

A high-angle photograph of a construction site. Four workers are visible, working on a large concrete structure reinforced with a dense grid of rusted steel rebar. The workers are wearing various safety gear: one in a white hard hat and maroon shirt, another in a blue shirt and a woven hat, and two others in orange safety vests. They are using tools to adjust the rebar. The concrete is in various stages of being poured and set, with some areas showing fresh pours and others more finished.

MIDEQ NEPAL- MALAYSIA CORRIDOR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

ABOUT MIDEQ



The Migration for Development & Equality Hub (MIDEQ) unpacks the complex and multi-dimensional relationships between migration and inequality in the context of the Global South. MIDEQ aims to transform understandings by decentring the production of knowledge about migration and its consequences away from the Global North towards those countries where most migration takes place.

Drawing on the experience and expertise of partners across 12 countries, MIDEQ builds an evidence-based understanding of the relationships between migration, inequality and development. MIDEQ's ultimate aim is to translate this knowledge into concrete policies and practices which improve the lives of migrants, their families and the communities in which they live.

There are 6 corridors in the MIDEQ Hub: Haiti-Brazil; Ghana-China; Ethiopia-South Africa; Jordan-Egypt; Burkina Faso-Cote d'Ivoire; and Nepal-Malaysia

The Nepal-Malaysia Corridor is helmed by Dr Anita Ghimire, Nepal Institute for Social & Environmental Research (NISER) and Associate Professor Yeoh Seng-Guan, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Monash University Malaysia.

To learn more, visit: mideq.org

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the contribution of Nepali migrant workers in Malaysia has been significant. Nepal receives almost a third of its Gross Domestic Product from remittances. In 2018, Nepali migrant workers sent home USD\$8.1 billion, making it the 19th biggest beneficiary of funds sent by migrants around the world, according to a report released by the World Bank.

For Nepali workers, Malaysia has been the top destination for labour migration since 2008 when the government started keeping records of labour migrants. In 2019, Nepali mission in Malaysia reported around 500,000 Nepalis living in Malaysia. A total of 4.23 percent labour permits were issued in 2018/19 for Nepali migrants who sought to work in Malaysia (IOM, 2019).

Malaysia continues to rely heavily on foreign migrant labour. About 14 percent of its workforce is populated by workers of various nationalities, amounting to approximately 1.5 million workers (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). Many Nepalis are employed in manufacturing, services, agriculture and plantation, as well as construction (Immigration Department Malaysia, 2020).

Like so many other foreign migrant workers in Malaysia, numerous Nepali migrants have to cope with harsh working conditions, exploitation and human rights abuses on a daily basis as they endeavour to provide for their families back home. Their particular narratives and experiences as human beings and as important contributors to the Malaysian and Nepal economies are not well documented nor appreciated.

The Nepal-Malaysia Corridor focuses on three major research themes (“Work Packages”):

- 1. Work Package One (Gender Inequalities)** examines the gendered nature of migration and mobility.
- 2. Work Package Four (Migrant perceptions, knowledge and decision-making)** examines how these elements shape migrant subjectivities and how they evolve over time in the migration experience.
- 3. Work Package Five (Intermediaries)** examines the facilitation of migrant recruitment and mobility along the Nepal-Malaysia corridor.

This booklet provides preliminary findings primarily from the Malaysian end of the Nepal-Malaysia corridor.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

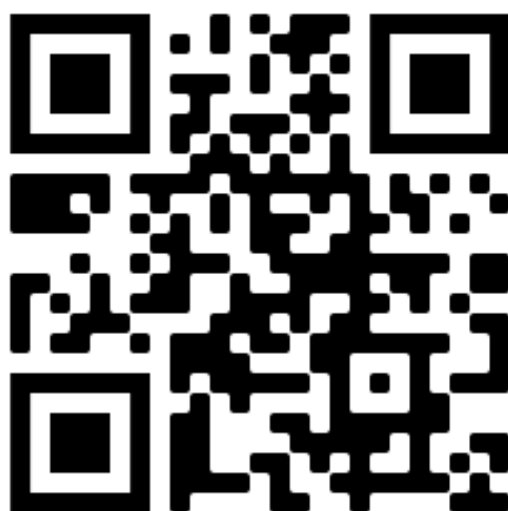
The findings presented here are from data collected between 2020 and 2021.

A total of 98 Nepali migrant workers (64 men and 34 women) were interviewed. All interviewees were between 21 and 50 years of age. A majority of the interviewees were employed within the Klang Valley. Sixty three individuals were located in the Central West of Peninsular Malaysia, in urban centres like the Klang Valley and other parts of Selangor. Twelve interviewees were located in Penang state and 20 in Johor state. There were also 3 interviewees based in Pahang state.

As there were government travel restrictions due to Covid-19, almost all the interviews were conducted through WhatsApp, Zoom and telephone calls. The interviewees were sourced through the assistance of Nepali social mobilizers who also doubled up as translators.

A majority of the interviewees were sourced from Selangor to reflect the reported 60 percent of Nepali migrant workers found in this state (Immigration Department of Malaysia 2020). However, in the case of female Nepali migrant workers, the research team decided to sample more than the official three percent in order to find out more about their experiences in keeping with the aim of the Work Package (2020 Nepal Labour Migration Report).

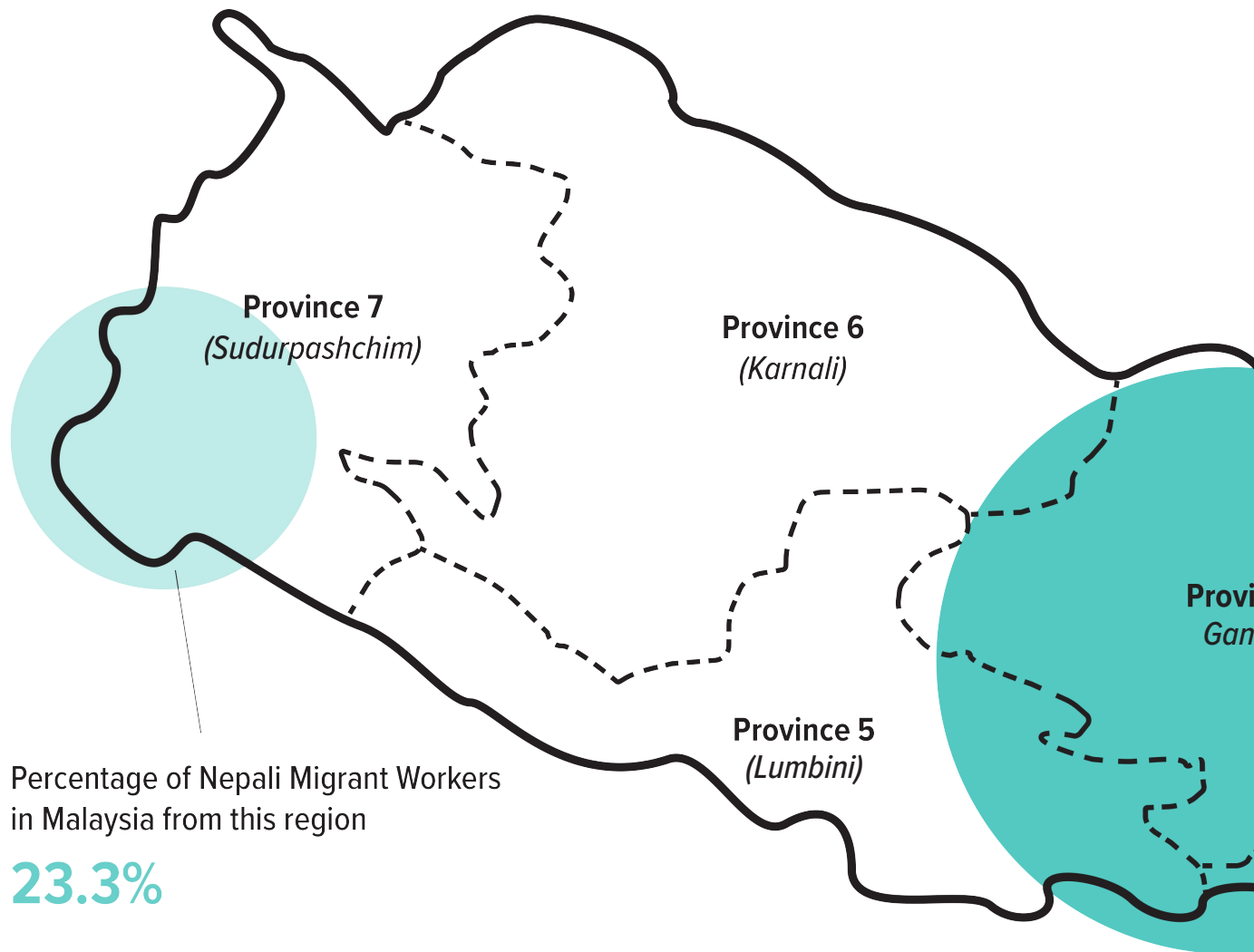
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POPULATION & ORIGINS OF NEPALI MIGRANT WORKERS*

Illustrative Map of Nepal

- Total population of Nepali Migrant workers in Malaysia (2020): **241,106**
- Total Male Nepali Workers in Malaysia (2020): **234,252**
- Total Female Nepali Workers in Malaysia (2020): **6,854**
- Percentage of GDP for Nepal remittance receivers in 2017: **29%**

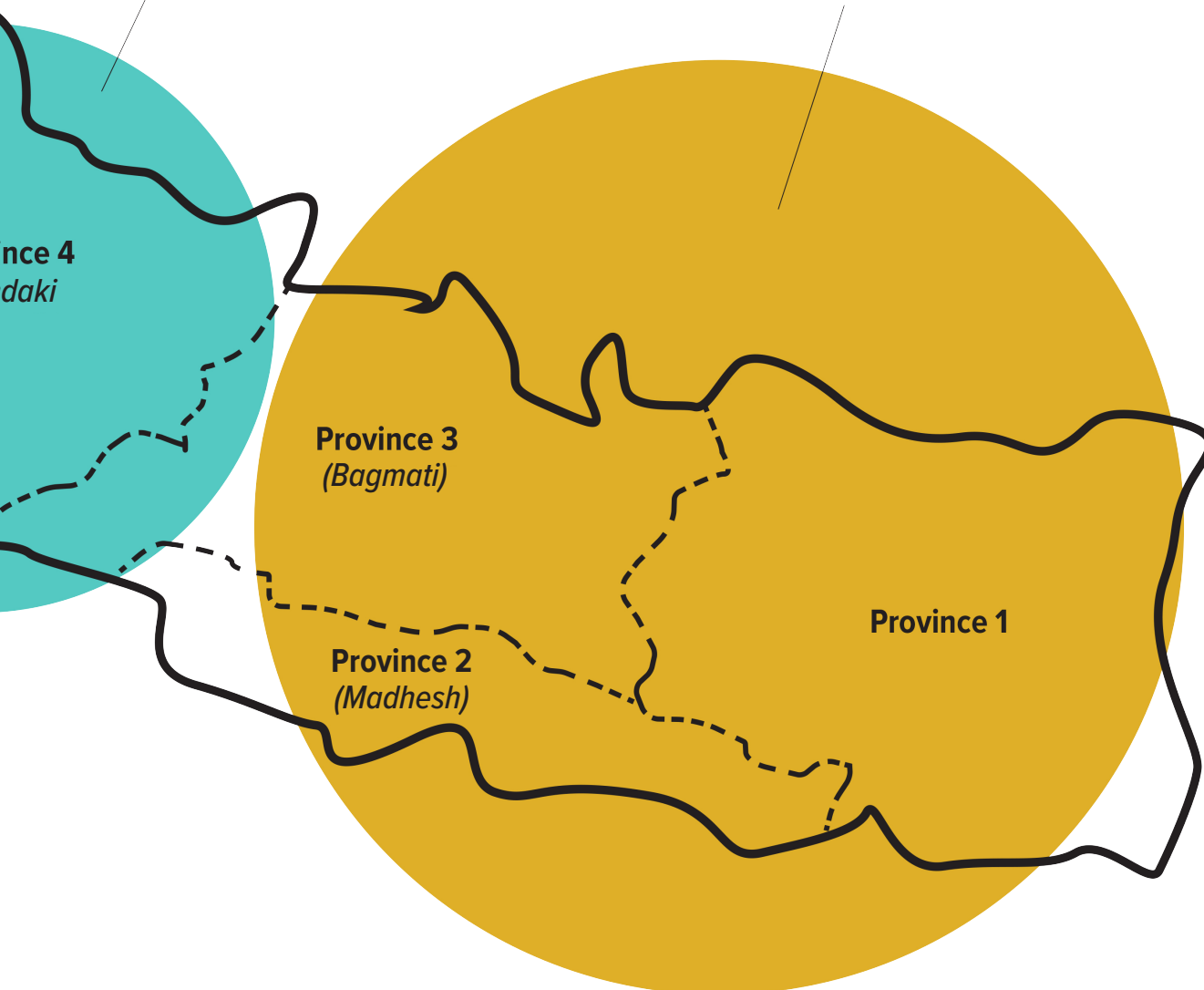


Percentage of Nepali Migrant Workers
in Malaysia from this region

34.9%

Percentage of Nepali Migrant Workers
in Malaysia from this region

41.9%



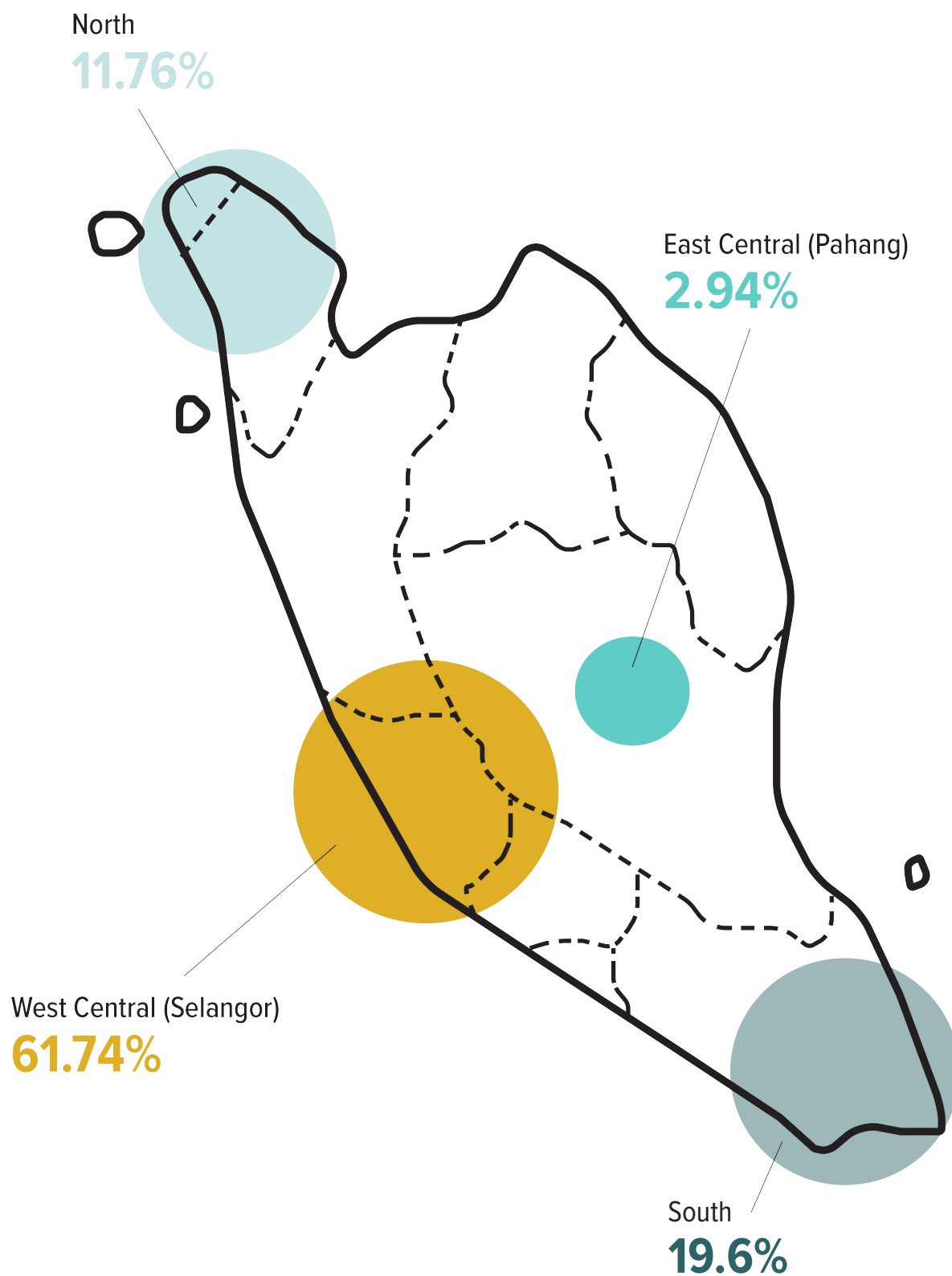
RAL

EAST

* "Data is based on fieldwork conducted in 2020-2021"

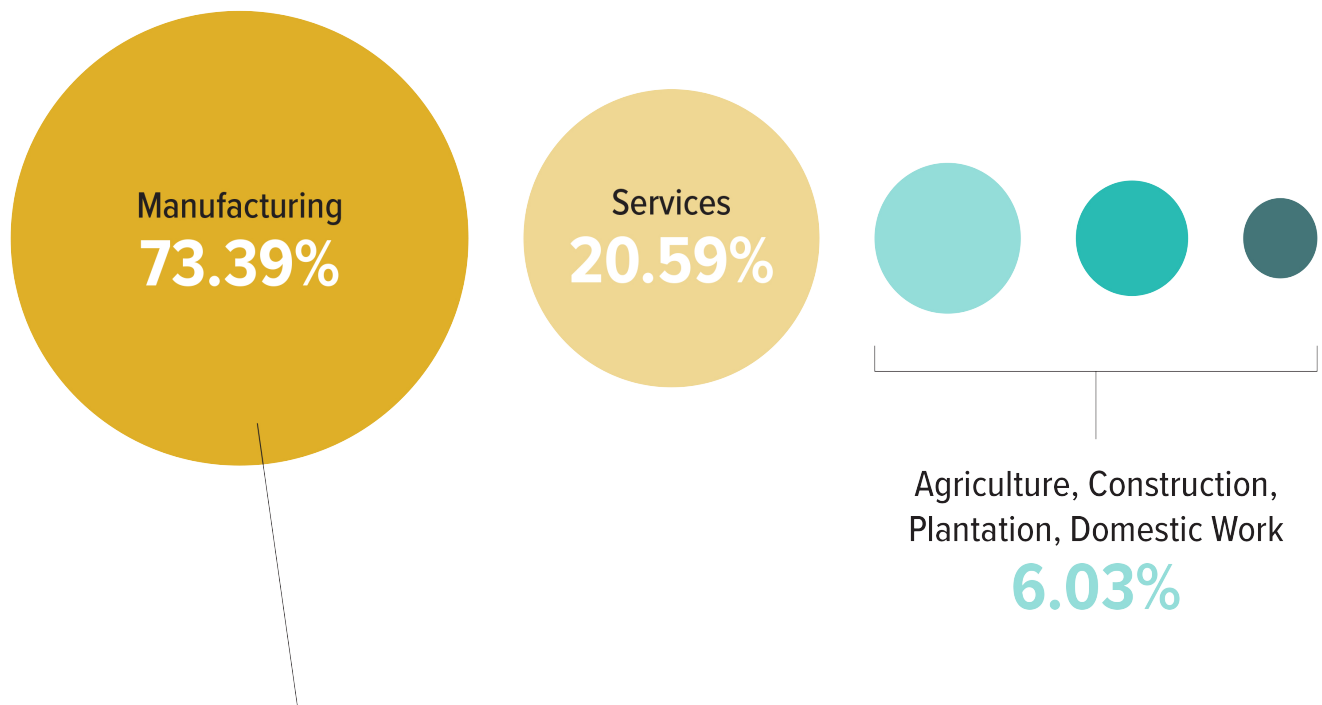
LOCATION OF EMPLOYMENT FOR NEPALI MIGRANT WORKER*

Illustrative Map of Peninsular Malaysia



SECTORS BASED ON GENDER

Percentage of Migrant Workers working in different sectors



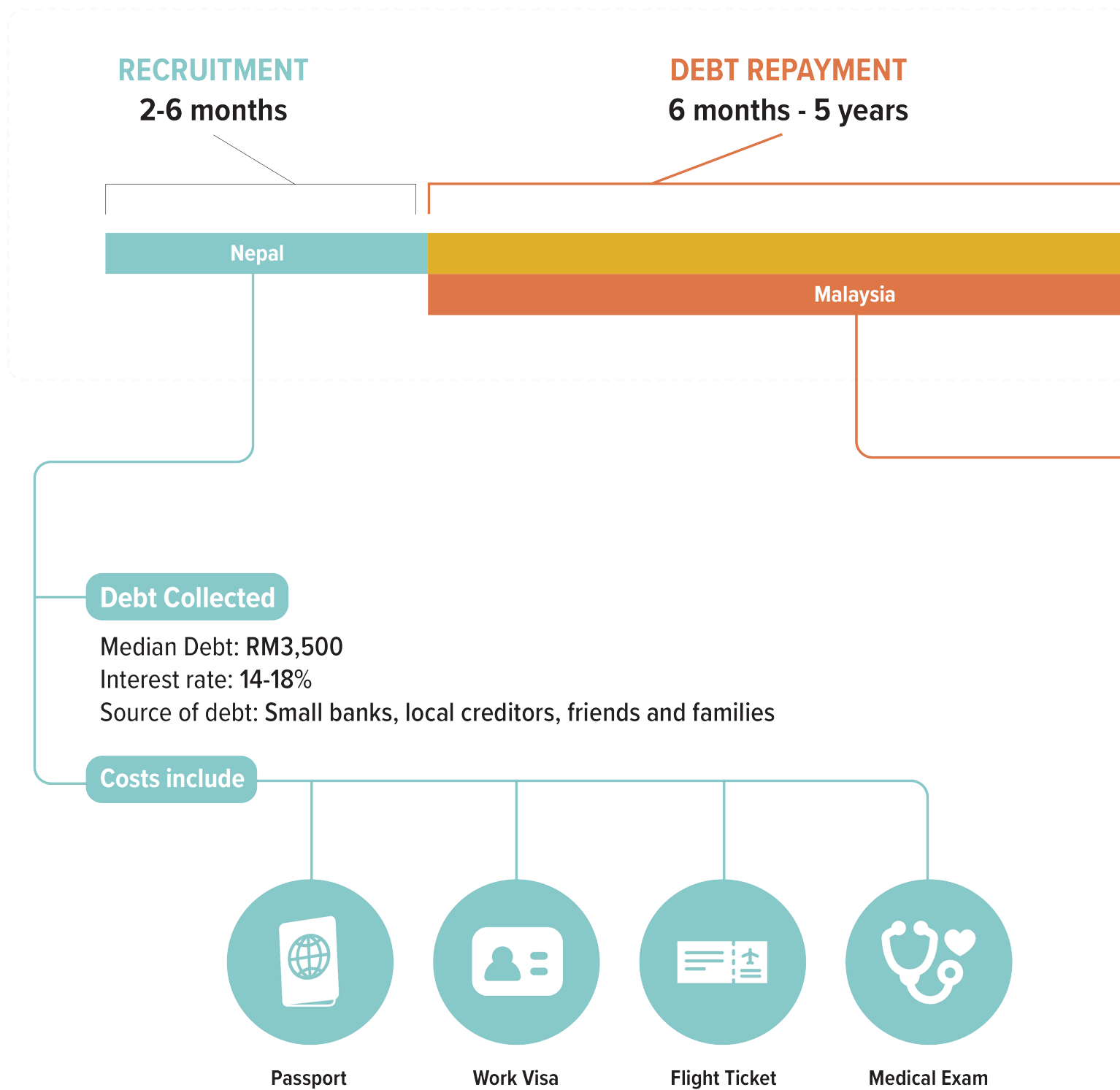
95% of the Nepali female workers work in the manufacturing sector in Malaysia (2018)

(Source: Ministry of Human Resources, Malaysia)

"It should be noted that even though almost all female respondents are hired in conventionally understood 'low' or 'semi-skilled' sectors, from interviews it is revealed that the classification may misrepresent the level of aptitude and skill that is practically required to fulfil certain work requirements. For instance, a female respondent working in a large Japanese electronics manufacturing factory, her work predominantly involves operating heavy machinery that produces parts for batteries. Another female respondent is employed as a supervisor at an optical lens factory and is required to manage an assembly line of workers of various ethnicities."

MALAYSIA GNI PER CAPITA*

Financial costs as a Nepali Migrant Worker



- Nepal Gross National Income (GNI) per capita: USD 1,120 (2020)
(Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD?locations=NP>)
- Malaysia GNI: USD 10,570 (2020)
(<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD?locations=MY>)

EMPLOYMENT

5-10 years

Malaysia

Earnings & Costs

Average wage: RM1,229.95

Debt Repayment: RM200-RM600 per month

Additional bills include



Housing
RM50-RM100
per month



Water
Varies



Electricity
Varies



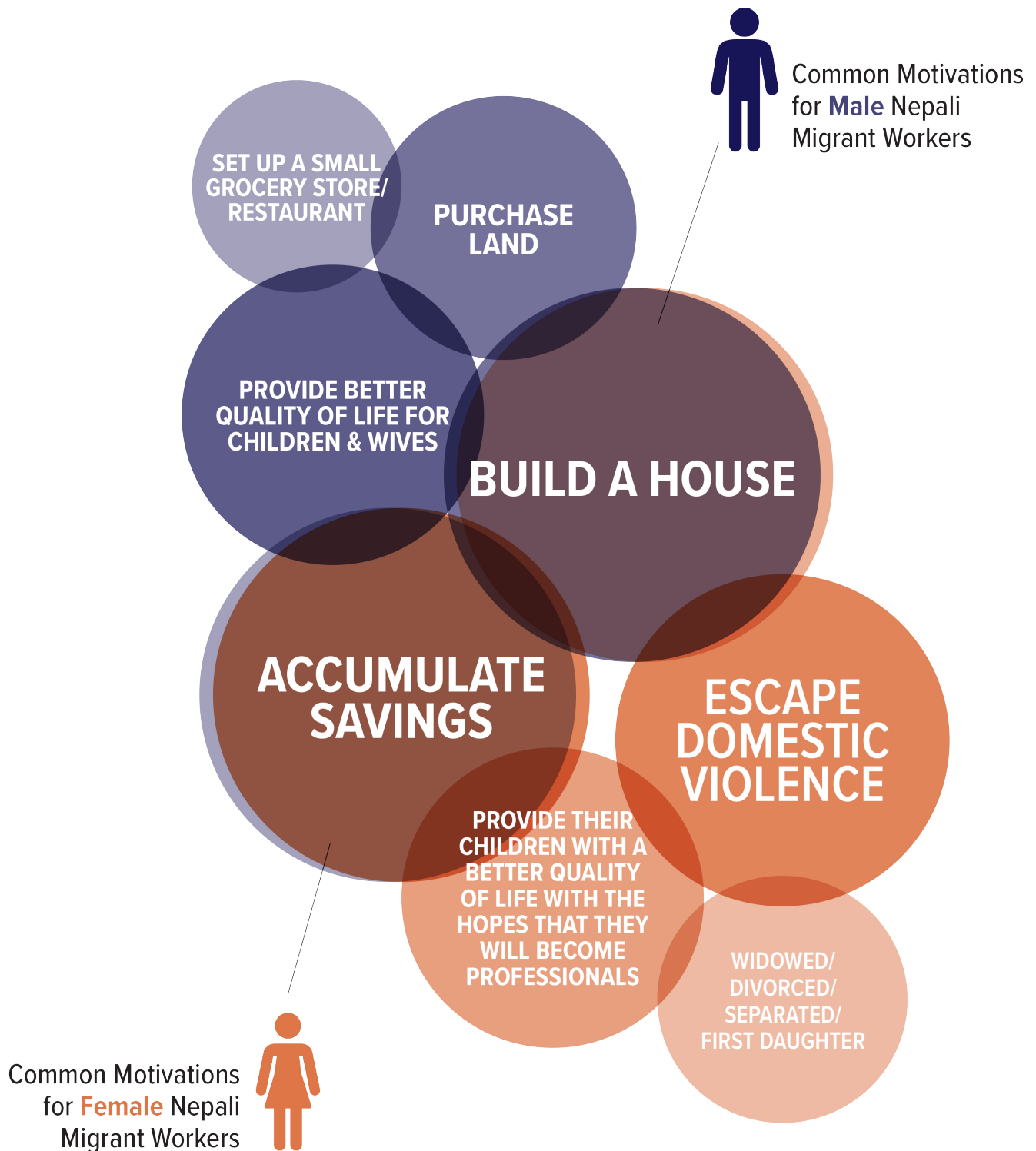
Levies
Varies



Visa Renewal
Varies

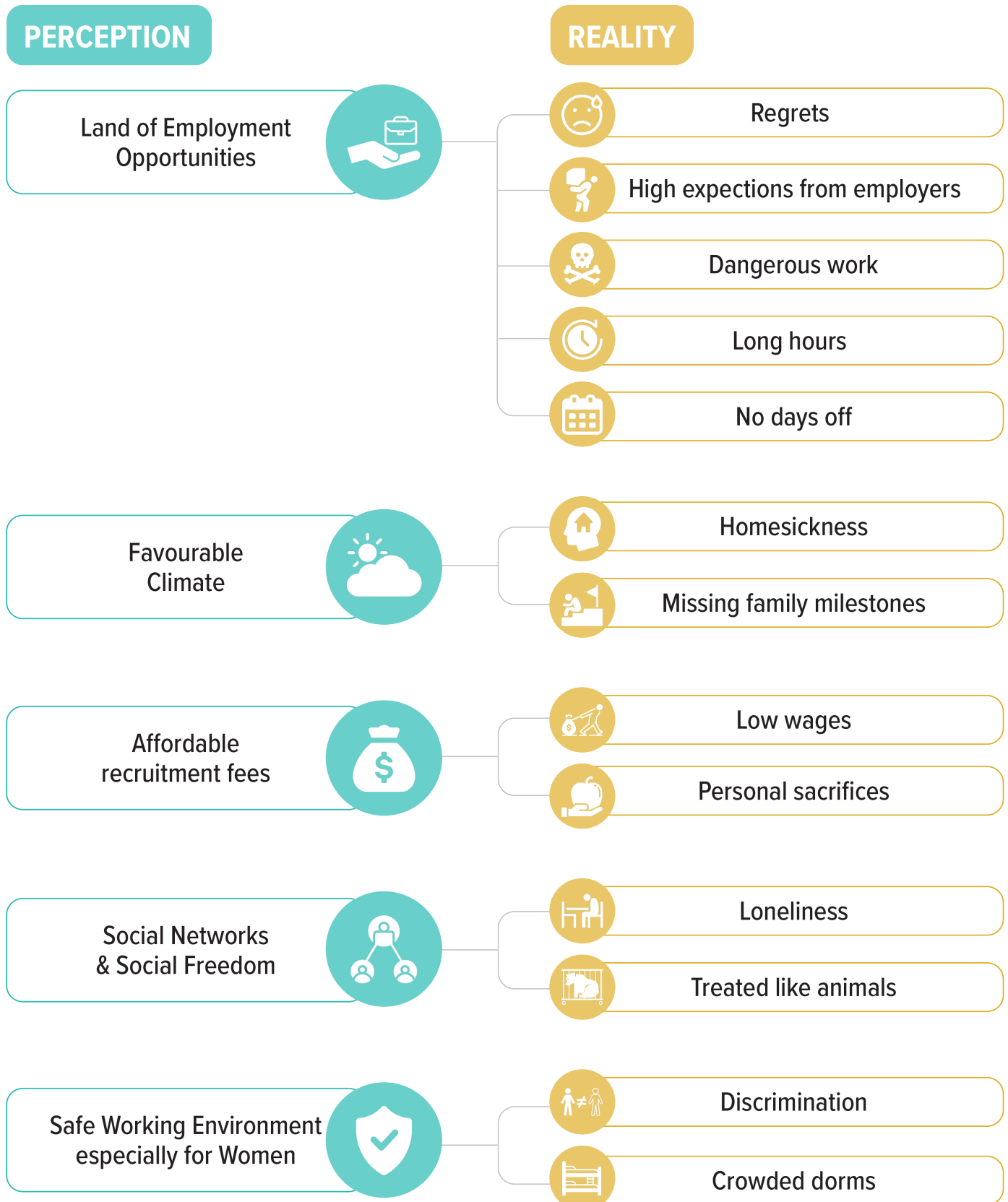
MOTIVATIONS*

Reasons why Nepali Migrant Workers choose to work in Malaysia



PERCEPTION vs REALITY*

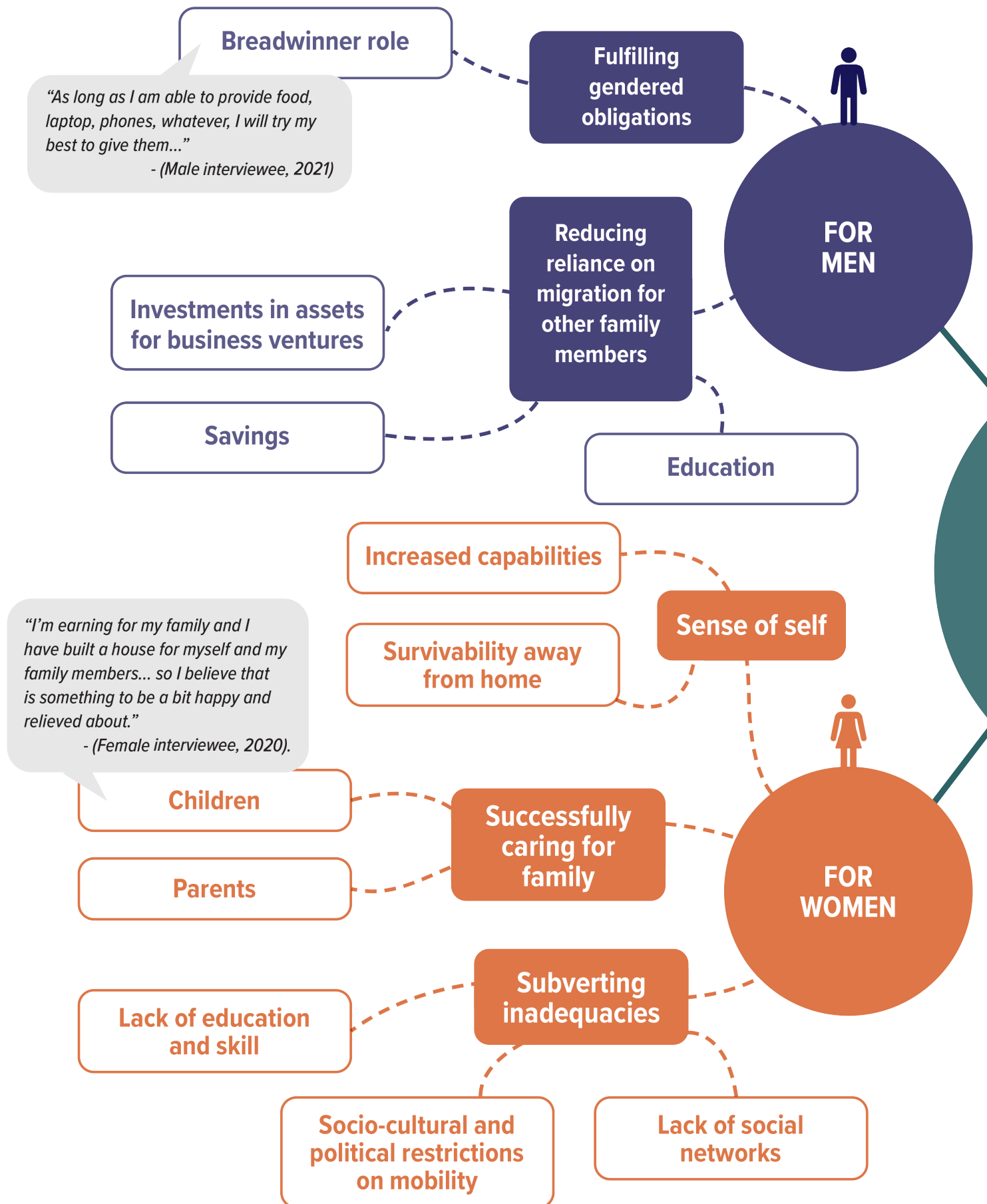
Comparison of what is perceived compared to reality

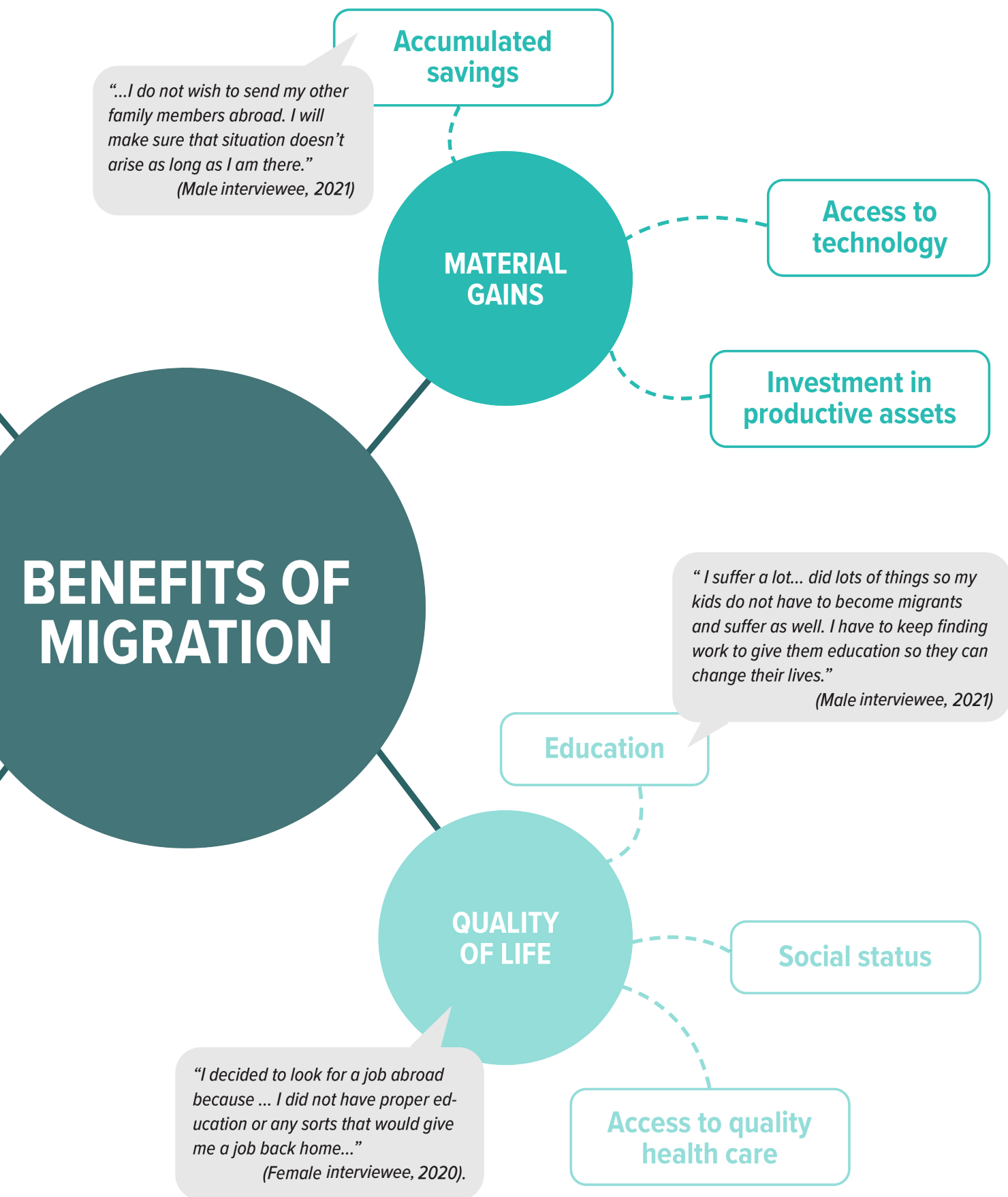


* "Data is based on fieldwork conducted in 2020-2021"

BENEFITS OF MIGRATION*

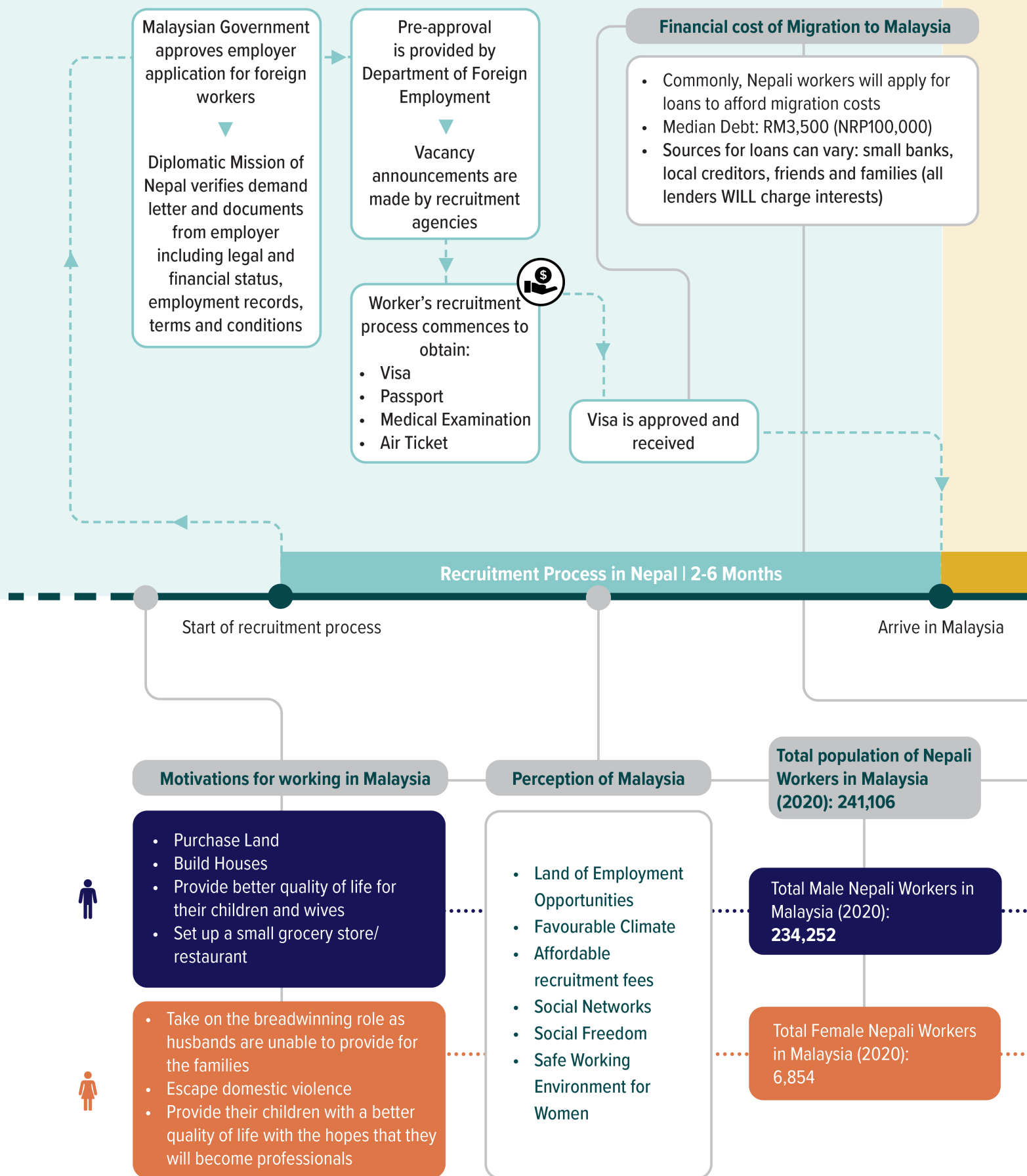
The benefits obtained by Nepali Migrant Workers while working in Malaysia





FULL MIGRATION PROCESS MAP

The Journey of a Nepali Migrant Worker



Realities of working in Malaysia

Manufacturing

- Lenses/optical glass
- Garment
- Raw materials (rubber, paper)
- Electronics
- Food processing

- Personal Sacrifices
- High Expectations of Employers
- Missing family milestones
- Long Hours
- Dangerous working conditions
- Low Wage
- Loneliness/ Homesickness
- Regrets
- Treated like animals

Service

- Retail
- Security Guarding
- Food & Beverages

- Personal Sacrifices
- Crowded dorms
- Long Hours
- No Days Off
- Missing family milestones
- Treated like animals
- Loneliness/ Homesickness
- Regrets

Assignment of sector

Work Visa Validity | 3-10 years

Employment



Financial cost of Migration

- Loan repayment 6 months to 5 years (depending on the existing debt on top of migration loan) - local creditors will charge 14-18% (2020) interest rates on the migration loans
- The use of land, house, livestock as "collateral"/"pawn" with their creditor for money borrowed

- Loan repayment 6 months to 5 years (depending on the existing debt on top of migration loan) - most loans are borrowed by their husbands
- Family/husbands need to use their land, house, livestock as "collateral"/"pawn" with their creditor for money borrowed

Average monthly earnings & expense

- Average Earnings: RM1,229.95

- Migration cost: Average of RM200- RM300 is deducted a month from their salaries
- Housing: Average RM50 - RM100
- Water and electricity: Varies in amount
- Levies for employment: Varies in amount
- Visa renewal: Varies in amount

LEGEND:



Loan



Male Nepali Migrant Worker



Female Nepali Migrant Worker

CONCLUSION

This brief preliminary report has shown the key characteristics and realities of work migration along the Nepal-Malaysia Corridor.

While migration motivations and expectations may be generally similar between Nepali men and women, there are nevertheless some differences between them as to why they chose to leave their countries for work and what they hope to achieve while they are away from their families. These differences are influenced by knowledge and perceptions gained from social networks of other aspiring and returnee migrants, village intermediaries and state representatives. However, the reality of everyday experiences once they reach Malaysia can contradict the information, expectations, gains and costs for migrant workers.

Our findings have uncovered various issues that require more in-depth study. Firstly, certain forms of exploitation can occur based on sectors of employment and their gender composition. Interviews reveal that the most apparent and debilitating forms of exploitation for female Nepali migrants occur for those who are usually employed by human resource outsourcing companies and placed in factories. This historically feminised sector continues to mistreat foreign female workers through unlawful practices such as overcharging for recruitment, extra deductions in salaries and spreading misinformation about labour rights. As such, more research is needed to empower women along the corridor so they are continuously aware of their rights as contributors to the Malaysian and Nepali economies.

A related area that requires more research is the issue of knowledge dissemination amongst aspiring migrant workers. Interviews with Nepali migrant workers reveal that unlike high-waged migrants, labour migrants in Malaysia are not highly educated. Subsequently, there are gaps in their knowledge and understanding of information provided by their social networks and the recruitment agencies. These gaps translate to harsh realities in worker mistreatment and in some instances, blatant exploitation.

shaped by the lack of formal and consistent access workers have to channels or avenues to learn about their rights and to seek recourse. This access also varies when factors like geographical origins, access to social networks and gender are considered.

Another major issue that has come up is the cost of migration. Like other foreign migrant workers coming to Malaysia, Nepali migrant workers are initially employed through the usual formal channels. However, interviews with Nepali migrant workers have revealed that several intermediaries and informal actors are also involved in the recruitment process before they reach out to legal intermediaries such as manpower companies in Nepal and Malaysian employers. This has repercussions on migration cost and their employment status. More research is needed to uncover the complexities of this process.

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