/FEB
Recruitment intermediaries in migration	Share of migrant workers using recruitment agencies, sub-agents, family members, friends, or self-managed	Primary survey	Percentage	Sex, destination	Every 3-4 years	FEB/MOLES
Average Cost of Migration (NPR)	Average total cost and recruitment fees paid by migrant workers	Primary survey, FEB/MOLES	NPR	Sex, country, skill type	Every 3-4 years	FEB/MOLES

Source: Author's compilation based on various reviewed sources

Notes on Framework:

Disaggregation: All indicators are disaggregated by sex, skill type, and country of destination wherever applicable. Additional disaggregation (e.g., age, education) can be added if data permits.

1. **Frequency:** Most indicators rely on 3-4 year periodic surveys or administrative reporting. Some indicators (e.g., migrant protection incidents) are collected continuously with annual aggregation.

2. **Data Sources:** Combines administrative data (MoHA, MOLES, FEB), embassy reporting, household surveys, and primary field surveys for comprehensive coverage.

3. **Responsible Agencies:** MOLES and FEB are primary implementers; CBS and local government bodies support data processing, aggregation, and publication.

4. **Integration with SDG Reporting:** The framework aligns with SDG 8 (decent work, labour rights, occupational safety) and SDG 10 (migration costs), while incorporating locally relevant practices such as recruitment cost measurement and safe migration channels.

By focusing on key corridors and standardized remittance amounts, Nepal can generate actionable data that informs policies on reducing costs, improving remittance efficiency, and maximizing developmental benefits for families and communities dependent on remittances.

The refined indicator system also strengthens Nepal's capacity to report on global SDG commitments while generating national-level insights on labour market outcomes, occupational safety, recruitment practices, and returnee reintegration.

It highlights institutional needs, including digital system integration, capacity building, and improved governance of recruitment agencies. Greater data transparency supports ethical recruitment, bilateral labour agreements, and negotiation leverage with destination countries. Overall, these measures bridge the gap between global aspirations and national realities, enabling meaningful, evidence-based migration and remittance reporting.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

4.1 Discussion

This study assessed Nepal's capacity to monitor labour migration under the SDGs, focusing on four key SDG indicators: 8.8.1, 8.8.2, 10.7.1, and 10.c.1. While Nepal has made progress in SDG reporting, significant gaps remain in data availability, measurement methods, indicator specification, and institutional coordination.

Recruitment costs (10.7.1) remain high despite the "free-visa, free-ticket" policy, with low-skilled workers paying NPR 120,000-225,000, often through multiple intermediaries. Periodic primary surveys every three to four years, disaggregated by gender and skill, can provide actionable insights. **Remittance costs (10.c.1)** are disproportionately high for small transfers (USD 200-500), with the SDG target to reduce costs below 3% by 2030. Nepal reports this annually using World Bank data supplemented by MoF, MoLES, and NRB records, and standardized reporting for key corridors is feasible.

Occupational safety and **labour rights (8.8.1 & 8.8.2)** can be monitored through CBS, MoLES, and Police data, though rights violations (8.8.2) remain hard to quantify. Regional comparisons show wide variation in data practices across Asia, emphasizing the need for standardized methodologies. Nepal's SDG monitoring faces fragmented responsibilities, inconsistent definitions, and limited digital integration. Strengthening inter-agency coordination, harmonized data systems, and periodic surveys is essential for reliable, policy-relevant reporting and global comparability

4.2 Conclusion

This paper has reviewed labour migration and decent labor work-related SDG monitoring framework of Nepal by closely examining four priority indicators-SDG 8.8.1, 8.8.2, 10.7.1, and 10.c.1. The analysis shows that, although labour migration is very important in Nepal's development pathway, its representation and coverage in the SDG reporting system remains very partial and uneven. There are huge gaps in data availability, inconsistent in indicators' definitions, long delays in reporting intervals, and weak coordination among responsible institutions in reporting labour statistics; these factors continue to limit the usefulness of migration-related indicators for policy formulation. Review of experiences from selected Asian countries further suggest that effective monitoring of labour migration does not depend on complex systems alone, but on clear indicator design, realistic reporting cycles, and practical use of existing administrative and survey data in national statistical systems

The paper suggests that strengthening Nepal's SDG migration framework is both an urgent due task, and if committed this can be achievable work. By refining indicators' specification, aligning data collection process with institutional capacity, and improving coordination among key agencies, Nepal can move towards a more credible and policy-relevant SDG indicators monitoring system. Better measurement of occupational injuries, labour rights compliance, recruitment costs, and remittance costs would allow policymakers to track migrant welfare more accurately and respond to emerging hurdles and risks foreign labor migration sector in a timely manner. More importantly, improved SDG monitoring system can help place migrant workers more visibly within national development planning, ensuring that migration is treated not only as a source of remittances, but as a core development agenda linked to decent work, rights protection, and inclusive growth. Strengthening the SDG indicators monitoring framework will ultimately support better governance of foreign labour migration and enable Nepal to meet both its national development priorities and its global SDG commitments in a more meaningful and inclusive manners.

5. Recommendation

Strengthen Institutional Frameworks

Nepal should establish a central coordination mechanism for SDG labour migration monitoring, involving MoLES, MoF, NRB, CBS, and local governments. Harmonizing data definitions and standardizing reporting templates across agencies, alongside adopting integrated digital platforms, will enable real-time tracking of recruitment, remittance, and occupational safety indicators, improving accuracy and policy relevance.

Enhance Data Collection and Reporting

Primary surveys every three to four years should track recruitment costs in key destinations, while remittance costs can be benchmarked using the World Bank platform, supplemented with national surveys. Police and occupational safety data should strengthen reporting on SDG 8.8.1 and 8.8.2, ensuring comprehensive, disaggregated, and timely information on migrant worker welfare.

Policy Interventions for Recruitment and Remittances

Nepal must enforce transparency and regulate recruitment agencies, ensuring compliance with the free-visa, free-ticket policy. Publicizing cost ceilings, promoting financial literacy, and expanding access to low-cost digital remittance services will protect low-skilled workers and help achieve SDG 10.c targets.

Gender-Sensitive Measures

Surveys and administrative records should include gender-disaggregated data to capture women migrant workers' vulnerabilities. Targeted programs must address exploitation, occupational hazards, and unequal remittance opportunities to ensure equitable protection and empowerment for female migrants.

Future Research Directions

Longitudinal tracking of migrants can assess reintegration, labour rights compliance, and economic outcomes. Evaluations of social protection, insurance and financial inclusion strategies, along with comparative studies on recruitment and remittance policies, will inform evidence-based policy reforms for Nepalese migration governance.

Monitoring and Accountability

Annual reports summarizing SDG indicators 8.8.1, 10.7.1, and 10.c.1 should be published. An independent review mechanism can validate data, track government commitments, and integrate findings into national SDG reports and global UNSDG platforms to ensure transparency, accountability, and policy impact.

Acknowledgements:

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Annexes:

Table 1: Costs Borne by Labor Migrants in the Process of Foreign Employment

Malaysia-bound	For Malaysia bound workers	For Gulf country-bound workers
Item	Cost in USD	Cost in USD
Passport	From 43.80 (regular processing) to 1131.39 (one-day processing)	From 43.80 (regular processing) to 1131.39 (one-day processing)
Migram	27.15	
Health Check	39.42	39.42 (56.94 for Saudi Arabia)
ISC	28.03	Varies by Country (24.53 for Saudi Arabia)
One-Stop Centre	52.56	
Visa Stamping	6.13	
Welfare Fund	13.14	13.14
Insurance	Varies depending on age	Varies depending on age
Pre-department Orientation	6.13	6.13
Recruitment Service Charge	87.60	87.60
Minimum Total	216 (NPR 24,700)	103 (NPR 11,700)
Maximum Total	400 (NPR 45,700) plus insurance	304 (NPR 34,700) plus visa stamping and insurance

Source: Adapted from Nepal Rastra Bank, 2018.

Table 2: Sources of loans taken by sample surveyed migrant workers in Nepal (2021)

Loan providers	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Traditional moneylenders	52.0	25.0	50.6
Family members/relatives	25.3	50.0	26.6
Friends/neighbors	20.0	0	19.0
Informal groups	8.0	50.0	10.1
Banks/cooperatives	9.3	0	8.9
Others	1.3	0	1.3
Total %	116.0	0	116.5
Total number	75	4	79

Source: Based on Bhattarai et al., 2022 and Derivation by Authors

Table 3: Recruitment Costs of Nepalese Migrant Workers by Destination Country

Country	Average Total Cost (NPR)	Average Paid to Agency (NPR)	Recruitment Method Share (%)
Malaysia	148,611	105,813	Agencies 77.8, Sub-agents 30, Family 11.1, Friends 10, Self-managed 1.1
Qatar	120,486	97,303	
Saudi Arabia	127,500	92,206	
UAE	225,294	104,750	

Source: Derivation by Authors