

OVERSEAS EMPLOYMENT FROM BANGLADESH

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Introduction

In the context of huge population and insufficient facility to generate new jobs for growing economy, overseas employment has become one of the primary concerns of the government of Bangladesh towards poverty alleviation, reducing the unemployment problem and economic development. Formal migration for employment started in 1976 with a modest number of 6078. Presently about 8m Bangladeshis are engaged in overseas employment in more than 159 countries. About 90% of the overseas employment took place in 9 countries only. These are KSA, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Malaysia, Korea and Singapore.

Considering contributions and importance of expatriate Bangladeshis, government created the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment on Dec 20, 2001 with a view to ensuring the rights and interest of Bangladeshi workforce both at home and abroad and to facilitate overseas employment for rapid economic growth.

Key Statistics

Population	160 million	Overseas Employment: 2011: 568,662 2012: 607,789 2013: 409,235 2014: 425,684 2015: 555,881 2016: 757,731
Persons/sq.km	1100	
Labour force (10 ⁺)	56.0 million	
Entry into LF/year	2.5 million	
No. of countries of Overseas Employment	162	Remittances: (b US \$) 2011: 12.16 2012: 14.16 2013: 13.83 2014: 14.94 2015: 15.27 2016: 13.61
Skilled migration	42% (2016)	
Female migration	15% (2016)	

Gender specific migration

Female migrants constituted only 1% up to 2004. After 2004 the trend changed and reached about 18% in 2015 but declined to 15% in 2016. Female migrants are mainly facing the problems of lack of an understanding on a gender sensitive employment. Concentration of employment

opportunities in a few low paid and unskilled conventional jobs limits their opportunity for overseas employment.

Remittance

The major benefit arising from the emigration of workers has been the worker's remittances. They have made a significant contribution towards the GDP (9%) and facilitate the balance of payment's deficit. It is 11 times the FDI and 9 times of ODA.

Recruitment procedure

BMET provides license to the private recruiting agents to conduct recruitment for overseas market on the basis of demand. Recruiting agents are to obtain prior permission from the Govt. before embarking on recruitment. Such permission is given on the basis of a valid offer of employment indicating category of posts, terms of employment, monthly or annual wages, food, accommodation, leave, air passage, etc. Government fixes this charge time to time for different countries. VISA/Entry permit received by individual through personal efforts may apply directly for emigration clearance. The documents will normally have to be attested by the Bangladesh missions abroad if there is one in the employing country. Recruiting Agents need to deposit Tk. 1.6 m (about US \$ 23,000.00) to BMET for processing license which is kept as security deposit. This money may be distributed to the claimants for any fraudulence activity detected. Persons are migrated individually through their own initiatives also.

Policies, Rules and regulations for overseas employment

Migration from Bangladesh is regulated under Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013 which encourages promotion of overseas employment and can prohibit emigration of a person if the government thinks otherwise. It appears to be comprehensive in terms of nature, scope and dimension.

The provisions under the act for protection of the migrant workers includes:

- i) Penalty for contravention of agreement;
- ii) Recovery of expenditure from recruiting agents for repatriation of migrant worker;
- iii) Provision for trial of offences;
- iv) Punishment for fraudulently inducing to emigrate;

There are 3 sets of rules in this regard promulgated in 2002. These are i) Emigration Rules 2002, ii) Recruiting agents conduct and license Rules 2002 and iii) Wage Earners' Welfare Fund (WEWF) Rules 2002. These have been formulated for promotion and regulation of emigration and controlling the practices affecting migration.

Overseas Employment Policy

Bangladesh adopted Overseas Employment Policy in 2006 which is revised in 2016 to organise overseas employment sector and to ensure welfare of Bangladeshi workers abroad. Salient features of the Oversees employment policy are as follows:

- Ensure the prospect of regular migration of long term and short term for both men and women from all parts of Bangladesh at a rational cost.
- Ensure abolition of any scope of irregular migration.
- Commitment of government to protect the rights, dignity and security of all migrant workers in and outside the country.
- Commitment to explore scope of migration for professional and skilled workers.
- Measures to ensure the social protection of the left behind families and properties of both short-term and long-term migrants.
- Consideration of misconduct in the recruitment process and provision to make the concerned accountable.
- Encouraging remittance flows through official channels and support to the workers and their families to ensure effective and efficient use of remittance.
- Assist in social and economic re-integration of returnee migrant workers.
- Allocation of necessary resources and strengthen the existing institutional infrastructure and personnel for the implementation of the above policies.

Other Policies of the Ministry are as follow:

- Selection of CIP (NRB) policy, 2006
- Special privilege policy of expatriate Bangladeshis for remittance, 2008
- Medical Test policy for overseas employment 2008

Protection of rights of the migrant workers

Protection of migrants' rights is mainly ensured through the following measures:

- Signing of bilateral accord or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with labour receiving countries.
- Legal support to the workers fallen in trouble.
- Ensuring working hour, payment for wage, over time, leave, health service, freedom of movement in the work contract.
- **Awareness development:** Dissemination of information and Regular briefing sessions at headquarters before departure of the workers to the country of destination to make them aware about agreement of service conditions, working environment, culture, wages and other benefits, remittance system, local language of the host country, etc. To develop awareness on the use of legal channel of migration, campaign through electronic and print media is also there.

To ensure the rights of migrant workers UN Convention on the Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 1990 is followed. Bangladesh has signed and ratified this Convention.

Impact of migration from Bangladesh:

Migration from Bangladesh facilitates the following socio-economic benefits for the country:

- It reduces the prevailing unemployment problem of the country and leads to poverty alleviation.
- The remittances enhance the economic condition of the migrant workers which in turn ensure the overall economic development of the country. This sector earns the highest amount of real foreign currency for the economy.
- Overseas employment helps in reducing the frustration among the youths, terrorism, drug addiction, social unrest, etc.
- It develops the capability of investment for self-employment and entrepreneurship.
- It enhances transfer of technology through technical knowledge and expertise acquired by the migrant workers working abroad. It creates motivation and develop awareness of the migrant workers towards cleanliness, hygienic environment, importance of literacy, discipline, etc.

Welfare measures for the expatriate Bangladeshis

Government arranges the following welfare measures for the migrant workers and their family:

- 1) Legal assistance to the workers in problem in the destination countries.

- 2) Necessary initiatives to ensure legal support to all Bangladeshi expatriates who are in Jail/Deportation camp. Sometimes International Organization for Migration (IOM) is requested to extend assistance to repatriate Bangladeshis where no Bangladeshi mission or labour wing is present.
- 3) On priority basis, residential plots are distributed at the new residential area.
- 4) Warning and awareness campaign among job seekers to use proper channel of recruitment.
- 5) Families of deceased are receiving Tk. 35,000.00 (US\$ 450.00) to bear the transportation cost of dead body and funeral/burial expenses.
- 6) Extending necessary financial assistance up to Tk. 3,00,000.00 (US\$ 3900.00) to the distressed family members of deceased migrants when death compensation from the foreign employer is not received.

Problems faced by the Bangladeshi migrants:

Bangladeshi workers are facing some problems in their countries of employment, which may be summarized as follows:

- 1) Sometimes demands are placed by the employers for labourers more than their requirement or without any requirement at all just to get the money by selling visa.
- 2) Procedural problem in some legal institutions causes delay in disposal of cases of labour problems for getting their proper dues.
- 3) Non-payment, underpayment, delayed payment, poor living conditions, refusal to provide air tickets at the time of exit, non-adherence to the terms and conditions of employment by the sponsors.
- 4) Sometimes as soon as the worker reaches the host country, the agreement is substituted by a new agreement having low wages, substandard accommodation, no free food and other lower fringe benefits, etc.
- 5) In case of accidents it takes years to get the death compensation by the next of kin due to complexity of legal procedures of the host countries.

Government Initiatives towards better migration management

i) Digitization in Migration management

A Computer database has been prepared to stop the fraudulent activities in the process of migration. Public awareness campaign for the overseas employment is being conducted. Smart

card is being provided to the migrant workers to ensure accountability and transparency in the process.

ii) Promotion of Skill Development Training

Programmes for facilitating export of skilled manpower through providing training to the workers in 70 Training Centres(including 6 Institutes of Marine Technology) in various trades have been taken. Projects are being implemented to establish 35 more Training Institutes in different Districts to facilitate more skilled migration.

iii) Efforts to reduce migration cost

This overseas employment sector in Bangladesh is stigmatized by the allegation of charging high migration costs and it is the highest in the world. This is mainly due to the unethical practices of the Recruiting Agencies in procuring visa and purchasing it with a high cost. Government has adopted various measures towards curbing this exorbitant migration cost to ensure the migration make a success.

iv) Enhancement of Labour Attaché

To provide welfare services, to ensure the protection of right of the migrant workers and to mitigate problems of the workers, number of Labour Attachés has been increased in different countries.

v) Inter-Ministerial Vigilance Task Force

Unscrupulous agencies and intermediaries or middlemen sometimes create problems through cheating the innocent aspirant migrant worker in different way. To curb this type of fraudulent activities, the Ministry has formed Vigilance Taskforce with the representation from other relevant ministries. The Taskforce keeps on monitoring at various stages of migration including in the airports during departure of the workers.

vi) Adopting Anti-Trafficking Law

To keep the migration free from all kinds of deceive and fraudulent practices particularly to dissociate it with the attempt of trafficking in the name of migration, government is finalizing the Anti-trafficking law with some special features making it punishable offence.

Key Actors

- Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment

- Ministry of Home Affairs
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism
- Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET)

BMET is a department under the control of the Ministry, established in 1976 to execute all plan and policy of the Ministry for enhancing the labour migration. BMET is controlling and monitoring the activity of the recruiting agent. BMET is also engaged in human resources development programs providing skill development training in various employable trades through its infrastructural facility of training centres countrywide.

- Wage Earners Welfare Board

The wage Earners Welfare Board is an organization to operate the Wage Earners Welfare Fund and to execute all welfare activities towards the migrant workers before departure, in the countries of destination and also after return.

- Bangladesh Overseas Employment and Services Limited (BOESL)

BOESL is a limited company under the control of the Ministry. It was established in 1984. This is a government owned organization, which is responsible for enhancing and processing foreign employment. The main function of this organisation is to carry out the business of recruiting agents for employment of Bangladeshis abroad with a nominal service charge. It is also undertaking effective employment promotion campaign in the labour receiving countries.

- Expatriates Welfare Bank

With a view to reducing the cost of migration, the Government has established “Expatriates Welfare Bank’ (*ProbashiKallyan Bank*) for giving loan with simple interest to the aspirant workers going abroad and providing financial assistance to the returnee migrants to invest in productive activities.

- Department of Passport and Immigration
- Airport Authorities
- Recruiting Agencies (Association is BAIRA)
- NGOs
- Civil Society
- Labour wings in Bangladesh Missions:

28 Labour wings in fourteen countries are working under the Ministry. Officials are engaged for enhancing overseas employment along with ensuring welfare of the migrants.

Returnee migrants

Overseas employment is contract service with duration of 2 to 3 years with extension in some cases. Migrant workers return after completion of the agreement. These workers usually come back with skill and experience. It has an impact on the economy for absorption of the returned migrants in the domestic employment market. There exists insufficient facilities and unsuitable environment to absorb the returned migrant workers particularly for the female migrants to utilize their expertise and promote self-employment & entrepreneurship to re-integrate in the society. Investment opportunities created by the Govt. for expatriate workers is not adequate and not easily accessible to ordinary workers so that they can take advantage of these avenues of investment.

Skill in migration

About 48% of the total Bangladeshi workforce in various countries particularly in the Middle Eastern countries and Malaysia are unskilled or less-skilled workers. They have very little or no educational background and have not received any kind of training. Semi-skilled workers are accounted for 11 %, skilled workers 42% and professionals are 1%. Bangladeshis working abroad currently range from domestic aides to atomic scientists. Changes in the relative composition of skills over time and their sectoral distribution in the importing countries are very important factors. Doctors, Engineers, Architects, University and College teachers, Accountants, Computer programmers, Pharmacists, Nurses, Foremen, Diploma Engineers, Paramedics, Sales personnel, etc., are treated as professionals. Skilled workers group includes Mechanics, Welders, Masons, Carpenters, Electricians, Painters, Cooks, Drivers, Plumbers, Tailors, Blacksmiths, Tile fixers, Operators, etc. Semi-skilled category includes Farmers, Gardeners and different types of helpers in various trades. Finally Cleaners, Servants, Labourers, General workers, etc., are grouped into the Less-skilled category. There has been noticeable mismatch in supply and demand of manpower resources across the countries and regions in different categories of occupations and skills. Demand for skilled manpower in different trades is increasing in the world employment market. The benefits can be derived only if a skilled labour force is available to face competitiveness in the world market. Bangladesh can enhance the skills of the labour force providing them with appropriate education and training to achieve further success in global employment market.

Overseas employment market encourages enhancement of human capital and develop them to cope with international demand and competent enough to be globally employable. Bureau of Manpower, Employment & Training (BMET) is engaged in human resource development by

providing skill training through its institutional capacities. There are 38 Training Institutes and 35 more are under construction.

Bangladeshi institutions need accreditation from the internationally recognized agencies. Skilled Bangladeshi workers will find it much easier to get employment in other countries, if their degrees are accredited by the internationally recognized institutions. This may improve the situation of Bangladeshi workers migrating abroad not being able to find high quality jobs because of their low skill levels and sometimes lack of recognition of their skills. To enhance the reputation of Bangladesh as a quality supplier of human resources at a global level, skill assessment, testing and certification should be made mandatory for the prospective migrant workers. It is important also to provide country-specific language training.

With globalization and increasing trade liberalization, the demand for more skill intensive and technology-literate workforce to produce high quality goods competitive in the global market is becoming increasingly greater for more developed economies. Bangladesh needs to have a number of internationally recognized sector specific training institutions in the fields of information technology, healthcare, catering, driving and vocational jobs such as electricians, plumbers, carpenters, mechanics, and in the service sectors, e.g., nursing, catering, physical therapists, etc.

Migration is largely demand-driven in nature, different skill groups largely depends on the structural changes and transformations taking place there. The overall demand of workers in the receiving countries varies on the economic condition and the infrastructural status. The present trend of investment in the middle-eastern countries is towards industrial development, agricultural exploration and improvement of various service facilities. Hence they require more skilled and semi-skilled types of workers than those of less-skilled types.

General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) specifies Temporary Movement of Natural Persons (TMNP) in MODE-4 as per bilateral agreement between two countries (Sending and Receiving). The Government may undertake efforts to take advantage of WTO Mode-4, i.e. International movement of labour by collaborating with other developing countries to work on negotiating with the international community to implement the provisions.

Fund

There is a fund titled “Wage Earners Welfare Fund” formed under the Ministry in 1991. This is contributory fund by the outgoing migrant workers. The fees from attestation of visa papers in the Bangladesh missions abroad and a portion of the consular fee are added to this fund. Welfare measures to the migrant workers abroad through the missions are conducted including lumpsum grant to the deceased migrants.

Another fund called “Skill Development Fund” is placed under the Ministry to facilitate the skilled migration. Seed money of Tk. 140.00 crore (USD 18m) has been provided as the endowment fund from which the expenditure is incurred for promotion of skill training aiming towards overseas employment from the interest incurred thereof.

Projects

A project titled “Promoting Decent Work through Improved Migration Policy and its Application in Bangladesh” is being implemented with an estimated cost of USD 3.5 m funded by SDC for the period of July 2011 – June 2014. The implementing agency is ILO alongwith IOM, UN WOMEN, local NGOs and employers’ and workers organizations.

Issues and Challenges

- Overseas employment needs more attention in respect of protection of rights of the migrant workers at the destination countries.
- Skilled and semi-skilled migration is about 48% which needs to be increased. This requires international acceptance of the curricula of the TVET in Bangladesh.
- To enhance the number, destinations and quality in overseas employment a comprehensive plan of action is necessary as per the Overseas Employment Policy.
- Proper monitoring and regulation is necessary to regulate the overseas employment management process.
- Migration cost should be minimized and the channel of migration needs to be made easy and accessible to alleviate the exploitation of middlemen in this sector.
- There should be program for utilization of remittance of the migrant workers in productive venture.