



REINTEGRATION GOVERNANCE IN NEPAL

REINTEGRATION GOVERNANCE AS A POLICY PRIORITY

Nepal has made important advances in recognizing reintegration as a policy priority, most notably with the implementation of the National Reintegration Policy as well as provincial and local policies, particularly in Madhesh and Koshi provinces. However, these policies are new and require time for coordination, development, and implementation. There is a need for effective horizontal and vertical coordination between the three tiers of government and reintegration service points, particularly at Employment Service Centres.

REINTEGRATION GOVERNANCE EFFECTIVENESS

Returnees who received reintegration assistance via reintegration governance providers had similar outcomes to returnees who did not receive any reintegration assistance. Pilot projects have been successful in improving motivation, financial literacy, and connections between returnees. Returnees are open and welcome reintegration assistance; however, comprehensive and proven modalities are necessary to have effectiveness on longer-term outcomes.

FAMILY- CENTRED AND GENDER FOCUS

Reintegration governance in Nepal requires significant investment and an expanded focus on family-centred reintegration and gender-responsive approaches. The ReMi project is developing new programming designed to be family-centred and gender-responsive, which can guide further reintegration governance in Nepal.

REINTEGRATION GOVERNANCE IN NEPAL

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REINTEGRATE

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Reintegrate Project and Reintegration Governance

The Reintegrate Project aims to understand how reintegration is governed and how reintegration governance influences returnees' experiences. Many people do not have the right to stay in countries of migration and return to their countries of origin through different types of programmes and policies; this return can be chosen, or it can be forced. Little is known about how different countries govern the process of reintegration once people return and how return migrations experience their return and reintegration process. This study presents stakeholders' perspectives, alongside return migrants' experiences of return and reintegration in a comparative analysis across four case studies of Nepal, Nigeria, Serbia, and the Philippines.

Reintegration is defined in this study as “the process in which return migrants are supported in maintaining their cultural and social identities by the host society and the whole population acquires equal civil, social, political, human, and cultural rights” (Kuschminder, 2017, p.43). This definition considers various domains of reintegration and places emphasis on the duality of responsibility between both returnees and the receiving society in facilitating reintegration. A reintegration policy is defined “as instruments intended to address the social, economic, and political needs of returnees to facilitate their reintegration into society” (Kuschminder and Saguin, 2025).

Reintegration policies are widely considered as implemented by different actors, reflecting different intentions and designs, and showing trade-offs between migrant protection and migration management objectives. Reintegration governance refers to “the policies, practices, and institutions involved in the design, delivery, funding, implementation, and/or evaluation of processes to manage or support the returnees transition into the household, community, and broader society of their country of origin” (Kuschminder, 2024). Reintegration governance thus includes multiple actors and their associated policies to implement reintegration.

Introduction

Reintegration governance has become a policy priority in Nepal over the past decade. Labor migration from Nepal to countries other than India has steadily increased since the early 2000s. From approximately 50,000 labour migrants leaving Nepal in 2000, approvals surged to over 500,000 by 2014. This upward trend continued, with the fiscal year 2024-2025 (2081-82) seeing a total of 839,266 approvals issued to Nepalis, of which 505,957 were new approvals and 333,309 were renewals (DoFE). This rise in labour migration has led to many new challenges, and the initial discourses and policies focused on pre-departure processes and safe migration. Although the Foreign Employment Act, 2007, included the provision that employment programmes could be implemented for return migrants using the Foreign Employment Welfare Fund (FEWF), such programmes were hardly implemented. In 2012, Nepal implemented its first Foreign Employment Policy that included some reintegration-related provisions such as the utilization of skills, remittances (economic and social), psychosocial coun-

selling and rehabilitation services, skills recognition, and enterprise development support for returnees.

The governments of Nepal and Switzerland started collaborating under the Safer Migration Programme (SaMi) in 2011, which has led to the establishment of Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) in 156 municipalities in Nepal by the time of the research for this study. The SaMi project has been comprehensive on migration support, including pre-departure information sessions, counselling including legal counselling, financial literacy programmes for families left behind, and skills training referrals. Collectively, in the late 2010s, the challenges of reintegrating return labour migrants in Nepal became more prominent. The COVID pandemic led to rapid mass returns to Nepal, which was considered a logistical and health-related crisis. This triggered the existing momentum to be harnessed into policy action.

The Reintegrate Project in Nepal focuses on returning labour migrants from the Middle East and Southeast Asian countries. This is because the dynamics of migra-

Research settings



Kathmandu

Capital, HQ of National Government and IOs.

Dhankuta

First Local Reintegration Governance Policy in Nepal.

Triyuga

Implementation site for SaMi and National Government Reintegration Governance Pilot Programme.

Sangurigadhi

No available reintegration governance.

tion to India from Nepal are very different from those of labour migration to countries in the Middle East and South-East Asia. The Government of Nepal's visa policy, bilateral agreements, and main migration governance policies focus on overseas migration (Middle East, Malaysia, South Korea, and Japan). Despite the growing prevalence of return and reintegration in Nepal, there is limited understanding of how reintegration governance is coordinated among governmental, development, and multilateral actors, implemented by these actors, and utilized by returnees. This policy brief provides an overview of reintegration governance in Nepal and how different forms of reintegration governance shape returnees reintegration experiences.

Data Overview

Data was collected at five research locations: Kathmandu as a site to investigate the actors situated at the Federal (central) level; Dhankuta and Triyuga as the local government sites where the programmes have been implemented; Sangurigadhi as the local government where no reintegration programmes have been implemented; and Biratnagar (Koshi Province headquarters where the three local governments are part of) as a site to investigate the actors situated at the Provincial level. In each location, the research team sought to interview all relevant key stakeholders working on migration and reintegration. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in Nepal between March 2023 and December 2023. Except for seven interviews conducted in English with representatives of international organizations, all other interviews were conducted in Nepali.

Reintegration Policies

This policy brief examines three different reintegration policies in Nepal: 1) The National Directive, 2) The Bi-Lateral Nepal-Switzerland Reintegration for Returnee Migrant Workers (ReMi) programme, and 3) the Local Dhankuta Reintegration policy. All three policies can be considered protection-focused reintegration policies that aim to support citizens' return.

Reintegration of Returnee Migrant Workers (ReMi) project

The ReMi Project emerged from the recognition after more than a decade of collaboration between the governments of Nepal and Switzerland to make labour mi-

gration safer (SaMi programme) that reintegration of returnee migrants required a dedicated intervention to ensure the people can successfully reintegrate, benefiting the national economy and society using their skills and capital. Operating through Nepal's federal structure with the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security coordination at the federal level, provincial line ministries at the province level, and local governments as primary implementers, ReMi strengthens the capacities of Employment Service Centres, reimagined as '*reintegration hubs at local level*'.

The project supported the establishment of a case management and referral system linking returnees to existing government programmes, SaMi psychosocial services, One-Stop Crisis Management centres, and private sector services. The target beneficiaries include returnee migrant workers, their families, and private sector actors. The most distinctive innovation is ReMi's family-centred approach, which recognizes that successful reintegration requires both partners to have economic agency. As one ReMi team member stated, '*If you want sustainable reintegration, both [the] husband and wife should work. Only the [the] husband's income will not be enough.*' ReMi builds on SaMi's financial literacy model, where spouses start businesses while partners are abroad, creating economic foundations that should ease remigration pressures upon return (SaMi, 2024).

National Reintegration Directive

In July 2022, Nepal's Ministry of Labour, Employment, and Social Security issued the Reintegration Programme (Operation and Management) Directives for Returning Migrant Workers 2022. This was the first federal-level policy on reintegration in Nepal, which aimed to provide a framework for reintegration focused on social reintegration, employment, and entrepreneurship promotion. Approved by the cabinet after a four-year development process starting in 2019, the resulting policy sought to address competing interests as much as possible within a single policy.

The directive envisions a multi-level governance approach, wherein the guiding policy is set at the national level, and implementation occurs primarily at the local level, with the role of regional governments largely being undefined. According to the policy, Foreign Employment with cost-sharing arrangements launched its pilot phase in 2022-23 with 81 municipalities selected from

Koshi, Madhesh, Gandaki, Lumbini, and Sudurpaschim provinces serving approximately 3,000 returnees in the first year with a budget of NPR 15 crore (approximately USD 112,000). The selection process prioritized municipalities where the SaMi project operates, ensuring the existence of migration infrastructure and data availability. Although often perceived that the policy emerged as a response to a high number of returns during COVID, the challenge of reintegration had been discussed for several years in government and took multiple rounds to be concluded.

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 also recognized the mobilization of capital, skills, and experience gained from foreign employment in the country's productive sectors. The Sixteenth Periodic Plan (2024/25- 2028/29) and the Government of Nepal's employment creation agenda, the Internal Employment Promotion Decade (2025-35), have also prioritized job creation and self-employment for youth and return migrants.

Dhankuta Municipal Reintegration Policy

The Dhankuta Municipality Foreign Employment and Reintegration Policy, enacted in 2078 BS (2021-22), represents Nepal's first local-level policy framework for re-integrating returning migrant workers. Developed over 18-24 months through collaboration between Dhankuta Municipality, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Samriddhi Project, Center for Migration and International Relations (CMIR), returnee networks, and local civil society, the policy was catalysed by IOM's emergency response funding mechanism providing \$350-400 to 40 returnees, demonstrating both acute need and potential for systematic intervention.

Following IOM's integrated approach, the policy encompasses economic, social, and psychosocial reintegration components with a family centred strategy. Key provisions include seed grants, skills training, business incubation, returnee networks, and data collection (psychosocial counselling remains unimplemented). The policy targets subsistence-level returnees, prioritizing women, Dalits, persons with disabilities, and those who have experienced violence or exploitation. Operating through the Migration Resource Centre with two staff members and an annual budget of NPR 2-2.5 million, programming relies primarily on IOM donor funding—providing \$1,100 in three instalments to 210 beneficiaries for agriculture, livestock, and small enterprise development.

Additional Reintegration Policy Development

In the provinces where ReMi has been implemented, provincial governments such as the Ministry of Labour and Transport in Madhesh Province and the Ministry of Social Development in Koshi Province have introduced policies and procedures for self-employment grant support programmes, including a focus on women, skill development programmes, and the objective of facilitating the reintegration of returnee migrant workers. Likewise, several local governments in the respective provinces have also introduced and (some) implemented policies and guidelines related to the formation and mobilization of returnee migrant workers' networks, emergency fund management to support the reintegration of returnees and their families, self-employment programmes, and entrepreneurship and business selection training.

This study could not encompass all these policies in the research. Nevertheless, reintegration governance in Nepal is notably expanding through new policy development at the local and provincial levels, and further research is required to understand the extent and effectiveness of this policy development.

Coordination of Multi-Level Reintegration Governance

Although significant advancements have been made in reintegration governance in Nepal, implementation remains in the early stages, with coordination among multi-level governance actors still developing. The bilateral development aid of the Swiss Development Cooperation, which funds ReMi with CHF 6.8 million through Helvetas technical support, plays a significant role, and IOM, International Labour Organization (ILO), and other UN Agencies have a technical and advisory role. Civil society organizations, including research institutes, contribute to research, advocacy, and grassroots mobilization, although they face funding constraints and occasional competition for visibility rather than collaboration.

At the federal level, the ReMi and Korea Happy Migration (K-HAMI) projects operate through two key coordination bodies: the Policy Advisory and Coordination Committee (PACC) and the Project Coordination and Implementation Unit (PCIU-F). The PACC is chaired by the Secretary of MoLESS and headed by four secretaries of MoLESS. It coordinates the project's implementation, ad-

vises on quality improvement, and addresses policy and inter-ministerial coordination challenges. The PCIU-F is led by an employment section official from the Secretary Level Social Development Ministry.

Provincial coordination occurs through Provincial Project Coordination and Implementation Units (PCIU-P) and Provincial Project Support Units (PPSU), led by officials from the provincial governments. Project Support Units (PSU) operate in the Koshi and Madhesh provinces within the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Labour and Transport, respectively, providing technical assistance, planning support, and development management. Project Steering Committees (PSC), chaired by the respective ministers, approve budgets and yearly plans for returnee and LG orientation activities.

ReMi also partners with the National Association of Rural Municipalities (NARIM) and Municipal Association of Nepal (MUAN), facilitating inter-government discourse on reintegration and return migrant workers at the local and provincial levels. This partnership aims to sensitize stakeholders to reintegration policies and returnee-centric services while building the capacity to institutionalize reintegration services within local governments.

As the national policy is intended to be implemented at the local level, strong coordination is essential for its effectiveness. Some complementarities exist: Foreign Employment Board (FEB) and ReMi operate in non-overlapping geographic areas, ReMi builds on SaMi infrastructure in 50% of target municipalities, and referral linkages connect the programmes. Although coordination challenges persist in the early stages, stakeholders report that partners 'do not share their tasks or compete for visibility,' and provincial roles remain undefined. The recent endorsement of the Integrated Labor and Employment Service Procedure (2081 BS/May 2024), which mandates Employment Service Centres as coordination hubs, represents progress, although effectiveness depends on moving from individual relationships to institutional mechanisms.

Dhankuta's local reintegration policy emerged outside this system, having started before the national frameworks. There is a strong need to incorporate bottom-up local policies into the national system. In the Philippines, for example, many local reintegration policies complement the national policy with locally specific programming, such as Quezon City's prioritization of returnees for municipal employment positions.

Within the national policy process, CSOs and returnees felt that their consultation and involvement were largely figurative. Future reintegration governance initiatives must consider not only how coordination works between levels of government but also how to genuinely include CSOs and returnees in policy development, implementation, and monitoring. CSOs have been active in providing reintegration support in Nepal for over two decades with promising programmes including shelters for highly vulnerable returnees, female empowerment projects, and upskilling programmes, although many had ended at the time of this research. Incorporating the knowledge and experience of these actors remains essential.

Returnees Experiences

Fifty-four returnees participated in detailed interviews regarding their reintegration experiences. The sample was predominantly male (48 of 54) and married (48 of 54), with an average duration of stay abroad of 7.4 years. The main destination countries included Malaysia (20), Saudi Arabia (12), and Qatar (9), with the remaining participants migrating to other Gulf Cooperation Council countries. At the time of the interview, participants had been back in Nepal for an average of 3.2 years, and nearly all had returned to their family and community of origin. The majority experienced significant challenges both during their time abroad and upon their return. Most were returned at the end of their employment contracts by their employers. However, some returnees engaged in their own return (15). This could include situations of employer abuse, fleeing employers, and needing to receive a laissez-passer and their own funding to return.

Of these 54 returnees, only 22 (41%) had received any form of reintegration governance assistance, likely a much higher percentage than nationwide, given the study's purposive oversampling of returnees receiving support. The targeting of reintegration assistance was based on those considered economically viable for creating their own businesses. This is an important consideration, as vulnerability is not necessarily a criterion for receiving assistance. Of the 22 returnees who received access to reintegration assistance, ten received assistance from IOM in Dhankuta, two from IFAD in Dhankuta, and ten from the national government in Triyuga. Sangurigadhi was purposely selected as a community where no reintegration assistance was available to enable comparison of access challenges and experiences.

The number of returnees sampled in this study was relatively small; however, the focus was on in-depth life history interviews and not survey responses. Furthermore, the number of returnees participating in these programmes was quite small, with 210 returnees receiving assistance in Dhankuta and approximately 100 receiving assistance in Triyuga. The results are thus intended to provide initial insights; however, further research is necessary to understand the effectiveness of reintegration governance in Nepal.

Triyuga: National Policy Implementation

In Triyuga, the municipality issued a notice inviting returnees for training as part of the National Reintegration Policy's pilot project. Participants learned about the opportunity through ward officers, family members, and neighbours. Returnees could choose different training options, including driving, electrician work, cooking, and various agricultural skills. All participants received financial literacy training, which emerged as the most appreciated component of the programme.

The financial literacy training utilized practical experiential learning techniques that the returnees found highly valuable. Using role-play business simulations, where participants employed paper money to produce and sell goods, the training effectively conveyed complex concepts about savings, investment, and profit margins. As one returnee explained: *'I got to learn that, only earning money isn't enough, and how can savings be done. I learned where it would be good to open a bank account. We didn't know things like this.'*

Training programmes lasted 10-20 days depending on the skill type. Returnees appreciated the government recognition and community building aspects, with one stating: 'The government caring for us after our return has raised a hope that we can do something after return.' The programme reduced feelings of idleness and loneliness while empowering participants to think about opportunities in Nepal and changing their orientation toward saving and financial management.

However, returnees identified significant limitations. The training duration was too short for some skills; one participant noted that 15-20 days of driving training meant 'I could not become perfect at all' and lacked funds for licensing and vehicle costs. From the training, returnees were encouraged to form collectives for self-employment, with promises of municipal support for

loans and business establishment. At the time of the interviews, the participants had not received the promised low-interest loans or started businesses, although several had received modest material support, such as goats for home rearing. Some received technical materials worth NPR 20,000-25,000, though participants noted that this was insufficient for actual business needs that required NPR 60,000 or more.

Dhankuta: Local Reintegration Policy Implementation

Participants in Dhankuta learned about the programme through ward offices or community networks. The municipality contacted known returnees and invited them to fill out forms for business and training support programmes. Business support was offered in instalments of approximately \$1,100 across three payments, contingent on demonstrating progress.

The outcomes for returnees varied across the programmes. Three participants successfully established operational businesses: one used their instalments to purchase cows for dairy farming, expecting to profit once the third instalment enabled full loan repayment. Two participants struggled but maintained businesses, although accumulated debt made sustainability uncertain. Five participants failed to establish a viable business. For example, one participant used the first instalment to buy four pigs, but all died from diseases. He explained: *'Now we do not have a clue about how much [medicine] to give, so apparently, I gave a lot. All four died in this manner. Many people's pigs died in the same way.'* Another planned a hotel business, but his children fell ill, forcing him to prioritize their care over business development, resulting in the loss of subsequent instalment eligibility.

Thus, perceptions of the programme were highly mixed. The five successful/ongoing business operators appreciated the support but emphasized that grant amounts were insufficient, forcing them to accumulate debt to cover costs between instalments, with no ongoing training or monitoring to assist with implementation challenges. The five participants unable to establish businesses felt frustrated and abandoned, having accumulated debt to participate; they received no support when problems arose beyond their control, such as disease outbreaks affecting livestock. One participant stated, *'They do not pick up the phone. We feel bad when this happens. I hoped that I could do something with the*

support they provided. Despite us having such thoughts, they do not give much interest to us, they do not come for monitoring.'

Experiences of Returnees Without Reintegration Assistance

Most of the returnees interviewed (59%) had not received any reintegration assistance. Most reported having no knowledge of available programmes, with approximately 78-81% either completely unaware or having heard only vague, unverified rumours. As one returnee stated:

TABLE 1 | Returnees Subjective Wellbeing at the time of Interview

	Received Reintegration Assistance	Spontaneous No Reintegration Assistance
Very Dissatisfied	11%	11%
Dissatisfied	7%	11%
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	68%	42%
Satisfied	14%	32%
Very Satisfied	0%	5%

'I heard a rumour that they give 1 lakh rupees to people coming from abroad to start a business, but I don't really believe such rumours.' For this majority, who had not heard of reintegration governance, strong openness was expressed towards the possibility of assistance.

A small number of returnees who had learned about reintegration assistance expressed perceptions of favouritism and corruption, believing that the programs were inaccessible to ordinary citizens. A few returnees attempted to access programmes but faced hostility at government offices. One described: *'After coming here, I did not know where to ask about it. The people I find there are all similar, some show too much attitude some do not show any concern. That is why I thought why should I go there to bow rather I will go abroad.'* Overall, the experiences reveal gaps in information dissemination, accessibility, and trust in reintegration governance.

Reintegration Governance and Subjective Well-Being

Returnees were asked to report their subjective well-being on a scale of 1-5 (where 1=very dissatisfied and 5=very satisfied with their current life situation) at the time of interview. As shown in Table 1, receiving reintegration assistance via reintegration governance providers shows little correlation with well-being outcomes. Both groups cluster predominantly at the neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, with 68% of recipients and 42% of non-recipients reporting this outcome. The distribution across satisfaction levels remains fairly similar whether returnees received support or not.

This lack of correlation reflects gaps between programme design and actual outcomes. The two programmes examined were quite different, the National Policy focused on mid-term training while Dhankuta's local policy focused on instalment-based grants, yet neither were comprehensive reintegration assistance. Although Triyuga participants appreciated training, gained motivation, and acquired skills, they lacked sufficient connection to labour markets and resources to establish businesses at the time of interview. Knowledge and inspiration alone did not translate to economic transformation.

Dhankuta's grant programme provided little ongoing guidance or technical support, resulting in high failure rates (50% of participants were unable to establish viable businesses), with some ending up in debt, de-motivated, and struggling more than before participation. Broken promises, particularly regarding low-interest loans in Triyuga and withdrawal of support when businesses struggled in Dhankuta, further eroded the potential positive impact. Meanwhile, the large proportion of returnees with no access to any support (59%) experienced challenges in their own businesses and reestablishing livelihoods. Ultimately, both receiving inadequate support and receiving no support left returnees at similar levels of moderate life satisfaction, highlighting the need for comprehensive, sustained, and accessible reintegration programming.

Promising Practices

Recognition Matters: Government Acknowledgment Creates Hope and Returnee Engagement

Official recognition by the government created psychological value and hope among returnees, with participants expressing that being '*listed at number one*' after years abroad made them feel remembered and valued by the state. Returnees demonstrate strong willingness and eagerness to participate in training programmes when opportunities are provided, actively choosing skills based on their interests and capacities. Local government initiatives, with ReMi support, to build returnee migrant worker networks at the local, district, and provincial levels should be recognised as commendable, alongside the networks' participation in policymaking and their leadership in running cooperatives. This combination of government acknowledgment and returnee openness creates a foundation for effective reintegration governance, though success depends on following through with quality and sustained support.

Learning by Doing: Experiential Financial Literacy Builds Skills and Community

Participatory financial literacy training using hands-on methods—such as role-play business simulations where returnees use paper money to produce and sell goods—proved highly impactful in conveying complex concepts about savings, investment, profit margins, and distinguishing essential from wasteful expenses. These practical learning methods resonated strongly with returnees of varied educational backgrounds, creating both motivation ('*only earning money isn't enough*') and concrete understanding of financial management that lectures alone could not achieve. Training programmes also generated valuable peer networks among returnees, fostering community building, collective organizing capacity, and knowledge-sharing that extended beyond the formal programming.

Families First: Long-Term Bilateral Partnership Enables Holistic Support

Unlike individual-focused interventions, ReMi supports both returning migrants and their families left behind.

This reflects the understanding that successful reintegration requires economic agency for both partners and depends on the stability of the entire household. The project's 4-year partnership model between the governments of Nepal and Switzerland, with mandatory local government cost-sharing (10-15%), creates conditions for sustained engagement, iterative learning, and genuine ownership that short-term donor projects cannot achieve. By integrating full migration cycle support (pre-departure through SaMi, destination awareness, post-return reintegration) and embedding services within existing government structures (Employment Service Centres as hubs), ReMi demonstrates how long-term bilateral commitment can build institutional capacity and create scalable models rather than parallel, dependency-creating systems. However, system building in the ongoing federalization and transition context of Nepal, will take long time as well as adequate resources to build the capacities at ESCs.

Challenges

- **New Policies Require Time for Implementation:** While Nepal has developed comprehensive reintegration policies, these policies remain primarily on paper. It is recognised that these are new policies with little time between the policies being passed into law and this research study. Therefore, more time is needed to assess implementation in Nepal.
- **Skills Training Shows Limited Economic Impact:** Returnees who received training valued the knowledge gained, particularly in financial literacy and business skills, but repeatedly reported being unable to apply what they learned due to insufficient material support, lack of work opportunities, and absence of market linkages. The gap between knowledge acquisition and economic transformation highlights the need for comprehensive approaches that match training quality with adequate startup capital, extended duration (months not weeks), ongoing mentorship, employment connections, and rescue mechanisms when businesses face crisis.

- **Absence of Psychosocial and Gender-Responsive Support:** Despite returnees experiencing trauma, exploitation, family separation, and mental health challenges during migration, reintegration programmes focused almost exclusively on economic dimensions while neglecting psychosocial needs. On the one hand, research has shown that when the economic dimension improves, psychosocial dimensions tend to follow (Barnett et al., 2023), however, there remains a gap in the reintegration governance system for those in severe distress and to meet mental health needs. None of the existing frameworks include systematic mental health screening, counselling services, or trauma-informed approaches, despite stakeholder acknowledgment that psychological reintegration is fundamental to sustainable return. Simultaneously, reintegration policies lack gender awareness and fail to address distinct challenges faced by female returnees including domestic violence, social stigma, limited property rights, and restricted mobility. Although there are referral services of the projects and governments, services are not so much accessible, or they are not of good quality.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen Multi-Level Governance Architecture: Balancing National, Bilateral, and Local Approaches.

Nepal's reintegration governance landscape demonstrates the value of complementary approaches. The National Reintegration Directive provides federal framework and policy coherence across 81 municipalities. The ReMi project brings technical expertise and innovation testing across 20 municipalities with mandatory local cost-sharing. Dhankuta's local policy represents bottom-up municipal leadership that preceded and informed national frameworks. Rather than viewing these as competing or duplicative, Nepal should strategically leverage the distinct strengths each governance type offers.

- **Build and support local government initiatives on re-integration:** Local governments have taken diverse and leading roles in reintegration governance. More attention is needed on local-level successes and how knowledge can be transferred and shared across municipalities.

- **Strengthen partnerships beyond government:** Engagement with the private sector, returnee networks, and civil society organizations is essential. Priority areas include:

- Accessible job-seeking and job-matching services for returnees
- Facilitated access to finance through subsidized loans from financial institutions and cooperatives
- Business development training to support entrepreneurship
- Institutionalize coordination mechanisms: Sustainable reintegration governance requires regular convenings across governance levels, shared monitoring systems, and explicit recognition that success depends on balancing federal frameworks, donor partnership expertise, and local government ownership rather than relying on any single approach alone.

- 2. **Full Cycle Reintegration Governance.** Following from the recommended model by the ReMi team, it is essential to consider reintegration within the migration circle, from the migration departure to the return. It is noteworthy how impactful returnees found the experimental financial literacy training in Triyuga. Earlier interventions prior to migration may have supported more savings and preparedness for return and reintegration. Incorporating reintegration into the full migration cycle enables further preparedness for reintegration success. Effective reintegration governance must also be multidimensional, addressing both economic needs and psychosocial wellbeing rather than focusing solely on employment and income.

3. Develop Family-Centred and Gender-Responsive Reintegration Governance.

A key success of the SaMI project is its family focus, which is being incorporated into the ReMi programming. This is an important learning that should be expanded through coordination and collaboration with the national government to ensure family-centred reintegration governance. Family-centred reintegration governance can include family training sessions, de-stigmatizing activities to prevent stigmatization of spouses left behind, and how families can work together to prepare for return and reintegration. In alignment with the Global Compact on Migration, it is essential that reintegration governance should be gender responsive and consider vul-

nerable returnee groups (Bhattarai et al. 2023). This can include developing gender- and disability- responsive and failed migrants reintegration frameworks that address women-specific barriers (domestic violence, social stigma, limited mobility and property rights) and analyse household power dynamics in family-centred programmes. All reintegration interventions should explicitly incorporate gender analysis and ensure women returnees have equal access to services, decision-making power over resources, and protection from gender-based violence. To that end, engagement and community level outreach activities as well as effective referral systems will be crucial.

4. Continuous Learning and Improvement Through Evidence.

Nepal's reintegration governance is at a critical juncture where multiple initiatives are generating valuable lessons. To build on this momentum, the government should establish a systematic learning and accountability framework with four core components:

- **Establish reliable local-level returnee data systems.** Strengthen the Foreign Employment Infor-

mation Management System (FEIMS) to provide disaggregated data at the municipal level, including gender, destination country, return circumstances, and vulnerability indicators. This foundational infrastructure is essential for evidence-based programming and resource allocation.

- **Document and disseminate successful reintegration** cases that demonstrate returnees' contributions to their families and communities, countering stigma narratives and positioning returnees as agents of transformation to shift societal attitudes and political will.
- **Institute regular evaluation of reintegration governance** across all government levels, capturing successes and challenges to inform policy revisions and identify proven models for scaling to other contexts.
- **Develop clear monitoring frameworks** that delineate rights and responsibilities across federal, provincial, and local actors, ensuring accountability in service delivery and enabling returnees to understand their entitlements.

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