

# International labour migration

## Hurdles ahead

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International labour migration has been an integral part of Bangladesh's economic and social Development since the 1980s. It creates employment, ensures stability to foreign exchange reserve and in the context of 7th five-year plan of the country, it offers additional avenues to the government to attain its long term developmental goals. Along with the review of the challenges and achievements of government, this piece suggests steps that can be taken in migration governance in the coming years. First let us look at level and extent of migration during recent years.

**Statistics**

In 2015, a total of 5,38,667 workers have migrated overseas from Bangladesh to take up employment. In 2014, the total number who went was 425,684. In 2013, it was 409,253. Compared to 2014, this year migration flow has increased more than 30%, while when compared to last four years combined, it increased by 35%. There is no system of keeping data on returnee migrants. The recently conducted SDC and RMMRU household survey (2015) found that 9% of the migrant households were returnee migrant HHs. The number of female migrants has been on the rise over the last few years. Since January to November 2015, a total of 91,858 female workers has gone abroad to take up employment. This is more than 19% of the total flow of the year. In 2014, the number of female migrant was 76,007 and again it was 18% of the total flow.

Almost 80% of the workers, who migrated in 2015, went to the Gulf and other Arab countries. The average flow of



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migration over the last 39 years also depicts the same scenario (82%). The remaining 20% went mostly to different South East Asian countries (1,25,492). 23% of the workers migrated to Oman. Compared to the last year, total share of Oman increased 9%. Qatar received the second highest number of migrants from Bangladesh (22.4%). This year, a substantial increase of migration to Saudi Arabia has been noticed. Saudi Arabia accounts for almost 10.22% of the total migrants. This is the highest migration flow to Saudi Arabia in the last 7 years, followed by Singapore. A significant rise has been noticed in migration flow to Malaysia this year. This can be seen as one of the most important developments in migration flow of this year. UAE government's ban on migration of male workers still remains. This year only 24,898 workers had migrated to UAE and almost 92% of them are female workers. UAE is the single most important destination for the Bangladeshi

female migrant workers in 2015, followed by Jordan (21.69%), Oman (16.88%), Saudi Arabia (16.4%), Lebanon (9.1%), Qatar (8.76%) and Mauritius (1.3%).

**Flow of remittance**

This year the labour migrants remitted more than USD15 billion. Last year the remittance figure was USD 14.94 billion. Since 2013, Bangladesh has been the seventh largest remittance receiving country of the world. Similar to last year, this year as well Saudi Arabia is the highest remittance sending country for Bangladesh (21.49%). It is followed by UAE (18.14%) and the USA (16.11%). Although, till date highest amount of remittances are sent from Saudi Arabia, but it's total share is falling each year. In earlier years, 50% of the total remittance received was from Saudi Arabia. Bangladesh experienced a substantial increase of remittance flow from Malaysia in 2015 compared to the previous year. A total of

6.8% remittances were received from Kuwait this year another 6% from Oman, 2.1% from Qatar and 2.67% from Singapore.

Still a significant amount of remittance comes through informal channels such as hundi, friends or relatives. It is obvious that, amount of actual remittance flow to the country is much higher than the official flow. However, it is expected that, due to the growing consciousness among the migrants and also the flexibility in money transfer system, the percentage of informal flow is gradually decreasing.

**Contribution of migration**

A research book titled 'Impact of Migration on Poverty and Local Development' published by SDC and RMMRU in 2015 shows that in the period of 2014 and 2015 migration cost in average for male is about Tk. 3,80,000, whereas female migrants spent about Tk. 1,00,000 as migration cost. The report also reveals that male

migrants remit about Tk. 2,00,000 a year. On the other hand, female migrants remit Tk. 80,000 a year. While female migrants earn less than male migrants, they (female) remit 90% of their total income, male migrants remit 50% of their income.

A comparative study among both migrant and non-migrant households shows that annual income of the household with international migrant is Tk. 2,60,000. And annual income of non-migrant household is Tk. 1,14,000 while national rural annual average income is Tk. 1,15,000.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau Statistics (BBS), 26% of the rural population is living under the poverty line. SDC and RMMRU survey found that only 13% of international migrants' family is living under poverty line, whereas 40% of non-migrant family and 46% internal migrants' family live below poverty line. A current research study by RMMRU and RPC found that migrants' households spend much more money for primary and secondary level education than non-migrants' household. But for higher education they spend less money comparing to non-migrants' household. From this finding, it could be assumed that migration is one kind of disincentive for higher education.

**ACHIEVEMENTS IN GOVERNANCE**

**Entry to 3 traditional labour markets**  
This year, Bangladesh experienced breakthrough in re-entering into 3 of its traditional labour markets. These are Kuwait, Saudi Arab and Malaysia. After about eight years, Kuwait government resumed hiring Bangladeshi workers

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