



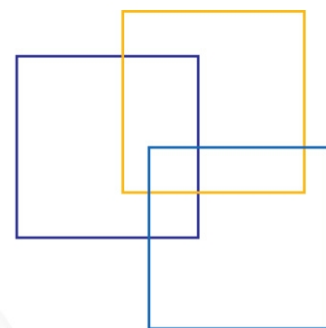
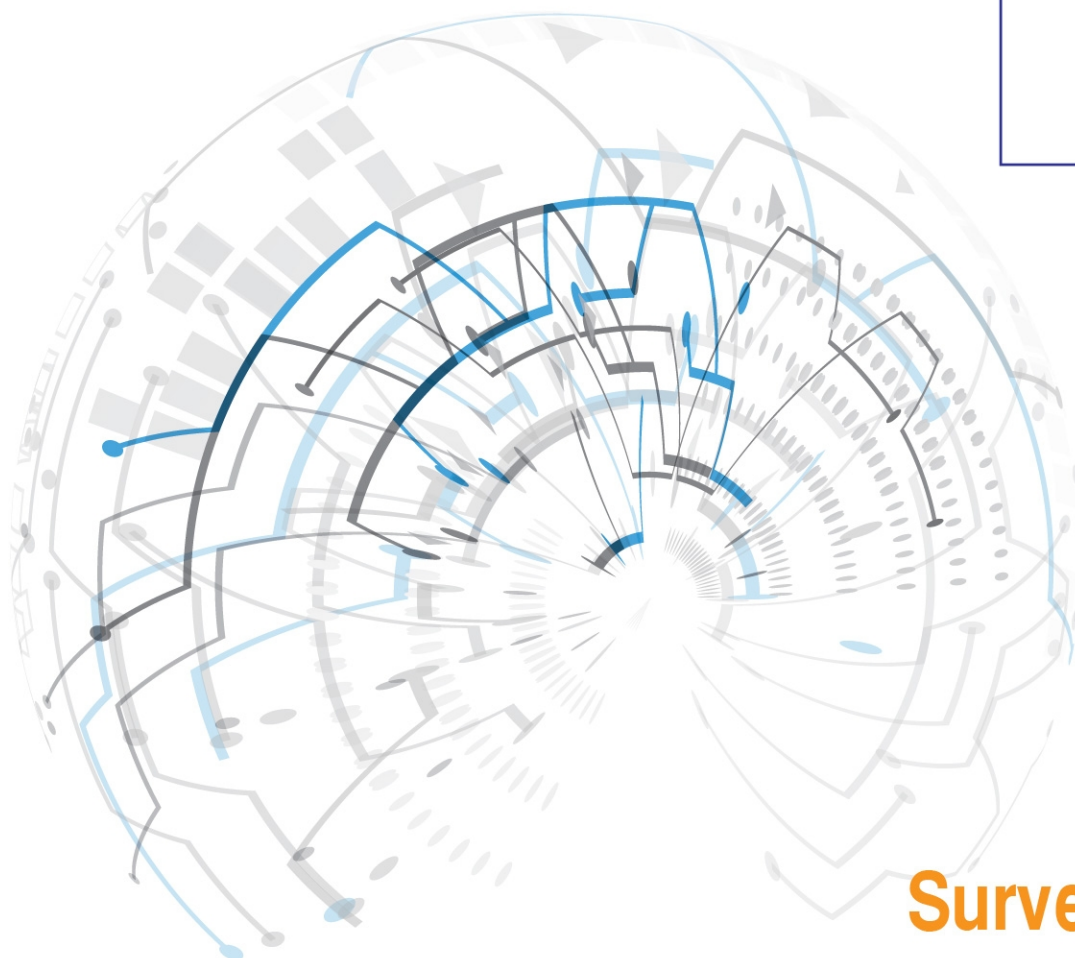
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**Swiss Agency for Development
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International
Labour
Organization

Managing Migrant Worker Information in Bangladesh



**Survey on
Data Integration**

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Published

December 2018

www.ilo.org

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First published 2018

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English edition

ISBN: 978-92-2-132069-2 (print); 978-92-2-132070-8 (web pdf)

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Printed in Bangladesh

Preface

As Bangladesh is fast developing into a middle income country, the contribution of overseas employment and remittances to the country's economy has gained prominence in its overall strategy, especially through the development of a more pro-active and migrant worker-oriented approach to management.

This has led to changes in the overall legislative and policy framework, and a gradual recognition of the need to develop improved information systems for management, including concrete measures for social protection, for complaints investigation and redress, and for investment in building the skills and qualifications of workers to improve the quality of their overseas employment.

In order to move into full implementation of the Overseas Employment and Migrants' Act 2013 and the Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy 2016 as part of ongoing improvements in labour migration, it has now become pertinent to develop the institutional capacity of the government to collect, manage, and monitor migration and labour market information

As such, through the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) funded "Application of Migration Policy for Decent Work of Migrant Workers" project, the International Labour Organization in close collaboration with the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), has developed a set of four reports on the Integrated Migrant Workers Information System and the Labour Market Information System in Bangladesh.

This particular report *Survey on data integration* of the Migrant Workers Information System and Labour Market Information System in Bangladesh presents the findings of two qualitative surveys that are expected to inform and guide policy-makers to develop and design an integrated database information system on migrant workers' information (MWMIS) and a labour market information system (LMIS). The two surveys reached potential male and female migrants; returnee male and female migrants; local workers by skill set; key data holders such as District Employment and Manpower Offices (DEMOs), Departments of Youth Development (DYDs), Technical Training Centres (TTCs), labour attachés, and migrant community organizations; data users, such other government ministries agencies and directorates, private sector officials, civil society organizations (CSOs), and academia; intermediaries; recruitment agencies; and employers.



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Acronyms and abbreviations

A2i	Access to Information
BAIRA	Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies
BANBEIS	Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BMET	Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training
BOESL	Bangladesh Overseas Employment and Services Limited
CRVS	Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
CSO	civil society organization
DEMO	District Employment and Manpower Office
DYD	Department of Youth Development
EGPP	Employment Generation Program for the Poorest
FGD	focus group discussion
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IDI	in-depth interview
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOA	inter operable application/interconnection oriented architecture
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
IT	information technology
ITES	information technology enabled service
KII	key informant interview
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LMIS	Labour Market Information Systems
MEWOE	Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment
MIS	management information system
MWMIS	Migrant Workers' Management Information Systems
NSDC	National Skill Development Council
NTVQF	National Training and Vocational Qualifications Framework
STEP	Skills and Training Enhancement Project
TTC	Technical Training Centers
WEWB	Wage Earners' Welfare Board

Essential definitions

Data can be any character, text, words, number, pictures, sound, or video. Within the context of a database, data are figures that are arranged in rows and columns of a table.

Data versus information: Data is simply raw information, and if not put into context, data mean little or nothing to a person. **Information** is the context created or processed from that data. Computers typically read data, but that data is not necessarily something that a computer actually understands. Through the use of formulas, programming scripts, or software applications, a computer can turn data into information that a person can understand.

Data versus statistics: Data is the raw information from which statistics are created. That is, **statistics** provide an interpretation and summary of data.

Data table represents a single table in a database. It has rows and columns.

Dataset is simply the collection of data tables.

Database is collection of interrelated data organized in a specific format. A database is where data is stored and managed.

Database management system is a software for controlling and managing databases.

Application programming interface (API): A set of functions and procedures that allow the creation of applications that access the features or data of an operating system, application, or other service. It is essentially a bridge linking the flow of data between two or more systems or applications.

Inter-operable application/interconnection-oriented architecture (IOA): a software application's capability to communicate, execute programs, or transfer data among various functional units (or systems) in a manner that requires the user to have little or no knowledge of the unique characteristics of those units. Within an IOA, a concept like "the network is the computer" becomes a reality.

Data dashboard (or simply "dashboard") is an information management tool that visually tracks, analyses, and displays key performance indicators (KPIs), metrics, and key data points to monitor the health of a business, department, or specific process. Dashboards are customizable to meet the specific needs of a department and company. Behind the scenes, a dashboard connects to your files, attachments, services, and APIs, but on the surface displays all this data in easily readable forms, such as tables, line charts, bar charts, and gauges. A data dashboard is the most efficient way to track multiple data sources because it provides a central location for businesses to monitor and analyse performance. Real-time monitoring reduces the hours of analysing and the long lines of communication that previously challenged businesses.

Big data involves extremely large data sets that may be analysed computationally to reveal patterns, trends, and associations, especially relating to human behavior and interactions. These data sets are so voluminous and complex that traditional data processing application software are inadequate to deal with them. Big data challenges include: capturing data, data storage, data analysis, search, sharing, transfer, visualization, querying, updating, information privacy, and data source. There are five dimensions to big data known as Volume, Variety, Velocity, and the recently added Veracity and Value.

Big data analytics is the process of examining large and varied data sets – i.e., big data -- to uncover hidden patterns, unknown correlations, market trends, human behavior, customer preferences, and other useful information that can help organizations (and countries) make more-informed decisions with regard to business, procedures, planning, and governance decisions.

1. Introduction

1.1. Migration context

Bangladesh has experienced a steady increase in international migration for short-term employment for over half a century. Labour migration plays a significant role in maintaining macro-economic stability, and ensures income and employment generation at the micro level. With the exception of a few years, labour migration from Bangladesh has steadily been increasing since 1976 (Ahamed and Karm, n.d.). The number of human resources migrating abroad stood at 6,087 back in 1976, but grew to 1 million-plus in 2017 (BMET website, 2017). On average, 400,000-plus workers leave Bangladesh for overseas employment each year (ILO, n.d.). Although the outflow of labour migrants from Bangladesh is increasing, earnings from remittances have dipped since 2015 (Bangladesh Bank, 2018). Over the years, Bangladeshi migrant workers have remained one of the most vulnerable sections of its labour force due to lack of proper policy implementation and lack of systematic administrative measures, including a lack of proper documentation and a tracking/monitoring system of labour migrants' welfare in countries of destination. In fact, this process of victimization starts in the recruitment phase. Challenges faced by Bangladeshi migrants include: high cost of migration, especially compared to the low skilled jobs held by many migrants; low wages; lack of information on migration opportunities and risks; discrimination, exploitation, and abuse while overseas; and insufficient services to protect the rights of migrant workers (ILO, 2018).

Two ways to protect the rights of workers abroad are increased transparency in transactions, and the monitoring and tracking of migrants' status while abroad. These can be achieved through the digitization of records for each stage in the migration process. Hence it is very important to develop and manage a database system for labour migration, be it internal migration within Bangladesh or migration abroad. A sound labour market information system (LMIS) would cover and be designed to provide accurate labour market needs assessments, skills anticipation and recognition, decent working condition for all workers, and so on. It is found that migrant workers often face issues around skills recognition, especially within low- and medium-skilled job categories. Returnee migrants frequently encounter difficulties in registering their experiences in destination countries through official documentation, creating barriers to utilizing their experience to develop better human resources in Bangladesh. In addition, potential and returnee migrants are facing more challenges in the dynamic job market due to economic globalization and skill mismatch in local job sectors. A sound LMIS can help mitigate these issues by recording skills information, enabling migrant returnees to showcase their skills to local employers through an official portal.

1.2. Scope of the project

The Application of Migration Policy for Decent Work for Migrant Workers project of the International Labour Organization (ILO) builds on the successes of the Promoting Decent Work through improved Migration Policy and its Application in Bangladesh project, which operated from 2011 to 2015. The new project will provide research and technical advisory support; facilitate social dialogue and stakeholder engagement; and support the implementation of pilots to test a range of strategies for migrant workers' education, support, and re-entry into the Bangladesh labour market. It focuses on strengthening the overall policy and governance framework for migration; improving the institutions responsible for managing migration; and supporting the development of expanded services to migrant workers. Data on migrant workers and labour markets are critical for effective migration governance and ensuring safe and orderly migration. As a need to respond to the increasing numbers of migrant workers from Bangladesh, the ILO is planning to support the development of an integrated and comprehensive migrant workers information system (MWMIS) that will potentially include a database system of internal labour forces.

1.3. Objective of the survey report

Particular objectives of this survey report include:

- A review of the research topic and summary of the existing studies on data integration related to labour markets;
- Analysis of key issues involving data at various handling stages; and
- Reporting on the key findings from in-depth interviews and surveys of individuals, groups, and stakeholders.

1.4. Approach in reporting

The report focuses on the findings and analysis of the surveys under the project. The approach of this study is three fold: First, this assignment will consider the existing literature on migrant workers' information systems, labour market information systems, their sub-set database systems or datasets, and their achievement and challenges in these regards. Second, it will discuss the findings from different types of interviews conducted through the use of question sets. Before the discussion, the report will clearly mention the assumptions and methodology of the survey. Finally, the report presents two studies, one on LMIS systems and one on MWMIS systems, and attempts to build a frame of reference for analysis of these systems in Bangladesh.

1.5. Survey methodology

Two qualitative surveys were conducted for the study as such, a large sample size was not pursued for these surveys. Basic details on conducting the surveys are given below:

Target groups of the surveys were:

1. potential migrants (male/female);
2. returnee migrants (male/female);
3. Local workers by skill set (male/female);
4. key data holders at the district level (re: local workers) and country of destination level (re: migrant workers), including District Employment and Manpower Offices (DEMOs), Departments of Youth Development (DYDs), Technical Training Centres (TTCs), labour attachés, and migrant community organizations;
5. Dhaka-based stakeholders (data users/holders), including Government ministries and agencies/directorates, private sector officials, civil society organizations (CSOs), and academia; and
6. sub-agents (dalals), recruitment agencies, and employers.

The types of interviews and instruments deployed included:

1. in-depth interviews (IDIs);
2. key informant interviews (KIIs); and
3. focus group discussions (FGDs).

All interviews were guided through the use of question sets developed ahead of time.

Table 1. Coverage of the survey on the LMIS, as per the survey methodology

Target Group	Type of Interview	No. of interviews per district	No. of districts (including Dhaka)	Total no. of interviews
Potential migrants (now part of the internal labour force)	FGDs (male/female) – 6 to 8 persons per group	2	3	6
Potential migrants (not now part of the internal labour force)	FGDs (male/female) – 6 to 8 persons per group	2	3	6
Returnee migrants (now part of the internal labour force)	IDIs	4	3	12
DYD officials	KIIs	1	5	5
Workers by skill set segment (internal labour market)	IDIs	5	3	15
Dhaka-based stakeholders (internal labour market-related)	KIIs	32	1	32
<i>Dalals</i>	IDI	4	3	12
Employers (internal labour market)	IDI	4	3	12
Total				100

Source: Compiled by authors

Table 2. Coverage of the survey on the MWMIS, as per the survey methodology

Target Group	Type of Interview	No. of interviews per district	No. of districts (including Dhaka)	Total no. of interviews
Potential migrants (may not be in the labour force now)	FGDs (male/female) – 6 to 8 persons per group	4	3	12
Returnee migrants (may not be back in the labour force yet)	IDIs	4	3	12
DEMOs; TTCs	KIIs	2	5	10
Labour attachés – (one current and two former attachés)	KIIs	3	1	3
Workers by skill set segment (overseas labour market)	IDIs	4	3	12
Dhaka-based stakeholders	KIIs	29	1	29
Recruitment agencies	IDI	1	3	3
<i>Dalals</i> (sub-agents)	IDIs	4	3	12
Employers (of returnee migrants)	IDIs	4	3	12
Total				105

Source: Compiled by authors

The two surveys –one related to the MWMIS and one related to the LMIS – covered a total of 205 interviews (see tables 1 and 2 above). In total, 13 field enumerators were trained and engaged, in addition to two project staffs who participated in the survey process.

Five districts in Bangladesh (including Dhaka) were selected for the survey, with table 3 presenting the reasoning behind the selection of each district. The respondents were reached through a cluster network reference of both current and returnee migrant communities. The study gave equal importance to female and male respondents. So, to cover the two studies – i.e., one for the LMIS and one for the MWMIS – three districts were surveyed in each of the surveys, with Dhaka being the overlap district.

Table 3. Reasons for selection of districts for the two surveys

Sl. No.	District selected for survey	Reason for selecting the district
1.	Dhaka	Most of the stakeholders for this sector and this survey reside and work in Dhaka – for both LMIS and MWMIS
2.	Barishal	District with most internal migration – for LMIS
3.	Narayanganj	District with most internal female migrants– for LMIS
4.	Comilla	District with most overseas labour migrants– for MWMIS
5.	Gazipur	District with most female overseas labour migrants– for MWMIS

Source: Compiled by authors

1.6. Key assumptions regarding the choice of methodology

1.6.1. Sample size

The study is not striving at any statistical rigor as such. There was no separate structured/semi-structured questionnaire, there was no code book, and no instruction manual employed for the survey. Each interview was supposed to last for more than an hour if needed. Although these two studies are qualitative in nature, an attempt was made to include many viewpoints and a relatively large sample size. As such the number of interviews for each of the studies was set at 100– though the total number of interviews ended up being slightly higher at 205 (100 for the LMIS and 105 for the MWMIS).

1.6.2. The reason for covering all five selected districts for some target groups

Though five districts were selected for the surveys, for most target groups the survey was only conducted in three of those five districts, with Dhaka being included in both (table 3). However, there were certain target groups in which respondents from all five districts were interviewed. This was done only with government officials from a few directorates under the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MEWOE). The decision to interview officials from all five districts was made to see whether there is an effort on the part of local arms of the Government to liaise among themselves, as this is after all a labour issue with multiple dimensions, such as skills, wages, employability, and sourcing for recruitment.

1.6.3. Structured questionnaire or not?

The question sets utilized were not structured questionnaires of the type typically used in regular sample surveys. They are rather checklists of questions that would allow the interviewer to probe interviewees, but impromptu and follow-up questions can be developed on the spot, which will be noted and answers sought. Although the study has tried to perceive, understand, and catalog issues

relevant to each group regarding the use of data (if and once it is available), there can always be a new line of questioning cropping up from interviewee responses to existing questions. In that regard the question checklists are referred to as guideline by the demographer in the study team.

1.7. Question sets to cover both the LMIS and MWMIS

The question sets covered two issues under two surveys –one on the LMIS and one on the MWMIS. There were KII question checklists for both systems. The IDI and FGD question lists were addressed to specific target groups, but had a generic format with sections dedicated for each of the groups. There are questions in each that cover some transitional aspects (e.g., from internal labour market activity to external labour market activity). The complexity involved with these issues had to be compensated for by rigorous training of an already field-tested team, who had conducted previously surveys on migration issues in over 20 districts over last couple of years.

1.7.1. Formatting and standardization of question sets

Issues like respondent whereabouts, skill level, and definitions of data-systems were standardized and set down in a detailed structure in the question set to help communicate a sophisticated issue like data to laypeople (e.g., migrant workers) who may lack knowledge of or have no direct involvement in the issue. Some personal details and household profiles were taken, but only on a rather limited scale so as to allow the studies to maintain focus on the returnees' or potential migrants' interest, understanding, and usage of data or information technology enabled service (ITES) platforms like portals or apps on smart-phones. At a minimum, the necessary profiling parameters were set and a tabular format was used to characterize each respondent.

1.8. Survey data processing

The qualitative data derived from each interview was processed one by one, with responses put under different answer categories constituting different variables. There was no need for data processing with SPSS or any other similar software, as no statistically quantifiable data was aimed for.

1.8.1. Issue of subjectivity in the survey

The survey is focused on an issue that is not well understood at the community level. It is not an easy task to elicit substantive responses from workers or labour migrants in district towns or at the upazila level regarding data and their use of it in terms of services they require or can procure. In sights on the techniques employed and key instigating factors for an overseas labour migrant or internal worker to make use of data are important. As such their narratives will perhaps shed light on real needs and gaps.

However, the issue of data and use of data in migration is totally new to many at the grassroots level, and it could require a bit of explaining to respondents before they could really answer. Before the actual survey began, pre-testing was done with 18 individuals within Dhaka. In addition, for some key ideas the researchers informally talked to current migrants, government officials working on the migration sector, and academics to gauge the extent to which they would be able to grasp the concepts at play. One takeaway from these sessions was that time would be an important factor in conducting the survey. Too many questions and sub-questions on an issue a respondent does not understand readily may well trigger interview fatigue in the respondent, which would dilute the whole purpose and outcome goal of the survey. In addition, the very process of explaining the contexts of sector or the survey is definitely subjective, and these explanations are bound to have at least some influence on the interviewer and the respondent. But such explanations could not be done away with, even by trying to leading respondents through questions step by step.

These two studies on the LMIS and MWMIS are a bit subjective on another ground as well: If the respondents are individuals who do not see the use or merit of data in their migration decision-making – or even see the use of data as impractical – then there will be nothing to gain from their responses. Hence, even at the field level the studies pre-questioned potential respondents and then chose among respondents who were conversant with smart phone technology (at a minimum) and who think that data initiatives could be of benefit.

1.8.2. Limits to information sharing by respondents

The study cannot ask for any sensitive information that is generally not asked of or answered by respondents in a research survey in Bangladesh. Again, the country and subject of research create the context here, and context is important. For example, business people and recruiters among the respondents were not asked for their business identifier number (license number). Usually these are not shared by respondents unless it is a government-driven survey that requires mandatory and full disclosure. People in Bangladesh generally do not share such information, as they think these answers will be used against them later on by the Government for tax or other problems.

1.8.3. Gender balance in the respondent set

The question checklist and methodology of the survey for different segments of respondents worked to ensure there were an equal number of women and men respondents where possible – particularly with regard to workers. Each respondent category is inclusive of male and female respondents. As a policy, RMMRU always maintains equal, or at least equitable (where equal is not possible), numbers in respondent coverage. Labour force participation of women in Bangladesh ranges at about 30–35 percent, including the current growth rate. This proportion was nearly achieved across the entire respondent set, with the male to female respondents ratio sitting at 75 per cent male to 25 percent female. There was greater parity among worker respondents with the ratio sitting at 53 per cent men to 47 per cent women.

1.8.4. Geographical area coverage and population segments

Since these two studies are on the LMIS (domestic market information) and the MWMIS (domestic to overseas market information), the district that produces the most internal migrants (Barishal), the most overseas migrants (Comilla), the most internal female migrants (Narayanganj), and the most overseas female migrants (Gazipur) were selected. The district of Dhaka fell in the intersection, as it has the most common overlap with regard to most of the development sectors in Bangladesh. So, apart from the capital the teams of field enumerators travelled to these four other districts. Returnee migrants– both male and female – were sought in each district.

1.9. Stakeholders holding data

The available indicators on labour market information covered by the existing database systems include qualifications, source of labour (age, gender, skill sets matches), source of recruitment (as per type, area), and new openings (against new employment opportunities created). Most of these indicators are available in the dataset on outbound migrant workers, but they are not available on the web. The Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA), and the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) are the primary data holders for these existing indicators. The Ministry of Shipping has some updated data on workers who go abroad as a shipping staff, masters, sailors, and other skilled or semi-skilled seafaring workers. The Ministry of Home Affairs (Special Branch – Immigration, Police), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, BAIRA, and embassies have data on labour migrants currently working abroad. In addition, the Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) have data related to education information.

The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief also have a management information system (MIS). This ministry oversees the Employment Generation Program for the Poorest (EGPP) project, which includes 900,000 beneficiaries who are working in rural infrastructure. As per World Bank data, 31.1 per cent of the population (or 47 million people) are considered to be “poor” and 17.4 percent (or 26 million) “extremely poor”. The EGPP targets the latter segment of extremely poor, with 3.02 million beneficiaries in 2012/2013 (World Bank, 2015). Thirty-six per cent of these beneficiaries were women, contributing to overall female labour force participation. Another programme undertaken by the EGPP is “food for work”, now turned into a “money for work” programme. Here, no women are included, as the workers are engaged in heavy construction tasks. The EGPP project also has an MIS.

The Health Information System supported by the World Bank collects data on a quarterly basis going back to 2010, before which time it updated its data annually. The World Bank also supports the Skills and Training Enhancement Project (STEP), which ultimately supported the setting up of BMET’s MIS.

In addition, the National Skill Development Council (NSDC) database is collecting household data, which includes a remittance indicator along with an individual's current residence status. From these two indicators one can generate information for the MWMIS. The Department of Social Service under the Ministry of Social Welfare keeps an updated MIS that includes data on disability. They also hold data on the allowances provided to widows over the age of 18, who may well be active in the labour market. The department conducts a comprehensive survey every few years and that survey is updated quarterly.

Other organizations like RMMRU, the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, the Centre for Policy Dialogue, the Bangladesh Overseas Employment and Services Limited (BOESL), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program, and the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies collect primary data based on their project purposes and needs. But these are all survey data and are not database systems with regular, stipulated upgradation processes.

2. Findings from the study

2.1. Review of secondary literature

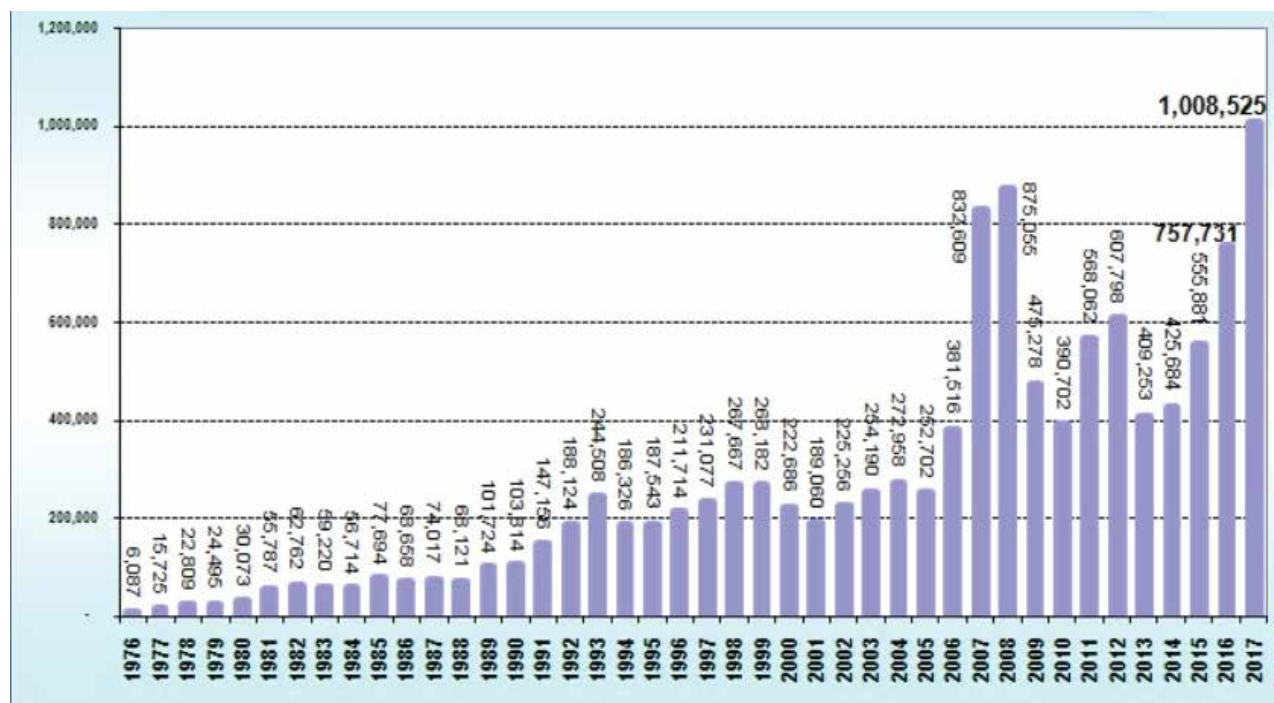
2.1.1. Labour migration trends from Bangladesh

In 2017, Bangladesh experienced a huge flow of outbound migration, crossing the 1 million mark with Bangladeshis migrating primarily to Europe, South-East Asia, and Gulf countries (BMET website, 2018). This is the largest migration number recorded for a single year, and represents an increase of almost 34 percent over 2016. Unfortunately, there is no data to see how many of these outbound migrants have already returned, either prematurely or after completing their work tenure. Despite this growth in migration for work, Bangladesh's attempted labour market diversification strategy has not worked to the desired level so far, according to a BMET official. For instance, data shows that half of these 1 million-plus migrant workers have gone to a single destination country – Saudi Arabia. Bangladesh has not been successful in increasing its share in the labour marketing Hong Kong (China), Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Taiwan (China), and other destinations. However, efforts are still underway and the BMET's work through signing memoranda of understanding and other bilateral agreements with countries like Japan are gaining momentum.

However, prior to the recent boom in outbound migration, the Government of Bangladesh observed a downward trend in migration growth from 2009 to 2014. Due to the global financial crisis and its impact on oil prices, there had been declining demand for less-skilled workers (figure 2), and restrictions have been placed on the recruitment of Bangladeshi workers in different Gulf and South East Asian countries, including Saudi Arabia and Malaysia (Siddiqui, 2009). However, many countries in the Middle East countries (particularly Gulf States), South East Asia, East Asia, and Western Europe demonstrated a need for professional, skilled, and semi-skilled migrant workers to implement big projects and sustain economic growth. For example, aggressive mega-investment infrastructure projects such as a proposed US\$500 billion mega-city, the Jeddah Tower, and Riyadh Metro in Saudi Arabia; the United Arab Emirates Expo 2020 and Dubai Blue Water Island; Qatar's World Cup 2022 developments; Bahrain's The Avenues; the Kuwait Olympic Village; and Oman's Ras Al Khar Eco-Resort Sur are good projects that could be aimed by the Bangladesh Government and private sector for sending human resources for overseas employment. To sum up Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries need workers for the construction, hospitality and retail, care giving, and medical sectors as well as in the research industry (Malit and Naufal, 2017). As a result, migration flows from Bangladesh increased after aforementioned years of decline, with 555,000 migrant workers heading overseas in 2015, and 757,000 going overseas in 2016 (figure 1). Although figure 2 below demonstrates how reliant Bangladesh has been on less-skilled workers when it comes to labour migration.

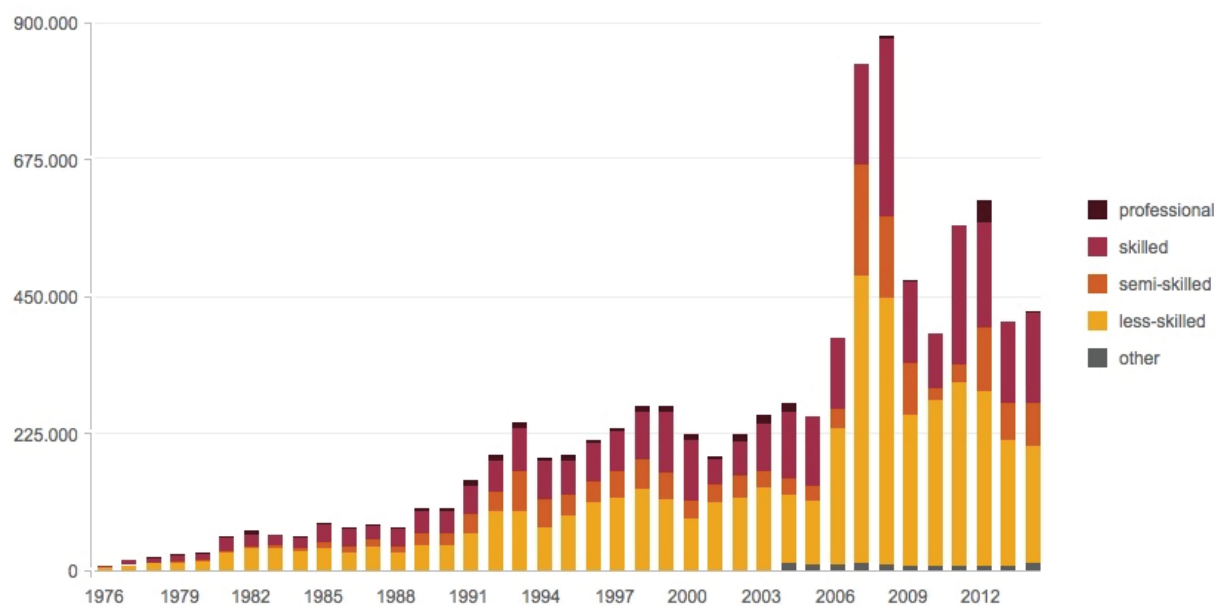
KII with **Dr Md. Nurul Islam**, Director Training Operation, BMET, 2017.

Figure 1. Total annual outflow of migrant workers from Bangladesh, 1976–2017



Source: BMET database

Figure 2. Annual outflow of migrant workers from Bangladesh by skill level. 1976–2014



Source: BMET database

2.1.2. Upcoming demand for migrant workers in the international labour market

Over the next 30 years China's working age population is estimated to shrink by 180 million, forcing China to import foreign workers to meet the demand for semi-skilled workers in its vast manufacturing industries. Similarly, East Asian countries and territories – Hong Kong (China), Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan (China) – will have to import 275 million people between the ages of 15 and 64 by 2030, and South-East Asia would have to attract 6 million workers from overseas (The Economist, 2017). Facing aging populations and shrinking workforces, the countries of the European Union are expected to continue to need more foreign workers to sustain their welfare states (Rapoza, 2017). However, unlike advanced Western countries, demand for foreign workers in GCC countries has waned over the years, due to falling oil prices and increasing nationalization of the workforce combined with economic diversification and the imperative of creating knowledge-based economies a-la Vision 2030. As such, GCC countries are seeing an increase in demand for highly skilled workers at the expense of less-skilled and semi-skilled foreign labourers (Callen et al., 2014). The situation in North America is well known, with the Hispanic and other communities hit hard with the Trump Administration's roll back on the immigration and naturalization policies of the previous administration.

Return migration from the Gulf region and the reintegration of returnees is likely to be a challenging task, but the only way for countries like Bangladesh to deal with this task is to utilize skillsets, enterprise/agency, and broadened outlook of returnee migrants, as these attributes can potentially create a positive multiplier effect in their home communities. It remains to be seen how creatively and prudently Bangladesh can turn this prospect from a source of vulnerability towards a point for hope.

2.1.3. Why an MWMIS and LMIS?

The data on the global labour market indicates that potential demand for workers offers significant opportunities for enhancing overseas employment for Bangladeshi labour migrants. It is a challenge for any government to manage such large numbers of migrant workers. Both governments in countries of origin and countries of destination need accurate real-time information on labour migrants. Such data will impact development, the safety of labour migrants, and the operation of government support mechanisms. In such a context, MIS systems for migrant workers and the domestic labour market are very necessary to have throughout integration with control systems in place to enable workforce movement to be monitored and if necessary to be managed (Azad, 2017). An LMIS is needed to generate strategic reports that would be institutionally arranged, produced, and automated (Sparreboom and Powell, 1999). Since the data integration process related to creating these systems is going to create a "big data" project, it will be highly interesting for development practitioners and policy-makers alike to see big data analytics in play to optimally utilize the expansive data collected on both migrants and labour market dynamics. It may be noted that labour market information is only one component of an LMIS/MWMIS, as other components, such as users, the methodology, and an analysis of institutional structures, are also equally important to establish a fruitful system (Sparreboom and Powell, 1999).

2.2. Key findings from field surveys

2.2.1. The availability of jobs data in the internal and overseas labour markets

- Potential and returnee migrant respondents only gain their knowledge of job availability, opportunities in desired sectors, and opportunities in other districts through informal personal network of relatives, friends, and community members.
- Most of the sub-agent (dalal) and employer respondents had general knowledge of the availability of jobs and opportunities in desired sectors, but they do not have enough knowledge on opportunities in specific districts or countries.

- According to the response of potential migrants, they mostly received information about migration from their relatives or friends who are currently working overseas or who recently came back.
- Potential migrant respondents appeared to readily rely on their informal sources of information, and hence they do not try to crosscheck what they have been told to verify the authenticity of that information.
- Some recruitment agencies and potential migrants think that it would be better if they could get information through a mobile application, believing that it will be more useful and make the process easier.
- Recruitment agencies and potential migrant respondents also believed a mobile app would help reduce their dependency on middlemen/dalals as well.
- Most of the respondents preferred a mobile platform for information. They viewed it is being easier for them to know and process the accessibility and availability of (internal/external) migration information, including for re-migration. It is relevant to mention here that currently there are a little over 80 million total Internet users in Bangladesh, according to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission. Over half of the total population uses the Internet, while nearly 100 per cent of mobile phone users are users of the Internet. Indeed, most Internet users in Bangladesh – 75 million out of 80 million – access the Internet through mobile subscription plans (Dhaka Tribune, 2018). The number of smart phone users has crossed 25 million. However, simple queries and answers, either by voice message or SMS, for migration related information, complaint registration, etc. can very well be done on a smart phone. But similar functions of information exchange can also be done on a GPS receiver phone, which are readily available in Bangladesh and affordable poorer people as well. Such phones cost only 2,800 to 4,200 taka (BDT).
- The available indicators on labour market information covered by existing database systems are qualifications, source of labour (age, gender, skill sets matches), source of recruitment (as per type, area), and new openings (against new employment opportunities created). Most of these indicators are available in an outbound migrants dataset, but are not available on the web. The BMET, BAIRA, and BBS are the primary collectors and preservers of these existing indicators.
- The Ministry of Shipping has some updated data on workers who go abroad as a shipping staff, masters, sailors, and other skilled or semi-skilled seafaring workers.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs (Special Branch – Immigration, Police), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, BAIRA, and embassies have data on labour migrants currently working abroad.
- Other organizations like RMMRU, the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, the Centre for Policy Dialogue, BOESL, the IOM, the Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program, and the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies collect primary data based on their project purposes and needs.

2.2.2. Reasons for migration/re-migration

- The primary factors that were attracting potential migrant respondents to overseas migration were favourable benefit packages and an increased income. They stated that they need salary-related data for confirmed jobs abroad.
- Returnee migrant respondents stated that they want to re-migrate for better life; because their previous migration(s) were not profitable enough; because they have no savings; and due to pressures related to income and continuing poverty due to debt.

- According to returnee migrants, dalals, and employers, factors that led to return are mostly end of job tenure, underpayment, termination due to problems with owners/management, job hopping, and deportation due to irregular papers, etc. In all these instances, it was believed that data/information could have helped the migrants.
- So, as much as migrants, returnees, employers, and dalals need employment data, they also need information in the form of references that can guide their actions. Such references could include sample incidents/cases and referral points that can help them understand practical elements of migration inside and outside the country.

2.2.3. The recruitment process

- Dalal respondents said they are getting information from recruitment agencies in Dhaka, and from migrants staying abroad. There is no mechanism for the dalals to confirm the authenticity of said information, so they only rely on visa papers.
- Employer respondents said they get information from dalals, newspapers, resumes, and online job portals. They also have no mechanism to verify the information. Potential jobseekers also depend on the dalals, who manage workers and send them to employers.
- Sources like the Mobile platform, the Union Parishad information centre, dalals, and friends/family abroad were cited by worker respondents and by returnee migrants as the best possible providers for information on jobs, businesses, and re-migration/internal migration.
- Worker respondents said they would not want to abandon the current information structure, even if they are provided a new source with authentic data. But it can safely be said that mobile platforms would be more popular.

2.2.4. Verification of returnee migrant information by government agencies

- Most returnee migrant respondents said that no one came to verify their personal, job, skill, social, and economic conditions upon their return. They were not asked if any support was needed, nor did they receive any information upon their return.
- A few returnee migrant respondents said that the local police station (thana) came to verify their information. But they could not say why.

2.2.5. Skill classification

The National Training and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF) is a comprehensive nationally consistent framework of competency-based skills standards that are certified by the Bangladesh Technical Education Board. The framework already has competency standards developed for over 50 occupations and counting. The NTVQF information management system has been established for registering students, trainers, and assessors under the NTVQF system.

- According to survey respondents from the Government, the NTVQF answers the needs of the current job market (both domestic and international), as it gives more flexibility and quality assurance functions to vocational and technical trainings, as well as reliability and consistency in recognition of workers' skills.
- However, some of the stakeholders surveyed think that these classifications are inadequate and there is no standard definitions of these skill indicators.

2.2.6. Job categorization, the job market, and standardization of data

- Most of the job categories under the BBS follow International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) standards. It is very important to be aligned with ISCO, as that might be useful for increasing the employability of migrant workers abroad. A worker's degree of employability will be better understood if standards are comparable across countries. It would be easier for foreign recruiters and employers to understand whom to hire, especially since Bangladesh will soon be developing a database of potential migrants from which hiring will be done. On the same note, as a country of origin, Bangladesh will also gain a better understanding of the required standards for overseas employment. This, in turn, can aid in identifying gaps in training and lead to an improved understanding of the reality of work overseas.
- Some stakeholders replied that Bangladesh should have their own standard. In reality, the BBS does currently have such a standard – BISCO. However, the BBS is thinking of gradually and completely shifting towards ISCO. But since census data collection is currently based on BISCO parameters, the BBS will have to go slow in making the full transition to ISCO.

2.2.7. The role of labour attachés

Labour attachés are engaged to know about growing sectors and new opportunities that may exist in the country of their deployment. They are well informed about development plans and in touch with major companies that recruit overseas workers. They facilitate interaction between employers and recruiting agents. As a major task, they also deal with factory owners, authorities, and trade chambers for the purpose of exploring new market information.

- Labour attaché respondents stated that they get their labour market demand and supply information from both sending and recipient countries.
- They might also get labour market information on demand and supply from recruitment agencies when they submit demand letters for attestation from embassies.
- Attachés have connections with the TTCs whereby they collect information from overseas companies and recruiters and pass that information to TTCs.

2.2.8. Data sharing and accessibility

- Stakeholder respondents, including from government and private organizations, said they are willing to share their data in the form of periodic report sharing, key statistics sharing, and database integration with other data holders. But upon further probing by interviewers, government officials clarified that they want each data holder to continue holding onto their database systems as it is now, and rather than developing a single, unified database system, they only advocate that a merging or bridging platform be made for all to access the data via a single platform or portal. This means the development inter-operable application (IOA) collecting all data on a single platform from different database systems upon any query.
- According to these respondents, it is better to share macro data and generated reports among the private sector, trade bodies/associations, government, civil society/research organizations, and foreign donors. If necessary and only upon application, micro data can also be released for research and policy formulation purposes.
- A few organizations surveyed have very strict regulations with regard to sharing their data. They can only share their data after a certain period following the publishing of their report. In general, accessibility to data is currently not very easy for all organizations surveyed.

- Big data holders like the BBS and BMET offer limited macro data on their portal or website. Micro data remains unavailable to the general public and researchers who have not been provided approved access. Upon application, both agencies need to go through a lengthy process to make such data accessible to others.

2.2.9. Capacity to manage database systems

- BBS has quite an agile and equipped team, as well as adequate infrastructure to collect, manage, and analyse labour data. Its field staff are very well trained, and statisticians and analysts are working at the grassroots level as teams.
- In case of migrant workers, the Wage Earners' Welfare Board (WEWB) is responsible for data management along with the BMET. Currently, a group of 20 technical staff are working for BMET on database management under an outsourcing mechanism.
- Recently, it was proposed for the BMET to have a separate data centre. The existing variable set or data structure is in some cases too vast for the human resources at the BMET to handle.
- According to respondents, there is need for at least 45 information technology (IT) specialists and statisticians for more robust management of the database system at the BMET.

2.2.10. Updating databases

- The BBS database for the domestic labour market is generated from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), which is updated through quarterly surveys and presented through snapshots/info-graphics. A detailed report with analysis of the labour force is published annually.
- The BMET regularly inputs new information on an “as and when” basis, but they do not upgrade this information in the public domain, as their database is too vast.
- The Ministry of Shipping has some updated data on workers who go abroad as a shipping staff, masters, sailors, and other skilled or semi-skilled seafaring workers.
- TTCs regularly collect and update their data on students who come for training.
- Youth Development Centres also collect primary data on youths who come for training and update them regularly for the purpose of quality judgment, training selection, development, and certification.

3. Conclusions from the survey and recommendations

3.1. Summary of conclusions from the survey

- MWMIS/LMIS system integration will create a critical link to policy instruments by feeding accurate, essential information for better predictive management and rights-based governance:
 - It will improve the information flow on labour migration by Bangladeshi workers and on the labour market in Bangladesh.
 - It will also inspire enterprise at the local level among people involved in the domestic labour force or in the migration process as potential, current, or returnee migrants.
 - It can reduce labour market rigidities tied to seasonal and structural unemployment.
- All data needs to be integrated with the national ID card data to have a proper database on migrants and returnees.
- The adaptation of migrant workers and the domestic labour force to the requirements of labour market demand can be improved through acquired information on needed professions, skills, and wages. The contents of existing databases in Bangladesh are well qualified and frequently updated.
- Regarding data sharing and accessibility, no legal framework has been installed by the Government. This will need to be addressed.
- Domestic market employers hardly use BBS data, but they might need it in the future more than they perceive now.
- The Government of Bangladesh can benefit a lot from an integrated database, as the data that would be contained therein would inform planning processes for achieving Sustainable Development Goals and for its five-year plans. This data can directly benefit the sectoral planning process.
- Government should manage and inject financial resources for updating and maintaining database systems.
- It is highly recommended that demand for labour both in the internal and overseas job markets be studied so that there will be proper distribution of labour supply in every sector, as per wages and required skill sets. Such a study should be carried out at regular intervals and monitored very carefully.
- The Bangladesh Government's skill classification indicators should be reviewed on a periodic basis. Professional demand is not being fulfilled through the current classification system.
- The linking of child labour data, post-retirement age data, and disability-related data to national databases is not getting adequate focus. With a growing, ageing population and increased standardization of workplaces, these data will be very important.
- Data related to workplace injuries and death suffered by migrant workers in foreign countries are not being adequately integrated into the BMET database. Data on disabled people and their rehabilitation should also be incorporated in this database.
- More trainers and assessors qualified for the NTVQF need to be further developed to make the system more efficient and to adequately recognize the skills developed by migrant workers while

overseas. Government-to-government initiatives are needed for this, in addition to current laudable initiatives by the BMET on recognition of prior learning.

- High quality and timely data will help CSOs to produce better analyses, but it needs to be acknowledged that CSOs also have capacity constraints in undertaking such research. CSOs are also often motivated by supply-driven factors (i.e., donors). The fact that CSOs have failed to develop an alternative, better quality database is an example of their constrained capacity – either human capital-related or finance-related.

3.2. Recommendations from survey respondents

There are many specific recommendations that came from different stakeholders, employers, returnees, and potential migrants, and which were later cross-checked with references and system/administrative documents:

- For capturing data on a database of potential migrants it is recommended to include multiple categories, such as job specification, name, contacts, passport number of individuals, driving license number, and desired profession. Such information can be captured through job portals for both the internal and international labour markets.
- The same information should be detailed in the Labour Force Survey of the BBS as well.
- Post-migration information for returnees, including any legal or medical data as well as skills qualifications, should be incorporated in both the BMET and BBS database systems.
- Data from online complaint mechanisms under the MEWOE and BMET should also be linked to the national ID database system.
- Labour attachés should work under approved guidelines set by the Government of Bangladesh in consultation with stakeholders to assess labour market demand in countries of destination and to pursue employers to recruit Bangladeshi workers.
- Bangladesh government skill classification indicators need to be monitored and improved upon, as the job market is very dynamic, and some high level/skilled cross-sectoral jobs may be falling out of the skill category net.
- There are several improvements that the BBS can do to its data collection process. For example, all subsets of the informal economy need to be covered to account for the hitherto undetected or unregistered enterprise of youths engaged in that informal economy. At present, many are reluctant to register their participating in the informal economy during surveys and censuses, partly due to a social mindset that associates value with high demand jobs like being a doctor, engineer, MBA, entry level jobs in the private sector, and so on. . Whereas if one were to consider opportunity cost, informal jobs like tutoring or part-time engagements are yielding much better monetary and creative returns for the persons involved.
- Regarding the integration of subsets of BMET and migration sector data, it is important to coordinate the efforts of the WEWB, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the BMET, including labour attachés. This is ultimately a simple matter of data input and monitoring at regular intervals.
- To improve Bangladeshi worker access to overseas job markets, the Government of Bangladesh should work toward securing the mutual or international recognition of Bangladesh NTVQF standards by governments/agencies in overseas markets.
- Training should be sector-specific, and it should be mandatory for all potential migrants.

- Real-time data should be integrated and updated with the LFS regarding the number of workers in the domestic labour market and their ages, wages, and employment. Domestic labour force data should also be integrated with overseas migration data related to short-term contract workers.
- Members of the Bangladeshi diaspora and non-resident Bangladeshis can help to explore overseas labour markets and can contribute to assessing the skills of Bangladesh's labour force. Through their input the country will have a third-party view on whether Bangladeshi workers have relevant skills for overseas jobs or are not procurable within a given timeframe.
- It is necessary to have tiered database access determined by balancing individual need and privacy concerns. Different levels of access can be designed, and national ID verification can grant users entry into certain access levels. This way, security and confidentiality of data for the Government and private citizens can be maintained.
- A best practice guide for maintaining operational transparency will have to be launched to maintain accountability, even within the Government.
- The Government of Bangladesh should increase the budget related to data. A minimum of 0.17 per cent of the total budget should be allocated for adequate management of database systems across the board.

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