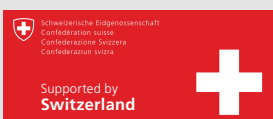




Enhancing Welfare and Rights of MIGRANTS AND MIGRANT COMMUNITIES

Role of National Budget

Khondaker Golam Moazzem
ASM Shamim Alam Shibly
Moumita A Mallick



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First Published July 2023

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Cover Design

Avra Bhattacharjee

Copyediting

HM Al Imran Khan

Page Layout and Typesetting

Md Shaiful Hassan

Citation: Moazzem, K. G., Shibly, A. S. M. S. A., and Moumita, A. M., (2023). *Enhancing Welfare and Rights of Migrants and Migrant Communities: Role of National Budget*. Dhaka: Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

Abstract

Migrant workers make significant contributions to national development, yet their essential needs are frequently overlooked in national budget allocations. The FY2023–24 budget lacks migrant-focused programmes. Challenges persist in the different stages of migration: pre-migration, in the destination countries, and during reintegration. The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment is not solely responsible for the welfare and rights of migrant workers. This study identified eleven different ministries and divisions that are responsible for the implementation of welfare projects targeted towards migrant workers. This study examines these issues, reviews previous budgetary allocations, and suggests a BDT 4,550 crore budget for the three stages of migration to strengthen ministries' assistance for migrants. This research emphasises targeted measures to improve migrant welfare and recognises their critical economic contribution.

Acknowledgements

This research is an outcome of a joint Initiative of the Parliamentarians' Caucus on Migration and Development, the WARBE (Welfare Association for the Rights of Bangladeshi Emigrants) Development Foundation, and the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Dhaka. This study is authored by *Dr Khondaker Golam Moazzem*, Research Director, CPD, *Mr ASM Shamim Alam Shibly*, Senior Research Associate, CPD, and *Ms Moumita A Mallick*, Programme Associate, CPD.

The author would like to register their deep appreciation to the Chairperson of the Parliamentarians' Caucus on Migration and Development, *Barrister Shameem Haider Patwary MP*, Secretary General *Ms Mahjabeen Khaled*, and other members of the Caucus for their guidance and continuous support throughout the study period which made it possible to deliver the study report on time.

Mr Md. Abul Basar, Project Director, Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation Bangladesh, and *Ms Nazia Haider*, Programme Manager – Safer Migration, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) have extended support by providing technical feedback on the study. The authors acknowledge their generous support.

The authors appreciate the valuable partnership with the WARBE DF for undertaking this important study. Special mention to *Mr Syed Saiful Haque*, Chairman & Founder Member and *Ms Jasiya Khatoon*, Director, WARBE DF for extending technical and logistical support which helped smoothly undertaking the study-related activities.

The authors also offer their sincere gratitude to government officials, private sector professionals, and representatives from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), trade union and academia.

Besides, the research team gratefully acknowledges the valuable support received from *Dr Rafat Alam*, Associate Professor, MacEwan University, *Dr Shah Md Ahsan Habib*, Professor, Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management, *Mr Avra Bhattacharjee*, Joint Director, Dialogue and Outreach, CPD, *Mr HM Al Imran Khan*, Publication Associate, CPD, and *Mr S M Khalid*, Dialogue Associate, CPD, in carving the final shape to the manuscript.

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Acronyms

8FYP	8th Five-Year Plan
ADP	Annual Development Programme
BAIRA	Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BDT	Bangladeshi Taka
BMET	Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training
BOESL	Bangladesh Overseas Employment and Services Limited
BTEB	Bangladesh Technical Education Board
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DEMO	District Employment and Manpower Office
DoLE	Department of Labour and Employment
DWAB	Decent Work Across Borders
FLOIS	Foreign Labour Operations Information System
FY	Fiscal Year
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICRMW	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
ILAB	International Labour Affairs Bureau
ILO	International Labor Organization
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
MoCAT	Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoEWOE	Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoFD	Ministry of Food and Disaster Management
MoHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MoHFW	Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
MoHPW	Ministry of Housing and Public Works
Mol	Ministry of Information
MoLE	Ministry of Labour and Employment

MoLGD	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development
MoLJPA	Ministry of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs
MoP	Ministry of Planning
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-government organisation
NSDA	National Skills Development Authority
OEMA	Overseas Employment and Migrants Act
PKB	Probashi Kallyan Bank
RAISE	Recovery and Advancement of Informal Sector Employment
RMG	Readymade Garments
TTCs	Technical Training Centres
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
USD	United States Dollar
VAT	Value Added Tax
WEWB	Wage Earners Welfare Board

1. Introduction

Despite the widespread recognition of migrant workers' significant contribution to national development, their needs and concerns are consistently disregarded in the national budget. The proposed budget for FY2023–24 lacks any new financial initiatives aimed at improving the welfare and protecting the rights of migrant workers. Although there were recommendations to enhance the existing 2.5 per cent cash incentive for remittances through formal channels, this crucial matter has been overlooked in the proposed budget. Notably, the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare received an allocation of Tk 1,018 crore in the proposed budget, marking an increase of Tk 419 crore compared to the previous one.

The movement of migrants has been on the rise in the post-COVID-19 period. The Bangladesh Bureau of Manpower, Employment, and Training (BMET) reported a total of 617,209 workers migrated from Bangladesh in 2021. In 2022, the number of Bangladeshi workers migrating to various countries, including those in the Gulf, other Arab nations, and South-East Asia, reached 1,135,873. This represents an 84 per cent increase in migration flow compared to the previous year (Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit [RMMRU], 2022).

In 2022, despite 1,135,873 Bangladeshi workers migrating to different countries, there was a negative growth in the remittance flow. The total remittance flow for the year was US\$ 21.28 billion, showing a 3.53 per cent decrease compared to 2021. Remittance flow experienced a significant surge from 2001 to 2010, except for a 2.7 per cent decline in 2010. During this period, there were increases in remittance flow ranging from 10 to 37.5 per cent. However, between 2011 and 2022, remittance flow grew at a rate of 10 per cent to 18 per cent, with negative flows observed in 2013, 2016, and 2017. Interestingly, despite these negative remittance flows, there was a substantial increase in migration during 2016 and 2017 (Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit [RMMRU], 2022).

Despite their significant contributions to the Bangladeshi economy, migrant workers face numerous challenges, including exploitation,

language barriers, cultural differences, workplace accidents, and a low quality of life. Additionally, limited financial resources hinder their access to essential services like healthcare and legal aid. Although the government has implemented various acts, policies, and financial incentives to support migrant workers, these initiatives have proven to be insufficient or inaccessible.

The Parliamentarians' Caucus plays a vital role in securing budgetary allocations and facilitating migrant workers' access to essential support and services. Their multi-dimensional engagement includes pre-budget consultations with government officials and knowledge-sharing workshops with migrant rights networks. This involvement aims to address migrant workers' challenges in the upcoming national budget by ensuring sufficient financial resources, access to services, and protection of their legal rights.

With the broad objective to analyse challenges faced by the migrant workers and propose fiscal/budgetary solutions to improve their welfare, the study looked into the following specific objectives: to analyse and compare challenges faced by the migrant workers of Bangladesh, to examine the budgetary allocation of previous budgets, to identify the welfare gap associated with migrant workers, and to identify solutions and possible resource allocation to handle the challenges.

To conduct the study, primary and secondary information were collected, including desk research and KIs with stakeholders such as migrant workers, non-government organisations (NGOs), government officials, and experts (Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE), Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA), among others). One pre-budget discussion with civil society organisations and Caucus Members, pre-budget dialogue for the FY2023–24 on migrants' welfare, and pre-budget national consultation for the FY2023–24 on migrants' welfare were conducted to identify possible solutions (Figure 1). Relevant literature on budgetary implications, migrant workers' rights, challenges at different stages of migration, and reintegration were also reviewed.

Figure 1: Methods of the Study

	Secondary	Primary
Literature Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget documents • Rights and welfare issues of Bangladeshi migrant workers • National and international conventions • Cross-country experiences on migration issues 	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px; width: 45%;">10 KIIs with MoEWOE, BMET, BAIRA</div> <div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px; width: 45%;">Pre-Budget Discussion with Civil Society Organisations and Caucus Members</div> </div>
Data Collating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including but not limited to— • Budget allocation, expenditure and development budget analysis by project status • BMET data on migration • BBS data on migration 	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px; width: 45%;">Pre-Budget Dialogue for the FY2023–24 on Migrants’ Welfare</div> <div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px; width: 45%;">Pre-Budget National Consultation for FY2023–24 on Migrants’ Welfare</div> </div>

Source: Author’s Compilation.

2. Welfare and Rights of Migrant Workers—Literature Review in the Global Context

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has identified some global good practices that is helpful for migrant workers during the pre-departure stage for promoting fair labour migration practices and protecting the rights of migrant workers.

India’s ‘Decent Work Across Borders’ (DWAB) project, funded by the European Union and implemented by the ILO, organised a training course for trade union leaders in May 2014. The course aimed to build the capacity of trade unions to participate in shaping migration policies, promote fair labour migration practices, reach out to migrant workers, and ensure that the benefits of migration are maximised for all. The training encouraged trade unions to enter into bilateral agreements with destination countries and work towards increasing the ratification of relevant ILO Conventions.

In the Philippines, the International Labour Affairs Bureau (ILAB) has created an interactive computer-based system called the Foreign Labour Operations

Information System (FLOIS) to enhance its ability to respond efficiently to the increasing needs of its clients and information requirements of the Department of Labour and Employment (DOLE). As a part of the ILO’s DWAB project, training materials have been developed to assist in the use of the newly created FLOIS system. The FLOIS system ensures that the data of the Department’s foreign operations remains current, reliable, and readily available for the DOLE Secretariat and other stakeholders.

In Sri Lanka, an ILO project has created 39 standardised pre-departure training manuals to equip migrant workers with job-specific skills, knowledge, and awareness of their rights. These manuals were launched on International Migrants’ Day in 2013 and provide consistent training across 27 centres. They cover job-related skills and language skills in six languages, with translations in Sinhala and Tamil languages. The standardised manuals help migrant workers to better understand their rights and improve their employability, thus reducing their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse during the migration process.

These global good practices serve as an excellent example for other countries like Bangladesh to follow in their efforts to promote fair labour migration

practices and protect the rights of migrant workers. By providing comprehensive training and information to trade unions, government agencies, and migrant workers, the country of origin can create a more just and equitable migration system for all.

3. Distribution of Migrant Workers of Bangladesh

The proportion of skilled workers who migrated in 2022 decreased compared to the previous year. In 2021, 21.33 per cent of migrants were skilled workers, but in 2022, that percentage dropped to 17.76 per cent. The percentage of semi-skilled workers who migrated remained unchanged, with 3.26 per cent migrating in 2022 and 3.28 per cent in 2021. On the contrary, the percentage of unskilled workers who migrated increased in 2022, with 78.64 per cent migrating as unskilled workers, up from 75.24 per cent in 2021. Among Bangladeshi migrant workers, only a small percentage migrated as professionals, although this figure has slightly increased from 0.14 per cent in 2021 (Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit [RMMRU], 2022).

In 2022, a significant number of female workers, specifically 1,054,660 individuals, migrated from Bangladesh for employment purposes. This represents a notable increase of 31.6 per cent compared to the female migration figures of 2021. However, despite this growth, the rise in female migration in 2022 did not match the extent of the increase observed in male migration. Female migration accounted for only 9.3 per cent of the overall international migration flows during that year. Among the destination countries for female migrants, Saudi Arabia emerged as the primary choice, followed by Oman, Jordan, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit [RMMRU], 2022).

4. Role of the MoEWOE and Other Ministries Concerned on Migrant Welfare

Several ministries have specific roles and responsibilities to contribute to migrants and migrant communities (Table 1).

Table 1: Role of the MoEWOE and Other Ministries Concerned on Migrant Welfare

Ministry		Responsibilities towards Migrants and Wider Migrant Community
1.	Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-ordinating with foreign governments, international organisations, and recruitment agencies to create employment channels and explore new labour markets. Provision of support for their rehabilitation, skill development, and job placement within the country.
2.	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of consular services to Bangladeshi migrants abroad which includes issuing passports, visas, and other travel documents, as well as assisting migrants with consular matters such as registration, renewal of documents, and emergency assistance.
3.	Ministry of Health and Family Welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raising awareness among migrants and the wider migrant community about health issues, preventive measures, and available healthcare services.
4.	Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplification of travel procedures and ensuring smooth movement of migrants which includes collaborating with airlines, travel agencies, and immigration authorities to streamline visa processes, reduce barriers, and provide necessary assistance to migrants.
5.	Ministry of Home Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification and prosecution of individuals and networks involved in human trafficking and smuggling of migrants. Provision of support and rehabilitation services to trafficking victims.

(Table 1 contd.)

(Table 1 contd.)

Ministry		Responsibilities towards Migrants and Wider Migrant Community
6.	Ministry of Finance	• Encouraging financial institutions to offer inclusive financial services tailored to the needs of migrants, such as affordable remittance transfer services, savings accounts, insurance products, and investment options.
7.	Ministry of Social Welfare	• Protection of migrants' rights which includes advocating for their rights at national and international levels, combating human trafficking, and preventing exploitation and abuse of migrants.
8.	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs	• Promotion of various aspects related to female migrant worker's empowerment, such as facilitating them with information related to legal ways of migration and safeguarding children's safety during and after migration.
9.	Ministry of Information	• Compilation of data concerning various aspects related to migration within a specific country, such as information on the requirements of the job market, the demand for labour and the availability of skills, the costs of sending remittances, healthcare, living and working conditions, wages.
10.	Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs	• Establishment of mechanisms to ensure access to justice for migrants, like legal aid programmes, counseling services, and awareness campaigns about their rights and legal procedures.
11.	ICT Division	• Digitisation of government services and making them accessible to migrants including services related to visa applications, work permits, remittance transfers, and consular assistance.

Source: Author's Compilation.

5. National Budget on Migrants' Welfare and Rights

5.1 Allocation of National Budget for MoEWOE and Other Ministries

The MoEWOE plays a crucial role in supporting migrant workers and their families, both in Bangladesh and abroad. However, the budgetary allocation for the MoEWOE in FY2024 stands at BDT 1,018 crore, which was BDT 990 crore in FY2023 and BDT 599 crore in the revised FY2023. This amount is only 0.13 per cent of the total budget (Figure 2). While this allocation has increased by 70 per cent on year-on-year basis against the revised budget of FY2023, it is still inadequate for the scale of the ministry's responsibilities.

Moreover, the ministry's performance in terms of utilising its budgetary allocation has been poor, with a utilisation rate remaining below 70 per cent over the past five years, except for the year of FY2023 (Figure 3). This poor utilisation rate is applicable to both the operating budget and the development budget. The ministry needs to improve its performance in utilising

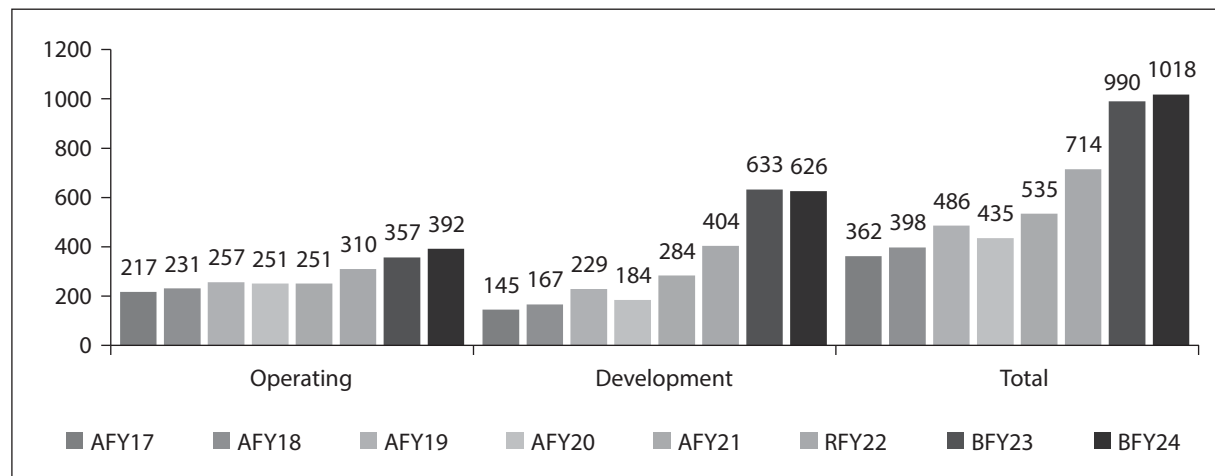
its budgetary allocation effectively to maximise the benefits for migrant workers and their families.

The government has taken some steps to provide economic support to migrant workers. For example, PKB provides different loans to migrant workers, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government allocated BDT 750 crore at a concessional interest rate to help returnee migrants with their economic reintegration. However, the implementation rate of the special reintegration loan is still a concern, as the fund disbursement process was slow even in 2021. One of the major reasons behind the slow disbursement is the lack of PKB manpower and infrastructural capacities in different districts. Moreover, the branches are division-centric rather than targeting remote and migrant-dense areas. Transportation costs for returnee migrant workers to visit the branches is also a concern.

In addition, the ministry needs to take the initiative to implement development projects related to the reintegration and employment of returnee migrants, their accommodation, and other support services. While several Annual Development Programme (ADP) projects are being implemented, many are being

Figure 2: MoEWOE Budget

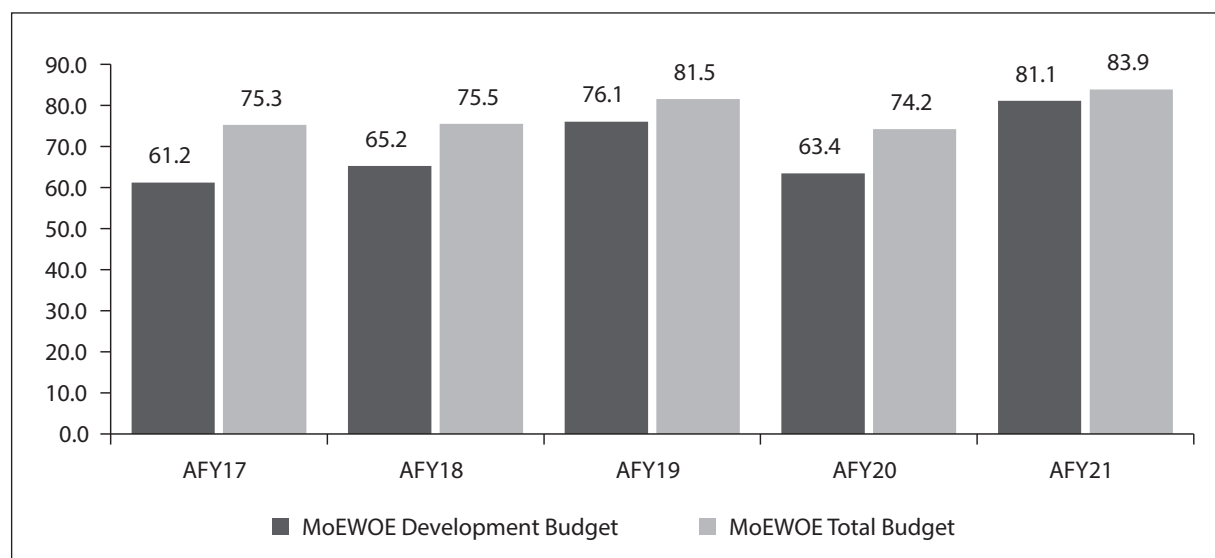
(in BDT, crore)



Source: MoF, 2023.

Figure 3: MoEWOE Budget Utilisation

(in per cent)



Source: MoF, 2022.

carried over, continuing, and completing projects. These projects should be implemented immediately to generate employment opportunities and facilitate the reintegration of returnee migrants into society.

It is also important for the government to allocate a specific budget for the development of the industry. While the development of ministries is important, the growth of the industry is crucial for economic progress. Therefore, the government should allocate adequate funds for the development of the expatriate

welfare and overseas employment sector to support the migrant workers and their families and boost the country's economy.

5.2 Fiscal Measures Related to Migrants' Welfare and Rights

Remittances sent by the migrant workers play a crucial role in the overall economic development of the country. It is a major source of foreign currency, which contributes significantly to the country's foreign

exchange reserve. In recent years, the government has taken several initiatives to encourage migrant workers to send remittances through official channels. One of these initiatives is providing a cash incentive of 2.5 per cent to migrant workers who send remittances through legal procedures. This incentive has been increased from 2 per cent to further encourage migrant workers to use official channels.

However, according to a KII, the budgetary allocation for incentives should be around 10 per cent of the total foreign reserve. While the current incentive is a positive step, a more substantial incentive may further encourage migrant workers to send remittances through official channels. This would increase the

amount of foreign currency in the country, leading to a stronger foreign reserve.

Moreover, the government should also consider implementing policies that will ensure the effective utilisation of remittances. Many migrant workers send remittances to support their families' basic needs, such as food, education, and healthcare. However, there is a lack of effective mechanisms for investing these remittances productively. Providing opportunities for investment in various sectors, such as entrepreneurship, real estate, and agriculture, can help migrant families become more financially stable and create a positive impact on the country's economy.

Table 2: Implementation of ADP Projects

Types of projects	Name of the projects	Timeline	Remarks
Ongoing Projects	Carryover: Establishment of Dhaka Technical Teachers Training Institute	(01/07/2016 - 30/06/2022)	Need proactive role and additional allocation to be implemented within the stipulated timeline.
	Carryover: Establishment of 40 nos. Technical Training Centre at Upazila and Establishment of a Institute of Marine Technology at Chittagong (1st Revised)	(01/01/2016 - 30/06/2023)	Need proactive role and additional allocation to be implemented within the stipulated timeline
	Concluding: Providing driving training for the employment both local and overseas.	(01/01/2020 - 31/12/2024)	Need proactive role and additional allocation to be implemented within the stipulated timeline
	Concluding: Recovery and Advancement of Informal Sector Employment (RAISE): Reintegration of Returning Migrants	(01/07/2021 - 30/06/2024)	Need proactive role and additional allocation to be implemented within the stipulated timeline
Unapproved Projects	Strengthening and capacity building of BMET develop and accelerate the migration management system	(January 2023- June 2026)	Need to approve on an urgent basis with additional allocation
	Establishment of technical training centers at the Upazilla level (establishment of 50 TTCs in the first phase and 50 TTCs in the second phase)	(July 2023 – June 2027)	Need to approve on an urgent basis with additional allocation
	Reform, Modernisation, and Strengthening of Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Women's Technical Training Center and Bangladesh-Korea Technical Training Center	(July 2023 - June 2024)	Need to approve on an urgent basis with additional allocation
	Introduction of heavy equipment machine operation courses suitable for the foreign labour market in 10 technical training centers run by the BMET	(July 2023 – June 2028)	Need to approve on an urgent basis with additional allocation
	Introduction of caregiving courses suitable for the foreign labour market in 15 technical training centers run by the BMET	(July 2023 – June 2028)	Need to approve on an urgent basis with additional allocation

5.3 Key Development Projects Related to Migrants' Welfare and Rights

The ongoing project portfolio consists of various initiatives aimed at addressing the challenges faced by migrant workers (Table 2). It includes two carryover projects: the 'Establishment of Dhaka Technical Teachers Training Institute' and 'Establishment of 40 nos. Technical Training Centre at Upazilla and Establishment of an Institute of Marine Technology at Chittagong'; and two concluding projects: 'Providing driving training for the employment both local and overseas' and 'Recovery and Advancement of Informal Sector Employment (RAISE): Reintegration of Returning Migrants'. These projects require active and additional allocation to ensure timely implementation.

Additionally, there are five unapproved projects that are currently awaiting approval. They are: 'Strengthening and capacity building of BMET develop and accelerate the migration management system'; 'Establishment of technical training centers at the Upazilla level (establishment of 50 TTCs in the first phase and 50 TTCs in the second phase)'; 'Reform, Modernization, and Strengthening of Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Women's Technical Training Center and Bangladesh-Korea Technical Training Center'; 'Introduction of heavy equipment machine operation courses suitable for the foreign labour market in 10 technical training centers run by the BMET'; and 'Introduction of caregiving courses suitable for the foreign labour market in 15 technical training centers run by the BMET'.

6. Policies, Acts, and Rules Associated with Migrant Workers' Welfare and Rights: Bangladesh Context

The rights and welfare issues of migrant workers have been addressed through numbers of national policies, acts and action plans. Bangladesh's policies and laws relating to labour migration include the Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy 2016, the National Skills Development Policy 2011, the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act, 2013, the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012, an

action plan based on the 8th Five Year Plan (8FYP), and the policy of the Wage Earners Welfare Board (WEWB).

The Overseas Employment and Migrants Act (OEMA) 2013 is a legal document. There are not enough legal actions being taken against people who break the law. Even though there are many instances of fraud, victims are sometimes reluctant to take legal actions because they believe it would prevent them from working overseas. Low financial standing and a lack of awareness about rules and rights act as impediments to prosecution under the law (Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit [RMMRU], 2016).

According to the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), policy documents are designed to follow a 'right-based approach', which means policies are formulated to ensure the protection and promotion of the rights of all individuals. In the 8FYP, a detailed strategic guideline has been formulated to guide policy implementation. However, despite this, the draft action plan developed by the government primarily focuses on increasing remittances rather than ensuring the welfare and protection of migrant workers.

Furthermore, while the policy of the WEWB is formulated with a right-based approach, there has been a lack of initiative by the WEWB to implement their rights and welfare. This is a significant concern as migrant workers are often vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and human rights violations, making it crucial to ensure that policies are developed and implemented in a manner that protects their rights and welfare.

Rules on labour migration include Emigration Rules 2002, Wage Earners' Welfare Fund Rules 2002, Recruiting Agents Conduct and License Rules 2002, Selection of Commercially Important Persons (Non-Resident Bangladeshi) Rules 2015, Special Privilege Policy of Expatriate Bangladeshis for Remittance, 2008, and Medical Test Policy for Overseas Employment 2008. Some anomalies were noticed in these rules. For example, in the Emigration Rules, the role and tasks of immigrant registrar and labour attaches are mentioned but how to bring them under accountability has not been mentioned (Khoda & Akram, 2017).

A number of international conventions and declarations have articulated the protection of the rights of the migrant workers which include: International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, ILO Convention No 143 Concerning Migrations in Abusive Conditions and the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Migrant Workers, Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, and ILO 189 Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Work.

There is a significant flow of Bangladeshi migrant workers to Saudi Arabia, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Malaysia, Qatar, Kuwait, Maldives, South Korea, and Japan, among others. And it is essential to ensure that these workers are treated equitably and receive their entitled rights and welfare benefits. Hence, it must be taken into account the number of international conventions signed by the major destination countries. International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, ILO Convention No 143 Concerning Migrations in Abusive Conditions and the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Migrant Workers, and ILO 189 Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Work have not been ratified by any of the above-mentioned destination countries. Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air has been ratified by Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, South Korea, and Japan by not by the other above-mentioned destination countries.

This lack of ratification is concerning, as it suggests the destination countries may not be fully committed to ensuring the rights and welfare of migrant workers. Ratification of these conventions would demonstrate a strong commitment to protecting the rights of migrant workers and would signal a willingness to work with the international community to address this important issue.

Similarly, Bangladesh has so far signed and ratified few of such conventions: International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW), 1990, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948, and Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979.

7. Analysis of Challenges Faced by Migrants and Migrant Community

7.1 Challenges at the Pre-Departure Stage of Migration

In Bangladesh, the costs associated with the pre-departure of the migration process can be a significant financial burden for migrant workers and their families.

7.1.1 Immigration and VISA-related concerns

Typically, the expenses associated with recruitment encompass various costs, such as document fees for items like passports, visas, and residency permits. Additionally, there are security-related expenses, including medical check-ups and security clearance checks, as well as skills-related fees, such as language tests and vocational training. Transportation costs, both locally to obtain necessary documents and internationally to cross borders, are also part of the recruitment cost. Additionally, recruitment service fees are paid to agents, recruiters, or middlemen as well as any unforeseen expenses. These fees can be included as part of the total payment to an agency or broker or paid separately (BBS, 2020).

Recruitment agencies in Bangladesh are known to charge high fees to migrant workers, which can make it difficult for them to afford the migration costs. This is compounded by high travel expenses, such as airfare, transportation to and from the airport, and visa fees. Besides, other expenses associated with migration can include medical tests, and document processing fees.

The following Table 3 shows the category-wise service charges paid by migrant workers for airfare when it is provided by employer and when it is not provided by employer. The service charges seem to be low for semi-skilled, skilled, and female garment workers when airfare is not provided by employer. On the contrary, the service charges seem to be significantly high for professional workers when airfare is not provided by employer.

Table 3: Category-wise Service Charges

Category	When Airfare is provided by Employer							
	Rate of Service Charge	VAT (15 per cent)	Wage Earners Welfare Fee	Smart Card	Data Entry Fee	Insurance	Total (in BDT)	Total in USD*
Semi-Skilled	26,400	3,960	3,500	250	200	490	34,800	372
Skilled	42,000	6,300	3,500	250	200	490	52,740	563
Professional	72,000	10,800	3,500	250	300	490	87,340	932
Female Garment Workers only	12,000	1,800	3,500	250	200	490	18,240	195
When Airfare not provided by Employer								
Semi-Skilled	20,400	3,060	3,500	250	200	490	27,900	298
Skilled	30,000	4,500	3,500	250	200	490	38,940	416
Professional	54,000	8,100	3,500	250	300	490	66,5640	7101
	6,000	900	3,500	250	200	490	11,340	121

Source: BOESL, 2022.

Note: *Variable on the current rate of USD.

The migration scenario in Bangladesh differs significantly from other countries. Instead of employers or hiring organisations paying for visa fees, Bangladeshi recruiting agencies and visa traders purchase visas at a high cost after paying the levy themselves. This results in Bangladeshi migrant workers paying the highest cost for purchasing a visa due to the unhealthy competition among recruiting agencies and visa traders (Table 4). For instance, a migrant worker from Nepal, India, or Pakistan may have to spend only Riyal 800-5,000 to migrate to Saudi Arabia, while a Bangladeshi worker may have to purchase the same visa for Riyal 7,000-20,000. The government has fixed the maximum cost of migration to Saudi Arabia for a Bangladeshi worker at Tk 165,000, but workers end up spending around Tk 0.55 million and sometimes even up to Tk 1.2 million. The cost of migration to other Middle Eastern countries, Malaysia, and Singapore varies from Tk 0.25 million to Tk 0.85 million. Bangladeshi workers take a long time to recover these costs, while migrant workers from other South Asian countries can recover their migration expenses within 2-3 months. Moreover, in most cases, the visa and job contract of the Bangladeshi migrant worker expire before they can recover their costs (Khoda & Akram, 2017).

According to the KII, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has criticised recruiting companies for engaging in forced labour practices. The fiscal process for migration often involves arrangements for passports, visa charges, but middlemen provide these services without legal document certification. Despite the government-declared rate of approximately BDT 80,000 to migrate to Malaysia, the costs can be three to six times higher due to the middlemen and agency syndicates. The recruiting agencies rely on middlemen to find potential migrant workers.

As per the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), a Bangladeshi migrant worker needs to work for at least 18 months to earn enough to cover their migration costs. By contrast, a Filipino worker needs to work for only one month, and workers in neighbouring countries need to work for just three months (Table 5).

There are exceptions to this pattern, such as in Saudi Arabia, where the government sends migrant workers directly to employers, and women can migrate at zero cost. Similarly, Bangladesh Overseas Employment and Services Limited (BOESL) sends female migrant workers to Jordan at subsidised costs to work in readymade garment (RMG) factories. Additionally,

Table 4: Average Migration Costs from Bangladesh to any Country

Class		Recruitment Cost (BDT)	Monthly Average Income (BDT)
National Level	-	41,6789	23,693
Gender	Men	471,668	24,673
	Women	100,102	18,033
Skill Type	Skilled	427,217	29,477
	Unskilled	477,927	23,629
	Domestic Worker	118,964	16,678
Destination Countries	Saudi Arabia	436,366	22,140
	Oman	308,047	19,177
	Malaysia	404,448	23,896
	Qatar	402,478	22,293
	Singapore	574,241	38,129
	Other Countries	436,449	26,061

Source: BBS (2020).

agencies facilitating the migration process receive USD 1,000 per worker, which can be considered a source of remittance earnings.

Table 5: Average Migration Costs from Other Countries to Gulf Co-operation Council

Country	Recruitment Costs (BDT)	Recruitment Costs (USD)
India	121,523	1,156
Nepal	114,375	1,088
Philippines	43,521	414
Bangladesh	416,000	3,957

Source: Migration Data Portal.

As recommended by a respondent of KII, to address these issues, the recruitment process should be done following a recruitment pay model where there is no visa cost. The government should take the initiative to implement this convention in both the employment contract and during the MoU signing with the recruiting country. By doing so, the costs of migration can be reduced, and migrant workers can be better protected from exploitative recruitment practices.

7.1.2 Training

Migrant workers have the opportunity to receive formal training to enhance their skills in addition to on-the-job training. The BMET in collaboration

Table 6: Migrant Workers who have Received Training by Source and Gender

Source of Training	Number			Per cent		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Government Institutes	246,515	111,611	358,125	33.6	59.0	38.8
Non-Government Institute	433,999	64,052	498,050	59.2	33.9	54.0
NGO	2,905	0	2,905	0.4	0.0	0.3
Foreign Institute	4,804	474	5,278	0.7	0.3	0.6
Joint Venture Institute	35,110	10,886	45,997	4.8	5.8	5.0
BMET	4,735	1,223	5,958	0.6	0.6	0.6
Others	4,727	931	5,658	0.6	0.5	0.6
Total	732,794	189,176	921,971	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: BBS, 2020.

with the WEWB provide pre-departure training for all migrant workers, but the rates of technical and vocational training and pre-departure training are not very high, particularly for female returning workers. Although all women who migrate as domestic workers receive a 21-day training programme, which may suggest a higher percentage of women receive training compared to men, the effectiveness of this training in the long term is uncertain. Table 6 shows training received by the source of training and sex for migrant workers aged 15 or older. A significantly high number of trainings was received from non-government institutes.

The destination country provides very limited post-migration training, with less than one-fifth of returning workers reporting that they have received such training.

A female returnee migrant respondent of a focus group discussion stated she had to pay BDT 40,000 for a one-month training programme. However, the programme was not up to the mark for the fees she paid.

According to the KIIs, the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA) faces significant challenges in ensuring that its member agencies comply with international labour laws and ethical recruitment practices. The organisation has more than 2,000 members, making it challenging to monitor each agency individually. Although some of the more established recruiting agencies are known to follow ethical recruitment practices, many newer ones tend to follow a mix of ethical and unethical recruitment practices, indicating the entire sector is not fully adhering to ethical recruitment practices.

7.1.3 Insurance

The current insurance mechanism for migrant workers only covers death or injury, leaving the health issues of migrant workers uncovered. This means if a migrant worker becomes physically ill or suffers from a serious illness, they are not entitled to any health coverage or medical benefits. While public organisations receive budgetary allocations to ensure the welfare and rights of migrant workers, their financial statements

and allocations are not clear in terms of implementing or providing services related to migrant workers, despite implementing those activities. Moreover, most of the activities related to migrant workers are being implemented using the funds of the WEWB, which raises questions about the effectiveness of the budgetary allocation for migrant workers.

To address these challenges, the government needs to allocate more funds for the health coverage of migrant workers, as their health is just as important as their safety. Additionally, public organisations responsible for the welfare and rights of migrant workers need to be more transparent about their budgetary allocations and financial statements. The implementation rate of loans and other economic support measures also needs to be improved by addressing the challenges of lack of manpower, infrastructure, and transportation costs.

7.2 Migrants' Challenges in the Destination Countries

7.2.1 Wage, Work Environment and Exploitation

In destination countries, migrant workers encounter a host of problems, including meagre or no remuneration, gruelling working conditions, inadequate living arrangements, indebtedness, abrupt termination of employment, abandonment by employers, physical and psychological abuse, and involuntary repatriation. These challenges are exacerbated by language barriers, difficulties adapting to local cuisine, and vulnerability to exploitation by employers. Non-payment, underpayment, and late payment of wages are common issues faced by migrant workers, and the informal nature of employment leaves them without adequate protection.

Accidents or death can lead to complicated legal procedures for the next of kin to receive compensation. Women migrant workers, in particular, face challenges related to household work, including long hours and sexual harassment.

A survey was carried out in Paikora union comprising nine villages and 11 wards of Elenga municipality,

which included 5,407 households. The results of the study revealed 51 per cent of the households who were aspiring to migrate, currently working abroad, or have returned from working abroad, had encountered fraudulent, harassing, or inhumane treatment. Among these households, 19 per cent of them had paid some or the entire amount to relatives, friends, or middlemen but were unable to go abroad (Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit [RMMRU], 2017).

As per KIs, middlemen often manipulate low-skilled workers, leading to exploitation in the name of a “free VISA”. Despite 1.1 million workers migrating to different countries in 2022, the government has no statistics on how many of them have become unemployed or are being exploited in the destination countries.

7.2.2 Support from Consulates

Labour attaché in the labour wings lack manpower, which should be increased significantly to support migrant workers better. Currently, there are 32 labour wings operating in 29 different countries. On average, per country, there are only 4-5 labour attachés to support migrants, making it challenging to provide adequate assistance to all. Over the past few years, additional positions have been added in destination countries to support the work of labour attaches, although not under the official title of labour attaché. The funding for labour attaches comes from the revenue budget, rather than the WEWB fund.

Labour wings in the destination countries can facilitate ensuring the basic needs of migrant workers, such as payment, medical check-ups, accommodation, and transportation issues. The embassy and labour wings should develop a database to track all migrant workers for strong monitoring and provide need-based support, including reintegration.

7.3 Migrants’ Reintegration Challenges

7.3.1 Economic Reintegration

The process of reintegrating into one’s home country after working abroad can be challenging for many migrant workers. One significant challenge is finding employment, as there is often a lack of effective

mechanisms in place to assist returnee migrants in finding job opportunities or validating the skills they acquired while working abroad. Additionally, many migrants may not be aware of the various avenues available to invest their remittances productively, which can further complicate their return.

Probashi Kallyan Bank (PKB) initiated the ‘reintegration loan’ in 2001 when it began operations. Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, PKB introduced three new types of loans. These loans are typically utilised for agricultural activities and small to medium enterprises. However, the disbursement of PKB’s reintegration loans has some key drawbacks, including discrepancies between prerequisites and actual practices. Problems are faced in finding guarantors, collecting bank statements, requiring an up-to-date trade license, and prior investment. Additionally, there is a lack of innovation in the design of the loan schemes, which does not cater to the needs and opportunities of returnee migrant workers for their reintegration. Furthermore, there is no customer care service available in branch offices to provide comprehensive information about loan schemes and prerequisites (Islam & Sravasti, 2022).

The challenges in the process of reintegrating returning workers into wage employment were identified as the lack of information about returning workers among the government and employers, inadequate information for workers about local job opportunities, and the absence of suitable government policies regarding the reintegration of returning workers. One of the main obstacles to successful reintegration is the insufficient knowledge about returning migrant workers, including their numbers, skills, and experiences with reintegration and rehabilitation. This lack of information makes it difficult for employers and business owners to determine which skills the returning workers possess and whether they can fill any skill gaps. The absence of a formal platform or forum for returned workers seeking employment is also an obstacle in the reintegration process. The lack of available information on returning migrant workers makes it difficult to reach out to them and organise them effectively. As a result, both employers and returned workers remain disconnected from each other, lacking a formal system for sharing and disseminating information. Another issue with

reintegrating returning workers is that there is often a mismatch between the aspirations of these workers and the willingness of employers to hire them. Many returning workers have high wage expectations, which may not be realistic given the current labour market conditions in Bangladesh, making it difficult to reintegrate them into the domestic market (ILO, 2015). Furthermore, according to the KIs, it is crucial to note that migrant workers are often manipulated by middlemen who deceive them about their employment options in destination countries. Many workers end up working for employers who are not designated on their visas, which can result in fines, imprisonment, and deportation without legal documentation. This makes it impossible for them to claim any benefits, such as insurance, compensation, or loans, from the government upon returning from abroad.

7.3.2 Physical and Psychological Reintegration

Returnee migrants may also face physical and mental health issues, as well as trauma and abuse that they have experienced while working abroad. Women migrants, in particular, are often vulnerable to physical, mental, and sexual abuse, and social stigma can make it difficult for them to reintegrate into their home communities.

According to research by REMAP, IOM, and DTM (2020), some of the other challenges faced by returnee migrants include financial problems, debt repayment, and negative reactions from their community towards their return. Access to formal finance, market information, and networking can also be challenging for many returnee migrants.

7.3.3 Reintegration Challenges of Survivors of Human Trafficking

The process for returnee migrants, particularly human trafficking survivors, to receive trial services from the BMET can be prolonged for up to a year, which is inefficient. Additionally, the judging panel consists of agency representatives, which may not ensure a fair trial for the victim. The BMET and WEWB proactively facilitate the return of undocumented migrant workers or their deceased bodies. The Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012,

exists; however, the Ministry of Home Affairs does not allocate a budget for the referral mechanism, and victims do not receive support or grants to attend the trial process. To provide compensation or cash incentives for victims, a block allocation made by the ministry is required, excluding other financial benefits. The absence of a clear and standardised procedure for arbitration in the OEMA 2013 creates a hindrance to the migrant workers' access to justice. The lack of a "code of conduct" allows recruiting agents to deliberately disregard the arbitration process to dissuade migrant workers from pursuing their complaints. Since migrant workers have less influence in the process, they are at a higher risk of being manipulated, discriminated against, and exploited (Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program [OKUP], 2021).

7.4 Migrant Community's Challenges

Migrant worker families in Bangladesh face a multitude of economic, social, and psychological challenges that can significantly impact their quality of life. One of the primary challenges is the financial instability caused by the irregular and unpredictable remittances that migrant workers send back home. This unpredictability can create a significant burden for families who may depend heavily on these funds to meet their basic needs. Additionally, the high cost of migration and the debt burden that many families take on to finance it can also create economic challenges, especially if the migrant worker is unable to find employment or their employment is terminated abruptly.

The migration of parents can have a negative impact on their children who are left behind. These children may experience insecurity, loneliness, and the absence of one or both parents, particularly their mother when they fall sick. Additionally, they may have to take on more household responsibilities, which tend to be gendered. Girls may have to cook, clean, and care for their siblings, while boys may have to handle tasks like shopping, paying bills, and helping with agricultural work (Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit [RMMRU], 2019).

Left behind husbands may experience various social costs due to the migration of their wives. These can include loneliness, a lack of companionship, increased household responsibilities, psychological stress,

disagreements with their wives, concerns about their wives' safety and well-being, and difficulty in managing their children's sickness. Many left behind husbands have had to manage their households on their own, while some have sought external support (Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit [RMMRU], 2019).

The migration of husbands can have varying effects on the decision-making authority and autonomy of left behind wives, which depends on their age, education level, and family structure. While some may experience an increase in power, this is not the case for all left behind wives. In addition to potential changes in decision-making power, left behind wives may also face significant social costs for their husbands' migration. These can include loneliness, restrictions on their movement, control by their in-laws, overwhelming responsibilities for child-rearing and education, physical and sexual insecurity, psychological stress, and even occasional nervous breakdowns. The absence of their husbands can leave them feeling lonely and isolated, making it difficult to cope and sometimes leading to mental health issues (Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit [RMMRU], 2019).

According to KIIs, family members of migrant workers may also face additional challenges such as eviction from their homesteads by local influencers and the loss of their land to them. This can create significant financial and emotional stress for the affected families. Additionally, families of wounded or deceased migrant workers may face severe financial crises that can further impact their well-being.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government included families and returnee migrants in emergency relief efforts, providing in-kind support to those in need. However, addressing the long-term economic, social, and psychological challenges faced by migrant worker families will require sustained efforts from the government and other stakeholders. These efforts may include creating more comprehensive support services for families, increasing access to education and training opportunities, and addressing issues such as land grabbing and financial exploitation.

7.5 Challenges Related to Training Institutions

Training institutions such as the BMET and Technical Training Centres (TTCs) play a crucial role in producing skilled workers in Bangladesh, thereby enhancing their employment opportunities, welfare, and rights. However, the lack of adequate training instruments and practical learning facilities is resulting in the production of mostly "less skilled" workers. According to the BMET, approximately 50 per cent of the migrant workers fall under this category. For women workers, the provided training programmes are inadequate, with only 21 to 30 days of training being offered, which does not meet the required standards of the destination countries. Language training is being prioritised to some extents but is insufficient to improve the overall skill levels of the workers.

The funding for the BMET and TTCs comes from the ministry's budget, which is reflected in their financial statements. However, it is unclear whether the allocation has been made for development or operating expenditure purposes. This lack of clarity raises concerns about the effectiveness of the training programmes and the potential misuse of funds. Therefore, it is essential to differentiate between the allocation of funds for development and operating expenses to ensure the training institutions receive adequate resources to improve the quality of their training programmes and facilities. By investing in the development of training infrastructure, practical learning facilities, and comprehensive training programmes, Bangladesh can produce skilled workers who can compete globally and contribute to the country's overall economic growth.

7.6 NGO-Related Issues

NGOs or civil society organisations (CSOs) play a critical role in reducing the risks and vulnerabilities associated with migration, providing assistance during migration and reintegration, and supporting the livelihoods of migrants. However, these activities are mostly run by external funding, which is not sustainable, particularly after graduation from the

category of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). After graduation, it will become challenging for the CSOs to facilitate migrant workers in various aspects. Currently, the government provides no budgetary support to the CSOs for facilitating migrant workers in their different needs.

The only support that migrant workers receive from the CSOs is the orientation training provided by the WEWB and CSOs during the pre-departure and departure stages. The CSOs are working towards promoting “informed migration by choice”, emphasising the importance of providing migrants with accurate and relevant information about the migration process and their rights.

To facilitate migrant workers effectively, there is a need for a public-private collaboration model for financing, implementing, and monitoring. The collaboration and co-ordination between the government, private sector, and the CSOs can ensure migrant workers receive the necessary support to make informed decisions, migrate safely, and have a smooth reintegration process. It is crucial to

allocate budgetary support to the CSOs to ensure the sustainability of their activities and create an enabling environment for them to contribute effectively to the welfare of migrant workers.

8. Proposed Budgetary Allocation

To address the existing challenges effectively, it is essential to introduce more focused initiatives. After reviewing relevant documents, it has been observed that the 8FYP acknowledged the importance of a strategy concerning external migration and outlined corresponding objectives. However, there is a notable absence of a detailed action plan and follow-up actions for executing this strategy.

Taking all these factors into account, a proposed budget allocation of BDT 4,550 crore is recommended in this study for various ministries. This allocation is intended to facilitate their respective roles pertaining to overseas employees, as outlined in Table 7. Here’s a breakdown of the proposed allocation for your reference.

Table 7: Summary of Proposed Budgetary Allocation

Migration Stages	Challenges	Total Allocation (BDT, Crore)
Pre-Departure	High recruitment costs	2,150
	Visa fees	
	Medical fees	
	Police clearance	
	Airfare and travel expenses	
	Training	
	Costs for obtaining a legal document	
Destination	Accommodation costs	1,700
	Food costs	
	Remittance costs	
	Legal costs	
	Language barriers and cultural differences	
Reintegration	Financial costs of returning home	700
	Employment opportunities	
	Under-utilisation of remittances	
	Repaying loans/debts	
	Social stigma	
Total		4,550

Source: Author’s Proposition.

8.1 Proposed Budget for Pre-departure Phase

The required budgetary allocation for addressing recruitment fees charged by migration agents or agencies; visa fees and other travel document expenses; medical check-up and vaccination fees; cost of obtaining a police clearance certificate is BDT 1,050 crores, with BDT 100 crores each for the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), BDT 150 crores for the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), BDT 500 crores for the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism (MoCAT), and BDT 200 crores for the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW). Suggestions for fair and ethical migration include regulating recruiting agencies by MoEWOE, not allowing labourers to leave without a demand letter attestation by labour wings, digitalising the immigration process by the MoHA, subsidising airfare, setting up dedicated offices for police clearance certificates, and providing free health services. The engagement of various ministries, including MoEWOE, MoFA, MoHA, MoCAT, and MoHFW, is necessary for implementing these suggestions.

To address language training and orientation challenges for migrant workers, a budgetary allocation of BDT 500 crores is required. This allocation will cover language training and test fees, as well as orientation and training programme fees. Some suggestions include establishing an internationally recognised certified training centre in eight divisions of Bangladesh, providing subsidised or free language training and test preparation programmes, facilitating partnerships between employers and training providers to develop customised training and orientation programmes, modernising training equipment, expanding language courses such as French, Spanish, and Japanese, and developing language labs. Additionally, encouraging employers to cover the cost of orientation and training programmes for their employees, arranging post-arrival orientation for workers, and promoting the type of training provided by Hong Kong TTCs for caregivers in the destination country i.e., Hong Kong. To implement these initiatives, the engagement of various ministries, such as the Ministry of Education

(MoE), National Skills Development Authority (NSDA), and Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB), is essential. Moreover, negotiation is required in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for post-arrival orientation arranged by employers.

A budgetary allocation of BDT 100 crores is required to address the challenge of travel expenses for migrant workers to reach the departure point or at the airport. Suggestions to alleviate this challenge include providing subsidised or free transportation options, establishing a transportation subsidy programme, and offering pick-and-drop services. The purchase of transportation by the District Employment and Manpower Office (DEMO) from districts to airports could also be managed by the BMET. The MoEWOE and MoCAT are the possible ministries that could engage in implementing these suggestions.

To address the challenge of the cost of obtaining work permits and other legal documents, a budgetary allocation of BDT 500 crores is required. The suggestions to tackle this issue include encouraging the use of electronic documentation and online application systems to reduce administrative costs and improve efficiency in the application process. Collaboration with relevant government agencies to ensure they accept digital applications and have the capacity to process them in a timely manner is also necessary. Furthermore, extensive media campaigns to spread information and raise awareness about digital application systems can be an effective solution. To implement these initiatives, the engagement of the MoEWOE and the Ministry of Information (MoI) is required. These measures will help to reduce the cost and hassle of obtaining legal documents for migrant workers, making them more accessible and convenient for them.

8.2 Proposed Budget for Migrants in Destination Countries

A proposed budgetary allocation of BDT 500 crores aims to address the challenges related to accommodation, shelter, and food costs for migrant workers. The Ministry of Housing and Public Works (MoHPW) and the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management (MoFD) can collaborate to provide

information and support for workers to find safe and affordable housing and food options in the destination countries. In addition, shelter houses for women and domestic workers can be established in the destination country with support from the country of origin. Support centres in destination countries and a special fund for crisis periods can also be set up. The MoEWOE, MoHPW, MoFA, Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE), and Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs (MoLJPA), along with the BMET, BAIRA, and can be engaged to implement these suggestions.

A budgetary allocation of BDT 500 crore is suggested to address the challenge of remittance costs faced by overseas workers. The Ministry of Finance can establish partnerships with banks and financial institutions to provide low-cost or free remittance services. A remittance subsidy programme could be established to incentivise banks and financial institutions to offer low-cost or free remittance services. According to internal sources and information, the parliamentary standing committee of migrants to MoEWOE has demanded more incentives for earning better remittance, and 3 per cent has been approved. The PKB should collect remittance, and a bank account at PKB should be made mandatory. Financial products for migrant workers, such as investment and saving options, should be developed. A migrants' welfare fund could be generated with \$1 per transaction of remittance, similar to Mexico and other countries. Additionally, a special pension scheme could be introduced for remittance-sending migrants.

A budgetary allocation of BDT 200 crores has been proposed to address various challenges related to access to justice for migrant workers in the destination countries. The primary focus is on legal costs and ensuring that migrant workers have access to legal aid programmes. The MoLJPA can play a crucial role in constructing such programmes that provide free or low-cost legal services in destination countries. The suggestions also include setting up hotlines or online platforms to receive legal inquiries from migrant workers and connecting them with appropriate legal services. Additionally, the MoLJPA's involvement is required in issues related to compensation, access to justice, rights violations, and working with overseas lawyers. The budget should also address the issue of

wage theft, including unpaid wages and portability of investments, and support from the MoLJPA is needed in the legal processes to reclaim these wages. Other relevant ministries, such as the MoEWOE, may also be engaged in these efforts.

To address the issue of discrimination faced by migrant workers based on nationality, ethnicity, or religion, a budgetary allocation of BDT 100 crores is required. The MoEWOE can work with destination countries to establish anti-discrimination policies and practices in the workplace. A taskforce may be established to look into the discrimination-related issues, and awareness-raising campaigns will be developed through mass media like TV channels and newspapers to sensitise destination country employers and employees on the harmful effects of discrimination. The MoEWOE has the potential to play a critical role in this effort and work towards ensuring that migrant workers are not discriminated against based on their identity.

The government may allocate BDT 100 crores to address challenges related to exploitation in the workforce, such as low wages, long work hours/overtime, and denial of legal rights. Suggestions to address these issues include the MoEWOE mediating agreements with destination countries to establish and enforce labour laws, increasing the revenue budget to hire more manpower for monitoring and reporting exploitation cases, establishing women welfare officers/labour attaches to support female migrant workers in destination countries, and setting up a reporting mechanism for exploitation cases and ensuring access to legal remedies. The MoEWOE and the MoLJPA may engage in these efforts.

To address the challenges of language barriers and cultural differences faced by migrant workers, the government may allocate BDT 300 crores. Suggestions include providing language and cultural training programmes for workers to communicate effectively and understand the culture of the destination countries. In this regard, the BOESL, BMET, and BAIRA can collaborate with destination countries to offer additional resources for language and cultural training. Moreover, establishing cultural centres at every embassy, particularly in the Middle East, can provide services, training, and cultural orientation to migrant workers.

8.3 Proposed Budget for Reintegration

To address the financial costs of returning migrant workers to their home country, the government may set aside BDT 200 crores which includes expenses related to airfare or transportation. To tackle the financial costs of returning home, the MoEWOE can provide financial assistance or subsidies to cover the transportation costs for returnees. It is generally the employer's responsibility to bear the expenses of sending back migrant workers to their home country. However, in times of crisis, when employers are unable to provide transportation expenses, the MoCAT can provide subsidies to cover the costs. Additionally, collaborating with airlines and transportation providers to negotiate reduced fares or rates for returnee migrant workers can also be helpful. To support the repatriation of dead bodies, subsidised costs can be provided. The MoEWOE, MoCAT, and MoFA can be involved in these initiatives.

The government may allocate BDT 200 crores for returnee migrant workers to address the challenge of finding employment opportunities in their field of expertise. To manage this issue, the MoLE can create employment and training programmes that are specifically designed for returnee migrant workers to assist them in finding the right jobs that align with their skills and experience. In addition, the employment exchange department in BMET can be reinstated to offer counselling, job placement, job fairs, and other support services with the assistance of business associations. Career counselling and job placement services should be developed to help returnee migrant workers find employment that corresponds to their skills and expertise.

To address the under-utilisation of remittances sent back home, the government may allocate BDT 100 crores. The MoF and the MoEWOE can develop financial literacy programmes for returnee migrant workers and their families. These programmes can educate them on managing and investing in remittances effectively. To test the effectiveness of these programmes, a pilot project for public-private partnerships can be

implemented. Additionally, the government can develop financial literacy programmes tailored to the specific needs and skills of returnee migrant workers and collaborate with financial institutions and experts to provide training and resources on effective money management and investment strategies. To promote these programmes, public-private partnerships involving NGOs and CSOs are needed to develop a business profile. The DEMO and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MoLGD) can also be utilised for creating awareness in various forms.

A budgetary allocation of BDT 100 crores is required to address the issue of loan repayment for returnee migrant workers. The MoF can create loan repayment assistance programmes to help workers who have taken out loans to finance their migration. To prevent workers from taking out loans informally at high-interest rates, an awareness campaign can be launched, and debt mediation through public-private partnerships can be promoted. Making PKB and government bank loans more accessible and developing more grassroots-level projects funded by the government can also help. Additionally, a rehabilitation grant can be provided to those in need. The loan repayment assistance programme should offer financial counselling, debt consolidation services, and flexible repayment plans to help returnee migrant workers repay their loans in a sustainable manner.

The government may allocate BDT 100 crores to address stigma and discrimination issues faced by the returnee migrant workers, especially returnee women migrant workers and left-behind families. The MoI, MoLGD, and MoEWOE can create public awareness campaigns. Such campaigns may include drama, cultural programmes, and print media, such as booklets, leaflets, and stickers. Furthermore, awareness campaigns and TV commercials can also be effective. To engage the community at the grassroots level, religious groups and different stakeholders should be involved, and partnerships with CSOs should be established. These campaigns can help combat negative attitudes and stigmatisation toward returnee migrant workers.

9. Recommendations

To ensure migrant workers are supported and empowered, Bangladesh must allocate more funds for migrants in the national budget as it transitions from being a least developed country. The government should allocate budgetary funds to monitor the skill development programmes of migrant workers and evaluate the quality of their skills. Additionally, risk funds should also be allocated to provide support during crises such as natural disasters or for workers returning from war-torn countries. By investing in these areas, Bangladesh can help ensure that its migrant workers are protected and equipped with the skills and resources necessary for success in their destination countries.

However, some of the specific recommendations are narrated below for the greater comprehension.

- (a) *Policy Reform and Implementation*: This includes policy changes, eradicating intermediaries, ratifying international conventions, increasing human resources and embassy consulates, and allocating budget for industry development and training programmes.
- (b) *Bilateral agreements*: Strengthening and establishing bilateral agreements with destination countries to protect migrant workers' rights, including fair wages, safe working conditions, and access to healthcare.
- (c) *Skill development programmes*: Enhancing skill development programmes in Bangladesh to equip potential migrants with necessary skills demanded in destination countries, increasing employability and reducing vulnerability to exploitation.
- (d) *Pre-departure training and orientation*: Implementing comprehensive training programmes to educate potential migrants about legal rights, destination country culture, language, job prospects, and potential challenges they may face.
- (e) *Recruitment regulation*: Establishing strict regulations on recruitment agencies to prevent unethical practices and ensuring compliance through monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.
- (f) *Information dissemination*: Developing comprehensive information campaigns to educate potential migrants about legal migration channels, available job opportunities, required documents, and authorised recruitment agencies.
- (g) *Remittance management*: Enhancing mechanisms for secure and cost-effective remittance transfer channels, promoting financial literacy, and providing information on investment options.
- (h) *Financial Literacy and Empowerment*: Providing training and support to workers for economic empowerment, simplifying loan application processes, and enrolling workers in economic empowerment programmes.
- (i) *Gender-Sensitive Training*: Providing targeted pre-departure training to female migrants, focusing on preventing sexual harassment. Equipping them with knowledge on their rights, ways to recognise and respond to harassment, and avenues for seeking help.
- (j) *Welfare support for returnees*: Creating reintegration programmes and support systems for returning migrants, including financial assistance, skills training, and entrepreneurship development.
- (k) *Develop Social Protection Programmes*: Allocating budgetary funds to develop comprehensive social protection programmes for migrant workers and their families, including healthcare, insurance coverage, and support for dependents left behind.
- (l) *Enhance Monitoring and Grievance Redressal Mechanisms*: Establishing robust monitoring systems and grievance redressal mechanisms to oversee working conditions and address worker grievances.
- (m) *International Support and Trade Unions*: Collaborating with international organisations and destination countries to develop bilateral agreements that promote ethical recruitment practices and protect the rights of migrant workers, gaining support from trade unions and strengthening Bangladesh's position in the global market.

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Migrant workers make significant contributions to Bangladeshi economy; however, they encounter a range of obstacles. These challenges encompass issues including exploitation, language barriers, cultural differences, workplace accidents, and low quality of life. Moreover, their constrained financial means impede their ability to avail of crucial services like medical care and legal assistance. Though the government has introduced diverse measures, policies, and economic incentives aimed at aiding migrant workers, the efficacy and accessibility of these endeavors have fallen short. The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE) assumes a pivotal function in providing assistance to migrant labourers and their families, both within Bangladesh and abroad. The study assesses difficulties confronted by the migrant workers and suggests paths to enhance their welfare.



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