GRASSROOTS TO GLOBAL

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FEMIG WORKSHOP REPORT: NEPAL

Building Feminist Migration Policy for Gender Equality from Grassroots to Global

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INTRODUCTION AND WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

FeMig (Building a Feminist Migration Policy for Gender Equality, from Grassroots to Global) is an initiative led by the Gender+Migration Hub at the International Migration Research Centre, Wilfrid Laurier University, in partnership with the Women in Migration Network and the International Detention Coalition (IDC) and funded by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

The FeMig initiative responds to the reality that migration, when shaped by structural inequality, gendered labor markets, racial hierarchies, and restrictive governance regimes, does not automatically lead to empowerment or gender equality. Instead, women, gender-diverse, and racialized migrants, particularly those concentrated in feminized, undervalued, and informal sectors such as domestic and care work, are systematically exposed to precarity, violence, and rights violations across the migration cycle. These harms are not incidental, but are produced through policy choices, labor recruitment systems, border regimes, and social norms that devalue women's labor and constrain their mobility.

FeMig seeks to disrupt these dynamics by grounding migration governance in feminist, rights-based, and intersectional approaches developed from the lived experiences, organizing practices, and policy expertise of grassroots civil society organizations (CSOs). Central to FeMig is the recognition that civil society actors are not merely service providers or policy stakeholders, but key agents of migration governance. Working directly with migrant communities, CSOs document gender-based violence (GBV), labor exploitation, and systemic exclusion; provide legal, psychosocial, and humanitarian support; and advance advocacy and accountability efforts at local, national, regional, and global levels.

As part of this initiative, participatory workshops are being conducted in multiple countries, including Thailand, Mexico, Ethiopia, Colombia, Ecuador, Nepal and Albania.

These workshops are designed to promote meaningful civil society participation in migration governance, to surface feminist analyses rooted in everyday realities, and to ensure that global migration debates are informed by the knowledge and leadership of those most affected by gendered migration regimes. These workshops are designed to promote meaningful civil society participation in migration governance and to ensure that feminist perspectives inform global migration debates and policy processes.

The FeMig Nepal workshop was held in Kathmandu on Friday, December 5, 2025, in partnership with Aprabasi Mahila Kaamdar Samuha (AMKAS Nepal), a leading organization working on women's labor migration and rights. The workshop brought together civil society organizations working on issues affecting Nepali women migrant workers across the migration cycle from pre-departure and recruitment, to employment abroad, return, and reintegration.

The workshop was led by Dr. Jenna Hennebry (Co-Director, International Migration Research Centre; Founder and Project Lead, Gender + Migration Hub) and Dr. Hari KC (Balsillie School of International Affairs), and co-facilitated by Bijaya Rai Shrestha, Executive Director of AMKAS Nepal.

The overall objective of the Nepal workshop was to:

- Identify and connect CSOs working with women in migration contexts in Nepal;
- Create a safe, feminist, and participatory space for shared reflection and learning;
- Generate grounded analysis and policy recommendations for feminist migration governance;
- Contribute Nepal-specific insights to the global FeMig process, including surveys, indicators, and advocacy outputs.

COUNTRY CONTEXT: GENDER AND MIGRATION

Nepal is a major country of origin for labour migration, with women migrant workers playing a critical role in sustaining households, communities, and the national economy through both remittances and unpaid care labour. Yet women's migration from Nepal is deeply shaped by gendered norms, restrictive state policies, and global labour markets that channel women into precarious and undervalued forms of work, particularly domestic and care labour in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and parts of Southeast Asia.

Long-standing state policies framed as "protective," including bans and age-based restrictions on women's migration for domestic work, have not prevented migration. Instead, they have contributed to the growth of informal and irregular migration pathways, increasing women's exposure to trafficking, deception, and violence. Migrating outside formal systems often excludes women from pre-departure orientation, insurance schemes, welfare funds, and access to consular protection. As a result, women who experience abuse, wage theft, confinement, sexual violence, injury, or death while abroad frequently remain invisible within state systems and are denied access to justice and redress.

Gender-based violence is a central, though often obscured, feature of Nepali women's migration experiences, manifesting not only as interpersonal violence in workplaces and homes, but also as structural and institutional violence embedded in migration governance itself. Civil society organizations in Nepal have long challenged these conditions, documenting how restrictive policies undermine women's autonomy, dignity, and safety while failing to address the political economy of recruitment, the lack of labour protections in destination countries, and the absence of accountability across borders.

The timing of the FeMig Nepal workshop, during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, was therefore both intentional and symbolically significant. It situated women's labour migration squarely within

global and national struggles to end GBV, highlighting how migration policies, labour regimes, and border controls can either reproduce or challenge gender-based harm. At the same time, the overlap with the 16 Days campaign underscored the reality that feminist and migrant-rights organizations are often stretched thin, balancing crisis response, survivor support, advocacy, and movement-building within highly constrained funding and political environments.

WORKSHOP DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS

Participants
The workshop brought together 34 participants from a diverse range of civil society organizations working on women's migration, labour rights, gender-based violence, legal aid, psychosocial support, advocacy, and research. Participants included women-led including by women migrant returnees and women-focused organizations, grassroots groups, and national NGOs with extensive experience supporting migrant women and returnees.

The diversity of participants enabled rich, intersectional discussions that reflected varied organizational mandates, regional experiences, and forms of engagement from service provision and survivor support to policy advocacy and movement-building.

Workshop Design & Process
The FeMig Nepal workshop was structured as a full-day participatory process, carefully sequenced to move from shared grounding and evidence-generation to collective analysis, creative feminist knowledge production, and policy-oriented agenda setting. The agenda was intentionally designed to reflect feminist principles of inclusivity, co-creation, care, and recognition of multiple ways of knowing.

Registration & Informal Networking
The day began with participant registration, informal networking, and shared coffee and tea. Participants received workshop materials, including the agenda, information on accessing the FeMig Global CSO Survey (via QR code or paper copies), and guidance on the participatory arts session. This opening period helped establish an atmosphere of trust, accessibility, and collegial exchange.

Welcome, Opening Remarks & Grounding
The workshop formally opened with welcome remarks from the FeMig team

and AMKAS Nepal. This session introduced the FeMig initiative, its global scope, and the specific objectives of the Nepal workshop. Facilitators also led a collective grounding exercise to establish feminist principles, shared values, and agreements for a safe, respectful, and inclusive space, recognizing power differences, lived experience, and the emotional dimensions of migration work.

FeMig Global CSO Survey – Nepal Session
Participants engaged in a one-and-a-half-hour guided session to complete the FeMig Global CSO Survey. Facilitators explained how the survey data contributes to the development of global feminist migration policy, report cards, and indicators. This session ensured that Nepal-based civil society perspectives are directly embedded in global advocacy and knowledge-production processes.

Context Setting: Issues Facing Nepali Women Migrant Workers
An interactive context-setting session combined short inputs and open discussion to map key issues shaping Nepali women's migration today. Discussions focused on:

- Migration pathways for Nepali women, including domestic work bans and irregular channels;
- How restrictions and bans increase irregular migration and exposure to trafficking and exploitation;
- Vulnerabilities faced by domestic workers in GCC countries under the kafala system;
- Gender-based violence, labor exploitation, and lack of access to justice;
- The absence of formal state recognition of domestic and care work;
- Reintegration challenges faced by returnee women, including stigma and economic exclusion.

Participants collectively identified the top five issues affecting Nepali women migrant workers, which informed the creative and policy-focused sessions.

Participatory Arts Session: Imagining Feminist Migration Futures

A central feature of the workshop was the extended participatory arts session, designed as a feminist methodology for knowledge generation and collective visioning. Participants divided into small groups and engaged in creative processes responding to prompts on:

- Lived realities, challenges, and aspirations of women migrant workers;
- Agency, resistance, leadership, and solidarity among Nepali women migrants;
- What feminist migration governance in Nepal could and should look like;
- Reimagined migration futures grounded in safety, dignity, rights, and recognition.

Groups used diverse artistic forms, including drawing, collage, symbolic imagery, poetry, and storytelling visuals, to express complex experiences and policy visions that are often marginalized in formal policy spaces. The session unfolded in two parts: group creation and group presentations. Key messages emerging from the artworks were documented for integration into FeMig Report Cards and feminist migration indicators.

KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Thematic Deep Dive: Policy, Protection, and Pathways

The afternoon session centred on an interactive thematic deep dive into priority policy areas identified earlier in the day. Participants engaged in facilitated dialogue through plenary and breakout discussions across four thematic clusters:

1. Bans and Restrictions: examining how bans expose women to irregular migration and trafficking, and exploring feminist alternatives to restrictive mobility governance;
2. Protection and Accountability: addressing gaps in pre-departure training, embassy and shelter support, recruitment agency regulation, and access to justice;
3. Domestic Work Rights and Recognition: focusing on legal invisibility, decent work standards, and advocacy toward ratification of ILO Convention No. 189;
4. Reintegration and Return: discussing economic opportunities, psychosocial needs, social stigma, gender-based violence, and the role of local CSOs and municipalities.

Collective Priorities Mapping

Through a facilitated plenary exercise, participants collaboratively identified:

- The top five feminist policy priorities for Nepali women migrant workers;
- The top five gaps in current migration governance;
- The top five areas where civil society can most effectively intervene;
- A shortlist of two to three Nepal-specific feminist migration indicators to share with the global FeMig team.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Migration Bans and Restrictions**
   - Abolish migration bans that are counterproductive, discriminatory, and harmful.
   - Shift from prohibition to regulation centered on rights, safety, and informed choice.
2. **Protection and Recognition**
   - Ensure unconditional state recognition and consular support for all Nepali migrant workers, regardless of migration status.
   - Guarantee access to justice, welfare funds, repatriation, and legal remedies.
3. **Domestic Work and Labor Rights**
   - Urgently ratify ILO Convention No. 189 to recognize domestic work as dignified labor and enforce international labor standards.
4. **Accountability and Justice**
   - Strengthen mechanisms to hold recruitment agencies and employers accountable.
   - Ensure timely, survivor-centered legal redress for exploitation and abuse.
5. **Governance and Monitoring**
   - Develop Nepal-specific feminist migration indicators that measure success beyond remittance flows, focusing instead on safety, dignity, empowerment, and quality of reintegration.
   - Enable civil society to play a formal role in monitoring, evaluation, and accountability processes.

Contact Us

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