The COVID-19 pandemic is forcing an exceptional level of reverse migration of Nepali migrant workers from the destination countries and places. The current global pandemic is increasing health and safety risks. There are reports of migrant workers being unemployed, unpaid, and at the mercy of the employers, resulting in them living off their inadequate savings. Nepal began to see a significant influx of migrant returnee people from India as India saw an increase in new cases throughout the country.

Nepali migrant workers coming from India struggled to get back as India announced its own nationwide lockdown from March 25. Many walked hundreds of miles through the Indian lockdown and finally came to the border towns and enter Nepal from designated 20 border points.

This study was undertaken to identify the impact of COVID-19 on Migrant workers in Kanchanpur, Kailali, Doti and Achham district. It covered 1,572 migrant’s returnees. The multistage stratified systematic random sampling method was adopted to identify the respondents for the survey. The majority 94.3%, were male. The mean age of the migrant’s returnee is 29 years. 33.8% of respondents have studied up to grade 6 to 10. Most of the migrant’s returnee HHs (78.4%) fall into the vulnerability category. 19.4 % of the respondents stated that they have a person with Disability (PWD) family members in the HHs and 64.1% of respondents fall under Poor and Food Insecure (PFI) household. 97.1% of migrant returnees come back from abroad, while 2.9% returned from other districts of Nepal. The respondents that returned from abroad, 98.2% returned from India, while 1.8% returned from Gulf countries i.e. Dubai, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.

98.7% of migrant’s returnee have lost their household livelihood due to COVID-19. The key reasons for the disruption in their current livelihoods activities are (i) shutdown of markets due to lockdown, (ii) had to stay at home to look after their children due to school closures, (iii) impact on markets due to the economic downturn (iv) travel restrictions and contract termination were also a reason for livelihood loss.

The main food source for the HHS is its crop production, livestock rearing, and purchasing from the market. 12% of migrant’s returnee HHs do not have food stock; whereas 37.8% have food stock for 3 months and 30.8% have food stock for 6 months. Likewise, 38.2% of the respondents purchase more than half of the food items from the market. 40.8% of respondents believe that their local marker places are not safe in terms of the spread of COVID-19.

The women’s workload has increased significantly after the COVID-19 pandemic; 77.2% agreed that women’s workload has increased mainly in terms of preparing and managing food for their family, taking care of their children and livestock. Mostly, 84.1% adult female member and 73.4% adult male members of the family is most stressed in the current situation. 57.5% agreed that the risk of Gender-Based Violence has increased. There is a need to create livelihood opportunities for the migrant’s returnee to make an environment to use their skill. Of returnees, 56.2% have agriculture-related skills; 35.5% have cooking skills, 6.5% have housing construction skills; 6.3% have iron smith skill, 5.2% are skilled in driving. Similarly, 5.4% have tailoring and driving skills respectively.
Of the migrant’s returnee, 24.5% did receive skilled based training while working in their destination countries and districts. Of total trained returnee, 54.5% have received training to enhance their cooking skills, 25.7% waiter; 20.7% training in driving; 10% tailoring; 7.8% iron work; 5.2% electrician and 1.6% of the respondents have received training in plumbing.

63.1% of the migrant’s returnee would prefer to stay in Nepal, while 36.9% of the respondents would prefer to go abroad after the lockdown. There is a need to revive the livelihoods opportunity of the migrants returning by creating an enabling environment for them to start their micro-enterprise or making them engaged as per their skills in the local job market in close coordination with private sectors and local government.

64.1% of the respondents are interested in agriculture-related work, with interest in commercial vegetable and banana farming; 33.9% in hotel management related work.

62.7% of migrant’s returnees do not have the financial ability to invest in their interested businesses. 89.7% expect the local government to ensure local investment grants and collaboration arrangements; 40.8% expect the local governments to have insurance in place in case of sinking investments and 44.6% expect the local government to ensure the sale and distribution of their products.

The investment that the respondent can contribute towards the business 48.7% stated that they would be able to contribute 10 percent; 31.6% can contribute up to 25 percent; 14.1% can contribute up to 50 percent; 3.7% can contribute up to 75 percent and 2% can contribute only technology.
Distribution of the amount of food items purchased at the market

- 30% Approx. half
- 15% Everything
- 1% Less than half
- 38% More than half
- 3% Nothing

Increased work burden among women

- 77% Increased
- 16% No Change
- 6% Don’t Know
- 1% Did not want to answer
Duration of time spent abroad

- Spent 1-5 years: 57%
- Spent 6-10 years: 21%
- Spent 11-15 years: 8%
- Spent 16-20 years: 3%
- Spent more than 20 years abroad: 2%
- Spent less than a year: 9%

Respondents ever received training in host country (multiple choices)

- Cook: 55%
- Waiter: 26%
- Driving: 12%
- Tailoring: 10%
- Iron Work: 8%
- Electrician: 5%
- Plumbing: 2%
- Saloon: 1%
- Vehicle Repairing: 2%
- Others: 11%
Migrant returnees interested area of work in Nepal (multiple choices)

- Agro Related Work: 64%
- House/Road Construction: 12%
- Hotel Management: 34%
- Retail Grocery/Cloths Shop: 23%
- Beauty Parlour: 2%
- Vegetables/Fruit Cart Business: 3%
- Bottle Repair: 1%
- Auto Rickshaw Driver: 2%
- Other: 15%

Migrants returnee ability to invest in interested Micro Enterprises

- 37% Can invest
- 63% Cannot invest

Percentage of investment that the respondent is able to invest

- Invest 10%: 48%
- Invest 25%: 32%
- Invest 50%: 14%
- Invest 75%: 4%
- Only Technology: 2%

Migrants returnee expectations from the LG (multiple choices)

- Create conducive working environment: 90%
- Ensure local investment: 69%
- Insurance in case of investment sinking: 41%
- Ensure sale and distribution of products: 45%