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SAFER MIGRATION (SAMI) PROGRAMME PHASE III (2018–2024)

LEARNING SERIES 2024/4



HELVETAS
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SaMi
Safer Migration Programme

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The SaMi Programme is a bilateral initiative between the Government of Nepal and the Government of Switzerland. It is implemented by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MoLESS) and 156 participating local governments. Helvetas Nepal provides technical assistance to the programme on behalf of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

This document has been prepared with the support of the research team at the Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility (CESLAM), Social Science Baha. The information presented here may be freely used for non-commercial purposes with proper acknowledgment and attribution to the source.

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Cover Photo: A female passport applicant receives information on safer migration during her visit to the Migrant Resource Centre located within the premises of the District Administration Office in Parbat.
Photo Credit: SaMi/Helvetas Nepal

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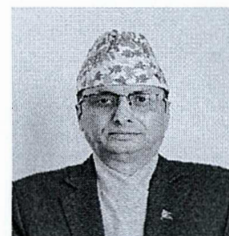
Government of Nepal
Ministry of Labour, Employment & Social Security



Singhadurbar, Kathmandu
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Ref. No.:

Foreword



I am pleased to see the publication of overall achievements and lessons learned from the Safer Migration (SaMi) Programme - Phase III. This publication is not only a collection of achievements and lessons learned during the implementation of the SaMi programme but also an important document on foreign employment management. I expect that these lessons and suggestions will help in evidence-based planning and policy reforms at the related fields in the future.

Even though the government has set the goal of ending compulsive migration for foreign employment, Nepali citizens are increasingly migrating for work due to the current economic situation of the country, and limited opportunities for domestic employment. While the remittance received from foreign employment contributes significantly to the foreign exchange reserves and the economic and social sector, workers face various problems during their migration journey. The SaMi programme has made a significant contribution to the field of foreign employment by providing information and counselling to potential migrant workers, legal supports to individuals facing deception during the migration process, rescue and repatriation to the workers facing difficulties in the destination countries, foreign employment-focused vocational skill training for potential migrant workers, psychosocial counselling services to address the psychosocial problems faced by migrants and their families, and financial literacy classes focused on utilising remittances in the productive sector and promoting self-employment. The technical assistance provided to the federal, provincial, and local governments reflects the essence of federalism. It has facilitated incorporating foreign employment-related issues in their policies, directives, guidelines, profiles, and periodic plans, and implementing migration-related services accordingly. In addition, the coordination and partnership between the three tiers of government have helped in the promotion of inter-governmental coordination and cooperation envisaged by the constitution.

I would like to thank the programme-implementing local governments, provincial ministries responsible for labour and employment, the Department of Foreign Employment, the Foreign Employment Board, the Programme Support Unit/Helvetas Nepal, and all the staff and institutions, directly and indirectly, contributing to the successful implementation and achievements of the programme. Also, I would like to express my gratitude for the support and cooperation of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) for the implementation and management of this programme. Finally, I extend my best wishes for the successful implementation and management of the Safer Migration (SaMi) Programme (Phase IV).

Mukunda Prasad Niraula
Secretary

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Sita Ghimire

Team Leader (2013–2024)

Safer Migration (SaMi) Programme

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BLMA	Bilateral Labour Migration Agreement
CDO	Chief District Officer
CMC-Nepal	Centre for Mental Health and Counselling – Nepal
CoD	Country of Destination
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAO	District Administration Office
DEPROSC	Development Project Service Centre – Nepal
DoCS	Department of Consular Services
DoFE	Department of Foreign Employment
EPS	Employment Permit System
ESC	Employment Service Centre
FEB	Foreign Employment Board
FEIMS	Foreign Employment Information Management System
FET	Foreign Employment Tribunal
FIR	First Information Report
FLC	Financial Literacy Committee
FLF	Financial Literacy Facilitator
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GoN	Government of Nepal
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
KII	Key Informant Interview
LG	Local Government
LGPCC	Local Government Programme Coordination Committee
MIS	Management Information System
MoLESS	Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRC	Migrant Resource Centre
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NMRC	National Migrant Resource Centre
NSTB	National Skill Testing Board
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
People Forum	People Forum for Human Rights
PNCC	Pravasi Nepali Coordination Committee
PRA	Private Recruitment Agency
PSA	Public Service Announcement
PSC	Programme Steering Committee
RMN	Returnee Migrant Network
RV	Returnee Volunteer
SaMi	Safer Migration Programme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TMI	Training Management Institute

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Safer Migration (SaMi) Programme (previously SaMi Project) was launched in 2011 as a collaborative effort between the governments of Nepal and Switzerland to prioritise the rights and welfare of Nepali migrants and their families. Currently in its third phase (16 September 2018 – 15 July 2024), the programme builds on past experiences to empower Nepal's governmental bodies in the migration sector and aligns with the federalisation process, particularly emphasising support for local governments in managing foreign employment matters. It spans all provinces in Nepal, engaging 38 districts and 156 local governments. The programme's interventions are centred on five components—providing migrant workers and their families with pre-departure orientation, skills training, legal support, financial literacy, and psychosocial support—working with key stakeholders at the national, provincial and local levels with a number of thematic partners.

The SaMi Programme represents a crucial intervention in Nepal's labour migration sector. This report has documented the learnings of the programme over its 13-year implementation. This document is meant to serve as a guide to transfer the knowledge gained to governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, help address gaps, perpetuate good practices, and elucidate future implications, iterations and actions. The lessons learned have been documented through the use of quantitative data such as programme statistics and impact metrics as well as qualitative data gathered through interviews and group discussions with beneficiaries (migrants and their families) and governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

The main learnings are as follows:

Programmatic-level learnings

Lesson 1: Use of returnees as volunteers is an innovative approach that benefits from the lived experiences of returnee migrant workers for programme implementation. The SaMi Programme has provisions in its implementation framework that mandate the employment of returnees as Returnee Volunteers (RVs) who are motivated and have the lived experience of foreign employment and understand the circumstances of other migrant workers.

Lesson 2: Financial literacy training has supported in strengthening family relationships and mitigating social stigma. The financial literacy classes have not only empowered the participants but also fostered greater transparency and accountability in financial activities and household matters within the family. This has resulted in improved relationships and trust between migrant workers and their family members and helped in reducing the social stigma directed towards left-behind wives, who may be seen as being spendthrifts.

Lesson 3: Garment machine operator training for aspiring women migrant workers is a major success of gender mainstreaming in the labour migration sector of Nepal. The training supported by the SaMi Programme, paired with an excellent job placement ratio in Jordan, has allowed many women migrant workers to experience a safe, dignified, fair, and fruitful migration.

Lesson 4: Direct implementation is crucial for local government's ownership of the SaMi Programme. Implementation of migration-related services provided through the programme via the local government has helped develop greater ownership and internalisation of services and coordination at local level.

Lesson 5: A multi-stakeholder approach is important for providing rapid and prompt services to migrant workers. The SaMi Programme employs a multi-stakeholder partnership approach encompassing all three levels of government and various civil society organisations (CSOs) working as thematic partners. Partnership and collaboration between formal government mechanisms and CSOs has been effective and ensured faster service delivery. The placement of representatives at the Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE), the Foreign Employment Board (FEB), and the Department of Consular Services (DoCS) were reported to have improved and expedited services provided to migrant workers. However, it has also increased the workload of these individuals as a result of being tasked with responsibilities beyond their original mandate, and increased the dependency of the department/government institutions on the staff supported by SaMi. There is thus the need for increasing technical, financial and human resources, and integrating these officials within the government system.

Policy-level learnings

Lesson 6: Effective implementation of existing laws and policies on safe migration remains a crucial issue to protect migrant workers. While information provided through the Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) has been effective in terms of increasing the number cases of migrant workers 'leaving documents at home' and 'reducing pre-departure costs through negotiation', it is not quite as effective for 'obtaining receipts of pre-departure payment', indicating that access to information may not be sufficient to guarantee little or no cost for migrating workers. This underscores the fact that effective implementation of existing policies and other interventions is important.

Lesson 7: Development of migration-related policies and guidelines at provincial and local levels builds accountability and leads toward sustainability. Development of provincial labour and employment policies, safer migration guidelines, migration profiles, inclusion of migration-related activities in periodic plans, and incorporating programme components like psychosocial counselling and financial literacy in municipal health and financial literacy policies is crucial for enhancing local government accountability in labour migration issues and paving the way for internalisation of migration services. They also act as guidelines for newly elected representatives and government officials.

Lesson 8: Agreements and partnerships with destination country governments and employers are needed to improve post-training job placement. The job placement ratio of beneficiaries from Kathmandu-based training management institutes (TMIs) was reported to be higher than among province-based institutes. Access to private recruitment agencies (PRAs) in Kathmandu could be a major reason for this. This highlights the importance of and need for demand matching for beneficiaries through government-to-government partnerships or even informal partnerships with employers abroad.

Governance-related learnings

Lesson 9: The Local Government Programme Coordination Committee (LGPCC) is an effective means for inter-governmental collaboration and learning. Mechanisms for local government coordination, like the LGPCC, help promote inter-municipal learning and collaborative implementation of migration-related services. Thus multi-tenure local representatives can share their understanding of labour migration with newly elected representatives, resulting in a quicker orientation of the latter and the transfer of best practices across municipalities. It can also form the basis for future collaborations in standardising practices, pooling resources and in joint planning.

Lesson 10: Establishment and strengthening of inter-governmental collaboration is crucial to institutionalise migration services. Recognition of the programme's importance is growing, with a need to extend its services across all government levels. The programme has amassed expertise, ensured data availability, and supported the government in initiating Bilateral Labour Migration Agreements (BLMAs) by participating in multilateral platforms, and formulating policies and strategies. The components of the SaMi Programme entail many cross-cutting components, requiring collaborative efforts from multiple relevant ministries for effective implementation. To this end, SaMi has established and strengthened both vertical and horizontal inter-governmental collaboration through the participation of all tiers of government in the Programme Steering Committee (PSC), as well as through joint review reflection/monitoring activities, fund flow through Line Ministry Budget Information System (LMBIS), and programme expansion beyond participating local governments with the collaboration of provincial and local governments. Additionally, joint review reflections at the local level are conducted by the LGPCC.

Lesson 11: Signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) helps in programme implementation. MoUs had been signed before the implementation of the programme between the concerned stakeholders, including the local governments and the SaMi Programme Support Unit (PSU). The MoUs specify the roles and responsibilities of each party, clarifying their specific mandates. These agreements resulted in expedited service delivery, with greater compliance from all parties. The DAO promptly provided space for the MRC within its premises, and the role of the SaMi Programme to provide technical assistance was valued more. A prior understanding of the implementation model through the MoU thus helped generate easier cooperation with less effort.

Lesson 12: Provincial and local government collaboration for establishment of MRCs has become emblematic of programme ownership by the government. Provincial and local governments, with technical assistance from SaMi, have established MRCs in six districts—Arghakhanchi, Gulmi, Lamjung, Myagdi, Palpa, and Parbat—on a cost-sharing basis. Provincial and local governments have also established other migration-related services including hiring and mobilising RVs. These initiatives are emblematic of government ownership of the programme and demonstrate the vital importance of inter-governmental collaboration and cooperation for the sustainability of activities under the SaMi Programme. Inter-governmental collaboration—vertically and horizontally—will thus be necessary to ensure the sustainability of the programme and institutionalisation of migration services.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, Nepal has experienced a significant increase in transnational migration, with a considerable number of its citizens seeking opportunities overseas for both work and education.¹ While Nepal has a long and diverse history of migration, albeit limited mainly to the region, the predominant trend this century has been migration to various countries around the globe for employment.² Labour migration has become a significant livelihood choice for Nepalis; surging with the liberalisation of migration regime in Nepal, especially with the introduction of the Foreign Employment Act of 1985,³ which coincided with the opening up of the labour market in the Gulf countries to South Asian workers.⁴ This was also followed by the reduction in agricultural subsidies in Nepal in the 1990s⁵ and the perceived reduction in prospects within the country because of the Maoist insurgency that began in 1996.⁶ According to the 2021 Census, more than 2.1 million Nepali citizens live outside the country, with 77 per cent being away for work-related reasons. This trend is also confirmed by the fact that the DoFE issued over 6.4 million new labour permits to Nepali workers for overseas employment between 1993/94 and 2023/24 with yearly numbers increasing from 3,600 in 1993/94 to nearly half a million in 2023/24.⁷

Labour migration serves as a crucial source of economic empowerment for many Nepali households. With the increase in the number of labour migrants, the country has also experienced an uptick in the volume of remittances relative to the national gross domestic product (GDP).⁸ Beyond economic gains, labour migration also facilitates skills enhancement and knowledge transfer. However, the benefit of labour migration notwithstanding, there are numerous challenges and risks. Mortality and morbidity,⁹ issues of human and labour rights abuses, and lack of access to health services and justice, both in destination countries and in Nepal, are quite common.¹⁰ It is clear that foreign employment will continue to be an integral part of Nepali households, making it essential to ensure that foreign employment is safe, dignified and beneficial for Nepali migrant workers. Protection of migrants and their rights, as well as their dignified return and reintegration, including through the use of social and economic remittance, experiences and knowledge, has been increasingly critical.¹¹ It is in this landscape that the SaMi Programme emerged as a pivotal initiative in Nepal in 2011, aiming to address the vulnerabilities and risks inherent in the outbound Nepali migration landscape.

SaMi Programme: Exploring the Inception and Objectives

The SaMi Programme (previously the Safer Migration Project) was launched in 2011 to prioritise the rights and welfare of Nepali migrants and their families as a collaborative effort between the governments of Nepal and Switzerland. The programme was established shortly after the enactment of the Foreign Employment Act of 2007 and the Foreign Employment Rules of 2008, both focused on structuring labour migration processes and improving migrant workers' welfare, including by protecting their rights and interests.¹² Likewise, the inception of the programme also closely coincided with the Foreign Employment Policy of 2012. This revamped regulatory framework had a significant contribution to improvements in migration governance, and SaMi complemented the goals outlined in these legislative and policy documents. It was a provision in the Foreign Employment Policy 2012, allowing the Nepali government to engage in international and regional governmental collaboration, that nurtured SaMi's initial and subsequent engagement within the country.¹³ In partnership with government agencies as well as international, and non-governmental

organisations (NGOs), SaMi aimed to enhance foreign employment governance by educating potential migrants on safe procedures and legal rights and also equipping NGOs and government bodies with the know-how to offer protection and support to migrant workers. As articulated in SaMi's previous learning document, these objectives were duly met during the first two phases that lasted from 2011 to 2013 and 2013 to 2018, respectively.

Currently in its third phase since September 2018, SaMi spans all of Nepal's seven provinces, covering 38 districts and 156 local governments. Compared to the earlier phases (2011–2018), when SaMi had formulated strategies to refine foreign employment governance, the extended Phase III, lasting till July 2024, aims to build on past experiences, empowering Nepal's governmental bodies involved in the migration sector while also aligning with the federalisation process, particularly emphasising support for local governments in managing issues related to foreign employment.

Figure 1: Participating SaMi districts



Source: The Safer Migration Programme

The SaMi Programme has begun a number of initiatives aimed at providing migrant workers and their families pre-departure orientation, skills training, legal support, financial literacy, and psychosocial support. Under the strategic guidance of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MoLESS), SaMi has been offering technical assistance to multiple local governments, aiding in enhancing their capabilities and integrating labour migration into their institutional framework. This support has involved assisting in crafting safer migration guidelines, developing migration profiles, integrating foreign employment into regular plans, and bolstering labour and employment sections/units within local government structures. At the provincial level, the programme has facilitated the formulation of labour and employment policies.¹⁴

By arming migrants with information and tools to make informed decisions, particularly through MRCs and sub-MRCs guided by the MRC (Operation and Management) Procedures, 2078 (2021),¹⁵ SaMi has sought to protect (aspirant) migrant workers from fraud and deception by recruitment agencies, agents and employers. In addition, the programme has worked to improve regulations, fortify frameworks pertaining to migration policy, and enhance monitoring of recruitment agencies to guarantee adherence to legal and ethical standards. Furthermore, SaMi's initiatives have greatly increased public awareness of the dangers of risky migration practices and given migrants the power to stand up for their rights. Included in the remit of MRCs is their ability to facilitate migrants and their families to have access to justice and support, not only in Nepal but in the destination countries too. Essentially, the SaMi Programme has developed into a

mainstay of Nepal's efforts to reduce the risks encountered by migrant workers, with a view to fostering a more informed and safer environment for individuals seeking opportunities overseas while preserving their safety, rights and dignity.

SaMi works with key stakeholders at the national, provincial and local levels, including its thematic partners, the Pravasi Nepali Coordination Committee (PNCC), the People Forum for Human Rights (People Forum), the Centre for Mental Health and Counselling-Nepal (CMC-Nepal), the Development Project Service Centre-Nepal (DEPROSC-Nepal), and Ujyaalo Multimedia Pvt. Ltd.¹⁶ SaMi's partnerships with these stakeholders is mainly to enhance the technical capacity of the programme implementation team.

A more effective management of labour migration is a clearly identified priority for Nepal. The government has endeavored to ensure the safety of Nepali migrant workers through a range of national and sub-national policies, bilateral agreements, and active engagements in regional and global policy dialogues. As such, SaMi's initiatives have directly supported the Government of Nepal (GoN) achieve its international and regional commitments such as those made in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, and the Colombo Process, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Why a Learning Document?

The documentation of lessons learned constitutes an integral part of any programme through which scarce knowledge is identified and recorded, validating the programme's work as well as helping to improve performance and building expertise. The SaMi Programme represents a crucial intervention in Nepal's labour migration sector. With over 13 years of implementation, the creation of a comprehensive learning document becomes increasingly significant to consolidate and report the vast learnings garnered over time. The learning document facilitates the transfer of knowledge to governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, helps eliminate mistakes, perpetuates good practices, and elucidates future implications, iterations and actions. Learning can occur throughout and across the programme elements and components within individuals or processes and practices. This document amalgamates these learnings into a collective whole and captures both successes and failures, and is grounded in data and experiences. The focus has been placed at the programme and component levels and the lessons gleaned are both specific to the SaMi Programme and also applicable to the implementing agencies.

1.1 Objective

The primary aim of this study is to create a comprehensive learning document based on the activities carried out by SaMi in the third phase of implementation. Specifically, the goals include capturing:

1. the major achievements at outcome and output levels, including testimonies of change brought in the lives of migrants and their families;
2. learning and challenges related to the modalities of programme interventions that evolved over the implementation period;
3. policy-level interventions, including contribution to institutionalising migration-related services in Nepal, particularly at the local level;
4. learning around intergovernmental collaboration and programme implementation through local governments, and
5. learnings and challenges while coordinating and collaborating with all the three levels of the government and related agencies in Nepal and in the countries of destination.

2. METHODOLOGY

The data collection strategy for the preparation of the learning document involved gathering both quantitative data from the SaMi Programme, such as programme statistics and impact metrics, as well as qualitative data, such as beneficiary (migrants and their family members) experiences, stakeholder feedback, and anecdotes. Interviews, group discussions and document analysis were used as tools to extract information from diverse actors from multiple research sites, such as programme staff, migrant beneficiaries and families, partner organisations, and other stakeholders, including governments involved at all levels. All these tools were enriched by observations by the researchers themselves. The use of both qualitative and quantitative data provided the study with both depth and breadth, allowing for a deeper understanding of SaMi and its various components. The data was triangulated as far as possible to nullify respondent bias and ensure that the data reported is valid and reliable. The detailed methodology is presented in Annex 1.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Thematic Interventions of SaMi Programme

The SaMi Programme's interventions can be categorised into five components: access to information; access to justice; psychosocial support; vocational skills training, and financial literacy, with each entailing different interventions (Table 1).

Table 1: Thematic interventions of SaMi Programme

Theme	Major interventions
Access to information	Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs)
	Community outreach and returnee volunteer mobilisation
	Media mobilisation
Access to justice	Legal aid
	Legal counselling
	Paralegal support
Psychosocial counselling	Individual
	Group
Vocational skills training	Skills training through Training Management Institutes (TMIs)
Financial literacy	Financial literacy classes

Lesson 1: Relevant information and skills are important to ensure safe, dignified and beneficial foreign employment for Nepali migrant workers and their families. Unethical recruitment practices are prevalent in the foreign employment market in both Nepal and destination countries. This is mainly due to power imbalances, with a surplus of workers compared to the number of available jobs,¹⁷ a predominance of low-skilled Nepali migrant workers,¹⁸ and the involvement of informal agents.¹⁹ These factors significantly increase the vulnerability of migrant workers. This market environment necessitates government intervention to prevent and reduce the vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers. The SaMi Programme represents this intervention as it works to increase access to information, access to justice, psychosocial support, and the skills of migrant workers before and after departure as well as providing financial literacy classes predominantly to members of remittance-receiving households. The number of beneficiaries served through SaMi has increased throughout the years as the programme has expanded to more districts. The programme benefited more than two million (aspirant) migrant workers and their families in total in this third phase (Table 2 and 3).

The programme found that with relevant information and skills, migrant workers can make informed decisions and are likely to avoid deceit and fraud. Likewise, migrant workers with skills training—both technical and soft skills—have a higher probability of obtaining higher-skilled jobs and quicker promotions, reducing their risk of vulnerability. The presence of MRC counsellors during case facilitation can help migrant workers and their families navigate complexities in accessing justice in Nepal. Similarly, psychosocial counselling contributes to reducing any psychosocial health issues experienced by migrant workers' families while the financial literacy component helps them save and invest, preparing for the eventual return of the migrant workers and thus ameliorating one of the major drivers of re-migration.

Table 2: SaMi beneficiaries by component and fiscal year

Service type	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Total
Access to Information (through MRCs/sub-MRCs)	87,377	78,936	108,803	237,946	401,420	424,895	1,339,377
Access to Information (through community outreach, including Returnee Volunteers [RVs] reach)	6,564	5,124	49,580	72,925	279,158	357,993	771,344
Access to Justice	3,398	3,641	4,231	6,643	6,508	7,414	31,835
Financial Literacy (including psychosocial group counselling)	717	3,180	13,929	14,320	14,761	15,302	62,209
Psychosocial Service	336	344	2,392	3,284	3,408	4,252	14,016
Vocational Skills Training	1,229	1,071	950	1,747	1,528	2,187	8,712
Total	99,621	92,296	179,885	336,865	706,783	812,043	2,227,493

Table 3: SaMi beneficiaries by component and gender

Service type and reach	Men	Women	Total
Access to Information (through MRCs/sub-MRCs)	972,606	366,771	1,339,377
Access to Information (through community outreach, including RV reach)	462,398	308,946	771,344
Access to Justice	29,074	2,761	31,835
Financial Literacy (including psychosocial group counselling)	1,259	60,950	62,209
Psychosocial Service	1,436	12,580	14,016
Vocational Skills Training	6,721	1,991	8,712



Community orientation at Khartamchha, Kepilashgadhi Rural Municipality–2, Khotang

Lesson 2: Component-wise focus of the SaMi Programme has helped build understanding and ownership among local-level representatives and officials. The component-wise focus of SaMi makes the results more visible and allows for smooth political navigation—particularly in placating inter-party tensions—during Working Committee meetings for committing budget and other resources. Similar disaggregation at the implementation level streamlines the programme’s framework, allowing local representatives and government officials to gauge each component on its own. This, thus, simplifies the programme to the output level with a focus on on-the-ground results, removing any complexities in the programme’s functioning, particularly considering the limited time available to local representatives and government officials for research. With results being tangible, it was reported that there is little party-based opposition in decision-making. Likewise, this segregation also renders foreign employment with a cross-cutting issue that allows ownership by local-level politicians without being seen as promoting foreign employment.

Lesson 3: Effective implementation of existing laws and policies on safe migration remains a crucial issue to protect migrant workers. Most migrant workers use PRAs or informal agents to help them navigate the complex recruitment process.²⁰ However, many migrant workers do not receive relevant information from PRAs or informal agents about the process of migration and its implications for the future, and often are not able to convey important information about their migration to their families. This is evidenced by the fact that many migrant workers remain unaware of the benefits due to them, despite contributing to the Foreign Employment Welfare Fund (FEWF)²¹ and insurance²² while obtaining labour permits. Because of this, many migrant workers or their families do not apply for compensation in cases of death of the migrant worker and injury. Representatives of MRCs highlighted many instances of counsellors informing and supporting migrant workers and their families to claim compensation. In addition,

the programme experienced an increase in the number of such cases received by the MRCs, all of which can be attributed to improvement in access to information by migrant workers.

The programme found that while information provided through the MRCs seems to be effective when it pertains to migrant workers 'leaving documents at home' and 'reducing pre-departure costs through negotiation', it is lower for 'obtaining receipts of pre-departure payment'. In the case of the latter, access to information alone may not suffice (see Annex 2). It is important to note that most migrant workers have a compulsion to migrate in a supply-heavy market and, as such, possess little bargaining strength against the recruiter. As a result, they are compelled to act according to the recruiter's demands, even if they are aware that they need to pay only a certain amount as per existing policies such as 'free-visa, free-ticket' and obtain a receipt for the same from recruitment agencies or agents, highlighting further the effective implementation of existing policies and other interventions.

The GoN has not been able to fully implement its 'free-visa, free-ticket' policy and the 'employer pays' principle, which asserts that the employer in the destination country should bear the costs of migration, with migrant workers needing to pay a maximum of NPR 10,000 for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Malaysia. However, migrant workers have continued to pay exorbitant recruitment fees and other migration-related costs to go abroad.²³ The MRCs inform (aspiring) migrants about the existing policies in recruitment fees but the latter undergo a contrasting experience for the most part since implementation is generally lacking. This difference in policy and implementation endangers the goodwill and legitimacy of the MRCs as (aspiring) migrants are likely to believe that information from the MRCs is not always accurate. Effective implementation of existing legal and policy provisions is necessary in order to retain general goodwill towards MRCs.

Lesson 4: Programmes need to be adaptable and flexible to effectively respond to changing conditions and emerging challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted the movement of people globally, including in Nepal, created difficulties in the implementation of the SaMi Programme with many of its mandated activities halted for many months. Adapting to the challenge of the lockdown, SaMi introduced tele-counselling services to migrant workers and their families.²⁴ Psychosocial support was also extended to quarantine and isolation centres. Likewise, the programme reconfigured its vocational skills training component to include returnee migrant workers in order to support their reintegration.

Table 4: SaMi's COVID-specific achievements

Programme reach	Legal aid for returnees in quarantine facilities at hotels in Kathmandu (by People Forum)			Psychosocial first-aid counselling via telephone			Psychosocial first-aid counselling in group quarantine		
	M	W	Total	M	W	Total	M	W	Total
Year 2 (16.7.19–15.7.20)	-	-	-	3,941	5,785	9,726	4,540	1,066	5,606
Year 3 (16.7.20–15.7.21)	1,161	1	1,162	3,983	4,310	8,293	10,699	2,361	13,060
Year 4 (16.07.21–15.07.22)	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,319	138	1,457
Cumulative achievement of the phase (16.09.18–15.07.2024)	1,161	1	1,162	7,924	10,095	18,019	16,558	3,565	20,123

3.2 Access to Information

Access to information is a crucial component of the SaMi Programme and aims to ensure that migrant workers make informed choices, go for foreign employment with all the correct information on hand, and avoid risks and vulnerabilities in the process. The programme has a number of major interventions to improve access to information for migrant workers, namely MRCs, community outreach, and engagement with concerned stakeholders, including elected representatives, police, Returnee Migrant Networks (RMNs), and engagement with the media through media mobilisation, including interaction with journalists.

Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs)

Strategically located within the premises of the DAO, MRCs serve the dual purpose of operating as a point of information and linking migrant workers to other necessary support services before, during and after migration.²⁵ MRCs host two counsellors—one for general counselling and another for case facilitation. Currently everyone applying for a passport, including students and those travelling for leisure, are required to mandatorily visit the MRCs to receive counselling.²⁶ The MRC counsellors provide visitors with information on all aspects of the migration process, including inter alia, proper process of labour migration, recruitment costs, significance of skills training, and risks associated with migration.²⁷ They also detail good practices such as obtaining a labour permit, conducting a medical test, being insured, documenting transactions with intermediaries, leaving copies of documents with family members, and obtaining receipts from recruitment agencies. Furthermore, the MRCs also disseminate information on free skills training, psychosocial counselling and financial literacy classes provided by SaMi as well as access-to-justice mechanisms available to migrant workers.²⁸ Not only this, MRCs also provide a source of information and support for those who visit the MRC, not only aspiring migrants, but families of migrant workers, and returnee migrants.

Lesson 5: Compulsory visits to MRCs ensure migrant workers are oriented on safe migration processes and practices. The existing requirement of visiting the MRC when obtaining one's passport is a successful approach. The programme found that without embedding the visit in the passport-obtaining process, exposure of aspiring migrant workers to the information provided by MRCs would decline drastically. This required visit represents a costless but effective mechanism to augment visitors to the MRCs and, in consequence, the orientation of (aspiring) migrant workers to information on safe migration. A comparison of MRC visitors and labour permits issued showcases the increasing reach of the MRCs, with the MRC visitors to labour permits issued ratio increasing from 40 per cent in 2018/19 to 81 per cent in 2022/23.²⁹ Without this, the Nepali government would have had to spend a considerable amount to obtain this level of beneficiary outreach.

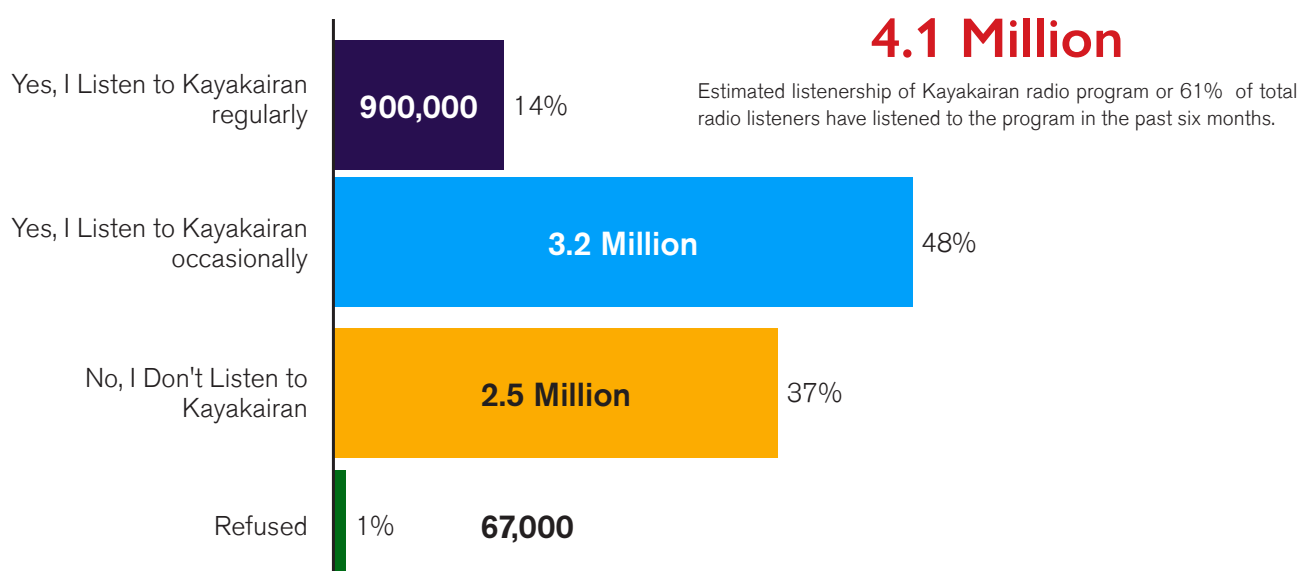


Local government representatives during a monitoring visit to the Migrant Resource Centre in Gorkha.

MRC representatives said that migrant workers only understand the importance of the information provided by the MRCs once they experience distress. In that sense even those visitors in a rush to finish the process of acquiring their passports will know the point of contact in case they face any problems. Thus, counselling at the MRCs represents a crucial avenue for migrant workers' access to information and justice.

Lesson 6: Utilisation of mass media platforms amplifies information on safer migration practices and augments the reach of the SaMi Programme. The SaMi Programme mobilises media at both the national and local levels to increase its reach to people throughout the country. One of its primary interventions for this is “Kayakairan”, the flagship radio news bulletin of Ujyaalo Network—SaMi's media partner—that broadcasts public service announcements (PSAs) through 200 FM radio stations. A study showed that Kayakairan has a reach of 4.1 million, with 900,000 people reporting they are regular listeners. Similarly, at the local level in all 38 districts, local FM radio stations, contracted through SaMi by the local government, also broadcast PSAs regularly.

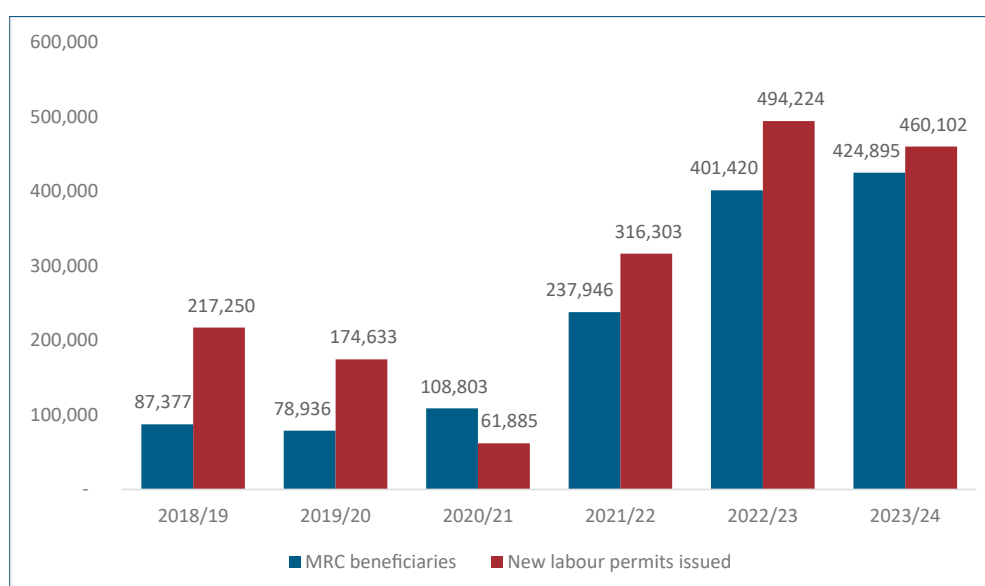
Have you heard Ujyaalo Radio Network's Kayakairan News Bulletin in the past six months?



Source: Sharecast

The Ujyaalo Network also regularly creates content related to safer migration, such as case studies of current and returnee migrant workers, video stories on financial literacy and psychosocial counselling, and video tutorials on processing migration from Nepal. They then share it through various online and social media platforms like Facebook, where it boasts 1.6 million followers. One such post that provided a tutorial on safer migration processes reached over 650,000 people within a few days.³⁰ The use of various media ensures all potential beneficiaries, including migrant workers in various destination countries, can avail themselves of the content, which is also archived for accessibility. The SaMi Programme's activities through the Ujyaalo Network thus reiterate and reinforce its messages disseminated through MRCs and other media on a larger scale, greatly accentuating their impact. It also contributes to the resolution of workers who are missing and other cases, as media reports increase people's awareness and puts pressure on decision-makers. Aspirant migrants have also visited MRCs and attended skills training programmes after receiving information from the radio/FMs.

Figure 2: Comparison of MRC visitors and labour permits issued



Source: SaMi MIS and DoFE

Information provided by MRCs is as important for returnees as for aspirants

Suhang Gurung (name changed) had to return to Nepal because the company he worked for fired him and dozens of others at the same time. Currently he works in a local sweets shop, earning NPR 15,000 to 20,000 per month. He has not committed to opening a shop himself due to fears of failure, as he can see many empty shutters in his locality. He says that he attempted to re-migrate to various countries after his initial return to Nepal, but has been unsuccessful thus far. Now, he is planning to make a final attempt for Romania; if this is not successful, he plans to stay in Nepal. He is already 43 years old and realises that he will not be able to work for long overseas if he does not migrate immediately. He is adamant about migrating because his earnings in Nepal are not even sufficient to pay for his children's education. He is also aware of the future costs of education for his children.

He arrived at the DAO in Kapilvastu to renew his passport and was asked to make the mandatory Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) visit. The MRC staff informed him of the importance of being skilled and using a banking channel for transactions, as it can be used as evidence in cases of fraud, among others. He says that all of the information provided is crucial for migrant workers and is to their benefit. He added: "many returnees might think they do not need counselling because they have already stayed abroad. But this may not always be the case. The foreign employment system changes periodically. The same system may not have been in place when they initially migrated. The information from a decade-long stay does not matter much if laws change on a monthly basis. The MRCs, however, are able to inform us of these things. For example, I went abroad in 2007 without a medical test in Nepal, but if one fails a medical test in the destination country now then one not only has to return home but also loses the amount invested as recruitment costs. I also found out today that I can come to the MRC in case of distress during any period of the migration cycle. Without that information I would have gone to Kathmandu and filed a case at a police station. The information provided by MRCs also reassures us because a government-run entity would not provide false information."

Lesson 7: Placement of MRCs at DAO is not only effective but also promotes ownership of the programme by the Chief District Officer (CDO) and the DAO. The MRCs at DAOs have helped the SaMi Programme to have greater access to its beneficiaries—(aspirant) migrant workers. MRC's positioning within the government office has also facilitated MRC counsellors in building trust with the beneficiaries and handling cases. As DAOs represent a district-wide body with significant powers, this confers legitimacy on the MRCs. Furthermore, the programme found that the CDOs and the DAOs are more likely to take ownership of the MRCs when they are placed within the DAO. The 2019 amendment to the Foreign Employment Act has mandated CDOs with the responsibility of case mediation in individual cases related to foreign employment. Considering that MRCs primarily identify these cases and forward them to the CDOs, a good working relationship between the two is of the utmost importance. The strategic placement of MRCs within the DAO fosters this relationship and ensures the identification of cases and their quick resolution.

Lesson 8: Information provided through MRCs needs to be continually relevant to emerging trends and changes in policies in Nepal and the country of destination. Nepal's labour migration sector is characterised by regular changes in laws, policies and other developments. Although most of the aspiring migrant workers from Nepal still seek employment in the GCC countries and Malaysia, countries in Europe have started becoming prominent CoDs.³¹ These countries differ from the traditional ones in a number of ways but primarily in terms of occupation, circumstances of work, recruitment cost, and work culture. Thus, the programme has updated its training content with information related to newer labour destinations, and with country-specific profiles for six new European destinations. This proactive approach can help many (aspirant) migrant workers avoid risks in recruitment and distress in these newer destinations.

Since the role of the MRC counsellors, and RVs in particular, is to provide accurate information to beneficiaries, it is essential that they themselves remain cognisant of the latest developments both in Nepal and in CoDs, a difficult proposition under any circumstance. Further, the multi-stakeholder framework of the SaMi Programme necessitates regular revisits of its function for its staff at the local level. Accordingly, SaMi has been conducting regular refresher training to orient its staff on any recent developments as well as for their capacity development. Likewise, circulation of press clippings related to labour migration issues and policies also aids in keeping them up to date.



A local agent in Dhanusha returns the money to the father of a potential migrant after failing to send him abroad for employment.

Lesson 9: The National Migrant Resource Centre (NMRC) is an important entity for strengthening local-level MRCs and their institutionalisation but needs improved capacities and resources for better functioning.

The NMRC was established with the important role of controlling quality, capacitating staff and building uniformity across all MRCs while also ensuring the implementation of the MRC handbook.³² To that end, the NMRC has conducted training events and monitoring visits as well as publishing information, education and communication (IEC) materials in line with the Migrant Resource Centre (Operation and Management) Procedures, 2078 (2021). Its role also extends to supporting MRCs in case facilitation, particularly making suggestions in complex cases. However, the balancing of the two could be difficult because of the incongruence between the NMRC mandate and the staff allocated to fulfil it. To make the NMRC more effective, it is necessary that it be provided more financial and human resources. The NMRC staff otherwise will not be able to perform tasks of quality control and instil uniformity across MRCs since a significant portion of their time is spent assisting with case facilitation.

It is also important to build the capacity of the NMRC staff themselves through training to ensure they can perform their quality control responsibilities efficiently and effectively. Furthermore, training manuals need to be developed to facilitate training or orientation of MRCs by the NMRC. This is crucial as MRCs are now being established in six non-participating districts as well. The NMRC will be crucial in maintaining the quality of newer MRCs.

Community Outreach

Predominantly conducted by RVs and social mobilisers,³³ community outreach entails in-depth and community-level orientation and discussions on labour migration as well as door-to-door visits.³⁴ This approach expands the outreach of information provided to (aspiring) migrant workers and their families, functioning as a critical referral mechanism for MRCs and, as a result, helping those with poor accessibility or knowledge of MRCs. RVs thus play a critical role in identifying potential migrant workers and referring them to MRCs for support and assistance.

Lesson 10: Use of returnees as volunteers is an innovative approach that benefits from lived experiences of returnee migrant workers.

The SaMi Programme has provisions in its implementation framework for the employment of returnees as RVs. Returnees have the lived experience of foreign employment and understand the circumstances of other migrant workers. They also possess a high level of motivation to work as many of them experienced distress themselves and are driven to prevent the same for others. They also receive additional training from SaMi to help them work as community mobilisers and to refer complicated cases to MRCs. This engagement has also contributed to preventing them from remigrating.

Lesson 11: Recognition of RVs by local level governments helps them build trust in community.

As RVs conduct most of their work at the community level, they do not obtain automatic recognition through association with local government bodies such as, for instance, MRC counsellors do because of their placement at the DAO. RVs need to build trust in the community to make their task of information dissemination and case identification effective. A successful practice, seen in multiple local governments, seems to be providing them with municipal uniforms and ID cards since this helps reduce suspicions within the community. The continued presence of informal agents in Nepal's labour migration landscape makes it extremely necessary to distinguish RVs with official recognition so there is no confusion between the two.

Lesson 12: Community outreach and RVs in particular play a crucial role in servicing beneficiaries seeking confidentiality.

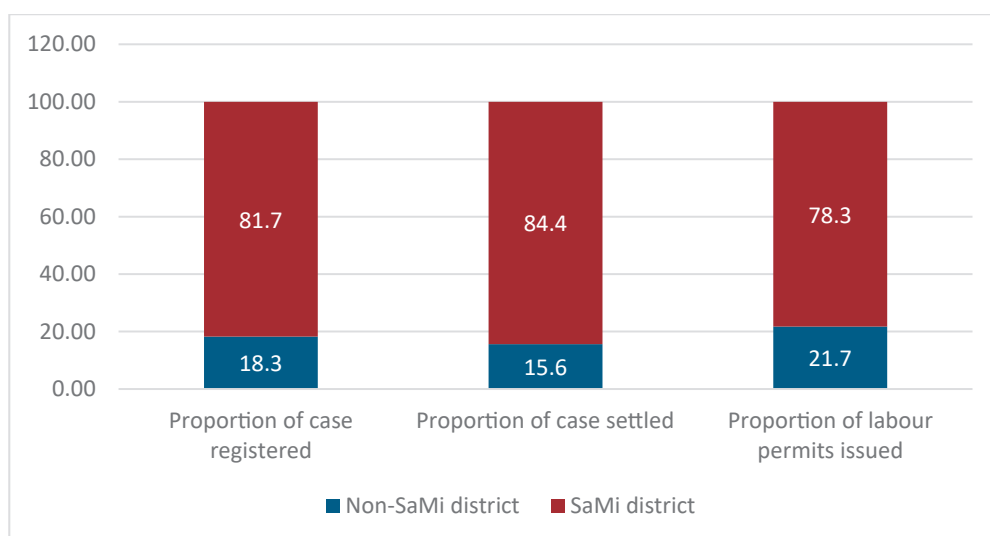
Migrant workers and their families, especially women migrant workers and women left at home, may encounter stigma, prejudice and discrimination from their family and local community due to their increased social interaction resulting from the increased responsibilities of family management and their migrant status.³⁵ Because of this, migrant workers and their family members are often wary of sharing their grievances, if any. Even though MRC counsellors strive to provide confidentiality, some districts do

not have separate counselling rooms, making it difficult for aggrieved migrant workers and their families to approach them confidentially. The MRC visit may be scrutinised in the community, as a result of which many cases may remain hidden. The door-to-door visits made by the RVs have been crucial in uncovering cases since these visits provide an opportunity to keep discussions clandestine, reassuring the victims of their safety from societal surveillance. This is particularly relevant for those requiring case facilitation or psychosocial support.

Lesson 13: Extensive community outreach offsets the influence of informal agents on aspiring migrant workers. Informal agents remain pervasive in Nepal's labour migration industry and in most cases these agents are people known to the aspirant migrant workers. These agents can have a strong presence in their community, influencing and even 'brainwashing' aspiring migrant workers before their MRC visits. The SaMi Programme found that most beneficiaries trust informal agents more than the information from MRCs. This, coupled with the desperation to migrate abroad and the allure of higher income, can render the information provided by MRCs ineffective. In such an environment, according to government officials and SaMi Programme staff, it is paramount that the community outreach activities are made more extensive to offset the narratives spread by informal agents at the community level, which would also make the information provided through the MRCs more effective besides sensitising the wider public on safer migration practices and labour migration-related services.

Lesson 14: High number of cases registered by people from participating SaMi districts and local municipalities/rural municipalities highlight the importance of community outreach. A significant number of cases are registered for mediation at the DAO in participating SaMi districts.³⁶ This points to the need for expanding such services to all districts. Even considering the fact that SaMi has been strategic with its choice of districts by taking into account the outflow of migrant workers, the number of cases registered in non-SaMi districts is still not commensurate with the outflow of migrant workers.³⁷ The proportion of settled cases is, for instance, lower than the proportion of labour permits issued from non-SaMi districts. For participating SaMi districts, the proportions of cases registered and settled are both higher than the proportion of labour permits issued (Figure 3). This also shows that without similar intervention, it is less likely there will be automatic learning in non-participating districts. It will take some time for the government to establish MRCs or sub-MRCs across all districts but community orientation can be expanded immediately to reach those aggrieved but who do not have the wherewithal to access justice.

Figure 3: Comparison of cases registered and settled with labour permits issued between SaMi and non-SaMi districts in 2022/23

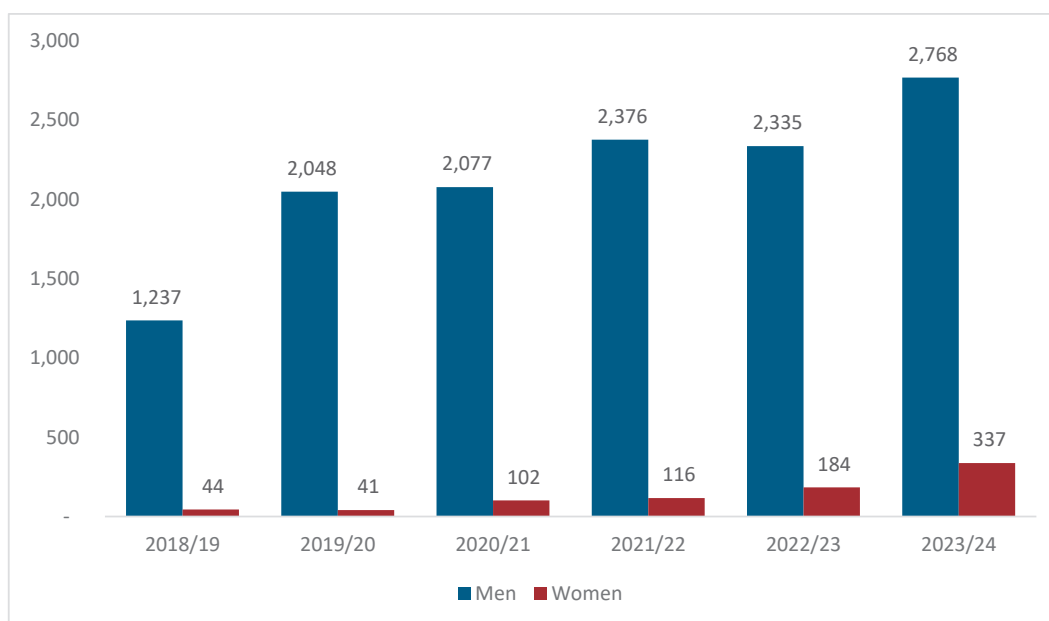


Source: People Forum, Annual Progress Report 16 July 2022—15 July 2023; DoFE.
Note: This is the data for cases registered and settled at DoFE.

3.3 Access to Justice

The SaMi Programme has been providing legal aid and legal counselling to distressed migrant workers and their families and linking them with justice mechanisms in Nepal on a variety of cases.ⁱ The MRCs closely coordinate with the CDO at the DAO, the FEB, the DoFE, the DoCS, diplomatic missions, insurance companies and thematic partners, among others, for the facilitation of the cases received. SaMi has partnered with an NGO, People Forum, which provides free legal aid and paralegal services to migrant workers and their families, along with facilitation services such as those for drafting complaints, photocopying and stamping, counselling and follow-up services including evidence generation for policy reform and advocacy.³⁸ Furthermore, the SaMi Programme, through its another partner organisation, the PNCC, provides paralegal support, rapid response and remedial services to migrant workers facing difficulties in various CoDs (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Beneficiaries in CoDs through PNCC



Source: PNCC, Annual Progress Report (16 July 2023 to 15 July 2024).

Lesson 15: Mandate for CDOs to handle and mediate grievances/cases related to individuals is largely victim-centric and reduces the workload at DoFE. The 2019 amendment to the Foreign Employment Act, 2007, conferred authority to the CDO to mediate foreign employment-related cases against individuals.³⁹ The amendment decentralised access-to-justice mechanisms for migrant workers and their families, with many cases being resolved at the district level, removing the need for migrant workers and their families to make trips to Kathmandu to seek redress. This has made the case facilitation services under the programme more effective, with coordination between the CDO and the DAO positive in most districts. It is noteworthy, however, that many non-participating SaMi districts have yet to recognise the mandate of the CDO.⁴⁰

The programme also found that it is necessary to orient and capacitate government staff in the case section of the DAO on foreign employment and its access-to-justice framework so that they can effectively handle the cases lodged with them. In this regard, the programme has also conducted orientation and consultation programmes, in collaboration with the DoFE, with CDOs and DAO staff, especially those in the case section, with regard to their mandates and ensuring access to justice for migrant workers. However, due to a lack of

ⁱ Cases include but are not limited to missing, jailed and death cases; medical emergencies; contract-related issues such as fraud or substitution; passport confiscation, and cases requiring repatriation and compensation.

guidelines on mediation, CDOs reported difficulties in effectively carrying out mediation on individual cases. Recognising the need for specific guidelines on mediation, SaMi facilitated the development of a “Case Mediation and Referral Guideline” for CDOs, assisting them in resolving cases at the district level and also establishing inter-district coordination among CDOs.

Lesson 16: Acceptance of digital forms of evidence expedites migrant workers’ access to justice.

Notwithstanding the government’s laws and policies that bans informal agents, they remain a reality in Nepal’s labour migration landscape. The programme found that (aspiring) migrant workers’ transactions with agents mostly involve informal means of documentation. Even in the case of PRAs, they were found to be without evidence of transactions. As a result, in cases of fraud, (aspiring) migrant workers may not have any concrete evidence. However, the DAO, after the approval of the Case Mediation and Referral Guideline 2080 (2024), has started to accept digital forms of evidence such as phone recordings, screenshots of text messages, and bank vouchers, mentioning foreign employment, among others. This circumvents the absence of formal evidence, which is the norm in dealings with informal agents and even PRAs. In the context of Nepal’s labour migration, this represented an important change for access to justice for migrant workers. However, there remains an abundance of cases, as highlighted by MRC case facilitators and thematic partners, where even this digital documentation is not present. Additionally, recruitment agencies and agents, in recent years, have started using alternative methods to receive money from migrant workers.

Legal officers from thematic partners working under the SaMi Programme said that pending cases mostly include those with non-existent or inadequate evidence. In many cases, the transaction for foreign employment is not mentioned, even though the money was sent through banking channels. Without this specification, quasi-judicial and judicial bodies—the CDO, DoFE, and the Foreign Employment Tribunal (FET)—do not have the mandate to adjudicate the matter. Hence, MRCs and RVs emphasise this aspect while disseminating information in order to improve migrant workers’ orientation on the critical issue. Including a ‘foreign employment’ option in the bank vouchers as the reason for the transaction would also help migrant workers generate evidence easily.

Lesson 17: It is necessary to expand cross-district collaboration on case facilitation. Cross-district cases, where the accuser and alleged perpetrators belong to different districts, also represent a challenge for MRCs and DAOs in successful case facilitation. It becomes difficult to identify and bring the alleged perpetrators to the DAO for case mediation and adjudication, which leads to the case being pending or unsolved. Although a few resolved cross-district cases were mentioned, those were the exceptions. It is necessary to expand cross-district coordination and collaboration to resolve such cases. This should include both inter-MRC and inter-DAO coordination as well as with Employment Service Centres (ESCs) located in non-participating local governments. The case mediation and referral guideline to the CDO developed by SaMi provides the framework for inter-district collaboration between CDOs in foreign employment-related cases.

Lesson 18: Elected representatives, judicial committees and local-level mediators are reliable sources of case referrals, and they can play a part in facilitation as well. The programme found that local governments and elected representatives, judicial committees/local-level mediators, particularly ward officials, are important sources of case referrals. As the first point of contact for many individuals within the community, these officials play a crucial role in identifying and referring cases to the appropriate authorities. Although ward officials do not have mandates in case facilitation or mediation, some MRCs reported that inviting ward officials to the mediation of individual cases at the DAO was effective in reaching reconciliation between the contesting parties.

Likewise, the Constitution of Nepal authorises each rural municipality and municipality to form a three-

member judicial committee under the chairpersonship of the vice-chair or deputy mayor to settle disputes under their respective jurisdictions.⁴¹ However, it has been observed that judicial committees at the local level often lack awareness and understanding of their mandates, leading to misconceptions that they can handle any type of case. Even though there is no legal provision allowing these committees to handle cases related to foreign employment, they have been found to do so; a situation that could potentially lead to legal complications in the future. Therefore, it is crucial to orient deputy mayors and vice chairs, including local-level mediators, on the importance of referring cases to the CDO while supporting the process by helping with the collection of evidence and informing individuals about existing legal provisions. Recognising the important role of local governments and judicial committees and that merely enhancing the capacity of deputy mayors is not sufficient, SaMi expanded its training programme to include all deputy mayors, ward chairs, and mediators at the local municipality level, thus aiming to ensure a more informed and effective judicial committee system.

Lesson 19: The SaMi Programme has highlighted the importance of decentralising services provided through FET and FEB. With the increase in people's access to information, the number of registered cases related to foreign employment as well as compensation claims, insurance, scholarships, economic assistance, rescue and repatriation, among others, has been rising and is likely to increase in the foreseeable future. This will exert commensurate pressure on the workloads of officials in the FEB and the FET. The centralised nature of these institutions also creates a barrier for migrant workers and their families to access justice. Hence, it is necessary to decentralise services such as investigation, prosecution and justice systems to the provincial levels to both reduce their workloads and to improve migrant workers' access to justice.

Lesson 20: Incomplete and insufficient information, and difficulties in identification of alleged perpetrators hinder effective progress and resolution of cases related to access to justice. With regard to cases of fraud and cheating, lack of human resources, both within the government offices and with thematic partners, cause delays in access to justice for migrant workers including when registering the cases or referring the cases to the FET. This is particularly pertinent given the number of cases registered every day; lack of or incomplete/insufficient evidence; challenges in identification of alleged perpetrators, especially when they go into hiding; having the wrong addresses or incorrect identification, and complainants being out of reach either because of their return home or re-migration. Also, when an arrest warrant is issued, the responsibility shifts to the Nepal Police, and unless the alleged perpetrators are arrested, neither the DAO nor the DoFE can do anything. Likewise, in institutional cases, a first information report (FIR) needs to be registered and although there is a provision to file these cases at the district level, government institutions require such cases be filed at the DoFE. As a result, victims have to travel to the DoFE in Kathmandu to register an FIR, and when the victims do not have complete or concrete evidence, this further burdens the migrant workers and makes the process long. To this end, there is a need to enhance the capacity of investigation and monitoring officers within the DoFE. The programme also found that regular interactions with police, government lawyers, and judges are crucial for ongoing improvement and collaboration. Additionally, as per a DoFE official, the frequent transfer of staff poses a significant challenge that must be addressed to ensure continuity and effectiveness in investigations and monitoring.

Lesson 21: Networks are important in providing migration services in destination countries. Certain types of cases, such as missing persons, deaths, and those involving incarcerated individuals (in the destination countries) tend to take a significantly longer time to update and resolve. These cases require meticulous investigation, coordination with various authorities in Nepal and in the destination countries, and often face bureaucratic hurdles that contribute to delays. The programme found that the appointment of outreach officers and volunteers in the destination countries, in coordination with Nepali diplomatic

missions and relevant government agencies of destination countries, has helped provide easier and quicker facilitation of such cases. However, as these officers and volunteers are only in four destination countries (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates [UAE], Qatar, and Malaysia), cases from other countries take longer to be solved as alternative measures need to be deployed. Network and diaspora organisations such as the Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA) and the Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA) have been mobilised to facilitate rescue and repatriation, highlighting the importance of expanding national and internal networks to support migrant workers in destination countries.

Additionally, Nepali diplomatic missions are crucial to ensuring access to justice for migrant workers. However, coordination with diplomatic missions has been described as difficult.⁴² Lack of prompt responses from diplomatic missions to outreach officers can cause delays in receiving updates on the cases and informing migrant workers or their families. In such cases, MRC counsellors, who had referred the cases, can face pressure from family members.

It is also important to orient MRC counsellors in particular on the duration of legal process, laws, policies and procedures in the destination countries as well as limitations faced by thematic partners and the diplomatic missions in handling cases. For example, fulfilling the procedures for repatriation of dead bodies from Saudi Arabia takes at least two months, but family members of the deceased might expect immediate action. Similarly, it may take a considerable period of time for volunteers and outreach officers to locate missing or jailed migrant workers in destination countries. MRC counsellors need to be aware of these impediments and communicate the same to the family members.

Lesson 22: Collaboration between thematic partners and government agencies has helped to expedite service delivery to migrant workers and their families. Thematic partners have significantly expedited service delivery to migrant workers and their families. The arrangement, such as through the placement of case officers at the DoFE, FET, and FEB, and the appointment of outreach officers and volunteers in destination countries, helps them bypass bureaucratic delays and streamline processes. This may not be possible if they are appointed as government staff or the tasks they perform are shifted to such officials. In these cases, they will be found to adhere to formal government procedures, significantly slowing down service delivery. The absence of the current informal mechanism may create a vacuum, requiring more resources to be allocated and a rapid response mechanism to be developed within the diplomatic missions, DoFE, FEB, and DoCS.

Lesson 23: Police are crucial for case referrals and facilitation. It is common for distressed individuals unaware of Nepal's foreign employment laws to first approach the police with their complaints. Besides arresting alleged perpetrators in foreign employment-related cases, the police are vital for referring cases to MRCs and the DAOs. They need to be oriented on access-to-justice mechanisms in foreign employment-related cases as well as understand their context and patterns to be able to provide effective service and refer these distressed individuals to the correct institution. If this is not the case, access to justice for individuals approaching the police can be compromised. The SaMi Programme has been training district-level police on foreign employment and safe migration – an effort that should be continued and expanded. The programme also recognised that having a designated focal person within the police force further facilitates the effective coordination and prioritisation of these cases, as demonstrated in districts where this approach has been implemented.

Lesson 24: Collaboration between DoCS and MRCs has facilitated resolution of rescue and repatriation cases. The DoCS has provided access to its online complaint handling system to MRCs in 43 districts, allowing MRCs to file rescue and repatriation cases and receive updates. This initiative has connected MRCs with the DoCS and diplomatic missions and provided them real-time data on sensitive cases. As families of migrant workers contact MRCs for updates, this access to the DoCS system allows MRC counsellors to convey up-to-date data to them promptly, helping reduce uncertainty-induced stress for families of migrant workers.

Access to justice made easier through MRC

Surendra (name changed) for a long time aspired to go to South Korea. He had a full-time job and was not able to prepare for the EPS (Employment Permit System) exam so he looked around for an alternative. That was when he first heard about a training centre in Biratnagar (place changed) where the proprietor promised to send aspirants to South Korea without the need of EPS.

Surendra was aware of the various fraudulent activities that take place in the name of foreign employment. He was also aware of the existence of the Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) but felt confident about the training centre and the prospect of going to South Korea. However, after paying the full amount, when he asked the training centre for his visa and date of departure, they kept making excuses and pushing back the date. The departure date moved from one week to one month to another. It had been almost three months when Surendra finally started to realise he had been duped. Initially, it was hard for him to accept the fact but after realising it, he visited an MRC.

The counsellor at the MRC listened to his plight, and asked him to collect all his documents, not give the training centre any more money, and also suggested that he submit an official application to establish the case. Rallying his friends from the training centre, he and 18 others jointly submitted their applications to the MRC. Following the counsellor's advice, they gathered evidence by recording their transactions and ensuring payments were made through the bank. Within three to four days, all 19 of them got their money back. Of the 370 people who took the training, over 40 others also submitted applications to the MRC and successfully recovered their money. Surendra credits the MRC for their unwavering support and guidance. Without the MRC, he says, they would have been lost, not knowing where to seek help or how to submit their case. Surendra believes that a resource centre like the MRC should be available at every local level, as there are many cases of defrauding and cheating.

3.4 Psychosocial Support

Migrant workers can face various forms of psychosocial problems arising from the emotional impact of separation from their family, the inability to integrate into the host country's culture, stress due to poor working conditions, excess workload or conflict with colleagues and superiors, and distress-induced trauma. Additionally, female migrant workers are especially vulnerable to mental and sexual abuse.⁴³ Left-behind family members also experience the emotional impact of the migrant worker being away. In the context of Nepal, left-behind wives in particular are stigmatised by society with accusations of adultery and being

spendthrifts. While their workload increases significantly as they have to assume responsibility for children and single-handedly run the household in the absence of their husbands, the stigmatisation by society can engender tremendous psychological stress and trauma. Possible disputes between family members for control over resources also cause stress in migrant households.⁴⁴ In cases of death or injury, left-behind family members can encounter grief and an inability to find a way forward. Identifying this, SaMi introduced a psychosocial support component in 2013 to improve the condition of those experiencing such debilitating psychological stress.⁴⁶ Initially, psychosocial support was only provided to migrant workers' families and returnee migrant workers,⁴⁶ but, recognising its overall importance, local governments decided to extend it to all Nepali citizens, including members of non-migrant households.⁴⁷

SaMi provides psychosocial counselling individually through home visits and also in group sessions to participants of financial literacy classes.⁴⁸ Since the fiscal year 2018/19, a total of 14,016 and 62,209 individuals have benefited, respectively, (see Annex 2). Group sessions are provided to family members of migrant workers, particularly left-behind wives, as part of the financial literacy classes, but with eligibility restricted only to remittance-receiving households.⁴⁹

Lesson 25: Awareness and outreach programmes to destigmatise mental health problems are important at grassroots level. Within many communities, pervasive stigma and a lack of understanding surrounding mental health persist, posing significant obstacles to accessing and seeking psychosocial support. As such, individuals are unlikely to recognise psychosocial problems and seek counselling by themselves, so proper awareness and destigmatisation campaigns regarding the importance of mental health are necessary to increase access and understanding among the general public, including migrant workers and their families. This is because many of those who received counselling reported improved psychosocial well-being (see Annex 2).⁵⁰

Central to the SaMi Programme is its innovative approach of conducting home visits, a strategy that has proven instrumental in encouraging individuals to seek support for their mental health concerns. This proactive outreach approach increases the likelihood of individuals seeking help, emphasising the importance of meeting people where they are. The continuation of home visits is, therefore, crucial to overcoming the barriers in making psychosocial counselling support services more accessible to everyone. The programme found that by extending services beyond the confines of clinical settings and into the homes and neighbourhoods of individuals, the gap between the community and psychosocial counselling services can be reduced, fostering a sense of trust, comfort and familiarity among those in need. Furthermore, the home visit initiative serves as a catalyst for sparking much-needed conversations about mental health within communities. By engaging directly with individuals and families in their own environments, counsellors have the opportunity to not only provide support to clients but also orient families and raise awareness about mental health issues.

After realising its significance through the SaMi Programme, some of the municipalities and wards have started outreach programmes. Many counsellors reported being approached by elected officials to provide support to non-migrant families as well. This could be an indication of the effectiveness of the referral mechanism as well as a decrease in the stigma associated with seeking help for mental health issues. Many of the counsellors have also requested and been provided with mental health awareness in schools for adolescents. Previous studies conducted by SaMi have shown that children of migrant families are likely to face psychosocial problems due to family separation.⁵¹ In this context, outreach programmes in schools can play an important role in destigmatising mental health problems and addressing problems from a young age.

Lesson 26: Integration of psychosocial content into financial literacy classes has assisted in case identification and referral. The community outreach through RVs, social mobilisers and other community-level actors is crucial for the identification of individuals requiring psychosocial support. Likewise, MRC counsellors, psychosocial counsellors, and financial literacy facilitators reported that the integration of psychosocial content within financial literacy classes has also proven to be an excellent mechanism for identifying such individuals and making referrals. Incorporation of psychosocial counselling modules in financial literacy has helped create awareness and a safe space for discussing various aspects of family management. Through these integrated sessions, beneficiaries gain a deeper understanding of issues and learn to recognise signs of distress in themselves and others. This not only enhances their overall well-being but also encourages help-seeking behaviour when needed. Many beneficiaries have been found to approach counsellors regarding their problems after attending these sessions, highlighting the importance of the integrated approach.

Lesson 27: Delicate and dynamic nature of psychosocial counselling requires rigorous capacity building for counsellors and clear coordination between them and other SaMi staff. The cornerstone of effective psychosocial counselling lies in the quality and depth of psychosocial counsellor's capacity building. Given the multifaceted ethical considerations inherent in this sector, it becomes imperative to equip counsellors with a comprehensive understanding of these intricacies. The SaMi Programme provides training to its counsellors before they begin work, following a Government of Nepal approved training manual. Despite this, some counsellors said they felt ill-prepared when dealing with ethical dilemmas and sensitive cases even though they received assistance from psychosocial supervisors.

Similarly, the evolving nature of mental health and psychosocial support underscores the importance of ongoing professional development for counsellors. Refresher training sessions and supervision workshops have served as an invaluable platform for counsellors to refine their skills, deepen their understanding of emerging issues, and remain aware of best practices in the field. By investing in comprehensive and continuous training initiatives, as suggested by the counsellors, they can navigate the complexities involved in psychosocial counselling of even difficult cases such as suicide and gender-based violence with confidence, competence and compassion.

Lesson 28: Counselling should be gender-friendly and providing pre-counselling to family members mitigates social stigma in psychosocial counselling. One of the major challenges inherent in psychosocial counselling is the issue of social stigma, which casts a shadow over both the beneficiary seeking support and the counsellor providing it. This stigma often arises when counselling sessions require prolonged periods of one-on-one interaction in private settings. The situation becomes more pronounced, particularly when the beneficiary and the counsellor belong to different genders, triggering heightened societal scrutiny and potential misperceptions. Many counsellors reported being questioned and sometimes even threatened by family members or the spouse of the beneficiary. To address this, counsellors started providing orientation to family members to establish trust and communication which has helped alleviate this problem to some extent. Additionally, 60 per cent of the counsellors are women to match the majority of beneficiaries, who are women.

Furthermore, recognising that social stigma often extends beyond the confines of the counselling room, it is essential to extend support and guidance to the families of beneficiaries. Empowering families with the knowledge and tools to navigate and challenge societal prejudices not only increases the efficacy of counselling intervention but also promotes a culture of inclusivity and empathy within the broader community.

Lesson 29: Integration of mental health and psychosocial counselling-related issues into local government policies is crucial. Through continuous and prolonged engagement, the SaMi Programme has been able to sensitise participating local governments on the importance of psychosocial counselling. To this end, community mental health training for health coordinators has been organised in multiple local governments to promote coordination and institutionalise mental health and psychosocial counselling in overall health services at the local level.⁵² Field visits by government officials and elected representatives have also been helpful in sensitising them about its importance. As a result, recognising its significance, and after active lobbying, some participating local governments have mainstreamed psychosocial counselling within local government policies. By doing so, local governments have taken a crucial step towards recognising and addressing the holistic needs of their communities. Such policies have been instrumental for local governments to implement new programmes and allocate budget for activities related to psychosocial health such as awareness-raising initiatives.

Lesson 30: There is a need for enhancing support systems for beneficiaries of psychosocial counselling through effective coordination. The role of local governments is crucial in providing support to beneficiaries of psychosocial counselling. Individuals who have received counselling report significant improvements in their outlook on life and willingness to engage in productive activities. Recognising the importance of holistic support, some participating local governments have extended additional assistance, such as facilitating opportunities for entrepreneurship or employment, thereby fostering the recovery process and ensuring the sustainability of the help provided. Integrating psychosocial counselling with other (financial and skill development) support can be seen as an effective strategy in supporting beneficiaries.

Similarly, effective coordination between counsellors and other stakeholders is of the utmost importance in ensuring comprehensive care for beneficiaries. Counsellors have reported notable improvements in coordination with the health section of municipalities and external medical health facilities. Referring extreme cases, particularly those involving psychosis, to these facilities has yielded positive outcomes, with many cases showing drastic improvements. However, one challenge highlighted during this process was that mental health hospitals remain centralised, leading to logistical difficulties for beneficiaries. This underscores the need for a more decentralised approach to mental healthcare delivery, particularly at the provincial and local levels, to ensure accessibility and effectiveness in addressing psychosocial issues.

Lesson 31: Harnessing SaMi's human resources helps mainstream mental health programmes at the local level. The human resources developed by the SaMi Programme, particularly psychosocial counsellors, hold immense potential for mainstreaming mental health and psychosocial programmes at the local level. Counsellors' knowledge enables them to provide direct support and counselling, in addition to serving as advocates and educators within their communities. SaMi has facilitated accreditation of some of the counsellors with the National Health Training Centre (NHTC). Similar programmes on a larger scale to integrate SaMi's psychosocial counsellors with national mental health programmes would be very fruitful in increasing the sustainability of the programme and the effective use of existing human resources.

Lesson 32: Psychosocial counselling should be systematically expanded for migrant workers in destination countries with pre-departure mental health screening as well. Pre-departure mental health screening and counselling sessions should be provided to migrant workers before they depart for the CoD. This would equip them with coping strategies and resilience before their migration experience begins. Likewise, the programme has been providing psychosocial support to some migrant workers in destination countries. It is important to learn from that experience and expand such services systematically in order to ensure distressed migrant workers can avail of them. The programme's mobilisation of a psychosocial counselling officer at the FEB to support migrant workers in destination countries is helping systematise this undertaking.⁵³

Psychosocial counselling provides relief and rejuvenation to distressed left-behind wives

Sarita Tamang (name changed) was suffering from severe anxiety, an inability to sleep, episodes of shaking, poor appetite, and no desire to socialise. Her husband had migrated to Malaysia for foreign employment but was cheated during his migration journey. Sarita, recognising her financial issues—as they had no house or wealth and two children to educate—faced debilitating mental health issues. Because of her insomnia, she lost a lot of weight. She even had suicidal thoughts and inclinations to not return home and leave everything behind. Her anxiety rendered her unable to speak to people. She used to cry a lot, which was the only way she could calm herself. She had not shared her experience with anyone in the community as these issues remain stigmatised.

She came to know about the SaMi Programme through a case involving the repatriation of a dead person in her community. She approached the SaMi staff with her problems who, in turn, visited her house and listened to her grievances. The SaMi staff undertook some rapport-building exercises with her and convinced her to receive psychosocial counselling. During her sessions, she learned that spending a lot of time alone can trigger anxiety. So, she started engaging in her community more with the encouragement of the counsellor. The counsellor also taught her time management skills and exercises to reduce stress—basically to keep busy as much as possible through various activities. She complied with these skills and exercises. The counsellors also taught her ways to induce sleep, which she reported to be extremely effective.

But her financial troubles remained. She gained some confidence after the initial counselling sessions and started to work as a tailor, earning some money. Her involvement in the community grew and her husband appreciated these changes in her. SaMi coordinated with the ward and arranged tailoring training where she was the instructor. She overcame her shyness and hesitancy and successfully delivered the training. Consequently, her outlook on life has now changed. The counsellor taught her to think about her children and their future and she is completely focused on them. She says, “if we knew about the SaMi Programme’s initiatives beforehand, my husband would not have been cheated and my depression episodes, I believe, would not have begun. This programme is essential.”

3.5 Financial Literacy

Many households that receive remittances remain unaware of how to properly manage and utilise the money, leading to poor savings and an inability to invest. This has resulted in many left-behind family members, wives in particular, being accused by society of conspicuous consumption, resulting in familial conflicts and tensions. One way to overcome this state of affairs is to conduct financial literacy classes for left-behind family members in migrant households so that they can spend the remittances prudently, save regularly, and achieve optimal returns from investments. The SaMi Programme began its financial literacy component in 2014, with the objective of supporting remittance-receiving households to make informed financial decisions. Members of remittance-receiving households, predominantly women, are the primary targets of these classes, which are conducted in small groups of around 25 participants at the community level. Running for 21 weeks, the classes consist of 17 weeks on financial literacy and four weeks on psychosocial counselling.

Lesson 33: Financial literacy fosters financial management skills in participants. The financial literacy classes have yielded transformative outcomes, resonating with participants and moving them towards notable behavioural shifts. The testimonials from various stakeholders and beneficiaries show that the programme has produced a tangible impact on the behaviour of participants, including increased awareness of their financial management, and have demonstrated a proactive approach towards tracking their expenses and financial details after the completion of the programme. For example, in fiscal year 2022/23, 8,036 participants kept records of income and expenditure with 2,168 opening bank accounts; 1,186 starting new businesses; 1,629 expanding existing businesses, and 2,864 setting up an emergency fund.⁵⁴ This diligence has fostered a greater sense of financial responsibility and also developed a tendency for informed decision-making and long-term financial planning. A majority of the participants in the financial literacy programme have reported increased savings six months after training (see Annex 2).

Similarly, the programme's influence has extended beyond financial management, and into participants' everyday lives and consumption patterns, including a decrease in unnecessary expenditures, indicative of a shift towards more informed spending habits. By instilling a sense of frugality and prioritisation, the programme has empowered migrant families to allocate resources carefully, thereby enhancing their financial resilience and stability.

Lesson 34: Financial literacy classes empower women towards entrepreneurship, helping reduce remigration drivers. Financial literacy classes help in fostering entrepreneurship and empowerment among women participants, yielding multifarious benefits in migrant communities. Many participants have embarked on ventures to expand existing businesses or initiate new enterprises. Those unable to do so have explored alternative avenues such as commercial cattle rearing or agricultural farming in pursuit of economic independence. The classes have empowered women to assert themselves confidently and actively engage in public life, amplifying their voices and contributions within their communities. This newfound confidence not only enhances individual well-being but also contributes to the collective empowerment of women, promoting gender equality and social inclusion.

Furthermore, the entrepreneurial endeavours sparked by the financial literacy classes have made it possible to create economic gains for participants, generating additional income and bolstering financial independence. This is particularly significant in the context of labour migration from Nepal, where the temporary nature of employment abroad underscores the importance of sustainable livelihoods and financial resilience. Importantly, beneficiaries recognise the long-term implications of their entrepreneurial pursuits, particularly in mitigating the compulsion for spouses to remigrate. By building sustainable businesses and securing additional income streams, participants reported contributing to the overall economic stability of their families and communities, aligning with the GoN's aspirations to promote domestic employment and economic self-sufficiency.

Lesson 35: The financial literacy programme supports in strengthening family relationships and mitigating social stigma. The financial literacy classes have proven to be transformative beyond the realm of financial prudence, significantly impacting the dynamics within migrant families. Participants, primarily left-behind family members and wives of migrant workers, have reported following sound financial decision-making practices, leading to a reduction in expenses and an increase in savings. This shift towards financial responsibility has not only empowered beneficiaries but also fostered greater transparency and accountability within family relationships and fostered trust among family members. One notable outcome of the financial literacy classes is the improvement in the relationship between migrant workers and their family members. Furthermore, the classes have played a crucial role in challenging social stigma directed towards left-behind wives as being wasteful with their money. By actively participating in efforts to improve

savings and even invest, left-behind wives and family members of migrant workers are dispelling these misconceptions and demonstrating their commitment to financial prudence.

Lesson 36: There is need for integrating financial literacy classes with livelihood training programmes. One of the major barriers to participation in financial literacy programmes was reported to be the lack of perceived economic incentives among potential beneficiaries. As the classes require participation over a long period of time, many people expressed their reluctance to enroll in them. Financial literacy facilitators (FLFs) reported difficulty in finding participants, especially in the hilly regions, due to the lack of incentive and time required. However, these barriers have been found to diminish over time as participants recognise the practical utility and importance of the classes in their lives, especially with the positive feedback shared by previous participants in their communities.

Beneficiaries emphasised the potential for enhancing the effectiveness of the financial literacy classes through the integration of livelihood training components. By combining financial education with practical skills development, participants can more effectively apply their newfound entrepreneurial skills and ambitions in real-world scenarios. Local governments reported realising that tying existing livelihood training and other financial incentive programmes at the local level with financial literacy classes could be beneficial.

Lesson 37: Orientation sessions for beneficiaries, family members, and the community play a significant role in destigmatisation. The financial literacy classes have also faced several challenges that have impacted participation, including stigmatisation, geographical barriers, and language difficulties. Stigmatisation from families and society often leads to participants dropping out of the programme. SaMi staff, facilitators, and sometimes even local-level representatives visit the homes of beneficiaries and encourage them to join financial literacy classes. Prior orientation sessions—aimed at raising awareness and reducing negative perceptions among beneficiaries, their families, and community members—have played a significant role in destigmatising these classes. Additionally, proactive home visits before and during the classes can provide continuous support and encouragement, helping to retain participants.

In hilly regions, geographical limitations pose significant barriers in attending classes, resulting in higher dropout rates. A more decentralised approach, such as conducting financial literacy classes at the *tole* (neighbourhood) level would make it easier for participants in remote areas to attend. This approach requires logistical adjustments and additional resources to ensure effective delivery, but it would significantly enhance accessibility for all beneficiaries in these regions.

Language barriers present another significant challenge, particularly in Madhesh Province, where participants have to rely on pictures to understand the text. While the pictorial lessons are reported to be very helpful, development of textbooks in multiple languages, tailored to the linguistic diversity of the participants would make the classes more inclusive. Incorporating localised context into the learning materials would also enhance their relevance and effectiveness. The current practice of having local facilitators conduct classes in the local language has been successful and should be continued, as it helps bridge the language gap and makes the content more accessible.

Lesson 38: Local governments are crucial in ensuring success of financial literacy programmes. The success of financial literacy classes is highly dependent on the involvement of local governments and representatives, particularly the ward chairpersons. To this end, a management committee, headed by the ward chair, has been established to oversee operations. By identifying problems and the necessary support through the committee, ward chairs are found to ensure effective coordination with the local government during programme and budget planning as well as in addressing logistical challenges, with some even providing operational resources (travel allowances) to FLFs. This support from the local leadership not only validates the programme's impact but also helps in its implementation and sustainability.

On the other hand, conflict between the mayor, deputy mayor, and ward chair as well as problems due to internal political dynamics and bias in selection of beneficiaries and sites for running classes has been a major problem. In some municipalities, the programme has facilitated coordination meetings, conducted field visits, and provided explanations, to ensure the implementation of the classes. Hence, developing a financial literacy strategy, which 23 local governments have done, is crucial for the effective implementation of the financial literacy programme as it provides a clear framework and direction for implementation.

Lesson 39: Lessons focused on market needs have been successful. The financial literacy curriculum is comprehensive and covers a wide range of topics, from saving and budgeting to investing. FLFs highlighted the positive impact of classes, especially of lessons focused on recognising market needs. Participants have benefitted from these sessions by gaining insights into market gaps and learning to tailor their production or investment strategies accordingly. By equipping participants with the skills to identify market opportunities, the programme has empowered them to make informed financial decisions that align with market demands, thereby increasing their chances of success in entrepreneurial ventures.

Lesson 40: Adapting the financial literacy curriculum is necessary to enhance participants' understanding. The FLFs have noted that while the overall course yields visible results, certain sections, notably the entrepreneurship module, appear to be too complex for participants to fully comprehend and hence are not as useful. Simplifying this aspect of the curriculum could significantly enhance participants' understanding and application of entrepreneurial concepts.

Lesson 41: Embracing a comprehensive recruitment strategy for financial literacy classes is beneficial. Participant selection for financial literacy classes presents a comprehensive approach, engaging various stakeholders to identify and enroll beneficiaries. While the efforts of MRC counsellors, RVs, and core programme staff are pivotal, the involvement of local-level elected representatives, particularly ward officials, seems to have the most significant value to the recruitment process. Their active participation has not only expanded the reach of the programme but also fostered community ownership and trust.

This holistic recruitment strategy ensures that potential beneficiaries are reached through multiple channels, increasing the classes' visibility and accessibility within migrant communities. By leveraging the networks and influence of local leaders, individuals who may otherwise be overlooked can be identified and outreach efforts may be tailored to suit the specific needs of diverse communities. This collaborative approach strengthens partnerships between the SaMi Programme and local authorities, paving the way for continued support and cooperation in future initiatives.

Financial literacy class: empowering migrant families to save and invest

Amrita (name changed) first heard about the financial literacy class from women in her neighbourhood. As the wife of a migrant worker, she was eager to sign up but discovered the programme was in another ward. Determined, she rallied local women and personally requested a class in her area. Her efforts were successful, and a few months later, a financial literacy class started in her ward. Since then, she has gained a new perspective on finances and saving.

Her husband had first gone abroad to repay a loan taken for Amrita's kidney treatment. She felt empty and helpless so when she heard about the programme to help families of migrant workers she wanted to be part of it. The financial literacy class provided her with a space to learn and discuss. The class taught her the importance of saving, financial planning, and insurance. Once skeptical about life insurance, Amrita has now taken out policies for her entire family.

Recognising the impact of isolation on her health as well to become independent, she started a shop selling savoury snacks. She uses her earnings from the shop for household expenses and saves her husband's income. When her husband returned due to a work accident, Amrita managed the crisis with her savings. Before he went back to work abroad, she suggested they run the business together at home. Amrita credits her newfound confidence and positive outlook to the SaMi financial literacy class.



Participants of a financial literacy class during a practical session in Nilkantha Municipality, Dhading.

3.6 Vocational Skills Training

Skills are identified as a crucial mechanism to make migration safer, dignified and more fruitful. Through its skills training component, the SaMi Programme provides a 30-day (208 hours) residential, free-of-cost pre-departure vocational skills training to aspiring migrant workers in various occupations. These skills include welding, garment machine operating, industrial electrician, masonry, plumbing, scaffolding, and training in being a kitchen helper, housekeeper/cleaner, and shuttering carpenter. Food and accommodation for the participants is included in the training. The curriculum includes technical training on the respective occupations, trade-specific occupational health and safety (OHS) training as well as three days of soft skills training encompassing life skills, health sessions and foreign employment. The skills training regime of SaMi employs a centre-based skills training modality to mimic destination country conditions and prepare participants for foreign employment by instilling teamwork, work-life balance, and collaborative attitude during the hostel stay. SaMi delivers skills training through TMLs, which are private institutions procured through a thorough bidding process to guarantee quality. Currently, the training is being provided in Butwal, Dhanusha, Jhapa, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur and Pokhara. This is in part to maintain quality, as local-level TMLs in many other locations have neither the infrastructure nor human resources to provide quality skills training.

Lesson 42: Skills training needs to be supplemented by skills testing and international recognition.

The SaMi Programme assures the quality of the skills training provided by TMIs through a rigorous and systematic monitoring mechanism. It also conducts a skills test after the completion of the training and provides graded (A, B, C) certificates to the participants. Internally, SaMi strives to assure quality and certify the participants with the support of certified trade experts/assessors. However, internal recognition of skills is not always sufficient to enable participants to get jobs in the same occupation in the country of destination as employer recognition of the skills and certification is equally important. Thus, to achieve this, it is paramount that the GoN include provisions for mutual skills recognition in the BLMAs, which would not only improve the government's return on investment in skills training but also render migration safer for participants and help avoid loss of gained skills.

The skills recognition and job-matching currently being implemented with employers in the garment industry for Nepali women migrant workers in Jordan serves as an example. Because employers in Jordan recognise the skills training provided by SaMi, job placement has become easier, with those obtaining the skills training benefitting tremendously. This has resulted in job placement among women trainees being proportionately significantly higher (see Annex 2).

Another dimension is post-training skills testing and certification by skills certification agencies in Nepal. It was reported that because external skills testing and certification are not always available immediately after training, beneficiaries miss out on them due to having departed for foreign employment or to their hometowns. A large number of skills training beneficiaries who applied for the National Skill Testing Board's (NSTB) end-of-training test in certain occupations such as scaffolding, plumbing and industrial electrician passed it. However, the NSTB recently changed its eligibility criteria and will no longer conduct skills testing for Level 1 training which lasts less than 390 hours, rendering trainees from SaMi ineligible. Thus, it is also important for the GoN to arrange a timely external certification process for participants to further legitimise the skills training.

Lesson 43: Soft skills training is essential in preparing migrant workers for foreign employment.

The current skills training module includes a three-day component on soft skills, including OHS awareness to minimise dangerous and difficult work, within the 30-day programme. The soft skills training, provided once a week in the initial three weeks, has helped participants who lack prior experience and find the training daunting navigate this feeling of uncertainty and provided them with the confidence to complete the training. The soft skills training is likely to have a similar impact on migrant workers during their employment abroad. The programme finds that while technical skills represent the core determinant of success for migrant workers abroad, soft skills can help them accentuate their expertise through confident delivery and enhanced presentation and cognitive skills. Similarly, the OHS training orients participants in employing safety measures and helps them avoid workplace injuries.

Lesson 44: Agreements and partnerships with destination country governments and employers are needed to improve post-training job placement.

Although no differences vis-à-vis quality or coordination were reported between TMIs in Kathmandu and other places, the job placement ratio of beneficiaries from Kathmandu-based TMIs was reported to be higher. Access to recruitment agencies in Kathmandu could be a major reason for this. This highlights the importance of demand matching for beneficiaries, who are unable to bargain for jobs in the same sector at an individual level. Government-to-government partnerships or even informal partnerships with employers abroad can help in this regard.

Lesson 45: Inclusion-based criteria help prioritise needy participants.

The skills training selection criteria include pre-medical tests, compliance with TMI's rules, and inclusion-based criteria such as the distance to participants' residence and their financial condition. The latter two criteria play a vital role in

ensuring those in need are prioritised during selection. Those who live close to the TMIs, for instance, are able to wait for the next training, which participants from faraway regions cannot afford to do.

Lesson 46: Garment machine operator training for aspiring women migrant workers is a major success of gender mainstreaming in the labour migration sector of Nepal. The garment machine operator training conducted by SaMi, paired with an excellent job placement ratio in Jordan, has allowed many women migrant workers to experience safe, dignified and fruitful migration. Many beneficiaries said that the certainty created by the skills training and subsequent placement made their decision to migrate much easier and anxiety-free. Some beneficiaries said they had obtained visas for jobs in different sectors previously but had cancelled them, fearing abuse. The garment machine operator training can be considered a major success in gender mainstreaming since it has proven to be a viable alternative to jobs like domestic work, with its high levels of abuse and exploitation.



Participants during the garment machine operator training at an institute in Kathmandu.

Free training and safe migration assure the migration of female migrant workers

Ramila Pakhrin's (name changed) child was born with a blockage in his intestine, and she had to incur a debt of 10-12 lakhs for his treatment. Because of the debt burden, quarrels started at home. So, she began to enquire about foreign employment. A relative who had gone to Jordan after training under the SaMi's garment training programme informed her that the one-month-long training was free and also led to safe and no-cost job placement in Jordan afterwards. The relative provided her with the phone number of the training centre. Her mother-in-law warned her that since everything was free, she might get sold abroad. However, she was able to persuade her mother-in-law by informing her that she had visited the training centre and understood that it was a government-approved operation.

Although she found all aspects of the skill training satisfactory, she particularly liked the way the training has been designed to mimic the foreign employment environment in Jordan. After receiving the session on soft skills, she has become more aware of how to balance her family relationships and how to work carefully after going abroad as well as the procedures to be completed for a safe foreign employment experience.

She had thought about going to the Gulf countries many times due to her household debt burden but could not muster the courage as she had heard harrowing tales of people being stranded abroad after being sent by agents and recruitment agencies. She had even cancelled multiple visas to other destinations as the migration entailed no skills training and required recruitment costs of more than NPR 200,000 and did not guarantee her safety. But she has no reservations about going to Jordan and working in a garment factory there. She wants others with similar problems to be able to avail themselves of the free training and learn about safe migration as well and recommends that these services be continued for a long time.

3.7 Working Modality

Following the Constitution of Nepal (2015) and particularly the Local Government Operation Act (2017) and the amended Foreign Employment Act (2019), the SaMi Programme aids the federalisation process and strengthens labour migration governance in all three tiers of government. The PSC of the SaMi Programme is chaired by the Secretary in MoLESS, with members from DoFE, FEB, other relevant federal ministries, the Joint Secretary of the MoLESS, along with a Secretary from the relevant provincial ministry handling labour and employment sector, and the mayor/chair of two selected local governments on a rotational basis.⁵⁵ A Programme Coordination Unit (PCU) has been established at MoLESS.⁵⁶ Similarly, mechanisms have been set up for monitoring and coordination, such as the Province Programme Coordination Committee (PPCC) at the provincial level, the LGPCC, and the Local Government Programme Management Committee (LGPMC) at the local level.⁵⁷ The programme's outputs for improving governance include the strengthening of MoLESS, DoFE's Foreign Employment Information Management System (FEIMS), and provincial ministries handling labour and employment sector for strategic and coordination roles, as well as provision of foreign employment services by local governments.⁵⁸

Lesson 47: Continuous engagement with all three tiers of government has led to increased understanding of foreign employment among elected representatives and government officials and greater ownership of migration-related services offered through SaMi. Given the significance of labour migration for Nepal and Nepali households, it is crucial to make foreign employment safe, dignified and beneficial. Despite recognition of labour migration as a cornerstone of the Nepali economy, society and future development, this sector often does not take precedence during programme formulation and budget allocation. In this context, continuous engagement with all three tiers of government as well as provision of migration-related services have facilitated greater awareness and understanding among elected representatives and government officials about safer migration practices. The SaMi Programme has further facilitated greater ownership of migration-related services offered among the participating local governments. This includes allocation of budget and incorporation of labour migration-related provisions in the labour and employment, psychosocial health, and financial literacy-related policies at the provincial and local levels.

Lesson 48: Direct implementation is crucial for local government ownership of the SaMi Programme. Implementation of migration-related services provided through the programme via the local government instead of a local service provider has helped develop greater ownership and internalisation of these services within local governments. It has been observed that difficulties in coordination with the latter were reduced after direct implementation of these services by them.

Lesson 49: Development of policies and guidelines at provincial and local levels builds accountability for labour migration, leading towards sustainability. Development of provincial labour and employment policies, safer migration guidelines, migration profiles, inclusion of migration-related activities in periodic plans, and incorporating programme components like psychosocial counselling and financial literacy in municipal health and financial literacy policies are crucial for enhancing the accountability of provincial and local governments in the labour migration sector while also paving the way for internalisation of migration services. The development of legal mechanisms has been found to improve local government accountability and responsiveness since actions are clearly spelled out in legal documents. They also act as guidelines for newly elected representatives and government officials. For instance, the Safer Migration Guidelines of Bhanu Municipality explicitly mentions the gradual internalisation of SaMi's psychosocial component into its health unit.⁵⁹ It also commits funds for SaMi activities through the fiscal equalisation grants received from the federal and provincial governments, internal revenue and other sources.⁶⁰

Lesson 50: Assigning a focal person and establishing a labour and employment section at provincial and municipal levels have been crucial. The appointment of focal persons at the provincial and municipal levels is crucial since it offers several key advantages that streamline processes, ensure better communication, and improve overall programme outcomes. Likewise, having a dedicated labour and employment section centralises the coordination and management of all labour-related activities within the municipality and ensures that there is a clear point of contact for migration-related activities. In addition, SaMi is emphasising the capacity development of relevant (political) thematic committees and (administrative) sections of local governments for the institutionalisation of labour migration-related services at the local level. This practice can also contribute to narrowing the information gap that arises due to the frequent changes of government officials and elected representatives.

Lesson 51: Multi-stakeholder approach is important for providing rapid and prompt services to migrant workers. Supporting migrant workers effectively requires a comprehensive approach that involves various stakeholders working together through a well-structured partnership model. The SaMi Programme employs a multi-stakeholder approach encompassing all three tiers of the government and various CSOs working as thematic partners. Through this, the programme has been able to promote a partnership model to address the multifaceted challenges faced by migrant workers, ensuring their rights are protected, and their well-being is prioritised while harnessing the strengths and expertise of the thematic partners. Supporting migrant workers through formal government mechanisms often entails navigating bureaucratic processes and can lead to delays in service delivery. While government agencies play a crucial role in providing essential services, such as rescue, repatriation, and protection to migrant workers, the formal nature of these mechanisms can sometimes impede swift responses to urgent needs. In contrast, utilising response mechanisms through CSOs can offer rapid and flexible support to migrant workers facing immediate challenges.

The placement of SaMi staff at DoFE, FEB and DoCS was reported to have improved and expedited services provided to migrant workers. However, challenges were reported in terms of increased workload, resulting from being tasked with responsibilities beyond their original mandate. Increased dependency on these officers has also been observed for critical assistance and guidance. There is also the question of the

sustainability of services provided by these individuals. Addressing these challenges will require increasing human resources and integrating these officers within the government system as well as mobilising resources for capacity enhancement of government officials.

Lesson 52: LGPCC is an effective means for inter-governmental collaboration and learning.

Mechanisms for local government coordination such as the LGPCC helps promote inter-municipal learning and collaborative implementation of migration-related services, where multi-tenure local representatives can share their understanding of labour migration with newly elected ones, resulting in a quicker orientation of the latter and the transfer of best practices across municipalities. It can also form the basis for future collaborations in standardising practices, pooling resources and joint planning, even despite of inter-party tensions in some districts which have been found to have affected the smooth operation of these committees. For example, in Nawalparasi (Bardaghat Susta West) district, seven local governments pooled resources to continue safer migration programmes after the phasing out of project funds by SaMi in its second phase.⁶¹

Lesson 53: Change of elected representatives and transfer of government officials represents a major challenge in the institutionalisation of the programme's components in local governments.

Local governments are crucial for the efficient and effective implementation of all the components of the SaMi Programme. Local representatives are an important source of referrals as they are the first point of contact for many individuals within the community. Some MRC counsellors said that inviting ward officials during the mediation of individual cases at the DAO was effective in reconciling contesting parties.

Continuous engagement is necessary to orient local representatives and government officials on labour migration and its many facets. However, disruptions due to the transfer of government officials renders internalisation of knowledge and learning within government bodies difficult. While transfers can aid in knowledge replication in other districts and the local level, they do disrupt the review process and reform initiatives, introduce inconsistencies in monitoring, erodes ownership of the programme, and creates challenges in priority setting and decision-making. A labour and employment section at the local government level could enable the institutionalisation of knowledge, activities, learning, commitment of budget and human resources.

Lesson 54: Turnover of SaMi staff increases capacity development costs and impacts service delivery. The SaMi Programme provides initial training as well as regular refresher training to equip its staff with the skills and capability to perform the tasks involved. When transfer or turnover of staff is inevitable, it can increase the capacity development cost for the newly hired staff and impact service delivery. On the other hand, such individuals can also aid in knowledge transfer, bringing their experience and knowledge with them to the new workplace.

Lesson 55: Training and capacity development of local-level actors beyond SaMi is necessary.

The Constitution of Nepal (2015) provides for a three-member judicial committee headed by the deputy mayor/vice-chairperson in each of the 753 local governments, with the mandate to adjudicate, arbitrate and refer cases for mediation at the local level. However, it has been observed that judicial committees often lack awareness and knowledge about their mandates, leading to misconceptions about their authority, particularly regarding foreign employment-related cases. While they serve as the first point of contact for Nepali citizens seeking legal assistance, they do not have the mandate to mediate foreign employment-related cases. To establish a referral system from local governments to CDOs and the DoFE, capacity building and training programmes have been initiated for deputy mayors, ward chairs and mediators in some municipalities. These efforts need to be extended to other local governments as well.

Lesson 56: Establishment and strengthening of inter-governmental collaboration is crucial to institutionalising migration services. There is increasing recognition of the importance of the SaMi Programme and the need to extend and internalise its services and activities at all levels of government. The programme has accumulated vast expertise, ensured prompt availability of data and information, and provided inputs and support to the government for initiating BLMAs, participating in multilateral platforms, and formulating policies and strategies, among others. Though implemented by MoLESS, the components of the SaMi Programme entail many cross-cutting components requiring collaborative efforts from multiple relevant ministries for effective implementation. In this regard, SaMi has established and strengthened both vertical and horizontal inter-governmental collaboration through the participation of all tiers of government in the PSC, joint review reflection/monitoring activities, fund flow through the Line Ministry Budget Information System (LMBIS), and programme expansion beyond participating local governments with the collaboration of provincial and local governments. Additionally, joint review reflections at the local level are conducted by the LGPCC.

Lesson 57: Signing MoU helps in programme implementation. MoUs are signed between the concerned stakeholders, including the local governments and the SaMi PSU, before the implementation of the programme. The MoU specifies the roles and responsibilities of each party and thus clarifying their specific mandates. SaMi staff reported that this agreement resulted in expedited results, with greater compliance from all parties.

Lesson 58: Functional RMNs is crucial for sustainability of migration service delivery. The SaMi Programme has supported the formalising and strengthening of RMNs, consisting of returnee migrant workers and, sometimes, members of migrant households.⁶² RMNs have been crucial in supporting migrant workers and their families, disseminating vital information about migration processes, serving as referrals to available migration services, and mainstreaming migrant workers' issues into the political agenda at all levels of the government. However, financial constraints pose a major challenge in ensuring their functionality and sustainability and, by extension, the effectiveness of these networks.

Lesson 59: Provincial and local government collaboration for establishment of MRCs in six districts is emblematic of inter-governmental collaboration and programme ownership by government. Provincial and local governments, with technical assistance from SaMi, have established MRCs in six districts—Arghakhanchi, Gulmi, Lamjung, Myagdi, Palpa and Parbat—on a cost-sharing basis. These initiatives are emblematic of government ownership of the programme and demonstrate the vital importance of inter-governmental collaboration and cooperation for the sustainability of activities under the SaMi Programme. Inter-governmental collaboration—vertically and horizontally—will thus be necessary to ensure the sustainability of the programme and institutionalisation of migration services.

Lesson 60: The SaMi Programme's holistic approach connects all facets of the migration cycle. The SaMi Programme employs a holistic approach whereby it spans all facets of the migration cycle and connects migrant workers and their families with destination countries, including diplomatic missions located in these countries. Such an approach allows the programme to solve complex issues on its own without having to rely on external bodies, which speeds up procedures significantly. In this regard, the incorporation of outreach officers is an example of synergistic programme implementation.

Lesson 61: Information management systems are crucial to providing services and facilitating evidence-based policymaking but need to be expanded and made sustainable. Information management systems play a pivotal role in delivering services and facilitating evidence-based policymaking. However, it is imperative to expand and ensure the sustainability of these systems to maximise their benefits. Data collected through the Management Information System (MIS), under the SaMi Programme, and the

FEIMS provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of existing policies and programmes. Policymakers can use this evidence to make informed decisions, prioritise areas for intervention, and identify emerging issues. Recognising its importance, the programme has been providing technical and financial support to upgrade and sustain FEIMS.

Lesson 62: Technical assistance to SaMi has been crucial for its effective implementation and the generation of learnings. The PSU has been playing a crucial role in overseeing and guiding project activities, ensuring alignment with strategic goals, and facilitating coordination among stakeholders. Similarly, the services available through thematic partners have been crucial in providing rapid responses to issues faced by migrant workers and their families in Nepal and in destination countries. In particular, effective access to justice necessitates coordination with different stakeholders and navigating complex aspects such as employment contracts, international laws, and BLMAs. According to government officials, as the systems and processes regarding access to justice are not yet fully established or functioning efficiently, continuous support will be required. Likewise, psychosocial counselling is yet to be fully integrated into healthcare systems in Nepal. Hence, continued thematic support will be essential, particularly in the transition period.

ANNEX 1: METHODOLOGY

Data collection strategy

The data collection strategy for the preparation of the learning document involved gathering both quantitative data from the SaMi Programme, such as programme statistics, impact metrics and financial/budgetary allocations, as well as qualitative data consisting of beneficiaries' (migrants and their family members) experiences, stakeholders' feedback and anecdotes. Interviews, group discussions, and document analysis were used as tools to extract information from diverse actors, such as programme staff, migrant beneficiaries and families, partner organisations, and other stakeholders including governments involved at all levels. The use of both qualitative and quantitative data provided the study with both depth and breadth, allowing for a deeper understanding of SaMi and its various programme components.

Secondary review of programme documents

The research team undertook a thorough secondary review of SaMi's programme conceptualisation documents, such as the Theory of Change and logframe, programme evaluation documents, learning documents for Phase II, annual reports from 2018–2023, and SaMi's internal reports, including those submitted by thematic partners and provincial managers as well as legal documents. Legal documents consisted of the MRC Operation Guidelines, the Programme Implementation Guideline, migration profiles and safer migration guidelines. This review enabled the research team to uncover valuable patterns and insights about SaMi's past performances across all programme components as well as understand the evolution and hurdles encountered in the programme's progression. It also provided valuable insights on SaMi's initial conceptualisation, its learnings throughout all the phases, and future implications.

Review of data extracted from the SaMi's MIS

The research team analysed quantitative data from SaMi's MIS, which enabled reporting of SaMi's work in its various components, making comparative assessments for various indicators of the said components, and conducting quantitative evaluations. Descriptive statistics were used in the reporting of the quantitative data.

Interviews with migrant workers/family members

In-depth interviews were conducted with SaMi's primary beneficiaries—migrant workers and members of their family. This group represents key respondents in informing the effectiveness of SaMi's interventions as well as the challenges that remain in their implementation. Because different components of SaMi are aimed at different sets of beneficiaries, the interview participants were chosen purposively, encapsulating beneficiaries from all five components. Interviews were conducted with beneficiaries of information and awareness, legal aid and paralegal services, and psychosocial counselling, while group discussions were held with beneficiaries of skills training and financial literacy classes. This ensured all of SaMi's components were covered exhaustively for the study. The research team carefully selected a diverse group of participants who had received SaMi's services, ensuring representation in terms of both demographics and experience.

In-depth interviews were conducted both in-person and virtually. The total number of interviews conducted per component has been provided in Table 2. Purposive sampling ensured the quality of the respondents, and a case study approach was used to report the data.

Number of beneficiary interviews per component

Component	Number of interviews
Information and awareness	9
Legal aid and paralegal services	6
Psychosocial counselling	7
Vocational skill training	3

The study faced ethical challenges, particularly with regard to migrant workers and their family members who have undergone psychosocial counselling. Considerations such as obtaining informed consent and maintaining confidentiality were paramount, and hence, the research team closely collaborated with SaMi's psychosocial counsellors and sought their support to coordinate, facilitate and administer such interviews. For beneficiaries of other components, the researchers themselves conducted the interviews.

Key informant interviews (KIIs)

The SaMi Programme is implemented through, and in collaboration with, various organisations and individuals, encompassing governmental, non-governmental and private entities. To understand the views of these partner organisations, KIIs were conducted with stakeholders engaged with SaMi across all five programme components. This helped triangulate and supplement the findings from the secondary documents. Additionally, the KIIs proved crucial to unearthing successful practices and innovative strategies, contributing to the identification of gaps and challenges, and providing guidance for the development of recommendations.

The stakeholders selected for interviews included federal, provincial and local government officials linked with SaMi's activities as well as intra-SaMi officials such as information counsellors (responsible for providing both information and case facilitation), RVs, and FLFs, each holding distinct roles within SaMi's five programme components, and national-level partners. A detailed list of stakeholders interviewed for the KIIs has been provided in the table below. The interviews were conducted both in-person and virtually. The local-level actors and national level partners illuminated ground-level situations, challenges and learnings in implementation, while elected representatives at the local level and other government officials provided clarification, particularly regarding the governance and institutionalisation component.

Local, provincial and federal level stakeholders

Province and components covered	List of respondents (local and provincial) for in-person KIIs
Koshi (Components 1, 2, 4, 6)	MRC counsellors (both responsible for providing information and case facilitation); SaMi Programme Coordinator; SaMi Programme Officer; ESC Coordinator; RVs; RMN representatives; FLFs; Ward Chair of the ward with Financial Literacy Committee (FLC); elected representatives of local governments; DAO officials; SaMi Provincial Manager; Financial Literacy Cluster Coordinator; representatives of the relevant officials at provincial level.

Madhesh (Components 1, 2, 4, 6)	MRC/Sub-MRC counsellors (both responsible for providing information and case facilitation); SaMi Programme Coordinator; SaMi Programme Officer; ESC Coordinator; SaMi Provincial Manager; Financial Literacy Cluster Coordinator; RVs, RMN representatives; FLFs; Ward Chair of the ward with FLC; elected representatives of local governments. DAO officials; representatives of the relevant officials at provincial level.
Bagmati (Components 3, 5, 6)	SaMi Provincial Manager; SaMi Programme Officer; SaMi Programme Coordinator; psychosocial supervisors; psychosocial counsellors; MRC counsellors (both responsible for providing information and case facilitation); representatives of the relevant provincial level ministry; TMLs.
Gandaki (Components 3, 4, 5, 6)	SaMi Provincial Manager; SaMi Programme Officer; SaMi Programme Coordinator; psychosocial supervisors; psychosocial counsellors; Financial Literacy Cluster Coordinator; FLFs; members of the FL committee; RVs; elected representatives of local government; Labour and Employment Division (focal person/municipality); ESC; District Coordination Committee (DCC) representatives; DAO representatives; MRC counsellors (both responsible for providing information and case facilitation); representatives of the relevant provincial level ministry.
Lumbini (Components 1, 3, 5, 6)	SaMi Provincial Manager; SaMi Programme Officer; SaMi Programme Coordinator; psychosocial supervisors; psychosocial counsellors; members of the FLC (elected representatives of ward); RVs; RMN representatives; local health units; MRC counsellors (both responsible for providing information and case facilitation); Education, Youth and Sports Division (focal person/municipality); Senior Administrative Officer (Municipality), elected representatives of LGs; DAO officials; representatives of the relevant provincial level ministry.
National-level stakeholders	MoLESS; DoFE; FEB; DEPROSC; CMC-Nepal; PNCC; People Forum; Ujyaalo; Skill Development Coordinator; Monitoring and Evaluation Officer; outreach officers.

Note: The components are: (1) Information and awareness, (2) Access to justice, (3) Psychosocial counselling, (4) Financial literacy, (5) Skills development, and (6) Governance and institutionalisation.

A checklist was prepared for the interviews and adjusted and adapted to suit the stakeholder in question to ensure compatibility and maximum insights. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing flexibility to incorporate any novel insights not covered by the checklists.

Group discussions

The research team conducted group discussions with migrant workers' family members who have benefited from SaMi's financial literacy programme. Group discussions provide a fairly quick method of data collection, with data from multiple respondents captured in a single setting while allowing for comparison between the respondents. This comparative feature provided through group discussions proved a useful measure in gauging the effectiveness of financial literacy classes since they augmented the sample size and allowed for the incorporation of diverse perspectives, highlighting both success stories as well as possible gaps. Group discussions were held in Koshi, Madhesh and Gandaki Provinces, where the financial literacy component

was being assessed. Geographic proximity was taken into accounts while choosing the venue districts and municipalities for the group discussions. Group discussions were also held with beneficiaries of skills training in Kathmandu.

Study site(s) and research participant selection strategy

The researchers visited selected districts for data collection. Data collection was centred around the MRCs, with these acting as crucial points in accessing and identifying research participants. Visiting district headquarters helped in accessing provincial-level elected representatives, ministries, and other provincial actors. The research team tried to ensure that all three types of study sites were included—those characterised as good, moderate, and challenging—for each of the programme components. One non-SaMi district, Myagdi, where the MRC was established with the government's own resources, was also included for comparison. National-level stakeholders were interviewed in the country's capital, Kathmandu.

Limitations of the study

One of the limitations of this study lies in the limited geographical coverage, which may have led to overlooking variations that exist in other geographical contexts. Another limitation is the inadequate comparison of learnings across different phases of the programme which could hinder a comprehensive assessment of the programme's learnings over time. Additionally, the study lacks comparison between old and new districts where the programme has been implemented and, as such, understanding the programme's learnings may differ based on the duration of implementation, among other factors. Addressing these limitations would, hence, require further study.

ANNEX 2: OUTCOME MONITORING SUMMARY (SAMI PHASE III)

Indicators	Phase Target 2024	Baseline	Achievements					
			Year 1 (2018/19)	Year 2 (2019/20)	Year 3 (2020/21)	Year 4 (2021/22)	Year 5 (2022/23)	Year 6 (2023/24)
Outcome 1: Men and women migrants and their families, including those from marginalised groups, have increased the benefits and mitigated the social implications of migration.								
1.1: % of MRC visitors (M/W) that applied the messages on safe migration practices and the rights of migrants ⁱⁱⁱ	Left a copy of documents at home: 95%	Old districts: 80% ^{iv} , New districts: 17.1% ^v	80.2% (Old districts: 80.2%, New districts: NA ^{vi})	80.52% (Old districts: 80.6%, New districts: 72.2%)	84% (Old districts: 86.5%, New districts: 75%)	82.3% (Old districts: 85.2%, New districts: 76.6%)	91% (M: 91.3%, W: 89.8%)	93.8% (M: 94.6%, W: 90.6%)
	Reduced pre-departure costs through negotiations: 50%	Old districts: 17%, New districts: 33.4%	63.7% (Old districts: 63.7%, New districts: NA)	64.26% (Old districts: 64.13%, New districts: 72.2%)	59% (Old districts: 57.1%, New districts: 64.7%)	64.6% (Old districts: 63.5%, New districts: 66.7%)	69.2% (M: 69.3%, W: 68.8%)	62.6% (M: 62.9%, W: 61.6%)
	50% of migrants received receipts for pre-departure payments from recruitment agencies	Old districts: 30%, New districts: 11.6%	55.7% (Old districts: 55.7%, New districts: NA)	39.91% (Old districts: 39.93%, New districts: 38.9%)	35% (Old districts: 35.9%, New districts: 30.9%)	42.6% (Old districts: 38.2%, New districts: 51.0%)	44.8% (M: 44.8%, W: 44.9%)	34.6% (M: 34%, W: 36.9%)

ⁱⁱⁱ Disaggregation between "new" and "old" districts was removed for this indicator as the performance of the MRCs/sub-MRCs in both districts is similar from 2022/23.

^{iv} The baseline data for old districts correspond to the achievement of Year 4 of Phase II for 19 districts of intervention.

^v A baseline survey was conducted in 20 new districts of SaMi Phase III intervention in early 2020.

^{vi} No achievements in the first year i.e., 2018/2019.

1.2.1. % of trained migrant aspirants (M/W/caste/ethnicity) gainfully employed in the countries of destination six months after completing training	50% men 60% women ^{vii} 20% Dalits	59% men 84% women 13% Dalits	40% men 59% women 15% Dalits	10% men 64% women 16% Dalits	0% men 0% women 0% Dalits ^{viii}	45% men 70% women 58% Dalits	51% men 75% women 49% Dalits	81.2% men 58.7% women 82.2% Dalits
1.2.2. % of trained migrant aspirants who pass the end-of-training test conducted by NSTB or an internationally accredited certification board	90%	NA	NA	NA	85.78%	90%	91%	NA (The National Skill Testing Board (NSTB) will no longer conduct skills testing for training lasting less than 390 hours for Level 1. The training of the SaMi Programme does not meet this criteria.)
1.3.1. % of households that have increased savings six months after training	65%	49%	NA	60%	NA	75%	80%	76%
1.3.2. # of persons (M/W/caste/DGs) who gained access to formal financial services in Swiss intervention areas (Swiss ARI E2)	16,000 (W: 98%, DGs including women: 80%)	1,600 (W: 98%)	2,170 (W: 99.5%, DGs: 100%)	1,050 (W: 98.3%, DGs: 99.5%)	2,321 (W: 98.5%, DGs: 99.9%)	7,624 (W: 98.6%, DGs: 9.4%)	5,634 (W: 98%, DGs: 99.8%)	8,572 (W: 97%, DGs: 99%)

^{vii} The target for the gainful employment of men and women trainees was adjusted as the pandemic affected the mobility of potential migrant workers and job demand in the CoDs.

^{viii} Gainful employment could not be reported as none of the trainees could complete training from July 2020 to January 2021. The vocational skills training was disrupted as the training management institutes were closed from mid-July 2020 to mid-January 2021, and again from April 2021 to mid-July 2021 due to the government's restrictions in the context of the global pandemic.

1.4.1. (a) # of persons with improved psychosocial well-being ^x (M/W/caste/ethnicity)	70%	65%	83%	12% ^x	23.4% ^{xi}	53%	63%	92.14%
1.4.2. % of women completing financial literacy and psychosocial classes who experienced less stigmatisation in their communities	80%	Notable changes in community attitudes	NA	NA	NA	68%	NA	93%
1.5. # of citizens (M/W/caste/ ethnicity) having emerged as competent advocates for migrant rights at the province and local level in Swiss intervention areas (Swiss Strategy indicator 3.3.1	165 (M:122, W: 43, DG: 80%)	50 (M: 40, W: 10, DG: 50%)	46 (11 women)	NA	119 (32 women)	165	This indicator was dropped following a study, ^{xii} the findings of which led to stopping the systemic support of "champions" and to rather focus on Returnee Migrants' Networks (RMNs) instead.	
Outcome 2: All three levels of government use effective mechanisms for the protection of migrants and their families.								
2.1. % of migration-related complaints at the national and sub-national levels in intervention areas are resolved	Formal mechanism at the national level: 40%	30% at the national level	25% (510 out of 2,039)	43.4% (543 out of 1,251)	29.1% (331 out of 1,137)	38% (1,191 out of 3,149)	39.2% (1,751 out of 4,464)	49.43% (3,837 out of 7,763)
	Formal mechanism at the local level with CDO mediation: 40%	37% at the local level	35%	39% (96 out of 249)	36.1% (215 out of 596)	26% (390 out of 1,499)	25% (705 out of 2,842)	30.4% (1,496 out of 4,922)

^x The progress of above 60% is considered as significant improvement.

^x There are two reasons behind the low achievement: first, the regular counselling services were interrupted and had to be adapted in the form of tele-counselling due to COVID-19; second, the psychosocial counsellors had not completed their training, which impacted in the targeted achievement.

^{xi} The regular counselling services were interrupted and had to be adapted in the form of tele-counselling due to COVID-19.

^{xii} Effectiveness of Migrants' Rights Networks and Migration Champions.

2.2. FEB and local governments (LG) increase fund contribution to foreign employment services	50% of local governments/provincial governments contributing cost for migration-related programmes	NA	46 LGs have allocated budget for foreign employment	64 LGs	77 LGs	109 LGs allocated budget of NPR 73,384,500 (out of the total allocated budget, 17 non-SaMi LGs allocated NPR 8,600,000)	FEB allocated NPR 1.5 million to print IEC materials and spent NPR 3.5 million for the capacity development of MRCs and related staff Koshi Province allocated NPR 6 million, Bagmati Province allocated NPR 12.5 million and Lumbini Province allocated NPR 1.3 million 106 LGs (65 LGs including 10 non-SaMi LGs) allocated more than NPR 300,000	PGs: 5 LGs: 107 (72 allocated more than NPR 300,000) FEB: NPR 392,000
2.3. # of local governments, which have established services in support of migrants and their families in Swiss intervention areas ^{xiii}	50	NA	Migration profile: 5, safer migration guidelines: 0, inclusion of migration issues in periodic plans: 4	Migration profile: 6, safer migration guidelines: 0, inclusion of migration issues in periodic plans: 0	Migration profile: 11, safer migration guidelines: 15, inclusion of migration issues in periodic plans: 9	Migration profile: 49, safer migration guidelines: 61, inclusion of migration issues in periodic plans: 7	Migration profile: 51, safer migration guidelines: 18, inclusion of migration issues in periodic plans: 15	Migration profile: 47, safer migration guidelines: 31, inclusion of migration issues in periodic plans: 14

^{xiii} In order to measure the services established by the local governments (LGs), development of migration profiles and inclusion of migration issues in the periodic plans of local governments after the facilitation of SaMi will be reported for this indicator.

NOTES

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- 4 Kasim Randeree, 'Workforce Nationalisation in the Gulf Cooperation Council States,' *Occasional Paper*, No. 9 (2012).
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- 7 Report of the DoFE on the country-wise distribution of labor approvals from 2023-07-17 to 2024-07-15; Bhattarai, Upadhyaya and Sharma, *State of Migration in Nepal*. This figure does not include those headed to India.
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- 11 Baniya et al, *Unscrupulous Recruitment and Precarious Employment*; Sadikshya Bhattarai, Jeevan Baniya, Sanjit Shrestha, Prasansa Thapa, Rajib Neupane, Dogendra Tumsa, Sita Nepali and Sita Mademba, *Return, Weak Reintegration, and Remigration: A Study of Nepali Migrant Workers* (Kathmandu: PNCC/CESLAM, 2023); UN Women, *Returning Home: Challenges and Opportunities for Women Migrant Workers in the Nepali Labour Market* (Kathmandu: UN Women, 2019).
- 12 Foreign Employment Act 2007, Preamble, <https://www.ceslam.org/uploads/backup/foreign%20employment%20act%202064%202007.pdf>.
- 13 Foreign Employment Policy 2012, Part 8, Policy 'f', <https://www.ceslam.org/uploads/backup/foreign%20employment%20policy%202012.pdf>.
- 14 MoLESS, *Nepal Labour Migration Report 2022*.
- 15 Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) have been set up in 38 districts, housed within district administration

offices (DAOs), along with one in the Department of Passport in Kathmandu. Moreover, there are 18 sub-MRCs operating within Area Administration Offices. Furthermore, local governments beyond the SaMi Programme's scope have also established MRCs and sub-MRCs with the programme's technical assistance. These MRCs and sub-MRCs play a pivotal role in conducting and coordinating various activities like outreach and awareness campaigns, as well as providing counselling and support services.

- 16 'National Level,' Safer Migration Programme, accessed 6 January, 2024, <https://www.sami.org.np/national-level>.
- 17 Baniya et al., *Unscrupulous Recruitment and Precarious Employment of Nepali Migrant Workers*.
- 18 MoLESS, *Nepal Labour Migration Report 2022*.
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- 20 MoLESS, *Nepal Labour Migration Report 2022*.
- 21 All migrant workers are required to contribute to the Foreign Employment Welfare Fund (FEWF) to obtain their labour permits. Managed by the FEB, the FEWF is used by the government to provide various welfare and social protection services to migrant workers, such as death or injury compensation and scholarship for children, among others.
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- 23 Baniya et al, *Unscrupulous Recruitment and Precarious Employment of Nepali Migrant Workers*.
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- 25 Roni Pradhan Dhaubhadel, *Migrant Resource Centre: A Tested Model for Information Provision and Linking Migrants to Safe Migration Services* (2018).
- 26 Safer Migration Programme Implementation Guidelines, a. 19(4).
- 27 Safer Migration (SaMi) Programme, *Manual for Migrant Resource Centre Counsellors-2077*. (Internal document)
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 The remaining visitors at the MRC could be students and those migrating as dependent.
- 30 Ujyaalo Network, *Monthly Narrative Progress Report for Safer Migration (SaMi) Programme*.
- 31 MoLESS, *Nepal Labour Migration Report 2022*.
- 32 Safer Migration (SaMi) Programme, *Manual for Migrant Resource Centre Counsellors-2077*.
- 33 RVs are returnee volunteers assigned to specific wards and reach households to provide information on safe migration and referrals to MRCs. Social mobilisers disseminate information at the community level through orientations and presentations to the entire community or to particular groups.
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