

CGS PEACE REPORT

an initiative of BPO

CGS
CENTRE FOR
GENOCIDE
STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA



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May-June 2021



**Crime and Violence in
Bangladesh:
An Analysis from BPO**

**The Impact of COVID-19
Pandemic on Labour Migration
and Remittance Sector in
Bangladesh**

**Covid-19 and Women Migrant
Workers: A Perspective from
Bangladesh**

**Labour Migration and the
COVID-19 Pandemic: Regional
and Global Overview**

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From the Editor's Desk

Most people prefer to live in their home country, and only a few migrate to newer places. The share of international migrants to the total population of the world is minuscule. In 2019, about 3.5 per cent of the world population were international migrants, compared to 2.8 per cent in 2000. Again, the few that migrate mostly do to escape bodily harm or fear of one kind or another, in fact, for a relatively better life or at least of promises of it. This has resulted in the migration of people across international borders for all kinds of reasons. However, there is greater attention now, mainly because the composition of the migrants and the direction of international migration have changed considerably. Earlier the migration was from the North to the South. Again, predominantly Europeans migrated to faraway places either to escape persecution or to seek a better life. Of course, there was also the case of banishing the felons and minorities and making Europe safe in the name of nation-building. Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States, even South Africa would be good examples of such migration. But this changed with the end of colonialism and almost got reversed in recent times. The migration is now from the South to the North. The composition of the people has changed, although the reasons remain the same, seeking a better life! However, the earlier migration flow was viewed as part of the 'white man's burden,' and the noise was less, but not the recent ones, which face more restrictions and fewer are welcomed unless the person comes with know-how and a bag full of money!

The migration of labour or what is more popularly referred to as 'economic migrants' has received the most attention. In Bangladesh's case with remittances, it plays a critical role in reproducing the country's economy, next to the export of ready-made garments, which Bangladesh was second in the world after China in 2020. However, in remittances, when measured against the population, Bangladesh ranks 7th with a per capita remittance flow of USD 14 (2021 estimate). Mexico has the highest per capita remittance flow of USD 40, with Ukraine and the Philippines coming second and third with a per capita remittance flow of USD 38 and 33, respectively. In this ranking, India and China are ninth and tenth, with their per capita remittance flow standing merely USD 6 and 4, respectively.¹

But in the case of Bangladesh, there is an interesting side to it. The migration of semi-skilled and, at times, unskilled labour to the Middle East, where most of Bangladesh's labour migrants are located, allows for the continuous flow of remittances to Bangladesh, which incidentally had a growth of over 18 per cent even during the Covid-19 pandemic

¹ Calculated from Rejaul Karim Byron and Ahsan Habib, "Remittance to lose steam - World Bank projects," *The Daily Star*, 19 November 2021. See, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/economy/news/remittance-lose-steam-2233741>. Accessed on 29 November 2021.

with the remittances standing at USD 21.7 billion in 2020.² But there is an outflow of money as well. The skilled migrants from Bangladesh help the economies of the developed countries not only with their intellect but also with their profits and assets. A part of the laundered money in Bangladesh is regularly siphoned off to the developed countries, with the latter legalizing the illegal funds to the full! As one critic pointed out, “Many politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen try to launder money as their children stay abroad... [Those] people do not have the confidence to invest funds in the country.”³ In fact, one report, published in March 2020, indicated that capital flight from Bangladesh amounts to USD 7.53 billion on an average per year,⁴ and that again due to misinvoicing during import and export alone. Other kind of transfers, including *hundi*, would make the amount even greater. This would imply that in addition to the migration of labour, there is also the migration of intellect, profit, and property, which only makes corruption in the developing countries profitable to the developed countries! The following report, published in *The Guardian*, summed it up nicely:

When you connect the words corruption and the United Kingdom, people tend to respond with shock and anger. Corruption, we believe, is something that happens abroad. Indeed, if you check the rankings published by Transparency International or the Basel Institute, the UK looks like one of the world’s cleanest countries. But this is an artefact of the narrow criteria they use.

As Jason Hickel points out in his book *The Divide*, theft by officials in poorer nations amounts to between \$20bn and \$40bn a year. It’s a lot of money, and it harms wellbeing and democracy in those countries. But this figure is dwarfed by the illicit flows of money from poor and middling nations that are organised by multinational companies and banks. The US research group Global Financial Integrity estimates that \$1.1tn a year flows illegally out of poorer nations, stolen from them through tax evasion and the transfer of money within corporations. This practice costs sub-Saharan Africa around 6% of its GDP.

² Siddique Islam, “Remittance grows by 18.4pc in 2020,” *The Financial Express*, 20 May 2021. See, <https://www.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/remittance-grows-by-184pc-in-2020-1621480606>. Accessed on 29 November 2021.

³ Staff Correspondent, “Tk 640b siphoned off the country for ‘trade’,” *English Prothom Alo*, 5 March 2020. See, <https://en.prothomalo.com/business/local/tk-640b-siphoned-out-of-country-for-trade>. Accessed on 14 December 2020.

⁴ Star Business Report, “Capital flight through trade mis-invoicing staggeringly high,” *The Daily Star*, 5 March 2020. See, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/capital-flight-through-trade-mis-invoicing-staggeringly-high-1876546>. Accessed on 14 December 2020.

The looters rely on secrecy regimes to process and hide their stolen money. The corporate tax haven index published by the Tax Justice Network shows that the three countries that have done most to facilitate this theft are the British Virgin Islands, Bermuda and the Cayman Islands. All of them are British territories. Jersey, a British dependency, comes seventh on the list. These places are effectively satellites of the City of London. But because they are overseas, the City can benefit from “nefarious activities ... while allowing the British government to maintain distance when scandals arise”, says the network. The City of London’s astonishing exemption from the UK’s freedom of information laws creates an extra ring of secrecy.

The UK also appears to be the money-laundering capital of the world. In a devastating article, Oliver Bullough revealed how easy it has become to hide your stolen loot and fraudulent schemes here, using a giant loophole in company law: no one checks the ownership details you enter when creating your company. You can, literally, call yourself Mickey Mouse, with a registered address on Mars, and get away with it...⁵

Only closer attention can demystify the complexity of international migration. Will the developed countries become transparent and stop the flow of such money from the developing countries and help them return to the latter? Or, for that matter, will Bangladesh make rules to penalize those persons transferring wealth unwittingly, if not illegally, from the country by seizing their property or taxing them for joining the diaspora in some developed countries? Or, should the Government of Bangladesh create facilities for the migrants who have entered the diaspora to engage in the developmental activities of the country and make them repay for their education and livelihood in Bangladesh? Unless such queries are addressed and policies put into execution, Bangladesh will see money entering from one side and exiting from another side, with the empowered and the dubious sucking out the country’s resources and depriving the people of Bangladesh as international migrants.

29 November 2021

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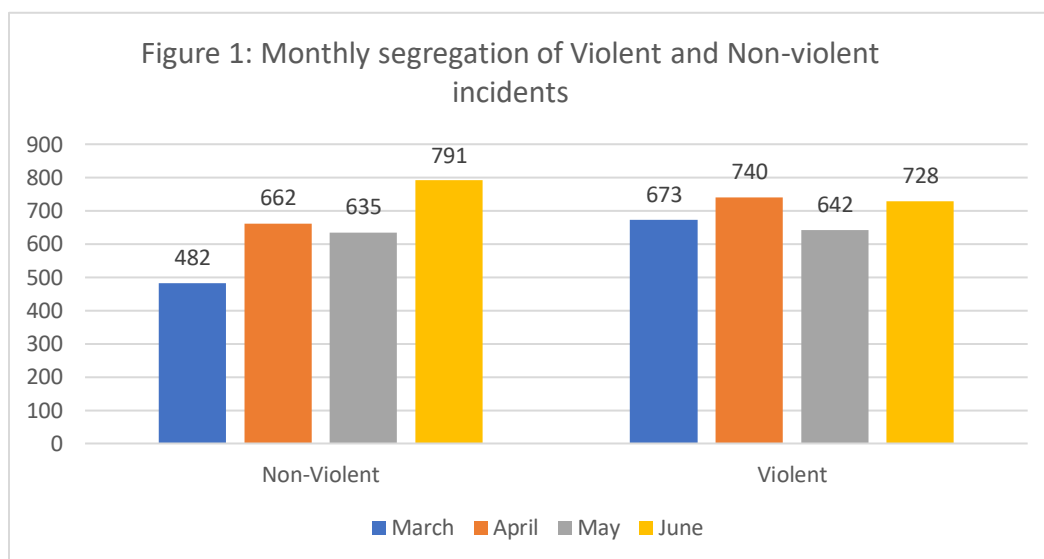
⁵ George Monbiot, “If you think the UK isn’t corrupt, you haven’t looked hard enough,” *The Guardian*, 10 September 2020. See, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/sep/10/uk-corrupt-nation-earth-brexit-money-laundering>. Accessed on 29 November 2021.

Crime and Violence Update in Bangladesh: An Analysis from BPO

Violence update (May-June 2021)

The Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO) brings together different streams of publicly available data on violence using news reports from prominent national and regional dailies. In May-June 2021, BPO has recorded a total of 1370 violent⁶ and 1426 non-violent⁷ incidents. Figure 1 shows the monthly segregation of the violent and non-violent incidents of March-April 2021

and May-June 2021. Drawing a comparison between these two timelines, it is noticeable that non-violent incidents increased by almost 25% in May-June 2021 than March-April 2021. On the other hand, the violent incidents decreased by 3% in May-June 2021 than March-April 2021.



⁶ Violent Incident: According to BPO Codebook: The reported incident involved the intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group, in a manner that resulted or could have resulted in death, injury or any other form of physical harm to persons or property.

⁷ Non-violent Incident: According to BPO Codebook: The reported incident did not involve the intentional use of physical force by an individual or group against another individual or group, in a manner that resulted or could have resulted in death, injury or any other form of physical harm to persons or property, e.g. Arrest, Peaceful Protest, Rescue and Recovery.

According to BPO data, the overall number of incidents increased by 9.3% in May-June 2021 than the previous two months. Table 1 summarises the updates on major violence types that constitute most of the violent incidents. A brief description of each category is available in the Annex.

The table depicts that incident numbers under most categories experienced nominal changes except for clash and fights. The number of Clashes and Fights decreased significantly in May-June 2021. Table 2 illustrates the comparison of the consequences. The total number of abductions and arrests increased, and the number of Injured decreased significantly in May-June 2021

Table 1: Comparison of major violence types

Major Violence types	March	April	May	June
Abduction/hostage	19	18	17	30
Assault	419	461	438	444
Clash	88	77	53	70
Sexual assault	90	111	87	112
Fight	29	8	8	4
Gunfight	2	6	7	2
Mob violence (large group assault)	2	7	6	4
Other	6	18	13	24

Table 2: Comparison of the changes of consequences

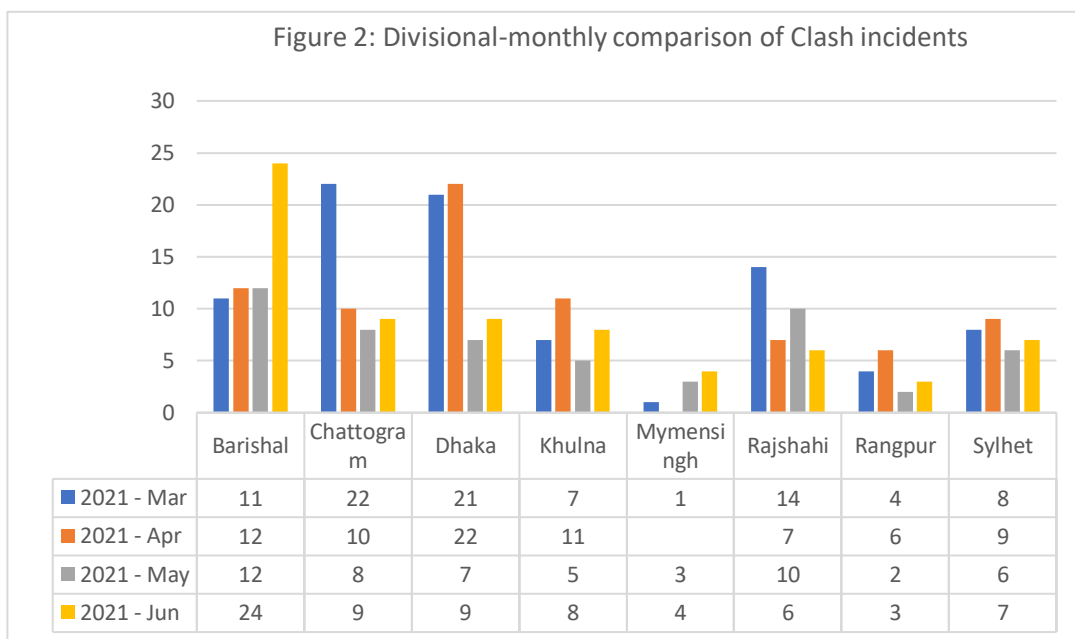
Consequences	Total Killed	Total Abducted	Total Injured	Total Sexually Assaulted	Total Arrested
March-April	777	60	3375	222	4307
May-June	776	67	2489	216	5181
Changes in Percentage	-0.1	11.7	-26.3	-2.7	20.3

Understanding the High Number of Assaults

BPO enlists the inter-personal attacks by different parties against one person/persons by another person/persons for various motives under the assault category. BPO recorded a total of 882 cases that primarily fit under the assault category in May-June 2021. The motives include domestic violence, dowry-related, land and other enmities related to economic factors, social-personal rivalry, attacks with criminal intent, suicide attempts, etc. Under the assault category, 292 suicide and attempted suicide cases were reported, and in those cases, 289 people were killed, including 143 women. Besides, the recovery of unidentified dead bodies is also enlisted under this category.

Decrease in Number of Clash

The total number of clashes decreased in May-June 2021 than March-April 2021 (see Table 1). In the 123 clashes reported in May-June 2021, 1462 people were injured, including 56 women. The main motives of these clashes are election-related confrontations, political tension between groups, social rivalry, control over land or natural resource, economic and business-related feuds, social and personal trivial matters, etc. Most of the election-related clashes took place in the Barishal division, and at least six people were reportedly killed in this division in election-related clashes.



Decrease in Sexual Assault

Reported incidents of sexual assault have slightly decreased in May-June 2021 than in March-April 2021. Out of 199 reported cases of sexual assaults, there were at least 16 reported incidents of gang rapes. The perpetrators of these offences were men of different ages, including a few minor boys, teasers, local miscreants, teachers, family members, relatives, neighbours, and so on. The majority of the victims are girls. In March-April 2021, ten boys were reportedly the victims of sexual assault.

Significant Decrease in Fight Incidents

The number of incidents of fights decreased significantly in May-June 2021 than in March-April 2021 (see Table 1). In April, the number dropped drastically, and it continued in later months. In March-April 2021, land-related disputes and social tension were the major cause for fights, but in May-June 2021, most of the fights took place because of trivial issues.

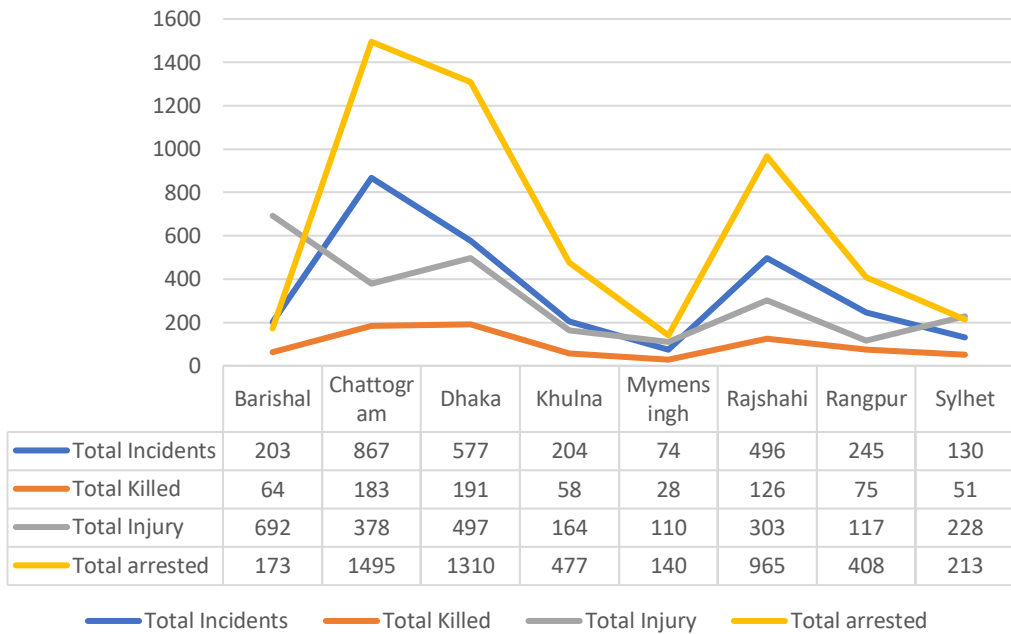
A Low Number of Gunfight Persists

The number of gunfights went down since August 2020, and the number did not exceed one digit since then. In August 2020, a retired Major of the Bangladesh Army was killed in a reported gunfight. This event might have influenced the sudden decline in Gunfight from August 2020 onwards. In May-June 2021, the number of gunfights increased by one than March-April 2021.

Violence-Population Nexus

Figure 3 provides a spatial glimpse through the divisional distribution of the recorded incidents and their consequences. The graph illustrates that Chattogram, Dhaka, and Rajshahi are the first, second, and third respectively in terms of incidents and second, first, and third respectively in terms of the death count. In addition, these three divisions are the most populous in Bangladesh.

Figure 3: Divisional distribution of Incidents and consequences



At first glance, the incident/death/injury comparison in Dhaka seems alarming. But if the population ratio is applied to understand the incident prevalence and its consequences, then a different picture emerges. In that case, the Barishal division has the third-highest incident rate but the highest death rate,

female death rate, injury rate, and the second-highest sexual assault rate. The Rajshahi division being the third in terms of incident number, occupied the second-highest incident rate, death rate and, female death rate. Dhaka has lower rates than other divisions. (see Table 3).

Table 3: Divisional segregation of incidents and consequences in terms of population: May-June 2021

Division	Incident	Rate by pop*	Death	Rate by pop*	Female Death	Rate by pop*	Injury	Rate by pop*	Sexual Assault	Rate by pop*
Barishal	203	2.44 (3 rd)	64	0.77 (1 st)	26	0.31 (1 st)	692	8.31 (1 st)	14	0.17 (2 nd)
Chattogram	867	2.97 (1 st)	183	0.63 (3 rd)	68	0.23 (3 rd)	378	1.30	53	0.18 (1 st)
Dhaka	577	1.16	191	0.38	69	0.14	497	1.00	55	0.11
Khulna	204	1.30	58	0.37	22	0.14	164	1.05	20	0.13
Mymensingh	74	0.65	28	0.25	7	0.06	110	0.97	13	0.11
Rajshahi	496	2.68 (2 nd)	126	0.68 (2 nd)	48	0.26 (2 nd)	303	1.64 (3 rd)	28	0.15 (3 rd)
Rangpur	245	1.55	75	0.48	34	0.22	117	0.74	24	0.15 (3 rd)
Sylhet	130	1.33	51	0.52	16	0.16	228	2.32 (2 nd)	9	0.09

The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Labour Migration and Remittance Sector in Bangladesh

Syeda Rozana Rashid*

More than 13 million Bangladeshis have migrated to the Middle East, South East Asia and Europe from 1976 to 2021 to join mostly in low-paid work.⁸ Remittances sent by them have become an important capital for the fast growing economy of Bangladesh. During Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, remittance contributed to 5.52 per cent of the country's GDP, 54.06 per cent of total export earnings and 35.91 per cent of total import payments.⁹ Nonetheless, this valuable sector suffered a severe blow in 2020 due to coronavirus pandemic. Migrants disproportionately faced job loss, wage theft, arbitrary return and problems with remigration throughout the pandemic as countries of destinations (CoDs) imposed sudden lockdowns, travel bans and social distancing rules. Uncertainty gripped Bangladesh as new migration flows came to a halt and return migration increased sharply. The World Bank and other financial institutions predicted a record decline in the flow of migration and remittances.¹⁰ Defying all speculations, however, the country witnessed an unprecedented upward

trend in the remittances during the pandemic.

In what follows, the paper attempts to analyse the impact of the pandemic on labour migration and remittances in Bangladesh. The section below examines the flow during the pandemic and highlights the challenges that migrants and their families faced. Next, the reasons and future of unprecedented remittance flow are discussed. The final section presents the policy implications and the way forward.

Fluctuating Migration Flows during the Pandemic

On average yearly 750,000 Bangladeshis migrated abroad for work during 2015-2019 (See Figure 4). As the pandemic hit the country in March 2020, only 217,669 people migrated which was 31 per cent lower than the previous year. During the first five months of 2021, a total of 195,240 could go abroad for work (See Figure 4 and 5).

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⁸ BMET, *Statistics*. Available at: <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/statisticalDataAction>. Accessed on 7 July 2021.

⁹ Bangladesh Bank, *Quarterly Report on Remittance Inflows*, April- June 2020. Available at:

https://www.bb.org.bd/pub/quaterly/remittance_earnings/april_june_2020.pdf

¹⁰ World Bank, "COVID-19 crisis through a migration lens. Migration and Development" *Brief* 32. April 2020. Available at:

<https://www.knomad.org/publication/migration-and-development-brief-32-covid-19-crisis-through-migration-lens>

Figure:4 Year-wise Overseas Employment from Bangladesh (1976-May2021)



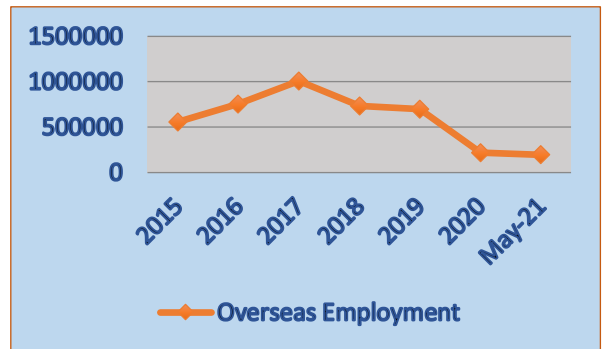
Source: BMET website

By March 2020, almost all CoDs in the Middle East, South East Asia and Europe went for lockdown. More than 150,000 aspirant migrants could not travel due to flight closures and job cuts. Surveys conducted on the plights of migrants depicted their sheer job loss, non-payment of wages, arbitrary arrests, detention and deportation.¹¹ Migrants without legal status suffered the heat even more disproportionately than those without a legal status due to the irregular and daily nature of their jobs, payment and lack of access to any social protection.¹² Migrant families at home also underwent distresses as they could not receive remittances.¹³ Pressure was mounting on

¹¹ Syeda S. Rozana, Mohammad H. Jahid , F., and R. Nasrin, "Facing COVID-19 In Countries Of Destination: Health Shocks, Income Risks, Detention, Deportation and Wage Theft". Tasneem Siddiqui ed. *The Other Face of Globalisation COVID-19, International Labour Migrants and Left-behind Families in Bangladesh* (Dhaka: RMMRU, 2021)

Bangladesh to evacuate migrants from Bahrain, Kuwait, Maldives, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) especially those with 'irregular' status and serving custodial sentences.¹⁴ While youth under the age of 30 accounts for around 70% of the international labour migrants such downturn contributed to increased youth unemployment in Bangladesh.

Figure 5: Flow of Overseas Labour Migration before and during the Pandemic



Source: Prepared by the author, based on BMET Statistics

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ BRAC. *A Survey on 'Exploring and Analyzing the Socio-economic situation of Returnee Migrants after one year of their return during COVID-19 pandemic'*(Dhaka: BRAC Centre, 2021).

¹⁴ IOM. *Impact of COVID-19 on Bangladesh Overseas Migrant Workers.*(Dhaka: IOM, 2020)

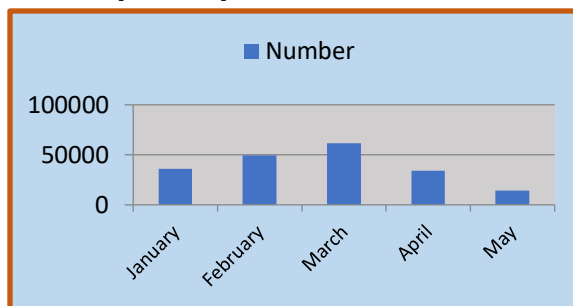
A new dimension was added to this picture in April 2020 as migrants in large numbers started to return home from pandemic-affected countries in Europe, in particular from Italy. In the absence of clear-cut policy and preparedness, these people found themselves in a new quandary, went back to their communities and were further stigmatised for carrying and spreading the disease.¹⁵ According to an IOM survey, almost 70% of migrants who were repatriated from abroad between February and June 2020 remained unemployed.¹⁶ Another study of returnee migrants found that 86% of returnees received no assistance after returning to Bangladesh.¹⁷

By September-October 2020, many CoDs withdrew lockdown and resumed economic activities. New and old migrants attempted to migrate to their destinations. This time the flow was severely affected by the shortage of flights and travel bans imposed by transits and destinations. Gaps in coordination and communication among different stakeholders were imminent in terms of negotiations with CoDs to extend migrants visas, allowing them to join in work as well as arranging their travels. Hundreds of migrants gathered in Dhaka in hope of securing airline tickets and negative COVID certificates while some had to spend more than double amid existing financial crisis. The migration flow

thus came to a relatively normal at the cost of unbearable sufferings of the migrants.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh witnessed yet two more waves of the coronavirus pandemic. Vaccination was rolled out in the country from January 2021, though migrant workers were nowhere in the priority list of frontlines. Migration flow faced another setback from this lack of preparedness, when the country was hard-hit by a deadly *Delta* variant of coronavirus. As vaccine certificate became mandatory for all foreign workers at CoDs, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) prioritised migrants' vaccination from July 2021, even when the country had no certainty of vaccine supply from one or other sources. From January to May 2021 only 195,240 people could migrate for work. Monthly data shows (Figure 6) the graph changed directions according to the rise and fall of pandemic in the country.

Figure 6: The Flow of Labour Migration from Bangladesh from January to May 2021



Source: Prepared from Bangladesh Bank Data

Knowledge During COVID-19. (Dhaka: USAID and Winrock International, 2020)

¹⁵ BRAC, *op.cit.*

¹⁶ IOM, *op.cit.*

¹⁷ USAID and Winrock International, *Situational Assessment of Labor Migrants in Asia: Needs and*

Another important feature of labour migration during the pandemic was the rise in irregular migration. Despite lockdown, travel ban and border closure, labour migration through irregular pathways increased significantly, especially to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea. Combining data from Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), IOM and EU estimated that around 4,510 irregular Bangladeshi nationals arrived by sea and by land in Italy, Malta, Spain or Greece in 2020.¹⁸ The year 2021, has seen a further surge in the number. Frontex data shows between January and May 2021 the total number of ‘illegal crossings’ on the central Mediterranean route more than doubled to over 15,700 and Bangladeshis were among the top two nationalities accounted for this route.¹⁹

The Remittance Puzzle

Bangladesh is one of the largest recipients of remittance contributing about 13% to the South Asian remittances.²⁰ However, the World Bank speculated that global remittances will fall by 7.2 and 7.5% in 2020 and 2021 respectively, surpassing the

5% decline seen during the global financial crisis in 2009.²¹ The Asian Development Bank had made a similar forecast that Bangladesh would be among the five worst-hit developing Asian economies in terms of remittance inflows.²²

Figure 7: Monthly Flow of Remittances during FY2019-2020 and FY2020-2021

Month	FY 2019-2020 (in billion US dollar)	FY 2020-2021 (in billion US dollar)
June	1.83	1.95
May	1.51	2.17
April	1.09	2.07
March	1.28	1.91
February	1.46	1.78
January	1.64	1.96
December	1.69	2.05
November	1.55	2.08
October	1.64	2.10
September	1.47	2.15
August	1.45	1.96
July	1.59	2.60
Total	18.20	24.78

Source: Prepared from Bangladesh Bank Data

Globally, inward remittance did decline worldwide by \$50.5 billion. In 2020, it was \$666.2 billion compared to

¹⁸ See IOM and EU, “Bangladeshi Migrants in Europe 2020-A Multiple Source Snapshot” Report, 2021.

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Bangladeshi%20Migrants%20in%20Europe%2020_Final.pdf

¹⁹ Frontex, “Situation at EU External borders- Detections rise from record lows a year ago”, News, June 22 June, 2021. Available at: <https://frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/situation-at-eu-external-borders-detections-rise-from-record-lows-a-year-ago-AvxlbX>

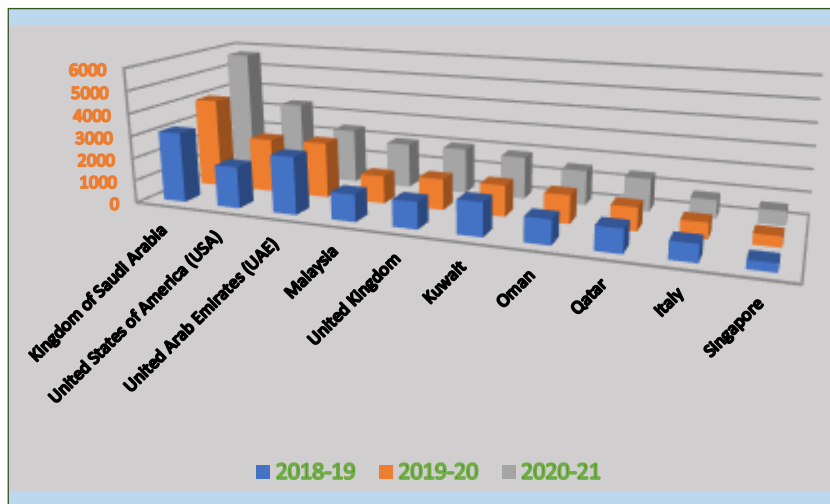
²⁰ World Bank Migration data portal: Remittances. [https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/remittances#:~:text=Remittance%20flows%20in%202020%20to,\(World%20Bank%2C%202020a\)](https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/remittances#:~:text=Remittance%20flows%20in%202020%20to,(World%20Bank%2C%202020a)). Accessed on 20 June 2021.

²¹ World Bank, COVID-19 Crisis. *op. cit.*

²² ADB, “COVID-19 Impact on International Migration, Remittances and Recipient Households in Developing Asia”, ADB Briefs, August 2020. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22617/BRF200219-2>

\$716.7 billion the year before.²³ Large remittance recipient countries i.e. India, China, the Philippines, Egypt, Nigeria, Vietnam, and Ukraine saw decline in inward remittance in 2020.²⁴ As far as Bangladesh is concerned, between February and April 2020 it also witnessed decline in remittance flow (See Figure 7). However, from May onwards flows were on the rise as CoDs gradually started to lift travel bans. In July 2020, the inflow of remittance hit the single-month record as migrant workers sent home \$2.6 billion which was 62.5% higher than the last year. In August, remittance inflows rose 35.9% and in September 45.6%. As a whole, 2020 inflows were 19.7% higher than that of 2019. Bangladesh became one of the top three remittance-recipient countries that registered a rise in inward remittance in 2020.²⁵

Figure 8: Remittance flow (in million US dollar) from Top 10 Sources during and before the Pandemic



Source: Prepared from Bangladesh Bank Data

A number of reasons are cited behind the unexpected growth of remittances. The 2% cash incentives introduced by the GoB definitely have boosted flows.²⁶ The ceiling of sending remittances was also raised by Bangladesh Bank from US\$ 1500 to US\$ 5000 which might have some impact on money transfer through official channels more conveniently.²⁷ Remittance

²³ World Bank, Migration Portal. *op.cit.*

²⁴ EIU *op.cit.*

²⁵ Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU), *Bangladesh Economy, Politics and GDP Growth Summary*, June 2021. Available at:

<https://country.eiu.com/bangladesh>

²⁶ See The Business Standard, "Remittance Incentives Allows from Jul'19". 11 September 2020, Available at:

<https://www.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/r>

emittance-incentive-allowed-from-jul19-1599794930

²⁷ Mustafizur Rahman and Md Al-Hasan, "Remittance flows in recent times: Wherefrom is so much money coming?" *The Financial Express*, 9 February 2021. Available at:

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/remittance-flows-in-recent-times-wherefrom-is-so-much-money-coming-1612880545>

senders might have been motivated to use formal channels by the 1% bonus offered by bKash and other mobile transfer platforms.²⁸

However, a deeper analysis suggests that the increased remittance inflows were likely tied to factors unique to the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic closed avenues of sending remittances in non-banking channels through *Hundi*²⁹ or in person.³⁰ The operational chain of *Hundi* and social network was badly affected by the enforced lockdown, social distancing and the spread of the disease. Consequently, migrants found the formal channels an alternative and reliable ways of sending remittances home. The shift from cash-based flows to mobile or internet-based remittances helped accelerate the process further.³¹

At home, demands for cash support among remittance-receiving households became higher as many of them had lost income and employment opportunities due to the pandemic. Migrants who could not send remittances to their families for the first few months, started to remit from savings and

borrowing in order to protect families from slipping down to poverty.³² Some even remit the money saved for performing Hajj which was cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic.³³ Some migrants found earning opportunities again as the economic activities returned to normal in many CoDs by May-June 2020. Figure 8 demonstrates no visible changes in terms of the sources of remittances coming to Bangladesh in 2020 and 2021. Saudi Arabia³⁴ had the highest share in remittance flows followed by the United States and United Arab Emirates.

In the backdrop of the ongoing pandemic, these high flows have significantly contributed to the Bangladesh economy, both at the national and household level, by refilling foreign exchange reserves and by raising incomes of recipient families at a time of falling income. Studies show that in normal time remittances account for 85% of daily expenditures for the families of overseas migrants whereas sixty per cent of these families are totally dependent on remittances for their daily expenses.³⁵ The increased remittance flows have triggered supply-side response through multiplier

²⁸ bKash, *1% cash bonus on receiving remittance through bKash on top of 2% govt incentive*, 5 December 2020. <https://www.bkash.com/node/4387>

²⁹ an informal payment system in which a person directs another to pay a certain sum of money to migrant families at home while the migrant pay him at destination.

³⁰ Dilip Ratha, "Staying the course on global governance of migration through the COVID-19 and economic crises". *International Migration (Geneva, Switzerland)*, 59(1),2021. p.285. doi: 10.1111/imig.12822

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Tasneem Siddiqui (Ed.), *The Other Face of Globalisation COVID-19, International Labour Migrants and Left-behind Families in Bangladesh* (Dhaka: RMMRU, 2021)

³³ Mustafizur Rahman and Md Al-Hasan, *op. cit.*

³⁴ 31.8 per cent of the total of 13.2 million who have left for employment since 1976.

³⁵ Tasneem Siddiqui, Ananta Neelim, C Rashad Shabab and Mahmudol Hasan, *Impact of Migration on Poverty and Growth in Bangladesh*, (Dhaka: RMMRU and SDC, 2018)

effects arising from increased consumer spending.³⁶

Experts, however, do not see this sudden rise of the remittances as an unmixed blessing. First, there is an assumption that a part of the remittance money originates from an attempt to recycle Bangladeshi funds to receive incentives and to whiten black money, although the central bank has the safeguard mechanism against such malpractices.³⁷ Second, the one-off nature of remittance flow increases the risk of remittances falling in the years to come. EIU studies predict that countries such as Bangladesh that ran pre-Covid current-account deficits and rely on remittances for a sizeable share of current-account credits may face difficulties in future.³⁸ If the number of outgoing migrants does not increase significantly, the current flow of remittance may not stand like this. Third, the incentives that helped raise the flow may raise government expenditure. In FY 2019-20 GoB allocated Tk. 30.60 billion for payment of incentives on remittances. The same amount is allocated in FY 2020-2021. Increased remittance flow will require additional money for the Government to pay for the incentives which amount to around Tk. 13 billion. Last but not the least, a large part of

remittances would be consumed and spent to finance regular and irregular migration. A recent BSS survey shows that the full cost of migration often ranges between \$3000 to \$8000 as migrants carry over agency fees, air tickets and other official costs at both ends.³⁹ A substantial part⁴⁰ of this financing is covered from remittances indicating a vicious cycle of migration financing remittance and remittances financing migration.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The above discussion may be summarised by saying that the pandemic has unveiled the self-regulating nature of labour migration and remittance sector in Bangladesh. The country was essentially late in recognising to have a strategic road map for dealing with the sector during the pandemic. Migration flow was marred by the lack of coordination among different Ministries and offices and hence was totally at the mercy of the external forces i.e. CoDs' policies and priorities. Within this quandary, migrants continued to uphold their responsibilities by sending even more remittances home than normal time. These have vital implications for the

³⁶ Mustafizur Rahman and Md Al-Hasan, *op. cit.*

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ EIU, *op.cit.*

³⁹ See BBS, *Cost of Migration Survey 2020.*

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) (Statistics and Planning Division, GoB: Bangladesh, 2021) Available at:

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/--ro-bangkok/---ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms_766198.pdf

⁴⁰ around one-fourth of the average annual remittance.

country's migration and remittance policies.

First, there is no alternative to a well-articulated strategy and preparedness to deal with the uncertainty and risk that pervades the labour migration sector. While GoB has finally drafted the post-COVID recovery strategies for migrants and aligned them with 8th Five-Year plan, proper implementation and financing of the strategies are even more important to ease migration flow and remittances.

Second, assuming the huge remittance potential of migrants, migrants' households need to be brought under formal social safety nets. A household receiving remittances does not always qualify for a solvent household, especially when and if the household incur debt for migration. The pandemic has clearly unveiled the need for emergency and permanent provisions to prevent these household from slipping down to poverty.

Third, being important capital for import and development, remittances need to be brought more through formal channels. Factors that can significantly influence migrants' remitting behaviour through unofficial channels should be identified and counter-strategised so as to attract remitters to formal channels.

Fourth, to restore employment and remittances during and after the pandemic inter-ministerial coordination, collaboration and cooperation is extremely important. This would also involve initiating dialogues, negotiations and diplomacy with the existing and prospective CoDs to protect jobs, reduce the cost of migration and promoting workers' rights as well as to explore new labour markets so that both migrants and the country enjoy the net welfare benefit by receiving remittances.

Covid-19 and Women Migrant Workers: A Perspective from Bangladesh

Nadia Nur*

“Out of more than 244 million migrants throughout the world, half are women, and an estimated 20% are in an irregular situation. And in overall, international migration is becoming increasingly feminised as more women are migrating on their own volition, seeking economic and social opportunities and empowerment through migration.”

-United Nations-

Migrant workers play a significant role by directly contributing to the socio-economic advancement of Bangladesh. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic migrant workers are in a vulnerable economic condition. They are facing the adverse impact of COVID-19 pandemic including- pay cut, joblessness, lack of social protection, short working hours, unhealthy living condition, isolation and forced return. The impacts of the pandemic were never gender-neutral, and Coronavirus is no exception. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, the migration sector was already one of the most marginalised, least protected and least valued

employment sectors for female migrants. From the very beginning of global lockdown, migrant workers were subjected to salary cuts and unemployment. Despite many problems, the question of returning home remains not an option considering the lack of income-generating opportunities in Bangladesh. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has made the situation more precarious. Evidence suggest that women and children in times of catastrophe outbreak are more vulnerable than men.⁴¹ The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges of female migration from Bangladesh.

This write-up has used journal articles, a wide range of academic literature on female migration in Bangladesh. It grasped seminars, workshops, conferences, reports, research papers, books, reported manuals, journal articles, newspapers and statistical reports published by the Bangladesh government as secondary sources of information.

* Research Manager, Bangladesh Peace Observatory (BPO), Centre for Genocide Studies, University of Dhaka

⁴¹ Quisumbing, A. R., Kumar, N., & Behrman, J. (2018). Do shocks affect men's and women's

assets differently? Evidence from Bangladesh and Uganda. *Development Policy Review*, 36(1), 3– 34.

This write-up aims to highlight the pandemic-induced vulnerability that the Bangladeshi female migrant workers are facing. It aims to line up the disproportionate impact of global health emergencies on the female migrant workers at the destination and source country. Finally, the write-up accomplishes some recommendations to safeguard the well-being of female migrant workers.

Impact of COVID-19 on Female Migration in Bangladesh:

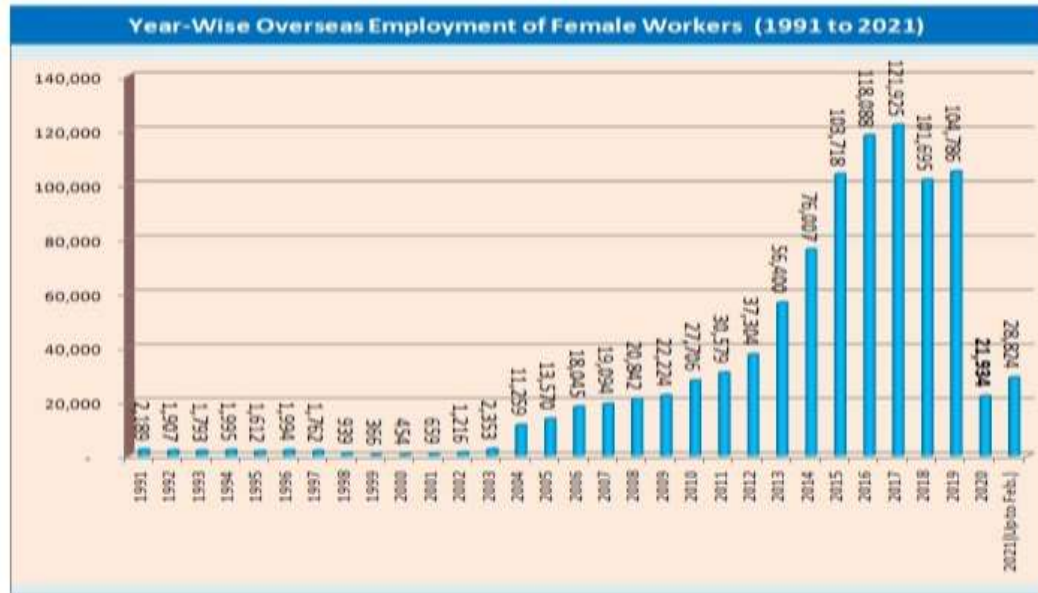
The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely impacted international labour market and global economy. The pandemic has resulted in business closures, restrictions on movements, closure of borders, quarantines and changed our regular lives. Such restrictions have created additional pressure on the Bangladeshi migration sector. On the one hand, COVID-19 has disrupted the plans of aspirant migrants, on the other hand, it has resulted in the reduction of working hours, forced unemployment and return from the host

country. The year 2020 has observed a sharp decrease in overseas employment especially for female migrant workers. According to the data published by the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), overseas employment of female workers in 2020 decreased by 79.06% compared to 2019.⁴² It is the lowest number of overseas employment of female workers in the last 15 years. Although, overseas employment in the Gulf countries began to increase in 2021, but due to high transmission rate it is now on the decline. According to 'International Migration Report 2020' COVID-19 has slowed global migration nearly by 30%.⁴³ Now-a-days, no one can go abroad without being vaccinated.

⁴² Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), Statistical Report 2020, Cited in <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/viewStatReport.action?reportnumber=16> Accessed July 5, 2021.

⁴³ The Business Standard, Cited in https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20201012_acaps_thematic_series_on_migrant_vulnerability_in_south_asia_0.pdf Accessed July 15, 2021.

Figure 9: Ratio of Overseas Employment of Female migrant workers from 1991-2021



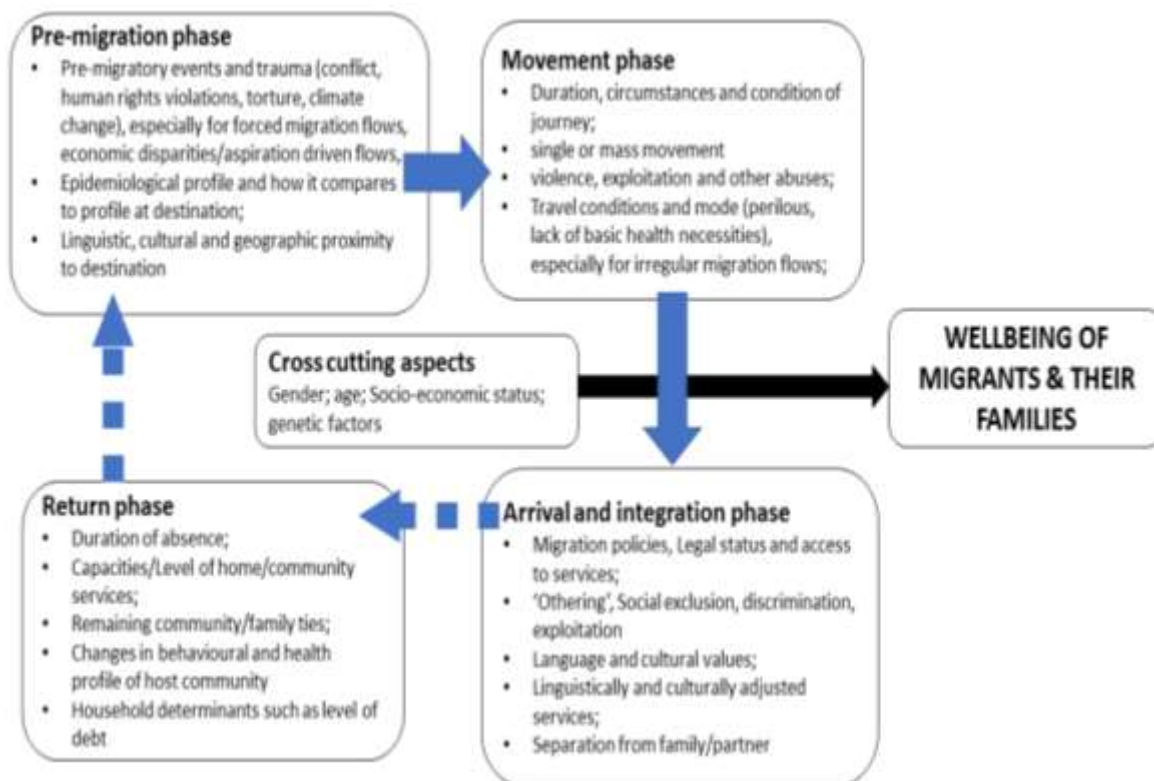
Deceptive gender discrimination is noticeable in both the recruitment method and at the workplace of female migrant workers. In some cases, women are forced by their families to migrate abroad. Besides the pandemic-induced challenges, there are several interconnected socio-economic factors which are responsible for making the situation worse for female migrant workers. Poverty, cheap labour, harmful gender norms or gender-based discrimination, social inequalities, social

mobilisation, unemployment, gender-based violence, lack of safe working environment and sustainable livelihoods force women to search for employment outside the country of origin.⁴⁴ The outsourcing of caregivers in the host countries is another important cause of female migration.⁴⁵ The pandemic has hit both men and women migrant workers depending on the sectors they work in. It has disproportionately impacted the health, welfare and livelihoods of migrant workers and their families.

⁴⁴ J. Edward Taylor, "The New Economics of Labour Migration and the Role of Remittances in the Migration Process", *International Migration* Vol. 37, No. 1, 1999, p. 64.

⁴⁵ Hennebry, J.L., K. Williams and M. Waltom-Roberts (2016), 'Women working worldwide: A situational analysis of women migrant workers' UN-Women, New York.

Figure 10: Factors influencing the health of migrants and their families.⁴⁶



Migration is a viable livelihood option for many underprivileged and poor people. Increased demand for cheap labour and an improved lifestyle attracts people to migrate abroad. Being a source country Bangladeshi migration sector is overwhelmed with multi-level complications. Female migrant workers encounter countless challenges at the pre-departure and post-departure stages. The problems encountered by female migrant

worker's includes fraudulence practices by middlemen or sub-agents, inadequate access to information on safe recruitment and employment options sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, trafficking, violent physical assault, torture, unpaid work, deception regarding the terms and conditions of employment, mental abuse, rape, forced medical check ups, pregnancy and HIV testing. In some circumstances, marriage or pregnancy can

⁴⁶ Migration Data Portal. 'Factors influencing the health of migrants and their families along the phases of migration' Cited in <https://migrationdataportal.org/infographic/factors-influencing-health-migrants-along-migration-phases> Accessed on 24 July 2021.

be grounds for revocation of employment contract and forceful return. For instance, Malaysia and Thailand have prohibited marriage for women migrant workers. The outbreak of the pandemic has made this problem more acute. The COVID-19 pandemic crippled the global economic activity, the closure of businesses in the Gulf region has hit Bangladesh migrant workers particularly female migrants. Many businesses have also breached their agreements with migrant workers and have brought them down to lower salaries, forced the workers to take unpaid leave and left them into extreme uncertainties. In many destination countries, workers are at an increased risk of losing their jobs.

Women migrant workers who work as domestic help are often sexually harassed by the male members of the house. In such circumstances, women workers are unable to confront sexual harassment in fear of losing their job. They are also concerned that reports of sexual harassment could easily reach back to their own community in Bangladesh. Even after going through such kinds of situations women who do not attempt to go home face further complexities. The

story does not end here. Rather, those who return home, are treated differently by their communities.

Worldwide the pandemic has resulted in economic downturn causing the termination of many jobs and forced many workers to return home. According to BRAC Migration programme, about 49,924 female migrant workers returned home from 21 countries amid the coronavirus pandemic.⁴⁷ As calculated by BRAC, the number of female workers returning from gulf countries amid the pandemic is, 21,230 from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), 11,602 from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), 4,826 from Qatar, 3,209 from Oman, 2910 from Lebanon, and 2259 from Jordan.⁴⁸ In 2020, worldwide countries suffered from shrinking remittances while Bangladesh received remittances worth \$21.75 billion- an increase of 18.4% compared to the pre-COVID levels in 2019. ⁴⁹ According to UNDP, approximately 400,000 migrants returned home from different destination countries. The pandemic has a direct and indirect effect on the well-being of female migrant workers and their dependents.

⁴⁷ The Daily Star, cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/bangladesh/news/49924-female-migrant-workers-return-home-21-countries-amid-covid-19-pandemic-brac-migration-2055981> Accessed on 21 July 2021.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Dhaka Tribune. Cited in <https://www.dhakatribune.com/business/2021/05/18/remittance-inflow-to-bangladesh-accounted-for-6-6-of-gdp-in-2020> Accessed on 21 July 2021.

COVID-19 and Social Stigma:⁵⁰

Julekha Begum, from the district of Bogura. She returned from Saudi Arabia at the end of February and does not know when she can go back to work.

Along with the loss of livelihoods, returnees are also experiencing social stigma as a result of the coronavirus outbreak and being shunned by their community.

Since her return, Begum has been confined to her home even before the government-imposed lockdown. “I have to survive and live my life as a regular human being. I need to go back overseas again. But right now, I cannot even get out of my home because of social pressure,” she said.

“When I got back here, my health condition was good. Still, the neighbours are suspicious about me, they think I will spread the virus. I don’t know when this will end and when I will be able to move freely.”

Key Recommendations:

Bangladesh government has taken numerous initiatives to decrease the impact of COVID-19 on migrant workers. Despite those efforts migrant workers are still at risk due to the cascading effects of COVID-19 in the destination countries. Following strategies can be taken into account to lessen the hazards and susceptibilities of the female migrant workers:

- Female migrant workers work mostly in the non-formal sector. The number of female migrant workers is not less than that of male workers. Considering the

current situation, it is important to ratify the ILO Domestic Workers Convention No. 189 and its supplementing Recommendation No. 201 to protect the rights of domestic workers.

- Since most of the female migrants go to KSA. It is important to ensure a safe working environment for them in the destination country. In coalition with international governing body Bangladesh should stand against the Kafala system in regional and international forums.

⁵⁰ UN WOMEN, cited in <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/feature-women-workers-hardest-hit-by-covid-19-in-bangladesh> Accessed 24 July 2021.

- Building well equipped 'safe houses' for female migrant workers in the destination country by the Government of source country; so that they can take enough rest and maintain decent working hours.
- Redefining existing policies to ensure the well-being of the migrant workers amid the pandemic.
- Adoption of standard employment contract for domestic migrant workers.
- Establishing a separate arbitral tribunal under the direct supervision of the 'Ministry of Expatriate and Overseas Employment as a separate wing. Besides, decentralisation of the arbitration tribunal is also important to ensure the easy access for migrant workers who come from remote areas of Bangladesh.
- Collaboration and cooperation with regional networks to uphold the labour market in the host countries. A detailed database needs to be prepared to trace and track all migrant workers. Subsequently, all exit and return record should be kept to ensure mutual recognition of skill.
- Collaborating with the Government of destination country to ensure short-term financial protection and to stop the return of migrant workers.
- Regionally, an aggregated platform can be used to identify and address the vulnerability of the migrant workers. The Colombo Process (an organisation of Asian worker-sending nations) and Abu Dhabi Dialogue (an organisation of worker-receiving countries) should take the initiatives to propose measures in response to the adverse impacts on migrant workers amid the pandemic.
- Finally, migrant workers, regardless of status must have equal access to information on health care and social protection. In order to reduce transmission of communicable diseases safe workplaces with sufficient preventive measures in place must be ensured. The crisis also emphasizes the need to revise the bilateral agreements and healthcare provision for the migrant workers.

The Global Compact for Migration (GCM) is designed to tackle the practical challenges of the migration sector. It aims to develop practical solutions for tactfully handling the challenges. Being a sending country, Bangladesh is committed to implement the compact. The Government has to be proactive in eliminating the problems faced by migrant workers. Government must ensure comprehensive support to ensure sustainable

reintegration of the returnees. Social safety-net programmes should be introduced to promote sustainable reintegration. Bangladesh government must launch long-term plans to protect

the migrant workers and to ensure the inflow of remittance. Therefore, the Government must utilise its diplomatic networks to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration.

Labour Migration and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Regional and Global Overview

Md. Mahbub-Uz-Zaman*

Introduction

Migration for seeking resources, safety, survival, or just for exploring is nothing new for the human species. We have been migrating for different causes since the inception of human history. Many argue that the constant migration kept us alive and helped us survive as a species on the earth. Therefore, it cannot be denied that migration has turned into a natural trait for humankind. Even after the creation of the modern state system where borders separate states could not stop human migration. Moreover, the blessings of modern technology and the advancement in communication and transportation made it easier for relocating from one place to another for the migration-seeking people. However, the reason behind the influx of migration among people has changed from seeking resources to other reasons over time. At present, humans migrate mostly either to find economic well-being or to escape violent conflicts in the world. Consequently, it can be said that migration is an ongoing process.

This write-up will discuss a particular type of migration, which is termed as labour migration. According to International Organization for Migrants (IOM), “labour migration is defined as the movement of persons from their home State to another State for the purpose of employment”.⁵¹ However, the definition of labour migration not only encompasses inter-state migrants but also includes those migrants who migrate within their own country of residence for the purpose of work.⁵² Furthermore, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), “economic hardship and geopolitical crises leading to the lack of decent work are resulting in growing and diverse migratory movements”.⁵³

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has not only resulted in the disruption of human lives and their activities; but also affected the ongoing migration process by impacting the global economy. The economy of all the nations of the world is going through ups and downs, which directly caused the downward trends of labour migration both globally and regionally. Therefore,

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⁵¹ IOM (2008). Infosheet. *IOM and Labour Migration*. Geneva: IOM. Cited in https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/ICP/IDM/Labour-Migration-Infosheet-2008.pdf. Accessed on 4 July 2021.

⁵² IOM (2019). Glossary on Migration. *International Migration Law*. Geneva: IOM. Cited in https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf. Accessed on 4 July 2021.

⁵³ “Statistics on international labour migration,” Cited in https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/labour-migration/#elementor-toc__heading-anchor-2. Accessed on 4 July 2021.

everything related to the economy, including market, business, employment, remittance, and labour migration faced adversities. Furthermore, the nature of contamination of coronavirus, which is by interacting physically with people, has compelled the countries to shut down their borders and go into lockdown. Border restrictions have also impacted the flow of labour migration during the pandemic. In numbers, ninety-one million international migrants, mainly from Asia and the Pacific, are facing uncertainty regarding their job security.⁵⁴ It was primarily overseas migrant workers from Asia who were the first to lose their jobs at the beginning stage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on the above context, this write-up aims to find out the global and regional impact of the COVID-19 on labour migration in countries like the Philippines, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. These three countries are among the major suppliers of migrant workers from Asia and have faced severe challenges caused by the global pandemic.

COVID-19 and Labour Migration Scenario of Philippines

The Philippines is one of the largest origin countries in terms of sending migrant workers from Asia. However, during the pandemic, the flow of migrant workers dropped significantly across Asia, including the Philippines.⁵⁵ In 2020, from January to May, only 71,000 workers were sent in comparison to 174,300 workers sent in the same time frame of 2019.⁵⁶ So it is a 60% drop in numbers in 2020 compared to the previous year's stats.⁵⁷ According to the Philippines Overseas Employment Agency (POEA), in April of 2020, only 47 workers were hired overseas compared to 30,600 in the same month of 2019.⁵⁸

The outgoing flow of labour from the Philippines halted during the pandemic, and a surge of migrant workers' return was observed. Therefore, it has created a crack on the export-based and remittance-dependent economy of the Philippines.⁵⁹ For example, since the beginning of the pandemic, over 230,000 overseas Filipino migrant workers have returned as of October 2020.⁶⁰ The returning workers lost their jobs and had

⁵⁴ Maria A. Villalba, "How COVID-19 has affected international labour migration – and the path to enduring reintegration," 31 May 2021. Cited in <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/05/how-covid-19-has-affected-international-labour-migration-and-the-path-to-enduring-reintegration/>. Accessed on 4 July 2021.

⁵⁵ ADBI, OECD, and ILO (2021). Report. *Labour Migration in Asia: Impacts of the COVID-19 Crisis and the Post-Pandemic Future*. Bangkok: ILO. Cited in <https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/--ro->

[bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_784823.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/--ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_784823.pdf). Accessed on 4 July 2021.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ Sophie Henderson, "Returning 'heroes': Filipino migrant workers met with a devastated economy," 5 January 2021. Cited in <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/pandemic-border/returning-heroes-filipino-migrant-workers-met-with-a-devastated-economy/>. Accessed on 4 July 2021.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

to face challenges after returning home with the Government's policy and system of testing and quarantining at the Government's designated facility. The Government undertook the policy and strategy to curb the spread of the COVID-19 and to facilitate the return of the migrant workers.⁶¹

However, the overwhelming situation and overflow of the returnee migrant workers made it impossible for the Government to keep the system under control. As a result, the returning workers suffered from the mismanagement of the Philippines government at the initial stage of the pandemic. Furthermore, those workers found themselves in a challenging position in finding jobs at the domestic market since the domestic job market is also hit hard by the pandemic and job opportunities are scarce.⁶² Consequently, the unemployment rate has risen to 17.7%, three times more than the rate recorded in 2019.⁶³

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the faults in the system of labour migration in the Philippines.⁶⁴ It has further uncovered the lack of social and economic safety for the overseas migrant workers in

the host countries.⁶⁵ Additionally, such a challenging situation with the migrant workers in the Philippines during the pandemic has compelled the Government to rethink and redesign its foreign remittance-based economic policies. The Philippines' Government has understood that overdependence on the remittances sent by the overseas migrant workers is not always good for the country's economy, especially in a crisis like the pandemic.⁶⁶ Moreover, they realised that improving and protecting the socio-economic condition for the labour migrants is also necessary for the economy to sustain and endure crises.

COVID-19 and Labour Migration Scenario of Nepal

Similar to the other countries in Asia and the world, the COVID-19 has reversed labour migration in Nepal. Consequently, millions of Nepalese overseas migrant workers lost their jobs and became unemployed, many had to return, and the rest were stranded in the host countries.⁶⁷ Even those migrant workers who could keep their jobs despite the pandemic were faced with reduced wages, work hours,

⁶¹ ILO (2020). *COVID-19 labour market impact in the Philippines: Assessment and national policy responses*. Philippines: ILO. Cited in https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/--ro-bangkok/---ilo-manila/documents/publication/wcms_762209.pdf. Accessed on 4 July 2021.

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ Sophie Henderson, op. cit.

⁶⁴ Jean Linis-Dinco, "The Plight of Filipina Domestic Workers in Times of COVID-19," 28

Januray 2021. Cited in <https://gchumanrights.org/preparedness/article-on/the-plight-of-filipina-domestic-workers-in-times-of-covid-19.html>. Accessed on 4 July 2021.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ Suswopna Rimal, "Pandemic Dramatically Alters Path of Migrant Workers," 12 May 2021. Cited in <https://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/pandemic-dramatically-alters-path-migrant-workers>. Accessed on 5 July 2021.

and lack of access to basic rights.⁶⁸ In Nepal, overseas migrant workers are one of the main pillars of the country's national and household economy.⁶⁹ Currently, there are around 2.4 million to 3 million overseas Nepali migrant workers working in different countries around the globe.⁷⁰

Given the prospects for better financial stability for most Nepalese, the Nepali government has made labour migration part of the country's economic development strategy through an orthodox and standardised system.⁷¹ Consequently, between 2008 to 2017, around 3.5 million labour permits were granted by the Nepalese Government to the migrant workers. As a result, the Government received NPR 699 billion (\$6.5 billion) worth of remittance from this sector alone.⁷² However, the COVID-19 badly impacted the remittance inflow, Nepal's main economic lifeline.⁷³ It is estimated that 25.4% of Nepal's GDP is from remittance, and by 2020 it might experience a 28.7% reduction in receiving remittance.⁷⁴ Such a decrease in remittance flow and financial hardship during the global pandemic will put the vulnerable migrants and their families into deeper poverty.⁷⁵ Moreover, Nepal's

economic development will be badly affected for an unknown period.

Nepali Government brought back 103,807 Nepalis, including overseas migrant workers, to home under the government scheme, and it is estimated that over 500,000 will also return due to the global pandemic.⁷⁶ But unfortunately, Nepal's current pandemic time supporting mechanism for the returning migrants are not adequate. Moreover, the Government's policies, resources, and strategies to facilitate the returning overseas migrant workers into the community and national labour market are unsatisfactory. Furthermore, the government-provided services are only available to migrants with legal permits, and a large number of undocumented overseas workers are excluded from receiving such services in Nepal.⁷⁷ Additionally, almost all the returnee overseas workers faced mental pressure, unemployment, uncertainty, and the social stigma of carrying the virus. In Nepal, not only the previously migrated overseas workers are affected, but also the aspiring migrant workers are facing challenges from the global pandemic. Around 115,000 aspirant migrants received a permit, and 328,681 received pre-approval

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ IOM (2020). Report. *Status of Nepali Migrant Workers in Relation to COVID-19*. Kathmandu: IOM. Cited in <https://publications.iom.int/es/node/2576>. Accessed on 5 July 2021.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ Sohini Nayak, "Nepal: COVID-19 crisis and migrant labour," 14 April 2020. Cited in <https://www.orfonline.org/research/nepal-covid19-crisis-and-migrant-labour-64558/>. Accessed on 5 July 2021.

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ IOM (2020), *op. cit.*

⁷⁴ ADB (2020). ADB Briefs. *COVID-19 Impact on International Migration, Remittances, and Recipient Households in Developing Asia*. Manila: ADB. Cited in <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/622796/covid-19-impact-migration-remittances-asia.pdf>. Accessed on 5 July 2021.

⁷⁵ IOM (2020), *op. cit.*

⁷⁶ Suswopna Rimal, *op.cit.*

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

from the Government but could not fly to their destination countries due to worldwide lockdown.⁷⁸

The Nepali Government needs to undertake multilateral actions to face the challenges of labour migration during the global pandemic. The Government should adopt a more flexible policy to facilitate the return of overseas migrant workers. The Government should allocate more resources to ensure the well-being of the migrant workers who are still working or stranded in the host countries. Along with the migrant workers, their families back home should also be taken care of by the Government as most of the time the family members are overly dependent on the migrant workers and their income. Providing soft loans, vocational training for the returnee migrants, creating entrepreneurship opportunities, changing labour laws, exploring diplomatic channels, and many more are the few steps the Government can take to address the challenges faced by the labour migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ IOM (2020), op. cit.

⁷⁹ Suswopna Rimal, op.cit.

⁸⁰ IOM (2020). International Dialogue on Migration - 2020. *Protection of vulnerable migrants during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis - Statement by Sri Lanka*. IOM. Cited in https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/ICP/IDM/2020_IDM/statement_sri_lanka_panel_2.docx#:~:text=Vhile%20the%20COVID%2D19%20pandemic,for%20Sri%20Lankan%20migrant%20workers. Accessed on 6 July 2021.

⁸¹ "Labour migration in Sri Lanka and the Maldives," 6 July 2021. Cited in

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Around 1.5 million overseas migrant workers from Sri Lanka were working in different countries around the world at the initial period of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸⁰ Annually, up to 200,000, Sri Lankans migrate overseas for work purposes, and the large outflow of labour migration has already been generating a significant amount of remittance for Sri Lanka.⁸¹ For instance, in 2019, Sri Lanka received an estimated 6.7 billion USD from its migrant workers, 7.8% of its GDP.⁸² However, the global pandemic has halted the flow of remittance for Sri Lanka and negatively impacted the country's economy due to the job loss of migrant workers.

In the destination countries, the Sri Lankan migrant workers face formidable challenges due to the strict measures undertaken by the Government to control the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the overseas workers are interested in returning to Sri Lanka, and by 1 October 2020, nearly 525,000 workers registered to return to Sri Lanka.⁸³

<https://www.ilo.org/colombo/areasofwork/labour-migration/lang--en/index.htm>. Accessed on 6 July 2021.

⁸² "Migration data in Southern Asia," 6 July 2021. Cited in <https://migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/southern-asia>. Accessed on 6 July 2021.

⁸³ Indraka Ubeysekara, "Sri Lankan women migrant workers: more risks, more trafficking during COVID-19," December 2020. Cited in <https://www.shareweb.ch/site/Migration/focus-area/Pages/Sri-Lankan-women-migrant-workers-->

Overseas workers want to return for their safety as well since 90 Sri Lankan migrants died from COVID-19 while staying abroad, and most of them are low-skilled workers in the Middle East.⁸⁴ Additionally, female overseas migrant workers are in more vulnerable positions in the destination countries since they are exposed to exploitation.⁸⁵ The gender dynamics and engagement in the informal job sectors by most women and girl migrant workers made it easier for the recruiters or employers to exploit them through various means, including forced labour, wage cut, physical and mental torture, violation of migrant and human rights, sexual torture, passport confiscation, and the like.⁸⁶

With the sharp rise in infection of the COVID-19, thousands of Sri Lankan overseas migrant workers were stranded in overcrowded shelters or work sites without any social distancing facilities, which increased the health risks of the workers.⁸⁷ According to the Ministry of Foreign Relations of Sri Lanka, more than 40,000 Sri Lankans, including 17,900 migrant workers from the Middle East, returned by 11 November 2020.⁸⁸ However, still, a large number of overseas migrant workers are awaiting their return. In March 2020, the Sri Lankan government opened a database called 'Contact Sri

Lanka' to facilitate registration online and receive emergency assistance for overseas migrants.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the Sri Lankan government is also providing emergency funds, temporary housing, creating alternative employment opportunities, and facilitating COVID-19 testing for the returnee migrant workers.⁹⁰ However, given the limited local quarantine facilities, weak healthcare infrastructure, shortage of health care workers, and national COVID-19 situation, it has been challenging for the Sri Lankan government to facilitate the return of overseas migrant workers in a large number.⁹¹

Return to Sri Lanka and into the community and the national job market have not been easy for the Sri Lankan overseas migrant workers. It was not easy, primarily due to mismatched skills and the shrinking job opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic is not over yet and as a result, going back to the destination countries for the migrant workers is still uncertain. Therefore, most of the migrant workers are going through mental depression and insecurity. The Sri Lankan Government needs to adopt a long-term and short-term approach to address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on migrant workers.

more-risks,-more-trafficking-during-COVID-19.aspx. Accessed on 6 July 2021.

⁸⁴ "Stranded migrant workers plead to return to Sri Lanka," 27 November 2020. Cited in <https://www.ucanews.com/news/stranded-migrant-workers-plead-to-return-to-sri-lanka/90478>. Accessed on 6 July 2021.

⁸⁵ Indraka Ubeysekara, op. cit.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ IOM (2020), op. cit.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ IOM (2020). International Dialogue, op. cit.

⁹¹ *ibid.*

Concluding Remarks

This write-up shows that the COVID-19 has predominantly impacted the employment, return, and remittances of overseas migrant workers. Although this write-up only focused on the impact of the COVID-19 in countries like the Philippines, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, it can be applied to understand labour migration during the global pandemic in other countries as well. Bilateral and regional or sub-regional agreements are two of the most effective mechanisms of inter-state cooperation on labour migration.⁹² Even during the pandemic, these two labour migration mechanisms were crucial in managing the challenges of labour migration. However, a global effort is needed to face the challenges of international labour migration generated by the pandemic. No country alone can deal with challenges of such magnitude; instead, a collective approach and collaboration by the governments, non-government organisations, international organisations, and stakeholders need to address the formidable challenges of international migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹³ Moreover, a supportive environment for the migrant workers must be ensured by both, origin and destination countries, and it is most needed during the ongoing global pandemic.

The restrictions that came along with the COVID-19 pandemic, including the travel ban, social distancing, lockdown, shut down, and many more, have brought the global and regional economy to a near standstill. Such an economic downfall severely impacted labour migration worldwide. For example, according to International Monetary Fund (IMF), the world economy had curved by 3% in 2020, and there is a possibility of continuation of economic recession in 2021.⁹⁴ Furthermore, by the first quarter of 2020, the average cost of remittances plunged 6.8% globally.⁹⁵ On the other hand, according to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), in 2020, total remittances to Asia were estimated to drop between \$31.4 billion (baseline scenario) and \$54.3 billion (worst-case scenario).⁹⁶ The far-reaching impact of the COVID-19 has compelled both the host and origin country's Government and the international organisations related to labour migration to reassess the migration, return, and social and economic policies and strategies for migrant workers. Unless it is addressed now, labour migration will further fall into the trap of a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic and cause global and regional economic upheaval.

⁹² "Bilateral agreements and regional cooperation," 7 July 2021. Cited in https://www.ilo.org/asia/areas/labour-migration/WCMS_226300/lang--en/index.htm. Accessed on 7 July 2021.

⁹³ Nadia Nur, "COVID-19 Pandemic and Labour Migration: A Perspective from Bangladesh," in Imtiaz Ahmed, ed., *State of Peace 2020* (Dhaka: BPO, 2021), pp.44-61.

⁹⁴ World Bank Group (2020). Brief Reports. *COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens*. World Bank Group. Cited in <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33634/COVID-19-Crisis-Through-a-Migration-Lens.pdf?sequence=5&isAllowed=y>. Accessed on 7 July 2021.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ Maria A. Villalba, *op. cit.*

Annex:

Some definitional clarification according to BPO Codebook.

Gunfight. Shootout between the law enforcement agencies and criminals, militants, or other irregular forces, including amongst the latter, that does not match the definition of a non-state armed group.

Clash. Two-sided violence between groups, outside of the context of war or insurgency. *Example: supporters of rival political parties fight each other.*

Assault. One-sided violence by an individual or small group against another individual or small group. *Example: stabbing, shooting of someone by a perpetrator*

Fight. Two-sided violence between individuals or small groups. *Example: brawl between 3-4 people.*

Sexual assault. One-sided sexual violence, such as rape or attempted rape, by an individual or small group against another individual or small group.

Destruction of property. One-sided violence perpetrated with the intent of damaging property. *Examples: vandalism, arson.*

Mob violence (large group assault). One-sided violence by a mob or large group against an individual or a comparatively small and/or defenseless group. *Examples: lynching of a thief, looting of shops and houses owned by a religious minority*



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