

## **Deceived Lal Bahadur Finds Hope through Migrant Resource Center**

The COVID-19 pandemic, combined with imposed lockdowns to contain the virus, affected people globally in unprecedented ways, leading to social, economic and psychosocial problems. Migrant workers, who were already vulnerable to human rights violation and exploitation, faced even more problems. Some of the major issues were unavailability of work, contract violations, health and safety issues, confiscation of passports, and deception.

Lal Bahadur Koli from Dhangadhi, the far west region of Nepal, was one victim of deception. A daily wage labourer by profession, Lal Bahadur struggled to fend for his family of seven and educate his children. "My family depended on my income as a daily wage labourer which was barely sufficient," says Lal Bahadur. Meeting the daily household expenses, along with educating his three children, was a challenge. He says, "It was frustrating, and I was looking for a way to make a decent living for my family."

While scrambling to find a job, Lal Bahadur met a person who soon turned into his friend. Lal Bahadur shared his struggles with his newfound friend, who proposed him a job in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Happy with the proposal, Lal Bahadur consulted with his family and arranged NPR 150, 000 (CHF 1,158) to pay his friend for the recruitment process.

Dreaming of a comfortable life for his family, Lal Bahadur flew to UAE in 2020, with a job assurance as a security guard on a visit visa. When he landed at the airport, no one came to receive him. New to the country and stranded at the airport, he had to beg and spent several nights under the open sky. His several efforts to contact the agent went futile.

Luckily, he met a distant relative who took him to his rented apartment. Unfortunately, his relative was jobless too and could not continue supporting him. Lal Bahadur borrowed some money from the relative and moved to a low-cost shelter, operated to support the people in need. Meanwhile, he also approached several companies, but none of them were hiring because of the surge in COVID-19 cases.

With no hope left, Lal Bahadur shared his plight with his wife back home. She immediately approached a returnee volunteer in her community mobilized under the Safer Migration (SaMi) project. The returnee volunteer connected his wife with the Migrant Resource Center (MRC). The MRC referred Lal Bahadur's case to a Pravasi Nepali Coordination Committee (PNCC), one of the national partners of SaMi project who facilitates access to justice for migrant workers.

The outreach staff of PNCC searched for Lal Bahadur in the UAE and coordinated with the Nepali Embassy for necessary documentation, as his visit visa had already expired. Back home, his wife was in regular communication with the MRC and getting updates on the situation. She took out a loan of NPR 100,000 (CHF 772) from a local women savings and credit group for Lal Bahadur's return ticket.

After his return, the PNCC further supported Lal Bahadur with NPR 25, 000 (CHF 193) from their own resources to set up his livelihood. Lal Bahadur added to that amount and bought a buffalo. He now runs a dairy business and sells about four liters of milk daily. He has also bought an auto-rickshaw helping him earn additional money for his family. Despite the challenges, he is fulfilling his dream of having a comfortable life for his family.



Lal Bahadur is among 2,179 individuals who received paralegal support from SaMi in 2020-2021. Last year, the MRCs of SaMi provided information and other related support to 108,803 individuals, including 25.3 percent women, in 38 districts of project intervention.

#### *About the Project*

*SaMi is a bilateral project between the Government of Nepal and the Government of Switzerland, implemented by the Ministry of Labor Employment and Social Security and 156 participating local governments. Helvetas Nepal provides technical assistance to the project on behalf of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).*

*The MRCs act as a hub for the coordination of project activities and refer the visitors to relevant support services. The MRCs provide information and counseling to the potential and returnee migrants and their family members. They provide information about skills training and refer the potential candidates to the training institutes. They also facilitate for the referral of legal and paralegal cases and coordinate for financial literacy trainings and psychosocial counseling support and referral. The MRCs are within the District Administration Office (DAO) premises, as DAO processes passport applications. Although the pandemic and the lockdowns affected many project activities, the MRCs continued to function by adopting virtual means to provide the services. They provided counselling to the beneficiaries and helped in facilitating cases over the telephone.*