SEEFAR

Ethically Recruited

How ethical recruitment can impact workers and their families, and reduce the incidence of forced labor

August 2022

Executive Summary

Ethical recruitment is increasingly seen as a priority solution to reducing the global prevalence of the nearly 21 million people trapped in forced labor worldwide,[1] though much remains to be done. As highlighted at the 2021 Global Forum for Responsible Recruitment: "Responsible recruitment is a win, win, win scenario."[2] Indeed, literature on exploitation in the overseas labor recruitment industry repeatedly calls for ethical recruitment as a key innovation that may reduce or eliminate exploitation. Practitioners and international donors, too, cite ethical recruitment as a priority solution.[3]

Yet there is a surprising dearth of theory and evidence on ethical recruitment and its impacts. To date, the limited number of ethical recruitment channels has been a major barrier to evidence generation on this subject. This report aims to contribute to an improved evidence base by i) understanding how and to what degree ethical recruitment impacts workers, their families, and their communities; ii) assessing the degree to which ethical recruitment reduces the incidence of forced labor among workers; and iii) understanding the degree to which migrants would choose ethical alternatives to recruitment if given the opportunity. Seefar conducted mixed method research between November 2020 and March 2022 in Uttar Pradesh, India, with key informants, returned migrant workers, and their families and friends.

The following are key findings from the research:

- All respondents said they would migrate abroad through an ethical recruitment agency if given the opportunity. They stated that it would be a relief to not have to spend money during the recruitment process. However, it takes time to build trust in no-fee recruitment options as respondents considered this practice highly unusual. Combining ethical recruitment initiatives with behavior change campaigns away from the widespread practice of paying excessive recruitment fees bears potential for wider industry change.
- Debt and debt-bondage linked to traditional forms of recruitment were less pronounced among returned migrant workers in UP than expected. Instead, workers and their families save up with the explicit purpose to pay recruitment fees. Rather than paying high costs for high risks during recruitment and working abroad, workers and their families can use existing savings more quickly and channel them elsewhere when being recruited ethically.
- Family members play a key role in paying recruitment fees. They also described significant levels of stress and mental health issues related to having to pay for recruitment costs. Ethical recruitment can likely lower families' mental health and stress levels related to paying for recruitment.
- Paying back debt correlated with sending fewer remittances back home among migrant workers. Of the respondents who borrowed money and paid their debt with their monthly salary, 60% were significantly more likely to send fewer remittances than those who did not borrow at all.
- Remittances were the only variable that affected perceptions around increased social status after migration among returned migrant workers. However, medium- to long-term benefits from

[1] For example: IOM (2016) "Promoting the Ethical Recruitment of Migrant Workers"; ILO (2014) "Profits and Poverty: The economics of forced labour"; ILO (2015) "Regulating labour recruitment to prevent human trafficking and to foster fair migration: Models, challenges and opportunities"; Ethical Trading Initiative (2019) "Ethical Recruitment Practices and Forced Labour in China: Guidelines for Employers".
[2] ILO (2021) "The Global Forum for Responsible Recruitment".
[3] For example: U.S. Department of State (2020) "2020 Trafficking in Persons Report"; Open Working Group on Labor Migration & Recruitment (2017) "Labor migration and recruitment"; Migrant Forum in Asia (2015) "Ethical Recruitment".

traditional migration, such as income gain, employability, or increased social status appear limited.

- Recruited migrant workers sometimes suffer from physical and mental health problems upon return. There were significant differences in negative physical health experiences between those who indicated they were recruited by a recruitment agency, versus those who reported having been recruited through family, friends, neighbors, a government agency, or directly through the company.
- The most often reported indicators of forced labor among our sample included: limited freedom of movement during recruitment and while working abroad; inability to leave an employer and job to return home or find another job abroad; false information about the nature of the work; poor living conditions; and inadequate and incorrect pay (i.e., not aligned with what was promised). During the recruitment process, too, migrant workers were often given inaccurate (when not openly false) information on the nature of their job, living conditions, and pay.

Findings suggest that the following components of ethical recruitment are likely most effective at positively impacting workers and their families, and reducing the prevalence of forced labor:

- No-fee principle;
- Focus on and monitoring of worker welfare; and
- Pre-departure training, and ongoing information sharing and assistance while abroad.

The no-fee principle appears to bear the most significant potential for positive impact. Although debt and debt-bondage were not happening as frequently as expected, no-fee recruitment can be understood as a means for redirecting money to vulnerable people. Ethical recruitment also comes with lower opportunity costs for migration than traditional recruitment, making it more easily accessible to workers in a fairer way: Those who are unable to save can still access jobs abroad, without the risk of high debt and debt-bondage. It is likely that the no-fee principle can also lower families' mental health and stress levels related to saving up and paying back money for recruitment as shown in focus group discussions conducted for this study. By not charging fees and allowing workers and their families to continue saving money, ethical recruitment furthermore bears important potential for increasing remittances sent home. These, in turn, can improve migrant workers' social status in their home communities. Because not paying recruitment fees means workers and their families do not have to spend money otherwise saved for recruitment, ethical recruitment may be able to contribute to better medium- to long-term migration outcomes, for example through a better investment of savings and remittances in local economies, education of younger household members, nutrition, and medical expenses.

Focusing on worker welfare is likely to reduce negative experiences related to physical and mental health, as well as experiences of indicators of forced labor that were found to occur in our sample of returned migrant workers. Meanwhile, only 12% of traditionally recruited migrant workers surveyed reported having received pre-departure training. Ethical recruitment may greatly reduce the incidence of indicators of forced labor by providing clear and precise information during the recruitment and ongoing assistance abroad. In particular, it can draw attention to freedom of movement and the right to change or quit jobs and support them (remotely) in doing so where needed. For example, support in identifying alternative jobs can ensure that migrants find jobs without the financial risks and repercussions connected to traditional forms of recruitment and work abroad.

Ethical recruitment has the potential to bring migrant workers and their families significant benefits, including improved economic outcomes, a decrease in the negative impacts on workers' and families' health, and a reduction in situations of forced labor. It should therefore continue to be a priority solution to fund, advocate for, and implement.

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Introduction

The exploitation of low-skilled labor migrant workers in the recruitment sector is pervasive globally. From the earliest stages of the migration process, workers are often highly vulnerable to deceptive recruitment practices, fraud, crippling recruitment fees, and debt. These practices are perpetuated by a network of unlicensed sub-agents and middlemen. Once abroad, migrant workers recruited through these informal means in turn experience wage theft, hazardous working and living conditions, and situations of forced labor and modern slavery.

Ethical recruitment has emerged as a promising solution to address these issues. However, theory and evidence on ethical recruitment and its impacts are missing, including because there is a limited number of ethical recruitment channels that can form the basis for evidence-generation on the subject.

With funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS), Seefar has licensed and is piloting its registered subsidiary, The Ethical Recruitment Agency (TERA), in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh (UP), India. TERA aims to provide exploitation-free labor migration and work opportunities to individuals in vulnerable communities.

Seefar has designed the *Ethically Recruited* research project to generate new evidence on the recruitment of migrant workers, which adheres to international ethical recruitment standards (see Annex 1 for examples). The research focuses specifically on the labor migration landscape in UP, i.e., migrant workers who are recruited in UP and migrate abroad for work.

The research has two overarching objectives:

1. Understand how and to what degree ethical recruitment impacts workers, their families, and their communities.
2. Assess the degree to which ethical recruitment reduces the incidence of forced labor among migrant workers.

The report first introduces the research methodology. It is worth emphasizing that the conceptualization of ethical recruitment is at a very early stage. Therefore, we review existing evidence and offer a definition of ethical recruitment that forms the basis of this study. Next, the research explores the impact of traditional and ethical recruitment on four dimensions (economic, social, physical and mental health, and protection and human rights) at the individual, family, and community levels. We then explore the frequency of forced labor occurring within the sample surveyed for this study and review the potential effects of ethical recruitment on reducing forced labor among migrant workers. Based on our findings, we provide recommendations for future programming and evidence generation. Collectively, the research aims to support donors, commercial actors, governments, and civil society actors attempting to decrease the prevalence of forced labor and modern slavery. We hope that this will ultimately benefit vulnerable workers themselves by supporting effective future programming.

Methodology

Drawing on a theoretical framework developed in the early stages of this research (Annex 2), Seefar defined two primary research areas with several associated research questions:

Figure 1

Research Area	Question
1 How - and to what degree - does ethical recruitment impact workers, their families and their communities?	In which dimensions does ethical recruitment affect workers and their communities?
	Which dimensions appear minimally or adversely impacted by ethical recruitment, and why?
2 To what degree does ethical recruitment reduce the incidence of forced labor among workers?	How effective or ineffective can ethical recruitment be at reducing forced labor?
	How could ethical recruitment become more effective at reducing forced labor?
	Are there potential secondary prevalence-reducing benefits from ethical recruitment at the individual or community levels?
	How likely are potential migrant workers to choose safe, ethical alternatives over risky migration if given the chance?

Challenges in migrant labor recruitment are particularly striking in UP, one of the largest migrant-sending states in India.[4] Migrants from UP often hail from rural areas and travel to seek low-skilled work abroad, especially in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. UP was the most significant migrant-sending state in India in 2016, with an annual total of 230,000 migrants leaving the region to seek employment opportunities abroad. The main reasons for this high rate include strong economic drivers, relatively low literacy rates, and the lack of upward social mobility.[5,6]

The research took place in five communities in Lucknow, UP: Barabanki, Old Lucknow, Atesua, Madiyaon, and Dewa Sharif. TERA India's local staff and enumerators defined these as priority areas based on the high concentration of low-skilled workers interested in migrating abroad as well as of migrants who had returned from working abroad.

The research design blends both quantitative and qualitative methods to address the research questions. This mixed methods approach supports triangulation through multiple data collection and analytical approaches.

Key informant interviews

In-depth key informant interviews (KIIs) constitute a practical and effective method of informing the research from its earliest stages. We conducted 27 interviews with key informants in November and December 2020, to establish a methodological baseline from which to guide the remaining research.

[4] Ask India (2019), "Beneficiary Vulnerability Analysis & Engagement for India Overseas Labor Migrants".
[5] Thornton, F. (2016), "Overseas Migration Patterns from India".
[6] Duttagupta, I. (2019), "Rise of blue-collar workers from Uttar Pradesh in Gulf countries - The Economic Times (indiatimes.com)"

Respondents were selected through a purposive sampling strategy leveraging The Fund's and Seefar's networks. We interviewed 12 international and national stakeholders and 15 local stakeholders in UP. This included four academic experts, two donor country representatives, three members of international organizations, one ethical recruitment initiative, two private sector actors, three local recruitment agents, three government officials, two members of local organizations, and seven community leaders. Interviews with international stakeholders were conducted remotely while local stakeholders were interviewed both remotely and in person when possible, using COVID-19 safety measures.

Quantitative survey with returned migrant workers

To achieve the research objectives, we conducted quantitative surveys with 345 returned migrant workers who had previously worked in the GCC. The survey instrument consisted mainly of close-ended questions, with a smaller number of open-ended questions. Survey questions aimed to capture migrants' experiences of working abroad, their expectations before departure, and return conditions. The survey also sought to collect broad snapshots of workers' perceptions in response to the research questions, such as the impact of ethical or traditional recruitment on their financial situation and psychosocial well-being.

Migrant worker

We define a migrant worker as "a person who migrates or who has migrated from one country to another with a view to being employed otherwise than on his own account and includes any person regularly admitted as a migrant worker."[7]

Respondents were screened for inclusion in the study based on meeting all of the following criteria:

- Individuals who have migrated and lived and worked abroad in the GCC;
- Individuals who have returned to India within the last 5 years; and
- Individuals who were employed in unskilled or lower-skilled jobs abroad[8].

Five communities were selected in the preparation of the fieldwork, based on having a high concentration of populations disproportionately likely to have out-migrants.[9] Respondents within these communities were sampled in three ways:

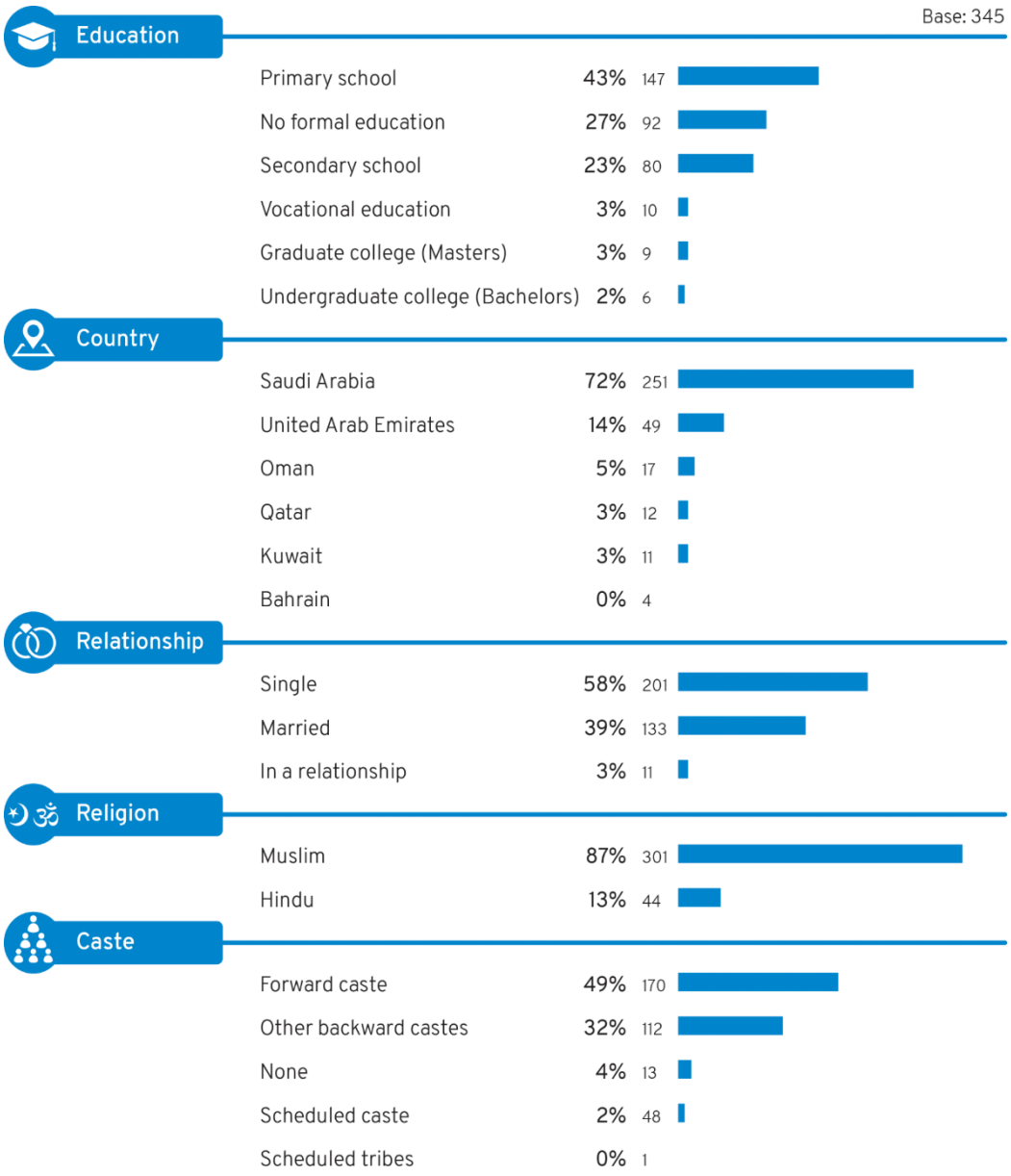
- Enumerators approached people living in every fifth home in previously defined streets that were known to house a high number of returned migrant workers. Streets were selected based on local enumerator knowledge and informal conversations within the communities during the pilot phase.
- Enumerators approached every fifth person who walked past them in main public spaces on the days of surveying. Public spaces in the five communities were selected based on local enumerator knowledge about high passer-by rates. In total, 33 different streets and public places within the five communities were included in the data collection.

[7] ILO (2012), "Hard to see, harder to count: Survey guidelines to estimate forced labour of adults and children".
[8] Unskilled or lower-skilled jobs were defined as occupations that require minimal technical knowledge. This is deliberately a broad and inclusive definition. Seefar research staff trained enumerators on identifying unskilled or lower-skilled jobs to ensure this screening criterion is met. Examples include cleaners, construction helpers, bussers, warehouse loaders/packers, etc.
[9] Communities selected: Barabanki, Old Lucknow, Atesua, Madiyaon, and Dewa Sharif.

- Finally, additional snowball sampling – asking all survey respondents to recommend other returned migrant workers they knew to be included in the survey – allowed enumerators to reach as many workers as possible within the targeted communities.

The resulting demographics of respondents reflect our current understanding of the profile of migrant workers from UP. Respondents were male, a majority were Muslim[10], less educated, and with lower socioeconomic statuses. In our sample, most migrant workers had returned from Saudi Arabia (Figure 2).

Figure 2



[10] The way Muslims are censused into the Indian Social Categories differs across the country's regions. It appears in the case of this study that many Muslim respondents chose to self-identify as other backward castes (OBC) (112 out of 301) and forward caste (143 out of 301). It is likely that many in our sample selected forward caste because of an aversion to being categorized into Hindi castes. This can lead to members of this community saying they are "normal" (identifying with forward/general rather than other castes/social categories). Yet, even in the forward caste, there are typically many who are Below Poverty Line (BPL) and who are economically heavily disadvantaged, therefore choosing to migrate out of their homes.

Qualitative data collection with returned migrant workers, families, and friends

Seefar used two qualitative methods to complement findings from the survey. We conducted:

- 11 case studies with individuals who had migrated through traditional recruitment channels[11] and who had since returned to UP. Case studies enabled us to capture evidence of the implications of traditional recruitment in more depth, including the prevalence of forced labor. Respondents were chosen randomly from the database of respondents for the quantitative survey. We only interviewed respondents who agreed to be re-contacted. Qualitative interviews took place in person due to the potential sensitivity of the topics discussed.
- 10 focus group discussions (FGDs) with family members and friends of returned migrant workers, with five to eight people in each group. There were two FGDs conducted with friends and the remaining eight with family members. FGD participants were overwhelmingly male, most were fathers, brothers, or uncles of a returned migrant worker. Returned migrant workers who had participated in the structured survey were asked for contact details of family members and/or friends who might be willing to be interviewed. Among those who had agreed and shared contact information, respondents were chosen at random. FGDs were initially only divided by participant status (family member/friend) and gender (male/female). However, migrant workers' families lived in a variety of areas in and around Lucknow, a minimum distance of 20 kilometers apart from one another. To bring respondents together to conduct in-person FGDs, researchers added an additional grouping characteristic based on location. This meant that while family members and friends, as well as males and females, still attended separate FGDs, groups were also designed to take geographic proximity into account.

Mixed methods follow-up questionnaire

A follow-up semi-structured interview was conducted with returned migrant workers. This allowed Seefar to gather specific insights on workers' perceptions of ethical recruitment and whether they would hypothetically be willing to pursue ethical recruitment. Researchers conducted 12 follow-up mixed-methods questionnaires with traditionally recruited migrant workers who were interviewed for the quantitative survey. The follow-up interview was conducted in person with a randomly selected group of workers who agreed to be recontacted and would be available for an additional interview.

Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic heavily affected the design of this study as TERA was unable to send workers abroad for employment as a result of the pandemic. All six of the GCC countries shut their borders by April 2020, the month in which this research pilot began. Although restrictions on movement had started to ease and the demand for workers increased for certain periods of 2021, the migrant labor market had simply not recovered before the end of the year. By early 2022, data from

[11] "Traditional recruitment" refers to the opposite of how ethical recruitment is defined in this report, i.e., recruitment that may but often does not comply with legal regulations, that typically charges fees to aspiring migrant workers, does not adhere to a credible set of worker welfare principles and/or code of conduct, and usually involves informal and/or independent actors in the recruitment chain.
At the time of this research, there were no respondents available who had migrated through an ethical recruitment channel from UP. Among TERA beneficiaries, one had picked up employment abroad just a few days before the completion of data collection, while others were in the process of being placed with employers. They could therefore not be included in the case studies.

the Indian government showed that upwards of seven million migrant workers had returned to India from the Gulf as the result of the government's Vande Bharat Mission, which aimed to repatriate Indian nationals stranded outside of the country due to the pandemic.[12]

The research originally aimed to draw heavily from a comparative analysis and feature a longitudinal element, all based on TERA sending migrant workers abroad in time to be studied for this report. In line with this design, the research areas and questions outlined above were redesigned to align with the practical limitations of implementing this research during the COVID-19 pandemic. Annex 3 depicts the research questions as originally designed. In lieu of the comparative and longitudinal elements and after reaching an agreement with GFEMS, we included a third focus area for the study. The design evolved to accommodate the additional research question: "Would migrants choose ethical alternatives to traditional migration if given the chance?"

Additional limitations are outlined in Annex 3.

[12] Chadha, S (2022), "Over 7 lakh Indian workers returned from six Gulf countries during pandemic: Govt data".

Ethical Recruitment

The concept of ethical recruitment is not universally defined.[13] Though still an emerging concept, ethical recruitment has already been cited as a leading solution to the challenges and exploitation embedded in the overseas labor recruitment processes.[14] Organizations have begun to recognize that the need to end harmful recruitment practices cannot be understated. In response, many have developed initiatives aimed to protect vulnerable individuals and counteract exploitation in the recruitment sector.

This has resulted in various sets of principles, initiatives, codes of conduct, auditing schemes, and actors related to ethical recruitment (see Annex 1 for a selection). While many of them overlap and share core concepts, they diverge in terms of the high-level language used (e.g., "responsible recruitment", "ethical recruitment", "fair recruitment") and contain significant substantive differences in how they define ethical recruitment (e.g., what constitutes a recruitment fee, what is the role of sub-agents, what should be included in contracts, and what are minimum working standards).

Adding to the complexity of defining ethical recruitment, a growing number of recruitment actors label themselves as "ethical" or advertise themselves as adhering to top-level ethical standards. In the absence of a clear definition of ethical recruitment, these actors have developed their own definitions that draw on existing codes of conduct (including those contained in Annex 1) and industry experiences. For example, TERA's ethical approach draws on over 12 leading sets of ethical principles and codes of conduct.[15]

Ethical recruitment typically starts by acknowledging the exploitative nature of migrant labor recruitment.[16] It then seeks to redress the harms present in the recruitment industry by standardizing systems designed to mitigate the risks of forced labor and modern-day slavery. The success of these standardized systems also depends on the proper implementation of robust legal and policy frameworks[17]; the elimination of deception in recruitment practices through increased transparency[18]; and the development and enforcement of regulatory frameworks surrounding recruitment.[19]

Across existing definitions and practices, Seefar's review has identified three essential pillars for ethical recruitment:

1. Legal compliance;
2. No-fee recruitment; and
3. Worker welfare principles.

[13] Migrant Forum in Asia (2015), "Ethical Recruitment".
[14] U.S. Department of State (2020), "2020 Trafficking in Persons Report"; Open Working Group on Labor Migration & Recruitment (2017), "Labor migration and recruitment"; Migrant Forum in Asia (2015) "Ethical Recruitment".
[15] The Ethical Recruitment Agency (2020), "Compliance".
[16] Examples of such exploitation can be found in Liu (2015), "Exploitation of Overseas Migrant Labor: Analysis of Migration Policy in Nepal and the Philippines" and the ILO fact sheet on "Regulating International Labour Recruitment in the Domestic Work Sector: A Review of key issues, challenges and opportunities".
[17] For more, see Council of Europe (2019), "Human Trafficking for the Purpose of Labor Exploitation".
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

At the same time, we found that the three individual pillars of ethical recruitment are insufficient in isolation to constitute ethical recruitment.[20] Instead, it is the collective presence of these factors that makes recruitment ethical.

Some existing literature and TERA's design furthermore point to one other factor relevant to conceptualizing ethical recruitment, namely the number and type of actors involved in the recruitment process.[21] This finding aligns with the wealth of literature that underlines the exploitative role sub-agents, brokers and intermediaries often play in the recruitment process.[22] The figure below provides a conceptual model of ethical recruitment, which formed the base of this research at the start.

Figure 3

In formulaic terms, we can posit that:

$$y = B_0 + B_1(Compliance) + B_2(NoFees) + B_3(WelfareCode) + B_4(Actors) + e$$

Where

- **y** = The outcomes of interest;
- **Compliance =** Legal compliance. Ethical recruitment is characterized by adhering to national laws in the source and destination countries, including recruitment agency registration and licensing requirements.
- **NoFees** = Workers are not charged fees to migrate abroad. While there are countries where recruitment fees are legally allowed (including India), there is still significant room for exploitation connected to paying fees, and ethical recruitment, at a minimum, significantly reduces costs or eliminates them altogether for the worker. In our definition, no-fee recruitment refers to not charging any fees from the worker.
- **WelfareCode** = Adherence to a credible set of worker welfare principles and/or code of conduct. This could be an internationally approved code (e.g., IOM's International Recruitment Integrity System, IRIS, Standard) or a multinational company's supplier code of conduct; it also covers due diligence and principles, such as transparent processes. Worker welfare activities also fall into this category - for example, awareness-raising, worker deployment and return support, pre-departure orientations, free technical training, monitoring of workers post-deployment, protection of their human rights, etc.
- **Actors** = The quantity and type of actors involved in the migration process (e.g., brokers, agencies, employers, etc.). Existing models of ethical recruitment typically contain fewer actors. Meanwhile, the literature finds that each actor involved in migration can be responsible for exploitation.[23] Conversely, ethical recruitment eliminates informal sub-agents, often (though not always) relies on directly recruiting

[20] Jureidini, R (2016), "Ways Forward in Recruitment of Low-Skilled Migrant Workers in the Asia-Arab States corridor".
[21] Ibid.
[22] See, for example, Seefar (2019), "Making Migration Work".
[23] For example, each actor charging additional fees to workers. See, for example, Taylor, M., (2018), "Developing a financially viable ethical recruitment model".

workers, and reduces the number of private recruitment or employment actors involved in the process.[24]

- **e** = Error term, signifying that there may be many other factors linked with outcomes.

In an attempt to harmonize these elements, Seefar offers the following definition that forms the basis of this study: "Ethical overseas labor recruitment is legally compliant recruitment that does not charge fees to workers and follows an internationally recognized and credible set of worker welfare principles."[25]

[24] See: Seefar/TERA, (2022), "Roadmap to Replicability: How to create, sustain, and scale an ethical recruitment agency."

[25] Examples of "internationally recognized and credible set of worker welfare principles" are listed in Annex 1, with the caveat that not all principles are equally credible. UN and IOM/ILO guidance, for example, is likely to be far more internationally credible than others.

Impact of Ethical Recruitment on Workers, Families, and Communities

During the first phase of this research project, Seefar carried out key informant interviews to validate our theoretical framework (Annex 2) and inform our research design and methods going forward. Findings confirmed respondents categorized the potential impact of ethical recruitment on workers, families, and communities in four key dimensions:

1. Economic impacts;
2. Social impacts;
3. Physical and mental health impacts; and
4. Protection and human rights impacts.

These dimensions form the basis of the analysis and are explored in more detail in the following chapters.

Economic dimension

Potential benefits of ethical recruitment: More workers save money, are supported by family, and don't incur debt

In the literature, recruitment fees are thought to "significantly increase the risk to workers of experiencing forced labor, debt bondage, and human trafficking."[26] Key informants and returned migrant workers hypothesized that ethical recruitment would, in particular, lead to less debt and borrowing for workers and their families, thereby also reducing forced labor and debt bondage.

Forced labor

We adopt the definition of forced labor following the International Labour Organization (ILO) Forced Labor Convention, 1930 (No. 29), where forced or compulsory labor means "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily" (Art. 2.1). The definition "encompasses situations such as slavery, practices similar to slavery, debt bondage or serfdom". "The coercion may take place during the worker's recruitment process to force him or her to accept the job or, once the person is working, to force him/her to do tasks which were not part of what was agreed at the time of recruitment or to prevent him/her from leaving the job." [27]

[26] ILO (2020), "A global comparative study on defining recruitment fees and related costs: Interregional research on law, policy and practice".
For a definition of forced labor based on the ILO's Forced Labor Convention, refer to page 29 of this report.
[27] ILO (2012), "Hard to see, harder to count: Survey guidelines to estimate forced labour of adults and children".
See also: ILO Forced Labor Convention, 1930 (No. 29). ILO (2020), "Forced labour".

Debt bondage

Debt bondage can arguably be considered a sub-component of forced labor. It occurs when a worker enters some form of debt (e.g., taking a loan or wage advance) with an employer or recruiter, for instance, to pay a recruitment or processing fee. "Debt bondage occurs when a person is forced to work to pay off a debt. They are tricked into working for little or no pay, with no control over their debt. Most or all of the money they earn goes to pay off their loan."[28]

According to the United Kingdom Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, "Poverty, threats, violence, surveillance, and imprisonment are used to make sure [a worker] cannot leave or get help. Debt bondage can also be a significant factor in human trafficking. Victims may be offered a job abroad with 'free' transportation, or they may borrow money from the employer/controller for the travel and a job finding fee. Once they have arrived, they then find the job either does not exist or is not what was originally offered, and are trapped trying to pay off the debt."

Many workers are either deprived of options (i.e., they have no choice) or have insufficient information on the consequences of the arrangement to guide decision-making. As such, workers enter into debt lacking an awareness of the often-inevitable outcome of their engagement.[29]

Human trafficking

As phrased by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "Human trafficking is a global crime that trades in people and exploits them for profit."[30] According to Article 3 of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, human trafficking means: "[The] recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs."[31]

The UN further adds that the definition consists of three core elements:

- "The *act* of trafficking, which means the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons.
- The *means* of trafficking which includes threat of or use of force, deception, coercion, abuse of power or position of vulnerability.
- The *purpose* of trafficking, which is always exploitation."[32]

[28] Anti-Slavery International (n.d.), "What is bonded labour?".
[29] UN OHCHR (2016), "Debt bondage remains the most prevalent form of forced labour worldwide – New UN report".
[30] UN Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC] (n.d.), "Human Trafficking FAQs".
[31] UN OHCHR, "Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, adopted 15 November 2000".
[32] UN Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC] (n.d.), "Human Trafficking FAQs".

Surprisingly, data from this study shows that workers recruited via traditional recruitment channels in UP did not experience debt and debt bondage as frequently as previously suggested by the literature.[33]

This is not because recruitment costs decreased significantly. On the contrary, recruitment costs appear to have stayed at a similar level as the data from five years ago suggests (see Figures 4-6).

Figure 4

Recruitment Costs

In 2016, recruitment costs for the India-Saudi Arabia corridor, for example, averaged roughly USD 1,500.[34] For the India-Kuwait corridor, this number stood at roughly USD 1,250, and for the India-Qatar corridor at roughly USD 1,000.[35]

Our data from 2022 indicates that recruitment costs have stayed at roughly the same level though definitions of those costs among migrants varied. The vast majority of returned migrant workers stated they paid more than INR 50,000 (USD 650) (see Figure 5). Qualitative interviews highlighted that this cost sometimes referred to the payment the recruitment agent/agency received and that there were additional costs for the visa, passport, transport, and medical check-up, leading to an overall cost of roughly INR 90,000 (USD 1,150) (see Figure 6).

[33] Prior studies found that recruitment agents charge high fees that create debt bondage: migration cycles in UP were said to cost between USD 850 to 1,100 while average annual per capita income was just USD 800. Migrant workers from UP spent a minimum of three to ten months of a two-year contract paying back their debt. See: Association for Stimulating Know-How (ASK), (2019) "Beneficiary Vulnerability Analysis and Engagement for India Overseas Labour Migrants"; Legislative Research (2022). "Uttar Pradesh Budget Analysis 2020-2023"; Martin, Philip (2016). "What do Migrant Workers Pay for Foreign Jobs? KNOMAD Data and SDG Indicator 10.7.1."
[34] Ratha, D., & Seshan, G. (2018), "Worker-Paid Recruitment Costs".
[35] Martin, P. (2017), "What do workers pay for foreign jobs?".

Figure 5

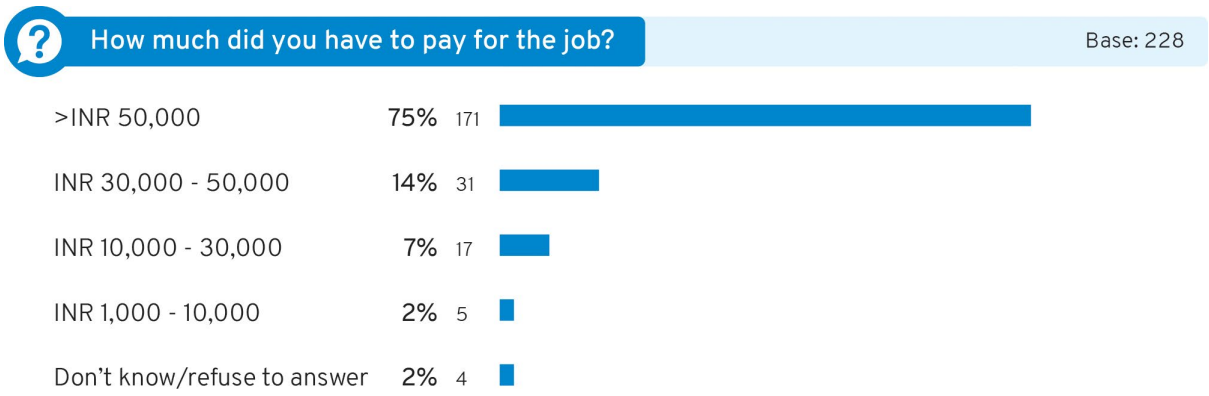


Figure 6

"The agent asked me to pay INR 90,000. He looked after all the processes. He took INR 70,000 initially after which he sent me the passport, visa, and ticket. He then took another INR 20,000. I also had to pay INR 5,000 for the medical checkup."

Case study respondent 3

Instead, findings from our data indicate two important changes: (i) a lower number of migrant workers reported having paid for recruitment at all; and 2) aspiring migrant workers may have become more aware of these costs and, rather than indebting themselves, appear to save money to be able to pay the costs themselves or borrow more heavily from family.[36]

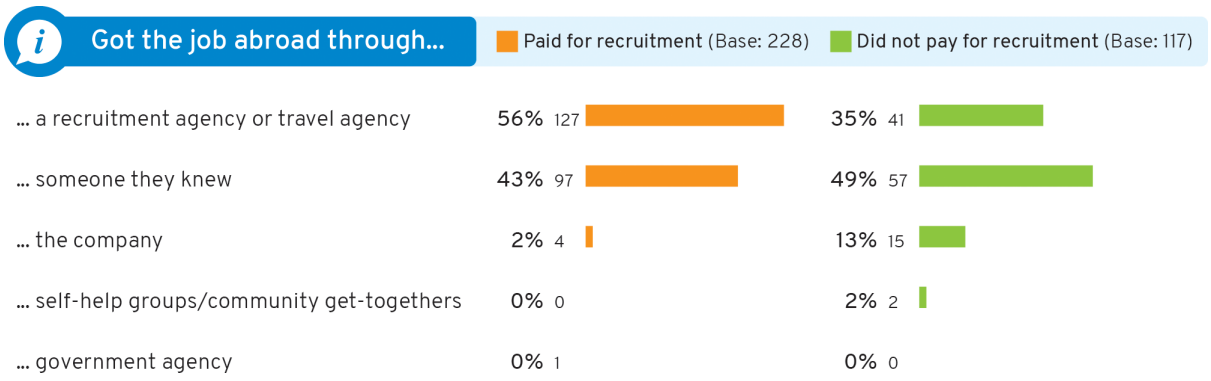
Based on our data, 66% (228 out of 345) of returned migrant workers said they had to pay the recruiter to get a job. This is a lower number than originally hypothesized though there is no available data on the actual share of migrant workers who have paid recruitment fees in UP. Given that recruitment agents in India are legally allowed to charge recruitment fees "at the equivalent of 45 days of wages" but "limited to no more than 30,000 rupees", 66% appears to be unusually low.[37]

Likely, some respondents did not pay the recruiter because they found their jobs through someone they knew, specifically family members. As Figure 7 shows, a larger proportion of those who did not pay for the job received the job through someone they knew. FGDs also pointed to families often bearing responsibility for paying the recruitment fee. Some respondents to the survey may therefore

[36] There is a possibility that reduced demand for migrant workers during the pandemic affected costs. However, this could not be confirmed in this study and should be examined in more detail.
[37] ILO (2020), "A global comparative study on defining recruitment fees and related costs: Interregional research on law, policy and practice".

have said they did not pay for recruitment when in reality their family may have paid for recruitment directly.

Figure 7



Among those respondents who paid for the recruitment, 29% (65 out of 228) borrowed money to do so. This is also surprising as it is widely believed that paying recruitment fees and incurring debt are heavily connected and that a large proportion of workers typically borrow money to pay for recruitment.[38] Of the 345 returned migrant workers interviewed, less than half (38%, 133 out of 345) said they had a job where they lived before migrating. Those who had a job before migrating had an average monthly income of only INR 10,932 (USD 140)[39], which is surprising given their lower rate of borrowing.

Our data indicate that rather than borrowing money, returned migrant workers were able to cover the costs through longer-term savings. One FGD respondent shared the example of a family member who, rather than falling into debt, had to save money for two more years than originally planned because of the high price the recruitment agent was asking for. Among survey respondents, 69% (158 out of 228) of the respondents paid their recruitment fees with their savings. Three respondents also sold goods or land to pay for recruitment. It is likely that the returned migrant workers had been prepared and had saved money specifically to pay the recruitment fees. Our sample, therefore, suggests that migrant workers may have become more aware of the high costs and risks of debt and debt bondage and saved up precisely to avoid becoming victims of these issues.[40]

The risk of debt bondage also appears to be lower because only some returned migrant workers borrowed from external and potentially harmful sources. Of the 29% who borrowed money to pay for the recruitment, 62% (40 out of 65) of respondents said they borrowed from friends and family[41]. This

[38] See for example: Ratha, D., & Seshan, G. (2018), "Worker-Paid Recruitment Costs".
[39] The GDP per capita in UP was INR 81,398 in 2021-22, with migrant households in UP typically having far lower annual income. Legislative Research (2022), "Uttar Pradesh Budget Analysis 2020-2023".
[40] Literature overwhelmingly agrees that debt to pay for recruitment is one of the most common factors leading to exploitation during recruitment and work abroad. The fact that the findings from this study contradict common knowledge suggests there is a need for additional verification and understanding of whether this applies to only the specific sample, location or time period. Given the small sample size, it is recommended to follow up on these findings both within UP and outside to understand if this is a trend more widely applicable to migrant workers.
[41] Family was not further defined in the questionnaire. This is because definitions like "household members" can be understood vastly different by each respondent, while only including parents and siblings may be irrelevant for others. We therefore asked broadly whether they borrowed money from family. FGDs and case studies then highlighted that parents were most often involved in funding migration.

finding was supported by the FGDs. Almost every family said they had contributed to the amount paid to a recruiter (see Figure 8 for example). Most appeared not to expect the family member to pay back the money. For some, this also resulted in stress and mental health issues as they struggled to raise the money. Twenty-three percent (15 out of 65) of respondents said they were able to borrow money from self-help groups.[42] One respondent indicated they had borrowed money from the recruiter, four respondents stated they had borrowed from informal money lenders[43] and another four respondents stated they had borrowed from a bank. The respondent borrowing from the recruiter also experienced more restrictions on their freedom of movement and communication with friends and family, but otherwise did not experience indicators of forced labor abroad. However, the respondent refused to answer questions regarding if they had experienced mistreatment during the recruitment process.

Figure 8

> "Family members borrow or sell their jewelry, land, etc. to pay the money that the agent takes for sending someone abroad."
>
> FGD 3, family member

We observed difficulties faced by those borrowing money. Twelve percent (8 out of 65) of respondents were unable to pay back their loans. This included the person who borrowed from the recruiter, as well as the person who borrowed from the bank. Among the remaining respondents, it took on average 14.5 months to pay back the money, with eight respondents being able to pay back within the first three months and 18 respondents needing more than 12 months to pay back the loan.

Although the amount of incurred debt overall was lower than anticipated for respondents using traditional recruitment, 29% of them still had to borrow money to pay for recruitment. According to secondary literature, roughly 85,000 migrant workers from UP work in the Gulf each year.[44] Assuming our sample would represent the study population on the whole and based on the share of respondents borrowing money in our sample, this represents 24,650 migrant workers who incur debt. Through its no-fee principle, ethical recruitment strives to significantly reduce the likelihood of debt and debt-bondage as well as the time it takes to pay back loans. It can also reduce the financial burden on families who are financially supporting the recruitment and allow for less stress and fewer mental health issues overall for family members.

The information above critically questions the commonly held belief that ethical recruitment is particularly effective in reducing debt and debt-bondage, as well as subsequent conditions of forced labor.[45] The overall lower occurrence of debt and borrowing from potentially harmful sources within

[42] A self-help group refers to a group of 10 to 12 people who come together to work on any issue of significance to the group. They are usually created to support each other in uplifting individuals and families from poverty and generate wealth.
[43] Individuals who do not have a registered business/institution that is legally allowed to lend money and who primarily rely on their own funds.
[44] Duttagupta, I. (2019), "Rise of blue-collar workers from Uttar Pradesh in Gulf countries".
[45] See for example IOM (2016), "Promoting the Ethical Recruitment of Migrant Workers"; ILO (2014), "Profits and Poverty: The economics of forced labour".

our sample indicates that the primary benefits of ethical recruitment on the economic dimension may not include debt reduction and at least in part need to be conceptualized differently.

Respondents of the follow-up tool, focus groups, and case studies provided a valuable avenue to explore with a view to the benefits of ethical recruitment. Although they also believed that ethical recruitment would result in less debt, they highlighted that a major benefit would be more savings generally and better utilization of these savings. Workers and their families could use existing savings more quickly and channel them into the local economy rather than to recruitment agencies, agents, and sub-agents operating illegally.[46] This supports what key informants said, namely that ethical recruitment could essentially be understood as a means for redirecting money to vulnerable people that would otherwise flow to the different illicit/illegal actors involved in the recruitment process.

Responses to the follow-up tool and FGDs also confirm the key informants' hypothesis that ethical recruitment comes with lower opportunity costs for migration. All respondents said they would migrate abroad through an ethical recruitment agency. They stated that it would be a relief to not have to spend money to be recruited. FGD respondents pointed to the idea that reduced expenses would make migration easier and would allow the positive economic effects to be more quickly felt by the worker and their family. One respondent expressed: "It cost [the family member] another two years of saving to reach the destination. It costs him so much and if there is an agency that sends the person to the Gulf without charging then it helps them to reach the Gulf easily without draining their hard-earned money."[47]

Benefits of ethical recruitment's no-fee principle: Less debt and more savings can lead to a larger amount of remittances

Key informants pointed to a direct relationship between lower recruitment fees, less debt and the ability to send more remittances to families and communities. Our data from this study support this hypothesis even though debt overall is lower than expected. A majority of respondents who borrowed were able to pay back the money they borrowed from external sources using their monthly salary (60%, 39 out of 65).[48] However, for those who borrowed and paid with their monthly salaries, remittances sent by them decreased noticeably compared to those who did not borrow and those who paid back the money through different means. Of the respondents who borrowed money (29%, 65 out of 228) and paid their debt with their monthly salary, 60% (39 out of 65) were significantly more likely to send fewer remittances than those who did not borrow at all.

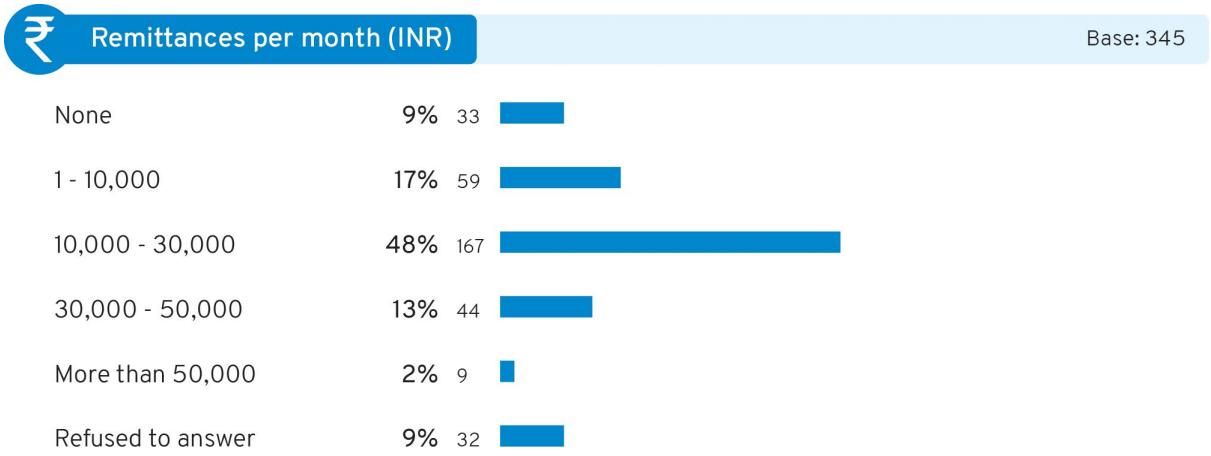
As posited by key informants, wages earned abroad have a significant impact on communities back home. This was observed among traditionally recruited workers. Ninety percent (311 out of 345) of our respondents were able to send remittances back home. Most were able to send between INR 10,000 and INR 30,000 (see Figure 9). Families in FGDs agreed that increasing income and remittances were both important reasons to send a family member abroad. One respondent stated: "If the salary here was INR 9,000 in a month, it would be very difficult to support the family expenses. Because of this, the decision was taken to work abroad because the salary there was much higher than here."[49]

[46] Respondents did not provide detail on the potential use of additional savings at home. It is possible that additional savings would allow families to better invest in household members at home, such as in the education and nutrition of younger family members. However, further research on this is needed.
[47] FGD 5, family members.
[48] 18% (12 out of 65) said their families and friends paid back the borrowed money.
[49] FGD 1, family members.

For most respondents (82%, 256 out of 311), the remittances were considered to be sufficient to cover families' expenditures. Yet, 37% of these respondents (94 out of 256) were also not primary income earners for the families, suggesting other sources contributed to covering the family's expenditures. For 17% (54 out of 311) of respondents, remittances were not sufficient, with amounts sent ranging from INR 10,000 to INR 50,000 per month. Of these, 74% were the primary income earner in the family. Most respondents sent between INR 10,000 and 30,000 per month.

Ethical recruitment bears important potential for increasing remittances sent home. Through the no-fee principle, any costs associated with recruitment are removed, which in turn reduces the likelihood that debt will be paid off by using monthly salaries. This positively affects not just the workers but also their families and communities at home. However, because a sizable number of returned migrant workers found remittances to be sufficient even when recruited through non-ethical channels, more data is needed to explore the difference between remittances sent by persons recruited ethically as compared to those sent by persons recruited through traditional means.

Figure 9



Limited longer-term benefits from migration

As the high number of migrant workers who sent remittances back home suggests, workers typically migrate abroad for higher financial gains. Among our respondents, the vast majority said the best part about working abroad was earning enough money. Just 5% (18 out of 345 respondents) said they had to return home because they did not earn enough money. Conversely, 5% returned home because they had earned enough money.[50] While labor migration allowed most respondents to send home remittances, other longer-term positive economic effects appear to be minimal. Most respondents faced significant economic and financial challenges upon return.

More than a third of returned migrant workers in our sample (37%, 127 out of 345) did not have any savings left when they returned. As outlined above, savings incurred before migration usually went into paying recruitment fees. Traditional recruitment and the high number of remittances sent home

[50] For most, the contract finished or the visa expired (164 out of 345). 39 returned because of family reasons, 25 because of Covid-19, 15 because of mistreatment by the employer, 9 because of the nature of the job, 8 were forced to return, 7 because of homesickness and 2 because of the living conditions.

both led many migrants to return home with no savings at all. In addition, 118 respondents said that among other challenges upon return, they had also incurred some level of debt, which was unrelated to migration costs. Of these, 68% (80 out of 118) respondents did not have any savings left upon return.

Many workers who have returned face challenging employment situations upon return. As many as 102 respondents listed finding employment upon return as one of their challenges. On the one hand, respondents reported income post-migration was higher on average than before migration, with an average difference of INR 4,296 (USD 55). On the other hand, respondents who did not find employment post-migration returned to pre-migration conditions or economic situations that were worse than those they had been in before migrating. Among survey respondents, 25% (85 out of 345) reported a higher salary upon return than the one they had before migrating, compared to 12% (40 out of 345) who reported a decrease in their salary. Just 21 respondents with an increase in income attributed this to their migration, whereas 42 believed migration had no impact on their income upon return.

Limited long-term benefits of labor migration led many to want to re-migrate abroad for employment. Fifty-eight percent (199 out of 345) of the returned migrant workers interviewed said it was likely or very likely that they would migrate to work abroad again. Seventy-four percent (148 out of 199) of those respondents claimed they would do so because of economic and financial reasons. Interest in re-migration was also correlated with the ability to pay remittances while abroad. Twenty-seven percent (9 out of 33) who did not send remittances indicated they were likely or very likely to migrate, compared to 61% (189 out of 311) of those who sent remittances.[51] On the other hand, respondents also recognized that labor migration may not yield the financial results they were initially hoping for, with one case study respondent for example highlighting, “Going abroad was a huge financial loss.”[52]

There is currently no evidence on the long-term impact of ethical recruitment on migrant workers’ economic and financial situations. This is an important avenue to explore. As outlined above, ethically recruited migrant workers’ ability to invest savings into something other than the recruitment may mean migration contributes to better and longer-term economic outcomes. At the same time, key informants noted that without other financial interventions, workers may not be able to save money and may continue to be vulnerable to economic shocks, such as health emergencies or the loss of property due to flooding. For ethical recruitment to evolve, there needs to be further understanding of how ethically recruited workers can save money, invest, or hold on to savings by not paying for recruitment, and what their economic situations look like upon return. This can help lead ethical recruitment in directions it has not yet prioritized, such as pre-departure training that includes information on long-term financial security and benefits from the labor migration experience.

Social dimension

Social improvements are correlated only with remittances, paving the way for an important contribution of ethical recruitment

Many key informants said that through economic gains and changes, ethical recruitment can facilitate the transfer of remittances for social needs. These enable workers to pay for culturally important events and expenditures, such as weddings, and open up work opportunities for individuals who may

[51] Proportion test, 5% significance level.
[52] Case study 3.

not otherwise have had access to them. FGD respondents also linked the economic dimension to the social one, saying that families expected migration to result in a "good social status" alongside an "increase in their income and good sources of income"[53]. The economic dimension is indeed of critical importance to the workers and their families and a primary reason for their labor migration. Data collected for this study, however, suggests that changes in social status and upward social mobility appear at least somewhat independent of economic gains.

> "The aspirations of the family are that his working overseas aids in boosting their economic and social position."
>
> FGD 3, family member

Instead, the migration experience itself may contribute to a sense of climbing the social ladder for the migrant worker and their family. Of the returned migrant workers interviewed, a little more than half (52%, 181 out of 345) said their social status had improved after their migration. Survey data also showed that workers did not struggle with social exclusion or negative social stigma due to migration upon their return, which was mentioned by only two respondents. Just three out of the 345 respondents said they had difficulty connecting with family members upon their return.

Yet, the improvement in social status did not correlate significantly with any other variables except for one (remittances, explored in more detail below). For example, respondents stated that working abroad improved their social status in the community, regardless of their caste or religion. Improvement or lack of improvement in social status was also independent of the returned migrant's salary upon return, their job status more generally, or whether they were recruited through an agency or someone they knew. It remains unclear whether the share of migrant workers reporting improvements in their social status would increase or decrease if they were to be recruited ethically. If the simple fact of migration leads some to experience social improvements, ethical recruitment may ultimately not lead to different outcomes than traditional recruitment.

The only variable that affected improved social status was the ability to send remittances. Just three respondents who reported an improvement in their social status were unable to send remittances. All others who reported a positive change in their social status supported their families financially during their migration. Building on the economic benefits outlined above, ethical recruitment may therefore also be able to increase the likelihood of social changes. Allowing workers to send more remittances and save more money increases the likelihood a worker's social status will simultaneously improve.

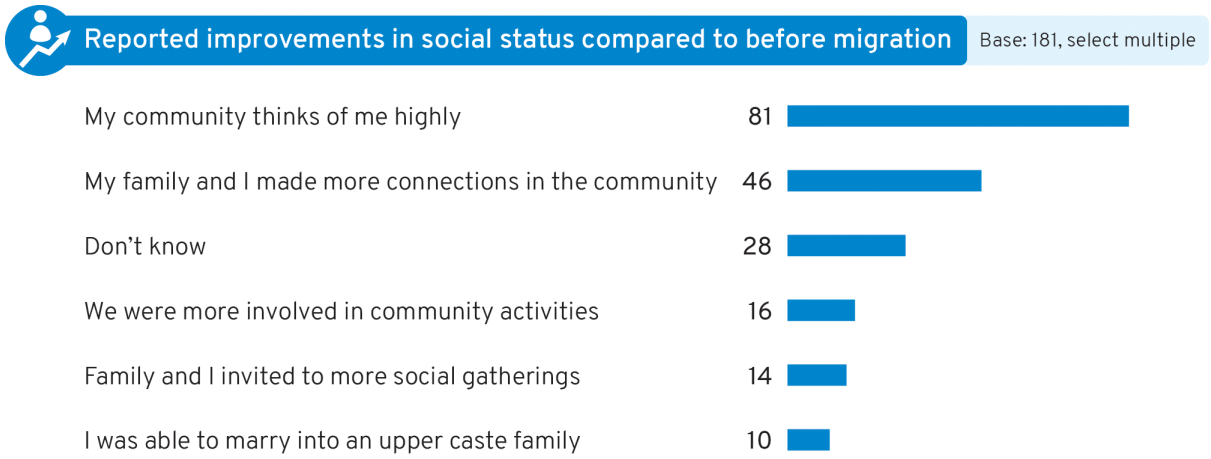
At the same time, social changes such as upward social mobility were less commonly reported social changes among the returned migrant workers interviewed. The most reported change in the social dimension was that upon return, the community thought more highly of the migrant worker (listed as one improvement by 81 respondents among the 181 respondents with improved social status). However, only 16 respondents said they were involved in more community gatherings, 14 were invited to more social gatherings, and 10 married into an upper caste, breaking down caste barriers in marriage (see Figure 10). It is possible that ethical recruitment can further strengthen positive social change as it may contribute to more savings, thereby opening up more avenues for workers to move

[53] FGD 3, family members.

between social classes as a result of more economic opportunities. However, more evidence must be gathered on the effects of ethical recruitment on de facto social improvements.

It is unclear whether changes in social status in fact go beyond the migrant workers themselves. Family members did not discuss experiencing social changes other than the community thinking more highly of the worker and their family. However, family members highlighted observing social changes for the migrant: “I have seen many changes in the personal lives of people going abroad to work, like changes in living habits, social status and I also have seen many changes in the cultural status.”[54]

Figure 10



Finally, key informants suggested that working abroad could strain relationships between families and workers. Key informants reported that employers tend to strictly control communication between the worker and the family. This then alienates the worker from the family or vice versa, causing significant social tensions. The survey confirmed that employers indeed controlled communication between workers and family members back home. Forty-eight percent of returned migrant workers (167 out of 345) reported that the employer controlled or limited contact with family members or friends. In most FGDs, family members did not notice any significant changes in the worker’s communication style, but two respondents stated that the family member largely stopped talking to relatives after their return. FGDs and case studies highlighted how family and friends usually supported and encouraged labor migration rather than seeing it as a possible rift. In the words of one case study respondent: “In the same manner as the people in my family were overjoyed, the people in the community rallied around me to assist me in my international endeavor.”[55]

[54] FGD 1, family members.
[55] Case study 6.

Physical and mental health dimension

Worker welfare principles can likely reduce the number of workers experiencing physical and mental health problems

Data from this study suggests the no-fee principle and adherence to a credible set of worker welfare principles and/or code of conduct both constitute important benefits of ethical recruitment regarding workers' physical and mental health.

Key informants indicated that no-fee recruitment and decent and stable income would result in a sense of security and stability for the migrant worker and their family, which may also affect workers' health. Debt and high recruitment fees were recognized sources of distress emerging from case studies and FGDs, both for migrant workers and their families. In this respect, eliminating recruitment fees is an important part of implementing a successful ethical recruitment process that supports migrants' and families' mental well-being.

> "One of the benefits of ethical recruitment is that it will not have an effect on my mental health or that of my family."
>
> FGD 3, family member

Case study responses showed that for some traditionally recruited migrant workers, the lack of financial security resulted not only in mental/emotional but also physical distress. One respondent stated: "Physically I felt weaker as I did not eat much during those days and mentally it was still a burden for me as I lost the little money I had."[56]

Ethical recruitment's adherence to and monitoring of worker welfare can likely play an even bigger role in reducing migrant workers' experiences of physical and mental health problems during recruitment and while working abroad.

As key informants highlighted, ethical recruitment can have significant implications on migrant workers' mortality and morbidity. Although most case study respondents agreed that there was no change in physical well-being during or after working abroad, one respondent explained that "while working in the pharmaceutical company the co-workers sprayed some hazardous chemical on me which disturbed me physically and also mentally."[57]

Similarly, several survey respondents stated they were deprived of food and medical help or were working in a hazardous workplace (Figure 11). In total, 5% of returned migrant workers surveyed (16 out of 345) said that recruitment or employment resulted in long-term physical health implications,

[56] Case study 3.
[57] Case study 2.

including hypertension and physical injury. Of these, ten stated they were injured outside of the workplace.[58]

Families and friends were also concerned about the health and physical well-being of their family members working abroad. In more than half of the FGDs, the biggest concerns around labor migration included whether family members would have access to proper food, their general well-being, and life expectancy.

> "The general concern of the family is whether the person who is going abroad to work for the first time reached the country safely. They ask how the living conditions of that person are after going there, whether the food is done on time or not, how the person's work is."
>
> FGD 1, family member

Among traditionally recruited migrant workers we spoke to, 6% (20 out of 343) stated that they had experienced mental health issues.[59] Anxiety (60%, 12 of 20) and insomnia (35%, 7 of 20) were the most commonly reported illnesses. Comparatively, those whose mental health was impacted (20%, 4 out of 20) were significantly more likely to have reported being threatened by their employer than those not experiencing mental health effects (4%, 14 out of 325).[60] Respondents with mental health illnesses were also more likely to have reported experiencing violence during the recruitment process and employment (20% versus 1%).[61]

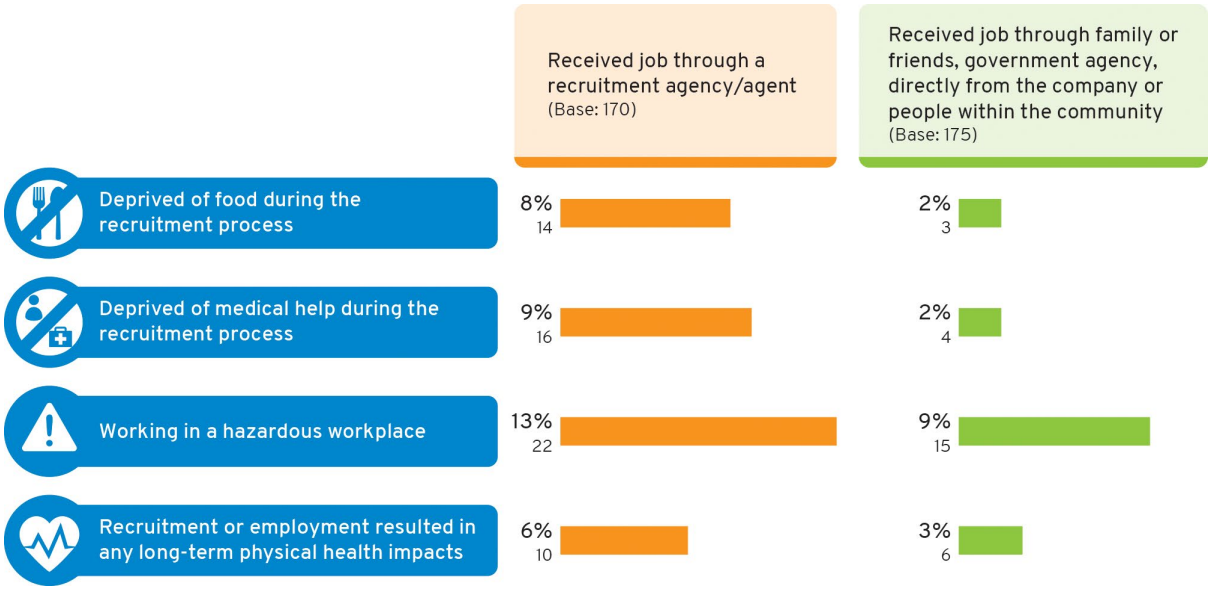
Considering that the reported rate of violence was higher among those experiencing psychological distress, it is not surprising that this group also reported a greater rate of physical health impacts (35% versus 3%). These findings are consistent with other data examining the psychological health of traditionally recruited migrant workers.[62] Even beyond the physical health consequences of occupational hazards, violence has been commonly associated with negative consequences on all forms of health, including physical and psychological.[63] One of the most critical contributions ethical recruitment can have is ensuring that employers whom they partner with are not inflicting violence upon recruited migrant workers.

Importantly, there were significant differences in negative experiences between those who indicated they were recruited by a recruitment agency, versus those who reported having been recruited through family, friends, neighbors, a government agency, or directly through the company (Figure 11). These actors do not qualify as ethical recruiters under the definition. Nonetheless, the differentiation does suggest that recruitment agencies have an impact on negative experiences during both recruitment and work abroad, specifically regarding health and physical well-being. Ethical recruiters who ensure overall worker welfare and pay specific attention to the welfare of the workers they recruit

[58] Demographic features such as age, gender, time since return, time spent abroad, employment status, and education level, did not affect whether or not respondents experienced health-related or other physical issues.
[59] Demographic features such as age, gender, time since return and spent abroad, employment status, and education level, did not seem to affect whether or not respondents indicated experiencing distress.
[60] Proportion test, 1% significance level.
[61] Proportion test, 1% significance level.
[62] Mucci, N., et al. (2019), "Migrant Workers and Psychological Health: A Systematic Review".
[63] Rivara, F., et al. (2010), "The Effects Of Violence On Health | Health Affairs".

and place abroad are likely to reduce negative experiences related to the physical and health dimension.

Figure 11



As shared by key informants, ethically recruited workers receive better pre-departure training, ongoing support and information, which is tied to improved psychological wellbeing during recruitment. On a basic level, ethical recruiters are thought to provide more reassurance for individual workers and their families than traditional recruiters, through effective pre-departure training, and helping them understand and prepare for the job, the nature and responsibilities under their contract, and learn about the foreign country they will be placed in. This is confirmed by the survey data, which shows that 20% (7 out of 20) of those who experienced distress referenced both homesickness and an unfamiliarity with the language and culture as their main reasons for disliking working abroad.[64] Survey results showed that experiencing distress did not correlate with receiving pre-departure training. However, pre-departure training was referenced during interviews as a potential solution to reducing stress.

Finally, key informants hypothesized that decent wages would increase families' ability to access adequate and nutritious meals and proper healthcare when needed. Our data was unable to confirm this. Given that respondents largely believed that remittances were enough to cover the families' expenses when recruited traditionally, the added value of ethical recruitment may allow families to move beyond simply covering expenses, for example, they can access better healthcare and more nutritional food.

[64] The second most common responses, accounting for 15% (3 of 20) of responses, included "not earning enough money", "bad living solutions", and "too much work".

Protection and human rights dimension

Training and ongoing support through ethical recruiters likely improves migration experiences

The most prominent rights mentioned by key informants included the freedom of movement and the ability to freely change jobs. Since ethical recruitment is built on the concepts of worker welfare and legal compliance, it could likely increase the number of workers who experience respect for their right to freedom of movement. A staggering 77% (265 out of 345) of the returned migrant workers surveyed reported that their employer had restricted their movement.[65] Similarly, many returned migrant workers reported having limited freedom to change their jobs and employers, with 79% (272 out of 345) saying they would not have been able to change employers, 71% (246 out of 345) saying they would have been unable to quit, and 32% (112 out of 345) reporting they would have been unable to return home.

An important contribution of ethical recruitment is its increased ability to protect and support workers through training and ongoing availability. Key informants explained that traditional recruitment normally inhibits the right to quit a job through debt bondage, which was not found to take place often within our sample. Penalties and threats, while existing, were also not frequent among the 70-80% who reported limited freedom to change jobs. The high share of respondents who said they were unable to change employers may therefore be because workers did not have support and knowledge about their rights.

KIIs revealed a potential snowball effect, whereby ethical recruitment increased rights awareness and knowledge. Several local key informants highlighted that many migrant workers, especially in Northern India, are not aware of their rights and the available support systems in source and destination countries. They could thus easily fall prey to exploitative practices or believe they are unable to change their situations while working abroad. In contrast, ethical recruitment agencies may build awareness of and interest in no-fee recruitment through marketing and word of mouth driven by ethically recruited migrant workers. This is also supported by existing Seefar research, which found that aspiring migrant workers who had been in contact with TERA were significantly more knowledgeable about the risks of migrating abroad than non-TERA prospective migrants.[66]

Among returned migrant workers, just 12% of respondents (41 out of 345) had received training before departure. In our study results, receiving training correlated with paying the recruiter to receive the job. People who paid a recruiter to get a job were significantly more likely to have received training than people who did not. Training attendance also correlated with the ability to send remittances that were thought to be sufficient to cover family expenses. Of the 33 respondents who found remittances were not sufficient, none had received training and had paid more than INR 50,000 in recruitment fees. The follow-up survey highlighted that workers were in fact not accustomed to the idea of getting training, including on their destination country's language, systems of seeking redress, and grievance mechanisms. Ethical recruitment, through its no-fee principle and worker welfare focus, bears significant potential to address this shortage of training, thereby increasing knowledge about migrant worker rights and redress possibilities.

[65] It is possible that some of this may have coincided with Covid-19 related movement restrictions. Out of the 265, 97 returned one or two years prior to the survey implementation, meaning they likely returned early in the pandemic. However, just 10 respondents specified that their return was the result of Covid-19, and the majority reported their contract to have finished.
[66] Seefar (2021), "The Pre-migration Impacts of Ethical Recruitment: Measuring the role of ethical recruitment on migration knowledge, decision-making, and vulnerability to forced labour".

Reducing the Incidence of Forced Labor Among Migrant Workers

In this section, we dive deeper into how traditional recruitment is linked with indicators of forced labor in our sample of returned migrant workers and their families and friends. We explore the prevalence of forced labor to better assess the degree to which ethical recruitment can reduce the incidence of forced labor among migrant workers.

There are four categories to assess forced labor, following ILO guidelines[67]:

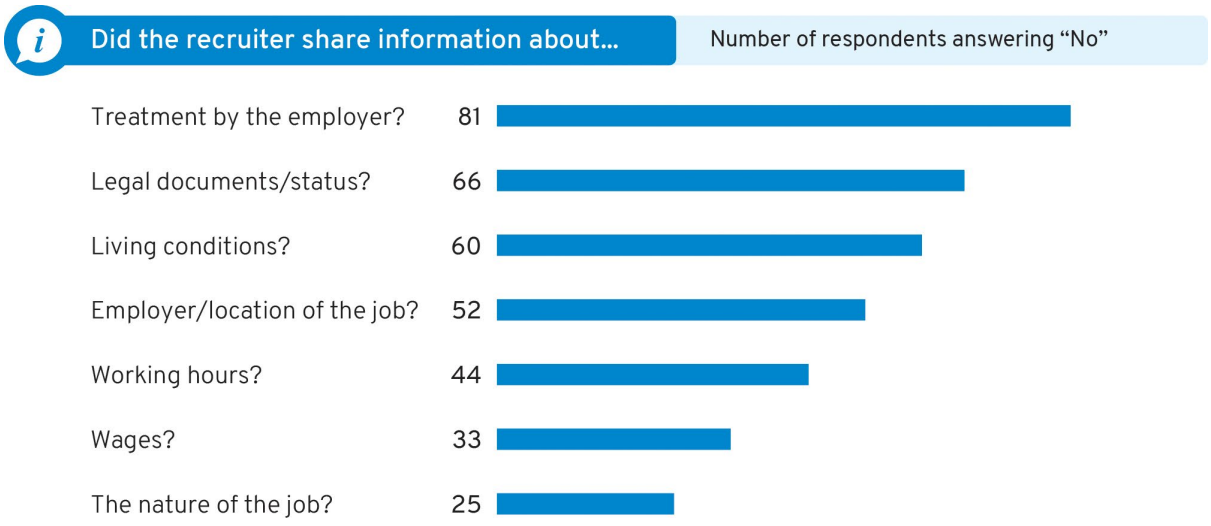
1. Unfree recruitment;
2. Work and life under duress;
3. Impossibility of leaving an employer; and
4. Penalty or menace of penalty.

The four categories listed above cover both forced labor during the recruitment process and while working abroad. To provide a more precise overview, we explore forced labor practices, which have occurred distinctly in each phase.

Information as part of ethical recruitment can likely reduce forced labor resulting from the recruitment process

Provision of information to prospective migrant workers is scarce during the recruitment process. Respondents reported that recruiters typically did not provide information on several main topics including how they would be treated by the employer, the issuing of legal status, and overall living conditions (see Figure 12). The scarcity of information and the lack of clarity on these key topics effectively means migrant workers are mostly left in the dark about what they are signing up for.

Figure 12



[67] For a definition of forced labor based on the ILO's Forced Labor Convention, refer to pages 14 and 15 of this report.

FGDs highlighted that families were particularly worried about what awaited the family member once they migrated abroad. Many family members were aware that what migrants expected or thought they were going to experience abroad did not often correspond with reality. In the words of one respondent, the "initial concern" was whether the worker was "safe in the foreign country or not", whether they "got the job for which they aspired" and whether "the working condition is good or not".[68]

Among our sample, many migrant workers did not have access to their contracts before leaving the country. Even when they did, the contract was often written in a language they could not read or understand. Our survey results show that 34% (118 out of 345) of respondents did not receive a contract before they left the country, while an additional 32% (112 out of 345) said the terms and conditions of the contract were in a language they could not read or understand. Among respondents who had been provided a contract in their mother tongue, 22% found that the terms and conditions did not correspond to what was told to them by the recruiter. As one case study respondent reported: "I expected the working conditions would be better in terms of the compensation, working hours, and wellbeing of employees, but none of my expectations were met."[69] The same respondent as well as others in the sample also explained having received about half of the pay that was promised to him before his departure.

Ethical recruitment can likely fill this gap in the provision of information. A core principle of ethical recruitment is transparency throughout the recruitment process: migrant workers are informed from the very beginning about the nature of the job, the living conditions abroad, and the legal status under which they will be registered. The contract is shared in a timely manner and is available in English, in the language of the destination country, and the mother tongue of the prospective migrant worker. Respondents in the follow-up tool as well as in FGDs recognized this benefit and expressed that they would value the provision of more information as a key element of ethical recruitment.

> "I would have not been scammed and I would not have had to pay such a huge amount of money. Also, ethical recruitment means I could have gotten training and could have understood the entire registration process. I would have preferred to learn the transparent process."
>
> Returned migrant worker, follow-up tool

Ethical recruitment has the potential to empower workers due to its strong emphasis on pre-departure training. KIIs emphasized that such training can provide reassurance for individual workers and their families by helping them understand and prepare for the job and understand the contract and foreign country in more detail than through a traditional recruiter. Similarly, knowing how to handle problems and how to safely return home can substantially impact migrant workers' mental statuses and stress levels.

Our study results align with that finding, as all respondents interviewed stated that they would have benefitted from pre-departure training. A total of 88% (305 of 345) returned migrant workers in our sample had not received any training. The most desired topics of information included wages (96% - 254 out of 264), the nature of the job (98% - 260 out of 278), details on the employer and living

[68] FGD2, family member.
[69] Case study 1.

conditions (96% - 256 out of 278), working hours (96% - 256 out of 278) and legal documents (94% - 250 out of 264).

Ethical recruitment is a welcome alternative to recruitment fees and frauds but requires building trust

Paying for recruitment was considered common practice by respondents in all qualitative data. Whereas just 66% (228 out of 345) of returned migrant workers stated they had paid a recruiter to get the job, FGDs with families suggested that when workers did not pay themselves, families often stepped in to pay the recruitment fees.

In addition to the widely known practice of paying large sums for recruitment, our data uncovered that many recruiters scam migrant workers by considering them medically unfit for the work assignment. While many recruiters do not have a job to offer, others call more workers than needed and require them to pay for and undergo a medical examination and then exclude workers based on medical unfitness. As one respondent reported: “If four persons are called by the agent for the medical examination and they have only two spots, they will disqualify two of them as medically unfit and keep the money the workers paid to them without offering another job.”[70]

Insights from KIIs show that paying for recruitment is so common that it is seen as a measure of legitimacy by migrant workers. Migrant workers and their families save money to prepare in advance to pay recruitment costs. Given the prevalence of the forced labor practices outlined below as well as frauds occurring during the recruitment process, our data shows that aspiring migrant workers and their families tend to be highly suspicious of ‘too-good-to-be-true’ possibilities. Respondents mentioned the need to confirm the genuinity of ethical recruitment agencies with trusted others. The linkage between fees and legitimacy may be an obstacle to promoting no-fee ethical recruitment as a significant amount of resources will likely have to flow into trust-building.

Providing a thorough explanation of what an ethical recruitment agency does is key to overcoming trust issues. While there were no FGD participants who had heard of recruitment agencies not charging fees, all respondents from the follow-up survey answered that they would choose to migrate through an ethical recruitment agency if given the chance. As one FGD respondent stated: “If recruiting is offered by an ethical recruitment agency, members of family and community will be extremely shocked by the fact that it does not charge a fee. They will investigate its legitimacy from their end but finally will be very delighted with it once they understand how it works.”[71]

It will be important for ethical recruiters to reference past successes in sending migrant workers abroad while enabling them to earn money, send remittances, and be treated well by their employers. When asked whether they would recommend ethical recruitment to others, all FGD participants but one stated they would first need proof that ethical recruitment agencies are successful in sending workers abroad.

[70] FGD 1, family member.
[71] FGD 3, family member.

Ethical recruitment could address limited freedom of movement during the recruitment phase

Migrant workers and their families interviewed were aware of fraudulent recruitment practices as well as potentially harmful working and living conditions while working abroad. However, we found that some migrant workers still experienced restrictions on their freedoms during the recruitment process. Of the returned migrant workers who received training, 76% (32 out of 42) said they were not allowed to leave the recruitment facilities. Case study respondents unfortunately did not further elaborate on experiences of limited freedom of movement during recruitment. Most case study respondents (similar to the survey results) did not receive any training. Among the three respondents who did attend training, two received government-led training and one voluntarily attended technical skills training independent of the recruitment. None of them were able to describe to what degree limited freedom of movement aligned with ILO categories of unfree recruitment practices. Nevertheless, ethical recruitment promises to be effective at reducing the incidence of limited freedom of movement during the recruitment phase through its commitment to worker welfare and focus on reducing the number of actors involved in the recruitment process.

Reducing forced labor practices while working abroad

Building on Seefar's prior work on assessing the incidence of forced labor amongst domestic workers in Southeast Asia[72], we reviewed forced labor practices among our sample based on the indicators in Figure 13. The figure also displays how many people reported having experienced the respective indicator.

[72] Seefar (2019), "Making migration work: Understanding forced labour amongst migrant domestic workers in Asia".

Figure 13

Indicators of forced labor	Occurrence in sample (Base: 345)
Coercive recruitment (abduction; confinement during the recruitment process)	13
Recruitment linked to debt	65
Deceptive recruitment*	77
Forced overtime	149 worked >12 hours per day 81 worked 7 days a week
Limited freedom of movement	265
Limited freedom of communication	167
Degrading living conditions	16
Forced to work on call (24/7)	3
Forced illicit or dangerous activities**	48
Reduced freedom to terminate contract	12 would not have been able to say no to the job during recruitment 246 unable to quit
No freedom to resign in accordance with legal requirements	272 not change employer 246 unable to quit 112 unable to return home
Forced to stay longer than agreed while waiting for wages due	0
Confiscation of identity papers or travel documents	302
Sexual violence	0
Physical violence	11
Other forms of punishment (e.g. verbal threats and abuse, neglect)	17
Denunciation to authorities	5
Religious retribution	1
Threats against family members	0
Financial penalties***	0
Exclusion from community and social life/isolation	46
Exclusion from future employment	4
Informing family, community or public about worker's current situation (blackmail)	2
Withholding assets or wages	6
Locked in the workplace or living quarters	No data available
Other forms of punishment (e.g. deprivation of food, water, sleep)	0
Violence against worker in front of other workers	No data available
Dismissal	8
Extra work for breaching labor discipline	2
Further deterioration in working conditions	No data available
Confiscation of mobile phone	No data available
Constant surveillance	138

* regarding working conditions; content or legality of employment contract; housing and living conditions; working wages; legal documentation or acquisition of legal migrant status; job location; or employer
** dangerous work, several employers, outside contract
*** threat of debt or cancellation of contract by placement agency for changing employers

An ethical recruitment agency may have few sanctioning mechanisms at its disposal to address the mistreatment of workers by employers abroad. However, it can ensure ethical treatment of workers through mechanisms such as pre-departure training, grievance mechanisms and opportunities for redress, in-depth employer vetting, and providing ongoing assistance to workers.[73] No-fee recruitment, training, and worker welfare monitoring while abroad, all constitute promising avenues to work towards the reduction of forced labor for migrant workers abroad.

Yet, ethical recruitment agencies should also provide migrant workers with support in returning home and assistance in finding another job in case they end up in situations of forced labor.[74] In our sample, returned migrant workers appeared particularly vulnerable to being forced to stay in their employment positions while they were abroad, despite facing harsh working conditions. It is likely that at least some did so because they were afraid of losing their jobs and income, rather than because of threats of violence, for example

- Severe indicators, specifically of physical violence, were rarer among our sample. Only 2% (7 out of 345) of respondents reported being actively threatened. About 3% (11 out of 345) reported having experienced physical violence, of which all but one experienced violence at the hand of their employer. However, it is possible that more workers experienced both physical and/or sexual violence but did not want to talk about their experiences with the enumerator.
- Most returned migrant workers (79%, 272 out of 345) reported feeling unable to resign from their jobs. This is even though almost half of them reported working overtime, specifically more than 12 hours per day (49%, 149 out of 345). As one respondent reported: “I used to work for about 20 hours a day. My day started at 5 in the morning and used to come back late after midnight.”[75]
- The vast majority of respondents (88%, 302 out of 345) reported that their identity papers or travel documents were confiscated upon arrival to the working country. Most received their documents at some point, but 18% (54 out of 302) never received their documents back. This practice effectively left the 18% at the mercy of their employer and prevented them from resigning from their jobs and traveling back home.
- Among the interviewed migrant workers, 77% (265 out of 345) experienced limited freedom of movement once reaching their workplace abroad, while 48% (167 out of 345) had their phones confiscated. About 40% (138 out of 345) of respondents mentioned being under constant surveillance while working. These practices further isolated migrant workers, adding a psychological burden to an already challenging situation.

Giving migrant workers the security to not only leave their employers without (financial) repercussions but also enabling them to apply for another position within the ecosystem of the ethical recruiter can likely go a long way in empowering them to report these violations. Furthermore, pre-departure training that helps migrant workers understand and empowers them to use grievance mechanisms while informing them of possible options to return home or try changing employers should be coupled with ongoing assistance to workers abroad to have maximum effects. Quantitative data confirm the positive impact of ongoing communication regarding support systems. All migrant workers surveyed

[73] A Roadmap to Ethical Recruitment. In preparation.
[74] TERA, for example, enables a free return home if workers find that the realities of employment conditions are not as stipulated.
[75] Case study 1.

highly valued the presence of an agency available to communicate with them promptly. Families and friends of migrant workers argued that going through an ethical recruitment agency can reduce stress as they would not have to deal with any ambiguity regarding their relative or friend's working and living conditions abroad.

Conclusion

This research aimed to provide new evidence on the impact of ethical recruitment on migrant workers and their communities. Findings on ethical recruitment's role in impacting workers, their families, and communities, as well as reducing the incidence of forced labor suggest that the following components of ethical recruitment are likely most effective at positively impacting workers and their families, and reducing the prevalence of forced labor:

- No-fee principle;
- Focus on and monitoring of worker welfare;
- Pre-departure training, ongoing information sharing, and assistance.

Specifically, our data shows that:

1. Debt and debt-bondage linked to traditional forms of recruitment are less pronounced among returned migrant workers in UP than expected. Instead, there appears to have been a change in awareness around the high costs of recruitment. Workers and their families save up to pay recruitment fees.

   ➔ **Because of its no-fee principle, ethical recruitment can be understood as a means of redirecting money to vulnerable people.** This is because individuals and families can better utilize their savings: rather than paying high costs for high risks during recruitment and working abroad, workers and their families can use existing savings more quickly and channel them into the local economy and members of their families at home, rather than spending them on fees demanded by recruitment agencies and sub-agents operating illegally.

   ➔ **Ethical recruitment can contribute to further lowering the number of individuals incurring debt.** While lower than anticipated, 29% of our sample still borrowed money to pay for recruitment.

2. Family members likely play a key role in paying for recruitment. Two-thirds of our respondents said they paid for recruitment, however, FGDs showed that family members were the ones who paid for the costs related to recruitment. Family members described significant levels of stress and reported mental health issues related to having to pay for recruitment costs and migration.

   ➔ **Ethical recruitment can likely lower families' mental health and stress levels related to saving up and paying money for recruitment.**

3. Paying back debt correlated with sending fewer remittances. Of the respondents who borrowed money (29%, 65 out of 288) and paid their debt with their monthly salary, 60% (39 out of 65) were significantly more likely to send fewer remittances than those who did not borrow at all. KIIs also pointed to a direct link between lower recruitment fees and higher remittances to families and communities.

   ➔ By not charging fees and allowing workers and their families to continue saving money, **ethical recruitment bears important potential for increasing the amount of remittances**.

4. Remittances were the only variable that affected perceptions around increased social status after migration. Just three respondents who reported an improvement in their social status were unable to send remittances. All others who reported a positive change in their social status supported their families financially during their migration.

➔ In increasing remittances, **ethical recruitment can likely directly affect migrants' social status at home**.

5. All respondents said they would migrate abroad through an ethical recruitment agency, though trust-building in a no-fee recruitment option is necessary. Respondents stated that it would be a relief to not have to spend money to be recruited. FGD respondents pointed to the idea that reduced expenses would make migration easier and would allow the positive economic effects to be more quickly felt both by workers and their families.

   ➔ **Ethical recruitment comes with lower opportunity costs to migration than traditional recruitment.** Empowering more people to migrate for work under ethical conditions can likely help benefit the community on the whole. Lower opportunity costs also mean that labor migration becomes more accessible to workers in a fairer way: Those who are unable to save can still access jobs abroad, without the risk of high debt and debt bondage.

6. Medium- to long-term benefits from traditional migration appear extremely limited. More than a third of returned migrant workers in our sample did not have any savings left when they returned. Many also faced difficult employment situations upon returning.

   ➔ **Ethical recruitment may be able to contribute to better medium- to long-term migration outcomes.** Though more research is needed, ethical recruitment's contribution to different utilization of savings may mean better financial outcomes from working abroad.

7. Traditionally recruited migrant workers sometimes suffer from physical and mental health problems, including because of their recruitment and work experiences abroad. There were significant differences in negative physical health experiences between those who indicated they were recruited by a recruitment agency, versus those who reported having been recruited through family, friends, neighbors, a government agency, or directly through the company. Evidence from quantitative data shows that migrant workers who did not experience psychological distress were more likely to have their expectations regarding employment met or exceeded.

   ➔ Ethical recruiters who ensure overall worker welfare and pay specific attention to the welfare of the workers they recruit and place abroad, are **likely to reduce negative experiences related to physical and mental health.** Pre-departure training, ongoing support and information, in particular, appear tied to improved psychological wellbeing during recruitment.

8. During the recruitment process, migrant workers were given inaccurate (or openly false) information on the nature of their job, living conditions and pay. The greatest rights violations occurred with regard to freedom of movement. Among returned migrant workers in our sample, 77% reported that their employer had restricted their movement. Similarly, many returned migrant workers reported having limited freedom to change their jobs and employers despite overall low levels of debt bondage, penalties, and threats.

   ➔ **Ethical recruitment may greatly reduce the incidence of indicators of forced labor during the recruitment process by providing clear and precise information** on the nature of the job, pay, and living conditions awaiting the migrant worker upon arrival. In-depth employer vetting and provision of ongoing assistance to workers are likely to mitigate the occurrence of forced labor practices while the worker is abroad.

   ➔ **Ethical recruitment can contribute to better worker rights protection through pre-departure training, information sharing, and ongoing assistance to migrant workers**. In

particular, it can draw attention to freedom of movement and the right to change or quit jobs and support them (remotely) in doing so where needed. Giving migrant workers the security to not only leave their employers without (financial) repercussions but also enabling them to apply for another position within the ecosystem of the ethical recruiter, can likely go a long way in empowering them to report violations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings above and throughout this report, and in line with the limitations outlined previously, we have divided recommendations into those focusing directly on programmatic developments and those focusing on different avenues of research that should be pursued to further understand the effects of ethical recruitment.

Program implementation

- **Funding ethical recruitment (pilot) projects**: Ethical recruitment promises to significantly improve the labor migration experiences of migrant workers in UP. Because of its added value in supporting meaningful saving, reducing debt, and improving the physical and mental health of migrant workers, ethical recruitment should continue to be offered to communities in the region and be replicated in different locations. International donors and other stakeholders should fund additional pilot projects that can directly link with research (including comparative and longitudinal research) to understand its effect on the different dimensions outlined in his report as well as the reduction of forced labor.
- **Couple ethical recruitment initiatives with behavior change campaigns**: Workers moved to saving money rather than falling into debt, suggesting that there is significant potential for behavior change among future migrant workers away from paid-for recruitment altogether. With increasing demand for no-fee recruitment, existing businesses may feel additional pressure to move away from highly expensive recruitment fees in the medium- to longer term. Because migrant workers currently see paying for recruitment as a measure of legitimacy, well-conceptualized behavior change campaigns that accompany ethical recruitment initiatives can likely go a long way in building trust and increasing demand among workers.
- **Ethical recruitment with a focus on families, including pilot projects for financial planning and livelihoods support**: Families appear to be much more affected by the negative elements of traditional recruitment than previously thought. Future ethical recruitment programming should take this into account. This could include: Marketing to an audience that is larger than only migrant workers themselves and; offering training to family members so that they may understand the positive effects of ethical recruitment as well as how best to reap its benefits in the long-term. With ethical recruitment promising to reduce the use of savings for recruitment and increase remittances, families may not only experience fewer financial stressors but likely also have more money at their disposal overall. Future pilot projects could include support to families on how to better use savings and decrease potential vulnerability to economic shocks.
- **Reducing fear of financial repercussions when terminating employment contracts:** Existing ethical recruitment initiatives sometimes, but not always, pay for return when a worker decides to terminate their employment abroad. This should be one of the critical elements of ethical recruitment agencies, as it empowers workers to in fact leave their employer when needed without fearing financial repercussions. Similarly, ethical recruitment agencies can enable workers to apply for other positions within their ecosystems.
- **Pre-departure training for behavior change**: Existing ethical recruitment initiatives should use their pre-departure training to not only help migrant workers understand what grievance mechanisms are available to them but also to empower them to use them. Informing migrant workers of possible options to return home or to change employers should be coupled with ongoing assistance to workers abroad to have maximum effects. Training should also pay

specific attention to fully understanding the no-fee principle of ethical recruitment, including to build trust in the ethical recruiter.

- **Tracking effects of ethical recruitment on TERA beneficiaries**: To fill existing evidence gaps, TERA should build upon mechanisms to track forced labor indicators as well as information on the four dimensions into its operations. This data will likely also go a long way in showcasing the benefits of ethical recruitment on the global stage.

Research

- Our data suggested a need to critically question the commonly-held belief that ethical recruitment is especially valuable with regard to reducing debt and debt-bondage, as well as subsequent conditions of forced labor. While ethical recruitment can affect all four dimensions described in this report and can help reduce the incidence of forced labor, findings under the economic dimension show that ethical recruitment may be especially valuable when it comes to savings rather than reducing debt and debt-bondage. This may be a relatively recent shift or one that only applies to workers in UP, but this should be researched in more depth and different geographies.

- The original research design (comparative and longitudinal) should be applied as soon as multiple workers have been sent abroad and have returned. This will enable more detailed information on the de facto effects of ethical recruitment of the four dimensions as well as on reducing the prevalence of forced labor.

- Further research on increased savings and remittances through ethical recruitment, as well as their effect at the family- and community level may unveil unknown positive externalities. This includes: i) understanding the added value of ethical recruitment in allowing families to move beyond simply covering expenses, for example being able to access better healthcare and more nutritional food; and ii) understanding how, if at all, an increase in the income of a certain member of a community (whether through more savings or remittances) has trickle-down effects on the community. Research should also further examine migrants' and their families' economic situations upon return to be able to conceptualize programming on other types of financial assistance and training for families.

- Further research on fellow workers as a source of psychological or physical violence should be explored. Initial evidence shows that poor living conditions, cultural diversity, and a highly competitive environment may lead to tension between workers. Although ethical recruitment is likely to mitigate some of the factors causing this tension, cultural diversity may remain a possible source of tension between workers and lead to psychological or physical violence. Further research on this aspect may help to improve the mitigating mechanisms ethical recruitment will implement to counter possible tensions within the workplace. Exploring the effects of pre-departure training on potentially reducing these tensions would also be useful.

Annex 1: Selection of Ethical Recruitment Conventions, Principles, and Initiatives

Figure 14

Initiative/Principles	Description
IOM IRIS	The International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS) promotes ethical labor recruitment through a set of standards (the IRIS Standard).
UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights	Set of guidelines for governments and businesses to prevent, address and remedy human rights abuses that have occurred in business operations, with clauses and principles commonly cited in ethical recruitment guidance.
ILO Declarations and Conventions	International Conventions, guidelines and policies related to migrant worker recruitment, including a) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and Follow-up; b) C181 – Private Employment Agencies Convention
IHRB Dhaka Principles	Human rights-based principles aimed to enhance the rights of migrant workers from the recruitment stage, throughout their overseas employment, and through their return home or subsequent re-migration abroad.
IOM CREST	The CREST initiative develops partnerships with businesses to implement ethical recruitment standards that address migrant workers' vulnerabilities and achieve sustainable change towards ending modern slavery.
ILO Fair Recruitment Initiative	This initiative works toward preventing human trafficking and forced labor, protecting the rights of migrants from recruitment-related abuses, decreasing the cost of labor migration, and enhancing migration outcomes.
IHRB Leadership Group for Responsible Recruitment	A group of major businesses and organizations that aim to drive positive change in the way that migrant workers are recruited, including a commitment to the Employer Pays Principle.
RBA Responsible Labor Initiative	Drawing on its RBA Code of Conduct, this is a multi-industry initiative aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of workers most vulnerable to exploitation and forced labor in global supply chains. A core part of the initiative is the Responsible Recruitment Program, which provides a development path, with public recognition for progress, to labor providers to meet the ethical recruitment standards of today's leading industry customers. This process includes training, verification, audits, and certification.
Building Responsibly	A group of leading engineering, construction, oil, and gas companies working together to promote the rights and welfare of workers across the industry.

WEC Code of Conduct	An industry-created set of principles that ethical, quality, and professional private employment services should integrate into the provision of their services.
Verité Fair Hiring Toolkit	A set of tools, guidance, and approaches to support responsible recruitment.

Annex 2: Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in a multidisciplinary theoretical framework. Rigid adherence to one model of migration - and the (possible) impact of ethical recruitment - over another ("theoretical exclusivity") fails to capture the complexities of migration. We, therefore, do not impose a model of dimensionality but rather leave open the possibility that ethical recruitment impacts unexpected dimensions. The below areas highlighted in the literature accordingly functioned as our starting point:

Potential areas of impact of ethical recruitment:

1. **Economic and financial dimensions**: Personal income gain, risk mitigation, household wealth gain, community savings and investment, and remittances.[76] [77]
2. **Psychological and emotional impacts**: Intersection with health and physical wellbeing. These include stress, poor mental health, depression, insomnia, anxiety, memory loss, aggression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance abuse.
3. **Social dimensions**: Social dimensions are broad and include social exclusion, discrimination, loss of social status/capital, social stigma, inequity, separation from family members, and loss/gain of social networks, among other factors
4. **Political dimensions**: Political factors include government measures and policies for citizenship, regularization, asylum, integration, and social security.[78]
5. **Health and physical well-being**: Health is a cross-cutting factor that includes access/lack of access to adequate health care services, and migration can exacerbate certain issues such as inadequate hygiene and sanitation, inadequate nutrition, physical/sexual violence, abuse, hazardous working and harsh and conditions, and heightened risk of illness.[79]
6. **Protection and human rights**: Another intersectional area includes recognition of economic, social, and cultural rights, freedom of association and right to collective bargaining, elimination of all forms of forced labor, abolition of child labor, mobility-related rights, elimination of discrimination, equal opportunity, and treatment for migrants and migrant workers.[80]
7. **Exploitation and forced labor**: A cross-cutting area, forced labor includes unfree recruitment (forced and deceptive), life or work under duress, and the impossibility of leaving the employer.[81]

[76] Taylor, J. E. (1999), "The New Economics of Labor Migration and the Role of Remittances in the Migration Process."
[77] Taylor, J. E., & Wyatt, T.J. (1996), "The Shadow Value of Migrant Remittances, Income and Inequality in a Household-farm Economy."
[78] ILO (2010), "International labour migration: a rights-based approach"
[79] IOM (2020), "Migration and health".
[80] Inter-Parliamentary Union (2015), "Migration, human rights and governance"
[81] ILO (2012), "Hard to see, harder to count".

When exploring these dimensions, a basic socio-ecological model helps illustrate how labor migration - and ethical recruitment specifically - can impact different levels of analysis, from the individual to the international or institutional level.[82] This model also permits an understanding of how the different levels of analysis interact and influence one another. In this research, we focus on individuals, and key influencers (families and friends) but do not explicitly explore state and country levels.

[82] Dalhberg, L. & Krug, E (2006), "Violence a global public health problem"

Annex 3: Limitations

Figure 15 below depicts the research areas and research questions as per the original research design.

Figure 15

Research Area	Question
How - and to what degree - does ethical recruitment impact workers, their families, and their communities?	In which dimensions do ethical recruitment affect workers and their communities?
	To what degree does ethical recruitment benefit workers?
	To what degree does ethical recruitment benefit workers' communities?
	Which dimensions appear minimally or adversely impacted by ethical recruitment, and why?
	Do ethically-recruited workers differ from traditionally recruited workers? If so, how?
To what degree does ethical recruitment reduce the incidence of forced labor among workers?	How effective or ineffective is ethical recruitment at reducing forced labor among TERA's beneficiaries?
	How could ethical recruitment become more effective at reducing forced labor?
	Are there secondary prevalence-reducing benefits from ethical recruitment at the individual or community levels?

Seefar pivoted to a new design but the practical constraints prevented the research from adopting a true experimental design, as had originally been intended. By comparing between recipients of ethical recruitment (in this case, TERA's beneficiaries) and similar individuals who have not been exposed to ethical recruitment, the research would have provided non-causal indicative evidence of impact and differences. The latter was planned to take place over six to 12 months, tracking how individuals change over time to yield insight on the research questions in a deeper manner than a single cross-sectional study. However, with Covid-19 heavily limiting TERA's operations, the longitudinal and comparison group was not available for this research.

In addition, the following limitations apply to this research:

- The lack of established theory on ethical recruitment is well worth emphasizing. The design of this research posits a preliminary theory but is intended to advance the literature towards more robust evidence. Seefar recognizes that the theory is in its early stages and is likely to evolve based on evidence gathered over time. This means that the current results are limited in that they base only on the existing understanding of what ethical recruitment is and entails.
- As indicated in the theoretical framework, there are potentially endless "dimensions" that ethical recruitment may affect. The research was designed to identify and engage with the

most important dimensions, but it is possible that certain dimensions remained less explored and require further research (e.g., does recruitment impact political beliefs?).

- The study adopted a combination of random and snowball sampling approaches. This means that the sample is not fully representative of characteristics of returned workers in the areas sampled. However, demographics and a diversity of experiences abroad suggest that the sample was broadly representative of the usual profile of migrant workers in sampled areas. Further, the sample and study findings are not representative of migrant workers that do not live in the targeted communities.
- It is also possible that the sample was biased towards workers that made positive experiences abroad. They might have been more comfortable participating in interviews and talking about their experiences. Experiences abroad that include abuse or perceived financial failures are topics that are rarely openly discussed in Indian society and access to the most vulnerable populations was difficult during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Some of the survey questions included hypothetical situations. This is useful to get an indication of possible scenarios and the impact of ethical recruitment. However, some respondents might likely respond in a socially desirable way to those hypothetical scenarios. Actual behaviors heavily depend on contextual variables within such a situation that might not be taken into account when answering such a question.
- The survey was designed in English and delivered by Seefar's bilingual researchers in both Hindi and English to participants. Efforts were made to ensure respondent comprehension and explain questions in Hindi where needed. This means that some enumerators may have phrased explanations slightly differently from other enumerators.

SEEFAR

Ethically Recruited

How ethical recruitment can impact workers and their families, and reduce the incidence of forced labor

August 2022