

Migrants' outflow dips, labour shortage hits reconstruction

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While the outflow of Nepalis for jobs abroad has decelerated, the country's reconstruction efforts have been hampered by lack of labourers, shows a recent report.

“The monthly outmigration for foreign employment, which stood at around 50,000 persons, has stabilised below 40,000 since the devastating earthquake of 2015,” said Ganesh Gurung, a prominent labour and migration expert, presenting his research findings. “However, to meet the labour shortage in Nepal, reconstruction works are being handed over to migrant labourers from India and Bangladesh.”

The report, which was unveiled here today during a discussion on ‘Migration and Labour Dynamics in Post-Disaster Nepal’ also showed that the earthquake has diverted migration from Nepal's mid- and far-western hills to the earthquake-affected districts in central and western Nepal.

“The earthquake has pushed the daily wage from Rs 500 to Rs 800 in the rural areas,” Gurung said.

Jagdish Chandra Pokharel, former vice chairman of National Planning Commission, pointed out that people in the affected areas have postponed their plans to seek job opportunities abroad due to delayed distribution of government compensation to rebuild destroyed houses.

Ramesh Badal, secretary at the Department of Foreign Affairs of General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions, underscored the need to remember the social costs of brain drain in terms of health, missed opportunities, breakdown of families, among others. He also pointed out that many migrant workers have been unable to return home due to their contracts with their employers, essentially making them bonded labourers.

During the discussion, Posh Raj Pandey, chairman of South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), opined that remittance can emerge as a resource for reconstruction financing but then it can only be taken as a means to sustain in the short-run.

Other participants representing civil society organisations, academia, labour unions, foreign employment agencies, highlighted that issues such as, ‘free visa, free ticket’ for migrant workers post-earthquake has, in fact, created confusion and delayed the departure of workers. They also stressed that the country has not focused on utilising expertise of returnee migrant workers for rebuilding, among others.

The discussion programme was organised by SAWTEE under a project called ‘Initiating Dialogue on Post-Disaster Reconstruction’ with support from The Asia Foundation. Under the project, a series of dialogues is being conducted on various topics related to the post-disaster reconstruction.