

# **LABOUR MIGRATION FROM BANGLADESH 2017 ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES**



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An enterprising internal migrant, Manikganj

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# Labour Migration from Bangladesh 2017

## Achievements and Challenges

International migration plays a key role in the development of Bangladesh. Overseas employment and the concomitant flow of remittances of the Bangladeshi migrants contribute to the poverty alleviation efforts and local development in Bangladesh. Thus the migrant workers are a major driver in transforming Bangladesh as a lower middle-income country that is expected to officially graduate from the group of the least developed countries by 2024.

Realising the role of migrants in national development, Bangladesh government included labour migration in a number of planning documents i.e. Seventh Five Year Plan, National Skills Policy, Climate Change and Displacement Strategy Paper, DELTA planning and the SDGs implementation planning. In 2017, Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and its line agency, Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) have introduced a number of activities for better governance in migration sector. In line with the government initiatives, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have also undertaken various innovative initiatives to support the government and the migrants. Since 2010, RMMRU has been publishing Annual Migration Trends Report based on the evaluation of the activities of the government, private sector and the civil society. This report makes an assessment of the challenges and the major achievements in the migration sector in 2017. The report also suggests steps that can be taken in migration governance in 2018.

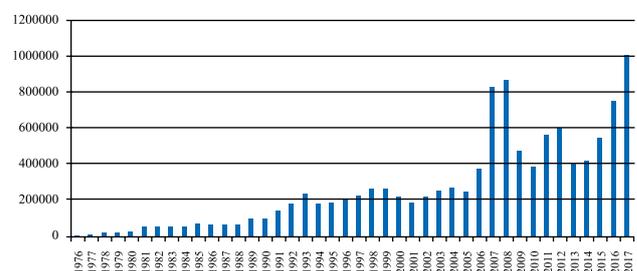
### 1. Labour Migration from Bangladesh 2017

#### 1.1 Flow of Migrants

In 2017 a total of 10,08,525 Bangladeshi workers migrated to the Gulf, South East Asia and other destination countries. In 2016, the figure stood at 7,57,731. In 2015 and 2014 the figures were 5,55,881 and 4,25,684 respectively. In 2017

migration flow has increased by 33.1% compared to the previous year. Therefore, overseas migration of more than a million workers in 2017 is surely a major achievement.

Graph 1: Labour Migration from Bangladesh from 1976 to 2017



Source: Prepared from BMET data

The Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) data inform that from the 1976 to December 2017, about 10.2 million Bangladeshis have migrated overseas for employment. Graph 1 presents year-wise labour flow from Bangladesh. It is not possible to ascertain the total number of returnee migrants in the absence of mechanism on tracking or keeping data on returnee migrants. There is a need for such data. Recently RMMRU has conducted a household survey in Tangail district on labour recruitment under PROKAS project of the UKaid. This survey found that among the migrant households, 44% were returnee migrants, 52% are current migrants and 4% households had both returnee and current migrants. In this study, only those returnees were considered as a returnee, who returned within the last 10 years and stayed in Bangladesh for more than 6 months. This finding is important for the government, banks and NGOs to design and plan activities for the rehabilitation and reintegration of the returnee Bangladeshis.

#### 1.2 Female Migration 2017

Female migration from Bangladesh has increased significantly over the last few years. In 2017, a



total of 1,21,925 female workers went abroad on employment, which is 3.24% higher than the previous year. In 2016, the figure stood at 1,18,088. As the number of male migration has increased, the percentage of female migration in the total flow has decreased. This year the flow of female migration is around 12.08% of the total.

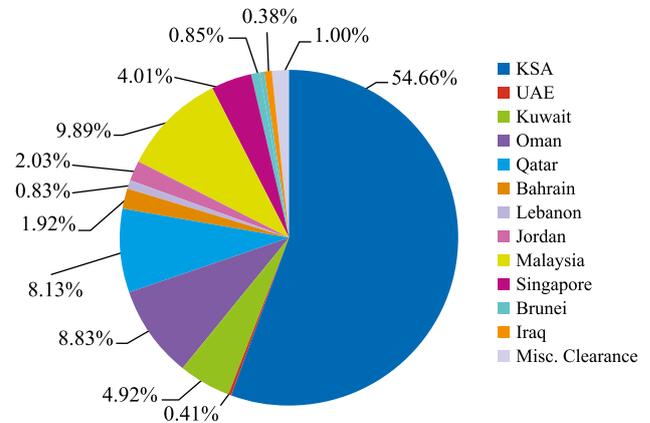
### 1.3 Countries of Destination

Like the previous years, most of the Bangladeshi short-term contract workers migrated to the Gulf and other Arab countries. This year has been no exception. Almost 82.11% of the total workers who migrated from Bangladesh went to the Gulf and other Arab countries in 2017. The remaining 17.89% went mostly to different South East Asian countries.

Let us look into the country-wise scenario of 2017. In 2017, the highest number of Bangladeshi workers migrated to Saudi Arabia. The figure stood at 5,51,308, which is about 54.66% of the total flow in 2017. The stagnation of Saudi Labour market that prevailed for a long period has started to recede during last few years. With Oman leading the table, Saudi Arabia was the second highest migrant-receiving country in 2016. By receiving 89,074 workers (8.83% of the total annual flow), Oman receded to third position this year. After a few years of instability, the Malaysian labour market appears to be vibrant with a significant rise in the flow to that country. Holding the second position, a total of 99,787 workers migrated to Malaysia, which has doubled than that of 2016.

By receiving 82,012 workers Qatar holds the fourth position. This amounts for 8.13% of the total annual flow. By receiving 49,604 workers, Kuwait holds the fifth position in 2017. Interestingly, the flow of migration to Malaysia, Oman and Qatar is pretty similar in 2017. Apart from that, 200 Bangladeshis have migrated to Japan between the years of 2013 to 2017. The UAE government's ban on the migration of male workers still remains in force. The number of female migrants also decreased this year. Except for a Memorandum of Understanding signed with an export-oriented association in Brazil, no new labour market was found in 2017.

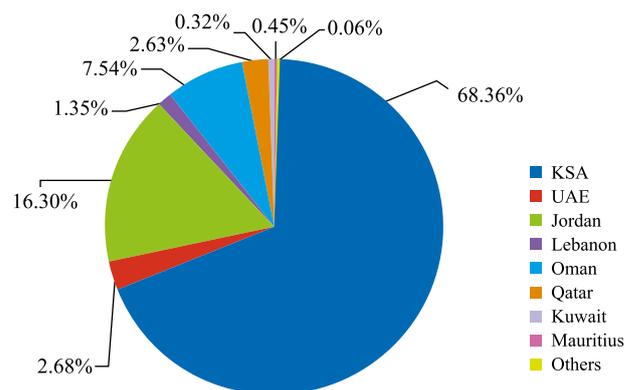
Chart -1: Destination Countries of Bangladeshi Migrant Workers in 2017



Source: Prepared from BMET data

As with male migration, Saudi Arabia has received the highest number of female workers from Bangladesh in 2017. A total of 83,354 female workers went to this country, which is almost 68.36% of the total flow of female migrants. Receiving 19,872 workers Jordan holds the second position. Oman accounts for the third position by receiving 9,199 female workers.

Chart -2: Destination Countries of Female Bangladeshi Migrant Workers in 2017



Source: Prepared from BMET data

Based on an overall assessment of the migration trend for both the male and female migration, it appears that Bangladeshi labour market has always been dominated by one particular country. Depending on years, it was Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar or Malaysia that dominated the labour market. But the problem with the monopoly of one particular

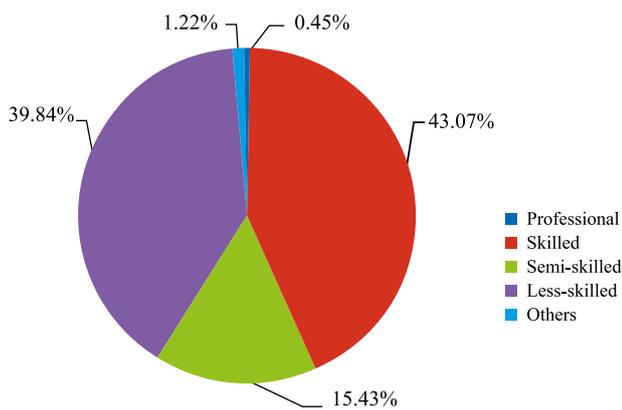


country is that if the country goes through a period of political, social or economic unrest, then it is the migrant labour force that is disproportionately and adversely affected.

### 1.4 Skill

Skilled migration has increased just by 1% from 42.07% in 2016 to 43.07% in 2017. Around 39.84% of the workers fall under the less skilled category, and 15.43% under semi-skilled category. These percentages have not changed in a major way from the previous years. Around 0.45% of the workers are in professional category.

Chart- 3: Skill Composition of Bangladeshi Migrant Workers in 2017



Source: Prepared from BMET data

Despite the growing number of international migrants in recent years, the proportion of skilled workers going abroad is still insignificant. The vast majority of our workers are still engaged in unskilled jobs. Due to their lack of skills, these workers are forced to undertake dangerous jobs with poor salary under hazardous working conditions, with irregular working hours.

### 1.5 Source areas

As in the previous year, Comilla tops the migrant source district list. Around 10.58% of total migration took place from Comilla in 2017. Brahmanbaria ranks second in the list replacing Chittagong (5.83%). After Comilla and Brahmanbaria, the next 8 important source districts are Chittagong (5.83%),



Book launching, January 2017



The harvest of an internal migrant's family, Mymensingh

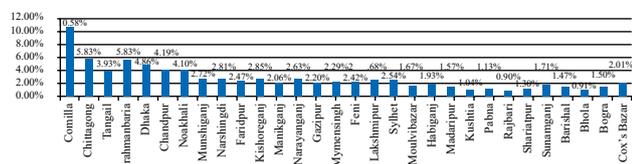


Jute processing by an international migrant household



Dhaka (4.86%), Chandpur (4.19%), Noakhali (4.10%), Tangail (3.93%), Kishoreganj (2.85%), Munshigonj (2.72%) and Narsingdi (2.81%). It should be highlighted that there has also been no major change in the list of districts and percentage as of previous years except in case of Tangail district. This year, migration from Tangail district has dropped to 7th position from the 4th and 3rd position in 2016 and 2015 respectively. Like previous years in 2017 as well an insignificant number of workers migrated from the northern part of the country. The scenario of the hill districts is also identical as the previous years. In 2017, migration from Bandarban was only 0.06% of the total flow, Khagrachori (0.10%) and from Rangamati (0.05%). Those who migrate from this region are mostly from the ethnic Bengali community. The majority of the indigenous community in Bangladesh lives in this region. This indigenous community who observe a distinct culture and language, are always neglected and there is no visible effort to bring them into the mainstream migration flow. Other communities like Santals, are also absent in the data.

Graph 2: Source areas of Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2017



Source: Prepared from BMET data

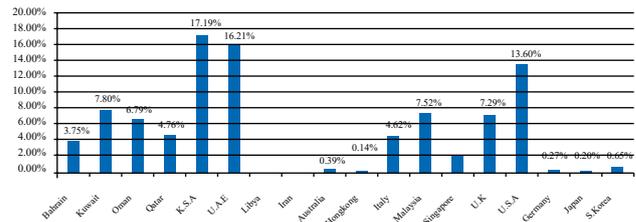
Recently, international migration is also taking place from the regions affected by climate change. RMMRU in collaboration with DECCMA has completed a household survey in 50 climate hotspots across Bangladesh. The findings inform that around 13% of the surveyed households has a migrant member overseas. Efforts should be made and policy should be framed in addressing the needs and skilling these people to undertake a safe and successful international migration.

### 1.6 Remittances

Remittance dropped to a six-year low to \$13.53 billion in 2017. The figure is 0.53 percent lower than 2016 a year in which migrant workers remitted \$13.6 billion.

As in the previous year, this year as well Saudi Arabia is the highest remittance sending country for Bangladesh (17.19%). It is followed by the UAE (16.21%) and the USA (13.60%) and Malaysia (7.52%) and the United Kingdom (7.29%). Nevertheless, given the record increase of migration in 2016 - 2017, the amount of remittance could have increased.

Graph 3: Source countries of major remittance flow in 2017



Source: Prepared from BMET data

Government and private banks have played a major role in receiving foreign remittance in 2017. According to the Bangladesh Bank, Islami Bank has collected over 19.3% (US \$2388 million) of the total remittances, making it the top remittance receiving bank in 2017. However, prior to the major change that occurred in the management of the bank, it used to collect around 30% of the total remittance flow. Islami Bank is followed by Agrani Bank (9.79%), Sonali Bank (7.82%), Janata Bank (6.44%) and Dutch-Bangla Bank (5.35%).

Graph 4: Remittance flow from 2001-2017



Source: Prepared from BMET data

### 1.7 Complaints

To provide assistance to deceived migrants, BMET receives complaints in two ways: through online



(www.ovijogbmet.org) and in person at BMET office. BMET launched online complaints system in 2009 with technical assistance from RMMRU. From its inception up to December 2017, a total of 647 complaints have been lodged. Of them, 453 have already been settled, and hearing has been completed in 181 cases, 11 complaints are under investigation and 2 complaints are pending. Through this online complaint system a total taka 1,82,84,000 has been recovered. The online complaint system was inoperational from January to April 2017. With the assistance of RMMRU, it has been re-established from April 27. From April 27 to December 31, a total of 37 online complaints were received in 2017. None of the complaints lodged in 2017, have been settled so far. Almost half of the complaints received in 2017, were filed from Saudi Arabia (16). The rest are from Bahrain (5), Oman (2), Malaysia (2) and Bangladesh (4), and one each from Singapore and Jordan. The rest 5 complaints did not mention the name of the country. Significantly, 12 complaints have been filed by the female migrants. Government agencies should address the concern immediately. Besides, lack of computer and IT skills among the migrants, lack of internet facilities at the destination and inadequate knowledge about the online system are also responsible for poor response in filing complaints. BMET has received a total of 156 complaints in person. From them, 103 complaints have been filed by female migrants and the rest 53 by male migrants.

## 2. Reflection on Important Migration Issues in 2017

### 2.1 Large Scale Fraudulence in Processing Migration

In 2017, RMMRU conducted a survey in Tangail district on 5407 households. The findings reveal that 51% of the aspirant, current and returnee migrant households experienced some form of fraudulence, harassment and inhumane or degrading behaviour during their migration process. Among this group, 19% could not go abroad after paying some or full amount mostly to relatives, friends and dalals. On an average, their families spent Tk. 2,43,000 in failed migration. 32% faced fraudulence and various degrading inhuman behavior while staying in the

countries of destination. Fraudulence is not unique to any particular country. Experience of fraudulence is common. 36% to 40% of those who went to Oman, Qatar, UAE and Malaysia experienced fraudulence. In case of Saudi Arabia and Singapore percentage of fraud cases stood around 25%.

### 2.2 Dalals-the Real Merchants of Migration

The findings of the same study reveal that there is no way out for the aspirant migrant families other than seeking the help of dalals (sub-agents) in processing international migration. Information on why, where and how to migrate is prerequisite of any migration decision. NGOs, and to some extent migrant activist groups, provide information on regular paths of migration. However these information sources are not sufficient to process migration. In most instances it is the dalals who process the work permit or visa that is needed to work abroad. Even the family visas that are being received from migrants relatives or acquaintances living abroad are processed through local dalals. Moreover, there is no system in which the recruiting agencies recruit workers directly from the villages. Therefore, despite having necessary information on migration, it is nearly impossible to migrate without the help of dalals.

As of now, dalals are the most important source of migration information on opportunities for jobs. The RMMRU study (2017) found that 57% of migrants first received information on jobs from the dalals. Around 7% migrant households availed overseas work visas through dalals. The latter helped 76% of migrants to complete BMET registration. About 32% applied and received their passport through dalals, 72% of migrants received BMET Smart Cards from dalals, 65% received help from dalals to arrive at the departure airport and 70% received the medical test with the help of dalals or their assistants. Even to receive pre-departure training, 90% of respondents went to training center with their local dalals and 85% collected their flight tickets from dalals. What is more revealing is that 90% of the migrants or members of their families have paid the full or partial cost of migration to the dalals. Therefore, it is evident that the demonization of dalals is not in conformity with the reality.



It does not matter from whom the migrant receives information on jobs or procures visa—he or she will have to avail the services of dalals to process migration. The above scenario clearly establishes the fact that under the present arrangement dalals are the real merchants and the main drivers in processing migration.

Since dalals do not have any legal entity, it is hard to bring them under legal cover. The absence of formal recognition, make it is easy for the recruiting agencies and others to pass on blames of fraud on the dalals. Time has come to institutionalize the dalal system by recognizing their role and bringing them under legal cover. In the Overseas Employment and Migration Act 2011, under the provisions of sections 31-36 and 47, there is scope to allow dalals to perform their task legally.

### **2.3 Reform in the Labour Receiving Countries**

Following a global outcry and concern over the treatment towards migrant workers, a major reform initiative has been undertaken in many Gulf countries. According to the new law in Saudi Arabia, women migrant workers will be accommodated in dormitories or hostels instead of placing them in houses of their employers in order to enhance the security. Labour supply agencies are responsible to organize this new facility. Workers will be transported from their hostels to the workplace. If these policies are implemented, instances of physical abuse and torture on female workers in Saudi Arabia are expected to be reduced. In order to ensure ethical recruitment, Saudi Arabia introduced the Musaned electronic platform for the direct hiring of domestic workers, without having any role of the middleman or agencies. Saudi Ministry of Labour has also unveiled a multi-language hotline for domestic workers to lodge complaints. A call from the victim is sufficient, the electronic tracking system will identify the address and will reach out immediately. The helpline is also aimed at answering inquiries and will inform domestic workers of their rights and duties.

### **2.4 Irregular Migration**

Irregular migration from Bangladesh has become a major challenge in recent years. IOM reports in the first quarter of 2017, more than 2,800 Bangladeshi arrived in Europe making the country the largest single source of origin of migrants arriving to European shores during that time. Another 2,000 Bangladeshis are still stranded in Turkey. Some Bangladeshis crossing the Mediterranean have lived in the country for up to four years, while others stayed there for months before attempting to travel to Europe. According to information gathered by IOM, Bangladeshi migrants pay up to \$10,000 to reach Libya, then another \$700 to board a boat. According to the Italian Ministry of the Interior in 2017 until 22 May, 5,650 Bangladeshis arrived in Italy, accounting for 11 percent of all arrivals of undocumented migrants to the country. Eurostat claims that from 2008 to 2015, a total of 93,435 Bangladeshis had illegally entered Europe.

In ‘Desperate Journeys’, a report of the UN refugee agency UNHCR published in February 2017, it was stated that Bangladesh topped the list of 10 countries from where persons were crossing the Mediterranean to reach Europe. And there were 72 children among the 8131 Bangladeshis who crossed the Mediterranean this year.

As response the European Union (EU) has threatened to impose visa restrictions unless Bangladesh rapidly takes back its illegal migrants. In 2017, Bangladesh and the European Union have signed standard operating procedure for the return of irregular migrants with no right to stay in EU member countries.

### **2.5 Labour Market Syndicate and Migration to Malaysia**

There has been no major improvement in sending workers to Malaysia in 2017. Transparency in labour recruitment from Bangladesh for Malaysia



still remains a major concern. This year government started sending workers through G2G plus agreement. It was undertaken by Malaysia and Bangladesh after the previous state-level labour hiring arrangement, G2G, signed in late 2012, appeared less effective. The Malaysian government, under its new system, has allowed only 10 recruiting agencies for sending workers to the country. However, there has been no significant progress in sending workers to Malaysia due to the ‘syndicate’ of these 10 recruiting agencies. There is a concern that if the cartel remains in operation, it will monopolize the job market and discriminate against other recruiting agencies.

## 2.6 Rohingya Refugees

Since late August 2017, more than a million Rohingya Muslims have fled Burma’s Rakhine State to neighbouring Bangladesh to escape the military’s large-scale genocidal campaign.

The atrocities committed by Burmese security forces, including mass killings, sexual violence, and widespread arson, amount to crimes against humanity. The plight of hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas has created to be one of the world’s fastest-growing refugee crisis. The refugee crisis has thrown major challenges to Bangladesh. In its emergency meeting on the Rohingya crisis on September 28, the UN Security Council identified the situation as the “world’s fastest developing refugee emergency” and a humanitarian and human rights nightmare”.

A systematic persecution of Rohingya community has been taking place since 1978 with the major outbreak in 1991-92, 2012, 2015, 2016 and the latest in August 2017. With killing, torture, rape, fire, shooting, fleeing civilians, what happened in August-September 2017 under the state military forces in Myanmar, is nothing but an organized genocide. Since 1992 to 25 August 2017, around 300,000 fled to Bangladesh. Neither the government nor the international community ever genuinely wanted to understand why these people have been



National consultation on the Global Compact



RMMRU receiving International Migrants Day award 2017



RMMRU participation on International Migrants Day 2017



pushed out from their home. Apparently, by the end of 2017, more than a million Rohingyas are now being looked after by the Bangladesh government.

On September 18, 2017, RMMRU published a set of recommendation in the leading Bangla daily Prothom Alo titled “Rohingya Refugees: Relief, Support and Repatriation”. Highlighting Bangladesh’s long experience in relief operation and rehabilitation, it urged the government to develop an urgent plan of action. Considering the complexity of the situation, this plan of action should coordinate the knowledge of the representative of the refugee community and the skills and expertise of the civil society in handling such crisis. Apart from the relief operation, aid and rehabilitation, the concern of the local people should also take into consideration. Basic needs like safe drinking water, sanitation, physical and psychological treatment, and specialized support for women and children should be provided on an urgent basis. A system should be developed and monitored to protect them from trafficking, smuggling and sexual violence. RMMRU also recommended running an international campaign and developing a long term and short term planning for their safe repatriation to Myanmar. In this unprecedented humanitarian crisis, India and China, the major powers in the region, have prioritized their geopolitical, strategic and security interest over the humanitarian principles. In this challenging atmosphere, it is important for Bangladesh to gain the support and trust of the international community to continue to put pressure on Myanmar for a sustainable and dignified repatriation of the Rohingyas.

Little progress has been achieved through various bilateral meetings between two countries since the crisis erupted. Bangladesh has signed repatriation deals with Myanmar on November 23 and December 18. However, a number of clauses in the agreement will only delay the process further. The latest agreement allows third-party involvement on repatriation and rehabilitation, but not on verification. In this matter Myanmar’s decision would be final. The agreement stresses

for documentation, but how come a community, who fled atrocities and ethnic cleansing, can be expected to furnish their documents? Bangladesh has to be extra cautious and keep the issue alive in the international forum. Myanmar is not a trusted neighbour and it has managed to successfully banish the Rohingyas from their own land. Bangladesh should lobby the powerful states and international community at large to impose economic and military embargo on Burma if it refuses to comply with repatriation agreement. A collective effort alone can solve the Rohingya crisis. In order to ensure this, we need to mobilize global civil society and launch social and cultural movements worldwide.

### **2.7 Rohingya Genocide: the Judgement of the International People’s Tribunal**

On 22 September the Permanent People’s Tribunal (PPT) at a session on State Crimes on Myanmar, deemed the Myanmar government guilty of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes against Rohingyas. The tribunal’s seven judges, comprising legal and human rights experts, handed down the preliminary judgment holding the State of Myanmar fully responsible for genocide against the Rohingya people. The hearings took place at the Malay University in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from September 18-22, 2017. The tribunal and the judges also accused Myanmar State Counselor Aung Sun Su Kyi and her military collaborators as “War Criminals” and recommended bringing them under the trial of the International Criminal Court. RMMRU Executive Director, CR Abrar was an expert witness at the PPT. As a follow up to the PPT, an international conference was organised in Dhaka on Ending Slow Burning Genocide of Rohingyas by Myanmar on November 29, 2017. RMMRU in collaboration with the Euro-Burma Office organized this international conference where more than 350 participants including international genocide scholars, Rohingya diaspora members, dissident Buddhist scholars, researchers, religious leaders and rights activists participated. It ended by adopting the following resolution:



“This International Conference on the Rohingya genocide by Myanmar, with scholars of law and genocide in the audience, on November 29, 2017 in Dhaka, Bangladesh, hereby resolves that what Rohingyas are facing is a textbook case of genocide where an indigenous community, living in their own ancestral land, is being systematically wiped out by the military, political and religious establishment of Myanmar.”

## 2.8 Global Compact

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants expressed the political will of world leaders to save lives, protect rights and share responsibility on a global scale. At the UN Summit on 19 September 2016, the world came together around one plan. Member States have reached an agreement by consensus on an outcome document. The Declaration reaffirms the importance of the international refugee regime and represents a commitment by the Member States to strengthen and enhance mechanisms to protect people on the move. It paves the way for the adoption of two new global compacts in 2018: a global compact on refugees and a global compact on migration. It is expected that these two compacts will identify inter-state policies on migration and decide the guideline for a safe, orderly and regular migration.

Following the adoption of the New York Declaration, an inter-governmental negotiation process started on April 6, 2017. This negotiation process was co-facilitated by Switzerland and Mexico, who were appointed by the President of the General Assembly to lead the consultations with States in order to determine the modalities relating to the intergovernmental negotiations. A stocktaking meeting took place in Mexico from 4-6 December 2017 to accumulate the inputs received during the national, regional consultation phase and it also discussed means of implementation and mechanisms for follow-up and review. These negotiations will lead to an intergovernmental conference on international migration in 2018, where the Global Compact on Migration (GCM) will be presented for adoption. Instead of having the universal ratification of the Geneva Convention 1951 for



Workshop with policy makers and city planners of Chittagong



International conference on Rohingya genocide



Solidarity press conference



the migrant workers and their families, the global compact was initiated by some of the powerful states. The Mediterranean refugee crisis and the arrival of millions of refugees in Europe triggered the question of national security in the New York Conference in 2016. The refugee flow was presented as irregular migration, which caused uproar during the conference. On the eve of first formal discussion on the compact on December 4, the US government pulled out of the global compact on migration. US Ambassador Nikki Haley said that “We will decide how best to control our borders and who will be allowed to enter our country. The global approach in the New York Declaration is simply not compatible with US sovereignty.” Observers have regretted the US decision and viewed that this would undermine collective action in addressing the global migration problem.

### 3. Service Providing Agencies

#### 3.1 Wage Earners’ Welfare Fund

The Wage Earners’ Welfare Fund (WEWF) was created in 1990 to provide various welfare services to the migrants. The main sources of funding of WEWF are: mandatory contribution of departing migrants, interest earned from license fees of recruiting agencies, consular fees charged at the embassies, fees collect at embassies for attestation of demand notes and work permits of the migrants, etc. Each departing worker pays BDT 3500 as a compulsory subscription to the Ministry and this year a total of BDT 32,61,42,000 has been received in this fund from the migrant workers.

In 2017, 49,695 departing migrants received pre-departure briefing under this fund. This year, BDT 101,16,30,192 has been paid as financial grant to the deceased migrant workers families. Another BDT 11,41,35,000 has been spent on bringing back bodies of deceased workers from destination countries and facilitating their burial. About 955 families were paid compensation amounting to BDT. 69,35,21,364 million. From 2009 until June 2017, a total of BDT 1,53,00,000 has been paid to 140 injured and disabled workers as financial grant. To encourage education among the children of migrant workers, WEWF introduced scholarship programme since 2012. Students from class six until the final year of

the graduation received scholarship From 2012 to 2017, a total of Tk. 80,244,400 has been spent on this stipend programme. This year, 2658 students received this stipend.

In order to provide shelter to the female migrant workers who face torture, harassment, insecurity and many other similar problems, safe homes have been established with funds from WEWF predominantly in countries where mostly female workers migrate. From 2009 to 2017, Tk. 2,23,00,000 has been spent on maintaining safe homes in these countries. These safe homes are run under the supervision of the Bangladesh missions and provide food, health and all other services. Currently, there are three safe homes in Saudi Arabia (Jeddah 2 and Riyadh 1), one each in Oman and Lebanon.

The Fund is also used in a range of activities. Included among them is supporting schools for children of Bangladeshi migrants abroad, one-stop services in migrant welfare building, establishment of Wage Earners’ Welfare Board office and automation of this and other offices, purchase of office air-conditioners, maintenance of vehicles, operation of SMART card system, online registration of workers, foreign trips of ministry and BMET officials for searching new markets.

It has been reported that a sum of Tk.380 crore has been earmarked from the WEWF to Migrants Welfare Bank from this fund. It is unfortunate that the money of the poor migrants which is supposed to be spent on their direct services are being spent on opening new branches of the bank and paying the salary of its employees. The Bangladesh Civil Society on Migration (BCSM), urged the government and the concerned ministries not to proceed with the transaction. Instead, if government feels the urgency, the amount can be sourced from the government’s own account. WEWF is a major innovation of the Bangladesh government. There has been a number of innovative uses of such fund in many South Asian countries and in the Philippines. In India, the Non-Resident Indian Fund (NRIF), in Pakistan, the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF), and in the Philippines Overseas Contract Workers Fund (OCW) have developed numerous investment projects.



These projects have been further supported and augmented through collaboration with banks and other financial institutions under the Corporate Social Responsibility Fund. The workers are also a major stakeholder in many such initiatives. Bangladesh government can undertake similar projects to better use of the fund including facilitating successful reintegration of the returnee migrants.

### 3.2 Recruiting Agency

BMET database informs there are 1165 licensed recruiting agencies. Of them 554 recruiting agencies are authorised to send female migrant workers to Saudi Arabia. In 2017, the licenses of 116 recruiting agents have been suspended.

### 3.3 Probashi Kallayan Bank

The Probashi Kallyan Bank operates 55 Branches. The bank did not open any new branch in 2017. However, a proposal for launching 9 new branches is under consideration of the Bangladesh Bank. In 2017-2018 fiscal year, out of the 10,08,525 migrants who departed for overseas employment, only 2839 secured loan from this bank to finance their migration. The total amount disbursed in 2017 for processing migration was Tk. 36 crore 08 lac . Only 3 returnee migrants received Tk. 600,000 as reintegration loan. Since its opening until December 2017, 26,416 migrants received Tk.263 crore 31 lac as loan from this bank. A total Tk.187 crore 34 lac has already been returned. So far, there has been no proper evaluation of the bank's activities. Moreover, it has been reported the government has decided to secure another large amount of money from Wage Earners Welfare Fund to further capitalize the PKB.

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

In order to provide services to migrant workers at the grassroots level, 42 DEMO offices are functioning currently under the BMET. The Ministry of Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment has decided to set up DEMO offices in all 64 districts and divisional offices in all seven divisional headquarters, which is expected to be completed by the year



An international migrant enjoying her holidays, Faridpur



Colouring leaf for weaving mat, Lakshmipur



Children of a migrant, Faridpur



2020. In order to decentralize the service system under DEMO offices, BMET has taken some major initiatives in 2017. This year, 29 DEMO offices introduced fingerprint collection system. Smart cards are being distributed from Dhaka and Chittagong DEMO offices. Under the decentralization initiatives, 6 more DEMO offices (Comilla, Sylhet, Gopalganj, Jessore, Pabna and Rangpur) will be provided with the Smart Card distribution facilities. Currently, Chittagong DEMO office is providing a large number of services to the migrants. Earlier it used to be processed only by Dhaka office.

However, an evaluation of the institutional structure of these offices reveals that unlike other government officials, DEMO office employees start their career from 9th salary grade. This financial constraint is demotivating. Besides, the possibility of promotion in their job is also limited. The staff members do not receive any specialized training to serve the workers and never get posted abroad. Moreover, DEMO offices do not have their own office buildings which make their activities less visible. In order to make the decentralization initiatives successful, concerned authorities also need to address the above-mentioned problems.

### 3.5 Human Resources Development and TTC

There are 62 Technical Training Centers (TTCs) including 6 diploma level Marine Technology Centres and 3 internee training centers under the BMET. Among these 62 TTCs, 38 TTCs provide training on housekeeping trade which was 30 the previous year. Currently, 66 TTCs provides pre-departure training to the aspirant migrants, the number was limited to 6 in 2016. This is a major achievement of the decentralization process.

### 3.6 Labour Attaché

Labour attaches are the main points of contact between the migrants at their destination and their country of origin. Currently, 29 labour wings are functioning in 26 countries. Recently a new labour

wing has been established in Mauritius. A total of 41 labour attaches are currently working in these labour wings. An additional 300 employees are working to support the labour attaches. Due to the increasing number of female migrants from Bangladesh, it is essential to appoint more female staff at the labour wings abroad. Besides, lack of knowledge of the local language by the labour attaches and a lack of resources for employing interpreter and lawyers act as a major hindrance in securing justice in favour of migrants at the destination countries. Besides, there is yet to emerge appropriate coordination between the foreign ministry and the ministry of expatriates' welfare to serve the labour migrants. Employees under the labour attaches are often used for other departments which restrict extending services to the migrants.

## 4. Initiatives by the Civil Society in 2017

For decades, civil society has been playing an 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, submit complaints 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 government to undertake various policy reforms. In 2017, WARBE, BOMSA, BRAC, OKUP, IMA, Awaj Foundation and RMMRU collectively provided more than 715 training on pre-decision and 438 pre-departure training. Altogether, these institutions helped migrants and victims' families to recoup about Tk. 63,94,500 against 149 claims through local settlements.

This year, civil society institutions have introduced some innovative services. RMMRU launched a pilot project on mediation programme in one Union and a Poursrava in Tangail district in 2017. It formed two mediation committees consisting 11 and 15 members in each committee. A Youth Volunteer Group and an



advisory committee has been formed. At the initial phase, the mediation committee resolved 14 cases out of the 30 cases submitted. Through this, cheated migrants and victims' recovered Tk. 10,45,000 as compensation. This year, for the first time in Bangladesh, RMMRU launched a mobile app titled Ovijogbmet for the cheated migrants to submit their complaints online. Any migrant who experienced cheat, fraudulence or any other problem can submit their complaints from any part of the world.

The most innovative contribution of the WARBE DF in 2017 is the formation of the Parliamentary Caucus on Migration. Establishment of a Grievance Receiving Centre in the BMET building is also an important achievement of WARBE.

BOMSA is working at the policy level on strengthening monitoring of the labour wing, arranging accommodation for the female workers in TTCs and handing over the main certificate to the female workers.

In order to encourage the return of the irregular Bangladeshi migrants from Europe, BRAC has introduced a reintegration project for the returnees with the support from the European Union and IOM. Through establishing re-integration service center in 10 districts, this project is providing support to the returnee and affected migrants for their social, psychological and economic re-integration. By recruiting 10 professional counselors, this project will also provide psychological counseling. It also established an information center near the Dhaka airport to provide information, develop a database of the returnees and to ensure hotline services for the cheated and affected returnee migrants.

Awaj Foundation has started a mechanism system to increase civil society cooperation with the labour receiving countries especially with Malaysia, Singapore and Lebanon. By establishing 20 Women Workers Cafe center, it is working on collecting information for the aspirant migrants to facilitate their safe migration.



A middleman pleading his case in mediation



Rohingyas at Kutupalong raises hand to go back



Solidarity Rally



OKUP has been providing health training to the Bangladeshi female migrant workers in Lebanon. They formed coordination group and developed a system to exchange information among the groups. Besides, they organized National Migrant Congress in order to ensure sufficient budget for the migrants in National Budget 2017.

## 5. New Knowledge on Migration in 2017

RMMRU recently organized a miking campaign (using public address system) at three unions in Tangail district to collect data of fraudulence cases and know the preferred choice of accessing justice. The findings of this exercise showed that 72% people preferred mediation, 25% wanted justice through pursuing litigation, 2% preferred BMET arbitration and 1% expressed no particular preference.

RMMRU in collaboration with Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) and Southampton University conducted a study on Climate Change and Migration in DELTA region. The findings reveal that almost 21% of the international and internal migration from 19 coastal and delta districts including Bhola, Lakshmipur, Jessore, Noakhali, Chittagong, Barguna and Bagerhat, took place due to the climate change and intensified natural disasters and livelihood crisis. The study findings inform almost half of the 50 study area populations was directly affected by drought, flood, riverbank erosion and salinity. The loss of property and homestead, the threat to the food security has increased in last 10 years as a consequence of the dire environmental crisis. It forecasts that the number of migration will further increase in coming years due to the climate change. One-third of the respondents believe that they have to migrate in future for work due to the natural disaster.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendation

In terms of sending workers abroad, the achievement in 2017 is laudable. More than a million Bangladeshis migrated for overseas employment this year, a record in the history of Bangladeshi labour migration. Along with the female migration, male migration has also registered an upward trend. Nevertheless, in contrast to these success stories, there remain a few challenges. Fraudulence in processing migration has become a grave concern. Around 19% could not go abroad after making part or full payment of migration costs. A significant number of workers faced jail, blackmail, physical, verbal and sexual torture in the destination. A recent study on dalals has brought a new perspective and some important findings regarding their role in facilitating migration. Dalals are working as a bridge between government, recruiting agencies and the aspirant migrants. It would have been impossible for many families to migrate overseas without the help of dalals. RMMRU urges the government to institutionalize the dalal system by recognizing their role and bringing them under legal cover.

The decentralization system introduced by the BMET this year is indeed a major move forward. In order to reap the benefit of this decentralization system, the government should recruit skilled employees in all these vacant positions, skilling the workforce, provide proper grade in government service structure and take strong action against corruption. Again, a large number of these challenges can be well addressed. We expect the government will take necessary steps in order to resolve these challenges.

The Rohingya refugee crisis has posed a major challenge for Bangladesh. The Permanent People's Tribunal (PPT) on Myanmar held Myanmar government guilty of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes against Rohingyas. The tribunal and the judges also accused Myanmar State Counselor Aung Sun Su Kyi and her military collaborators as "War Criminal" and recommended bringing them under the trial of the International Criminal Court.



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## Forthcoming publications of RMMRU

- Sumaiya Khair, Justice at the Doorsteps: Mediation on Migration Fraudulence, RMMRU
- Shahdeen Malik, Regulation of Dalals and the Overseas Employment & Migration Act 2013: A Critical Assessment, RMMRU
- Tasneem Siddiqui and CR Abrar, Towards Transparency in Recruitment: Making Dalals Visible, RMMRU,
- ASM Ali Ashraf , Dynamics of Decentralisation: Migration Services under Spotlight, RMMRU
- Nurullah Azad, Social Exclusion and Migration: Policy Implications from Convergence and Divergence , RMMRU



Collection of fraud cases through miking



Migrant from Bhola adapting to new livelihood in Chittagong



Modernising agriculture: international migrant, Brahmanbaria



Ministers of EWOE, Home and Foreign Affairs visiting RMMRU stall during International Migrants Day 2017

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