

## Bangladeshi Migration across the Globe: The Recent Experiences of Development and Challenges

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### ABSTRACT

In Bangladesh, international migration has long been crucial to development as it has enormous impacts on creating employment, reducing poverty and ensuring stability to foreign Exchange reserve. It has a significant effect on country's GDP. Migration and remittances not only maximise income but also minimise risk. International migration outperforms foreign aid and foreign direct investment (FDI) in the development of Bangladesh. Bangladeshi immigrants and their sending remittances are being considered major contributors to develop the country's economy. Nevertheless, expatriate workers are facing new challenges in KSA, UAE and Malaysia, the traditional job market for Bangladeshi labour migrants. Moreover, there are some irregular migration, mainly taking place in south-east Asian regions and EU member countries affecting the country's image severely. Along with these experiences, the government should be more proactive to deal with the issue properly and to develop a national strategy to integrate migration in development planning.

**Keywords:** Migration, immigrants, remittance, development, challenges

### INTRODUCTION

Migration is an age-old phenomenon which may occur in internal or international as a result of human's aspiration for better jobs and better lives. At present, International migration had become an extensive global phenomenon when the United Nations included migration in the SDGs framework in 2015 to transform the Globe equally (UN, 2015). Therefore, migration is not only treated in recent years as just like moving from one place to another but also considered as "agents of change" and "enablers for development in countries of origin, transit and destination" (IOM, 2017). It is an important

understanding of world leaders, professionals, academicians and researchers who act for the future.

According to Global Migration Indicators 2018, there are roughly 258 million international migrants now (IOM, 2018b) - if which were considered together, they would account for the world's fifth-most populous country. However, considering the number of migration stock globally, Bangladesh is one of the major partners of this issue. The table underneath shows the name of the top five countries (UN, 2018):

**Table 1.** International Migration Stock 2017

Name of the Country	Number of Migrants (Million)	Position (2017)
India	16.6 Million	First
Mexico	13.0 Million	Second
Russia	10.6 Million	Third
China	10.0 Million	Fourth
Bangladesh	07.5 Million	Fifth

Bangladesh is an 8<sup>th</sup> most populous country in the world (UN, 2019b). She experiences high-

rate unemployment, which is around 4.5% (Paul, 2018). Every year 2.5 million work forces

are added in the labour market of Bangladesh (Islam, 2011). But, most of the Bangladeshi workforces are unskilled or semi-skilled. On the other hand, there is a limited prospect for employment here. She can't provide job facilities to a vast number of half-skilled, even skilled workers. In this backdrop, international migration was made an integral part of employment for many Bangladeshi job seekers.

Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), Bangladesh record shows, in 1976, total 6087 Bangladeshi migrated abroad for employment for the first time after getting independence in 1971(BMET, 2019). At present, Bangladeshi immigrants are found in more than 168 countries globally. Bangladeshi workers, students and professionals work, study and live even with their family members to every corner of the world. Therefore, Bangladeshi immigrants are now well familiar globally. The following table demonstrates the country-wise international movements from Bangladesh (BMET, 2019):

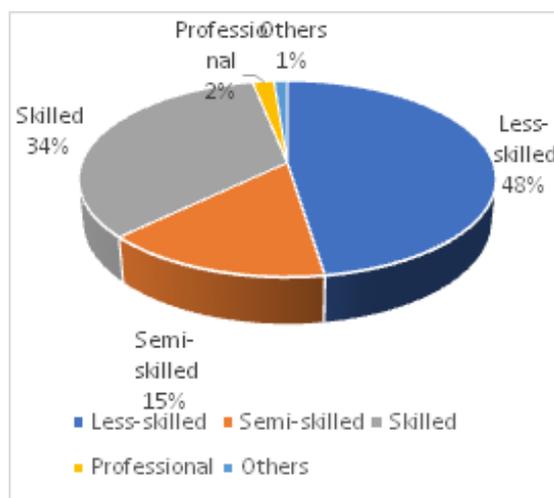
**Table 2.** Country-Wise Migration from Bangladesh (1976 to 2018)

Country	Migrants	Percentage
KSA	3,650,588	30.29%
UAE	2,368,227	19.65%
Oman	1,428,216	11.85%
Malaysia	1,056,511	8.77%
Qatar	757,798	6.29%
Singapore	732,828	6.08%
Kuwait	616,651	5.12%
Bahrain	410,327	3.40%
Lebanon	162,223	1.35%
Jordan	160,216	1.33%

On average, half a million people go abroad annually for both long-term and short-term employment. In 2017, it was more than one million, and in 2018, a total of 734,181 workers have migrated to different countries from Bangladesh (BMET, 2019). A record of 6.5 million immigrants went abroad to take up employment over the last ten years. Generally, there are two types of international migration happen here, firstly, industrialized western countries and secondly, middle eastern or south-east Asian countries.

Developed western countries like USA, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand generally receive high skilled immigrants for boosting their continuous development. There is a great Bangladeshi immigrants' community in these developed countries. Reversely, numerous unskilled or less-skilled migrant workers are found

in Gulf Region or South-East Asian countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, UAE, Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore etc. Educated and skilled migrants easily receive a higher salary than un-skilled or less-skilled immigrants. It finds from many studies that a high number of migrant workers across the globe were illiterate or read and write only. Most of the Bangladeshi immigrants around the world are temporary less-skilled or semi-skilled workers. But unskilled workers are engaged in risky or temporary lower level jobs where local citizens do not involve them. The table below demonstrates the categories of overseas employment from Bangladesh (BMET, 2019):



**Figure 1.** Categories of Overseas Employment of Bangladeshi immigrants

It is unpleasant that nearly 50% Bangladeshi migrants, who are mainly engaged in so-called 3D-jobs (dirty, dangerous and demeaning) abroad, are less-skilled. Not only their social acceptance in the host country is less, but also their earning is insufficient, whereas some skilled and professional Bangladeshi migrants are well established abroad due to their knowledge and expertise. Some of them got citizenship in different developed countries like USA, UK, Canada, Australia etc. Even many of them are taking part in local and national politics in various countries across the globe. Surprisingly, some of them are being selected as a member of several local or central government. Nevertheless, international migration from Bangladesh is going on through numerous hurdles and obstacles.

The main purpose of this study is to explore, integrate and evaluate the recent development and achievements of Bangladesh in the connection of international migration. Bangladeshi immigrants are facing many

challenges globally, which has underpinned here. Although lots of researches have been done regarding these issues, this study has accumulated almost all recent development features as well as challenges for Bangladeshi immigrants across the globe.

**METHODOLOGY**

In this study, all data and information are collected from credible secondary sources. These sources include journal/newspaper articles and relevant books of migration studies. Some Bangladeshi prominent migration researchers took special coverage. Moreover, data are also composed of Bangladesh Government sources, international organizations, especially the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations (UN) publications and reports and internet databases. We have employed the content analysis method for getting reliable findings and outcomes. The information related to recent challenges of Bangladeshi immigrants has partially gathered from national and international newspaper’s reports and editorials. To thoroughly understand the subject matters, we made a robust discussion of the relevant literature. No theoretical framework has been used to conduct the study.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Due to the continuous movement of Bangladeshi emigrants around the globe, some influential achievements are observed in this study. International migration has not only been reducing domestic unemployment and poverty but also encouraging socio-economic development possibilities through remittance flows and human capitals.

According to the Bangladesh Development Update, national poverty line plummeted to 24.3% in 2016 from 48.9% in 2000 (WorldBank, 2018a). The same report shows that the national extreme

poverty line has continued to make good progress from 33.7% in 2000 to 12.9% in 2016. The last Bangladesh Poverty Assessment disclosed that poverty lessening was driven by growth in labors (both internal and abroad) income (WorldBank, 2013). International migration is considered one of the robust determinants of decreasing poverty from Bangladesh. Moreover, the World Bank has anticipated that extreme poverty would be eliminated by 2030 in Bangladesh (World Bank, 2016). Centre for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka depicts clearly in the following table about the recent poverty reduction data of Bangladesh (CPD, 2018):

**Table3.** *GDP & Employment Growth and Poverty Reduction Trends in Bangladesh*

Average annual	2000-05	2005-10	2010-16
GDP growth (%)	5.1	6.1	6.5
Employment growth (%)	3.3	2.7	1.9
Poverty reduction (percentage point)	1.8	1.7	1.2

Bangladesh, which has been an LDC since 1975, recently fulfilled the UN’s current criteria to graduate from a „least developed country“ to a „developing country“. Bangladesh has also recently advanced from a low-income country to a low-middle income country on the World Bank’s scale. (UN, 2019a). Following to the UN criteria, a country is eligible to graduate from the LDC category if it has a gross national income (GNI) per capita of \$1,230 or above for three years, a Human Assets Index (HAI) of 66 or above and an Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI) of 32 or below. Bangladesh has fulfilled the three conditions on a very large margin. Bangladesh's current GNI per capita income is \$1,274, The HAI is 73.2, while the EVI is 25.2. Remittances are contributing hugely to the overall country’s macroeconomic stability.

**Table4.** *Bangladesh’s LDC graduation*

Criteria	Threshold, 2018 (UN)	Bangladesh’s Achievement
GNI per capita	US\$ 1,230 or greater	US\$1274
Human Asset Index (HAI)	66 or greater	73.2
Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI)	32 or less	25.2

The Centre for Economics and Business Research, a UK based think tank, mentions in „World Economic League Table 2019“ report that Bangladesh is the 41st largest economy in the world in 2019 (Cebr, 2018). The report forecasts that Bangladesh would emerge as the 36th largest economy in 2023, 27th in 2028 and 24th in 2033. According to the report, growth in

Bangladesh’s economy is driven by domestic consumption expenditure, government spending, remittances and exports. International migration and remittances are playing essential roles in boosting the country’s economy.

The World Bank Group KNOMAD’s “Migration and Remittances: Recent

Developments and Outlook“ mentioned the name of the top 10 countries who received the highest amount of remittances globally. Bangladesh ranked ninth among them who received \$13 billion in 2017 (World Bank, 2018b). It was US\$15.54 billion in 2018 (BMET, 2019). Whereas the net foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2018 was the only \$3.6 billion (Financial Express, 2019), and foreign aid was in last fiscal year (July 2017 to June 2018) \$6.12 billion (Financial Express, 2018a). Moreover, on average, the remittance of Bangladesh has been increased by 10.85% from 1995-2016, which is higher than the average growth of the country’s GDP (Sarkar, Rahman, Islam, Sikdar, & Khan, 2018). The average GDP growth of Bangladesh was almost 7% in the last five year (BBS, 2018).

The World Bank Office, Dhaka has recently published a report titled „The Bangladesh Development Update April 2019: Towards Regulatory Predictability“. It expresses evidently that Bangladesh is among the top five fastest-growing economies in the world (World Bank, 2019). Bangladesh ranks fifth after Ethiopia, Rwanda, Bhutan and India respectively. Djibouti, Ivory Coast and Ghana have the same position as Bangladesh. The following figure shows the top five GDP’s in the world (DailyStar, 2019):

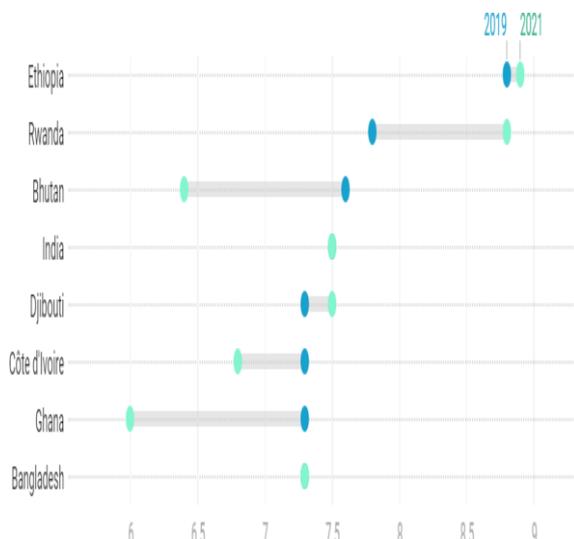


Figure 2. The top five fastest growing economies in the world

The World Bank has identified several causes for the growth, for example, manufacturing, and construction, bumper crop harvest, coupled with private consumption, remittances and increasing rural income. Migrant’s remittance is being played as one of the major contributors to boosting the economy.

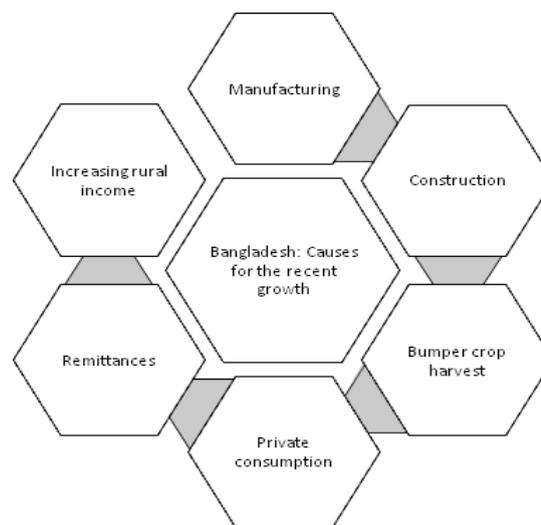


Figure 3. Causes for the recent growth of Bangladesh

### Recent Challenges for Bangladeshi Immigrants

Though Bangladeshi migration across the globe is an integral part of her development, it was not free of challenges. Always, there were hurdles to go and to survive abroad from here. At present, Bangladeshi migrants are facing many obstacles within and beyond the country. Some of these are mentioned below:

- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) introduced Value Added Tax (VAT) on 01 January 2018 to increase revenue for addressing governments budget deficits (BBC, 2018). Both countries imposed a 5% levy to the majority of goods and services. Previously Gulf States are known as a land of the tax-free living for foreign workers. As the world’s gas and oil prices decline, taxation of foreign workers’ remittances were kicked in both countries for the first time in their history (Malit Jr & Naufal, 2016). Almost 50% of Bangladeshi migrant labours live and work in these two countries. They are severely affected by this taxation due to their low-income status in the local market. Purchasing power ability of the low-skilled migrant workers decreased significantly because of the rising cost of living. So, they spend more and remit less. The situation creates formidable challenges for Bangladeshi temporary workers in these regions. Many of them already have come back home country, being unable to survive in a changing environment.
- Besides, the Ministry of Labour and Social Development, KSA banned outlets of 12 activities and occupations for foreign labors (SaudiGazette, 2018). Only Saudi citizens

will employ these 12 private sectors; no expatriates are allowed further. As a result, many Bangladeshi workers who are already engaged in these services lost their jobs and

became unemployed. In the coming years, it would create more challenges for expatriate labourers in KSA. These restricted work areas are:

**Table5.** Recent Restricted Work Areas for migrant Labors in KSA

Serial	Work area	Serial	Work area
01	Watch shops	07	Outlets selling all types of carpets
02	Optical stores	08	Automobile and mobile phone shops
03	Medical equipment stores	09	Shops selling home furniture and ready-made office materials
04	Electrical and electronics shops	10	Sales outlets of ready-made garments
05	Outlets selling car spare parts	11	Children clothes and men's supplies
06	Building material shops	12	Household utensils shops and pastry shops

- Malaysia is one of the key destinations for Bangladeshi migrant workers. It is assumed that almost one million Bangladeshi migrants are working in Malaysia, and according to the Home Ministry of Malaysia, only 221,089 of them are legal (Nasa, 2017). Last year, Malaysia's new government suspended workforce recruitment from Bangladesh because of large-scale irregularities in the migration process (Financial Express, 2018b). For example, organized human trafficking syndicate run by a Bangladeshi businessman in connivance with Malaysian authorities and involvement of only ten private Bangladeshi manpower recruiters in recruiting process etc. The Malaysian government had stopped issuing demand letter for Bangladeshi workers from September 01, 2018 due to alleged syndication of only ten recruiters (Ara, 2018). Meanwhile, the Malaysian new government is working on building a unified labour recruitment policy from all labour-sending countries.
- Several Bangladeshi migrants are trying to illegally reach South East Asian countries and Europe (Siddiqui, 2016). These two irregular migration routes have been introduced recently. Generally, boat migration, which is seen to Malaysia and Thailand, has been termed as „slave trade“. Whereas, with the flow of Syrian refugees' migration, some Bangladeshis are trying to enter Europe with the help of human smugglers. These are matters of the major concern of the government of Bangladesh. But for this, labour migration to a volatile region like Iraq has been created a huge risk for Bangladeshi migrants (Siddiqui, 2016). Moreover, Bangladeshi embassies abroad are often unable to provide MRP passports with due time for expatriate workers. So, it prolongs the troubles of migrants' work permits which are dependent on valid visa stamp on a valid passport. Even labour

attaches abroad, the main contact points of expats in host countries, have no capability to provide proper services to the distressed Bangladeshi emigrants who are in detention centers awaiting trials in prison, or serving sentences or facing deportation.

- A recent study conducted by the International Organization for Migration, expresses that among a few countries in the world, Bangladesh has the highest migration cost (IOM, 2018a). These costs for male migrants can potentially shoot up to Tk700,000 and for female migrants to Tk 95,000 each. It highlighted that potential migrants depend more on go-betweens than directly contacting the recruiting agencies. The enormous cost of migration only makes a migrant more vulnerable. The lack of appropriate knowledge and the influence of mediator, coupled with an inability to pursue skilled jobs in countries of destination, are often forcing migrants to accept low wages and poor working environment.
- Migration is treated positively for the development of both host and sender countries, especially when the United Nations adopted migration in SDGs framework in 2015 for transforming the globe equally. However, most of the immigrants are workers globally. Though the migrant labours play a crucial role in the development arena, they have minimal scope for receiving justice in case of deception. Every year lots of Bangladeshi migrant workers, for example, die in their workplaces or remain unpaid. Sometimes, they are cheated by migration agents, employers or intermediaries. International Labour Organization found 13 barriers to accessing justice for the migrant workers (ILO, 2017). Many Bangladeshi expatriate workers are facing these hurdles, which are mentioned below:

**Table 6.** Barriers to accessing justice for the migrant workers

Serial	Name of Hurdles	Serial	Name of Hurdles
01	Lack of written evidence	07	Language barriers
02	High cost of legal assistance	08	Irregular legal status
03	Slow legal process	09	Employer-tied visas and work permits
04	Fear of retaliation	10	Restriction of movements
05	Discriminatory attitudes	11	Lack of coverage by labour law
06	Unclear statutory responsibilities	12	Non-functional complaint mechanisms
13	Lack of information about expatriate workers' rights.		

- According to European Union, there are nearly 250,000 Bangladeshi immigrants in 28 EU member countries, among them about 80,000 are living there for years illegally, and more are still arriving with the flow of Syrian refugees (Hussain, 2016). EU emphasized a stronger framework for legal migration and tougher measures against irregular migration. Countries like Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, Jordan, Singapore and Malaysia have long been the preferred destination for these migrant labourers. However, for various reasons, most of these countries began cutting down on imported labour from Bangladesh in recent years. With the traditional foreign job markets shrinking, more significant numbers have turned to the EU countries with the help of some human traffickers from Libya. Britain, Germany, Italy, France and Greece are the favorite destinations of the illegal Bangladeshi migrant workers. Most of those illegal immigrants entered the countries by irregular sea and land routes after they had reached some African and other countries from Bangladesh legally.

Bangladesh has been identified along with other top 29 as illegal immigrants source countries in Europe. They are called as “economic migrants”. Many Bangladeshi migrants were imprisoned between 2008 and 2016 because of having no documents. The discussion on Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) is going on between the relevant EU authority and the government of Bangladesh (Karim, 2017). According to SOPs, the EU wants to begin the deportation by following a specific timeframe, while the Bangladesh government wants logical time to go through its nationality verification process. EU emphasized on confirming the identities within 48 hours of arrested illegal immigrants. Otherwise, they will be forced back to Bangladesh. But the government of Bangladesh divided them into four categories and wanted to verify under this classification.

Firstly, who are in police custody for a long time; secondly, those who went in Europe with valid visas but became irregular later; thirdly, those who entered EU region without a valid visa but they have a passport; and finally, those who have no any types of documents. Still, there is no significant advancement in these issues.

- The intrusion of Rohingyas from Myanmar and their overseas travel on fake Bangladeshi passports are big headaches for the authorities. Once abroad, they commit different kinds of crime, thus tarnishing the image of Bangladesh (Daily Star, 2012). The problem has been unchallenged for long. This trend of Rohingyas going abroad is also threatening the country's labour market overseas. There are roughly about one million Rohingyas live at Teknaf Cox's Bazar and other areas of the Chittagong region. The large number of Rohingyas with Bangladeshi passports indicates the weakness of the administration that allowed the Myanmar nationals to obtain passports of another country illegally. Thousands of Rohingyas have used illegally obtained Bangladeshi passports to travel abroad for work. Although the government holds no data on the exact number of false passports in circulation, it was assumed that about 250,000 Rohingyas had gone abroad with Bangladeshi passports (Mahmud, 2018). The same report mentions Bangladeshi workers are facing an “image crisis” as a result. Many of Rohingyas are involved in criminal activities abroad.

### CONCLUSION

Bangladesh, the next emerging tiger in Asia, are frequently discussed in many international forums across the globe due to her recent incredible development in almost every sector. She is considered one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Meanwhile, Bangladesh graduated from the LDC category to a „low-income country“. Mostly development related

all International reports find that remittance is one of the core reasons for the recent thriving achievements of Bangladesh. As a developing country, Bangladesh is being benefitted from International migration and remittances. As Bangladeshi migrants abroad mostly are an economic migrant.

In spite of the current progress, Bangladeshi immigrants are going through lots of challenges across the globe. It was noticed that major destination countries, for instance, KSA, UAE, Malaysia, were become more challenging to survive for Bangladeshi migrants. Recent recruitment went down day by day. It did not discover enough for new markets for workforce export from Bangladesh. Some illegal attempts to go abroad are being created a negative impact on the whole migration process. After all, the government should take a visionary plan to maximize the gains from migration and remittances. Otherwise, Bangladesh will face formidable challenges for her further expected development.

This study recommends the following actions:

- To hold traditional labour markets firmly
- To explore new opportunities for future immigrants
- To encourage international legal movement
- To prevent human trafficking or unlawful migration
- To arrange skill migration for promoting overseas employment
- To reduce migration cost for getting more employment
- To strengthen labour wings of Bangladeshi mission abroad
- To rehabilitate the migrants who have been deceived
- To handle the Rohingya issue properly for ensuring the image of Bangladesh abroad

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