Objective: The proposed dialogue envisages to discuss particularly two issues which are emerging as major concerns from the perspective of safeguarding the interests of migrant workers from Bangladesh: (a) Financial Inclusion of Migrant workers and (b) Social Protection of Migrant Workers.

Rationale: There is little doubt that migrant workers and the remittances they are sending play an important role through contributions to Bangladesh’s macroeconomic development: higher foreign exchange earnings; healthy balance of payment situation; employment creation; socio-economic upliftment of relatively poor households; domestic demand creation. However, two of the key areas that continue to remain less focused in the discourse on migration and remittances relate to financial inclusion and social protection of migrant workers. Indeed, significant benefits could emerge from harnessing the advantages of better use of remittance through greater financial inclusion of the migrant workers. A related issue which ought to receive more attention concerns the issue of reducing the cost of sending remittance from host countries to Bangladesh. This would have allowed the migrant workers to have significantly higher disposable income. Currently, financial inclusion of particularly small remitters remain a neglected area. The second less-trodden area concerns safeguarding the interests of migrant workers through better social protection. Here also at present there is a lack of appropriate instruments and schemes which could be deployed towards providing better protection to migrant workers.

At present, banking channel is the most frequently used means for transferring remittances to home by Bangladeshi migrants. At the same time, banking services remain the costliest amongst the various modes of transfers. Financial inclusion of Bangladeshi remittance earners has remained rather limited as of now. Bangladeshi low-skilled migrants remit relatively small amounts of money but more frequently. The transaction costs involved, however, is relatively higher for sending smaller amount of money.

Availability of appropriate policy tool for financial inclusion of relatively low income remitters is rather limited. Instruments such as Wage Earners’ Bond can be accessed by only large remittance
senders. There are some initiatives by commercial banks to attract deposits from remitters; but these are limited in scopes and are not widely availed. Bangladeshi migrant workers remain mostly isolated from financial services also in the host countries. Financial education of migrant workers is also limited.

It is also important to investigate the reasons why financial products are not being designed by financial institutions to tap into the potentialities of financialisation of remittance earnings. Incentivisation of financial institutions in mainstreaming remittance in the financing domain and providing low-cost financial service also merit attention.

The issues of social protection of the migrants and their families at home and also in the host country have emerged as a new concern in view of the increasing importance of labour migration from Bangladesh. However, Government of Bangladesh’s (GoB’s) social protection schemes are limited to the public sector and a limited number of marginal population groups. Till now no specific measures have been put in place for social protection of migrant workers.

To strengthen social protection of the migrant workers, access to essential health care services and income security need to be given priority focus. Regrettably, the draft National Strategies for Social Securities (NSSS) strategy has not given particular focus on Bangladeshi migrants or their families. It is also not very clear how the Bangladeshi migrant workers will be integrated in the proposed universal pension scheme. Also, there is no provision for contributory welfare fund for Bangladeshi migrants to meet their emergency needs in the country of destinations.

In view of the above, the dialogue will be an opportunity to discuss the ideas provided in the keynote presentation to be made by the CPD and get feedbacks from the stakeholders present. The discussion at the dialogue will help finalise the report and contribute towards designing a set of policies, initiatives and instruments to address the challenges in the two identified areas. It is hoped that these recommendations will help in implementing the objectives set out in the 7th Five Year Plan and other policy documents pertaining to the relevant areas.

**Format:** The discussion will follow open dialogue format. The event will begin with a welcome note. The CPD which is conducting a research on the two aforesaid issues to be discussed at the dialogue, will then make a presentation to initiate the discussion. The presentation will focus on (a) the
emerging importance of the two issues in the context of Bangladesh, (b) global best practices to address the issues; (c) results from analysis and focus group discussions and (d) recommendations for policymakers and to help implement the relevant objectives in the 7th Five Year Plan.

The keynote will be followed by comments from designated discussants who will share their views on the keynote and highlight other relevant issues. This will be followed by open floor discussion by the stakeholders present. The Special Guest and Chief Guest will then make their statements and comments. The Chair then will sum up the discussion and make concluding remarks.

**Outcome:** A dialogue report will capture the key messages from the discussion. The dialogue will also help the CPD team to finalise the study report. The dialogue is expected to sensitise key stakeholders as regards relevant issues. Since the dialogue is expected to get wide coverage in print and electronic media, it is hoped that pertinent issues will receive attention of a broader range of citizens and concerned people.

**Organisers:** The event will be organised jointly by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment (MEWOE) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Country Office in Bangladesh.

**Participants:** Key relevant stakeholders will be invited to the dialogue. They will include Ministers, government officials from concerned Ministries including MEWOE and Ministry of Finance, ILO and concerned development partners, representatives from Bangladesh Bank and commercial banks who deal with transfer of remittances, economists and analysts dealing with migrant issues, migrant workers’ associations, Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA). Print and electronic media will be invited to cover the event.

**Proposed Venue and time:** 21 October 2015 at Hotel Lake Shore, Dhaka