



COUNTRY OVERVIEW

# WOMEN AND MIGRATION IN BANGLADESH



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**GROUNDING IN THE VISION OF EQUALITY ENshrined IN THE CHARTER OF THE UNITED NATIONS, UN WOMEN WORKS TO ELIMINATE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS, EMPOWER WOMEN, AND ACHIEVE EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN AS PARTNERS AND BENEFICIARIES OF DEVELOPMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS, HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND PEACE AND SECURITY. WITH THE GLOBAL MANDATE TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, UN WOMEN BANGLADESH COUNTRY OFFICE PROMOTES THE RIGHTS OF THE COUNTRY'S FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS, ESPECIALLY LOW-SKILLED MIGRANT WORKERS WHO MAKE UP 90 PER CENT OF ALL FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS FROM BANGLADESH.**

This Country Overview looks at the implications of the national and international laws and policies aimed at protecting the rights of female migrants, including domestic workers.

Recognizing that female migrant workers face gender-specific challenges and barriers, this Country Overview provides recommendations for policymakers and implementers on how to ensure that these women secure better terms of employment. This report was produced as part of UN Women's regional project on Empowerment of Women Migrant Workers in South Asia Through Implementation of Standard Terms of Employment.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>BAIRA</b>	Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies
<b>BMET</b>	Bangladesh Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
<b>GED</b>	General Economics Division, Bangladesh Planning Commission
<b>GFMD</b>	Global Forum on Migration and Development
<b>IDWFED</b>	International Domestic Workers Federation
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>ITUC</b>	International Trade Union Confederation
<b>SDC</b>	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>UNDESA</b>	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNIFEM</b>	United Nations Development Fund for Women
<b>UN-INSTRAW</b>	United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Most domestic workers worldwide are women, and increasingly these women are migrants (UN Women, 2013). There is a growing demand for domestic workers as many developed countries have ageing populations and declining welfare provisions. Global evidence shows that migrant domestic workers receive poor wages, work excessive hours and are most often exposed to labour rights violations (ILO, 2015). Nevertheless, women migrate to escape poverty and limited employment opportunities in their home countries.

Bangladesh is one of the major labour-sending countries of the Asia-Pacific region, and women made up almost 19 per cent of all Bangladeshi migrant workers in 2015. Their remittances substantially benefit the country. The social capital that female migrants bring back home also contributes to socioeconomic development, human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment (UN Women, 2013a).

Bangladesh has a number of laws and policies to protect female workers both within the country and abroad. The Government says international migrant workers need legal and social protection and training so they can take advantage of new employment opportunities and sustain their remittances (Bangladesh GED, 2012).

In most labour-receiving countries of the Persian Gulf region and elsewhere, the labour laws do not cover domestic workers. But one promising mechanism to regulate migrant labour is bilateral labour mobility agreements between the sending and receiving countries. Bangladesh has signed a number of such agreements. Another mechanism in place is standard terms of employment for female migrant workers (UN Women Asia Pacific and SDC, 2016). Apart from stipulating working conditions, such terms also protect the workers' rights. However, these terms cannot address the structural constraints in current labour migration systems that foster conditions for abuse and exploitation.

A number of international instruments aim to protect migrants and safeguard their freedom and dignity (ILO, 2009). The Colombo Process promotes dialogue on female migrant workers, especially domestic workers. The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) has also supported the rights of these women.

Furthermore, there are numerous examples of good practices in different countries around the world to protect migrant workers and domestic workers in particular.

The Government of Bangladesh needs to build on current initiatives to ensure that gender-sensitive and rights-based migrant worker policies and practices are effective – before migrant workers leave home, while they are abroad, and on their return. This will involve collaboration within the Government as well as with other countries, and a commitment to offering a support network for Bangladeshi workers worldwide through embassies and consulates. Recruiting agencies need to respect the code of conduct for ethical recruitment and adopt the standard terms of employment. Civil society organizations and international development agencies can also play key roles in promoting safe migration and in monitoring progress of reforms.

## GLOBAL CONTEXT

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that there were 150 million migrant workers worldwide in 2013 and that approximately 44 per cent of them, were women (ILO, 2015).

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (UNDESA) estimated that the number of migrants in the world had risen to 244 million by 2015, and that 48 per cent of them were women and girls (UNDESA, 2016).

About 83 per cent of domestic workers worldwide are women, and increasingly these women are migrants (UN Women, 2013). The growing demand, for domestic workers is fueled by supply and demand. Many developed countries are confronting ageing or stagnating populations and declining welfare provisions. Also, more and more women are participating in the labour force. These factors increase demand for domestic workers – a phenomenon known as the “global care chain” (Petrozziello, 2013).

Furthermore, poverty, gender discrimination and limited livelihood options in rural areas in their home countries ensure a continuous supply of women who to go into domestic work abroad (ILO, 2010).

Migrant domestic workers often find themselves in particularly unequal power relationships with their employers. They tend to face higher levels of isolation and discrimination because they are unable to associate with people outside their work environment. The situation is compounded if they do not speak the local language and are not aware of their rights. They may not have any local support networks and, not being part of any workers’ unions, they are unfamiliar with the law and the local customs. They may be unable to access resources and assistance because they fear being deported or losing their employment (Min-Harris, 2008).

Global evidence shows that migrant domestic workers receive poor wages because they have little or no bargaining power. They usually work excessive hours with little rest and are often exposed to labour rights violations at different stages in the migration cycle (ILO, 2015).

These women, having migrated to escape poverty and limited opportunities, tend to perceive their employment as a temporary measure to fulfil certain personal and family needs (Kawar, 2003). However, sometimes these needs are difficult to fulfil in the short term or over a single contract period (UNIFEM, 2005).

## MIGRATION FLOW OF FEMALE WORKERS FROM BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is now one of the major labour-sending countries of the Asia-Pacific region.

Government figures in 2017 show that 750,000-830,000 Bangladeshis go abroad each year for work, and there are now a total of 11 million of these migrants in 151 countries.

Bangladesh Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) records show that the number of female workers who traveled alone, unaccompanied by family members, was negligible from 1991 to 2003, at around one per cent of total migration. This was largely due to the severe restrictions placed on female migration, which were partly relaxed in 2003 and 2006.

Female migrants made up 4 per cent of all migrant workers from Bangladesh in 2004, with the percentage gradually increasing in the years that followed up to 2013. With relatively sharp rises in 2014 and 2015, women made up almost 19 per cent of all Bangladeshi migrant workers by 2015 (see Figures 1 and 2). However, this percentage is still low compared to other countries that export large numbers of female workers.

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Women migrate to escape poverty and the limited employment opportunities in their home countries.

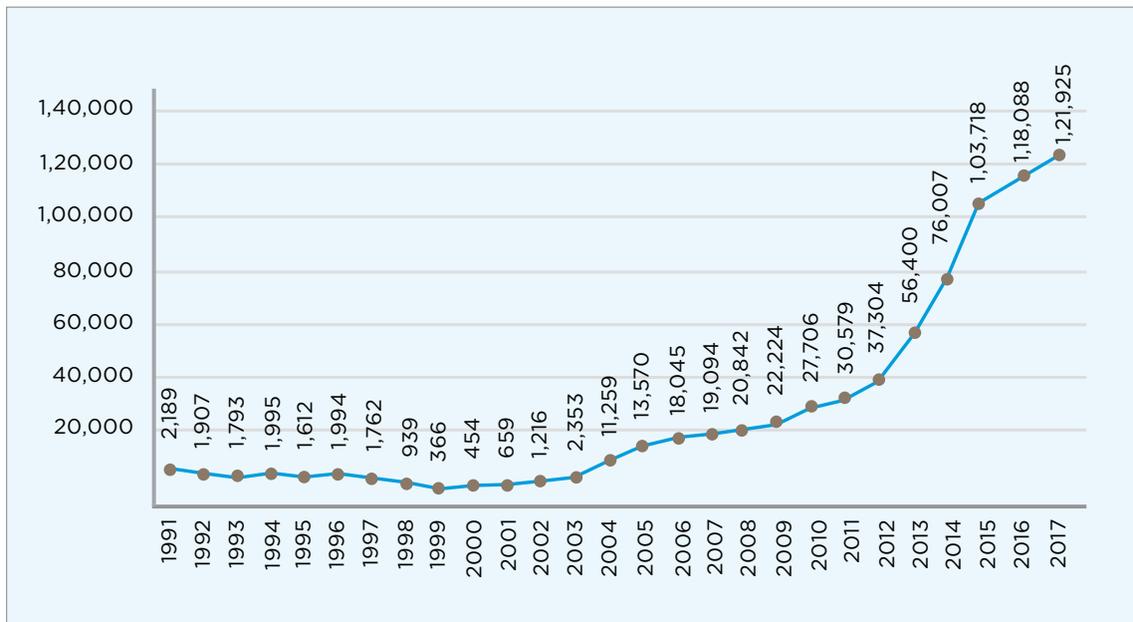
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Women receive training on using household appliances, before their travel abroad to do domestic work.

FIGURE 1

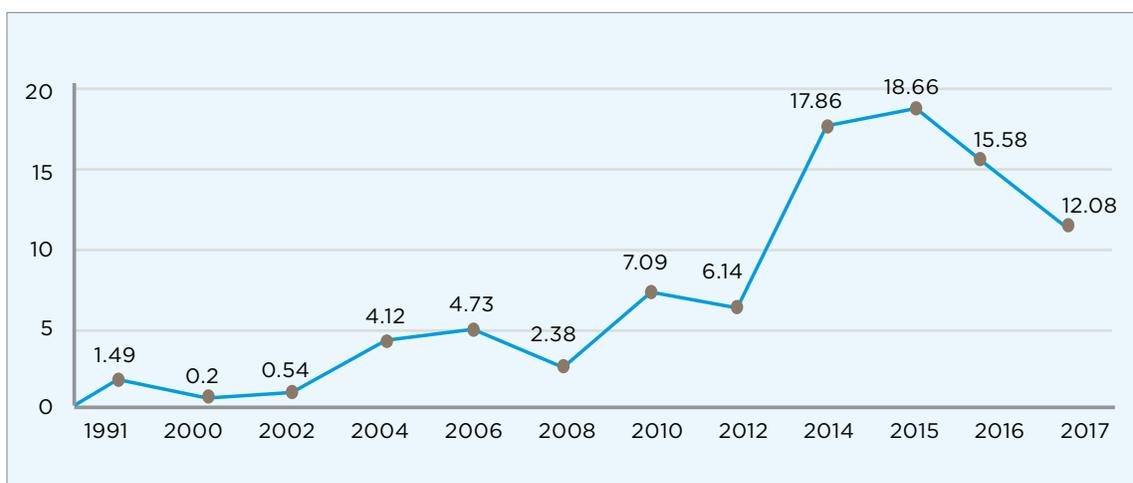
Number of female migrant workers departing Bangladesh by year, 1991-2017



Source: BMET: [www.bmet.org.bd](http://www.bmet.org.bd)

FIGURE 2

Per centage of women in total migrant workforce, Bangladesh 1991-2017



Source: BMET: [www.bmet.org.bd](http://www.bmet.org.bd)

FIGURE 3

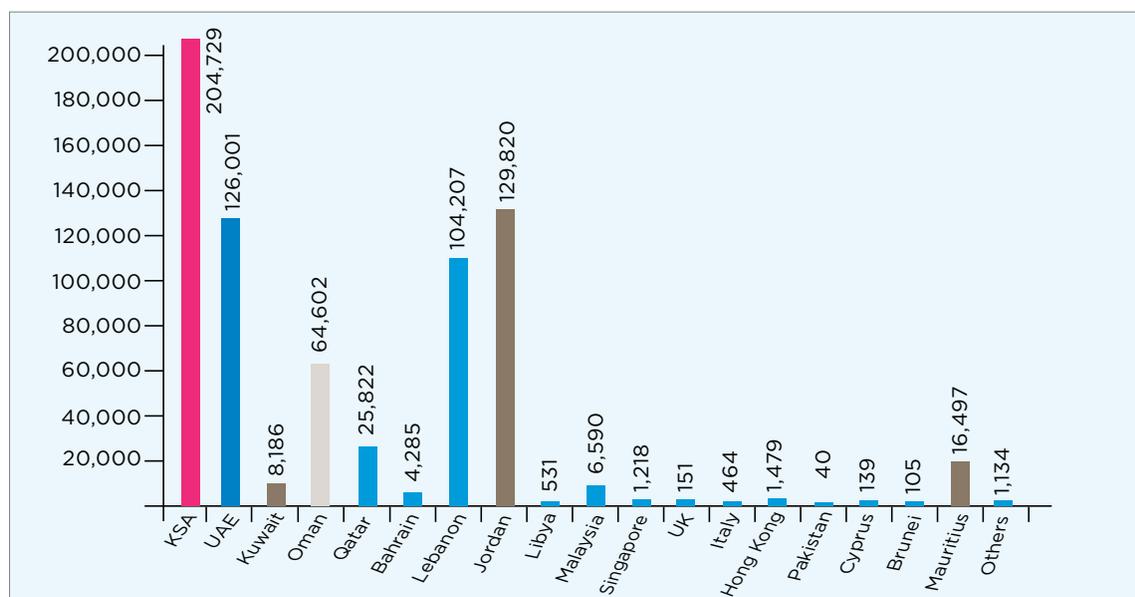
Major destination countries of female migrant workers from Bangladesh, 1991-2017



Source: BMET: [www.bmet.org.bd](http://www.bmet.org.bd)

FIGURE 4

Total numbers of Bangladeshi female migrant workers by countries of destination, 1991-2017



Source: BMET: [www.bmet.org.bd](http://www.bmet.org.bd)

Figure 3 highlights the major destination countries of the Middle East and Asia where most female migrants go for different types of short-term employment.

Figure 4 shows the countries where women migrated. During 1991-2017, many migrated to the Persian Gulf countries:

United Arab Emirates (126,001), Jordan (129,820), Lebanon (104,207), and Saudi Arabia (204,729).

Bangladeshi women also migrated to Oman (64,602), Qatar (25,822), Kuwait (8,186), and Bahrain (4,285). More recently, they started to migrate to Mauritius (16,497) and Malaysia (6,590).

# CONTRIBUTION OF FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS FROM BANGLADESH

Female migrant domestic workers from Bangladesh contribute to the income of their families back home in addition to the income of their employers' families. These women often become the breadwinners of their families back home.

Overseas employment is the country's second-largest source of income, with remittances amounting to \$12 billion in 2016, the Government says.

In many labour-sending countries, women's remittances are among the largest sources of cash revenue. Although women generally earn less than men and so may send home smaller amounts of money at a time, they tend to remit a higher proportion of their earnings and do so more frequently (UN-INSTRAW & IOM 2000; Omelanuik 2005; International Federation for Human Rights, 2007)<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, the data available on remitters is not sex-disaggregated. However, study findings reveal that even low-skilled female workers remit between 70 to 80 per cent of their income to their families, much more than men do. Kabeer (2007) said that a Bangladeshi woman working in the Middle East on average sends 77 per cent of her income back home.

A 2013 study by UN Women says these remittances are only part of what the female migrants contribute to their homelands. The social capital of female migrants -- their ideas, skills, attitudes, knowledge, contacts and networks -- further contribute to socioeconomic development, human rights, gender

equality and women's empowerment in their countries of origin (UN Women, 2013).

A UN Women Policy Brief on female migrant workers in countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) highlighted that the migrant's new earning capacity can elevate her status and offer opportunities beyond those that are usually available (Temin et al., 2013, 8).

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**The social capital of female migrants -- their ideas, skills, attitudes, knowledge, contacts and networks -- further contribute to socioeconomic development, human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment in their countries of origin.**

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These remittances allow families not only to buy more, but also to do and achieve more. The Policy Brief said, for example, that the improved education and health of the migrants' children can lead to greater opportunities for the next generation. It concluded that "social remittances may be seen as more sustainable than economic remittances". What is true in ASEAN countries can certainly also be true in Bangladesh.

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**Remittances allow families not only to buy more, but to do and achieve more.**

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<sup>1</sup>See also UN Women, Australian Aid and ILO, Policy Brief Series: *Women's Labour Migration in ASEAN, Valuing the Contributions of Women Migrant Workers in ASEAN*.

# RECRUITMENT AND SPONSORSHIP OF FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS

The costs of migration are high, and even higher if migrant workers use private recruiting agencies. In the case of Bangladesh, it is largely private recruitment agencies and brokers in both the sending and receiving countries that control employment and work permits for migrants. This creates a gap in protection for workers, especially if countries do not provide effective state oversight and monitoring. Bangladeshi female workers tend to pay the costs of migration in advance as they mostly rely on local agents, or *dalals*, and they can end up paying them excessive fees (Shamim, 2011).

Furthermore, some recruitment agencies may engage in malpractices like “visa trading”, where workers pay inflated sums for their visas; “floating visas”, where workers are moved from one employer to another; forgery of documents; and trafficking. They may demand that the women pay visa charges that the employer has already paid.

While the recruitment agency route incurs high costs, informal networks based on personal contacts and direct referrals to employers can play a significant role in recruiting female migrant workers (ILO website). Some women accept the *kafala*, or sponsorship recruitment system, in the Arab countries. This system does not require upfront

payments and the women can be recruited, processed and placed in employment without much difficulty (UNDP, 2008). For example, women migrating as domestic workers to Saudi Arabia through government channels recently have been able to do so at zero cost (Interview with migrant workers during pre-departure training at TTC-Mirpur, Dhaka).

However, in the *kafala* system, the employers or sponsors have disproportionate power over their employees. Female migrant domestic workers can end up in precarious situations where the sponsor holds their papers, secures piecework for them with several employers and then charges them for the sponsorship services. In this system, the women are isolated and their movements are restricted by their sponsors (Timothy and Sasikumar, 2012).

The *kafala* system in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries restricts workers from changing employers, making them completely dependent on their sponsors. This can result in abuses and exploitation by employers (UN Women, 2013b).

To try to improve in the *kafala* system, in 2011 the United Arab Emirates banned private recruiting agencies from “collecting any fees or sums of money under any designation from the recruited domestic worker, directly or indirectly” (UNDP, 2008).

# LEGAL FRAMEWORK RELATED TO FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh has a number of laws, policies and plans that stipulate safeguards for workers both at home and abroad. They include codes of conduct to regulate the recruiting agencies and those employing female domestic workers. The codes also provide for skills development training for workers.

**TABLE 1**

## Salient features of national laws and policies affecting female migrant workers

<p><b>The Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Requires registration of migrant workers, including female domestic workers, and protection of their interests</li> <li>● Requires recruitment agents to provide an employment contract between the worker and the employer, stipulating wages, accommodation facilities, duration of employment, compensation amount in the event of death or Injury, and costs of emigrating to and returning from abroad</li> <li>● Stipulates the right to information, the right to file a civil suit, and the right to return home, and</li> <li>● Provides penalties for sending migrant workers overseas in an unlawful manner; charging unlawful amounts of fees; using unfair means of collecting demand notes, visas or work permits or trading in such documents (Bangladesh Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare, 2015).</li> </ul>
<p><b>The Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy 2016</b></p>	<p>Formulated in line with international laws on migration, this policy amends the short policy framed in 2006 and links to the National Skills Development Policy 2011 and the Government's Seventh Five-year Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provides six policy directions that: ensure safe migration; protect migrant workers and their family members; ensure the welfare of migrant workers and their access to facilities; regulate the migration of female workers; associate migration with national development and establish proper planning for labour migration;</li> <li>● Provides specific directions for ministries including the Ministries of Finance, Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, Commerce, and Civil aviation and Tourism, to ensure proper welfare, facilities and safety for female migrant workers</li> <li>● Provides a separate chapter on female workers who migrate for specific types of work and recommends that the Government establish a special unit for female migrants; promotes skills</li> </ul>

	<p>development; appoints trained female officials in embassies to provide health, economic and legal advice to female migrants; ensures the safety and empowerment of female migrants by establishing a database of these migrants at embassies; establishes a secure banking system for sending remittances; and allocates a budget for gender-responsive training for female migrants (Shareweb website).</p>
<p><b>Domestic Worker Protection and Welfare Policy 2015</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Relates to domestic workers in Bangladesh, not to migrant workers</li> <li>● Recognizes domestic work as a profession and entitles domestic workers to the benefits available under the labour law</li> <li>● Entitles workers to a healthy and safe space to sleep while they are off-duty and stipulates four months of maternity leave for female domestic workers</li> <li>● Plans to establish a “helpline” for workers and awareness-raising campaigns</li> <li>● Requires employers to ensure full-time workers’ salaries and other allowances and to distribute working hours, allowing time for proper rest, sleep, entertainment and leave, and</li> <li>● Requires employers to pay for necessary medical expenses and compensation for any accidents (IDWFED website).</li> </ul>
<p><b>National Skills Development Policy 2011</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Creates mechanisms to develop skills, enhance employability and secure safe and decent work for workers in the informal economy</li> <li>● Targets youth, women, low-skilled people, people with disabilities, migrants and internally displaced people, older workers, indigenous people, ethnic minority groups and the socially excluded, workers in small and medium-sized enterprises, people in the informal economy and in the rural sector, and self-employed people, and</li> <li>● Provides for demand-driven, flexible and responsive training to meet the needs of local and overseas employers, workers and members of the community (Bangladesh Ministry of Education, 2011).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recruiting Agents Conduct and Licence Rules 2002</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Stipulates that recruiting agents should not receive or claim any fees other than the service fee determined by the Government</li> <li>● Requires agents to give various kinds of assistance to migrants during their stay abroad, and</li> <li>● Requires agents to meet all valid claims of the migrants (Bangladesh Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare, 2015).</li> </ul>

## Seventh Five-year Plan, 2016-2020, Bangladesh

The Bangladesh Seventh Five-year Plan 2016-2020 (Bangladesh GED 2016), recommends these measures for international migrant workers:

- ensuring that they have access to legal and social protection
- strictly monitoring their employment contracts, and
- providing adequate outreach, follow-up and support, such as legal and psychosocial counseling.

The Five-year Plan envisions that women will make up 30 per cent of the total number of outbound migrant workers by 2020. It recommends periodic reviews of bilateral and multilateral employment agreements in order to increase oversight of working conditions and to detect any breaches of contract. These reviews are intended to protect women in particular, eliminate fraudulent recruitment activities, and ensure standard and ethical practices.

The plan says that once bilateral and multilateral employment agreements are signed between Bangladesh and the migrant destination countries, authorities need to follow up with annual reviews to expose any gaps and establish what measures worked and did not work so the agreements can be revised.

The Government also plans to expand training programmes for domestic workers so that about 50,000 women will be trained annually. However, the plan does not prioritise exploring new destination countries that promote standard terms of employment to protect the rights and welfare of migrant domestic workers.

## Perspective Plan of Bangladesh, 2010-2021

The Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2010-2021: Making Vision 2021 a Reality (Bangladesh GED, 2012) outlines strategic actions to ensure the continued flow of remittances. These include:

- closely monitoring and supervising the activities and practices of recruitment agencies
- moving towards an effective, technology-based system for remitting money
- training workers in the vocations and skills that have a high future demand in global markets, and
- expanding the Overseas Employment Policy to cover multiple aspects of migration, including documentation for workers and employment contracts and their implementation, and workers' welfare settlements.

The Perspective Plan acknowledges the significant impact that remittance inflows have had on poverty reduction. In 2011, remittance inflows were \$11.5 billion, about 10 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). The Government aims to strengthen institutional arrangements to facilitate remittances, although increasing remittances also depends on how quickly the economies of the labour-receiving countries recover.

According to the plan, the key challenges involved in expanding remittances are training and recruiting labour for overseas employment; ensuring rightful earnings, job security and well-being in workplaces abroad; and setting up efficient remittance mechanisms. A major challenge is how to channel remittances into productive investments. For this, migrants need access to bank credit through institutional mechanisms such as banks that cater to the specific needs of non-resident Bangladeshis.

The Perspective Plan also restates the Government's commitment to international agreements related to female migrants, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action, as enshrined in the Constitution (Bangladesh GED, 2012).

## Bilateral agreements on labour migration

In almost all the labour-receiving countries of the Persian Gulf where Bangladeshi women are working, the labour laws do not cover domestic workers. Because of this, employers enjoy a significant degree of control over their workers. Abuses suffered by domestic workers from Bangladesh in the Gulf states include non-payment of wages and irregular or reduced payments, abuse and maltreatment, forced labour, restrictions on mobility, lack of rest hours and insufficient food (Asfar 2011).

Bilateral labour mobility agreements between the sending and receiving countries are promising mechanisms to regulate migrant labour. These agreements are based on collaboration and shared responsibility. Bangladesh has signed bilateral agreements with Kuwait (2000/2008), Qatar (1988/2008), United Arab Emirates (2007), Malaysia (2003/2006/2012), Oman (2008), Libya (2008), Republic of Korea (Employment Permit System–2007), Jordan (2012), Iraq (2013), Hong Kong, China (2013) and Saudi Arabia (2015).

These agreements focus on:

- enhancing employment opportunities in the destination countries
- ensuring the host country takes measures to protect workers and their welfare in the different sectors
- regulating the recruitment process in both the countries, and
- establishing a joint working group to ensure the memorandum of understanding is being implemented and that any labour concerns can be resolved bilaterally.

Bilateral memorandums of understanding between countries of origin and countries of employment strengthen the rights of migrant workers. They establish effective government-to-government channels and methods of managing migration that the countries implement jointly. This ensures that female migrant workers are covered under the labour laws (UN Women, 2013b).

However, only a few agreements focus on female migrant workers and particularly on female domestic workers. Two notable ones are the Bangladesh–Jordan memorandum (2012) that provides Bangladeshi domestic workers with the protection and rights of Jordan's labour law, and the Bangladesh–Saudi Arabia memorandum (2015) that focuses on the recruitment of domestic service workers.

## AN EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS: THE CASE OF JORDAN

The Special Working Contract for Non-Jordanian Domestic Workers drawn up initiative by UN Women stipulates that:

- every employer, agent and domestic worker must sign the contract and abide by its regulations
- the contract lasts for two years and can be extended for two more years
- the employer and the recruiting agency agree to pay for a round-trip ticket, work and residency permits, and an agreed-upon salary
- the employer agrees to provide the worker with meals, clothing, accommodation and medical care
- the employer is not allowed to take the worker's passport
- the employer cannot have the domestic worker work anywhere except in the employer's home
- the employer must not place any restrictions on the worker's correspondence, and
- the worker is allowed one rest day a week (D'Cunha, 2005).

Although the Jordanian contract covers a number of issues, it still leaves room for overwork and exploitation. For example, working hours are not specified, and it is not clear whether food and accommodation will be provided over and above the wages agreed. The contract is based on civil law, so contract violations do not carry the same level of consequences as violations of the national labour law.

In 2013, Jordan amended the labour code but it still clearly states that it applies to all workers except domestic servants, cooks and the like.

## STANDARD TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT

About 40 per cent of 73 countries studied worldwide have no form of regulations of any kind for domestic workers (UN Women and ITUC, 2013).

The UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific has instituted a consultative process to draw up a template for gender-sensitive standard terms of employment for use by female migrant domestic workers and their employers (UN Women Asia and Pacific and SDC, 2016). Apart from stipulating working conditions with regard to hours of work, accommodation, leave and remuneration, the template includes sections designed to protect the rights of migrant domestic workers including safety risks related to gender and their right to keep their passports.

By adopting these standard terms of employment as part of any bilateral agreements, the labour-sending and labour-receiving countries can ensure that migrant workers are protected, even if they are domestic workers not covered by state laws. When Bangladesh negotiates bilateral memorandums of understanding with countries of employment, it can ask those countries to adopt the standard terms of employment for female migrant domestic workers.

However, while the terms of employment can improve living and working conditions for migrant workers, they do not address the structural constraints in current labour migration systems that foster conditions for abuse and exploitation. Migrant domestic workers still encounter serious practical problems in seeking redress for violations of the terms and conditions in their contracts. For example, their employers may forcibly confine them to the house or confiscate their mobile phones so they cannot file a complaint, find the money to start proceedings, or contact a lawyer prepared to take up their case (UN Women and ITUC, 2013).

# INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS GOVERNING FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS

A number of international instruments, including conventions, treaties and forums, related to gender and safe migration and aim to protect migrants and safeguard their freedom and dignity (ILO, 2009).

TABLE 2

## Provisions in international instruments affecting female migrant workers

<p>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979 (ratified by Bangladesh 6 November 1984) and its General Recommendation No. 26</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Prohibits discrimination against women and ensures protection of the rights of women, including their right to employment, decent work conditions and social security</li> <li>● General Recommendation No. 26 addresses the concerns of female migrant workers and calls on states to formulate gender-sensitive and rights-based policies, remove restrictive and discriminatory policies, and ensure workers' access to health services and redress mechanisms, and their reintegration with family and society (ILO, 2009).</li> </ul>
<p>International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 1990 (ratified by Bangladesh 24 August 2011)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Guarantees the right to people and their families to migrate subject to the legal restrictions imposed by any Member States of the United Nations</li> <li>● Outlines the rights of all migrant workers to have the same working conditions as citizens, without specifying separate rights for female migrants</li> <li>● Prohibits inhumane living conditions, physical and sexual abuse, degrading treatment and forced labour and</li> <li>● Safeguards the rights of migrants to freedom of thought, expression, religion and access to courts.</li> </ul>
<p>UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress Persons, Especially Women and Children, 2000</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Covers workers in exploitative situations, such as domestic workers</li> <li>● Provides migrants with the right to humane treatment and full protection of their rights and</li> <li>● Aims to stop the transnational organized crime of trafficking in women and children (UN, 2000).</li> </ul>
<p>ILO Convention 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize, 1948 (ratified by Bangladesh 22 June 1972)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provides workers and employers, without distinction whatsoever, with the right to establish and, subject only to the rules of the organization concerned, to join organizations of their own choice without previous authorization (ILO website).</li> </ul>

<p><b>ILO Convention 97 on Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Requires states to maintain adequate and free assistance to migrants for employment, and facilitate their departure, journey and reception;</li> <li>● Mandates that legal provisions on remuneration, trade union membership and legal proceedings be applied equally to migrants without discrimination on grounds of gender, and</li> <li>● Deals with legal provisions in respect of employment, injury, maternity, sickness, invalidity, old age, death, unemployment, family responsibilities and any other contingency covered by the social security scheme of the member country (ILO website).</li> </ul>
<p><b>ILO Convention 143 on Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions), 1975</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Requires states to identify migrant workers illegally employed, verify if such migrants transit, reside or are employed in circumstances that contravene multilateral or bilateral instruments or agreements and national laws, and take preventative measures</li> <li>● Asks member states to suppress the illegal employment of migrants and stipulates that they should act against those organizing such movements, and</li> <li>● Stipulates that migrants who have lost their employment should not be treated as illegal migrants (ILO website).</li> </ul>
<p><b>ILO Convention 181 on Private Employment Agencies, 1997</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Requires member countries to oversee the functioning of private recruiting agencies in accordance with national laws after consulting the representative organizations of employees and workers</li> <li>● Stipulates that these agencies should be regulated with a suitable licensing or certification system and that they should not collect fees or costs from the migrants unless an exception is granted by a competent authority for certain categories of workers</li> <li>● Stipulates that adequate mechanisms should be in place to investigate any alleged abuses and fraudulent practices of these agencies, and</li> <li>● Provides for the privacy of the migrants to be protected while their information is being processed (ILO website).</li> </ul>
<p><b>ILO Convention 189 Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers, 2011</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mandates that migrant domestic workers receive an enforceable written contract prior to departure</li> <li>● Requires that agencies adopt the guidelines and enforcement mechanisms for recruiting domestic workers, and</li> <li>● Provides for legal mechanisms to safeguard the rights and interests of migrant domestic workers (ILO website).</li> </ul>

## International commitment: Sustainable Development Goals

On 25 September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

From 2016 to 2030, countries agreed to mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind. While these goals are not legally binding, governments agreed to take ownership of them and establish national frameworks to achieve them.

Migration is a central issue in the 2030 Agenda. Migrants will always need work but it is equally certain that many destination countries will need new workers in coming years.

Goal 5 is relevant to the concerns of migrant female workers in that it aims to achieve gender equality and to empower women and girls. The first target of Goal 5 is to end discrimination against women and girls everywhere.

Goal 8 is to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Under Goal 8, the specific target dealing with female migrant workers aims to protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, particularly female migrants and those in precarious employment.

Goal 10 is to reduce inequality within and among countries, and includes a specific target to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.

In the context of the 2030 Agenda, the Global Migration Group, chaired by UN Women, organized an event during the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2016. The focus was on empowering migrant women and girls. In its conclusions, the Commission said it

*... recognizes that women's equal economic rights, economic empowerment and independence are essential to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. ... The Commission acknowledges the positive contribution of migrant women workers to inclusive growth and sustainable development (E/2016/27-E/CN.6/2016/22).*

The Commission on the Status of Women also urged states to

*... acknowledge the need to eliminate violence and discrimination against women migrant workers and to promote their empowerment, including through international, regional or bilateral cooperation among all stakeholders, in particular countries of origin, transit and destination (E/2016/27-E/CN.6/2016/22).*

# ROLE OF REGIONAL AND GLOBAL PROCESSES TO ENSURE MIGRANTS' RIGHTS AND PROTECTION

Regional and global consultative processes are critical advocacy platforms for the labour-sending countries of Asia. They give these countries the opportunity to engage with the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, and to focus on the rights of female migrants.

## The Colombo Process

The Colombo Process was launched at the Ministerial Consultation for Asian Labour-sending Countries held in 2003 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The process subsequently involved the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. It promoted a dialogue on female migrant workers, emphasizing for the first time the issue of female domestic workers. This is a significant issue in the context of Bangladesh where migrants tend to be low-skilled and domestic work is the obvious choice for many women migrants.

The first three Colombo Process conferences focused on the welfare and protection of migrant workers, institutional capacity building, inter-State cooperation and ways to optimize the benefits of labour migration. The main concerns were:

- irregular migration and its consequences of vulnerability and abusive conditions for migrants, and
- exploitation and harassment of women in low-skilled and low-wage jobs (Colombo Process website).

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**Migrants will always need work but it is equally certain that many destination countries will need new workers in coming years.**

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The fourth Colombo Process meeting in Dhaka in 2011 was on the theme of Migration with Dignity and resulted in the Dhaka Declaration. The declaration recognized that increasing numbers of women have been joining labour migration from Asia. Considering the rise in employment opportunities for migrant women workers and the increase in the number of destination countries, the declaration recommended that countries:

*... effectively address the specific needs and concerns of vulnerable groups of migrant workers, especially women, domestic workers, low-skilled and low-wage workers (Colombo Process website).*

## The Abu Dhabi Dialogue

The Abu Dhabi Dialogue meeting, held in January 2008, for the first time brought together the Colombo Process countries with the Gulf Cooperation Council states plus Yemen, Malaysia and Singapore. Republic of Korea and Japan participated as observers (IOM 2008). In April the same year, the Colombo Process countries also began a dialogue on labour migration with European Union member states; two more meetings were held in 2011 and 2014.

## The Colombo Declaration

In 2017, the combined Senior Officials' Meeting and Fourth Ministerial Consultation of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The primary outcome was the Colombo Declaration. The declaration welcomed the announcement from some member states, including Bangladesh

and Saudi Arabia, that they would cooperate to design and implement Comprehensive Information and Orientation Programmes for migrant workers.

The declaration also recommended that member states build on national and bilateral initiatives to increase the use of technology to facilitate and manage regional labour mobility. It cited the Musaned platform that is used to contract and deploy domestic workers from Bangladesh to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The protection and welfare of migrant workers, including women featured prominently in all of these dialogues.

## The Global Forum on Migration and Development

The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) a global initiative set up in 2007. The forum is organized by a different state or states each year. These states coordinate thematic meetings and roundtable preparatory sessions throughout the year and host the annual summit.

The Government of Bangladesh hosted the ninth global forum in 2016 with the theme, “Migration that works for sustainable development for all: Towards a transformative migration agenda”.

The forum addressed the economics, sociology and governance of migration and development, with gender as a cross-cutting issue. It sought to define the precise contribution that migration can make to development and to specific SDGs. The aim was to enable governments to formulate the human rights based gender-sensitive policies they need in order to realize the full potential for sustainable development of migrant work and of female domestic workers in particular (GFMD, 2016).

At the 2016 forum, the importance of promoting the rights of female migrant workers was highlighted in an event co-hosted by UN Women and the Government of Bangladesh. The event was entitled, “Integrating a Gender Perspective into the Development of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration”. During this session, the Government and in particular the Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment played an important role in advocating for a gender-responsive international framework on migration.

The rights of Bangladeshi migrant women have also been raised through previous Global Forum on Migration and Development initiatives. The Third Thematic Meeting in 2015 considered the context of Bangladesh and was entitled, “Recognizing the contributions of women migrants to economic and social development in countries of origin and destination and addressing their specific needs.”

# GOOD PRACTICES TO PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF FEMALE MIGRANTS

1. **Standard terms of employment** for female migrant domestic workers are being used by Hong Kong, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Singapore and the Philippines.
2. The Embassy of the Philippines in the United Arab Emirates and Lebanon offers **programmes to educate female domestic workers** and help them to move out of the unskilled work category. The embassy provides free classes on computer literacy, cooking, sewing, photography and other skills (Sabban, 2002).
3. Jordan and Hong Kong have set up hotlines for migrant domestic workers to report abusive treatment such as physical abuse and sexual harassment (UNIFEM, 2005).
4. Saudi Arabia has introduced Musaned website that offers seven tools: rights and obligations of both the employer and the employee; service stages of recruitment, employment and departure; list of all licensed recruitment offices and companies; complaints and committees, including how to file a complaint; an information centre providing news; required documents; and e-recruitment services. The programme was initiated by the Ministry of Labour, and aims to protect domestic workers. The website also offers clear, accessible information that includes important guidance for migrant domestic workers when they have to travel (Project 189).
5. In Hong Kong, the Home Affairs Bureau has published **Your Guide to Services in Hong Kong**, in different languages. This document is given to arriving migrants and provides information on such topics as obtaining and renewing work permits, rights and obligations, and the addresses of organizations offering support services (Kawar, 2003).
6. In Hong Kong, certain public areas are allocated as **gathering spots for different nationalities of migrant domestic workers** – Filipinas, Indonesians, Thais, Nepalis, and others. Many of the migrant associations conduct their activities in these areas on the workers' rest day (Kawar, 2003).
7. In Singapore, the Ministry of Manpower has issued **A Guide for Employers of Foreign Domestic Workers**. It is available in the four main languages and aims to enable employers to “develop a close and cordial relationship” with their workers. It highlights important work permit requirements as well as other employer obligations (Kawar, 2003).
8. In Italy and South Africa, **migrant domestic workers have the same protection as other workers** and enjoy the same benefits, including minimum wages; medical benefits; one day of rest in seven; paid annual leave; a 13th month salary; and a written contract that must be in line with the labour law and is therefore enforceable in court (D'Alconzo, 2005).
9. Thailand offers periodic **registration opportunities for irregular migrant workers** including domestic workers. This covered over 1.2 million people from Myanmar, Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic when it was offered in 2004. A clear process was designed for the migrant workers to report, along with the owner of their house of residence, and register with the Ministry of Labour. This gave the workers legal status in Thailand for a year. Simultaneously, employers who wished to hire migrant workers were required to register with the Ministry. Both of these initial registration processes were free (UNIFEM, 2005).
10. In the United Arab Emirates, electronic bank payment of wages was made compulsory from 2008. The Government has facilitated employment transfers, enhanced the legal rights of workers vis-à-vis employers, and introduced compulsory health insurance for all workers, including those in domestic service paid by sponsors (Thimothy and Sasikumar, 2012).

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## GOVERNMENT

### 1. Encourage collaboration within and among government ministries and develop the capacity of officials to collect and analyse sex-disaggregated data

The Government of Bangladesh laid out its targets for implementing the SDGs in a mapping study by the General Economics Division of the Planning Commission in 2016. These targets are aligned with the Government's Seventh Five-year Plan, 2016–20 (Bangladesh GED, 2016), so that the global agenda is integrated into the local context and supports local development plans.

The mapping study lists the goals, associated targets, actions and indicators, as well as the ministries responsible for devising and implementing plans and reporting on progress. To ensure that the ministries coordinate and cooperate internally as well as with each other to achieve these targets, the Government has formed an SDG Implementation and Monitoring Committee in the Prime Minister's Office and the Planning Commission is finalizing a monitoring and evaluation framework for implementing the SDGs.

The SDGs include various indicators<sup>2</sup> related to migration and all ministries concerned need to ensure that sex-disaggregated data on labour migration is collected, analysed and shared. This data is crucial in mainstreaming gender in labour migration and in developing and implementing relevant policies.

<sup>2</sup>See the section on 'International commitment: Sustainable Development Goals' on page 16 of this Country Overview.

Officials in the Ministries of Women and Children Affairs, Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, and Planning need to improve their capacity to gather, record and analyse sex-disaggregated data on labour and migration, including, for example, data on skills, occupations, and remittances. This needs to be a regular exercise to identify and address the gender-differentiated needs of migrant workers. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, in collaboration with line ministries and departments, should collect and update the sex-disaggregated data on labour migration and publish a periodic compendium on women and migration.

### 2. Promote and ensure a participatory approach in the SDGs reporting process

In 2016, Bangladesh volunteered to be part of the national voluntary review set up by the High-Level Political Forum<sup>3</sup>. The participants will report annually to the United Nations Economic and Social Council on their progress and challenges in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs.

The government needs to encourage the participation of all stakeholders in the process of reporting on progress in implementing the SDGs. More dialogue among the Government, Civil Society Organizations, United Nations agencies, Development Partners and other key groups stakeholders will ensure a multi-stakeholder contribution to the reporting process.

<sup>3</sup>The High-level Political Forum is the United Nation's central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs.

### **3. Negotiate, implement and monitor gender-responsive agreements**

The Government of Bangladesh, and the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment in particular, wants to explore further opportunities for memorandums of understanding and bilateral agreements to protect migrant workers' rights in destination countries. However, it is challenging to implement and monitor such agreements for domestic workers, particularly for women. Domestic workers tend to have highly personalized relationships with employers and so are at greater risk of abuse and exploitation. They are often cut off from their fellow workers and have no means of communicating with the authorities.

Furthermore, in most labour-receiving countries, domestic work is not covered under the labour law.

A comprehensive approach is required to resolve these issues. This should include holding regular meetings involving all stakeholders to advocate for domestic workers' rights and to establish ways to protect these rights. Where appropriate, the results of these meetings need to be shared with international agencies in order to enlist further technical assistance from them.

Key stakeholders including civil society organizations need to be consulted during the negotiations between the Government and destination countries, and the process should be made public. The specific needs of female migrant domestic workers and their gender-based vulnerabilities need to be reflected in any agreements, in line with the provisions for rights protection and equality under CEDAW.

### **4. Explore new employment opportunities and occupations for female migrant workers**

The Government has been exploring new migration corridors and occupations for migrant workers, and some of its research has focused on opportunities for female workers. However, upgrading female migrant workers to higher-value jobs remains a challenge since most of those from Bangladesh continue to do domestic jobs abroad.

An in-depth analysis of the socioeconomic situation of women who seek to migrate is needed in order to develop customised tools that address their special needs and concerns such as their reproductive roles, the social stigma they face, and their lack of experience in skilled trades. The Government needs to do more specific country–occupation market research to find new employment opportunities for women, for example in Jordan and Malaysia. With training, female migrant can fill new demands for workers or supervisors in the ready-made garment industry, for nurses and caregivers, and for workers in the electronics sector as well as in other semi-skilled jobs.

### **5. Build on current pre-departure orientation and training programmes that offer new opportunities for migrant workers**

The Government is developing country-specific pre-departure training modules with the assistance of United Nations agencies and civil society organizations.

By collaborating with civil society and community-based organizations that already conducted pre-departure training for female migrant workers, the Government could replicate their programmes

through local authorities in districts that are not yet covered. The training modules need to present practical information through a user-friendly methodology to help female migrant workers access new opportunities, for example as supervisors in the garments sector.

## **6. Establish a women's unit dedicated to female migrant workers**

The Overseas Employment Policy (2016) calls for the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment to establish a women's unit to protect the rights of female migrant workers and enhance their potential. This can be done in collaboration with national, international and civil society organizations, in particular with women's organizations, workers' groups, and trade unions that support women's movements. By analysing the skills and motivation of the workers, the unit would ensure that each worker is sent to the right place and given the right work that ensures their safety and well-being.

Using social media applications, the unit can become a forum for Bangladeshi female migrant workers around the world to share ideas and experiences. It also can offer practical advice to these women. This would give them a sense of security and the confidence to understand their own worth and to demand their rights. The unit would thus ensure the safety and protection of female migrant workers and preserve their role in the global workplace.

## **7. Ensure employment policies are implemented at the local level**

The Overseas Employment Policy (2016) tasks line ministries with implementing the policy. The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment has drawn up a policy implementation

plan designating the specific roles of each of the line ministries in this collaboration. Ministries concerned include the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.

However, local implementation needs to be strengthened. Local government representatives need to be sensitized to the migration issues of women and should receive standardized information on safe migration from the national level. Help desks providing comprehensive, up-to-date information on the migration process should be established at all union council offices that are situated far from the local district employment and manpower offices. People would then have quick access to accurate information and would be less vulnerable to fraud perpetrated by middlemen and others.

## **8. Ensure smooth reintegration for returnee migrant workers**

While the Government assists migrant workers who are leaving Bangladesh, those returning home also need support.

A comprehensive reintegration framework should be developed to serve female returnees. The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment can take specific actions to ensure this, in collaboration with the Ministries of Home Affairs, Social Welfare, Foreign Affairs, Women and Children Affairs, and Local Government and Rural Development. The Bureau of Manpower and Employment (BMET) should establish employment link services in its field offices to help female returnees find work and reintegrate. In addition, BMET and non-governmental organizations could provide the returnees with skills training to improve their productivity and performance.

## EMBASSIES AND CONSULATES

### 1. Actively support migrant workers

Labour attachés need to coordinate with employers, potential migrants and BMET and play a central role in verifying employment demands and in ensuring that contractual provisions are enforced.

Labour attachés can support female migrants by collaborating with civil society and women's organizations in Bangladesh and in the destination countries. They could also connect these organizations with networks of female migrants from other countries working in the same destination countries.

The Government of Bangladesh and particularly the ministries that manage the consulates or missions in the destination countries need to coordinate more effectively so they can respond rapidly to situations and take the necessary actions.

### 2. Allocate resources to implement employment policies

The Overseas Employment Policy requires embassies to create separate windows for female migrant workers to discuss their problems with embassy officials. The consulates should have the capacity and resources to advise and support female workers and embassy staff need to be aware of the gender-specific vulnerabilities that these workers face.

For this, embassies and consulates need to be allocated adequate financial resources. Additional funds would enable them to increase staff numbers, train officials and expand services. The embassies would then also be able to provide more mediation support between employers and workers.

## RECRUITMENT AGENCIES/ BANGLADESH ASSOCIATION OF INTERNATIONAL RECRUITING AGENCIES

### 1. Implement the code of conduct to protect workers and monitor compliance

The Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA) has drafted a code of conduct for recruiting agencies. It has been submitted to the Government for approval.

The code commits the agencies to protect female workers in all phases of the recruitment process. It recognizes the distinct challenges and responsibilities of foreign recruitment.

Once the code is approved, recruitment agencies need to create a mechanism to regularly assess compliance with the code and send reports on this to the executive committee of BAIRA.

### 2. Promote the Standard Terms of Employment

BAIRA is the chair of the Alliance of Asian Associations of Overseas Employment Service Providers and plays a crucial role in advocating for standard terms of employment for female domestic workers.

BAIRA should make full use of its role and become an effective platform for sharing experiences, exchanging views and generating dialogue on the standard terms of employment.

A national-level strategy can be formulated by encouraging dialogue among the Government, BAIRA and civil society organizations. This strategy could use the standard terms of employment template as a guideline to ensure the protection of domestic workers' rights.

### 3. Train recruitment agencies to adopt gender-sensitive practices

A UN Women study<sup>4</sup> in 2014 on the ethical practices of recruitment agencies found that these agencies did not have a common understanding of the gender-sensitive language recommended for contract agreements.

BAIRA should organize training for recruitment agencies on gender-related national and international policies and agreements so they can develop their own protection, safety and remediation mechanisms for migrant workers.

Agencies need to be able to provide job seekers with accurate details of working conditions in the host country, including the nature of the work, wages, benefits and duration of contracts. This information needs to include the needs and concerns of women, so any training for the agencies must include guidelines on gender sensitivity.

## CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

### 1. Campaign for regulated and safe migration

Civil society organizations play a critical role in raising awareness about female migrant workers, both at home and abroad, and advocating for safe migration as a key to realizing the full benefits of migration.

These organizations, should help ensure regulated and safe migration by collaborating with the Government and particularly with the District

<sup>4</sup>Conducting a review of standard practices of recruiting agencies for ethical recruitment, under Strengthening labour migration management capacities in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal and the Philippines for replication in other Colombo Process member states, a project of IOM funded by European Union, November 2014

Employment and Manpower offices and union council information centres, on campaigns to encourage workers who wish to migrate to follow the legal channels. In collaboration with local administrations, intensive campaign activities need to be planned with a long-term vision. If the scale and frequency of activities were increased, the campaigns could have a long-lasting effect on the welfare of migrant workers. Border districts and subdistricts (*upazillas*), which are more prone to trafficking of women and children to other countries, should be specifically targeted.

### 2. Collaborate with recruitment agencies and government

Strengthening partnerships and collaboration among civil society organizations, recruitment agencies and the Government is crucial in protecting the rights of migrant workers. The experience of these partners in designing capacity-building programmes can be used to develop human rights-based and gender-responsive information and dialogue sessions in the communities for female workers before they decide to migrate. These sessions need to include training on financial literacy and basic banking to help female migrants better manage their earnings.

Civil society organizations could strengthen their social and economic reintegration support for returnee migrants by, for example, providing them with advice and information on managing their money and understanding the economic opportunities available to them.

### 3. Strengthen psychosocial support

UN Women pilot<sup>5</sup> projects on return and reintegration have shown how important it is to institutionalize the trauma centre services in shelter homes and to sensitize staff on delivering gender-responsive psychosocial support to survivors.

Civil society organizations should collaborate with the National Trauma Counselling Centre of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs to strengthen psychosocial support and referral services for female migrants who have experienced abuse or violence.

## UNITED NATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

### 1. Strengthen existing partnerships to protect workers

The Migration Working Group, Dhaka<sup>6</sup> was formed to enhance coordination among the development partners on migration issues. This platform can be used to strengthen collective dialogue and advocacy work for exploitation-free and safe labour movement between Bangladesh and countries of destination. More cooperation between United Nations agencies and other agencies would ensure that female migrant workers are more effectively protected through the various programmes these agencies run in Bangladesh.

<sup>5</sup>Piloting comprehensive reintegration support to returnee women migrant workers in 2015, under the ILO project on decent work, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development.

<sup>6</sup>The Migration Working Group supports and complements the efforts of the Government and other stakeholders and promotes joint policy positions, research and interventions on migration in Bangladesh. The Group is open to all development partners and United Nations and other international organizations, including those that are already active on the issue inside and outside Bangladesh.

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More cooperation between the United Nations agencies and other agencies would ensure that female migrant workers are more effectively protected.

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### 2. Implement a Comprehensive Information and Orientation Programme to support migrant workers

The Comprehensive Information and Orientation Programme endorsed by the Abu Dhabi Dialogue includes two major elements.

Firstly, it covers the development of regional pre-departure orientation modules to provide practical information to migrant workers about working in a particular foreign environment, including information on their rights and on how to secure them. United Nations agencies and the Government need to collaborate on researching and producing these modules to ensure they take into account the different situations workers will encounter in each country and the specific issues that arise in certain categories of work.

Secondly, the programme covers the development of an efficient and effective programme management system. This will ensure that the quality of the pre-departure orientation training is monitored, the trainers are well-qualified, the content and duration of the courses are standardized and appropriate, and sessions are regular and accessible so that all workers have the opportunity to attend.

Considering the coordination and cooperation involved both within Bangladesh and with the labour-receiving countries, sharing and accessing up-to-date information is vital to managing migrant labour. We need to build on current national and bilateral initiatives to increase the use of

information technology in managing labour mobility. The Musaned platform set up by the Ministry of Labour and Employment and Social Development of Saudi Arabia has proved to be effective in contracting and deploying domestic workers from Bangladesh to Saudi Arabia. An in-depth review of this platform<sup>7</sup>, using a gender lens and with technical support from United Nations agencies, would give us insight into how to set up and expand on such platforms and use them to help female migrant workers.

### 3. Ensure the gender-responsive Global Compact on Migration is effectively incorporated

United Nations agencies and other development partners have used various interventions to facilitate national and regional discussions on the Global Compact on Migration, which is due to be adopted in 2018. For example, the Swiss Agency for

Development and Cooperation has set up the SDC Migration Network so that countries can share experiences and ideas.

United Nations agencies need to continue promoting dialogue on the gender-responsive Global Compact and gathering inputs from stakeholders. Providing a forum that Member States, United Nations agencies, International Non-Governmental and Civil Society Organizations can use to explore methods and collaborative approaches will ensure that the compact is fully incorporated into development goals, and the 2030 Agenda goals are achieved.

United Nations agencies can help the Government of Bangladesh to analyse its policies on migrants and uphold its positions at national, regional and international levels. More effort and attention are required to leverage the potential of South–South cooperation for migration at national, regional and interregional levels.

Workers traveling abroad wait in the immigration queue.



<sup>7</sup>Musaned is an online recruitment system for domestic workers introduced by Saudi Arabia.

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