

# LABOUR MIGRATION FROM BANGLADESH 2015

## ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES



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A left behind father of a Nepali migrant interviewed after earthquake by Bangladeshi journalist under RMMRU-RPC programme

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# International Labour Migration from Bangladesh 2015

## Achievements and Challenges

With four decades of active participation in the global labour market, international migration has become a key social, political and economic discourse in Bangladesh. Migration is not only an avenue of employment for a section of those who join the labour force each year, and a source of foreign exchange, it also offers new avenues for attaining various social and economic development goals of governments. 2015 is a particularly eventful year for Bangladesh. At this year's UN Global Forum on Migration and Development, it was agreed that Bangladesh will host the high profile meeting in 2016. To host the event successfully, the government is required to demonstrate best practices in migration governance. Along with the review of the challenges and achievements of the government, the private sector and the civil society organisations working in the migration sector, this report suggests steps that can be taken regarding the migration governance in 2016.

### 1. Labour Migration from Bangladesh 2015

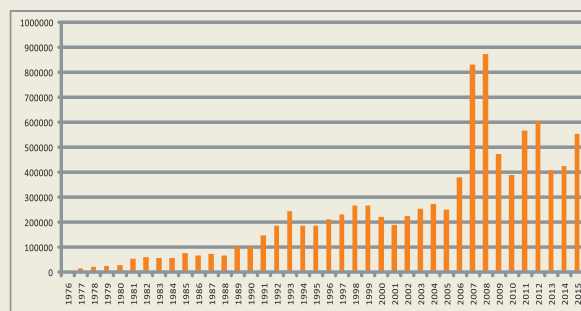
#### 1.1 Statistics

In 2015, more than half a million Bangladeshi workers migrated to the Gulf and other major destination countries. This year, migration flow has increased by 30.50% compared with last year. In fact, the migration flow has increased at a greater rate than in the last four years. This is 35.80% higher compared to the growth rate in 2013. In 2013, a total of 409,253 workers went abroad for employment. Last year, a total of 425,684 workers did so, while in 2015, a total of 5,55,881 workers migrated overseas from Bangladesh.

Different policy and action gaps at national and international levels have been identified as the reasons for the previous years' downward trend in the migration growth rate. The global financial crisis, Arab spring, and policy shifts at the Bangladeshi end as well as at the labour receiving countries' end have been identified as important among these. The pursuit of the Government to Government (G2G) recruitment procedure by the Bangladeshi government, replacing the private recruitment agencies in the case of Malaysia, the restriction placed on the recruitment of Bangladeshi workers in different Gulf countries including Saudi Arabia, and the political turmoil in Libya are some of these. This raises the question, then, of how the migration flow has increased this year, even though the international environment remains similar.

From the BMET data, we can say that, from the year 1976 to December 2015, nearly 10 million people migrated overseas for work. Graph 1 demonstrates the annual labour flow from Bangladesh. However, as there is no system for keeping data on returnee migrants, it is virtually impossible to ascertain the total number. The government, civil society and experts all would like to know the

Graph 1: Labour migration from Bangladesh from 1976 to 2015



Source: Prepared from BMET data.



number of returnees. The recently conducted RMMRU survey found that 29% of the migrant households were returnee migrant HHs (Siddiqui 2015). In this study, only those who have returned within the last 10 years and stayed in Bangladesh for more than a year are considered as returnees. Based on this, an estimation can be made about the national figure of returnee migrants in Bangladesh. From the BMET data, we know that, during the last 10 years, a total of 55,21,838 workers have migrated for work. If 29 percent of them return, then we can say that, during last ten years, 16,01,333 workers have returned.

## 1.2 Female Migration 2015

For the first time in the labour migration history of Bangladesh, the number of female migrants reached new height in 2015, the highest ever flow since records began (1991). The number of female migrants has been rising over the last few years. From January to December 2015, a total of 1,03,718 female workers have already gone abroad to take up employment, which is 22.8% of the total flow. In 2014, the number of female migrants was 76,007, which was 18% of the total flow.

## 1.3 Countries of Destination

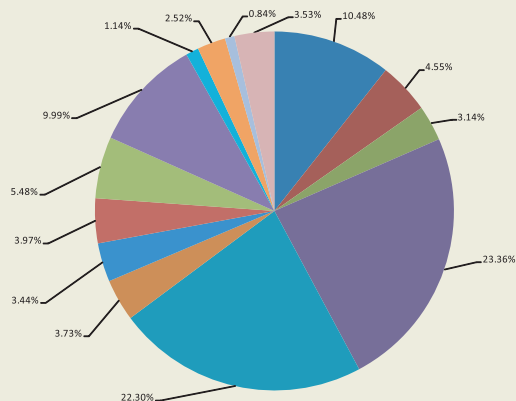
*Destinations of all migrants:* As in previous years, most Bangladeshi short-term contract workers migrated to the Gulf and other Arab countries. This year is no exception. Almost 80% of the total workers who migrated from Bangladesh went to the Gulf and other Arab countries. The remaining 20% went mostly to different South East Asian countries. The average flow of migration over the last 39 years also reveals a similar scenario (82%). The highest proportion of migration to the Gulf and other Arab countries took place in 1991, with

97.30%, and the lowest in 2007, with 58.10% of the overseas migrants for that year.

Let us have a look at this year's scenario. In 2015, Oman received the highest number of Bangladeshi workers. 1,29,859 workers migrated to Oman. This is 23.36% of the total flow from Bangladesh. It was also at the top of the list in 2014. This year, an increase in migration to Qatar has been noted. 1,23,965 persons migrated to that country. It constituted 22.30% of the total flow making it the second largest destination country. Saudi Arabia becomes the third highest receiving country in 2015, surpassing Singapore. Saudi Arabia accounts for 10.48% of the total migrants. This has been the highest migration flow to Saudi Arabia in the last 7 years.

By receiving 55,523 workers, Singapore is the fourth largest migrant receiving country. This year, around 10% of the total workers went to Singapore. However, this is 1.4% less than what the number it received in 2014. The Bangladesh government is in the process of changing the G2G system for labour migration to Malaysia.

Chart-1: Destination countries of Bangladeshi Migrant workers in 2015

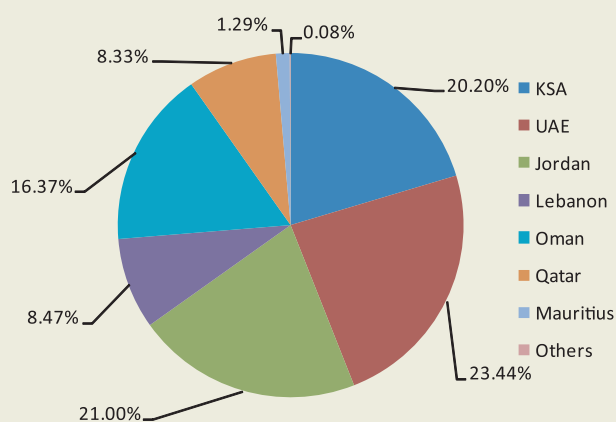


Source: Prepared from BMET data.



A significant rise has been noticed in the migration flow to Malaysia this year. This can be seen as one of the most important developments in the migration flow this year. In 2015, a total of 30,483 workers went to Malaysia, which is the highest flow to this country in the last 7 years. Around 5.5% of the total workers who migrated from Bangladesh in 2015 went to Malaysia. The UAE government's ban on the migration of male workers remains in force. This year, only 25,271 workers had migrated to the UAE and 90.5% of them were female workers. As in preceding years, labour migration to politically unstable countries was a major concern for Bangladesh. Due to the internal and ethnic conflict in that country, the Bangladesh government stopped sending workers to Libya in August 2014. In 2015, only 231 people migrated to Libya. However, around 14,000 people migrated to Iraq in 2015, which is about 2.6% of the total flow. Despite the ongoing crises in large parts of Iraq and the absence of stable governance, why the government of Bangladesh allowed people to migrate to this volatile region is a matter of concern.

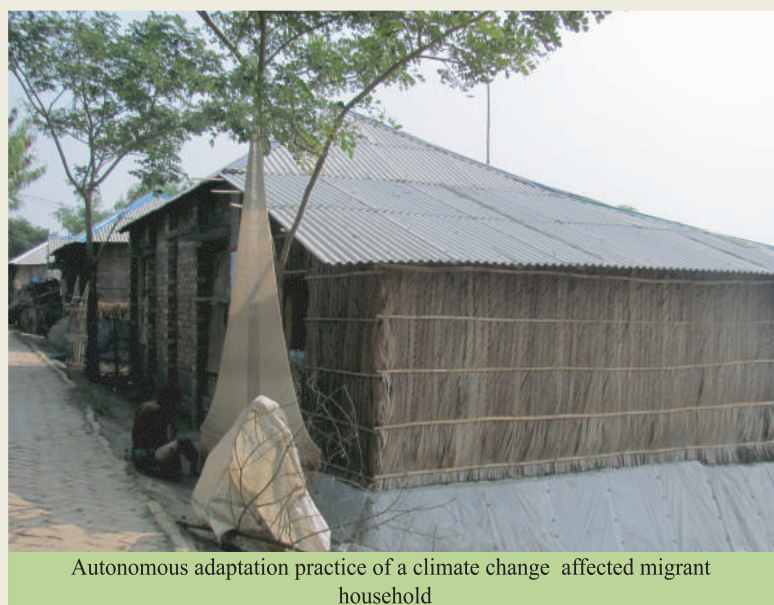
Chart-2: Destination countries of female Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2015



Source: Prepared from BMET data.



Members of RMMRU-DECCMA research team in Satkhira



Autonomous adaptation practice of a climate change affected migrant household



*Destinations of Female Migrants:* The Gulf and other Arab countries are also the major labour market for female Bangladeshi migrant workers. As in the previous year, by receiving 23.44% of the total female migrant workers, UAE is the single most important destination for female Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2015. A total of 24,307 female workers went to this country. Jordan (21%) is the second largest female migrant receiving country, followed by Saudi Arabia (20.2%), Oman (16.4%), Lebanon (8.5%), Qatar (8.3%) and Mauritius (1.3%). In response to the new agreement between Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia, the number of female migrant workers has increased by more than 90% this year. Despite the major concentration of Syrian women migrants in the Lebanese market due to the war in Syria, Lebanon is still a stable market for female workers from Bangladesh.

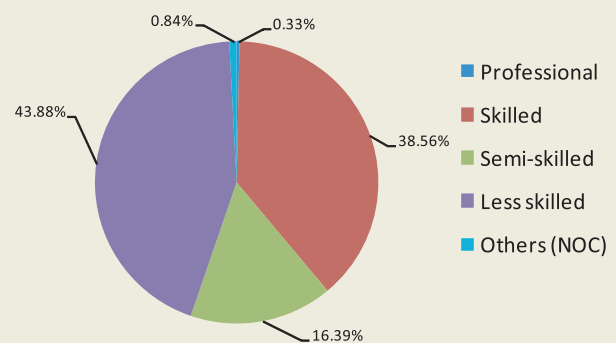
The flow of female migration to the Gulf countries is increasing. Following that, the responsibility of the government must increase. Recently, some incidents of torture against female Bangladeshi migrants, particularly in Saudi Arabia, have been reported. The government needs to be cautious in this regard.

### 1.4 Skills

Skilled migration has increased by almost 4 percent this year compared to 2014, according to BMET statistics. In 2015, 38.56% of the total migrant workers went abroad in the skilled category. In 2014, this percentage was only 34.95%. Most of these skilled workers who went abroad this year are women. They mostly went overseas to work as domestic workers and cleaners. In the international context, domestic workers, cleaners, etc., are considered low skilled workers.

However, as BMET provides training for female migrant workers who go abroad to undertake domestic and cleaning work, it recorded them as skilled workers. This year, a record number of female workers went abroad and, hence, the increase in the number of skilled workers.

Chart-3: Skill composition of Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2015



Source: Prepared from BMET data.

Therefore, in reality, the number of skilled workers has not increased. Around 43.88% of the workers are less skilled workers, 16.39% are semi-skilled and 0.33% are in the professional category in 2015. This percentage is almost the same as in previous years. In the case of male migration, Bangladesh is still dependent on less skilled labour. In a number of Gulf countries, the demand for skilled workers is increasing. For example, Qatar is recruiting more technical workers, targeting the 2022 Football World Cup. The government should explore these areas and prepare its human resource in these sectors. Although, in the newly initiated 7th Five Year Plan, the government spelled out skilling the workforce, no major effort has been noticed to accelerate market research and generate more skilled workers through providing training and other life skill programmes.

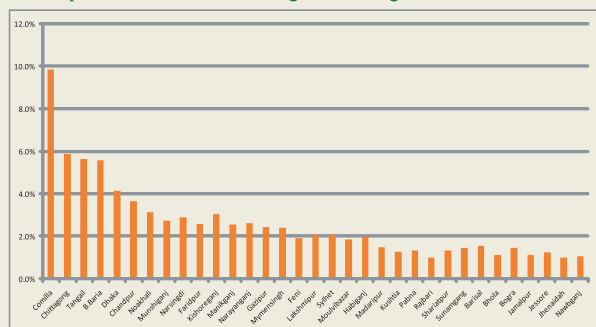


## 1.5 Source Areas

As in the previous year, Comilla still tops the migrant source districts list. Around 9.83% of total migration took place from Comilla district in 2015. With no change, Chittagong is holding the second position, as in previous years (5.88%). However, migration from Chittagong decreased by 1% compared to the previous year. After Comilla and Chittagong, the next 8 highest source districts are Tangail (5.62%), Brahmanbaria (5.58%), Dhaka (4.15%), Chandpur (3.67%), Noakhali (3.13%), Narsingdi (2.89%), Munshigonj (2.73%) and Narayanganj (2.62%).

It should be highlighted that there has also been no major change in the list of districts and percentages of previous years. As in previous years, this year as well, a very insignificant number of workers migrated from the northern part of the country. Data on the source districts are yet to reflect positively on the benefit of the 4% reserve system for the northern districts with severe poverty, and it is yet to have any real effect. Besides, in the top 20 list of source areas for international migration, the southern coastal regions and Chittagong hill tracts are absent. Migration is still taking place from the traditional pockets through established social networks. The BMET data show that only 11.5% of

Graph-2 Source areas of Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2015



Source: Prepared from BMET data.

the total migration takes place from the 16 northern districts of Rangpur and Rajshahi divisions. The graph below reveals that a very negligible number of people migrated from the poverty-affected Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions in 2015.

It is important to observe that Cox's Bazar, one of the traditional migration pockets, has a very poor presence in the statistics. This year, only 4567 people migrated from Cox's Bazar officially, which is less than 1% (0.83%). However, migration is taking place regularly from this district. We need to look into this seriously as it is one of the most vulnerable districts to irregular migration as evident from various reports in the print and electronic media.

A recent book published by RMMRU in September 2015 shows that the number of poor people had decreased in those areas of the country from where a significant amount of international migration takes place. However, in its background paper on ending extreme poverty for the 7th Five Year Plan, there are hardly any suggestions about how to mobilize this.

## 1.6 Remittances

In 2015, Bangladesh received US\$15.31 billion as remittances. This is 2.4% higher than in the previous year. Last year, the remittance figure was US\$ 14.94 billion. Since 2013, Bangladesh has been the 7th largest remittance receiving country among the developing countries. This year will be no exception.

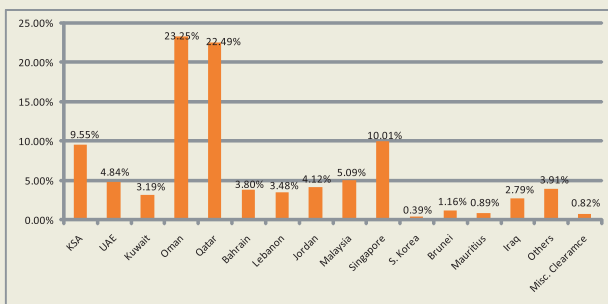
Similar to last year, this year also, Saudi Arabia is the highest remittance sending country for Bangladesh (19.5%), followed by UAE (16.6%) and the USA (14.8%). Although, to date, the highest



amount of remittances is sent from Saudi Arabia, its total share is falling each year. In earlier years, 50% of the total remittances received was from Saudi Arabia, whereas it stands at 19.5% now.

Bangladesh experienced a substantial increase in remittance flows from Malaysia in 2015 compared to the previous year. In 2015, it received 8.4% from Malaysia. In 2015, Bangladesh received 5.6% of the total remittances from Oman, which is quite similar to the previous year. A significant rise in remittance flow from Kuwait has been observed in 2015. A total of 6.3% of remittances was received from Kuwait this year. This is 1% higher than the previous year.

Graph-3: Source countries for the major remittance flows

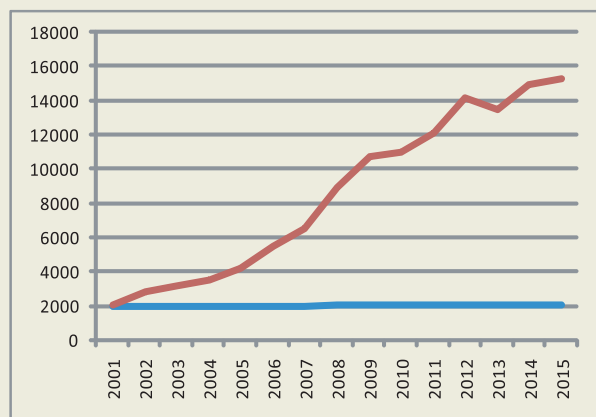


Source: Prepared from BMET data.

It is pertinent that although, for quite a few years, Oman, Qatar and Singapore topped the list of labour receiving countries, yet a very small portion of the total remittances are received from those countries. Bangladesh received 5.6% from Oman, 2% from Qatar and 2.4% from Singapore. The shares of remittances received from Singapore, Malaysia and UAE should be much higher compared to the current situation. However, the foreign currency needed for trade and smuggling from Singapore and UAE drives remittances away from the formal channels. Still significant amount of remittances comes through informal channels in

Bangladesh; for example by hundi, friends or relatives. It is obvious that the amount of actual remittance flow to the country is much higher than the official flow. However, it is expected that, due to the growing consciousness among the migrants and also the greater flexibility of the money transfer system, the percentage of informal transactions is gradually decreasing.

Graph-4: remittance flow from 2001-2015



Source: Prepared from BMET data.

## 2. Reflection on Important Migration Issues

### 2.1 Irregular Migration and the Crisis in the Bay of Bengal

One of the greatest migration governance challenges of 2015 was irregular migration via maritime routes. This was not only a challenge for the government of Bangladesh in particular; it was also a challenge for the global community. The mass graves and illegal detention facilities filled with Bangladeshi and Myanmar nationals along Thai and Malaysian border were discovered this year.

According to UNHCR, since 2014, approximately





95,000 refugees and migrants are estimated to have departed by sea from Bangladesh or Myanmar, including 31,000 departures in the first half of 2015. Although no departures have been reported since May 2015, due to the high incidences during the beginning of the year, the overall flow was 34 percent higher compared to the first half of 2014. Over 1,100 people are now estimated to have died at sea while attempting to migrate to Malaysia since 2014 to date, which includes an estimated 370 deaths in 2015.

However, hardly any cases were launched against the human smugglers who were involved in processing irregular migration through maritime routes under the “Migration and Overseas Employment Act 2013”. A survey of 35 Lawyers from 16 district level bar associations and 30 members of the law enforcing agencies from the police academy reveal that concerned lawyers and police officers did not have any knowledge about the new law. No wonder prosecution under this law was almost non-existent.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.2 New Routes for Irregular Migration

Despite the continuous awareness campaigns organized by NGOs, civil society and government agencies; irregular migration continues to be a major concern. A new irregular migration route has become highly active in 2015. Sudan has become a hotspot in 2015 as a transit country for people from Asia and Africa. With the flow of Syrian refugees migrating to the European region, unscrupulous



Cultural event of RMMRU-RPC programme

<sup>1</sup>The training of lawyers on Prosecution under the Overseas Employment and Migration Act 2013, 25th of October 2014, 05th of September 2015 and police academy training for officials on forced and voluntary migration, 24th March 2014, 24th March 2015.



individuals and agencies are trying to smuggle a number of Bangladeshis to Europe. The Bangladeshis are taken to Sudan on a tourist visa and then are smuggled to Libya from there. Some of them wait for opportunities to migrate to Europe. Around 39 Bangladeshis were on hunger strike at the Greek-Macedonian Border in November this year. No one knows how they reached there, who helped them and why they were left at the Macedonian border.

### **2.3 Migration to Malaysia and the G2G+ Memorandum**

In November 2012, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the governments of Malaysia and Bangladesh regarding labour recruitment. The agreement is popularly referred to as government to government recruitment (G2G). Through G2G, the Malaysian government withdrew the four year embargo on labour recruitment from Bangladesh. Although it was supposed to generate a major flow of workers, in reality, since the signing of the agreement till the middle of 2015 only about 10,000 workers were able to take up employment in the plantation sector in Malaysia. In June 2015, the governments of Malaysia and Bangladesh signed another agreement known as G2G+.

Shortly afterwards, the Malaysian home minister announced that his government would recruit 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers in the next three years. The private sector will be involved in the new agreement. Following the announcement in early August, a Malaysian delegation met the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment and private recruiting agencies but, finally, the draft memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the two countries, which was

meant to be placed before the cabinet meeting of the government of Bangladesh on 9 November, 2015, was removed from the agenda. Various sources report that there are moves in both countries to create syndicates. A handful of agencies are attempting to control the recruitment process. RMMRU feels that such syndication is likely to stifle competition and shore up migration costs.

### **2.4 The Malaysian Government's Decision to Expel Irregular Migrants**

At the end of 2015, the Malaysian Government took the decision to expel irregular migrants from their country from January 2016. Many of those who would be considered as irregular entered Malaysia with a valid visa. When the employment agencies that sponsored them could not provide them with work, they found new jobs under different employers. This compromised their legal status and made them irregular. Moreover, many of the irregular migrants who entered Malaysia using maritime route are also in difficulties. In this situation, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) should initiate discussions with its Malaysian counterpart to consider the humanitarian aspects of the Bangladeshis who are stranded there. The government can attempt to convince its Malaysian counterpart to regularize those irregular workers who are already there instead of recruiting fresh workers from Bangladesh.

### **2.5 A Breakthrough in Re-entering the Traditional Markets**

This year, Bangladesh experienced a breakthrough in reentering 3 of its traditional labour markets. These are Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. After about eight years, the Kuwait government



resumed hiring Bangladeshi workers from February 2015. In 2015, a total of 17,472 workers went to Kuwait. This is 3.1% of the total flow from the country. Kuwait imposed a ban/restriction on recruiting Bangladeshi workers in early 2000 and then again in 2006, based on a murder incident as well as “malpractices in the recruitment process by Bangladeshi private agencies”. Before the ban, it was one of the major destinations for Bangladeshi workers in the Gulf region. It is extremely important to nurture a good relationship with the Kuwaiti government to continue the process.

In 2015, a total of 30,483 workers went to Malaysia through regular channels. This is 5.5% of the total flow from Bangladesh. This growth began soon after the announcement of the abolition of the G2G system. On average, 4,000 workers migrated to Malaysia every month since June this year. On the contrary, it was only 200 workers per month in the first half of the year.

In 2015, a total of 58,270 workers went to Saudi Arabia. This is 10.5% of the total flow for this year. Last year, it was only 10,657 and most of them were male. More importantly, a substantial section of those who migrated this year were men (74%).

## 2.6 Migration and the 7th Five Year Plan

Compared to the 6th Five Year Plan, the 7th Five Year Plan dealt with migration as an area of greater importance. This time, a total of 30 background papers have been prepared, one of which was on international migration.

In order to mainstream migration in the development strategy, it is imperative that migration is not



Training-workshop of RMMRU and MJF on “Migration Act 2013”



Press conference on migration trends - 2015



only treated as a separate sector but also integrated into all the other sections within the document. However, based on our reading of these background papers, we felt that migration is less well integrated than it deserved. The terms migration, remittance and migrants featured 167 times across the 26 background papers. The specific chapter on migration did not focus on mainstreaming migration in the development agenda. Instead, the focus was on policies that will promote migration as a sector, which by itself will not be enough to mainstream migration.

Important sections of the document like the South-South cooperation strategy, climate change and disaster management, food security and equity and growth, hardly addressed migration. Policy recommendations with a focus on migrants only appeared once in the chapter related to education. However, it mentioned migration in terms of achieving a digital Bangladesh by 2021, the section on impact of demographic transition, on socio economic development and ending extreme poverty; it is still left out in other relevant sections.

## **2.7 Migration in SDG's: the Role of Bangladesh**

As migration has been addressed as an important development tool in the recent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations with full support from the member states, it is important to highlight the role of Bangladesh behind this major move in favour of global migration in the United Nations (UN) initiatives. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh, with the support from Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation's (SDC), organized the Global Expert Meeting on Migration in the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda that took place in Dhaka,

adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This Expert Meeting in Dhaka serves to reinforce the role that migration plays in the development process, and provides space for the inclusion of migration in the architecture of the post-2015 agenda. It focuses on areas in which migration is most likely to factor into the new development agenda, namely: health; education; employment and decent work; and the means of implementation which is now being included by the UN. The Meeting brings together technical experts and representatives from the key Ministries of the UN Member States and also other stakeholders to discuss migration and development issues in the Post-2015 processes. The demands of the 60 countries were articulated at the meeting; lead the stone in processing migration under the SDGs. To sensitize the global community regarding the specific manner in which migration could be incorporated into the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the meeting set six recommendations under five broad categories; namely health, development and education, which were later adopted in the SDGs.

## **3. Legal and Institutional Changes**

### **3.1 Issuance of MRP Passports**

From November 2015, only MRP passports are acceptable for international travel. The government of Bangladesh (GoB) outsourced the task of the issuance of MRP passports in three countries, Malaysia, UAE and Saudi Arabia, to a Malaysian firm named IRIS Corporation Berhad. The company is yet to provide such passports to at least 500,000 Bangladeshis abroad. The company also did not pay BDT 50 crore that it had collected from Bangladeshi expatriates as passport fees.



In this situation, GoB has officially requested the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to extend its deadline by two years. The Department of Immigration and Passports (DIP) under the home ministry made the request on November 22; only two days before the deadline was over. ICAO expressed that it does not have the authority, and suggested that all concerned should resolve the matter bilaterally. Bangladeshi migrants are in trouble, as their work permits are dependent on having a valid visa stamp on a valid passport. Due to no fault of their own, they are likely to become irregular migrants.

#### 4. Service Providing Agencies

##### 4.1 Wage Earners' Welfare Fund

Bangladesh has been credited internationally for establishing the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund (WEWF). However, civil society has been campaigning for a long time for the effective use of the fund. Currently, WEWF is being spent on heads like establishing and maintaining a migrant welfare desk at the international airport of Bangladesh, the online registration of migrants, the preservation of the fingerprints of migrants, the issuance of smart cards, pre-departure briefings to outgoing workers, and giving salaries to staff members of WEWF and embassy staff abroad. In a few cases, the fund is also used to pay those who provide legal assistance.

Based on a recent study (RMMRU 2015 PB-16), RMMRU has advocated for the fruitful usage of the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund (WEWF), that ensures direct benefits are given to the migrants and their family members. As the fund is created from the contributions of contract migrants,



Inter-district exchange programme of MRPC



RMMRU PSA on female remitters' aspiration, available at [www.rmmru.org](http://www.rmmru.org)



unfortunately, most of the activities under the above heads should be financed from the revenue budget of the government. Only two heads can be treated as being of direct benefit to migrants –i.e. the pre-departure briefing and death compensation. In these cases as well, the performance is way beyond the expected level. Only 16.02% of the workers have been receiving pre-departure briefings each year on average. The study strongly recommends that the salaries of employees of WEFW or mission staff should not be borne by the fund. An external audit should be conducted to ensure the transparency of the fund. Trauma centres should be supported to provide therapy for migrants who face severe trauma in their country of destination.

#### **4.2 Recruiting Agency**

As per the BMET information, currently, there are 935 licensed recruiting agencies. In 2015, 98 recruiting agents' licenses have been suspended. Since the announcement of G2G+, a division has surfaced among the recruiting agencies. A few recruiting agencies who are politically powerful are trying to monopolize the labour recruitment work under G2G+. BAIRA on the other is lobbying the government to allow all recruiting agencies to take part. This demonstrates that a few individuals who are politically connected can be more powerful than a long established institutional interest group such as BAIRA.

#### **4.3 Probashi Kollyan Bank**

The Probashi Kollyan Bank (PKB) operates all over Bangladesh through 48 branches. It also has a booth at the airport. It has proposed opening a new branch in Naraynagonj. Out of the 5,55,881 workers who departed for overseas employment in

2015, only 5,463 migrants took out a loan from this bank. The total amount it disbursed is Tk. 48,690,6000. This year only 18 returnee migrants received Tk. 488,0000 as a reintegration loan.

This bank was formed with a capital of Tk.100 crore. 95% of the fund was provided by the WEFW. Without any assessment of the performance of the organization, the Parliamentary Standing Committee of the relevant ministry recommended the transfer of another BDT 300 crore from WEFW to PKB but the founding principle of the Bank was that further capital has to be collected from other sources instead of WEFW. There is an urgent need to evaluate the performance of the Bank.

#### **4.4 District Employment and Manpower Office (DEMO)**

In order to provide services to migrant workers at the grassroots level, 48 DEMO offices are functioning. An evaluation of the institutional structure of these offices reveals that almost half of them run without the top functionary and half of the posts in these offices are vacant. Moreover, the staff members do not receive regular specialized training to serve the workers. There are no branches of DEMO offices at the Upazila level. More importantly, the BMET functions are extremely centralized. This leaves very few functions to be performed by the DEMO offices.

#### **4.5 Human Resource Development and TTCs**

There are 53 Technical Training Centres (TTCs) including 6 diploma level Marine Centres under the BMET. The government has announced plans to increase the number of TTCs to 70. In 2015



(January to 30th June), 81,000 participants received skills training on different trades. This is double that number who received training in the 12 months of 2014 (750,000). At the various training centres, 1046 trainers are engaged in training programmes. The number of trainees and centres are increasing every year but instructors are not recruited proportionately, which undermines the quality of the training. The government of Bangladesh with the technical assistance of IOM recently signed an agreement with a British technical training centre for the accreditation of the diplomas provided by TTCs.

#### 4.6 Labour Attaches

Labour attaches are the main points of contact between the migrants at their destination and their country of origin. Currently, labour attaches are posted in 17 countries. An insufficient number of labour attaches creates major problems in providing services to migrants. In Bahrain and many other Gulf countries, hundreds of Bangladeshis are in detention centres awaiting trial, in prison serving sentences or facing deportation. The lack of knowledge of the local language by labour attaches and a lack of resources for employing interpreter and lawyers act as a major hindrance to the process of attaining justice in favour of the migrants at the destination centres. The lack of female labour attaches creates problems for female migrants with regard to sharing cases of abuse. Along with increasing the budget for providing these services, it is also essential to appoint more female officials in the labour wings abroad.

#### 4.7 The Role of Civil Society

For decades, civil society has been playing an



South Asian Journalist workshop in Kathmandu



important role in the migration sector of Bangladesh. Different non-governmental organizations and think tanks are providing a range of services, such as awareness building, filing and seeking the redress of complaints, organizing compensation for cheated migrants, filing cases in different courts against fraudulence under the 2013 Migration Act, campaigning to bring stranded workers back home, providing skills development and training, etc. They play a vital role in convincing the government to undertake various policy reforms. In 2015, BRAC, the WARBE Development Foundation, OKUP and RMMRU collectively provided more than 1203 training sessions on pre-decision and 106 pre-departure training. Altogether, these institutions helped migrants and victims' families to recoup about Tk. 13,905,000 against 290 claims through local settlements.

In October 2015, RMMRU launched an online information portal for returnee migrants; this was the first of its kind in Bangladesh. It is expected to build a linkage between workers and the prospective employers of different sectors within the country. Employers abroad can also have access to the portal in order to match a skilled and semi-skilled workforce with their needs. The information portal can be accessed at [www.returneemigrant.info](http://www.returneemigrant.info).

RMMRU filed a writ petition (Petition No. 12396 of 2014) before the honourable high court, seeking judicial direction on why the apprehended human smugglers who were involved in irregular migration through the Bay of Bengal are not prosecuted under the 2013 Migration Act? In response to the RMMRU's petition, the honourable court delivered an order on the 6th of March 2015 to the relevant authority to take the necessary measures and

submit the report within four weeks, although this is yet to be followed up. Whether the different ministries and law enforcing agencies have responded to the judicial query is not known.

Along with civil society organisations, different development partners are also working in the area of migration. MJF, SDC, ILO, IOM and UN Women have been supporting the activities of local organizations working on migration. The Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA) based in the Philippines is a regional platform that is actively involved in the protection of the rights of migrants. In collaboration with RMMRU, the WARBE Development Foundation, ACD and ASK have been undertaking various actions. The Diplomacy Training Programme (DTP) that took place in the first week of December is one of these. For the capacity development of the journalists and reporters, a number of training sessions and workshops have been organised by RMMRU, ILO, SDC and Panos South Asia. RMMRU organised two training sessions in Dhaka and Nepal, where a total of 30 journalists had an opportunity to interact and exchange their migration experience with fellow journalists from other countries of the South Asian region. CARAM Asia is another regional body who is active in Bangladesh.

On the 5th of October, the Civil Society organisations of Bangladesh formed a Committee to work jointly to uphold migrant rights at the 9th Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) 2016. Professor C R Abrar, Executive Director of RMMRU, was elected the chair of the committee. The committee is working to support the government in holding the civil society days' programme of the 9th GFMD as well as organizing the Peoples' Global Action (PGA) before GFMD.





## 5. 2015: A Year of Major Global Initiatives on Migration

### 5.1 Highlights of the Global Migration Report 2015

Recently, the International Organization of Migration (IOM) published its global migration report 2014. This report identified urbanization as an important phenomenon in the current globalized world. In 2014, 54% of people were living in urban areas. By 2050, this is expected to double (6.4 billion).<sup>2</sup> The report showcases innovative ways in which migration and urbanization policies can be better designed for the benefit of migrants and cities. It offers many strategies that may apply to countries like Bangladesh, who experience high levels of internal and international urban migration.

### 5.2 UN Adopted Sustainable Development Goals

In September 2015, the New York summit of the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals 2030. Along with a set of 17 new Global Goals and 169 targets, it aimed to eradicate poverty, fight inequality and address the challenges related to climate change over the next 15 years. The Sustainable Development Goals recognize the positive contributions of migrants and their fundamental role in promoting sustainable development. It is based on the principle of “leave no one behind”, including migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons. It is now up to the governments of the 193 member states to translate the agenda into national policies.

<sup>2</sup> World Migration Report, IOM, 2015



Available at <[www.rmmru.org](http://www.rmmru.org)>



### 5.3 Special Meeting on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean, Bangkok 2015

In order to address the problem of irregular migration through the maritime route of the Bay of Bengal, the Royal Thai government on May 29 organized a special meeting. 17 countries participated in the meeting. The meeting underscored the need for immediate regional responses to the crisis of refugees and migrants, and emphasized the need for relevant countries to resolve irregular maritime migration issues including human trafficking and smuggling. The discussion focused on cooperation, international burden sharing and shared responsibility. In order to foster the comprehensive prevention of irregular migration, it was recommended that actions be taken to strengthen the enforcement of the law, as well as create meaningful jobs in the areas of origin.

A report of CNN on the 11th of December<sup>3</sup> reveals that the senior Thai policeman who led the investigation on the trafficking of Rohingya and Bangladeshi “boat people” after the discovery of mass graves in the Southern Sankhala province of Thailand has sought asylum in Australia because he feared for his life in Thailand. Major General Paween Pongsrin of the Royal Thai Police led the investigation against traffickers which brought the vicious cycle of human traffickers within the protection system of his country. While explaining to the news channel, he said that he had fled his homeland because “influential” Thai figures implicated in the human smuggling trade wanted him dead. His investigation, which was launched after dozens of shallow graves were uncovered in May 2015, initially caught the attention of the international community. Under his leadership, the Thai investigation team arrested nearly 90 people,

including the Thai army general and powerful regional officials. Later, his probe was abruptly halted by powerful people within the military-led government, the army and the police. This shows that irregular migration is organized by transnational crime and high influential of the destination, transit as well as origin countries benefit from it. Maritime migration through the Bay of Bengal provides us with grounds for arguing that we must put more emphasis on the international recruiting system, the role of intermediaries in the destination and transit countries, as well as on the labour recruitment policies of the origin countries in analyzing the drivers of migration, and also the poverty level of migrants.

### 5.4 EU’s Initiative in Connection with Irregular Migration

The increasing trend of irregular migration has special ramifications for the countries of Europe. The borders of the EU member countries are facing human tragedies in the face of irregular migration, human trafficking and smuggling. In May 2015, the European Commission prepared a new European Agenda on Migration. It presents a coordinated policy which will increase solidarity and mutual trust among the EU Member States.

### 5.5 COP 21 in Paris - Climate Change and Migration

In November 2015, the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP- 21) was held in Paris. The 195 nations gathered with the purpose of creating a legally binding agreement for countries to reduce their carbon output and do their best to keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius.

<sup>3</sup>“Thai human trafficking investigator seeks asylum in Australia”, CNN, 11 December 2015



Although climate migration had been acknowledged in previous draft agreements, in the final agreement, reference to the rights of migrants when taking action for climate change only appeared in the preamble, and therefore is not legally binding for the signatories. Since the release of the final draft of the Paris Agreement, many civil society groups have expressed their disappointment.

### 5.6 The 8th GFMD and Bangladesh as the Chair of the 9th GFMD

From October 12th-15th 2015, the 8th Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) was held in Istanbul, Turkey. 600 delegates including civil society representatives from 150 countries participated in the event. It discusses the linkages between migration and development, the problems of global and regional migration policies, particularly in the destination countries, and forced migration, with special attention on the ongoing refugee crisis in the Mediterranean. The next annual Global Forum on Migration and Development will be chaired by and hosted in Bangladesh in 2016. Preparations for this event will begin immediately. The event is estimated to attract 500 delegates from around the world.

### 6. Research Findings on Migration in 2015

The book entitled ‘The Impact of Migration on Poverty and Local Development’ published by SDC and RMMRU (2015) shows that, in 2013 and 2014, the migration cost on average for males is about Tk.3,80,000, whereas for female migrants it was Tk.1,00,000.

The report also reveals that male migrants remit

about Tk.2,00,000 a year. On the other hand, female migrants remit Tk.80,000 a year. While female migrants earn less than male migrants, females remit 90 percent of their total income. Male migrants send 50 percent of their income back home. The same study shows that the annual income of international migrant households is Tk.2,60,000, while that of non-migrant households is Tk.1,14,000, and the national rural annual average household income is Tk.1,15,000.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 26 percent of the rural population was living below the poverty line in 2014. The RMMRU and SDC study found that only 13 percent of international migrant families live below the poverty line whereas 40 percent of non-migrant families did so, as did 46 percent of internal migrant families.

Research conducted by BRAC shows that at least 1 out of 3 aspirant migrants experiences fraudulence and, on average, they lose US\$250, which is equivalent to three month’s income (Das *et al.*, 2014).

Research on “Intra-household dynamics” by RMMRU and RPC supported by DFID (2015) found that migrant households spend more on primary and secondary level education than non-migrant households but, for higher education, they spend less compared to non-migrant households. From this finding, it could be assumed that migration is one kind of disincentive for higher education. This finding matches that of the background paper on education of the 7th Five Year Plans. The paper shows that the sectors which help to attain economic growth for Bangladesh did not require people with a higher education. It predicted that interest in attaining a higher education in rural areas may be reduced due to this fact.



The same study, also found that remittances play a role in shaping youth aspirations. However, youth aspirations vary according to gender. The male children of migrant households aspire to take up public jobs whereas female members aspire to marry into a better household through having access to resources in the form of remittance flows.

On the basis of census data for 2001 and 2011, SCMR and RMMRU (2014) published figures on how many people would be displaced from climate change-affected districts. The study claimed that, during the period 2011 to 2050, about 16 to 26 million people would migrate from their area of origin due to floods, cyclones, river erosion and rising sea levels from 18 districts of Bangladesh.

## 7. Recommendations

- This report makes four major recommendations. These are:
  - The government should develop a national strategy to integrate migration in every sphere of development planning;
  - In order to achieve the goal of SDGs, and continue with the current level of economic growth, the government should incorporate migration into all of its development planning;
  - In order to make higher education an incentive for the rural youth, the government should expose them to vocational training with direct professional implications; and
  - To hold the 9th GFMD successfully, the government should seek collaboration with civil society from the very beginning.

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## RMMRU's Training Scholarship Programme for Entrepreneur Development

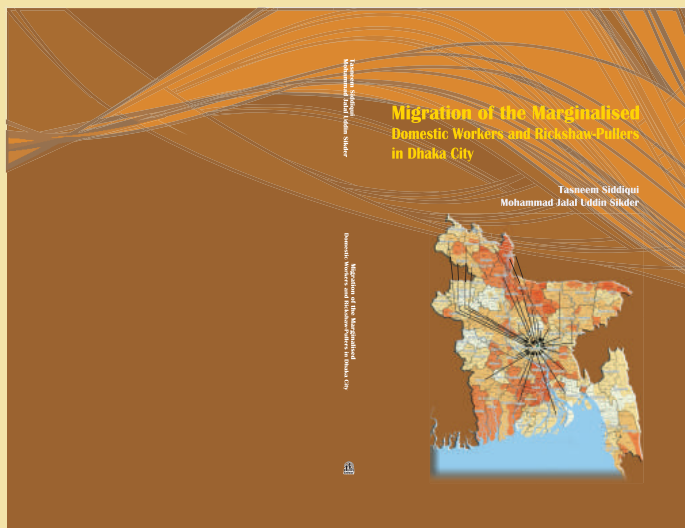


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RMMRU's Scholarship holders attending residential trainings



## NEW PUBLICATION OF RMMRU

### MIGRATION OF THE MARGINALISED DOMESTIC WORKERS AND RICKSHAW-PULLERS IN DHAKA CITY

TASNEEM SIDDIQUI  
MOHAMMAD JALAL UDDIN SIKDER



Speakers at different consultation of RMMRU

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