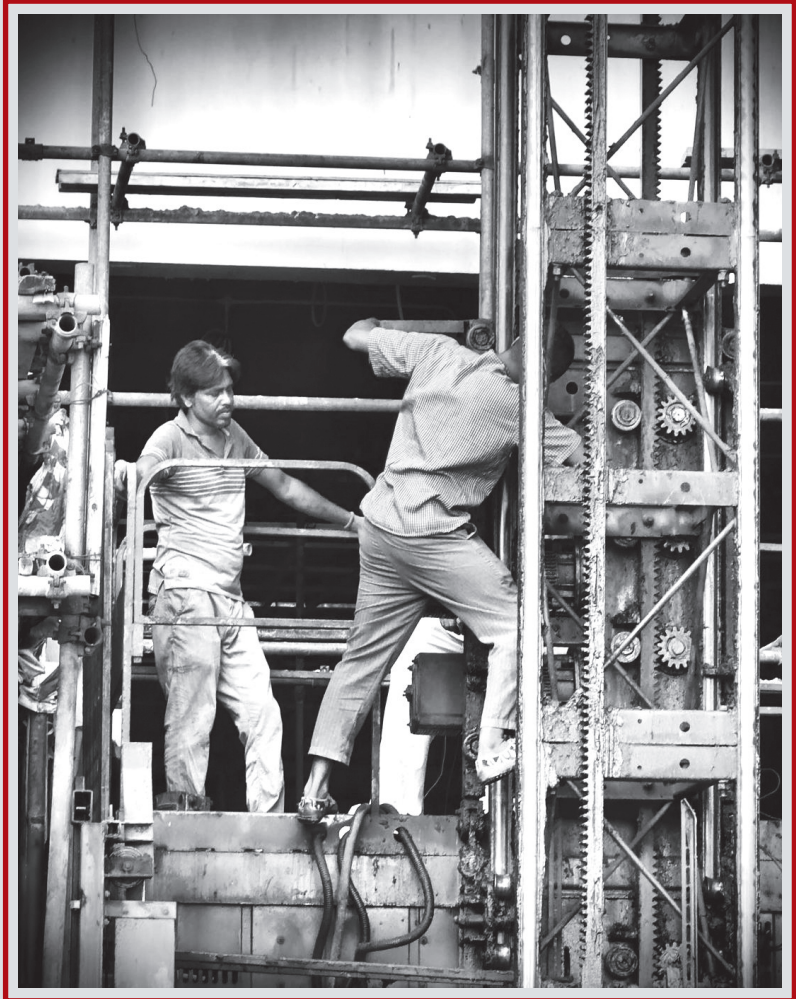


Migration Dynamics of Bangladesh and the Maldives Corridor



Shahab Enam Khan
C R Abrar
Md. Obaidul Haque

About the Book

This study unravels the dynamics of migration for employment in the Bangladesh-Maldives corridor. In contrast to research that is mainly based on returned migrant workers, this research builds on field work conducted both in Bangladesh and the Maldives. Active engagement of key stakeholders representing the government, the civil society and the private sector in both countries, from framing the research questions to validating the recommendations in a bilateral conference, has been another distinctive feature of the study.

**Migration Dynamics of
Bangladesh
and the Maldives Corridor**

**Migration Dynamics of
Bangladesh
and the Maldives Corridor**

**Shahab Enam Khan
C R Abrar
Md. Obaidul Haque**

Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit
Sattar Bhaban (4th Floor)
179, Shahid Syed Nazrul Islam Sharani
Bijoy Nagar, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh
Tel: 8802-58316524
E-mail: info@rmmru.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/rmmru
Website: www.rmmru.org

First published 2023

Copyright©RMMRU

All rights are reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or translated in any form or by any means without prior permission in writing from the publisher. Any person engaged in unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The study is supported by The Asia Foundation. The views expressed in this work are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Asia Foundation and the institutions with which the authors are affiliated.

ISBN: 978-984-35-9034-3

Published by C R Abrar, Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), Dhaka. Cover photo credit: Ali Naif and Public Interest Law Center, Maldives. This book has been set in Times New Roman. Cover designed by Abdur Rahman and printed at SR Printing and Supply, Dhaka.

Contents

List of Tables	viii	
List of Figures	x	
Acronyms	xi	
Glossary of non-English terms	xiii	
Foreword	xv	
Preface	xvii	
Executive Summary	xix	
Part I	Introduction	1
1.1	Background	1
1.2	The Rationale of the Study	3
1.3	Objectives of the Research	5
1.4	Key Research Questions	6
1.5	Literature Review	7
1.6	Research Methodology	18
1.7	Data Collection Tools	19
1.8	Limitations of the Study	20
Part II	Analysis of Field Findings	23
2.1	The Respondents	23
2.2	The Maldives as a Destination Country	26
2.3	Migration Experience	28
2.4	Employment Opportunities and Income	32
2.5	Remittance Transfer and Utilisation	36
2.6	Experiences of Working and Living in the Maldives	39

2.7	Rights and Entitlement Issues	43
2.8	Role of Missions	45
2.9	Intercommunity Marriage and Political Participation	46
2.10	Trafficking in Person, Narcotics, and Bangladeshi Migrants	47
2.11	Lack of Gender Sensitivity and Mainstreaming	50
Part III	Recommendations and Policy Options	53
	The Need for a Comprehensive Policy Implementation Framework	53
A.	Developing Accountable and Inclusive Institutions to Address the Migration and TIP Issues	53
3.1	Facilitate the Implementation of the Well-designed Migration Regime in Bangladesh and the Maldives	54
3.2	Technical Support to the Maldivian Government	54
3.3	Platforms for Engagement by the Maldivian Authorities with the Bangladeshi Workers	55
3.4	Greater Bilateral Cooperation to Access Justice to be Facilitated	55
3.5	Establishing Networks to Eliminate Employment and Welfare-Related Grievances	56
B.	Promoting Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development	57
3.6	Bilateral Technical Cooperation Mechanisms for Safe Migration and Labour Standards	57

3.7	International Collaboration to Implement an Effective TIP Regime	57
3.8	Build a Coalition to Counter TIP and Narco-trafficking	58
3.9	Develop a Strategy to Address the Grievances of the Workers and to Provide Social and Psychological Support	58
3.10	An Inclusive Gendered Approach to Migration	59
	Bibliography	61
	Annex I	69
	Annex II	71

List of Tables

Table 2.1.1	Educational profile	24
Table 2.1.2	Language training	25
Table 2.1.3	Profession	26
Table 2.2.1	Source of information	28
Table 2.3.1	Facilitator of migration	28
Table 2.3.2	Source of migration cost	30
Table 2.3.3	Year of arrival in the Maldives	31
Table 2.3.4	Time taken for earning	32
Table 2.4.1	Avenues for employment	32
Table 2.4.2	Monthly income	33
Table 2.4.3	Receipt of salary	34
Table 2.4.4	Amount promised and received	34
Table 2.4.5	Hours of work	35
Table 2.5.1	Amount of money remitted	36
Table 2.5.2	Channel of sending remittance	37
Table 2.5.3	Recipients and users of remittance	38
Table 2.5.4	Bank accounts	39
Table 2.5.5	Location of bank account	39
Table 2.6.1	Experience of physical and verbal abuse	40
Table 2.6.2	Sexual exploitation and workplace discrimination	40
Table 2.6.3	Facing discrimination in a public place	41
Table 2.6.4	Accessing medical treatment	43
Table 2.7.1	Knowledge of rights	43
Table 2.7.2	Sources of information about rights	44
Table 2.7.3	Perception of equality of rights of men and women	44
Table 2.8.1	Services of Bangladesh mission	45

Table 2.9.1	Intercommunity marriage	46
Table 2.9.2	Participation in political rallies	47
Table 2.10.1	Reporting incidences of sex trafficking	48
Table 2.10.2	Challenges in availing legal redress in Maldives	49

List of Figures

Figure 2.1.1	Migration status	24
Figure 2.2.1	Choice of Maldives as a destination	27
Figure 2.3.1	Time taken to process migration	29
Figure 2.4.1	Overtime	35
Figure 2.4.2	Gainful employment	36
Figure 2.6.1	Facing problems in accessing accommodation	41
Figure 2.7.1	Passport in employer's possession	45

Acronyms

AFP	Agence France-Presse
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BAIRA	Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies
BDT	Bangladesh Taka
BMET	Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ETM	Employment Tribunal Maldives
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
FIDH	International Federation for Human Rights
HRC	Human Rights Commission
HRCM	Human Rights Commission of the Maldives
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ID	Immigration Department
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LRA	Labour Relations Authority
MDN	Maldivian Democracy Network
MED	The Ministry of Economic Development
MMW	Mission for Migrant Workers Maldives
MNDF	Maldivian National Defence Force
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRC	Maldivian Red Crescent
MTUC	Maldives Trade Union Congress
NAHTSC	National Anti-Human Trafficking Steering Committee
NATAP	National Anti-Trafficking Action Plan
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations

PILC	Public Interest Law Center
RMMRU	Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
UN	United Nations
UNB	United News of Bangladesh
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
URP	Universal Periodic Review
USD	United States Dollar
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Glossary of non-English terms

Dalals *Dalals* are informal intermediaries who facilitate migration by linking migrants with formal recruiting agencies providing information about work available in destination countries and help migrants procure passport, work permit etc. They do not have any legal identity and operate outside the purview of the law and thus remain unaccountable.

Hundi *Hundi* is an informal transfer of money from one country to another bypassing the formal money transfer institutions such as banks and money transfer house.

Hawala *Hawala* is an informal funds transfer system that allows for the shifting of money from one person to another without the actual movement of money. It is used as an alternative remittance channel that exists outside of traditional banking systems. Another name of *hundi* system is *hawala*.

Foreword

This study on migration dynamics between Bangladesh and the Maldives has major significance for the South Asia region. The objective of this research is to better understand the migration patterns, processes, and complexities that exist within this corridor. The Asia Foundation, in its commitment to promoting sustainable development and regional cooperation, has provided funding to RMMRU for the study.

This collaborative effort between the Asia Foundation and RMMRU, sheds light on various aspects of migration, including the risks and vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers. By gaining a comprehensive understanding of these issues, we can formulate effective policies and interventions to protect the rights and well-being of migrants. I would like to express my gratitude to the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA) for their generous support through the South Asia Governance Fund (SAGF) Programme. Their financial assistance has made this research project possible. This partnership between The Asia Foundation, RMMRU, and SCA exemplifies the importance of collaborative efforts in addressing critical regional challenges.

The findings of this study are of utmost significance. They will provide policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders with valuable insights into the factors that drive migration and the associated risks. Armed with this knowledge, we will be better equipped to develop evidence-based policies and strategies that can counter high-risk migration from Bangladesh. Through concerted efforts, we can create an environment that fosters safe, orderly, and regular migration, while ensuring the protection and rights of all migrant workers.

I commend RMMRU for their tireless dedication and commitment in conducting this research. Their expertise and rigorous

methodology have contributed significantly to the quality of this study. I would also like to extend my appreciation to all the researchers and participants involved in this endeavor. Their valuable contributions have played an instrumental role in shaping our understanding of migration dynamics within this corridor. I am delighted that the study has provided a platform for the stakeholders of both countries to exchange knowledge, share experiences, and engage in meaningful dialogue.

We very much hope that the research findings will contribute to policy interventions to address the challenges identified. The collaborative efforts of all stakeholders can make a tangible difference in the lives of migrant workers and their families. TAF strongly believes that together, we can build a future where migration is safe, dignified, and beneficial for all parties involved.



Kazi Faisal Bin Seraj

Country Representative, Bangladesh

The Asia Foundation

July 2023

Preface

Over the last decade or so the Maldives has become an important destination country for the Bangladeshi workers. However, movement of people from Bangladesh to this island state is one of the least researched areas in contemporary migration scholarship. In the recent times, the restrictions imposed on the flow of workers through formal channel has led to a situation in which the burgeoning demand for Bangladeshi workers, particularly in the hospitality, fishing and construction sectors, is met by workers who overstay their contracted period or by those who are often misled by the unscrupulous agents and employers. Their irregular immigration and work status often make them vulnerable to abuses by agents and employers. Some are forced into conditions of servitude, a situation associated with human trafficking.

This study is an important initiative that unravels the dynamics of migration for employment in the Bangladeshi-Maldives corridor. In contrast to studies which mainly focus on returned labour migrants, this research is based on field work conducted both in Bangladesh and the Maldives. Active engagement of key stakeholders representing the government, the civil society and the private sector in both countries, from framing the research questions to validating the recommendations in the bilateral conference, has been another distinctive feature of the study. A separate research by the Maldives based Public Interest Law Center (PILC) on the Bangladeshi workers in that country at around the same period has provided a unique scope to compare and contrast the research findings.

The study is the result of a collective effort. First and foremost RMMRU thanks the migrants, returned migrants and members of their families for sharing their insights and time with the research team. The Unit is grateful to the researchers, Prof. Dr. Shahab Enam Khan of Jahangirnagar University and Associate Professor Md. Obaidul Haque of University of Dhaka for their effort in

successful completion of this study. It also thanks Nazmul Haque, Md. Shimonuzzaman, Rabab Ahmed and Rukaia Parveen Tuba for their critical support in facilitating the field work and Parvez Bhuiyan for collating the data. RMMRU also thanks the field enumerators and other members of the research team for their hard work and commitment.

The Unit expresses its deep appreciation of the inputs offered by the members of Advisory Committee comprising of senior lawyers, journalists, government functionaries and representatives of the civil society. It also thanks the PILC for extending its support in conducting the field survey in the Maldives and holding of the bilateral conference. Finally, RMMRU expresses its gratitude to The Asia Foundation for funding this important study and to Mr. Kazi Faisal Bin Seraj, the Country Representative; Mr. Md. Zakaria, Senior Program Manager; and Mr. Asinur Reza, Senior Program Officer of the Foundation in Dhaka for their unwavering support that resulted in the successful completion of this study.



C R Abrar

Executive Director

RMMRU

July 2023

Executive Summary

The Maldives, known for its reliance on tourism and fishing industries for economic growth, has been an attractive destination for foreign workers in the region for quite some time. It offers opportunities for low-skilled workers, hospitality staff, and mid-level managerial positions. These migrant workers, including those from Bangladesh, are indispensable contributors to the Maldives' economic progress, serving vital roles in industries like tourism, hospitality, construction, agriculture and fisheries, and services. Despite the substantial presence of Bangladeshi migrant workers in the Maldives, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the trends and patterns of this migration corridor. A good segment of Bangladeshi workers work without proper documentation. Consequently, Bangladeshi migrants constitute a significant portion of the workforce, accounting for nearly one-third of the country's population. Despite substantial contributions to the Maldivian economy, Bangladeshi migrant workers face multiple levels of challenges in the Maldives ranging from employment-related discrimination, trafficking in person, socio-cultural alienation and marginalisation, and limited access to fundamental rights such as access to justice, health, and accommodation.

This research paper has identified that mitigating the challenges faced by migrant workers requires multiple interventions that involve political commitment from the governments of Maldives and Bangladesh, civil society engagement, and a coordinated migration strategy with various stakeholders. This would require mutual and bilateral efforts to establish accountable and inclusive institutions to address migration and trafficking in persons (TIP) issues. Both countries would require working together, mobilising all the resources such as government machinery, private sector, civil society, and legal apparatuses to create favourable conditions that ensure safe, regular, and dignified migration. This requires

transparent, effective, and accountable institutions that protect migrants' rights, including workers' rights, and provide access to justice. The research highlights the need for providing technical support to the Maldivian authorities and employers to impart rights-based justice. Support is needed to build human resources, enhance language proficiency, decentralise immigration services, increase citizen engagement, ensure transparency, and build public trust.

This research paper has recommended evidence-based recommendations that include parliamentary collaboration to ease the migration process, further strengthening of recruitment through accountable measures, opening of work visas for migrant workers to reduce TIP and employment discrimination, and inclusion of civil society and NGOs to provide access to justice, training on legal services, social relations, and conflict prevention. Collaboration between the Maldivian government and the international community is essential to enhance the capacity of law enforcement officials in combating trafficking. Measures include identifying victims, encouraging disclosure of trafficking sources, and increasing oversight of agents and employers. Anti-trafficking training for officials, establishing victim shelter centres in Bangladesh and the Maldives, and providing protection services and support are recommended. This research also highlights the need for a practical coalition to counter trafficking and protect migrant welfare. This coalition should identify changing trends, provide legal protection and services, and conduct awareness programmes. It should include representatives from various sectors and issue anti-trafficking campaigns in local languages. Collaboration between governments is crucial for sustainability.

PART I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Maldives is an upper-middle-income country with a robust growth trajectory. While the country saw a steep fall in economic growth during the Covid-19 pandemic, its economy has gradually started to recover from 2021. In the last three decades, sustained growth has significantly reduced poverty, and Maldives performs well on poverty outcomes compared to its regional, income, and small-island peers (The World Bank, 2022). Over the past three decades, economic growth has become significantly dependent on tourism and fishing. The dependence on tourism makes the country highly vulnerable to macro-economic and external shocks (The World Bank, 2022). Although 3.9 percent of the population was below the international poverty line (US\$6.85/person/day) in 2019, more than 90 percent of the poor were concentrated in the atolls. The poverty rate is estimated to have risen to 19.8 percent in 2020 due to the impact of the pandemic. However, with the sustained recovery in tourism, poverty is expected to drop to 3.8 percent by the end of 2022 (The World Bank, 2022). As such, the Maldives presents better economic prospects for migrants from the regional countries.

The Maldives has become an international destination for foreign workers, mainly from Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia. The country is perceived as an economically viable destination for low-skilled workers, hospitality staff, and mid-level managerial employment for Bangladeshi, Indian, and Sri Lankan workers. They are vital contributors to the economic development of the Maldives, providing the workforce needed for significant industries such as tourism and hospitality, construction, agriculture and fisheries,

and services. Similarly, higher-skilled workers from Bangladesh and India are employed in the education and health sectors filling labour market gaps in these sectors. Despite the close link between migration and the economy of the Maldives, migrants, significantly low-skilled and undocumented, continue to encounter multilayered economic, legal, social, and health challenges. This study has found that Bangladeshi migrants are often exploited, discriminated against, and face challenges in accessing health and justice. These issues are especially significant for the large, vulnerable undocumented migrant workers. Limited complaint mechanisms, advocacy bodies, and inspections undertaken by regulators allow abuses by employers to persist (United Nations Network on Migration, 2021).

Understanding migration patterns and the decision-making processes of the migrant workers to choose the Maldives as a destination requires an approach that considers changing economic, legal, cultural, and socio-political factors. This study undertakes an analytical framework of migration that includes demographic, economic, and social drivers from the country of origin, income and wage differentials and expectations, and exposure to health and legal services as crucial human rights indicators. The theory of planned behavior can be used here to supplement the framework that assumes that migrants, in general, tend to behave rationally and they migrate to other countries based on available information to undertake specific action (economic, political, social, religious, or cultural) (Ajzen, 1991). Hence, the assumption is that the decision for a Bangladeshi to migrate to the Maldives is influenced by three main factors: (1) the individual's positive or negative evaluation of the Maldives; (2) subjective norms or the person's perception of economic potential in the Maldives; and (3) perceived gainful economic opportunities, influenced by kinship-based relations, which describes the person's perceived self-efficacy or ability to adjust with the Maldivian society. Structural barriers such as lack of access to legal services and socio-economic marginalisation are likely to play less influence on decision-making. As a result, skills, knowledge, and other resources are not critical determinants for a migrant's perception of economic activities in the Maldives.

1.2 The Rationale of the Study

International migration is increasingly playing an important role in the socio-economic development of origin and destination countries such as Bangladesh and the Maldives. While migration is a source of remittance for the sending countries, it is a major pillar of stability and economic development for the host countries. Remittances generate increased incomes with a substantial contribution to poverty reduction, improvement in education and health for the household members, and overall welfare of the local communities of the sending countries, while the host country gains from hiring human resources at a competitive cost to sustain its economic development processes. However, migration has its challenges and comes at substantial costs to the migrants. The challenges include lack of jobs, non-payment and irregular payment of wages, poor work and living conditions, limited labour rights and violation of labour rights, lack of legal documentation and access to legal services, and the like.

The skill shortages and higher wages of the Maldivian workforce are pull factors for migrant workers predominantly from, but not limited to, the neighboring countries, i.e., Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and extra-regional countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia. Migrant workers, mostly from less developed countries, allow Maldives to overcome labour shortages in the key sectors of construction, education, health care, and tourism (IOM, 2018). The significant inflows of migrant workforces have increased hand in hand with the transformation in the population composition and transition into an economy of 557,426 population (UNICEF, 2020). Bangladeshi workers are engaged in sectors such as construction, tourism, domestic assistance, and fishing.

While the Maldives has a rising younger population, the child population (0-17 years) accounts for 23 percent and the youth population (18-24 years) for 14 percent, and the country presents a unique population ecosystem in which 180,000 migrant workers exist (UNICEF, 2020; Mohamed, 2020). The average age of a recent migrant in the Maldives was 24 years in 2019 (National

Bureau of Statistics, Maldives, 2019). It is estimated that 143,000 Bangladeshi work in the Maldives, and at least 63,000 are undocumented. Hence, Bangladeshi migrants have a significant presence in the workforce and represent nearly a third of the country's population. The Maldivian Red Crescent identified that "the largest country of origin for these migrants is Bangladesh at 57 percent, with India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal being the next greatest contributors" (Malsa, 2019). Most migrants are young men from Bangladesh who provide low-skilled labour (IOM, 2018). Around 45,000 undocumented Bangladeshi workers were regularised in 2019, and it is expected that 34,000 workers will get a documented status in 2022 (Abdulla, 2022). The Maldives thus has the highest proportion of Bangladeshis anywhere in the world outside Bangladesh when compared to the home country population (UNDP, 2020).

Despite the significant contribution of the Bangladeshi workers to the Maldivian economy, safe and secure conditions for these workers have been wanting. The migrant workers are often subjected to a range of vulnerabilities due to deceptive recruitment practices, wage deprivation, passport confiscation, unsafe accommodation and working conditions, excessive work demands, and abuses from employers leading to forced labour violating domestic laws and international standards (Human Rights Watch, 2020). On top of the existing malpractices, the COVID-19 pandemic and the enforced lockdown have further exacerbated the situation, leading to unemployment, unpaid leave and work, and reduced salaries. The World Bank has approved a USD 24 million grant to improve social protection coverage and employability of Maldivian workers by providing insurance against shocks and employment support (The World Bank, 2022). However, the fund will improve the employment situation of the Maldivian workers with indirect support for the migrant workers through financial capacity building and strengthening compliance practices of the employers.

The migration to the Maldives from Bangladesh takes place due to four dominant reasons. Poverty, lack of access to social and

economic opportunities, and the consequent unequal access to fundamental human rights are dominant factors behind migration. The peer and family connection of the migrant workers living in the Maldives is another critical factor behind considering the Maldives as a migration destination. In addition, the agents assigned to hire migrant workers, in collaboration with the employers, offer cheaper migration costs than migration to the Middle East and Southeast Asia. The cost of migration is more affordable for the migrant, but the scope for profit for the agent is high. However, the migration process, in most cases, is not transparent due to a lack of information about the employer, agent, and visa and documentation procedures. As the migrants are primarily low-skilled workers with weaker educational backgrounds, the agents often exploit their ignorance. Such a scenario facilitates trafficking in person and engaging migrants, more precisely women, children, and unskilled workers from rural areas of Bangladesh to the Maldives for domestic work and prostitution. Moreover, there is a lack of understanding of the term and ability to intercept and deter “trafficking in person (TIP)” on both sides of the migration – Bangladesh and the Maldives.

The political economy of migration between Bangladesh and the Maldives presents positive mutual economic benefits for these two countries, yet challenges for the migrants are complex and high. The challenges are further heightened due to difficult working conditions and social exclusion that most workers face in the country, and those, in turn, can give rise to frustration and perceptions of injustice.

1.3 Objectives of the Research

While policies and institutions are in place in Bangladesh and the Maldives for migration, the challenge lies in effectively implementing those. It is in this context the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) undertook this research to:

- a. empower stakeholders with a clear, fact-based understanding of the migration patterns, processes, and complexities;

- b. identify the gaps and needs in responding to the risks and vulnerabilities related to migration and the rights of the migrant workers; and
- c. propose action-based policy recommendations for the public institutions, recruiters and agents, and civil society to deter and prevent high-risk migration from Bangladesh.

This research is, then, designed to facilitate a sustainable process for the migrant workers to work in conditions of safety and dignity, enjoying the benefits of their labour with access to justice institutions. Such a process has to be built in collaboration with the relevant agencies of the Governments of Bangladesh and the Maldives, civil society organisations (CSO), the private sector, and the legal service providers working on migration and labour rights. Partnerships of that nature can lead to pathways to influence the policy framework to reduce irregular migration and provide justice to the returnees. Therefore, this research is intended to study a definitive snapshot of the migratory situation for Bangladeshi workers, including the returnee workers, in the Maldives.

1.4 Key Research Questions

Given the complex nature of migration, this research tends to address four pressing questions.

- a. What are the pull and push factors behind migration to and from the Maldives?
- b. What are the structural barriers for migrant workers in accessing justice, rights, and financial services?
- c. What are the gaps in legal and socio-institutional measures to ensure fair treatment of migrant workers and to prevent abuses, exploitation, and violence towards them?
- d. What concrete measures are required to facilitate equal access to justice for migrant workers seeking assistance and legal redress?

Answers to these questions will provide much more effective policy recommendations in line with the existing legal structures,

human resources, and institutions available in Bangladesh and the Maldives. RMMRU is committed to supporting the Government of Bangladesh, CSOs, and the key stakeholders to facilitate greater access to justice for women and men migrant workers.

1.5 Literature Review

A plethora of literature has emerged over the past few years on migration to the Maldives. Government agencies, CSOs, and policymakers have significantly contributed to and shaped the migration discourse in Bangladesh and the Maldives. Indeed, the labor market in the Maldives has undergone significant transformations over the past three decades and is likely to continue to transform in the coming years. However, despite a growing number of research, news, and public policy documents on the Maldivian migration structure, coherent and consistent data and information regarding migrant demography and livelihoods are largely absent. IOM identifies that “the Maldives has the largest proportional population of migrants in South Asia, with roughly 200,000 to 250,000 international migrants, constituting around one-third of the resident population (IOM, 2018).” However, the Maldivian National Bureau of Statistics (2019) identified that “administrative records of foreign migrant workers at island level is not systematically maintained. As such, data needed to assess the impact of migration on the ‘place of origin’ and ‘receiving end’ are not readily available through government administrative records. This adds complexity to identifying the population residing on a given island (National Bureau of Statistics, Maldives, 2019).” The report further mentions that “Challenges are numerous in managing the foreign workforce as well. If the current trend continues, by 2050, half of Maldives’ population will consist of foreigners (Maldives Population Projection 2014-2054) (National Bureau of Statistics, Maldives, 2019)”.

IOM (2010) found that the Maldives is primarily a destination country for migrants from other countries in the sub-region, with relatively high wages being the main pull factor (Yaegashi, 2010). The Maldivian economy snowballed over the past three decades due to a tourism and fishing boom. However, the pandemic

slowed economic growth in 2020 and 2021, and an economic rebound started in the second quarter of 2021 due to a recovery in the tourism sector. The Maldives received over 1.3 million tourists in 2021, about 80 percent of 2019 levels. Despite a new wave of COVID-19 infections due to the Omicron variant, the growth momentum has continued into 2022. Tourist arrivals were 43 and 54 percent above 2021 levels in January and February 2022, respectively (The World Bank, 2022). Hence, the demand for foreign migrant workers increased. The construction work continues to boom due to higher public and private infrastructure investment. The mismatch between rapid economic growth and slower growth in skills development, technical and vocational institutions, and a skills shortage continues to be a problem within the Maldivian population. The construction and tourism sectors depend on the migrant labor force to fill the employment gaps. The Financial Express (2021) reported, “almost all the hotels, resorts, and shops in the Maldivian capital, Male, have at least one Bangladeshi worker. Bangladeshis work as drivers, mechanics, electricians, or carpenters (The Financial Express, 2021). The same report noted, “Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, during his visit to Dhaka to join the celebrations of Bangladesh’s golden jubilee of independence and the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in March, urged the government to send doctors and nurses (The Financial Express, 2021)”.

While the demand for migrant workers is a fundamental element in the Maldivian development process, the multilayered economic, social, and institutional challenges that the migrants face continue to prevail. The Maldives has not ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. The absence of an effective local protection structure remains a core issue for migrant workers to avail of state services without “fear.” Mohamed (2020) documented that the challenges emerge from “the lack of monitoring in the recruitment and employment practices, as well as the failure to enforce labour laws and regulations by the relevant authorities and failure to penalise and bring to justice those who

violate labour laws (Mohamed, 2020).” The New Age (2021) documented that the Bangladesh migrant workers are “facing hardships as they could neither negotiate for better wages nor could return to homeland for lack of valid documents (Rahman, 2021). The US 2021 TIP Report on the Maldives (2022) documented that “over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in the Maldives, and traffickers exploit victims from the Maldives abroad (US Department of State, 2020)”. The Report noted the Bangladeshi workers are subjected to “forced labour, including fraudulent recruitment, confiscation of identity and travel documents, withholding or non-payment of wages, and debt-based coercion. Migrant workers pay approximately \$2,500 to \$4,000 in recruitment fees to work in the Maldives, contributing to their risk of debt-based coercion upon arrival (US Department of State, 2020)”.

However, the Maldivian Employment Act of 2008 protects migrant workers and their rights with specific articulations on maximum work hours, overtime, leave and workplace safety. The act has primarily been implemented for the benefit of the Maldivian workforce. The law establishes maximum work hours, overtime, annual and sick leave, maternity leave, and guidelines for workplace safety. To improve the situation for the foreign workers and avail the benefits of the existing act, ILO, UNDP, and Human Rights Watch have recommended that the Maldives to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. ‘The General Regulation Employment of Expatriates in the Maldives 2021 (2021/R-16) and ‘the Regulations on Standards of Accommodation Facilities for Foreign Employees’ (Reg No. 2021/R-15)’ have been enacted under section 65 of the revised Employment Act 2008 (Labour Relations Authority, 2022; Ministry of Economic Development, 2021). These two regulations are critical documents for advancing safe and secure migration. These documents are aimed at ensuring the registration of work permits and checking the status of the employers, quotas, and visas with the online ex-pat system, grant of quotas, collection of quota fees, grant of approval to work in the country, deposits,

and refunds, accommodation service providers, arrangements and standards of accommodation, and disciplinary measures for breaches (Maldives Insider, 2020). The Accommodation Regulations strictly impose precise tasks for employers to ensure better employee housing. Employers must register employee accommodations aptly built via modern technology, with proper cross-ventilation and shelter from the elements. It further makes it compulsory for the employers to ensure accommodation in a minimum area of 3.78 square meters for a single bed-based room, 5.13 square meters for a single bunk bed accommodation, 6.84 square meters for a two bed-based room, and an 8.55 square meter area is required for double bunk bed units. For each additional bed, an area of 3.24 square meters must be added to the floor plan (Aiham, 2020). Regulations also dictate that a toilet must exist for every ten employees (Aiham, 2020).

Along with the Employment Act, the Maldivian government has implemented the National Anti-Trafficking Action Plan 2020-2022 to curtail illegal trafficking in person. The Maldives National Anti-Trafficking Action Plan 2020-2022 (NATAP) constituted a National Anti-Human Trafficking Steering Committee (NAHTSC) under the Ministry of Defence. NATAP endorsed the necessity of countering human trafficking in the Maldives. It noted, “over the past two decades, and more so, in the past few years, our pristine paradisiacal image has been threatened by growing menaces that have seeped into our communities and are churning profits from the misery of their victims. Human Trafficking is one such evil we can no longer afford to be complacent about, as it is not only a crime against humanity but also an attack on human rights-whose nationwide restoration is a fundamental promise of and a cause close to the heart of President Solih’s administration (Ministry of Defence, Maldives, 2020)”. In line with the NATAP’s mandate, NAHTSC has been the catalyst behind a Nationwide Regularisation Programme for Undocumented Workers, the government has formed a High-level National Task Force on Issues Related to Migrant Workers, and MED has begun the process of regularly reporting progress to ILO under ratified conventions (Ministry of Defence, Maldives, 2020). In addition, UNODC has

provided technical support in drafting the Anti-Smuggling Act. Henceforth, NATAP and NAHTSC prioritise the issue of all forms of trafficking. The NAHTSC recognises that the issue of human trafficking resulting in child labour is a critical concern. Apart from overall employment and trafficking issues, the literature on Maldivian migration significantly discusses micro-level issues such as wage, accommodation, visa processes, health, sexual exploitation, and politicisation of migration.

The wage remains a critical source of frustration and grievance among migrant workers. In July 2020, the Maldivian authorities detained 80 migrant workers for demanding unpaid wages. Human Rights Watch (HRW) said that the authorities arrested the foreign workers during separate demonstrations against inhumane living conditions and work without pay (AFP, 2020). In response to HRW's report, the Maldivian foreign Ministry said it acknowledged the "unjust treatment" of foreign workers, and "the government accepts significant reform is required to redress these grievances... (but incidences) where individuals have resorted to violence have been deeply alarming, and will not be further tolerated" (AFP, 2020). However, "Freedom of Association" for political or apolitical purposes is under the government's strict control. The High Commission of Bangladesh recommends the introduction of a minimum wage rate for Bangladeshi workers in the Maldives. Despite the efforts to streamline the recruitment regime and wage, several reports indicate that the recruiters and traffickers operate with "impunity because of their connections with influential Maldivians" and "allegedly the government was more likely to prosecute foreign suspects than Maldivian suspects" (Maldives Independent, 2019; US Department of State, 2020; US Department of State, 2019)".

Moreover, to address the issue of the employment status of Bangladeshi workers and streamline the recruitment processes, the High Commission has undertaken initiatives to regularise 34,000 Bangladeshi undocumented migrant workers under an amnesty program initiated by the Maldivian government (Mahmud, Undocumented in Maldives: 34k Bangladeshis to

get papers, 2022). Regularising 34,000 workers will enable the High Commission to facilitate legal, remittance, and health care facilities. While regularisation has been initiated in the Maldives, the Maldivian Ministry of Economic Development took initiative to affix a quota of 150,000 individuals per country being able to reside in the Maldives at any given time Maldives extends ban on new Bangladeshi labour recruits (unb.com.bd). The stakeholders interviewed for this research mentioned that since Bangladeshi immigrants already exceed the quota, workers can only be allowed to come from other countries. However, this restriction is not applicable for high skill migration.

The Ministry of Economic Development (MED) of the Maldives imposed ban on the entry of new Bangladeshi unskilled migrant workers to the country on September 18, 2019, to tackle the problem of undocumented workers. MED has affixed a quota of 150,000 individuals per country able to reside in the Maldives at any given time (UNB, 2020). The Maldivian government established a “National Task-force on Issues Related to Migrant Workers” in October 2019 to document workers and “revamp the expatriate management system”(Srinivasan, 2020). MED plays a central role in the migration process as it is the focal point for setting quotas for employment and visa, and the Immigration Department is mandated to issue visas and work permits. MED has set up a comprehensive website to bring transparency to visa and employment-related services (Maldives Independent, 2019).

In many cases, Bangladeshi workers land in the Maldives, using Kuala Lumpur, Chennai, or Male airports, with a forged 12-month work visa, but in reality, with 3-month tourist visas. This happens due to a lack of awareness regarding the visa processes and cognitive skills to read and interpret the visa and employment conditions. The US 2021 TIP Report on the Maldives further noted, “recruitment agents in source countries collude with employers and agents in the Maldives to facilitate fraudulent recruitment and forced labour of migrant workers” (US Department of State, 2020). Furthermore, Avas (2019) noted that both governments recognise that “the recruiting agencies

that send Bangladeshi workers to the Maldives have developed the habit of sending the workers to the Maldives on visit visas, for which they become undocumented to make legal migration difficult.” The report further noted, “In order to seek a solution for this issue, it was proposed to necessitate a police clearance before migrating to the Maldives within a disciplined system. In addition, it was suggested that those interested in going to the Maldives for work are educated on the situation of Bangladeshi labourers in the Maldives”(Avas, 2019).

The Maldivian Vice President, Faisal Naseem, stressed the need for more Bangladeshi workers in the field following the rise in developmental projects across the nation (Zalif, 2022). The Maldivian government, recognising the need for migrant workers, has begun regularising the undocumented workers. Bangladesh High Commission in Male said, “About 34,000 Bangladeshi undocumented migrant workers in the Maldives are in the pipeline for regularisation under an amnesty programme (Mahmud, 2022)”. The Bangladeshi High Commission in the Maldives has already communicated to the undocumented Bangladeshi migrants to collect visas, work permits, or passports urgently. The regularisation process is expected to assist undocumented workers in gaining legal status, enabling them to get work permits through an employer and access rights-based legal services, health insurance, and banking services. In that case, the employer will have to apply for a “work permit” from MED.

The issue of regularisation was discussed between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih during the visit of Bangladesh’s Prime Minister to the Maldives on December 30, 2021 (Islam, 2021; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh, 2021). A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Recruitment of Qualified Health Professionals was signed during the Prime Minister’s visit. In addition, a “Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Maldives and the Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh Concerning Placement of Manpower”, initially signed in 2011, was updated and renewed on February

09, 2021, to provide a solid and transparent framework for the recruitment of human resources from Bangladesh and regularisation of undocumented workers (bdnews24.com, 2021). This coincides with the Government of Bangladesh's emphasis on ensuring better migration passages for Bangladeshi migrant workers. As a result of the importance of international migration to Bangladesh, the Bangladeshi government has prioritised migration as a development strategy in their Seventh Five-Year Plan. Additionally, the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment continues to support safe migration and best practices through the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET). BMET assists migrants in the regular migration process, promotes workers' rights, and facilitates training before migration (BMET, 2018).

The US Department of Labour noted that "there is evidence that children in the Maldives are subjected to the worst forms of child labour, including forced labour in domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking (US Department of Labour, 2020)". The same report mentioned, "civil society reported labour traffickers to target Bangladeshi children who enter the country on work visas and falsified passports (US Department of Labor, 2020)." In addition, many girls from Bangladesh, as tourists or as domestic (household) assistants, are victims of human Trafficking in the Maldives. Through consultation, it has also been found that these girls become victims of commercial sexual exploitation, and there are reports of foreign tourists engaging in commercial sex with children. The US Trafficking in Persons 2021 report further noted, "Police reported an increase in traffickers bringing Bangladeshi women into the Maldives on tourist visas and exploiting them in commercial sex. In addition, some employers transport Maldivian children to the capital from other islands for domestic work, where employers sexually abuse some, and others are vulnerable to labour traffickers (US Department of State, 2020). On July 12, 2022, a Bangladeshi was arrested for allegedly engaging in consensual but unlawful same-sex relations (according to Maldivian laws) and making video recordings (HRW, 2022). In

2019, three Bangladeshi men were arrested for murdering their co-workers over unwanted homosexual advances (Maldives Independent, 2019).

The Maldives has made advancements in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labour (US Department of Labor, 2020). The government passed a new Child Rights Protection Act, which takes steps to ensure compliance with international child protection laws and standards. In addition, the National Anti-Human Trafficking Steering Committee has been formed. However, although research is limited, there is evidence that children in the Maldives engage in the worst forms of child labour, including forced labour in domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes resulting from human Trafficking (US Department of Labour, 2020). Furthermore, the government has not determined specific hazardous occupations or activities prohibited for children, and the law does not sufficiently prohibit the commercial sexual exploitation of children (US Department of Labor, 2020). Data on foreign children as victims of sexual exploitation is lacking in public domains.

The migrant discourse in the Maldives shows that the impact of the pandemic has been adverse to migrant workers. Most COVID-19 infections have been among Bangladeshi workers who live in squalid conditions on different islands, particularly in the capital city of Male. The Maldivian Red Crescent (MRC) documented that “migrants, especially undocumented migrants living in our community, are one of the most vulnerable members of our community who needed additional support and guidance to understand what was happening” during the pandemic (Naher, 2021)”. MRC reported that the health situation continues to remain vulnerable for migrant workers. This is predominantly due to a lack of information, the spread of misinformation, and fear of deportation. Naher (2021) noted, “I met many migrants who were already facing challenges due to the onset of the pandemic; some were facing economic hardship due to loss of employment and were struggling to meet basic needs. Many others were concerned about access to health care and possible deportation,

either due to testing positive for COVID-19 or being exposed to the virus. With many migrants living in small, confined places and hesitancy to communicate, it was very challenging to provide the necessary information and reassurances in many instances (Naher, 2021)". MRC established a toll-free Migrant Support Helpline (1458) to provide information, referral services, relief assistance, and remote psycho-social support services for migrant workers (Maldivian Red Crescent, 2022).

The politicisation of "migrants" as a source of "security threat" and "xenophobia" is another core feature of the migration discourse in the Maldives. A stakeholder submissions report for the 36th Session of the Working Group for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), prepared by the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN), the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), CIVICUS, and the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum-Asia) noted, "the situation of xenophobia and discrimination against migrant workers has further deteriorated, with large parts of the society calling on the State to send victim of human trafficking, mostly Bangladeshi workers, back to their countries" (Forum-Asia, 2020). The feeling of xenophobia rose during the pandemic; as Mohamed (2020) noted, "Ensuring the welfare of migrant workers during the pandemic has put pressure on the public funds (even if they also indirectly contribute to these funds, in the form of taxes). This has led to rising concerns about the development of xenophobic feelings (Mohamed, 2020)". Hassan (2020) noted, "Racism and xenophobia are rampant in our community, especially towards expatriate workers who are being exploited and abused by the corporations and people who 'hire' them (Hassan, 2020)".

There is a widespread perception that migrant workers dominate the electoral politics of the Maldives. It is against this backdrop a number of political actors pledged to deport "all undocumented migrant workers from the Maldives, calling them a "national security threat" who are "taking away Maldivian jobs" (Maldives Independent, 2018). Former Home Minister Umar Naseer mentioned, "The fact that there are this many migrant workers

illegally in the Maldives is a national security threat. If this is left unaddressed, it could turn into a huge racial issue a few years from now. The Maldives' ethnicity may become mixed (Maldives Independent, 2018)." A former human rights commissioner, Ahmed Tholal, responded by labeling these claims as "racial hatred" and "It is concerning because it is an attitude held by many Maldivians. Even during Ramadan, you see separate fasting tables set up for expatriates in mosques or even sometimes not allowing expatriates into mosques." This has been identified as a growing "social stigma" and "sense of exclusion" among the migrant workers. The growing unemployment among the Maldivians, racial prejudices, and lack of skills among the youth are the key sources of social exclusion of Bangladeshi workers. Employers reported a preference for migrant workers due to the lower wages they are willing to accept and their job commitment and loyalty. Migrant workers contrast Maldivians, who are often perceived as less willing to work in lower-skilled and physically demanding occupations. They are said to lack soft and hard skills to work in higher-skilled and more technical positions (IOM, 2018). Hence, such exclusion and alienation have been at the core of reconciling immigration management and planning within the context of widespread unemployment in the national population, especially women and youth.

The prevailing migration discourse in the Maldives aptly denotes the challenges of migration and the political economy of the labour market between Bangladesh and the Maldives. The vulnerable economic status, the alienation from the host country, limited social support, restricted mobility, lack of language skills to communicate in Divehi, and the resulting diminishing sense of self-worth make them susceptible to gross human rights violations leading to conflicts and economic losses (Khan, 2018). The migrants lack knowledge of their rights, and the Immigration Department (ID), Labour Relations Authority (LRA), and Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (HRCM) are underfunded and understaffed to undertake adequate public awareness programmes (Khan, 2018). The Maldivian authorities agree that the language skills of the Maldivian government agencies remain a significant

obstacle in delivering services to the Bengali-speaking migrant workers (Khan, 2018).

This study on Bangladeshis working in the Maldives addresses the key issues in the literature surveyed for which the following research methodology has been incorporated.

1.6 Research Methodology

This research aims to address the challenges of safe migration to the Maldives and provides meaningful solutions to mitigate the perils of the undocumented status of the migrants. Hence, the study's target population includes documented and undocumented Bangladeshi workers in the Maldives. One has to note that there is a lack of coherent data on migration inflow and outflow regarding the migrant workers in the Maldives. As a baseline, the study includes BMET's data that shows 15,977 migrant workers returned from the Maldives between April 01, 2020, to December 31, 2020. According to the data of BMET, Cumilla tops the international migrants' list of source districts, accounting for around 8.52% of the total workers. The other migration-prone districts are Tangail (5.44%), Dhaka (4.84%), Chattogram (4.78%), Narsingdi (3.44%), Noakhali (2.97%), and others. Hence, this number of returnees can be considered a base population for this study. Due to the absence of a coherent dataset, specifically based on the sources of migration to the Maldives, the study has considered the three highest migration-prone districts (Cumilla, Tangail, and Dhaka) as research areas. These three areas offer more representation of the migrant population to and from the Maldives. No concrete and reliable data on migration were available during this study. Hence, the study had to rely on Key Informant Interviews (KII), Focused Group Discussions (FGD), and Stakeholder Consultations in Bangladesh and the Maldives to avail information on female migration. The study has followed both quantitative and qualitative tools for collecting data. For the sample survey, the study has selected snowballing method as it would help the study to be accurate and precise.

1.7 Data Collection Tools

Data collection tools include a comprehensive literature review, questionnaire-based survey, FGD, KII, and stakeholder consultation.

- a. **Questionnaire Survey:** Following the prepared questionnaire, the study has incorporated information from Bangladeshi workers residing in the Maldives, both documented and undocumented. To identify the problems faced by Bangladeshi migrant workers, the study surveyed workers who returned from the Maldives between April 1 to December 31, 2020, and the migrant workers in the Maldives. Using simple random sampling, the survey included 370 respondents [see Annex I for details].
- b. **Focused Group Discussion:** FGD is an effective tool of qualitative research methodology as it helps to extract an in-depth understanding of the research topic. In total five (5) focused-group discussions were held: two were conducted in Male and Hulhumale in the Maldives, and the remaining three in Bangladesh, one each in Tangail, Cumilla and Dhaka. 17 male migrants attended the two FGDs in the Maldives. In the FGDs held in Bangladesh, a total of 36 male returnee migrants participated. No female migrant (current or returnee) was present in any of the FGDs.
- c. **Key Informant Interviews:** The study has incorporated 15 KIIs with relevant stakeholders for collecting in-depth information about migration dynamics in the Bangladesh-Maldives corridor. Among other stakeholders the key informants included migrant workers working in Male, Hulhumale, and Himafushi in the Maldives and returnee migrant workers living in Cumilla, Tangail, and Dhaka.
- d. **Stakeholder Consultation:** Two high-level stakeholder consultations were conducted in Dhaka where representatives from the Parliament, BAIRA, legal professions, civil society, and media were present. Two stakeholder consultations were conducted in the Maldives

with representatives from the Immigration Department (ID), Labour Relations Authority (LRA), Employment Tribunal of Maldives (ETM), Ministry of Economic Development (MED), Maldivian National Defence Force (MNDF), and Human Rights Commission (HRC). Stakeholder consultation also included civil society and the legal community, including Public Interest Law Centre, Maldivian Red Crescent (MRC), Maldives Trade Union Congress (MTUC), Mission for Migrant Workers Maldives (MMW), and International Organization for Migration (IOM).

- e. Desk Research: The study included a desk research for secondary data collection and analysis. A set of preliminary information has been gathered through desk research. The desk research enabled the research team to comprehend the current migration discourse in the Maldives. Findings of the desk research are reflected in the literature review section. The desk research included publicly available reports, data, information, opinions, journal articles, books, and legal documents.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

This study encountered two core limitations when implementing research tools. These two limitations are:

- a. There is no coherent data on migrant workers from Bangladesh in the Maldives. However, contradictory data and information on documented and undocumented workers are available in public and government reports. Therefore, for the sampling, RMMRU relied on consistent data on returnees available with BMET to design its research interventions.
- b. Access to female workers in the Maldives was extremely difficult due to the nature of work performed by Bangladeshi female workers, i.e., domestic household assistance, employment in resorts on different islands, and restrictions on mobility. Information on female migration

was unavailable as neither ID nor MED could provide this data. RMMRU's partner organisation in the Maldives, PILC, has communicated with the relevant agencies. However, no data or information could be obtained on Bangladeshi women workers in the Maldives. Hence, the study had to rely only on surveys, KIIs and FGDs of males in both Maldives and Bangladesh.

PART II

ANALYSIS OF FIELD FINDINGS

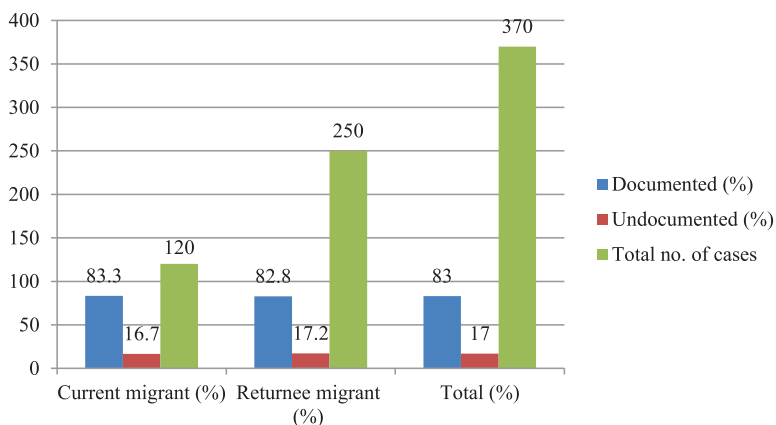
The study has looked into the dynamics of labour migration between the Bangladesh-Maldives corridor covering both documented and undocumented migrants. The survey, KIIs, FGDs, and community engagement identified multiple facets of migration in this corridor.

2.1 The Respondents

A total of 370 current and returnee migrants were interviewed: 120 current migrants were interviewed in the capital city of Male' in the Maldives and 250 returnees in Tangail, Cumilla, and Dhaka districts of Bangladesh. In this paper, migrants who have passport, visa, and work authorisation have been categorised as documented and those who lacked any of these three documents have been deemed as undocumented. Of the 120 current migrants 100 (83%) were documented migrants and 20 (17%) were undocumented migrants. Among the 250 returnee migrants 83% had necessary documents and 17% lacked such documents. Of the total stock, 99% were Muslims, and 1% belonged to the Hindu faith.

Profile of the Respondents: Of the 100 documented current migrants 53% were married and 47% were unmarried. The proportion of unmarried ones among the undocumented migrants was as high as 75%. 94% of all returnee migrants were married, only 6% remained unmarried.

Figure 2.1.1: Migration status



Educational profile of the migrants informs that about a fifth (18%) could only sign their name. 32% studied up to grade 5 and another 34% up to grade 10. Those who passed secondary certificate or equivalent level were 9% and those with higher secondary certificate and equivalent were 6%. Only a handful of migrants 2% had graduate degrees.

Table 2.1.1: Educational profile

Educational qualification of the migrant	Documented (%)	Undocumented (%)	Total (%)
Illiterate and/or can sign	16.6	23.8	17.8
Class 1 to Class 5	32.9	30.2	32.4
Class 6 to Class 10	32.2	39.7	33.5
SSC/Dakhil or Equal	9.4	4.8	8.6
HSC/Alim or Equal	6.5	1.6	5.7
BA or Equal	1.6	0.0	1.4
MA or Equal	0.0	0.0	0.0
Diploma	.7	0.0	.5
Others	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	307	63	370

Of the 28 individuals who reported securing technical training, 27 did so in Bangladesh and only 1 in the Maldives. Probed further 16 of them received training in government institutions, 8 in private institutions and 4 from NGOs.

Only 4% of the respondents answered in the affirmative if they received any language training. Of them, 12 migrants claimed learning Divehi and two others English.

Table 2.1.2: Language training

	Did the migrant receive training on language?				Which language did the migrant learn		
	D (%)	UD (%)	Total (%)		D (%)	UD (%)	Total (%)
Yes	3.6	4.8	3.8	Divehi	81.8	100.0	85.7
No	96.4	95.2	96.2	English	18.	0.0	14.3
Total no. of cases	307	63	370	Total no. of cases	11	3	14

Although most respondents reported not having formal training in Divehi, as many as 84% claimed they could understand and manage to communicate in that language. Likewise, 37% stated that over time they had also learned to communicate in English. Most of this group serve in the hospitality sector and have been living in the Maldives for long periods. They picked up the languages by interacting with their clients.

The respondents were from a diverse range of professions before they migrated. 21% were involved in agriculture, 14% worked as wage labourers in various sectors, 9% worked as employees in the private sector, and 8% in trading. More than a fifth stated that they were unemployed before migration. The average monthly income of the migrants before migration was Tk.11,945.

Table 2.1.3: Profession

	The migrant's profession before migration			Profession upon return		
	Docu mented (%)	Undocu mented (%)	Total (%)	Docu mented (%)	Undocu mented (%)	Total (%)
Agriculture	18.9	31.7	21.1	21.7	25.6	22.4
Business	8.1	11.1	8.6	14.0	11.6	13.6
Private job	8.8	1.6	7.6	4.3	2.3	4.0
Unemployed	21.5	15.9	20.5	15.9	16.3	16.0
Day labourer	16.0	6.3	14.3	13.5	7.0	12.4
Others	26.7	33.3	27.8	30.4	37.2	31.6
Total no. of cases	307	63	370	207	43	250

There has not been much of a variation in the pattern of profession of the 250 migrants who had returned. 22% are now engaged in agriculture, 14% in the trading, 12% work as wage labourers and 4% in private jobs. As high as 16% of workers are unemployed. The remaining 32% are engaged in various other professions, including tailoring, mason and electrical work, welding, hairdressing, restaurants, shop-keeping and the like. The current average monthly income of the returnee migrants is Tk. 16,833.

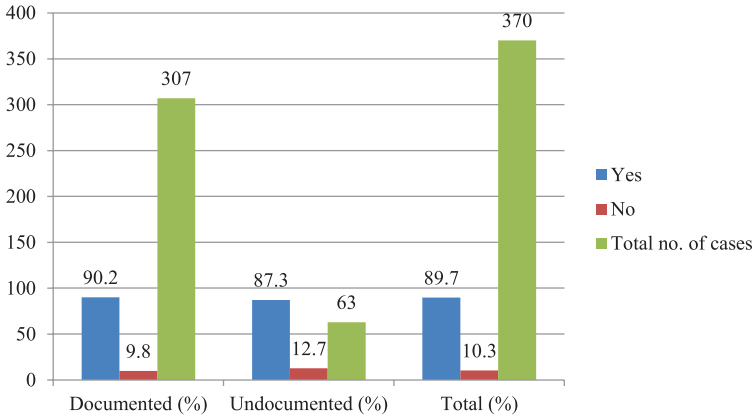
2.2 The Maldives as a Destination Country

Maldives as a destination country: The Maldives is a lucrative destination primarily due to the growing hospitality industry and the expansion of its economy, which requires cheap and efficient labour. Bangladeshi migrants are well suited for the expanding market given their relative affordability and socio-religious similarities. When asked if Maldives was their chosen destination, 90% of the respondents replied in the affirmative. Most of the 10% who did not opt for the Maldives informed that they wanted to go to one of the Gulf states, but their agents/*dalals*¹ were unable

¹ *Dalals* are informal intermediaries who facilitate migration by linking migrants with formal recruiting agencies providing information about work available in destination countries and help migrants procure passport, work permit etc. They do not have any legal identity and operate outside the purview of the law and thus remain unaccountable.

to procure visas. Finding no other option, they agreed to come to the Maldives.

Figure 2.2.1: Choice of Maldives as a destination



Sources of information: Almost all respondents (96%) informed that they secured information about the Maldives as a destination country from relatives and sub-agents. While the relatives provided information to 49% migrants, the sub-agents were the source of information of 47% cases, and they encouraged the migrants to opt such a destination as the cost of migration was low and it was relatively easy to find employment. That was followed by recruiting agencies and social media 3% each and other sources 4%. A few others stated that they just wanted to go abroad, “other than a hot place”, and Maldives was a good choice. The FGD participants in the Maldives and Bangladesh identified the relatively cheap cost of migration and easy access to visa, peer network, socio-religious similarities, and community influence as the dominant reasons for choosing the Maldives as a destination.

There was a pervasive interest among the current migrants to continue to stay in the Maldives. 98% of the respondents wished they would continue to work in the country. The 2% who did not want to continue stated that they planned to move to another country.

Table 2.2.1: Source of information

	Document (%)	Undocumented (%)	Total (%)
Recruiting agency	3.3	1.6	3.0
Sub-agent	49.5	34.9	47.0
Relatives	45.9	61.9	48.6
Friends	7.9	17.5	9.6
Social media	1.0	12.7	3.0
Others	2.3	11.1	3.8
Total no. of cases	303	63	366*

* The remaining 4 interviewees chose not to respond.

2.3 Migration Experience

Migration facilitation: It is interesting to note the registered agencies played a negligible role in facilitating migration to the Maldives. Only 4% were informed that their migration was facilitated by such agencies. Cases of 59% of respondents were processed by sub-agents/*dalals* and 36% by relatives. 14 migrants (4%) claimed that they migrated to the Maldives on their own initiative and did not avail services of anyone.

Table 2.3.1: Facilitator of migration

Facilitator	Multiple Response		
	D (%)	UD (%)	Total (%)
Recruiting agency	4.9	1.6	4.3
Sub-agent	61.1	49.2	59.1
Relatives	33.7	49.2	36.3
By self	3.6	4.8	3.8
Others	.3	1.6	.5
Total no. of cases	306	63	369*

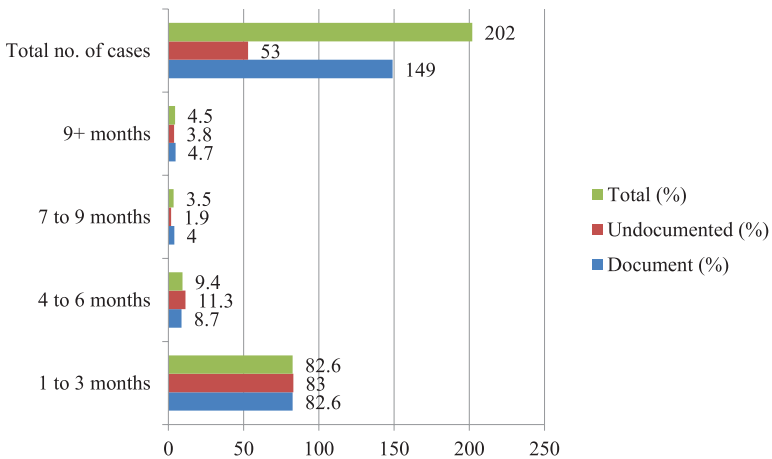
* The remaining 1 interviewee chose not to respond.

There is little evidence of migrants relying on their agents to seek redress or legal support assistance. Only about 10% of interviewees informed that they had some contact with those

who facilitated their migration to the Maldives (Annex II, Table 1). That results in the agents and sub-agents remaining unaccountable. The Maldivian authority has commissioned a one-stop website that would allow migrants and employers to see the legal statuses of the migrants. The Labour Relations Authority of the Maldives, along with the Employment Tribunal, is a crucial actor in overseeing the rights and safety of migrant workers. LRA is formed under the Employment Act to deal with the public and private sectors' labour relations and local and foreign labourers' disputes with their employers.

Processing time: A major problem that migrants often face is the time taken by the agents to secure their passport (if needed), visa, and necessary clearance of the destination country. In case of Maldives, however, such time taken appears to be considerably low. 83% stated that it took less than three months to complete all the formalities for departure and for another 9% it was within six months.

Figure 2.3.1: Time taken to process migration



* The remaining 105 interviewees chose not to respond.

Migration cost and sources of fund: On an average the respondents paid Tk. 205,997 (2,429 USD)² as cost of migration. There is a wide variation in the cost of migration to the Maldives. The maximum migration cost was Tk. 3,75,000 (4,422 USD) and the minimum migration cost incurred was Tk. 32,000 (377 USD) [Annex II, Table 2].

The migrants were asked about how they raised the migration costs. While some migrants raised funds from one particular source, others had to raise it from more than one source. Therefore, this question elicited multiple responses. As many as 53% of stated that they secured personal informal loans from friends and relatives. 37% identified family savings, while 19% noted that such resource was mobilised by selling of family assets. Personal savings of the migrant accounted for 19% of loans, followed by loans from NGOs or micro-credit agencies (10%). It is revealing to note that in only 4% cases the migrants availed credit from the formal banking institution.

Table 2.3.2: Source of migration cost

Source	Documented (%)	Undocumented (%)	Total (%)
Selling of property	17.3	28.6	19.2
Personal/ informal loan	53.1	50.8	52.7
Bank/Formal loan	4.9	1.6	4.3
NGO loan/ Micro-credit	10.7	7.9	10.3
Personal saving	17.9	23.8	18.9
Family saving	34.5	46.0	36.5
Others	.3	0.0	.3
Total no. of cases	307	63	370

Year of arrival: The migrants' year of arrival in the Maldives informs that 13% first arrived in the country before 2000, 24% between 2001 and 2010, and as expected, a significant cohort, 63% during the period between 2011 and 2020. Thus, more than a third (37%) of the total interviewees arrived in the Maldives

² According to the dollar rate of 2021

before 2011. 63% of current migrants and 64% of the returnee migrants arrived in the country in or after 2011.

Table 2.3.3: Year of arrival in the Maldives

Year	Current migrant			Returnee migrant			Total		
	D (%)	UD (%)	T (%)	D (%)	UD (%)	T (%)	D (%)	UD (%)	T (%)
2000 or before	18.0	55.0	24.2	7.2	9.3	7.6	10.7	23.8	13.0
From 2001 to 2010	16.0	0.0	13.3	27.5	34.9	28.8	23.8	23.8	23.8
From 2011 to 2015	22.0	10.0	20.0	36.2	27.9	34.8	31.6	22.2	30.0
From 2016 to 2020	44.0	35.0	42.5	29.0	27.9	28.8	33.9	30.2	33.2
Total no. of cases	100	20	120	207	43	250	307	63	370

Time taken for job placement: A critical element of labour migrants' experience in destination countries is the time to secure employment after arrival. Notably, as high as 91% of the interviewees have reported getting placed against jobs within three months. However, if disaggregated by documentation status, those in regular status fared much better (95%) than those in irregular status (70%). Only 4% of migrants (16 in total) reported that it took six months or more for them to secure employment. It may be noted that 2% of all migrants (2 documented and 4 undocumented) reported that they remained effectively unemployed during their stint in the Maldives, while two others (1%) stating that they were denied their entire amount of wages.

Table 2.3.4: Time taken for earning

Months	Documented (%)	Undocumented (%)	Total (%)
1 month	70.0	46.0	65.9
2 months	15.6	19.0	16.2
3 months	9.1	4.8	8.4
4 months	1.0	9.5	2.4
5 months	0.0	3.2	.5
6 months	2.0	1.6	1.9
More than 6 months	1.3	7.9	2.4
Unemployed	.7	6.3	1.6
Worked without pay	.3	1.6	.5
Total no. of cases	307	63	370

2.4 Employment Opportunities and Income

Avenues of employment: Employment opportunities in the services sector, such as hotels and resorts are the principal avenue for employment for Bangladeshis. As many as 33% of respondents were engaged in this profession. The next important group was those in the construction sector, accounting for 25%. Day labourers (7%), domestic workers (2%), and those in the fisheries sector (2%) were the other groups. The remaining 31% of the respondents were engaged in a diverse range of professions, including water transport, sand extraction, porter, restaurants, service stations, and the like.

Table 2.4.1: Avenues for employment

Avenues	Documented (%)	Undocumented (%)	Total (%)
Agriculture	2.0	0.0	1.6
Hotel & resorts	32.2	28.5	33.2
Domestic worker	2.9	0.0	2.4
Construction worker	23.8	28.6	24.6
Fisherman	1.3	4.8	1.9

Water transporter	1.0	1.6	1.1
Day labourer	6.5	7.9	6.8
Other	28.3	28.6	28.4
Total no. of cases	307	63	370

Issues pertaining to income: The average monthly income of the current migrants stood at Tk.35,147. This figure for the documented migrants was Tk.37,066, and for the undocumented ones was Tk.25,650. The average last monthly income of the returnee migrants stood at Tk. 22,586, with a marginal difference between the documented (Tk.22,595) and undocumented (22,539).

Table 2.4.2: Monthly income

		Monthly income in the Maldives				
		Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Count	Valid N
Current migrant	Documented	100000	15000	37066	100	99
	Undocumented	60000	20000	25650	20	20
	Total	100000	15000	35147	120	119
Returnee migrant	Documented	160000	700	22595	207	198
	Undocumented	78000	7000	22539	43	38
	Total	160000	700	22586	250	236
Total	Documented	160000	700	27419	307	297
	Undocumented	78000	7000	23612	63	58
	Total	160000	700	26797	370	355

There was a mixed response to the question if the migrants had received the salary the employers promised them. 53% reported that they did not face any problem in that regard. The remaining 47% claimed there was a gap between what the employers promised and paid. On average, they received Tk.18,203 per month as salary as against the promised sum of Tk.29,743. 70% of the respondents stated that they received their wages on time, and the rest 31% stated regularity in securing wages was a problem.

Table 2.4.3: Receipt of salary

	Receipt of salary promised			Did the migrant receive his/her salary regularly?		
	D (%)	UD (%)	T (%)	D (%)	UD (%)	T (%)
Yes	53.7	49.2	53.0	72.3	55.6	69.5
No	46.3	50.8	47.0	27.7	44.4	30.5
Total no. of cases	307	63	370	307	63	370

Table 2.4.4: Amount promised and received

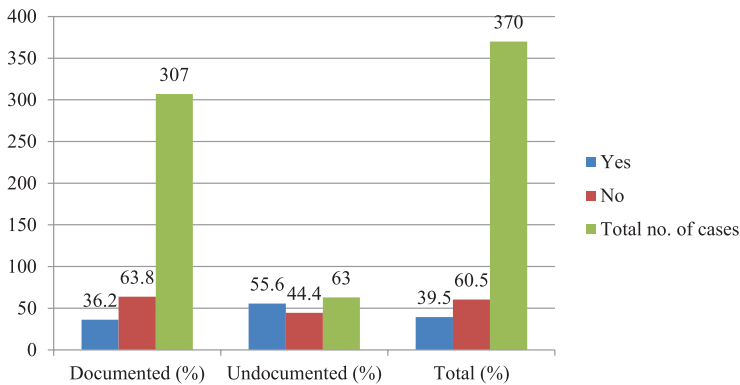
		Documented	Undocumented	Total
Promised salary	Maximum	400000	80000	400000
	Minimum	4000	11000	4000
	Mean	29722	29839	29743
	Valid N	143	31	174
	Count	307	63	370
Received salary	Maximum	175000	30000	175000
	Minimum	3000	4000	3000
	Mean	18630	16135	18203
	Valid N	126	26	152
	Count	307	63	370

Working hours: The figures suggest that, on average, all migrants worked for six days a week, while documented migrants worked for 11 hours a day and undocumented migrants for 12 hours. 40% of migrants stated that having to work overtime was an integral feature of their engagement. However, this varied between documented and undocumented workers. 56% of undocumented migrants and 36% of documented workers reported having to engage in such overtime work. Though hours of overtime work varied considerably, on average, it was 4 hours for documented and 5 hours for undocumented workers. When asked if they were properly compensated for working overtime, 64% replied in the affirmative, while 36% said they were not.

Table 2.4.5: Hours of work

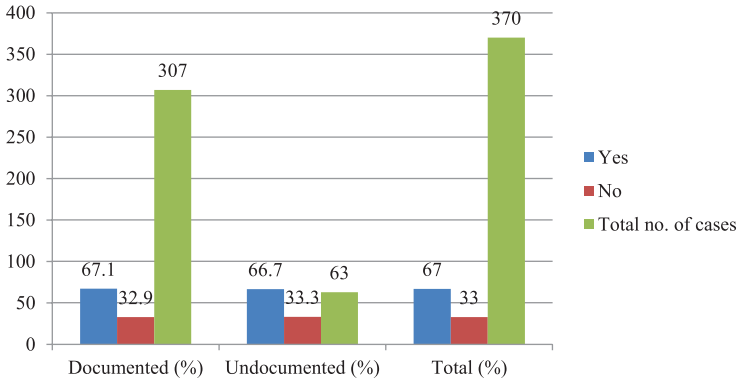
	Daily work hours			Number of hours worked overtime.		
	Docu mented	Undocu mented	Total	Docu mented	Undocu mented	Total
Maximum	20	18	20	8	10	10
Minimum	7	8	7	1	1	1
Mean	11	12	11	4	5	4
Valid N	302	60	362	103	35	138
Count	307	63	370	307	63	370

Figure 2.4.1: Overtime



If gainfully employed? Securing employment within a reasonable time after their arrival in the country of destination does not necessarily imply that migrants were gainfully employed for the entire duration of their stay. The respondents were asked if in general they would consider themselves having been gainfully employed during their stay in Maldives. Two-thirds of all respondents replied in the affirmative with one-third stating they did not consider that to be the case. Interestingly, there is hardly any difference between those who were documented and others in undocumented status. 67% of the documented and 67% of the undocumented migrants stated that they were gainfully employed.

Figure 2.4.2: Gainful employment



2.5 Remittance Transfer and Utilisation

Amount: The respondents were asked how much money was remitted over the last 12 months of their stay in the Maldives. On average, the amount stood at Tk. 246,592. However, logically the figure for current migrants is higher Tk. 297,667 than that of the cohort of returnee migrants Tk. 218,477. There is also a marked difference between the documented and undocumented migrants. The average amount remitted by current documented migrants over the last 12-month period was Tk. 312,600, while that of undocumented migrants was 223,000.

Table 2.5.1: Amount of money remitted

		Money sent during the last 12 months of stay				
		Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Valid N	Count
Current migrant	Documented	1200000	40000	312600	100	100
	Undocumented	400000	120000	223000	20	20
	Total	1200000	40000	297667	120	120
Returnee migrant	Documented	1900000	5000	214423	182	207
	Undocumented	600000	36000	238972	36	43
	Total	1900000	5000	218477	218	250
Total	Documented	1900000	5000	249238	282	307
	Undocumented	600000	36000	233268	56	63
	Total	1900000	5000	246592	338	370

Channel: The interviewees were asked about the channel used in sending remittance. This elicited multiple responses. It is revealing that only 41% reported that they used the bank or money transfer agencies as a channel for remitting money. In contrast, as high as 66% reported that they sent money back home through the *hundi*³ channel. 4% stated that either they hand-carried the money themselves or sent it through others who returned home. It is interesting to note that there is no marked difference between pattern of sending remittance between the documented and the undocumented migrants.

Table 2.5.2: Channel of sending remittance

Channel	Documented (%)	Undocumented (%)	Total (%)
Bank	33.1	17.7	30.5
Hundi/ Sub-agent	66.9	59.7	65.7
Money exchange house	11.1	6.5	10.4
Hand carried by self	2.0	0.0	1.6
Hand carried by others	2.3	0.0	1.9
Others	8.9	25.8	11.7
Total no. of cases	305	62	367

Recipients and users of remittance: Parents were the principal recipients of the money that migrant worker remitted home accounting for 63% of the cohort. 28% sent money to their spouses and 10% to their children, siblings and in laws respectively. In 7% cases it was sent to others including in laws and children.

³ *Hundi* is informal transfer of money from one country to another bypassing the formal money transfer institutions such as banks and money transfer houses. The system is also known as *hawala*.

Table 2.5.3: Recipients and users of remittance

	Recipients			Users		
	D (%)	UD (%)	Total (%)	D (%)	UD (%)	Total (%)
Wife	26.8	30.2	27.4	23.6	32.3	25.1
Husband	.7	0.0	.5	.7	1.6	.8
Father/ mother	65.9	57.1	64.4	65.9	54.8	64.0
Sibling	6.6	9.5	7.1	6.9	12.9	7.9
In-laws	.7	1.6	.8	.3	0.0	.3
Self	Not applicable			6.2	3.2	5.7
Children	.7	6.3	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6
Others	6.0	11.1	6.8	3.3	11.3	4.6
Total no. of cases	302	63	365	305	62	367

When migrants were asked about who took the decision on remittance utilisation a staggering 64% informed it was their parents, in most instances fathers. Spouses were identified by 26% migrants, siblings and in-laws by 8.2% migrants and children by 2%. In only 6% percent cases the migrants said they had full command about the utilisation of remittances. FGDs revealed that the money sent to Bangladesh is used for purchasing properties or family expenditures. Some participants mentioned that since they send money to their parents or in-laws, this money does not remain in the possession of the migrants. As a result, frustrations related to family feuds, strained marital relations, and loss of ownership of properties are common among migrants. Most of the participants in the FGDs agreed that they slid back into poverty once they returned home from the Maldives. They felt training in entrepreneurial skills, technical and vocational activities, and financial literacy would have helped their reintegration process.

Financial inclusion issues: Access to financial institutions helps migrants ensure saving their hard earned income. A little more than a third (37%) of the respondents stated that they had bank

accounts while as many as 64% reported not having any account anywhere (Table 2.5.4). When probed further it was noted that only 24% of those who answered in the affirmative, had their accounts in the Maldives and 64% in Bangladesh. Only 11% of the 135 respondents had had bank accounts at both ends (Table 2.5.5).

Table 2.5.4: Bank accounts

Holding of bank account	Documented (%)	Undocumented (%)	Total (%)
Yes	37.8	30.2	36.5
No	62.2	69.8	63.5
Total no. of cases	307	63	370

Table 2.5.5: Location of bank account

Bank's Location	Documented (%)	Undocumented (%)	Total (%)
Bangladesh	65.5	57.9	64.4
Maldives	26.7	10.5	24.4
Both	7.8	31.6	11.1
Total no. of cases	116	19	135

2.6 Experiences of Working and Living in the Maldives

Treatment received: The migrants were asked about the treatment they received in the country of destination both at the workplace and outside. 18% stated that at some point of their stay in the Maldives they were subjected to physical or verbal abuse. This appeared to be more so in the case of undocumented migrants (24%). In addition, 25% of the respondents stated that they had witnessed or had the knowledge of other workers of Bangladeshi origin experiencing the problem. In this instance as well as many as 35% of undocumented workers reported such abuse.

Table 2.6.1: Experience of physical and verbal abuse

	Experience of physical/ verbal abuse			Knowledge of anyone experiencing physical/ verbal abuse		
	D (%)	UN (%)	T (%)	D (%)	UD (%)	T (%)
Yes	16.3	23.8	17.6	23.1	34.9	25.1
No	83.7	76.2	82.4	76.9	65.1	74.9
Total no. of cases	307	63	370	307	63	370

4% of workers reported that they were subjected to sexual exploitation. An FGD participant stated that a section of Bangladeshis is engaged in homosexual relationships with the Maldivians. A Bangladeshi was arrested for homosexual act and was sentenced to seven months in prison by the Criminal Court on August 31, 2022. Others arrested and being investigated in connection with the scandal that includes a prominent lawyer and a former Drug Enforcement Department official (Mohamed, 2022).

Table 2.6.2: Sexual exploitation and workplace discrimination

Status	Is the migrant a victim of sexual exploitation?			Feeling of discrimination in the workplace		
	D (%)	UD (%)	T (%)	D (%)	UD (%)	T (%)
Yes	3.6	6.3	4.1	43.0	52.4	44.6
No	96.4	93.7	95.9	57.0	47.6	55.4
Total no. of cases	307	63	370	307	63	370

In responding to the question related to experiencing *discrimination at the workplace*, 45% of respondents, stated in the affirmative. The figure was higher (52%) among the undocumented migrants. From the FGDs, it was learned that the discrimination in the fixation of salary and the absence of or low rate of increment in salary compared to other nationals (Sri Lanka, India, and the

Philippines) has been a major contributor to such perception. It was further noted that the feeling of discrimination is linked mainly with social marginalisation rather than employment-related discrimination. Both in KIIs and FGDs, the long-term migrants stated that the social discrimination has been in decline over the years.

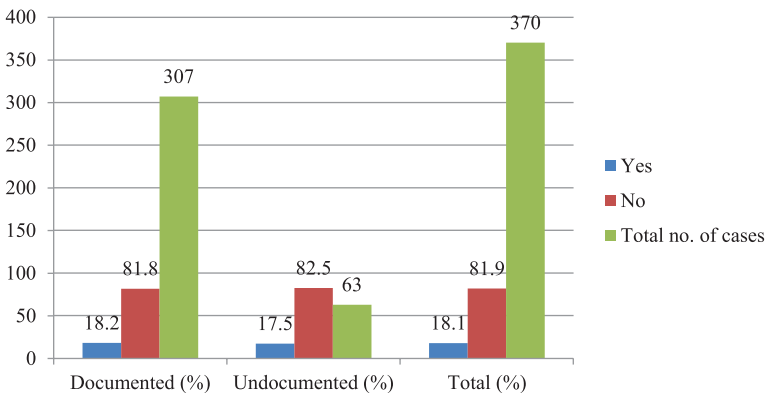
20% of the migrants (30.2% of the undocumented category) reported feeling discriminated against in public places.

Table 2.6.3: Facing discrimination in a public place

	Feeling of discrimination in public places		
	D (%)	UD (%)	Total (%)
Yes	17.9	30.2	20.0
No	82.1	69.8	80.0
Total no. of cases	307	63	370

Though a high percentage of respondents claimed that they felt discriminated at the workplace 18% reported that they faced problem in *accessing accommodation*.

Figure 2.6.1: Facing problems in accessing accommodation



Quality of accommodation: The cost of accommodation is a critical issue. Housing continues to be a significant challenge for undocumented, low-skilled, or low waged migrant workers.

From the FGDs, it was noted that almost 35% of the earnings of undocumented migrant workers are spent on accommodation, while documented workers have to spend around 20% of their earnings. Quality and hygiene of accommodation appear to be major challenges. The “guest houses” have little facilities for hygienic arrangements for beds, kitchens, or toilets. As a result, such accommodations are generally overcrowded; becoming a breeding ground for contagious diseases. A significant number of migrant workers are taken to the “guest houses” managed by the agents. Several visits to the guest houses reveal that a number of residents of those guest houses in the city of Male are workers without any valid work visa or documentation. During a KII an undocumented worker mentioned that the guest houses in the atolls have a high density of undocumented workers. Many of them are victims of trafficking coming to some atolls from India. Participants of KIIs and FGDs firmly put across the view that the guest houses are used for prostitution, including child prostitution including women and girls from Bangladesh. The situation of the guest houses that Bangladeshis run in collaboration with their Maldivian partners reached a new low during the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the FGDs, it was evident that both among the mainstream community and other migrant communities, Bangladeshi workers are perceived as “inferior” in category. There is a general resentment among Bangladeshis about such stigmatisation. The fear that undocumented status would act as an impediment of the transfer of their corpses to the home country was also cited as a source of insecurity.

Securing medical services in the destination country may appear to be a challenge for migrant workers. As many as 16% reported that they found it to be a problem. The proportion of undocumented workers facing these problems was higher (19%) compared to the documented ones (15%).

Table 2.6.4: Accessing medical treatment

	Facing challenges in getting medical treatment		
	D (%)	UD (%)	Total (%)
Yes	15.0	19.0	15.7
No	85.0	81.0	84.3
Total no. of cases	307	63	370

2.7 Rights and Entitlement Issues

Awareness: Migrant workers' lack of awareness about their rights and entitlements is one of the major deficits in migration governance of both countries of origin and destination. When the interviewees were asked if they were aware of their rights and entitlements, two-thirds (68%) answered in the affirmative, and the rest (32%) in the negative.

Table 2.7.1: Knowledge of rights

	Knowledge of legal rights/status		
	D (%)	UD (%)	Total (%)
Yes	72.3	44.4	67.6
No	27.7	55.6	32.4
Total no. of cases	307	63	370

A follow-up question to those who replied in the affirmative revealed that co-workers and friends constituted the most important sources, accounting for 52% of the respondents. Employers and the Bangladesh embassy were also cited as other conduits of information (34% and 27%, respectively). Maldivian NGOs (5%) and legal service providers (2%) were also cited. 12% cited other sources. Although there was little evidence of migrants taking recourse to legal services in the Maldives, 91% of the respondents agreed that both male and female workers enjoyed equal access to such services.

Table 2.7.2: Sources of information about rights

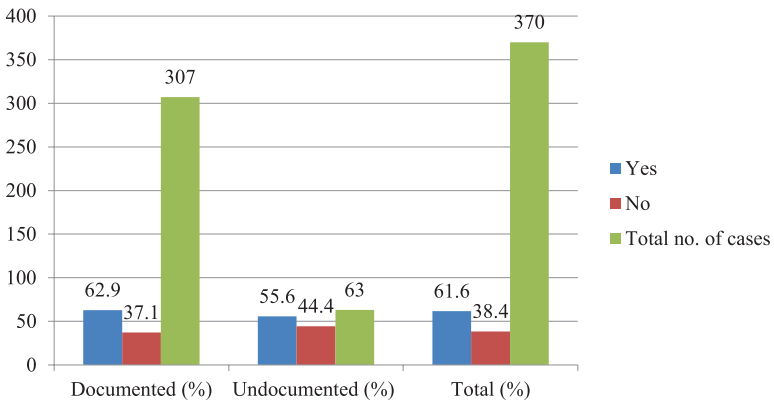
Sources	Documented (%)	Undocumented (%)	Total (%)
Coworker	35.5	42.9	36.8
Employer	34.9	31.7	34.3
Bangladesh High Commission Staff	25.7	34.9	27.3
Maldivian NGO	5.2	1.6	4.6
By agencies (legal service providers) on payment	1.6	3.2	1.9
Friends	14.3	20.6	15.4
Self	6.2	1.6	5.4
Others	9.8	23.8	12.2
Total no. of cases	307	63	370

Table 2.7.3: Perception of equality of rights of men and women

	Equality in accessing legal services/redress of men and women		
	D (%)	UD (%)	Total (%)
Yes	93.5	84.1	91.9
No	6.5	15.9	8.1
Total no. of cases	307	63	370

Seizure of passports and travel documents from the migrant workers by the employers is a violation of the rights of the former. As many as 38% of the respondents reported that their employers retained their passports. The FGD participants in Bangladesh and the Maldives shed light on passport-related exploitation. The passports are either taken by the employers from the workers to deter the workers from reporting exploitation to the concerned authorities and from leaving current jobs for better options.

Figure 2.7.1: Passport in employer's possession



2.8 Role of Missions

The missions play a major role as bridge between the country of origin and the workers deployed in the destination countries. There is a general complaint of migrant workers of Bangladesh about the lack of services and support from the country's missions. However, in contrast, as many as 74% of the study's respondents stated that the Bangladeshi workers could secure necessary services from the Bangladesh High Commission in Male. Almost a quarter (26%) replied in the negative.

Table 2.8.1: Services of Bangladesh mission

Availability of services from the Bangladesh High Commission	Total		
	D (%)	UD (%)	Total (%)
Yes	74.9	66.7	73.5
No	24.4	33.3	25.9
Don't know	.7	0.0	.5
Total no. of cases	307	63	370

Generally, undocumented workers face problems in availing of consular and financial support. This is mainly due to a lack of adequate proof of residency. The High Commission in Male has recently (2022) announced streamlining the documents of

undocumented workers in collaboration with the Maldivian government. The FGDs, KIIs and interviews with government officials identified the High Commission’s critical constraints, including a lack of human resources, adequate space for consular support, and reciprocal diplomatic personnel arrangements between Bangladesh and the Maldives. While passport and consular services are improving, equality in accessing legal services or redress remains problematic for migrant workers.

2.9 Intercommunity Marriage and Political Participation

The intercommunity marriage between Bangladeshi men and Maldivian women appears to be a common phenomenon. A majority of the respondent migrants (54%) reported that they knew someone within their peer circle who had married a Maldivian woman.

Table 2.9.1: Intercommunity marriage

	Knowledge of acquaintances married to Maldivian women		
	D (%)	UD (%)	Total (%)
Yes	54.7	47.6	53.5
No	45.3	52.4	46.5
Total no. of cases	307	63	370

While some FGD participants viewed it to be a positive indication of cross cultural interaction, others regarded the phenomenon as “marriage of convenience”. The anecdotal evidence of dissolution of such marriages and cases of abandonment by the Bangladeshi husbands were cited. A female FGD participant said Bangladeshi women migrants are also getting married to Maldivian men predominantly for “financial security” and also from “genuine emotional attachment.” A lawyer who participated in the stakeholder consultation in Male mentioned that he was aware of one of his peers who in 2021 facilitated 21 marriages between Bangladeshi male workers with Maldivian females. However, FGD participants in Bangladesh mentioned that in many instances

Bangladeshi workers marry Maldivian women without revealing the fact that they are already married.

Table 2.9.2: Participation in political rallies

Participation in political demonstrations/rallies	Current migrant			Returnee migrant			Total		
	D (%)	UD (%)	Total (%)	D (%)	UD (%)	Total (%)	D (%)	UD (%)	Total (%)
Yes	2.0	0.0	1.7	2.9	2.3	2.8	2.6	1.6	2.4
No	98.0	100.0	98.3	97.1	97.7	97.2	97.4	98.4	97.6
Total no. of cases	100	20	120	207	43	250	307	63	370

The politicisation of migration has been a feature in the Maldivian political landscape. Nonetheless, the survey reveals only 2% of migrant workers joined political rallies as they were either forced by their employers or by their Maldivian peers. On the other hand, 98% said they have never participated in political activities. The FGD participants noted that the Bangladeshi workers understand participation in any political activities will make their “life tough,” “opposition politicians will threaten” them and these acts can get them “expelled” from the Maldives. The participants of the FGDs in the Maldives identified that the lack of jobs for the Maldivian youth and the perceived security threat from the Bangladeshi community are the key messages that political parties peddle to their constituencies. They mentioned that while the Maldivians are not willing to undertake low-skill and low-income jobs, there is a widespread perception that Bangladeshis will take over the middle-tier and higher-tier jobs in the future. The political actors are capitalising on such perception.

2.10 Trafficking in Person, Narcotics, and Bangladeshi Migrants

UNESCAP reported that “As a destination country without strong provisions to protect foreign workers or prosecute trafficking-related offenses, Maldives has become a destination country for forced labour (UNESCAP, 2020)”. In the case of Bangladeshi

migrants, two cases have been reported. In the first instance, a Bangladeshi man on trial for the human trafficking of three fellow Bangladeshis admitted guilt in a Maldivian court in 2017 (Maldives Independent, 2017). In another case, three Bangladeshi migrants were sentenced to ten years in jail under Human Trafficking Act 12/2013 by the Criminal Court after the human trafficking charges against them were proven. (Maldivian Police, 2016).

However, NGOs reported approximately 180 undocumented migrant workers being processed for regularisation or repatriation at the Hulhumale Detention Center between July 2020 and November, were only allowed to leave or enter the center at certain times. The US 2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in Maldives noted that, “a September 2020 High Court ruling prohibiting arrested migrant workers from release on bail unless a local national was willing to take responsibility for monitoring them until the conclusion of their cases” (Maldives - United States Department of State).

The respondents noted an increase in the trafficking of persons and sex trafficking. 9% reported knowing individuals who have been victims of trafficking in person and sex trafficking, but only 1.4% of the migrant workers reported sex trafficking to the Police (Annex II, Table 3). This is primarily due to fear of legal scrutiny, fear of being harassed by the agents and traffickers for being legal witnesses, and lack of adequate language skills to deal with legal matters. Two of the five workers stated that actions were taken after they filed the reports; the other three were unaware of the subsequent outcome.

Table 2.10.1: Reporting incidences of sex trafficking

Reported sex trafficking cases	Current migrant			Returnee migrant			Total		
	D (%)	UD (%)	Total (%)	D (%)	UD (%)	Total (%)	D (%)	UD (%)	Total (%)
Yes	2.0	0.0	1.7	1.0	2.3	1.2	1.3	1.6	1.4
No	98.0	100.0	98.3	99.0	97.7	98.8	98.7	98.4	98.6
Total no. of cases	100	20	120	207	43	250	307	63	370

Those surveyed were asked to identify the challenges undocumented workers faced in availing of legal services in the Maldives. This elicited multiple responses. 46% felt registering a complaint may result in state action against the aggrieved migrant, such as deportation and imprisonment. This was followed by the fear of employers' retaliation (30%). Lack of knowledge of victims' rights (26%), lack of knowledge about legal service providers (22%), language difficulty (19%) and financial constraints (5%) were other reasons.

Table 2.10.2: Challenges in availing legal redress in Maldives

Challenges	Current migrant (%)	Returnee migrant (%)	Total (%)
Fear of deportation and imprisonment	36.4	50.8	46.2
Fear of employers' retaliation	25.4	32.0	29.9
Lack of knowledge of victims' rights	47.5	16.0	26.1
Lack of knowledge of legal service providers	33.1	16.8	22.0
Difficulty with language	29.7	13.2	18.5
Financial constraints	8.5	2.8	4.6
Others	.8	16.4	11.4
Total no. of cases	118	250	368*

* The remaining two interviewees chose not to respond.

The Maldivian government designed an Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan on March 30, 2020, to accelerate efforts to reduce and counter human Trafficking. During the KIIs the Maldivian government officials claimed that the incidence of trafficking has reduced during the post-pandemic period. The US 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Maldives quoted the Maldivian officials: "Trafficking in Maldives involved primarily Bangladeshi migrant workers; it had therefore diminished following the return home of the majority of these workers due to the pandemic (Office of the Inspector General, 2022)".

The FGD participants noted that the lack of legal knowledge, support from the High Commission, and physical threats from the “trafficking syndicates” are the key reasons behind the lack of reporting to law enforcement agencies. FGDs and KIIs inform that the Bangladeshi migrants are generally unaware of “trafficking in-persons”. The participants identified narcotics as a growing problem for the younger Bangladeshi migrants. This is mainly due to social intermingling with the Maldivian youth. For example, a Bangladeshi national was arrested for carrying 3 kilograms of narcotics on January 14, 2019. A statement published by Maldives Customs Service said that the drugs (cannabis) were found upon inspecting the luggage of the man (oneonline, 2019). This corresponds to the rising substance use in the Maldives. The Maldivian Customs Services data showed that the prime route for narco-trading is Trivandrum to Male sea route. Most traffickers involved Indians and Bangladeshis in connivance with local drug dealers (Shazly & Zilaal, 2016).

The survey, FGDs, KIIs and FGDs, backed by secondary information sources, indicate that migrant workers continue to face multilayered exploitations. However, there was also the recognition that the Maldivian government agencies have considerably improved immigration processes, institutions for labour welfare and migration, and processes to establish accountability of the employers and the agents. Nonetheless, human trafficking remains a grey area since Bangladeshi workers lack the ability to effectively communicate or confidence to report cases related to trafficking and narcotics.

2.11 Lack of Gender Sensitivity and Mainstreaming

The flow of Bangladeshi female migration to the Maldives has accelerated in recent years, more precisely since early 2010. While this study could not avail access to female migrant workers for their participation in surveys, FGD in Hulhumale reveals that female migration has increased due to three reasons: 1. Strong kinship based Bangladeshi diaspora network in the Maldives, 2. Perception of religious identity of the Maldives as an Islamic country, and 3. The cost of migration is cheaper than the Middle

East and Southeast Asia. While they leave their home country and migrate to the Maldives for their and their families' better future, they endure both positive and negative experiences. Women workers are mostly employed in three sectors: 1. Domestic household work; 2. Hospitality sector; and 3. Small business ventures. The KII interviews revealed that there are less visible social and structural factors in the form of dominant discriminatory social norms that are persistent and that underlie the migration of Bangladeshi women. These include the lack of substantive access to privacy, public life such as freedom of movement, excessive working hours, employment of girls before the age of 18, which limits their life chances, and ability to meaningfully compete in the labor market. Moreover, experiences of KIIs reflect a social mindset that regards domestic work as essentially lower tier job, thereby adding additional work burden to women. This is particularly true in the cases of single, widowed and divorced Bangladeshi women living in the Maldives. Literature reviews and discussions with various stakeholders, e.g. recruiters, migrant returnees, and community leaders in Bangladesh, indicated that returnee female migrants faced forced return, deportation and non-payment of their monthly wages for several months. Returnee workers in Bangladesh said that female workers in the households had to work more than 20 hours daily as the number of residents in the employers' places increased during the pandemic. Rather than being paid for the additional hours of work, many were not even paid the salaries that were agreed upon in the contracts.

PART III

RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY OPTIONS

The Need for a Comprehensive Policy Implementation Framework

Multiple interventions would be required to mitigate the existing and emerging challenges that migrant workers face. The interventions would necessitate political commitment and action of the governments of Maldives and Bangladesh, civil society activism and a well-thought-out migration strategy that can be developed in coordination with various stakeholders. Two sets of recommendations are thus proposed:

- A. Developing accountable and inclusive institutions to address migration and TIP issues; and
- B. Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for the migrants to better contribute to Bangladesh and the Maldivian economies

A. Developing Accountable and Inclusive Institutions to Address the Migration and TIP Issues

The Bangladeshi migrants significantly contribute to the Maldivian economy and, to a reasonable extent, the Bangladeshi economy. To build an inclusive society, the focus should be to create enabling conditions that facilitate migration takes place under safe, regular and dignified conditions and migrants enjoy access to justice and human rights (including workers' rights) through transparent, effective, and accountable institutions. This, in turn, would require effective implementation of regulations and policies, response mechanisms to support the needs of the migrants and to provide timely, appropriate, and equitable access to services. All these would entail multiple interventions ranging

from bilateral dialogues to capacity building to developing new institutions and policies. The following specific interventions are proposed:

3.1 Facilitate the Implementation of the Well-designed Migration Regime in Bangladesh and the Maldives

The Maldivian government has undertaken a significant reform in its migration regime. It intends to reduce ad hoc responses, improve inter-agency cooperation, and facilitate artificial intelligence (AI) and data-based technological solutions to migration challenges. However, a migration policy is essential to monitor and supervise the migration process, determine the levels of migration required over the period, ensure the rights of the migrant workers to reduce the potential for conflict between the employers and the workers; and provide a code of conduct for different agencies and stakeholders involved in the migration process. It was identified that the Ministry of Economic Development plays a critical role in determining the policies on immigration. Moreover, the Ministry is the responsible agency for labour and employment policies. Therefore, engagement with the Immigration Maldives, and ultimately with the Ministry of Economic Development, can help formulate and implement policy instruments required for planned migration in the Maldives. While TIP from Bangladesh has been observed as a critical issue, a well-coordinated immigration collaboration between the Maldivian Bangladeshi agencies, i.e., Ministries dedicated to migration, law enforcement, and expatriates' welfare, is essential to counter TIP. The Maldivian government may actively consider opening up employment visas for the Bangladeshi migrants which is on halt since 2018. Opening up of the visas will significantly reduce TIP and enable better migration governance.

3.2 Technical Support to the Maldivian Government

Technical support to the Maldivian government and civil society, particularly in skills training and language proficiency, is essential. The Maldivian government agencies, i.e., Immigration Maldives, Human Rights Commission of Maldives (HRCM), and Labour

Relations Authority (LRA) lack the technical capacity and human resources to create awareness regarding rights and entitlements among the workers. Notably, they are understaffed to cater to the needs of the workers as well as unable to provide language services to the Bangladeshi migrant workers. Therefore, technical support to build human resources and language capacity to deliver services to the workers is crucial. Moreover, technical support to implement the Maldivian Strategic Plan 2020-2024 and the vision “Jazeera Raajje” beyond 2024 would be essential. The Maldivian government’s “ambitious effort of decentralising immigration services, increasing citizen engagement, safeguarding the border, emphasising transparency and building public trust” is a milestone commitment that would require international and bilateral support.

3.3 Platforms for Engagement by the Maldivian Authorities with the Bangladeshi Workers

In some cases, the Maldivian labour authorities, law enforcement, and security agencies already maintain a productive relationship with the Bangladeshi community on economic and security issues. Still, a positive engagement based on trust needs to be facilitated. On the other hand, Bangladeshi community leaders should be encouraged, as they are already doing great unpublicised work in protecting their communities. Practical training on legal services, social relations, and awareness campaigns on conflict prevention among the Bangladesh community actors should be facilitated as a continuing process.

3.4 Greater Bilateral Cooperation to Access Justice to be Facilitated

Documentation, possession of the passport, and agency-quota system remain the core problem for Bangladeshi workers. It is often difficult for undocumented workers to become legalised, that is, to obtain documents permitting work; there is almost no social support, and difficulties with residence and housing must be addressed. In addition, the study found that the migrants are deeply affected by corruption, starting with the agents in Bangladesh and the Maldives and ending with the quota providers who sell their yearly quotas

to the agents. As a result, most workers either become subject to deception or victims of deprivation regarding employment and social identity. The governments of the Maldives and Bangladesh already have mechanisms to address migration issues through legal arrangements and institutions in their respective countries. Bilateral cooperation to curtail the agency-criminal network that leads to the undocumented status of migrants should be facilitated. This can be done through multiple engagements, i.e., track I and II dialogues, and by initiating country-specific programmes, i.e., easing the documentation process for undocumented workers, simplifying work permit procedure, wage standards, and monitoring the immigration process. Track II dialogues among the Bangladeshi and Maldivian CSOs, NGOs, and legal practitioners will be critical to building understanding, consensus, and collaboration on the migration affairs between Bangladesh and the Maldives. The lack of effective exchange of views, sharing of best practices, and coordination mechanisms between host and receiving countries necessitate track II dialogues.

3.5 Establishing Networks to Eliminate Employment and Welfare-related Grievances

The employment-related grievances among Bangladeshi workers are quite visible. While relations between the state and labour migrant communities are not always perfect, global practices show that good communication networks are essential in managing welfare related problems in some contexts. Agencies such as The Asia Foundation, USAID, and the UN can bring international experts to train and sensitise the government officials, CSOs, gender activists, media, religious actors, and migrant community leaders to learn methods, techniques, and platforms to help the Maldivian government to implement transparent employment regimes. The Maldivian government has already enacted modernised legal, institutional, and technological apparatuses to streamline the employment sector. A network of legal practitioners and NGOs can assist in reducing the role of the agents in recruiting workers. Such a network can also help deliver access to justice and human rights institutions. In addition,

the Maldivian authorities may consider introducing temporary cards for the undocumented workers to avail health services and insurance services for the workers.

B. Promoting Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development:

Social inclusivity in the Maldives and assimilation between the Maldivian society and the migrant workers are paramount in countering human trafficking and establishing transparent migration regimes. However, securitisation and politicisation of the migration issue will continue to generate gaps and tensions between the state, employers, and workers. Therefore, a comprehensive framework for socio-economic interaction between the Maldivian government and the migrant workers is required. The following interlinked components can facilitate a comprehensive framework:

3.6 Bilateral Technical Cooperation Mechanisms for Safe Migration and Labour Standards

The Governments of Bangladesh and the Maldives are committed to supporting safe migration regimes in their respective countries. Technical cooperation in the areas of language, health, skills development, legal assistance, and exchanges relating to visa information, labour database, and law enforcement can significantly improve the labour scenario. Technical committees comprised of government representatives, experts, private sector, and legal practitioners may be proposed for mutual assistance and collaboration. Moreover, opening up work visas for Bangladeshis will significantly reduce channels for TIP and the flow of illegal movements of workers.

3.7 International Collaboration to Implement an Effective TIP Regime

An international collaboration between the Maldivian government and the international community to increase the capacity of law enforcement officials to deal with trafficking is essential. This would require identifying victims, encouraging the migrants to

disclose sources of trafficking, and increasing oversight of agents and employers. Increase anti-trafficking training for front-line officials and train immigration officials and labour inspectors to identify and refer suspected trafficking cases to the Police. The study has found the “guest houses” for labourers as a significant source of human rights violations and gendered exploitation. Henceforth, it is recommended to set up trafficking or exploited victim shelter centers with facilities for protection services, psycho-social support, and financial assistance in both Bangladesh (for returnees) and the Maldives.

3.8 Build a Coalition to Counter TIP and Narco-trafficking

A practical and functional coalition on countering TIP and migrant welfare is a necessity. The coalition can be a platform to identify the changing natures of TIP and migration, provide legal protection and services, and undertake awareness programmes on TIP and safe migration. In addition, the coalition may have representations of the parliamentarians, legal professionals, CSOs, NGOs, academia, and the private sector and occasionally publish anti-trafficking campaigns and materials in Divehi, Bengali, and English for migrant workers. Currently, both countries lack collaboration for providing front-line services to victims and survivors of labour and human trafficking and crimes, more precisely sex trafficking, that affect the migrant population. However, government support and collaboration will be essential to sustain such coalition.

3.9 Develop a Strategy to Address the Grievances of the Workers and to Provide Social and Psychological Support

As discussed in this study, a well-developed strategy to address the workers’ grievances needs to be developed in consultation with various stakeholders. Four critical interventions should supplement this:

- a. Communication strategies for civil society and the Ministry of Economic Development would be necessary to carry out programmes for migrant workers. Bangladesh also requires this strategy to ensure safe inward and outward migration

through the Embassy of Bangladesh. These communication strategies should include traditional and online tools as the primary delivery channels for information campaigns. The online resources should be a combination of multiple levels of messaging, as developed under this project, based on the profile of the audience and their information consumption behavior.

- b. In-service skills-building capacity initiatives in both the Maldives and Bangladesh;
- c. Functional and practical CSO, NGO, and migrant community networks to identify the risks and develop solutions to the problems.
- d. The Maldives government may consider according migrant workers the right to visit clinics and hospitals without fear of arrest or deportation.

Therefore, structured community engagement, i.e., civil society support for social assimilation and NGO support for legal; financial; health; and psychological well-being, and effective regulations for employer-worker relations are critical. Furthermore, skills-building initiatives must be facilitated to ensure the migrants are skillfully engaged in the Maldives and can use this skill upon returning home. The CSOs/NGOs can effectively contribute to improve the livelihoods of the migrant workers who otherwise live in miserable conditions.

3.10 An Inclusive Gendered Approach to Migration

The migration discourse in the Maldives significantly ignores the gender aspect of migration. Female migrants are often victims of human trafficking or deception, which compels them to end up in prostitution or sexual slavery. This creates further stigma regarding the Bangladeshi community. In addition, initiatives should be funded to raise awareness programmes and institutional services for women to express their vulnerabilities and security concerns. Bangladesh and the Maldivian governments seek to comply with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly with SDG 8.8, which asserts, “Protect labour rights and promote safe and

secure working environments of all workers, including migrant workers, particularly women migrants, and those in precarious employment.” Hence, it is a crucial responsibility of these two governments to ensure appropriate policies and implementation strategies to prevent forced labour and fraudulent recruitment, which includes confiscation of identity and travel documents, withholding or non-payment of wages, and debt-based coercion. While policies and institutions are in place in Bangladesh and the Maldives, the challenge lies in the effective implementation of the arrangements. However, one should note that given the nature of employment and TIP, the requirements for interventions would vary regarding male and female migration. The literature review shows that to maximise the benefits of these arrangements and to ensure the rights of migrant workers, government-Civil Society Organisation (CSO) collaboration is essential. Such collaboration can lead to pathways to influence the policy framework to reduce irregular migration and provide justice to the returnees. In addition, the deeper ties between the CSOs working in Bangladesh and the Maldives can build synergies for disrupting the criminal nexus and enable the migrants to undertake legal recourse as necessary.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abdulla, L. (2022, August 08). Maldives to regularize 34,000 Bangladeshi workers. Retrieved from <https://edition.mv/business/25459>

AFP. (2020, July 25). Maldives detains migrant workers seeking unpaid wages. Retrieved August 14, 2022, from Arab News: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1709796/world>

Aiham, A. (2020, April 15). Maldives imposes stricter guidelines on expatriate accommodations. Retrieved August 03, 2022, from The Edition: <https://edition.mv/news/16136>

Ajzen, I. (1991). 'The Theory of Planned Behavior', *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179-211.

Avas. (2019, May 08). Labour agreement between Maldives and Bangladesh to be renewed. Retrieved January 18, 2022, from Avas Online: <https://avas.mv/en/63937>

Bdnews24.com Bangladesh signs deal with Maldives to send workers, regularise undocumented ones. Retrieved August 11, 2022, from bdnews24.com: <https://bdnews24.com/economy/bangladesh-signs-deal-with-maldives-to-send-workers-regularise-undocumented-ones>

Fallati, L., Castiglioni, S., Galli, P., Riva, F., Gracia-Lor, E., González-Mariño, I., . . . Zuccato, E. (2020). Use of legal and illegal substances in Malé (Republic of Maldives) assessed by wastewater analysis. *Science Total Environment* (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31499350/>), Online.

Forum-Asia.(2020). Maldives-Status of Selected Recommendations Made to the Government of Maldives. Geneva: Maldivian Democracy Network.

Gossman, P. (2020, March 27). Migrant Workers in Maldives at Added Risk from COVID-19. Retrieved August 11, 2022, from Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/27/migrant-workers-maldives-added-risk-covid-19>

Hassan, N. (2020, June 05). Anti-blackness, xenophobia and racism in the Maldivian community. Retrieved August 17, 2022, from Medium: <https://nuhahassan.medium.com/anti-blackness-xenophobia-and-racism-in-the-maldivian-community-18008c3ad331>

HRW. (2022, August 10). Maldives: Arrests for Gay Sex Politically Motivated. Retrieved August 10, 2022, from Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/08/10/maldives-arrests-gay-sex-politically-motivated>

Human Rights Watch. (2020, August 25). Maldives: Covid-19 Exposes Abuse of Migrants Overhaul System to Protect Foreign Workers at All Times. Retrieved August 18, 2022, from Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/25/maldives-covid-19-exposes-abuse-migrants>

IOM. (2018). Migration in Maldives: A Country Profile 2018. IOM: international Organization for Migration.

Islam, O. (2021, December 30). PM's visit to the Maldives. Retrieved December 31, 2021, from The Financial Express: <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/pms-visit-to-the-maldives-1640879076bdnews24.com>. (2021, February 09).

Khan, S. E. (2018). Vulnerability of the Bangladeshi Migrant Workers to Radicalization and Violent Extremism. Assessment and Support Implementation of Programmes on the Inclusion and Engagement of Migrants. Male: UNDP.

Labour Relations Authority. (2022, August 22). Regulations. Relations on Employment. Male, Maldives.

Mahmud, J. (2022, August 08). Undocumented in Maldives: 34k Bangladeshis to get papers. Retrieved August 08, 2022,

from The Daily Star: <https://www.thedailystar.net/nrb/migration/news/undocumented-the-maldives-34k-bangladeshis-get-papers-3090176>

Maldives Immigration. (2020). Strategic Plan 2020-2024. Male: Maldives Immigration.

Maldives Independent. (2017, October 13). Bangladeshi admits guilt on trafficking charge. Retrieved from Maldives Independent: <https://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/bangladeshi-admits-guilt-on-trafficking-charge-133844>

Maldives Independent. (2018, June 03). Undocumented migrant workers labelled 'national security threat'. Retrieved October 11, 2018, from Maldives Independent: <https://maldivesindependent.com/society/undocumented-migrant-workers-labelled-national-security-threat-138630>

Maldives Independent. (2019, May 18). Bangladeshi killed over homosexual advances. Retrieved August 12, 2022, from Crime: <https://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/bangladeshi-killed-over-homosexual-advances-145362>

Maldives Independent. (2019, September 18). Maldives bans recruitment of Bangladeshi labourers for one year. Retrieved August 11, 2022, from Maldives Independent: <https://maldivesindependent.com/business/maldives-bans-recruitment-of-bangladeshi-labourers-for-one-year-148020#:~:text=Maldives%20bans%20recruitment%20of%20Bangladeshi%20labourers%20for%20one%20year,-3%20years%20ago&text=The%20Maldives%20government%20has>

Maldives Insider. (2020, August 17). Maldives enacts new expatriate employment regulations. Retrieved August 04, 2020, from maldives.net.mv: <https://maldives.net.mv/42590/maldives-enacts-new-expatriate-employment-regulations/>

Maldivian Police. (2016). 3 Bangladeshi Nationals have been sentenced under Human Trafficking Law. Male: Maldives Police.

Maldivian Red Crescent. (2022). Migrant Support Helpline - Spread the word. <https://knowledge-hub.redcrescent.org.mv/category/blog/articles/7-migrant-support-helpline-spread-the-word>. Retrieved from <https://knowledge-hub.redcrescent.org.mv/category/blog/articles/7-migrant-support-helpline-spread-the-word>

Malsa, M. (2019, November 11). MRC, BDRCS host Humanitarian Dialogue on Migration. Retrieved August 18, 2022, from Edition. mv: <https://edition.mv/migration/13399>

Ministry of Defence, Maldives. (2020, March 30). Maldives National Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan 2020-2022. Retrieved August 05, 2022, from Ministry of Defence, Maldives: <https://www.gov.mv/dv/files/maldives-national-anti-human-trafficking-action-plan-2020-2022.pdf>

Ministry of Economic Development. (2021, January 28). Regulation on Employees' Accommodation Standards [2021/R-15]. Retrieved August 02, 2022, from Laws & Regulations: <https://www.trade.gov.mv/uploads/12/regulation-on-employees-accommodation-standards-2021-r-15.pdf>

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh. (2021). Bangladesh-Maldives Joint Communique on 23 December 2021. Dhaka: MOFA.

Mohamed, S. M. (2020, October 01). Protecting Migrant Workers in Maldives. Retrieved August 18, 2022, from www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---inst/documents/publication/wcms_776391.pdf

Naher, D. Z. (2021). Volunteer through a pandemic - Supporting Migrants in Hardship. Hulhumale: Maldivian Red Crescent. Retrieved from Maldivian Red Crescent: <https://knowledge-hub.redcrescent.org.mv/category/blog/articles/11-volunteer-through-a-pandemic-supporting-migrants-in-hardship>

Naseer, M. (2019, January 5). Drugs and Youth - the elephant in the room. Retrieved from Avas: <https://avas.mv/en/58395>

National Bureau of Statistics, Maldives. (2019). Population Distribution and Migration: Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2019. Male: Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure Survey 2019.

Office of the Inspector General. (2022). 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Maldives . Washington DC: Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons.

oneonline. (2019, January 14). 3 kilos of narcotics confiscated from Bangladeshi national entering Maldives. Retrieved from oneonline.mv: <https://oneonline.mv/en/4022>

Rahman, M. (2021, December 10). 50 thousand Bangladeshis turn ‘irregular’ in Maldives. Retrieved August 11, 2022, from NewAge: <https://www.newagebd.net/article/157032/50-thousand-bangladeshis-turn-irregular-in-maldives>

Sengupta, S. (2022, April 5). Long Read: Trouble in Paradise – Maldives’ Continuing Battle with its Drug-Abuse Problem. Retrieved from London School of Economics: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2022/04/05/long-read-trouble-in-paradise-maldives-continuing-battle-with-its-drug-abuse-problem/>

Shazly, M., & Zilaal, H. (2016). Drug Offender Treatment in the Maldives. Unafei.

Srinivasan, M. (2020, August 26). Rights watchdog flags ‘harsh treatment’ of migrant workers in Maldives. Retrieved August 21, 2022, from The Hindu: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/rights-watchdog-flags-harsh-treatment-of-migrant-workers-in-maldives/article32449932.ece>

The Financial Express. (2021, December 05). Bangladeshi migrants look to better days as Maldives tourism thrives amid pandemic. Retrieved August 12, 2022, from The Financial Express: <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/public/index.php/national/bangladeshi-migrants-look-to-better-days-as-maldives-tourism-thrives-amid-pandemic-1638682608>

The World Bank. (2022). The World Bank in Maldives. Washington DC: The World Bank.

The World Bank. (2022, May 27). World Bank Supports Maldives to Improve Social Protection Coverage and Employability of Workers. Retrieved August 05, 2022, from Press Release: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/05/27/world-bank-supports-maldives-to-improve-social-protection-coverage-and-employability-of-workers>

The World Bank. (2022, September 28). The World Bank in the Maldives. Retrieved from Where we work: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/maldives/overview>

UNESCAP. (2020). Situation Report: international Migration in South and South-West Asia Search form Search. Manila: UNESCAP.

UNB. (2020, August 21). Maldives extends ban on new Bangladesh labour recruits. Retrieved August 20, 2022, from UNB News: <https://unb.com.bd/m/category/Bangladesh/maldives-extends-ban-on-new-bangladeshi-labour-recruits/56322>

UNDP.(2020). Building Social Cohesion and Tolerance in Maldives and Bangladesh. Dhaka: UNDP.

UNICEF.(2020, Online).Maldives. Retrieved August 18, 2022, from UNICEF Maldives: <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/10571/file/Maldives.pdf>

United Nations Network on Migration.(2021). UN Network on Migration in the Maldives. https://migrationnetwork.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbdl416/files/docs/tor_un_network_on_migration_in_the_maldives_final_0.pdf. Retrieved from UNNM: https://migrationnetwork.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbdl416/files/docs/tor_un_network_on_migration_in_the_maldives_final_0.pdf

US Department of Labor. (2020). Child Labor and Forced Labor Reports: Maldives. Washington DC: Bureau of International Labor Affairs.

US Department of Labor. (2020, September 30). Maldives: Minimal Advancements. Retrieved August 12, 2022, from US Department of Labor: www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2019/maldives.pdf

US Department of State. (2019). 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report. Washington DC: Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Person. Retrieved from Office of Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

US Department of State. (2020). 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Maldives. Washington DC: Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking In Persons.

Yaegashi, A. (2010). Maldives. Online: IOM Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

Zalif, Z. (2022, May 25). More needs to be done to ensure workplace safety for Bangladeshi workers: VP. Retrieved June 11, 2022, from Raajje.mv: <https://raajje.mv/118269>

ANNEX I

Sample Size Calculation for Questionnaire-based Survey

In this survey, the sampling frame has included the number of migrant workers residing in the Maldives, documented or undocumented, and the workers who returned from the Maldives in 2020 and later. Again, the stakeholders chosen for the KIIs are parts of the frame for this study. For data collection, the survey randomly selected eligible participants [i.e., returned migrant workers] from the clustered survey zones following the probability-based sampling where every returned migrant worker of a particular area has an equal chance of participating. The formula that has been used for calculating the sample size is:

$$n = \frac{P(1-P)}{E^2} * n = \frac{P(1-P)}{E^2} * Z^2\alpha/2$$

Where,

N= the required minimum sample size

P= proportion of the target population estimated to have particular characteristics

α = the level of Significance

$Z\alpha/2$ = the Z-score corresponding to the degree of confidence

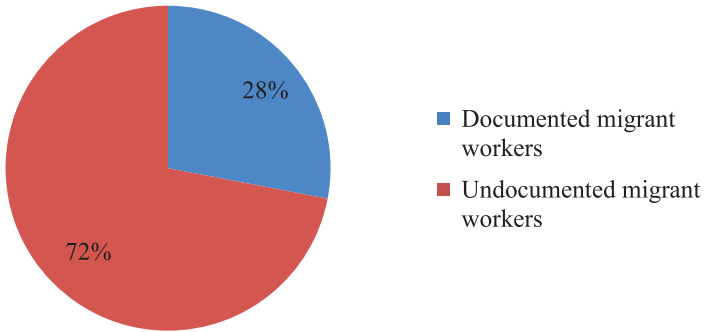
E = the margin of error (desired precision)

Following the simple random sampling method, we see that for the study to be accurate, it needs to survey at least 350 labor migrants currently working or have returned to Bangladesh from the Maldives.

For the questionnaire survey to be representative, the study surveyed 370 workers in total: 120 workers residing in the Maldives, and 250 returnees from that country. The study designed the questionnaires accordingly to bring every possible aspect of safe migration to the Maldives.

Sample Size Calculation	
Indicators	Information
Prevalence of an indicator (P)	65%
Level of Significance (a)	5%
Z-score corresponding (Za)	1.96%
Desired Precision (E)	5%
Required Minimum Sample Size	349.5856

Questionnaire Survey in the Maldives



ANNEX II

Table 1: Maintaining contact with sub-agents at home while in Maldives

Maintaining contact with sub-agents	Answer	Number of the migrants (%)
Who maintain contact with sub-agents	Yes	10
Who does not maintain contact with sub-agents	No	90
Total:		100

Table 2: Migration Cost (In BDT)

Migration cost (in BDT)	
Lowest	32,000
Highest	3,75,000
Average	205,997

Table 3: Knowledge of victims of trafficking

Knowledge of trafficking	Answer	Number of the migrants (%)
Who has knowledge of trafficking	Yes	9
Who has not knowledge of trafficking	No	91
Total		100

Shahab Enam Khan is a Professor in the Department of International Relations at Jahangirnagar University. He is also the Executive Director and CEO of the Bangladesh Center for Indo-Pacific Affairs. Professor Khan's expertise focuses on foreign affairs, defense, and security, i.e., terrorism and extremism; migration (particularly the Bay of Bengal region, Rohingya, and North East India); and energy.

C R Abrar is currently the Executive Director of the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU). He has also served as a Professor and a senior faculty member of the Department of International Relations at the University of Dhaka. Professor Abrar's research area includes refugees, labor migrants, and stateless and displaced peoples.

Md. Obaidul Haque is an Associate Professor in the Department of International Relations at the University of Dhaka. He is also a Member of the General Body and the Executive Committee of RMMRU. His research interests center around the evolving geopolitical landscape of South Asia in the context of increasing competition between the great powers. One of his core research areas delves into the intricacies of post-conflict societies, with a particular focus on the Chittagong Hill Tracts region in Bangladesh.

Also from RMMRU

**Impact of Migration on Transformation to Sustainability:
Poverty and Development in Bangladesh**

Edited by Tasneem Siddiqui

**The Other Face of Globalisation:
Covid-19, International Labour Migrants and
Left-behind Families in Bangladesh**

Edited by Tasneem Siddiqui

**Making Dalals Visible:
Towards Transparency in Recruitment**

Tasneem Siddiqui and C R Abrar

Untold Stories of Migrants: Dreams & Realities

Compiled by Tasneem Siddiqui

**Justice at the Doorsteps:
Mediation on Migration Fraudulence**

Sumaiya Khair



978-984-35-9034-3

