

Banned to Death

Why must Nepal lift migration
bans on domestic work?

Ayushman Bhagat

Lecturer in Political Geography,
Department of Social and Political Sciences
College of Arts, Law and Social Sciences
Brunel University of London

Author

Ayushman Bhagat

Dr. Ayushman Bhagat is a Lecturer in Political Geography at Brunel University of London.
ayushman.bhagat@brunel.ac.uk

Publication Date

July 2026

Recommended Citation

Bhagat, Ayushman (2026). Banned to Death: Why must Nepal lift migration bans on domestic work?.
Brunel University London. Book. <https://doi.org/10.17633/rd.brunel.32973386>

Resource Support

This report was developed with the support of the Brunel Impact Development Award.

License

© 2026 Ayushman Bhagat / Brunel University of London. Licensed under CC BY 4.0.

Dissemination Partner

WOREC (Women's Rehabilitation Centre)

Publisher**Brunel University of London**

Kingston Lane, Uxbridge, UB8 3PH, United Kingdom
www.brunel.ac.uk

Table of contents

Preface	4
Acknowledgements	5
Executive summary	6
1. Introduction	9
2. Policy background: 25 years of restriction	11
3. The evidence: Why migration bans harm Nepali women	13
3.1 The ban does not stop migration	13
3.2 The ban is a gender and caste discriminatory policy	14
3.3 The ban creates the harm it claims to prevent	14
3.4 The ban exposes women to abuse, deception, exploitation, and death	15
3.5 The ban hides the disappearances and deaths of Nepali citizens from accountability	16
3.6 The Bilateral Labour Agreements (BLAs) cannot be the condition for lifting the ban	16
3.7 Who does the current migration ban serve?	17
4. Policy recommendations	19
4.1 Lift the ban and create legal migration pathways	19
4.2 Protect Nepali women already abroad	19
4.3 Reform social protection and compensation systems	19
4.4 Use BLAs as protection mechanisms, not migration barriers	20
4.5 Reform recruitment systems and reduce dependence on brokers	20
4.6 Support returnee workers and challenge migration stigma	20
4.7 Establish accountability and improve migration data	21
4.8 Shift the purpose of migration governance	21
5. Conclusion	22
Annex: Methodology note	23
References	24

Preface

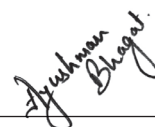
In 2016, I set out to understand how people on the move encounter, experience, and escape anti-trafficking and emigration control measures such as migration bans on domestic work in Nepal. Over the following decade, I explored various aspects of these bans, including decision-making, borders, escape, subversion, exploitation, stigma, abandonment, strandedness, return, and, most recently, the deaths of Nepali women marginalised by caste, class, and gender hierarchies.

This report summarises what I have learned over a decade-long engagement with migration bans framed as measures to protect women. It is about the women whose deaths those same policies have helped make possible. It is written for the Members of Nepal's Federal Parliament, who have the power to end a policy of migration bans on domestic work that has now outlived any credible claim to protecting the women it was designed for. It draws on a decade of fieldwork; on sustained relationships with returnee domestic workers; on direct testimony from families who have lost daughters, wives, and mothers; and on an analysis of a policy environment that has had 25 years to demonstrate that restriction has never kept, and will never keep, Nepali women safe.

I do not argue that women's migration for domestic work abroad is risk-free—any more than men's labour migration is. Nor do I deny that exploitation occurs in overseas domestic work; it does, just as extreme exploitation permeates male-dominated sectors of foreign employment. Neither do I deny that women domestic workers lose their lives abroad. They do. Yet, official records consistently document even higher numbers of deaths among Nepali men in foreign employment. The question, then, is why one form of exploitation has been repeatedly sensationalised and used to justify restricting only one group's labour mobility. I argue that migration bans rest on two flawed assumptions: first, that all domestic work is inherently exploitative; and second, that bilateral labour agreements can eliminate exploitation. Some of the women whose stories inform our findings spoke with me and/or my research collaborators directly; others are known to us through families who trusted us with their grief, many of whom remain in touch with us still. I have tried throughout this report to honour that trust by being care-full about what the evidence shows.

What the evidence shows, consistently and across every study cited here, is this: when the state responds to the labour exploitation Nepali women face abroad in domestic work by making their migration illegal, women cease to be protected. Instead, the ban creates incentives for every state and non-state actor involved in this debate except Nepali migrant domestic workers and those who seek to migrate through irregular channels for domestic work abroad. For example, I have built a career studying this issue, including a doctorate, a permanent lectureship, publications, awards, policy access, and most recently, an impact case study now in progress. Yet the returnee women and bereaved families whose grief, testimony, and experiences underpin these pages have received no comparable benefits. Many remain subject to the very ban that I, and many others like me, have spent the past decade documenting.

Rather than protecting women, Nepal's policy of migration bans pushes them into irregular migration channels, exposing them to exploitation and premature death. Parliament has the power to change that. This report explains why it should, and how it can.



Dr Ayushman Bhagat
July, 2026.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the returnee migrant domestic workers, bereaved families, and community members who shared their stories of migration, labour, exploitation, death, stigma, and grief, in the hope that doing so might contribute to meaningful change. I am grateful for the trust you placed in me. I am confident that no report can undo the harms you have experienced or compensate for what has been lost as a result of this policy of migration bans. I hope this report contributes to changing such restrictive policies that have impacted so many of your lives.

I am grateful to Durham University, Edge Hill University, and Brunel University of London for supporting different stages of this research over the past ten years. I also thank Social Science Baha (CESLAM) and WOREC for supporting the fieldwork that underpins multiple aspects of this report. My sincere thanks to WOREC for partnering in the dissemination of this report.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of working alongside many remarkable people whose friendship, collaboration, and generosity have shaped both this decade long work and me as a scholar and human being. I am especially grateful to Dolma didi, Cheewang, Sitamaya ji, Thangu didi, Dhan Dorjee, Temba ji, Lakpa Dorjee ji, Sita ji, Rajiv ji, Renu ji, Sulochana ji, Pooja ji, Sangita ji, Dil Kumari ji, Budha ji, Rusha ji, Kalpana ji, Kamala ji, Srijana ji, Chandika ji, Suva ji, Anupama ji, Sabitri ji, Deependra ji, and Sunita ji. Thank you for your trust, companionship, discussion, debates, disagreements and unwavering support. I am deeply indebted to Bharti Birla, Dr Siobhan McGrath, Professor Lauren Martin, Professor Deirdre McCann, Professor Joel Quirk, Dr Sallie Yea, Professor Cherith Moses, Professor Nicola Ansell, and Dr Anneleen Kennis for their mentorship, encouragement, and intellectual generosity over the years. Your confidence in my work has made this decade-long effort possible.

Finally, my deepest thanks go to Ankita, whose criticisms, insights, and encouragement challenged me to think more carefully and write more honestly, and to Sweta, whose love and support made this work possible in more ways than I can express.

Executive summary

For over 25 years, the Government of Nepal has treated migration bans as its primary tool for protecting women who migrate abroad for domestic work. Since 2017, a blanket ban has prevented Nepali women from accessing formal migration pathways for domestic work, whilst since 2020 the ban has been conditionally eased subject to seven preconditions, the most consequential being a requirement that destination countries first sign a Bilateral Labour Agreement (BLA) in domestic work.

This report presents cumulative evidence from three interdependent research projects involving more than 150 community members, 81 documented mobility stories, interviews with over 70 migration-sector actors, and 17 in-depth family testimonies relating to migrant deaths. The evidence demonstrates that the migration ban has failed on its own terms: it has not prevented Nepali women from migrating for domestic work, but it has reduced their access to legal protection, state support, and accountability mechanisms when harm occurs. The report finds that:

- Nepali women continue to migrate for domestic work through informal channels, but without legal recognition, state support, or access to protection mechanisms.
- The ban restricts the mobility of women from marginalised caste, ethnic, and low-income communities whose migration decisions are shaped by poverty and limited opportunities.
- By pushing migration outside formal systems, bans increase exposure to deception, exploitation, abuse, disappearance, and death whilst reducing accountability.
- Women migrating outside official systems remain invisible in state records, limiting their access to rescue, justice, and compensation.
- Bilateral Labour Agreements (BLAs) in domestic work cannot substitute for enforcement, worker participation, access to justice, and effective Nepali mission-led protection systems.

Based on this evidence, the report recommends replacing migration prohibition with a rights and dignity-based framework. The key recommendations are to:

- I. Immediately lift the ban and create accessible legal migration pathways for domestic workers;
- II. Protect Nepali women already abroad regardless of migration status, including through stronger embassy support, legal assistance, and emergency protection mechanisms;
- III. Reform social protection, compensation, and repatriation systems for migrant workers and their families;
- IV. Use Bilateral Labour Agreements as protection mechanisms rather than barriers to migration;
- V. Reform recruitment systems and reduce dependence on unregulated brokers;

- VI. Support returnee workers and challenge stigma associated with women's labour migration;
- VII. Strengthen accountability mechanisms and migration data systems to ensure migrant deaths, disappearances, and exploitation are properly recognised and addressed.

The evidence presented in this report shows that migration bans have made Nepali women's migration less visible, less regulated, and less safe. Nepal's migration governance should move away from restricting women's mobility and towards ensuring that all migrant workers are recognised as rights holders entitled to protection, and accountability. Lifting the ban is the first step towards a just and fair migration governance where women citizens of Nepal can migrate with dignity.

1. Introduction

Every year, hundreds of thousands of Nepali citizens migrate for foreign employment. According to official records, 8,39,266 labour permits were issued to Nepali citizens for foreign employment abroad during FY2024–25ⁱ. During the first quarter of FY2025–26, an average of about 2,230 labour permits were issued per dayⁱⁱ, resulting in 2,00,716 labour permits being issued to Nepali citizens for foreign employment during the quarter. The recent labour migration report indicates that Nepali women constitute an increasing share of labour migrants, rising from less than 7% in 2011 to approximately 11% in 2021, whilst labour permit records show an even steeper increase, from under 4% of permits issued in 2008/09 to nearly 13% in 2023/24ⁱⁱⁱ.

Nevertheless, these 'official data' underestimate women's labour migration, as they exclude the large number of women who migrate to undertake domestic work in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, Malaysia, and other destinations. The scale of this omission is difficult to overstate. Whilst unofficial estimates suggest that the number of Nepali women employed as domestic workers abroad runs into the hundreds of thousands, no reliable estimate exists of the total population living and working overseas^{iv}. As a result, we do not know how many women leave Nepal each day for domestic work, the proportion of remittances (equivalent to approximately 27% of GDP^v) that they generate, how many experience exploitation or abuse, or how many die whilst employed abroad. Thus, despite the centrality of migrant labour and remittances to Nepal's economy, the mobility, labour, caste, deaths, and contribution of women migrant domestic workers remain absent from official statistics and policy discourse.

This is due to the Government of Nepal's long-standing policy of migration bans on foreign employment in the domestic work sector.

This restrictive policy framework governing women's migration for domestic work is not a uniquely Nepali approach. Comparative research across Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka has identified two recurring policy narratives behind such bans^{vi}: (a) where sending states use bans as leverage in labour diplomacy to negotiate better conditions abroad, and (b) where the state positions itself as "protector," to reaffirm traditional gender norms. The evidence in this report suggests that Nepal's ban has functioned as the latter, without generating the negotiating leverage that its proponents have long claimed it would. The seven preconditions introduced in 2020 for lifting the migration ban: (a) legal protections, (b) bilateral agreements, (c) guaranteed labour rights, (d) social security, (e) occupational safety, (f) regulated working conditions, and (g) 24-hour insurance^{vii}; have proved unattainable in practice, thereby creating grounds for the indefinite continuation of bans. Most of these conditions lie beyond the Government of Nepal's capacity to secure unilaterally.

Moreover, even where formal protections exist, they do not automatically prevent exploitation^{viii}. The continued exploitation and deaths of Nepali male migrant workers despite "strong BLAs" and formal labour protections demonstrates that such mechanisms, whilst important, cannot alone guarantee safety and dignity. The continued application of these restrictions has therefore come at the expense of thousands of Nepali migrant domestic workers.

This report brings together nine years of academic research, grassroots fieldwork, investigative journalism, and direct engagement with government, civil society, and international migration-sector actors^{ix}, alongside the wider international research literature on migration bans and domestic worker exploitation^x, to make a single, evidence-based argument to Parliament:

Migration bans on domestic work do not protect women. The preconditions for lifting them will not eliminate labour exploitation; instead, they abandon Nepali women already marginalised by class, caste, and gender—both in life and in death.

The report is built on the stories of mobility of 81 Nepali women, which reveal that informal migration produces highly varied outcomes, including multiple cases of successful employment and improved livelihoods alongside cases of abuse, deception, exploitation, and death. However, even those with positive experiences remain vulnerable due to the absence of legal status, institutional protection, and access to formal support mechanisms.

Migration bans on domestic work must be lifted, followed by efforts to negotiate decent working conditions of Nepali domestic workers abroad. What follows is organised in three parts: the policy history that produced today's ban (Section 2), the evidence of what that ban has actually done over nine years of fieldwork (Section 3), and what Parliament can do instead (Section 4).

2. Policy background: 25 years of restriction

The formal regulation of women's labour migration in Nepal began with the 1985 Foreign Employment Act, which required women to obtain a male guardian's permission to migrate^{xi}. This codification assumed that women's mobility required family and state control rather than being their own choice.

1998: The first ban

All women migrant workers were first banned from migrating to Gulf countries following the highly publicised death of a domestic worker, Kani Sherpa, in Kuwait^{xii}. This event triggered the government's first migration ban targeting women and established a pattern that has recurred over the following two decades: a high-profile death or crisis, public outrage, and a blanket restriction on women's mobility. Since then, Nepal has implemented, repealed, and re-implemented various bans and restrictions on the migration of women and domestic workers, at various points covering total bans as well as restrictions by country, occupation, and age^{xiii}.

2017: The blanket ban on domestic work

Following a parliamentary committee's field visit and consultations on bans, restrictions, and related frameworks, the government imposed a total ban on migration for domestic work^{xiv}.

2020: Conditional easing

The Committee requested that the government repeal the 2017 ban in September 2020, subject to seven preconditions^{xv}, including the signing of Bilateral Labour Agreements (BLAs) with all destination countries, and the existence of separate labour laws. The single most consequential precondition remains the requirement that destination countries sign a BLA specifically covering domestic work.

2017–2026: Nine years of inaction

No BLA specifically covering domestic work had been signed with any major destination

country for most of this period. Meanwhile, the government has layered on further restrictions (for example, the No Objection Certificate (NOC) requirement for transit through Indian airports, increased scrutiny of visit-visa issuance, and expanded surveillance at borders, highways, and airports)^{xvi}, whilst the demand for Nepali domestic workers, and the flow of women meeting it, has continued unabated.

Despite the restrictions, Nepali women have continued migrating for domestic work through both formal and informal channels; many resort to irregular channels, making it difficult to accurately estimate their actual numbers, which unofficial estimates suggest could run into the hundreds of thousands. The abandonment this created was made visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the government introduced repatriation procedures to bring stranded citizens home, but the initial repatriation criteria prioritised migrants documented through the formal labour migration system, leaving many irregular migrants without equal access to state-supported repatriation. Whilst the list was later amended, this instance offers one of the clearest documented instances of the ban's logic in determining who the state considers worth protecting.

The most recent discussion prior to the youth-led protests of September 2025 driven by outrage over nepotism, corruption, governance failures, unemployment, and police accountability (in other words, the "Gen Z" movement, predominantly centred in Kathmandu, which disrupted government and business activity nationwide), was that the Government of Nepal was considering lifting the migration ban on domestic workers^{xvii}. Advocacy groups, human rights organisations, and critical scholars have long called for this, on the grounds that the ban increases workers' vulnerability to exploitation. However, Section 3.5 provides evidence that a

BLA alone, which is an opaque document that rarely, if ever, incorporates the views of domestic workers into its design and negotiation, and often lacks enforceable protections, will not address the underlying conditions that enable severe exploitation.

Why domestic work has been treated differently

Domestic work sits at the intersection of two devaluations. First, patriarchal gender norms frame cleaning, cooking, and caregiving as women's natural, unpaid domestic duty rather than legitimate paid labour. Second, as a form of social reproduction^{xviii}, domestic work sustains households, economies, and labour markets, yet remains systematically undervalued because it is performed largely by women and within private spaces. Third, in Nepal and wider South Asian societies, caste hierarchies have historically associated domestic labour with lower-status occupations^{xix}, reinforcing its stigma and invisibility. This contradiction has fuelled the growth of global and regional care chains^{xx}, through which women from poorer countries migrate to meet rising demand for domestic and care work in wealthier societies, whilst their own care responsibilities are transferred to other women within their families and communities.

In Nepal and wider South Asia, these gendered dynamics intersect with caste and class hierarchies that have historically associated domestic labour with marginalised occupations, further reinforcing its stigma and invisibility. These intersecting norms mean that the exploitation and deaths of male migrant workers in other sectors, even at comparable or worse scale, have never triggered a comparable ban. For example, during the FIFA World Cup construction in Qatar, reports suggested two to three Nepali male workers' bodies arrived home each day^{xxi}, yet the government did not ban migration to Qatar. Most recently, 1,273 Nepali migrant workers returned in coffins in the first ten months of this fiscal year (mid-July 2025 to 11 May 2026); of these, 1,229 were men and only 44 were women^{xxii}. These figures capture only migrants who travelled through formal channels. This means the deaths of women who migrated informally, very likely the larger share of women in domestic work, are not counted here at all, and remain entirely absent from the state's record. Yet the policy response has focused specifically on restricting women's mobility. When women are the ones migrating, and specifically into feminised, caste-associated labour, restriction has been the default state response.

3. The evidence: Why migration bans harm Nepali women

3.1 The ban does not stop migration

Despite 25 years of intermittent migration bans, Nepali women have never stopped migrating for domestic work. Whilst introduction of the recent ban in 2017 put a complete halt on women migrating as domestic workers through formal channels, especially in the gulf countries, this decline in formal migration did not correspond to a decline in actual migration in those countries. Estimates suggest that between 60,000 and 100,000 Nepali women currently work in the Gulf as domestic workers^{xxiii}. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the figure could be considerably higher still, given how much of this migration is via informal channels.

Twenty-five years of bans have not prevented determined Nepali women from migrating for domestic work. These migration bans selectively strip Nepali women of the constitutional rights of citizenship^{xxiv}. By denying labour permits, the state denies women access to the legal channels through which protection, accountability, and assistance are provided. In doing so, it relinquishes responsibility for their safety, leaves families to bear the consequences alone, and transforms the state's duty of care into a policy of abandonment. Hence, Nepali women migrate via informal channels, and Nepali state disappears for them. Those travelling through informal channels:

- Have no labour contract, no vetted employer, and no minimum-wage guarantee;
- Cannot register with Nepali missions abroad, because doing so would expose their "illegal" status;
- Even though the government has provisions for registering them through official contracts, many are either unwilling or unable to

produce such documents for various reasons, including employers' reluctance and illiteracy;

- Have no access to consular assistance if they face abuse, wage theft, confinement, or violence;
- Cannot access government compensation schemes if injured, exploited, or killed;
- Are frequently forced to pay agents for their own "rescue" from exploitative situations;
- Have weaker bargaining power with employers, many of whom understand and exploit the fact that these workers have no support from their countries.

Illustrative account. *A woman interviewed for this research migrated to Kuwait via an agent who promised one destination country and a labour permit, then delivered both a different country and a visit visa. The agent groomed her to lie to immigration officers along the way. Her passport and phone were confiscated on arrival. When she later asked to return home after enduring food deprivation and physical abuse from an employer, the same agent demanded a further payment for her return ticket, forcing her family into high-interest debt.*

This pattern recurs across the wider set of life-history interviews reviewed for this report and illustrates what "no institutional recourse" means in practice. Several labour-sending countries, including Nepal, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka, have also imposed restrictions on women's domestic work migration. For example, the ILO suggests that Nepal's own ban was briefly lifted in 2010; during that period, the proportion of women migrating through legal channels tripled. Further, the Philippines

represents a more regulated approach, relying on migration governance systems and bilateral agreements rather than blanket bans. However, Filipino migrant domestic workers continue to face documented cases of abuse and structural vulnerability. To address these risks, the Philippines has invested in overseas worker protection through migrant worker offices, welfare programmes, and targeted support for domestic workers abroad. Its experience demonstrates that protecting domestic workers requires regulation, monitoring, and support systems, not restrictions on women's mobility.

3.2 The ban is a gender and caste discriminatory policy

Women who migrate for domestic work are disproportionately from Dalit, Janajati (Indigenous), and low-income backgrounds, with limited literacy, financial resources, and social capital. Although some argue that the government does not collect caste-disaggregated data on labour migration or domestic workers^{xxv}, making precise estimates impossible, existing research consistently shows that many women who migrate for domestic work come from structurally disadvantaged communities. For these women, migration is often a strategy to escape entrenched poverty as well as the enduring legacies and contemporary realities of caste-based oppression in Nepal.

The discriminatory effects of the ban are compounded by the gender-blind nature of Nepal's labour migration governance^{xxvi}. The foreign employment registration system fails to account for the intense social stigma around female labour migration, meaning that even women who attempt to migrate through regular channels often face familial and community sanction. Rather than addressing the structural inequalities that shape women's migration decisions, including, but not limited to, poverty, caste-based exclusion, and inadequate social protection, the ban confines women within the intersecting hierarchies of gender, caste, class, and indigeneity that many seek to escape through migration.

I have documented cases of Nepali women intercepted at borders and airports by anti-trafficking organisations and forcibly returned to their communities of origin^{xxvii}, where they faced renewed domestic violence, debt pressure, or caste-based exclusion without any improvement in the structural conditions that prompted them to migrate. Research further suggests that restricting women's mobility in economically marginalised households can itself increase the risk of domestic violence^{xxviii}, particularly where male family members have migrated and women are left solely responsible for household survival. Hence, the ban disproportionately reproduces the harms experienced by women from already marginalised caste and socioeconomic groups.

3.3 The ban creates the harm it claims to prevent

Migration bans allow anti-trafficking and emigration control infrastructure in Nepal to expand control over women's mobility. In all three research projects, participants have suggested that this protectionist approach often harms the very women it claims to protect. Women trying to migrate for work are frequently stopped at borders, highways, and airports based on assumptions about their appearance, caste, travelling alone, or behaviour^{xxix}. Many are taken to shelters, kept there until a male family member arrives, and sent back to communities they were trying to leave. Border monitoring has created a large enforcement system focused on stopping women's movement^{xxx}. At some border points, several anti-trafficking organisations operate at the same location. This shows the scale of resources invested in preventing women's movement. Yet these interventions often fail to provide protection, access to rights, or solutions to the conditions that drive migration. Instead, they return women to the same conditions of poverty, gender inequality, caste discrimination, and violence that pushed them to leave. There are multiple cases where participants reported experiencing gender-based violence from their spouses after being returned to their "homes" by anti-trafficking organisations^{xxxi}.

Hence, stopping women from moving removes their choices and increases state control over their lives. Protection should mean safe migration, access to information, support, and accountability. Migration bans remove accountability from the state, anti-trafficking organisations, and those who promote bans as a way to protect women on the move. They stop women from leaving without addressing the conditions that force them to migrate. As a result, they reproduce the very harms they claim to prevent.

3.4 The ban exposes women to abuse, deception, exploitation, and death

Women who cannot migrate through legal channels must rely on unregulated brokers and informal recruitment networks, which significantly increases exposure to abusive recruitment practices^{xxxii}. Whilst most of them reach the destination countries with documents (e.g., paper-based visa, transit visa etc.), they are functionally abandoned by the Nepali state on arrival, since their presence is not officially recognised.

This vulnerability is compounded by labour migration governance in GCC countries. In many Gulf countries, migrant workers depend on their employer to maintain their visa and legal status under the kafala system which requires migrant workers to have an in-country sponsor, usually their employer, who is responsible for their visa and legal status^{xxxiii}. This practice creates opportunities for exploitation, since many employers confiscate workers' passports and abuse them with little chance of legal repercussion or repatriation. This visa-sponsorship system does not allow most migrant domestic workers to move to a new job (inter-employment mobility is not allowed) before their contract ends without their employer's consent. This restrictive regime traps many in abusive situations, and combined with inadequate labour law protections, creates conditions for exploitation and abuse. Whilst several GCC countries have introduced legal protections for migrant domestic workers, including written contracts, rest days, paid leave,

wage protection, and complaint mechanisms (for example, the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia), these protections remain uneven, domestic workers continue to be excluded from many general labour laws, labour inspection inside private homes is limited, and enforcement remains weak. As a result, legal reform has not eliminated the risk of exploitation.

A Nepali woman who migrates informally to evade the ban is doubly exposed: unprotected by her own state's ban-driven abandonment and unprotected by a destination-country legal system where labour protection is not yet strong. The isolation of the work itself compounds this further. Because most domestic workers live in their employers' homes, they remain invisible to legal oversight and are largely excluded from national labour laws in destination countries—a structural invisibility that Nepal's migration ban then reinforces from the sending side, by denying these same women recognition, embassy registration, or state accountability if something goes wrong.

This has several compounding effects specific to the Nepali case:

- Workers without recognised status cannot credibly threaten to report abuse to authorities, leaving them more exposed to coercion and unpaid or extracted labour, much of which occurs inside private homes, away from any public oversight.
- Nepali missions are chronically understaffed, especially in GCC and Malaysia which host over 85% of Nepali migrant workers. Typically, staff number is between seven to seventeen personnel who are constrained from assisting workers who lack formal status.
- Many women who get into difficulty must rely on informal diaspora support rather than official channels, since official channels do not recognise their presence. Diaspora networks could be exclusionary as well.

- Some women spend months in immigration detention; some die abroad in circumstances that are never properly investigated.
- Because most anti-migration enforcement is conducted by anti-trafficking organisations, the ban's legal architecture potentially criminalises not only the women who migrate but anyone who facilitates their passage, including family members, community members, transport operators, and sometimes officials under trafficking law intended for a different purpose entirely^{xxxiv}.

Illustrative account. *One woman spent over a decade in the same household in Saudi Arabia, gradually earning higher wages and describing what she experienced as genuine care from her employer's family. She held no labour permit, no control over her own passport, and no ability to leave the household independently. She attributes her outcome to personal "luck" and compatibility with her employer. For many Nepali women, migration for domestic work is a lottery. Their safety depends on whether they are placed with an employer who treats them fairly. The migration ban leaves Nepali women almost entirely to chance, without the protection of any rights guaranteed by the state.*

3.5 The ban hides the disappearances and deaths of Nepali citizens from accountability

The migration ban increases the risk that Nepali women disappear or die without state support or accountability. Official records show 60,948 missing person cases in Nepal between 2019/20 and 2023/24, of which 26,770 involved women^{xxxv}. The ban pushes women into migration channels where their movements are not recorded by the state. It also discourages families from reporting missing relatives because they fear accusations of "trafficking" or "illegal" migration. The 2020 repatriation order, which initially excluded irregular migrants from rescue support, reinforced the belief that irregular status could prevent access to state

assistance. When women migrate outside official systems, their disappearance becomes harder to report and resolve. Families often lack information about where women travelled, who recruited them, or where they are working. Without official records, state agencies have fewer ways to locate women, provide assistance, or investigate harm.

Deaths abroad create the same problem. Families often receive explanations that do not match the injuries they see on the body. Although the Supreme Court of Nepal requires post-mortems both at the place of death and after repatriation, this is rarely implemented. Deaths are often recorded as suicide or natural causes without further investigation, particularly when women migrated outside formal channels. Families are left without answers and without a clear path to justice. Across the Gulf, migrant domestic workers face risks including passport confiscation, recruitment debt, wage theft, restricted movement, abuse, and death. The migration ban increases the number of women outside official systems, removes state oversight, and makes disappearances and deaths harder to prevent, investigate, and resolve^{xxxvi}.

3.6 The Bilateral Labour Agreements (BLAs) cannot be the condition for lifting the ban

The government's position on solving exploitation in domestic work sector abroad relies on Bilateral Labour Agreements (BLAs) as the solution (often advocated by various pro-domestic workers and feminist organisations). However, the evidence does not support this approach^{xxxvii}. Whilst BLAs form part of a protection system, they cannot replace it. Making BLAs a condition for lifting the ban has delayed protection whilst women continue to migrate through unsafe channels.

First, BLAs have not prevented exploitation or deaths, even in sectors where formal agreements exist. The best example is exploitation and deaths of Nepalis in the construction sector in Qatar during the World Cup. Qatar introduced labour reforms in 2020, including allowing

workers to change jobs without employer permission and introducing a minimum wage. Yet, legal reform did not end abuse. Problems such as passport confiscation, recruitment fees, deceptive recruitment, and penalties against workers who leave employers continued. This shows that legal commitment does not guarantee protection in practice.

Second, existing domestic work agreements have not protected women. Jordan has had a domestic worker BLA with Nepal since 2017, yet Nepali domestic workers there continue to report abuse, exploitation, and deaths. Across the Gulf, domestic workers often remain outside the labour protections available to other workers. A signed agreement does not change the daily reality of workers unless there are strong enforcement systems, access to complaints, and consequences for abuse.

Third, BLAs are often weak because workers are not involved in negotiating them. Returnee workers, civil society organisations, and human rights institutions are rarely part of the process. Many agreements rely on general commitments, weak enforcement mechanisms, and non-judicial dispute processes that do not provide meaningful remedies for serious abuse, including violence, wage theft, or exploitation. The UAE pilot agreement is a step towards creating safer migration channels, but it also shows why BLAs cannot be treated as a solution before lifting the ban. Questions remain about how workers will be selected, how information will reach potential migrants, and how the government will protect the many Nepali women already migrating outside formal channels.

Since 2020, Nepal has treated BLA agreements as a precondition for lifting the migration ban on domestic work. During this period, women continued to migrate, but without the protection that formal migration channels could provide. BLAs should follow the removal of the ban as part of a wider protection system. They should not be used to delay women's access to safe and recognised migration.

3.7 Who does the current migration ban serve?

The migration ban is presented as a measure to protect women. Yet the evidence raises a basic question: who does the current migration ban serve? In all three research projects, the evidence indicates that migrant domestic workers and their families bear the greatest costs of the status quo, whilst migration actors continue to operate within, and many benefit from, the incentives created by restrictive migration governance^{xxxviii}.

Unlicensed agents and brokers benefit because the ban creates demand for irregular migration channels. With few legal routes available, many women depend on brokers to arrange travel, documents, and access to work. The ban strengthens the role of the brokers. Accounts of agents charging fees to arrange ways around the formal system appeared repeatedly across interviews. Licensed recruitment agencies also face concerns about lifting the ban because formal migration would place greater responsibility on them to protect workers' rights. Some agencies fear that increased legal obligations and liability for abuse could create financial pressure, particularly for smaller businesses.

Many anti-trafficking organisations, domestic work networks, and NGOs working on feminist and Dalit issues operate within a system built around preventing women's migration. Funding and programmes often focus on rescue, interception, and awareness campaigns that present migration as a danger rather than addressing how to make migration safer. Participants reported that some "safe migration" campaigns discourage women from discussing migration plans rather than providing information that would allow them to make safer decisions. This can increase stigma and push migration further underground.

Employers abroad also benefit when workers have no recognised status. Women who migrate

through irregular channels have less ability to report abuse, demand wages, or leave harmful employment. Across the Gulf, domestic workers already face risks because they work inside private homes and remain difficult to monitor. Lack of legal status increases this vulnerability.

Academic researchers and institutions are also situated within the wider system of incentives on migration bans. Migration research often gains attention and funding when it documents harm, risk, and vulnerability, particularly when it aligns with state priorities. This can create incentives to portray women primarily as victims rather than as workers with rights, choices, and agency.

The politics of knowledge production are also relevant here. Research agendas are often shaped by which forms of suffering become legible, fundable, and institutionally valued. For example, when I began researching the deaths of Nepali domestic workers, some questioned

why Nepali women's deaths deserved attention when more Nepali men die abroad. This reflects a broader issue in migration governance and research: certain forms of suffering become politically and institutionally visible, whilst others remain normalised or excluded from dominant narratives. Further, scholars can build academic careers through studying these issues. For example, like many researchers studying migration, I have received a doctorate, secured a permanent lectureship position at a university, published in leading journals, advised policymakers, gained professional recognition (for example, by presenting at the fifth National Labour and Employment Conference, and subsequently receiving "global impact awards"), and am currently producing an "impact case study", through documenting and highlighting how Nepali women encounter, experience, and escape migration bans. Yet the women whose lives and struggles produce this knowledge often continue to face the same migration bans.

4. Policy recommendations

4.1 Lift the ban and create legal migration pathways

- Immediately remove restrictions preventing women from migrating for domestic work through formal channels.
- Simplify migration procedures, reduce documentation barriers, and establish accessible registration systems for women seeking overseas employment.
- Recognise all Nepali migrant workers as rights holders regardless of their migration pathway. Access to protection, assistance, and justice should not depend on whether a worker migrated through a state-approved channel.
- Strengthen regulation and accountability of recruitment agencies whilst avoiding policies that push women back into irregular migration.
- Ensure that any pilot arrangement, including the current UAE pilot, includes a protection plan for the much larger number of Nepali women already working abroad outside formal migration systems.

4.2 Protect Nepali women already abroad

- Direct all Nepali missions abroad to register and assist domestic workers regardless of their migration status or documentation.
- Establish dedicated migrant domestic worker support units in countries with significant Nepali domestic worker populations.
- Increase embassy capacity through additional labour attachés, legal officers, case managers, and trained personnel able to respond to abuse, wage theft, confinement, and emergencies.
- Provide legal aid, psychosocial support, and health services to all migrant workers, including those without formal labour permits.
- Ensure all future emergency repatriation policies cover Nepali citizens regardless of migration status or recruitment pathway.

4.3 Reform social protection and compensation systems

- Expand the Social Security Fund beyond contributory schemes by creating mechanisms that cover informal workers, domestic workers, and their families.
- Establish a government-funded migrant protection and repatriation mechanism covering emergency return, repatriation of remains, funeral costs, and immediate family support regardless of migration status.
- Decentralise compensation claims by allowing local governments to process applications and support families directly.
- Create a child protection and guardianship mechanism for children of deceased, missing, or incapacitated migrant workers to ensure compensation reaches intended beneficiaries.

4.4 Use BLAs as protection mechanisms, not migration barriers

- Negotiate and implement BLAs alongside the removal of the ban, rather than using them as a condition for allowing women to migrate.
- Include returnee migrant workers, civil society organisations, and national human rights institutions in BLA negotiations, implementation, and monitoring.
- Require BLAs to include enforceable protections on employer change, passport retention, wage payment, freedom from violence, and access to justice.
- Ensure domestic workers are explicitly covered by labour reforms in destination countries, including protections related to employer mobility and employment rights.
- Require destination countries to establish employer registration systems linked with Nepali missions before recruitment takes place.
- Establish independent investigation procedures for migrant worker deaths, including mandatory post-mortem examinations and transparent sharing of findings with families.

4.5 Reform recruitment systems and reduce dependence on brokers

- Register and regulate all recruitment intermediaries, including local-level brokers currently operating outside formal systems.
- Create accessible complaint mechanisms with clear investigation timelines and penalties for exploitation, negligence, and fraud.
- Regulate migration-related lending practices to prevent excessive debt burdens and recruitment-linked financial exploitation.
- Expand access to affordable credit and financial information for prospective migrants and their families.

4.6 Support returnee workers and challenge migration stigma

- Establish accessible psychosocial services for returnee migrant workers through local governments and existing community health systems.
- Fund reintegration programmes that provide economic, social, and legal support to returnee domestic workers regardless of how they migrated.
- Recognise domestic work as labour and remove narratives that portray women migrants and their families as responsible for risks created by weak migration governance.
- Redesign safe migration programmes to provide practical information on rights, risks, and available support rather than discouraging migration.
- Require independent evaluation of migration awareness programmes to assess whether they improve safety or reinforce stigma.

4.7 Establish accountability and improve migration data

- Create a Migrant Death Review Board with authority to investigate suspicious deaths, identify patterns of abuse, and recommend legal action.
- Require Nepali missions to publish migration-related death, disappearance, and repatriation data disaggregated by gender, occupation, destination country, and migration status.
- Establish formal, regular, and accountable mechanisms to institutionalise the meaningful participation of returnee migrant workers, migrant families, and representatives of marginalised communities throughout the migration governance process.
- Support research led by Dalit, Madhesi, Janajati, and migrant researchers to ensure migration policy reflects the experiences of those most affected.
- Establish independent monitoring of border interception practices and require social audits of anti-trafficking interventions, shelters, and detention processes.

4.8 Shift the purpose of migration governance

- The purpose of migration governance should be to maximise the state's duty of care towards all citizens without discrimination. All migration policies of Nepal should be guided by this principle.
- Nepal should take steps towards the abolition of labour permits (a colonial era artefact used by the British for indentured labour) as a mechanism for controlling workers' mobility and replace them with a universal protection and registration system that allows the state to regulate migration without excluding workers who are unable or unwilling to navigate restrictive administrative processes.

5. Conclusion

The evidence presented in this report draws on nine years of research, fieldwork, interviews, policy analysis, and engagement with existing literature. The central conclusion is: migration bans cannot prevent Nepali women from migrating for domestic work abroad. Instead, they push migration into informal channels where women face greater risks of deception, abuse, exploitation, disappearance, and death. At the same time, these bans reduce the ability of the Nepali state to identify, support, and protect its citizens when harm occurs. A policy introduced in the name of protection has therefore removed the very protections women need.

Across South, Southeast Asia and beyond, many states that have attempted to restrict women's migration for domestic work through migration bans have produced similar outcomes: they have made migration in domestic work invisible, unregulated, and unaccountable. However, the experience of domestic workers' sending countries, including the Philippines and others, that have moved towards more regulated migration frameworks which creates mechanisms for recognition, assistance, and accountability after exploitation occurs. The question is whether and when the Nepali state will recognise that migration bans in the domestic work sector undermine women's

autonomy, mobility, labour and dignity, and fulfil its responsibility to protect all citizens. These restrictions disproportionately impact women who have historically experienced exclusion and neglect from the state, pushing many towards irregular migration channels in search of livelihoods.

Across interviews, women were clear that they are not asking for permission to migrate. For many, domestic work migration remains one of the few available pathways to support themselves and their families, to challenge the inequalities that shape their lives, and to seek a future beyond the limits imposed by gender, caste, and class. What they asked for was rights, recognition, and protection from their state which has the duty of care towards them.

Nepal can continue with a policy of migration bans that has failed women for more than two decades, or it can choose a path that recognises women as workers, citizens, and rights holders, and most importantly, human beings with dignity. Lifting the ban is the first step towards a Nepal that recognises the dignity, rights, and contributions of tens of thousands of women who migrate abroad, and accepts its responsibility to stand with them rather than abandon them.

Annex: Methodology note

This report synthesises findings from three interrelated original research projects conducted between 2016 and 2025: Participatory Action Research (2016–2020); Ethnographic research on abandonment with recent returnee domestic workers (2023–24); and Feminist research on deaths of domestic workers (2024–25). Overall, we documented 81 stories of mobility; engaged with 150 community members in a post-disaster research site; interviewed 17 bereaved families of deceased or missing female migrant domestic workers across four districts; and interviewed 70 participants from government, civil society, trade unions, United Nations agencies, and international migration organisations. Whilst ethical clearance was obtained prior to conducting all three research projects, from the relevant institutional ethics review bodies at the universities where the work was based, we have maintained everyday ethics (consent as an ongoing process, reflexivity, reciprocity, participation, representation, positionality, accountability, and trauma-informed approaches) throughout our fieldwork. The report draws extensively on my peer-reviewed publications, newspaper articles, policy briefs, and reports, reflecting a decade of sustained research and policy engagement on migration bans and women's labour migration in Nepal. Whilst findings are grounded in sustained, in-depth qualitative engagement, all errors, omissions, and generalisations in this report remain my own.

References

- ⁱ Nilam Sangroula, 'Sociology of Nepal's Labour Migration', *The Rising Nepal* (Kathmandu, Nepal.), 2026, <https://risingnepaldaily.com/news/73512>.
- ⁱⁱ Nepal News, 'Over 2,300 Nepalis Leaving Daily for Foreign Jobs', *Nepal News* (Kathmandu, Nepal.), 2026, <https://english.nepalnews.com/s/nation/over-2300-nepalis-leaving-daily-for-foreign-jobs/>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Government of Nepal, *Nepal Labour Migration Report 2024* (Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, 2025).
- ^{iv} National Human Rights Commission of Nepal, *Report on the Human Rights Situation of Migrant Workers*, no. 293/2079 (National Human Rights Commission of Nepal, 2022); Rojita Adhikari, *Why Women Defy Nepal's Travel Ban to Take on Domestic Work Overseas*, Women in Migration Network, 2018, <https://womeninmigration.org/2018/06/why-women-defy-nepals-travel-ban-to-take-on-domestic-work-overseas/>; ILO, *A Comprehensive Analysis of Policies and Frameworks Governing Foreign Employment for Nepali Women Migrant Workers and Migrant Domestic Workers* (International Labour Organisation, 2021), <https://www.ilo.org/publications/comprehensive-analysis-policies-and-frameworks-governing-foreign-employment>.
- ^v Republica, 'Harnessing Remittances for Long-Term Growth', *Republica* (Kathmandu, Nepal.), 2025, <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/harnessing-remittances-for-long-term-growth-89-20.html>.
- ^{vi} Richa Shivakoti et al., 'The Migration Ban Policy Cycle: A Comparative Analysis of Restrictions on the Emigration of Women Domestic Workers', *Comparative Migration Studies* 9, no. 1 (2021): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-021-00250-4>.
- ^{vii} ILO, *A Comprehensive Analysis of Policies and Frameworks Governing Foreign Employment for Nepali Women Migrant Workers and Migrant Domestic Workers*.
- ^{viii} Joelle Mak et al., *Pathways to Prevent Labour Exploitation in Nepal: Do Pre-Migration Interventions Work?* (LSHTM, 2019); IOM, 'Over 350 Nepali Migrant Workers Assisted by Qatar Development Fund in Past Two Years', International Organization for Migration, 2017, <https://nepal.iom.int/news/over-350-nepali-migrant-workers-assisted-qatar-development-fund-past-two-years-iom>; Antonio Donini, 'Social Suffering and Structural Violence: Nepali Workers in Qatar', *International Development Policy | Revue Internationale de Politique de Développement*, no. 11 (June 2019): 11, <https://doi.org/10.4000/poldev.3077>; James A. Brown et al., 'Synergistic State Governance of Labour Standards in Global Value Chains: Forced Labour in the Malaysia–Nepal–UK Medical Gloves Supply Chain', *Competition & Change* 28, no. 5 (2024): 581–603, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10245294241272190>.
- ^{ix} Ayushman Bhagat, 'Departure Avenues: The Politics of (Anti-) Trafficking and Emigration Control in Nepal' (Durham University, 2021); Ayushman Bhagat and WOREC, *Invisible in Life and Death: Visibilising the Deaths of Female Nepali Migrant Domestic Workers and the Struggles of Their Families* (Brunel University London, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.17633/rd.brunel.29804651.v1>; Ayushman Bhagat, 'The Autonomy of Migration as Travelling Theory: Situated Principles from Nepal', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 12 August 2025, 02637758251365388, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02637758251365388>; Ayushman Bhagat, *Reducing Vulnerability to Exploitation of Nepali Migrant Domestic Workers* (Brunel University of London, 2024), <https://www.brunel.ac.uk/about/brunel-public-policy/news-and-events/news/Policy-briefs/Societal-challenges/Policy-Brief-Reducing-Vulnerability-to-Exploitation-of-Nepali-Migrant-Domestic-Workers-%E2%80%93Dr-Ayushman-Bhagat>; Ayushman Bhagat, *The Impact of Migration Bans on Female Nepalese Citizens* (2022); Ayushman Bhagat et al., 'Who Benefits from Migration Bans?', *The Kathmandu Post*, 2024,

- <https://kathmandupost.com/columns/2024/08/10/who-benefits-from-migration-bans>; Ayushman Bhagat, *BLAs in Domestic Work*, 2025, <https://kathmandupost.com/columns/2025/07/15/blas-in-domestic-work>.
- * Shivakoti et al., 'The Migration Ban Policy Cycle: A Comparative Analysis of Restrictions on the Emigration of Women Domestic Workers'; Hari KC and Richa Shivakoti, 'Narratives on Emigration of Women from Nepal: Is the State Discourse Keeping up with Reality?', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 51, no. 18 (2025): 4780–99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2025.2544091>; Jenna L. Hennebry et al., 'Bilateral Labor Agreements as Migration Governance Tools: An Analysis from a Gender Lens', *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 23, no. 2 (2022): 184–204, <https://doi.org/10.1515/til-2022-0015>; ILO, *No Easy Exit: Migration Bans Affecting Women From Nepal* (International Labour Organization, 2015); Neha Wadhawan, 9: *Invisibilized Migration, Unaccounted Work: The Governance of Women's Migration for Paid Domestic Work from Nepal and Sri Lanka to the Gulf* (2022), <https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/display/book/9781529221510/ch009.xml>; Cathy Zimmerman et al., 'Human Trafficking: Results of a 5-Year Theory-Based Evaluation of Interventions to Prevent Trafficking of Women From South Asia', *Frontiers in Public Health* 9 (May 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/FPUH.2021.645059>; Bandita Sijapati et al., 'Nepali Women's Labour Migration: Between Protection and Proscription', *Migration Letters* 16, no. 4 (2019): 611–24, <https://doi.org/10.33182/ml.v16i4.594>; Barbara H. Grossman-Thompson, 'Disposability and Gendered Control in Labor Migration: Limiting Women's Mobility through Cultural and Institutional Norms', *Organization* 26, no. 3 (2019): 337–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508418812584>.
- ^{xi} Government of Nepal, *Labour Migration for Employment: A Status Report for Nepal: 2014/2015* (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2018).
- ^{xii} Ganesh Gurung, *Living the Golden Dreams: The Gulf and Nepalese Women*, 2013, <http://archive.nyu.edu/handle/2451/42274>.
- ^{xiii} ILO, *No Easy Exit: Migration Bans Affecting Women From Nepal*; Ayushman Bhagat and Sallie Yea, 'Towards Carceral Protectionist Territories: Relational Geographies of Anti-Trafficking Confinement in Nepal', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 43, no. 3 (2025): 504–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544241251961>.
- ^{xiv} Ayushman Bhagat, 'Entrapment Processes in the Emigration Regime: The Presence of Migration Bans and the Absence of Bilateral Labor Agreements in Domestic Work in Nepal', *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 23, no. 2 (2022): 222–45.
- ^{xv} ILO, *A Comprehensive Analysis of Policies and Frameworks Governing Foreign Employment for Nepali Women Migrant Workers and Migrant Domestic Workers*.
- ^{xvi} Ayushman Bhagat, 'Internal Deportation', *Area* 58, no. 2 (2026): e70097, <https://doi.org/10.1111/area.70097>.
- ^{xvii} Ayushman Bhagat and Sunita Mainali, 'Ban on Female Migrant Workers to Be Lifted', *Nepali Times*, 2025.
- ^{xviii} Alessandra Mezzadri, 'A Value Theory of Inclusion: Informal Labour, the Homeworker, and the Social Reproduction of Value', *Antipode* 53, no. 4 (2021): 1186–205, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12701>.
- ^{xix} Sarita Pariyar, 'A Touchable Woman?S Untouchable Daughter: Interplay of Caste and Gender in Nepal', *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion* 1, no. 2 (2020): 187–92; Megha Bdr Bishowkarma, 'The Debate about How the Caste System Controls the Power Structures and Forcefully Shoves the Dalit Community into Landlessness: A Sociological Study of Changunarayan Municipality of Kathmandu Valley', *Pashupati Pragya पशुपति प्रज्ञा* 2, no. 3 (2026): 80–93, <https://doi.org/10.3126/pp2.v2i3.90986>.
- ^{xx} Arlie Russell Hochschild, 'Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value', in *Justice, Politics, and the Family*, 1st edn, ed. Daniel Engster and Tamara Metz (Routledge, 2014); Parvati Raghuram, 'Locating Care Ethics Beyond the Global North', *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 15, no. 3 (2016): 511–33, <https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v15i3.1353>.
- ^{xxi} Krishna Prasad Pathak, 'Foreign Employment Trend, Death and Socioeconomic Issues of Nepalese Migrant Workers', 4 *مجلة مالك بن نبي للبحوث والدراسات*, no. 2 (2022): 59–79; Pete Pattison et

- al., 'Revealed: 6,500 Migrant Workers Have Died in Qatar since World Cup Awarded', *Global Development*, *The Guardian*, 23 February 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/23/revealed-migrant-worker-deaths-qatar-fifa-world-cup-2022>; Pramod Acharya, 'Who Lives after a Migrant Worker Dies in Qatar?', *openDemocracy*, 2022, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/death-in-qatar-but-no-just-compensation-for-families-back-home/>; Peter Millward, 'World Cup 2022 and Qatar's Construction Projects: Relational Power in Networks and Relational Responsibilities to Migrant Workers', *Current Sociology* 65, no. 5 (2017): 756–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392116645382>.
- xxii Sabita Khadka, '1,273 Nepalis Return Home in Coffins in 10 Months', *Republica*, 2026, <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/1273-nepalis-return-home-in-coffins-in-10-months-56-29.html>.
- xxiii Ayushman Bhagat, *Reducing Vulnerability to Exploitation of Nepali Migrant Domestic Workers* (Brunel University of London, 2024), <https://www.brunel.ac.uk/about/brunel-public-policy/news-and-events/news/Policy-briefs/Societal-challenges/Policy-Brief-Reducing-Vulnerability-to-Exploitation-of-Nepali-Migrant-Domestic-Workers-%E2%80%93Dr-Ayushman-Bhagat>.
- xxiv Constituent Assembly Secretariat, *Constitution of Nepal 2015* (Nepal Gazette, 2015).
- xxv Ayushman Bhagat and Ankita Shrestha, *Caste and Labour Migration*, 2025, <https://kathmandupost.com/columns/2025/12/21/caste-and-labour-migration>.
- xxvi Grossman-Thompson, 'Disposability and Gendered Control in Labor Migration: Limiting Women's Mobility through Cultural and Institutional Norms'.
- xxvii Ayushman Bhagat, 'Trafficking Borders', *Political Geography* 95 (May 2022): 102598, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102598>.
- xxviii Bhagat, 'Internal Deportation'.
- xxix Bhagat, 'Trafficking Borders'.
- xxx Nina Laurie et al., 'Post-Trafficking Bordering Practices: Perverse Co-Production, Marking and Stretching Borders', *Political Geography* 48 (2015): 83–92, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2015.06.001>.
- xxxi Bhagat, 'Internal Deportation'.
- xxxii Arjun Kharel et al., Recruitment Cost, Fraud and Redressal in Foreign Labour Migration from Nepal, *Kathmandu: CESLAM* (2023); Alice Kern and Ulrike Müller-Böcker, 'The Middle Space of Migration: A Case Study on Brokerage and Recruitment Agencies in Nepal', *Geoforum* 65 (2015): 158–69, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.07.024>.
- xxxiii Sawsan Abdulrahim et al., 'Beyond Kafala! Employers' Discriminatory Attitudes and Violations of the Rights and Freedoms of Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon', *Migration Studies* 12, no. 2 (2024): mnae012, <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnae012>.
- xxxiv Ayushman Bhagat, '“Who Is Not an Agent Here?”: The Collateral Damage of Anti-Trafficking in Nepal', *Antipode* 55, no. 1 (2023): 70–89, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12882>.
- xxxv Ayushman Bhagat et al., 'Missing Nepali Women', *The Kathmandu Post*, 2025, <https://kathmandupost.com/columns/2025/06/27/missing-nepali-women>.
- xxxvi Bhagat and WOREC, *Invisible in Life and Death*.
- xxxvii Bhagat, *BLAs in Domestic Work*; Yuval Livnat and Hila Shamir, 'Gaining Control? Bilateral Labor Agreements and the Shared Interest of Sending and Receiving Countries to Control Migrant Workers and the Illicit Migration Industry', *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 23, no. 2 (2022): 65–94; Adam S. Chilton and Eric A. Posner, 'Why Countries Sign Bilateral Labor Agreements', *Journal of Legal Studies* 47, no. S1 (2018): S45–88, <https://doi.org/10.1086/694456>.
- xxxviii Bhagat et al., 'Who Benefits from Migration Bans?'

About the author

Dr. Ayushman Bhagat is a Lecturer in Political Geography at Brunel University of London.

Dissemination partner

WOREC (Women's Rehabilitation Centre)

Contact



Brunel University of London
Kingston Lane, Uxbridge, UB8 3PH, United Kingdom
Email: ayushman.bhagat@brunel.ac.uk
Website: www.brunel.ac.uk



WOREC

Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC)
P.O. Box: 13233, Kathmandu, Nepal
Email: ics@worecnepal.org
Website: www.worecnepal.org