### Development Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>148,692</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total fertility rate, 2009</th>
<th>Percentage urban, 2009</th>
<th>Net migration rate, 2009 (per 1,000)</th>
<th>Remittances received to GDP, 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>-4.0</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Per capita GDP, 2009 (at current prices in US Dollars)**

**Source:** World Bank (2011), UN DESA (2010).
Bangladesh faces a high unemployment rate, and as a result, labour migration serves as an important livelihood option for many Bangladeshis.

Remittances from Bangladeshi migrants have been growing at an average rate of 17 per cent annually since 2001. The rate surged 32.4 per cent to reach a record high of about $10.7 billion in 2009. Remittances in 2010 were $9.9 billion, about 9 times higher than total foreign direct investment (FDI), 5 times that of official development assistance (ODA) for the country and about 11 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).

In addition to the official channels, a substantial number of migrants also leave the country through irregular channels, causing concern to both the countries of origin and destination.

Human trafficking is a major challenge for Bangladesh. It is a complex issue that is carried out in an organized and complex manner and many of the victims’ families are reluctant to report trafficking cases. Consequently, obtaining accurate data and statistics on this practice is very difficult.

Bangladesh is a developing country with a population estimated to be about 148.7 million in 2010 (World Bank 2011) and a labour force of about 53.7 million people (BBS 2009).

Approximately 43.6 per cent of the labour force is employed in the agriculture sector (BBS 2009), with rice being the single most important product. As a result, most farmers are not likely to be fully employed throughout the year and require either higher wages for the agricultural work to carry them through the year, or additional non-farm income. This combined with the country’s historical circumstances, geographic location and ecology has made Bangladesh a major resource of low-cost labour (Rahman 2000).

There are no official estimates of unemployment and underemployment in Bangladesh, but some sources have suggested that about 5.0 per cent of the labour force is unemployed and 28.7 per cent is underemployed (BBS 2009). Out-migration has consequently helped alleviate the country’s surplus of workers.

Based on estimates, about 9 per cent of the country’s labour force, or 6.9 million Bangladeshis, are working abroad (IOM 2010) and the remittances from overseas migrants contribute to almost 11 per cent of GDP (World Bank 2010).

During the 2008 global financial crisis, the country’s economic growth remained resilient due in part to remittances. Notably, remittance figures have continued to remain strong and steady even though overseas employment of Bangladeshis fell by about 45 per cent in 2009 from the previous year (BMET 2011).

---

2 The condition in which people in a labour force are employed at less than full-time or regular jobs or at jobs inadequate with respect to their training or economic needs.
Labour force participation of Bangladeshi women is estimated to be about 31.5 per cent, a relatively high rate in Asia, but their representation among Bangladeshis in the international labour market in percentage terms is among the lowest in the region (BBS 2009). The relatively low representation is the result of a comprehensive ban imposed on women migration by the Government of Bangladesh in 1997 in response to widespread reports of physical and sexual abuse of domestic workers in some of the destination countries, principally in the region comprising the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). This ban, however, proved to be counterproductive, as women continued to migrate overseas by using unofficial channels. Although the Government lifted the ban in 2004, a number of conditions still remain that make it difficult for women to receive authorization to work abroad. The lifting of the ban, however, has raised the level of women’s participation in the overseas employment sector over the last decade, albeit it is still low. Currently, women migrants constitute approximately 7 per cent of the total number of labour migrants going abroad for work through official channels (BMET 2011). Various studies argue however, that the figure is not representative of the actual number, as a large number of women continue to migrate through irregular channels due to the restrictions imposed on them on migrating through official channels.

According to government sources, temporary labour migration officially began in 1976. More than 7.1 million migrant workers are estimated to have been employed overseas between 1976 and 2010 (BMET 2011).

The number of migrants leaving Bangladesh averaged 250,000 a year between 2001 and 2005, rose to almost 400,000 in 2006, and then doubled to 832,600 in 2007. Overseas employment reached a record high in 2008, with 875,055 workers leaving the country through official channels. In 2009, overseas labour employment fell 47 per cent from the previous year, due in part to the global economic crisis. The annual flow slowed down even more in 2010, with about 390,000 workers leaving the country (figure 1).

In 2010, the main destination countries for migrant workers from Bangladesh were Bahrain, Lebanon, Oman, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates. About 80 per cent of migrants who moved to Lebanon were women, a reflection of the increasing role of women migrants from Bangladesh. While the main destination subregion is still Western Asia, some countries are emerging as new destination locations, such as Italy, Mauritius and the Republic of Korea. In fact, recently, there have been significant shifts in the key destination countries. For a long time, Saudi Arabia was the host country for more than half of the Bangladeshi migrants but this number dropped sharply in 2009 and 2010. Similarly, Malaysia was an important destination country for several years, but recently the outflows to this South-East Asian country have tapered off (figure 2).

---

3 The member States of the GCC are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.
Figure 1.
Annual labour migration outflows from Bangladesh, 2000–2010

About 50 per cent of temporary migrants from Bangladesh are classified as low skilled, 16 per cent semi-skilled, 31 per cent skilled and only 3 per cent professionals (BMET 2011). Bangladesh is looking to steadily turn its human capital resource into an asset through training, skills development and market research programmes and reap benefits from the labour migration process. This, however, presents a significant challenge due to the fact that low-skilled workers comprise about half of the migrants seeking employment abroad. These migrants generally lack basic education, and often do not have the opportunity to partake in further training to develop their skills.

Currently, the skill development training facilities in the country, both in the public and private sectors, are limited. However, efforts are being made to enhance and develop the capacities of the existing 38 skills training institutions to ensure that migrants are better prepared for working overseas. In addition, the Government has implemented initiatives in this area, such as the Skill Development Fund, to be used as a revolving fund to finance skills training programmes. The Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) is now estimated to be able to train 50,000 workers annually in different trades (BMET 2011).

Systematic research into overseas labour market prospects and trends is not well developed in Bangladesh, and overseas employment takes place predominantly on an ad hoc basis. As a result, the country lacks a well-managed labour migration policy which would match demand in specific sectors with the properly skilled supply of labour. Only recently, the Government set up a market research unit in BMET.

The private sector is the most common channel for migration, accounting for more than 95 per cent of the migrant outflows. Within the sector, migrations are either arranged through personal networks (59 per cent) by the prospective migrants or through licensed recruiting agencies (40 per cent). Private recruitment agencies are further supported by the presence of sub-agents or middlemen (known as dalals) who work at the grass-roots level. The middlemen, who are often relatives, neighbours or returnee migrants, work with the recruitment agencies and provide a one-stop service to migrants aspiring to go abroad. For the low-skilled potential migrant, the middleman offers services, such as obtaining passports, visas, ticketing, government clearance and other documentations, in return for a fee. They also assist in making arrangements for departing migrants to obtain pre-departure orientation and training if required. The agencies, in essence, play a significant role in helping the migrants access their required travel-related documentation and carry out other official procedures. But, this service also often comes with its share of deceit and exploitation. As the middlemen are not registered with the recruiting agents or the governments, it has become a major challenge to monitor their activities and in turn, many of them exploit the migrants by charging exorbitant fees, in comparison to the amounts fixed by the government.

There is also significant migration from Bangladesh to Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, which notably has increased in recent years. The main destination countries are the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America. In previous years, more than 10,000 Bangladeshis migrated to the United States of America annually (OECD 2011).
Figure 2.
Outflow of migration workers from Bangladesh to main destination countries, 1990–2010

Source: ESCAP Labour Migration database, based on data from Bangladesh Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment (unpublished).
Remittances play a key role in the Bangladesh economy. In 2010, remittance flows to Bangladesh reached a record $10.7 billion (figure 3), which placed the country among the top remittances receivers in the world. The increase in remittances also reflects the spikes in out-migration in 2007 and 2008.

As stated earlier, the migration of women from Bangladesh is still low. However, in recent years, the number has picked up, mainly to countries in Western Asia, from only 454 in 2000 to 24,838 in 2010. In contrast, the flow of male migrants has dropped in the past two years. Approximately 80 per cent of women migrants work as domestic workers (BMET 2011).

Main destination countries of migrant women have changed over time. In the early 1990s, Malaysia was the main destination country but by the end of that decade, the flow of Bangladeshi women migrants to the country almost stopped, with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates becoming the main destination countries. In 2009 and 2010, the majority of women labour migrants went to Lebanon. Mauritius has also emerged as an important destination for women migrants (BMET 2011).
As a result of restrictions placed on Bangladeshi women seeking employment abroad, many of them have resorted to private and informal channels, making them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Also facilities and activities, to support women migrants, such as skills development and training, are limited. However, in light of growing recognition of the potential of female labour migration from Bangladesh, the Government recently adopted significant measures to encourage and support women labour migration through such activities as seeking out new markets, skills development training and pre-departure orientations.

In addition to the official movement mentioned above, a large number of women reportedly cross the border illegally to India and become irregular migrants. Due to the nature of this flow, the exact number of these migrants is difficult to ascertain.

Although Bangladesh has strong diasporas in different countries of the world, with an overwhelming majority in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America, tapping these communities to support the overall development of the country through business, trade links, investments, remittances, skill circulation and exchange of experiences has only recently been considered.

In-migration

Bangladesh is primarily a labour-sending country, but some incoming migration flows take place, due in part to the porous borders and cultural affinities with neighbouring countries in the region. However, data on in-migration to Bangladesh remain limited.

Bangladesh hosts refugees belonging to an ethnic minority from Myanmar, known as the Rohingya. In the early 1990s, more than 250,000 people belonging to this ethnic minority entered Bangladesh. The Government of Bangladesh recognized Rohingya as refugees and created 22 camps. Since then, about 236,000 Rohingya have been repatriated and to date only two camps remain, the Kutupalong Camp and the Nayapara Camp, with a total of population of 28,000. Besides the registered refugees, an estimated 200,000–400,000 Rohingya have crossed into Bangladesh in the past two decades and settled predominantly in the south-east of the country bordering Myanmar (UNHCR 2007).

Human trafficking

Human trafficking is major problem for Bangladesh. Given the complex, organized and clandestine nature of the crime, combined with reluctance of the victim's family to report cases of trafficking, it is difficult to obtain accurate and reliable data and statistics on human trafficking (UNODC 2011).

In addition to the conventional perception of trafficking, which tends to be limited to the sexual exploitation of women and children, Bangladeshis are highly vulnerable to labour trafficking due to the large number of labour migrants from the country. Recognized labour trafficking offences under the Government's legal framework include exploitation of labour at destination countries, infringement of contracts and bonded labour along with other forms of exploitation. It does not account for, among others, organ transplant and child labour. In response to all these challenges, the Government has drafted a new comprehensive law on
The current legal framework related to out-migration in Bangladesh includes the Emigration Ordinance, 1982; Emigration Rules, 2002; Recruitment Agents’ Conduct and License Rules, 2002; Wage Earners’ Welfare Fund Rules, 2002; and Overseas Employment Policy, 2006.

The Government of Bangladesh developed the Overseas Employment Policy in 2006 to define its policy structure and implementation activities for the protection of the rights of migrants in the country and abroad; exploring new markets and human resource development, recruitment process, welfare of expatriates, remittance flows and investments; and economic and social reintegration of returnee migrants. In addition, the Policy sets the roles and responsibilities of the different government ministries and agencies that work on issues related to overseas employment.

On 11 April 2011, the Government ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families without any reservations. However, the ratification has yet to be published with the United Nations Treaties Section. The Government is expected to enact the necessary enabling legislation to support its implementation, and in turn introduce adequate protection mechanisms for Bangladeshi migrant workers against exploitation and abuse during all stages of the migration process. Bangladesh has yet to ratify the other key international instruments listed in table 1.

### Status of ratification of key international instruments and legal framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International Instrument</th>
<th>Entry into Force</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ILO Convention concerning Migration for Employment (rev 1949) (Nº.97)</td>
<td>22 January 1952</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO Convention concerning Migrations in Abusive Conditions and the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) (Nº.143)</td>
<td>09 December 1978</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families</td>
<td>01 July 2003</td>
<td>ratified 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children</td>
<td>25 December 2003</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Air and Sea</td>
<td>28 January 2004</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees</td>
<td>22 April 1954</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees</td>
<td>04 October 1967</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ILO (no date), United Nations (no date).
References


• United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2011). Interview with Zakir Hussain, Dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of Chittagong, in Bangladesh on 9 June 2009.