

LABOUR MIGRATION FROM BANGLADESH 2019

ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES



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অভিবাসন ও সোনার মানুষ সম্মিলন ২০১৯



The Chief Guest of the award ceremony, Mr. M A Mannan, MP Minister of Planning of Obhibashon o Shonar Manush Shommilon 2019

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Labour Migration from Bangladesh 2019

Achievements and Challenges

Since 2010 the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) has been publishing annual reports on the achievements and challenges faced by the migration sector in Bangladesh. This 2019 Report is a continuation of the initiative. It is divided into seven sections. Section 1 presents the statistics of migration flows and patterns while Section 2 focuses on the initiatives and issues at the national and international levels. Section 3 reviews the activities of the service providing agencies. Bangladesh's role in the international arena is discussed in section 4. Section 5 focuses on the role of the civil society while Section 6 presents new knowledge acquired and Section 7 offers some recommendations for the sector.

1. Labour Migration from Bangladesh 2019

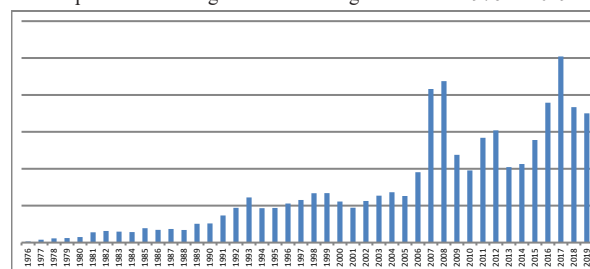
1.1 Flow of Migrants

According to BMET, a total of 700,159 Bangladeshi workers migrated to different countries of the world including the Gulf, other Arab and South-East Asian countries in 2019. This year (2019), the flow of migration has decreased by about 5% in comparison to the previous year. In 2018, the total number of workers who migrated from Bangladesh stood at 734,181.

From 1976 to 2019 a total of 12,899,283 Bangladeshis migrated overseas for employment. ¹It does not necessarily indicate that currently 12,800,000 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 thus it is not possible to have an estimate about the number of Bangladeshi currently working abroad. Although Bangladeshis have gone to 173 countries for work,

more than 95% of workers migrate to a little more than a dozen countries

Graph 1: Labour migration from Bangladesh from 1976 to 2019



Source: Prepared from BMET data

1.2 Female Migration

In 2019 a total of 104,786 female workers migrated from Bangladesh for work. During this year, the female migration rate had increased by 3.04% from the previous year. A RMMRU survey shows that the average age of a female worker is 27 years. 70% of them are married and 30% are divorced or widowed.

1.3 Countries of Destination

BMET's data informs that most Bangladeshi short-term contract workers primarily migrate to the Gulf and other Arab states. In 2019 this trends was maintained. Almost 82% of the total number of workers who had migrated from Bangladesh went to the Gulf and other Arab states. The majority of the remaining 18% went to different South-East Asian countries.

In 2019, the highest number of Bangladeshi workers migrated to Saudi Arabia. The figure stood at 399,000, which is about 56.99% of the total flow of migrants. The second-largest flow was to Oman of 72,654 migrants that constituted about 10.38% of the total flow.

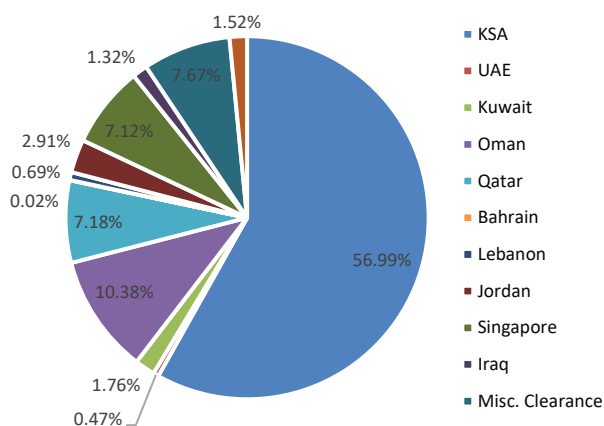
¹BMET Website (<http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/statisticalDataAction>)



Qatar is the third-largest destination country for Bangladeshi workers which received 50,292 (7.18%) migrants. Singapore holds the 4th position by receiving 49,829 (7.12 %) of workers. Kuwait is ranked fifth with a total of 12,299 migrants going to the country which is about 1.76 % of the total number of migrants. The three countries – Oman, Qatar and Singapore have received an almost similar number of migrants this year.

An issue of concern has been the continuation of ban on male workers from Bangladesh in UAE. At the same time following the termination of the G2G-Plus agreement Malaysia has also stopped receiving workers from Bangladesh. Malaysia was the second largest labour-receiving country in 2018 with 175,927 workers migrating to that country. However, only 545 workers who got work permits before the G2G-Plus were able to migrate to Malaysia in 2019.

Chart 1: Destination Countries of Bangladeshi Migrant Workers in 2018



Source: Prepared from BMET data

Saudi Arabia is the main destination state for women migrants. This year, 62,578 women workers migrated to that country. This is

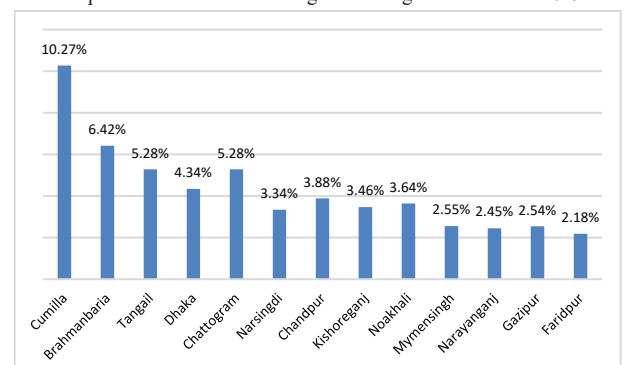
59.72% of the total number of female migrants. Also, 19,706 women workers migrated to Jordan, while 12,226 women went to Oman. These three countries account for 90% of female workers from Bangladesh.

Like previous years, this year as well, Bangladesh is mostly dependent on a few destination countries that provided job opportunities to its citizens. This puts Bangladesh in a difficult situation. If the countries concerned decide not to accept workers from Bangladesh or their economies are subjected to any kind crisis (financial, health related or disaster) then that would have significant adverse impact on the flow of workers from Bangladesh.

1.4 Source Areas

As in previous years, the largest outflow of international migrants in 2019 was recorded from Cumilla district. It accounted for 9.47% of the total flow. This year a total of 66,335 migrants went aboard from this district. Brahmanbaria ranked second with 41,455 workers migrating from the district constituting 5.92% of the total flow. Chattogram is the third-largest migrant sending district with 34,887 (4.98%) of total flow.

Graph 2: Sources areas of Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2019



Source: Prepared from BMET data

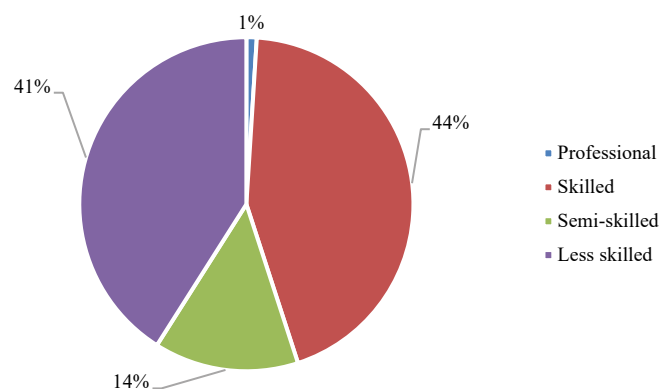


In 2018, Tangail ranked third in the list but this time the district moved to the fourth position. From this district, a total of 34,076 workers migrated which was 4.87% of the total flow. This year, there has not been any change in the hill districts in terms of international migration. Only 423 workers migrated from Bandarban which accounted for only 0.06 of the total migration, 806 (0.12%) from Khagrachari and 504 (0.07%) from Rangamati. The migrants from the hill districts were mainly the Bengali population living in that area.

1.5 Skill Composition

According to the BMET, there are 64 Technical Training Centers (TTCs) with 6 Institutes of Marine Technology to develop skilled labour. Through these institutions, the government is providing training in fifty-five trades. Several steps have been taken to modernize the TTCs this year. The BMET divides migrant workers into four categories based on their skills. Accordingly to BMET, about 2,073 workers migrated as professionals (1%), 252,862 as skilled (44%), 27,007 as semi-skilled (14%) and 377,102 as less skilled (41%) abroad during the fiscal year of 2019-2020.

Chart 3: Skill composition of Bangladeshi Migrant workers in 2019



Source: Prepared from BMET data



Courtyard meeting at Cumilla



DEMO AD Present at Pre Decision orientation at Cumilla



GMC and DEMO are jointly raising awareness about safe migration and linking the government services to community migrants.

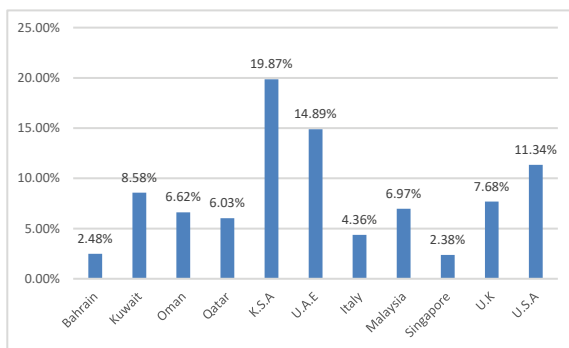


In August 2019, an agreement was signed with between Bangladesh and Japan for sending skilled workers. According to this agreement in the next five years Japan will receive a total of 342,000. However, one of the conditions for sending these workers is that they should be able to speak Japanese language. With the help of the IM Japan (International Manpower Development Organization) BMET has officially sent 183 skilled workers to that country until October 2019.

1.6 Remittances

According to Bangladesh Bank, Bangladeshi migrants have remitted US\$18.33 billion in 2019. The figure was 17.95% higher than that of 2018 (\$15.54 billion)². Foreign exchange reserve of Bangladesh Bank is in a satisfactory condition due to the increased flow of remittance. In 2019, the total reserve of Bangladesh Bank stood at \$38.50 billion³.

Graph 3: Source countries of major remittance flow in 2018

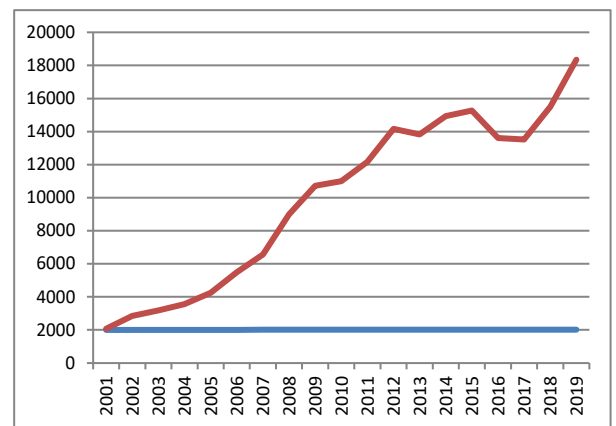


Source: Prepared from BMET data

As in the previous years, Saudi Arabia is the source country of the highest amount of remittance (19.90%) to Bangladesh. This is followed by the United Arab Emirates (14.92%), the United States (11.39%), Kuwait (8.60%), Malaysia (6.98%), and the United Kingdom (7.69%). According to Bangladesh Bank, with the receipt of \$3482.84 million (19.00%) the largest remittance-receiving

bank is the Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited. With \$1932.93 million (10.54%) the second largest remittance receiving bank is Dutch Bangla Bank Ltd. The other banks are Agrani Bank (\$1770.12 million - 9.66%), Sonali Bank \$1247.73 - 6.8 %) million and Janata Bank (\$902.08 million - 4.92 %).

Graph 4: Remittance flow from 2001-2019



Source: Prepared from BMET data

2. Important Migration Issues in 2019

2.1 Unexpected Return of Female Workers from Saudi Arabia

A total of 62,587 female workers have migrated to Saudi Arabia in 2019. At the same time, a large number of female migrants had to return as victims of ill treatment. However, the exact figure of returnee female migrants is not known. They reported mental, physical and sexual abuse in that country. Some had passed away. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs sources inform that a total of 9,177 female migrants have been kept in shelter homes in Saudi Arabia from 2015 to 30 October 2019. Of them, 8,637 female migrants were sent back to the country. During the first 10 months of this year, 1,206 female migrants were kept in the shelter homes run by the Bangladesh Embassy in Riyadh. Of them, 93 migrants were sick and at least 16 were pregnant while they returned to Bangladesh.⁴

²Bangladesh Bank Website (www.bb.org.bd/econdata/wageremittance.php)

³Bangladesh Bank Website (www.bb.org.bd/econdata/intreserve.php)



In cases of deceased migrants although the concerned countries provide death certificates, the cause of death is not further verified in Bangladesh. The Wage Earners' Welfare Board has reviewed the data of 311 returned dead bodies of women workers who were brought back from the Middle East from June 2016 to June 2019. It was alleged that 53 of them committed suicide, 120 migrants suffered from strokes and 56 died in accidents. On the other hand, a report was sent from the Bangladesh Embassy in the first week of November on the situation of women workers in Saudi Arabia. The report stated that 131 dead bodies of female migrants were returned from the Middle East from January 2015 to October 2019. Of them 98 had committed suicide, 5 were murdered⁵.

According to BMET, a total of 62,578 female workers migrated to Saudi Arabia in 2019. However, exact figures are not available on the number of women workers who have returned to Bangladesh during that period. Newspapers and private organization sources claim that there has been an estimated 3,000 female workers who returned from Saudi Arabia in 2019. However, the government has reiterated that women workers will not migrate if they are not guaranteed respectable jobs⁶.

2.2 Saudi Nationalization and Return of Male Workers

The Saudi government has decided to nationalize various professions in 2018. According to the new policy, no foreigner can be employed in the 12 types of work in Saudi Arabia. This process was implemented from November 10, 2018, of which 4 occupations had already been nationalized. A government measure stipulates that 60% of workers in the fisheries industry must be Saudi and only 40% can be sponsored from abroad. To encourage the appointment of Saudi nationals, the government has

provided an incentive of bearing the half of the salary of the Saudi nationals. The decision of the authorities to allow Saudi women to drive may also have an impact on the migration of drivers to that country.

Foreign workers are also banned from working in the Borkha (veil) factories. This will also force many Bangladeshi workers to return. Besides, under the Saudi law, there is no opportunity to work on a free visa. Workers will have to work in a particular company without any possibility of changing their Iqamas (work permit). If anyone takes up employment with another employer other than the sponsor his/her visa will get cancelled rendering the person in irregular status.

The cost of migration is the highest in Bangladesh and the salary of Bangladeshi workers is one of the lowest. Many hiring firms terminate their migrant staff before their contract expires. Ever since the Saudi government imposed taxes, many of the migrants were forced to take up multiple jobs to bear both migration costs as well as the new taxes. Those working for employers other than the employer stipulated in the contract are apprehended by the authority. They are detained and subsequently deported to Bangladesh despite having an iqama (work permit). According to the Welfare Desk, about 21,000 workers returned to Bangladesh by October 2019. Bangladesh Embassy in Riyadh informs if anyone works outside the sponsor, escapes or violates any provision of the iqama, border and labour law, then the law enforcement agencies are allowed to detain the migrants based on specific allegations. Saudi Arabia can deport the migrant to his/her own country.

2.3 Finding New Labour Market and Accessing Old Market

In October 2019, Seychelles, the island nation of East Africa, withdrew the ban on workers and signed an agreement with Bangladesh.

⁴Prothom Alo, November 5, 2019 (<http://bit.ly/3g0ESWS>)

⁵Prothom-Alo, November 17, 2019

⁶Samakal, November 12, 2019



Under this agreement Bangladeshi workers will be able to migrate to Seychelles at zero cost. The country currently employs about 2,500 Bangladeshi workers; most of them work in the construction industry. Besides, Bangladeshi workers are employed in hotels, tourism, healthcare, housekeeping, villa attendants, and in agriculture and poultry sectors. They also have the opportunity to work in the fishing industry, financial institutions and tourism sectors.

Although the UAE's labour market was scheduled to open for men in 2018, it remains closed until now. So far, the country is accepting only female domestic workers from Bangladesh. A total of 3,318 workers have migrated from Bangladesh to the UAE; among them 2,483 were women. However, at a ceremony of the Dubai Air Show in 2019 a meeting between the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and the Emir of the United Arab Emirates created the scope of lifting the ban on male workers from Bangladesh.

After Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad's government assumed power in Malaysia, as part of the corruption investigation of the members of the Najib government labour recruitment process was stopped from Bangladesh from September 2018. In 2019 only 545 workers whose cases were approved by the Malaysian authorities before August 2018 were allowed to enter the country. In a bilateral meeting on September 25, 2018 both countries decided that all Bangladeshi registered recruiting agencies will be allowed to recruit workers for Malaysia⁷. The new method for hiring workers is yet to be finalized. Although the two countries had several rounds of meetings to address the issue, no MoU has been signed yet. Under a separate arrangement workers have started to migrate to Sarawak province of Malaysia.

Foreign workers who have been working in

Malaysia without valid documents for a long time have been allowed to return to their own countries by December 31, 2019, under the "Back for Good" programme. About 30,000 workers were reported to be on the list.

2.4 Irregular Migration

The Government of Bangladesh has banned workers from migrating to Libya due to the country's political instability. In last five years, only 500 people have migrated to Libya following due procedure. In 2019, only 213 migrated to Libya. However, Libya is being used as an irregular route to Europe. Many Bangladeshis cross the Mediterranean Sea to Libya to eventually reach Italy or Greece. Well organised human trafficking networks operate that send aspirant migrants to Italy from Bangladesh via India, Dubai, Turkey, Libya using the Tunisian coast. In November of this year, 152 Bangladeshis were repatriated from Libya.

2.5 Rohingya Refugee

August 25, 2019 marked the second anniversary of the beginning of an influx of a large number of Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh. Despite signing bilateral agreements between the two countries and a series of meetings so far not a single Rohingya has been repatriated to Myanmar. This is because Myanmar has failed to create necessary enabling environment for repatriation. The Myanmar government has unfairly blamed Bangladesh for delaying the repatriation process.

A significant development has been the filing of a case by the Gambia in the International Court in the second week of December 2019. The Gambia has charged Myanmar government for conducting genocide against the Rohingya. The court issued an interim order to stop further atrocity crimes against the Rohingya people. The interim order has been viewed as a moral victory for the Rohingya.

⁷Daily Sun July 19, 2019 (<https://bit.ly/3o9saIq>)



Not surprisingly the Myanmar government rejected the allegations of genocide and claimed that its army had launched an anti-terror operation in the Rakhine region. The Free Rohingya Coalition, an international association of the Rohingya diaspora called for a movement to boycott Myanmar products on December 9, 2010 the International Genocide Day.

2.6 Pass the Citizenship Amendment Bill of India and NRC application in the State of Assam

The implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in the Indian state of Assam and the enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Bill are recent examples of the rise of religion based nationalism in India. The registration of the citizens of Assam under the NRC was completed in 2019. The decision for registration is the result of a court judgment in response to the demands of a group of student organizations of Assam. Political analysts believe that the current BJP government implemented the NRC as part of its religion-based politics. Contrary to the expectations of the BJP leadership that the registration process would affect only the Muslims, a staggering number of 4,000,000 Assam residents including a large number belonging to the Hindu faith were excluded from the registration. Of those, 3,600,000 applied for reconsideration. It is estimated that about 2 million Assam people will become stateless through the process⁸.

In December this year, the Indian Citizenship Act was amended to create an opportunity to grant citizenship to Indians of any religion other than Muslims who would not be able to prove their citizenship by birth. At the same time, India is setting up detention camps in several states, including Assam, to accommodate the new stateless. One of the concerns for Bangladesh is that the citizenship amendment act has created scope to expel members of the Muslim community to neighboring countries including Bangladesh. Although the Prime Minister of India has verbally assured the Prime Minister of Bangladesh that no

⁷The India Forum, November 13, 2019 (<http://bit.ly/2KGXEav>)



Signing of MoU with a2i and RMMRU



The Chief Guest of the award ceremony, Mr. M A Mannan, MP Minister of Planning of Obhibashon o Shonar Manush Shommilon 2019



Conference on “Transforming Challenges of Migration into Opportunity Call for declaration of 2021-2030 as the Decade of Migration in Bangladesh



deportation will take place as a result of NRC⁹, in reality several members of the Muslim community have already been pushed back to Bangladesh without following due procedure.

In addition to the Rohingya refugee challenge, expulsion of members of Muslim community from India, including from Assam, can pose a major challenge for Bangladesh. The government needs to engage in extensive diplomatic efforts to address this challenge.

2.7 Changes in law and policy in Bangladesh

2.7.1 Government Incentives for Remittance Senders

This year Bangladesh Bank has decided to offer 2% incentive on remittance to encourage its through the regular channel. It was put into effect from July 1, 2019. According to Bangladesh Bank, the remittance flow was increased by 17.95% and reached at US\$18.33 billion. In contrast it was \$15.54 billion in 2018. From January to June 2019 the volume of remittance was \$8.92 billion while after the announcement of the incentive from July to December it rose to \$9.40 billion.

2.7.2 Life insurance

Compulsory life insurance for overseas migrant workers is an important step taken by the government in 2019. On the occasion of International Migrants' Day the Prime Minister inaugurated the insurance scheme for the protection of labour migrants. On the occasion, the Prime Minister said that workers are being covered under low-cost insurance scheme from this year. Half of the insurance premium will be covered by the government¹⁰. The employees insured under the scheme for two years will get Tk. 200,000 to 400,000 for injury or death while abroad. Under the current system, workers in regular status abroad pay a fee of Tk. 3,500 as insurance fee to the Wage

Earners Board before leaving the country. If a worker dies abroad, he is provided financial assistance of Tk 300,000. This insurance has been introduced by keeping this facility. Workers will not be allowed to migrate if they do not have insurance. Those who have legally migrated in the past can also be beneficiaries of this scheme. The insurance will have to be renewed within two years. If due to accidents eyes, hands and feet are lost, the insured workers will get the full amount of money. However, if a worker dies in war or riots he will not be covered under the scheme. Proper information has to be disseminated among the migrant workers regarding the benefits offered by this scheme. Measures should be in place to monitor payments of claims by the concerned company.

2.7.3 Special Instructions of the Ministry for the

Protection of Women Workers

The media and civil society have been concerned throughout the year about the mistreatment and persecution of women domestic workers in Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Employment issued a directive on December 10, 2019. The directive states that if a recruiting agency facilitates migration of woman by providing false information on age and without medical checkup, legal action will be taken against the recruiting agency. It has also taken steps to increase the supervisory capacity of the Female Migrants Protection Cell, extend the training period of the female worker to 30 days, introduced a third party evaluation of training of women workers and ensure that recruiting agencies provide workers Bangla translation of the contract they go abroad and a cell phone. Steps have been taken to maintain a list of returning women and their flight numbers in advance with the concerned wing of the Welfare Desk and recruiting agency. Initiatives have been taken to send the personal details about

⁹The Print 30 December 2019 (<https://bit.ly/3mx1b8s>)

¹⁰The Financial Express December 19, 2019 (<https://bit.ly/3h4WgdP>)



the woman at the Safe Homes to BMET's Women's Protection Cell. At the same time, a re-integration cell near the airport by the Wage Earner's Welfare Board has been planned.

3. Service Providing Agencies

3.1 District Employment and Manpower Office (DEMO)

To provide services to migrant workers at the grassroots level, 42 DEMO offices are currently 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 eight divisions. BMET, the line agency, have been decentralized several more activities through the DEMOs. The fingerprint collection system has been introduced in all existing 42 DEMO offices and the Smart Card distribution facilities have been put in place in 6 DEMO offices. Currently, under the decentralization initiative, Cumilla DEMO office provides the highest number of services to the migrants while in earlier times migrants had to come to Dhaka to complete those tasks.

3.2 Technical Training Centers (TTC)

There are 64 Technical Training Centres (TTCs) including 6 Institutes of Marine Technology (IMT) and 3 internee training centres under the BMET. Currently, there are language courses in 42 TTCs. Courses on the Japanese language is provided in 29 TTCs, English in 11 TTCs and Korean language in 20 TTCs. At present, 42 TTCs provide housekeeping training and the training period has been increased to 30 days instead of 21 days. To ensure the quality of training, manuals and pre-departure training modules are being updated to match with the times.

3.3 Wage Earner's Welfare Fund

In 2019, a total of 700,159 departing workers paid Tk 3,500 each as a compulsory subscription to the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund (WEWF).



Book Launching of Making Dalals Visible Towards Transparency in Recruitment and Obhibashir Okothito Golpo Shopno O Bastobota



Health and Life skill training at Faridpur 05.02.20



Lobby meeting with newly appointed hon_ble Secretary of MoEWOW



This amounted to Tk 2450.55 million. The total amount of money received in this fund would have been higher if other sources of funding of WEFW such as interest earned from license fees of recruiting agencies, consular fees charged at the embassies and fees collected at embassies for attestation of demand notes and work permits of the migrants are added. In 2019, a total of 55,526 departing migrants received pre-departure briefing with the resources from this fund.

In 2019 a total of 3,658 dead bodies were returned to the country. Taka 128.03 million has been spent on bringing back bodies of deceased workers from destination countries and facilitating their burial. During the same period, 850 deceased migrant families were granted monetary support amounting to Tk 536.95 million. Another Tk 1201.07 million has been paid as financial grants to 4,077 families of the deceased migrant workers¹¹.

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. In 2019 a total Tk 97.8 million has been offered to 6,913 students of different grades. 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 and 1 each in Oman and Lebanon). The Welfare Board finances safe homes, food, medical and a few other services that are provided to women workers in the safe homes.

RMMRU urges the government to use the resources from this fund only for ensuring direct services to the migrant workers. The government should desist from 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.

3.4 Labour Attache'

Currently, 29 labour wings are functioning in 27 countries. No new labour wing has been established in 2019. A total of 39 labour attachés are currently working in the labour wings. With the increase in female labour migrants, there emerged the need for the appointment of female staff in respective countries, particularly in the Gulf region. Inability to speak the local language and inadequate funding for employing interpreters and lawyers work as a hindrance to labour attachés in providing redress to migrant workers in destination countries.

3.5 Probashi Kallayan Bank

Probashi Kallayan Bank has provided loans of 1054.9 million to 7,115 migrants in 2018-2019 fiscal year. Out of them, 7,107 persons have been granted migration loan of Tk 1053.3 million during the period. On the other hand, the reintegration loan has been provided to only eight people (Tk.1.6 million) The PKB has recovered Tk. 2.5 million from reintegration loans during the fiscal year. The total amount of money recovered during the same period was Tk. 769.4 million. The PKB provided migration loan of Tk 744.4 million to a total of 4,349 people in the fiscal year 2019-2020 (upto 30 December 2019). But no loan has been provided for reintegration purpose, however, it recovered Tk 1.3 million as repayment of previous reintegration loan during the fiscal year. The total amount collected was Tk 476.7 million till December 2019 of the fiscal year¹².

¹¹Wage Earners Welfare Board Website (<https://bit.ly/3ptoNNg>)

¹²Information collection PKB



3.6 BOESL

BOESL was established in 1984 to ensure safe and secure migration. From 1986 to 2018, BOESL sent a total of 85,469 workers. In the fiscal year 2018-2019, a total of 11,519 Bangladeshi migrants were sent with the assistance of BOESL to Jordan, Japan, South Korea, Maldives and Bahrain. This is only 1.9% of the total stock of migrants of the year. Among them it sent 9,498 skilled workers, 9,220 female workers and 6,366 workers at zero cost. In the fiscal year 2018-2019, BOESL has earned Tk 190.55 million. Out of this, it made Tk. 170.69 million as profit. On the other hand, in the previous fiscal year (2017-2018) earning of BOESL was Tk 170.69 million, the profit it made amounted to Tk. 115.02 million¹³. In a recent strategy document, RMMRU recommended BOESL to open branch offices in important destination countries or regions. The organisation needs to strengthen its outreach programme and awareness campaign. It also needs to continuously train its teachers who provide language training¹⁴.

3.7 Complaints

BMET accepts online and direct complaints of migrants who are victims of fraud and cheating. In 2019, BMET received 2,132 complaints through both of these channels. Of these 1,082 were lodged by female migrants and 1,050 by male migrants. The number of complaints through online platform has doubled. In 2017 there were 348 online complaints 2018 it increased to 890. The then director, training of BMET Dr Nurul Islam opined that the campaign launched by RMMRU for registration of complaint in its TV programme Obhibashir Adalat made a difference in this regard. During this period 794 cases (representing both online and directly in-person at BMET) were resolved whereas it was 660 in 2018 and 177 in 2017. In 2019, 386 cases of male migrants and 408 cases of female migrant were resolved.

¹³BOESL Annual Report 2019, page 34, 48

¹⁴RMMRU (2019) Bangladesh Overseas Employment and Services Ltd (BOESL): Policy Document for the betterment of migrants by Zahid ul Arefin Choudhury, Regan Chakma and Nusrat Jahan Jebin



Press Conference on Migration Trends 2019



Observance of International Migrants Day in Presence of Minister of MoEWOE



Press Conference on Migration Trends 2019



An amount of Taka 34.84 million was paid as compensation to the victims by BMET. In 2018 and 2017 the compensation amount stood at Taka 25.70 million and Taka 12.40 million respectively. In 2019, a total of 490 complaints were under process against 446 recruiting agencies. In 2019, 159 workers were brought back from destination countries. Only 11 of those were male workers and the rest were 148 female workers.

3.8 Recruiting Agency

In 2019 there were 1,302 licensed recruiting agencies. Among those agencies 573 send women workers to Saudi Arabia. The Ministry has suspended the license of 178 recruiting agencies and terminated the license of 3 agencies. The decisions were taken following launching of inquiries after the return of a large number of migrant workers from Saudi Arabia, especially female migrant workers. Earlier recruiting agencies of Bangladesh used to take the responsibility of women workers for sending workers to Saudi Arabia for three months, but according to the decision of the Third Joint Technical Committee meeting held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in November, the recruiting agency will take full responsibility for the safety of women workers for the full tenure (2 years). It was also decided in the meeting of the Technical Committee that the Saudi Recruiting Agencies would be accountable to the Bangladesh Embassy¹⁵.

4. Bangladesh in the International Sphere

4.1 The Role of Migration Sector in Achieving Sustainable Development Goal

Bangladesh has taken various steps to implement the SDGs after the adoption of the SDG or Agenda 2030 in 2015 with 17 goals and 169 targets. The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment is acting as the lead ministry for

implementing the target 10.7, migration-related goals. The government has fixed the maximum migration cost that the recruiting agencies can charge to the aspirant migrants for 16 countries including Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and Singapore. The government only allows recruitment of female domestic workers at zero cost in case of Saudi Arabia. It also organised low-cost migration through EPS systems to South Korea, the IM system to Japan and the G2G system to Hong Kong.

As part of decentralization, fingerprints and Smart Cards are provided from DEMO offices along with other services like online registration, online visa checking and three-day pre-departure orientation and technical training from 64 TTCs and 6 IMTs in 55 trades. The driving course has been introduced in 61 TTCs from January 2019. Advocacy is being undertaken at regional and international forums to reduce the cost of visa trading and remittance transfer along with other mass awareness-raising activities. Also, a Vigilance Task Force has been set up in the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment to prevent irregularities and illegal activities of recruiting agencies in labour migration.

Various steps have been taken by the government to achieve sustainable development and goals which are commendable but the level of migration costs remains high for every country. The process of decentralization of various activities of BMET (fingerprints, smart cards, etc.) plays a vital role in establishing good governance in labour migration.

There are various courses in the TTCs and IMTs to improve the skills of migrant workers. Training in hospitality, tourism and care sectors need to be incorporated in line with international needs. In this case, ToT (Training for Trainer) can be organised in selected TTCs by hiring Master Trainers on selected courses from abroad.

¹⁵Prothom-Alo, December 9, 2019 www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh



Middleman (intermediaries) has a major role in labour migration. These middlemen are in most cases involved in sourcing workers for the recruiting agencies. So there is a special need to bring the middleman under the legal cover to ensure good governance in the migration sector.

4.2 Global Compact on Migration

Along with 163 countries Bangladesh has adopted the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) in December 2018 for safe orderly and regular migration. Meanwhile, the MoEWOE has taken various steps to implement the GCM.

The government has taken several initiatives to develop human resources as per the demand of the labour market in foreign countries. A databank is being created to select aspirant migrants by the agents. Initiatives have been taken for returnee migrants to facilitate the socio-economic reintegration. Awareness programmes have been initiated nationwide for disseminating reliable information on overseas employment, involving the national and grassroots stakeholders, especially representatives of local government.

Emphasis has been placed on the skill development of migrant workers and the accreditation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). One of the important things that GCM has to achieve is that migrant workers can easily transmit remittances to their country and ensure proper utilization of remittances.

To meet the goals of the Global Compact the government has taken initiative to establish a databank of aspirant migrants who are interested to go abroad. The existing database is not effective. An evaluation of current database is important before establishing a new one. The government has undertaken various initiatives to disseminate accurate and reliable migration information.



RMMRU participation in GFMD side event on Struggle of Women Migrant



RMMRU handover the Arbitration Model and Code of Conduct of BAIRA to the President and other EC members



RMMRU presence as guest speaker at conference on 'Coordination in Management of Migrant Labour Issues among SAARC Nations'



In this regard, there is a need to involve civil society as well as various government institutions. The importance of recognition of workers' skills gained through work abroad (skill acquired on the job) requires emphasis at bilateral negotiations with concerned countries and various international forums on migration.

The return reintegration and their involvement of migrants have so far been left out of national activities. There is also a special need for taking collective initiative by government and non-governmental organizations.

5. Civil Society Initiatives

For more than two decades, civil society organizations have been playing an important role in the migration sector of Bangladesh. A range of services is being provided by these organizations. These include awareness-raising campaigns, encouraging migrants to register complaints and seek redress, 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 and providing skill development and training etc. CSOs play a vital role in urging the government to undertake policy reforms.

In 2019, WARBE, BOMSA, BRAC, OKUP, IMA Research Foundation, Awaj Foundation and RMMRU collectively provided more than 380 pre-decision and 102 pre-departure trainings. Altogether these institutions helped 1,026 migrants and victim families to recover Tk 17.84 million as compensation settlement claims against arbitration, mediation, death, accident and other cases.

Innovative Services

In 2019, 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 programme aims to help the cheated migrants and their families with legal advice. Lawyers, migration experts and government officials provide the aggrieved migrants with legal advice on a case by case method through the programme. By the end of 2019, a total of 50 episodes were aired. So far through Obhibashir Adalat and RMMRU's 'legal support cell,' the organization has received 491 complaints from migrants and their families in 2019. 167 victims were screened live on those episodes of the television show. 648 victims were informed about their problems by direct telephone and 'hotline number of legal support. Through this programme, 142 complaints have been lodged, 98 have been forwarded to BMET and 44 to the Wage Earners' Welfare Board. Among 142 complaints, 61 complaints were fully addressed and the rest have been under process. So far, a total of Taka 3,175,000 was recovered. Besides, 275 complaints were received at the local level through RMMRU Mediation Committee. Out of which 106 have been resolved. Through this mediation, it has been possible to recover a total of Tk 5,850,000 from the middleman and the recruiting agencies. BMET acknowledged that an increase in the number of registered is an impact of airing of *Obhibashir Adalat*.

From January to November 2019, a total of 1,977 migration-related complaints were filed; the figure stood at 890 in 2018. Thus, the number of complaints received was more than double. RMMRU has set up an Emergency Support Center in Dokkhinkhan to provide service to unexpected returnee migrants. Through this centre, RMMRU facilitates providing psycho-social counselling for mentally challenged migrants, especially women, transportation services, catering and emergency accommodation etc.



Through this support centre, RMMRU has provided medical services to a total of 14 returnee migrants, including 9 mentally challenged migrants, emergency services to 32 people, accommodation to 33 persons on an emergency basis and a total of 1,842 people were provided emergency food.

The WARBE Development Foundation has raised an issue in parliament through the Parliamentary Caucus to generate mass awareness with the help of BOAF. These include workplace safety and migration-related issues specific to certain districts. BOMSA has released a monograph on the life experiences of women who have directly served victims of persecution and organised policy discussions with government officials, local government and civil society representatives. BOMSA articulated the demand for conducting the post-mortem of selected dead bodies of female migrants who untimely lost their lives in different destination countries. In 2019, OKUP did door-to-door campaigns, outreach campaigns, school awareness programmes, spouse meetings, migrant information services, migrant forum monthly meeting, national level advocacy work and so on. At the same time, BRAC assisted 3,000 migrants' training and economic re-integration support, started a toll-free hotline service and counselling assistance to returnee migrants by professional counsellors. YPSA built a network with NLASO in pursuing the migration issues. The Awaj Foundation, with its involvement in various national and international organizations and Bangladesh missions, demanded for protection of the rights of those Bangladeshi garment workers who organised demonstration against non-payment/termination of employment in Mauritius (65 individuals) and Jordan (17 individuals). The organisation also successfully negotiated the freedom of a Bangladeshi worker in exchange of blood money. This was done with the support of Migrant Forum Asia (MFA) and the Filipino Foreign Ministry.

Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants (BCSM)

Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants (BCSM) has



hon'ble Minister of MoEWOE visited RMMRU stall in International Migrants Day



Service center



Service center



played an important role as the leading platform of civil society organizations at the national level in 2019. The BCSM submitted a memorandum to the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment in May 2019 for the re-opening of the Malaysian labour market. This year, the members of the BCSM held a meeting with members of the Parliamentary Caucus on Migration. The meeting provided information on recent issues of labour migration, in particular, on protection of women's migrants' rights. Last year, BCSM highlighted the challenges of Bangladesh's migration in regional forums. In collaboration with the MFA, BCSM has facilitated a parliamentary delegation's visit to the Philippines, Indonesia and Nepal, and held formal meetings with the ministries of those countries.

6 New Knowledge on Migration

6.1 The RMMRU Model for Regularizing Middleman

On September 4 2019, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina directed the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment to issue identity cards to the middlemen involved in hiring workers in the international market. In this context, RMMRU has developed a model of regularization of the middlemen in the recruitment of migrant workers¹⁶. The middleman has been identified as the root of all migration-related problems for a long time. But the fact remains that the middlemen provide at least 17 types of services to the migrants. Without these services, it would be impossible to send migrant workers from the grassroots. However, there is no recognition of their work in the 'Overseas Employment and Migration Act, 2013'. As a result, they are involved in an informal recruitment process. Informal participation creates opportunities for some middlemen and recruiting agencies to deceive and cheat migrants. Siddiqui, T. and Abrar, C. R. (2019) study notes that 19% of those who attempt

to migrate cannot go abroad even after paying majority of the migration cost. If the individual losses are combined, then, the total amount stands at Tk. 27,062 billion¹⁷. As a result of the continuous campaign supported by evidence-based research, this year the prime minister issued a directive to the ministry of EWOE to create an institutional mechanism to register the middleman.

There are three possible ways to provide an identity card to the middleman: (a) registration with DEMO, (b) registration with the recruiting agency and (c) registration with BAIRA. RMMRU prefers the option (c). The first option i.e registration through demo office is not a good idea as DEMOs are government bodies which are in charge of regulation and monitoring. Registering the Dalals can bring conflict of interest. Option (b) is not financially viable. Individual recruiting agencies would require opening offices in every district to register dalals. BAIRA on the other hand can open its offices in all the districts of Bangladesh and register the dalals. Individual recruiting agencies can then engage dalals in recruiting workers from the BAIRA list in exchange of prescribed fees. The establishment cost will be significant and BAIRA may not want to make such investment. Donor agencies or the government can provide financial support to establish such offices. Having offices at district level will also enhance the institutional capacity of BAIRA.

6.2 Social Cost of Migration on Left Behind Household Members

RMMRU's research on the social cost of migration on left-behind children, husbands and wives shows that most of them have to go through some form of mental stress. Left behind children face insecurity, loneliness and emptiness in the absence of their migrant parents.

¹⁶RMMRU Website (www.rmmru.org/newsite/publications/infographic/)

¹⁷Siddiqui, T. and Abrar, C. R. (2019). Making Dalals Visible Towards Transparency in Recruitment, Dhaka, RMMRU, page 98



Children particularly feel vulnerable when they are sick. Left behind husbands suffers from the lack of companionship. Some of them are stressed with household chores. They particularly feel helpless when their children fall sick. The left behind husbands also have to go through social scrutiny that their wives may have been involved in extra-marital relationships. Left behind wives also suffer from loneliness, fear of husband having other relationship etc. Young left behind wives face unnecessary control over their movement by in-laws. However, migrant family members often develop their agency and overcome such mental stresses. The research recommends that interests of left behind spouses and left behind children should be well integrated in all migration policies.

7. Recommendations

- To ensure the safety of women migrants in Saudi Arabia, there is a need for the government to make the recruiting agencies more accountable. In order to pursue cases against the perpetrators, a select group of abused women should be provided shelter by the embassy and cases should be filed in the local labour courts. Civil society organizations should highlight the plight of women migrants in international forums.
- The Prime Minister's order to register the intermediaries requires immediate implementation. RMMRU suggested that BAIRA can facilitate registration of middlemen of its affiliated agencies by opening offices at the district level.
- Many of those who are returning from Saudi Arabia are proficient in different trades as they have been working there for a long time. A database of returnee skilled migrant workers needs to be created to utilize their skills for national development. That database will connect them with different private sectors/organizations. At the same time, it will also be possible to give them the opportunity to secure reintegration loan from Probashi Kallyan Bank.
- BMET has been decentralizing the services of Dhaka centric activities for several years. To make this process fruitful, district-level officials need to provide different incentives for better service. At the same time, it is important to make those officers accountable who have failed to deliver their services.
- When the dead bodies of the migrants are returned, with the consent of their families post-mortem of selected bodies with injury marks should be held in Bangladesh. By doing so, it will be possible to independently assess the reason of death in the destination country and seek redress in case of any irregularities committed.
- Bangladesh will have to gear up its diplomatic efforts to increase international pressure on Myanmar government, accused of genocide by the Gambia and others. At the same time, actions should be taken to de-securitize the Rohingya refugee issue.
- The NRC enforcement and citizenship law amendments in India can cause a major crisis for Bangladesh. To prevent this crisis from escalating, a diplomatic strategy of the Government of Bangladesh needs to be framed. For this purpose, a task force must be formed consisting of government, opposition and non-governmental organizations and experts.



Social Cost of Migration: the Left-behind Children

