

# **LABOUR MIGRATION FROM BANGLADESH 2018**

## **ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES**



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Cultural Event of Obhibashon o Shonar Manush Shommilon 2018

**February 2019**

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**Published by**

RMMRU

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# Labour Migration from Bangladesh 2018

## Achievements and Challenges

Soon after independence Bangladesh was branded as a ‘bottomless basket’ by foreign pundits. In 2017 the country has transformed into a lower-middle income country. International migration and the remittances sent by the Bangladeshi labour migrants have played a critical role in this breakthrough. The impact of overseas employment and concomitant remittance flow contributed significantly in the success of alleviating poverty in the country as well. Realising its importance successive governments in Bangladesh have paid attention to migration management. Since 2010 the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) has been publishing annual reports highlighting the achievements and challenges that migration sector faces. This report on 2018 is a continuation of that process. It is divided into six sections. Section 1 highlights the statistics related to migration in 2018 while section 2 lays down the initiatives and issues at the national and international levels. Section 3 reviews the activities of national and international organizations. Bangladesh’s role in the international arena is discussed in section 4, and that of the role of civil society in section 5. Section 6 presents new knowledge on migration and section 7 offers some recommendations.

## 1. Labour Migration from Bangladesh 2018

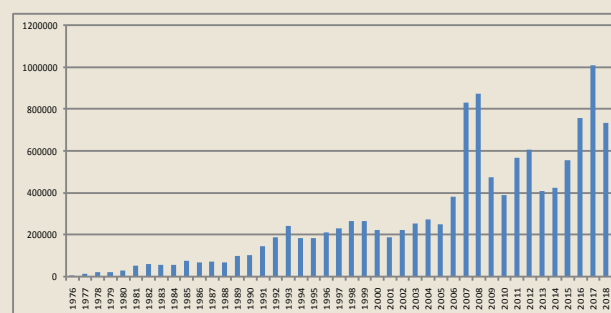
### 1.1 Flow of Migrants

The Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) data inform that a total of 734,181 Bangladeshi workers migrated to different countries of the world including the Gulf, other Arab and South East Asian countries in 2018. In 2018, the flow of emigration has decreased by 27 percent in comparison to the previous year. In 2017, the total number of workers who went abroad from Bangladesh stood at

1,008,525. The Government acknowledges the role of migration in creating opportunities for employment of Bangladeshis.

According to BMET, from 1976 to 2018, a total of 12,199,124 Bangladeshis have migrated overseas for employment. It does not necessarily mean that at the moment a total of 12.2 million Bangladeshis are working abroad. Bangladeshi workers mainly engage in short-term contract employment; and thus they have to return on completion of their contracts. There is no mechanism in place to record data on returnee migrants and hence it is not possible to have an estimate about the number of migrants currently working abroad. RMMRU and SDC panel data, 2018 on 20 districts found that among the migrant households, 21 percent were returnee migrants and 79 percent were current migrants.

Graph 1: Labour migration from Bangladesh from 1976 to 2018



Source: Prepared from BMET data

### 1.2 Female Migration

Female migration from Bangladesh has been increasing since 2015. In 2015 female migration increased by 36 percent from the previous year. It registered an increase by 14 percent in 2016 and percent in 2017.



The highest number of female workers (121,925) migrated in 2017. But, the flow of female migration has dropped by 17 percent to 101,695 in 2018. There are a few reasons for the drop in the number of female migrants. Since May 2018, many aspirant women migrants felt discouraged to go abroad as the print and electronic media began highlighting the news of return of abused women migrants from the Saudi Arabia. It led the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MEWOE) and BMET to be cautious in the recruitment of women migrants. All these have resulted in this decline. Furthermore, in general there was a drop in the migration flow of both male and female workers from Bangladesh in 2018. In 2017, female migrants constituted 12 percent of the total flow of the year, in 2018 it marginally increased to 13.85 percent. Therefore, the flow of male migration has been lower than female migration in 2018.

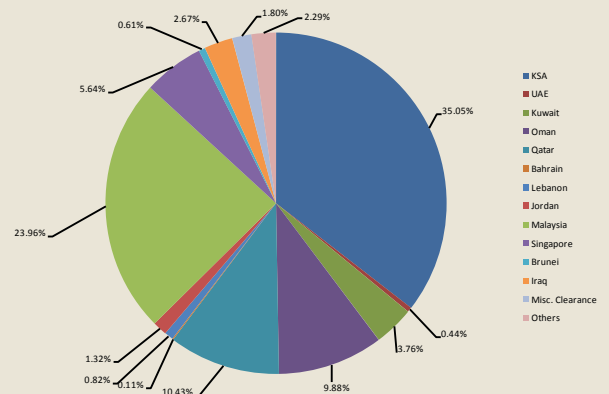
### 1.3 Countries of Destination

According to BMET, most of the Bangladeshi short-term contract workers mainly go to the Gulf and other Arab states. 2018 was no exception. Almost 64.48 percent of the total number of workers who had migrated from Bangladesh in 2018 went to the Gulf and other Arab states. The majority of the remaining 35.52 percent went to different South East Asian countries.

In 2018 the highest number of Bangladeshi workers migrated to Saudi Arabia. The figure stood at 257,317, that is about 35.05 percent of the total flow. Like 2017, the second largest flow in 2018 was also to Malaysia (175,927) that constituted about 24 percent of the total flow. Qatar is the third largest destination country of Bangladeshi workers (10%), while Oman holds the 4th position (9.8%). By receiving 41,393 workers (6%), Singapore became the fifth largest destination country in 2018. The UAE government's ban on

migration of male workers from Bangladesh still remains in force. In 2018 there has been a drop in the modest number of female migrants that the country had received in 2017. With a view to explore new job markets for Bangladeshi migrants studies were commissioned by the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment on the labour market opportunities in 53 countries. A Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) was signed with Japan in 2018 under which Bangladeshis would get the opportunity to work as technical interns in four sectors - construction, caregiver, hospitality and manufacturing. This is an important development as only 668 Bangladeshis had migrated to Japan between the years 2013 and 2018.

Chart 1: Destination Countries of Bangladeshi Migrant Workers in 2018



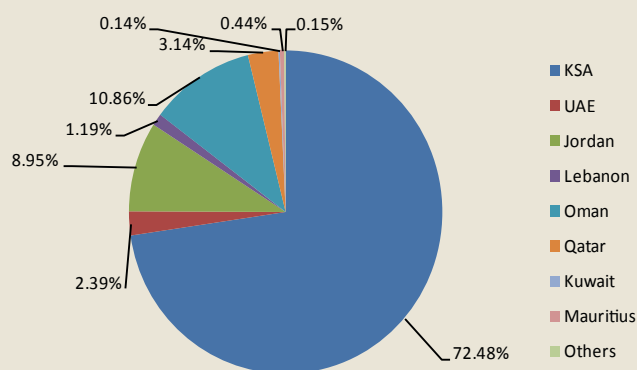
Source: Prepared from BMET data

With a total of 73,713 workers going to that country Saudi Arabia was the largest recipient of female migrant workers in 2018. The figure is 72.48 percent of the total flow of female migrants from Bangladesh. By receiving 11,034 (11%) and 9,100 (9%) female workers, Oman and Jordan hold the second and third positions respectively. 92.28 percent of the total number of female workers has migrated to these three countries. Like previous years it is one or two countries that dominate the labour market of Bangladeshi workers. The problem with the concerned countries go through



a period of political, social or economic uncertainty or unrest then their migrant workforce get adversely affected which in turn impacts on the country of origin of the workers.

Chart 2: Destination countries of Bangladeshi female Migrant workers in 2018

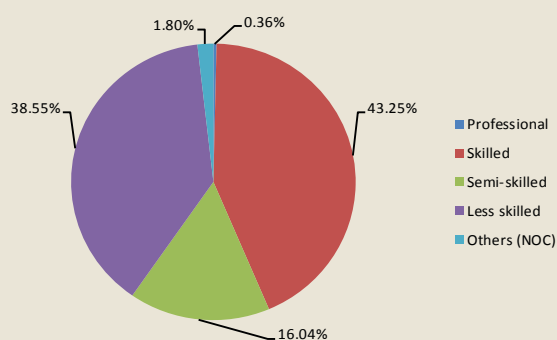


Source: Prepared from BMET data

### 1.4 Skill Composition

Chart 3 presents the skill composition of the migrants who went abroad for work in 2018. It shows that the proportion of skilled workers remains the same in 2018 (43.25%) in comparison to 2017 (43.07%). 16 percent of the migrant workers fall under the semi-skilled category, 39 percent of the workers fall under less skilled category. The shares of semi-skilled and less skilled categories also have not changed in a major way from the previous year. 0.36 percent of the migrants belong to professional and 1.8 percent to other categories.

Chart 3: Skill composition of Bangladeshi Migrant workers in 2018



Source: Prepared from BMET data



School meeting on safe migration



Miking about safe migration by Youth Volunteers



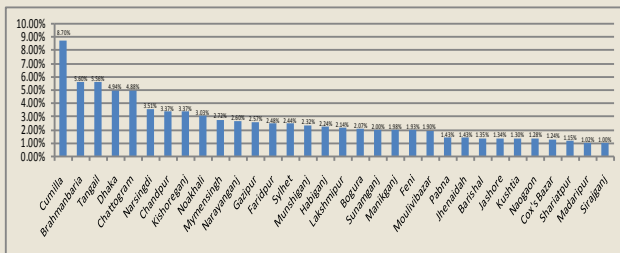
Training of Community Groups for Migration Services



## 1.5 Source areas

As in the previous years, with 62,562 migrating from the district, Cumilla tops the international migrants' list of source districts. It accounts for 8.52 percent of the total workers. Brahmanbaria ranks second in the list (5.49%). The next 8 important source districts are Tangail (5.44%), Dhaka (4.84%), Chattogram (4.78%), Narsingdi (3.44%), Chandpur (3.30%), Kishoreganj (3.30%), Noakhali (2.97%) and Mymensingh (2.66%).

Graph 2: Sources areas of Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2018



Source: Prepared from BMET data

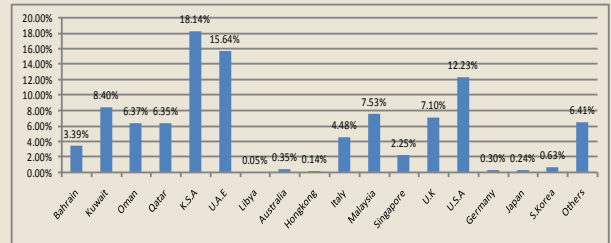
Like previous years the scenario of the hill districts remain unchanged. In 2018 Khagrachhari, Bandarban, and Rangamati accounted for only 0.10 percent, 0.05 percent and 0.05 percent of the total flow respectively. Those who migrated from this region were mostly from the Bengali community. Most of the indigenous communities in Bangladesh live in this region. There is no visible effort to bring these communities into the mainstream migration flow. Other communities such as the Santals are also absent in the data.

## 1.6 Remittances

According to Bangladesh Bank Bangladeshi migrants have remitted US\$15.54 billion in 2018. The figure was 15 percent higher than that of 2017 (US\$13.53 billion). Generally, migrants cannot remit money in the year they migrate. They start doing so from the second year of migration. The increased flow of remittance in 2018 can perhaps be attributed to the massive increase in the outflow

of migrants in 2017.

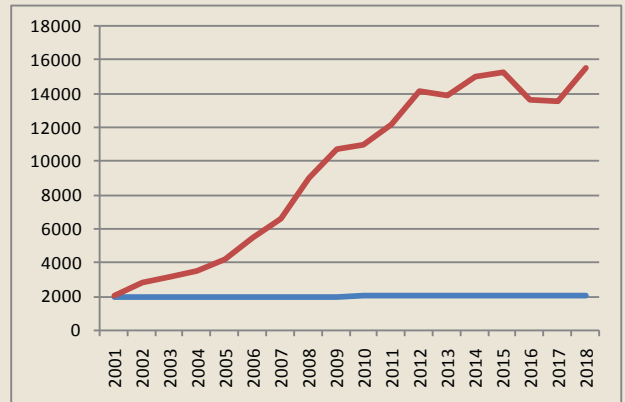
Graph 3: Source countries of major remittance flow in 2018



Source: Prepared from BMET data

Following the trend of the previous year, the highest amount of remittance was received from Saudi Arabia (18.14%). It is followed by the UAE (15.64%), the USA (12.23%), Kuwait (8.40%), Malaysia (7.53%) and the UK (7.10%).

Graph 4: Remittance flow from 2001-2018



Source: Prepared from BMET data

Bangladesh Bank reported that Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited has secured over 29.68 percent (US\$3013.61 million) of the total remittances, making it the top remittance receiving bank in 2018. It was followed by Agrani Bank - \$1515.05 million (14.92 percent), Sonali Bank - \$1137.33 million (11.20 percent), Dutch-Bangla Bank Limited - \$936.42 million (9.22%) and Janata Bank - \$907.06 million (8.93%).



## 2. Important Migration Issues in 2018

### 2.1 Labour Migration in Election Manifestos

The eleventh national parliamentary election was held on 30 December 2018. Political parties and the alliances had declared their manifestos before the election. The manifesto of the Awami League contained 35 sections in which migration was addressed under the labour welfare and labour policy (3.17). Sending more skilled workers to different destinations and chalking out plans and schemes to ensure growth and benefits from the investment of the remittances of migrants were pledged. Extending loans on soft conditions and low interest by Probashi Kalyan Bank and ensuring loan for permanent employment to the returnee migrants were also included in the manifesto of the Awami League. The 23rd of the 35 points manifesto of the Oikyo front detailed out their goals on expatriates' welfare. The alliance promised for the suffrage of the expatriates. Imparting training, ensuring dispute resolution, creating specialized facilities at the airports, providing incentives for investment, transporting corpses of the deceased migrants home and creating opportunities for facilitating contribution of the skilled and professional migrants staying abroad to the national economy of Bangladesh are amongst those figured in the Manifesto. Besides, 19 point manifesto of BNP shed light on the voting rights of the migrants.

### 2.2 Unanticipated return of tortured women migrant workers from Saudi Arabia

The return of female migrant workers due to torture and abuse figured prominently in the media in 2018. About 800 domestic workers returned to Bangladesh since the beginning of January 2018. They claimed to have faced a range of problems in the destination countries including physical torture and sexual abuse. 75 more women migrants were reported to have been waiting for repatriation in various safe homes established by the Bangladesh government in Saudi

Arabia. Those who have returned bore the marks of physical torture and even claimed to have been victims of sexual abuse. A good number of these returnee migrants complained that the female heads of the family tortured them.

A number of male migrants returned from Saudi Arabia in 2018 as well. This is the first-ever incident of return of such a large number of migrants from that country. The returnee workers complained that despite having valid passport, visa and 'aqama' the Saudi police first detained and subsequently sent them back home. Some of them had migrated to Saudi Arabia just a few months ago, while others have been working in that country for a long time. In 2018, Saudi Arabia reiterated its earlier policy of reserving certain categories of work for Saudi nationals. The policy ensures that 20 percent of the workforce should be reserved for Saudi nationals. In the past these steps met limited success. Furthermore, the jobs of unskilled and semi-skilled workers have not been affected by this scheme as hardly any Saudi national took part in unskilled jobs. Nonetheless, this policy will affect a large group of Bangladeshi workers who are involved as tailors in burkha (veil) factories. Already, a large number of Bangladeshi who are associated with this factories, had returned to Bangladesh.

### 2.3 Cancellation of the syndicate system by the new government in Malaysia

2018 was an important year for labour migration of Bangladeshi workers to Malaysia. In February 2016 a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on G2G+ (a state facilitated labour recruitment system that included private sector) was signed between Bangladesh and Malaysia. Since February 2017, 179,330 Bangladeshi workers migrated to Malaysia under this scheme. Immediately after coming to power, the new government in Malaysia led by Mahathir Mohammed, as part of investigating



corruption of Najib's government, halted the process of recruitment of Bangladeshi workers that was monopolized by 10 recruiting agencies in Bangladesh. Later, on 25 September 2018, at a bilateral meeting a decision was taken to abolish the 10-agency based recruitment system allowing all registered recruiting agencies to participate in sending workers to Malaysia. In addition, the workers who were granted permission to work in Malaysia before August 2018 were also allowed to enter the country by January 2019.

## **2.4 Male migration to United Arab Emirates**

The labour market of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has virtually remained closed for male Bangladeshi workers since 2012. Till date UAE only receives the female domestic workers. Under a MoU signed between the two countries the UAE committed to receive domestic workers and gradually extend it to include a total of 19 categories of workers from Bangladesh. Included among those would be guard, chef, gardener, shepherd, house-maid, driver and personal nurse. The manpower ministry of UAE will supervise the recruitment process that will be conducted by Tadbir Service Centre, a recruiting agency. Only 3,235 Bangladeshis migrated to the UAE in 2018.

## **2.5 New legislative and policy initiatives in Bangladesh**

### **2.5.1 Wage Earners' Welfare Board Act 2018**

Wage Earners' Welfare Board has been established as a statutory body through 'Wage Earners Welfare Board Act, 2018'. The Act was gazetted on 29 July 2018 after being enacted in parliament as the 30th Act in 2018. This is a procedural law that lays out the formation and work-plan of the Wage Earners' Welfare Board. With the aim of implementing the objectives under the Act, the Welfare Board is authorized to initiate and implement projects,

provide emergency support to migrants, extend them support upon return to ensure protection and social and economic reintegration, help migrant families carry the bodies of deceased migrants and bear the burial cost, provide scholarship to meritorious children of migrant workers and support the physically challenged children or dependents of migrants. An important feature of the law is that it has taken on board the needs of female migrants of the country. The Act obliges the Board to submit an annual report on its activities to the government within four months after the end of each financial year. Finally, the Policy for Wage Earner's Welfare Fund 2002 stood annulled under the Act of 2018.

### **2.5.2 New policy of sending female labour migrants to Saudi Arabia**

In addition to performing the recruitment function the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment has been playing an important role in ensuring safety and upholding the rights of female workers in the countries of destination. In particular it ensures adherence to minimum standards that are applicable to female migrants going to Saudi Arabia. Included among those is that the migrant must be in the age group 25 to 38 years, pass the interview before finger-prints are taken, study at least up to grade 3, be able to read the agreement provided by the recruiting agency that contains name, address and contact number, and have the physical and psychological ability to adjust in an alien culture. Besides, any woman with children below the age of five is not allowed to migrate. Finally, the recruiting agency is to bear the responsibility of the workers for the entire duration of the contract.





## 2.6 Amendment in the laws in labour receiving countries

### 2.6.1 Twelve jobs are banned for expatriates in Saudi Arabia

The newly adopted policy in Saudi Arabia bars migrants to be employed in twelve types of work. The jobs were mostly in sales: watches, eyewear, medical equipment and devices, electrical and electronic appliances, auto parts, building materials, automobiles, furniture stores, and the like. The fall in the price of crude oil has resulted in increase in the rate of unemployment in Saudi Arabia (12%). To overcome the crisis, the Saudi government has decided to nationalize several professions. The ban came into force on 10 November 2018.

### 2.6.2 Amendment of the Labour Law in Qatar

For a few years Qatar is trying to establish protection measures in its labour law. Prior to 2022 World Cup football tournament, the government of Qatar has revised its labour law. In 2018 the government signed two important human rights instruments: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. For the first time the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has established an office in Qatar to help implementation of labour rights and safe work environment. The recently revised law allows migrant workers to leave the country even before the expiry of their contract period. The workers will not need to secure prior permission of their employer in this regard. The minimum wage for currently employed short-term workers is fixed at Qatari Riyal 750. A dispute resolution committee has been formed to address the minimum wage related disputes. Despite forming the committee, doubts persists among the workers if they can register complaints without facing adverse repercussions. They fear that in case they choose to file complaint against their employers the latter can dismiss and send them back to Bangladesh.



Perspective gathering workshop of ESRC project in Chattogram



Photo voice - a new research technique in use by RMMRU



Dr. Nurul Islam of BMET receiving award from Mr. Nurul Islam BSc, MP, Hon'ble Minister of MoEWOE, for special contribution in migration sector



### 2.6.3 Malaysian Government's steps to control immigrants in irregular status

The Malaysian government started 3-Plus-1 programme<sup>1</sup> to control irregular migration in 2018. The deadline for the migrants in irregular status to report to the authorities was on 30 August, 2018. After the expiry of the deadline the Malaysian police launched a massive campaign against irregular migrants. Thousands of workers from various countries were apprehended, including many Bangladeshi nationals. 300,000 Bangladeshis<sup>2</sup> are believed to be working in Malaysia in irregular status. Around 130 labour rights and other civil society organizations around the world called for suspension of the operation and expressed their concern over forcibly sending the irregular migrants to their home countries. In addition, more than a hundred Malaysian organizations petitioned to bring about a halt to the operation and extend the deadline by six months. In December 2018 in order to curb forgery the Malaysian immigration department has redesigned the Malaysian visa with hologram and distinctive security features.

### 2.7 Irregular migration

Irregular migration has become a serious challenge for Bangladesh. Targeting Europe as destination a group of Bangladeshi migrants chose the risky way of crossing the Mediterranean Sea. According to International Organization for Migration (IOM) between January and August of 2017, 8700 Bangladeshis have migrated to Europe through Italy. Among them 94 percent experienced some form of exploitative practices during their journey through the Mediterranean Sea. In 2017, about 2000 migrants were stranded in Turkey. The report states 91 percent of the stranded Bangladeshis were themselves desperate to migrate and the rest 9.3 percent considered migration option to support their families. Another IOM survey that covers

migration to the Middle-east and South-east Asia as well finds that 66.7 percent of irregular Bangladeshi migrants anticipated arrest, deportation or exploitation when migrating without proper travel documents and 81 percent of the returned migrants anticipated the same. Migrants who attempted to migrate through irregular routes are from various migration prone districts except from Sunamganj, Sylhet and Shariyatpur. The study reveals that 48 percent migrant from Cumilla, 46 percent from Feni and 34 percent from Noakhali do not find it risky to go abroad for work with a student, travel or Hajj visa instead of a work visa<sup>3</sup>.

## 3. Service Providing Agencies

### 3.1 District Employment and Manpower Offices (DEMO)

In order to provide services to migrant workers at the grassroots level currently 42 DEMO offices are functioning under the BMET. The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment has taken steps to set up DEMO offices in all 64 districts and divisional offices in all seven divisional headquarters. BMET, the line agency, has taken up some major initiatives in 2018 to decentralize many of its services to DEMO offices. Fingerprint collection system has been introduced in all existing 42 DEMO offices and the Smart Card distribution facilities have started in 6 DEMO<sup>4</sup> offices. Currently under the decentralization initiative Cumilla DEMO office provides the highest number of services to the migrants. Earlier migrants had to come to Dhaka to complete those tasks.

<sup>1</sup>Under this scheme workers in irregular status could change their visa status and become regular migrants by paying Malaysian Ringgit 400 or return home escaping prosecution.

<sup>2</sup>The Daily Star. 2 July, 2018

<sup>3</sup>[www.dhakatribune.com/special-supplement/2018/05/02/safe-migration-bangladesh](http://www.dhakatribune.com/special-supplement/2018/05/02/safe-migration-bangladesh)

<sup>4</sup>EWOE (2018), Shoronika of International Migrant Day 2018



### 3.2 Technical Training Centres

There are 64 Technical Training Centres (TTCs) including 6 Institutes of Marine Technology (IMT) and 3 internee training centres under the BMET. Among these in 2018 training in housekeeping trade is provided in 41 centres. This number was 38 in 2017. Pre-departure training for aspirants was made available in 62 TTCs since 2017. This is a very important step in the decentralization process of BMET<sup>5</sup>. However, quality of training still remains an issue of concern.

### 3.3 Wage Earners' Welfare Fund

In 2018, a total of 734,181 departing workers paid Taka 3,500 each as a compulsory subscription to the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund (WEWF). This amounted to Taka 2,569,633,500. The total amount of money received in this fund will be higher if the other sources of funding of WEWF such as interest earned from license fees of recruiting agencies, consular fees charged at the embassies, fees collected at embassies for attestation of demand notes and work permits of the migrants are added. In 2018, a total of 46,623 departing migrants received pre-departure briefing with the resources from this fund.

In 2018 Taka 128,660,000 has been spent on bringing back bodies of deceased workers from destination countries and facilitating their burial. During the same period 3,942 people were granted monetary support amounting to Taka 1,139,360,000. Another Taka 630,390,000 has been paid as financial grant to 959 families of the deceased migrant workers.

To encourage education of the meritorious children of migrant workers, the Wage Earners' Welfare Board introduced a scholarship programme for students from grade VI to Bachelor level. From 2014 to 2018, an amount of Taka 87,889,800 has been offered to 6,084 students of different grades<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup>EWOE (2018), Shoronika of International Migrant Day 2018

<sup>6</sup>EWOE (2018), Shoronika of International Migrant Day 2018



Learning sharing programme of IBP partners



Consultation on Assessment of Migrant Workers Information System



Training of enumerators for Social Cost of Migration research



In order to provide shelter to female migrant workers who faced torture, harassment, insecurity and other similar problems, safe homes have been established with the resources of WEFW in 3 countries (3 in Saudi Arabia, 1 each in Oman and Lebanon). The Welfare Board finances the safe homes. Food, medical and a few other services are provided to women workers in these safe homes. From 2014 to 2018 an amount of Taka 45,800,000 was spent on maintaining safe homes in these countries<sup>7</sup>.

RMMRU considers WEFW to be an innovative initiative of the Bangladesh government. However, RMMRU urges the government to use the resources from this fund only for ensuring direct services to the migrant workers. The practice of using the fund for administrative activities such as online communication with missions, office automation, setting up call centres and offices of the Welfare Board, providing Smart cards to migrants, maintenance of vehicles and staff, online registration project, purchase of office air-conditioners, foreign trips of ministry and BMET officials for exploring new markets etc. should be reduced as soon as possible.

### 3.4 Labour Attaché

Labour attaché acts as a bridge for labour migrants between the destination and origin countries. Currently, 29 labour wings are functioning in 26 countries. No new labour wing has been established in 2018. A total of 41 labour attachés are currently working in the labour wings. An additional 300 employees are working to support the labour attachés. With the increase in female labour migrants, there emerged the need for appointment of female staff in the offices of labour attaché, particularly in the Gulf region. Inability to speak the local language and inadequate funding for employing interpreter and lawyers work as hindrance to labour attachés in providing redress to migrant workers in destination countries. There is

also a gap in coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment. Often staff members of the office of labour attachés are required to put in their time to other matters of the mission. This again works are an impediment in providing timely services to the migrants.

### 3.5 Probashi Kallyan Bank

The Probashi Kallyan Bank (PKB) currently has 63 branches<sup>8</sup>. In 2018, nine new branches were opened. A proposal for opening 19 more branches is under consideration of the Bangladesh Bank. Out of a total of 734,181 Bangladeshi workers who migrated in 2018, 3,344 took loan from this bank to finance their migration. It amounted to Taka 455,700,000. Since its inception until December 2018, a total of 32,505 migrants received Taka 3.44 billion as loan from this bank. Of this amount more than Taka 2.56 billion has already been recouped. 95 percent ownership of this bank lies with the Wage Earners' Welfare Board. The PKB turned into a scheduled bank in 2018. So far, the activities of the bank are to be evaluated properly.

### 3.6 Complaints

BMET accepts online and direct complaints of migrant victims of fraud, cheating and the like. In 2018 BMET received 890 direct complaints. Of these 687 were of female migrants and the rest 203 were of male migrants. During this period 660 cases were resolved; 520 of the 660 cases were that of female migrants. An amount of Taka 25,705,000 was paid as compensation to the victims. From 2009 to 2018, a total of 821 complaints have been registered with BMET website and mobile app. Of those 453 cases have been resolved, in 283 cases hearing have been completed, 21 cases are in the process of investigation and 64 cases are to be processed. An amount of Taka 18,284,000 have

<sup>7</sup>EWOE (2018), Shoronika of International Migrant Day 2018

<sup>8</sup><http://www.pkb.gov.bd>



been realized as compensation in online and website posted dispute cases that have been resolved. 177 new complaints have been filed online in 2018. About half of the cases (88) are from Saudi Arabia alone. The rest of the complaints are from Malaysia (47), Qatar (11), Iraq (4), Singapore (5), within Bangladesh (3), Oman (4), Kuwait (3), Algeria (3), Bahrain (2), England (2) and one each from Afghanistan, Mauritius, Poland, Russia and South Korea. None of the 2018 cases have been resolved yet. It may be noted that only a few cases of fraudulence are filed by the victims via online system. One may therefore conclude that despite being connected with the social media, the families of the households do not have adequate knowledge about the existence of the apps to file complaints. This calls further dissemination of information about the app both within Bangladesh and in destination countries.

### 3.7 Recruiting Agency

BMET database informs that there are 1,211 licensed recruiting agencies in Bangladesh. 559 of those agencies are authorized to process female migration to Saudi Arabia. The Ministry has suspended the license of 105 recruiting agencies and terminated the license of 2 agencies<sup>9</sup>. A number of illegal migration attempts were thwarted in 2018 through effective cooperation of Ministry of EWOE, the police department and BAIRA.

## 4. Bangladesh in International Sphere

### 4.1 Migration Contributes to Sustainable Development Goals

On 25 September 2015 leaders of 150 countries congregated at the United Nations headquarters and adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs sets 17 goals and 169 targets. Immediately after the adoption of the agenda to ensure its implementation, a secretary level committee of 21 members of different ministries/divisions has been

<sup>9</sup><http://www.bmet.org.bd>



Workshop on Impact of Migration on Poverty



Policy advocacy on Climate Induced Internal Displacement



Press Conference on Migration Trends 2018



formed in Bangladesh with the leadership of Chief-coordinator of SDGs. The General Economic Division of the Planning Commission is the focal point in this regard. With a view to achieve the SDGs strategic targets have been incorporated in the Seventh Five Year Plan (2016-2020) of Bangladesh. Accordingly, setting landmarks for ministries, adoption of national work plan, setting up the structure for monitoring and evaluation, finance strategy, assessing the information deficit, SDG tracker etc. have all been set in motion. Hopes have been laid that migration will play a major role in attaining SDGs for Bangladesh. The Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth) and Goal 10 (reduced inequality) engage with migration directly in attaining targets 8.7, 8.8, 10.7, 10(c).

The target 10(c) aims at reducing the transaction costs of migrant remittances to less than 3 percent and eliminating remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 percent by 2030. It appears that increased competition has led to lowering of remittance costs in case of Bangladesh. On average in the first quarter of 2017, across remittance corridors worldwide, the average cost of transaction was 7.45 percent and 5.4 percent for South Asia. During that period the cost in Bangladesh was recorded at 3.84 percent. By the first quarter of 2018, the percentage dropped to 7.13 percent globally, 5.21 percent for South Asia and 3.58 percent for Bangladesh<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, in 2018 Bangladesh fared well on the cost for remittance flows to the country.

Bangladesh Bank has taken various regulatory and institutional measures in this regard. The foreign money transfer companies impose fee/charge that differs from country to country, money transfer companies, remittance procedures and so on. That is why Bangladesh Bank is trying to reduce the remittance transfer fee by undertaking newer drawing arrangements that would accelerate the

competition among the exchange houses. Besides, the national bank owned exchange houses are playing important role in this regard. A total of 250 money transfer agencies, including 29 national bank owned exchange houses, have 1,210 drawing arrangements with Bangladeshi banks. Since Bangladeshi banks do not impose any charge/fees for inward remittance transfer the scope of further reducing the costs of remittance is limited for these banks. The Seventh Five Year Plan sets the target of creating 12.9 million additional jobs in Bangladesh including 2 million abroad. This target has been set by the Government keeping SDG goal 8 in mind.

#### **4.2 Eleventh Global Forum on Migration and Development**

The Eleventh Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) was held in Marrakesh from 5-7 December 2018 on the theme “Honouring International Commitments to Unlock the Potential of All Migrants for Development”. Germany and Morocco jointly organized the global conference. Along with high level government officials and representatives of almost all the countries, 280 representatives of 75 civil society organizations took part in the event. The discussions focused on safe migration and best possible protection of the migrants. Three roundtable discussions were held: ‘From vulnerability to resilience: recognising migrants the agents of development’, ‘regional mobility to promote transferable learning and policy coherence’, and ‘good migration governance for sustainable development’. The GFMD common space provided a platform to the migration stakeholders. The three-day long Civil Society Days were observed from 4 to 6 December. The forum shed light on the implementation of Global Compact of Migration (GCM).

<sup>10</sup><https://remittanceprices.worldbank.org>



### 4.3 Global Compact for Migration (GCM)

The Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration took place in Marrakesh, Morocco on the 10 and 11 December, 2018. 163 country representatives approved the Compact. This is a voluntary, non-binding agreement. It contains twenty-three commitments<sup>11</sup>. The Global Compact is consistent with target 10.7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in which member states committed to cooperate internationally to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration. The positive side of GCM are: it paves the avenue for collecting and utilizing accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies, it aims to reduce the cost of remittance transfer, it calls for enhancement of consular protection, assistance and cooperation and access to basic services for migrants, and it calls to ensure that all migrants have proof of legal identity and adequate documentation and so on.

Despite these positive aspects there are some concerns as well. A few organizations engaged in upholding migrants' right argue that the Global Compact will limit the significance of 1990 UN Convention on Migrants Rights. The compact curtails the rights and protection of migrants that were ensured in the UN Convention and tends to uphold the interests of the receiving countries, specifically the developed countries' national security concerns. Imprisonment or arrangements for imprisonment of migrants have been validated through the Compact. Besides, the Compact did not take any step to urge states to de-criminalise migrants in irregular status.

### 5. Civil Society Initiatives

For more than two decades, civil society organizations have been playing an important role in migration sector of Bangladesh.

<sup>11</sup><https://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration>



Book launching and handover of migration mediation module to BMET



Book launching of Impact of Migration on Proverty and Growth



New Migrants from CHT in Chattogram celebrating their new space for congregation



A range of services are being provided by these organizations. These include awareness building, encouraging migrants to submit complaints and seeking redress of such complaints, helping cheated migrants secure compensation, filing cases in courts against fraudulence under the Overseas Employment and Migration Act 2013, campaigning to bring stranded workers back home, providing skill development and training etc. They play a vital role in urging the government to undertake policy reforms. In 2018, WARBE, BOMSA, BRAC, OKUP, IMA Research Foundation, Awaj Foundation and RMMRU collectively provided more than 494 pre-decision trainings and 294 pre-departure trainings. Altogether these institutions helped 529 migrants and victim families to recoup about Taka 19,529,500 as compensation settlement claims

### 5.1 Innovative Services

In 2018, some civil society organizations have taken up a few innovative programmes to serve the migrants. RMMRU has been producing a television programme ‘Obhibashir Adalat’ or ‘Migrants’ Court’ on DBC channel since February 2018. The aim of the programme is to help the cheated migrants and their families with legal advice. Lawyers, migration experts and government officials provide the affected migrants with legal advice on case by case through the programme. By the end of 2018 a total of 29 episodes were aired. So far through Obhibashir Adalat and RMMRU’s ‘legal support cell’ the organization has received 511 complaints from migrants and their families in 2018. 106 were registered during the TV programme. 56 persons registered their complaints through phone, and the rest 349 brought their cases to the ‘legal support cell’ of RMMRU.

In 2018 WARBE Development Foundation along with 17 other organizations launched migration

awareness campaign providing information on radio and television for utilization, investment and savings of remittances. Brac provided emergency support, monetary compensation and reintegration of Saudi returnee male and female migrants. Awaj Foundation helped the workers in Jordan, Singapore and Lebanon through civil society organizations of those countries. Obhibashi Kormi Unnayan Program (OKUP) organized an ‘Annual Congress on Migrant Budget’ to raise the demand for higher allocation of resources for migrants. Bangladeshi Obhibashi Mohila Sramik Association (BOMSA) launched a women desk at DEMO offices with the support of BMET in 2018.

Bangladesh Civil Society for Migration (BCSM), the civil society platform for migration took a number of initiatives with the participation of RMMRU, WARBE, BOMSA, OKUP, IMA research Foundation, BRAC, Ain O Shalish Kendro (ASK), Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), International Network of Alternative Financial Institutions (INAFI), Bangladesh Construction and Wood Workers Federation (BCWWF), BASUG -Diaspora and Development throughout the year 2018. It organised a human chain to highlight the plight of women returnee migrants on 31 May 2018 and a press conference. Subsequently BCSM submitted a memorandum to the Secretary of Expatriates’ Welfare calling for effective action to stop violence against Bangladeshi female migrants in Saudi Arabia. To ensure protection of women migrants BCSM demanded Bangladesh government to launch legal support cell and hire lawyers, extend emergency support and pay compensation to the tortured returnee women domestic workers and ensure medical support. . BCSM also arranged a side event marking GFMD 2018 at People’s Global Action (PGA) and arranged a policy dialogue for ensuring protection of women migrants in the light of ILO Convention 189.





## 6. New knowledge on Migration

### 6.1 Poverty and Growth

SDC and RMMRU conducted two rounds of survey covering 6,143 households of high, medium and low migration intensity areas in 20 districts of the country in 2014 and in 2017. The study generated insightful new knowledge on migration dynamics.

**Migration cost:** The study reveals that the cost of migration from Bangladesh to Middle Eastern and South East Asian countries has reduced by one-tenth over the three year period.

**Consumption Growth:** Overall consumption of all types of households, internal migrant, international migrant and non-migrant, has grown in three years. International migrant households increased their consumption on an average by 30 percent, the growth rate for internal migrants is 21 percent and that of non-migrants was 27 percent.

**Poverty Rate:** The poverty rate is the lowest among the international migrant households. About 10.35 percent of the households lived below the poverty line in 2014, which dropped to 9.6 percent in 2017. 32 percent of internal migrant households lived under the poverty line in 2014 and the figure dropped to 28 percent in 2017. 24 percent of non-migrant households lived below the poverty line in 2014 and this figure dropped to 15.4 in 2017.

**Female Migration:** Among all the groups of migrant and non-migrants it is the female international migrants who come from the most depressing socio-economic background. The level of education of the female international migrants is lower than that of male internal or international migrants, and that of female internal migrants. The proportion of the widowed, separated, divorced and abandoned women is the highest among the international migrants. The ownership of land and homestead is also the lowest among this category. The female international migrant

### RMMRU research on social cost of migration



Grand ma helping enumerator to measure the height of a son of a female migrant



"I no longer consider cooking only as women's job"



A left behind child of male migrant feeling important as she is the person who is being interviewed



households used to lag behind in accessing safe drinking water, latrine, and electricity usage. Migration has lifted their income and the standard of living. However, the scope for increase in the salary of female migrants is much lower than that of male migrants. Also the scope for employment for women is also very restricted compared to men. Eighty percent of all the women from Bangladesh are employed in the labour market abroad in two professions: domestic work and cleaning while for male migrants it is more diversified; only 28 percent of male migrants are employed in three professions. The prospect for upward mobility in job is lower for female migrants than those of male migrants. The migration cost of women migrants is one-fourth of their male counterpart. Female international migrants require 1 year to recover their cost of migration while male international migrants require 3 years.

## 6.2 Returned Migrants

A baseline survey of RMMRU of 780 households in 10 districts of Bangladesh on returnee migrant workers from European countries demonstrates that 41 percent of the returnees experienced moderate to high level of psychological stress while integrating to home-communities. 32 percent experienced feeling of withdrawal. On the post traumatic disorder scale (PTSD), 8 percent scored high level of stress and 33 percent showed moderate to low level of PTSD. Another 26 percent experienced very low. 61 percent did not get job upon return. 61 percent find it difficult to get employed upon return. Only 25 percent tried to utilize their skill and experience in their current work and among those who have tried to utilize 36 percent are running their business reintegrating their skills.

## 6.3 Typology of fraudulences

An analysis of the types of complaints on fraudulence reported by the migrants and members

of their families in the RMMRU programme ‘Obhibashir Adalat’ aired in DBC TV and the cases directly submitted to RMMRU Legal Support Cell shows that along with the traditional ones, new forms of fraudulence against migrants have surfaced. The traditional types of fraudulence that the aspirant and current migrants experience are: not being able to emigrate even after paying the migration cost; not getting job in destination; paying significantly higher than regular cost; not getting job as per the contract; non-payment, irregular payment and payment less than contracted amount of salary; longer working hours than what is stipulated in the contract; false visa; sending workers through student/tourist visa and false contract marriage, forged medical report; confiscation of passport; inadequate food; poor accommodation; having to work in multiple households. The new forms of fraudulence include sending workers through illegal maritime routes, abduction, unlawful confinement and seeking ransom after taking migrants to destination at a very low cost.

In pre-migration phase, fraudulence experienced by male migrants is much higher than that of female migrants. But after reaching their destination the female migrants are often treated as slaves. Though the female migrants are supposed to migrate without spending money, the reality is that they had to pay Taka 90,000 on an average during the period of 2014 to 2017<sup>12</sup>. Women do experience untimely return. Some of them are subjected to cruel and inhumane treatment. Some cases of sexual abuse get reported where perpetrators male members of the household. However, some domestic workers also face extreme physical torture in the hands of female adult members.

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<sup>12</sup><http://www.bmet.org.bd>



## 7. Recommendations

- In the Seventh Five Year Plan and other development policies of Bangladesh, migration has been identified as the tool to achieve development target. Implementation of SDGs is no exception to this. RMMRU recommends that instead of using migration as tool for development, the migrants and their families must be taken on board as partners in the journey of attaining Sustainable Development Goals.
- Government should ensure legal support to female workers in the countries of destination. In order to do that it should appoint lawyers and interpreters and negotiate with authorities so that those who lodge complaints can stay back and work in the country of destination until their cases are resolved. Besides, the existing safe homes need to be improved and more safe homes are to be established. In countries where the cases are severe, battered women require specialised support from counselors who have expertise on psycho-social stress management. In Bangladesh as well similar services need to be provided for those who return traumatized.
- In order to process migration in the grassroots the migrants require various services. It is not possible to fulfill the requirements without any external support from experienced service providers. Grassroots level informal dalals are filling the vacuum of such service providers. It is therefore the demand of the time that the services that are proved by the dalals should be institutionalized. In doing so, the role and functions of dalals need to be institutionalized. Necessary amendment should be brought about in the Overseas Employment & Migration Act 2013 or in the rules that are framed to implement the law.
- The Wage Earners' Welfare Fund must be utilized for services that are provided to the migrants directly rather on administrative and infrastructural development activities. Otherwise, the subscription fee imposed on migrants should be reduced.



Unsafe dwelling of new migrants in hill slopes



A migrant child facing the challenge of going to school



Plastic factory work requires the migrant worker to stand all day long



- Ninety-five percent of the capital of Probashi Kalyan Bank is collected from the contribution of the migrant workers. Therefore, migrants should be made aware about the effectiveness of the bank after a thorough performance evaluation.
- System of free visa under which kafils sponsor migrants but do not employ them and migrants have to fend for themselves, often put many migrants in precarious condition once they reach their destination. The government should take effective measures to reduce the scope of sending workers under free visa. It may decide not to issue clearance of work-permit which are not linked to jobs.

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### Forthcoming publications of RMMRU

- Tasneem Siddiqui and Ansar Uddin Anas, *The Social Cost of Migration on Left Behind Husbands, Wives and Children in Bangladesh*
- Shahdeen Malik, *Regulation of Dalals and the Overseas Employment and Migration Act 2013: A Critical Assessment*
- Tasneem Siddiqui, *Towards Transparency in Recruitment: Making Dalals Visible*
- Tasneem Siddiqui (ed), *Obhibashir Okothito Golpo*



**Impact of Migration on Poverty and Growth in Bangladesh**

SDC RMMRU

Tasneem Siddiqui  
Ananta Neelam  
C. Rashaad Shabab  
Mahmudol Hasan

**About the book**

This book studies the role of migration in reducing poverty and enhancing growth and economic development in Bangladesh. The analysis is conducted on newly available data collected by SDC and RMMU which constitutes the second wave of a panel survey. Impact of Migration on Poverty and Local Development, which was published in 2015, was based on the first cross-section of this ongoing panel survey. This earlier study found that international migrants experienced lower rates of poverty and had higher indicators of living standards compared to non-migrant and internal migrant households. However, that study was limited by the cross-sectional nature of the data available at that time.

The current study is informed by a true panel, where the same households are observed over a three-year period. This richer data structure allows the study of a wide range dynamic processes that are related to migration. For example, the book studies the causes and implications of transitions in migration status within households over time. Where earlier work was restricted to static measures of poverty, this book is able to distinguish between chronic and transient poverty, while also studying the dynamics of poverty among migrant and non-migrant households. The book is able to study differences in asset accumulation and changes in investment patterns over time.

This book also benefits from an increase in the geographic scope of the survey sites. The newly added sites have been selected to include areas that produce female labour migrants. As a result, this book is able to identify the drivers and consequences of female labour migration in Bangladesh, a topic which has until now been understudied. The book documents clear differences between male and female international migrants in their levels of education, the ways in which they finance their migrations and the relative rate of return on their initial migration investments. It also catalogues important differences between the processes which drive international female migrants and internal female migrants.

Price: Tk. 600.00

**Accommodating Migration in Climate Change Adaptation**  
A GBM Delta Bangladesh Perspective

Tasneem Siddiqui  
Md. Rashed Alam Bhuiyan  
Prodip K. Das  
Gobinda Chakraborty  
Mahmudol Hasan

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Sumaiya Khair

ISBN 978-984-34-5454-6  
9 789843 454546

DECCMA

**About the book**

This book attempts to understand the influence of climate change on migration decisions of affected households who reside in Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) delta in Bangladesh. It also explores whether livelihood migration of one or a few members increases the adaptive capacity of the left behind households who face different stresses from climate change and environmental hazards.

The book draws from empirical data generated in 14 GBM delta districts of Bangladesh. It encompasses 50 mouzas of 41 upazilas representing very high, high, medium, low and very low climate hotspots of the delta. Based on population census of 200 households from each mouza, it proportionately samples 1386 households.

The analytical framework used in the study relies on multiple concepts. In understanding the drivers of migration, it also explores why around 70 percent of households did not participate in migration. This book questions the conventional wisdom that due to place attachment people do not want to move unless they are forced to.

By rigorous analysis of different autonomous adaptation measures practiced by the delta population, it provides strong evidence of contribution of livelihood migration in *in-situ* adaptation of left behind migrant households in origin areas. Along with continuing with local level adaptation programmes, it strongly recommends policy changes to accommodate migration as one of the climate change adaptation tools. Perhaps accommodation of migration will contribute to more inclusive growth, and raise demand for decentralization, creation of secondary cities and development of connectivity, rather than current approach of mega-city development around Dhaka and Chattogram.

Price: Tk. 600/-

# অভিবাসন ও সোনার মানুষ সম্মিলন ২০১৮

২৫ জানুয়ারি ২০১৮

বঙ্গবন্ধু আন্তর্জাতিক সম্মেলন কেন্দ্র



The Chair and the Chief Guest in the session on "Vision 2030 for Migration" in Obhibashon o Shonar Manush Shomnilon 2018

*This document is co-authored by Tasneem Siddiqui, Founding Chair, RMMRU, Marina Sultana, Director Programme, Rabeya Nasrin, Programme Officer, and Sanjida Akhter, Research Associate at RMMRU. Parvez Alam, Senior IT Officer at RMMRU prepared statistical graphs and graphic design. RMMRU thanks PROKAS Project of British Council under UKaid for supporting this publication.*

