Migration in the Hindu Kush Himalaya: Governance, Drivers, and Consequences

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Key messages

- Migration drives a broad range of economic, social and political changes in this region, while migration itself is determined by multiple factors

- Labour migration contributes significantly to poverty reduction in this region, although this depends on who is able to move and under what conditions

- Issues associated with internal migration remain peripheral to the policy discourse in most HKH countries, even though more than three times as many people migrate internally than internationally

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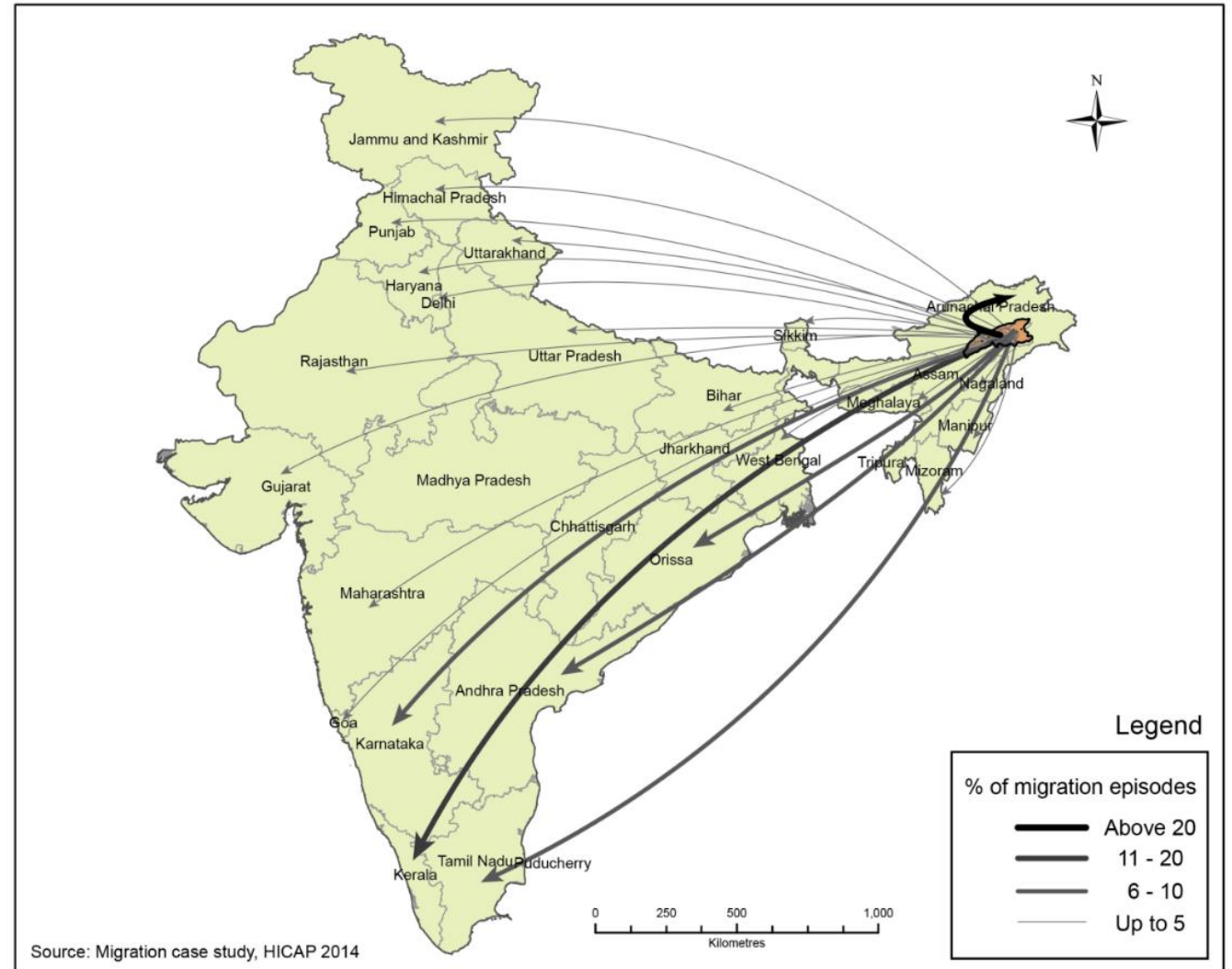
What drives migration?

In search of a better life

- Limited opportunities in mountains reflect high dependence on agriculture, lack of market access and limited livelihood security

- Economic growth of urban centres within and beyond the HKH region exerts a strong influence on migration

- Improved infrastructure, including roads and other communications infrastructure, could facilitate migration

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Better educated, better connected

- Access to better education is a strong driver of migration, as a route to the skilled labour market

- Labour migration is often selective of the better educated

- Social networks are critical to providing information about work opportunities, and financial support to meet the costs of migration

Source: Migration case study, HICAP 2014

Legend

% of migration episodes

▬▬▬	Above 20
▬▬	11 - 20
▬	6 - 10
—	Up to 5

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States shape, promote, and constrain migration

- Policies on education, social protection, welfare, can directly or indirectly limit the need for, or possibility for individuals to migrate

- There have been open borders between India and Nepal for 70 years, helping shape substantial migration in both directions

- Policies are emerging to reduce or eliminate costs associated with migration agencies

- Bilateral agreements help to shape international migration, consolidating particular corridors

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Mountain Depopulation: A new trend

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Nepal

- A new trend since 2011

- Depopulation in more affluent regions – multi-dimensional poverty important

- Trapped population another important section

Other Districts
Districts with negavtive growth rate

0 25 50 100 150 200
Kilometers
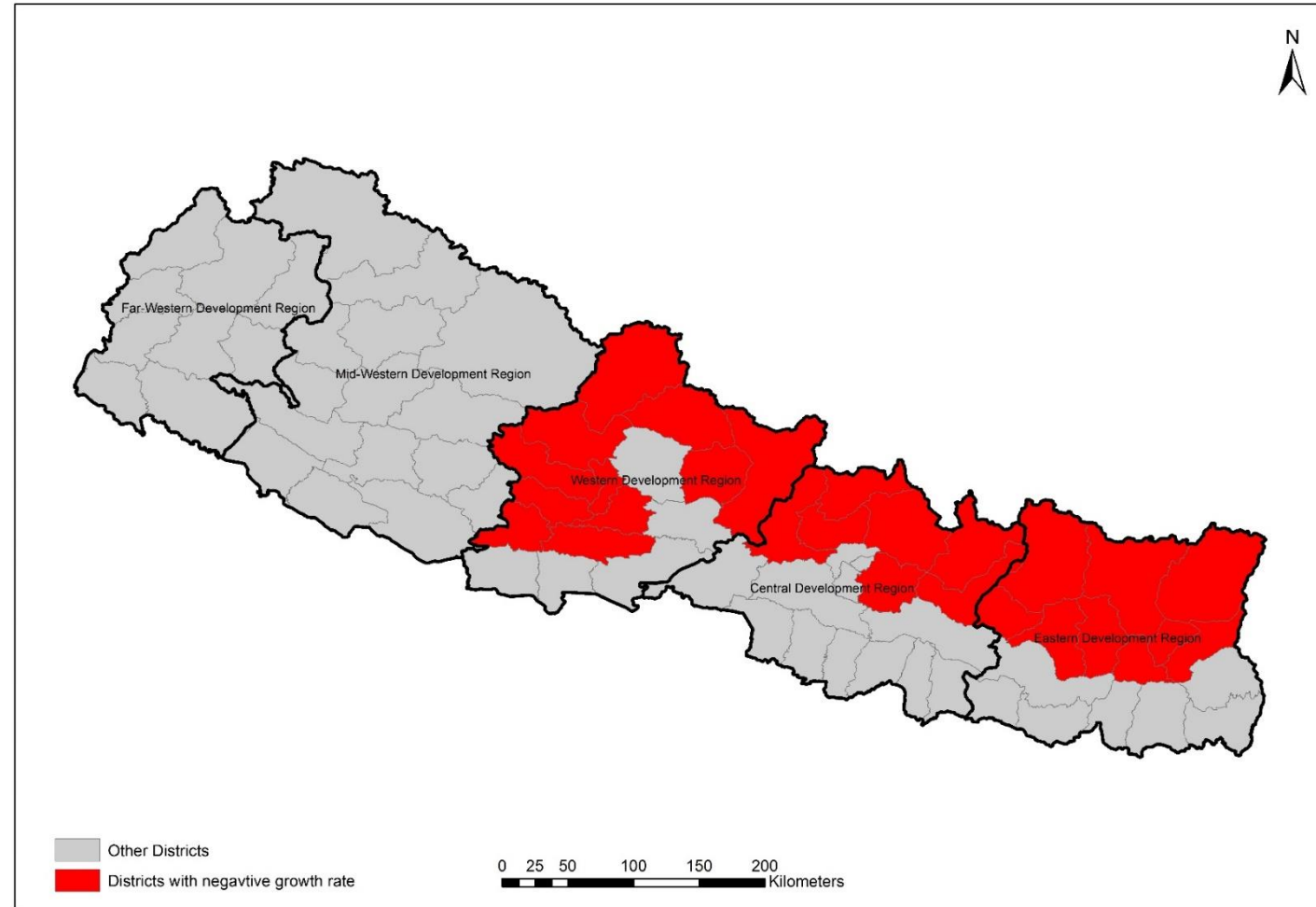
Mountain Depopulation: A new trend

Uttarakhand, India

- One of the ten sources of internal migrants in India

- 1,053 'ghost villages' and 405 villages with less than 10 persons

- Negative growth rates in Pauri and Almora (mountain districts) between 2001 and 2011

- Mountain tehsils within Pithoragarh district also recorded negative growth rate
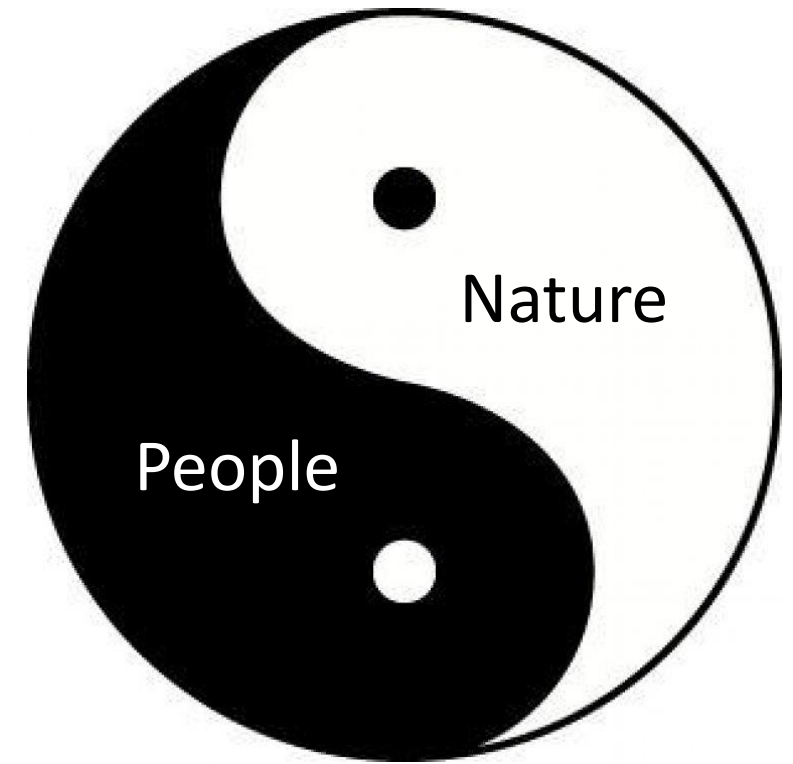

1960

1980
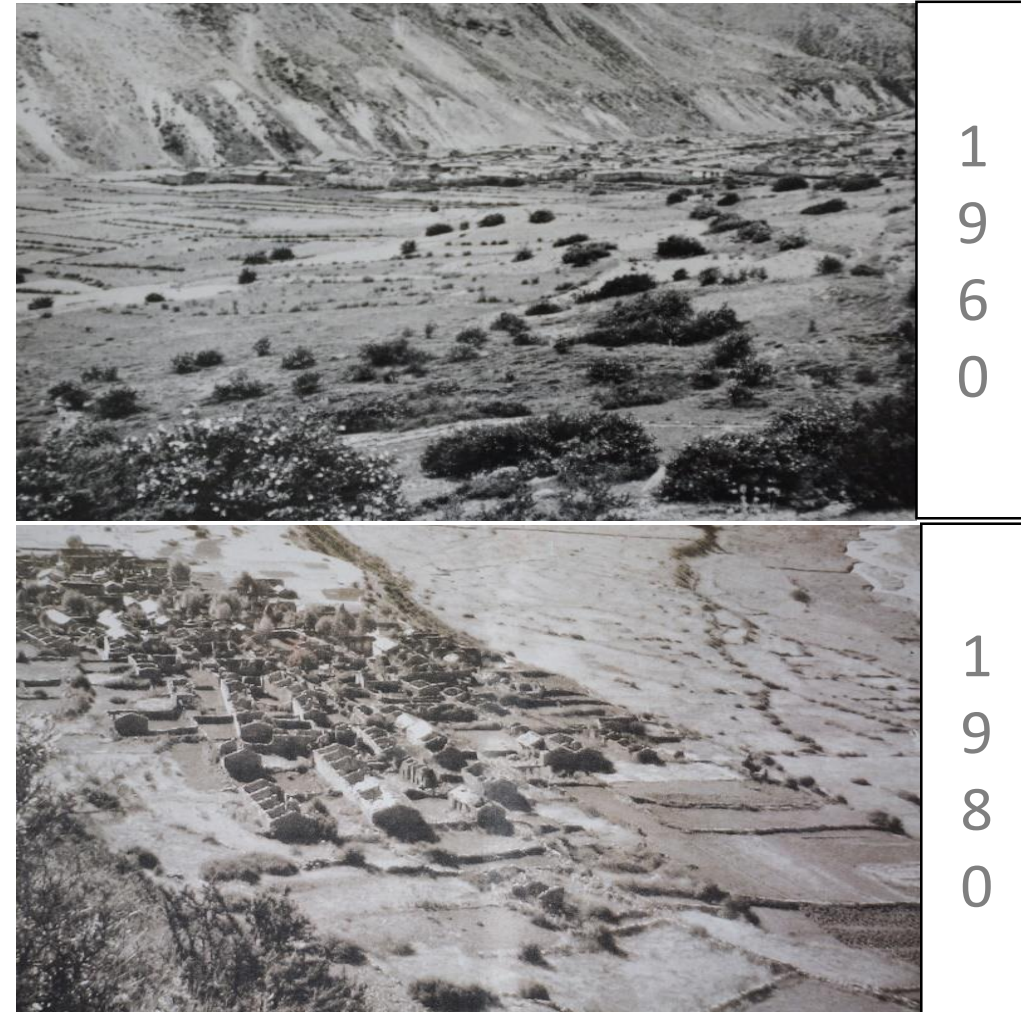
'Ghost Village' in Milam Valley

- Disturb current socio-ecological system

- New system???

Social systems

- Population – old people, vulnerable women, disadvantaged caste

- "Devta, Dalit and Daridra" – Gram Pancha

- Brain and brown drain

- Loss of community vitality

Nature

People

Mountain system

Ecological systems

- Agriculture land abandonment

- Increased wild life-human conflict

- Increased invasive species

- Global mountain learning – increased forest expansion leading to biodiversity loss, diminished habitats, landscape homogeneity (MacDonald et al 2000); new forest expansion positive impact

- Abandoned terraces – affect the hydrological and geomorphologic functioning of hillslopes and fluvial channel (Garcia-Ruiz et al., 1996)

Lamjung

2,225 ha

Nuwakot

2,251 ha
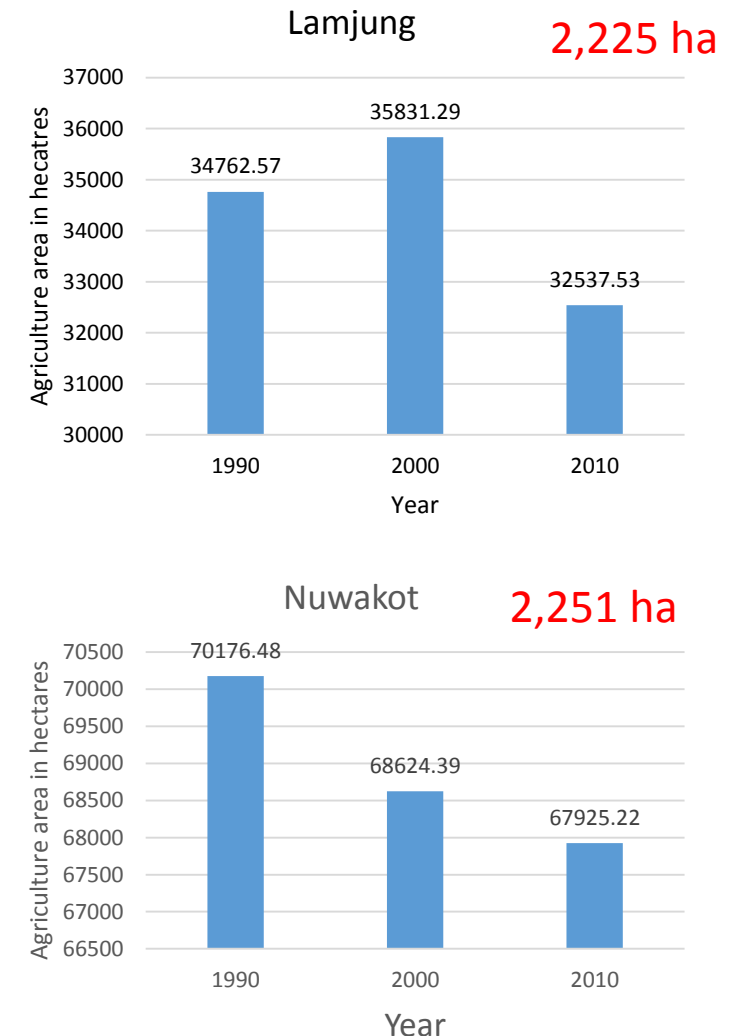
What are the consequences of labour migration?

Migration reduces mountain poverty and creates new livelihoods opportunities

- A significant proportion of rural households across the HKH region benefit economically from remittances

- The poverty-reducing effect of migration, and its impact on inequality, depends on who has access to migration, and under what conditions

- Levels of investments in livelihoods are higher among households whose remittance income acts as a supplement

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Better social outcomes

- A disproportionately higher portion of remittances from international migration is spent on education and health than on everyday consumption

- Despite fears about the impact of migration on 'children left behind', there is mounting evidence that migration contributes to increased school enrolment and improved educational outcomes

- There are many examples of remittances contributing to social infrastructure, including health posts, improved water supply in remote areas, improved infrastructure in schools and public libraries

- Evidence on the social consequences of internal migration is limited compared to international migration

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Left behind or left in charge?

- Though age-selective nature of migration means that elderly and children would be left behind and this may increase their workload, evidence on these issues in the HKH region is sparse

- Migration is highly gendered: male flows predominate, although women are increasingly represented amongst migrants in the region

- Some studies suggest migration (including female labour migration) contributes to the economic and social empowerment of women. However, the extent of such empowerment is context-specific

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Disaster preparedness is not a top priority

- Remittances finance relief and reconstruction in the aftermath of disasters across this region

- Remittances are less volatile than foreign direct investment or official development projects

- Migration can be seen as a way to promote resilience to climate change, but investment in CCA and DRR is rarely the first priority of migrant households.

- The effects of migration in sending areas depend on other factors such as education, financial literacy and inclusion, access to gender-sensitive extension-services and the level of development more generally.

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The governance of labour migration in the HKH

National policies, laws and acts

- **Countries with comprehensive policies and regulations on international migration:** Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan

- **Laws governing emigration date back to 1922:** more recent policies focus on overseas employment, female migration and human trafficking, and most recently, migration and climate

- **Regulations introduced to limit female migration in response to cases of abuse:** these have rarely worked, and often stimulated irregular migration, leading to worse abuse

- **Specific institutions in some countries for the diaspora:** overseas offices, welfare funds, and diaspora-focused financial instruments

- **Relative lack of policies and instruments on internal migration:** some cases lack portability of rights across administrative boundaries

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International instruments and mechanisms

- **Lack of ratification:** Rights assigned under many international instruments cannot be exercised. Only Bangladesh has ratified 1990 UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and the Members of their Families (ICRMW).

- **Regional consultative forums:** Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Nepal, and Pakistan have joined forums such as the Colombo Process and Abu Dhabi Dialogue

- **Sustainable Development Goals:** Target 8.8 of Goal 8 specifically mentions migrants – "Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment"

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Bilateral mechanisms

- Only avenue to facilitate labour migration in absence of enforcement of multilateral instruments

- The Nepal-India Peace and Friendship Treaty 1950 recognized the open border

- Bilateral agreements are low: destination countries are not keen on signing bilateral agreements with minimum rights

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Innovations in governance on migration

- **Wage Earners' Welfare Fund in Bangladesh:** subscription by migrant workers, consular fee charged in the embassies, and interests charged from the bond money kept from the recruiting agency as license fee

- **India fund to support migrants:** security deposit of USD 2,500 per worker from the foreign employer hiring an Indian worker

- **'Free-visa, free-ticket' scheme in Nepal:** weak, leading in some instances to greater abuse of workers; if Nepal succeeds, it will be an innovation in workers' recruitment

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Challenges of migration governance

International migration

- Existence of tiers of intermediaries in both the countries of origin and destination

- Lack of accountability of recruiting agencies

- Lack of efficient governance system

- Lack of information on safe migration among potential migrants

- Abusive working conditions (particularly for female migrant workers)

- Soaring cost of migration

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Challenges of migration governance

Internal migration

- A strong sedentary bias in policies that affect internal migrants, in contrast to international migration

- Lack of policy on internal migration keep internal migrants outside the purview of government programmes and entitlements

- Negative attitude and hostility towards internal migrants

- Inter-provincial migrants face more hardships as social security programmes are not portable

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Policy recommendations

- Mainstream migration into national policy processes associated with CCA, Sendai Framework, and SDGs

- Social protections across administrative boundaries

- Measures to reduce migration costs and decentralize migration governance

- Quality data on seasonal migration, remittances, and reintegration of returnees

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