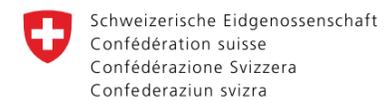


# The Mapping and Scoping of Services for The Migrant Workers of Bangladesh at Various Stages of Labour Migration Cycle



**Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC**



International  
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Scoping of Services for  
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Labour migration has emerged as an important source of foreign currency in Bangladesh and the Government of Bangladesh has taken several policy initiatives in mainstreaming migration as well as catering services according to the needs of the migrant workers in the country. Nonetheless, there is still a knowledge gap on the types of services available to the migrants during the entire process of migration cycle namely pre-departure, post-arrival and return.

The ILO and IOM with the support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) commenced a study on "Mapping and scoping of services for the migrant workers of Bangladesh at various stages of labour migration cycle". The aim of the study was to assist the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE), Wage Earners' Welfare Board (WEWB) and relevant stakeholders to address the gap and identify scopes for further improvement in availing services to migrants from a gender-sensitive approach. The study highlights the major trends in labour migration, the institutional structure that governs labour migration from Bangladesh, identifies key service providers, gaps and challenges along with key recommendations.

The ILO and IOM would like to thank the team of Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) including the co-authors Dr Syeda Rozana Rashid and Dr ASM Ali Ashraf who jointly carried out the research. The ILO and IOM are grateful to the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE), Wage Earners' Welfare Board (WEWB), the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) for their unconditional support during the implementation of the project. Furthermore, IOM and ILO would like to thank the SDC for their financial and technical support to commence the study. The last but not the least, appreciation goes to the joint efforts of the staff of ILO and IOM for their excellent collaboration in bringing up this final publication.

At the end, we believe, the report will be useful for all the relevant stakeholders in prioritizing and planning their interventions and would like to express our sincere commitment to work closely with all related stakeholders to ensure migration benefits all.



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# ABBREVIATIONS

BAIRA	Bangladesh Association of international Recruiting Agencies
BGB	Border Guard Bangladesh
BMET	Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training
BOESL	Bangladesh Overseas Employment Services Limited
BOMSA	Bangladesh Ovhibashi Mohila Sramik Association
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CBO	Community-based Organization
CoD	Country of Destination
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAM	Dhaka Ahsania Mission
DEMO	District Employment and Manpower Office
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
G2G	Government-to-Government
GAMCA	Gulf Approved Medical Centres Association
IDI	In-depth Interview
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IMPD	Impact of Migration on Poverty and Development
KII	Key Informant Interview
MJF	Manusher Jonno Foundation
MoCAT	Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism
MoEWOE	Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment
MRPC	Migrants Rights Protection Committee
nda	no date available (for bibliographic reference material)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OKUP	Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Programme
PKB	Probashi Kallyan Bank
PRA	Private Recruitment Agency
RMMRU	Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
TTC	Technical Training Centre
UDC	Union Digital Centre
WARBE DF	Welfare Association for the Rights of Bangladeshi Emigrants Development Foundation
WEWB	Wage Earners' Welfare Board
WEWF	Wage Earners' Welfare Fund



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IOM, in partnership with ILO and with funding support from SDC, is working on an initiative to map the services for migrant workers. IOM has commissioned RMMRU to conduct a “Study on the Mapping and Scoping of Services for the Migrant Workers of Bangladesh at Various Stages of Labour Migration Cycle”. The study aims at understanding the extent to which existing migration-related institutions and agencies have adopted a citizen-centric and gender-sensitive approach to addressing the needs of both men and women leaving the country for overseas employment. This paper presents the findings of the mapping and scoping study. It is divided into seven chapters. The central findings of each chapter are presented below.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the context, research questions and methodology.

### Context

Bangladeshi citizens have pursued international employment for more than four decades. The Government of Bangladesh has set up a yearly target of sending 1 million Bangladeshis abroad, including men and women workers, to the international job market (BMET interview, 2017). Over the past decade, an average of 600,000 Bangladeshis have pursued short-term labour migration each year. After a brief fluctuation from 2009 to 2013, the outmigration trend has registered a steady rise, with the annual target of 1 million outmigration fulfilled in 2017 (BMET, 2018). Bangladeshi women are also increasingly participating in the international labour market, with women migration representing 12 per cent of the total migration flow from the country in 2017 (BMET, 2018). Although labour migration has emerged as a major source of foreign currency, there is a knowledge gap in the existing literature on the types of available services, the challenges to their delivery, and scopes for further improvement. Service delivery to labour migrants is related to labour and human rights and State obligation to protect them. Hence, MoEWOE included this initiative in the ILO project with a perspective to improve services for outbound migrant workers in Bangladesh and countries of destinations (CoDs).

## Central research questions

This study asks four central questions:

- What is the current labour migration governance structure and who are the major providers of migration services?
- What are the various types of services at different stages of labour migration from Bangladesh?
- What are the challenges and gaps in current service provision in the context of labour migration management in Bangladesh?
- Which measures can be taken by government agencies and other stakeholders to improve the labour migration services, especially for returnee reintegration?

## Methodology

In addressing these research questions, the study relied on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were generated from a survey, key informant interviews (KIIs), in-depth interviews (IDIs), focus group discussions (FGDs) and non-participant observation. To triangulate data collected through other methods, a survey was conducted on 200 returnee migrant households in four migration-intensive districts: Tangail, Cumilla, Chattogram and Gazipur.<sup>1</sup> The respondents were chosen from households surveyed under RMMRU's Impact of Migration on Poverty and Development (IMPD) project, which followed a rigorous and systematic selection process (Annex 1). Twenty-five per cent of the survey participants were women migrant households. The researchers conducted 15 KIIs, 8 IDIs and 2 FGDs using unstructured interview protocol. The KII participants included government officials, private recruitment agencies and members of civil society organizations (CSOs). The IDIs and FGDs were conducted to validate the KII and survey findings.<sup>2</sup> While the survey districts were chosen using a purposive sampling criterion, the inclusion of one district to focus solely on women migrants and the use of random sampling for household selection have allowed the study to ensure representation of both women and men from rural and urban areas seeking international labour migration. The inclusion of various stakeholders in KIIs, IDIs and FGDs also allowed the study to ensure representative views. Secondary data came from published materials including official reports, books, journals and evidence-based studies. As key informants and participating organizations shared internal reports and databases covering topics raised in interviews, access to secondary data also gradually increased.

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<sup>1</sup> The surveys primarily targeted returnee migrants with at least one year of overseas employment experience. When returnee migrants were not available or had remigrated, their senior family members of household heads were surveyed.

<sup>2</sup> The survey questionnaire was used to conduct the IDIs and FGDs.

## CHAPTER 2: MIGRATION TRENDS AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

This chapter discusses the major trends in labour migration and the institutional structure that governs labour migration from Bangladesh.

### Major trends

Since 1976, there has been a steady growth in international labour migration from Bangladesh. During the first decade (1976–1985), an average of 41,000 Bangladeshis pursued international labour migration annually. This figure jumped to a yearly average of 137,000 during the second decade (1986–1995), to 240,000 in the third decade (1996–2005), and 552,000 during the fourth decade (2006–2015). In 2008, a record number of 875,055 Bangladeshis went abroad for work purposes. After a brief period of fluctuation from 2009 to 2013, the pattern has consistently increased again starting in 2014, reaching the highest annual rate of 1,008,525 in 2017 (BMET, 2018). The global economic recession, political turbulence in the Middle East, and embargoes by several CoDs on the recruitment of Bangladeshi migrants appeared to have a negative effect on the outflow of labour migration from Bangladesh between 2009 and 2013 (Al-Mahmood, 2011; Jandaly, 2012; Koser, 2009:18; MEI, 2010; Skeldon, 2010; The Daily Star, 2015; Toumi, 2018). The embargoes were aimed at preventing irregular migration and promoting business and employment opportunities for the nationals of CoDs. As the global economic conditions improved and the Government of Bangladesh negotiated a series of agreements with CoDs, the trend in outmigration continued to improve.

The Middle East and South-East Asia are the major destinations of Bangladeshi migrant workers. The top five destination countries are Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Malaysia and Singapore (BMET, 2017b). The first three represent 62 per cent while the latter two account for 14 per cent of all outmigration flows from Bangladesh (BMET, 2018).

### Migration governance

MoEWOE is the lead ministry for labour migration from Bangladesh. The Ministry operates with its major executive arms including BMET, the Bangladesh Overseas Employment and Services Limited (BOESL) and WEWB. BMET regulates the private recruitment agencies and acts as the principal executive agency for processing labour migration from Bangladesh. BOESL offers recruitment services, and WEWB provides support for migrants and their families. The Government has established Probashi Kallyan Bank (PKB) to provide loans and other financial services to migrants as well as returnees. The Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013 provides a legal basis for the operations of various migration-related agencies.

### Mapping service providers

Three broad categories of migration service providers are identified in this study: State, private sector and CSOs. The first represents the government ministries and institutions, the second formal and informal business entities, and the third citizens' and community-based initiatives.

- State providers include MoEWOE, and under its authority BMET, BOESL and WEWB. They channel their services through the District Employment and Manpower Offices (DEMOs) and the technical training centres (TTCs). In several districts, DEMOs opened Migration Resource Centres to promote information about safe migration. The Migration Resource Centres are supported by IOM and UN Women (IOM interview, 2018). There has been a growth in the types of services provided by BMET, TTCs, DEMO and labour attachés. For instance, in the past, the provision of online registration and emigration clearances were only available at BMET's head office and at Dhaka DEMO. As part of the Government's efforts towards decentralization and digitization of migration services, among the 46 DEMOs in the country, 42 provide online registration services and 29 provide both online registration and fingerprint services. After the Dhaka DEMO, Chattogram DEMO became the second public office to introduce issuing emigration clearances and smart cards. In addition to these services, the Government also provides services related to information on safe migration, pre-departure orientation, skills development, reintegration loans and consular support. These are discussed in more detail later in the report.
- Private sector providers comprise licensed private recruitment agencies (PRAs), dalals (also referred to as informal agents, subagents and intermediaries) and migrant recruiters. PRAs are authorized to recruit Bangladeshis for overseas employment, whereas dalals work as a bridge between potential migrants and urban area-based PRAs. Migrant recruiters collect visas from CoDs and sell them to aspirant migrants, who complete formalities for labour migration through licensed PRAs. More than 50 per cent of licensed PRAs survive by processing visas secured by the aspirant migrants from migrant recruiters or dalals and their social network. All of these recruiters – PRAs, dalals and migrant recruiters – play an important role in recruiting and facilitating migration. Migration information is mostly disseminated by informal intermediaries, friends, families and migrant recruiters. Recruitment agencies, with the help of subagents, offer employment opportunities and migration-related services to facilitate visa, passport and work permit. They also provide training and make travel arrangements for the migrants.
- CSOs offer a range of services, such as awareness-raising campaigns for safe migration, referral, legal services and small-scale reintegration. The participation of CSOs in migration services delivery appears to be constrained by their limited resources and space. Consequently, fewer non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and CSOs operate in the migration sector, catering to the needs of more than a million expatriates.

## CHAPTER 3: PRE-DEPARTURE SERVICES

This chapter presents an analysis of the major pre-departure services and the challenges to their delivery.

### Existing services

At the pre-departure stage, aspirant migrants receive information about work opportunities abroad. Migration processing involves services such as obtaining passports, visas, work permits and travel documents, as well as skills training and pre-departure briefings and orientations.

### Challenges and gaps

A major gap exists in terms of the Government of Bangladesh's pre-departure services to migrants. Migrants depend more on informal agents than the formal recruiters and State institutions due to their lack of awareness, trust and proximity with the former. This means most aspirant migrants, both men and women, are unaware of the safe migration practices and tend to rely on their friends, families and local intermediaries than the PRAs and government service providers, such as DEMOs and TTCs. Currently, there is no credible source of labour market information system. Existing sources of information are largely dominated by migrants' families and social networks, as well as informal intermediaries. The current source of information is not gender-responsive.

## CHAPTER 4: POST-ARRIVAL SERVICES

This chapter discusses services for migrants at countries of destination.

### Existing services

At the post-arrival stage, migrants avail themselves of consular, legal, medical and remittance transfer services. These services vary across CoDs, gender, status of migration and nature of employment. Due to a relatively larger presence of labour attachés, the Bangladeshi consulates in Saudi Arabia can bring a significant part of migrants into their service delivery network. Yet there are two challenges: first, the number of labour attachés and workers is not proportionate; and second, because of a restrictive employment environment, women domestic workers in the Middle Eastern countries have challenges in accessing those services. Among the CoDs, the Governments of Jordan and Kuwait provide better monitoring services to comply with migrant workers' rights. However, in CoDs, irregular migrants hardly receive any formal institutional support from the Bangladeshi missions or the host governments. For detained migrants and deportees, post-migration services also include support for safe return and legal aid.

### Challenges and gaps

Both the Government of Bangladesh and migrants identified the need for quantitative and qualitative improvement of gender-responsive services provided by the labour attachés. The Government of Bangladesh is yet to develop any emergency fund (apart from Wage Earners' Welfare Fund (WEWF) created by the compulsory subscription of outgoing migrants) or policy for repatriation of stranded, deported or detained workers abroad.

## CHAPTER 5: RETURN AND REINTEGRATION SERVICES

This chapter discusses both existing and potential services for migrants upon return to Bangladesh. It also identifies the challenges to delivering existing services.

### Existing services

At the post-return stage, there can be a range of services targeting the reintegration and remigration of returnees. The list would include bank loans for reintegration and rehabilitation, skills recognition for employment in the domestic labour market, and supports for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It would also include psychosocial support for migrants who experienced exploitation abroad.

### Challenges and gaps

Compared with the pre-departure and post-arrival stages, where migrants receive a wide range of services, there is a lack of formal support services available for migrants seeking to reintegrate to society or to further pursue an international career. There is limited mechanism to assess the skills of the returnees and to match them with local or foreign demands. The only State-run and migration-focused financial institution, PKB, has a small-scale loan service for the migrants to start their own ventures after return. In most cases upon return from foreign countries, they face economic crisis. Most of the study participants reported that they were unaware of the provision of reintegration bank loans from PKB.

## CHAPTER 6: WELFARE SERVICES FOR MIGRANTS

This chapter provides an analysis of welfare services for migrants at various stages of migration.

### Existing services

At various stages, migrants and their families receive several forms of welfare support. These include scholarships for migrants' dependents; financial support for deceased workers; administrative support for the repatriation of deceased workers' bodies; referral services from CSOs to find justice for the misappropriation of money, fraud and torture; and shelter centre services for the victims of abuse.

### Challenges and gaps

Existing welfare services concentrate on financial support for the returnee, burial and compensation of deceased migrant workers, and educational stipends for the children of migrants. In all of these cases, WEWB redistributes funds generated from migrants' compulsory financial contributions. Migrants and their families often report longer processing time for accessing some of the services, such as repatriation of deceased workers' bodies and limited scholarship opportunities or health-care supports. As stated before, there is a gap in addressing the psychosocial needs of both men and women migrant workers, especially those who experienced exploitation in CODs.

## CHAPTER 7: SCOPE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING MIGRATION SERVICES

This study finds that, while the quality and quantity of services have improved significantly in recent years, many people are yet to access a wide variety of services, either because of their lack of knowledge or due to geographical distance from the service providers. People use traditional kinship and community networks for financial services more than the formal services available. Against this backdrop, this chapter proposes policy recommendations for improved delivery of services at various migration stages.

Some of the policy imperatives listed here are closely aligned with the Colombo Process Joint Recommendations for the Global Compact for Migration (Colombo Process, 2017). The Colombo Process covers the following thematic areas: skills and qualification recognition process, fostering ethical recruitment, effective pre-departure orientation and empowerment, remittances and labour market analysis. Four additional thematic areas, as mentioned in the Colombo Process Ministerial Declaration 2016, are: migrant health, operationalizing migration-related elements of the Sustainable Development Goals, promotion of equality of women migrant workers, and consular support for migrant workers.

### a) Pre-departure stage

#### Focus on informed decision-making

Aspirant migrants depend largely on relatives and informal intermediaries, who not only take advantage of lack of awareness and publicly available information, but also manipulate the aspirants. To address this problem, the following steps can be taken:

- Expand information campaigns for safe, orderly and regular migration at the union council levels in rural areas and ward levels at the urban city council areas. Encourage the use of technology to expand the outreach campaigns.
- Ensure the availability of information regarding the regular migration process and migration services in both digital and print formats and include such information in primary-level national curricula.
- Ensure effective inter-agency collaboration between BMET, BOESL, PKB and WEWB at the central level and between DEMOs and TTCs at the district levels, to ensure that migrants, both men and women, are making an informed choice.
- Empower aspirant men and women migrant workers and their families through comprehensive orientations to ensure that migrants make informed decisions to maximize the benefits of safe, decent and regular labour migration, reduce their vulnerability in countries of destination, and facilitate their workplace and social integration.
- Promote tailored pre-employment and pre-departure orientation programmes as a means of ensuring that migrant workers understand their rights and obligations, grievance and recourse mechanisms, including with respect to local rules and regulations, and essential information, especially on health and safety, and potential risks they may face.

- Acknowledge the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women migrant workers in pre-departure orientation programmes and ensure the delivery of gender-responsive orientation service.
- Recognize the important role of civil society organizations and other social partners in disseminating safe migration information and ensuring migrant workers' and their families' access to necessary services.

### **Reduce the cost of migration and fraudulent practices and strengthen the complaints system**

Informal intermediaries and migrants' social networks now procure more than 50 per cent of the visas and other migration services, including passport and smart card collection, online registration and medical check-ups. Yet they remain largely out of the legal coverage of the Migrants Act 2013, and Government of Bangladesh regulation. As a result, cost of migration, mainly the recruitment fees, is very high in Bangladesh and aspirant migrants are often exposed to fraud, deception about employment terms and working conditions, and unethical practices, factors widely cited to contribute to forced labour and human trafficking. Moreover, women migrants at greater risk of falling victim to coercive recruitment practices are more likely to be exposed to physical abuse and sexual violence during the recruitment process, sexual service for debt repayment and physical confinement. Lack of labour market information and the types of skills required in the CoDs also acts as a barrier to safe migration. Several initiatives can be taken to address these problems:

- Take steps to reduce the cost of migration and fraudulent practices. Ensure such steps complement existing legal and practical measures.
- Promote the “employer-pay model” through defining recruitment fees and related costs.
- Ensure that all documents and contracts are translated into the local language of aspirant migrant workers.
- Create a mechanism for formalizing dalals (informal intermediaries) as responsible stakeholders. MoEWOE needs to consider legal and policy reforms to bring dalals and their services within a legal framework. This can be done through training, sensitization and incentive programmes, with a broader goal of preventing irregular migration. MoEWOE should encourage collaboration between various State agencies and grass-roots-level CSOs to reduce fraudulent recruitment practices.
- Ensure capacity-building of all relevant stakeholders, including licensed private recruitment agencies and employers, in Bangladesh and CoDs, respectively, to promote ethical recruitment at all stages of the migration cycle.
- Ensure the monitoring of fraudulent practices by local government offices. Large and small CSOs should network with each other for peer learning and expanding the types and geographical coverage of migration services, so that dependence on informal sources is reduced.
- Develop a code of conduct for PRAs and informal agents to ensure their responsibilities in promoting ethical recruitment and decent work.
- Conduct training in migration laws, policies and code of conduct for the PRAs and informal agents as well as for journalists, lawyers and judges.

- Develop an interactive labour market information system and a migrant worker information and management system, with detailed information about the job demands in countries of destination, skills categories and available aspirant migrants in Bangladesh.
- Adopt policies and practices for skills matching of migrant workers to expand safe migration and decent work opportunities for both men and women migrant workers.
- Strengthen the complaint system to address irregularities in the recruitment system. The complaint system can be decentralized and easily accessible to migrants and their families. There is a lack of data on the current online complaint management system. This needs to be monitored on a regular basis to examine the extent to which complaints lodged by male and female victims of fraud are addressed in a timely and gender-friendly manner.

### **Promote citizen-centric and gender-sensitive service processing**

Digitization and decentralization efforts by BMET should continue to target simplification of services so that citizens, including aspirant women migrants, can process their documents at reduced time, cost and number of visits. The following actions can be taken to achieve that goal:

- Extend the digital services delivery system to all the DEMOs so that they can provide online registration and fingerprint service and distribute smart card and emigration clearances. TTCs should also develop Web-based applications and expand e-learning opportunities for aspirant migrants.
- Provide more resources and develop capacity-building of DEMOs and TTCs for better services delivery and skills enhancement of all aspirant migrants, irrespective of their gender, race or religious backgrounds.
- Promote collaboration between Union Digital Centres (UDCs) and DEMOs so that aspirants can avoid travelling to district headquarters to avail essential migration services.

## **b) Post-arrival stage**

### **Protect rights and promote welfare in countries of destination**

Participants in this study reported inadequate services in the post-arrival stage to cater to the needs of migrants. Existing gaps and challenges can be addressed by adopting several actions:

- Develop a mechanism for delivering post-arrival orientation covering migrant workers' rights and obligations, grievance and recourse mechanisms. Ensure that, upon arrival in CoDs, migrant workers are well aware of the local rules and regulations, health and safety measures, and potential risks and vulnerabilities.
- Establish sufficient numbers of Labour and Welfare Wings at Bangladeshi missions in all CoDs, as per article 24 (1), (2) of the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013. Ensure that the proposed Wing at each mission conducts a needs assessment of and develops an intervention strategy for social protection of migrants, with special emphasis on both women migrants and migrants in conditions of distress.

- Develop national and regional guidelines to strengthen consular capacity to assist migrants in the context of crises to protect migrants in countries experiencing conflict or natural disasters.
- Ensure that the Labour and Welfare Wing's assessment of services in CoDs covers a wide array of support offered at the ports of entry, and other services related to consular, legal, medical and remittances transfer.
- Conduct periodic monitoring of work environments in CoDs.
- Expand the number of Labour and Welfare Wings in Bangladeshi missions. Strengthen existing Labour and Welfare Wings with more human resources, continuous in-service training and performance-based incentives.
- Encourage international agencies and development partners to support Bangladeshi missions to offer legal services to the detained, deported, and distressed migrants.

### **Promote efficient flow and effective utilization of remittances**

This study identified two challenges with regard to remittances: higher transaction costs and household consumption. This means that, due to higher costs, migrant workers often choose to transfer remittances through informal system, such as Hundi and cash carriers. At home, migrants' families spend most of the remittances for household consumption and less on investment in productive enterprises. In addressing these challenges, the Colombo Process Member States agree on the following two policy imperatives, which are also relevant for Bangladesh:

- Encourage migrant workers to access formal mechanisms for remittances, including through the use of new technologies such as mobile phone applications. Promote low-cost, compliant and faster remittance transfer systems.
- Promote financial literacy programmes for migrants and their families so that they can make informed choices about the use of remittances for household consumption and investment in productive sectors.

### **Ensuring migrants' access to health-care**

Migrant workers' health-care needs are often ignored by employers in CoDs. Often, the migrant communities offer voluntary support to address vulnerabilities experienced by migrants. Participants in the study strongly feel, and the Colombo Process Member States recommends, the need for prioritizing health-care access for migrants. Two policy recommendations are proposed in this respect:

- Ensure migrants' access to health-care services in both Bangladesh and CoDs.
- Address and remove situations, conditions and elements of vulnerability experienced by migrants in accessing health-care.

## **Support migrants in managing risks and vulnerabilities**

Migrants can be supported in managing risks and vulnerabilities in the following ways:

- Build partnerships with CoDs to strengthen support for migrant workers including providing access to complaint mechanisms. Continue to work with CoDs to expand the operational space of CSOs and recruitment agencies.
- Provide training for institutions responsible for delivering protection and assistance to migrants in the context of crises.
- Promote tailored post-arrival orientation as a means of ensuring that migrant workers understand their rights and obligations; grievance and recourse mechanisms, including with respect to local rules and regulations; essential information, especially on health and safety; and potential risks they may face.
- Ensure migrant workers' access to information on social security provisions and entitlements through post-arrival orientation.
- Support evidence-based and action research by academics and CSOs to propose how migrants can reduce and manage risks and vulnerabilities.
- Introduce formal mechanisms for PRAs' access to migrants' workplaces to monitor compliance with decent work conditions.
- Encourage CoDs to establish more shelter centres modelled on Kuwait's 500-seat shelter home with women attendants and doctors.

### **c) Return and reintegration stage**

#### **Ensure safe return of migrants in various conditions**

Currently, there are no well-structured return and reintegration services for Bangladeshi migrant workers. In line with the existing migration laws and policies, the Government of Bangladesh should:

- Ensure that, upon completion of a contract period, migrant workers have the opportunity for safe and voluntary return at the expense of employers.
- Develop special funds to facilitate the emergency returns of migrants who are stranded, deported, or experiencing physical and psychological distress. Respond to the needs of migrants willing to return under unusual circumstances such as deportation, occupational safety and hazards, and conflicts in CoDs.
- Strengthen counselling support and legal advice to migrant workers and empower consular personnel to provide effective services.
- Promote skills recognition and certification prior to migrants' return to country of origin.

## **Develop a returnee reintegration strategy**

Although the rehabilitation and reintegration of migrants are briefly mentioned in existing migration laws and policies of Bangladesh, there is no reintegration strategy with clearly defined roles for various ministries and agencies. Hence, the Government of Bangladesh should:

- Develop a comprehensive strategy for returnee reintegration with clearly defined roles for various agencies. One component of the returnee reintegration strategy should deal with the needs of stranded, deported and detained migrants. Other components should focus on remigration and reintegration loans, recognition of prior learning of skills, skills training for returnees, health-care and psychosocial services and referral services.
- Promote policies, processes and tools to assess and certify prior learning of returning migrant workers and facilitate their reintegration into the national labour market. Ensure that returnees can also use recognition of prior learning of skills while remigrating to the same or a new CoD.
- Ensure greater use of information communication technology, including mobile applications, to register returnee migrants, their skills and career choices. DEMOs, TTCs and UDCs should be authorized to offer registration and documentation of returnees. WEWB should expedite the delivery of financial support for migrants with physical injuries and arrange counselling services for psychologically distressed returnees.
- Encourage private business firms to allocate a portion of their job opportunities for returnee migrants. The Government of Bangladesh – in collaboration with the private sector, CSOs and development partners – can support media advertisement and sensitization campaigns for employers on returning migrants.
- Encourage banks and other financial institutions to allocate financial grants and loans to start small enterprises by returnees, as well as financial counselling/literacy.
- Strengthen partnerships between CSOs and TTCs for recognition of skills, access to information and referral services for job placement of returnees at home and abroad. They should continue to offer health-care and psychosocial services.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter has several sections, beginning with a background of the study, followed by the central research questions, rationale and methodology. Next, it describes a profile of the study participants, conceptual framework for the study and the organization of this report.



## 1.1 Background of the study

Since the 1970s, Bangladesh has emerged as a major source country for international labour migration. In the last decade (2008–2017), with a yearly outflow of approximately 600,000 migrant workers and roughly USD 12.5 billion in remittance inflow, labour migration emerged as a major source of foreign currency for Bangladesh (BMET, 2018; ILO, 2014a). A mapping and scoping of migration services is required to understand the extent to which existing migration-related institutions and agencies have adopted a citizen-centric and gender-sensitive approach in addressing the needs of both men and women leaving the country for overseas employment. Against this backdrop, RMMRU has conducted an evidence-based study on the state of services targeting international labour migrants of Bangladeshi origin.

Existing studies reveal the evolving nature of the migration regime in Bangladesh to cater to the needs of a growing migrant community (NHRCB, 2014; Rashid and Ashraf, 2015; ILO, 2014a, 2014c). The creation of MoEWOE, the introduction of the anti-trafficking and migration laws and the formulation of migration policies are useful evidence of the emerging institutional and legal structures. Under the authority of MoEWOE, BMET, BOESL, WEWB and PKB act as central actors to channel their services to migrants. BMET is the lead agency for processing and administering migration and BOESL offers a small-scale recruitment service. WEWB looks after the issues of welfare services for migrants and their families, and PKB mainly offers migration loans. Under BMET, DEMOs are responsible for providing a wide range of services to both aspirant and returnee migrants and their families. The TTCs also provide useful services catering to the needs of skills training of aspirants (MoEWOE, 2016a; WEWB, 2016, 2017). While most studies tend to adopt an administrative approach to describe the prevailing laws, policies and State agencies in the migration sector (Ali, 2011; Rashid and Watson, 2017; RMMRU, 2017b), there is little comprehensive study on labour migration from an approach of services available for migrant workers. This study will fill this knowledge gap by generating useful insights from a wide range of stakeholders.

## 1.2 Central research questions

There are four central questions of this mapping and scoping study:

- What does the current labour migration governance structure look like and who are the major providers of migration services?
- What are the various types of services at different stages of labour migration from Bangladesh?
- What are the challenges and gaps in current service provisions in the context of labour migration management in Bangladesh?
- Which measures can be taken by the government agencies and other stakeholders to improve the labour migration services, especially for returnee reintegration?

### 1.3 Rationale for the study

While migration is considered by the Government of Bangladesh to be a thrust sector for development, few studies have been carried out to trace the services rendered to migrants by public, private or civil society actors at all stages of migration. Existing literature suggests that – with the exception of a few DEMOs experiencing challenges to decentralize their services, and the TTCs adopting E-learning tools – there is a lack of innovation in public services targeting migrants. It is therefore necessary to identify the gaps and challenges in services offered to migrants at various migration stages at home and abroad to scope out how these can be better delivered to accrue sustained benefit from migration.

Existing research has also found that aspirant migrants at the pre-departure stage receive disproportionately more services than those who return from overseas employment (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), 2015; Islam, 2010; Zaman, 2015). The limited support given to returnees mainly covers the Government's frugal financial compensation to the deceased, as well as State- and NGO-run scholarships for migrant workers' children at home, and limited assistance for the migrants in host countries. In addition, the need for developing a framework of services for migrants at various stages, especially targeting the reintegration of returnees, remains a neglected area in migration research in Bangladesh. This study addressed these research gaps by employing a methodology that combined the use of surveys, KIs, FGDs and intensive discussion with experts and stakeholders. The aims were to propose recommendations for a framework of services for different stakeholders that would not only ensure safe migration but also make migration a profitable venture for aspirants.

### 1.4 Methodology of the study

The study employed a mixed method strategy. Both qualitative and quantitative data were used for understanding the migrants' profiles and representative views in selected districts for mapping existing services for migrant workers. The researchers adopted an analytical approach that focused on gender sensitivity and social inclusion of the poor and excluded people. Both primary and secondary data were collected using five tools, as discussed below.

#### Literature review

An extensive literature review was conducted to map the existing services provided to migrants (Table 1.1). The review included books, journals, policy briefs, official reports, official statistics, research papers, strategy and position papers, national and ministerial plans, and national laws and policies.

**Table 1.1: Types of documents reviewed for the study**

Sl. No.	Type of document	Source of document
1	National and ministerial plans	Five-year plan
2	National and international publications	IOM, ILO, Global Forum on Migration and Development, Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, Colombo Process, etc.
3	Research documents	RMMRU, Welfare Association for the Rights of Bangladeshi Emigrants Development Foundation (WARBE DF), IOM, ILO, South Asian Network on Economic Modeling, Migrants Forum Asia
4	National legislation and policies	<p>Bangladesh</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012</li> <li>• Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013</li> <li>• Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Migration Policy 2016</li> <li>• Draft Wage Earners' Welfare Board Act 2017</li> <li>• Wage Earners' Welfare Fund Rules 2002</li> <li>• Recruiting Agent Code of Conduct and License Rules 2002</li> <li>• Emigration Rules 2002</li> <li>• Emigration Ordinance 1982</li> </ul> <p>Philippines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipino Act, 1995</li> <li>• Return and Reintegration to the Philippines, 2015 (Working Paper)</li> </ul> <p>Sri Lanka</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Labour Migration Policy, 2008</li> <li>• Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment Act, 1985</li> </ul>
5	Guidelines and notifications	<p>BMET</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advisory guidelines discouraging travelling to Saudi Arabia on "free visas"</li> <li>• Notification on job demands from various countries</li> <li>• Registration for Government-to-Government (G2G) Plu scheme for Malaysia</li> <li>• Country-specific guidelines on major destinations (Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates)</li> <li>• Notification on formation of Complaint Management Cell for Expatriate Women Workers</li> </ul>
6	Official statistics	BMET Statistics, RMMRU Surveys (SDC, RPC)

**Sources:** BMET Website; Calzado, 2007; MoEWOE, nda, 2016a, 2016b; WEWB, 2016, 2017; Planning Commission, 1990, 1997, 2011, 2015; ILO, 2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2017a, 2017b; IOM, 2005a, 2005b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d; Rashid and Watson, 2017; RMMRU, 2013; Sddiqui et al., 2016, 2017, 2018.

## Field survey

A survey was conducted with 200 respondents, evenly distributed in four migration-intensive districts: Chattogram, Cumilla, Gazipur and Tangail.<sup>3</sup> Only women migrants were surveyed in Gazipur district, and male migrants in three other districts (Table 1.2). By choosing 25 per cent of women as survey participants, the study wanted to ensure their voices and realities were well represented. The four districts were selected using a purposive sampling criteria of top migration-intensive districts listed by BMET. In each district, the survey sites covered 50 households from two local union councils. The respondents comprised returned migrants or family members of current migrants with return experience. The target migrant completed at least one year of overseas employment and was able to address the survey questions regarding services at various stages of the migration cycle. The respondents were chosen from households surveyed under the RMMRU IMPD project,<sup>4</sup> which followed a rigorous and systematic selection process (Annex 1).

**Table 1.2: Survey area and sample size**

Sl. No.	Field (district)	Sample size	Target households
1	Chattogram	50	Men migrants/returnee
2	Cumilla	50	Men migrants/returnee
3	Gazipur	50	Women migrants/returnee
4	Tangail	50	Men migrants/returnee

**Sources:** Field survey for IOM Study on the Mapping and Scoping of Services for the Migrant Workers of Bangladesh at Various Stages of Labour Migration Cycle.

## Key informant interviews

The researchers conducted 15 KIIs with officials from the Government of Bangladesh, NGOs and civil society, and international organizations. The KIIs were conducted in Dhaka. The key informants were asked about the services migrants received, gaps and challenges in service provisions, and their recommendations to improve the services and intervention.

## In-depth and group interviews

Of the total 200 men and women respondents, 8 were randomly chosen for in-depth and group interviews to better understand the perception and expectations of migrants about different services. From each survey district area, the researchers conducted two IDIs and group interviews. In addition, two FGDs were conducted in Cumilla and Tangail with returnees. The IDIs and FGDs aimed at understanding the dynamics of services at various stages of migration cycle.

<sup>3</sup> Three of the districts – Chattogram, Cumilla and Tangail – represent migration-intensive districts for Bangladeshi men. There are some geographical pockets of women migration from Bangladesh. These pockets do not correspond to the men-migration-intensive districts. This is why Gazipur was chosen to study women migrants.

<sup>4</sup> RMMRU launched the IMPD survey research in September/October 2013 with funding support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The IMPD project generates panel data across diverse low, medium and high migration-intensive districts of Bangladesh by surveying 5,000 internal and international, women and men, migrant and non-migrant households every three years. Two IMPD surveys were conducted in 2014 and 2017. The next rounds of surveys are scheduled for 2020 and 2023. The goal of the IMPD survey is to examine the impact of internal and international migration on the household and broader community.

## Survey with service receivers

With a view to triangulation of the information provided by service providers, 10 unstructured interviews were conducted among service receivers at the premises of BMET, Gulf Approved Medical Centres Association (GAMCA), TTC and WEWB.

## 1.5 Profile of survey respondents

### Socioeconomic status of migrants

The study adopted a four-fold typology to understand the socioeconomic status of migrants: extremely poor, poor, middle income and solvent households.<sup>5</sup> Extremely poor indicates households suffering from chronic deficit; poor refers to households suffering sudden deficit; middle income implies households having no deficit and no savings; and solvent includes households having some savings.<sup>6</sup> Findings reveal both within-district and between-district variations in socioeconomic status (Table 1.3). Among the four districts, the sample size of the extremely poor migrants is the smallest in Tangail (4.3%) and highest in Chattogram (15.1%). By contrast, the size of financially solvent migrants is more than double (25.5%) in Cumilla than in Gazipur (11.3%), and considerably larger than in the other two districts.

**Table 1.3: Survey participants' socioeconomic status, 2017**

Socioeconomic status of the households	Name of district				Total
	Gazipur	Tangail	Chattogram	Cumilla	
Extremely poor	5	2	8	4	19
	9.4%	4.3%	15.1%	8.5%	9.5%
Poor	21	7	11	7	46
	39.6%	14.9%	20.8%	14.9%	23.0%
Middle income	21	30	22	24	97
	39.6%	63.8%	41.5%	51.1%	48.5%
Solvent	6	8	12	12	38
	11.3%	17.0%	22.6%	25.5%	19.0%
Total	53	47	53	47	200
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Sources:** Field survey for IOM Study on the Mapping and Scoping of Services for the Migrant Workers of Bangladesh at Various Stages of Labour Migration Cycle.

<sup>5</sup> There are no comprehensive databases on the socioeconomic background of all outbound international migrations from Bangladesh. In the absence of such data, the extent to which the survey participants constitute a representative sample cannot be established.

<sup>6</sup> This typology was developed by RMMRU with extensive consultations with development experts and migration practitioners. The first three categories of households suffer from varying level of income deficits, while the fourth category has surplus income.

More than half of the migrants in Tangail and Cumilla have identified themselves to be in the middle income group. Gazipur is the only district where nearly 39.6 per cent of migrants reported their status to be poor. This is almost twice the size of migrants reporting similar status in Chattogram (20.8%) and nearly three times the size of migrants in the same category in Cumilla (14.9%) and Tangail (14.9%). This discrepancy is possibly caused by the sampling bias. Since survey participants in Gazipur District were women, who are usually employed as domestic workers in the Middle East, the findings on socioeconomic status may indicate that women, in poor status, choose to migrate as a strategy to escape chronic income deficit.

### Migrants' countries and territories of destination

As far as countries and territories of migration were concerned, 89.5 per cent of respondents are returnees from Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Libya, Bahrain and Yemen. More than 10 per cent of migrants returned from Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China and Maldives. This finding indicates that aspirant migrants have long used social networks of migrants in the Middle East to find careers in the international labour market.

**Table 1.4: Survey participants' countries and territories of destination**

Countries and territories of migration	Number of migrants	Proportion
Bahrain	7	3.5 %
Jordan	6	3.0 %
Kuwait	5	2.5 %
Lebanon	4	2.0 %
Libya	1	0.5 %
Malaysia	14	7.0 %
Maldives	1	0.5 %
Oman	26	13.0 %
Qatar	9	4.5 %
Saudi Arabia	77	38.5 %
Singapore	6	3.0 %
Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China	1	0.5 %
United Arab Emirates (the)	42	21.0 %
Yemen	1	0.5 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0 %</b>

**Sources:** Field survey for IOM Study on the Mapping and Scoping of Services for the Migrant Workers of Bangladesh at Various Stages of Labour Migration Cycle. Note: Data for this table indicate migrants' presence in countries of destination in various years.

### Duration of migration

The survey of 200 migrants suggests that the maximum year of stay was 27 years and the minimum was one year. On average, migrants stayed for 6.9 years in the countries of destination. None of the respondents claimed that their decision to return was related to their perception of access to services upon return. Most migrants returned after completion of their contract, whereas nearly 15 per cent of them, especially women, reported that they were compelled to return after experiencing abusive conditions at workplaces. Some also mentioned deportation, as they were caught by the Saudi Arabian law enforcement agencies for doing some businesses, such as mobile SIM trade, which were prohibited for foreigners.

### Post-return employment status

Upon completion of at least a one-year overseas employment tenure, the returnee migrants accepted various types of job opportunities in Bangladesh. These include driving, carpentry, garment work, and shop keeping, to name a few. More than 25 per cent of returnees were engaged in agriculture and 18 per cent in owning small businesses. The unemployment rate was quite high among both men and women returnee migrants: 29 per cent of men claimed to be unemployed, and 54 per cent of women reported they were either unemployed or chose to maintain housewife status. Only 3 per cent of returnees mentioned they were on leave from work and would remigrate. The surveys did not ask questions about the types of jobs held by the returnees prior to their departure, as such questions were deemed not relevant to mapping the services for migrants.

**Table 1.5: Survey participants' post-return employment status in Bangladesh**

Occupation	Number of migrants	Proportion
Driving (auto rickshaw, car)	9	4.5%
Business	36	18.0%
Carpenter	1	0.5%
Contractor	1	0.5%
Day labourer	3	1.5%
Domestic work	3	1.5%
Farmer	51	25.5%
Gardener	1	0.5%
Garments worker	2	1.0%
Laundry	1	0.5%
Mason	2	1.0%

Occupation	Number of migrants	Proportion
On leave	6	3.0%
Service	8	4.0%
Shopkeeper	5	2.5%
Unemployed men	44	22.0%
Unemployed (housewife)	27	13.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0 %</b>

**Sources:** Field survey for IOM Study on the Mapping and Scoping of Services for the Migrant Workers of Bangladesh at Various Stages of Labour Migration Cycle.

## 1.6 Conceptual framework

### Meaning and typology of services

Services, in this study, are broadly divided into three types: basic, essential non-basic and welfare.

Basic services include passport, visa, work permit and travel-related services, without which a person cannot migrate. These also include financial and consular services. These services are mostly provided by the Government and the businesses (both formal and informal) at the pre-departure and post-arrival stages, and are discussed in chapters 3 and 4 of this report.

Essential non-basic services include referral provision, information dissemination, and reintegration and investment supports at different cycles of migration. While some of the referral and information services are offered at both the pre-departure and post-arrival stages, the reintegration services primarily focus on psychosocial support, financial support and opportunities for employment at home. The essential non-basic services are discussed in chapter 5.

From a social protection approach,<sup>7</sup> the welfare services address the needs of both men and women migrant workers and their family members, and are discussed in chapter 6. There are protective, preventive, promotive and transformative functions of social protection – all of which are relevant to ensuring welfare of the migrants who are common victims of fraud, sudden discharge, deportation and unplanned return. Drawing on the ILO framework of social protection, Devereux and Sabates–Wheeler (2004:4) note that protective measures aim to “guarantee relief from deprivation”, preventive measures “seek to avert deprivation”, and promotional measures “aim to enhance real incomes and capabilities”. By contrast, a transformative agenda involves “changes to the regulatory framework” for the protection of vulnerable groups (ibid.:10). Subsequent chapters will briefly discuss on the extent to which the existing services for migrants correspond with their overall social protection needs at various stages of migration.

<sup>7</sup> Social protection refers to a set of formal and informal interventions, including policies and programmes, that aim to reduce social and economic vulnerability, risk, stress and deprivations for all people by promoting efficient labour markets, diminishing people's exposure to risks, and enhancing their capacity to protect themselves against hazards and interruption/loss of income (see Devereux and Sabates–Wheeler, 2004).

## Cycles of migration

The study presents the services at three stages of migration cycle:

- Pre-departure
- Post-arrival
- Return and reintegration

The pre-departure stage starts from the pre-decision point, where a person starts considering migration as a livelihood option and begins looking for information regarding migration (Akhter, 2014; ILO, 2014b; IOM, 2005a). After making a migration decision, aspirant migrants collect passports and visas; procure work permits, contracts, relevant documents and permissions; acquire job-specific training and orientation; and arrange travel to the country of destination.

The post-arrival stage begins with a migrant's arrival in the country of destination (Abrar et al., 2014). The whole period of his or her stay abroad, irrespective of status, is covered by this stage.

The return and reintegration stage starts with the return of the migrant to the country of origin (European Union, 2016; ILO, 2015c; Public Service International, 2015). A returnee's employment status is more or less determined within 5 to 10 years of his/her return. Under this stage, the study traces the services available for successful reintegration or remigration.

## 1.7 Organization of the Paper

The paper is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 2 analyses the major migration trends and the governance structure. The next three chapters present a mapping of migration services at pre-departure, post-arrival, and return and reintegration stages. Chapter 6 analyses welfare services at various stages. Chapter 7 discusses the scope for further improvement in existing services.



# CHAPTER 2

## MIGRATION TRENDS AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

This chapter has two sections. The first shows the major trends in international labour migration and the second discusses the domestic governance structure for labour migration from Bangladesh.



## 2.1 Migration trends

### Yearly trends

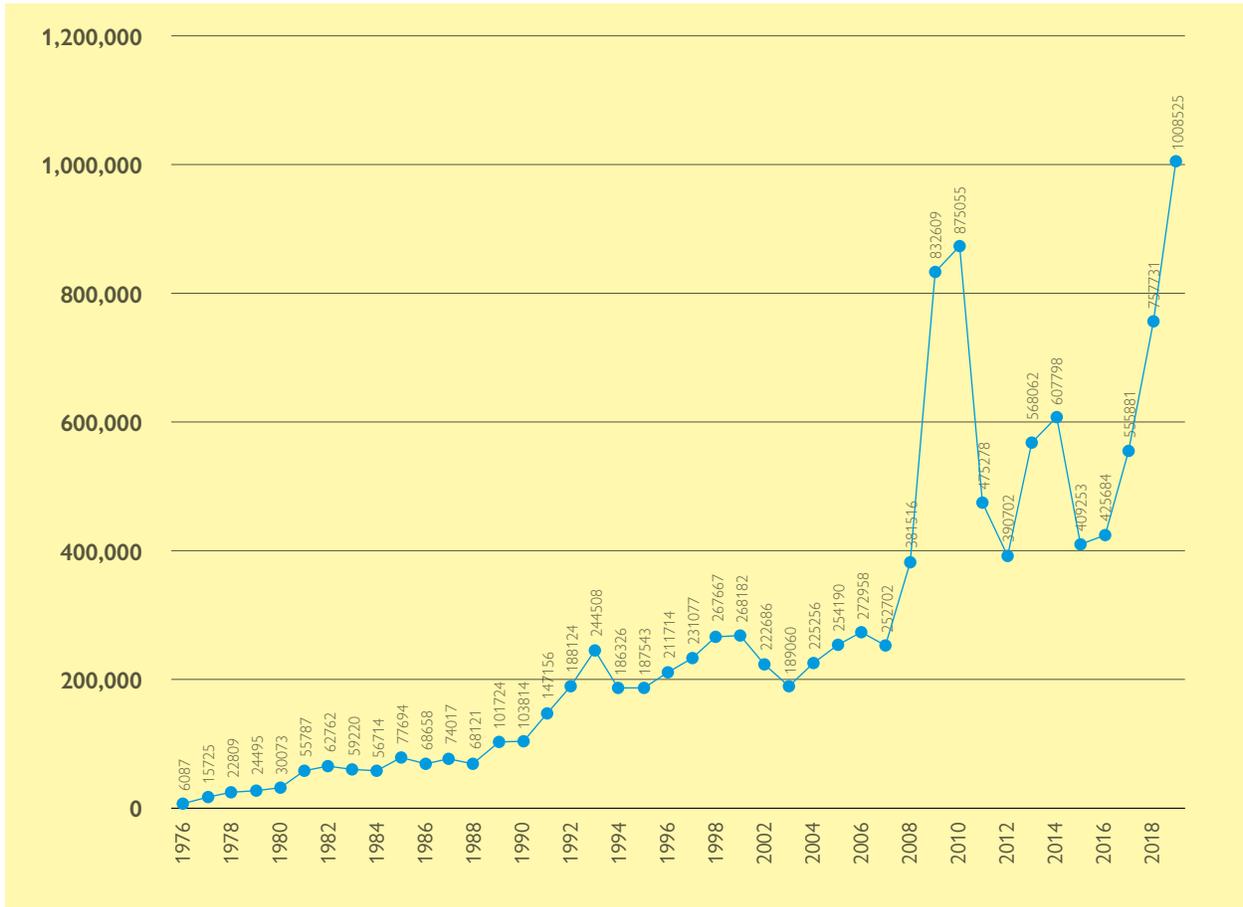
In 2017, the Government of Bangladesh planned to send 1 million migrant workers into the international labour market (BMET interview, 2017). This target was fulfilled as the number of migrants from Bangladesh stood at 1,008,525 in 2017 (BMET, 2018). This was hardly surprising. Since 1976, Bangladesh has seen a steady increase in the flow of overseas migration of its citizens.

A close look at Figure 2.1 shows that, during the first decade (1976—1985), an average of 41,000 Bangladeshis pursued international labour migration annually. This jumped to a yearly average of 137,000 during the second decade (1986—1995), 240,000 in the third decade (1996—2005), and 552,000 during the fourth decade (2006—2015). In 2008, a record number of 875,055 Bangladeshis went abroad for work purposes. This was the second highest annual migration data recorded by BMET. After a brief period of fluctuation in the next five years (2009—2013), labour migration from Bangladesh has consistently increased since 2014, reaching the highest annual rate of more than 1 million in 2017 (ibid.).

The fluctuations during 2009–2013 coincided with the global economic recession, political turmoil in the Middle East crisis, and embargoes by several CoDs on recruitment of Bangladeshi migrants (Al-Mahmood, 2011; Jandaly, 2012; Koser, 2009; MEI, 2010; Skeldon, 2009; The Daily Star, 2015; Toumi, 2018). This was evident in the oil-rich Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait, which were hard hit by the global economic meltdown and thus were unable to recruit as many workers as they did previously. In an effort to curb irregular migration and to promote employment and business opportunities for their own nationals, these three CoDs also imposed embargoes on the recruitment of Bangladeshi workers, which had a negative impact on overall labour migration from Bangladesh for quite some time.

The Government of Bangladesh has taken a number of steps, such as promotion of skills training, ethical recruitment, expansion of DEMO, TTC and labour attachés, and mapping the demands in international labour market to boost up outmigration. The Government of Bangladesh has also signed a series of memoranda of understanding and bilateral deals with CoDs. The net effect is seen in an increasing trend in outmigration from Bangladesh (Figure 2.1). Yet the future migratory trends of Bangladeshi people are likely to be affected by external economic shocks or restrictive immigration policies of CODs, as described before.

**Figure 2.1: Yearly trends in international labour migration from Bangladesh, 1976–2017**



Source: BMET, 2018.

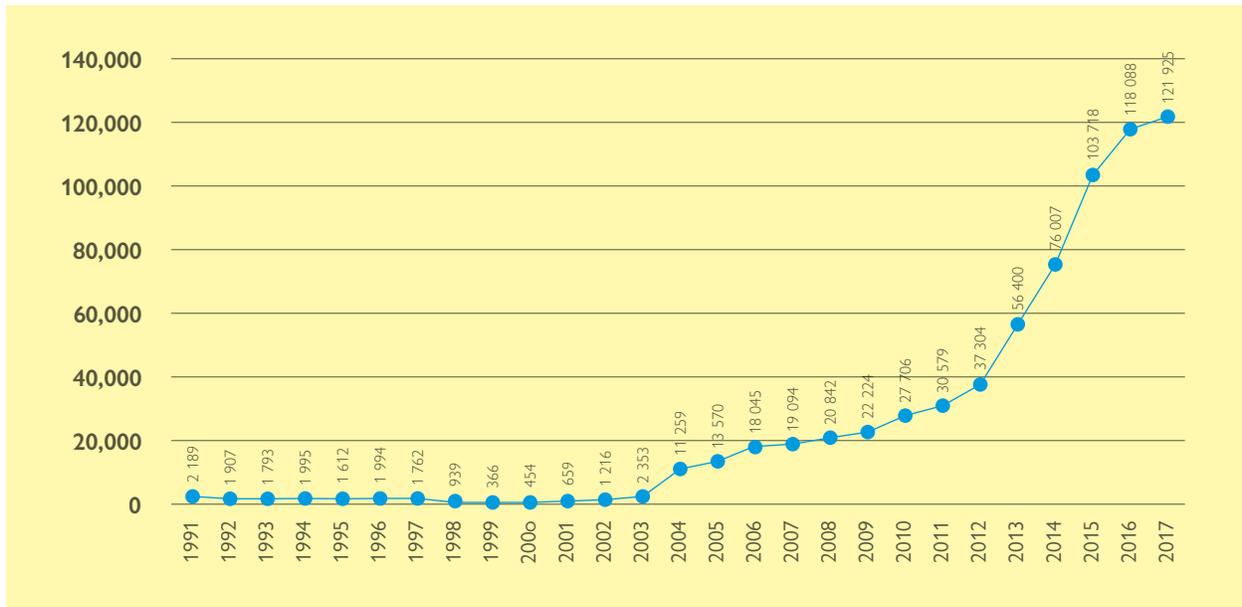
### Gender trends

Women’s participation in labour migration from Bangladesh remains low but has consistently increased since 2003 (Figure 2.2). During the first decade of female labour migration (1991—2000), an average of 1,500 Bangladeshi women pursued an international career annually. This number increased almost 10-fold to an annual average of 14,000 during the next decade (2001—2010), and 15-fold to an annual average of 78,000 between 2011 and 2017. In 2017, female migration from Bangladesh stood at 121,925. This accounted for 12 per cent of total outmigration in 2017. More than 90 per cent of women migrants from Bangladesh are employed as domestic workers. Although lower social status is attached to the housekeeping profession, and the risks of physical and sexual abuses at workplaces act as disincentives, Bangladeshi women tend to accept the housekeeping service for two major reasons: first, they lack required skills to pursue a career in other jobs; and second, the recently introduced “zero cost” provision of migration attracted a large recruitment pool.<sup>8</sup> In

<sup>8</sup> The zero cost provision requires that employers of women domestic caregivers will bear all costs associated with the recruitment and travel of an aspirant migrant. Recruitment agencies cannot charge any fees to aspirant women migrant workers (BMET, 2015). Instead, they earn USD 2,000 USD to USD 3,000 for processing migration of each woman domestic housekeeper to Saudi Arabia (interviews with Bangladesh Association of international Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA) and BMET officials, 2018).

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China, 1,300 Bangladeshi women were employed as domestic workers from 2013 to 2017, and another 800 aspirant women migrants are receiving housekeeping training to join the labour market of Hong Kong SAR, China (Islam, 2017a).

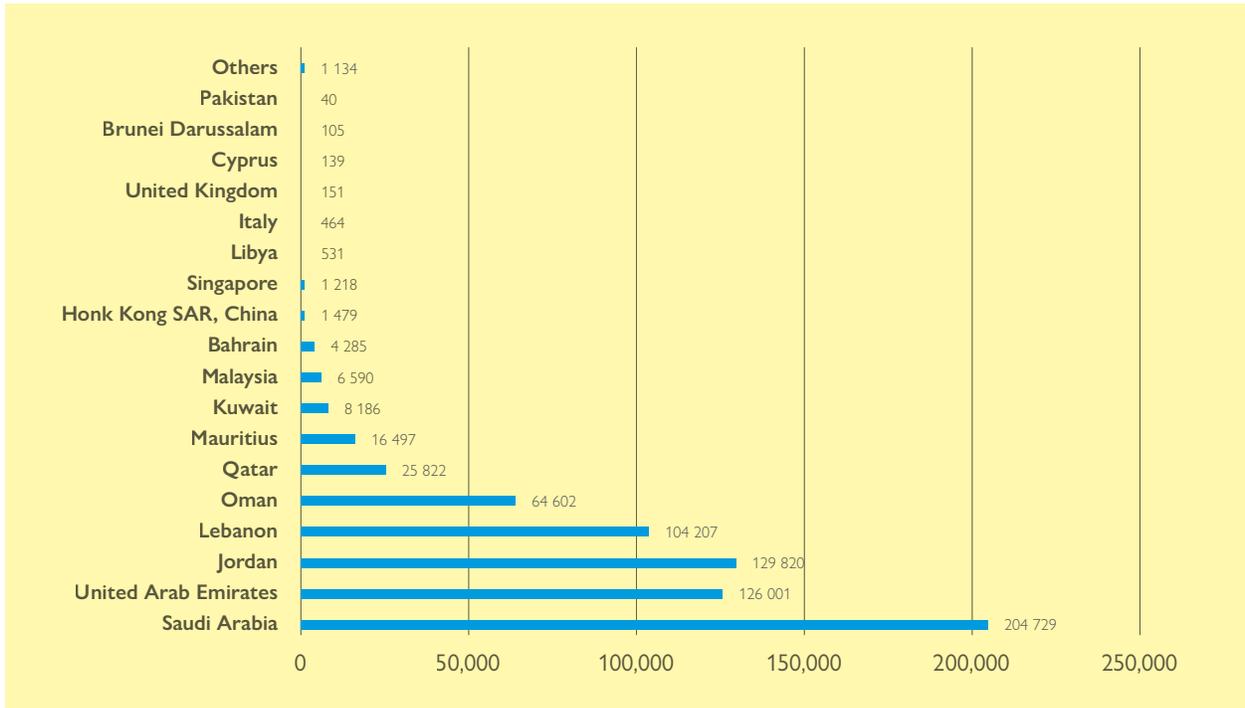
**Figure 2.2: Yearly trends in women's migration from Bangladesh, 1991–2017**



Source: BMET, 2018.

The top five destinations of Bangladeshi women workers are Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Lebanon and Oman (Figure 2.3). These five Middle Eastern countries constituted the destinations for 90 per cent of women migrant workers from Bangladesh from 1991 to 2017. They are mostly employed as housekeepers in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon and Oman, and in the ready-made garment industry in Jordan (ILO, 2015a, 2015b; Raju, 2017; The Daily Star, 2017). There is a strong demand for skilled women workers in nursing, caregiving, childcare, driving and clerical jobs in the Middle East, Europe and Asia (BMET, 2017a, 2017b; Islam 2017a, 2017b). Human rights observers have criticized the abusive work conditions in which Bangladeshi women workers often operate in the Middle East (Human Rights Watch, 2016a, 2016b; MFA, nda). Women domestic workers are reported to experience long working hours, non-payment of wages, and physical, verbal and sexual abuses in some Middle Eastern CoDs. The restrictive kafala visa system, which prohibits workers from changing employers, is a major barrier to migrants' rights in the region. Therefore, the Government of Bangladesh is currently exploring alternative markets for Bangladeshi women migrants.

Figure 2.3: Countries of destination for women migrants from Bangladesh, 1991–2017



Source: BMET, 2018.

### Skills

The majority of Bangladeshi migrants are either semi-skilled or low-skilled. Lower technical and linguistic skills are thought to be associated with lower pay and human rights abuses in the countries of destination. In the Middle East, most of the women migrant workers, who are exposed to verbal and physical abuse by employers and their family members, tend to lack required work skills and the ability to maintain effective communication with employers. The Government of Bangladesh has recognized this problem and has given due importance to promoting compulsory skills training among aspirant migrants. For instance, women migrant workers in the domestic housekeeping trade receive mandatory training at 36 TTCs, which are decentralized throughout the country (Islam, 2017b).

**Figure 2.4: Skill categories of labour migrants from Bangladesh, 1976–2017**



Source: BMET, 2018.

The participation of highly skilled professionals in outmigration is quite negligible (Figure 2.4). Yet skilled migration is increasing faster than semi-skilled. One possible explanation for this is that BMET considers migrants with training in housekeeping and some other trades as skilled. However, migration experts reject the skill classification of BMET and suggest that Bangladesh follow international standards in skills classification. Currently, BMET’s remittance data do not show disaggregation of migrants by various skill categories. As a result, it is not possible to assess whether the proportion of professional or skilled migrants’ remittances has increased or decreased.

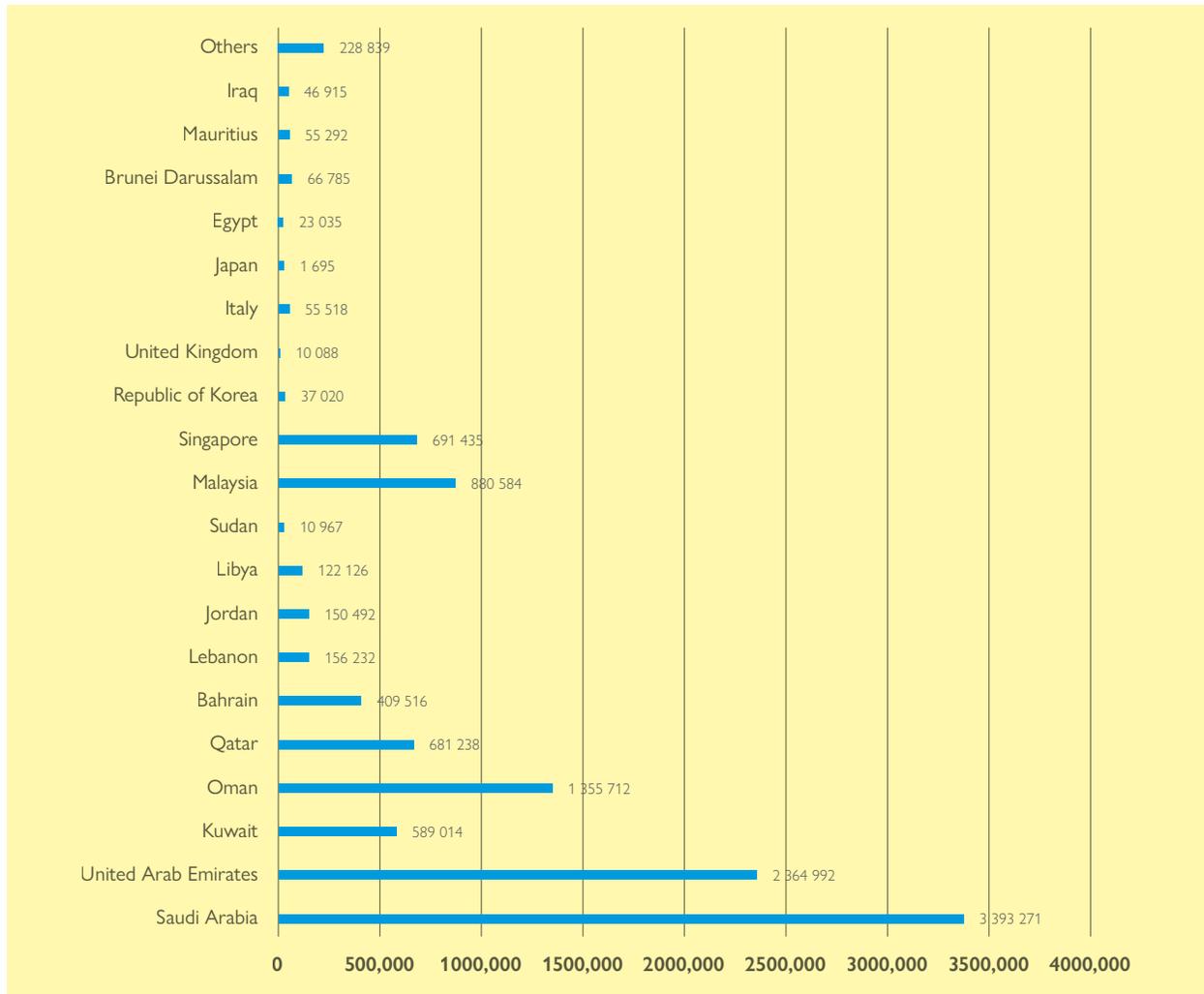
### Countries of destination

Figure 2.5 shows the destination of Bangladeshi labour migrants. The top five countries for Bangladeshi migrants, irrespective of gender, are Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Malaysia and Singapore. Among all the host countries, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have been the destinations for more than half of all international labour migration from Bangladesh using BMET’s formal channel since the 1970s (Figure 2.6). The past decade has seen consistent growth in migration of Bangladeshis to Oman, Qatar, Malaysia and Singapore.

An important question is whether migrants, both men and women, can access various services from the Bangladeshi embassies and their Labour and Welfare Wings, from concerned authorities in the CoDs and other actors, such as NGOs and international organizations. Media reports indicate that migrants experience poor service delivery in all of these destination countries referred to above. The survey participants want more proactive support and welfare-oriented services to address the needs of both male and female migrant workers

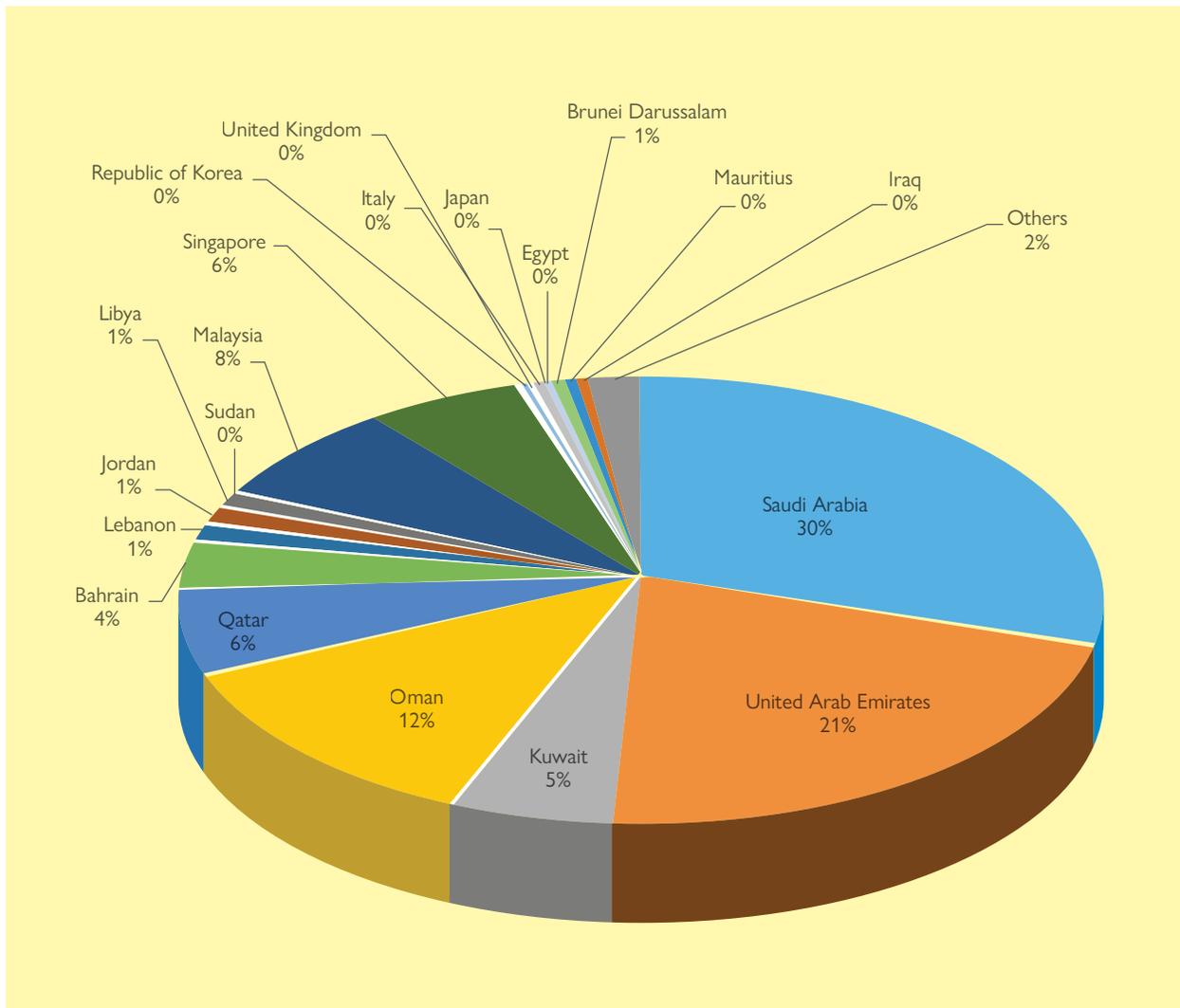
in CoDs. Prior studies have also identified that, unlike Sri Lankan missions, which remain open on weekday holidays (weekends), Bangladeshi missions are closed on weekday holidays (weekends), forcing migrant workers to take a leave of absence to visit the embassy to access services (Abrar et al, 2014:27). The Labour and Welfare Wings are also often understaffed and underresourced to address the needs of migrant workers.

**Figure 2.5: Countries of destination for labour migrants from Bangladesh, 1976–2017**



Source: BMET, 2018.

**Figure 2.6: Concentration of labour migration from Bangladesh**

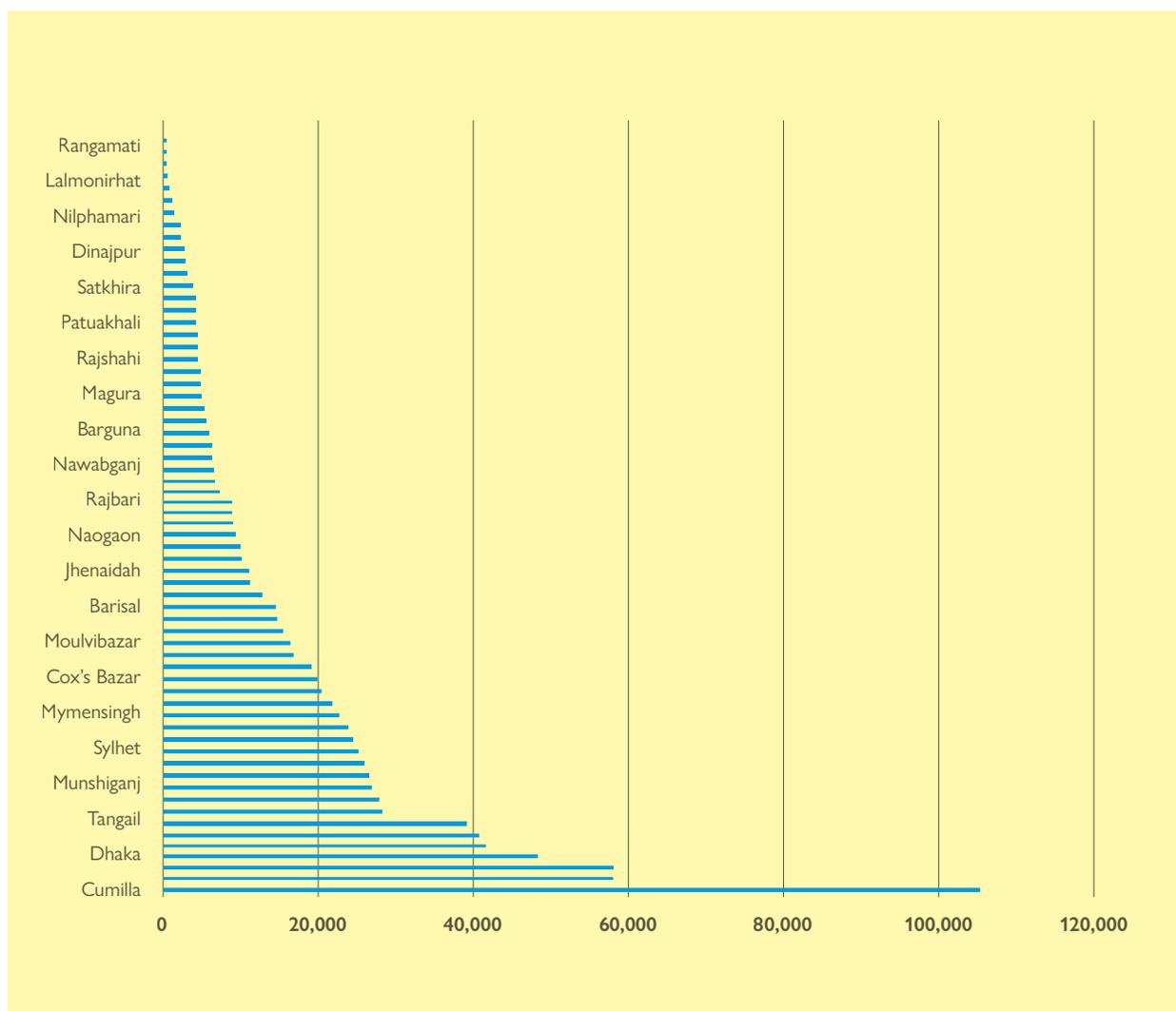


Source: BMET, 2018.

### Districts of origin of migrants

There is a huge variation in the districts of origin of Bangladeshi migrants. The top five migration-intensive districts are Cumilla, Chattogram, Brahmanbaria, Tangail and Dhaka. Figure 2.7 shows data for the districts of origin for labour migrants from Bangladesh. There are no publicly available disaggregated data about the districts of origin for women and men migrants of Bangladesh.

**Figure 2.7: Districts of origin for labour migrants from Bangladesh, 2017**



Source: BMET, 2018.

The analysis of the trends, skills and destination of labour migration from Bangladesh suggest that:

- Increased participation of women in labour migration requires gender-specific service provisions at home and abroad at all stages of migration;
- A majority of Bangladeshi migrants are employed in low-skills jobs, and therefore at risk of low pay and violation of human rights; and
- The country is highly dependent on the low-skilled labour markets of Middle Eastern countries and is yet to capture the markets of skilled and highly-skilled migrants in other parts of the world.

It is in the above context that this report traces the services offered to migrants by State, private sector entities and CSOs.

## 2.2 Governance structure

The domestic structure for governing labour migration from Bangladesh includes a set of State institutions and policies, the private sector and informal practices, and CSOs (Ashraf, 2017; MoEWOE, 2016b; WEWB, 2017). They provide a wide range of services to aspirant, current and returnee migrants.

### State institutions and policies

MoEWOE is the lead ministry for dealing with international labour migration from Bangladesh. As stated above, it oversees four constituent organizations: BMET, BOESL, PKB and WEWB (MoEWOE, 2016a). The legal and policy basis for MoEWOE and its constituent bodies comes from the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013, and the Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy 2016. These legal and policy frameworks have evolved from the Emigration Ordinance 1982 and the Emigration Rules 2002. Each of the above-mentioned organizations has a distinct line of authority. BMET is the main executive agency for labour migration. BOESL offers recruiting services for a few countries. PKB is mandated to provide pre-departure loans and post-return reintegration loans. WEWB is responsible for offering welfare support to migrants and their dependents.

Under the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Border Guard of Bangladesh and the Coast Guard are responsible for protecting the land and maritime borders, respectively, whereas the Special Branch of the Bangladesh Police is responsible for immigration control at the country's land and airports. The Border Guard of Bangladesh holds meetings with the Indian Border Security Force and the Myanmar Border Guard Police on a regular basis to discuss cross-border movement of people, goods and services. The Passport Directorate under the Home Ministry is responsible for issuing passports.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with the Labour and Welfare Wings of the Expatriate Ministry and the passport wing of the Ministry of Home Affairs, provides several services, such as verification of work permits, consular service, and issuance and renewal of passports through Bangladeshi embassies. Currently, there are 29 Labour and Welfare Wings in foreign countries which offer a wide range of services, including legal aid to Bangladeshi migrant workers.

The Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism is responsible for administering the international airports, and various security and intelligence agencies operate closely with the airport authorities. The Welfare Desks of WEWB at the airports interact with these agencies to run their operations.

Although the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism have some roles in managing cross-border movement of people to and from Bangladesh, MoEWOE is mandated to adopt legal and policy frameworks for governing labour migration from Bangladesh.

## Private sector and informal actors

Private sector providers comprise licensed PRAs, dalals<sup>9</sup> (informal agents) or intermediaries, and migrant recruiters. At present, only 10 per cent of about 1,000 licensed PRAs procure one third of the total migrant work contracts and visas, while aspirant migrants' friends and family networks procure two thirds of them (BAIRA interview, 2017). More than 50 per cent of PRAs, which tend to be smaller in size, thrive on processing visas procured by the migrants' friends and families (migration expert interview, September 2017). Informal agents, widely known as dalals, act as conduits between the migrants, recruitment agencies and government offices (Rashid, 2016). BAIRA is a professional body of private recruitment agencies. Although BOESL operates as a State-run recruiting agency, it has a small (less than 1%) market share (BOESL, 2017).

## Civil society organizations

Several CSOs have played important roles in promoting a rights-based protection regime for migrant workers at various stages. The list includes, but is not limited to, the Awaj Foundation, BOMSA, BRAC, Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Programme (OKUP), RMMRU and WARBE DF. They work on a range of activities and issues, as shown in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1: Migration services by selected civil society organizations**

Services	BRAC	OKUP	RMMRU	WARBE DF	BOMSA	MJF	Awaj	DAM
Pre-departure awareness	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Pre-departure orientation and training	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Post-arrival services	No	No	No	No	Yes (limited)	No	Yes	Yes
Return and reintegration training	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Community-based arbitration	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Evidence-based research	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Policy advocacy	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No

**Sources:** Abrar et al., 2014; BRAC, n.d.a., 2015, 2016; BOMSA, 2004; OKUP, 2017; Rashid and Watson, 2017; RMMRU, 2017; WARBE DF, 2016, 2017. KII with MJF; ILO 2016.

<sup>9</sup>“Dalals” are sub-agents or intermediaries.

### Challenges in the governance structure

BMET is responsible for issuing, renewing and cancelling the licenses of PRAs. It monitors PRAs and takes punitive actions against their irregular practices. Yet a loophole in the country's migration regime concerns the exclusion of informal subagents or dalals from the coverage of the Migrants Act 2013. Dalals offer a service package that includes handling visas, tickets, BMET clearance and insurance in return for a high charge, and this has a huge impact on raising the cost of migration (ILO, 2014e). Despite this loophole, the Government of Bangladesh often takes actions, albeit on a limited scale, against recruitment agents and dalals engaged in fraudulent practices (MoEWOE interview, August 2017). The deployment of the multi-stakeholder Vigilance Task Force and mobile courts of administrative magistrates has also produced tangible results in punishing fraudulent recruiters and dalals for deceiving aspirant migrants (MoEWOE, 2016a:19–21).

An important question is the extent to which the existing migration governance structure is gender-responsive. A review of the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013 and the Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Migration Policy 2016 suggests that the Government of Bangladesh has clearly prioritized promoting the rights of women at various stages of the migration process. Yet various public, private and non-profit actors demonstrate a varying level of attitude to cater to the needs of women migrant workers. The remainder of this report will discuss the gender dimension of migration services.

In summary, several State institutions, the private sector and CSOs constitute the domestic labour migration regime from Bangladesh. They provide a wide range of recruitment and welfare services to migrants. Among the State institutions, the major migration service providers are BMET, BOESL, PKB and WEWB, which offer their services through the DEMOs, PKB branches and TTCs at the district levels. PRAs, their informal intermediaries, and migrants' friends and families who procure visa and work contracts, represent the market entities, whereas CSOs constitute non-profit service providers. The exclusion of the informal agents and dalals from the country's Migrants Act 2013, and the porous borders with neighbours, pose a challenge to promoting fairer and ethical labour recruitment and migration. From a gender perspective, Bangladeshi women migrant workers receive varying levels of attention from the Government, the private sector and civil society actors.



# CHAPTER 3

## PRE-DEPARTURE SERVICES

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of various basic services offered at the pre-departure stage. It shows how the Government, the private sector, and civil society interact with each other in developing an interdependent migration system in Bangladesh. In closing, it provides a brief assessment of how services at the pre-departure stage address four functions of a social protection approach: protective, preventive, promotive and transformative.



### 3.1 Pre-decision awareness

Pre-decision awareness campaigns (for pre-employment decision-making) represent an important step in promoting safe, orderly and regular migration (Siddiqui, Rashid and Zeitlyn, 2008). RMMRU's prior studies found that – due to lack of awareness and knowledge among the aspirant migrants about employment, migration process and destination countries – nearly one of four aspirants was exposed to fraudulent practices. Hence, aspirant migrants need access to a wide variety of information, such as that related to cost–benefit analysis of migration, safe and regular migration, fair recruitment practices, career prospects in a foreign country, expected wage and compensation packages, cost of visa and other service charges.

#### State

Among the State institutions, MoEWOE, BMET, WEWB and DEMOs play an important role in disseminating information related to safe migration practices. As part of celebrating the International Migrants' Day each year, MoEWOE circulates leaflets and organizes public rallies to create awareness among the citizens. BMET authorizes the DEMOs to offer pre-decision information. DEMOs collaborate with local NGOs and local government officials during their monthly meetings at the field level to share information on safe migration at all districts. There is, however, no special consideration given to reach women or people of poorer social economic strata.

#### Private sector

The PRAs and informal intermediaries do not maintain any role in creating a pre-decision awareness campaign. Informal intermediaries often withhold information from aspirant migrants, which act as a barrier to safe migration practices.<sup>10</sup> BOESL advertises overseas employment opportunities through billboards, posters, announcements through loud speakers and social media (Rashid and Watson, 2017).

#### Civil society

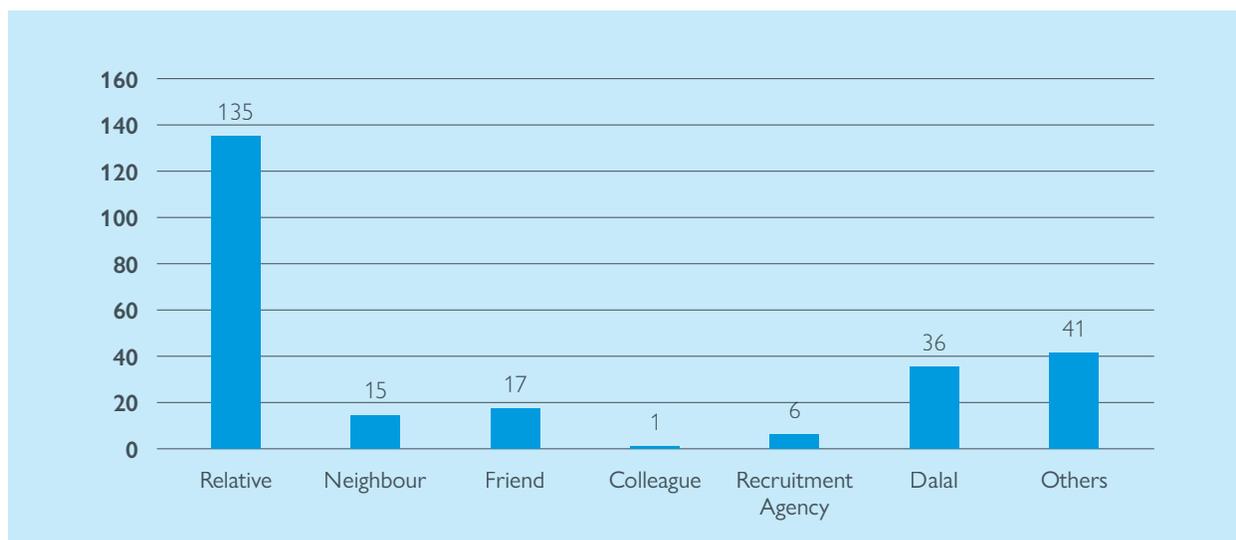
Several CSOs maintain an active awareness-raising programme to reduce fraudulent migration practices and promote ethical recruitment practices. BRAC, BOMSA, OKUP and RMMRU have field-level programmes targeting migration information dissemination (CSO interviews, 2017). Several local NGOs receive support from UN Women to offer pre-decision awareness campaigns targeting women and people from poor socioeconomic status (UN Women, 2012). Information campaign tools include door-to-door information services, courtyard meetings, popular theatre shows and counselling.

#### Survey findings

The survey findings indicate migrants' overdependence on relatives and informal intermediaries (Figure 3.1). Despite the government agencies' efforts to disseminate migration information, none of the participants in this study mentioned the role of State institutions in an awareness campaign. A small section of migrants (34 of 200) claimed they were proactive in collecting information themselves without being dependent on others.

<sup>10</sup> From in-depth interview with a woman migrant worker in Gazipur District, Bangladesh, 2017.

**Figure 3.1: Information sources at the pre-departure stage**



**Sources:** Field survey for IOM Study on the Mapping and Scoping of Services for the Migrant Workers of Bangladesh at Various Stages of Labour Migration Cycle. Note: Multiple responses were recorded.

### Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- Compared with rural areas, the urban areas in migration-intensive districts receive more attention from the Government and its awareness campaigns, leaving people in rural areas to rely more on relatives and informal sources.
- There is a lack of innovative or online mechanisms to provide information to aspirant migrants.
- Information campaigns that run during the International Migration Day seem to discontinue throughout the year.

## 3.2 Passport

### State

Under the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Department of Immigration and Passports is the only government agency with the mandate to issue passports to Bangladeshi citizens. The Department of Immigration and Passport has a provision for any passport applicant to submit either an online or a printer version of the application form. Aspirant migrants can apply for a passport, deposit the service charge for the passport, and must get their photographs taken at a regional or district-level passport office.

### Private sector

Informal intermediaries often offer expedited services and guide aspirant migrants, including women, through the process of procuring and collecting their passports. Friends and families of aspirant migrants also provide this service in exchange for money.

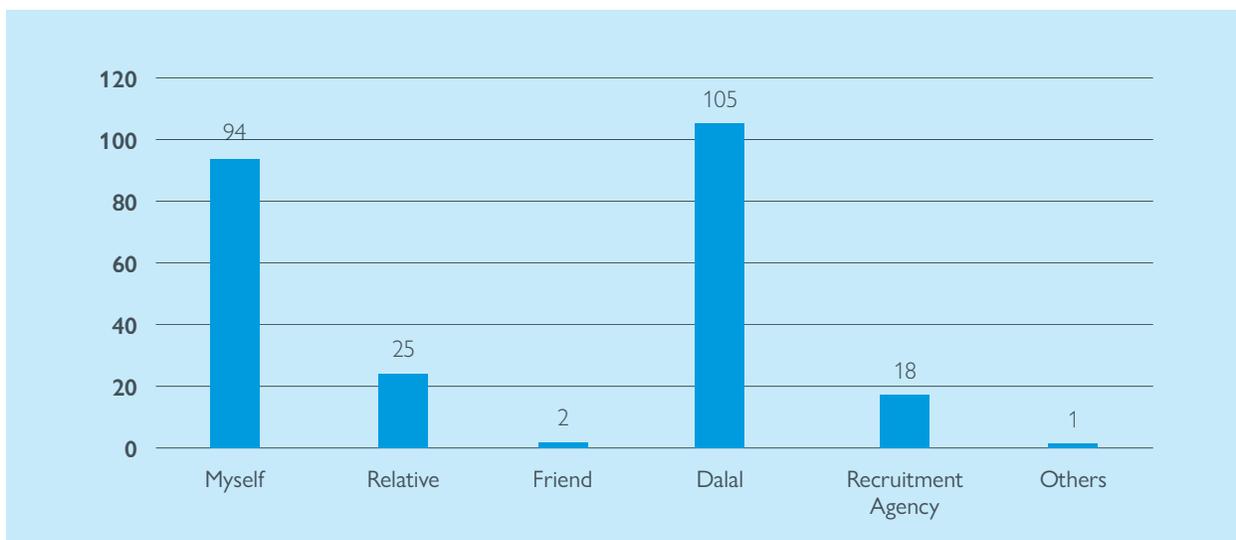
### Civil society

CSOs encourage migrants to apply for their passports themselves and avoid bribing informal agents. When requested, they help migrants fill out their passport applications and collect supporting documents such as photographs and national identity cards. CSOs do not have any role in visa facilitation.

### Survey findings

Among the 200 respondents, more than 50 per cent of respondents claim they depended on the dalals to apply for and collect their passports. They thought it would be easier for them to get the passport in this way. Many people are illiterate and therefore take the assistance of relatives or dalal in lieu of money. One of two migrants also reported that they arranged the passports themselves. Nearly 20 per cent of respondents reported that they relied on more than one source to process their passports due to their convenience

**Figure 3.2: Person who arranged passport service**



**Sources:** Field survey for IOM Study on the Mapping and Scoping of Services for the Migrant Workers of Bangladesh at Various Stages of Labour Migration Cycle. Note: Multiple responses were recorded.

## Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- Dalals often charge additional costs for processing passport applications, causing an increase in the cost of migration.
- In the past, there was a prevalence of dalals and PRAs arranging fake passports by changing the photograph of the original passport holder. With the introduction of biometric technology for issuing national IDs and passports, this practice of fake passports has gone down. As far as medical certificates are concerned, the study did not find any instance of offering fake medical certificates by dalals.

## 3.3 Job search and visa procurement

### State

BMET and BOESL are the principal State agencies responsible for helping aspirant migrants with their job searches. Under the G2G scheme, BMET is mandated to recruit workers for Malaysia, whereas BOESL and BMET offer recruiting service for Jordan; Hong Kong SAR, China; the Republic of Korea; and Japan (Rashid and Watson, 2017). For the past few years, BOESL has emphasized adding new job markets for Bangladeshi women, where the chances of decent work conditions are likely to be much better. BOESL officials boost Jordan and Hong Kong SAR, China to be their success stories in promoting safe migration for women migrants. Both BMET and BOESL advertise vacant positions through print and electronic media for recruitment purposes.

### Private sector

At present, a large number of aspirant migrants, whether new or returnee, contact their social networks (friends and family members) for searching overseas employment opportunities. Telephone conversations with current migrants, or face-to-face conversations with returnee migrants and their families, constitute the major sources of information for migrants' job searches. As Saudi Arabia has introduced a new policy that offers financial rewards to PRAs for recruiting domestic women migrant workers, Bangladeshi PRAs have shown a sustained interest in providing job search and visa procurement services to aspirant women migrants.

Yet, compared with migrants' social networks, which now constitute more than 60 per cent of the market share, PRAs have a smaller market share (about 35%), but maintain an extensive network of informal intermediaries who also provide job-search services to migrants.

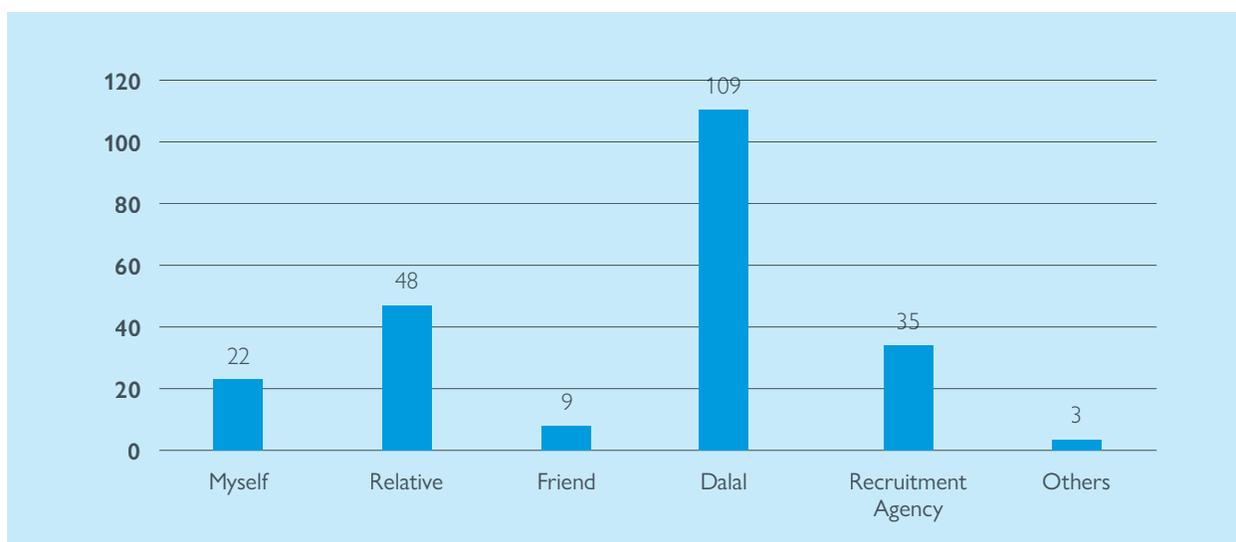
### Civil society

CSOs are not authorized to provide job-matching services. Our survey indicates that CSOs do not offer job search and visa procurement services.

## Survey findings

The study found that nearly 55 per cent of migrants procured their visas from dalals. The second and third largest sources of visa-procuring services were family members or relatives and PRAs (Figure 3.3). Dalals were usually neighbours of an aspirant migrant. If an aspirant migrant's family members operated as a dalal, this study records the latter as "Relative" rather than "Dalal".

**Figure 3.3: Visa procurement service provider**



**Sources:** Field survey for IOM Study on the Mapping and Scoping of Services for the Migrant Workers of Bangladesh at Various Stages of Labour Migration Cycle. Note: Multiple responses were recorded.

## Challenges and gaps

In the absence of a formal control over dalals, migration and recruitment, especially visas, are facilitated at a higher price in Bangladesh than in other South Asian countries.<sup>11</sup> This has caused an increase in the cost of migration from Bangladesh. It has also adversely affected women migrants, who pay BDT 30,000 (USD 375) to BDT 60,000 (USD 750) to dalals, even though employers pay for the full cost of recruitment. As a result, the zero-cost provision for women domestic caregivers cannot be fully implemented.

## 3.4 Online registration and fingerprint

This is an important step in the migrant workers' recruitment process (Figure 3.4). Aspirant migrants are required to complete an online registration form and record their biometric fingerprint data (BMET, 2016). The purpose is to digitize the migration process so that personal and biographic data of a migrant worker are easily accessible as a smart card. The digital smart card is used at various service points in the migration chain – from pre-departure stage to post-arrival, and return and reintegration stages. The online registration data stored in

<sup>11</sup> Interview with BAIRA representatives.

the smart card are used by the Government at airports, by BMET to process migration, and to provide welfare services such as processing return of a deceased migrant's body and payment of death compensation to the family members of the deceased. In the past, only the BMET head office and Dhaka DEMO would provide this service. As part of the Government's plan to decentralize migration services, 26 DEMOs were equipped with human resources and information technology to offer this service in 2016.

The process of online registration and fingerprint service involves several stages (see Figure 3.4). First, an aspirant migrant fills out a printed registration form that requires disclosing personal information, permanent and present addresses, and nominee information. Second, the migrant worker is required to deposit Bangladeshi BDT 200 (USD 2.50) to PKB as a service charge for completing the online registration and fingerprint requirement. Third, the worker has to attach a copy of the valid passport and visa of the destination country with the online registration form. Fourth, he/she has to collect a token indicating the serial number by which he/she will be provided the service. Fifth, a data entry operator transfers the personal details of the migrants from the printed form to an online form by typing it by hand. Sixth, another data entry operator takes a photo and a fingerprint of the migrant worker. At the end, the data entry operators, who are outsourced by the DEMO on a contractual basis, provide a printout of the completed online registration form and fingerprint. Data recorded at a DEMO is secured in a central server managed by BMET. When female migrant workers visit the PKB branch or DEMO premise to complete the formalities for biometric registration purposes, they wait in a separate queue reserved for women, and thus receive an equal treatment in getting timely service delivery.

**Figure 3.4: Recruitment process of migrant workers from Bangladesh**



**Note:** This figure shows an ideal sequence of key steps in the recruitment procedure. In reality, some of the steps may precede others.

The whole process of online registration and fingerprint can take a few hours to a day depending on how long is the queue of migrants. During the first two working days of the week, there is a huge rush of migrants.

### Private sector

PRAs and their informal intermediaries provide referral services to migrants, advising them to complete online registration and fingerprint. The Union Digital Centres (UDC)s also refer aspirant migrants to visit DEMOs to get this service.

### Civil society

The role of CSOs is also limited in advising aspirants to visit DEMOs. They are not authorized to offer online registration and fingerprinting services.

### Challenges and gaps

The study did not find any cases of fraud or data manipulation during the recruitment process. Officials and data entry operators at DEMOs identified several challenges that often impede their ability to provide services:

- Lack of computers and human resources create long waiting hours at DEMOs.
- DEMOs' lack of direct access to BMET servers creates undue problems in correcting any erroneous data.
- Slow Internet speed and lack of connectivity with BMET servers sometimes disrupt the delivery of this service, frustrating service seekers.

## 3.5 Online visa checking

Ideally, a migrant will do a visa checking before proceeding to online registration and fingerprint record. The process is simple. It requires a migrant to provide the passport number, date of birth, nationality and mobile phone number to DEMO.

### State

A designated DEMO official can check the visa status of an aspirant by logging onto the website of the country of destination. For any migrant worker seeking employment in the United Arab Emirates, the website of the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization provides a platform for checking the visa status of an overseas worker. Almost all the DEMOs in Bangladesh having Internet access can provide this service to aspirant migrants, including women.

### Private sector

Since the UDCs run by private individual entrepreneurs also provide a visa checking service for a nominal fee, aspirant migrants, especially women, tend to visit the UDCs more frequently than the DEMOs to secure the visa checking service (A2i, 2017). This is because UDCs are located at a more convenient distance than the DEMOs.

### Civil society

CSOs are not authorized to provide visa checking services, but they encourage aspirant or returnee migrants to check their visas at DEMOs or UDCs.

### Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- DEMOs are overburdened with online registration and fingerprint service and do not prioritize visa checking. As a result, many aspirant migrants have to rely on UDCs to access the visa checking service.
- Due to a lack of information about the visa application process, aspirant migrants remain unaware of the need to check their visa status, forcing them to rely on the dalals.

## 3.6 Technical skills training

Technical and vocational training enhances the skills of an aspirant migrant (ILO, 2014b; MoEWOE, 2015). Over the last decade, the Government of Bangladesh has given considerable emphasis to technical and vocational education and training through institutional development. Yet in Bangladesh, technical and vocational education and training curriculum are often perceived to be inferior to general education and course curriculum. As a result, TTCs fail to attract a bright pool of students and instead become the educational centres for those who are mostly dropouts from mainstream general education. Aspirant migrants also show a lack of interest in acquiring certain employable skills from TTCs. It is in this context that a large number of Bangladeshi migrant workers are either low-skilled or semi-skilled, a phenomenon discussed in chapter 2.

## State

TTCs, operating under BMET, provide training to a wide array of people in diverse trades. Currently, domestic women workers going to the Middle East are required to undertake a 30-day mandatory training at free of cost from the TTCs, which do not maintain any database of their graduates and their career paths (WEWB, 2017). As a result, there is no mechanism in place to determine how many TTC graduates have pursued an overseas career (BMET interview, September 2017). Currently, the Government of Bangladesh is trying to standardize TTC curricula and bring them under an internationally accepted certification process. This reform in TTC curricula will be implemented as part of a larger effort to promote a national policy on skills development through the National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF). During KIIs, BMET officials cited their efforts to secure accreditation from the United Kingdom-based City and Guilds for certification of hospitality management programmes in the country (BMET interview; WEWB, 2017).

## Private sector

Several private recruiting agencies have their own training facilities, where aspirant migrants acquire professional skills before their overseas deployment. The recruiting agencies have approximately a 5 per cent market share in providing skills training.<sup>12</sup> In most cases, these trainings are provided as part of the PRA's recruitment contract and are covered by the total recruitment cost. They mainly provide training for construction work and cleaning. Some of them also collaborate with BMET and five TTCs to facilitate housekeeping training for women migrant workers. BAIRA has recently constructed a five-story 26,000-square-foot training centre at Gazipur to cater to the needs of all its members to provide training to the outgoing migrants. Once it is fully operational, the BAIRA complex will offer training facilities to 15,000 migrants, both men and women, on required trades (BAIRA interview, 2017). The training facility of BAIRA is still under construction and no further details are available.

## Civil society

Several CSOs – including BOMSA, BRAC and WARBE DF – offer training on rights, safety and security. Under a collaborative project of MJF and BOMSA, women migrants used to receive a month-long housekeeping training at the Keraniganj TTC. Recently, MJF has signed a memorandum of understanding with BMET to introduce a five-months care-work training for women at Keraniganj TTC. The purpose of this new training is to deploy women migrant workers to Japan, which expects at least N-4 level skills and language training from foreign workers. BOMSA does not offer any skills training for women workers. It only offers a two-day pre-departure orientation at four TTCs: Bangla–German TTC, Bangla–Korea TTC, Fazilatunnessa TTC and Jessore TTC. BOMSA conducts the pre-departure orientation in conjunction with the Government's 30-day compulsory skills training programme for domestic workers.

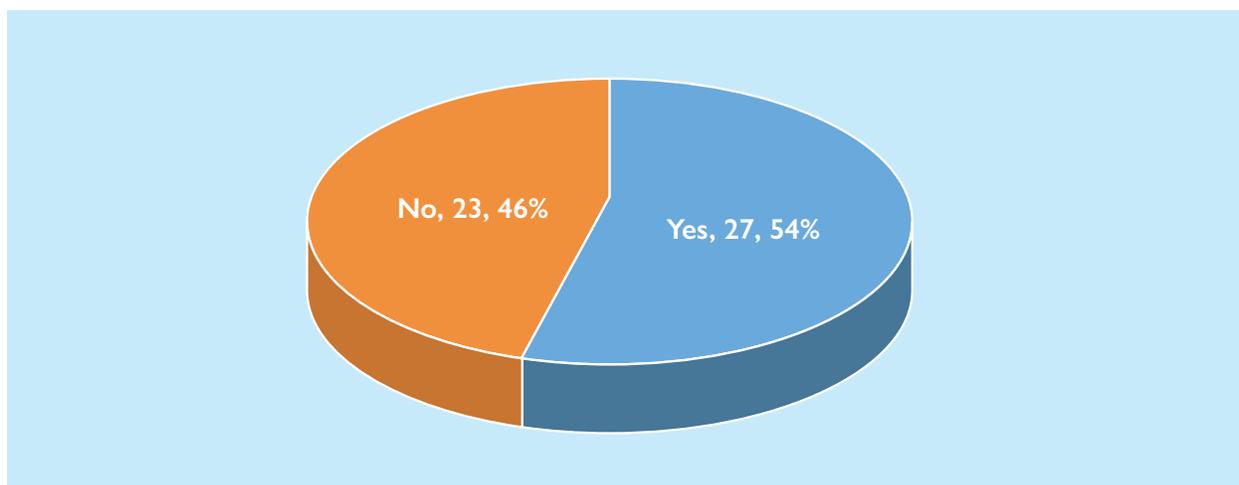
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<sup>12</sup> Interview with BAIRA representatives.

### Survey findings

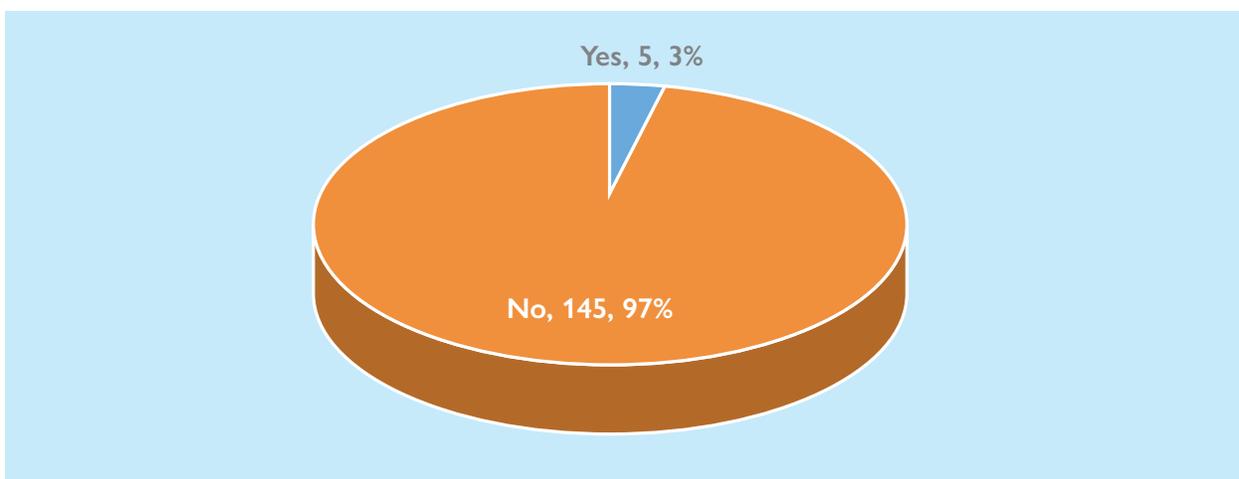
The survey data indicate that 54 per cent of women migrants received skills training at TTCs on housekeeping and ready-made garments at the pre-departure stage. The figure is 3 per cent for men migrants, who received training in construction work and driving (Figures 3.5 and 3.6).

**Figure 3.5: Women migrants' pre-departure skills training**



**Source:** Field survey for IOM Study on the Mapping and Scoping of Services for the Migrant Workers of Bangladesh at Various Stages of Labour Migration Cycle.

**Figure 3.6: Men migrants' pre-departure skills training**



**Source:** Field survey for IOM Study on the Mapping and Scoping of Services for the Migrant Workers of Bangladesh at Various Stages of Labour Migration Cycle.

The discrepancy in women and men migrants' skills training can be explained by the fact that the former group is now required to go through a mandatory skills training programme especially for housekeeping services in the Middle East, whereas men employed in low-skilled categories – such as construction labourers and masons cleaners – and semi-skilled and skilled categories – such as drivers, heavy machine operators, electricians, plumbers and so on – required no compulsory skills certification. In some cases, PRAs provide skills training to men as per the requirement of the employer.

### Challenges and gaps

Although the TTCs are responsible for providing skills training, they face obstacles from poor training facilities, inexpert trainers and a lack of an internationally recognized training modules. A recent study conducted by RMMRU for developing a comprehensive training module for women migrant workers revealed the following gaps in housekeeping training (RMMRU, 2017a).

**Table 3.1: Major gaps in TTC modules**

Content	Methods	Infrastructure	Trainers	Materials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incomplete curricula</li> <li>• Inadequate emphasis on job-related rights issues</li> <li>• Inadequate soft skills</li> <li>• Inadequately gender-sensitive and empowering tools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overreliance on classroom-based teaching methods</li> <li>• Lack of participatory methods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not equipped for training of persons with low levels of education</li> <li>• Lack of decorated rooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequate number</li> <li>• No formal place for experts to act as trainers</li> <li>• No formal place for returnees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of audiovisual materials</li> <li>• Lack of practice-oriented materials</li> <li>• Lack of experience sharing</li> </ul>

Source: RMMRU, 2017a.

As for the men workers, TTCs offer trainings of different duration in various sectors on payment. The duration of skills training for men participants ranges from three months to two years. The trades include welding, electrical and electronic work, automobile driving, autoCAD, refrigeration and ready-made garments.

### 3.7 Pre-departure orientation and briefing

Orientation and briefing sessions are aimed at giving aspirant migrants detailed information about the destination country, workplace etiquette and safety tips.

#### State

TTCs provide a three-day mandatory pre-departure orientation training. Upon completion of this mandatory training, aspirant migrants are given a certificate jointly signed by the TTC Principal and BMET Director General. The departing migrants also receive a day-long pre-departure briefing by BMET when they collect the smart cards. The pre-departure orientation and briefing sessions focus on information about the country of destination, emergency contacts at home and abroad, and an ethical code of conduct. For women migrant workers, the pre-departure orientation provides useful guidance on how to protect their rights and whom to contact during emergency needs.

#### Private sector

Public and private agencies and their informal intermediaries brief their recruits about flight information, and guide them on how to arrive at the airport and gather there to take their flight. PRAs also advise women migrant workers to contact their offices and their families to address any queries or to report any challenges in CoDs.

#### Civil society

Among the CSOs, BOMSA, BRAC, OKUP and WARBE DF provide some pre-departure orientation and briefing. BOMSA advises women to remain aware of their physical integrity and to avoid situations that may expose them to vulnerability. BRAC offers training sessions on rights and life skill services. It also provides health and skills training to women migrants. OKUP's training module includes cultural adaptation strategies for women labour migrants. WARBE DF's training handbook includes pre-decision cost-benefit analysis, airport departure formalities, and roles of PKB, WEWB and the Welfare Desk at airports in facilitating migration (Akhter, 2014). Several NGOs and CSOs exclusively deal with women migrant workers to address their pre-departure orientation needs.

#### Findings from the field survey

During the field research in Tangail TTC, the research team had first-hand experience to observe a pre-departure orientation session. An instructor was delivering a lecture on moral responsibility of a migrant worker in a foreign country. The classroom was full of nearly 150 aspirants, nearly 15 per cent of whom were women workers. The research team learned that, after the three-day mandatory pre-departure orientation, participants would receive a certificate co-signed by the Principal of TTC and Director General of BMET. Participants do not appear at any test to examine their aptitude before and after the orientation. This three-day

pre-departure training certificate is a prerequisite for migrants to secure their smart cards. During private discussions, aspirant migrants and TTC officials admitted that some outbound migrants received the pre-departure briefing certificate even without attending the full three-day training sessions.

### Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- Although the pre-departure orientation is regularly updated and will continue to change, returnees often express doubts about whether they acquire any new knowledge in such orientation programmes.
- Due to lack of motivation, migrants pay little attention to the pre-departure training sessions and TTCs lack any effective classroom environment to make the training sessions participatory.
- Currently, there is no system in place to evaluate the pre-departure orientation and briefing sessions, and the extent to which such sessions enhance the knowledge base of aspirant migrants.
- Pre-departure training sessions tend to rely more on lecture-based orientation and less on the use of audiovisual teaching–learning aids.

## 3.8 Contract paper and visa service

This is one of the most important but widely neglected aspects in the migration process (BOESL interview, 2017). This is due to the fact that neither PRAs nor migrants' social networks share the contract papers with aspirant migrants. There is no awareness among the people that contract papers should be checked in due time before migrating out of the country. This shows there is a gap in the monitoring mechanism.

The Government of Bangladesh has recently made pre-departure orientation and training compulsory for all outgoing migrants. Each migrant needs to attend pre-departure orientation and training to get clearance from BMET. Earlier, it was only mandatory for those going abroad on “group visas”. The Government of Bangladesh is monitoring this attendance closely. The pre-departure orientation and training sessions encourage migrants to check their contract papers and visas.

### State

BMET procures contract papers and visas only for those enrolled under the Malaysia-bound G2G scheme. On the other hand, BOESL processes the contract papers and visas for aspirants going to Qatar; Hong Kong SAR, China; the Republic of Korea; and Japan. The Bangladeshi embassies in countries of destination are responsible for vetting the “demand letters” and authenticating the contract papers before issuing single or group visas.

### Private sector

Migrants' friends and families also collect contract papers and work visas. A large majority of PRAs and their informal agents process visa-related documents. Sometimes, the PRAs keep the contract letters with them and thus some of the core labour rights-related information – such as migrants' job placement, working hours, wage and welfare provisions – is withheld from migrants. The survey found that both men and women migrants were either uninformed or unwilling to learn about the contract provisions, as they could not read it. This information gap increases migrants' vulnerabilities and risk of contract substitution, as well as human trafficking. It is important that recruitment agencies explain the conditions of their employment during pre-decision and pre-departure orientation of aspirant migrants.

### Civil society

CSOs have long been pressing the recruitment agencies to share the contract letters with the migrant workers. They lack a role in checking contract paper and visa processing.

### Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- Migrants are sometimes unable to read and verify their contracts.
- The contract letters are handed over at the last moment at the airport, when migrants have little scope to return.
- Scope of fraudulence is high in the processing of the service related to contract papers and visa processing. Yet there is little emphasis on the part of State agencies, PRAs and CSOs in improved service delivery in the domain of migration contract and visa affairs.

## 3.9 Migration loans

Migration loans are primarily aimed at facilitating movement of poor and needy citizens from Bangladesh to CODs. Bangladeshi migrants access a wide variety of formal and informal sources to secure loans to cover their migration costs.

### State

The only State-owned and migration-focused bank, PKB offers BDT 200,000 (USD 2500) loans to finance the costs of migration for a fresher migrant and BDT 100,000 (USD 1250) loan to a returnee opting for remigration. Senior PKB officials claim they offer a fast-track three-day loan processing service (PKB interview, 22 November 2017). The process of loan service requires a migrant to provide valid visa and passport, employment contract, national ID, BMT smart card, a guarantor and a check book page.

Women migrant workers going to Saudi Arabia are eligible to receive a maximum BDT 40,000 (USD 500) loan. Usually, this money comes as a support for maintenance cost for three months or for partially covering some costs of migration. Women migrants in the ready-made garment sector can get up to a BDT 200,000 (USD 2500) loan. If a migrant is returned in three months for valid reasons, PKB may waive up to 50 per cent of the total loans. The payment plan is 10 months of instalments for a 12-month visa. The recovery rate is more than 90 per cent. The rest become defaulters, either due to failed migration or their inability or unwillingness to repay the loan.

With support from IOM, PKB has been running a help desk at its head office in Dhaka for more than three years (PKB interview, June 2018). The help desk addresses queries from aspirant, current and returnee migrants about PKB's loan services. It also receives complaints and takes necessary steps against irregular practices. PKB does not maintain any data on the number of visitors at the help desk, or the proportion of women and men migrants accessing the help desk service.

### Private sector

The private banks are yet to provide loan facilities to migrant communities. Some of the private banks started the project, but later stopped it due to poor recovery rates. Currently, only BRAC microfinance offers migration loans for outgoing migrants under its Progoti scheme. The Probashi Banking division of the BRAC Bank caters to the non-resident Bangladeshi not only by facilitating remittance transfer service but also by creating a favourable environment for the non-resident Bangladeshis to make long-term financial contributions to the socioeconomic progress of the nation. The BRAC Bank has introduced the “One-Stop Banking Solution” to facilitate this service. Both women and men migrants usually depend on their social networks to avail themselves of informal loans from relatives, friends and neighbours, with or without interest. They also turn to informal money lenders to collect migration money (Rashid, 2016).

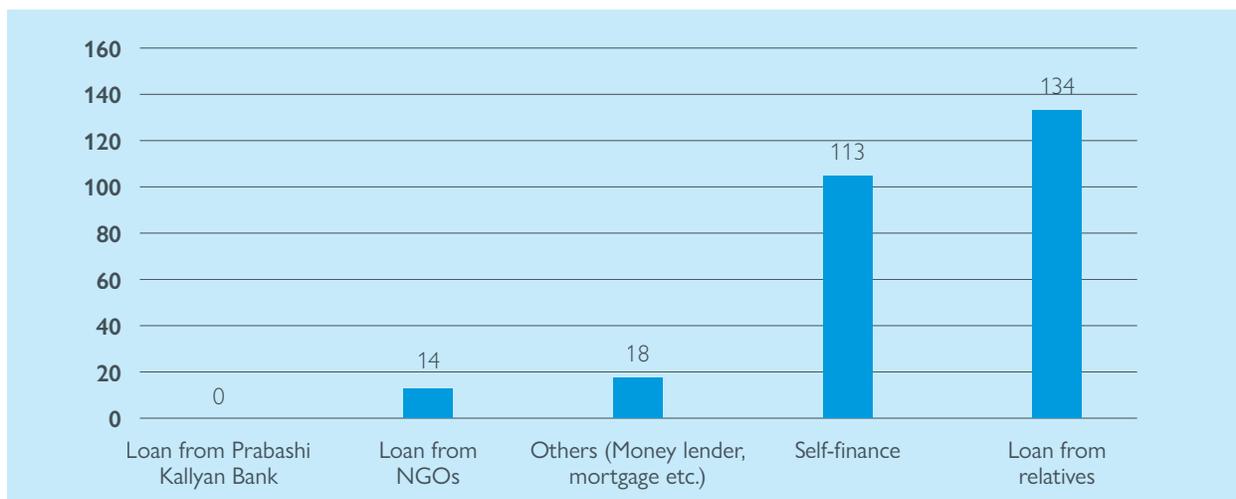
### Civil society

Among the CSOs, BRAC offers migration loans to aspirants after checking their visas. The upper limit of the loan is BDT 500,000 (USD 6250) at a 25 per cent interest rate. As of June 2016, BRAC microfinance provided migration financing to 194,000 households (BRAC, 2016). Both women and men migrants are eligible to apply for BRAC's migration loans.

### Survey findings

Findings from field data reveal that Bangladeshi migrants rarely access PKB for bank loans, primarily due to their lack of knowledge about PKB's services. In fact, self-financing and lending from relatives are the major sources of financing the cost of migration (Figure 3.7). During in-depth interviews, several participants doubted that PKB would offer them loans for remigration purposes. Migrants reported two challenges: lack of information about PKB services and the difficulty in procuring the documents required for such “small” loan amounts.

**Figure 3.7: Financing cost of migration**



**Sources:** Field survey for IOM Study on the Mapping and Scoping of Services for the Migrant Workers of Bangladesh at Various Stages of Labour Migration Cycle. Note: Multiple responses were recorded for each participant in the study.

### Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- PKB suffers from three distinct challenges: it has limited branch outlets to cover demands from a large number of migration loan seekers; it has inadequate human resources in existing branches; and it lacks a communication and promotional strategy to reach out to the migrants about its loan service and low interest rates.
- Although a large number of people avail themselves of BRAC's migration loan, it has a high interest rate that discourages many financially insolvent migrants.
- Private banks are yet to tap into the labour migration market, reducing the financing options for aspirant migrants.
- Since the actual cost of migration is much higher than the officially known migration cost, aspirant migrants are heavily dependent on private sources and informal loan services. Informal loans are easily and locally available, but the problem is that such loans lack regulatory control and oversight mechanisms, forcing migrants to sell or mortgage their landed properties to repay the debt burdens.

### 3.10 Smart card distribution

Collecting a smart card is one of the most important procedural requirements in the migration process. The smart card is a digital device containing migrants' biographical and migration-related particulars. Migrants are required to swipe this card at the airport immigration desk to facilitate their departure process on a fast-track basis. They are also required to produce this card at Bangladeshi diplomatic missions in CoDs to avail themselves of any services.

## State

The smart card is issued nearly at the final stage in the pre-departure stage of labour migration from Bangladesh. It was introduced in 2010 at Dhaka DEMO to simplify the migration process. As part of the Government of Bangladesh's long-term plan to decentralize migration services, Chattogram DEMO began issuing a smart card on 31 July 2017. Senior BMET officials opined that the Government had a plan to gradually extend the smart card services at other DEMOs.

An aspirant migrant is required to submit a list of documents to a licensed recruitment agency, which can in turn collect the smart card on behalf of the migrant. These documents include:

- Certificate of pre-departure training
- Copy of passport
- Copy of visa and work permit
- Proof of depositing BDT 3050 to PKB as a contribution to WEWB
- Proof of depositing BDT 50 for the smart card fee
- Proof of depositing BDT 500 for attesting a Saudi Arabia visa, BDT 250 for Brunei Darussalam, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates
- A non-judicial stamp of BDT 300

Although a recruitment agency usually submits these documents on behalf of migrants, aspirant migrants can also submit these documents, but they rarely do so, fearing hassles. The whole process takes one day. If the application package is submitted early in the morning, the smart card is issued the same day late in the afternoon.

## Private sector

BAIRA-enlisted PRAs often request smart cards for a group of recruited migrants. For group visas, BMET and DEMO respond to such requests and deliver smart cards to a delegate from recruitment agencies, who eventually transfers them to individual migrants.

## Civil society

CSOs do not have any role in issuing smart cards. However, during the safe migration awareness campaigns, the CSOs discuss the importance of collecting smart cards by the migrant herself or himself as part of migration processing.

### Box 3.1: Voice of an aspirant migrant going to South Africa

Registration, fingerprint, smart card – all I have done in the same premise. I didn't have to roam around from here and there for services much. I have completed my work easily.

**Sources:** *In-depth interviews with returnee migrants.*

### Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- Only Dhaka and Chattogram DEMOs issue the emigration clearances and smart cards. In the absence of decentralized distribution systems, migrants lose time and money in accessing the smart cards.
- Although the smart card is enriched with a wealth of information, it is currently used for limited purposes. During an expert meeting on returnee services, participants observed that there was a gap in using the smart card to detect the number of returnees, and the extent to which they completed their employment terms.

### 3.11 Medical check-up

Medical check-ups constitute an important step on the migration process. A wide variety of public and private sector agencies are responsible for providing this service.

#### State

BOESL arranges the health check-ups for migrants bound to Jordan and the Republic of Korea. For other CoDs with which BOESL works on processing labour migration, migrants can choose their own vendors for accessing medical screening service or rely on the vendors suggested by the CoDs. BOESL does not have any mandate for arranging health screening services for outbound migrants to countries such as Maldives.

### Private sector

The Gulf Approved Medical Companies Association (GAMCA) provides medical check-up services to aspirants going to the Middle East, which is mandatory for those going to Gulf countries. Other countries of destination such as Malaysia and the Republic of Korea have their own list of authorized centres for medical check-ups. On average, an aspirant migrant spends USD 40 to receive the medical check-up services. They need to collect a token from the GAMCA head office and then visit a GAMCA-affiliated diagnostic centre to give a blood and urine sample, and do a chest X-ray. With these initial medical check-ups, they can collect a medical clearance, which is needed for visa application in some countries.

### Civil society

CSOs do not have a direct role in medical check-ups. However, they provide migrants with relevant information about health-care providers during safe migration campaigns.

### Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- GAMCA-enlisted diagnostic centres often produce medical reports that contradict the findings from other diagnostic centres, creating worries among aspirant migrants, since GAMCA clearance is a mandatory requirement for outmigration to certain Gulf countries.
- Another issue is false approval, meaning migrants pay bribes to obtain medical certificates, even though they are not fit to work. This causes a major issue, especially when a migrant is required to do another medical examination after reaching the CoD, and thus can be returned to Bangladesh immediately with no reimbursement and support if any medical conditions are detected.
- For aspirant migrants originating from rural areas, especially women, finding the location of a GAMCA-approved centre may be a challenge. This was evident in the words of an aspirant migrant in Box 3.2.

### Box 3.2: Voice of Md Sujon, an aspirant migrant

I came here to complete medical examinations for going to Bahrain. First, I had to come to GAMCA and with its registration slip, I looked for a medical centre to do health check-ups. I found difficulty in identifying the medical centre, since I didn't know where to find it. It's better for us (migrants), if they could arrange everything related to medical examination under one roof.

Sources: In-depth interviews with returnee migrants.

From a social protection perspective, existing pre-departure migration services represent a mix of protective, preventive, promotive and transformative functions. For instance, both the pre-decision awareness and pre-departure orientations are aimed at preventing fraudulent migration practices, whereas passport, job search and visa support services can, in the long run, protect core labour rights in CoDs. By contrast, the skills training, migration loans and medical check-ups can promote opportunities for both male and female labour migration. Finally, the digitized services – such as online and biometric registration, online visa checking and smart card – are clearly transformational in the sense that they leverage the use of information communication technology to transform the paper-based migration governance system to improve citizen-centric and gender-friendly migration services.

# CHAPTER 4

## POST-ARRIVAL SERVICES

This chapter presents central findings on the post-arrival services in countries of destination (CoDs). It shows that, compared with the pre-departure stage, there are fewer services available for Bangladeshi migrants in CoDs. The extent to which these services respond to the social protection needs of women and men migrants workers is briefly assessed in the concluding part.



## 4.1 Services at the destination airport

### State

Neither the Government of Bangladesh nor its constituent agencies maintain any service-providing role at the airports in migrants' CoDs. The immigration offices of CoDs control the process.

### Private sector

In the CoDs, employers' representatives receive groups of men migrant workers at the airport and keep them in the waiting area. After completing the immigration process, migrants then go to their workplaces, local recruiting agency offices or residences in groups. Women domestic workers are usually received by their employers from the airport. In some cases, local agency representatives receive them and take them to their offices before delivering them to their employers' residences.

### Civil society

CSOs do not offer any service at the CoD airports.

### Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- There are circumstances when Bangladeshi individuals find themselves helpless, especially if they are detected as irregular migrants while entering a foreign country.
- The Government of Bangladesh has no desk or representative at the CoD airport.
- There is a lack of verification mechanisms initiated by Bangladesh to ensure that migrants who have arrived safely in CoDs and their terms and conditions as agreed upon in the contract prior to departure are kept (no-contract substitution).

## 4.2 Consular services

### State

Article 24 (3)(f) of the Migrants Act 2013 authorizes the Labour and Welfare Wing at Bangladesh missions overseas to facilitate passports, visas and consular services to Bangladeshi workers. The Labour and Welfare Wings operate under the direct authority and monitoring of the respective ambassadors/high commissioners/consulate generals, but they represent MoEWOE, and work closely with WEWB. There are 29 Labour and Welfare Wings in 26 countries under the Bangladesh diplomatic missions (embassies/high commissions/consulates) abroad. The Government of Bangladesh has Labour and Welfare Wings in Saudi Arabia (Riyadh and Jeddah), the United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi and Dubai), Malaysia, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar,

Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Spain, Iraq, Singapore, Maldives, Libya, Mauritius, China, Thailand, Italy, Switzerland, Australia, South Africa, Brunei Darussalam, the Russian Federation, Egypt, Kuwait and Jordan (MoEWOE, 2017). The Bangladeshi missions discharge the duties towards the welfare of Bangladeshi migrants, where Labour and Welfare Wings have not been created (ibid.). In CoDs with no Bangladeshi embassy, Bangladeshi migrant workers are required to contact the embassy in the nearest country for accessing consular services. Offering consular services in large countries such as Saudi Arabia is often beyond the capacity of the mission, since a large number of migrants work in remote areas of the country (former labour attaché and Expatriates' Welfare Ministry interview, November 2017).

Migrants need to visit the diplomatic missions in person to renew their visas and to apply for “out pass” (general amnesty) or renewal of machine-readable passports. About 40 per cent of migrants surveyed for this study visited Bangladeshi missions abroad to avail themselves of consular services, including passport and visa renewal, and document attestation for “out-pass” purposes, to name a few. As stated before, due to a restrictive work environment, domestic women migrant workers have disadvantages in accessing consular services at their convenience. Some embassies take a gender-sensitive approach to organizing open houses for women migrant workers to learn about their feedback on consular services (former labour attaché interview, 2017). Women respondents in this study who accessed consular services rated the embassies to be women-friendly.

Bangladeshi embassies offer consular support and services for migrants in crisis, emergencies and war situations. During the wars in Iraq, Kuwait and Libya, Bangladeshi embassies collaborated with IOM to facilitate consular services and the repatriation of thousands of migrant workers (former labour attaché interview, 2018).

### Private sector

Private enterprises are not authorized to provide consular services to Bangladeshi migrants. Hence, PRAs do not offer any services in CoDs. Yet a group of informal intermediaries has grown in CoDs who enjoy their privileged network with embassy officials to facilitate consular services to migrants at a variable service charge.

### Civil society

CSOs do not have any direct role in consular services. However, a number of CSOs maintain liaison with local rights-based organizations in CoDs, which often facilitates getting consular services for workers.

## Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- Labour attaché offices at CoDs have limited capacity and resources, lack of training, and lack of coordination mechanism among various ministries, all of which constrain their ability to provide effective service delivery (RMMRU, 2014).
- Migrants often complain about long waiting hours and unsatisfactory services.
- The extent to which missions are capable of providing emergency consular services depends on the willingness, understanding, liaison and coordination among service providers.
- While the seventh five-year plan spells out the need for strengthening Labour and Welfare Wings, migration services at CoDs are discharged by only a handful of 29 missions.
- Migrants, especially domestic women migrant workers, find it difficult to access the consular services due to limited mobility caused by employers' restrictions.
- Currently, there are no provisions for online services or hotline contact numbers. As a result, migrants have to visit embassy premises during weekdays.
- Migrant workers' weekly day off is on the day when the consular office is closed, thus preventing migrants from accessing such services.

## 4.3 Monitoring services

### State

Article 24(1), (2) of the Migrants Act 2013 authorizes the Labour and Welfare Wing to inspect migrants' workplace and meet with employers when needed (MoEWOE, 2013). The Act also mandates the Labour and Welfare Wing to check employment contracts. To do so, the labour attachés are required to pay regular visits to the companies. If any irregularity is found, the concerned Bangladeshi mission informs the labour ministry in the destination country to look into the matter and take actions against the accused employer. The other major task is to check the regular payment of salary to the migrant. The worker is asked to talk to his/her supervisor in cases of non-payment and to lodge a complaint at the labour dispute office. Renewing Akamas (work permits) is another area of activity monitored by them. Visiting and monitoring of the workers' working and living conditions is another responsibility of the labour attaché. There are fewer cases where labour attachés rescued workers from forced labour conditions in Saudi Arabia and other CoDs (former labour attaché interview, September 2017). This is true for a few cases but not in all cases and in all CoDs. Only a few Bangladeshi diplomatic missions – such as the consulate in Hong Kong SAR, China and the embassy in Saudi Arabia – maintain web pages on Labour and Welfare Wings providing a detailed list of services, including surprise visits to employment agencies and boarding houses, and suggesting occupational safety advisories for migrant workers.<sup>13</sup> Participants in this study, however, reported that they had not seen any embassy official at

<sup>13</sup>See Consulate General of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Hong Kong SAR, China, "Labour and Welfare Wing". Available from [www.bangladeshconsulate.hk/labour-welfare.html](http://www.bangladeshconsulate.hk/labour-welfare.html) (accessed 20 July 2018). See also the Embassy of Bangladesh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, "Service Provided by Labour Wing". Available from [www.bangladeshembassy.org.sa/service.html](http://www.bangladeshembassy.org.sa/service.html) (accessed 20 July 2018).

their workplace or residence in CoDs. This is either due a small sampling size of the study or due to the limited scope of the monitoring service offered by Labour and Welfare Wings at CoDs.

### Private sector

Two provisions in the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013 (MoEWOE, 2013) clearly state the duties of a recruitment agent in the CoD. Article 15 (a) requires an agent “to protect the interest of migrant workers”, and article 15 (c) emphasizes ensuring “good workplace conditions in accordance with the terms and conditions of the employment contract, and to maintain communication with the employer for these purposes” (ibid.). Despite the legal provisions spelled out in the Migrants Act 2013, PRAs do not consider it to be their responsibilities to monitor the employment status of their recruits. However, migrants in vulnerable situations usually contact their PRAs to address their employment-related problems. This study finds that, of 50 women migrants, 5 received services from PRAs through their local counterparts in CoDs. Those services concerned either changing the employers or facilitating return.

### Civil society

CSOs maintain a monitoring role via telephone conversation with migrant workers, communication with local rights-based organizations and through the Bangladeshi diaspora at destination countries to offer support to the victims of forced labour, who are often exposed to various types of abuses such as physical and sexual harassment (interview with WARBE DF, 2017).

### Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- Manpower and resource constraints are pointed out to be the biggest challenge to provide monitoring services to migrants.
- Only 9 per cent of migrants reported that their workplaces were visited by some authority (although they couldn't confirm the nationality of the visitors).
- Due to restrictions by employers, monitoring the condition of women migrant workers remains a challenge for the Government of Bangladesh and CSOs.
- Women migrants reporting their vulnerabilities to local agents of PRAs in CoDs are often forced to endure exploitative work conditions, including physical and psychological torture.

## 4.4 Legal support

### State

Article 24 (3)(d) of the Migrants Act 2013 provides for the Labour and Welfare Wings at Bangladeshi missions to facilitate “services, counselling and legal assistance” to migrants and report the status of such services on a yearly basis. The Government of Bangladesh is also expected to take necessary initiatives to ensure legal support through its missions abroad to all of its nationals who are in jail/deportation camps. The missions try to mitigate problems of non-payment of salary and other benefits with the help of labour court and other related offices, and often by providing legal assistance to the workers. Migrants also go to the embassies of Bangladesh to find solutions to the problems faced by their families at home. However, very few returnees were found to receive support from the mission. The following statement of a returnee migrant (Box 4.1) reveals this well.

Migrants who committed crimes in the CoDs are also provided with legal aid by the Labour and Welfare Wings. The Bangladeshi missions sometimes hire local lawyers for migrants with the financial support from WEWB. Migrants do not have direct access to the labour ministry or court in CoDs (labour attaché interview, September 2017). Interior/home ministry officials in some CoDs listen to labour attachés to address the problems of migrant workers. Labour attachés also lobby for the migrants who are given death sentences. With regard to irregular migrants, labour attachés often request the host country officials to regularize them.

### Box 4.1: Voice of Nasima, a returnee woman migrant from Gazipur

My experience of working in Qatar was not so good. I used to work for an elderly person, who did not give me enough food to eat... She used to change her maid quite often. I wasn't allowed to go out and meet Bangladeshis. She even beat me on several occasions. Her children used to compensate for her behaviour. They used to give me food and salary on a regular basis.

**Sources:** In-depth interviews with returnee migrants.

## Private sector

Recruiting agencies do not have any role in providing legal support to migrants.

## Civil society

CSOs offer tele-counselling and shelter home to a limited number of citizens who are the victims of abuse. The victims are usually assisted by their fellow workers and acquaintances to avail themselves of legal support services or arbitration. The study did not find diaspora and local associations in CoDs playing any role in providing legal services to migrants, although Bangladeshi NGOs started mobilizing diaspora and local associations in support of the vulnerable workers (interview with WARBE DF, September 2017).

## Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- The survey of returnees in four migrant-concentrated areas shows that very few migrants received or opted to receive legal services from the mission. According to the survey, only 8 per cent of the migrants went to the local Bangladeshi embassy for dispute settlement. While 22 per cent of migrants were victims of fraud, only 1.5 per cent of the 200 migrants received assistance from the Bangladeshi embassy.
- To resolve problems such as non-payment of wages, non-existence of work and sudden layoff, migrants sought assistance from Kofils (sponsors), local counterparts of the recruiting agencies and friends, instead of the Bangladeshi missions.
- In most cases, employers did not extend any support, while local agencies tried to help workers by negotiating with the employers, changing of the employer or arranging return for the migrant.
- Often, the diplomatic missions of Bangladesh lack the capacity to offer legal services to deal with issues relating to workers' salaries, benefits, etc.
- The Bangladeshi missions are also inadequately equipped to resolve the problems faced by the women migrant workers who suffer from physical or sexual abuse at work.
- Members of the Bangladeshi diaspora and local associations of Bangladeshi communities are yet to develop any full-scale support system to address the needs of migrants seeking legal support.

## Findings from the field survey

**Table 4.1: Support services received at work in countries of destination**

Service provider	Response (Yes/No)	Count	Proportion of total respondents
Embassy officials	Yes	6	3.0%
	No	194	97.0%
Labour ministry of the destination country	Yes	4	2.0%
	No	196	98.0%
Labour court	Yes	1	0.5%
	No	199	99.5%
Trade union	Yes	0	0.0%
	No	200	100.0%
NGOs	Yes	0	0.0%
	No	200	100.0%
Don't know	Yes	2	1.0%
	No	198	99.0%
Recruiting agents	Yes	4	2.0%
	No	196	98.0%

**Sources:** Field survey for IOM Study on the Mapping and Scoping of Services for the Migrant Workers of Bangladesh at Various Stages of Labour Migration Cycle. **Note:** Multiple responses were recorded for each participant in the study.

## 4.5 Medical support and services

### State

When a migrant worker requires medical support, and the issue is brought to the attention of the Labour and Welfare Wing, Bangladeshi missions offer referral services to contact medical centres in countries of destination. In extreme cases, the Labour and Welfare Wing officials contact WEWB and migrants' families to facilitate their return to Bangladesh for medical treatment. In 2016, the Government of Bangladesh returned 22 injured/seriously ill workers and spent BDT 23,00,000 (USD 28,750) for the treatment of 24 migrants who suffered from serious injuries while working abroad.

### Private sector

At destination, workers often fall sick and it is primarily the responsibility of the employer to offer medical services to their employers. The survey findings show that 72 per cent of the migrants receive medical services abroad at some point of migration. These services include health check-ups, outdoor patient services for occasional ailment, admission at hospital for long-term ailment, and injury from accident, etc.

**Table 4.2: Types of medical services received by migrants**

Types of services	Response (Yes/No)	Count	Proportion of total respondents
Check-up	Yes	101	50.5%
	No	99	49.5%
Outpatient department	Yes	51	25.5%
	No	149	74.5%
Admission	Yes	29	14.5%
	No	171	85.5%
Accident	Yes	15	7.5%
	No	185	92.5%
Other	Yes	6	3.0%
	No	194	97.0%

**Sources:** Field survey for IOM Study on the Mapping and Scoping of Services for the Migrant Workers of Bangladesh at Various Stages of Labour Migration Cycle. **Note:** Multiple responses were recorded for each participant in the study.

The medical assistance is provided in various ways. While some migrants received cash support, others received salary for the illness period and transportation to hospitals. Of about 20 per cent of migrants who suffered illness and injury, only 5.5 per cent received compensation from their employers. Again there were others, whose full medical costs were borne by the insurance company, while another migrant received only 25 per cent of the cost of his treatment. Migrants were usually considered unfit if and when detected with serious illness, pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases. In most cases, employers denied any responsibility for medical expenses, and sent them back home with or without an entry-ban for a few years.

### Civil society

CSOs lack the resources and operational space to offer medical support in CoDs. Yet Bangladeshi communities in CoDs offer voluntary support to address the emergency medical needs of co-migrants. In some cases, this includes fundraising for medical expenses of a poor migrant worker or returning a migrant worker having medical conditions.

### Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- Medical support for the migrants at destinations are not ensured for all. The Government of Bangladesh does not have an insurance scheme for migrant workers abroad. WEWB plans to introduce an insurance scheme for migrants.
- Although employers are primarily responsible for and bound by the contract to provide medical services to migrant workers, the survey shows not all migrants receive assistance from employers.
- It is also beyond the capacity of the Bangladesh mission abroad to take the responsibility for all sick or injured migrants, although there are instances of providing such services with the help of WEWB.

## 4.6 Remittance services

### State

One of the most important services required by migrants abroad is safe and low-cost remittance transfer (ILO, 2014a). Bangladesh Bank has authorized a number of private banks and relevant firms to facilitate the transfer of remittances from overseas employees. Although the State-run Probashi Kalyan Bank has planned to do so, it is yet to start offering remittance transfer services. The Labour and Welfare Wings of Bangladeshi embassies encourage migrant workers to use formal banking channels for remittance transfer purposes.

### Private sector

Remittance transfer services are usually offered by public and private banks, online money transfer agencies such as Western Union and MoneyGram, and migrants themselves. Almost all the private banks operating in Bangladesh offer remittance transfer services. Some of the well-known global service providers in this sector are Western Union, MoneyGram and Ria.

### Civil society

CSOs do not have licenses or mandates to offer money transfer services to migrants.

### Findings from the field survey

Our survey data revealed that migrants used multiple channels to send remittances. As many as 91.5 per cent of migrants used banking channels for remittance transfer, whereas 10 per cent of migrants preferred returnee friends, relatives or co-workers to be reliable sources to send money home. About 10 per cent of returnees reported using Mobile Financial Services (MFS) such as bKash<sup>14</sup> and Rocket, whereas 9.5 per cent reported money transfers through the Hundi system.<sup>15</sup> Some migrants invested their earnings abroad in local business in the country of destination. A returnee from Saudi Arabia reported:

“Within a few years of my migration as a worker, I started a business in partnership with other Bangladeshi people. We started selling mobile SIMs. The capital came from my earnings abroad and also I borrowed some money from Bangladesh.”

A section of migrant workers also invested their money to remigrate to Europe in irregular ways by contacting local middlemen.

<sup>14</sup> bKash is a mobile financial service in Bangladesh. It works with Western Union to provide remittance services. Available from [www.bkash.com/wu](http://www.bkash.com/wu) (accessed 20 July 2018).

<sup>15</sup> An informal system for transferring money which is not permitted by Bangladeshi law.

**Table 4.3: Remittance service providers chosen by migrants**

Service provider	Response (Yes/No)	Count	Proportion of total respondents
Bank	Yes	183	91.5%
	No	17	8.5%
Through people	Yes	20	10.0%
	No	180	90.0%
Hundi	Yes	19	9.5%
	No	181	90.5%
Self	Yes	0	0.0%
	No	200	100.0%
Mobile	Yes	0	0.0%
	No	200	100.0%
bKash	Yes	20	10.0%
	No	180	90.0%
Other	Yes	5	2.5%
	No	195	97.5%

**Sources:** Field survey for IOM Study on the Mapping and Scoping of Services for the Migrant Workers of Bangladesh at Various Stages of Labour Migration Cycle. **Note:** Multiple responses were recorded for each participant in the study.

## Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- Although banks are identified by migrants as the most trustworthy service provider, some migrants preferred to send money using non-banking channels, due to lack of access or accounts.
- Though PKB was created for migrants, it is yet to offer remittance transfer services to Bangladeshi migrants. This is due to the fact that it cannot perform as a schedule bank.

To what extent do the post-arrival services described above represent the four dimensions of a social protection approach: protective, preventive, promotive and transformative? Data and analysis suggest that the consular, monitoring, legal and medical support and services are mostly designed to protect the basic and labour rights of migrants, whereas the transfer services from airport to employment agency and remittance services are aimed at preventing the physical and financial risks of being cheated from criminal enterprises. None of the post-arrival services appear to be promotive or transformative.

# CHAPTER 5

## RETURN AND REINTEGRATION SERVICES

This chapter explores the types of services available for Bangladeshi migrants upon their return from overseas employment. It shows that the State is the main actor in providing return services, while CSOs run a wide variety of reintegration services to returnee migrants. The type of CSO-run services includes psychological counselling, health-care, community development and skills training. A brief analysis of linkages between return and reintegration services and various dimensions of social protection is presented in the conclusion.



## 5.1 Return of stranded, deported or detained workers

Usually, short-term migrants arrange their return after completion of their contract agreements. In most cases, the cost of return is borne by the employers. According to article 29 of the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013, migrant workers – including those detained, stranded or in situations of distress overseas – shall have the right to return to Bangladesh and to receive necessary assistance from the Bangladesh mission in the concerned foreign country. According to our survey, 107 of 200 migrants returned themselves before or after completion of the contract.

### State

The Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment in Bangladesh are the main actors to arrange the return of stranded and detained migrants from CoDs. These ministries seek support of IOM and national NGOs to facilitate the return of stranded and detained migrants. The foreign missions of Bangladesh extend necessary technical and financial assistance to the stranded workers for return and for emergency treatment of distressed workers (MoEWOE, 2017). This study found 24.5 per cent of undocumented workers and 19.5 per cent of detained workers who returned home received financial and administrative support from Bangladeshi missions, local authorities and employers. Some of them mentioned that they surrendered to the police voluntarily to go back home, while others reported that they were forced to return by their employers due to physical sickness.

Over the last 10 years, Bangladeshi migrants stranded in Libya, Iraq and other war-torn areas were rescued and returned with the help of IOM (IOM, 2017b, 2017c). From 2008 to 2015, 94,975 Bangladeshis were issued return decisions in the European Union, mostly in the United Kingdom, Italy and Greece. In the same year, 10,850 return decisions were issued to Bangladeshi nationals, but only 28.6 per cent of them effectively returned (European Union, 2016:3), while others were waiting to be returned under a memorandum of understanding signed in 2017 between Bangladesh and the European Union. MoEWOE requests IOM to extend assistance to repatriate Bangladeshis where there is a Bangladeshi mission or Labour and Welfare Wing (Islam, nda). Since early 2015, IOM has also worked with the Government of Bangladesh to assist migrants who had been stranded or detained in Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand during the Andaman Sea Crisis to return home (IOM, 2017c). As of June 2016, this successful collaboration enabled 2,813 survivors, including 183 children, to return voluntarily to Bangladesh in a safe and dignified manner.

WEWB has allocated a small fund for the return of stranded migrant workers. The concerned Bangladeshi missions can utilize a portion of this fund for the return of Bangladeshi workers. Both regular and irregular migrants can benefit from this fund (WEWB interview, July 2018).

### Box 5.1: Fate of the detained migrants

Three brothers from Muradnagar, Cumilla became victims of a recent ban of the Saudi Government on businesses run by Ajnabis (foreigners). They used to run a mobile SIM business besides working in a shop. They were caught on their way back home from the shop. They were taken to police custody before being sent back to Bangladesh. One brother described:

“We bribed local intermediaries within ‘Safarjan’ to expedite the process to return to our home. We did not try to contact our embassy, no one from the Bangladesh mission came to see us either.” The three brothers were eventually deported nine days after their arrest. They were taken directly to the airport from “Safarjan”. They themselves paid for their return journey.

None of them have any plan to go back to Saudi Arabia again. As the eldest brother described: “It is impossible to go back to the previous situation. We want to do some business. We have capital but not to our expectation. We don’t want to take loan from the offices. All we need is a safe and secured place to invest our money in.”

**Sources:** Focus group discussion with returnee migrants in Cumilla District, Bangladesh.

### Private sector

If a migrant worker is in a situation of distress due to negligence or illegal activity of a recruitment agent, the Government may direct the concerned recruitment agent to bear the costs of repatriation of that migrant worker (MoEWOE, 2013). During KIIs, a senior official of the recruiting agencies’ association BAIRA claimed that agencies usually make arrangements for the return or re-employment of the distressed migrants through their local counterparts. During the survey, some women returnees mentioned that they contacted their recruiting agents in Bangladesh regarding changing the employer or returning home. They also reported that some of them were exposed to ill-treatment and torture by local agents in CoDs when they expressed unwillingness to serve under the first employer.

## Civil society

BRAC helps to rescue and return migrants safely with the support of the Government of Bangladesh and other international agencies. OKUP managed to return some stranded Bangladeshis in collaboration with Lebanon Caritas. In some cases, local NGOs provide support to the victims of fraud. They assist returned migrants to negotiate with dalals to write off existing debts which, according to the NGOs, had significantly helped the families of migrants to deal with their financial difficulties (IOM, 2017c).

## Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- The Government of Bangladesh is yet to develop any clear-cut strategy and/or policy about how to repatriate the stranded or deported migrants, although it facilitates repatriation of seriously injured, ill or deceased persons.
- There is also a lack of funds for the return of migrants from CoDs in case of emergencies and crises such as the Iraqi and Libyan wars. Whenever necessary, the Government of Bangladesh draws resources from WEWB, although irregular migrants do not contribute to this fund.
- Return is a complex interministerial issue, which involves coordination between the ministries of home, foreign, civil aviation and WEWB.
- CSO's involvement in return is very limited to only the provision of referral services. None of the large NGOs working in Bangladesh on migration has a mandate to facilitate return of the migrants. RMMRU, WARBE DF, OKUP, BOMSA and BRAC contact BMET to expedite return of the migrants, if and when they come across cases of detained, tortured or stranded migrants from their working area across the country.
- Local NGOs in Bangladesh are permitted to spend money at source only, and therefore are unable to finance or provide services at destinations.

## 5.2 Reintegration of returnees: The present status

Reintegration is an essential part of sustainable return,<sup>16</sup> as it protects and empowers returnees by providing them with the necessary tools and assistance for their successful reinsertion into the society of their country of origin, while generally contributing to the sustainability of return (European Union, 2016). Until 2015, there was a lack of assistance and support services to help returnee migrant workers reintegrate into society (BRAC, 2015). In recent years, increased efforts have been made towards improving reintegration processes. Returnees interviewed for this study reported that they thought about creating business, finding jobs in the communities or remigration after return. More than 35 per cent of returnees had plans to do some local business, while 11.5 per cent thought about choosing salaried jobs. Almost half of the returnee migrants (41%) chose to remigrate.

<sup>16</sup> Sustainable return is here defined as reintegration into the economic, social and political processes of the country of origin and the ability to secure political, economic and social conditions needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity (European Union, 2016).

**Table 5.1: Survey findings about migrants' plans before return**

Career path	Response (Yes/No)	Count	Proportion of total respondents
Business	Yes	71	35.5%
	No	129	64.5%
Service	Yes	23	11.5%
	No	177	88.5%
Remigration	Yes	82	41.0%
	No	118	59.0%
Other	Yes	30	15.0%
	No	170	85.0%

**Sources:** Field survey for IOM Study on the Mapping and Scoping of Services for the Migrant Workers of Bangladesh at Various Stages of Labour Migration Cycle. **Note:** Each question was answered by 200 respondents.

During the field level survey, more than 50 per cent of migrants reported that they could not materialize their plans due to lack of money, support and facilities. About 95 per cent of migrants reported that they did not find any support system to utilize acquired skills after returning home. The remaining 5 per cent mentioned neighbours and informal service providers' assistance towards remigration. Eighteen per cent of migrants started businesses after return by their own initiative.<sup>17</sup>

### Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- The greatest challenge of returnee reintegration is the non-availability of records and databases.
- There is no mechanism to provide psychosocial counselling to the detained, ill migrants or victims of trafficking and forced labour.
- There are no public or private schemes for effective reintegration of returnee women migrants.
- Returned migrants still experience serious difficulties in re-establishing businesses and incomes reliant on the savings from their earning by working abroad.

This study identified several services for the returnees and their reintegration, which are discussed below.

<sup>17</sup> Field survey for IOM Study on the Mapping and Scoping of Services for the Migrant Workers of Bangladesh at Various Stages of Labour Migration Cycle.

## 5.3 Remigration and reintegration loans

### State

The State-run PKB offers a maximum loan of 01 lac BDT (USD 1,250) for remigration of returnees to cover the cost of airfare. It also offers up to 10 lac BDT (USD 12,500) for reintegration with only property documents and without collateral or mortgage. Yet our survey found that only 6 per cent of migrants knew about the reintegration loan provided by PKB. None of the 200 migrants surveyed for this study took this loan. Returnees also had no idea about loan facilities provided by other public and private banks. Eighty-eight per cent of migrants also had no idea about economic integration programmes run by NGOs.

Migrants come to know about PKB during a very early pre-departure stage, when they deposit a small fee to access the online registration service at the DEMO. IOM has supported the Bank to establish a help desk to address any queries and complaints. Despite these, lack of awareness among the migrants about the loan services offered for reintegration purposes, coupled with the small amount of reintegration loan available for disbursement, indicates that more targeted interventions are needed to reach out to the returnees.

### Private sector

The private sector in general and recruiting agencies in particular do not have any reintegration services for returnees. Among the private sector banks, BRAC Bank offers reintegration loans under its general loan schemes.

### Civil society

As stated in chapter 3, among the CSOs, BRAC's microfinance programme offers migration loans in the pre-departure stage, which is also applicable for returnees wishing to remigrate.

### Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- Public and private banks do not offer special loans or products for returnees to set up their own businesses.
- Lack of capital and insurance discourage migrants from setting up their businesses and hence many returnees invest in their own or family member's remigration.
- There is a gap in information services related to financial literacy campaigns for the migrants. As a result, returnees are not aware of the best strategies to make efficient use of their income in CoOs.

## 5.4 Recognition of prior learning and skills training for returnees

### State

In 2013, the Ministry of Education introduced the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) scheme to acknowledge the skills and knowledge acquired and provide enhanced pathways into further education and training (ILO, 2014d). Under the RPL programme, the Government of Bangladesh has permitted a number of training organizations to recognize the prior learning of workers through a certification. Until 2017, about 20,000 people received certificate under RPL, under the Technical Education Board of the Ministry of Education (interview with BMET Director of Training, 2017). There are no systematic data on how many Bangladeshis are employed at home and abroad with the RPL skill certificate (interview with BMET Director of Training, 2017).

### Private sector

BMET signed an agreement with City and Guilds in 2017, a private international company, for providing international standard skills certification to Bangladeshis. Although the City and Guilds does not deal only with RPL, its certification will be recognized in 80 countries.

### Box 5.2: RPL for Bangladeshi workers

Recognition of Prior Learning is an assessment to confirm and appreciate the competencies that people acquire from their life experience or have gained through informal or non-formal training and work experiences (ILO, 2010). Sixty-four per cent of Bangladeshi migrant workers are less or semi-skilled. Since they lack recognition of skill levels in overseas job stations, even after a few years of work experiences, they are deprived of better wages, reasonable status and jobs for which they should be eligible. Upon their return, returnee migrants face difficulties entering the local job market, due to lack of recognition of prior learning. The National Skills Development Policy 2011 recognizes the need for a system of “ladderization”, which will offer returnee workers an opportunity for skills testing, skills upgrading and skills certification at a higher level certificate or part thereof before returning from abroad.

**Sources:** Focus group discussion with returnee migrants in Cumilla District, Bangladesh.

## Civil society

Among the CSOs, BRAC, OKUP, Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) and BOMSA run skills training programmes for returnees, although this list is not exhaustive. BRAC's migration programme works towards creating an enabling environment for socioeconomic reintegration of migrant workers, their families and returnee migrants. BRAC's support groups, forums and volunteers at community levels help returnee migrants and their families through peer counselling. BRAC also helps returnee migrants in utilizing skills to establish income-generating activities and SMEs. The reintegration component of BRAC finds stronger focus on women and vulnerable migrants. BRAC developed peer education activities in migrant communities at selected destination countries.

The returnee reintegration programme of OKUP offers skills training to women migrants. So far, 400 returnee women in Faridpur and Narshingdi districts received training in sewing and livestock farming. Among them, 60 received seed money to establish businesses in their own neighbourhoods. OKUP not only provides support for covering the initial cost of doing business, but also connects returnee women entrepreneurs with local markets.

## Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- Despite huge enthusiasm, progress towards extending the RPL programme remains slow.
- With the exception of a few NGOs running skills training for returnees, there are no large-scale initiatives for skills training of the returnee migrants.
- Migrants also lack certificate/RPL of the skills they acquire in CoDs.

## 5.5 Health-care and psychosocial services

### State

There is no State-run initiative for psychological counselling of returnee migrants with experiences of abuse and distress in countries of destination. However, the Government of Bangladesh offers financial support for covering the medical expenses of migrants who have returned with serious physical injuries or diseases and were unable to continue their jobs in overseas stations. This is also discussed in chapter 6 on welfare services.

### Private sector

Recruitment agencies do not offer any service in this sector. There is no publicly available information on the role of the private sector in offering health-care and psychosocial services for the returnee migrants.

### Civil society

OKUP, a Bangladeshi NGO, provides support to the returnee migrant workers, particularly women, and the left-behind migrant family members, especially spouses, for social and economic reintegration and development. It has established migrant support centres and helpline services in its seven project areas of Cumilla, Dhaka, Faridpur, Mymensing, Narsingdi and Sylhet districts. It has also set up a small safe house in Dhaka to provide psychological support to returnee women who were exposed to torture and ill-treatment. The shelter home can accommodate six migrants.

OKUP also provides health services to migrants with serious physical or mental illness or injuries, with the help of public hospitals. As part of its social integration programme, OKUP takes the responsibility to reunite migrants with their families, especially in cases where migrants return with pregnancy, mental illness or contagious diseases. More recently, BRAC has appointed psychologists in its 10 migration-intensive areas to offer counselling services to returnees, especially for those who are deported from European States.

### Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- Although the Government of Bangladesh offers funding support to the health-care of returnee migrants. However it is important to support the psychosocial needs as well.
- CSOs have funding constraints in offering health-care and psychosocial services.

## 5.6 Community-based organizations for social reintegration

### State

Returnee migrants' CBOs can facilitate peer-learning processes among returnee migrants. However, the Government of Bangladesh agencies are yet to develop CBOs to support the social reintegration of returnee migrants. This is primarily due to the fact that protection of outgoing migrants is a priority of the GOB than reintegration.<sup>18</sup>

### Private sector

Recruitment agencies and other private businesses do not have any role in forming or supporting returnee migrants' CBOs.

### Civil society

Several CSOs have developed community-based reintegration strategies for returnee migrants. WARBE DF brings returnees and their family members to form CBOs to promote their welfare (WARBE DF, 2017). The CBOs run projects to enhance the knowledge and leadership of migrants and their families. WARBE DF started its reintegration programme with the help of TDH-Italia and Dan Church Aid. Social Structure of Migration is a village-based community development organization. For sustainability of this cooperative society, family members of migrants and returnees were also added to this organization. Under these CBO activities, WARBE DF runs the Bangladesh Obhibashi Odhikar Forum.

Another donor-funded NGO, MJF, channeled CBO support services through a number of partner organizations, such as BASTOB, OKUP, RMMRU and WARBE DF (interview with MJF official, 2017). Returnee migrants become active members in CBOs. From MJF intervention areas, migrants are connected with PKB to secure reintegration loans.

### Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- There are only a few CSOs with community-based initiatives, covering only a few geographical areas.
- Lack of human and financial resources constrain the ability of CSOs to replicate returnees' community-based programmes across the country.

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<sup>18</sup> This view was shared by several participants at the Expert Meeting on Framework of Services for Returnee Migrants' Reintegration and Remigration, held at WEWB on 1 April 2018. The expert meeting was organized as part of this study.

**Table 5.2: Return and reintegration services of IOM and NGOs**

Organizations	Return	Psychosocial counselling	Skills training	Reintegration loan	Referral services	Community-based organizations
IOM	Yes	No	No	No		No
BOMSA	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
BRAC	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
OKUP	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
RMMRU	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
WARBE DF	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes

**Sources:** Interviews with officials from IOM, BOMSA, BRAC, OKUP, RMMRU and WARBE DF.

In conclusion, return and reintegration services described before serve to fulfil various aspects of the social protection agenda. First, the return of stranded, deported or detained works is primarily protective, since it aims at relieving migrants from vulnerabilities. Second, the remigration and reintegration loans, recognition of prior learning, CBO support and referral services are geared toward promoting migrants' opportunities through expanding their career choices. Third, the health-care and psychosocial services fall into the overlapping preventive and protective dimensions of social protection, since they can both prevent the deterioration of existing risks and protect the existing health-care rights of migrants. Fourth, none of the services described in this chapter are transformative in nature, but the adoption of a well-articulated reintegration strategy would require a transformational paradigm in the migration sector of Bangladesh.

# CHAPTER 6

## WELFARE SERVICES FOR MIGRANTS

This chapter analyses the types of welfare services available for Bangladeshi migrants. It highlights the dominant role played by the Wage Earners' Welfare Board in facilitating the services. It concludes with a brief discussion on how various welfare services fit into the four protection functions—protective, preventive, promotive and transformative.



Currently, WEWB is the lead actor responsible for promoting the well-being of migrants and their families at various stages of the migration cycle (WEWB, 2016, 2017; Migrant Workers' Rights Global, 2013). In March 2017, the cabinet of the Government of Bangladesh approved the draft Expatriates' Welfare Board Act 2017 (Mamun, 2017). Once enacted by the Parliament of Bangladesh, the Welfare Board will get a clearly defined legal footing. The Board is chaired by the secretary of MoEWOE. It has 15 members, who represent BAIRA, BMET, BOESL and returnee migrants.

The proposed Wage Earners' Welfare Board Act 2017 provides for offering legal, financial and administrative services to Bangladeshi migrants, especially women migrant workers. It calls for the creation of briefing centres to educate the migrants about the laws, lifestyles and relevant information about countries of destination (ibid.). The Welfare Board was renamed in 2013 from the Wage Earners' Welfare Fund (WEWF). WEWF was established in 1990 to facilitate welfare services for migrants. Article 19 (1) of Emigration Ordinance 1982 and article 47 of Migrants Act 2013 provided the legal basis for the operation of WEWF.

This study finds the following welfare services offered to migrants and their families:

- Repatriation of deceased migrants
- Death compensation, unpaid salary, service benefits and insurance claims
- Medical support
- Educational support for dependents
- Redress for human rights abuses
- Arbitration services in dealing with fraud
- Referral services at pre-departure and post-arrival stages

For each of these welfare services, a list of major service providers and the challenges and gaps are described below.

## 6.1 Repatriation of deceased migrants

### State

During the 2016/2017 fiscal year, WEWB facilitated the repatriation of 3,455 deceased workers and provided instant funding support of BDT 35,000 (USD 437.5) to each family for burial services (WEWB, 2017:12). Usually, the employers are responsible for repatriating the bodies of deceased migrant workers. When the employers are unwilling or unable, the Bangladeshi community provides support to send the bodies. If support from employers and the community is unavailable, WEWB works with the Labour and Welfare Wings of Bangladeshi missions in countries of destination to process the repatriation of the bodies (ibid.:13).

The family of a deceased migrant worker, who has gone abroad with a clearance from BMET, or has accepted membership of the Welfare Board, can get a financial grant of BDT 300,000 (USD 3,750) (ibid.:15). If a migrant worker dies in Bangladesh within six months of his/her arrival while on vacation or undergoing medical treatment, his or her family is also eligible for the same financial grant of BDT 300,000 (USD 3,750) (ibid.:15). During the 2016/2017 fiscal year, WEWB spent BDT 1.1742 billion (USD 14.7 million) as financial grants for the families of deceased migrants (ibid.:15). WEWB processes the application for such financial grants through the DEMO. Although it usually takes two months to process such grant applications, migrants' families often report longer times for body repatriation and processing financial grants.

### Private sector

Recruiting agencies do not provide any support in repatriating bodies of deceased migrants.

### Civil society

Upon receipt of a complaint from family members, CSOs contact the DEMO to initiate the process of returning the bodies of deceased migrants.

### Challenges and gaps

Often the repatriation of bodies from the Middle East, especially from Saudi Arabia, takes longer due to procedural requirements in the CoDs for verification purposes.

## 6.2 Death compensation, unpaid salary, service benefit and insurance claims

### State

WEWB works with the Labour and Welfare Wings in Bangladeshi missions in countries of destination to secure death compensation, unpaid salary, service benefits and insurance claims from the employers. Once such monies are collected, WEWB distributes them to successors of deceased migrants (WEWB, 2017:16). In the 2016/2017 fiscal year, WEWB disbursed BDT 592.4 million (USD 7.4 million) to migrants' families and successors as compensation, salary, service benefits and insurance claims.

### Private sector

Recruiting agencies and other private businesses do not offer services facilitating death compensation, unpaid salary and insurance claims to migrants' families.

### Civil society

CSOs do not have a direct role in providing death compensation, unpaid salary or insurance claims. Nonetheless, WARBE DF, BRAC, RMMRU, OKUP and BOMSA have referral services in this regard. They advocate and support migrants and their families with paperwork, complaints and so on.

## Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- Migrants' families often lack detailed and updated information about the process of securing death compensation, overdue salaries and other benefits.
- Since many employers do not offer insurance packages, many Bangladeshi workers are dependent on the goodwill of the employer to secure benefits against cases related to occupational safety and hazards.

## 6.3 Medical support for migrants

### State

Migrant workers who are forced to return home due to accident, serious injury or sickness can receive up to BDT 100,000 (USD 1,250) as medical benefits (ibid., 2017:17). In the 2016/2017 fiscal year, WEWB spent BDT 6.5 million (USD 81,250) as medical support for migrants. During the same time, 37 migrants with medical conditions were repatriated and admitted to hospitals (ibid.:18). WEWB and Labour and Welfare Wings in foreign missions also offer financial support to migrant workers in countries of destination to cover their medical expenses (ibid.:18). WEWB provided an ambulance in Chattogram Airport and planned to provide two ambulances at Dhaka Airport for transporting migrant workers with medical conditions (ibid.:19).

### Private sector

The recruiting agencies do not have any provision for offering medical support for migrants.

### Civil society

As stated in chapter 5, several CSOs offer small-scale health-care services for the migrants.

## Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- Most migrant workers lack any insurance coverage during their employment in countries of destination.
- There is no provision for special services for migrants and their families in public or private medical care centres.
- There is inadequate medical support for the migrant workers.

## 6.4 Educational support for dependents

### State

WEWB facilitates three types of educational supports for dependents of migrant workers. First, since 2016, it has been able to arrange a 0.5 per cent quota for enrolment into the higher secondary level (11th grade to 12th grade) of migrant workers' dependent children. As a result of joint initiative of the Expatriates' Welfare Ministry and the Welfare Board, the Patuakhali Science and Technology University, a public university in Bangladesh, has allocated reserved seats for migrants' dependent children. Second, since 2012, WEWB has been providing educational stipends to four categories of children of migrant workers – primary, secondary, higher secondary and tertiary. During the 2016/2017 fiscal year, WEWB offered educational stipends to 2,412 meritorious children of migrants who secured grade point averages of 5 (out of 5) in public examinations. The board spent BDT 34.11 million (USD 426,400) for educational stipends of migrant children (WEWB, 2017:23). The third type of educational support comes in the form of financing Bangladeshi community-based schools in countries of destination. During the 2016/2017 fiscal year, WEWB disbursed BDT 150.3 million (USD 1.88 million) to support 11 schools: 9 in Saudi Arabia, 1 in Oman and 1 in Qatar.

None of the respondents in this study availed themselves of the educational support schemes. This was perhaps due to a small sample size. Also, a large majority of them were completely unaware of educational programmes for the migrants' children.

### Private sector

Private recruitment agencies do not offer any educational support for migrant workers.

### Civil society

CSOs encourage promoting educational opportunities for the children of migrant workers.

### Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- The State-run educational supports cover only a small fraction of migrant workers and their dependent children.
- The scholarship opportunities are not well-advertised among the migrants; hence, many migrants are not aware of such schemes.

## 6.5 Addressing human rights abuses

### State

Bangladeshi missions in CoDs are required to look after the welfare of migrant workers by visiting their workplaces and responding to their queries and complaints. In dealing with violation of contracts, embassy staffs at the Labour and Welfare Wings should contact concerned employers. They also lobby with the host Governments to arrange legal support and shelter homes for those in need. Of the 200 returnees surveyed for this study, 14 per cent of men (21 of 150) and 16 per cent of women (8 of 50) migrants mentioned that they were exploited physically and mentally by their employers. Yet none of them sought support from Bangladesh missions abroad, or from the labour court in the country of destination. This was due not only to the fact that they were sceptical about approaching the mission to address their issues, but also to their lack of knowledge in reaching out to the missions and labour court. A former labour attaché noted that, in some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, there were too few missions to cover such a large Bangladeshi community. Due to geographical distance, the migrant workers are often unable to come to the missions and lodge complaints. In most cases, migrants either leave their jobs or try to adjust with the situation as long as they can. In worst case scenarios, they quit their jobs and opt for returning home.

### Private sector

Registered recruiting agencies make little visible effort to address the human rights abuses by employers in CoDs. They claim that they are not allowed to operate in migrants' destinations, nor it is financially viable for them to intervene in distress situations. However, the best they can do is to partner with the Governments of Bangladesh and the CoDs, to identify the abusive employers and recommend legal actions against them (interview with BAIRA delegate, 2017).

### Civil society

CSOs also have negligible operational space in migrants' destinations. Yet they operate call centres and offer referral services in some Gulf CoDs upon receipt of complaints of abusive work conditions.<sup>19</sup> Usually, they collaborate with their counterpart NGOs and rights organizations at some destinations, such as Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

### Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- Insufficient staffs at the Labour and Welfare Wings give an impression that missions are unable to attend to the needs of migrant workers.
- Geographical distance between migrants' workplaces and Bangladeshi missions appear as a hindrance to seeking redress against abuses.
- A gap in the current welfare regime for migrants concerns the exclusion of undocumented migrants. Reintegration or social inclusion of the undocumented migrants is not guaranteed by any law (Rashid, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Interviews with WARBE DF, BOMSA and OKUP.

## 6.6 Shelter home

### State

Bangladeshi women domestic workers in the Middle East are common victims of abuse and torture at the hands of their employers. Recently, the Government of Bangladesh has established “Safe Homes” for the distressed women workers in Riyadh and Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, and in Oman and Lebanon. Among the Governments of CoDs, the Government of Kuwait has established a shelter home for women migrants with modern facilities, medical care and counselling services (Kuwait Times, 2016).

### Private sector

Recruiting agencies have yet to allocate any resources to support the formation or maintenance of shelter homes.

### Civil society

CSOs provide referral services to migrants, suggesting that they contact shelter homes in countries of destination. BOMSA and OKUP maintain contacts with women labour migrants, especially those experiencing abusive work conditions, and advise them to contact the Labour and Welfare Wings and safe homes for physical safety.

### Challenges and gaps

While there are a number of shelter homes in selected destination countries in the Middle East, the Government of Bangladesh is yet to develop sufficient shelter homes in all CoDs. There are funding and policy-related issues related to opening more shelter homes. In most cases, migrants try to escape by themselves or with the help of fellow workers. There are cases where migrants surrender to the police, to be sheltered in safe custody, and return home.

## 6.7 Arbitration services

### State

Among the 200 returnees surveyed, 22 per cent reported that they experienced a wide variety of fraudulent practices. Some felt deceived for not receiving the promised jobs, while others felt cheated when they were forced to return home. A few men workers reported that, although they paid money to informal brokers to migrate to other countries, especially in Europe, they were eventually unsuccessful. Only 3 of the 200 migrants reported that they went to the Bangladeshi embassy to find a solution.

Under the Migrants Act 2013, victims of fraud can lodge a case against a recruiting agency or their informal agents. The implementation of the Act remains a distant reality. BMET offers arbitration services for the victims of fraud. It has also introduced an online complaint system against registered recruiting agencies.

### Private sector

There is no publicly available information on recruiting agencies participation in arbitration.

### Civil society

Among the CSOs, RMMRU offers a small-scale arbitration service through a community-based initiative titled Migrants Rights Protection Committees (MRPCs). MRPCs represent local stakeholders, returnees, lawyers and government employees to provide alternative dispute settlement mechanism for the victims of fraud (RMMRU, 2013).

### Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- Although the online complaint system run by BMET requires documentary evidence, in reality many aspirant migrants lack such evidence, since they give money to informal agents without any receipt.
- Lack of knowledge among the migrants, law enforcement agencies and legal practitioners hinders the implementation of the Migrants Act 2013.
- Victims reporting fraud cases to DEMOs or BMET often report not being provided adequate support to address the complaints.

## 6.8 Referral services at home and abroad

### State

DEMOs offer limited referral services to migrants, pointing them to contact various government offices to receive relevant pre-departure services. For instance, at the time of online registration, DEMOs direct aspirants to contact BMET for collecting smart cards. TTCs also advise their graduates to contact BMET for collecting smart cards and accessing other services. DEMOs also refer migrants to WEWB to access welfare support.

### Private sector

Recruiting agencies only refer migrants to BMET or DEMOs to complete various pre-departure formalities, such as registration, fingerprinting and smart card collection.

## Civil society

Several NGOs and CSOs – including BOMSA, BRAC, RMMRU and WARBE DF – have referral systems for migrants. They pursue the cases coming to them through direct contact or project areas with BMET arbitration cells and try to realize compensation from the accused recruiting agency with the help of the Government.

BOMSA and RMMRU refer returnees to organizations providing livestock and other trainings, and try for their employment at the local level. MJF helps migrants secure bank loans from government and non-government banks for SME development.

WARBE DF has set up a Grievance Centre at BMET to deal with the complaints coming from the grass-roots level. It also refers the complaints received through the hotline and online to the arbitration cell of BMET. WARBE DF also deals with cases of domestic workers through the recruiting agency, using BAIRA's arbitration cell. Again, there are some groups in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Jordan and Qatar. It has welfare offices in some provinces of Saudi Arabia. It has also organized some migrants' groups in those countries. They try to contact the employer and rescue the migrants.

OKUP has community-based organizations working towards reducing the risks and vulnerabilities of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia and to promote their human rights (OKUP, 2017). It runs a project that aims at initiating and strengthening the cross-border case referral system between NGOs in Malaysia and Bangladesh for increasing migrants' access to justice and remedies, both in countries of destination and origin. In collaboration with local organizations at destination countries, OKUP also extends assistance to the migrant workers in Lebanon.

BOMSA offers referral services to migrants in need of assistance abroad. It contacts the concerned Bangladeshi embassy abroad, recruiting agencies and BAIRA, changes the employer (house) and arranges for medical services. BOMSA deals with 300–400 cases annually. It has a working connection with Tamkin in Jordan, and CARAM–Asia and Tenaganita in Malaysia.

MJF provides referral services through its partners. It does not have any direct services at destinations. If a migrant contact it, MJF tries to address his/her problem by contacting the mission through its partners.

BRAC offers referral services to the migrants through its Migrant Service Centres at 12 districts (interview with BRAC official, Dhaka). Through its volunteers and field workers, BRAC follows up with issues of human rights abuses of migrants in CoDs.

## Challenges and gaps

Challenges and gaps include the following:

- The challenges in referral services primarily concern resource constraints. Most projects are donor-driven and lack self-sustainability.
- It is difficult for NGOs to offer formal protection and monitoring services, due to CoDs' rules and restrictions, and the domestic nature of some jobs.
- NGO activities regarding reintegration are mostly donor-driven and often not self-sustaining.
- Many CBOs do not have credit programmes to run the project, irrespective of the funding received from donors.

In summary, this chapter shows that women and men migrant workers from Bangladesh access a wide variety of welfare services at various stages of the migration cycle. From a social protection approach, most of these services aim to protect and promote the rights of migrant workers and their families in the form of social assistance and insurance. The transformative measures to ensure social protection of migrants are also evident in the recent adoption of a normative framework regarding migrants' welfare services. There are, however, few available services to prevent risks and vulnerabilities of migrants.



# CHAPTER 7

## SCOPE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING LABOUR MIGRATION SERVICES

This chapter has two sections. The first provides a summary of existing services, providers and scope of services. The second assesses the scope for improved services delivery in the labour migration sector of Bangladesh.



## 7.1 Summary of available services and existing scope of services

This study conducted a mapping and scoping of services available to Bangladeshi migrant workers at different stages of their migration cycle: pre-departure, post-arrival, and return and reintegration. Table 7.1 shows a matrix of the services. Focusing on three broad categories of actors – State, market and CSOs – it identified the gaps and challenges in providing these services. Migration services are also broadly categorized as basic, essential non-basic, and welfare services.

### Available services

The study found that migrants received various kind of services at three stages of migration. First, at the pre-departure stage, they received information about overseas employment and basic services, such as obtaining passports, visas, work permits, travel documents, and training and orientation. Second, at the post-arrival stage in countries of destination, migrants accessed varying levels of consular, legal, medical and remittance transfer services. Third, in the return and reintegration stage, detainees and deportees received remigration and repatriation services. There are fewer reintegration services available for returnee migrants in Bangladesh. These include financing, health-care and psychosocial supports, skills training, and community-based organizations to act as self-help groups.

WEWB is the lead actor in facilitating the well-being of migrants and their families. The study examined the WEWB's role in repatriation of deceased migrants, death compensation and financial support for burial services of migrants, medical allowance and transport services, and educational supports for dependent children of migrants.

### Service providers

State service providers, as found in the study, include MoEWOE, its executive organization BMET, WEWB, PKB, TTCs and DEMO. Over the last two decades, the Government of Bangladesh has treated migration as a thrust sector and expanded its services to ensure fair recruitment, safe migration and skills development. Both horizontal and vertical expansion of services are evident as far as BMET, TTC, DEMO and labour attachés are concerned. A major gap, however, persists in terms of the Government of Bangladesh's pre-decision and post-return services to migrants.

Over the years, the private sector – comprised of licensed recruitment agencies, informal agents/intermediaries and migrant recruiters – has also become an important service provider. Migration information is mostly disseminated by informal intermediaries, friends, families and migrant recruiters. Recruiting agencies, with the help of their grass-roots level agents, offer visas, passports, work permits, training and travel services to migrants. Often, migrants depend on informal agents more than the formal recruiters, due to their proximity.

As far as CSOs are concerned, services such as awareness campaigns for safe migration, referral and small-scale reintegration services are provided by NGOs (Siddiqui, Rashid and B. Zeitlyn, 2008). CSOs' role as service provider is bound by number, space and resources. Most activities of CSOs are donor-dependent. Also, they cover only a small portion of the migrant community.

## Scope of services

Services are available at all stages of migration. The Government of Bangladesh has significantly improved the system of migration processing by introducing fingerprinting, smart cards, financial assistance and one-stop services. The services at destinations could not be improved at the same pace. Both the Government of Bangladesh and migrants identified the need for quantitative and qualitative improvement of services provided by the labour attachés. Compared with the pre-departure and post-arrival stages, migrants receive little or no formal support for reintegration and remigration after return. There is hardly any mechanism to assess the skills of the returnees and match them with local or foreign demands. Very limited reintegration investment or loan schemes are in place to help migrants start their own ventures after return. In most cases, migrants go back to their pre-departure socioeconomic conditions.

While the quality and quantity of services improved significantly over what it had been two to three decades previously, the survey on migrant workers shows that many people are still outside the realm of government services, either because of their lack of knowledge about them or unwillingness to avail themselves of these services due to distance. People use traditional networks for financial services more than the formal services available.

**Table 7.1 Migration services matrix**

	Migration services	State	Private sector	Civil society
Pre-departure stage	Pre-decision awareness	MoEWOE, BMET, WEWB, DEMOs and BOESL	---	BRAC, BOMSA, OKUP and RMMRU
	Passport collection	Ministry of Home Affairs, the Department of Immigration and Passports	---	---
	Job search and visa	BMET and BOESL	Private recruiting agencies, social networks, migrant recruiters	---
	Online registration and fingerprint	BMET and DEMOs	---	---
	Online visa checking	DEMOs	UDCs	---
	Technical skills training	TTCs	Private recruiting agencies, BAIRA	BOMSA, BRAC and WARBE DF
	Pre-departure orientation and briefing	TTCs	Public and private agencies and their informal intermediaries	BOMSA, BRAC, OKUP and WARBE DF
	Contract paper and visa service	BMET and BOESL	Private recruiting agencies, friends and family of migrants	---

	Migration loans	PKB	BRAC Bank, friends and family	BRAC
	Smart card distribution	BMET and DEMOs	---	---
	Medical check-up	BOESL	GAMCA	IOM
<b>Post-return stage</b>	<b>Migration services</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Private sector</b>	<b>Civil society</b>
	Services at destination airport	---	Local agency representatives, employer, acquaintances	---
	Consular services	Labour and Welfare Wing at Bangladeshi missions	---	---
	Monitoring work environment	Labour and Welfare Wing at Bangladeshi missions	---	CSOs via telephone, local NGOs and trade union
	Legal support	Labour and Welfare Wing at Bangladeshi missions	---	CSOs via telephone, local NGOs and trade union
	Medical support and services	Labour and Welfare Wing at Bangladeshi missions with assistance from WEWB	Employers	Bangladeshi communities in CoD
	Remittance transfer	Bangladesh Bank-authorized private banks and relevant firms	All the private banks and online money transfer agencies such as Western Union, MoneyGram and Ria	---
<b>Return and Reintegration stage</b>	<b>Migration services</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Private sector</b>	<b>Civil society</b>
	Return of stranded, deported and detained workers	The Government of Bangladesh's Ministries of Home, Foreign Affairs, and Expatriates' Welfare, IOM and some NGOs	---	IOM, BRAC and OKUP
	Remigration and reintegration loan	PKB	BRAC Bank	BRAC
	Recognition of prior learning and skills training	Ministry of Education through RPL	City and Guilds, a private international company	BRAC and OKUP
	Health-care and psychosocial services	---	---	BRAC and OKUP
	Community-based organizations	---	---	BASTOB, OKUP, RMMRU and WARBE DF
Referral services	DEMOS and TTCs	---	BRAC, WARBE DF, OKUP, BOMSA and RMMRU	

Welfare services at various stages	Migration services	State	Private sector	Civil society
	Repatriation of deceased migrants	WEWB	---	---
	Death compensation, unpaid salary, service benefits and insurance claims	WEWB	---	---
	Medical support	WEWB and Labour and Welfare Wings in foreign missions	---	CSOs
	Educational support for dependents	WEWB	---	---
	Redress for human rights abuses	Bangladeshi missions	Registered recruiting agencies	CSOs via telephone
	Shelter home	Government of Bangladesh, Government of Kuwait	---	BOMSA and OKUP provide referral services
	Arbitration and complaint mechanism	BMET	---	RMMRU through MRPCs
	Referral services	DEMOs and TTCs	Recruiting agencies	Some NGOs and CSOs such as BOMSA, BRAC, RMMRU and WARBE DF

## 7.2 Scope for improved services delivery: Some recommendations

From the survey, KIs and review of the existing services, the study proposes a set of recommendations at three stages of the migration cycle. Some of the policy imperatives listed here are closely aligned with the Colombo Process Joint Recommendations to the Global Compact for Migration (Colombo Process, 2017). The Colombo Process covers the following thematic areas: skills and qualification recognition process, fostering ethical recruitment, effective pre-departure orientation and empowerment, remittances and labour market analysis. Four additional thematic areas, as mentioned in the Colombo Process Ministerial Declaration 2016, are: migrants health, operationalizing migration-related elements of the Sustainable Development Goals, promotion of equality of women migrant workers, and consular support for migrant workers.

**Table 7.2: Thematic areas of intervention for improved migration services**

Stage of migration	Thematic areas of intervention
Pre-departure stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on informed decision-making</li> <li>• Reduce the cost of migration and fraudulent practices and strengthen the complaint system</li> <li>• Promote citizen-centric and gender-sensitive services processing</li> </ul>
Post-return stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect rights and promote welfare in countries of destination</li> <li>• Promote efficient flow and effective utilization of remittances</li> <li>• Ensure migrants' access to health-care</li> <li>• Support migrants in managing risks and vulnerabilities</li> </ul>
Return and reintegration stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure safe return of migrants in various conditions</li> <li>• Develop a returnee reintegration strategy</li> </ul>

### Pre-departure stage

#### Focus on informed decision-making

Aspirant migrants depend largely on relatives and informal intermediaries, who not only take advantage of lack of awareness and publicly available information, but also manipulate the aspirants. To address this problem, the following steps can be taken:

- Expand information campaigns for safe, orderly and regular migration at the union council levels in rural areas and ward levels at the urban city council areas. Encourage the use of technology to expand the outreach.
- Ensure the availability of information regarding the regular migration process and migration services in both digital and print formats, and also include such information in primary level national curricula.
- Ensure effective inter-agency collaboration between BMET, BOESL, PKB and WEWB at the central level and between DEMOs and TTCs at the district level to ensure that migrants, both men and women, are making informed choices.
- Empower aspirant men and women migrant workers and their families through comprehensive orientations to ensure that migrants make informed decisions to maximize the benefits of safe, decent and regular labour migration, reduce their vulnerability in countries of destination, and facilitate their workplace and social integration.
- Promote tailored pre-employment and pre-departure orientation programmes as a means of ensuring that migrant workers understand their rights and obligations, and grievance and recourse mechanisms, including with respect to local rules and regulations, and essential information, especially on health and safety, and potential risks they may face.

- Acknowledge the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women migrant workers in pre-departure orientation programmes, and ensure the delivery of gender-responsive orientation services.
- Recognize the important role of civil society organizations and other social partners in disseminating safe migration information and ensuring migrant workers' and their families' access to necessary services.

### **Reduce the cost of migration and fraudulent practices and strengthen the complaint system**

Informal intermediaries and migrants' social networks now procure more than 50 per cent of the visas and other migration services, including passport and smart card collection, online registration and medical check-ups. Yet they remain largely out of the legal coverage of the Migrants Act 2013 and Government of Bangladesh regulation. As a result, cost of migration, mainly the recruitment fees, is very high in Bangladesh, and aspirant migrants are often exposed to fraud, deception about employment terms and working conditions, and unethical practices, factors widely cited as contributing to forced labour and human trafficking. Moreover, women migrants at greater risk of falling victim to coercive recruitment practices are more likely to be exposed to physical force and sexual violence during the recruitment process, sexual service for debt repayment, and physical confinement. Lack of labour market information and the types of skills required in the CoDs also act as a barrier to safe migration. Several initiatives can be taken to address these problems:

- Take steps to reduce the cost of migration and fraudulent practices. Ensure such steps complement the existing legal and practical measures.
- Promote the “employer-pay model” through defining recruitment fees and related costs.
- Ensure that all documents and contract are translated into the local language of aspirant migrant workers.
- Create a mechanism for formalizing dalals as responsible stakeholders. MoEWOE needs to consider legal and policy reforms to bring dalals (informal intermediaries) and their services within a legal framework. This can be done through training, sensitization and incentive programmes with a broader goal of preventing irregular migration. MoEWOE should encourage collaboration between various State agencies and grassroots-level CSOs to reduce fraudulent recruitment practices.

Ensure capacity-building of all relevant stakeholders, including licensed private recruitment agencies and employers, in Bangladesh and CoDs, respectively, to promote ethical recruitment at all stages of the migration cycle.

- Ensure the monitoring of fraudulent practices by local government offices. Large and small CSOs should network with each other for peer learning and expanding the types and geographical coverage of migration services so that dependence on informal sources is reduced.
- Develop a Code of Conduct for PRAs and informal agents to ensure their responsibilities in promoting ethical recruitment and decent work.
- Conduct training in migration laws, policies and code of conduct for the PRAs and informal agents, as well as for journalists, lawyers and judges.

- Develop an interactive labour market information system and a migrant worker information and management system, with detailed information about the job demands in countries of destination, skills categories and available aspirant migrants in Bangladesh.
- Adopt policies and practices for skills matching of migrant workers to expand safe migration and decent work opportunities for both men and women migrant workers.
- Strengthen the complaint system to address the irregularities in the recruitment system. The complaint system can be decentralized and easily accessible to migrants and their families. There is a lack of data on the current online complaint management system. This needs to be monitored on a regular basis to examine the extent to which complaints lodged by male and female victims of fraud are addressed in a timely and gender-friendly manner.

### **Promote citizen-centric and gender-sensitive services processing**

Digitization and decentralization efforts by BMET should continue to target simplification of services so that citizens, including aspirant women migrants, can process their documents at reduced time, cost and number of visits. The following actions can be taken to achieve this goal:

- Extend the digital services delivery system to all DEMOs so they can provide online registration and fingerprint service, and distribute smart card and emigration clearances. TTCs should also develop Web-based applications and expand e-learning opportunities for aspirant migrants.
- Provide more resources and develop capacity-building of DEMOs and TTCs for better services delivery and skills enhancement of all aspirant migrants, irrespective of their gender, race and religious background.
- Promote collaboration between UDCs and DEMOs so that aspirants can avoid travelling to district headquarters to avail themselves of essential migration services.

## **Post-arrival stage**

### **Protect rights and promote welfare in countries of destination**

Participants in this study reported inadequate services in the post-arrival stage to cater to the needs of migrants. Existing gaps and challenges can be addressed by adopting several actions:

- Develop a mechanism for delivering post-arrival orientation covering migrant workers' rights and obligations, and grievance and recourse mechanisms. Ensure that, upon arrival in CoDs, migrant workers are well aware of the local rules and regulations, health and safety measures, and potential risks and vulnerabilities.
- Establish sufficient numbers of Labour and Welfare Wings at Bangladeshi missions in all CoDs, as per article 24 (1), (2) of the Migrants' Act 2013. Ensure that the proposed Wing at each mission conducts a needs assessment of and develops an intervention strategy for social protection of migrants, with special emphasis on both women migrants and migrants in distress conditions.

- Develop national and regional guidelines to strengthen consular capacity to assist migrants in the context of crises to protect migrants in countries experiencing conflict or natural disasters.
- Ensure that the Labour and Welfare Wing's assessment of services in CoDs covers a wide array of support offered at the ports of entry, and other services related to consular, legal, medical and remittances transfer.
- Conduct periodic monitoring of work environments in CoDs.
- Expand the number of Labour and Welfare Wings in Bangladeshi missions. Strengthen existing Labour and Welfare Wings with more human resources, continuous in-service training and performance-based incentives.
- Encourage international agencies and development partners to support Bangladeshi missions to offer legal services to the detained, deported and distressed migrants.

### **Promote efficient flow and effective utilization of remittances**

This study identified two challenges with regard to remittances: higher transaction costs and household consumption. This means that, due to higher costs, migrant workers often choose to transfer remittances through informal systems such as Hundi and cash carriers. At home, migrants' families spend most of the remittances for household consumption and less on investment in productive enterprises. In addressing these challenges, members of the Colombo Process agree on the following two policy imperatives, which are also relevant for Bangladesh:

- Encourage migrant workers to access formal mechanisms for remittances, including through the use of new technologies such as mobile phone applications. Promote low-cost, compliant and faster remittance transfer systems.
- Promote financial literacy programmes for migrants and their families so they can make informed choices about the use of remittances for household consumption and investment in productive sectors.

### **Ensure migrants' access to health-care**

Migrant workers' health-care needs are often ignored by employers in CoDs. Often, migrant communities offer voluntary support to address vulnerabilities experienced by migrants. Participants in the study strongly feel, and the Colombo Process recommends, the need for prioritizing health-care access for migrants. Two policy recommendations are proposed in this respect:

- Ensure migrants' access to health-care services in both Bangladesh and CoDs. Address and remove situations, conditions and elements of vulnerability experienced by migrants in accessing health care.

## **Support migrants in managing risks and vulnerabilities**

Despite the best efforts by the Government of Bangladesh and Governments in the CoDs, migrant workers are likely to experience risks and vulnerabilities. Hence, there is a need to:

- Build partnerships with CoDs to strengthen support for migrant workers, including access to complaint mechanisms
- Continue to work with CoDs to expand the operational space of CSOs and recruitment agencies.
- Provide training for institutions responsible for delivering protection and assistance to migrants in the context of crises.
- Promote tailored post-arrival orientation as a means of ensuring that migrant workers understand their rights and obligations, and grievance and recourse mechanisms, including with respect to local rules and regulations, and essential information, especially on health and safety, and potential risks they may face.
- Ensure migrant workers' access to information on social security provisions and entitlements through post-arrival orientation.
- Support evidence-based and action research by academics and CSOs to propose how migrants can reduce and manage risks and vulnerabilities.
- Introduce formal mechanisms for PRAs' access to migrants' workplaces to monitor compliance with decent work conditions.
- Encourage CoDs to establish more shelter centres modelled on Kuwait's 500-seat shelter home with women attendants and doctors.

## **Return and reintegration stage**

### **Ensure safe return of migrants in various conditions**

Currently, there are no well-structured return and reintegration services for Bangladeshi migrant workers. In line with the existing migration laws and policies, it is necessary to:

- Ensure that, upon completion of a contract period, migrant workers have the opportunity for a safe and voluntary return at the expense of employers.
- Develop special funds to facilitate the emergency returns of migrants who are stranded, deported, or experiencing physical and psychological distress.
- Respond to the needs of migrants willing to return under unusual circumstances, such as deportation, occupation safety and hazards, and conflicts in CoDs.
- Strengthen counselling support and legal advice to migrant workers, and empower consular personnel to provide effective services.
- Promote skills recognition and certification prior to migrants' return to country of origin.

## Develop a returnee reintegration strategy

Although the rehabilitation and reintegration of migrants are briefly mentioned in existing migration laws and policies of Bangladesh, there is no reintegration strategy with clearly defined roles for various ministries and agencies. Hence, it is recommend to:

- Develop a comprehensive strategy for returnee reintegration with clearly defined roles for various agencies. One component of the returnee reintegration strategy should deal with the needs of stranded, deported and detained migrants. Other components should focus on remigration and reintegration loans, recognition of prior learning skills, skills training for returnees, health-care and psychosocial services, community-based organizations and referral services.
- Promote policies, processes and tools to assess and certify prior learning of returning migrant workers, and facilitate their reintegration into the national labour market. Ensure that returnees can also use recognition of prior skills while remigrating to the same or a new CoDs.
- Ensure greater use of information communication technology, including mobile applications to register returnee migrants, their skills and career choices. DEMOs, TTCs and UDCs should be authorized to offer registration and documentation of returnees.
- WEWB may arrange counselling services for psychologically distressed returnees, along with the delivery of financial support services for migrants with physical injuries.
- Encourage private business firms to allocate a portion of their job opportunities for returnee migrants. The Government of Bangladesh, in collaboration with the private sector, CSOs and development partners, can support media advertisement and sensitization campaigns for employers on returning migrants.
- Encourage banks and other financial institutions to allocate financial grants and loans to start small enterprises by returnees, as well as financial counselling/literacy.
- Strengthen partnerships between CSOs and TTCs for recognition of skills, access to information and referral services for job placement of returnees at home and abroad. They should continue to offer health-care and psychosocial services.

# ANNEX 1

Impact of Migration on Poverty and Development Project -  
Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit Field  
selection process



**Selection of districts:**

Twenty migrant-intensive districts were selected randomly based on BMET data. Districts were then divided into high, medium and low migration-intensive areas.

**Selection of upazilas:**

One upazila was selected from each selected district on a random basis.

**Selection of unions:**

One union from each selected upazila was randomly selected.

**Selection of villages:**

After completion of union selection, six villages from each union were selected on a random basis.

**Selection of households:**

Each village was divided into several equal parts covering 60 households in each part. After segmentation, RMMRU conducted censuses in two segmented areas chosen randomly. After selecting of a total of 120 households, the households were divided into three bundles – international migrant households, internal migrant households and non-migrant households – to see the ratios. On determination of the ratio, RMMRU selected required households for survey.



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