

LABOUR MIGRATION FROM BANGLADESH 2021 ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES



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ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

The Patterns and Trends of Labour Migration from Bangladesh in 2021:

Achievements and Challenges

Introduction

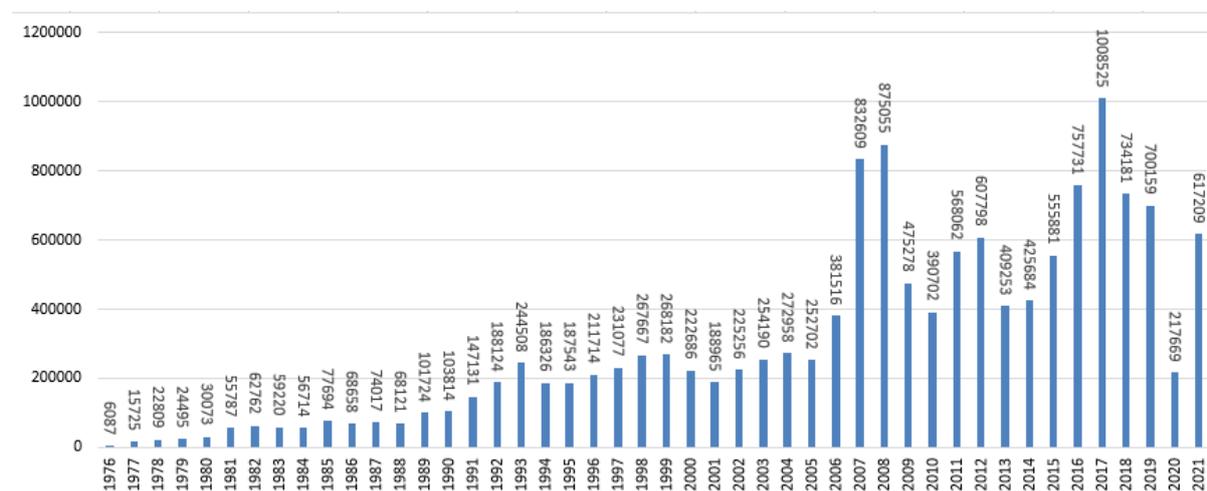
Migration has been playing a very important role in the economy of Bangladesh since the 1980s. To establish good governance in migration, RMMRU has been analysing the patterns and trends of migration for over 12 years. This year, 2021, the report also highlights the achievements and challenges of migration. The report is divided into seven sections. Section 1 presents the scenario of migration and remittance flows and patterns of 2021. Section 2 focuses on the important initiatives and issues at that took place this year. Section 3 reviews the activities and role of the service provider institutions. The changes in laws and policies in 2021 is discussed in the Section 4. Section 5 and 6 highlights the migrants' security under international law in the COVID-19 situation and the role of Civil Society Organisations. The report concludes with Section 7 discussing about the Rohingya Refugees and conclusion.

1. Labour migration from Bangladesh 2021

1.1 Flow of Migrants

Although labour migration started in 1970, Bangladesh started conserving the data on the flow of migrants since 1976.

Figure 1.1.1: Labour migration from Bangladesh from 1976 to 2021



Graph 1.1.1 illustrates that in 1976, fewer than 10,000 workers migrated for jobs overseas. By the end of almost one and a half-decade, the annual labour flows reached 100,000 workers in 1989. From 1976 to 2021, a total of 13,634,161 workers have migrated abroad from Bangladesh. However, it does not imply that Bangladesh has that number of migrants currently working abroad. Many of them have returned to the country after completing their work.

According to the recently published data of IOM, a total of 74 lakh Bangladeshis are in abroad on short and long-term basis.

Recent flows: Since March 2020, the world has been going through an unprecedented health crisis, COVID-19. All sectors of society and the economy in almost every country have been affected. The pandemic has also caused major disruption to international migration flows. According to the IOM, the number of international migrants dropped by 2 million in 2020. The number of air passengers has dropped by 60 percent due to the regulation process of global traffic. The number of passengers in 2019 was 4.5 billion and in 2020 it became 1.8 billion. These effects are reflected in the case of Bangladesh as well. In 2020, only 217,699 Bangladeshi workers migrated overseas for work. Among them, 181,218 workers migrated during the period from January to March 2020¹. Due to lockdown measures, migration from Bangladesh came to a virtual standstill from April to June 2020. From July to December 2020, only 36,413² individuals could migrate for employment overseas. In 2020 as a whole, the flow of migration decreased by 69 percent in comparison to the previous year. Approximately 100,000 new workers who had completed all procedures to migrate before the COVID-19 outbreak could not migrate due to the pandemic. In 2021, a total of 617,209 Bangladeshi workers migrated to different countries of the world. In comparison to the previous year (2020) migration increased by 183.6 percent in 2021.

Graph 1.1.1 shows that from 1976 to 2021 a total of 13,634,161 workers have migrated abroad from Bangladesh. This constitutes the total stock of migrants. However, it does not imply that Bangladesh has that number of migrants currently working abroad. As per the contractual obligations of short-term labour migration, migrants return to Bangladesh after a stipulated period. Many migrants do try to stay back for as long as possible but in the vast majority of cases, ultimately, they have to return. The COVID 19 pandemic has resulted in a shift of focus from the number of migrants going abroad to the number of migrants returning. Until the pandemic, no data was maintained on returnee migrants by BMET. However, as health restrictions were imposed after the outbreak of the pandemic the government started maintaining records of return migrants from April 2020. Data from BMET's Welfare Desk at the airport shows that a total of 408,000 migrants had returned to the country during the pandemic in 2020³. This suggests that the rate of job loss has increased greatly during the pandemic. In 2020, the rate of return of migrants was 8 times higher than any previous year. Data is not available for the total number of returned migrants for 2021. However, in this year, the number of workers returning from abroad with outpass documents was 72,646. Among them, 66,011 were males and 6,583 were females⁴.

1.3 Female migration

Up to 2003, migration of unskilled female workers from Bangladesh was either restricted or outright banned. Therefore, female migrants constituted less than one percent of the total flow of migrants. The rate of female migration has increased significantly since the ban was lifted. By 2016, female workers constituted 16 percent of the total labour flow from Bangladesh.⁵ Between 2016 and 2019, more than 100,000 female workers migrated for work from

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

² Ibid

³ Statistics of returning migrants from 1st April to 31 December 2020, Welfare Desk, Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport

⁴ Statistics of returnee migrants with smartcard and outpasses, 2021, Welfare Desk, Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport

⁵ RMMRU Labour Migration From Bangladesh 2016: Achievements And Challenges

Bangladesh. In 2021, a total of 80,143 female workers migrated abroad for work. This figure is 3.7 times higher than that of 2020 when only 21,934 females migrated for work. However, comparison with a regular year such as 2019 reveals a drop in female migration of 23.5 percent (104,786 in 2019).

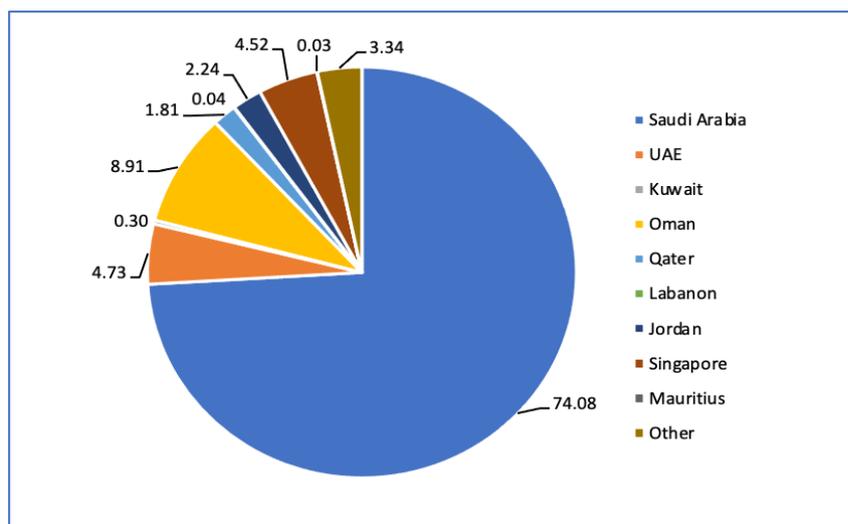
1.4 Returning to Work

In 2021, a total of 6,17,209 migrants have been joined the work abroad.⁶ 4,57,227 people went to Saudi Arabia, the largest labour market in Bangladesh to join the work.⁷

1.5 Countries of Destination

Figure 1.5.1 shows the distribution of Bangladeshi migrant workers by country of destination from 2001 to 2021. Although the BMET database lists more than 100 destination countries the vast majority of workers are accounted for by a handful of countries. These are Saudi Arabia, Oman, Singapore, Qatar, Malaysia, and Bahrain. Between 2001 and 2002, approximately 73 percent of migrants went to Saudi Arabia. Since then, the proportion of migrants going to Saudi Arabia started to decline. In 2010 only two percent of migrants from Bangladesh went to Saudi Arabia. From 2016 migration to Saudi Arabia again started increasing. During the COVID-19 pandemic Saudi Arabia received the largest number of both male and female migrants followed by Oman. 83 percent (512,236 workers) of the total number of migrants went to these two countries. Other receiving countries include the UAE (29,202 workers, 5 percent, 3rd largest) Singapore (27,875 workers, 5 percent, 4th largest), Jordan (13,816 workers, 2 percent, 5th largest), and Qatar (11,158 workers, 2 percent, 6th largest). Interestingly, Malaysia is also an important destination for Bangladeshi migrants. However, in 2020 and 2021 hardly any migration took place to this destination. If the Saudi market had not been in operation during the pandemic the Bangladeshi market for migrant workers would have encountered a major setback.

Figure 1.5.1: Destination countries of Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2021



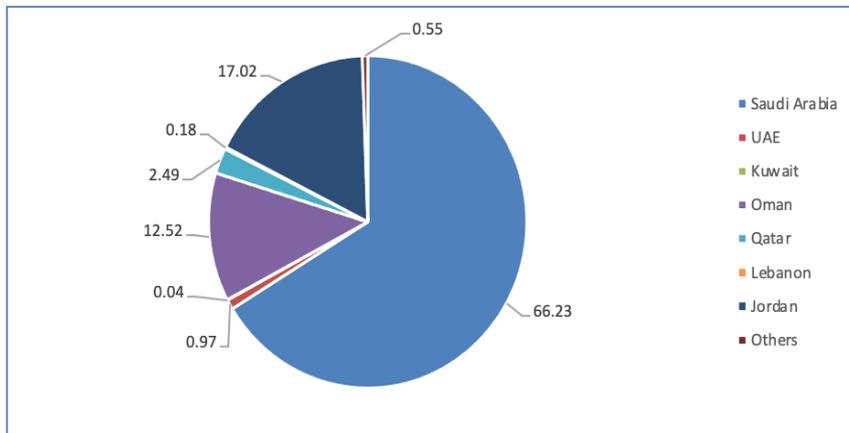
Source: Prepared by RMMRU from BMET data.

⁶ <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/viewStatReport.action?reportnumber=39>

⁷ Ibid.

A small number of countries account for the majority of female migration. 68 percent (53,082 workers) of female workers migrated to Saudi Arabia. This has been true over the last several years. The 2nd largest flow is to Jordan at 17 percent (13,643 workers), the 3rd largest to Oman at 11 percent (10,035), the 4th largest to Qatar at 3 percent (1,997), and finally the 5th largest to the UAE at 1 percent (777 workers).

Figure 1.5.2: Destination countries of female Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2021

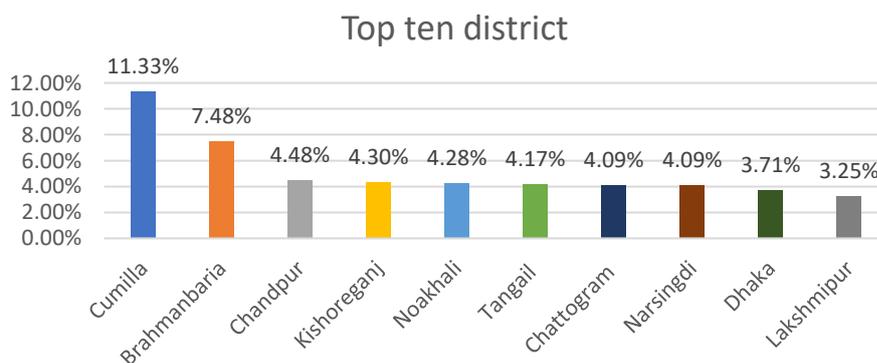


Source: Prepared by RMMRU from BMET data.

1.6 Source area

There are a few pockets of Bangladesh from where the majority of migrants seeking overseas employment originate. Of the 64 districts in Bangladesh, 50 percent of overseas migrants originate from just 10 districts. These are Cumilla, Brahmanbaria, Chandpur, Tangail, Narsingdi, Kishoreganj, Noakhali, Dhaka, Chattogram, and Lakshmipur. In 2021, the highest number of international migrant outflow took place from the Cumilla district. It accounted for 11.33 percent, a slight increase over the last year's 11 percent. 7.48 percent of international migrants originated from Brahmanbaria. With 4.48 percent of migrants, Chandpur is the third-largest migration origin district. Around 4.46 percent came from Chandpur. 4.17 percent of workers have migrated from Tangail district. Separate migration from Kishoreganj, Noakhali, Narsingdi, and Chittagong districts is about 4 percent. Chittagong was the third-largest exporter of migrants in 2020 (5.26 percent). Immigration from Sylhet, Faridpur, and Munshiganj was 2.8 percent, 2.56 percent, and 2.50 percent respectively.

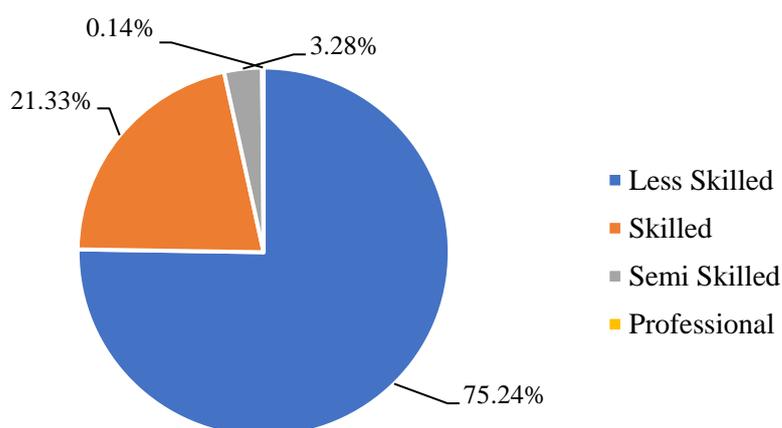
Figure 1.6.1: Source areas of Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2021



1.7 Skill Composition

BMET classifies migrant workers into 4 categories: these are professionals, skilled, semi-skilled, and less skilled. There has been a steady drop in the migration of professionals from Bangladesh. In 2020, only 1 percent of workers belonged to the professional category. In 2021 the figure dropped to 0.06 percent. However, COVID-19 has created opportunities for migration for certain categories of skills. The reduction of migration of skilled workers indicates that Bangladesh has not been able to tap the niche that has been created by the pandemic.

Figure 1.7.1: Skill composition of Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2021



Source: Prepared by RMMRU from BMET data

In 2021, 21.33 percent of workers migrated as skilled labour as compared to 44 percent (252,862 workers) in 2019. The percentage of semi-skilled workers also follows a downward trend of 3.28 percent in 2021 as against 14 percent (27,007 workers) in 2019. The percentage of less-skilled workers has increased dramatically from 41 (377,102 workers) percent in 2019 to 75.24 percent in 2021 (Graph 1.7.1). A large proportion of the work permits of less-skilled workers are collected by individuals or relatives working in different countries of destination. These are commonly called “free visas” and those who avail of them have little legal protection. The prevalence of this kind of visa indicates that recruiting agencies have a limited role in securing visas even for low-skilled workers in 2021. The reduction of migration of skilled workers indicates that Bangladesh has not been able to tap the niche that has been created by the pandemic.

1.8 Remittance Flow

Bangladesh Bank keeps records of inward remittance flows to Bangladesh. According to the World Bank report, Bangladesh is the 8th largest recipient of remittances in 2022. Data on remittance flows are available from 1976. That year Bangladesh received US\$23.7 million as remittances. In 1993, remittances reached the US\$ 1 billion mark and by 2009 the figure reached US\$10 billion. Table 1.8.1 shows the percentage increase and decrease in the flow of remittances to Bangladesh. Over the last twenty years, Bangladesh experienced negative year-on-year growth in remittances in only 2013, 2016, and 2017. Otherwise, remittance flows have

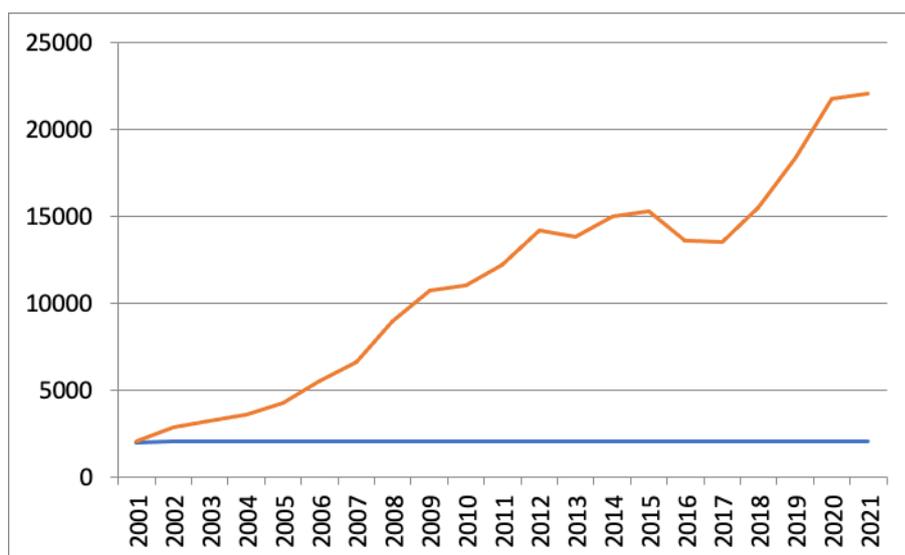
registered an upward trend. During 2018, 2019, and 2020, the growth of remittance flows continued. In 2018 Bangladesh secured US\$ 15.4 billion demonstrating 15 percent year-on-year growth. In 2019 it received US\$18.3 billion i.e., another 18 percent growth. Importantly, the table suggests that changes in the flow of migrants do not directly translate to changes in remittance flows. Table 1.8.1 shows that in 2005, migration reduced by 7 percent but remittances increased by 19 percent. Again in 2009, migration reduced by 46 percent yet in that year remittances increased by 19 percent. The table also indicates that it is only after the flow of migration reduces for successive years then the effect is reflected in remittance flows.

Table 1.8.1: Percentage increase/decrease in the number of migrant workers and remittances over the previous year (2001-2021)

Year	Number of Migrants	Increase/decrease %	Remittance (US \$ Million)	Increase/decrease %
2001	189060		2071.0	
2002	225256	19.2	2847.8	37.5
2003	254190	12.8	3177.6	11.6
2004	272958	7.4	3565.3	12.2
2005	252702	-7.4	4249.9	19.2
2006	381516	51.0	5484.1	29.0
2007	832609	118.2	6562.7	19.7
2008	875055	5.1	8979	36.8
2009	475278	-45.7	10717.7	19.4
2010	390702	-17.8	11004.7	2.7
2011	568062	45.4	12168.1	10.6
2012	607798	7.0	14164.0	16.4
2013	409253	-32.7	13832.1	-2.3
2014	425684	4.0	14942.6	8.0
2015	555881	30.6	15,271.0	2.2
2016	757731	36.3	13609.8	-10.9
2017	1008525	33.1	13526.8	-0.6
2018	734181	-27.2	15497.7	14.6
2019	700159	-4.6	18354.9	18.4
2020	217669	-68.9	21752.3	18.5
2021	617209	183.6	22,063.8	1.4

Source: Prepared by RMMRU from BMET data

Figure 1.8.1: Remittance flow from 2001-2021



Source: Prepared by RMMRU from BMET data

Bangladeshi migrants remitted US\$ 21.8 billion in 2020⁸. This indicates an 18.5 percent increase over the previous year's flow. In 2021, Bangladesh received US\$ 22.0 billion in remittances, i.e., a growth of 1.4 percent. As in previous years, the largest share of remittances came from Saudi Arabia. Bangladesh received US\$ 5.0 billion from that country in that year. This constitutes 23.1 percent of the total flow. United States ranks 2nd, with a 15.9 percent share (US\$3.5 billion), then the United Arab Emirates with 8.5 percent (US\$1.8 billion), the United Kingdom with 8.5 percent (US\$1.8 billion), followed by Oman with 5.2 percent (US\$1.1 billion).

Table 1.8.2: Remittance flow by country of employment in 2021

Country	In US\$(Million)	%
Bahrain	541.0	2.5
Kuwait	1,787.4	8.1
Oman	1,146.7	5.2
Qatar	1,460.8	6.6
Saudi Arabia	5,087.7	23.1
UAE	1,882.2	8.5
Italy	886.7	4.0
Malaysia	1377.2	6.2
Singapore	481.1	2.2
UK	1,884.1	8.5
USA	3507.4	15.9
Others	2021.8	9.2
Totals	22,063.8	100.0

Source: Prepared by RMMRU from Bangladesh Bank data

⁸ <https://www.bb.org.bd/econdata/wageremittance.php>

Studies (Siddiqui ed. 2021, Rahman 2021) have speculated various reasons behind the increase in remittance flows in 2020 and 2021. The government has offered a 2 percent incentive to encourage migrants to send remittances through formal channels. This incentive was retained in the 2020-2021 budget. Some banks are also offering an additional 1 percent on top of government incentives.

Siddiqui (2021) highlights the issue of demand for Hundi money for the purchase of work visas. The study estimated that at an average visa cost of US\$ 3,000 than in 2020, US\$1,446,993,000 was not required from the *Hundi* operators (informal money traders) to purchase visas by the recruiting agencies. The lack of demand for dollars in the *Hundi* channel diverted remittances to the formal channel. Besides, many migrants have returned because of COVID-19. In all likelihood, they brought back whatever resources they had accumulated in the destination countries. As economic activity has begun to gain pace in 2021, destination countries have resumed recruiting workers, albeit on a limited scale. Even so, the consequent demand for informal transactions through *Hundi* has meant that formal remittances have experienced much slower growth compared to 2020.

2. Important Incidents in the Migration Sector

2.1 MoU between Malaysia and Bangladesh

A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed in December 2021 between the Governments of Bangladesh and Malaysia for the recruitment of workers from Bangladesh. Under this Memorandum of Understanding, the employer will bear all the expenses of Bangladeshi migrant workers on the Malaysian side, such as: airfare to Malaysia, conscription of recruitment agency, employment, accommodation, workers' immigration and visa fees, cost of COVID-19 test and quarantine, cost of returning to own country etc.⁹ According to the agreement, the employer will be able to appoint Malaysian recruiting agents at their own cost and ensure quality medical care, insurance, accommodation, and welfare of the workers. Bangladeshi citizens between the ages of 18 to 45 can apply as migrant workers in Malaysia. Under the MoU, the Malaysian government has committed to take skilled and semi-skilled workers, but aspirant migrant workers must ensure the qualifications and skills declared by the employer for different professions, which include skill in Malay language, minimum knowledge of English language like being able to read signs/symbols, complete pre-departure orientation in Bangladesh, not having criminal record, etc. Most workers will be recruited in the agriculture, infrastructure construction, industry, mining, domestic chores, gardening and cleaning sectors.¹⁰ According to this MoU, migrant workers will get 1 day off per week (for rest) and will get overtime if they work for more than 8 hours daily. Based on Malaysian Law, the workers will be entitled to get extra payment for working on holidays and public holidays (minimum wage is 1,200 Ringgit or 24,420 Tk).¹¹ Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment informed that after signing of the MoU, other expenses including airfare would be borne by the employers and the migration cost will be decreased from the previous amount of BDT 160,000.¹²

⁹ Press Release of MoEWOE, 19 December, 2021

¹⁰<https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/diplomacy/630634/>

¹¹ <https://sarabangla.net/post/sb-626137/>

¹²<https://sangbadsarabela.com/business/article/767/>

2.2. Migrants and COVID 19 Vaccine

A global vaccination campaign to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic has been launched this year. From July 2021, the Government of Bangladesh started a special vaccination programme for the migrant workers on a small scale who were going to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. But due to the complexity of vaccination registration and lack of proper information, migrants had faced various issues including economic losses, travel inconveniences, and visa expiration.¹³ Later on, the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment began special COVID-19 registration for migrant workers through 'Ami Probashi' and 'Surokkha' apps.¹⁴

After airing the 64th episode of RMMRU's Obhibashir Adalat on migrants' COVID-19 vaccination programmes, the Honourable Minister for the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Mr. Imran Ahmed, MP decided to set up help desks at all Technical Training Centres (TTC)s and 6 Institutes of Marine Technologies (IMT)s for migrant workers. Through these help desks returnee migrants, aspirant migrants and migrant workers are being provided assistance in COVID-19 vaccine registration and information services.¹⁵ As of November 2021, about 5.87 million migrant workers have received the COVID-19 vaccine.¹⁶

2.3: COVID-19 and labour market

After a long period, the UAE has started issuing visit visas as well as work visas. In September 2021, the UAE government allowed migrants stranded in Bangladesh to enter into UAE whose visa dates had expired and who had been given a full dose of COVID vaccine.¹⁷ The UAE market has potentiality to recover its condition in 2022. After a visit to Romania in October 2021, the Foreign Minister said that the country has expressed interest in recruiting 40,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers. 1000 Bangladeshi migrant workers have already migrated to the country so far.¹⁸ 50 workers are currently under process to be sent into the Romanian shipbuilding industry. After a long break of 5 years, the recruitment of Bangladeshi workers has started in Italy.¹⁹ At the critical condition of COVID-19, the government continued to connect with Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Japan, South Korea, and Hong Kong in Asia and Eastern Europe to open up new labour markets for Bangladeshi migrant workers. According to government representatives, wage scales and workers' rights are better in these countries than the Middle East. By 2025, Japan is going to recruit half of a million workers from around the world who are familiar with the Japanese language and culture. In 2019, Japan-Bangladesh signed a Memorandum of Understanding. As a result, Japanese companies are selecting workers from Bangladesh, employing them in the factory work of various companies and manufacturing companies with language education. South Korea is also investing behind its language and skills and hiring workers from Bangladesh at its own expense. A special visa called EPS has been introduced for Bangladeshi immigrants to work in South Korea.²⁰

This year migrant workers have migrated in the bakery sector in Mauritius and Seychelles. However, their number is still very low. 5 workers went to Seychelles and 2 to Hong Kong in the 2020-2021 fiscal years.²¹ BOESL has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with an

¹³ www.bangla.bdnews24.com/bangladesh/article1908958.bdnews

¹⁴ www.dailyinqilab.com/article/396153/

¹⁵ www.rmmru.org/newsite/

¹⁶ স্মরণিকা ২০২১, প্রবাসী কল্যাণ ও বৈদেশিক কর্মসংস্থান মন্ত্রণালয়

¹⁷ www.bangla.bdnews24.com/probashi/article1938831.bdnews

¹⁸ www.bd-pratidin.com/minister-spake/2021/10/14/701460

¹⁹ www.fns24.com/article/222327/

²⁰ www.bbc.com/bengali/news-55746847

²¹ Data provided by representative of BOESL

agency of Croatia. The ministry is trying to sign Memorandum of Understanding with some Australian agencies.²²

Brunei, a country in Southeast Asia, has been facing worker crisis as the recruitment process has stalled for the past two years. The Brunei government has expressed interest in taking workers from Bangladesh through BOESL on some conditions. Brunei will sign a Memorandum of Understanding with Bangladesh only after the fraudulent activities of the brokers have been stopped and the recruitment process has been completed transparently.

2.4 One-time grant for the Migrants

Middle Eastern countries imposed some new conditions in 2021 to deal with COVID-19, which caused a temporary crisis for Bangladeshi migrants. In May 2021, the Saudi government stated that anyone who had not been vaccinated against coronavirus would have to complete seven days of formal quarantine at their own expense after landing to enter Saudi Arabia. This mandatory quarantine is expensive. According to the spokespersons of the recruiting agency, it will cost an average of BDT 60,000-70,000 per migrant worker to quarantine in the hotel.²³ Many migrant workers have also faced problems while giving booking hotels online. To alleviate the crisis, the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare has provided a subsidy of Tk 25,000 from the Wage Earners Welfare Fund for the hotel booking expenses for the institutional quarantine of migrant workers going to Saudi Arabia. So far, 1,0853 migrant workers have received a total grant of Tk. 271,325,000 from this sector.²⁴ 13 recommendations were given in the press conference organized by Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants (BCSM) to ease the processing of providing COVID-19 vaccination for the migrant workers. At that time, a demand to provide subsidy of BDT 25,000 by the government for quarantine hotel expenses for migrant workers going to other destination countries like Saudi Arabia was raised as well.²⁵ To avoid formal institutional quarantine, measures were taken to ensure COVID-19 vaccine for workers to travel to different countries, including Saudi Arabia.²⁶

2.5 Escalation of Migration Cost

The severe lockdown in April 2021 created many obstacles for the migrant workers in the country to return to work. Despite the demand for 60,000-70,000 workers from Saudi Arabia and 40,000 from Dubai, visa processing was not possible. About 20,000 to 25,000 migrants faced problems due to the lockdown, the suspension of all migration-related training and other necessary activities, the cancellation of international flights, and the cancellation of pending visas. To address this crisis, the Bangladesh government launched special flights in mid-April 2021. At first, many of these special flights were canceled.²⁷ Each migrant worker lost an average of about three and a half lakh Bangladeshi taka during this time.²⁸ On 28 October 2021, there was another schedule crisis at the airport. Migrants had to stay at the airport for 6 to 24 hours or more. Women migrants are the ones who suffered the most in this case.²⁹ At the end of the year, due to the increase of airfares in December, migrants are facing obstacles to join the work. In just two weeks, the airfare has escalated from 40-45 thousand taka to 70-90

²² স্মরণিকা ২০২১, প্রবাসী কল্যাণ ও বৈদেশিক কর্মসংস্থান মন্ত্রণালয়

²³ www.thedailystar.net/bangla/node/227177

²⁴ Data collected from WEWB

²⁵ www.gulfbangla.com/news/

²⁶ www.ekattor.tv/blog/article?article_id=3492

²⁷ www.somoynews.tv/pages/details/273967

²⁸ www.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/public/trade/migrants-cant-go-abroad-due-to-pandemic-effects-1619152549

²⁹ www.jamuna.tv/news/285661

thousand taka.³⁰ Dubai's airfare used to be USD 200, which has now risen to about USD 900. Similar airfares in Saudi Arabia have risen from USD 300 to USD 1,200.³¹ During this time many migrants had to migrate at a high cost.

According to the data of September 2021, about 1,500 migrant workers on holiday were unable to return to work in Bahrain. Many of these migrants have been stranded in the country for 18 months. 3,000 workers who were unable to return to work in Bahrain on time due to visa renewal complications and other problems, have partially relocated to other Middle Eastern countries on lower pay.³²

2.6 PCSR Tests

In August 2021, the United Arab Emirates published a list of six countries, announcing that migrants must show the results of two tests of the COVID-19 in two stages, 48 hours and 6 hours before entering the country. Bangladesh was one of the six countries. About 50,000 migrants stranded in Bangladesh due to this directive. The stranded migrants went on a hunger strike demanding the setup of RTPCR lab at the airport. In September 2021, the government launched 6 RTPCR labs for COVID-19 testing at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.³³ At the end of 2021, the Ministry fixed the fee of BDT 1800 for PCSR test at the airport from the Wage Earners Welfare Fund.³⁴ In December 4 companies were allowed to set up RTPCR labs at Shah Amanat International Airport, Chittagong for the detection of COVID-19.³⁵

2.7 Emergency services at the airport:

After landing in Bangladesh the returnee migrants need to wait at the airport for minimum 5-6 hours to get health clearance certificate and physical examination as a precaution against COVID-19. In this situation, some civil society organizations are providing emergency services to the migrants. RMMRU, BOMSA and BNSK have distributed emergency food, relief, masks, and safety supplies to the returnee migrants at the airport this year. These organisations have provided financial support to get the returnees back to their home and gave immediate medical help and bore cost of medical support to the sick returnee migrants as well.

2.8 'Ami Probashi' App

The Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment has launched an app called 'Ami Probashi' to facilitate and digitalised overseas employment-related services. Migrants can receive benefits of this app by registering in it with their mobile number or email id. Through this app migrant workers can register with the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) database. The app also helps to know the application process, job application progress, and what to do after reaching the destination. However, other services will not be available unless the application process is started or if the user is not included in the BMET database.³⁶ In addition to this, migrants can find the nearest Passport Office, Recruiting Agency, District Manpower Office, Medical Centers, Training Centers (TTCs) by using this app through GPS. Employees who does not yet registered or have the smartcard of BMET or have the smartcard before January 01, 2021 need to register in the BMET database using their

³⁰www.jamuna.tv/news/295987

³¹ BAIRA Representative

³² www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/migration/1500-bahrain-returnees-still-struggling-get-back-work-

³³ www.bbc.com/bengali/news-58700259

³⁴ স্মরণিকা ২০২১, প্রবাসী কল্যাণ ও বৈদেশিক কর্মসংস্থান মন্ত্রণালয়

³⁵ www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/coronavirus/

³⁶ www.banglatribune.com/680138/

valid passport and BDT 300 as registration fees through the app to facilitate registration for the COVID-19 vaccination. From January 2021, registered workers will not be required to re-register. However, there is some evidence that non-migrants are taking advantage of the ‘Ami Probashi’ app and taking Pfizer vaccine against the COVID-19 in a faster way.

2.9 Human trafficking and irregular migration

According to a report released by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in October 2021, 13 percent of the migrants who arrived in Italy by the sea in the first eight months of this year were Bangladeshi. Bangladesh is the second positioned state on the list of origin countries of irregular migration to the Mediterranean Sea. Last year, Bangladesh topped the list of irregular sea voyages to Italy as well.³⁷ In May, 33 people were rescued from a boat sinking on their way to Europe from Libya where they were all Bangladeshi. Another 50 people went missing in this incident.³⁸ The number of Bangladeshi rescued from the Mediterranean Sea in May and June alone is 243 and 428 respectively.³⁹ Bangladeshi were a significant part of those rescued from boats off the coast of Europe on different days in August 2021.⁴⁰ The total number of Bangladeshi rescued in 2021 is 3332.⁴¹ Irregular migrants have also been rescued by land at different times of the year. In mid-November, about 600 illegal migrants were caught in two trucks in eastern Mexico. 37 of them were Bangladeshi.⁴² The detainees were determined to enter into the United States.

3. Service Providers

3.1 District Employment and Manpower Office (DEMO)

It is currently operating 42 District Manpower and Employment Offices and 4 Divisional Employment and Manpower Offices in different districts under BMET. Fingerprint services are being provided in 42 District Manpower and Employment Offices. Smart Card Services are being provided through 7 District Manpower and Employment Offices located in Chittagong, Comilla, Rangpur, Pabna, Jessore, Sylhet, Gopalganj.⁴³ BMET has also taken initiative to introduce arbitration proceedings in the District Manpower and Employment Office (DEMO) to decentralize BMET's arbitration proceedings in resolving immigration-related disputes. The government has taken initiative to set up district manpower and employment offices in 64 districts and divisional employment and manpower offices in 8 divisional cities.

3.2 Technical Training Centers (TTCs)

Under BMET, there are 64 Technical Training Centers (TTCs) and 6 institutes of marine technology (IMT) across the country to create skilled workers. At the same time, the government has taken initiative to set up technical training centers in 40 Upazilas towards completion and has taken initiative to set up 100 more training centers in the second phase. Work is also in the final stages to set up Dhaka Technical Training Institute (DTTI) to improve the quality of trainers. There are 6 specialized TTCs for 43 women trainees.⁴⁴ There are also 3

³⁷<https://www.kalerkantho.com/online/national/2021/10/05/1080050>

³⁸ www.bbc.com/bengali/57167442

³⁹ www.banglatribune.com/693272

⁴⁰ / www.bbc.com/bengali/news-58374021

⁴¹ www.banglatribune.com/693272/

⁴² www.ittefaq.com.bd/303165/

⁴³ <http://bmet.portal.gov.bd/site/page/53e682c1-3a63-4b6f-a69f-00fb5032208d/>

⁴⁴ স্মরণিকা, আন্তর্জাতিক অভিবাসী দিবস ২০২১, পৃ. ২৬

apprenticeship training departments. Training is being imparted in a total of 55 trades through these training institutes. TTC is imparting training in 15 trades in the NTVQF system to provide training of international standards. There are currently language courses in 41 TTCs: Japanese in 30 TTCs, Japanese Care Giver in 8 TTCs, English in 11 TTCs, Korean in 16 TTCs, Chinese (Cantonese) in 2 TTCs, and Chinese (Mandarin) in 1 TTCs.

Initiatives have been taken to bring skills training under international accreditation through the UK-based certification body Citi & Guilds and affiliations with training systems in China and South Korea. BMET is providing training in 6 courses through 6 TTCs under the City and Guilds curriculum. There are 43 TTCs providing training in the housekeeping trade.⁴⁵ BMET is currently awarding “Recognition of Prior Learning” (RPL) certificates to experienced workers returning from 44 covid trauma through various technical training centers at full government expense in various trades

3.3 Wage Earners Welfare Board

In 2021, the Board has provided 2,01,90,000 tk for repatriation and medical assistance to 246 injured and sick migrants. In 2020, the board paid 2,14,60,000 tk to 231 migrant workers. From 2010 to 2021, the board has paid a total of 11,16,40,000 to to 1,09 migrant workers. In 2021, a total of 3,603 migrant workers’ bodies were repatriated and the Board paid a total of Tk 13,31,10,000 for the transportation and burial of these bodies. In the year 2020, a total of 284 bodies were returned to the country and a total of 10,09,40,000 to was paid for transportation and burial of those bodies. From 1993 to 2021, the Board paid a total of 136,17,00,000 to 43,281 bodies have been provided by the board for transportation and burial cost.⁴⁶

In 2021, the families of 6,585 dead migrants have been provided financial assistance of BDT 195,66,00,000. In the last 2020, the families of 4,620 deceased migrants were given financial assistance of BDT 140,21,20,000. From 1996 to 2021, the board provided 1,100,70,00,000 tk to the families of a total of 41,219 dead immigrants.⁴⁷

In 2021, the families of 6,575 dead migrants have been provided financial assistance of 195,66,00,000 tk. In 2020, the board distributed 47,42,90,000 tk against 63 immigrants. From 1996 to 2021, the Board distributed 751,49,90,000 against 20,941 immigrants.⁴⁸

The Wage Earners Welfare Board provides scholarships to the children of migrant workers from the sixth to the last year of graduation. In 2021, the board provided scholarships worth 4,8,8,400 tk to 2,841 children of migrant workers.⁴⁹

In 2021, people 4556 registered for Diaspora membership. In the last 2020, 18,494 people registered. From June 2016 to 2021, a total of 96,693 people registered for Diaspora membership.⁵⁰

Pre-departure briefing activities were not conducted in 2021 considering COVID infection. In the year 2020, 11,736 participants participated in the pre-departure briefing activities. Since

⁴⁵ <http://bmet.portal.gov.bd/site/page/431b319c-ded7-49e6-acdc-31a2f9fccc>

⁴⁶ http://www.wewb.gov.bd/site/view/monthly_reports/

⁴⁷ ibid

⁴⁸ ibid

⁴⁹ ibid

⁵⁰ ibid

1992, a total of 14,72,388 participants have participated in the pre-departure briefing activities.⁵¹

The Wage Earners Welfare Board has launched the Recovery and Advancement of Informal Sector Employment (RAISE) project in 2021 for the reintegration of returning migrants. The main objective of this project is to develop the skills of the returning migrants and to strengthen the welfare programs for expatriate workers. The duration of this project is from January 2021 to December 2023. The project will be implemented at a cost of Tk 425 crore from the World Bank and Tk 2.3035 crore from the government. Under this project 2 lakh repatriated migrants will be provided 13,500 tk for reintegration.⁵² The process of setting up a support center for expatriates called 'Bangabandhu Wage Earners Center' near Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport is nearing completion. Migrant workers can stay there temporarily before going abroad and after returning home. The board has also taken initiative to set up a modern hospital and diagnostic center for migrants at Bhatara in Gulshan of the capital.

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3.4 Labour Wing

At present a total of 30 labour wings are functioning in the embassies of Bangladesh located in 26 countries.⁵⁵

3.5 Probashi Kallyan Bank

In the fiscal year 2021-2022, till December 2021, Probashi Kallyan Bank has provided Tk 407.75 crore to 18,982 people for immigration, rehabilitation, special rehabilitation, Bangabandhu Migrant Large Family Loan, Women Immigration, and Self-Employment Loan.⁵⁶ In the fiscal year 2021-2022, Tk 263.41 crore has been disbursed to 11,835 people for immigration loans till December 2021. Tk 44.38 crore has been disbursed to 1,561 people for rehabilitation loans.⁵⁷

In the financial year 2021-2022, a special rehabilitation loan of Tk 66.65 crore has been disbursed to 2,390 migrants who have returned till December 2021.⁵⁸ There are various challenges in disbursing loans to repatriated workers through Probashi Kallyan Bank. Loan schemes for repatriated workers need to be gender friendly. The bank is facing various challenges in disbursing the loan amount. There is a need to create special loan packages for loan services, agent banking, women workers returning from abroad.⁵⁹

⁵¹ ibid

⁵² স্মরণিকা, আন্তর্জাতিক অভিবাসী দিবস ২০২১, পৃ. ৪০

⁵³ Dr. Ahmed Munirus Saleheen, Secretary, MoEWOE stated about the Support centre at the agreement signing programme between the WEWB and World Bank on October 28,2021

⁵⁴ স্মরণিকা, আন্তর্জাতিক অভিবাসী দিবস ২০২১, পৃ. ৪০

⁵⁵ Data collected from BMET

⁵⁶ Data collected from PKB

⁵⁷ ibid

⁵⁸ ibid

⁵⁹ Joint study of RMMRU and CPD

Probashi Kallyan Bank has disbursed Tk. 32.76 Crore to 1158 persons as “Bangabandhu Obhibashi Brihot Poribar Rin” till December of 2021 of the fiscal year 2021-2022.⁶⁰ The Board of Directors of the Bank has increased the maximum limit of 'Bangobandhu Obhibashi Brihot Poribar Loan' from TK 10 lacs to Tk 50 lacs. Considering the nature, scope, tentative interest and capacity of repaying the loan of the organisation has increased the tenure of the loan from 5 to 10 years.

The bank has disbursed loan of Tk 1,191.29 crore to a total of 71,278 people during the fiscal year 2011-2012 financial year till 2021 since the commencement of loan disbursement.⁶¹ At present, the bank has 89 branches across the country. PKB with the aim to create female entrepreneurs, has started low interest female migration loan scheme for foreign bound female migrant workers, female reintegration loan for returnee female migrant workers, and in order to fight the adverse effects of Covid-19 and for business and self-employment work for returnee migrant’s self-employment loan. The simple interest rate for female migration loan is 9%.

The defaulting borrower will be charged an additional 2% interest along with the interest rate fixed at the time of maturity. The maximum limit of a women rehabilitation loan is Tk 50,000,000. This loan does not require any equity for up to a Tk 1,00,000. The maximum limit of a self-employment loan is Tk 500,000. Interest will be charged at a 4% simple interest rate in EMI (Equal Monthly Installment) system and an additional 2% interest will be charged on the matured principal at the time of maturity for defaulting borrower. Any economic activity that is not prohibited and commercially profitable, productive, commercial, service will be considered as a sector of these loans.⁶²

3.6 BOESL

In the 2021-2022 fiscal year, BOESL sent 5,225 migrant workers to Jordan, Hong Kong and Seychelles as of November 2021.⁶³ In the fiscal year 2020-2021, BOESL sent a total of 5,556 migrant workers to Jordan, Hong Kong, and Seychelles.⁶⁴ In the 2020-2021 financial year, BOESL's income was Tk 13,99,14,002, expenses were Tk 6,93,24,182 and profit was Tk 7,05,89,874.⁶⁵

3.7 Complaints

To provide support to deceived migrants BMET accepts complaints in two ways; Online and in person (manual). In 2021, a total of 528 complaints have been lodged with BMET. A total of 905 complaints were lodged with BMET in 2020; Of these, 500 were by male workers and 405 were female workers.⁶⁶

3.8 Recruiting Agency

As of December 2021, the number of licensed recruiting agency is 1,516. Saudi Arabia has 599 female recruiting agencies. As a result of the allegations and investigations, the licenses

⁶⁰ Data Collected from PKB

⁶¹ ibid

⁶² <http://pkb.gov.bd/#>

⁶³ Data collected from BOESL

⁶⁴ <http://www.boesl.gov.bd/site/page/e16dd318-de9a-4997-825c-012ad490197c/->

⁶⁵ <http://www.boesl.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/boesl.portal.gov.bd/page/55904>

⁶⁶ Data collected from BMET

of 18 recruiting agencies have been suspended by BMET and the license of 7 agencies has been revoked.⁶⁷

Recruiting agencies have been vocal this year about the detention of their members under the Human Trafficking Act. At an inter-ministerial meeting on October 21, 2021, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal requested the law enforcement agencies not to harass the owners of legitimate recruiting agencies under the Human Trafficking Act. At the same time, he mentioned that if there is a complaint against anyone in any police station, it should be handed over to BMET, the licensing agency of the recruiting agency, for further investigation. If the BMET does not consider the complaint to be disposable, the Home Minister mentioned that a case can be filed under the Human Trafficking or Migration Act by understanding the nature of the complaint. Apart from the Home Ministry, the inter-ministerial meeting was attended by Ministers and officials of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Director General of BMET, law enforcement officials, and BAIRA leaders.⁶⁸

The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment asked for a list of intermediaries from recruiting agencies in 2021 to stop the migrants from being deceived. Recruiting agencies were instructed to submit the list of their respective representatives to BMET by March 7, 2021, but no one submitted it. In this situation, a new deadline of 31 March 2021 was fixed for the submission of the list of names of sub-agents.⁶⁹ By the end of 2021, about two hundred recruiting agencies had submitted to BMET a list of names of intermediaries used by them after re-issuing the letter.⁷⁰

4 Changes in law and policy in Bangladesh

4.1 Amendments to the 2013 Migration Act and Civil Society Recommendations

In 2021, the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment appointed experts to amend the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act of 2013. The definition of 'sub-agents' in the draft law and the provision to hold them jointly and individually liable, declaring the prevalence of existing law over any other law in the trial of migration-related offenses; imposing duties on migrant workers, imposing restrictions on a sub-agent representing more than one recruiting agency, assigning responsibilities to migrant workers, penalizing recruitment activities after suspension or revocation of licenses, unauthorised branch office management, and hiring sub-agents; Determining provisions, etc. are included.

RMMRU submitted a report to the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment with 11 observations on the draft law.⁷¹ BOMSA also recommended amendments to various sections of the draft law. On September 2021, the Parliamentary Caucus, RMMRU, BOMSA, Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants (BCSM) and PROKAS jointly presented a detailed report on the draft law at a meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment. Representatives of civil society expressed satisfaction over some addition to the draft law and made some demands regarding certain provisions. Out of which some significant points are, mentioning sub-agents alongside 'recruiting agency' in the relevant law, compensating the victim from the confiscated security amount, paying repatriation costs and ensuring adequate compensation to the victim by the

⁶⁷ <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/raHomeAction>

⁶⁸ <https://samakal.com/cricket/article/211185718/>

⁶⁹ <https://www.dailynayadiganta.com/diplomacy/570669/%E>

⁷⁰ Data collected from BMET

⁷¹ <http://www.rmmru.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Draft-Amending-Law-and-Recommendations-of-RMMRU.pdf>

recruiting agency if necessary, to clarify the issue of obtaining reasonable legal assistance by affected migrants, to amend the provisions relating to the liability of migrant workers in the draft, to remove the provision of imposition of penalty for the negligence of migrant workers, etc. The Secretary of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment assured that the provisions related to the imposition of the penalty would be omitted from the draft law and other recommendations would also may be considered.

4.2 Formation of Committee for Finalization of Draft Rules on Compromise and Arbitration of Complaints through Arbitration under the 2013 Act

Under the provisions of Section 41 of the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act of 2013, in the event of a complaint to the government, the authorised body may settle the alternative dispute through arbitration. There was a demand from the civil society to extend the benefits of such arbitration to the grassroots level as well. Having government's interest and scope in the Migration Act of 2013, RMMRU prepared a draft regarding the appointment of an expert and formation of a committee consisting of civil society members for Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) to assist in ensuring fair management of arbitration under sub-section 41 (4) of the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013. The draft rules provides jurisdiction to the Labor Welfare Wing, District Manpower Office, Upazila Nirbahi Officer's Office, or the person for migration related dispute resolution. The draft also contains detailed provisions on initiating dispute resolution, issuing notices, proceedings of dispute resolution meetings, adjournment of meetings, the role of authorised officers, conciliation agreement and report of arbitrators, the effectiveness of agreements and reports, etc. In order to finalise the draft Rule, an ADR Rule enacting committee consisting of representatives from MoEWOE, BMET, CSO/NGO⁷², and expert was formed in September 2021.

4.3 Three models of RMMRU in sub-agent regularization

Although Sub-Agents are generally considered to be the perpetrators of all misconduct in hiring workers for employment abroad, a study by RMMRU (2019) shows that sub-agents are an important part of the current recruitment process. According to the book, brokers or sub-agents have been providing 16 services in immigration processing. However, in the Foreign Employment and Immigration Act, 2013, there is no opportunity for representatives or sub-agents to work. Recruiting agencies have been informally recruiting sub-agents. Civil society and experts claim that such informal activities create opportunities for fraudulent agencies and sub-agents.

Analyzing the relevant legal documents, it is understood that the registration and liability of sub-agents may be determined in accordance with the provisions of the 182 Agreement Act. On the advice of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, the Parliamentary Caucus and the BMET, RMMRU provided three models for the registration of sub-agents. In all respects, BMET remains the main registration authority for the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment. The first model is the registration of sub-agents nominated by the recruiting agency by BMET, the second model is registration by BMET after processing the application form by the District Employment and Manpower Office (DEMO) and the third model is registration of sub-agents nominated by BAIRA by BMET.⁷³

⁷² RMMRU is made a member of this committee as the representative of CSOs

⁷³ <http://www.rmmru.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Sub-Agent-Registration-Model-Bangla.pdf>

4.4 Initiative to formulate Wage Earners Welfare Board rules

The Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment took the initiative to formulate the Wage Earners' Welfare Board Rules in 2021. The ILO is assisting in the drafting of the rules under Section 19 of the Wage Earners' Welfare Board Act, 2016. A meeting on pre-draft rules in this regard was held at the concerned ministry in November 2021; Where the relevance of separate rules on repatriation and reintegration of expatriate workers was discussed and it was initially decided to make a rule. The meeting also discussed the specific timing of the pre-departure orientation in the draft rules, the management and responsibilities of the Expatriate Welfare Desk, the formation of legal panels at home and abroad to provide legal services to migrants, the bringing of undocumented migrants' dead bodies. It was decided to include issues related to health protection, protection of female migrant workers, repatriation and reintegration of migrant workers, management of funds, functions of Wage Earners Welfare Board, welfare functions of Bangladesh Mission abroad, safe home etc.

4.5 Initiative to amend the policy regarding health test of Bangladeshi workers who want to go abroad in 2019

The Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment has prepared a new draft in November 2021 by amending and adding some paragraphs of the policy on health examination of Bangladeshi workers who want to go abroad. The draft includes issues such as enrollment of medical centres for health test, responsibilities of selection committee, formation and activities of expert committees for inspection, formation of associations by listed medical centers and monthly reports. Civil society recommends the following changes to the draft policy, to include in the list of medical centre manpower mentioned in the draft policy the required number of female attendants as male technicians as well as assistants to facilitate health test of female migrant workers; Determining the authority for confiscation of bail including cancellation of enrollment; In the light of Sections 12 and 16 of the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act, 2013, in the case of cancellation of enrollment of medical center and forfeiture of deposit, fix the process of cancellation of enrollment of medical center and confiscation of deposit by adding necessary sub-paragraphs in the draft policy in question; To define the charged medical center as the fulfillment provider in the relevant case; Determining where, how long, in what process the injured worker will apply for compensation etc.

4.7 Introduction of allowances for disabled children of immigrants

The Wage Earners' Welfare Board has introduced disability allowance in 2021 for the welfare of children with disabilities of migrants. In 2021, this allowance has been provided to 295 disabled children of migrants at the rate of Tk 12,000 annually.⁷⁴ This initiative will contribute to the mainstreaming of persons with disabilities and development of their skills in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

5. International law and protection of migrants during COVID-19

5.1 COVID-19 and Global Compact regarding Migration

⁷⁴ Data collected from WEWB

The Global Compact for Migration (GCM) was enacted with the goal of safe, orderly and regular migration in 2018 where Bangladesh along with 163 other countries adopted the Compact. The member states pledged to provide services to the migrants through achieving the goals of the GCM in the time of COVID-19 or any other pandemic. The first Asia-Pacific review of the implementation of the compact was held online in 2021 on the Kudo platform. The International Migration Review Forum will be held in 2022 to review the implementation of the Global Compact at the regional level.

International studies in 2021 show that migrants working in Gulf Cooperation Council countries, especially Bangladeshi women migrants, have been subjected to workplace harassment, wage theft and lack of health care products due to lockdown and other complications caused by COVID-19. Bangladesh is therefore faced challenge in achieving GCM's 8th goal of protecting human rights and the rights of migrants.

In 2021, due to COVID-19, migrants are facing obstacles in crossing overseas borders due to health restrictions, quarantine and different other complications. The extra cautionary steps to prevent COVID-19 are also creating hurdles to achieve the goals of GCM as the migrants are facing challenges to migrate in regular ways, safe work and in terms of ensuring mobility.

Bangladesh has adopted some special procedures for implementation of GCM Goals 4, 15, 16, 22 and 23 in the National Action Plan for 2021-2025 (NAP) and National Action Plan for Implementation of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy 2016 (2019). In both plans the need to increase social protection for migrants are being considered which will lead to greater social inclusion, non-discrimination and empowerment for migrants.

The Government of Bangladesh and civil society organizations are providing a variety of skills development training for potential migrants and pre-departure migrants in 2021, which will help achieving the 18th goal of the Compact. Bangladesh has been seen to take initiatives to enrich consular services abroad in achieving the 14th goal of the Global Compact to provide protection to migrant workers in its own and destination countries during the COVID period. Bangladesh's missions in the destination country are providing consular and emergency services to the migrants there and compensation to the migrants affected by the accident.⁷⁵

During COVID-19, the Bangladesh government decided to give 2% incentive on remittances in last year. This year, the Minister for Expatriate Welfare sent a letter to the Ministry of Finance requesting the government to increase the incentive from 2% to 4%, which would help achieve the 20th goal of the GCM.

To achieve the 23rd goal of the compact and to strengthen the global partnership and international cooperation, Bangladesh is participating in various international and regional meetings and forums in this year such as, Abu Dhabi Dialogue, Colombo Process, COP 26, GFMD etc.

5.2 Demands for Immediate Justice for Wage Theft

Last year on June 1, a major coalition of international civil society organizations and trade unions launched an appeal to their respective governments to establish an "emergency justice system" under the "Justice for Wages Theft Campaign". The coalition has since filed four more appeals in support of the concerted action taken by UN agencies, governments and businesses against wage theft and lack of justice. The Migrants Forum in Asia has published an analytical

⁷⁵ www.migrationnetwork.un.org/resources/bangladesh-gcm-voluntary-national-report-regional-review-asiaand-pacific

report in 2021 on the collection of wage theft cases of migrants.⁷⁶ MFA has analysed the cases of wage theft collected from January to May 2021. It shows that the major numbers of victims of wage theft have been the construction workers (50%). 13% of wage theft occurs in manufacturing sector workers and 10.33% in domestic workers.⁷⁷ Large campaigns such as Justice for Wage Theft and global coordinated action have led the ILO to include wage theft on the agenda of its 2021 annual congress.⁷⁸

5.4 COP-26 and Migration

At the COP-26 climate conference held in Glasgow, Scotland in November 2021, the issue of migration was also discussed. Bangladesh is the chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum in CoP-26, a group of 48 countries who are at most risk due to climate change. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh raised four proposals at the UN climate Conference this year. One of her suggestions is to reduce the global migration problem.⁷⁹ The UNFCCC COP-26 Conference must establish the necessary policies, resources and technologies for migration due to climate change.⁸⁰ At the COP-26 event, the United Nations Network called on member states to integrate human movement into their climate change policies, plans and actions.

The issues of migration and displacement in COP-26 under 'Loss and Damage' have been discussed on various platforms.⁸¹ But as a result, the developed countries have not been able to fulfill their promises of long-term financial commitment under the 'Loss and Damage' policy. At the COP-16 conference, the developed nations pledged to raise 100 billion USD annually by 2020. There had been no progress in achieving this goal in recent years. This year's conference calls on developed countries to fully achieve the target of 100 billion by 2025. Many of the developed countries have adopted the principle of equal distribution of climate funds in mitigation and adaptation. Funds created to assist in adaptation can be used to provide the necessary supports in the affected areas to use migration as one of several ways.

6. Civil Society Initiatives

This year, the organization working in the migration sector are focused on providing variety of services to migrants who are in risk.

Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants (BCSM)

Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants (BCSM), a leading civil society platform on migration, has played a significant role in 2021 at the local, national and international levels. Earlier this year, BCSM and RMMRU jointly published a research book titled 'The Other Face of Globalization: COVID-19, International Labour Migrants and Left Behind Families in Bangladesh'. The study recommends the creation of appropriate policy frameworks to protect the rights of migrants and their families in the event of an emergency in the country of origins and the destination country.

The International Migration Review Forum will be held at the United Nations in 2022 to see how the goals of the Global Compact of Migration have been implemented regionally. The

⁷⁶ <https://mfasia.org/report-crying-out-for-justice-wage-theft-against-migrant-workers-during-covid-19-volume-2/>

⁷⁷ <https://mfasia.org/migrant-workers-in-construction-sector-report-maximum-wage-theft-cases-mfa/>

⁷⁸ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/14680181211012958>

⁷⁹ <https://www.fns24.com/article/221170/>

⁸⁰ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27795&LangID=E>

⁸¹ <https://www.unb.com.bd/bangla/category/>

first Asia-Pacific Regional Review was held online in March of this year to provide specific advice on the process. As part of the Migrants Forum in Asia (MFA), BCSM organized a national debriefing online in March 2021 and established the GCM Follow-up Forum.

BCSM organized an online press conference on the implementation of COVID-19 vaccination registration program for migrants in the Bangladesh in July 2021 where the difficulties faced by the migrants in different parts of the country in processing the registration of vaccines were addressed. BCSM demanded the protection of the information provided by the migrants in the registration app. Of the 11 recommendations made at the press conference, the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment immediately accepted two. The MoEWOE expedited the recommendation of make the migrants learn about the registration process in two steps in easy ways through video tutorials and to publicize approved vaccine names in the destination countries. In addition, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs adopted one of the recommendations of giving single dose of Johnson & Johnson vaccine to migrant workers on emergency basis and directed to implement it accordingly.

Bangladesh Parliamentary Caucus, WARBE Development Foundation and BCSM jointly organized a pre-budget national consultation program considering the fiscal year 2021-2022 focusing on the development of migrants in July 2021. The main purpose of this online consolidation was to recommend an increase in the budget for the migration sector in the 2021-2022 national budget for the development of migrants.

The Parliamentary Caucus on Migration and Development, Bangladeshi Obhibashi Mohila Shromik Association (BOMSA) and the BCSM jointly created a draft of the Overseas Employment Act 2013 focusing on the amendment and Alternative Dispute Resolution policy through a residential workshop. RMMRU and BCSM jointly organized 4 webinars and 1 consultation programme titled 'Build Back Better' to protect the rights of migrants. More than 40 national newspapers and TV media have covered the programme. RMMRU had organized a two-day online international conference on the need for successful reintegration of migrant returnees during COVID-19. The conference was attended by senior officials from the MoEWOE and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as members, policy makers and experts from other destination countries and origin countries.

RMMRU has formed 12 market-oriented business models in 2021 to reintegrate returnee migrants. With collaboration with the Center for Development (CPD), RMMRU conducted a joint study through which the challenges of Probashi Kallyan Bank's in order to disburse the Special Reintegration Loan were identified and recommendations were made. To protect the legal rights of the migrants and to resolve migration disputes more arbitrarily through structured and institutionalized way, RMMRU formulated Alternative Dispute Resolution rules and identified specific areas for amendment of the Overseas Employment Act 2013 together with BOMSA, Parliamentary Caucus and BCSM as well as made recommendations to the Parliamentary Standing Committee and the Minister of MoEWOE.

RMMRU also launched a mobile application called 'SafeStep' to protect migrant workers from fraud or risk in labour migration. Migrants will be able to use the mobile application completely free of charge to save their urgent migration related documents, receive information of migration processing, calculate and identify the benefits and other risks of migration and be prepare for their migration journey.

Like last year, RMMRU has provided emergency support to 1170 women during COVID-19 at the Dakshinkhan Support Center this year as well. It provided emergency food, physical, psychosocial and other services. Total 14,995 returnee migrants received emergency assistance by RMMRU at the Dhaka International Hazrat Shahjalal International airport this year.

BOMSA provided emergency services to migrant families this year as well as helped 5,000 migrant families get registered for the COVID-19 vaccination. Besides providing legal aid to women migrants, they conducted pre-decision and pre-departure training for migrants and their family members through which about 5700 people received their services. BOMSA had also conducted advocacy activities to include specific provisions in the law on the safety of women migrants in overseas employment contracts.

The WARBE Development Foundation has launched a certificate course on climate change, displacement and migration in collaboration with the Parliamentary Caucus on Migration and Development in 2021. Through the government and local initiatives, WARBE has recovered compensation amounted of BDT 29,61000 for the affected migrants. During the COVID period, they distributed food, cash and health hygiene items among the migrants with the help of Bangladesh Obhibashi Odhikar Forum.

BNSK has provided employment to 125 women migrants during the emergency situation of this year. They distributed emergency food, relief, masks and safety supplies during the COVID period. At the local level, they also helped to settle migration disputes in 2021 and supported the migrant families in recovering about BDT 7,45,000.

BASTOB had provided pre-departure trainings to 83 batches in this year as well as supported the returnee migrants to receive BDT 24,00000 as loan from the Probashi Kallyan Bank. They had also provided financial assistance to the affected returnee migrants due to COVID-19.

7. Rohingya Refugees

The situation of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh deteriorated further in 2021. Due to the COVID situation, humanitarian aid activities in the refugee camps reached in a minimum level. At the same time the law and order situation had also been deteriorated. There is no indication that Rohingyas will return to their home in the near future in 2021. In addition, due to the military's direct occupation of political power in their country and the formation of a caretaker government in exile as well as the activation of anti-military militancy resistance within the country has virtually started a civil war there. In this context, the repatriation talks have almost reached a stalemate.

In this reality, the government of Bangladesh started the process of relocation of Rohingya refugees in Bhasanchar this year. So far, about 19,000 Rohingyas have been relocated in six phases.⁸² After much deliberation, different UN agencies agreed to engage in government activities in Bhasanchar.⁸³ Needless to say, the main problems for both the Ukhia-Teknaf refugee and relocated migrants are to ensure security, access to education and healthcare, sustainable livelihoods and their willingness to relocate to Bhasanchar. As long as the Rohingya are not able to return to their homeland, it is the responsibility of the international community to ensure that the needs of the Rohingya people are met in each of the above cases. As a patron country Bangladesh needs to play an important role in this case as well.

Education and livelihood are two important elements for living a dignified life. In this case, it is necessary to ensure the successful participation of children and women. Education opportunities open new door of possibilities and help refugees after their return to their homeland. Evil forces can also have a relatively small effect on educated youth. On 13

⁸² <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/rohingya-crisis/2021/11/25/rohingya-relocation-379-refugees-leave-for-bhasan-char>

⁸³ <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/rohingya-crisis/2021/10/09/crucial-mou-on-un-s-operational-engagement-in-bhashan-char-signed>

December 2021, the government of Bangladesh revoked the educational opportunities of the Rohingya people which had started in 2020 without giving any proper reason.⁸⁴ We demand that the government reconsider this decision. At the same time, we would like to draw the attention of the government to take effective measures for the overall security of education, health and livelihood of the Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshis in the refugee-inhabited areas in Bahanchar and Ukhia-Teknaf camps.

Conclusion

COVID-19 has adversely affected labour migration in Bangladesh. Migration has increased in 2021 as compared to 2020. However, migration in 2021 is 11.85 percent less than in 2019. In 2021, Saudi Arabia is the single most important destination country where 76.15% migrants workers are going. In 2021, remittance inflows increased by 1.43%.

In 2021, there have been several significant incidents in the migration sector. As a result of the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between Bangladesh and Malaysia, it is expected that the migrants will be able to migrate at a lower cost than before. Important steps have been taken for the migrant workers in terms of receiving COVID-19 vaccination. Besides Middle East, the government is trying to explore new labour markets in Asia and Eastern Europe. However, the impact of the COVID pandemic increased the migration costs in various levels in this year. The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief has formulated the National Strategy for Internal Displacement Management 2021 in 2021 which will help prevent displacement. Significant numbers of migrants from Bangladesh have been seen using irregular routes for the purpose of migration in this year as well. One of the important events of 2021 is efforts to digitalise the migration process with a mobile application called 'Ami Prabasi' but there is a need to ensure transparent use of the application.

In 2021, the Wage Earners Welfare Board introduced disability allowance for the welfare of migrants' children with disabilities. No pre-departure briefing activities were conducted this year due to COVID-19. The Wage Earners Welfare Board has launched the RAISE project for the reintegration of returning migrants. BMET has also taken initiative to introduce arbitration in the District Manpower and Employment Office (DEMO) with a view to decentralize BMET's arbitration activities in resolving migration related disputes. BMET is awarding 'Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL) certificates at various government-sponsored trades to veteran workers who have returned due to the COVID effect.

In 2021, the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment prepared a draft to amend the Overseas Employment and Migration Act of 2013. The Parliamentary Caucus, RMMRU, BOMSA, Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants (BCSM) and PROKAS jointly presented a report on the draft law at a meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee and the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment. In order to ensure proper management of arbitration under sub-section 41 (4) of the Overseas Employment and Migration Act, 2013, RMMRU appointed an expert and prepared a draft Rules on Alternative Disputes Resolution (ADR) and submitted it to the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment. The ministry formed a committee of experts to finalize the rules. RMMRU proposes three possible models for registration of the sub-agents. The Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment has taken initiative to formulate Wage Earners Welfare Board Rules under Section 19 of Wage Earners Welfare Board Act, 2018. In addition, the Ministry has prepared a draft policy for the purpose of formulating a new policy 2021 by amending and adding some paragraphs of the health examination policy of Bangladeshi

⁸⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/bangladesh-rohingya-refugee-schools-face-closure>

workers who want to go abroad, 2019. Probashi KallyanBank launched 'Women Migration Loan' for potential women migrants, 'Women Reintegration Loan' for returnee women workers and 'Self-Employment Loan' for migrant workers returning from abroad due to COVID-19 from December 2021.