

Policy Report

Special Issue

*Stepwise and Return Migration between the Gulf,
Europe and North America – How do GCC Countries
Fare in the Global Competition for Talent?*

No. 5

Regulating Stepwise Migration in the Nepal-Gulf-Europe Corridor

Challenges and Recommendations

Anurag Devkota

Executive Summary

Nepali migrant workers have historically concentrated significantly in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Malaysia. However, since 2021/22, there has been a sharp rise in migration to Europe, particularly through stepwise migration – a pathway where workers first migrate to a Gulf country, build capital and skills, then move onward to Europe. Despite its growing visibility, stepwise migration remains unrecorded and unregulated, as Nepal's governance frameworks and digital tracking systems, like the Foreign Employment Information Management System (FEIMS), capture only direct departures from Nepal.

Based on government data and interviews with migrants, officials, and diplomats, the current study identifies governance gaps stemming from limited data on stepwise migration from Gulf states and weak diplomatic presence in Europe. To address these challenges, the brief recommends (1) amending Nepal's Foreign Employment Act (FEA) 2007, the foundational legal framework that governs the recruitment, regulation, and protection of Nepali workers seeking employment abroad, to recognise stepwise migration; (2) integrating a stepwise tracking module into FEIMS; (3) enhancing diplomatic and labour attaché presence in key European destinations; and (4) upgrading skill certification and pre-departure orientation. Proactive policy action is essential to convert this growing migration trend from a governance blind spot into a safeguarded, opportunity-driven corridor.

Regulating Stepwise Migration in the Nepal-Gulf-Europe Corridor: Challenges and Recommendations

Introduction

For decades, the GCC countries have been the primary destination for Nepali migrant workers (see Table 1 in the Annex), with over 80 percent of the registered migrant workers employed in the region since 2013/14. Yet, available data since 2021/22¹ shows a sharp rise in the direct migration of Nepali workers towards European countries, especially of skilled and semi-skilled workers. Within eight months of the fiscal year 2024/25, that number surged by 46 percent, with a total of 34,366 individuals obtaining labour permits to work in Europe, compared to 23,510 in the same period of the previous fiscal year 2023/24.² While most studies focus on direct migration from Nepal to Europe, less is known about the stepwise migration pathway from Nepal to the Gulf states and onwards towards Europe. The present brief aims to further expand on this knowledge gap, which is exacerbated by a significant lack of official data, as there is currently no formal government mechanism for recording or monitoring Nepali workers who move to Europe after completing employment in the GCC countries. This absence of a systematic and coordinated tracking process means the true scale and nature of this corridor is unknown. In addition to the experiences of migrant workers, this study incorporates the perspectives of senior officials who are responsible for managing all migration processes, including stepwise.

Skilled Nepali migrants are redirecting themselves towards third destinations from GCC countries, as documented by several studies,³ to European countries like Romania, Croatia, Malta, and Portugal.⁴ Valenta and Garvik (2023) highlight how Nepali and South Asian workers often use the Gulf as a temporary transit location (stepping stone) before seeking employment opportunities in Europe.⁵ Complementary evidence from Gautham and Adhikari (2023) shows a gradual shift in destination trends since 2000, with rising outflows toward European labour markets, particularly in semi-skilled and service sectors.⁶ Together, these data points reinforce the argument that Nepal's migration landscape is evolving through stepwise mobility from the Gulf to Europe, marking a significant diversification of destinations. Compared to the GCC states, Europe has more comprehensive labour laws ensuring fair wages, regulated working hours, safer working conditions, and broader prospects for social mobility, which Nepali migrants find highly attractive.⁷ Redressal mechanisms for rights violations,⁸ equality of treatment, and better living conditions supported by housing policies and social welfare systems⁹ also motivate Nepalis to seek European opportunities.¹⁰ Further, Europe offers the possibility of acquiring permanent residency and family reunion opportunities in addition to robust migration governance and adherence to international human rights norms and standards.¹¹

In addition, these protection systems have incentivised many female workers to migrate to European countries like Cyprus,¹² especially in response to intermittent migration bans on women working in the Gulf region.¹³ Yet, the socio-economic background of migrants tends to influence access to these destinations and their corresponding protection mechanisms.

"While the Gulf countries were the dominant labour destination for Nepalis, restrictive policies, especially for women migrants...prompted many to explore alternative countries."

– Senior Official, Foreign Employment Board (Nepal)

This policy brief analyses stepwise migration patterns in the Nepal-Gulf-Europe corridor through quantitative and qualitative data analysis. It draws on official statistics from Nepal's Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MoLESS), and international reports, complemented by 18 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders – 10 migrant workers, 5 government officials, and 3 diplomats. Migrants whose trajectories were connected from the Gulf and Europe (e.g., Dubai–Luxembourg, Abu Dhabi–Germany, Kuwait–Romania, Qatar–Denmark, and Dubai–Malta) were interviewed. Former and serving government officials from the Foreign Employment Board, as well as officials and advisors at the MoLESS provided institutional insights into migration governance. Similarly,

Regulating Stepwise Migration in the Nepal-Gulf-Europe Corridor: Challenges and Recommendations

the diplomatic perspectives were drawn from representatives of the Nepal Consulate in Dubai and embassies covering Oman, Austria, and Spain. This dual-source evidence – migrant narratives and official recognition – form the empirical basis of the brief's argument that stepwise migration of Nepali workers to Europe through the Gulf states warrants more attention by policymakers in Nepal.

Nepal-Gulf-Europe: A Growing Stepwise Route

Migration trends from 2000 to 2025 highlight a significant increase in the number of Nepali migrant workers from 27,796 in 2000 to 741,297 in 2024.¹⁴ Over this period, the focus of skill development has shifted from traditional sectors such as construction, domestic work, and general labour to more specialised fields, including caregiving, healthcare, electronics, information technology, and other skilled professions. The major destination countries diversified beyond the traditional GCC countries and Malaysia to include South Korea, Japan, Israel, Germany, Romania, and the United Kingdom.¹⁵ According to the Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE), labour approvals for Nepali workers going to Europe (from Nepal) increased 17-fold, from just 6,090 in fiscal year 2015/16 to 103,943 in 2023/24.¹⁶

While Europe indeed provides a more favourable legal environment and improved working conditions, it is not free from challenges.¹⁷ Reports of deceptive recruitment practices, exorbitant fees, and hazardous working conditions have increased in sectors like agriculture (i.e., in Portugal),¹⁸ as have inadequate supervision of labour schemes and reports of exploitation in the Seasonal Worker Scheme in the UK.¹⁹ These malpractices affect migrant workers' access to rights, redressal for violations, repatriation, and rehabilitation. Although challenging, serious policy and institutional efforts are crucial to unlock bottlenecks, based on the key findings below.

Key Findings and Analysis

The GCC as a Launchpad and Springboard: Stepwise Migration to Europe

As indicated in the studies quoted earlier, and as confirmed by interviews with migrants and Nepali officials, a key feature of the new skilled Nepali migration to Europe is 'stepwise migration', with GCC countries serving as both an initial destination and a springboard for migration elsewhere. Though untracked, this forms a significant informal migration corridor.

"I also observe that migration patterns are changing with stepwise migration becoming more common...workers move from Nepal to the Gulf and then onward to Europe, but the state does not track these movements well because data is often missing once migrants leave the first destination."

– Senior Official, Foreign Employment Board (Nepal)

Stepwise migration is not an individual act but often a decision made collectively among family members:

"If we look at our history, it's always been the workers who move first, who are usually a few individuals exploring new opportunities. Then they help relatives and close contacts to join them. Only after that, private recruitment businesses identify the market and eventually, the government intervenes and catches up to formalise this movement."

– Former Advisor, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (Nepal)

Interviews have confirmed that many Nepalis first migrate to the GCC to accumulate capital, gain work experience and skills, and build networks that facilitate their subsequent move to Europe. Thus, migrants

Regulating Stepwise Migration in the Nepal-Gulf-Europe Corridor: Challenges and Recommendations

first obtain employment in the Gulf, then use it as a multi-year staging ground to build capital, skills, and networks for their eventual move to Europe.

"I migrated from Nepal to Qatar, and later from Qatar to Denmark. The skills I gained during my 12 years of experience working in the hospitality sector in Qatar have proven to be highly valuable in Europe. I am currently employed in the same field, and the knowledge and expertise I developed in Qatar have greatly supported my professional journey in Denmark."

– Nepali migrant worker from Qatar to Denmark

Notably, the stepwise pathway is typically accessed by ambitious skilled, semi-skilled, and mid-skilled workers, rather than the most vulnerable, low-skilled labourers, who comprise the majority of Nepalis in the Gulf.²⁰

Stepwise Migration and the Governance Paradox: Opportunity, Risk, and Reactive Management

Stepwise labour migration poses a paradox for Nepal: It expands economic opportunities amidst the state's limited and weak capacity to track, manage, and protect migrants once they leave the GCC.²¹ This 'strategic ignorance',²² by considering stepwise migration beyond the ambit determined by domestic law (FEA), coupled with a lack of policy and institutional frameworks designed for third-country transit, undermines proactive governance, leaving Nepal to react to crises on a case-by-case basis.

"Right now, we only know when someone leaves Nepal for a certain country, but we have no data on where they go after that."

– Senior Official, Foreign Employment Board (Nepal)

Despite efforts to improve data management, such as integrating the FEIMS, the state's digital tool for tracking the initial departure of workers from Nepal, with the Department of Immigration, significant inconsistencies and discrepancies persist, especially in tracking onward migration from Gulf states.²³

"There's serious lack of research on stepwise migration in Nepal, which has not been actively discussed within the government of Nepal."

– Former Advisor, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (Nepal)

Moreover, Nepal's migration strategy for Europe focuses mainly on formal, direct pathways, neglecting the mostly informal Gulf-Europe stepwise corridor. Initiatives like Germany's 2023 skilled migration pact,²⁴ the Safer Migration Programme (SaMi),²⁵ Nepal Secretariat for Skills and Training (NSST),²⁶ and FEIMS digitisation²⁷ remain misaligned with stepwise migration dynamics. The high costs of migration to Europe, often facilitated by informal networks and unscrupulous agents, have indeed led to debt bondage and exploitation.²⁸

"From a human rights perspective and under international law, we cannot restrict human mobility – it's an individual's choice. Since we can't stop it, people are exercising their right to seek opportunities elsewhere. So, we must regulate it thoughtfully by increasing labour agreements, ensuring workers' rights, appointing labour attachés in countries with large Nepali communities, and integrating migrants into our information network so they can access embassy services."

– Senior Official, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (Nepal)

Regulating Stepwise Migration in the Nepal-Gulf-Europe Corridor: Challenges and Recommendations

While the FEA 2007 mandates the Foreign Employment Board to explore new labour markets, implementation has historically focused on the GCC and Malaysia. Current initiatives to establish agreements with European countries address direct migration, leaving stepwise migration from the GCC to Europe largely unregulated and outside the existing protective framework. This gap has resulted in migration governance becoming reactive rather than preventive.²⁹

“Migration policy in Nepal remains largely reactive and centred on crisis response rather than proactive engagement. This results in a disconnect between the state and its workforce abroad, undermining any coordinated effort to use Gulf experience as leverage in Europe.”

– Former Executive Director, Foreign Employment Board (Nepal)

Forward-looking policies, robust research on emerging corridors like stepwise migration, and tailored measures, including social security portability, to protect specific migrant groups³⁰ are crucial to address this gap.

Weak Communication Channels and Learning from Practice

Communication between workers and Nepali diplomatic missions in the GCC is largely limited to consular services, with no formal systems for collecting feedback, utilising diaspora networks, or recognising GCC-acquired skills.³¹ Nepal can learn and adopt best practices from countries like the Philippines, which use well-resourced diplomatic missions and labour offices as hubs for citizen engagement and welfare support, establishing a continuous link with their diaspora.³²

Nepal’s labour attachés in GCC missions address workers’ grievances such as abuse and exploitation. In Europe, while such cases are less common, migrants face other challenges like wage theft, contract substitution, and limited access to legal and social security systems.³³

“There are multiple cases where labourers and students are given fraudulent promises of European placements and jobs (fake contracts, inflated wages) in Nepal or GCC, leading to protection cases and trafficking investigations which are often under-reported.”

– Diplomat, Nepal Consulate (Dubai)

Moreover, while most Nepali migrants engaged regularly with the embassies while in the Gulf, once they re-migrate to Europe, they tend to rely on informal networks with limited official contact—most likely due to their irregular status (as envisioned by the law).

“Compared to my GCC experience in Oman, migrants in Europe rarely contact the Embassy, often using informal channels—possibly out of fear of being tracked. This exposes them to financial exploitation, with agents charging exorbitant fees of 1.4–1.5 million NPR, far above the actual cost of migration.”

– Nepali diplomat who has served in Austria, Oman and Spain

This evidence underscores the need for Nepal to enhance its communication channels with its diaspora to provide better diplomatic support and protection mechanisms, especially in light of the growing reality of stepwise and irregular migration to Europe.

Finally, many major destination countries for Nepali workers in Europe do not have a residential Nepali embassy. The FEA of 2007 requires the stationing of labour attachés in countries with over 5,000 Nepali workers.³⁴ However, no labour attachés are posted in countries such as Romania, Croatia and Cyprus which host respectively 22,373, 11,053, and 7,525 Nepali workers.³⁵ This lack of diplomatic missions and

Regulating Stepwise Migration in the Nepal-Gulf-Europe Corridor: Challenges and Recommendations

labour attachés in key European destinations is a barrier to adopting protection mechanisms in new migration corridors.

“There’s no structured migration process for high-skilled workers from Nepal to Europe. When I arrived, the embassy in Belgium advised me to connect with the Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA).”
– Nepali migrant worker from Dubai to Luxembourg

Nevertheless, Nepal is adapting by adjusting its foreign policy to address emerging migration trends,³⁶ such as expanding diplomatic presence in countries like Portugal. Yet, coordination efforts remain focused on direct migrants and neglect stepwise migrants.³⁷

Migration to Germany: An Example of a GCC-Europe Corridor

The 2023 ‘Joint Declaration of Intent’ (JDol) signed by Nepal and Germany facilitates skilled migration and promotes knowledge exchange.³⁸ This declaration is non-binding and fails to address the operational mechanics of migration that are critical for workers’ protection. It also lacks explicit in-depth provisions on guarantees of recruitment costs by employers, standard employment contracts, and dispute settlement mechanisms.³⁹ Furthermore, the failure to incorporate social security⁴⁰ portability, a persistent issue for Nepali migrants, highlights that such high-level agreements can overlook the long-term financial security of workers.

“A Nepali worker who has contributed to social security schemes in both the GCC and in Germany currently has no clear mechanism to consolidate or transfer these benefits, resulting in a significant loss of long-term financial security.”
– Nepali migrant worker from the UAE to Luxembourg

“Nepal’s recent MoUs with Romania and Germany reveal weak negotiating power, often prioritising short-term gains over comprehensive, long-term interests. This stems from limited capacity in negotiation teams and reactive, rather than proactive, migrant protection. While European countries may be open to fair deals, Nepal must strengthen its diplomatic and technical capabilities to negotiate more effectively.”
– Former Executive Director, Foreign Employment Board (Nepal) and labour migration expert

Furthermore, unlike in the Gulf, where English is widely spoken, most European countries operate strictly in their native languages, which creates language barriers that limit workers’ understanding of rights, contracts, and grievance mechanisms, increasing their vulnerability. This is an issue largely overlooked in the current JDol.

“The biggest challenges I faced after migrating to Germany from Abu Dhabi is [the] language barrier...while in Abu Dhabi speaking English was sufficient for communication, in Germany, without knowing the language, everyday life is difficult.”
– Nepali migrant worker from Abu Dhabi to Germany

Nepal should consider leveraging the JDol as a political opening, not an endpoint. The next crucial step is to build on this declaration of intent by negotiating a detailed, binding protocol that translates Germany’s legal protections into an accessible and enforceable reality for Nepali workers, including those who have transited through Gulf states.

Regulating Stepwise Migration in the Nepal-Gulf-Europe Corridor: Challenges and Recommendations

Policy Recommendations

- **Amend the Foreign Employment Act 2007** to formally recognise and regulate stepwise migration. It should explicitly cover stepwise migration to Europe and other emerging corridors, enabling proactive governance and extending legal protections beyond the GCC.
- **Develop a stepwise migration monitoring system** to collect essential data and close the gap on policy blind spots by:
 - Integrating a stepwise migration tracking module into Nepal's FEIMS, in coordination with the DoFE, by adding a 'stepwise migrant' category with fields like country of previous employment and skills gained.
 - Establishing a voluntary data collection process via Nepali missions, similar to the Philippines' contract verification system, whereby overseas workers must register their new employment contracts with the nearest Philippine Overseas Labour Office (POLO).
 - Optimising the FEIMS to capture disaggregated data from the GCC-Europe corridor.

"FEIMS or embassy data systems can be improved by adding an 'onward migration' event type in the FEIMS to record moves from a third country, with fields for previous host country, new destination, recruiter IDs, providing mission staff a secured FEIMS portal to log reports and upload documents, enabling API/data export to share anonymised trends with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)/DoFE and missions in Europe, and training frontline staff and running awareness drives so migrants self-report moves."

– Diplomat, Nepal Consulate (Dubai)

- **Enhance diplomatic capacity and regulate recruitment.** The government of Nepal must develop and strengthen its negotiating power to govern stepwise migration. First, the recruitment practices must be monitored, followed by the deployment of labour attachés in countries with growing numbers of Nepali migrants. It is also recommended to negotiate with the GCC to incorporate provisions in Bilateral Labour Agreements (BLA)s to record onward migration and set up structures and effective communication channels with Nepali migrant workers in the GCC to gather inputs.

"The Government could formalise tri-lateral channels (Nepal embassy in GCC-Nepal mission in Europe-DoFE) for rapid case referral and verification to ensure inter-mission cooperation for tracking Nepali migrants in transition."

– Diplomat (Nepal-Austria)

- **Upgrade skill development and pre-departure orientation** to facilitate effective transition from GCC countries to Europe and direct migration to Europe:
 - Introduce a voluntary stepwise migration registration through Nepali missions in the GCC to ensure migrant safety and access to support.
 - Enhance pre-departure training with formal skill documentation and certification of GCC experience.
 - Facilitate skill registration and certification of experience gained in the GCC, drawing on best practice models like the Philippines' Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), which conducts onsite skill assessments and certifications for overseas workers through embassy structures and partnerships with non-state actors in destination countries.⁴¹
 - Provide targeted training on language, rights, labour laws, social security, and grievance mechanisms.

Regulating Stepwise Migration in the Nepal-Gulf-Europe Corridor: Challenges and Recommendations

Conclusion

Nepal is at a critical juncture in managing 'stepwise' migration governance due to the accelerated shift of labour migration from the GCC to Europe. However, major gaps in data, inadequate communication with its diaspora, and failure to leverage diplomatic ties and workers' experiences in the GCC expose deep-seated weaknesses in Nepal's migration governance. This policy lag leaves migrants vulnerable to exploitation and weakens Nepal's ability to negotiate better protections with European nations. A decisive policy informed by the findings and recommendations above is critical to transform this corridor of risk into opportunity. To prevent the exploitation of its citizens and to harness the full development potential of this trend, the Nepali government should develop a system to monitor trends and patterns of stepwise migration, converting informal agreements with European countries into binding BLAs, and ensuring worker protections like fair recruitment, social security portability, and legal support. Enhancing diplomatic capacity in Europe, as well as formally recognising GCC-acquired skills to protect citizens and enhance their employability, are also needed. Meaningful consultation with migrant workers, especially by relevant government actors and other social stakeholders, is crucial to ensure these policies are not only formulated but effectively implemented. This will secure a safe, dignified, and prosperous migration pathway from Nepal to Europe, through the Gulf states.

About the Author

Anurag Devkota is a human rights lawyer at Rights Lab Nepal specialising in the rights of Nepali migrant workers, with extensive experience litigating before the Supreme Court of Nepal. His work has contributed to key reforms in Nepal's migration governance through strategic litigation on migrant voting rights, migrant deaths, financial exploitation, access to justice, and the right to return during the COVID-19 pandemic. A Gates Scholar, he holds an LL.M. in Rule of Law for Development (PROLAW) from Loyola University Chicago. His research and commentary on labor migration have been widely published in leading Nepali and international academic journals and non-academic platforms.

Endnotes

1 Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Science 2022: Nepal Migration Report, in: https://giwmscdnone.gov.np/media/app/public/298/posts/1715249334_10.pdf, p. xviii.

2 The Annapurna Express 2025: Europe emerging as popular labour destination for Nepalis, in: <https://theannapurnaexpress.com/story/53277/>.

3 XINHUANET 2025: Japan, Eastern Europe emerge as new labour destinations for Nepalis, in: <https://english.news.cn/20250611/cebd3cb21d1a4b2bb61f9d9cf41ad51f/c.html>; Valenta, Marko & Garvik, Marianne 2023: The dynamic of stepwise migrations of Nepalese high-skilled migrants via the Middle East, in: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09584935.2023.2271861>.

4 The Annapurna Express 2025, N.2.

5 Valenta & Garvik 2023, N.3.

6 Gautam Tara, Adhikari Babu Ram: 2025: Drivers of Skilled Workforce Migration from Nepal, in: [DriversofSkilledWorkforceMigrationfromNepal.pdf](#).

7 Aryal, Gokarna Raj 2023: Overseas Labour Migration of Nepal: Trends and Patterns, *Journal of Population and Development*, p. 22.

Regulating Stepwise Migration in the Nepal-Gulf-Europe Corridor: Challenges and Recommendations

8 European Parliament 2022: The Fundamental Rights of Irregular Migrant Workers in the EU, in: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2022/702670/IPOL_STU\(2022\)702670_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2022/702670/IPOL_STU(2022)702670_EN.pdf)

9 Council of Europe: European Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers, in: <https://rm.coe.int/1680077323#:~:t>.

10 Raut Swechhya: 2024: Why are Nepalese shunning Gulf and Asia to work in Europe, in: <https://www.dw.com/en/why-are-nepalese-shunning-gulf-and-asia-to-work-in-eu/a-69978526>.

11 Neubauer Josef 2022: Envisioning futures at new destinations: geographical imaginaries and migration aspirations of Nepali migrants moving to Malta, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies in Envisioning futures at new destinations: geographical imaginaries and migration aspirations of Nepali migrants moving to Malta*.

12 Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MoLESS), Department of Foreign Employment, Labour Approval (2025.02.13 to 2025.03.13), For instance Female: Male Ratio= Cyprus 1,238:598.

13 K.C. Hari 2025: A Gender Lens on Transnational Labour Migration from Nepal, p. 166, in https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-97-9715-8_9.

14 Gautam Tara, Adhikari Babu Ram: 2025, N.6, p. 140.

15 Ibid.

16 Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, Labour Approval (2015/16 to 2023/24), in <https://dofe.gov.np/yearly.aspx>.

17 Business and Human Rights Resource Centre 2025: Europe: Reports of labour abuse & unfair recruitment on the rise as labour migration from Nepal is on the increase, in: <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/europe-reports-of-labour-abuse-unfair-recruitment-on-the-rise-as-labour-migration-from-nepal-is-on-the-increase/>

18 Journalismfund Europe 2024: Bitter Berries – Exploitation of Nepali workers in Portugal, in: <https://www.journalismfund.eu/bitter-berries-nepali>.

19 Fair Square 2023: UK's seasonal agriculture visa scheme exposes migrant workers to serious risk of abuse, in: <https://fairsq.org/uks-seasonal-agriculture-visa-scheme-exposes-migrant-workers-to-serious-risk-of-abuse-say-rights-experts/>

20 International Labour Organization 2023: Access to social protection for Nepalese migrant workers in countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), in: [wcms_903674.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/public/med/comm/2023/01/wcms_903674.pdf); Gautam Tara, Adhikari Babu Ram: 2025: Drivers of Skilled Workforce Migration from Nepal, in: [DriversofSkilledWorkforceMigrationfromNepal.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/public/med/comm/2025/01/drivers-of-skilled-workforce-migration-from-nepal.pdf).

21 Valenta, Marko & Garvik, Marianne 2023, N.5. p. 556.

22 Scheel, Stephan & Ustek-Spilda, Funda 2019: The politics of expertise and ignorance in the field of migration management, in: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775819843677>

23 Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Science 2022: Nepal Migration Report, in: https://giwmscdnone.gov.np/media/app/public/298/posts/1715249334_10.pdf, p. 28.

24 Republica 2023: Nepal to sign labour agreements with Germany and Romania, in: <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/nepal-to-sign-labourlabour-agreements-with-germany-and-romania>.

25 Global Forum on Migration and Development 2023: Safer Migration Programme (SAMI), in: <https://www.gfmd.org/pfp/ppd/19531>.

26 Nepal Secretariat of Skills and Training, in: <https://thensst.com/about>.

Regulating Stepwise Migration in the Nepal-Gulf-Europe Corridor: Challenges and Recommendations

27 The Kathmandu Post 2020: Nepal starts maintaining data on returning migrant workers, in: <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2020/01/31/nepal-starts-maintaining-data-on-returning-migrant-workers>.

28 Nepal Economic Forum 2022: Opportunities and Challenges of Migration for Nepal, in: <https://nepaleconomicforum.org/opportunities-and-challenges-of-migration-for-nepal/>.

29 Suva, B.C. 2025: Nepal's Migrant Workers in Gulf Crises: Caught in the Crossfire, in: <https://www.spotlightnepal.com/2025/06/28/nepals-migrant-workers-gulf-crises-caught-crossfire/>.

30 The Himalayan 2023: Nepal and Germany sign JDoI on skilled labour migration, available at <https://thehimalayantimes.com/business/nepal-and-germany-sign-jdoi-on-skilled-labour-migration>.

31 Malit, Froilan Jr. & Devkota, Anurag 2022: Bringing Skills Back? Lessons for Nepal's Future Migration Policy Approach, in: <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/bringing-skills-back-lessons-for-nepal-s-future-migration-policy-approach>.

32 Asis, M. M. B 2017: "The Philippines' Migration and Development Program: A Critical Review." Migration Policy Institute

33 Hart Elish and Stochita Radu. 2023: Romania: Nepali migrant workers report wage theft, poor accommodation, confiscated passports & high recruitment fees, available at: <https://www.businesshumanrights.org/en/latest-news/romania-nepali-migrant-workers-report-wage-theft-poor-accommodation-confiscated-passports-high-recruitment-fees/>

34 Section 68, Appointment of Labour Attaché, Foreign Employment Act, 2007

35 MoLESS, Labour Approval 2024-2025 in: https://dofe.gov.np/uploads/document/Document_2025080711080.pdf.

36 Adhikari, Ambika P. 2022: A review of Nepali Diaspora and their Role in Nepal's Development and Lessons for Developing Countries, Himalayan Research Papers Archive, Nepal Study Center, University of New Mexico, p. 19
https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1089&context=nsc_research.

37 Nepali Times 2024: Europe is the new destination for Nepali migrant workers, in: <https://nepalitimes.com/here-now/a-long-way-to-europe>.

38 Republica 2023: Nepal and Germany sign JDoI on skilled labour migration, in: <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/nepal-and-germany-sign-jdoi-on-skilled-labour-migration>.

39 The Himalayan Times 2023: Nepal and UAE renew labour agreement for four years, in: <https://thehimalayantimes.com/business/nepal-and-uae-renew-labour-agreement-for-four-years>.

40 Farsight Nepal 2023: Nepal signs labour agreement with two new European countries, available at <https://farsightnepal.com/news/258>.

41 Saguin Kidjie and Shivakoti Richa 2022: Keeping up with the migrant workers: The role of embassies in transnational administration of labour migration policy, in: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10841806.2022.2086754>.

Regulating Stepwise Migration in the Nepal-Gulf-Europe Corridor: Challenges and Recommendations

Annex

Table 1. Total Number of Nepalis in Gulf Countries (2005-Present)

Year	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Kuwait	Bahrain	Oman
2005-2006	55,892	15,813	15,317	640	540	28
2006-2007	59,705	39,279	25,172	2,441	1,200	509
2007-2008	85,442	42,394	45,342	1,967	5,099	2,626
2008-2009	76,175	48,749	31,688	2,291	6,360	4,247
2009-2010	55,940	63,400	33,188	8,255	4,234	3,285
2010-2011	102,966	71,116	44,464	15,187	4,647	2,442
2011-2012	105,681	80,455	54,482	24,575	5,865	3,163
2012-2013	160,373	142,602	88,507	21,091	7,390	6,084
2013-2014	128,874	86,876	54,965	19,353	4,185	3,435
2014-2015	17,457	145,170	88,869	18,473	66,819	4,684
2015-2016	127,744	134,677	51,996	9,922	3,125	3,024
2016-2017	121,317	73,953	57,990	13,151	3,916	3,073
2017-2018	103,179	40,962	60,244	17,555	4,862	3,059
2018-2019	161,215	117,904	119,855	25,996	8,674	5,437
2019-2020	8,156	83,163	93,424	16,862	6,183	4,139
2020-2021	54,915	46,960	40,477	1,014	4,940	3,133
2021-2022	18,492	188,692	122,635	35,541	12,062	6,849
2022-2023	133,262	112,777	116,159	43,507	7,690	5,294
2023-2024	134,669	141,502	193,438	40,368	9,806	5,910
2024-2025	140,792	152,557	274,590	59,065	11,624	8,601

*This table is compiled by Anurag Devkota and Bipashana Ojha using the data provided by the Department of Foreign Employment (DOFE). *Source: Department of Foreign Employment (DOFE), Annual Report*

Regulating Stepwise Migration in the Nepal-Gulf-Europe Corridor: Challenges and Recommendations

Contact

Philipp Dienstbier
Director
Regional Programme Gulf States
European and International Cooperation
philipp.dienstbier@kas.de

Imprint

Published by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the Gulf Research Center, 2026,
Berlin, Federal Republic of Germany

This publication was published with financial support of
the Federal Republic of Germany.

This policy report was written in the framework of a joint project with the Gulf Labour Markets, Migration and Population (GLMM) Programme of the Gulf Research Center (GRC) entitled “Stepwise and Return Migration between the Gulf, Europe and North America – How do GCC Countries Fare in the Global Competition for Talent?”. It forms part of a broader publication series that examines the drivers, governance, and impacts of migration and talent mobility across the Gulf and key global destinations. All publications can be accessed on the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) website [here](#) and through the GLMM website [here](#).

This publication of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. and the Gulf Research Center is solely intended for information purposes. It may not be used by political parties or by election campaigners or supporters for the purpose of election advertising. This applies to federal, state and local elections as well as elections to the European Parliament.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily represent that the official policy or position of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and its Regional Programme Gulf States, nor of the Gulf Research Centre and its Gulf, Labour Markets, Migration and Population programme.