Research Paper XVI

# WOMEN'S INTEGRATION INTO THE LABOUR MARKET

## A Comparative Study of Migrant Returnees and Non-migrants

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Centre for the Study of
Labour and Mobility

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## A Comparative Study of Migrant Returnees and Non-migrants

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This paper is based on the study, 'A Study on Causes of Women's Migration to Foreign Employment and Ways to Reintegration into the National Labour Market', conducted by the Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility (CESLAM) at Social Science Baha for UN Women in 2017. A summary version of the report was published as Returning Home: Challenges and Opportunities for Women Migrant Workers in the Nepali Labour Market. Since not all the data could be incorporated into the shorter report, given the richness of information collected and the relevance of the issue even till date, the full paper is being published with permission from UN Women. While sections of the paper, particularly the literature review may seem dated, CESLAM believes the findings remain valid.


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# Executive Summary

Much of the focus of the research on migration in Nepal has been on male migration, remittances, and safe migration. Despite the growing interest in women's migration and their process of return and reintegration, scholarship on this issue, particularly in Nepal, remains limited. This paper aims to fill this gap, examining the interplay between pre-migration and post-return contextual factors, migration conditions abroad and circumstances of return to study how they impact the reintegration process of returnee women migrant workers (RWMWs) into Nepal's labour market.

This mixed methods study provides a comparative analysis of RWMWs and non-migrant women, based on fieldwork conducted between March and April 2017. It uses information collected through a survey of 1220 women from both groups; key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders at the community and district levels; in-depth interviews with RWMWs and their male family members; and focus group discussions (FGDs) with RWMWs and non-migrant women. Fieldwork for the study was carried out in 22 field sites in five representative districts—Jhapa, Sindhupalchowk, Nawalparasi, Kaski, and Kailali.

## Findings

*Pre-migration contextual factors:* Women were more likely to migrate from households with more relaxed gender norms. Prior to migration, RWMWs were much more likely to have made important household decisions and enjoyed greater autonomy in their mobility than non-migrant women. That more than half of the RWMWs had been engaged in some form of economic activity prior to migration, including agriculture, suggests that the reasons for women's migration go beyond the simple calculus of limited employment and livelihood opportunities.

*Reasons for women's migration:* The majority of women had migrated to meet household economic needs and for the betterment of their children's future, both of which were more pressing for 'single women' who did not have adequate social support. Other reasons for women's migration included the lack of well-paying jobs, prestige issues related to working in low-status jobs in Nepal, seeking an escape from domestic violence, and a desire for greater autonomy. In areas with a relatively longer history of women's migration, there was wider acceptance of women's migration and a cumulative effect of migration could be seen. That is, as more women migrated, others were influenced as well. Differences were also seen in terms of different migration episodes; compared to their previous migration,

there was a decrease in the percentage of women who had migrated to pay debts and an increase in the proportion of those who had migrated for their children's future in subsequent migration, indicating that with subsequent migration episodes, women were not only able to fulfil their most pressing needs but also aspire for higher goals such as the future of their children.

*Migration process:* Despite the stigma associated with women's migration, which is often conflated with trafficking for sex, less than a third of the RWMWs faced barriers from family members, underscoring the greater acceptance of women's mobility, especially to meet household needs. Similarly, the majority of the RWMWs indicated that they did not face any challenges during their recruitment process even though not all of them had migrated through formal channels. Among those who experienced problems, the main challenges were associated with a lack of information about the recruitment process, the nature of their jobs, and the destination country and its culture.

*Experience abroad:* The majority of women (78 per cent) migrated to countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) during their most recent migration, and most were engaged as domestic workers (79 per cent). The average monthly earning of women workers abroad was equivalent to NPR 24,311 (ca. USD 236). A quarter of the RWMWs had to change their employer during their most recent migration, often due to various types of abuses. The most frequently cited forms of abuse were not being given days off, denial of leave, long working hours, and refusal to return their passports. More serious abuses such as physical and sexual abuse were reported by 8.9 per cent and less than 2 per cent, respectively.

*Circumstances of return:* Most of the women returned because their contracts had ended or because of circumstances at home such as the need to assume household/care responsibilities, pressure from family to return, and a desire to be near their families.

*Post-return context:* A comparison between RWMWs and non-migrant women showed that RWMWs were less likely to be tied to the traditional gender division of labour after their return and more likely to be in charge of household decision-making and have a higher degree of autonomy regarding their mobility. However, with some variations, the labour market participation of RWMWs did not seem to differ much from that of non-migrant women. The experience of migration did not necessarily provide a comparative advantage to RWMWs in domestic labour markets. As the majority of RWMWs would have worked as domestic workers, many reported that they had not gained any useful skills nor had they been able to use the skills acquired abroad in the Nepali domestic labour market.

*Determinants and challenges of reintegration:* Results of the binary logistic regression suggested that the likelihood of reintegration was lower for women who thought they

would be allowed to engage in work outside of their home prior to their migration possibly due to reduced need to find work immediately upon return. The likelihood of reintegration was higher for women who experienced adverse working conditions abroad.

Much of the challenges for women's reintegration into domestic labour markets were precisely the same factors that limited women's participation in the labour markets in general—gendered division of household roles and responsibilities; gender norms related to women working outside their homes; lack of sufficient skills, education, and experience; limited decent employment opportunities; and gendered access to productive inputs, particularly land and credit.

# 1. Background

## 1.1 Introduction

Migration in both its internal and international dimensions is not a new phenomenon in Nepal,[1] but the rapid increase in recent decades in the magnitude and scope of migration has tremendously altered the lives and livelihoods of individuals and communities across Nepal. This is truer of external migration, which has seen a significant increase from approximately 200,000 people living outside the country in the 1950s to some 2 million by 2011, with the biggest increase seen between 2001 and 2011.[2]

Migration from Nepal is also a highly gendered process, with men accounting for a much larger proportion of labour migration for foreign employment.[3] Recently, however, there has been a significant increase in the number of labour permits[4] obtained by women for employment abroad. Specifically, between 2010/11 and 2014/15, the number of labour permits issued to women migrant workers (WMWs) for foreign employment increased by 106 per cent, compared to 39 per cent for men.[5] However, it is believed that this official estimate does not accurately represent the entire population of WMWs. Due to a combination of factors such as the government's restriction on migration of domestic workers to Gulf countries, the open border with India as well as social and familial control on women's mobility, a large number of WMWs are known to use informal routes to go abroad. A 2013 report estimates that there may be as many as four times more WMWs than those officially recorded since 2006.[6]

Women's migration is also intimately tied to labour market conditions at home and Nepal's overall macroeconomic context. After a decade-long insurgency, followed by a lengthy political transition and the still-ongoing state restructuring process, not to

1 Kansakar 1984.

2 In the inter-censal period 2001-2011, the number of absentees nearly tripled, from 762,181 to 1,921,494 (Sharma et al 2014).

3 According to data from the Department of Foreign Employment, 95.7 per cent of the labour permits issued from 2008/09 to 2014/15 were for men (MoLE 2016). See also, Sijapati-Basnett 2011; Adhikari and Hobley 2011.

4 All Nepalis seeking to work in countries other than India are required to obtain work permits from the Department of Foreign Employment.

5 According to data on labour permits from the Department of Foreign Employment, in 2010/11, of the total 354,716 permits issued, 344,300 were obtained by men and 10,416 by women. In 2014/15, a total of 499,620 permits were issued, with 478,199 for men and 21,421 for women. This data does not include Nepali migrants who go to South Korea through the government-to-government Employment Permit System (MoLE 2016).

6 Gurung and Khatiwada 2013.

mention the devastating earthquakes of 2015, Nepal's economic development has suffered considerable setbacks. With an average per capita GDP of USD 681 in the last decade,[7] Nepal is the poorest country in South Asia, one of the poorest in the world. Service and agriculture sectors, with a GDP share of 53 per cent and 33 per cent respectively, are the main contributors to the country's output.[8] Although Nepal's unemployment rate is low at 2.1 per cent,[9] the percentage of the working-age population engaged in paid employment is just 16.9 per cent.[10]

Women lag behind in both access to employment and the quality of work they are engaged in. Across Asia, women are concentrated in the most vulnerable and poorest forms of informal employment, with low and irregular income and high level of job insecurity.[11] The situation in Nepal is not any different. Many women face challenges in finding decent work due to structural barriers and gender-based discrimination on various fronts, including in the labour market. As a result, women in Nepal have often been forced to engage in traditional, unpaid, and home-based work. The 2016 UN Human Development Report ranked Nepal 115th out of 188 countries in the gender inequality index, which includes empowerment and labour market among its three indicators.[12] Compared to other countries in South Asia, however, Nepal's female labour force participation rate is high at 63.3 per cent.[13] Although there are more women than men in the employed population, among those 15 years and above, the male employment ratio is 7 percentage points higher than that for females.[14]

There is a wide difference in the participation of men and women in Nepal's labour market, with a much higher participation of women in the informal economy. According to the Nepal Labour Force Survey (NLFS) 2008,[15] 96 per cent of the working-age population was informally employed, whereas 86.4 per cent of those employed in non-agricultural sectors were employed informally. Of the total informally employed population, 54 per cent were women. While women comprised 61 per cent of those informally employed in agricultural sectors, they only comprise 40 per cent of the workers informally employed in non-agricultural sectors.

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7 This average was calculated using per capita GDP between 2007/08 and 2016/17. The per capita GDP for 2016/2017 was projected (MoF 2017).

8 ADB 2017; Serrière and CEDA 2014.

9 Around 74 per cent are employed in the agriculture and forestry sector and 26 per cent in non-agriculture sector.

10 CBS 2009.

11 ILO and ADB 2011.

12 UNDP 2016. The UN defines gender inequality as a 'composite measure reflecting inequality in achievement between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market'.

13 For comparison, the Female Labour Force Participation Rate in India is 32.8 per cent (ILO and ADB 2011).

14 Female employment ratio is 78.5 per cent and male employment ratio is 85.3 per cent (Acharya 2014).

15 NLFS 2008 remained the last such survey at the time of writing.

Significant gaps in gender can also be seen in terms of paid employment. Of the total paid employee population, only 26.2 per cent are women, and of the total women workforce, only 8.3 per cent are paid.[16] These numbers are likely to remain high in the coming years as the data from the 2011 census suggests that a notable gender difference remains, especially in terms of education attainment, while the literacy of 75.1 per cent rate for men continues to outstrip the 57.4 per cent for women.[17]Along with difficulties in the workplace, there is a significant wage differential between men and women. According to the NLFS 2008, the average monthly salary (cash and kind) received by paid employees aged 15 years and above, was NPR 5,721 (ca. USD 56)[18] for men and NPR 3,402 (ca. USD 33) for women,[19] indicating a clear bias against the latter. With limited options in domestic labour markets, many women are forced to join the pool of international migrant workers where they become a part of the unskilled and low-paid foreign workforce.[20]

The rapidly increasing trend of labour migration of men and women has raised hopes as well as concerns. In 2015, Nepal received personal remittances equivalent to 31.75 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP).[21] In addition to providing an increasing share of GDP, remittances have also contributed significantly to the reduction of poverty, enabled poor families' access to education and health services and allowed families to meet their daily needs through alternative forms of employment and livelihoods.[22] At the same time, however, the increased trend of migration has led to female migrants being increasingly exposed to sexual exploitation, trafficking, and forced labour and abuse, which have resulted in a disproportionate concentration of women migrants in the insecure informal sector even in destination countries.[23]

Yet, as migration continues, over time, there has been a growing interest in the factors, processes, and impact of returning migrants. While many scholars and policymakers regard 'return' as an obvious completion of the migration cycle,[24] relatively little is known about the motivations, experiences, and consequences of return migration, particularly how the experience of post-return and reintegration is influenced by other factors in the migration cycle. To address this lacuna, this study seeks to analyse aspects that influence the successful return and reintegration into labour markets, societies, and communities, specifically examining the interplay of factors at both the sending and receiving end of the migration continuum.

16 Acharya 2014.
17 Sijapati et al 2015.
18 The exchange rate used here is from mid-2017 when USD 1 was around NPR 103.
19 CBS 2009.
20 Sijapati et al 2015.
21 World Bank Group. 'Data'. https://bit.ly/3N4wEOT.
22 World Bank 2011.
23 UN 2011; UNODC 2015; NPC 2013.
24 Pessar 1997; Cassarino 2004; Agadjanian, Gorina, and Menjivar 2014.

## 1.2 Review of the Literature

### 1.2.1 Gender and Labour Migration

A review of the recent literature on gender and labour migration indicates that there are substantial ways in which gender fundamentally organises social relations and structures, influencing the causes and consequences of women's migration, and their participation in labour markets. While it is more or less established that migration is a gendered phenomenon, women's migration, and its impacts and future prospects for their participation in labour markets and their empowerment, can perhaps best be understood as a constellation of relationships among a variety of factors. These include the political environment, socio-economic dynamics, legal and policy frameworks, demographic determinants, societal norms and family responsibility systems, labour markets, and gender relations.[25]

Gender roles and relations often determine the type and nature of work performed by men and women—low-wage, tedious, and routine work are tasked mostly to women, which leads to discrimination against women and their marginalisation in the labour market.[26] Especially women with little or no education and lacking in skills find it difficult to secure well-paying jobs to sustain their livelihoods and, in some cases, women are even barred from entering the labour market because of the implications on their family's overall prestige arising from their working in low-status jobs.[27] All of these factors motivate women to migrate, sometimes clandestinely. However, as argued by feminist scholars, beyond purely economic reasons that are assumed to shape both women's and men's migration, women are also motivated to migrate to escape marital and familial constraints, neglect, abuse, and exploitation.[28]

Juxtaposed with the increasing scholarly interest in women's migration, there yet remains a dearth of literature on the intersection between gender and labour migration in Nepal. Available sources suggest that factors that influence women to migrate—the routes women use to reach their destination, the sectors they work in, the types of jobs they take up, and the attitudes and behaviour towards them—are different from the circumstances surrounding the migration of men.[29] The majority of women who migrate are married with children and one of the primary reasons they migrate is financial problems in the

25 Torosyan et al 2016; Hoang and Yeoh 2011; Schneider 2011; Meares 2010; Curran et al 2006; ILO 2015; Sijapati and Nair 2014; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Mahler and Pessar 2006.

26 Espiritu 1997, cited in Pessar 2005.

27 Belanger and Rahman 2013; Guarnizo 1997.

28 Dannecker 2005; Belanger and Rahman 2013; UNESCAP 2007; Foreign Employment Promotion Board 2012.

29 ILO 2015; Paoletti et al 2014; World Bank 2011. Also, Adhikari et al 2006, Bhadra 2008, Gurung and Khatiwada 2013 discuss reasons for migration, recruitment challenges, migration process and conditions abroad, impact of women's migration and economic and social remittances.

family.[30] For example, a study published in 2008 indicates that financial constraints are the main reason for migration for Nepali women, followed by the desire to work abroad, lack of employment opportunities at home and unsatisfactory incomes.[31] These are further exacerbated by family pressure and the burden of single parenting. Existing evidence also suggests that women experience greater livelihood insecurities compared to men, for both themselves and their families, which often forces them to undertake foreign employment without acquiring adequate information on the migration process or experience, putting them at risk of violence and exploitation.[32] Although these studies highlight many of the issues Nepali women migrants face during the recruitment process, in the destination country, and upon their return to Nepal, and are indicative of some of the reasons that compel women to seek work abroad, they do not focus much on the effects of gender norms and relations,[33] which feminist economists have highlighted as being central to women's participation in the labour markets.[34] Further, these studies are focused only on women migrant workers and they do not compare their situation with that of women who have not migrated, thus rendering it difficult to determine if the observed changes are a result of the fact of migration or of other factors.

### 1.2.2 Consequences of Women's Migration

Women's migration impacts their families back home and women migrants themselves in various ways. Women's migration has helped both in reducing poverty in their households and meeting the basic necessities of their family members.[35] Studies suggest that women remit home a greater share of their earnings even though they earn less than men and that they remit more regularly and for a longer period of time.[36] Remittances sent or received by women are often spent on health and education more than anything else.[37] There are instances where women face hardships while working abroad; however, for many women, their decision to go abroad and send money back home was significant and empowering for them.[38] For some, foreign migration provided an opportunity to escape violent and threatening relationships.[39] Migration has helped these women retain their 'newfound autonomy' and bring new norms, skills, and expertise back home.[40]

The implications of women's migration on gender relations can be contradictory and

30 Adhikari et al 2006; Gurung and Khatiwada 2013.
31 Bhadra 2008.
32 Gurung 2013; Bhadra 2008.
33 Gender norms are standards or expectations of appropriate behaviours of men and women. Gender relations can be understood as relations of power between men and women.
34 Pearse and Connell 2016; Hewitson 2003; Nelson 1995.
35 Gurung and Khatiwada 2013.
36 IOM 2010; Piper 2005.
37 Fleury 2016.
38 Belanger and Rahman 2013.
39 Belanger and Rahman 2013.
40 Petrozziello 2013.

are far from homogeneous. In their study of Bangladeshi women, Belanger and Rahman (2013) found that while women felt that they had become independent following their migration and reported an increase in their status within their households, they were also victims of stigma for having transgressed gender norms. Similarly, other scholars have also argued that while some women become more assertive and adopt lead roles in family decision-making, many others resume their submissive roles in the family and society after returning.[41] For instance, in the case of the migration of Bangladeshi women to Malaysia, it was found that despite the social and financial gains that women migrants achieved, these did not have a positive impact on their status within the household and community. Additionally, the change in gender roles and relations brought about by women as breadwinners can be contradictory, for it can empower women but also be a major source of conflict and violence within the family, further increasing their vulnerability.[42] Women's migration also unsettles the patriarchal order and women's newfound financial independence and autonomy can, in many cases, work to further subordinate women upon their return.[43] A case study from Sri Lanka reveals that despite women's migration, there is hardly any uptake of their responsibilities by their husbands, which are most often passed on to other women in the extended family.[44] This illustrates very well Advincula-Lopez's (2005) conception that the 'freedom gained' by migrant women often results in 'freedom lost' by other female family members who are usually in charge of the left-behind children.[45] Notwithstanding the mixed evidence pointing to transformations in gender relations as evidenced in the review of literature above, Belanger and Rahman (2013) have also argued that despite the challenges women face while migrating, during migration and upon return, women benefit financially and socially because of migration, and hence they challenge the dominant narrative of 'victimised and agency-less Third World women'.

### 1.2.3 Reintegration of Migrant Workers

Until recently, international migration scholarship had generally focused on migrants' integration into host societies, with very little attention on the reintegration of migrants into their home communities upon completion of their migration cycle. In addition, most of this literature is either focused on men or issues related to the reintegration of refugees and asylum-seekers, victims of trafficking or other such abuses, which generally tend to be women. Gender differences in terms of return experiences are largely unaddressed even though existing evidence suggests that the experiences and consequences of migration, as well as of return, differ for women compared to men.[46]

41 IOM 2009.

42 Dannecker 2005.

43 Belanger and Rahman 2013; Dannecker 2005.

44 IOM 2009.

45 Advincula-Lopez 2005.

46 Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Reagan and Olsen 2000; Ravuri 2014; Nyberg-Sørensen, Van Hear, and Engberg-Pedersen 2002; Parreñas 2005.

The limited literature on the subject drawn from elsewhere suggests that central to the issue of reintegration are the reasons for return. In general, studies show that the decision to return is influenced by the economic conditions of the migrants, particularly financial success, which provide them with the resources to invest in their home countries,[47] conditions in their home societies,[48] and their experience with the labour markets in the destination country.[49] Besides economic reasons, the nature of support from relatives, friends and co-workers in migration destinations as well as at home,[50] the well-being and prospects of children and other family members,[51] as well as their status legally[52] are some of the other factors known to influence migrants' experiences in destination countries and their return choices and plans.

Similarly, the context of return, particularly the circumstances under which migrants take the decision to return, also has a bearing on their experiences thereafter. Lang et al (2012) developed five different typologies to describe the motivation for return: i) return of failure, ii) return of conservatism, iii) return of retirement, iv) return of innovation, and v) private/social return.[53] Besides these categories, which are generally voluntary in nature, involuntary return, i.e., migrants having to return because of illness, experience of abuse, forced repatriation, etc, are also important factors that ultimately determine the form of reintegration or, for that matter, re-migration.[54]

Regarding reintegration itself, available evidence indicates that whatever the circumstances of return, women migrants typically face greater difficulties while attempting to integrate into their families and communities of origin, especially after a prolonged stay abroad.[55] There is often tension between women's newfound financial independence and autonomy through migration and the continued patriarchal social order. The country of destination also matters, as societies generally tend to view favourably RWMWs from highly remunerative countries like Israel and Japan.[56] The economic integration of women

47 De Haas and Fokkema 2011; Constant and Massey 2002.

48 Dustmann and Mestres 2010.

49 Dustmann 1997; Jensen and Pedersen 2007.

50 Massey et al 1987; Epstein 2008; Haug 2008.

51 Parreñas 2005; Djajić 2008; Nyberg-Sørensen, Van Hear, and Engberg-Pedersen 2002.

52 Şenyürekli and Menjívar 2012; Massey and Gelatt 2010; Viladich 2012.

53 These five types are described as: i) 'unsuccessful performances on the labour market, personal disappointment, unemployment, etc'; ii) 'return might be planned or is at least not happening as a consequence of failure, but following the achievement of goals that allow to return and follow traditional or conservative patterns in the home society, not taking advantage of acquired human capital or knowledge from abroad'; iii) 'return is a consequence of going on pension, possibly leading to investment'; iv) 'return takes place when a migrant has reached their self-defined goals or those expected within their social network, like a higher level of education, qualifications, knowledge or financial resources'; and v) 'return is mainly influenced by private or emotional aspects'. (Lang et al 2012, 10).

54 van Houte 2014; Ruben et al 2009.

55 Constable 1999; Long and Oxfeld 2004; Martin and Radu 2012.

56 Adhikari et al 2006.

upon return, especially into domestic labour markets, is another challenge. For instance, in the Philippines and other Asian countries, unemployment rates among returnee migrants are significant and usually higher than before migration due to various reasons not limited to returnees' inability to adapt to lower salaries back home, skills mismatch, insufficient finances, lack of expertise, and lack of favourable local economic conditions for investment in enterprises.[57]

Several factors have been indicated as influencing successful reintegration. For instance, according to the Position Paper developed by IOM in 2015, 'opportunities to become self-sufficient, access to social networks, and psychosocial health' are three integral aspects of successful reintegration.'[58] However, a review of integration programmes designed by development organisations suggests that such programmes are often found to be rigid and frequently fail to provide for the needs and interests of migrant workers.[59] Similarly, development policies of labour-sending countries are often limited to ensuring a continued flow of remittances rather than seeking to introduce measures for integrating workers back into national labour markets.[60] Even in the context of Nepal, due to a lack of coherent reintegration policies, it is believed that RWMWs are unable to channel their skills and experiences into anything concrete, and in the absence of other opportunities, employment or sustainable livelihoods, they are forced to re-migrate.

57 Battistella 2004.
58 IOM 2015.
59 IOM 2009.
60 Sinatti 2015.

## 1.3 Research Objectives and Study Framework

### 1.3.1 Objectives of the Study

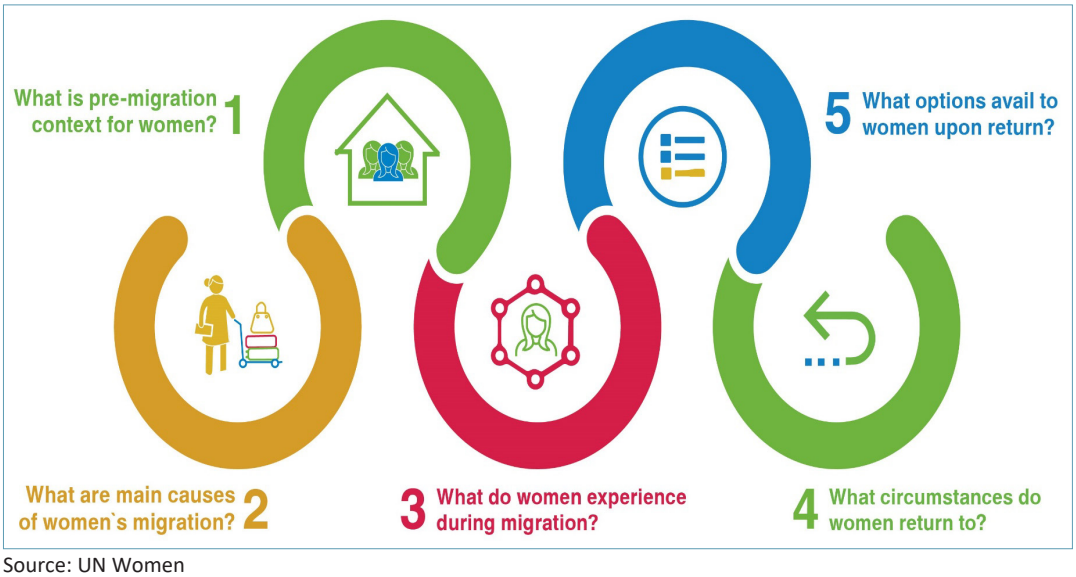
The overall objective of the study was to generate evidence-based research in order to enhance policy dialogue on the causes of women's migration for foreign employment, and ways to facilitate their reintegration into the national labour market. The specific objectives of the study are:

- To identify the socio-economic, demographic, and gender-based causes of the rapid increase in the rate of women's migration for foreign employment.
- To assess personal/cash and social remittances (knowledge of technology and exposure to skills) RWMWs gain in destination countries and their use in the national labour market.
- To identify the available opportunities and job skills required for the reintegration of RWMWs into the national labour market.
- To identify gender-based and any other relevant structural barriers in the reintegration of WMWs into the national labour market (employment) and business sector.

### 1.3.2 Conceptual Framework

Drawing from the existing literature on labour migration, gender relations, and the reintegration of migrant returnees, this study is guided by the premise that the successful

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Reintegration of WMWs into the National Labour Market**




Source: UN Women

reintegration of RWMWs, especially into the national labour market, depends on the interplay of five main factors: i) pre-migration context, ii) reasons for migration, iii) migration conditions in destination countries, iv) circumstances of return, and v) post-return environment (Figure 1). While these factors individually and/or collectively facilitate reintegration, it is important to bear in mind that they are embedded in gender relations, norms, and practices, which are constantly being negotiated and renegotiated in the household, society, and labour markets. Equally important is to situate migrants in social and network structures that shape the patterns and decisions for migration, return, and re-migration, which also support or challenge the interplay of these determining factors.

Based on this conceptualisation, the study is guided by the following lines of inquiry:

1. What are the pre-migration factors that provide the context for women's migration from Nepal? In particular, how do pre-migration gender roles and relations in the family and community, women's position in the household and community, and women's experience in the labour markets facilitate or constrain women's mobility?
2. What are the causal factors that lead to women's migration given the pre-migration circumstances? Specifically, what are some of the economic, social, personal, and political reasons for women's migration?
3. What are the differential experiences of women while abroad, especially in relation to their recruitment process, the jobs they hold, their status in the country of destination, the remuneration they receive, and their experiences in the workplace? What are some of the benefits accruing from their migration, especially in terms of social and economic remittances? What kind of relations and linkages do women maintain with their homes, co-ethnics in destination countries and their employers, co-workers, and others abroad? How do women negotiate their migration, including in terms of childcare arrangements, their reproductive roles, and their justifications for migration?
4. What are the circumstances under which women return to their communities? How do these influence the choices that women make upon return?
5. How do post-return contextual factors, both in terms of personal circumstances (e.g., personal traits, health, family background, intra-household dynamics, etc) as well as external factors (prevailing attitudes towards women migrants, labour market conditions, policy environment, institutional factors, etc) influence women's choices as well as experiences upon return?

While the overarching aim of the study is to explore these specific lines of inquiry relationally, that is, in terms of how they influence each other, and ultimately reintegration experiences, it also aims to identify factors that tend to be more salient in determining the success or failure of reintegration.

## 1.4 Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach. Survey questionnaires were administered among returnee women migrant workers (RWMWs) and non-migrant women for a comparative analysis of their labour market participation and changes in gender norms and relations within the household and community.[61] To contextualise the findings from the survey data within the political, socio-economic, and ethno-cultural realities of migration from Nepal, qualitative data consisting of key informant interviews (KIIs) with national-, district-, and local-level stakeholders; semi-structured interviews with RWMWs and families of RWMWs; FGDs with RWMWs and non-migrant women; and a literature review and policy analysis, were undertaken.

### 1.4.1 Site Selection

Research sites for the study were selected following a two-stage sampling design. In the first stage, five districts were purposively selected based on the volume of labour permits issued to women while also ensuring representation of various ecological and developmental regions of Nepal as well as the social diversity represented in each district. Using these criteria, Jhapa, Sindhupalchowk, Nawalparasi, Kaski, and Kailali were selected in the first stage (Table 1).

**Table 1: Characteristics of Selected Districts**

| District | Eco-development region | HH population | Labour permits issued to women from 2067/68-2070/71 BS | Per cent of labour permits out of total HH population | Ethnicity diversity index (2011 census) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Kailali** | Far-western Tarai | 142,480 | 287 | – | 0.75 |
| **Kaski** | Western Hill | 125,673 | 684 | 0.54 | 0.85 |
| **Nawalparasi** | Western Tarai | 128,793 | 895 | 0.69 | 0.90 |
| **Sindhupalchowk** | Central Mountain | 66,688 | 3,636 | 5.45 | 0.82 |
| **Jhapa** | Eastern Tarai | 184,552 | 3,610 | 1.96 | 0.89 |

For the second stage, the selection of one rural area (village development committee [VDC]) and one urban area (municipality)[62] with relatively high numbers of returnee women migrant

61 In order to isolate the impacts of migration on broader-level socio-economic changes in Nepal, the situation of non-migrant women 5-10 years back was compared to the situation of RWMWs before migration.

62 This study was conducted prior to the reorganization of municipalities and Village Development

workers (RWMWs) was planned to yield a total of 10 research sites. However, during the fieldwork, the inability to find an adequate number of respondents that would fulfil the requirements of the research design resulted in the study being conducted in a total of 22 research sites (Table 2).

**Table 2: Research Sites and Distribution of Survey Participants**

| | Rural | | | Urban | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Location | No. of RWMWs | No. of non-migrants | Location | No. of RWMWs | No. of non-migrants |
| **Kailali** | Dododhara, Godavari, Masuriya, Pahalmanpur, Pathariya | 22 | 22 | Dhangadhi | 25 | 25 |
| **Kaski** | Ghandruk, Dangsing | 19 | 19 | Pokhara | 27 | 27 |
| **Nawalparasi** | Daunne Devi | 36 | 36 | Sunwal | 30 | 30 |
| **Sindhupalchowk** | Ichowk, Mahankal, Palchowk, Helambu | 108 | 107 | Chautara, Melamchi | 111 | 110 |
| **Jhapa** | Goldhap, Chakchaki, Jalthal, Haldibari | 116 | 117 | Mechinagar | 111 | 112 |

Each of these research sites was selected and research participants identified with support from two organisations: Pourakhi, a network of RWMWs, and returnee volunteers from the Safer Migration (SaMi) Project.[63] These organisations have been working on issues relating to RWMWs and migration in each of the sampled districts and hence were an invaluable resource for the research team.

### 1.4.2 Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy for the study was designed so that the number of surveys administered in each district would be roughly proportionate to the number of labour permits issued to women by the DoFE. However, to maintain statistical significance, it was planned that a minimum of 50 surveys each would be administered to returnee women migrant workers (RWMWs) and non-migrant women in Kailali and Kaski, districts where a relatively fewer number of labour permits had been issued to women.[64] Accordingly, the survey

Committees (VDCs) into 753 local government units (six metropolitan cities, 11 sub-metropolitan cities and 276 municipalities representing the urban areas, and another 460 termed rural municipalities) by the Commission for Restructuring of Village, Municipalities, and Special, Protected and Autonomous Areas (commonly known as Local Level Restructuring Commission, or LLRC) formed in 2016.

63 The SaMi Project of Helvetas has recruited migrant returnees as 'returnee volunteers (RVs) in its project to offer counselling and other programme support.

64 However, due to the difficulty of finding RWMWs, especially in rural parts of districts like Kailali and Kaski, the research team could not meet the proposed sample of at least 100 surveys per district. The

questionnaire was administered to a total of 1210 participants with a sample distribution reasonably aligned with the originally proposed design (Table 3).

**Table 3: Sample Distribution**

| Districts | RWMWs | | Non-migrant women | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Proposed | Actual | Proposed | Actual |
| **Kailali** | 50 | 47 | 50 | 47 |
| **Kaski** | 50 | 46 | 50 | 46 |
| **Nawalparasi** | 60 | 66 | 60 | 66 |
| **Sindhupalchowk** | 220 | 219 | 220 | 217 |
| **Jhapa** | 220 | 227 | 220 | 229 |
| **Total** | **600** | **605** | **600** | **605** |

The survey was administered equally among the two different categories identified: i) RWMWs (605 participants), and ii) non-migrant women (also 605). RWMW households HHs were identified using snowball sampling method based on the information available from Pourakhi and SaMi. The comparison group of non-migrant women was selected from the household adjoining that of the RWMWs. Since the study adopted a non-randomised sampling design, it was expected that this selection strategy would help ensure that the two groups of women (RWMWs and non-migrant women) would be from similar socio-economic backgrounds.

### 1.4.3 Research Instruments

The following instruments were used in the course of the research:

#### 1.4.3.1 Quantitative Survey

The purpose of the survey was primarily to identify the causes of women's migration; assess their experiences during the recruitment process and their situation while abroad, especially in the form of the transfer of financial and social remittances; examine RWMWs' participation in the labour markets; and understand the barriers for the same. In addition, the survey also included a comparative dimension, with an equal number of RWMWs and households without women migrant workers/RWMWs (for the purposes of this study, called 'non-migrant' households) surveyed in order to control for exogenous factors that impact women's reintegration, especially into the labour market.

#### 1.4.3.2 Qualitative Interviews

*Key informant interviews (KIIs):* A total of 55 KIIs were conducted with relevant stakeholders from community and district levels, including representatives from local

number of RWMWs in Jhapa was increased to make up for the shortfall.

governments, local entrepreneurs, associations and networks of RWMWs, relevant ministries and departments and recruitment agencies, social mobilisers, women leaders and members of ward citizen forums and the Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The information collected was used to enhance the understanding of the existing challenges and opportunities for the integration of RWMWs into the labour market.

*Focus group discussions (FGDs):* Twenty FGDs were conducted with groups of RWMWs (10 in total) and non-migrant women (also 10). The FGDs were intended to explore the reasons behind women's migration and the dynamics of the Nepali labour market, along with the opportunities and challenges for RWMWs.

*In-depth interviews:* A total of 45 in-depth interviews were conducted with RWMWs and male family members, usually husbands, of RWMWs in every district. A minimum of four interviews were conducted with RWMWs and four with male family members of RWMWs per district.[65] The interviews focused on getting insights into the experiences of RWMWs and their families in relation to migration, return, and reintegration.

*Consultation meetings:* After a research framework for the study was prepared, a consultation workshop was organised on 22 February 2017 with relevant stakeholders and experts in consultation with UN Women for the confirmation of the conceptual framework, sample size, geographical locations, research tools, and work plan. Additionally, once the preliminary findings from both qualitative and quantitative data were ready, five consultation meetings (one in each district) were organised for the validation of the data collected for the study.

### 1.4.3.3 Ethical Considerations

The survey was pre-tested in Kathmandu following a detailed orientation provided to the enumerators before being deployed to the field. The enumerators followed the standard ethical codes of research during data collection. Participation in the study was completely on a voluntary basis. Prior to administering the research tools, each participant was briefed on the nature and purpose of the study, along with possible risks, if any, and the data was collected only after obtaining their consent. Respondents or their family members were also provided with contact information of relevant individuals/organisations to seek clarifications, if necessary. Surveys were conducted by a mixed team of nine female and five male researchers. However, keeping in mind the sensitive nature of the research, in-depth interviews with women were conducted by female researchers, and male researchers were not present in FGDs with RWMWs for the same reason.

65 Some of these interviews were conducted within the same family, whereas the majority of the interviews were conducted with different families.

### 1.4.3.4 Data Management and Analysis

The survey data was collected using tablet PCs with CSPro software and wireless technology was used to transfer data to the Social Science Baha office in Kathmandu, where they were monitored to immediately rectify any inconsistencies. Upon the completion of fieldwork, the survey data was cleaned and analysed using SPSS and Stata. A binary logistic regression analysis was conducted to understand the factors important for the successful reintegration of women migrant workers (Chapter 11).

Qualitative interviews and FGDs were transcribed by the field researchers themselves. The transcripts were coded and analysed thematically. The findings presented are based on both the quantitative data from the survey and the descriptive data from the qualitative study.

## 1.4.4 Description of Study Participants

This study was carried out among RWMWs and non-migrant women in rural and urban locations in the five districts of Jhapa, Sindhupalchowk, Nawalparasi, Kaski, and Kailali. There was a fairly equal division between rural and urban areas, with almost half of the participants from each. As already discussed in the sampling design, the majority of the respondents were from districts with high female migration, namely, Jhapa and Sindhupalchowk (Table 4).

**Table 4: District and Place of Residence of Survey Participants**

| Types of Respondents | No. of participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| RWMWs | 605 | 50 |
| Non-migrant women | 605 | 50 |
| **Location** | | |
| Rural | 602 | 49.8 |
| Urban | 608 | 50.2 |
| **Districts** | | |
| Jhapa | 456 | 37.7 |
| Sindhupalchowk | 436 | 36.0 |
| Nawalparasi | 132 | 10.9 |
| Kaski | 92 | 7.6 |
| Kailali | 94 | 7.8 |

The largest caste/ethnic categories represented in the survey were Mountain Hill Janajatis (49.1 per cent), followed by Hill Castes (30.7 per cent). In terms of demographic characteristics, the majority (85.1 per cent) of the respondents were married, 9.7 per cent were single women, i.e., separated, divorced, or widowed, and 5.2 per cent were unmarried.[66]

66 Separated, divorced, or widowed women are collectively and increasingly known as 'single women' in

Around 43 per cent were in the age group 26–35 years, followed by 28.4 per cent in the age group 36–45 years (Table 5). Although the sampling design envisaged surveying a non-migrant woman living in close proximity to the RWMWs and with a similar socio-economic background, there was some variance in terms of caste/ethnicity, marital status, and age.

**Table 5: Demographic Information of Participants**

| | RWMWs | | Non-migrant women | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| **Caste/Ethnicity** | | | | | | |
| Hill/Mountain Janajati | 320 | 52.9 | 274 | 45.3 | 594 | 49.1 |
| Hill Caste | 151 | 25.0 | 220 | 36.4 | 371 | 30.7 |
| Hill Dalit | 90 | 14.9 | 75 | 12.4 | 165 | 13.6 |
| Tarai Janajati | 33 | 5.5 | 26 | 4.3 | 59 | 4.9 |
| Tarai Caste | 3 | .5 | 2 | .3 | 5 | .4 |
| Tarai Dalit | 5 | .8 | 2 | .3 | 7 | .6 |
| Bengali | – | – | 1 | .2 | 1 | .1 |
| Muslim | 320 | 52.9 | 274 | 45.3 | 8 | .7 |
| **Marital status** | | | | | | |
| Married | 492 | 81.3 | 538 | 88.9 | 1030 | 85.1 |
| Unmarried | 32 | 5.3 | 31 | 5.1 | 63 | 5.2 |
| Separated/Divorced/ Widowed | 81 | 13.4 | 36 | 6.0 | 117 | 9.7 |
| **Age distribution** | | | | | | |
| 15 -25 | 82 | 13.6 | 138 | 22.9 | 220 | 18.2 |
| 26-35 | 272 | 45.0 | 246 | 40.8 | 518 | 42.9 |
| 36-45 | 196 | 32.4 | 147 | 24.4 | 343 | 28.4 |
| 46-55 | 51 | 8.4 | 61 | 10.1 | 112 | 9.3 |
| 56-65 | 4 | 0.7 | 11 | 1.8 | 15 | 1.2 |

### 1.4.4.1 Operational Definitions

In order to facilitate data collection and analysis, a variety of concepts/terms were used in the survey questionnaire, checklists for qualitative research, and also in this report.

***RWMWs:*** The study considered RWMWs as those women who had migrated to countries other than India for foreign employment and had returned at least three months before

Nepal following an advocacy movement over the past decade or so that aimed to remove the stigma associated with widowhood.

the date of data collection, had worked abroad for a minimum of two years, and had no immediate plans to re-migrate.

*Non-migrant women:* These were women from households from which women had never migrated to other countries, including India, for the purpose of working. However, males from these households could have migrated. For the sake of comparison between RWMWs and non-migrant women, questions about the past involved asking RWMWs about the situation before migration and non-migrant women about the situation 5-10 years ago.

*Reintegration into the labour market:* For the purposes of the study, to be reintegrated into the labour market meant that an individual was either involved in some kind of wage- or salary-based regular or casual employment or was self-employed, including being engaged in commercial agriculture.

### 1.4.5 Limitations of the Study

During the course of the study, the research team encountered a number of challenges. While some of these were expected, others were less so. The most common was getting the required number of RWMWs in all the research districts with the exception of Jhapa and Nawalparasi. This was due to the strict criteria used for the definition of RWMWs, RWMWs being less forthcoming in revealing their identity, time constraints among RWMWs, and difficulty of access to geographically remote and scattered settlements.

Another limitation of the study was that the diversity of respondents was dependent on the types of RWMWs whom the research team encountered through snowball sampling. Hence, the research sample under-represented certain caste/ethnic groups from the Tarai region.[67] In a few cases, researchers experienced language barriers, particularly among the Tamang community in Sindhupalchowk District. In such cases, a Tamang facilitator was hired to serve as translator.

The central aspect of the study was the comparative approach—RWMWs versus non-migrant women—but because the study could not adopt a randomised sampling strategy, the extent to which the findings were generalisable is limited. Nonetheless, it is clear that the challenges RWMWs and non-migrant women experience in the labour market were similar, and that reintegration of migrant women depended on a variety of factors, including the social and economic context in which women operate. It is quite unlikely that these results would be any different under a more rigorous sampling design. Given the relatively small sample size, however, the social and geographical differences affecting the reintegration prospects could not be rigorously examined either.

67 This is also because women's migration from Tarai Castes and Tarai Dalits is relatively low compared to other groups.

# 2. Findings and Analysis

## 2.1 Pre-migration Contextual Factors

- Women with a greater role in household decision-making and more autonomy with regard to their mobility are more likely to migrate.
- More than half the returnee women migrant workers (RWMWs) were engaged in some form of work before migration. This suggests that migration for foreign employment can be viewed as an extension of women's involvement in domestic labour markets.
- Women's migration is also closely tied to their mobility prior to migration—women who had been more mobile were also more likely to migrate. Noteworthy though is the significant percentage of RWMWs who had migrated despite restrictions on their mobility.
- Involvement of women migrants in community organisations prior to migration was limited, indicating low levels of engagement outside the household.

The extant literature indicated that the status of returnees, their reintegration into the community, and their prospects for integration into the labour market depends on their pre-migration status, networks, and work experience.[68] This section discusses both RWMWs' and non-migrant women's authority in household decision-making, autonomy relating to their own lives, involvement in community organisations, engagement in economic activities, gender norms at the household and community levels, and perceptions and attitudes towards women's migration.[69]

### 2.1.1 Perceptions of Gender Norms in the Household

Notwithstanding some methodological issues/limitations,[70] women's perceptions about their household members' views about various gender norms were found to be quite positive. However, women generally were found to be quite constrained, especially with regard to their productive roles. Notably, however, there were very few differences between

68 Belanger and Rahman 2013; Arif 1998.

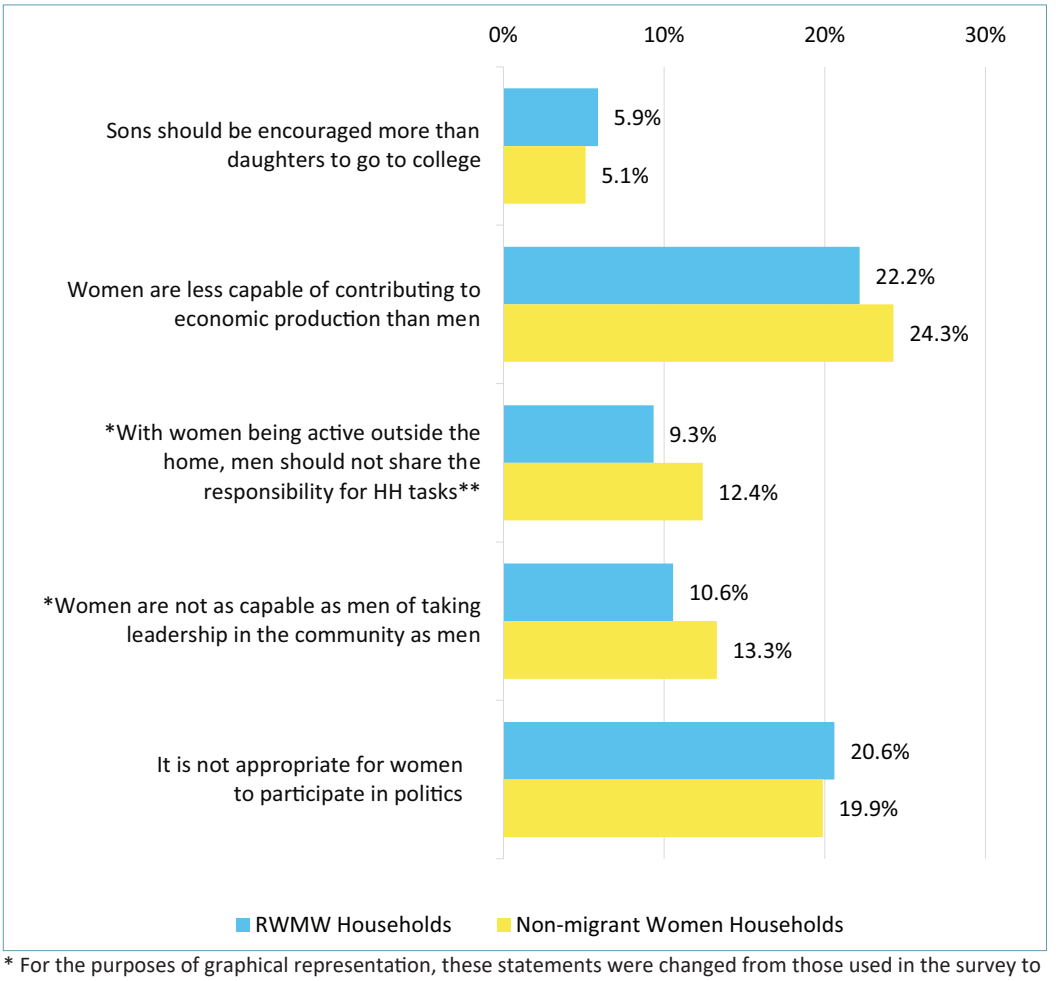
69 RWMWs were asked about their situation before migration, and non-migrant women about their situation 5-10 years earlier.

70 Women respondents asked questions about their households' perceptions would sometimes provide their own views, rather than that of their family. And, at times, it was clear they would think they had to give the 'right answer' under the situation when the interview was conducted in the presence of male family members, a situation that cannot always be avoided in Nepal.

RWMWs and non-migrant women across the various indicators (Figure 2).

The only statistically significant difference between RWMWs and non-migrant women was their perception about whether or not their family members would agree to the statement that men should not share household responsibilities when women were active outside the household. RWMWs were less likely to agree with this statement before migration than non-migrant women 5-10 years ago. The fact that the differences between RWMWs and non-migrant women's perceptions did not vary significantly

**Figure 2: Perception of Women about Household Members' Stance on Different Gender Norms**




* For the purposes of graphical representation, these statements were changed from those used in the survey to reflect negative statements across.

** Significant at the 5 per cent level.

Note: The proportion of women who said 'don't know' to how their household members would respond to the issue of women participating in politics or women taking up leadership positions in the community was higher than in other cases.

across the different groups,[71] suggests that gender norms relating to households' productive functions do not seem to have much bearing on women's migration decisions.

### 2.1.2 Household-level Decision-making Authority

As has been widely documented elsewhere, women in Nepal have very limited decision-making roles and authority within their families and beyond. In the context of this study, despite the positive perceptions of gender norms as described above (Section 6.1), women's decision-making roles were found to be limited. Specifically, while a significant proportion of RWMWs and non-migrant women stated that they were responsible for the day-to-day household affairs, decisions on more important issues were taken either by males in the family or through joint consultation. For example, prior to their migration, a larger proportion of RWMWs used to make decisions related to daily household expenses (35.8 per cent), but only 13.4 per cent said that they took decisions related to buying and selling productive assets (Table 6). Furthermore, disaggregation according to the type of household, suggested that women in joint households (as opposed to nuclear ones) had less authority because the role of women was divided among the various members of the family.

**Table 6: Women's Household Decision-Making before Migration**

| | Daily expenses | | Buying and selling productive assets | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | RWMWs households | Non-migrant women households | RWMWs households | Non-migrant women households |
| **Myself** | 35.8** | 41.6 | 13.4* | 8.2 |
| **Husband** | 23.4 | 20.6 | 17.2 | 18.2 |
| **Mother-in-law** | 11.6 | 10.0 | 3.8 | 5.3 |
| **Father-in- law** | 7.3 | 10.0 | 8.0 | 11.5 |
| **Mother** | 6.0 | 2.2 | 2.5 | 0.0 |
| **Father** | 3.2 | 3.3 | 2.7 | 3.5 |
| **Jointly** | 4.1 | 4.9 | 32.6 | 31.1 |

Note: Significant at *1 per cent level, **5 per cent level for differences between RWMWs households (before migration) and non-migrant women households (5-10 years ago).

71 Some differences were observed across the different population groups: 98 per cent of RWMWs in Nawalparasi indicating that household members agreed that men should shoulder household responsibilities compared to only 65 per cent of RWMWs in Kailali. A relatively higher percentage of Dalit women (38.7 per cent) indicated that their household members considered women less capable of contributing to economic production than men.

Differences between households of RWMWs before migration and non-migrants 5-10 years ago were statistically significant when we compare the kinds of household decisions made by the women themselves and the manner in which these were made. Findings showed that RWMWs were less likely to make decisions by themselves about day-to-day expenses, while they were more likely to make important decisions in the family (e.g., those pertaining to the buying and selling of productive assets). Moreover, across all districts and caste/ethnic groups, more RWMWs had been part of the household's decision-making related to the buying and selling of productive assets by themselves or jointly before migration compared their non-migrant counterparts.

This indicates that gender hierarchies on matters relating to household decisions were pervasive across Nepal, and it appeared that women being comparatively less involved in decision-making related to daily expenses and higher involvement in decisions dealing with large financial transactions increased their chances of migration, although there were variations across population groups.[72]

### 2.1.3 Restrictions on Mobility

Table 7 compares mobility trends of RWMWs prior to migration and that of non-migrant women 5-10 years ago. Whereas more than 80 per cent of the migrant and non-migrant respondents indicated that they were always allowed to travel to nearby localities during the day, this proportion decreased when it concerned travelling, working, or engaging in businesses outside the home or locality.[73]

There are significant differences between RWMWs and non-migrant women as well. Compared to non-migrant women, a higher percentage of RWMWs indicated that prior to their migration, they had 'always' been allowed to travel outside the house even if it required overnight stay and to engage in economic activities in the house, outside the house, and beyond their residential locality. Many RWMWs had been engaged in some form of economic activity before migration.

> Before migration, I used to go outside the house and earn and my mother took care of all the household chores and my children. I had also operated a small shop after taking a loan of 10,000 rupees at zero interest rate from a cooperative. I earned some money and paid back the loan. Since the income was still insufficient for the family, I migrated. (RWMW from Kuwait, Pathariya VDC, Kailali, Interview no. 59, 20 April 2017)

72 For example, contrary to the norm of fewer RWMWs being involved in decisions related to daily expenses, the opposite was true for Hill Caste RWMWs and those in Jhapa. When it came to decisions related to buying and selling assets, contrary to more RWMWs being involved, either by themselves or through joint decision-making, the case was reversed for RWMWs who were separated, divorced, or widowed.

73 Please note that researchers did not ask whether the informants had sought permission for these activities.

## Table 7: Women's Mobility Patterns before Migration

| Allowed to do the following? | No | | Sometimes | | Always | | Not sure | | No need to consult | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | RWMW | NMW | RWMW | NMW | RWMW | NMW | RWMW | NMW | RWMW | NMW |
| Travel to areas in nearby locality during the day | 5.3 | 8.6 | 7.9 | 10.2 | 85.5* | 80.2 | 0.2 | .6 | 1.1 | .2 |
| Travel to areas requiring overnight stay away from home | 18 | 24.6 | 11 | 13.1 | 65.8* | 48.7 | 4.2 | 9.7 | 1.1 | 3.8 |
| Take part in community events/ activities | 6.8 | 10.0 | 10.3 | 11.2 | 79.9** | 72.5 | 2 | 4.8 | 1.1 | 1.4 |
| Engage in income-generating work in the house | 9.3 | 10.7 | 3.2 | 6.0 | 83.4** | 60.6 | 3.2 | 16.1 | 1.1 | 6.4 |
| Take up work/business outside the household but in the locality | 15.1 | 21.8 | 3. 1 | 2.6 | 71.5* | 46.1 | 9.2 | 19.4 | 1 | 9.9 |
| Take up work/business outside the residential locality | 32.4 | 47.1 | 0.8 | 1.2 | 48.9* | 22.6 | 16.9 | 12.9 | 1 | 16.0 |

Note: Significant at *1 per cent level, **5 per cent level for differences between RWMW (before migration) and NMW (5-10 years ago).
RWMW: Returnee women migrant worker
NMW: Non-migrant women

When asked why some women migrate and others do not, a returnee noted that one required courage to defy gender norms in order to migrate.

> First, you need to have the courage to say that I will go and earn. Next, there is the old cultural belief that women should not go outside the house, women should not leave the house. What will happen if she is abused? Because of that too, women cannot go. For instance, will she (referring to a woman in his community) go? Even if you place gold before her, she will not go because she is old-fashioned. As for us, we went because of *dukkha* [hardship]; when there is *dukkha*, you do not worry about cultural norms. (A male participant during an FGD with RWMWs, Mechinagar Municipality, Jhapa, FGD no. 1, 9 April 2017)

Among the various categories of RWMWs, unmarried women were found to have been more mobile compared to married and single women, which again indicates restrictions imposed by society on women. This suggests that while women's migration in general is closely tied to their mobility prior to migration, in that those who were more mobile were also more likely to migrate; there were also those who had migrated despite restrictions on their mobility.

### 2.1.4 Pre-migration Employment Status

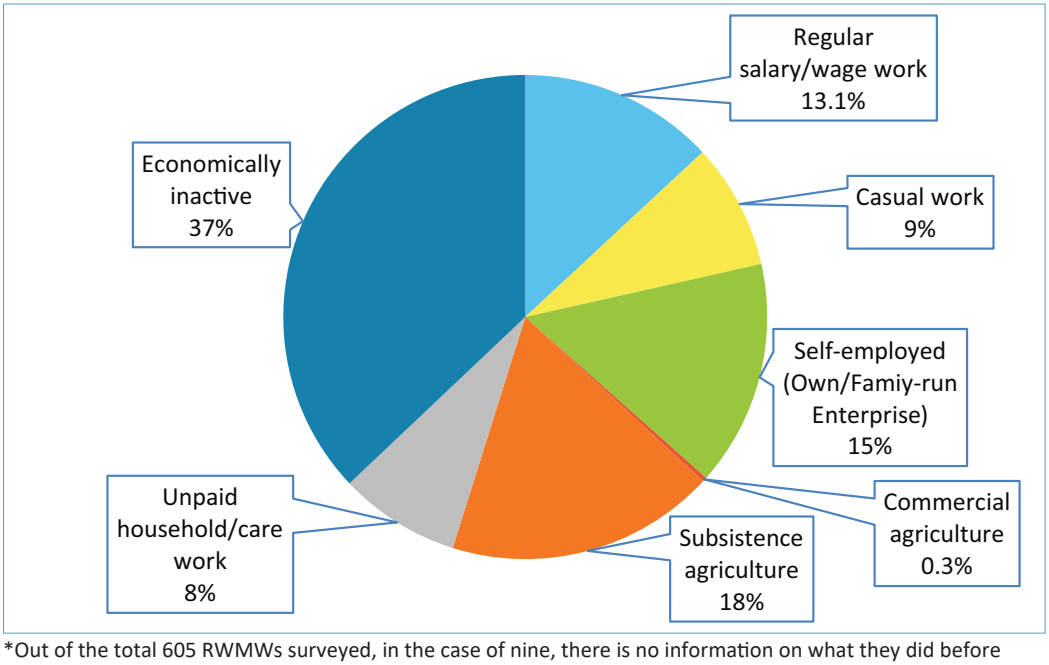
Understanding the pre-migration employment status of the migrants[74] is necessary not only to identify their work experience in the pre-migration context but also to compare the changes, if any, in their employment status upon return (see Section 10 for a discussion on the post-migration context). The majority (63 per cent) of RWMWs had been involved in some form of income-generating work previously, indicating that their migration for foreign employment was an extension of their work in domestic labour markets. However, as will be discussed in the ensuing sections, it was the inability to find well-paid or satisfactory jobs in domestic labour markets that led women to migrate. This is evident in what an RWMW from Kuwait said:

> Besides agriculture, I used to be a vegetable vendor. My children were small; I used to wake up early in the morning, and I used to go to Dolalghat to sell vegetables. The income from the business wasn't good, and it was very difficult to save money. From the business, we weren't even able to manage the household expenses and the children's education. Children give more pain to their mother than to their father. Therefore, I decided to migrate. (RWMW from Kuwait, Chautara Municipality, Sindhupalchowk, Interview no. 18, 6 April 2017)

74 The study collected data on present and on earlier two work experiences of both RWMWs and non-migrant women. However, although RWMWs were asked to state if the previous two work experiences were before or after migration, any comparable distinction was not made for non-migrant women.

Around 18 per cent of RWMWs mentioned subsistence agriculture as their primary area of work, 15 per cent said they owned or jointly owned an enterprise, followed by 13 per cent engaged in regular salary or wage-based employment, and 9 per cent in casual work (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Primary Working Situation of RWMWs Prior to Migration***




*Out of the total 605 RWMWs surveyed, in the case of nine, there is no information on what they did before migration because both of their last two work experiences were after migration.

### 2.1.5 Engagement in Community Activities

Although the reasons were not clear, the study revealed limited involvement of RWMWs[75] in community organisations[76] prior to migration. Specifically, only a fifth of the RWMWs said that they had been involved in any such organisation in the pre-migration period, which indicates that social networks outside their household were not very strong among RWMWs before their migration.[77]

75 Questions related to 'Engagement in community activities' were only asked to RWMWs to gauge their engagement with the community prior to migration. Since similar data on non-migrant women was not collected, a comparison between RWMWs and non-migrant women on that score cannot be made.

76 Community organisations are those that are located in the community, are established by people living in the community, and work for the community itself. There are many examples of such organisations all over Nepal, ranging from users' groups to manage resources like forests and water, savings and credit groups, mothers' groups, etc.

77 Further analysis to see if the low levels of engagement among RWMW prior to their migration was affected by age factors, i.e., if these women were too young to get involved in community activities,

This section highlighted the condition of RWMWs and non-migrant women before their migration and 5-10 years ago, respectively, to examine if these pre-migration contextual factors played any role in determining women's decisions to migrate. The findings showed no significant differences between RWMWs' and non-migrant women's households in perceptions of various gender norms, which means that it does not significantly impact women's decisions regarding migration. Even though the family's view on gender norms was quite positive across basic factors, women were still perceived to be less capable in terms of their ability to be economically stable. However, it was found that, prior to migration, RWMWs had been more involved in important household decisions such as buying and selling of productive assets and also had greater autonomy in relation to their mobility, compared to non-migrant women. This means that women from households with more relaxed gender relations and norms are more likely to migrate.

showed that 10.6 per cent of the RWMWs were below 18 years, and 25 per cent of them were between 18-22 years when they first migrated. Thus, while age factor could have been one of the reasons for not being involved in community activities prior to migration, the high percentage of women not being involved suggests that weaker social networks and linkages probably better explains migration than age-related variations.

## 2.2 Reasons for Migration

- Women's migration needs to be understood within the context of broader economic and social transformations underway in Nepal—women are not only burdened with household responsibilities but increasingly required to work outside of home to meet their families' economic needs.
- Women migrate for a variety of reasons, but the majority do so for economic ones such as improving household economic condition, debt payments, and a better future for their children. These reasons are especially striking among single women who tend to lack social support.
- In places where women's migration has a longer history, the effect of what is known as the cumulative causation of migration is stronger in that migration of women is taken to be the norm. The proliferation of recruitment agents also works as a factor in facilitating this 'culture of migration'.
- There are variations in the reasons for when women migrate for the first time and re-migrate; wealth accumulation and children's future are more pronounced as major reasons for repeat migration.

Literature on reintegration suggests that the reasons for migration and repeat migration have a strong bearing on the reintegration of a migrant. It has also been argued that the reasons for migration are gendered, complex, and beyond economic motives.[78] This section looks at the various reasons women migrate abroad for work, focusing on both economic and non-economic factors.

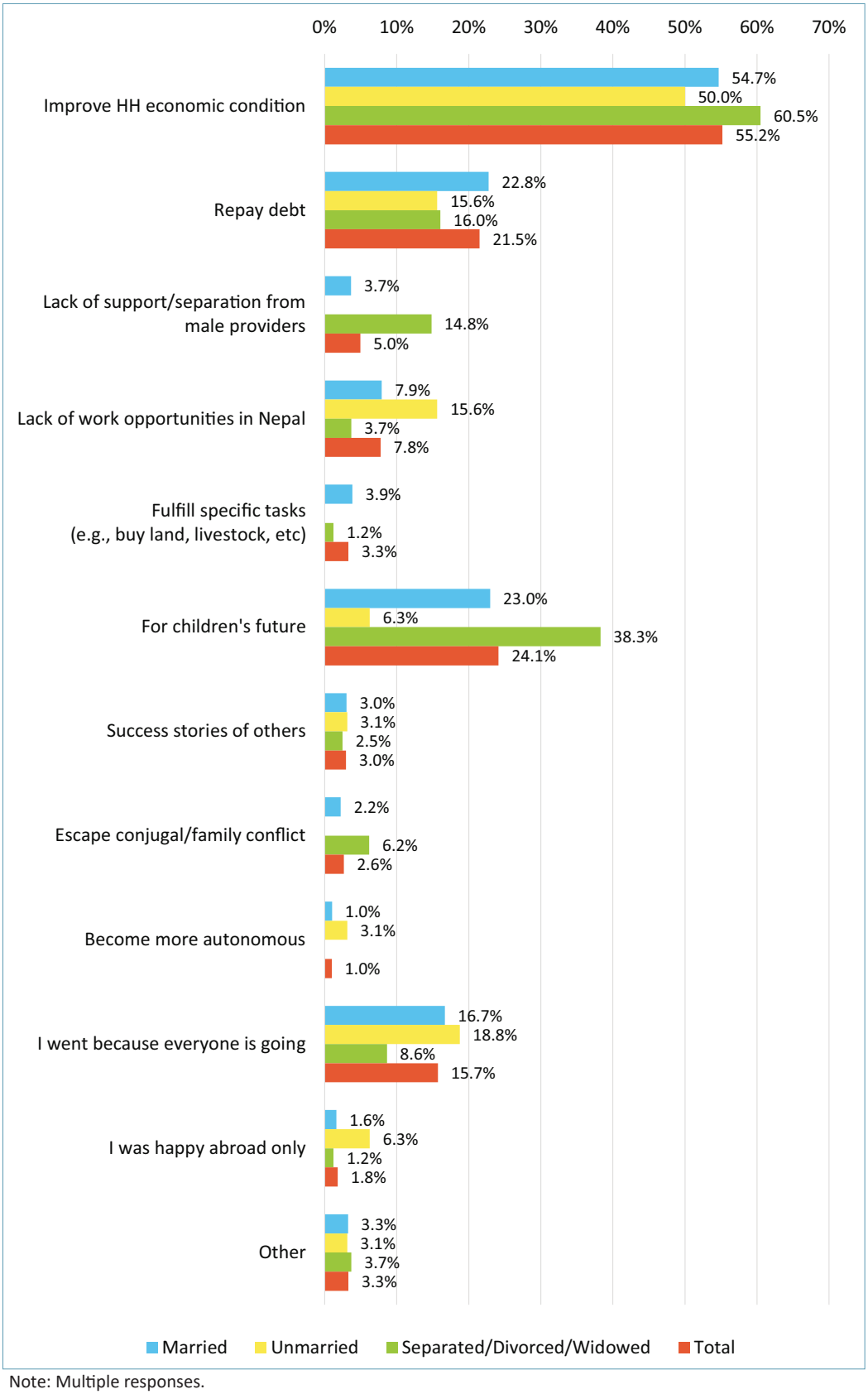
### 2.2.1 Fulfilling Household's Economic Needs

Findings from the survey suggested that the economic need of their household was the primary driving force for women's migration across all survey locations. Overall, 55 per cent of returnee women migrant workers (RWMWs) mentioned improving the economic condition of their households as a reason for their migration, 24 per cent for their children's future, and 21.5 per cent indebtedness. The disaggregated data implied that the pressure to fulfil households' economic needs was felt more acutely by single women who were much more likely to lack the economic and social support from males in the household (Figure 4).[79]

78 Dannecker 2005; Belanger and Rahman 2013.

79 At the aggregate level, only 5 per cent of women mentioned the absence of and/or lack of support and/or separation from male providers, and 2.6 per cent identified conjugal/family conflicts as major reasons for migration.

## Figure 4: Major Reasons for Migration during Most Recent Migration
(by marital status)




Note: Multiple responses.

> My husband didn't take any responsibilities. He wasn't working. Even if he worked, he never helped with the household expenses. It was difficult for us to have two meals a day from agriculture. I didn't have any funds for investment to raise cattle. Due to financial issues, I chose to go abroad for work… Due to poverty, I had to leave my 14-month-old son and two-year-old daughter. When I felt so helpless because my children were suffering from hunger, I decided to go abroad. I told myself, I don't care if I die, but I had to do something to fill my children's stomachs. (RWMW from the UAE, Sunwal Municipality, Nawalparasi, Interview no. 33, 15 April 2017)

Traditional gender norms mean that in Nepal women are burdened with household responsibilities and are also increasingly required to work outside of their home to meet their families' economic needs. This is evident from the fact that in the case of RWMWs as well as non-migrant women the average amount of time women spent on economic activities besides their household responsibilities (i.e., engaging in agricultural activities, working outside the home, and running businesses) was on par with their male counterparts, if not higher (Figure 5).[80]

There are some variations in reasons for migration between the rural and urban residents surveyed. A higher percentage of RWMWs from rural areas (66.1 per cent) stated that improving their household's economic condition was one of the main reasons for their migration compared to those from urban areas (44.4 per cent). More Hill Dalits (62 per cent) compared to other caste/ethnic groups (average 54 per cent) stated that improving their household's economic condition was a major reason for migration. Likewise, household economic needs were a major reason for migration for a larger proportion of RWMWs in Nawalparasi and Kailali Districts.

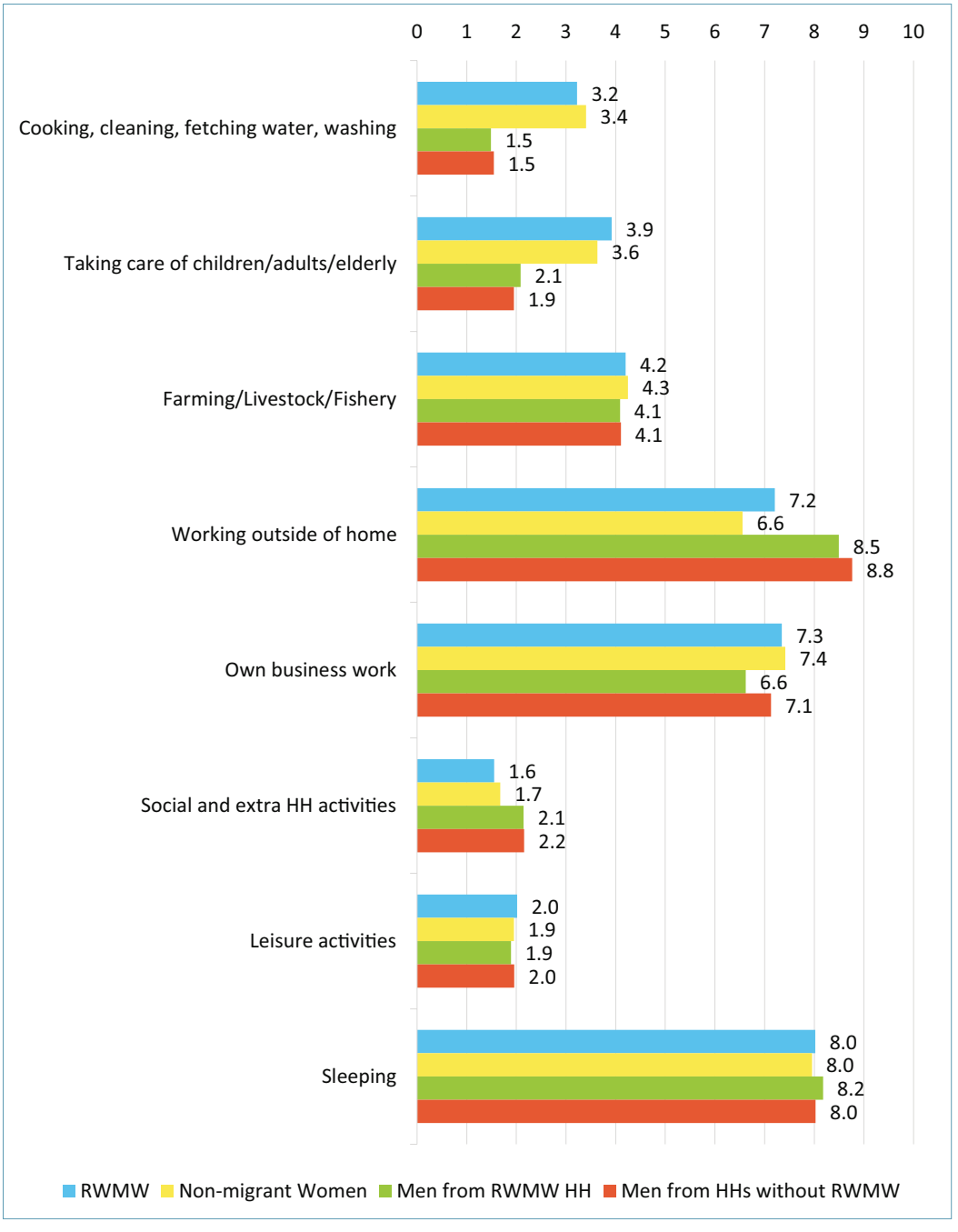
Findings from the study also indicated that women in general preferred access to employment and other livelihood opportunities within Nepal as opposed to going abroad even if they were forced to adopt the role of a breadwinner in the family. However, in the absence of such opportunities, they felt compelled to migrate.

> I got married at the age of 14/15 years. Since then, I haven't received any support from my husband or in-laws. We got into quarrels on a daily basis. We separated from them [the in-laws] but my husband was irresponsible. He didn't work at all and instead came home drunk and made my life more difficult. Our economic condition was getting worse and we also had to take loans to meet our living expenses. I realised that nothing good was coming from staying in Nepal, so I decided to migrate for foreign employment. (RWMW from Saudi Arabia, Dhangadhi Municipality, Kailali, Interview no. 52, 12 April 2017)

80 Around 16 and 14 per cent of the RWMWs and non-migrant women worked outside the home respectively. On the other hand, 51 and 49 per cent of the male counterparts of RWMWs and non-migrant women did the same. The average does not consider those who did not work outside their home.

I got married at the age of 14. My husband migrated to Malaysia. He's stayed there for about nine years now. But he would not send me any money. He wouldn't take care of either his parents or us. We were separated when my son was one year old. I stayed with my parents-in-law because my parents have passed away and it would have been difficult

**Figure 5: Average Hours Spent in Various Activities**



> to live with my brothers and their families. I stayed because I needed to secure the future of my son. As it was difficult for me to manage household expenses and as I didn't get support from my husband, I thought of going abroad myself. (RWMW from Kuwait, Goldhap VDC, Jhapa, Interview no. 11, 16 April 2017)

To summarise, meeting household expenses was the major reason for women's migration across the board, but, as the latter case above shows, women who were separated, divorced, or widowed were much more likely to migrate. Likewise, with some variations across districts, a slightly higher percentage of women from rural areas, and those from Dalit castes groups, reported that a major reason for their migration was to improve their household's economic situation.

### 2.2.2 Securing a Better Future for Children

Besides the aforementioned economic factors, social reasons were also important since these two factors are quite interlinked. The literature suggests that women often migrate with the primary objective of providing a better future for their children,[81] and many women included in the study had also migrated for the betterment of their children's future, with 24 per cent of the respondents stating that to be a major reason (Figure 4). Most of these women had very little or no education, but they wanted to educate their children. Interactions with RWMWs also indicated that most of them started realising the value of education as they set about seeking decent and well-paid jobs in Nepal.

> My husband married another woman while I was three months pregnant with my daughter. I came to stay with my mother. Our economic condition was so bad that I had to take care of my daughter on my own. So I decided to go abroad and work so that I could send my daughter to a good school and secure her future. (RWMW from Saudi Arabia, Pathariya VDC, Kailali, Interview no. 59, 20 April 2017)

> Women migrate for the future of their children. They are worried about how to educate their children, as they have no job and source of income here in Nepal. Therefore, they want to educate their children even by migrating for foreign employment… Despite the hardships, women go abroad, hoping that their children will be able to see and experience a better world and life. (A participant during an FGD with RWMWs, Ichowk VDC, Sindhupalchowk, FGD no. 6, 25 April 2017)

RWMWs who were separated, divorced, or widowed (38 per cent) were more likely to state 'children's future' as a major reason for their migration compared to married RWMWs (23 per cent). This could be because these single women were solely responsible for their children's upbringing. Across population groups, a larger proportion of RWMWs from

81 Belanger and Rahman 2013; Bhadra 2008.

Hill Caste (35 per cent) stated that the major reason for their migration was for their children's future, compared to 28 per cent of Dalit women and only 12 per cent of Tarai Janajati women. In terms of districts, a higher percentage of women in Kailali (38 per cent) and Kaski (37 per cent) stated that as the reason for migration compared to only 17 per cent women in Nawalparasi and 19 per cent in Sindhupalchowk. These differences indicate not just the premium women place on their children's education, but that the relative importance given to education is very much driven by the economic circumstances many women find themselves in: women from poorer and more disadvantaged groups were compelled to consider their households' daily needs more as opposed to the future prospects of their children.

**Box 1: Women, Work, and Class Differences**

Maya Khadka was born into an affluent household. She did not do well in her studies, and she did not feel like studying either. When she was 14, she eloped. Her husband belonged to a middle-class family. She had to work on the land, which she never had to do at her parents' house. She was the only daughter married to an economically average household while her sisters and cousins were daughters-in-law of rich and respected families. She felt awkward every time she had to meet her sisters. She said, 'I decided to migrate to earn money. Here, I wouldn't get a decent good job because I don't have much education. Even while migrating, I was determined not to go to a Gulf country. Even though it required a big sum of money, I decided to go to Israel.' (Based on an informal discussion with an RWMW from Israel, Mechinagar Municipality, Jhapa, 6 April 2017)

### 2.2.3 Struggles with Societal Norms and Stigma

While poor economic condition, debt, absence of male providers, and/or inability of male providers to support the household were major reasons for women's migration, because of gender norms related to the control of women's mobility and the stigma against women's migration, most women took up employment abroad as the last option. To the extent possible, RWMWs first mentioned having sought employment opportunities within the country. However, the gendered and discriminatory nature of the labour market is such that in addition to a lack of decent jobs generally, only a few sectors are open to women, and even in these sectors, they are not paid well.[82] As a result, women opt to migrate abroad.

> Even now, women are paid only five or six thousand rupees a month. When I was working for Mahila Bikas Samuha[83] [a local NGO] before migration, they paid me only 2400 rupees even though I had to work long hours. The money would only be enough for

82 Serrière and CEDA 2014.

83 The name of the NGO has been changed to protect the respondent's privacy.

> regular visits to the office in Melamchi. I was also working in a family planning project. I used to tell women not to migrate. For others, my condition looked good as I was working. The job was only one in name, as there was no money. What could I do? My son was growing and had started school. I then consulted an agent, took some training, and went abroad to work in a company. (A participant during an FGD with RWMWs, Ichowk VDC, Sindhupalchowk, FGD no. 6, 25 April 2017)

Furthermore, work in Nepal is often associated with prestige, and working in a low-status job would mean sullying one's own as well as the family's honour. However, women were often unable to aspire to 'respectable' or 'well-paid' work because of their lack of educational qualifications. As a result, the choices open to them were limited to unpaid/low-paid household and agricultural work. These societal mores combined with their desire to earn money compelled women to migrate abroad where while the nature of work they engaged in remained unseen and unknown, they could expect to gain prestige through the remittances they send or their contribution to the well-being of their households (Box 1).

Additionally, single women pointed to the daily experiences of harassment and stigma as factors that made it unbearable for them to remain in Nepal and earn a living.

> I couldn't continue my enterprise (restaurant) because of the stigma. Sometimes men used to eye me because I was single. I feared that I would be violently abused and left that work. (Informal discussion with an RWMW from Kuwait, Sunwal Municipality, Nawalparasi, 10 April 2017)

These perceptions towards women, the ill intentions of men, and the stigma attached to being a single woman not only discouraged women from engaging in work outside the home within Nepal but also provided some with the impetus to migrate.

> I was a widow and staying with my mother who is also a single woman. I tried running a small grocery shop but the stigma faced by single women made it difficult to run the shop. The way that society looks at widows is wrong. My husband died in an accident while I was pregnant. Many people from the community blamed it on my fate. It was difficult to stay in the village, so I chose to go for foreign employment instead. (RWMW from Saudi Arabia, Dhangadhi Municipality, Kailali, Interview no. 53, 13 April 2017)

### 2.2.4 Domestic Violence and Other Reasons

As can be seen from Figure 4, at the aggregate level, only 5 per cent of the women mentioned absence of and/or lack of support and/or separation from male providers as major reasons for migration, while 2.6 per cent cited conjugal/family conflicts.[84] Disaggregated data

84 It is difficult to ascertain the veracity of such 'low' figures on family conflicts/domestic violence. It

highlighted that the pressure to meet household economic needs were felt more acutely by separated/divorced/widowed women, who were much more likely to lack support from male providers (Figure 4). Likewise, several women also mentioned domestic violence at the hands of their husbands and/or in-laws as another factor that influenced their decision to migrate.

> Before migration, my husband beat me innumerable times, which I couldn't tolerate and I consumed Metacid[85] but I didn't die. I even took poison that is used to kill mice three times. My husband, in-laws, no one was supporting me… Even my own children took my in-laws' side. In such a situation, my elder sister suggested that I migrate to be free from the pain and that is why I left. (RWMW from Kuwait, Pokhara Sub-Metropolitan, Kaski, Interview no. 42, 12 April 2017)

Women were also compelled to choose foreign employment if their husbands failed to go abroad due to medical reasons or because male migration cost more than female migration.

> The decision for my wife's migration was made through discussions and consultations with family members. At first, I tried to go abroad, but I failed the required medical test. It also costs a lot more money for me to go abroad. (Husband of an RWMW, Goldhap VDC, Jhapa, Interview no. 15, 24 April 2017)

Studies on the political reasons leading women from Nepal to migrate are scant. However, during the course of this study, several women explained difficulties at the time of the Maoist insurgency[86] and hence their desire to migrate.

> I migrated in 2003, the time of Maoist insurgency in Nepal. My brother used to work in marketing and disappeared one day. We weren't sure if he was taken by the Maoists or by the Nepali Army. My parents were engaged in regular farming, which wasn't enough to finance the education of my sisters, so I discontinued my education to keep my sisters in school. In Nepal, I didn't find employment opportunities based on my education. There were jobs in the private sector in Birtamod but poorly paid, only around two or three thousand rupees per month. I went to Lebanon. Before migration, my plan was to study until the Master's level and to go to Aayog[87] for employment in some kind of govern-

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could be a result of under-reporting or women perceiving such issues to be 'normal', or simply because women consider the economic needs of their families as being more pronounced compared to family conflicts/violence.

85 Also known as methyl parathion, a form of organophosphorus pesticide that is commonly ingested to self-poison in Nepal.

86 The Maoist armed insurgency in Nepal was led by the then Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) between 1996 and 2006.

87 Short form for the Public Service Commission in the Nepali language.

> ment services. But because of what happened to my brother during the insurgency, I had to forgo my studies and go abroad. As there was insurgency ongoing here, there weren't many work opportunities either. (RWMW from the UAE, Goldhap VDC, Jhapa, Interview no. 12, 23 April 2017)

Despite little evidence pointing to any linkages between the Maoist insurgency and women's migration from Nepal, during discussions with RWMWs as well as non-migrants, the inability to find proper employment amidst the political instability was highlighted as one of the factors that caused women to believe that the options for them, especially in a worsening business environment, were extremely limited.

### 2.2.5 Cumulative Causation: The 'Migration Culture'

The theory on the cumulative causation of migration suggests that the social process of migration induces structural changes in migrants' communities of origin, which in turn, lead to more people from the same communities migrating.[88] The findings from the study also suggested that in addition to social and economic factors, 15.7 per cent of the respondents indicated that they had migrated because everyone around them had done so (Figure 4). Particularly, in places like Sindhupalchowk and Jhapa, the long history of women's migration had normalised their movement to the extent that families not only accepted the migration of their female members, but also encouraged them to migrate.[89]

> Parents encourage their daughters to go abroad. They say that those in the neighbourhood have earned this much, that much, so why don't you also go? Even when they don't ask them directly to migrate, they keep talking about how others have done well by migrating, which puts pressure on daughters… Young girls studying in grades 11 or 12 also quit their studies and migrate. They don't see any employment opportunities here even if they complete their education, so they decide to migrate in order to earn and have savings of their own. (NGO worker, Gyalthum VDC, Sindhupalchowk, Interview no. 23, 27 April 2017)

There was also the fact that due to the stigma attached to female migration, RWMWs shared only their good experiences with their relatives and neighbours, while keeping the unpleasant side to themselves. Media and other reports portrayed migrant women negatively through stories of abuse and trafficking. Therefore, not disclosing any negative experiences made it easier for RWMWs to reintegrate into their families and communities after they came back. However, such posturing also encouraged prospective women migrants to move forward with their migration decisions.

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88 Massey 1990; Durand et al 2005.

89 Apart from Sindhupalchowk, there were no instances of women being forced by their family members to migrate, and in Sindhupalchowk, too, none of the respondents revealed actually being coerced by their family members to migrate.

> They see returnees coming back and building big houses, women with dark complexions becoming fair and the fair ones becoming dark. They only hear good stories, and because of that, many people want to go abroad. (Husband of an RWMW, Mechinagar Municipality, Jhapa, Interview no. 5, 11 April 2017)

> If a woman builds a house and wears nice clothes from her earnings abroad, other women also want to migrate, saying, 'Oh! She did well and she earned money'. However, they don't care about difficulties they have to face while abroad and possible abuse and violence that women often experience. They are only hearing of successes of women migrants. (NGO worker, Melamchi Municipality, Sindhupalchowk, Interview no. 17, 8 April 2017)

The proliferation of agents was a supplementary reason fuelling women's migration. Findings from this study confirmed that if an agent was a relative or somebody from within the village, women tended to trust them and the information they provided on destination countries and working environments.

> The agent was from my village. I knew how to sew clothes so I had asked him to take me to do similar work there. I went to work in Kuwait. We had to stay in India for 10 days in a rented place before flying. It cost me around nine thousand rupees. The agent took care of other expenses. (RWMW from Kuwait, Dhangadhi Municipality, Kailali Interview no. 50, 20 April 2017)

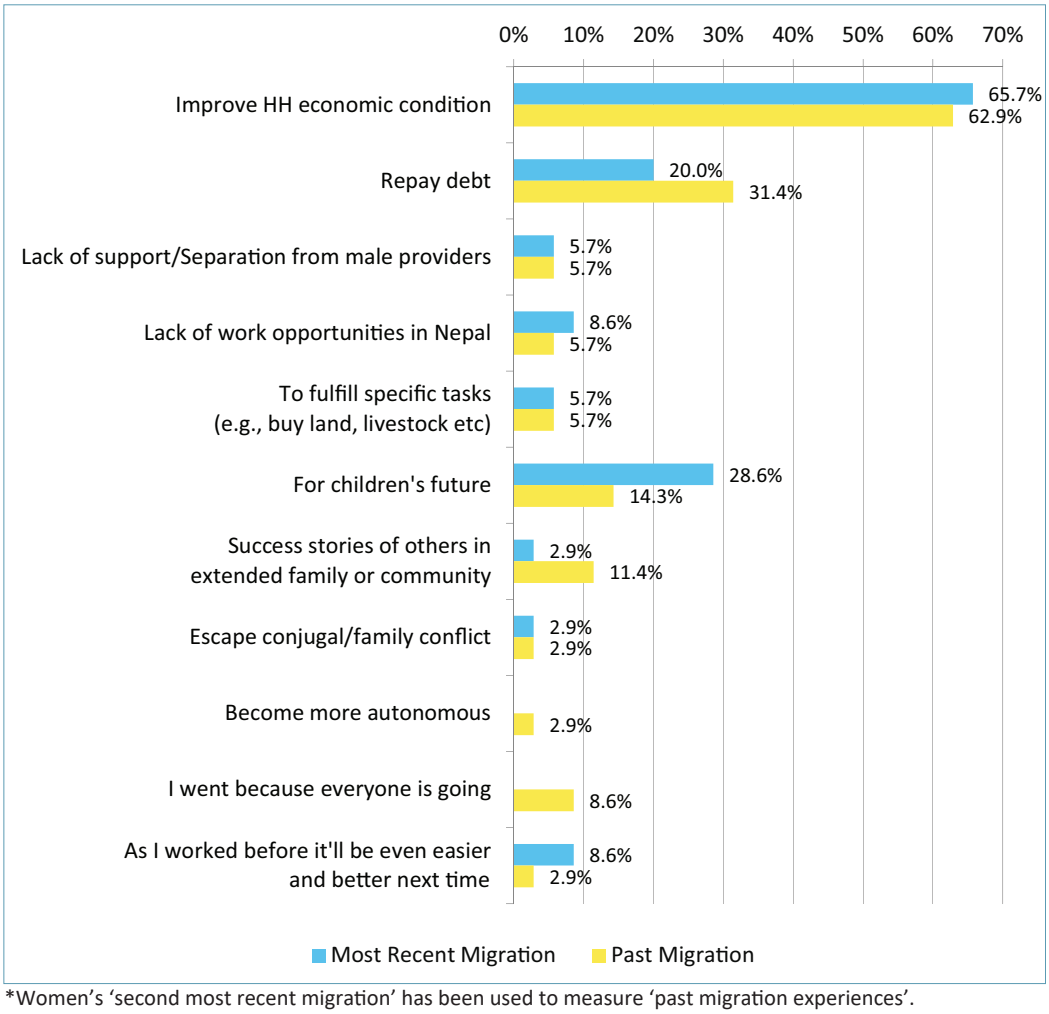
The desire to fly, experience life abroad, and earn more were factors that had increasingly become more prevalent. Such a desire combined with the demonstration effect of success stories of others along with the proliferation of recruitment agents was cumulatively encouraging more women to migrate.

### 2.2.6 Reasons for Re-migration

To examine the causal factors for women's migration, an important issue considered in the context of this study was changes in reasons for migration across different episodes of their migration stints for those who had gone more than once.[90] Field observations suggested that household economic condition remained the most important reason across the different periods (more than 60 per cent in the different migration episodes), but within the spectrum of economic motives, the precise reasons varied. Specifically, while 31.4 per cent of the women who had migrated earlier said that debt repayment was a major factor for their past migration stint, that reduced to only 20 per cent in the most

90 Here, 217 RWMWs who had migrated at least twice were compared for the two different episodes of migration. For 182 RWMWs (out of 217), their previous migration was their first migration, for 35, it was their second, third, or fourth migration.

### Figure 6: Differences in Terms of Reasons for Re-migration*




*Women's 'second most recent migration' has been used to measure 'past migration experiences'.
Note: Multiple responses

recent case. Conversely, while 14.3 per cent of the women mentioned their children's future as the main reason for the previous migration, that figure went up to 28.6 per cent in the case of re-migration (Figure 6), indicating perhaps the opening up of new avenues for children's education with their newfound disposable income.[91]

Corroborating quantitative survey results, qualitative findings also suggested that wealth accumulation (after repayment of debts, a major concern during the first migration episode) and future security, especially of children, were the main reasons for repeat migration.

91 Additionally, experiences of working abroad (8.6 per cent) and lack of work opportunities in Nepal (8.6 per cent) were factors that were more central to women's decision-making in their most recent migration episode.

This cycle of initially fulfilling household economic needs led to wealth accumulation and future security.

> My husband is unwell and there isn't much I can earn here. *Lutti lyayo bhutti khayo* [Earning just enough to last a day] is how we did it. So I went to Kuwait both times. The reasons were the same. The first time, I managed to pay off the loans which was around five hundred thousand rupees. After the loan was paid, we wanted a place of our own, so I went again and bought this land and built the house with my earnings. Who knows whether or not our son will take care of us in our old age and what type of daughter-in-law we might get, so to have some savings for our future, I want to go one last time. (RWMW from Kuwait, Mechinagar Municipality, Jhapa, Interview no. 4, 10 April 2017)

In conclusion, although women migrate for a wide variety of reasons, the majority do so to meet their household economic needs, and this was especially striking among women who had separated from their husbands, or were divorced or widowed. Improving the economic condition of their household was a much more pressing reason for rural women to migrate compared to urban women. Conversely, the latter were much more likely than rural women to migrate to secure their children's future. Additionally, women also migrated because of the lack of well-paying jobs, honour issues related to working in low-paying and low-status jobs, escape from domestic violence and the stigma related to working outside of one's home. There was a wider acceptance of women's migration in districts like Sindhupalchowk and Jhapa, which have a longer history of women's migration, and the cumulative effects of migration have been paramount. However, there were some differences in reasons for migration among women who re-migrated, as there was a decrease in the proportion of those re-migrating to pay debts and also an increase in the proportion who re-migrated for their children's future. This points to the fact that once women are able to meet their primary economic needs, they are able to focus more on the broader well-being of their families.

## 2.3 Migration Process and Conditions Abroad

- Around a third of returnee women migrant workers (RWMWs) faced barriers from family members while migrating, which is mainly linked to the stigma against women's migration and mobility in general. But the fact that the majority of RWMWs did not experience any barriers also suggests changing perceptions on women's migration and its greater acceptance.
- Migration via irregular channels is considered a 'normal' part of the recruitment process with more than half of the RWMWs stating that they did not experience any difficulties. The main challenges reported were lack of information about the recruitment processes and insufficient information on their jobs and the country of destination, followed by confiscation of passports and high recruitment fees.
- GCC countries were the most common migration destination compared to other countries, and most of the RWMWs (79 per cent) had worked as domestic workers, earning on average NPR 24,311 (c. USD 236) per month.
- The most frequently cited forms of abuse were not getting days off and denial of leave, long working hours, and confiscation of passports. Approximately 97 per cent of RWMWs had remitted their earnings, which was spent primarily for household expenses and education fees for children. Only 3 per cent of RWMWs mentioned that they had invested their remittances.
- While abroad, the majority of RWMWs were in regular contact with their families in Nepal, but their awareness about events and developments in their community, district, and Nepal was low, which suggests that the level of their planning and preparedness for returning home was also limited.

Literature on gender and migration shows that women's recruitment processes and experiences abroad are vastly different from that of men.[92] Recent studies have indicated that gender norms[93] and negative attitudes towards women's labour migration serve as hindrances to women's migration. Findings from this study indicated that even though RWMWs enjoyed a fair degree of autonomy and mobility prior to migration (see the section on 'Pre-Migration Contextual Factors'), there were striking hurdles when it came to women's migration abroad.

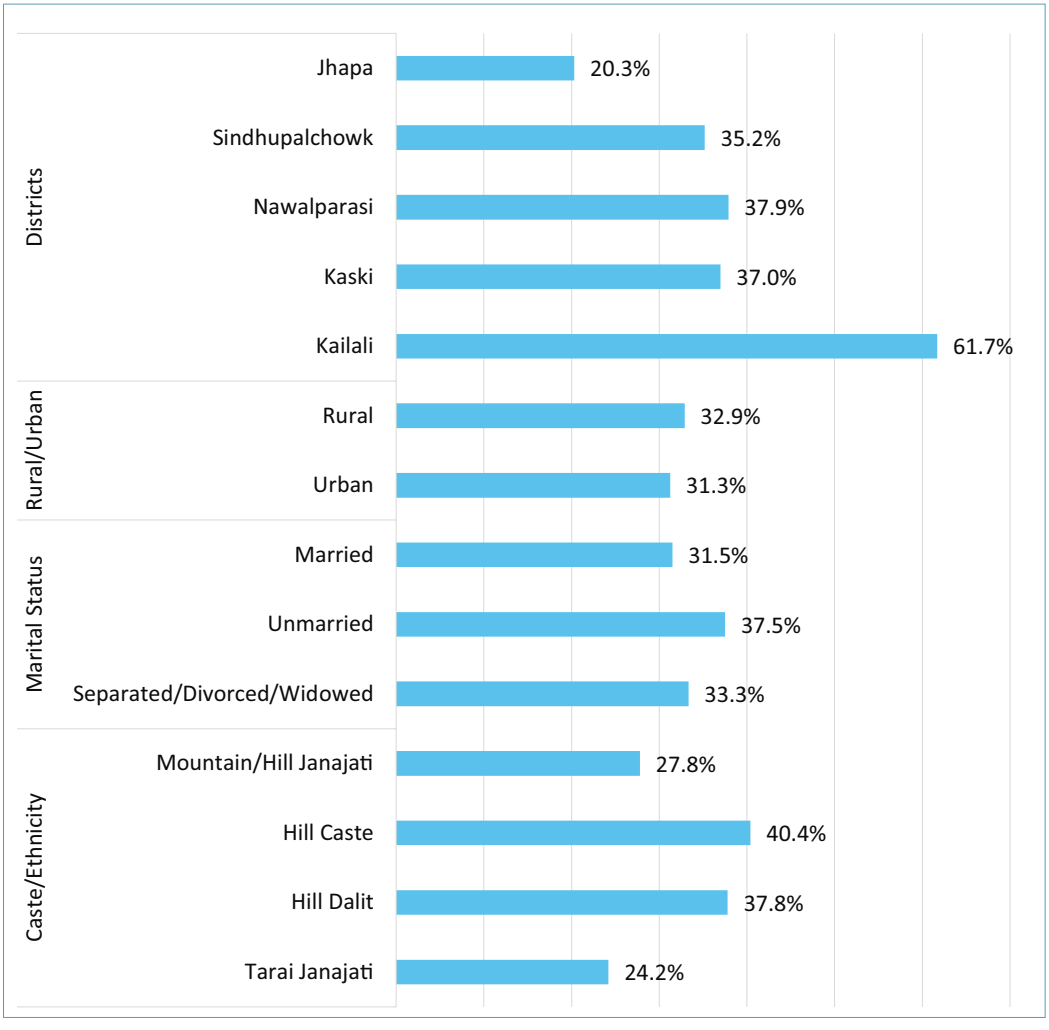
### 2.3.1 Barriers to Migration

Almost a third of RWMWs (32 per cent) reported that they faced difficulties from their family members during their migration, with some notable differences across districts and

92 Dannecker 2005; Belanger and Rahman 2013.

93 Bhadra 2013; CARE 2014.

**Figure 7: Percentage of RWMWs Who Experienced Barriers from Family Members during Migration**




castes and ethnicities. As shown in Figure 7, in Kailali, nearly 62 per cent of RWMWs said they faced barriers, whereas this was true for only around 20 per cent in Jhapa. This can be attributed to the fact that Jhapa is much more developed[94] with more equitable gender norms compared to a far-western Tarai district like Kailali. In addition, women's

94 Nepal Human Development Report 2014 (NPC 2014) calculates based on the 2011 census data, the Human Development Index score (which does necessarily measure gender dimensions) for Jhapa to be 0.518 and 0.46 for Kailali against the national average of 0.490. though the report does not report district-wise scores on gender development index (GDI) and gender empowerment index (GEM), both scores are highest for the Eastern Development Regions which includes Jhapa and lowest for Far-Western Development Region, which includes Kailali.

migration is a much more recent phenomenon in Kailali compared to Jhapa. Along a different parameter, a higher percentage of Hill Castes, Hill Dalits, and unmarried RWMWs said that they faced barriers from their families while migrating compared to other groups.

Of the 32 per cent of RWMWs who reported challenges to their migration from family members, 50.5 per cent indicated that these came from their parents, while for 37.6 per cent, it was from their husbands. As can be expected, there were significant differences in terms of parents posing hurdles between married and unmarried RWMWs. Of those who mentioned objections, it was true only for 48 per cent from the married cohort women while that figure was 92 per cent for the unmarried. In the case of married women, the main barriers were husbands (41.3 per cent) and parents-in-law (11.6 per cent).[95] Notably, in the Tarai districts, more RWMWs experienced barriers from their husbands and in-laws and less from their own parents. Likewise, a larger proportion of Hill Dalits (59 per cent) mentioned husbands and in-laws, compared to 49 per cent of the Hill Castes and only 25 per cent of Tarai Janajatis. On the other hand, Tarai Janajatis (87.5 per cent) were much more likely to experience barriers from their parents, compared to 55 per cent of the Mountain/Hill Janajatis and 50 per cent of the Hill Dalits.

The aforementioned differences between the various groups are aligned closely with gender hierarchies practised within these different groups. Gender norms that restrict women's mobility structure the role of women as primary caretakers of households and men as the primary breadwinners. Furthermore, negative societal characterisation of women's migration, with their supposed sexual exploitation abroad and absence of people to take on household duties and care responsibilities were some of the factors shaping negative attitudes towards women's migration.

> Society doesn't perceive women's migration positively... Men fear being stigmatised as being weak and not capable enough of taking care of their families economically if they send their wives abroad. Therefore, as far as possible, men don't allow women to migrate. (A participant during an FGD with non-migrant women, Ghandruk VDC, Kaski, FGD no. 16, 24 April 2017)

Notwithstanding the barriers that women did experience, it was quite striking that more than two-thirds of RWMWs did not face any barriers to their migration. Fewer objections to women's migration could be associated with the lack of livelihood options and the need to support their households.

95 Among married women who did experience barriers during migration, there was a higher percentage who said that they experienced it from their parents. This percentage is higher because there were some respondents who went abroad while still unmarried.

> I had already made my passport. But the first time I told him about my prospect, I had to wait for a whole year because my husband didn't allow me to go. He got sick after some time and the amount of our loan was increasing. We had no other option than for me to go abroad and my husband agreed when I told him again. (RWMW from Kuwait, Mechinagar Municipality, Jhapa, Interview no. 4, 10 April 2017)

However, over time, with the increasing trend in women's migration, for instance, as in Jhapa and Sindhupalchowk, and certain cultural contexts among certain communities, such as the Tamang in Sindhupalchowk, who reportedly encourage their female family members to migrate for labour, negative perceptions began to decline even though they may not be completely absent.

> Earlier, when women migrated, they were accused of being involved in prostitution and other immoral activities. Now, migrating means going for work, so people take it normally. They say so-and-so's daughter or daughter-in-law has gone, so what is wrong when we go? Earlier, it involved many risks and was scary. But now, people don't care, it is like going to Kathmandu from the villages. (A participant during an FGD with RWMWs, Chautara Municipality, Sindhupalchowk, FGD no. 5, 7 April 2017)

> They used to judge women who went abroad, saying that they had a bad character but not anymore. Now, many women have gone abroad, and these women have bought land, constructed houses and done work, which has made people feel women can also do something. If they hadn't done such things and stayed idle after returning, then they might not have been looked at positively. (Tea estate manager, Haldibari VDC, Jhapa, Interview no. 8, 21 April 2017)

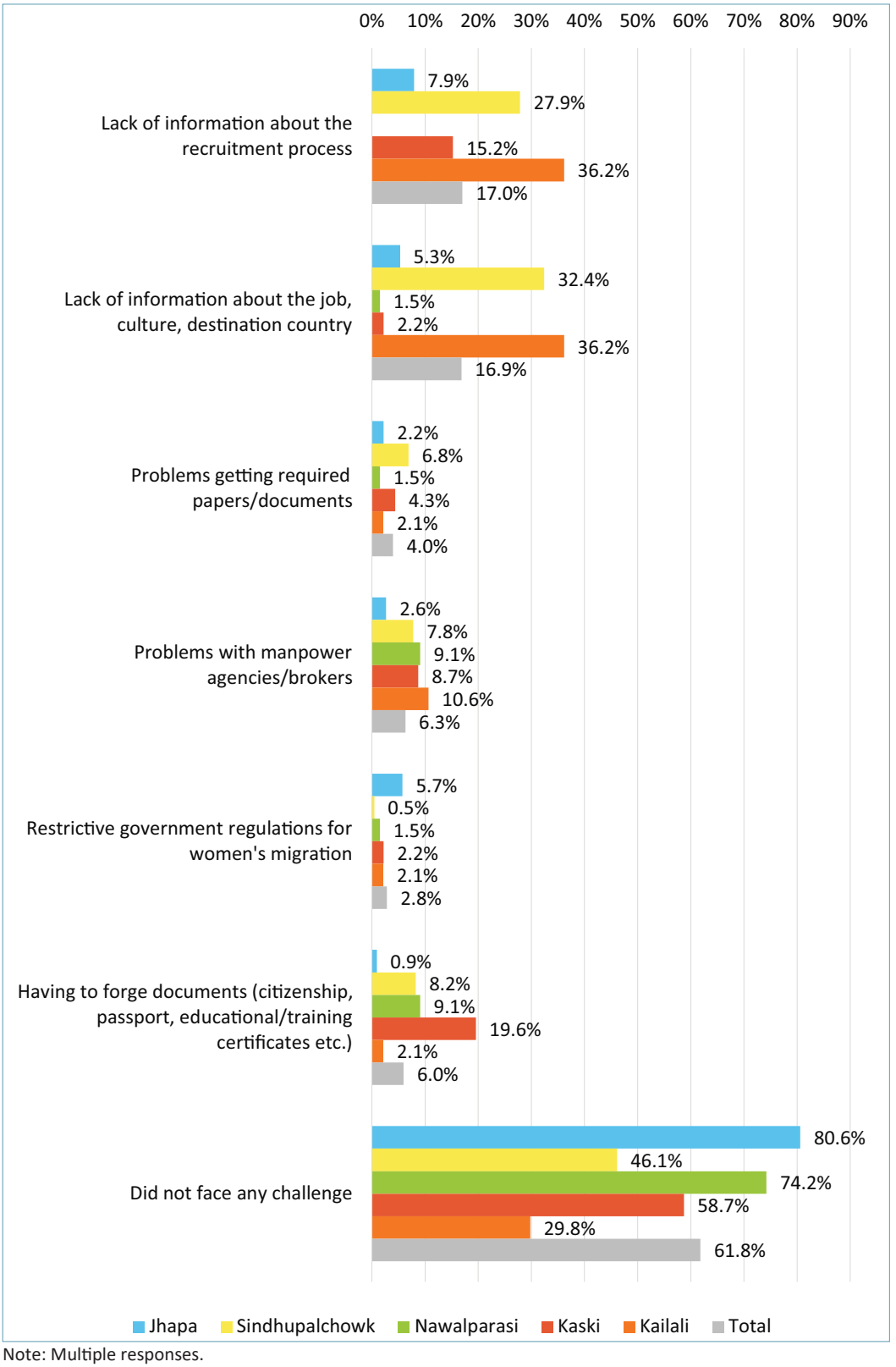
### 2.3.2 Recruitment Challenges

Conditions under which individuals migrate have significant bearing on their experiences both in the destination countries and, upon return, at home. In this study, just as the majority of the RWMWs did not encounter barriers from their families during their migration, the majority of RWMWs (62 per cent) also indicated that they did not experience any recruitment challenges either (Figure 8).

Although there were not many differences in terms of caste/ethnicity, location, or marital status, notable differences were observed between districts. For instance, while only 30 per cent of the respondents in Kailali and 46 per cent in Sindhupalchowk said they did not face any challenges during migration, a much higher proportion from Jhapa (80.6 per cent) indicated having a problem-free process. RWMWs mostly reported a lack of information about the recruitment process and insufficient information about jobs and about the country of destination, such as its culture, to be the main challenges.

For many women, the recruitment process was handled by their agents, who were usually people they knew from their neighbourhood or someone referred to them by a

## Figure 8: Challenges Faced during Recruitment




Note: Multiple responses.

relative or an acquaintance. Sometimes, RWMWs themselves worked as agents, creating a level of trust among prospective migrant women and their families. In a situation where information was limited, many women, including those who migrated via India (thus, 'illegally') considered their recruitment processes to be 'normal' and part of the regular recruitment process. This is not to say that women's migration is safe and without challenges. Women often overcomed challenges and uncertainties during the recruitment process by consulting with women migrants, RWMWs, and/or recruitment agents.

> A neighbour of mine, who was already working in Oman [and also working as an agent] sent me a letter. In that letter, she had written that if any woman wants to come abroad to work, they could do so without any fear and that it is safe to work in Gulf countries. She said that the work isn't very difficult, and if she faces any problems, she can complain to the office [recruitment company] and change the house [employer]… After that, I gathered my courage and decided to go abroad, and contacted the same agent who had sent her and went to Kuwait. (RWMW from Kuwait, Sunwal Municipality, Nawalparasi, Interview no. 33, 15 April 2017)

However, in some cases, dealing with agents was reported to be a challenge as there were reports of agents confiscating women's passports, charging high fees, threatening to cancel their visas if the money they demanded was not paid, forcing them to work despite their desire to return, and sending them to countries other than the ones they wanted to go.

> I wanted to go again, so I had applied for Dubai and had the visa, but then I changed my mind about going. The agent didn't return my passport. It has been three years now that I haven't got my passport back. Now my husband [also a migrant worker] will return and get it from the agent. (Informal discussion with an RWMW from Saudi Arabia, Mechinagar Municipality, Jhapa, 31 March 2017)

> My agent lied to me saying that he will send me to the Maldives for work. He then cheated me, took 15,000 rupees, including my passport and never returned it to me. (Informal discussion with an RWMW, Sunwal Municipality, Nawalparasi, 9 April 2016)

Additionally, women also faced challenges while getting the required official documents as they needed the support of their husband and family members in order to make official documents such as citizenship certificate and passport, which can be a challenge for some women.

> Sometimes, I feel like running away and going abroad, without telling my husband because he didn't allow me to go again. In order to go abroad, I now have to obtain an MRP [machine readable passport] for which I need a recommendation letter from him, which isn't possible. (RWMW from Lebanon, Melamchi Municipality, Interview no. 26, 28 April 2017)

#### 2.3.2.1 Recruitment Challenges Due to Policy Barriers

The Government of Nepal's regulations on women's migration to Gulf countries, especially through various forms of periodic bans, have obviously created challenges for women, mainly by compelling them to migrate via India or other countries. Survey findings of the most recent migration showed that between 2006/07 and 2015/16, 32 per cent of women had left via India. Further, 61.2 per cent of the RWMWs were 13 to 27 years of age when they first migrated, meaning many would have been below the government's previously mandated ban on women younger than 25 to work as domestic workers in the Gulf (MoLE).[96]

The government's restrictions on women's migration have not only made it inconvenient for women to migrate, it has also shaped the public discourse on their migration.

> When I first tried to go from the Indian border, a Maiti Nepal[97] team caught us at the Rupadiya border. They kept me there for two days and asked lots of question. My brother came to take me home. When I came back, people started humiliating me saying, 'Oh, you were so set on going abroad, weren't you?' After that, I became even more determined to migrate and tried again within a week. I went through another border the second time. (RWMW from Kuwait, Pathariya VDC, Kailali, Interview no. 59, 20 April 2017)

> When women try to migrate, Maiti Nepal stops them. These women take risks and about 10 per cent of them fail to cross the border [with India]. The government has placed a ban on women's migration as housemaids to the Gulf, but when they stay here, they are beaten by their husbands… When they go abroad, they at least get to send some money back home… They aren't allowed to go from Nepal and so they are bound to go via India, but don't call them trafficked women. Yes, maybe among them 10-15 per cent [are being trafficked], but not all women who go through India are sold. (Husband of an RWMW and owner of recruitment agency, Mechinagar Municipality, Jhapa, Interview no. 5, 11 April 2017)

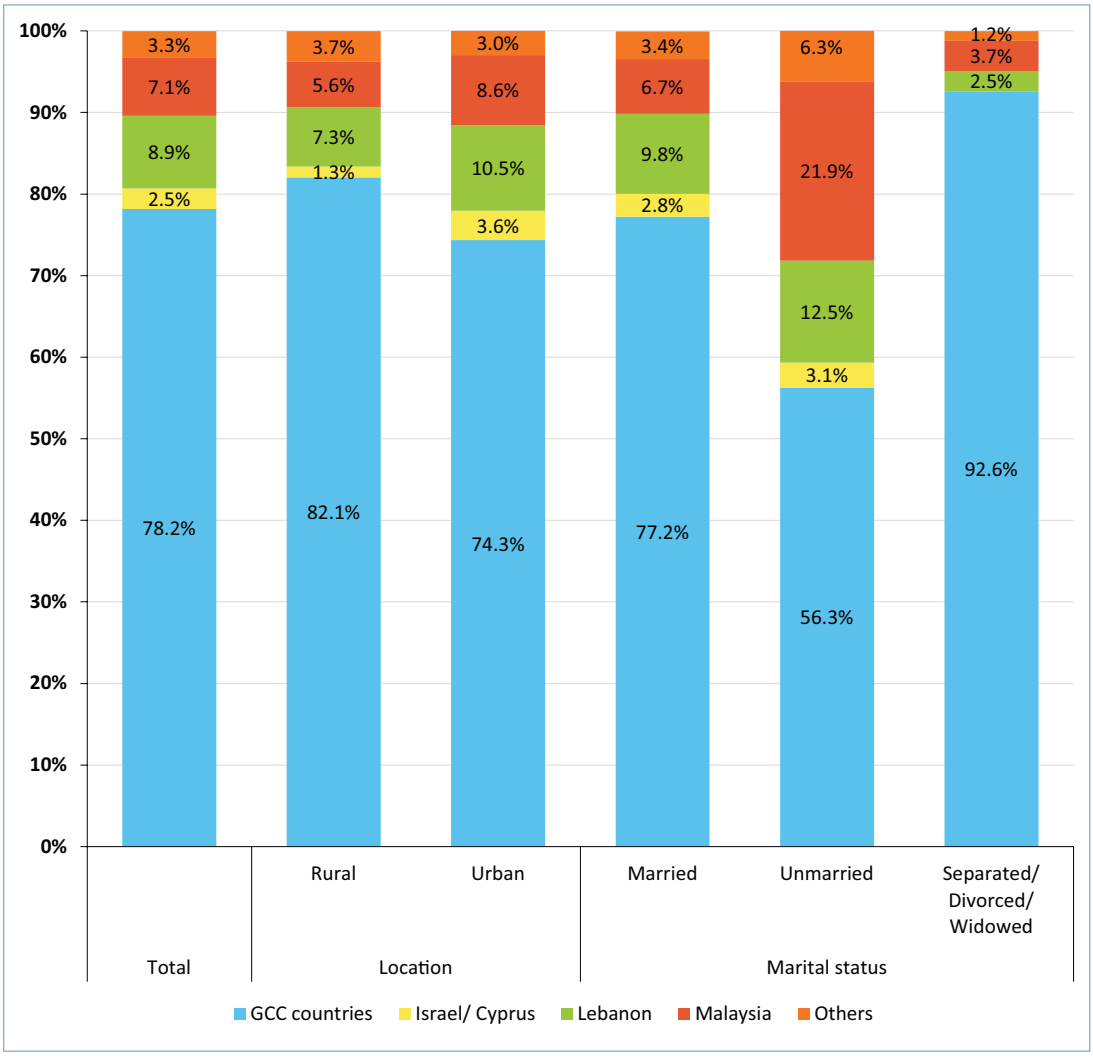
### 2.3.3 Situation in Destination Countries

In order to examine women's migration experiences abroad, respondents were asked about the type of work they undertook, working conditions, salary and use of remittance, and their linkages back home.

96 This ban became effective in April 2015. Earlier, the government had either completely banned women from migrating to Gulf countries to work as domestic workers or had set a limit of only allowing women above 30 years of age (MoLE 2016). As of 2 April 2017, the government has completely banned the migration of domestic workers to the Gulf until Nepal signs labour agreements with countries there.

97 A Nepali NGO that works on anti-trafficking and violence against women.

**Figure 9: Most Recent Migration Destination**
(by marital status and place of residence)




### 2.3.3.1 Destination and Type of Work

Findings from the survey indicated that the majority (78 per cent) of RWMWs migrated to the six countries of the GCC[98] during their most recent migration abroad, followed by 9 per cent who went to Lebanon, and 7.1 per cent to Malaysia. As can be seen in Figure 9, a greater percentage of unmarried women migrated to countries other than those of the GCC, and there is a slightly larger variety in destinations among RWMWs from urban areas, with more women going to destinations other than GCC countries.

98 The six GCC countries are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates (UAE).

There appears to be subtle differences in the choice of destination. For instance, in Sindhupalchowk, 74 per cent of RWMWs went to GCC countries, 13 per cent to Lebanon and 8 per cent to Malaysia. Meanwhile, among those from Nawalparasi, a district with a much shorter history of migration, the GCC was the destination for 85 per cent.[99] Likewise, a high percentage of Hill Dalits (92 per cent) migrated to GCC countries that was the case for only 73.4 per cent among Mountain/Hill Janajatis, which again seems to result from migration history as well as access to networks required for migration. In this case, the underprivileged Dalits would have had neither in general.

Survey findings also showed that the majority of RWMWs (79 per cent) worked as domestic workers during their most recent migration stint, followed by 7.8 per cent as care workers[100] and 7.4 per cent in factories. Other jobs included office-cleaners, cashiers, and restaurant workers, but a very small proportion of women worked in these sectors. A higher percentage of RWMWs from urban areas went for care and factory work, and

**Table 8: Nature of Work Abroad during Most Recent Migration**

| | | Domestic work | Care work | Cleaning and laundering | Restaurant work | Factory work |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| District | Jhapa | 77.5 | 10.6 | 3.1 | 0.4 | 6.2 |
| | Sindhupalchowk | 81.7 | 6.4 | 1.8 | 1.4 | 7.3 |
| | Nawalparasi | 84.8 | 1.5 | 3.0 | – | 7.6 |
| | Kaski | 80.4 | – | 6.5 | 2.2 | 10.9 |
| | Kailali | 61.7 | 17.0 | – | 2.1 | 10.6 |
| Rural/Urban | Rural | 83.7 | 6.0 | 2.3 | 1.0 | 6.0 |
| | Urban | 74.0 | 9.5 | 3.0 | 1.0 | 8.9 |
| Caste/Ethnic group | Mountain/Hill Janajati | 78.4 | 6.9 | 1.9 | .9 | 9.4 |
| | Hill Caste | 74.2 | 14.6 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 6.6 |
| | Hill Dalit | 83.3 | 2.2 | 5.6 | 1.1 | 5.6 |
| | Tarai Janajati | 90.9 | – | 6.1 | – | – |
| Marital status | Married | 78.7 | 8.5 | 3.0 | 0.8 | 7.3 |
| | Unmarried | 68.8 | 6.3 | – | 6.3 | 12.5 |
| | Separated/ Divorced/Widowed | 84.0 | 3.7 | 1.2 | 0.0 | 6.2 |
| | **Total** | **78.8** | **7.8** | **2.6** | **1.0** | **7.4** |

99 From Nawalparasi, 4.5 per cent went to Malaysia and 4.5 per cent to Lebanon. Even though women's migration in Kailali is a recent phenomenon, the destination countries RWMWs went to were quite diverse, with 68.1 per cent going to the GCC countries, 13 per cent to Malaysia and 10.6 per cent to Lebanon.

100 Due to gender segregation in labour migration, migrant women are usually hired to work as domestic workers and caretakers (Fleury 2016; Petrozziello 2013).

more of the unmarried RWMWs went for factory work, possibly because of their higher levels of education, skills, and experience compared to those from rural areas (Table 8).

### 2.3.4 Remittances and Savings

As shown in Table 9, respondents' average salary per month during their most recent migration was NPR 24,311 (ca. USD 236), with some variations across districts as well as caste and ethnic lines, which may be explained by the differences in destination, migration experience, and socio-economic background.

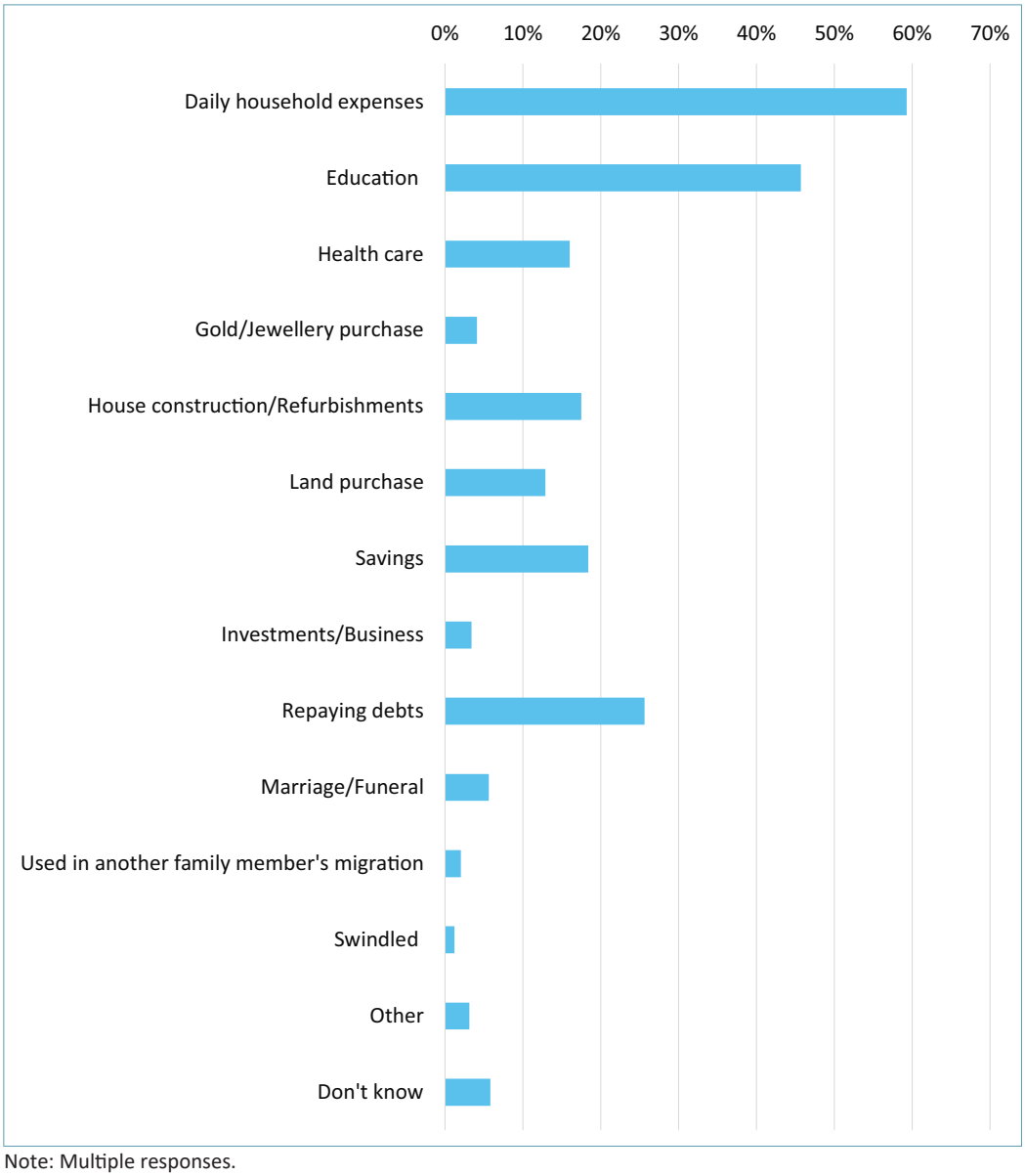
**Table 9: Average Monthly Salary** (in NPR)
(by place of residence, marital status, and caste/ethnicity)

| | | Average Monthly Salary |
|---|---|---|
| Districts | Jhapa | 24,008 |
| | Sindhupalchowk | 25,190 |
| | Nawalparasi | 22,403 |
| | Kaski | 27,102 |
| | Kailali | 21,681 |
| Rural/Urban | Rural | 23,884 |
| | Urban | 24,734 |
| Caste/Ethnicity | Mountain/Hill Janajati | 24,820 |
| | Hill Caste | 27,058 |
| | Hill Dalit | 20,858 |
| | Tarai Janajati | 19,543 |
| Marital Status | Married | 24,669 |
| | Unmarried | 26,844 |
| | Separated/Divorced/Widowed | 21,147 |
| | **Total Average** | **24,311** |

Around half of the respondents indicated that they did not spend anything on living expenses abroad, mostly because they worked as domestic workers and their living expenses were borne by their employers.[101] Accordingly, an overwhelming majority (97 per cent) of the women remitted money during their most recent migration, with not much variation across categories. Furthermore, remittances sent by migrant women were mostly used for daily household expenses (59.3 per cent), payment of educational fees (45.7 per cent), repayment of debts (25.6 per cent), and construction of houses (17.5 per cent) (Figure 10). Such prioritisation of women's remittances, especially to meet the basic requirements

101 Of the respondents, 36 per cent spent NPR 1000-5000 (ca. USD 10-49), around 8.3 per cent spent NPR 5,001-10,000 (ca. USD 49-97), and 4.8 per cent spent more than NPR 10,000 (ca. USD 97). Those who spent higher amounts on living expenses abroad were RWMWs who worked in factories and companies.

**Figure 10: Uses of Remittances during Most Recent Migration**




Note: Multiple responses.

of the family, has significantly helped in poverty reduction, which is also documented by Bhadra (2008), and Gurung and Khatiwada (2013). However, the fact that only 3.4 per cent of RWMWs said that their remittances were used for investments in businesses has a bearing on the scope of their reintegration into economic life upon return (Figure 10).

Interesting differences were found in terms of marital status and caste/ethnicity. A larger percentage of women who were separated, divorced, or widowed (61.5 per cent) said

that a major use of their remittance was education of children/siblings, compared to 44 per cent of married women and 29 per cent of unmarried women. In terms of caste/ethnicity, a higher percentage of Dalit RWMWs (23 per cent) said that the major use of their remittance was healthcare of household members, compared to Hill Castes (16 per cent) and Mountain/Hill Janajatis (14 per cent). Likewise, only 8 per cent of Dalit RWMWs stated that they had savings from their remittances, with the figure being higher for Hill Castes (18.6 per cent) and more so for Mountain/Hill Janajati (22 per cent), an indication that the use of remittances is closely tied with the socio-economic status of RWMWs prior to their migration.

#### 2.3.4.1 Working Conditions Abroad

Findings from this study revealed that negative experiences of women migrant workers were not uniform. Rather, they depended on the type of work women migrant workers undertook and the nature of their employers. The most frequently cited forms of abuse were lack of days off (62 per cent), denial of leave (58 per cent), long working hours (47 per cent), and confiscation of passport (45 per cent). A further 32 per cent reported that they sometimes suffered verbal, emotional and psychological abuse with 12 per cent stating they faced such abuse on a regular basis. Some 2 per cent of the respondents reported being subject to sexual abuse (Figure 11).

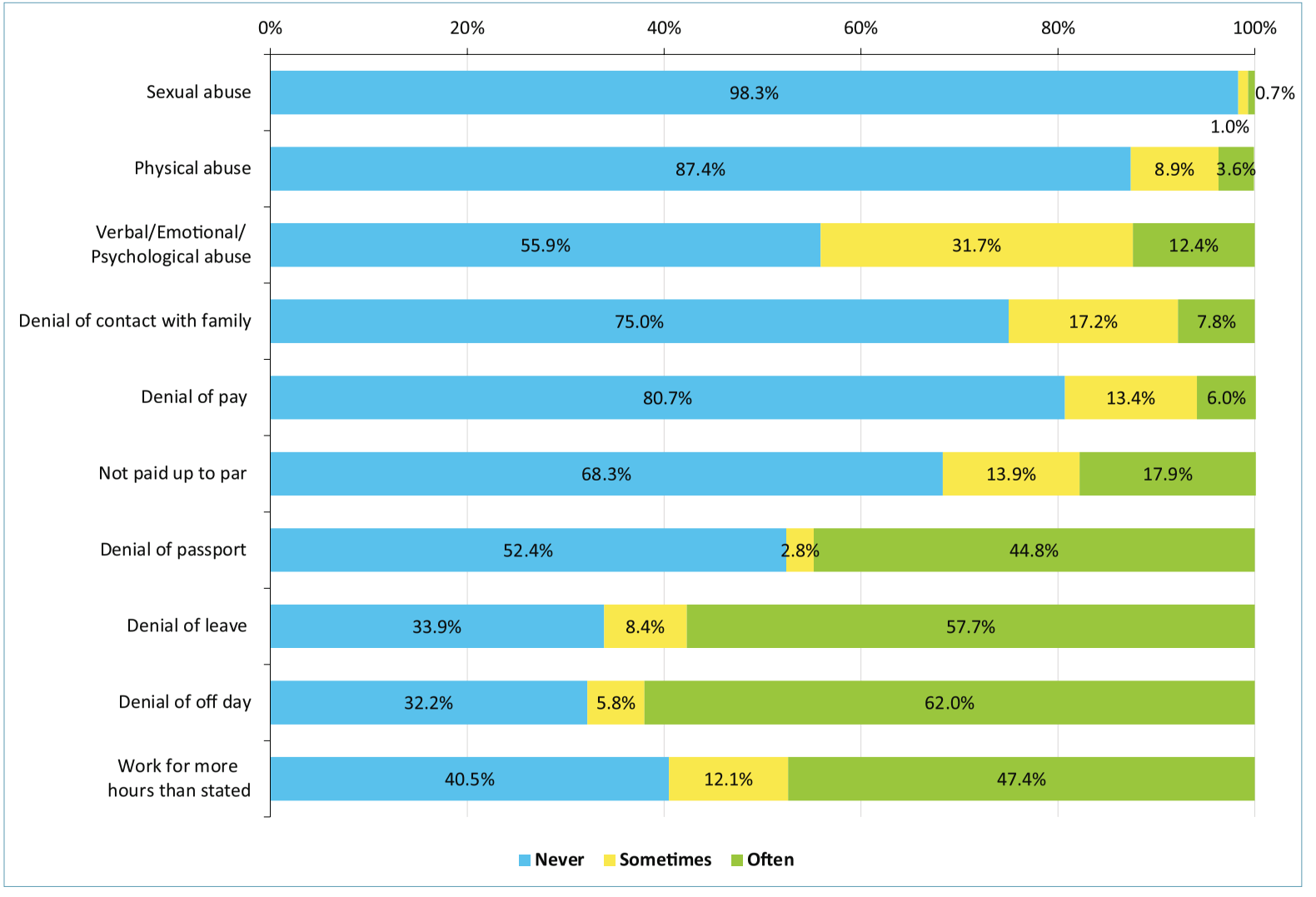
The following accounts from RWMWs who worked as domestic workers in the GCC countries represent the working conditions many women experienced while abroad. Their situation was further exacerbated by language barriers, especially during the first few months of work.

> I had to look after six children. I had to feed them, wash their clothes, iron clothes, and clean the house. I slept at midnight and woke up at six in the morning. I was the only housemaid working there. When people ask you, 'How are you doing?', you have to say that it is good, because your relatives get worried if you tell otherwise. (A participant during an FGD with RWMWs, Mechinagar Municipality, Jhapa, FGD no. 1, 9 April 2017)

> I used to sleep at 3 at night and get up at 9 in the morning. Children were not acquainted with us, so at the beginning, they used to bite and kick us but later they started loving us. Since I didn't have a mobile phone, the owner used to arrange calls, but I couldn't talk to my family frequently. (A participant during an FGD with RWMWs, Sunwal Municipality, Nawalparasi, FGD no. 9, 12 April 2017)

> The work there was very hard. They were not satisfied with what I did. It's so hot, unbearably hot, and there is no place to sleep either. They wouldn't let you rest. You have to be working all the time. There would be so much laundry. I don't know if you will believe me, but they would let me eat only in 15 days. Even then, they would give me only leftovers. (RWMW from Kuwait, Goldhap VDC, Jhapa, Interview no. 10, 14 April 2017)

## Figure 11: Experiences of Abuse during Most Recent Migration



Some of the women who worked as domestic workers revealed being sexually abused by their employers. The nature of their work made them more vulnerable to abuse.

> One week after I went to that house, my *sahu* [male employer] started coming to give me tea and tried to touch me. But my madam was good. I always tried to stay away from that *sahu*. (RWMW from Lebanon, Pokhara Municipality, Kaski, Interview no. 2, 15 April 2017)

> When I started working there, my [male] employer once came near me and tried to touch me. But I asked him what he was thinking of and I wasn't that kind of woman. He apologised and told me that he had such a relationship with the woman working before and thought even I would be willing to do such things. When I said I wasn't, he didn't touch me again. But he didn't pay me properly, sometimes he sent money home, and sometimes he didn't. Maybe he wanted to take revenge for not agreeing to what he wanted earlier. Some women coming here for work are like that. They try to flirt with their employers and later get into trouble. (Informal discussion with an RWMW, 8 April 2017)

Research on Nepali women's migration, especially to GCC countries, also documents similar findings.[102] It is generally the case that even when migrants do report victimisation, the criminal justice procedures could be ineffective in responding due to reasons such as limited linguistic and cultural adaptability and migrant victims of violence are also likely to lack access to legal aid and other necessary support.[103] Some women in this study also experienced abuse and violence in their workplaces, but most of them were reluctant to file complaints against their employers or seek help, fearing that such actions would worsen their situation. They felt that complaining or seeking protection exposed them to risks of retaliation or being sent back home.

> I never faced physical abuse, but many times my employer scolded me. She was aggressive and sometimes tried to attack me. Even though they scolded me frequently, I worked there for three years, considering it to be my own house. Where would I go even if I had left the job? We don't have passports in our hands. I never consulted or sought help from anyone. If I had gone against them, they might have killed me. I had heard about a woman working nearby who was killed by her employer and thrown away. (RWMW from Kuwait, Irkhu VDC, Sindhupalchowk, Interview no. 18, 6 April 2017)

Yet, around 25 per cent of the RWMWs reported having changed employers during their most recent migration, a sign of their having experienced some problems but also showing

102 Bhadra 2008; Gurung 2013; Gurung and Khatiwada 2013.
103 UN 2015.

their ability to seek alternatives. A higher percentage of RWMWs from Kaski (43.5 per cent), urban areas (29.3 per cent), Hill Castes (32 per cent), Hill Dalits (31 per cent), and RWMWs who were separated, divorced, or widowed (27.2 per cent) reported having switched employers compared to women from other categories (Table 10).

**Table 10: Percentage of RWMWs Who Switched Employers during Most Recent Migration**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Districts** | Jhapa | 25.1 |
| | Sindhupalchowk | 22.8 |
| | Nawalparasi | 19.7 |
| | Kaski | 43.5 |
| | Kailali | 25.5 |
| **Rural/Urban** | Rural | 20.9 |
| | Urban | 29.3 |
| **Ethnicity** | Mountain/Hill Janajati | 20.6 |
| | Hill Caste | 31.8 |
| | Hill Dalit | 31.1 |
| | Tarai Janajati | 21.2 |
| **Marital status** | Married | 25.2 |
| | Unmarried | 18.8 |
| | Single (Divorced/Separated/ Widowed) | 27.2 |
| | **Total** | **25.1** |

Finally, it is important to note that many respondents also reported positive experiences while working abroad. Survey findings also showed (Figure 11) that the percentage of RWMWs who often or sometimes suffered extreme forms of abuse, such as physical, sexual, and verbal abuses and denial of pay and contact with their family, was actually low. Additionally, when RWMWs were asked about the kind of advice they would give to prospective women migrants, 76 per cent suggested that migration is a good option but one should be well prepared in terms of skills and safe migration options. Hence, the popular narrative of victimised woman migrant workers highlighted by the media and even rights-based NGOs working with women migrants, generally based on a few case studies of negative experiences, does not appear to fully capture the experience of the majority of RWMWs who participated in this study.

### 2.3.4.2 Linkages Back Home

Women being able to maintain with family members and community in Nepal and establish networks in destination countries also help facilitate reintegration upon return. Survey findings indicated that almost 80 per cent of the respondents reported having

**Table 11: Awareness of Events Back Home**
(by marital status)

| | Married | Unmarried | Separated/ Divorced/ Widowed | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Family events/decisions | 99.6 | 100 | 100 | 99.7 |
| Social events/decisions/gossips | 70.1 | 71.9 | 65 | 69.5 |
| Community events/decisions/developments | 19.7 | 31.3 | 13.8 | 19.5 |
| Local political events/decisions/ developments | 8.3 | 28.1 | 5 | 8.9 |
| External development initiatives | 1.7 | 9.4 | 2.5 | 2.2 |
| District political events/decisions/ developments | 4.1 | 15.6 | 3.8 | 4.7 |

Note: Multiple responses.

communicated with their family members at least once a month.[104] Those with access to the internet and able to use instant messaging applications such as Viber and Imo could talk on a daily basis.[105]

An overwhelming 99.7 per cent of the women stated that they were kept informed about family events and decisions back home, and 69.5 per cent said that they had been aware of events, decisions, and gossip about their relatives and neighbours. However, only 19.5 per cent said that they had been aware of happenings in the larger community and far fewer knew what was happening elsewhere (Table 11). There were differences by marital status, with a higher proportion of unmarried women aware about events outside the home.

Expectedly, RWMWs from urban areas and Hill Caste RWMWs were more aware about community events and decisions, external development initiatives and national-level political events and decisions while abroad. The overall low levels of awareness among women regarding political developments and events back home could be one of the reasons why RWMWs were ill-prepared to effectively integrate back into life at home after their experience abroad.

104 Around 2.3 per cent of women reported that they never communicated with their families back home.
105 Around 10 per cent of women reported that they talked daily.

## 2.4 Circumstances of Return

- The major reasons for the return of returnee women migrant workers (RWMWs) were both voluntary, which included end of contract and inability to stay away from family, and involuntary, consisting of factors such as household and family responsibilities as well as pressure to return.
- There was no correlation between circumstances of return and success or failure to reintegrate into the domestic labour market. However, those who returned with the intention of 'doing something' in Nepal were more likely to be engaged in paid employment or self-employment.

Studies have shown that circumstances of return can have a strong bearing on opportunities or constraints on employability and integration of migrants into domestic labour markets after the completion of their migration cycle.[106] Specifically, the argument is that if the return is not entirely voluntary, RWMWs may face various challenges in reintegrating back into society.[107] Accordingly, this study also looked at the reasons for return, categorising them into: i) voluntary (end of contract; returned on leave and decided not to return, having accomplished everything expected from migration; wanting to do something in Nepal; not wanting to or being able to stay away from family and retirement) and ii) involuntary (having worked illegally and hence deported; being rescued; being stranded and/or rescued; dissatisfaction with employer; the work being too difficult; insufficient income; pressure from family to return; family issues; health issues; and the inability to work because of working conditions such as abuse).

There appeared to be no correlation between circumstances of return and success, or failure of reintegration as exemplified by RWMWs being employed or involved in various enterprises upon their return to Nepal.[108] The only group that stood out was RWMWs who mentioned that the main reason for their return was 'to do something' in Nepal; 88 per cent of the 17 individuals who said that were currently engaged in some kind of paid employment or self-employment. The case study in Box 2 below illustrates how an RWMW with a strong motive in that direction was able to start an innovative business with the training she had received in Nepal and savings from her foreign employment. Additionally, the demand in the local market for her products was also key to her business being successful.

When RWMWs were asked to list up to three main reasons for their return, it was

106 Ruben et al 2009.

107 Constable 1999; Long and Oxfeld 2004; Martin and Radu 2012; Lang et al 2012; Ruben et al 2009.

108 However, as described in the Section 11, regression shows that those with negative experiences abroad also tend to do well after return.

clear that the major ones were voluntary. Specifically, 'end of contract' was cited as one of the main reasons for return by almost half of the respondents, and the top three reasons were more or less the same across the districts, with just some exceptions (Table 12).

Findings from other studies indicate that there is a higher chance of return if a migrant has a spouse and children back home.[109] Results of this study also indicated the primacy of having a spouse and children for decision to return.

> I missed my husband and children a lot. At least I can play, talk to my children, and forget about all other worries now. While I was gone, the children were so lean and weak, but now they have become healthier. There is no substitute for a mother's care for children. (RWMW from Lebanon, Godavari VDC, Kailali, Interview no. 60, 27 April 2017)

> My work was going quite well, but I decided to return because of my daughter. My *mitini* [fictive sister] who had migrated along with me returned home before me and went to meet my children. Seeing my *mitini*, my daughter cried a lot, probably because she was expecting me to return as well. She used to cry when we talked on the phone. She asked me to come back and she even threatened to commit suicide if I didn't. So I was worried about her and decided to return. (RWMW from Saudi Arabia, Dhangadhi Municipality, Kailali, Interview no. 52, 12 April 2017)

Although an insignificant proportion of survey respondents said that they returned home because they had achieved their migration objectives, it became clear from interviews with RWMWs that family members opposed women continuing to work as labour migrants abroad once household circumstances improved.

> The work wasn't difficult in Saudi [Arabia] but when both my son and daughter were about to go abroad, they pressured me to return and I did, giving up almost a year's salary. (RWMW from Saudi Arabia, Mechinagar Municipality, Jhapa, Interview no. 7, 10 April 2017)

Survey results also demonstrated that issues related to family and household were also one of the major reasons for the 'involuntary return' of women migrant workers in a substantial number of cases. Specifically, since the division of labour in Nepal is very much gendered, and it is mostly women who are expected to carry out household work, including taking care of children, societal norms appear to have been instrumental in the return of women migrant workers. A significant 20.7 per cent stated 'household/family responsibilities' as a reason for their return, while 11.1 per cent were quite open in citing 'pressure from family members'.

109 Constant and Massey 2002, 27-28; Carandang, Sison, and Carandang 2007.

**Table 12: Main Reasons for Return**
(Voluntary reasons in shaded cells)

| Reason* | Total | Jhapa | Sindhupalchowk | Nawalparasi | Kaski | Kailali |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| End of contract | 48.3 | 37.9 | 71.7 | 51.5 | 13 | 19.1 |
| Because of care/HH responsibilities/ family issues | 20.7 | 26.9 | 6.4 | 34.8 | 32.6 | 25.5 |
| Did not want/Could not stay away from family | 19.8 | 18.1 | 14.6 | 10.6 | 39.1 | 46.8 |
| Pressure from family to return | 11.1 | 11.9 | 7.3 | 10.6 | 2.2 | 34 |
| Returned for leave and decided not go back | 8.1 | 6.2 | 7.8 | 7.6 | 17.4 | 10.6 |
| Could not work because of health reasons | 8.1 | 11 | 3.2 | 10.6 | 15.2 | 6.4 |
| The work was too difficult (long working hours, too much work load) | 5.5 | 7 | 4.6 | 6.1 | 2.2 | 4.3 |
| Dissatisfaction with employer | 3.8 | 3.5 | 4.6 | 6.1 | – | 2.1 |
| Wanted to do something here in Nepal | 2.8 | 2.2 | 3.7 | 4.5 | 2.2 | – |
| Insufficient income | 2.3 | 4.4 | 0.9 | – | 2.2 | 2.1 |
| Was an illegal and got deported/ was rescued | 2.3 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 3 | 6.5 | 2.1 |
| Could not work because of bad working conditions (e.g., abuse, unsafe working conditions) | 1.3 | 0.4 | 2.3 | 1.5 | 2.2 | – |
| Was stranded/Was rescued | 0.8 | – | 0.9 | 1.5 | 2.2 | 2.1 |
| Wanted to retire | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.5 | – | – | – |
| Able to accomplish everything I wanted from migration | 0.2 | 0.4 | – | – | – | – |
| Other | 8.8 | 8.8 | 8.7 | 6.1 | 6.5 | 14.9 |

Note: Multiple responses.
* As the criteria for sample selection required women to have at least two years of work abroad, RWMWs who had migrated only once and returned before the end of contract, generally of two years' duration, were not included in the survey. However, included in the survey were RWMWs who had migrated multiple times with the total duration of migration abroad being more than two years.

> I returned because my husband didn't take responsibility for the family and didn't pay attention to my son's education. My son also left his engineering studies without completing it. I felt I had to return home. (Informal discussion with an RWMW from South Korea, Sunwal Municipality, Nawalparasi, 8 April 2017)

It was also the case that when remittances sent by women migrant workers were misused or not spent judiciously by their husbands, women realised the futility of their efforts abroad and decided to return. In some instances, the fear of the husband being involved

**Box 2: Successful Return and Reintegration**

Babita Gurung is a 35-year-old RWMW who lives in a Kaski village. She, along with her family, currently runs a small bakery, a poultry farm as well as a liquor shop and is also involved in agriculture. Babita returned from Hong Kong, where she had worked as a domestic worker in a relative's house and as a part-time waiter, six years ago. Before migration, her family depended on agriculture and a small eatery, but this had not been sufficient to sustain the household. To make matters worse, the hotel had been damaged by a landslide, which deprived her family of the only source of income.

Having heard about foreign employment opportunities from one of her relatives working in Hong Kong, Babita decided to go for work there to support both her family and her child's education. She also wanted to see a new country. Since she did not see any possibility of migrating directly through legal channels, with the help of an agent from her village, she obtained an Indian passport and a Hong Kong work visa (and migrated illegally), which took her about two years and cost around USD 2000. Working two jobs with long working hours, she earned USD 750 per month in Hong Kong.

After three years, she realised that she could easily make a decent living in Nepal if she worked as hard as she had done in Hong Kong. She also missed her family. Instead of extending her visa, she returned with a strong determination and a plan to do something productive in Nepal. For a short time after her return, she took over household chores from her mother-in-law. She then heard about a training opportunity provided by a local NGO on making incense sticks, soap, candles, and noodles. She was extremely interested making bread since all the bread in her village was brought in from other places and she thought that if she made bread by herself, it would do good business.

She received a two-week training and was awarded with a certificate and USD 600 as seed money to establish a business. She also invested some of her savings from her Hong Kong stay. Currently, the bakery products she supplies are in high demand in all the hotels in her tourist village and she claims to make around USD 800 a month. Babita reported great satisfaction with her business, income, and family situation. She attributed her current progress to her migration to Hong Kong, family support, and the training she received. In her own words, 'I went abroad and learnt about the importance of hard work. I am very happy that I have been able to do something here with the money I earned abroad, and the training I took here. I consider this to be an outcome of foreign employment'.

in illicit relationships while the wife abroad also appeared to have induced the return of some of migrant women workers.

Considering that all migrant labourers have to produce a bill of good health in the form of a medical certificate before receiving labour permits, it is telling that a significant proportion (8 per cent) of the RWMWs mentioned that they had to return due to health issues. Some continued to work despite their poor health in order to respect the terms of

their contracts. The likelihood of their return, however, increased when their employers/companies did not provide any help in resolving their health problems but, instead, sought to send them back from their country. For example, an RWMW in her mid-30s from Irkhu VDC in Sindhupalchowk, who was also a widow and ran a tea shop, said when working in Kuwait as a domestic worker, she got sick and her health deteriorated to the extent that she could not do her work. Instead of providing her with medicines, she was beaten and tortured. She soon developed tuberculosis, but since her employer was not willing to cover her medical expenses, she had to return to Nepal.[110]

Although quite insignificant in proportion, some RWMWs mentioned that physical and/or psychological abuse at workplaces, mainly by their employers, resulted in their return home.[111] Furthermore, when women were deceived by recruitment agents and sent to destinations other than what was agreed upon, they sometimes had to work longer hours and under difficult conditions. In such cases, they often decided to return home.

> The household head was very generous but his wife and children were very cruel. He was usually away from home for his work. His wife and children used to beat me. They didn't allow me to sleep for more than two hours. I had to clean 18 rooms of that house. When they called me, I had to be in front of them right away. If I delayed, they would beat me. My situation was like that of a bird trapped inside a cage. (Informal discussion with an RWMW from Kuwait, Nawalparasi, 19 April 2017)

Migrant workers also returned home because they found themselves stranded in circumstances requiring interventions from institutions such as embassies. Although small in number, there were RWMWs who reported having to return because they were rescued from difficult situations.

> After we got married and our son was born, my husband went abroad. He sent me money for the first few months, but later he didn't care about me and I started to live in my *maiti* [natal home] with my son. I used to work at a construction site. I came to know about Syria through my friends and I went there as a housemaid. But it was very difficult as I didn't know the language and they [the family] used to beat me. I changed employers after eleven months. Although I wasn't beaten there, I wasn't allowed to contact my family in Nepal for five years. My parents didn't know if I was alive and they asked Pourakhi [a Nepal-based NGO] to rescue me. My employer learnt of that and she took me to the police because she didn't want to get any trouble due to my case. I was put in jail for three months before I came to Nepal with the help of Pourakhi. (Informal discussion with an RWMW from Syria, Pokhara Sub-Metropolitan, Kaski, 2 April 2017)

110 Interview, 31 March 2017.

111 However, district-level KIIs showed that women are not comfortable sharing their negative experiences, and this could be the reason for an insignificant number of women citing abuse and negative experiences as the primary reason for return.

Although few, there were also cases of women migrant workers being deported because of their legal status or they got into some kind of trouble with the law.

> I worked in Japan illegally for three years. I didn't have a visa. Everything was good at the workplace. I didn't have any problems. However, when the Japanese police found me and detained me, I was deported to Nepal. (RWMW from Japan, Pokhara Sub-Metropolitan, Kaski, Interview no. 40, 15 April 2017)

> I didn't get paid for six or seven months, due to which I had a fight with my *sahuni* [female employer]. I was fed up with her and told her to send me back home. One day, she told me that she was going to drop me at the airport, but later, I found out that I had been accused of theft and sentenced to six months in prison. No matter how hard I tried to convince them that I haven't stolen any money, nobody listened to me. I stayed in jail for six months, and after that, I was deported to Nepal without any money. (Informal discussion with an RWMW, Sindhupalchowk, 2 April 2017)

Additionally, there were other sudden and unexpected factors, such as changes in circumstances of employers or women being deemed unsuitable for employment after medical tests that caused migrant women to return.

> She had to take care of an old woman of around 70 years of age who was ill. One day, she gave medicine to the old woman and she was fine till midnight, but when she woke up the next morning, she found her dead. Her employer blamed her for the death of his mother but neighbours knew about the condition of the old woman. The locals supported her and suggested that she go back to Nepal despite her having a valid visa. For the sake of her own security, she returned to Nepal. (Husband of an RWMW from Turkistan, Melamchi Municipality, Sindhupalchowk, Interview no. 10, 29 April 2017)

Overall, most women returned voluntarily due to reasons such as their contract expiring or their desire to be with their families. Involuntary reasons such as household responsibilities and family issues were also reported by a large proportion of RWMWs. A large majority of RWMWs who mentioned that they had returned with the intention of 'doing something' in Nepal were currently employed or self-employed.

## 2.5 Post-Migration Context

- A third of the returnee women migrant workers (RWMWs) had been able to join productive sectors/labour markets, and another third were engaged in unpaid housework or were economically inactive upon return.
- Patterns of labour force participation among RWMWs and non-migrants are the same, suggesting that the migration experience of the former does not necessarily provide them with a comparative advantage in the labour market over non-migrant women.
- RWMWs are less likely to engage in the agricultural sector. As a result, they are more involved in the informal service sector than non-migrant women.
- Among women engaged in entrepreneurial activities, remittances and savings were the main sources of capital for RWMWs, while non-migrants were more reliant on finance from their family members.
- Rather than changes in gender roles, where men assume roles previously undertaken by women, the migration of women has resulted in an increase in household and care responsibilities for other female members of the family.
- After their return, intra-household dynamics are slightly in favour of RWMWs as they can now challenge traditional gender roles, become more engaged in household decision-making, and are much more mobile.

This section considers the post-return context of RWMWs focusing on what they have done after their return, the kind of changes evident in their family relations and circumstances and the policy environment related to gender and work. The post-return context of RWMWs is compared to that of non-migrant women to examine if migration has had an impact on their work and life in general.

### 2.5.1 Reintegration into the Labour Market

#### 2.5.1.1 Trends

Findings from the study suggested that 34 per cent of returnee women migrant workers (RWMWs) had been reintegrated into domestic labour markets, i.e., they were currently engaged in regular or casual employment, were self-employed or were engaged in commercial agriculture. Around 37.5 per cent of them had gone back to subsistence farming and 27.8 per cent had not been reintegrated into the labour market, i.e., they did unpaid household work or were economically inactive (Figure 12). A comparison between RWMWs and non-migrant women suggested that there was no statistically significant difference between them in terms of their working situations, which indicates that the experience of migration does not have much of a bearing on the ability of

women to integrate more easily into the labour markets.[112]

Among RWMWs, those from urban areas were better integrated into the labour market than those from the rural areas. The difference was minimal for regular and casual employment, but slightly larger for self-employment, with 25 per cent and 16 per cent of RWMWs in urban and rural areas being self-employed respectively. The trend was similar for non-migrant women, which, thus, suggests that the absorptive capacity of urban areas, rather than migration experience per se, seems to contribute more in the ability of RWMWs to obtain opportunities in domestic labour markets.

In terms of caste/ethnicity, Tarai Janajati and Hill Caste RWMWs were better positioned in terms of being able to find opportunities in the labour market upon return than other groups.[113] District-wise, RWMWs in Kaski and Sindhupalchowk were slightly better at reintegration.[114] In terms of differences due to marital status, a higher percentage of unmarried RWMWs (16 per cent) were engaged in regular employment, with 12 per cent of separated, divorced, or widowed RWMWs compared to only 6.2 per cent of married ones. Better positioned in the labour markets upon return were RWMWs from better socio-economic backgrounds and also those who had better migration experiences. Therefore, the post-migration context of many RWMWs appears already determined by their socio-economic status prior to migration.

#### 2.5.1.2 Sector and Position of Work

Among respondents who said they were engaged in regular or casual work at the time of the survey (11.2 per cent), there were differences between RWMWs and non-migrant women in the kind of work they did. A significantly higher proportion of non-migrant women were in the agricultural sector (20 per cent) compared to RWMWs (11 per cent), showing the proclivity of RWMWs to dissociate themselves from agriculture after their migration experience abroad. Fewer RWMWs were engaged in occupations in the formal sector (public services, registered enterprises, etc) compared to non-migrant women (Figure 13).[115] Differences between urban and rural areas were not very pronounced except for the fact that a higher percentage of respondents[116] in urban areas were engaged in government

112 Whereas a slightly lower percentage of RWMWs are engaged in subsistence agriculture and self-owned enterprises, a slightly higher percentage are involved in unpaid household/care-work, compared to non-migrant women.

113 For instance, whereas 11 per cent, 2.6 per cent, and 22 per cent of Hill Caste RWMWs were engaged in regular employment, casual employment, and self-employment respectively, 9, 10, and 12 per cent of Hill Dalits were engaged in the same.

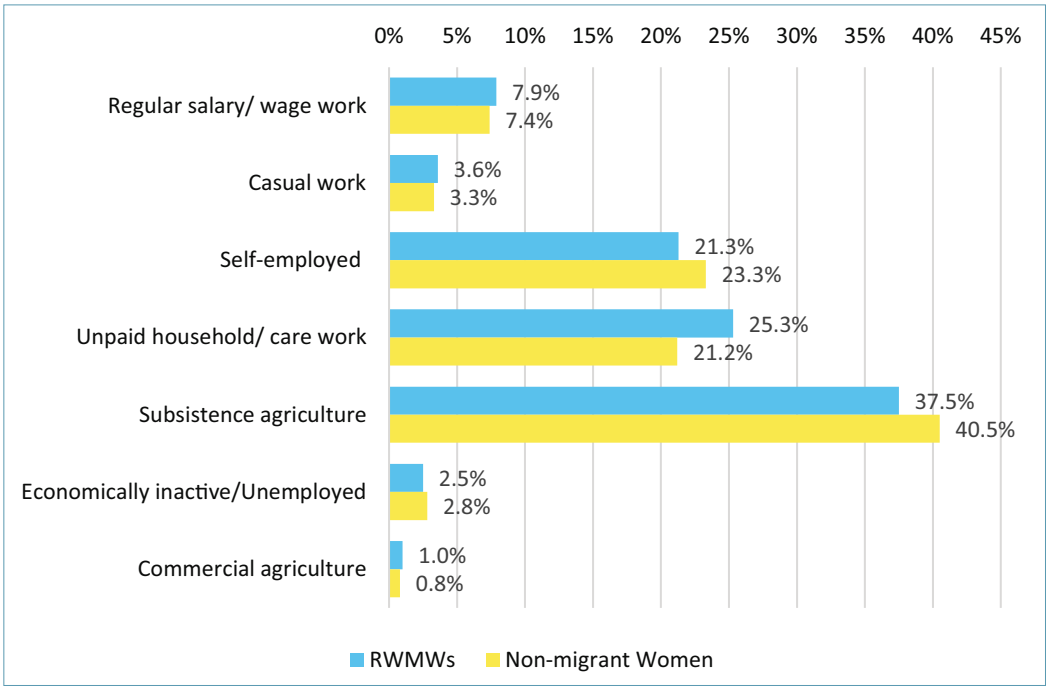
114 Kaski had the highest proportion of RWMWs engaged in regular employment, at 17.4 per cent, compared to only 4.3 per cent in Kailali. Sindhupalchowk had the highest proportion of RWMWs engaged in self-employment, at 25 per cent, whereas it was only 15 per cent in Kaski.

115 The proportion of non-migrant women engaged in education services (15.4 per cent), government agencies (3.1 per cent), other government services (9.2 per cent), and registered hotels and restaurant services (6.2 per cent) was higher than the RWMWs engaged in these sectors.

116 'Respondents' here refer to both RWMWs and non-migrant women who said that were engaged in

service compared to rural areas, 21 and 16.7 per cent respectively, which is only to be expected. In terms of occupations, more than half of the RWMWs (55.7 per cent) and non-migrant women (50.8 per cent) engaged in regular/casual work were in elementary occupations.[117] While a larger proportion of RWMWs (16 per cent) worked as service and sales workers,[118] compared to only 9 per cent of non-migrants, a larger percentage of non-migrants (17 per cent) were engaged as professionals, compared to 4.3 per cent of RWMWs. Around 70 and 24.3 per cent of the RWMWs doing regular/casual work categorised themselves as low-skilled and semi-skilled respectively, compared to 60 and 21.5 per cent of non-migrant women. The average monthly salary of RWMWs was NPR 9,537 (ca. USD 93) while that of non-migrant women was NPR 10,105 (ca. USD 98). These findings again reinforced the general trend that not only is there a lack of comparative advantage that RWMWs have over non-migrant women, especially in terms of access to opportunities in the labour markets, RWMWs are more likely to be in low-status and low-paying jobs compared to non-migrant women.

**Figure 12: Primary Working Situation of RWMWs and Non-migrant Women**

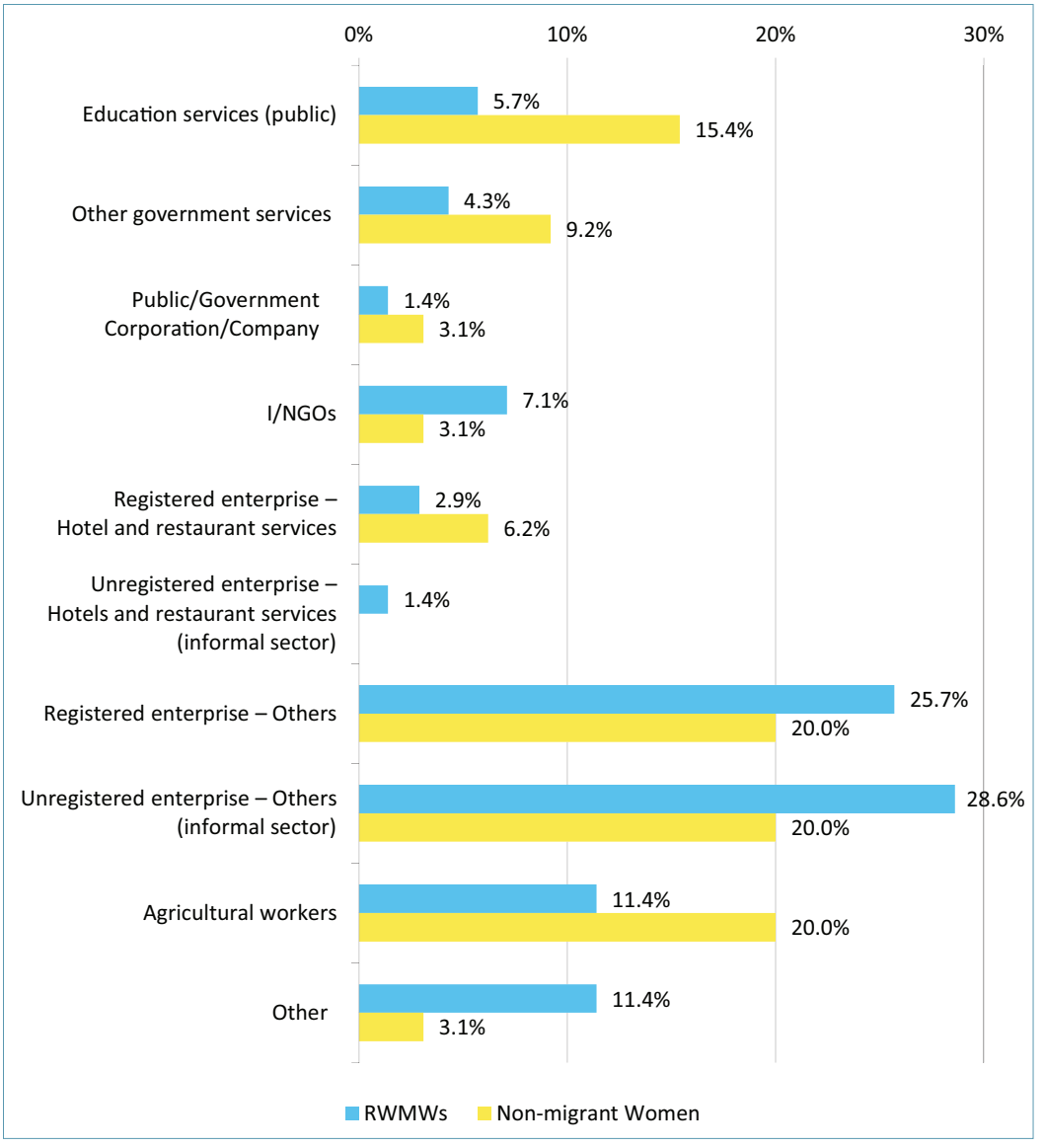



regular or casual work. It was not possible to disaggregate this further into RWMWs and non-migrant women because the sample size was too small.

117 Elementary occupations included street vendors, manufacturing labourers, agricultural labourers, and street workers. Paid domestic workers and care workers were placed in a separate category, with around 6 and 4.6 per cent of RWMWs and non-migrant women respectively engaged in it.

118 Waiters, hairdressers, shopkeepers, female community health volunteers, and social mobilisers.

Figure 13: Sectors of Work for Women in Employment

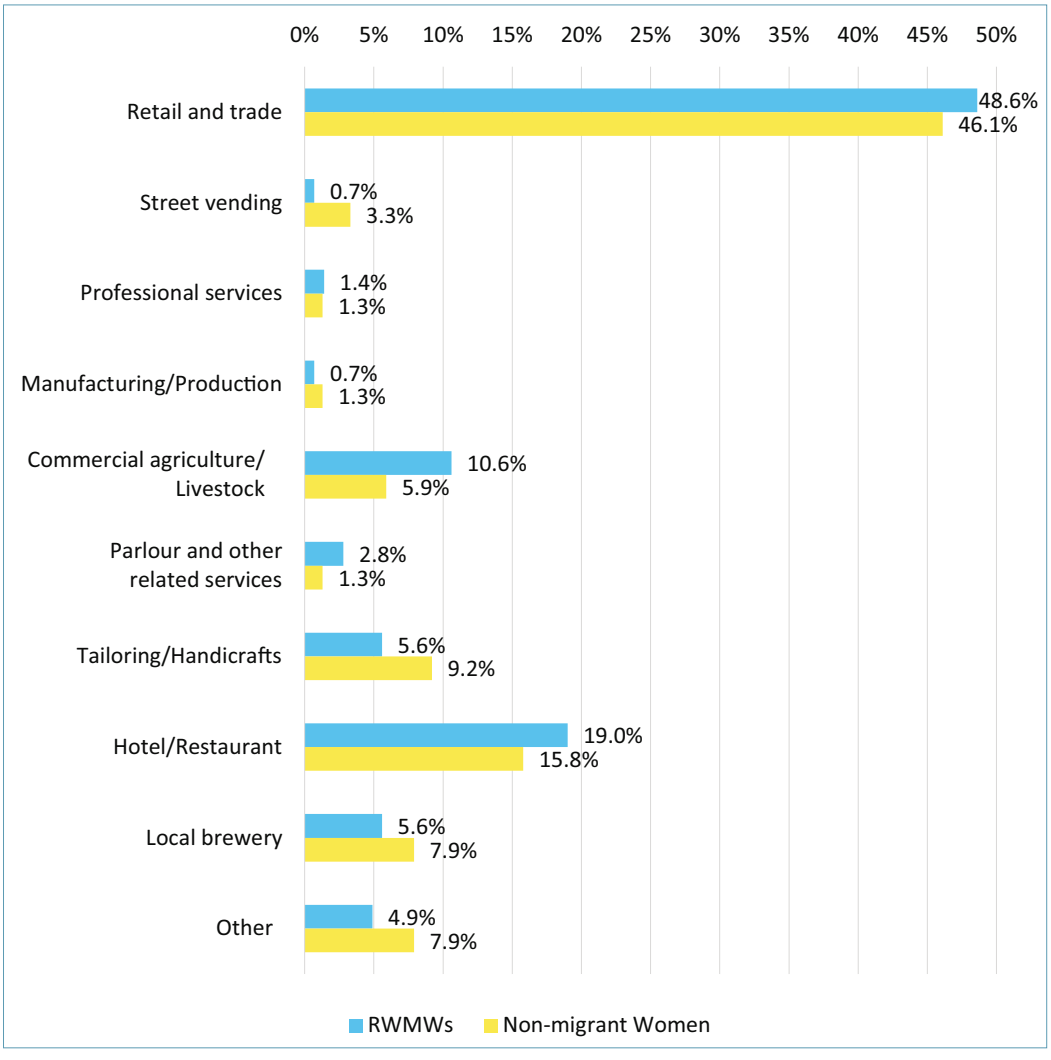



### 2.5.1.3 Self-Employment and Nature of Enterprise

Among respondents who said that they owned an enterprise or were engaged in commercial farming at the time of the survey (23.2 per cent), there were only slight differences between RWMWs and non-migrant women (Figure 12). In terms of types of enterprises run by women, a slightly higher proportion of RWMWs were engaged in retail and trade, commercial agriculture/livestock, beauty parlours, and other services such as hotels and restaurants, compared to non-migrant women. RWMWs' choices over types of economic activities to be engaged in can be attributed to their reluctance to go back to

farming upon return from migration (Figure 14). In terms of the difference in monthly earnings between RWMWs and non-migrant women, the average monthly profit earned though an enterprise owned solely or jointly by RWMWs was NPR 12,975 (ca. USD 126), which was slightly less than that of those owned by non-migrant women, at NPR 13,585 (ca. USD 132).

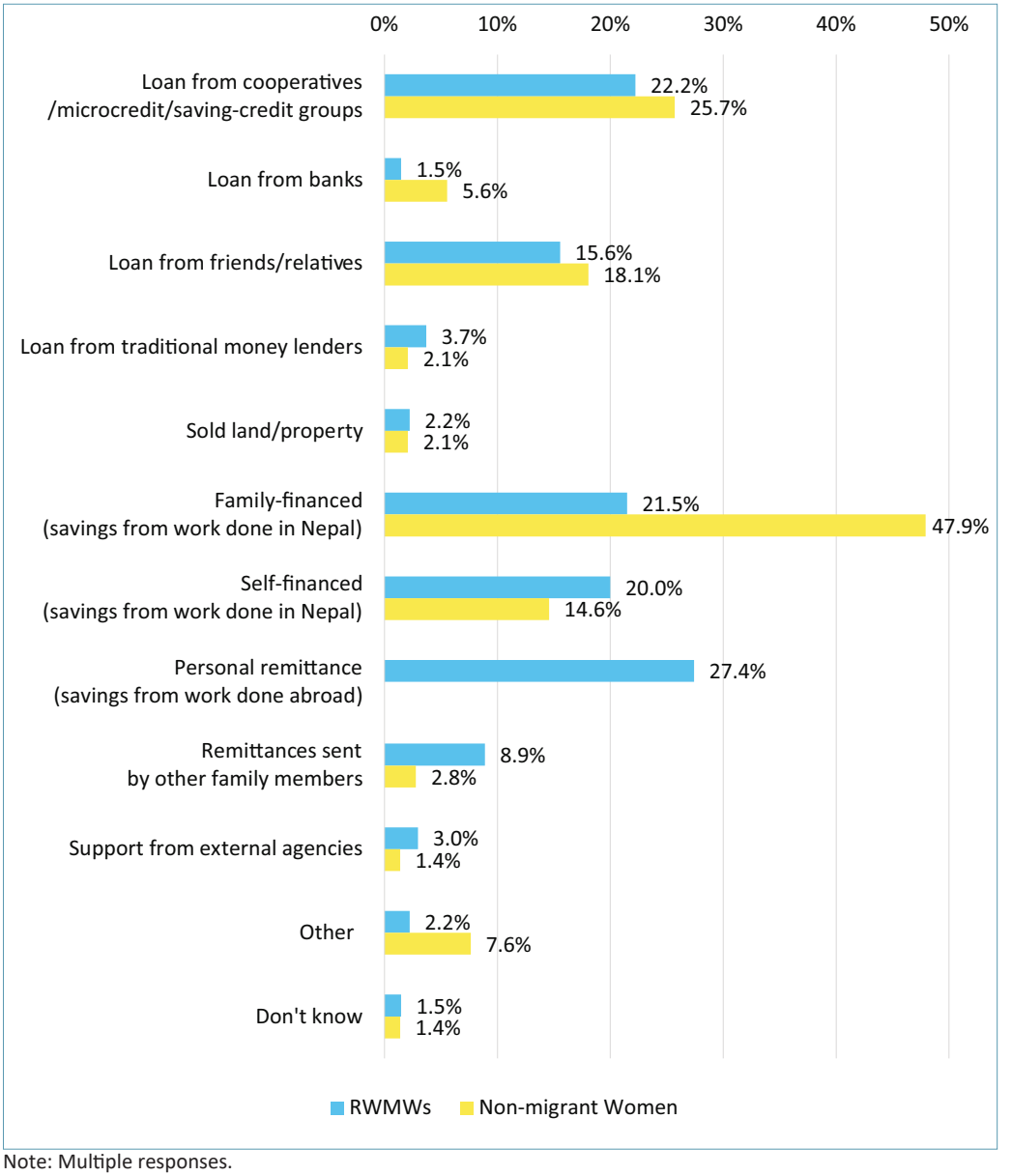
**Figure 14: Types of Enterprises Run by RWMWs and Non-migrant Women**




Regardless of the employment status upon return, earnings from migration seemed to have helped a considerable proportion of RWMWs invest in their own enterprises. In fact, RWMWs seemed to be benefiting not only from their own savings earned abroad, but also remittances from other family members to a greater degree than non-migrant

women. Conversely, non-migrant women were more dependent on their family members to finance their entrepreneurial activities (Figure 15).

**Figure 15: Major Sources of Finance for Entrepreneurship**




Note: Multiple responses.

### 2.5.2 Post-Return Intra-Household Dynamics

A comparison between RWMWs and non-migrant women in terms of the division of labour at home showed that a lower percentage of RWMWs reported themselves being primarily responsible for household chores, such as cooking, taking care of livestock, and taking care of children and the elderly, compared to non-migrant women (Figure 16). Likewise, a higher percentage of RWMWs said they were responsible when it came to representing the family in the public sphere and going to the market.

As shown in Figures 17 and 18, there appeared to be little change in terms of gendered division of labour in households resulting from women's migration. The findings suggested that it was mainly other women in the household who took over household responsibilities when women migrated. Furthermore, even in households where men started taking charge of household chores, such as cooking and childcare, in the absence of their migrant women, these roles reverted back to women after their return (Figure 19).

The following narratives demonstrate that upon return, RWMWs resumed the same household duties they held before migration.

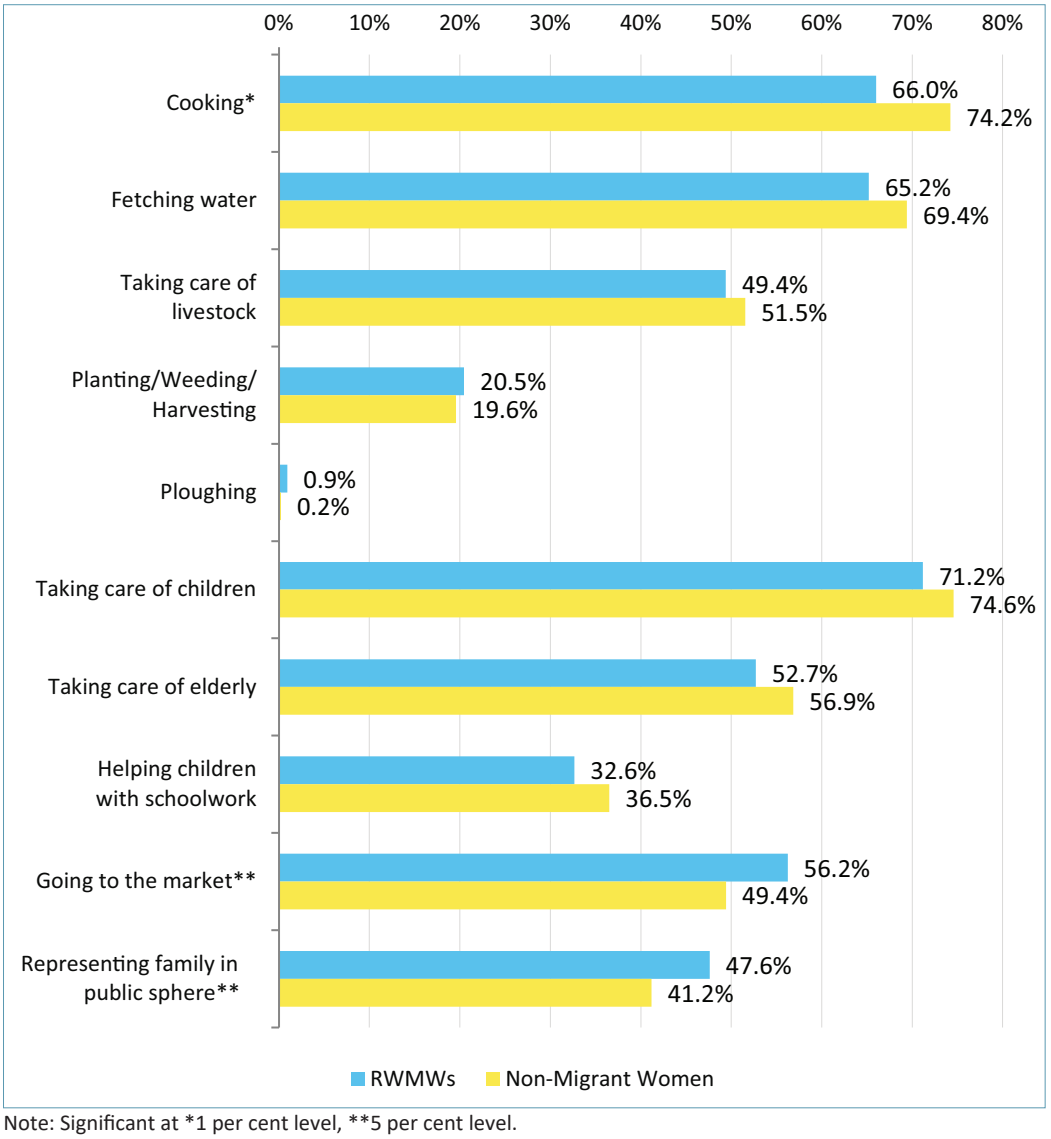
> My mother-in-law and I shared household work before migration. When I was abroad, everyone shared the work, but after my return, it was the same as before, that is, I had to take all the household responsibilities since my husband doesn't do anything. He doesn't even notice if I buy something big. I don't know why nothing has changed. (RWMW from Israel, Mechinagar Municipality, Jhapa, Interview no. 3, 10 April 2017)

> When my wife was abroad, I did most of the household work. It wasn't so difficult, although, of course, there were some difficulties. It was especially difficult when someone got sick. Now you cannot depend on children, they will say I will do it but they will go out and come back after three hours. After she [his wife] came back, I have handed over all of the household responsibilities to her. I don't look after anything now. I take care of things outside the home. I have left her to deal with the household finances as well. Now, even children send remittances. The money is kept in my account, but she runs the show. I only issue cheques. (Husband of an RWMW from Saudi Arabia, Mechinagar Municipality, Jhapa, Interview no. 14, 10 April 2017)

Differences could also be seen in decision-making roles of RWMWs and non-migrant women. After their return, RWMWs were more engaged in primary decision-making related to education, care of children, and also buying and selling of productive assets, compared to non-migrant women. As can be seen in Figure 18, there was a greater degree of change between 'before migration' and 'now' among RWMWs than non-migrant women between 'now' and '5-10 years ago'[119] for all four kinds of decisions.

119 The period '5-10 years ago' was chosen as a proxy for 'before migration' in the case of non-migrant women households so that changes in household decision-making processes could be measured for both

**Figure 16: Percentage of Respondents Primarily Responsible for Household Responsibilities**

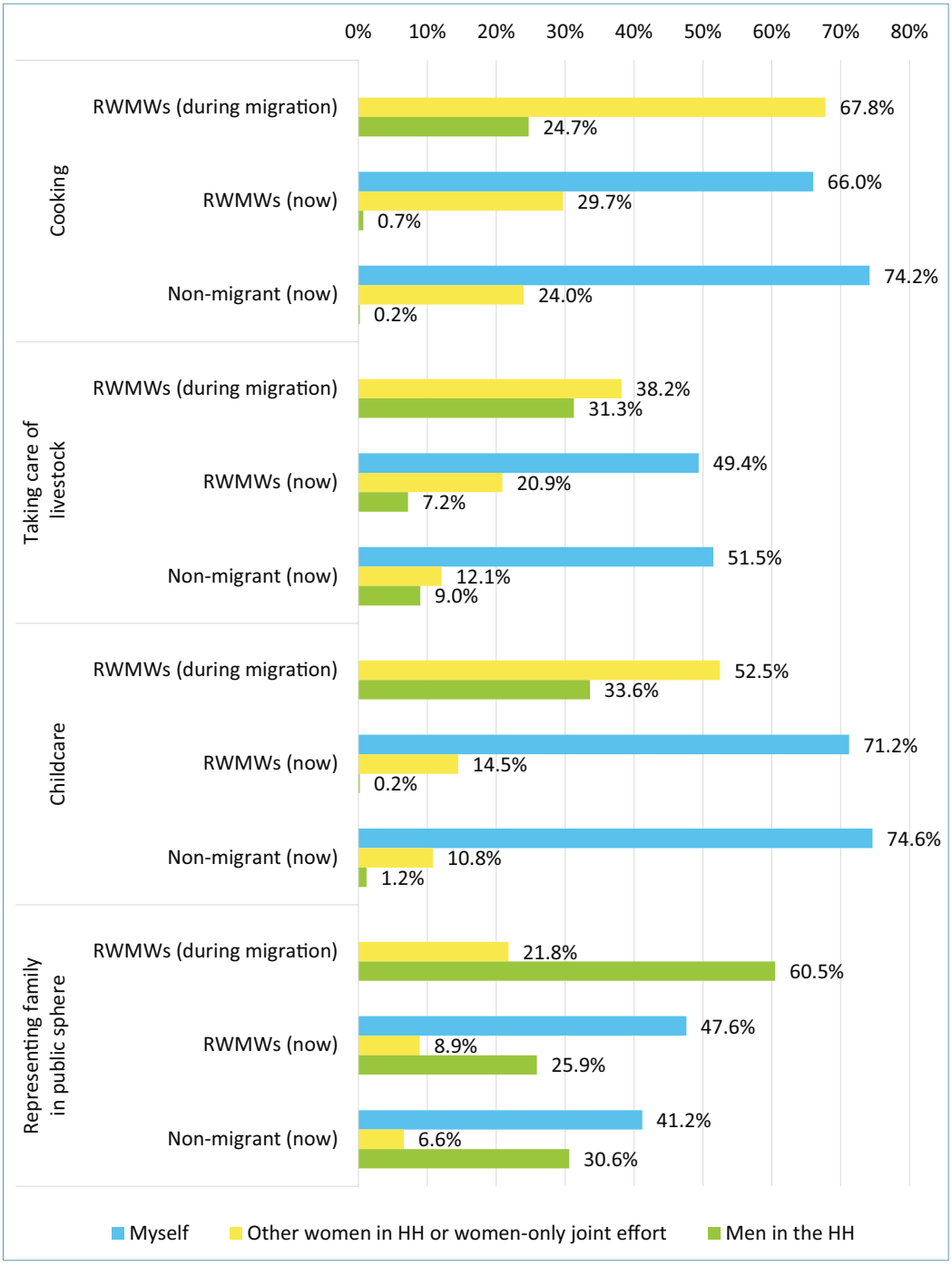



Note: Significant at *1 per cent level, **5 per cent level.

Likewise, a slightly higher percentage of RWMWs were more mobile than non-migrant women (Figure 20). RWMWs were more likely to be 'always' allowed to take up work away from their residential locality. They were also more likely to be 'always' allowed to travel to areas requiring overnight stay and they were also allowed to engage in income-generating work at home. A slight upward tick could also be seen in the autonomy and mobility of RWMWs after migration. While 53.2 per cent of RWMWs said that they

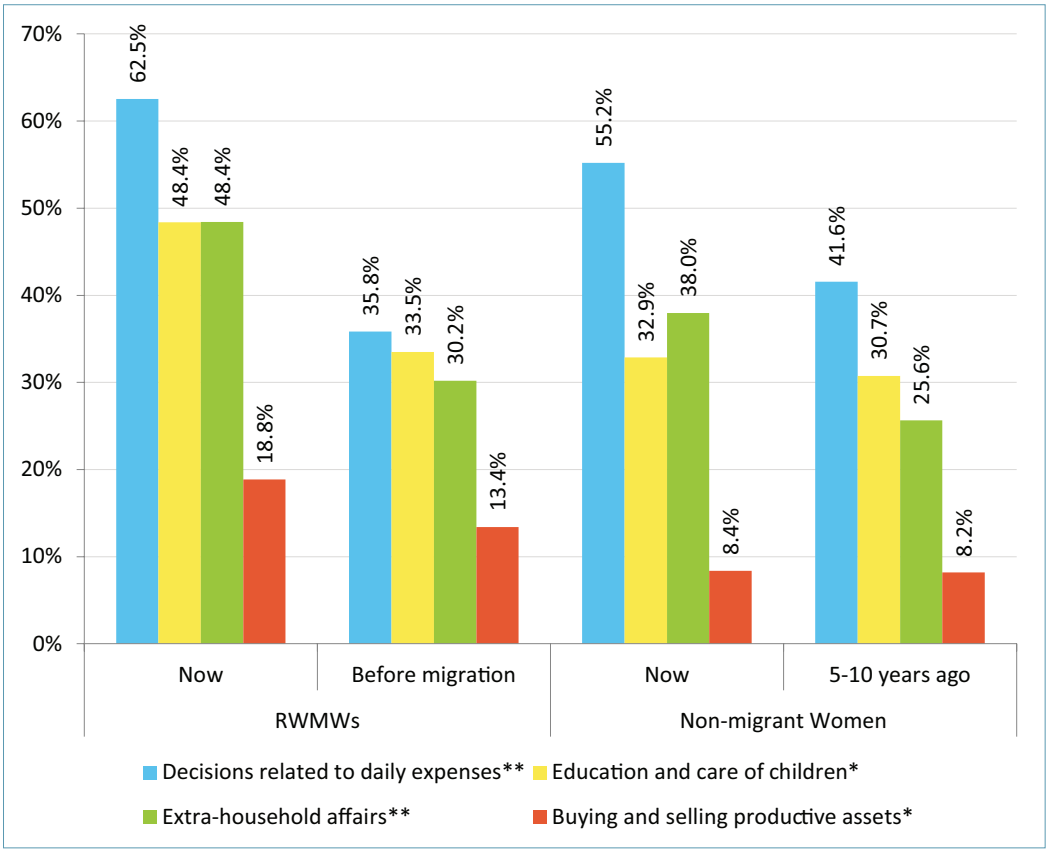
RWMWs and non-migrant women.

**Figure 17: Gendered Division of Household Labour**




had 'always' been allowed to work outside of their home in their own locality before migration, the percentage increased to 62.6 per cent after migration. However, unlike

Figure 18: Percentage of Respondents Who Took Decisions Themselves




Note: Significant at *1 per cent level, **5 per cent level for differences between RWMWs and non-migrant women (now).

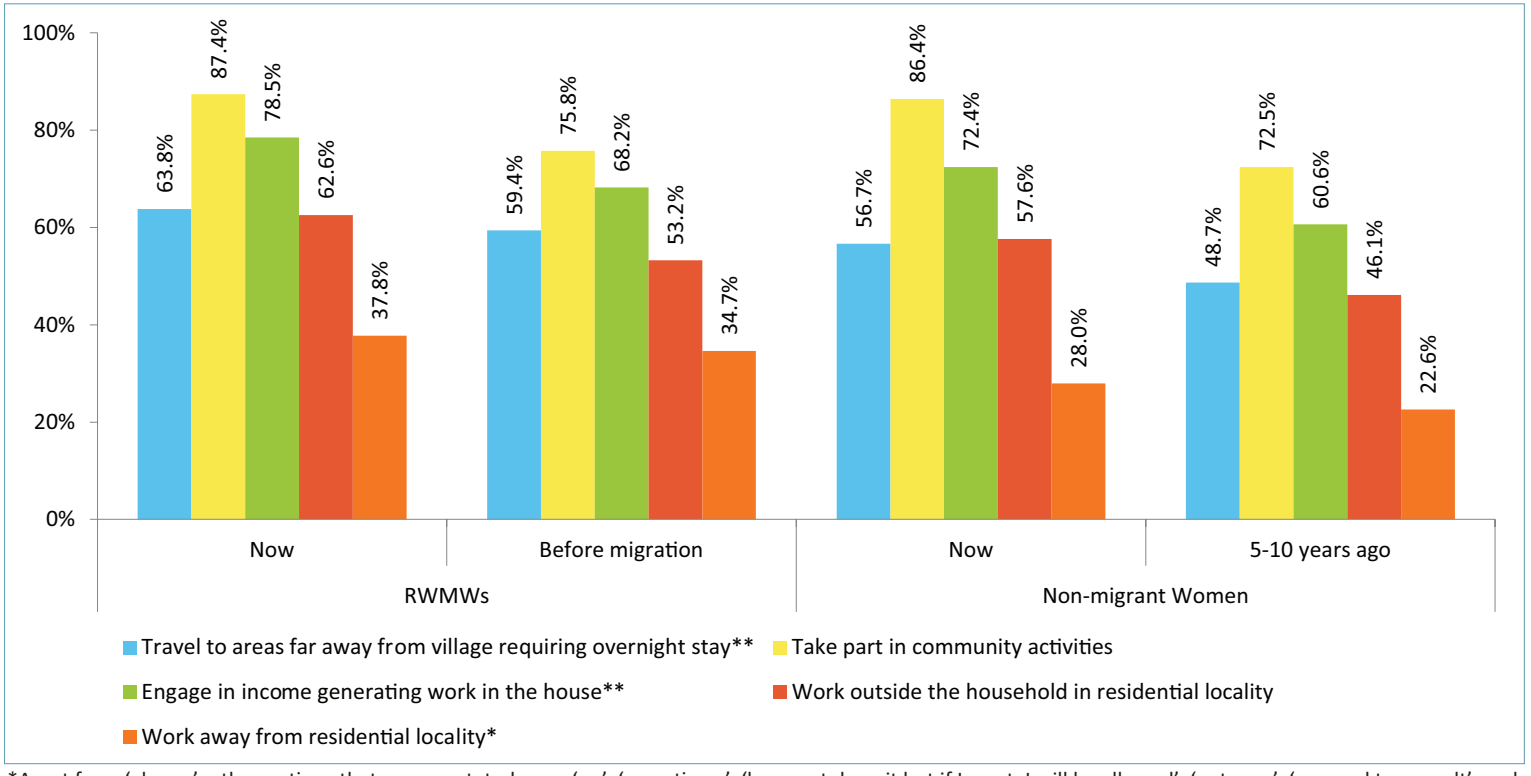
changes in decision-making, a greater change in this regard was apparent among non-migrant women (Figure 19).

Intra-household dynamics seemed to have slightly improved in favour of RWMWs upon their return as they were now able to challenge traditional gender roles, become more engaged in household decision-making, and become more mobile. However, engagement in the labour market of both RWMWs and non-migrant women was equally low and, as described in the previous section, improvement of their status at the household level after their return did not seem to have much of an impact on labour market participation of RWMWs.

### 2.5.3 Economic and Social Remittances

Findings from the study indicated that returnee women migrant workers (RWMWs) on average saved or brought back NPR 249,577 at the end of their most recent migration. Savings were greater among RWMWs from urban areas than those from rural areas and among Hill Castes, and Mountain and Hill Janajatis than other groups. Likewise,

## Figure 19: Percentage of Respondents on Ability to Engage in Different Activities*




*Apart from 'always', other options that women stated were 'no', 'sometimes', 'have not done it but if I want, I will be allowed', 'not sure', 'no need to consult', and 'not applicable'.

Note: Significant at *1 per cent level, **5 per cent level for differences between RWMWs and non-migrant women (now).

unmarried RWMWs and RWMWs in Sindhupalchowk saved the most (Table 13). Notably, RWMWs in these categories were also more likely to be engaged in self-employment.

**Table 13: Average Savings at the End of the Most Recent Migration**
(NPR)

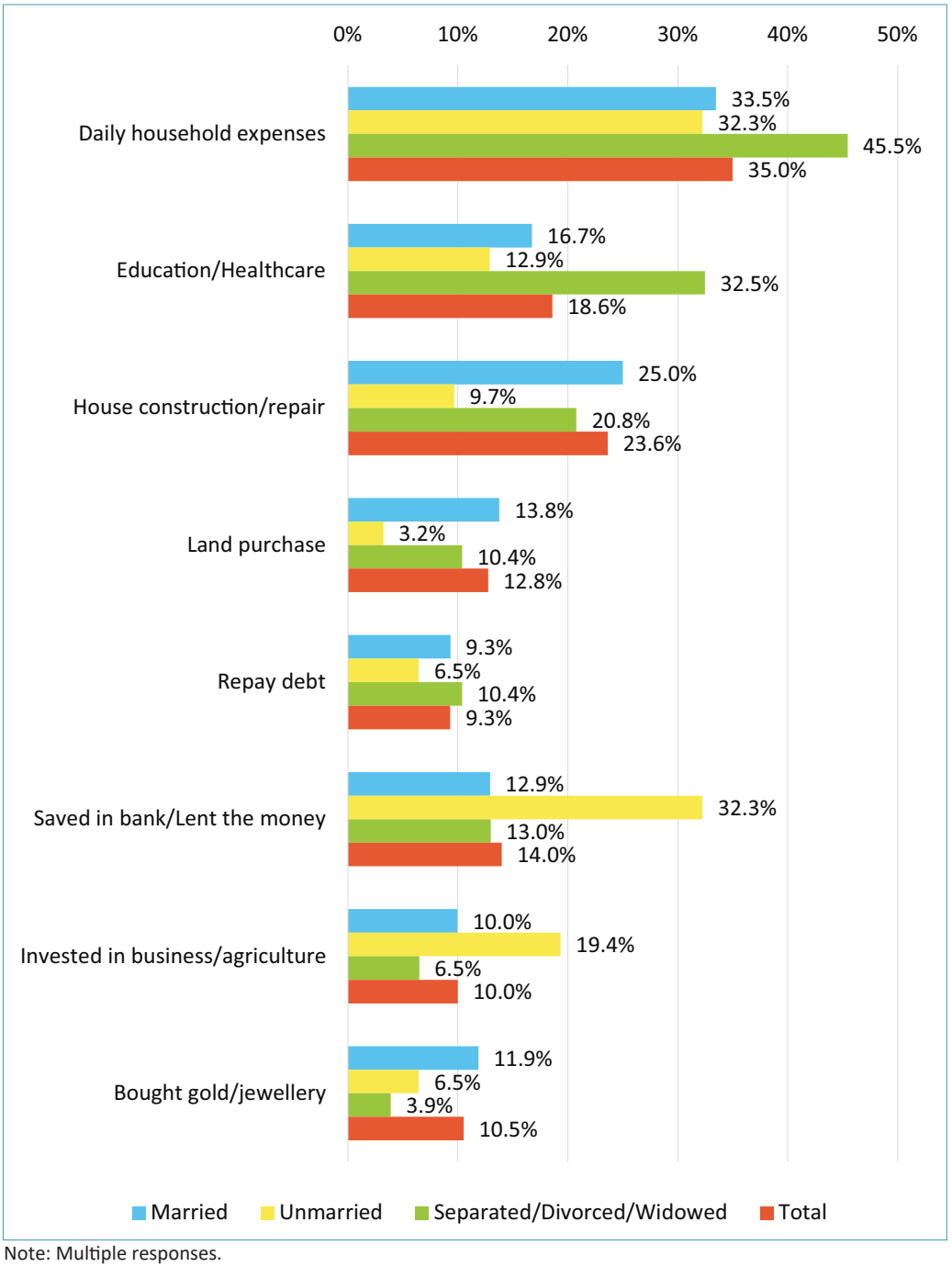
| | | Average savings (NPR) at the end of most recent migration | Percentage of RWMWs involved in self-employment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Settlement | Rural | 221,316 | 18.0 |
| | Urban | 277,739 | 25.3 |
| Districts | Jhapa | 245,557 | 19.9 |
| | Sindhupalchowk | 289,756 | 25.2 |
| | Nawalparasi | 139,788 | 22.6 |
| | Kaski | 259,788 | 15.2 |
| | Kailali | 216,356 | 19.1 |
| Caste/ Ethnicity | Mountain and Hill Janajati | 264,711 | 24.4 |
| | Hill Caste | 292,485 | 21.9 |
| | Hill Dalit | 182,954 | 12.2 |
| | Tarai Janajati | 134,667 | 21.2 |
| Marital Status | Married | 253,386 | 22.0 |
| | Unmarried | 258,400 | 22.6 |
| | Separated/Divorced/ Widowed | 222,587 | 19.8 |

Most of the remittances saved or brought back at the end of the most recent migration was spent on household consumption with around 35 per cent of RWMWs stating that a major use of the money they earned was on daily household expenses. The next major expense was house construction/repair (23.6 per cent) and education/healthcare (18.6 per cent). Only 10 per cent of RWMWs said they had invested in business or agriculture (Figure 20).

As can be seen in Figure 20, RWMWs who were separated, divorced, or widowed stated that the major use of their savings from abroad was daily household expenses, education, and healthcare, and they were also less likely to invest their savings in business and agriculture. On the other hand, unmarried RWMWs were the least likely to spend their savings on education and healthcare, house construction and repair, land purchase, or repaying debt. They were more likely to have saved their money, lent out, or invested in business/agriculture.

Approximately 84 per cent of the RWMWs surveyed said their migration abroad had brought about a change in their skill level and also in their attitudes towards work and

**Figure 20: Uses of Savings from Most Recent Migration**




Note: Multiple responses.

life. Of them, 68 per cent said they had become more confident, 40 per cent mentioned a change in worldview because of exposure to the outside world, 51.8 per cent highlighted

proficiency in languages of destination countries and around 18 per cent stated that their cooking skills had improved. Apart from culinary skills, a small percentage of RWMWs stated that they had picked up skills in marketing/sales, housekeeping, etc. Because the majority of RWMWs had worked as domestic workers, they had limited opportunities to learn skills applicable in Nepal's labour market and the labour market for professional domestic workers has not been well developed in Nepal, being limited to urban centres and highly informal and lowly paid. Apart from the limitation of the labour market, there were prestige issues preventing many women from working as domestic workers in Nepal.

Qualitative data from the study also suggested that it was not only RWMWs who thought that their confidence had increased after migration; others in the community had also noted the same.

> When a woman migrates for foreign employment, she earns money to which she has access. She will invest her earnings, join informal and formal groups, and lend out her money. On the other hand, she can also observe the outside world through which she gains confidence. She is full of enthusiasm to do some productive work with the money she has earned. Generally, a woman doesn't have land, a house, or a bank account in her own name. Foreign employment enables a woman to be conscious that she should also own some assets as she has earned the money. She will start raising a voice for her rights. (Social mobiliser, Daunne Devi VDC, Nawalparasi, Interview no. 34, 26 April 2017)
>
> The difference is that we can now buy things, and we don't need to ask for money from anyone if we want to go somewhere. Earlier, who would have given us money to go outside? We also feel more knowledgeable and are confident. When I was here, I used to tie up my hair, but, after I returned, I let my hair down. I have become modern. There are many differences. We had simple thoughts here, but when we return from there, that changes. When we were here, we thought this was our world, but after going abroad, we see there is more to the world and we start to care less about what people say. Our thinking has become modern, free, and independent. (RWMW from Israel, Mechinagar Municipality, Jhapa, Interview no. 3, 10 April 2017)

> Even if something bad happens, we alone will be able to do something for our livelihood. When there is a fight between a husband and a wife, he will say, 'I will leave you and then let's see how you will manage your livelihood', and I will say, 'Why worry? I will take out money, reserve a vehicle, buy a lot of stuff, then sell them off and earn money'. The first gain from foreign employment for a woman is increased self-confidence. However, there is hardly any improvement in people's thinking about women, especially about RWMWs. (A participant during an FGD with RWMWs, Daunnedevi VDC, Nawalparasi, FGD no. 11, 23 April 2017)

Survey findings indicated that RWMWs were not only able to earn but also able to increase their self-esteem from their migration experiences abroad. While their savings had contributed to their household's economic needs and also for investment in some cases, their increased self-esteem had made them more proactive within their own households and also more open to engagement with the wider community. However, the skills learnt abroad could not be directly translated into economic opportunities in Nepal.

## 2.6 Determinants and Challenges of Reintegration

- Returnee women migrant workers (RWMWs) experiencing distress abroad are more likely to return and be employed/self-employed in Nepal.
- RWMWs who believed they would have been allowed to engage in income-generating work outside of their home prior to migration are less likely to be employed upon return.
- RWMWs with a perception of better employment opportunities after their return are more likely to be employed.
- RWMWs have not been able to translate the economic and social gains from migration abroad into gainful employment. In fact, RWMWs do not necessarily consider their experience or skills gained abroad have helped them find decent employment in Nepal after return.
- Foreign employment is not remunerative enough to provide RWMWs with sufficient capital to engage in entrepreneurial activities upon return.
- One major reason women want to repeat migration for foreign employment is because their 'unpaid' work at home is converted into 'paid work' when they go aboard.

Drawing from existing literature on labour migration, gender relations and reintegration of migrant RWMWs, the conceptual framework for the study was based on the premise that successful reintegration is determined by a constellation of five factors: i) pre-migration context, ii) reasons for migration, iii) migration conditions in destination countries, iv) circumstances of return, and v) post-return environment. The preceding analyses indicated multiple ways in which these different factors individually or collectively facilitated women's migration decisions as well as their choices upon return. Findings pointed to a complex web of interactions between these variables, all of which were embedded in gender relations, norms, and practices, which were further differentiated along social identity, marital status, networks, and relationships, to name a few.

Notwithstanding this complex interplay of factors, from a policy perspective, there was a need to understand which of these variables had the most significant bearing on women's successful reintegration. To that end, a multi-layered regression analysis was conducted to measure the nature and significance of the relationship between a set of independent variables to a dependent variable. The model used for the analysis and the results are described below.

### 2.6.1 Description of the Model

To measure the nature and significance of the relationship between labour market reintegration and the impact of various independent factors—namely, i) pre-migration

context, ii) reasons for migration, iii) migration conditions in destination countries, iv) circumstances of return, and v) post-return environment—a multiple regression analysis was carried out. Specifically, RWMWs' engagement in regular and casual wage/salary-based employment, self-employment, and commercial agriculture was taken as a proxy for successful reintegration into the labour market. Employed or entrepreneur RWMWs were considered to be reintegrated into the Nepali labour market, while RWMWs who

**Table 14: Description of Independent Variables**

| Category | Independent variable with dichotomous responses | Question asked |
|---|---|---|
| **Reasons for migration** | 1 = Non-economic<br>2 = Economic | What were the reasons for migration during most recent migration? |
| **Pre-migration context** | 1 = Women without authority<br>2 = Women with authority | Decisions related to buying/selling/lending/borrowing of productive assets like land, real-estate, farm equipment, etc. before migration |
| | 1 = Women's non-mobility<br>2 = Women's mobility | Engage in income-generating work in the house before migration |
| | 1 = Women's non-mobility<br>2 = Women's mobility | Take up work/engaged in business outside the household in residential locality before migration |
| | 1 = Women's non-mobility<br>2 = Women's mobility | Take up work/engaged in business outside the household, away from residential locality before migration |
| | 0 = No<br>1 = Yes | Before migration, were you involved in any community organisation? |
| **Migration condition** | 0 = No<br>1 = Yes | In general, have you experienced any challenges/barriers from your household/family members while seeking to work abroad? |
| | 0 = No<br>1 = Yes | While you were working abroad, did you have to switch employers for any reason? |
| | 1 = Care related<br>2 = Non-care related | What was the nature of your work abroad? |
| | Monthly salary/wages E58 [Scale values] | Approximately what was your monthly salary/wages while you were abroad? |
| **Circumstances of return** | 1 = Involuntary<br>2 = Voluntary | Can you tell us why you returned to Nepal when you did? |
| **Post-return context** | 1 = Women's non-mobility<br>2 = Women's mobility | Decisions related to buying/selling/lending/ borrowing of productive assets like land, real-estate, farm equipment, etc. now. |
| | 1 = Worsened<br>2 = Improved | In general, how much do you think your personal circumstances have changed since you returned (in family and community)? |
| | 1 = Worsened<br>2 = Improved | How do you feel about investment opportunities for you in your locality after return? |
| | 1 = Worsened<br>2 = Improved | What are your perceptions about employment opportunities for you after your return? |
| | Savings from abroad E63 [Scale values] | At the time of your return, how much money in total were you able to save from your migration abroad? |

Note: 'Do not know/ cannot say', 'Not sure', 'Not applicable' are treated as missing and excluded from the regression analyses.

were unemployed or engaged in unpaid household and care work or subsistence farming as their primary jobs were considered not having been reintegrated.

A binary logistic regression analysis was performed to investigate the relationship between reintegration and a variety of independent variables (Table 14). The reason for employing the binary logistic regression was due to the binary nature of the dependent variable. For the convenience of analysis and interpretation, similar responses of the independent variables were also merged to make them dichotomous. Individual independent variables under each of these categories are listed in the following table. Altogether, there are 16 independent variables (Table 14).

### 2.6.2 Factors Leading to Successful Reintegration:

The binary logistic regression result suggested that three of the 16 independent variables used in the model significantly predicted the outcome, i.e., responses on women's primary work status being unemployed or employed/entrepreneur (Table 15).

Specifically, women's perception in terms of income-generating work outside the home had a negative influence on RWMWs' reintegration into the labour market. The Beta coefficient was negative (-0.871) and significant at $p<0.05$, which means that those women who had perceived that before migration they would have been allowed to engage in income-generating work outside home, they were less likely to be employed upon return, suggesting that the pre-migration perception that there were no barriers to working away from home was possibly linked to the reduced need to find work immediately upon return.

Regression analysis also confirmed the likelihood that reintegration was significantly higher among RWMWs who had to switch employers while abroad (since the Beta coefficient of this variable was positive and significant at $p<0.05$). This means that women who experienced adverse working conditions abroad, and, as a result, changed employers were more likely to return and be employed or self-employed in Nepal. Additionally, RWMWs who had a perception of better employment opportunities after their return were also more likely to find employment in Nepal (the Beta coefficient was positive and significant at $p<0.01$).

To summarise, the results from the regression analysis indicated that, of the various factors influencing reintegration, the most important were: whether they had switched employers or not and perceptions about their employment prospects upon return. These findings indicated that challenging working conditions (e.g., having to switch employers) while abroad would make it more likely for women to reintegrate into the national labour market upon their return. This is probably because women with a negative experience abroad (leading to a change in employers) were more committed to finding work and other opportunities upon return, but also that such individuals possessed a more independent streak. Furthermore, perceptions of better employment opportunities in Nepal upon return were correlated to women being reintegrated into the labour market after their return. This again suggests perceptions do matter and positive assessments about opportunities do, in fact, motivate women to seek opportunities domestically. However, as will be discussed in

the next section, it is in principle difficult for both RWMWs and non-migrant women to set up enterprises and/or enter into the domestic labour markets regardless of their migration experiences.

**Table 15: Binary Logistic Regression with RWMWs' Current Employment Status as the Dependent Variable**

| | B | S.E. | Exp(B) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reasons for migration (E46F1)<br>(1. Non-economic 2. Economic) | -.238 | .342 | .789 |
| Women's authority in buying & selling before migration (C24Diii)<br>(1. Women without authority 2. Women with authority) | -.287 | .344 | .751 |
| Women's income generating inside house before migration (C25Diii)<br>(1. Women's non-mobility 2. Women's mobility) | .216 | .416 | 1.241 |
| Women's income generating outside house before migration (C25Eiii)<br>(1. Women's non-mobility 2. Women's mobility) | -.871* | .353 | .418 |
| Women's income generating away from locality before migration (C25Fiii)<br>(1. Women's non-mobility 2. Women's mobility) | .410 | .292 | 1.507 |
| Involvement in community organisation (E42)<br>(O. No 1. Yes) | .189 | .286 | 1.209 |
| Experienced challenges/barriers from HH (E47)<br>(0. No 1. Yes) | -.125 | .268 | .882 |
| Switching employers while abroad (E50)<br>(0. No 1. Yes) | .559* | .276 | 1.748 |
| Nature of work abroad (E46I)<br>(1. Care related 2. Non-care related) | .430 | .350 | 1.537 |
| Monthly salary (E58)<br>[Scale values] | .000 | .000 | 1.000 |
| Circumstances of return (E65)<br>(1. Involuntary 2. Voluntary) | .490 | .260 | 1.632 |
| Women's authority in buying & selling now (C24Di)<br>(1. Women without authority 2. Women with authority) | .055 | .368 | 1.056 |
| Personal circumstances (E73)<br>(1. Worsened 2. Improved) | .354 | .250 | 1.424 |
| Investment opportunities (E67)<br>(1. Worse 2. Better) | -.215 | .267 | .806 |
| Employment opportunities (E68)<br>(1. Worse 2. Better) | .767** | .263 | 2.154 |
| Money saved (E68)<br>[Scale values] | .000 | .000 | 1.000 |
| **N** | **363** | | |

** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

Note: Current employment status: 1 = Unemployed, 2 = Employed/Entrepreneur.

### 2.6.3 Challenges in Domestic Labour Markets

Despite tremendous improvements in women's labour force participation in Nepal,[120] findings from the study indicated that the gendered household division of roles and responsibilities, gendered access to productive inputs—particularly land and credit—and differences stemming from market and institutional failures have a strong bearing on the nature and state of female labour participation. These factors, as will be discussed below, are central to the challenges RWMWs face as they try to reintegrate into the national labour market.

#### 2.6.3.1 Reproductive Roles, Productive Work and Social Norms

As mentioned in the previous section, only 34 per cent of RWMWs had been participating 'actively' in the labour force after return (i.e., being self-employed, engaged in regular or casual work, involved in commercial agriculture, etc). Of the rest, approximately 37.5 per cent had gone back to subsistence farming, and 28.6 per cent were either engaged as unpaid household workers or were economically inactive. The difference between RWMWs and non-migrant women in terms of working situation was not significant, indicating that RWMWs had not been able to translate the economic and social gains from migration abroad into gainful employment in Nepal.

When asked why they were not engaged in any income-generating work, the majority (49 per cent) of RWMWs said that care/household responsibilities did not allow them to work. Care responsibilities as a reason for not working was more common among married women (58 per cent) than among those who were separated, divorced, or widowed (32 per cent) or unmarried (16 per cent). Furthermore, the prevailing gender norms in Nepal suggest that there are various social stigmas attached to women working outside their homes. Whereas in some cases women are prohibited by their husbands and other family members from working, some of these restrictions are also self-imposed.

> We want to work but we cannot work without asking our fathers/husbands. If we work without asking them, we run the risk of being forced out of our homes. Even society backbites about women who engage in small businesses. On the contrary, men are free to work but it is still difficult for women. Women cannot decide and are not free even if they want to work. (A participant during an FGD with RWMWs, Melamchi Municipality, Sindhupalchowk, FGD no. 8, 29 April 2017)

Similar sentiments were expressed by RWMWs and non-migrant women in separate group discussions.

> I was thinking of starting a hotel (restaurant) but people started saying that since I am beautiful the hotel will run well… And they said that if I sell alcohol my honour would

120 World Bank 2012.

> be lost. That is why I stopped saying that I will start a hotel business… We have to face such humiliation from family members… What can we expect from others? (A participant during an FGD with RWMWs, Daunne Devi VDC, Nawalparasi, FGD no. 11, 23 April 2017)

> Even if women are interested, they cannot do anything at home. They don't have money for investment even if they want to rear livestock… On top of that, they aren't supported by the family either… Even husbands don't allow women to run a business or an enterprise. They think that if women go out of their homes, they will get spoilt… Hence, due to societal norms, women don't work outside their homes. (A participant during an FGD with non-migrant women, Dhangadhi Municipality, Kailali, FGD no. 19, 16 April 2017)

The issue of prestige also prevents women from working outside the home.

> There is no alternative for us here. Most of the RWMWs open cosmetic or clothing stores or other such shops, but I am not interested in such businesses. My sister [living abroad] tells me that I shouldn't feel embarrassed to engage in any kind of work but if I open a *pyazi* [deep fried diced and battered onion] stall on the roadside, my husband will feel embarrassed while crossing it, and others will also look down upon us. (Informal conversation with an RWMW from Israel, 30 March 2017)

The issue of stigma is much more pronounced for women working in sectors like hotels and restaurants.[121] Left with no other option, that is, either work in such sectors or go abroad, families encouraged women to go abroad instead. This was the case of a 27-year-old married RWMW.

> We cannot use our skills here because if we start a hotel (restaurant), it is mostly drunkards who frequent these places and people accuse us of being promiscuous. Gradually, family members also start believing the same. Thus, instead of working in hotels and restaurants, we are encouraged to go abroad for employment. (A participant during an FGD with RWMWs, Sunwal Municipality, Nawalparasi, FGD no. 9, 12 April 2017)

While these narratives of women's struggles are abundant, there were women, especially RWMWs who had rejected perceived societal norms and had successfully engaged in income-generating activities. An RWMW who had been running a school canteen for the past year, explained how she managed to run her business despite the odds.

121 However, this is not true among the Gurungs in Ghandruk.

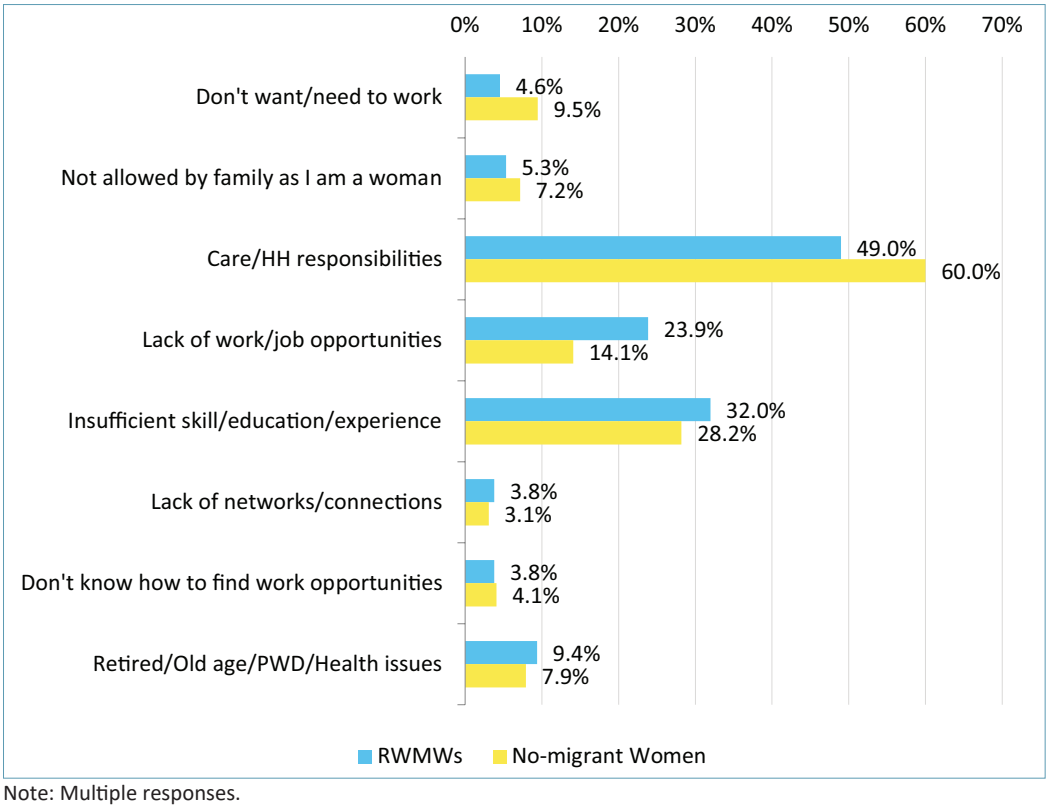
> After coming back, I sold vegetables by carrying them in a *doko* [back carrier] for three years… Initially, people pointed fingers at me, saying she returned from abroad and is like this and that. People say such things when you are a single woman. They said I was working outside of my home to attract boys, not sell vegetables. But I ignored them and continued my work. Eventually, many women followed suit and started running similar businesses. (RWMW from Saudi Arabia, Dhangadhi Municipality, Kailali, Interview no. 53, 13 April 2017)

### 2.6.3.2 Employment Options and Barriers to Entry

Besides family responsibilities, another 32 per cent of RWMWs indicated that they were not working upon return since they had insufficient skills, education, and/or experience while another 24 per cent mentioned lack of work opportunities (Figure 21). A comparison with non-migrant women showed that a higher percentage of non-migrant women did not work because they were bound by care/household responsibilities, restrictions from family, and because they did not need to work.

It is important to note here that a higher percentage of RWMWs (32 per cent) than non-migrant women (28 per cent) considered the lack of sufficient skills, education, and experience to be important factors for not working. Likewise, more RWMWs (24 per

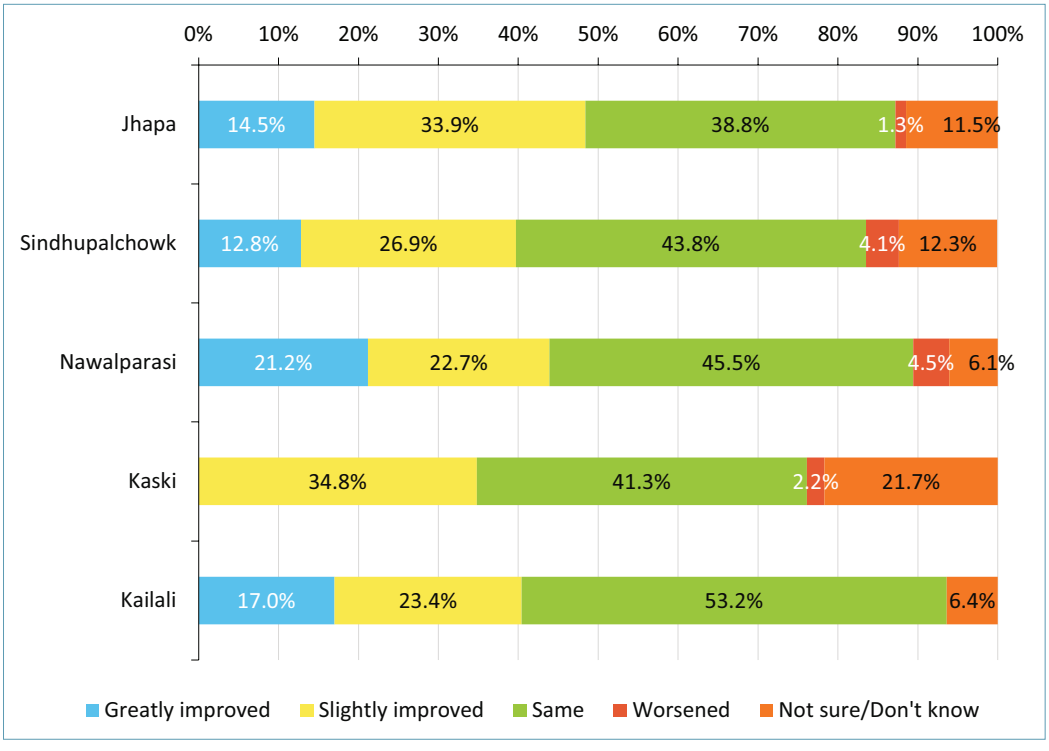
**Figure 21: Major Reasons for Not Working outside Home**




Note: Multiple responses.

cent) indicated the absence of suitable job opportunities than non-migrant women (14 per cent) as a constraint. Findings across all the districts suggested that a higher percentage of RWMWs believed that their employment opportunities upon return were the same as before migration (Figure 22).

**Figure 22: RWMWs' Perception of the Change in Employment Opportunities after Return**

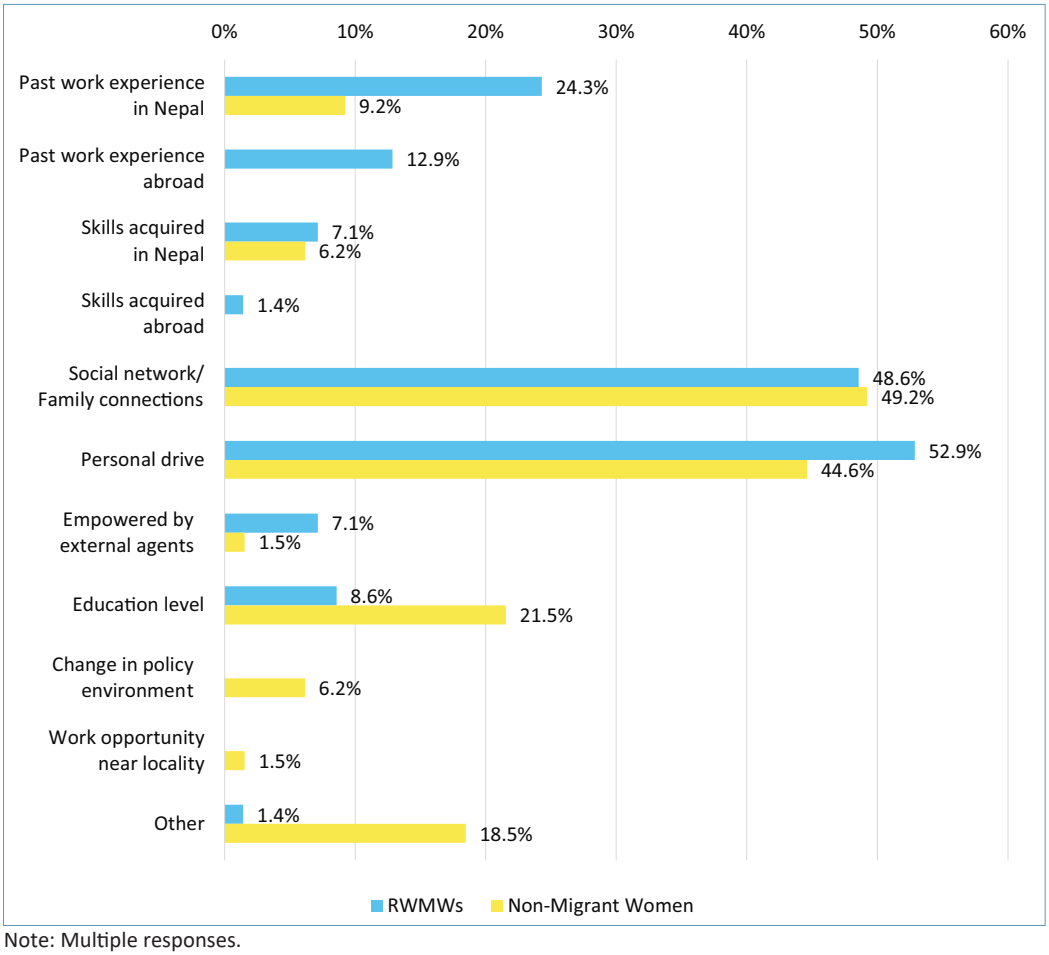



Many women did not see any decent work opportunities commensurate with their skills and education levels.

> We have to work so hard just for 1500 or 2000 rupees per month. Who will do it? I wonder why we people with no education cannot get any work except as construction workers. (A participant during an FGD with RWMWs, Chautara Municipality, Sindhupalchowk, FGD no. 5, 7 April 2017)

The finding that women did not necessarily consider their experience or skills gained abroad as having the potential of helping them find decent employment in their locality was also corroborated by the fact that among women who were successful in securing employment in Nepal, factors such as personal drive and connections, as opposed to skills or past work experience, were attributed to their being able to find work (Figure 23). Only

**Figure 23: Major Factors Facilitating Secure Employment**




Note: Multiple responses.

a negligible percentage of RWMWs attributed their past work experience abroad (4.2 per cent) and skills acquired (2.1 per cent) as important factors in their finding suitable employment in Nepal. This was the case for RWMWs as well as non-migrants.

> Many women don't have links or networks, and they cannot compete and be selected without connections. Many organisations hire their own people and then there is also political pressure. Political parties only speak on behalf of cadres who are active. Even in training, you need networks because they give training to their own people. Even in a Red Cross programme, there are party-wise divisions. (Local politician, Mechinagar Municipality, Jhapa, Interview no. 1, 3 April 2017)

These findings indicate that employment abroad does not necessarily prepare migrant women for the domestic labour market. This, as will be discussed in the ensuing section,

can be attributed to the fact that women are generally employed as domestic workers while abroad, an occupation they would not necessarily consider undertaking in Nepal.

#### 2.6.3.3 Engaging in Entrepreneurial Activities: Opportunities and Challenges

Aside from employment, another option that women, including RWMWs, often considered was setting up their own enterprise. In the study sample, 21.3 per cent of RWMWs and 23.3 per cent of non-migrant women were engaged in such undertakings. When asked about the reasons for starting an enterprise, more than 40 per cent of the women (both RWMWs and non-migrants) mentioned it as an alternative to remaining idle. There were some differences between the two groups in that a larger percentage of RWMWs opted for self-employment due to the absence of other livelihood opportunities, while a higher percentage of non-migrant women said that encouragement from their family members was key (Figure 24).

However, engaging in entrepreneurship posed its own set of challenges. Asked about some of the major challenges they experienced while setting up their enterprises, the top four challenges listed by both RWMWs and non-migrants were: i) insufficient access to capital, including credit; ii) lack of sufficient information; iii) fear of failure and social stigma; and iv) household/care responsibilities.

On the issue of capital, women's ownership of productive assets was low, which, in turn, limited their access to the financial markets as they were unable to provide any collateral. Due to the challenges women in Nepal face while acquiring loans, they generally start enterprises with only a third of the capital available to men, irrespective of sector or location.[122]

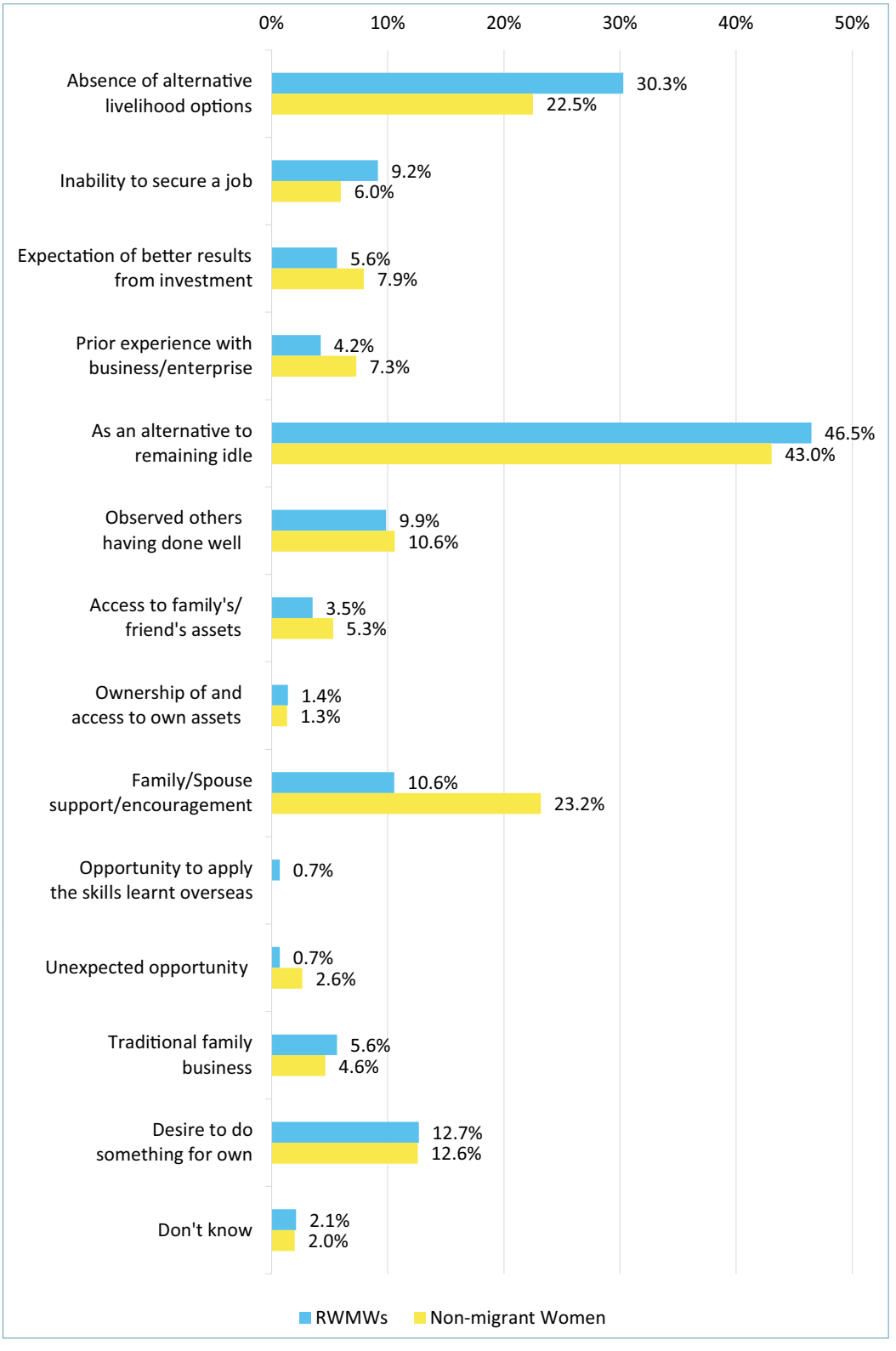
> If you think of doing anything and moving ahead, the major barrier is economic. If you have the financial capital to invest, you can move forward. Women don't have access to ancestral property. Even if you want to do something, you don't have any assets in your name, it is in your husband's name and that creates a barrier. (A participant at FGD with non-migrant women, Pokhara Sub-Metropolitan, Kaski, FGD no. 15, 15 April 2017)

> It's harder for us to take loans from cooperatives because they ask for collateral. As we have no land of our own, we cannot get loans. Without collateral, you can get a loan of up to only 10,000 or 15,000 rupees, which is not a whole lot. (Woman leader, Mechinagar Municipality, Jhapa, Interview no. 1, 3 April 2017)

Among women not engaged in regular/casual work or self-employment, 32 per cent of RWMWs and 27 per cent non-migrant women stated that the lack of finance was a major reason for not starting an enterprise. The lack of finance or access to capital was as pressing an issue for RWMWs as it was for non-migrant women, indicating that foreign employment does not necessarily lead to sufficient capital upon return.

122 De Gobbi 2005, cited in Bushell 2008.

## Figure 24: Major Reasons for Starting an Enterprise



Even when women had skills and capital, the lack of a market and the knowledge required for marketing as well as managing an enterprise also became a challenge. The lack of access to markets often made many skills-training programmes irrelevant as they could not utilise the newly acquired skills.

> I didn't know how to use a measuring tape earlier, but I learnt it while abroad. My madam had also taught me the calculations while cutting cloth. This knowledge was quite useful and I do it even now. I even learnt how to sew new clothes. Here, in a village, it isn't that useful, but if I open a shop in a market area then I'm sure those skills will be useful. (RWMW from Kuwait currently working as a tailor, Pathraiya VDC, Kailali, Interview no. 59, 20 April 2017)

The situation was similar for non-migrant women.

> They make a woollen cap putting in a lot of work but there is no market. One goes through a lot of trouble making dolls but where can we sell them? If we talk about tailoring, people with low economic status cannot invest while those who can think of learning computers or other work. If someone learns and brings a machine home, they won't be able to continue because of the household situation. For example, you need to give your client's clothes urgently and you have done the cutting. But, then, a guest comes to your house and you will have to decide whether to serve them tea or work on the cloth. That is why women are left behind. (A participant during an FGD with non-migrant women, Goldhap VDC, Jhapa, FGD no. 4, 24 April 2017)

#### 2.6.3.4 Attraction of Foreign Labour Market

Besides the challenges women experienced in the domestic market, household/care work was a significant barrier that limited their participation, particularly when considered in tandem with issues of stigma and women's limited options for employment and livelihoods. Findings from the study also indicated that regardless of the skills or education women had, options available to them in the domestic market hardly ever matched their earnings abroad. In Nepal, women also have to balance work and household responsibilities, both of which are daunting, particularly since the latter is unpaid.

In contrast to the situation in Nepal, the majority of RWMWs (79 per cent of those included in the study) had worked as domestic workers while abroad. Thus, they were earning and supporting their families while doing something they would have otherwise done for free back home. The fact that domestic work does not require high levels of skills and education also influences women in dire need of money to migrate. As a counsellor of the SaMi project in Sindhupalchowk noted, despite the fact that they counselled prospective migrants to enhance their skills to go into better paying sectors, the number

of women seeking to go for domestic work had not declined.[123] In fact, the majority of women, as corroborated by our survey findings, chose domestic work because it did not require any skills, and neither did they have time to go for training and focus on skill development. Similar work in the informal sector in Nepal would pay poorly and there is no dignity attached to it either. In the absence of viable and well-paying employment opportunities in Nepal, women are likely to re-migrate or continue their traditional means of livelihood, such as subsistence farming.

### 2.6.3.5 Policy Environment

Although an in-depth evaluation of policies and programmes related to women and the labour market was beyond the scope of this report, field observations suggested that even though there had been some policy attempts to make the labour market more women-friendly, there is very little awareness about them. For instance, according to the Industrial Policy 2011, enterprises registered in a woman's name get 35 per cent discount in the registration fee. [124] However, there is minimal awareness among women regarding this and other such policies. The survey found that among those women who owned an enterprise, only 11 per cent of RWMWs and 22 per cent of non-migrant women had registered their enterprise. Even when services and programmes related to women entrepreneurs exist, the majority of the women are unaware of them.

> I came to know that VDCs receive budgets earmarked for women only after I became a ward coordinator… Previously, the budget was used in developmental activities like drinking water, roads, etc. Then, I stopped wasting our budget on other things, and we started to use that budget for commercial agriculture, livestock rearing, and poultry farming. We started to work with women and constructed a women's community house. We did programmes related to women and also distributed 50 poly-tunnels worth one hundred thousand rupees each for the development of commercial agriculture in the village. Unseasonal vegetables are also produced through these tunnels. We don't have any idea about the concession or offers provided to women entrepreneurs by the Nepal government. (RWMW from Oman, Dangsing VDC, Kaski, Interview no. 47, 27 April 2017)

> Returnee women in the village don't know about government policies and programmes for women entrepreneurs. Even though women are interested in doing something, they aren't aware about it. Hence, after their return, they are obliged to do something with what knowledge and skills they have. If they work here, they can only earn five or six hundred rupees a day and are not able to save. The money they earn abroad will be used building a house, and they are again interested in earning money to solve other prob-

123 Interview no. 69, 3 April 2017.
124 MoI 2011.

> lems. There is no family support for women to work outside. (Chairperson of a local NGO, Melamchi Municipality, Sindhupalchowk, Interview no. 17, 28 April 2017)

Women were also discouraged by the long and bureaucratic process of registering enterprises.[125] Additionally, it was harder for women in rural areas and those with a low level of education to access the information and services provided by state and non-state agencies because much of it was centred at the district headquarters.[126] Many women also lacked access to external programmes because of their weak social networks and lack of self-esteem.

> People with access and networks receive training repeatedly whereas we aren't even informed about it. When we get the information about any vacancies, it would already have been taken by someone else. If a job is available, it is given based on networks and connections. Accessing services of cooperatives, finance institutions, private organisations, all need social networks. (Dalit participant during an FGD with non-migrant women, Pathariya VDC, Kailali, FGD no. 20, 20 April 2017)

> Not many women here are involved in running an enterprise or business... Some have done chicken farming. All of the work related to rearing chickens is done by women, but in financial matters their husbands take the lead. Because of the lack of training, women here have had to suffer losses in their business. When women are called to meetings, they say they don't know how to speak properly and so they send the men in their family. (Sub-coordinator of Tuki Sangh, Gyalthum VDC, Sindhupalchowk, Interview no 23, 27 April 2017)

A senior officer at the Regional Labour Office in Pokhara was of the view that training was often provided by state and non-state agencies as a way of spending their budget, rather than with the vision of effecting change.[127] It is thus no surprise that programmes related to enterprise development are often short-term and not holistic. According to an official from the Small and Cottage Industries Office in Pokhara, most women lack the information and knowledge about marketing, business planning, public relations, and management.[128] Training is often short and not put to use.

> We organise training for women in order to give them skills and make them capable of income-generating work. But the problem with the training is that the same kind of

125 Interview no. 98, 4 May 2017 (Woman entrepreneur and vice president of Chamber of Commerce, Pokhara).

126 Interview no. 91, 4 April 2017 (President of Multipurpose Co-operative), and Interview no. 90, 3 April 2017 (Counsellor, Shakti Samuha, Sindhupalchowk).

127 Interview no. 97, 4 May 2017.

128 Interview no. 100, 5 May 2017.

> training keeps being repeated and the same women get opportunities again and again. Also, the support is limited to training only, and not help in starting up enterprises or getting some sort of employment. (Senior official at the Woman Development Office, Nawalparasi, Interview no. 73, 11 April 2017)

When it comes to women and the labour market, much of the focus is on entrepreneurship despite the obvious fact that not all women have the desire or aptitude to be entrepreneurs. Due to the gendered nature of the labour market, women's employment choices are limited. As discussed in the introductory section, women are not only concentrated heavily in informal employment, they also take on the most vulnerable and lowest-paid jobs.[129] Although the Industrial Policy 2011 sets out to encourage industries to hire more women by providing concessions in income tax of up to 40 per cent to industries that employ women, Dalits, and people living with disabilities equivalent to 50 per cent of their workforce, there are few effective safeguards to mandate against the discrimination of women during the hiring process or during their employment.

> Industries and companies don't follow a fair and transparent hiring process. Instead, employees are hired based on personal and family links. And, most senior posts are filled with their own people... Due to the lack of adequate staff capacity and resources, governing and monitoring the labour market and issues of workers is overlooked. Supervising and monitoring industries gets challenging when we are made to wait at the gate of the industry by the guard when we visit them on our old motorcycle. (Official from Regional Labour Office, Kaski, Interview no. 97, 4 May 2017)

Field observations also suggest that a sectoral outlook among state and non-state actors prevents them from considering the impact of various contextual dynamics on their respective sectors. For instance, when researchers involved in this study mentioned the desire to talk to them about migration, many government officials would try to point them to projects and individuals working on migration per se. Although they provide training and conduct other programmes, there was no collection of data on the migration status of participants. Organisations that directly work with RWMWs, such as Pourakhi and Shakti Samuha, are often the only ones targeting RWMWs.

> Mahila Atma Nirbhar Kendra[130] and Shakti Samuha have been working for these women's groups. There are groups of RWMWs who are infected with HIV and they are provided seed money for their livelihood programmes in order to involve them in income-generating activities such as operating grocery shops, beauty parlours, teashops, home-stays, goat rearing, and seasonal vegetable farming. The main objective of these

129 Acharya 2014, ILO and ADB 2011.

130 A local women's organisation based in Sindhupalchowk.

> programmes is to encourage women to integrate into the family and society and livelihood empowerment is necessary. Furthermore, Mahila Atma Nirbhar Kendra has also been spreading information about HIV and ways to stay safe from HIV infection. (Chairperson at the Mahila Atma Nirbhar Kendra, Melamchi Municipality, Sindhupalchowk, Interview no. 17, 28 April 2017)

Right now, there are 15 of us in Pourakhi from three VDCs here. With the help of the district coordinator of Pourakhi, we later started a savings group among the 13 of us. It has been two years since this group started to save. First, we said we would save 200 rupees per month, but that was too difficult for many women, so we brought it down to 100 rupees. We have conducted entrepreneurship training in Birtamod from Pourakhi and maybe some other organisations. There were women from four or five VDCs, and one year ago, we received livestock and things like sewing machines and bees from Pourakhi based on our own needs. We meet every month and we can take loans from this savings groups at an interest rate of 1.5 per cent per month. We haven't given loans to people outside the group. Right now, we have a total of 32,000 rupees in savings, and we have a plan to save up to 50,000 or 60,000 and do something substantial with it. We 13 women will not depend on others. We will take the opportunities we get, but we will also invest the money we have. (Chairperson of Pourakhi, Goldhap VDC, Jhapa Interview no. 9, 24 April 2017)

The study suggested that although there was not much difference in the employment condition of RWMWs and non-migrant women, a larger percentage of RWMWs were found working in elementary occupations. Moreover, the average monthly salary or wage (regular and casual employment) or average profit RWMWs earned from enterprises was lower than those of non-migrant women. Also, as mentioned earlier gender norms were much more relaxed in RWMW households compared to non-migrant women households and a larger percentage of RWMWs depended on their own savings to set up their enterprise, while non-migrant women were largely dependent on their family member's contribution.

Nepal's labour markets also pose certain challenges and the limited employment or self-entrepreneurial opportunities across the country continue to push Nepali men and women to travel abroad in search of employment to fulfil the economic needs of their families. On their return, the same challenges remained in most of the cases and acted as a barrier for the successful reintegration of RWMWs. As the findings in this section suggest, RWMWs were not actively engaged in economic activities after their return, mostly because of the care responsibilities in their households and the lack of skills required for decent jobs in Nepal. The findings also showed that despite having worked in a foreign country, there were few opportunities to utilise any skills learned abroad due to the lack of jobs where these skills could be applied. Further, there were various challenges that women in general faced such as the lack of capital to set up enterprises and lack of information and social networks to access services and programmes.

# 3. Conclusion

This study examined the status of women, returnee women migrant workers (RWMWs) and non-migrant women, their context before migration, the reasons for migration, the migration process, their conditions abroad, the circumstances of their return and, ultimately, their post-migration context to see how each of these factors interact to shape women's reintegration.

The findings showed that a higher percentage of RWMWs were involved in household decision-making related to investments and enjoyed more autonomy when it came to their mobility compared to non-migrant women, indicating that women's migration was more likely in households with more relaxed gender norms. The fact that a significant proportion of the women were engaged in work outside their home means that women migrated not because of lack of work opportunities but because they were not satisfied with the kind of work available. Meeting household economic requirements was the main reason for the majority of women to migrate, especially those who had separated from their husbands, were divorced or widowed. In addition, linked to economic reasons, social factors such as betterment of their children's future (education), domestic violence, and conflict within families were other reasons that led women to migrate for work abroad.

Despite the stigma associated with women's migration, which is often linked with sex trafficking, barriers from family members against women's migration seemed to be on the decline with more than two-thirds of the RWMWs stating that that they had not experienced any obstacles from their families. In fact, the majority of women migrants even mentioned having consulted their husbands and other family members while making migration decisions. Most of the RWMWs reported that they did not face any challenges during the recruitment process, primarily because they relied completely on an agent to manage their recruitment and migration processes. The majority of women (78 per cent) had migrated to GCC countries and most (79 per cent) were engaged as domestic workers even though the Government of Nepal had some strict directives on migration as domestic help to those countries.

The average monthly earnings of women workers while abroad was NPR 24,311 (ca. USD 236) and around half of the RWMWs who had worked as domestic workers did not spend anything on living expenses. Around 97 per cent of the RWMWs remitted money during their migration with the majority identifying the main uses of their remittances being daily household expenses, children's and/or siblings' education, and repaying debts. The study findings suggest that most of the women returned because their contracts had ended while family responsibilities and wanting to be near their families were also among the major reasons for their coming back.

Following their return, RWMWs were less likely to be tied to traditional gender norms, were more likely to be in charge of household decision-making, and also have a higher degree of autonomy in their mobility. A larger proportion of the RWMWs said their level of self-confidence had increased after working abroad, which was also corroborated by non-migrants. However, with some variations, the participation of RWMWs in the domestic labour markets did not seem to differ much from that of non-migrant women. A higher proportion of RWMWs were employed in different enterprises as workers while non-migrant women were more likely to be employed in government service and as agricultural workers. In terms of self-employed women, there was also little difference in terms of the types of enterprises RWMWs and non-migrant women operated. These findings indicate that the financial and social capital that women were able to acquire through their experience abroad did not necessarily provide them with an advantage over non-migrant women. RWMWs did not work mainly because of the care responsibilities in their households and because of their lack of skills required for decent jobs in Nepal. This means that, despite having worked in a foreign country, RWMWs were unable to use their skills acquired abroad to secure decent work or run their own enterprise in Nepal.

Finally, the results of the binary logistic regression suggested that switching jobs while abroad and believing there were better employment opportunities upon return positively impacts the likelihood of their finding employment. Accordingly, the study indicated that much of the challenges for women's reintegration into the domestic labour market has to do with the gendered division of household roles and responsibilities; gendered access to productive inputs, particularly land and credit; and gender discrimination in the labour markets.

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# Annex A: Case Studies

## Case Study 1

Rashmi Shrestha, a 43-year-old RWMW from Kuwait, lives with her husband and four children in Chautara Municipality in Sindhupalchowk. She has only primary-level education but all of her children are in high school (grades 11 and 12). Currently, she runs a grocery shop and a poultry farm. Before migrating abroad for work, she had been involved in subsistence agriculture and, in the mornings, as a vegetable vendor in the nearby bazaar of Dolalghat. However, her family's limited income made it very difficult for her to meet expenses, including the children's education. To overcome this situation of perennial poverty, she consulted with her husband about foreign employment. Her husband supported her and promised to take care of the children. The youngest son was just four years old when she first migrated to Kuwait in 2005.

She first migrated to Kuwait via India, with the assistance of an agent, at a cost of around USD 400. She worked as a housemaid for a total of six years, broken into two stints. In both jobs, she had to work long hours, from five in the morning till midnight. She used to cook, clean the house, do the laundry, and take care of the children. She was paid KWD 40 (ca. USD 130) dinars during the first stint and KWD 50 (ca. US 165) during the second. She compares her experience in Kuwait with life in a cage, as she was hardly allowed to go out of the house. However, she believed staying within the house was safer and her employer used to help her remit her income to Nepal and let her use their phone to communicate with her family in Nepal. At times, she was subjected to verbal abuse from her female employer (*sahuni*) but she did not consider it to be a big issue and thought it would not be good to leave or change her employer since it could put her at risk of not earning any money at all and also of being deported if her status became illegal. Keeping in mind the future of her family to be her single priority, she endured all difficulties. She used to cry a lot as she missed her children in Nepal.

After she returned to Nepal, she was able to buy a piece of land and build a house next to the road that connected to the district headquarters. With the strong support and help from her husband, she opened a grocery shop in her new house and has also started a poultry farm and a meat shop. She also benefitted from a training programme on poultry farming and market opportunities provided by an NGO. Soon after her training, she borrowed USD 1000 from a bank and started a poultry farm with a total 170 chickens. The business is doing well and she now has around 500 chickens, and she claims to earn around USD 800 per month from her businesses, which makes her satisfied and feel more positive that the future of her children is more secure. More importantly, she is now considered a role model female entrepreneur by the other women in her village.

She believes there is an abundance of opportunities and possibilities, but she is of the

view that family support is of critical importance if a woman is to be successful. She is also thankful for, and values, the support and encouragement given to her by NGOs and government agencies in making her businesses a success. Furthermore, she believes that RWMWs could do well in the labour market of Nepal if the government provides them with assistance and creates an enabling environment. But, she believes, the women should also be interested, confident, and determined to do something in their own country. In her own words: 'We can earn in our own country rather than go abroad. If we work as much and as hard in Nepal as abroad, we can do better in Nepal'.

## Case Study 2

Geeta Khanal, aged 38 and an RWMW who returned from Israel, is a housewife from Mechinagar Municipality in Jhapa. She lives with her husband and three daughters. She has completed secondary-level education. Before she migrated, she used to own a grocery shop in Kathmandu. She had to sell the shop after her second child was born even though it was doing well because it proved to be very difficult for her to run the shop and take care of her children all by herself as her husband would not help her with the work. She sold her shop and became a housewife for the next three years. Following the trend among her fellow villagers of migrating to Israel, considered to be a safe and good destination to earn money, she migrated to Israel for care work. She switched jobs three times while in Israel but did not return to Nepal as she had invested a lot of money while going to Israel. Changing jobs was not difficult for her as long as she had a work visa because agents helped her find new positions.

At her first job, Geeta had to take care of an elderly man with a disability, which involved feeding, cleaning, helping him move, and cleaning and changing his clothes. In addition to physical difficulties and the natural awkwardness of dealing with an unknown man, she also felt frustrated and faced challenges from not knowing the local language and unfamiliarity with the names and uses of home appliances. She was abused and mistreated being scolded and beaten, her clothes torn and even dragged and thrown into the street. She left that job within a week. In her new job, the employer always kept the air conditioner on in a shared room, but she was not provided a separate room although she was allergic to air conditioning. Neither was she provided enough food to eat. She quit that job as well after a few months and found a third one.

She used to earn around USD 1000 per month, but she decided to return to Nepal after six years because she was concerned about the future of her children. During her stay in Israel, she claimed to have acquired skills in housekeeping and care work, and, most importantly, learnt Hebrew. She became more confident and believed that she could be independent and self-reliant. After her return, she had to carry out most of the responsibilities, including managing household financial and economic affairs and the regular chores, because her husband, who was involved in politics, could not be bothered. She even gave birth to a third child after returning. Her husband also began to accept the negative views about migration and maintained a less-than-friendly perception towards

her, and, as she put it, started living in his own world (*afnai duniya*). When neighbours and villagers gossiped about her, he would not support her. She wore jeans and trousers after returning, but this was frowned upon by her community and society, which made her return to wearing *saris* and *salwar-kameez*. Before her migration, she used to live with her parents-in-law, but she split with them because of a row they had after she inquired about her income remitted from Israel. Her husband had invested her earnings in buying a car to rent out, but the investment had failed.

Soon after her return, she aspired to establish a business and even buy a car. She had established a language institute in Birtamod to teach Hebrew to those who wanted to go to Israel, but, unfortunately, labour migration to Israel through legal channels became closed for Nepali citizens, which resulted in her institute being closed and the loss of her investment. Subsequently, she tried another business, she imported clothes from India to sell. Again, due to the recent demonetisation of large currency notes in India, access to and availability of Indian currency became challenging, forcing her to close her business. After these multiple failures, she is feeling extremely despondent to try anything new, although she does not want to stay idle. She argues that unstable, unpredictable, and unfavourable markets and the political situation are the major problems for people like her who want to start and run a new enterprise. She is also of the view that compared to abroad, there is a lack of opportunities in the labour market of Nepal that fit her various skills, qualifications, and experiences.

The Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility (CESLAM) is a research centre within Social Science Baha, Kathmandu, set up with the primary objective of contributing to broader theories and understandings on labour and mobility. It conducts interdisciplinary, policy-relevant research on critical issues affecting working people; serves as a forum to foster academic, policy and public debates; and provides new insights on the impact of labour and migration.