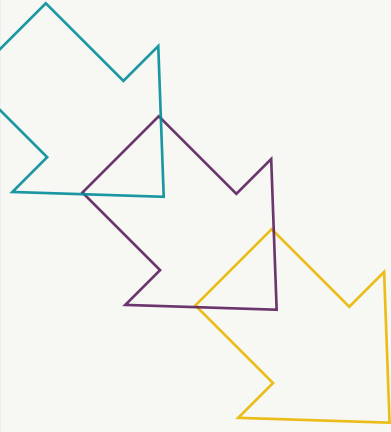
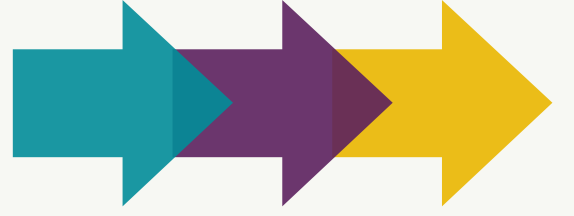


**CLEAR**

Covid-19 Learning, Evidence  
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**ক্লিয়ার**

কোভিড-১৯ লার্নিং, এভিডেন্স  
অ্যান্ড রিসার্চ প্রোগ্রাম



Research Briefing

# Impact of Covid-19 on Migration in Bangladesh

April 2022

# Impact of Covid-19 on Migration in Bangladesh

**T**his briefing summarises priority areas for future research and key stakeholders with whom to engage, as identified in the scoping paper ***Impact of Covid-19 on Migration in Bangladesh*** by Rakib Hossain, Afsana Binte Khaleque and Sakib Mahmood from the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD). The scoping paper and this briefing were commissioned for the Covid-19 Learning, Evidence and Research Programme in Bangladesh (CLEAR). CLEAR aims to build a consortium of research partners to deliver policy-relevant research and evidence for Bangladesh to support the Covid-19 response and inform preparation for future shocks.

## Migration in the context of Covid-19

Migrants with overseas employment play a significant role in the socioeconomic development of Bangladesh. In 2020, the country received around \$US15bn in remittances, accounting for 12 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) and generating employment for 9 per cent of the total active workforce.

After the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, more than 400,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers were involuntarily returned to Bangladesh while those who remained abroad faced loss of income, restrictions on movement, problems accessing vaccinations, and other difficulties triggered by the disease and the response to it from their host countries.

Female migrants working as domestic workers became even more vulnerable to abuse and harassment, coupled with a sharp increase in workload due to male family members staying at home during the lockdown.

Those aspiring to migrate were stranded with an uncertain future as the pandemic forced at least 85,000 travel suspensions or postponements for aspiring migrants.

Following the outbreak of Covid-19, households with a migrant family member have experienced a 25 per cent reduction in income relative to non-migrant families. This has left migrant families having to reprioritise their expenses, leading to the early marriage of their daughters, stopping children's education, and changing health-care-seeking behaviour.

State and non-state actors have taken a host of measures to contain the impact of the migrant crisis in Bangladesh during the pandemic. However, substantial policy and research gaps exist which, if addressed, could support these measures and inform future responses.

## Existing data gaps and research opportunities

The economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on returnee migrant households has been a focus of much of the research which has been conducted so far. However, few studies have examined the effects of migration disruption and its numerous implications for the lives of migrant families. These vary from economic costs such as decreased income, increased pressure of debt payments, and difficulty obtaining work through to social repercussions such as hostility of the host community and declining mental/psychosocial health. Specific areas for future study might include the following:

### Poverty and vulnerability

- **How migrant workers assess the trade-off between the risks and rewards**, and to what extent information and awareness campaigns can benefit migrants and promote safe migration.
- **The coping strategies and alternative options for migrants stranded in Bangladesh and aspirant migrants** who face an uncertain future and enormous debt burdens.
- **The impact on family members due to abrupt termination of migrant income.** A systematic quantitative survey could provide representative insights and inform policy.
- **The impact of the pandemic on migrants' life trajectories**, the experience of migrants who stayed in host countries, and those of the receiving communities. There are significant knowledge gaps on the social and psychological impacts of the pandemic on international migrants.
- **The hostility experienced by migrants upon return to their own communities** and its eventual consequences needs further exploratory work with a special focus on the additional psychosocial stresses for female migrants.

## Service delivery, accountability, and governance

- **The potential of social safety nets for returnee migrants** to provide a buffer during future crises, and the long-term efficacy of such programmes.
- **The gaps in state and private migration processes** and mechanisms that must be strengthened to ensure that migrants receive efficient, reliable, and accessible migration services.
- **How to improve coordination and integration** across the migration sector needs to be explored and devised. Research can help identify the mismatches between the interest and motives of the different stakeholders and explore the less tangible incentives and incompatibilities among them.
- **The corruption and inefficiency of the migration process** has so far received little attention from researchers despite numerous reports in the local media.

## Rights of the marginalised population and disadvantaged groups

- **The impact of the Covid-19 crisis on female migrants** is still unclear, and no systematic survey exists on female migrants to inform policymaking.
- **Can community-based models of partnership between non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government promote migrant workers' rights** and support the creation of associations to unify Bangladeshi migrant workers?

## Innovations

- **Can productive utilisation of remittances** through innovative products to stimulate savings and spur investments benefit migrants?
- **Can employment opportunities** across the world be diversified for prospective Bangladeshi migrant workers, especially for female migrants?
- A comprehensive and **nationally representative survey covering the cross-sections of migrant workers and a resulting data set** is needed to inform future policies aimed at reintegration and rehabilitation of migrant workers.



Bangladeshi migrant workers listening to a Bangladeshi official, who is translating the instructions of the camp's authorities, and explaining how to proceed with registration.

Photo credit: SEBDECH LICENSED UNDER CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

## Key stakeholders

The primary responsible ministry for migration in Bangladesh is the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE). The Wage Earners' Welfare Board (WEWB) and Bangladesh Overseas Employment and Services Limited (BOESL) are among the other government agencies that manage migration from Bangladesh.

Other ministries and government agencies such as the National Skills Development Authority (NSDA under the Prime Minister's Office, PMO) and the Bureau of Manpower, Training and Employment (BMET, an agency under MoEWOE) are engaged in migrant skills development.

Among international development partners, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) run migration-specific projects while BRAC, the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), and the Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP) are some notable names that work in migration research and programme implementation. Probashi Kallyan Bank (PKB) is the state-owned bank in Bangladesh, a specialised financial institution for non-resident Bangladeshis.

## Reference

Hossain, R.; Khaleque, A.B. and Mahmood, S. (2022) *Impact of Covid-19 on Migration in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: BRAC Institute of Governance and Development

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This Research Briefing was written by Aurin Huq and edited by Alan Stanley at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) based on original work by Rakib Hossain, Afsana Binte Khaleque and Sakib Mahmood from the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD).

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