

LABOUR MIGRATION FROM BANGLADESH 2014 ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES



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A family displaced by riverbank erosion in Munshiganj now lives in a boat

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International Labour Migration from Bangladesh 2014

Achievements and Challenges

Migration plays an important role in the national economy of Bangladesh. Recent studies on migration (BBS 2014, RMMRU-SDC 2014) have also captured the impact of migration on local economies of the country. Studies show that poverty rate in migrant families is 13% lower than the national poverty rate of Bangladesh (RMMRU-SDC 2014). Migration governance should be made integral part of all its development strategy if Bangladesh aims to fulfill its dream of transforming itself into a middle income country and reduce the level of national poverty. This report makes an assessment of the challenges faced and achievements of the government, the private sector and the civil society in migration sector.

1. Labour Migration from Bangladesh 2014

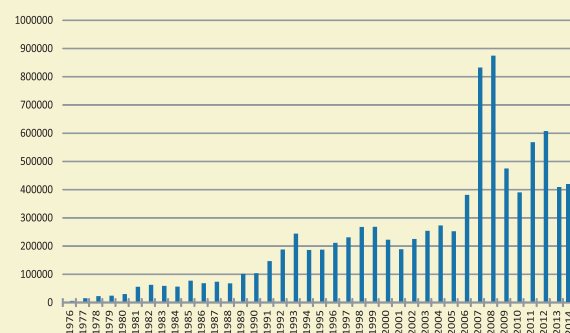
1.1 Statistics

No substantial upward trend is observed in 2014 in respect to flow of international labour migration from Bangladesh. Compared to the previous year, migration flow increased only by 3.85% in 2014. This is still 29.5% lower compared to the growth rate attained in 2012. Bangladesh has experienced the highest flow of outward migration in 2008. That year more than eight hundred thousand workers went abroad on short-term contract. In 2009 and 2010 this figure slowed down to almost half due to the global financial crisis. Again in the next two years (2011 and 2012) migration flow from Bangladesh increased marginally compared to their previous years. In 2012, a total of 607,798 workers went abroad for employment. In 2013 the

number of international migrants was 409,253. This year, a total of 425,684 workers have gone abroad for employment.

According to BMET database, from 1976 to December 2014, more than 9 million people had migrated overseas for work. However, as there is no system of keeping data on returnee migrants, it is impossible to ascertain the total number of migrants currently working abroad. There is no reason to think that 9 million workers who went abroad with BMET clearance are still working there. The following graph demonstrates year wise labour flow from Bangladesh.

Graph: Labour migration from Bangladesh from 1976 to 2014



1.2 Female migration 2014

From 2012, female migration from Bangladesh has increased significantly compared to male migration. This year a total of 76,007 female workers have gone abroad for work, which is almost 18% of the total flow. Last year the number of female migrant was 56,400 and it was 13.78% of the total flow. A cursory look at the BMET data shows that from 1991 to December 2014, a total of 352,269 female workers went overseas for employment. Lebanon is the most

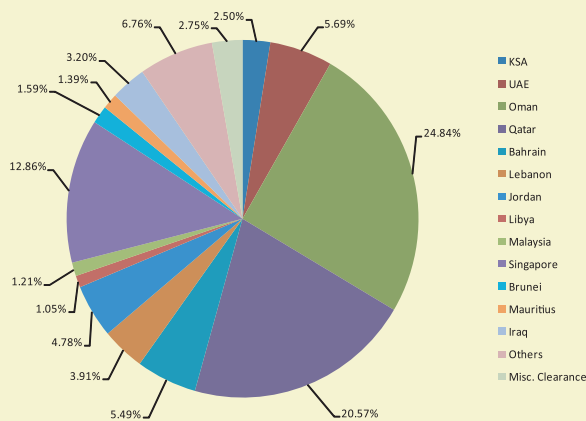


common destination, receiving 91,333 Bangladeshi female migrants. In the face of reduced entry to markets for male migration, the government is focusing more on female labour market.

1.3 Countries of Destination

Most Bangladeshi short-term contract workers migrate to the Gulf and other Arab countries. This year is no exception. In 2014, 84% of the Bangladeshi workers migrated to the Gulf and other Arab countries. The average flow of migration over the last 38 years also depicts the same scenario (82%). The remaining 18% went mostly to different South East Asian countries. The highest number of migration to the Gulf and other Arab countries took place in 1991 with almost 97.30% and lowest in 2007 with 58.10% of the overseas migrant of that year.

Chart 1: Destination countries of Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2014



In 2014, Oman received the highest number of Bangladeshi workers. A total of 105,748 workers migrated to Oman which constitutes 24.84% of the total flow. Qatar received the second highest number. A total of 87,585 workers migrated to Qatar (20.57%). This was 6.5% higher than the previous year. By receiving 54,750 workers, Singapore accounts for the third highest migrant flow from Bangladesh. This year 12.86% of the

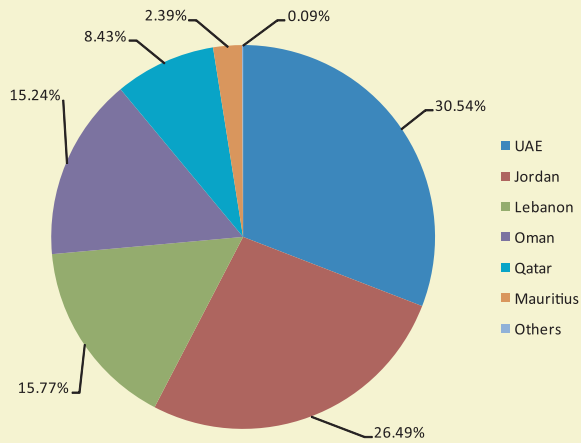
total workers went to Singapore. It is 2.2% less than what it received in 2013. Bangladesh has a government to government (G2G) agreement for migration with Malaysia. However, an insignificant number (1.26%) of workers went to Malaysia under this process.

Saudi Arabia imposed a restriction on migration from Bangladesh almost 7 years ago. No major breakthrough in reopening the market took place this year. A total of 10,654 workers had migrated to Saudi Arabia in 2014, which accounts for only 2.50% of the total migrants. The percentage of male labour migration to UAE has drastically dropped since September 2012, after imposing the restriction by the UAE government on male migration. Of the total migrants, this year only 24,232 had migrated to UAE, which is almost 90% less compared to the period before imposition of the restriction. 95% of these workers who went to UAE this year are female. There is no restriction on female migration to UAE from Bangladesh.

Gulf and other Arab countries are also the major labour market for Bangladeshi female migrant workers. In 2014 by receiving 30.54% of the total female migrant workers, UAE was the single most important destination for the Bangladeshi female migrant workers. Jordan (26.49%) is the second highest female migrant receiving country followed by Lebanon (15.77%), Oman (15.24%), Qatar (8.43%) and Mauritius (2.39%). Female migrant workers have been doubled in Oman and Qatar compared to the previous year. Since 2013, a good number of female workers are migrating to less frequent destination countries like Singapore, Hong Kong and Mauritius. As in preceding years, labour migration to politically unstable countries was a major concern for Bangladesh.



Chart 2: Destination countries of Bangladeshi female migrant workers in 2014



Due to internal and ethnic conflict, Bangladesh government stopped sending workers to Libya in August 2014. Despite this, more than 5000 people migrated to Libya in the first half of the year. Currently almost 45000 Bangladeshi workers are working in different cities of Libya. Six Bangladeshi workers died in conflict prone Benghazi town of Libya.

1.4 Skills

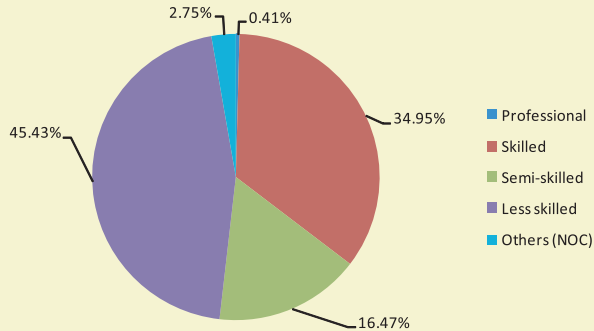
In 2014, 34.95% of the total migrant workers went abroad in skilled category. In 2013, this percentage was only 19.94%. The figure shows that migration of skilled workers has increased almost 16% in 2014. Most of the skilled workers went abroad this year, are women. They mostly went as domestic workers and cleaners. In the international context, domestic workers, cleaners etc. are considered as lowly skilled workers. However, as BMET provides training to female migrant workers who went abroad for domestic and cleaning work, it recorded them under skilled workers. Therefore, in reality the number of skilled workers did not increase. The workers who were earlier recorded



Pre-departure skill training sessions for aspirant migrants



Chart 3: Skill composition of Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2014



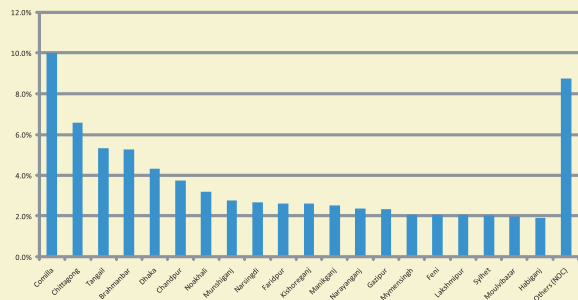
as less skilled, got recorded as skilled this year. 45.43% of the workers belong to low skilled workers, 16.47% to semi-skilled and 0.41% to professional category in 2014. In case of male migration, Bangladesh is still dependent on the less skilled labour.

1.5 Source areas

Like previous year, Comilla continues to top the list of migrant source districts. Almost 10% of the total migration takes place from Comilla district. Chittagong is in second position holding that of previous year (6.62%). After Comilla and Chittagong, the next 8 highest source districts are Tangail (5.27%), Bhahmanbaria (5.22%), Dhaka (4.34%), Chandpur (3.77%), Noakhali (3.23%), Munshigonj (2.79%), Narsingdi (2.68%) and Faridpur (2.63%). Like previous years this year as well very insignificant number of workers migrated from northern part of the country. Although there was a plan to increase migration from northern part of Bangladesh and a 4% reserve quota was set for the northern districts with severe poverty, it is yet to have any real effect. Besides, in the list of top 20 source areas for international migration, the southern districts of Satkhira, Bagherhat, Barisal, Patuakhali,

Barguna and Bhola are absent. Migration is still taking place from the traditional source areas with established social network. BMET data inform that Naogaon accounted for 0.85% of total flow, Gaibandha 0.49%, Rangpur 0.41%, Kurigram 0.28% and Panchagar only 0.11%. The graph below reveals very negligible number of people had migrated from poverty-affected Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions in 2014. A recent report of

Graph 2: Source areas of Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2014



RMMRU shows that the number of poor people had decreased in those areas from where significant number of international migration takes place (RMMRU-SDC 2014).

1.6 Returnee migrants

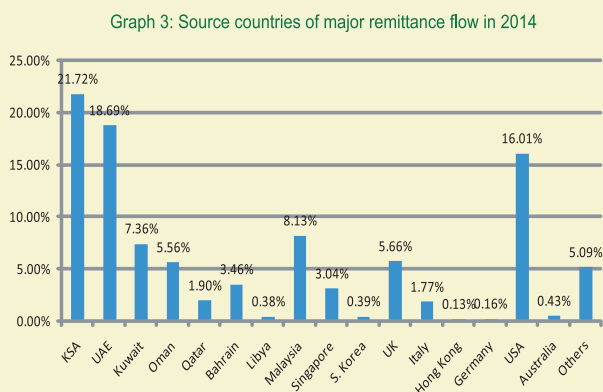
In the absence of systematic data it is not possible to figure out the total number of migrants who had returned home on completion of their contracts. Lack of information on returnee migrants hinders public or private sector organizations to use the skills of returnee migrants within the country. There is no job portal for returnee migrants. It is further complicated when it comes to female migrant workers. Skills they gain as domestic workers do not create job opportunities once they return. Due to social and cultural stigma, returnee domestic workers do not engage in the same profession. Studies have shown that they do not



bring enough capital home to start any enterprise. In the absence of a job portal of returnees the skills of returnee migrants cannot be systematically harnessed.

1.7 Remittance

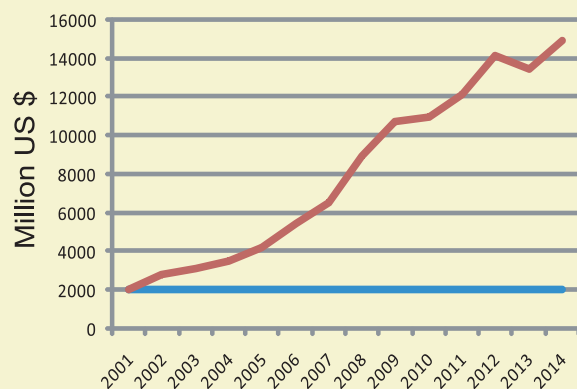
In 2014, Bangladesh received US\$14.94 billion as remittance. The flow is 5.3% higher than the previous year. Bangladesh is in 7th position among the highest remittance receiving countries of the world in 2014. In 2013, there was a downward remittance flow and it was 2.75% less than 2012. This sudden negative growth of remittance affected the economy of Bangladesh. During last year Bangladesh Bank has initiated different action plan. It is due to that despite reduced flow of migration, inbound remittance has increased. Bangladesh Bank took proactive role in reducing the cost of remittance transfer. It encouraged opening booths of exchange houses in dispersed areas of destination, organizing road shows in different Gulf countries, easing restrictions on transfer of remittance through mobile solutions. With these initiatives, flow of remittance through formal channel has increased and a positive growth has been observed.



As last year, this year as well Saudi Arabia is the highest remittance sending country for Bangladesh (21.72%). It is followed by UAE (18.69%) and the USA (16.01%).

Due to six years ban on migration flow from Bangladesh to Saudi Arabia, share of remittance flow has been falling each year. Even a few years back, 50% of the total remittance received was from Saudi Arabia, whereas it stands at 21% now. Remittance flow has increased from Malaysia and Oman in 2014 compared to the previous year. In 2013, Bangladesh received 7.22% and 4.5% from Malaysia and Oman respectively. Compared to last year it rose to 8.13% and 5.56% respectively. From the top three highest labour sending countries of 2014, Bangladesh received 5.56% from Oman, 1.90% from Qatar and 3.04% from Singapore, out of the total remittance received in formal channel. A recently published report by ILO estimated that approximately 30-40% of the annual remittance to Bangladesh still comes through informal channel. This means, amount of actual remittance flow to the country should be 30-40% higher than the official flow.

Graph 4: Remittance flow from 2001-2014





1.8 Complaints

To provide assistance to deceived migrants, BMET receives complaints in two ways: through online (www.ovijogbmet.org) and in-person at BMET premise. BMET launched online complaints system in September 2009 with technical assistance from RMMRU. From its inception up to December 2014, a total of 550 online complaints have been lodged. 311 of them have already been settled, hearing has been completed in 226 cases, 8 complaints are under investigation and 5 complaints are pending attention. This year a total of 23 complaints were lodged of which hearing has been completed in 16 cases, 4 complaints are in pending and 3 are under investigation. Till 9 December, no case has been settled that were filed in 2014. Interestingly, almost half (11) of the online complaints filed in BMET is from UAE. The rest are from Oman (5), Jordan (3), Iraq (2) and one each from Qatar and Sudan. Out of these 23 online complaints only one case has been filed by a female migrant. Generally, poor access and lack of skills is a major impediment in the process of lodging online complaints. On the other hand, a total of 140 in person complaints has been filed in BMET in 2014.

2. Important Events in Migration Sector 2014

2.1 Irregular Maritime Migration

Irregular migration from Bangladesh continues to be a major concern. Migration to Malaysia by the irregular route across the Bay of Bengal was regularly reported in the newspapers throughout 2014. Brokers and informal agents have been processing such risky migration from almost half of the districts of Bangladesh. These brokers and

agents used innovative techniques in luring people to migrate through irregular channels.

According to UNHCR, in July 2014, almost 87,000 people have migrated to Malaysia by sea. This is 61% higher than the previous year. In its Trend Report of 2012, RMMRU expressed its concern over irregular maritime migration. It predicted that if adequate steps are not taken to address the problem, then it would affect regular labour market of Bangladesh and put the life of potential migrants in danger. However, authorities did not pay heed to RMMRU's concern. Newspaper reports inform that, more than 540 Bangladeshis died at sea in 2014.

Through such risky voyages, a section of those who could reach Thailand, are employed in Thai fishing industry in slave like condition and the rest gradually find job in rubber and palm plantation in Malaysia. In most cases they paid minimum salary and some have to settle for without salary. In October 17, 2014 around 171 migrant workers were rescued from the jungles of Thailand and of them 118 were Bangladeshis. In 2014, approximately 700 Bangladeshi migrants were rescued from Thai coastal belt and forests close to sea¹. A recent report by RMMRU revealed that more than 4000 people have migrated to Malaysia through maritime routes, from only 7 upazillas of Sirjaganj district. As of December 28, around 500 people are still missing and 250 people are reportedly detained in different jails of Thailand².

¹ BBC, "Bangladeshi slaves rescued from Thai jungle", 17 October, 2014

² RMMRU press conference on 'Irregular migration to Malaysia Through Sea Route and application of Migration law 2013', 22 November, 2014



A strong and well organized group of agents, those who are well known in localities lure people to migrate to Malaysia by charging amounts that varied between Tk 10,000 to Tk. 100,000. Once they are convinced, they begin their journey by boat. After weeks, while the migrants are at sea, the human smugglers demand around Tk. 220,000 to 250,000 by making them hostage. If the families of the migrants fail to send the ransom, these brokers/human smugglers torture and in cases beat or push them to death in high seas.

It is understood that recently an irregular maritime route is being discovered for smuggling workers to UAE through cargo vessels. A few incidents have been reported in which people migrated to the UAE using cargo vessels. Bangladesh government and concerned authorities should take immediate step to investigate these reports, identify the routes and perpetrators, and take action against them to avoid a situation similar to that of Malaysia and Thailand.

2.2 Migration to Malaysia under G2G process

Like 2013, this year as well only 5,191 workers could migrate to Malaysia under G2G system. Tenaganita, a human rights organization in Malaysia, identified corruption among the government and practice of taking money by the employers against job contract as two major hindrances in the process of operationalizing G2G. In the previous section we have seen that Malaysian employers are interested to take Bangladeshi workers. The constraint of the G2G system has to some extent contributed to development of irregular migration through sea route. Under these circumstances, if



Journalists and participants observing a "moment of silence" at RMMRU press conference to pay respect to migrants who died at sea



A left behind wife of a migrant from Satkhira



Bangladesh wants to keep the avenue of formal migration open, then it should re-evaluate the G2G policy and bring in necessary changes.

2.3 Migration and Climate Change

In a joint study of RMMRU with the University of Sussex, it is found that the areas which are exposed to climate change or are at risk are experiencing a significant flow of out migration. According to the study findings, approximately 16 to 26 million people will migrate from their place of origin. In last population census, 29 upazillas reported a negative population growth. These areas are highly affected by flood, cyclone and riverbank erosion.

Scrutiny of newspaper reports on migration source areas of irregular flow through Bay of Bengal shows that except for a few, almost all of them are from climate stressed areas. The areas are Satkhira, Khulna, Bagherhat, Bhola, Sirajganj, Kurigram, Rangpur and Barisal. These areas are affected by cyclone, riverbank erosion, flood and other natural disasters. Traditionally short term contract migration did not take place from these areas. Given the loss of livelihood in the face of climatic stresses and the desire of affected people to find alternative livelihoods at a 'low cost' has made them easy prey of human smugglers.

2.4 High cost of migration

RMMRU has completed a countrywide study in 17 districts of all 7 divisions of Bangladesh titled "Impact of Migration on Poverty and Local Development" during September 2013 to November 2014 (RMMRU-SDC, 2014). Findings reveal that those who had migrated this year to Saudi Arabia had spent an average of

Tk. 676,000. In case of Kuwait it was Tk. 180,000. Average cost of migration to Oman was Tk. 250,000 (highest 700,000), Malaysia Tk. 260,000 and Singapore Tk. 385,000. The government stipulated a cost of only Tk. 34,900 for a female worker to migrate. The employer will bear the plane fare and commission to the recruiting agency. But the study found that the female migrants are spending Tk. 94,000 on average to migrate from Bangladesh. Although only 10,000 workers had gone to Malaysia under G2G, everyday a large number of people are going to that country with student and tourist visas. They are spending around Tk. 300,000 to 400,000 as migration cost. There is hardly any visible impact of the government's migration cost reduction programme. In a report ILO suggested that to migrate to UAE, Oman, Malaysia and Singapore the cost should be between BDT 40,000 to BDT 45,000 including air ticket, medical checkup, insurance, service charge and application fees. But in reality, migrants are spending on average BDT 350,000 to BDT 400,000 to migrate to those countries. In fact, Bangladeshi migrant workers are spending approximately 7 times higher than the actual cost to migrate to these countries (ILO, 2014).

2.5 Bangladeshi workers stranded in Iraq

As per the report of three human rights organizations³ and NGOs in 2014, 180 workers from 37 districts of Bangladesh were stranded in Iraqi city of Najaf. They were confined in a company premise named Abu Torab, against their wishes and without adequate food, water and sanitary toilet facilities. Victim families got in

³ Rights Jessore, SHISUK and Coordination Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh organized a Press Conference at the National Press Club on this issue on December 3 2014



touch with NGOs to seek support for their return to Bangladesh or to provide them job in secured companies in Iraq.

According to the workers and their family members, Government agencies and Bangladesh Embassy in Iraq were not supportive to repatriate the migrant workers or in assisting to secure alternative employment elsewhere in Iraq. Members of the victim families expressed that they were threatened and harassed by the police and local administration for filing cases against the recruiting agency.

2.6 Initiatives to reopen the traditional labour market

The government was active in reopening the labour markets in the Gulf region. According to government, Kuwait is reopening the entry of Bangladeshi workers in that country from February 2015. A high level delegation led by Prime Minister visited UAE on October 26 and signed agreement with a private company named Amala to send 2000 female workers but no progress was reported in reopening the market for male workers. Another delegation led by the Prime Minister visited Malaysia on December 3, 2014 and signed an agreement to send 12,000 plantation workers to Sarawak province in Malaysia beginning from early 2015. Sarawak is an isolated and hard-to-reach area in Malaysia. It is also worrisome that there is hardly any presence of civil society organization dealing with migrants in Sarawak, who can monitor or protect the workers.



Investment of remittance in handloom factory in Tangail



Investment of remittance in small grocery shop in Kustia



2.7 Safety of Female Workers

Human Rights Watch published a report in 2014 on female domestic workers who are working in UAE (I already bought you). A total of 99 female domestic workers who migrated from Bangladesh, the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia to UAE were interviewed in this report.

The report highlighted that although many female workers enjoying relatively good working condition, a section of them face physical and sexual harassment, torture, confinement at home, no or late payment of salary, working for long hours without rest, inadequate food, bad living conditions, and lack of access to medical care.

2.8 International migration in mainstream media

Print and electronic media are playing an important role in highlighting the plight of migrants. A primary assessment of the news reports of 2013 and 2014 of four selected newspapers found that those have covered news on migration issues with more importance compared to the previous year. Covering different migration issues, a total of 431 reports were published in 2014 as against 299 in 2013. It was a 30% increase over 2013. Analysing the published reports it is found that, there were 55 reports in these four newspapers on irregular migration, which is almost 12.8% of the total reports. There were 66 reports on fraudulence and violation of terms of employment between employers and migrant workers, which is 15.3% of the total report. Newspapers have also given importance to report on new labour markets. A total of 75 reports have been published in these four newspapers, which is almost 18% of

the total report. Apart from these, 26 reports on climate induced migration (6%) and 13 reports on MRP passport renewal issues have been published in these four newspapers which accounts for 4.4% of the total.

The leading Bangla newspaper, daily Prothom Alo, introduced its Gulf version targeting the Bangladeshi workers in the Gulf region, which is the first of its kind. Targeting migrant workers of Oman, Qatar and Bahrain, this special supplement will support civil societies through providing information on Bangladeshi workers condition in these countries.

3. Legal and Institutional Changes

3.1. Implication of Overseas Employment and Migrant Workers Law, 2013

More than 15 months have been passed since the Overseas Employment and Migrant Workers Law 2013 was enacted. But unfortunately not a single case has been filed under this law despite evidence of plethora of cases of fraudulence and irregular migration that took place in 2014.

A recent study of RMMRU found that institutions and persons, who are empowered to apply this law, are unaware of it. People and institutions which were empowered under this law including police officers, immigration officers, UNO, magistrates, lawyers, migrants and members of their families are also not familiar about this law. Beside this, the law itself has many inconsistencies. There is no obstantive clause under this law. That means the law did not establish that it should take precedence over past legislation in relation to



migration issues. In different places, regarding punishments the law used “can be done” instead of “should be done”.

Article 38, 39 and 40 of the Act are very important. However there are some serious limitations. The law has empowered first class judicial magistrate and some cases Metropolitan magistrates to adjudicate. Metropolitan magistrates do not have the power to sentence more than 10 years.

Moreover, as stated in article 40, this act will be scheduled under the Mobile Court Act 2009 (Act 5 of 2009). Mobile court can give up to one year imprisonment. That means a legal way is kept open to save a criminal by giving one year imprisonment by mobile court.

4. Service providing organizations

4.1. Wage Earners' Welfare Fund

For a long time RMMRU has demanded that the Wage Earners Welfare Fund should be used in those avenues which directly provide services to the migrants. Unfortunately in most of the cases this fund is being used in activities which should be financed from the revenue budget of the government.

A recent study by RMMRU found that, in accordance to the Rules of 2002 the audit of these funds should be conducted by the office of the Auditor General. In reality such audit did not take place on a regular basis (RMMRU 2014). While establishment of pre-migration briefing centers in Dhaka along with other districts is one of the major areas identified in the Rules still no



Five Emmy award winning documentary "Years of living dangerously" drew from RMMRU research findings on Climate Change



step has been taken to establish briefing centers at the district level. Rehabilitation of the returnee migrants is one of the three main purposes of this Fund. However, there is hardly any programme that supports reintegration of returnee migrants. A large amount of money has been spent on various construction projects. The construction of 500 flats for migrants at Vatara of Gulshan has been stopped as it was deemed to be an ill conceived project. The salary of Labour attaches and offices in few of the 17 missions abroad is being paid from these funds which should come from the state revenue.

4.2 Recruiting agency

As per BMET information, currently there are 884 licensed recruiting agencies. In 2014, 32 recruiting agents received new licenses.

4.3 Migrants Welfare Bank

Currently there are 39 branches of Migrants Welfare Bank, with 11 of these branches opening in 2014. Out of the 425,684 migrants who departed for overseas employment in different countries in 2014, 3288 migrants availed loan from this bank. The bank is yet to initiate any scheme that would encourage returnee migrant workers to develop enterprises with loan from the bank. This year only 66 returnee migrants received Tk. 7,855,000 as reintegration loan.

4.4. Government at grassroots: DEMO

In order to provide services to migrant workers at the grassroots, 42 DEMO offices function. Evaluation of institutional structure of these offices reveals that almost half of these offices run without the top functionary and half of the

posts in these offices are vacant. Moreover, the staff members do not receive any specialised training to serve the workers. There are no branches of DEMO offices at Upazilla level. More importantly, BMET functions are extremely centralized.

4.5 Human Resource Development and TTCs of BMET

There are 47 Technical Training Centers (TTCs) under the BMET and 10 of these have been established in 2014. In 2013 about 75,000 participants received training in different skills. In 2014, the number of participants rose to 100,000. Training centers and participants have increased but instructors did not increase proportionally. The problem of lack of human resource is also visible in these TTCs. In 2014, no new trainers have been recruited. On the other hand, a notable number of trainers had retired. Currently, in 13 training centers there are no Principal or Vice-Principals. In the absence of Principal and Vice-Principals it is the instructors who are running the TTCs. These training centers have the capacity of training 30,000 workers per year. The actual number of workers who receive training is three times more than its capacity. In 2013, no new trade or curriculum has been introduced. This year no Training of the Trainers (TOT) has been provided to train even in old trades. In 2014, freelancer course has been introduced in different centers but it may not be suitable for international migrants.

4.6. Labour Attaches

Currently Labour Attaches are posted in 17 countries. RMMRU's recent research reveals that 80% of total complaints placed by the migrants in



2013 were about timeframe required for renewal of passport, issuance of MRP passport, migrant unfriendly locations of embassies, lack of availability of drinking water in embassy premise, lack of sufficient waiting areas, toilet facilities in the embassies and inconvenient and avoidable repeat visits. In general, labour attaches are blamed for this. However, a major portion of these services are provided by the Ministry of Home and Foreign affairs.

Absence of legal advisor in embassies is a major problem in securing legal support in the destination. Because of this, it becomes difficult to receive proper legal advice under the law and judicial system of the concerned state. Most of the embassy staff in Gulf countries are not well versed in Arabic, which leads to problems in communicating and negotiating with their counterparts. Bangladesh is still following the traditional recruitment system for the Labour Attaches'. On the contrary, India and Sri Lanka have established a separate recruitment procedure for the Labour Attaches and recruiting staff that are skilled and well accustomed as found in a recent tri-nation study of RMMRU on Labour Attaches (RMMRU-RPC 2014). The officers and support staffs in Bangladeshi embassies are inadequate considering the large number of migrants working in different countries. There is hardly any shelter home in receiving countries for the female migrant workers. As female migration is increasing at a faster pace, government should allocate resources to establish shelter home, counseling, legal assistance and interpreter services for female workers.



RMMRU documentary 'The Door' highlights the role of labour attaches in destination countries



4.7 Slow pace of Machine Readable Passport Delivery

By November 2015 all Bangladeshi nationals will have to travel with machine readable passports (MRP). Hand written passports will not be acceptable. Till the end of 2014, government could provide MRP to 1.5 million workers and another 6 million workers would require MRP passport. If urgent steps are not taken on this matter, labour migration as a whole will immensely suffer.

New findings of RMMRU research conducted in 2014

In 2014 RMMRU conducted a major study titled “Impact of migration on poverty and local development”. It was conducted in 17 districts of all 7 divisions of Bangladesh. The study found only 13% families of international migrants are living under poverty line whereas 26% of the total population is living under poverty line according to national estimate. This trend highlights the beneficial impact of international migration. The percentage of poverty rate of non migrant and internal migrant families is 40% and 47% respectively. The study also reveals that daily wage is higher in the high migration areas compared to low international migration districts because of the flow of remittances from overseas and shortage of labour in the locality. It is creating employment and job opportunities for non migrant as well as internal migrant through seasonal employment. It is found that, the benefit of international migration is well distributed in local economy, national growth and the overall outlook of the national development discourse of Bangladesh.

Role of Civil Society in Migration Sector

For decades civil society has been playing an important role in the migration sector of Bangladesh. Different private organizations are providing various services like awareness development, redressing complaints, organising refunds to cheated migrants and skill development training. They are playing a vital role in advocating for policy reform. In 2014, BRAC, BOMSA, IMA and RMMRU collectively provided more than 325 training on pre- decision. Altogether, these institutions helped migrants and victim families to get back about 50 million taka against 147 claims through local level settlement. At rural level, these institutions made aware approximately 728,319 people through 11,154 public awareness campaigns and arranged 167 training for migrants before departure.

In order to increase the efficiency, social responsibility and to promote safe migration of women the development partners such as Danchurch Aid, Manusher Jonno Foundation, SDC, ILO, IOM, UN- Women have been supporting activities of local organizations working on migration.

Conclusion

The report shows that international migration from Bangladesh has increased 3.85% in 2014 compared to the previous year. However, the increase is mostly in female migration. In 2014, no new labour market was opened. Despite a low flow of labour, inbound remittance has increased in 2014. The Bangladesh Bank played an important role in bringing remittance through formal channel.



This year, irregular maritime migration has become a major threat for the migration sector of Bangladesh. A very small portion of the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund is used to provide direct services to the migrant workers. There is no regular audit of this fund. The number of trainees are increasing in the government training centers, but there is a lack of trainers compared to the number of trainees. No case has been filed under the migration law despite hundreds of occurrence of migration through irregular route.

Recommendations

- The inconsistencies should be resolved immediately in the Overseas Employment and Migration Act 2013. Lawyers, police, immigration officials, local administration, migrants and their families should be trained on different aspects of the law.
- There should be regular audit of the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund, as well as the publication of annual reports. The fund should be used only for providing direct services to the migrants. Officers, responsible for taking wrong decision in using this fund in projects like Vatara, should be held accountable.
- According to recent RMMRU findings, poverty rate is lower among those households who have international migrants. In such context, programmes are required to include areas affected by climate change. BMET service should decentralize and DEMO offices should be established at upazilla level to provide services and information to the people at grass roots level.
- In order to ensure protection of female migrants RMMRU recommends providing cell phone to female

migrants, establishment of 24 hour emergency hotline services and setting up of safe home.

- Permanent cadre service should be introduced in order to ensure effective and efficient services to migrants in destination.

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RMMRU workshop on Migration and Media

RMMRU invites application for the media fellowships in 2015 for journalists in South Asian region who report on internal and international migration. The fellowships are being offered by RMMRU as a part of RPC on Migrating out of Poverty project for encouraging media coverage and shaping public opinion in concerned countries.

Applications are invited from young journalists from print and electronic media who write or report on migration issues from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. A total of 20 fellowships will be offered on a competitive basis. This will cover accommodation, meals and course materials. The fellowship does not include travel cost to and from Nepal and insurance. Travel cost will be offered only to 10 participants on the basis of the strength of their written newspaper articles and reports on migration. Female journalists are encouraged to apply.

To know more about the fellowship and to download the application form visit www.rmmru.org. Last date of receiving application is 25 May, Monday, 2015.



First Public Interest Litigation in Bangladesh by RMMRU for the Migrant Workers

Overseas Employment and Migration Act-2013 was enacted in October 2013 by the Bangladesh government for the protection of the migrant workers. But unfortunately not a single case has been filed under this law in last 16 months despite evidence of plethora of cases of fraudulence and irregular migration that took place in 2014.

On March 6, 2015 the High Court of Bangladesh asked the government and responsible agencies to explain and show cause in four weeks why they should not be directed to prosecute the people responsible for human trafficking and irregular migration under the enacted law. High Court came up with the Rule after hearing a writ petition filed by Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU).



Courtesy: Dhaka Tribune



RMMRU Forthcoming Publication

Impact of Migration on Poverty and Local Development in Bangladesh

About Book:

Based on the experiences of 5084 internal, international and non-migrant households in seventeen districts of Bangladesh this book provides evidence of significant role of international migration in reducing poverty. As per national data, 26% of people live below poverty line. Compared to that, only 13% of the international migrant HHs under the survey lived below the poverty line. Both male and female migrants contributed to the reduction of household level poverty, but the scale of impact differs. Twelve percent of the male international migrant households lives below poverty line, whereas, 20% of the female international migrant households belong to that category. Along with headcount method the study also used living standard indicators of poverty and human development.

The study shows in comparison to internal and non-migrant households, international migrants contributed more to local level development through investment, consumption and community development work. Compared to internal and non-migrant households' international migrants contributed 31% more to development of local markets through their larger spending capacity. International migration created employment for local non-migrant households. The benefits of international migration are distributed among non-international migrant producing areas through creation of employment for seasonal migrants in international migrant sending areas.

Tasneem Siddiqui
Raisul Awal Mahmood

Impact of Migration on Poverty and Local Development in Bangladesh





Members of the victim families sharing their stories at RMMRU Press Conference on irregular migration held on November 22, 2014

This document is co-authored by Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui, Professor in Political Science and Chair, RMMRU, Md. Ansar Uddin Anas, Communications Officer and Marina Sultana, Former Programme Manager, RMMRU, University of Dhaka. Mr. Parvez Alam, IT Officer at RMMRU prepared statistical information and graphic designing. RMMRU thanks them and deeply acknowledges the contribution of its programme and research divisions. RMMRU further thanks Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) for supporting the publication under its "Sustaining Gains from Migration: Asserting Migrants Rights" (AMR) project.



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