



Parliamentary briefing – Domestic work migration bans in Nepal

The policy context

- Since 2017, Nepal has banned its citizens from going abroad for domestic work¹, a sector that disproportionately employs poor, lower caste, Dalit and indigenous women².
- The government justified this ban as protection from exploitation³. In 2020, it set seven conditions for lifting it, the most important being that destination countries must first sign Bilateral Labour Agreements in domestic work⁴.
- It has been more than nine years, and no such agreement has been signed with any host countries. Yet tens of thousands of Nepali women migrate for domestic work through irregular channels, and work without Nepal's recognition and protection in the Gulf countries⁵.
- This increases their risk of exploitation throughout their migration journeys⁶.

The evidence: Migration bans on domestic work are harmful for Nepali women

- The migration ban does not stop migration.
- Nepali women travel through India, change their documents in transit countries, or leave on visit visas⁷.
- Not all domestic work migration experiences are negative, and evidence of positive migration outcomes exists within the sector. By treating all domestic work migration as dangerous, the policy risks portraying women as victims rather than as people making choices for themselves and their families.
- Because their migration is not officially recognised, women working as domestic workers in Gulf countries cannot access consular support when they face abuse and exploitation⁸.
- Many are forced to rely on recruitment agents; pay for their own rescue; spend months in detention⁹.
- Some die abroad without any official record.
- Migrant domestic workers who return to Nepal are excluded from official reintegration programmes due to their irregular migration. Without viable alternatives at home, and burdened by stigma and debts, many feel compelled to re-migrate through the same irregular channels¹⁰.
- Recent research by Bhagat and WOREC (2025) shows that families of women who die while working through irregular channels often cannot bring their loved ones' bodies back home¹¹. Family members are left to bear the financial and emotional burden on their own.
- The government's position rests on BLAs as the solution. However, the evidence suggests BLAs are not sufficient. Even where BLAs exist for domestic work, for example in Jordan since 2017, there is evidence of exploitation and deaths among women working in the sector¹².
- The government has used BLA conditionality to justify nine years of inaction whilst tens of thousands of women have migrated without protection.

Recommendations

- Lift the migration bans immediately and without precondition. Open legal pathways for women to migrate for domestic work.
- Unconditionally register all Nepali domestic workers at Nepali missions abroad, regardless of their migration status. Instruct Nepali missions to establish dedicated gender-responsive service centres for domestic workers.
- Restructure the Social Security Fund¹³ from a contributory model to a hybrid model that extends non-contributory coverage to informal and domestic workers and their families. Negotiate portability of these provisions into all future bilateral labour agreements.
- Pursue legally binding bilateral labour agreements with destination countries as a parallel track, not a precondition. BLA negotiations must begin immediately alongside the lifting of the ban, not instead of it. Domestic workers, civil society organisations, and national human rights institutions from both source and destination countries must be included in negotiations¹⁴.
- Establish reintegration support at the local level and cover all women regardless of their migration channels. Local authorities and employment service centres must be empowered and resourced to support returnee domestic workers and their families through psychosocial, legal, and economic programmes.



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This parliamentary briefing has been prepared by Dr Ayushman Bhagat, Brunel University of London, in an independent capacity. It reflects the author's assessment of the available evidence, informed by peer-reviewed research and multiple studies conducted over the past decade with returnee domestic workers and their families across various sites in Nepal. The briefing does not constitute an endorsement of any political party or position. For further information, please contact Dr Ayushman Bhagat at ayushman.bhagat@brunel.ac.uk.