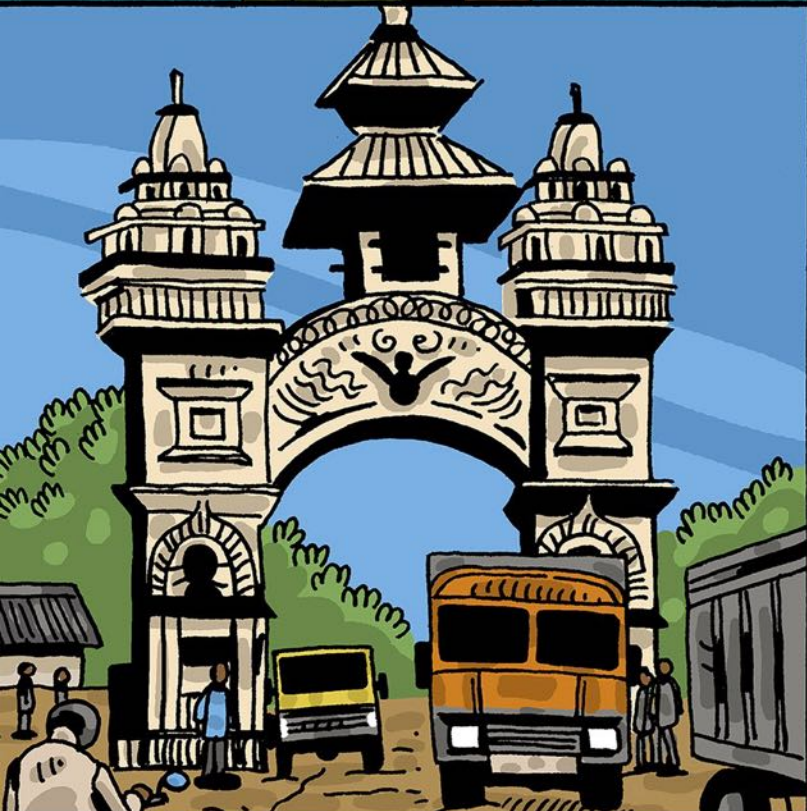


Modern Slavery - Nepal

No Identity, No Protection: We have no choice



**Freedom Fund
Modern Slavery
Credits**

Nepal

Produced with research from

Nepal Institute for Social and Environmental Research, United Nations University Centre for Policy Research and the Freedom Fund

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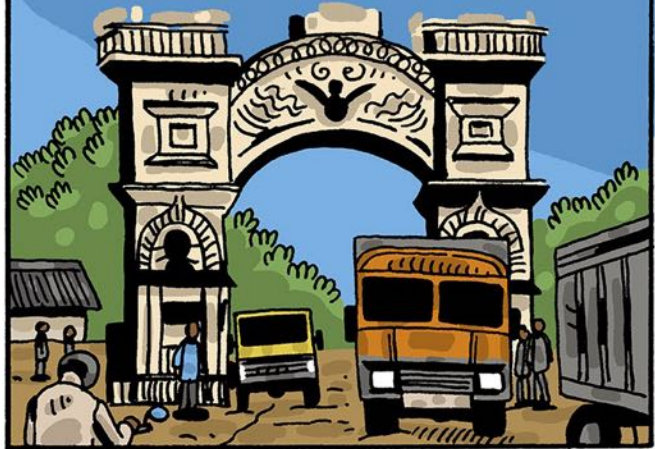


Nepal's historically porous border with India has resulted in a situation where citizenship can be a very messy issue.

NEPAL

INDIA

Many communities live and work in informal economies across this border and have done so for generations. People cross daily to work, shop and trade.



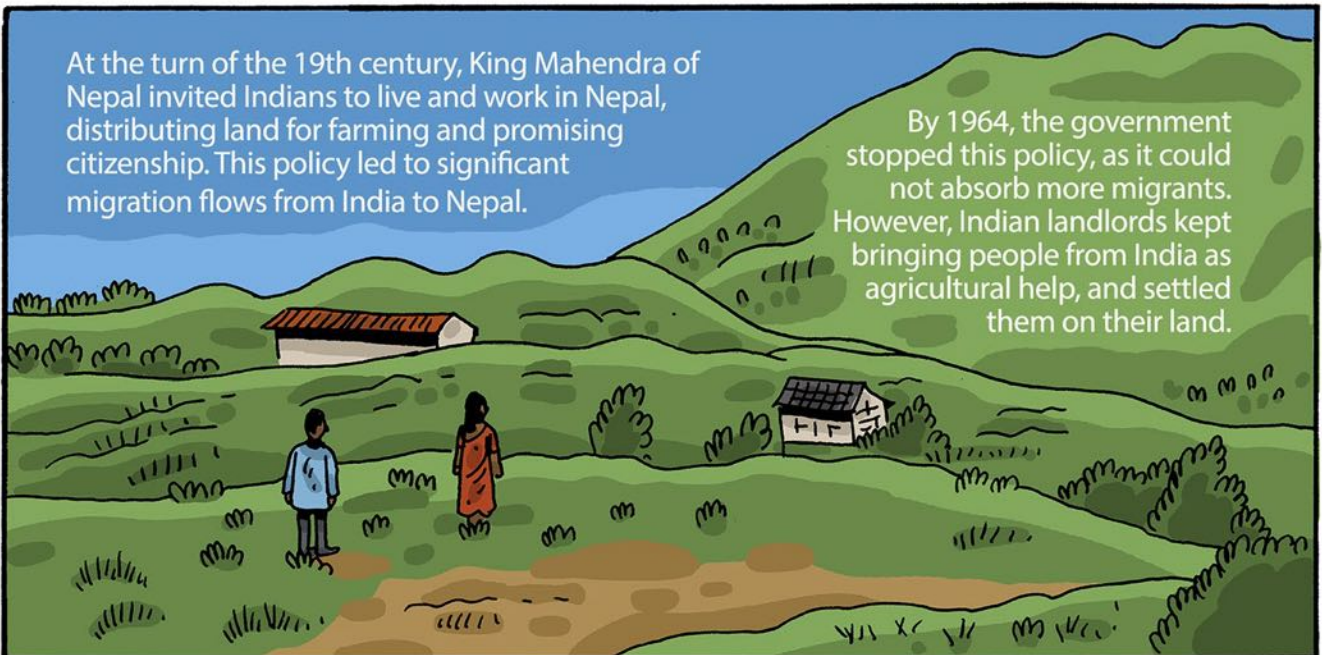
Cultural and familial links within these border communities are deep set and long standing.



Community arrangements and local understanding are often more important than centralised state infrastructure.

At the turn of the 19th century, King Mahendra of Nepal invited Indians to live and work in Nepal, distributing land for farming and promising citizenship. This policy led to significant migration flows from India to Nepal.

By 1964, the government stopped this policy, as it could not absorb more migrants. However, Indian landlords kept bringing people from India as agricultural help, and settled them on their land.



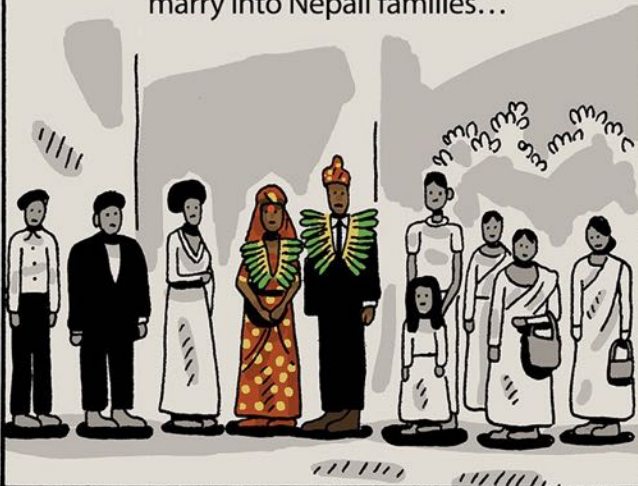
The government distributed Nepali citizenship to many but most recipients were Indian landlords, and the labourers were excluded.



This left many agricultural labourers in very precarious situations, bound to land owners, with few options or choices. They are not the only ones without access to citizenship...



For generations people have migrated across the border to marry and work. Often very young Indian women will marry into Nepali families...



Over time, links that once existed to her Indian family can become broken.



In this situation a person is rendered stateless, unable to prove any citizenship and unable to claim rights within Nepal. Even with recent amendments to the Citizenship Act, new laws are not always followed by local officials or known about in communities. Sometimes there is a gap between what the law states and the experiences of people's lives.



These, and other factors, have combined to mean that many people lack documentation and are forced into potentially exploitative or dependent economic relationships - including forms of modern slavery.



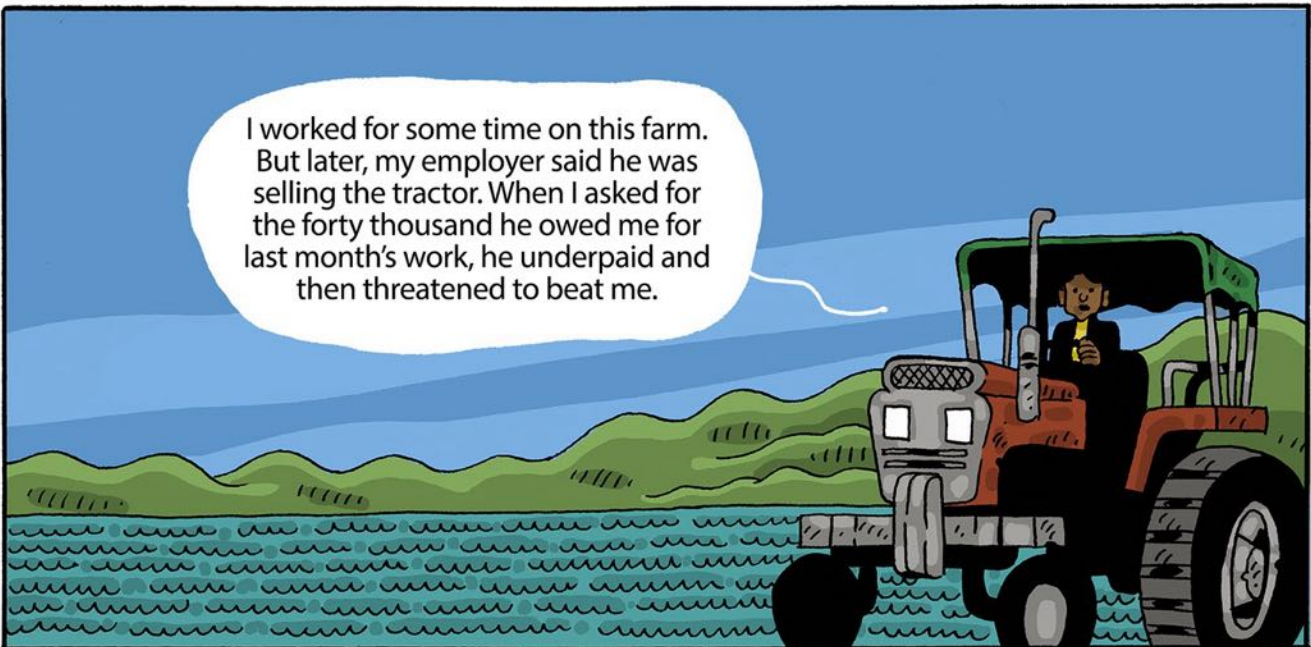
I have lived here all my life, just like my father and his father before him. This place is filled with my family's memories. My father did not see the need for a citizenship certificate. Now I can't get one.



Work is hard. I know how to drive, but I cannot get a licence because I don't have a citizenship card. Owners do not want a driver without a licence. So, I have to work informally and accept a very low wage or non-payment.



I worked for some time on this farm. But later, my employer said he was selling the tractor. When I asked for the forty thousand he owed me for last month's work, he underpaid and then threatened to beat me.



I also used to work as a teacher in a private school but they paid me half of what they would pay other teachers. I asked for a raise and they said they will not employ a person without citizenship.



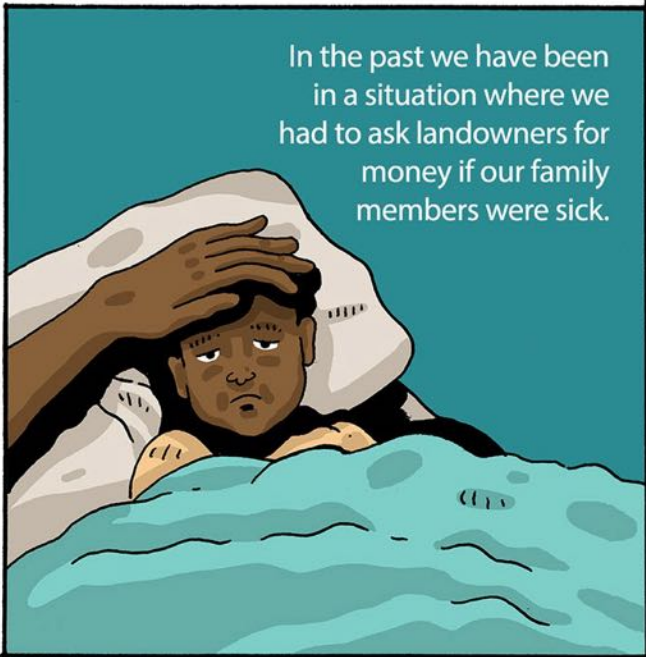
I cannot save my money in a bank or community saving group because I don't have citizenship. I also cannot get loans from these institutions.



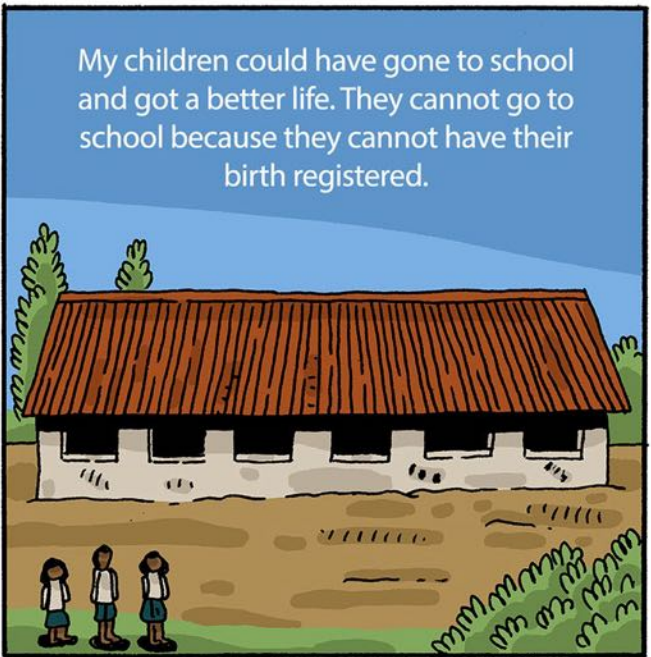


With a citizenship card I would have a contract for my job and be sure of payments. I could support my family. Right now, I have nothing to bring my children up.

I would have a choice. I have never had a choice.



In the past we have been in a situation where we had to ask landowners for money if our family members were sick.



My children could have gone to school and got a better life. They cannot go to school because they cannot have their birth registered.

I am from Nepal and so are my parents. But I got married in India and lived there for some time.



My husband was also born in Nepal but his mother is from India.

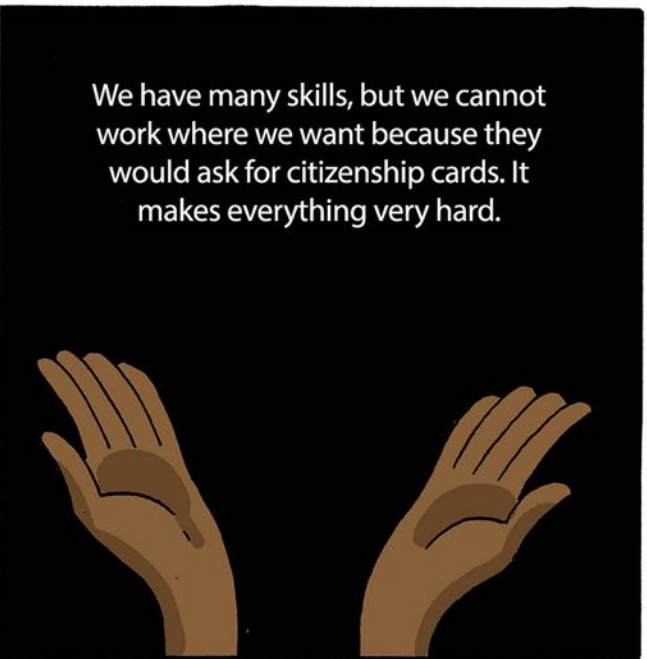
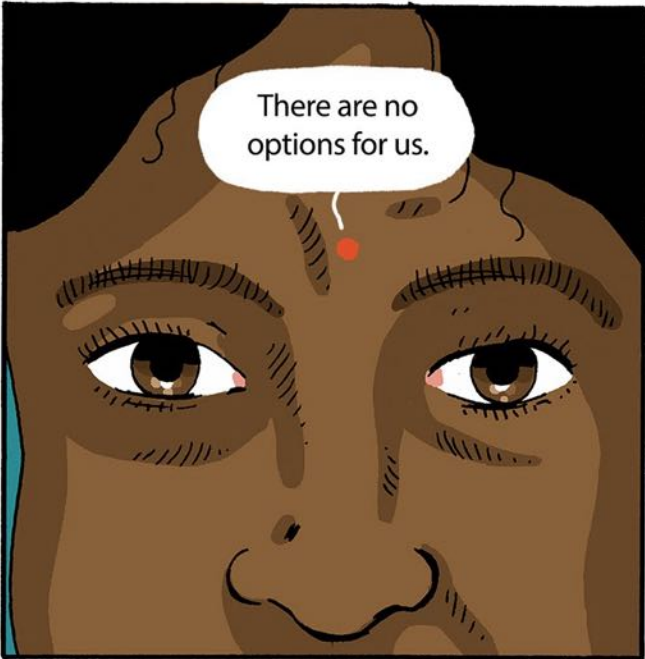


When his parents could not get a citizenship card, they returned to India. Then I got married to him.



I have already been back here for many years and I am still unable to get any documents. I feel stuck and I do not know how to move forward.





I am 72 years old. I came here when I was very young, with my husband.



He was born in India and came here as a child. He does not remember his parents' whereabouts, and that is why he does not have a citizenship card.



I don't have a citizenship card either. My parents disowned me after I married out of my choice. So, they would not fill the reference form for me.



Even though we've worked hard and lived prudent lives, without the citizenship card, it's impossible for us to own land.



We labour on other people's land, knowing it will never be ours. We have no choice; this is the work we've always done, the work we have to do.



If I had had a citizenship card, I would have been able to visit my sister in India over the years. But the police on the Indian side did not allow me to cross the border without showing my Nepali citizenship.



...I would have also had the old age allowance.



...I could have crossed the border to India and bought food and medicine for a cheaper price.



I have always been told that citizenship is hard and expensive to get so I never seriously tried.



But the local government has recently tried to make things better, and yesterday I finally got my citizenship card. It did not even cost a day's wage! It's never too late to enjoy the benefits, even at my age.



This comic has been illustrated by **Daniel Locke** and produced by **Positive Negatives** from research by the **Nepal Institute for Social and Environmental Research (NISER)** and **United Nations University Centre for Policy Research**, in partnership with the **Freedom Fund**.

The research in the Nepal case examined how a lack of access to citizenship cards significantly raises the risks of modern slavery, including bonded labour. It focuses on the challenges faced by those without documentation, who are often forced to work in the informal sector and trapped in exploitative conditions.

The research addresses these critical documentation gaps, advocating for targeted policy interventions to reduce vulnerabilities and exploitation.

You can learn more about the findings of the research in the full report entitled "No Identity No Protection: How lack of documentation drives modern slavery."



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