



Research Paper

# Halfway Home: Stigmatization against Bangladeshi International Reverse Migrants in the Post COVID-19 Economy

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**Abstract** - Bangladesh, once known for its economic success stories, now faces the challenges of reverse migration. The nationwide lockdown and the sealing of international borders to control the COVID-19 pandemic led to the reverse migration of informal migrant workers from India. To facilitate their reverse migration and seamless reintegration into the post-COVID economy, the Central and State governments had to jointly come up with policies, which they failed to do so. This paper focuses on the stigmatization faced by Bangladeshi International Reverse Migrants in the post COVID-19 economy by their host and home countries, mainly due to the neglecting attitudes of governments of Bangladesh and India. The paper focuses on how COVID-19, lack of protection by employers, inability to bring back remittances, and ineffective public administration aggravated the situation. The paper provides recommendations to make reverse migration a seamless process that doesn't lead to negative societal behaviors. These recommendations include effective pre-migration preparation to extend through the whole migration cycle and including return and reintegration planning.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

According to estimates from the United Nations Population Division, Bangladesh has one of the greatest migrant populations in the world. About 8 million of its 160 million inhabitants live abroad, ranking only behind India, Mexico, China, Russia, and Syria. Bangladeshi migrants remit much of their savings back home every month. (Hooper, 2020)

Bangladesh has successfully fought against poverty and transformed itself into one of South Asia's economic success stories. It was on course to leave the United Nations' list of least developed countries by 2024. Unfortunately, the nation's advancements were hampered in part by having to handle one of the largest humanitarian crises: receiving 1.1 million Rohingya who fled neighboring Myanmar (*Myanmar Situation*, n.d.).

These challenges were heavily exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The public-health crisis was aggravated by the economic ripple effects resulting from the shutting down of industries - the consequences were faced by Bangladeshis working abroad: Large-scale job loss and salary reductions eventually lead to the rapid increase in the reverse migration of Bangladeshi workers.

Reverse migration refers to the phenomenon where workers migrate back to their native country for reasons such as loss of jobs and unstable employment. Many industries and economic activities were affected by the COVID-19 lockdown, which worsened the circumstances of daily wage workers, the majority of whom are migrants. Reverse migration began as a result of the lack of employment opportunities and the deteriorating living conditions, with all migrants returning to their home countries through whichever methods possible. There are about 450 million of these migrants, whose migration is either directly or indirectly related to the pursuit of employment (*Bangladesh : Development News, Research, Data*, n.d.). At the destination sites, they are involved in making significant contributions to the manufacturing, urban services, and construction industries, all of which are in high growth. Bangladeshi employees who had previously been working abroad are

in a challenging social and economic condition as a result of COVID-19 and its devastating effects. This is due to the fact that migrant workers are important to Bangladesh's economy, contributing about USD 15 billion into it each year, directly supporting Bangladesh's socioeconomic development (*COVID-19's Impacts on Migrant Workers From Bangladesh*, n.d.). Bangladeshi migrant workers experience negative effects such as unemployment, short working hours, loneliness, poor quality of life, social discrimination, and mental stress while their dependents at home experience financial hardship due to the limited or reduced cash flow from their working relatives. Due to the effects of COVID-19 in their host countries, a sizable number of migrant workers have been forced to go back to Bangladesh, and many of them live in constant fear of being sent back as well. As a result, COVID-19 exacerbates a number of socioeconomic difficulties like unemployment, family members using up reserve funds, and a decline in remittance inflows. The most pressing and crucial necessity in this scenario is to provide Bangladeshi workers working abroad and those who have returned home with financial and social security. The main reason that the Bangladeshi International Workers were deprived of their basic human rights was the governments of both their home country as well as India, neglected them throughout. Even though these workers bring remittances back to the countries and help increase the productive economic activities, they are still ignored and not considered a valuable resource for the nation. Reverse migration is seen as a challenge, when it can prove to be an opportunity for nations to do better. Effective pre-migration preparation to extend through the whole migration cycle and include return and reintegration planning, cooperation between the countries of origin and destination to be encouraged to support sustainable return and reintegration during the migratory cycle, meeting the demands of stakeholders for capacity-building to aid in efforts to promote reintegration, are a few recommendations that would help in solving the problem of ineffective reverse migration.

In this paper, the main focus will be on the Bangladeshi workers who are facing the impacts of COVID-19 in India, and had to return to Bangladesh due to the same from India.

The rest of this study is organized as follows: Section II reviews various existing studies and discusses their weaknesses. Section III presents the methodology used for research. Section IV then includes the limitations faced while conducting research followed by Section V which includes the findings of the literature review. Section VI then includes the discussion - policy proposals to help decrease the stigma against reverse migrants as well as past case studies that have successfully tackled this program. Lastly, Section VII consists of the conclusion of the paper.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **COVID-19 and Stigmatization**

As a result of COVID-19, the most vulnerable people, such as migratory workers and their children, have suffered greatly, which has created widespread global disruption. Measures of containment, such as border closures and limits on travel, have had a substantial impact on migrants, aggravating already-present vulnerabilities and possibly raising transmission risks. For vulnerable groups, especially their families who rely heavily on remittances, a loss of income has resulted in instability, elevated risks of violence, and mounting debts.

The risk of abuse, exploitation, and human trafficking has grown due to isolation and limited mobility, particularly for children and female migrant workers (including by employers and partners). Women and girls are more likely to be at danger of abuse when homes are under the heightened strain brought on by security, health, and financial concerns, as well as crowded living situations. Excluding migrant workers from the informal economy from COVID-19 response mechanisms increases the danger of exploitation for those workers and their families.

Closing schools has exacerbated the vulnerabilities of migrating children. In addition to offering instruction, schools also serve as a refuge, a food supply, a chance to recognise abuse, and a vital informational hub. The curtailing of child protection services, to which migrant children already have restricted access, is now made worse by the loss of this safety mechanism. They have faced considerable obstacles while trying to access chances for online learning.

Even before the pandemic, attitudes towards migrant workers were typically negative. They have only gotten worse since then. According to The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, there have been allegations of increased verbal abuse against migrants and some nationalities as they were thought to bring viruses with them (Türk, 2020).

These types of stigmatization and discrimination are not only wrong but also hazardous, since they put women migrant workers, their families, and their children at risk of gender-based and xenophobic assault, harassment, and trafficking.

Women who migrate to other countries work in a variety of vocations, such as domestic work, hospitality, processing seafood, manufacturing, agriculture, and construction. Many people, particularly those working in care, are playing key front-line roles in the pandemic response. The living and working conditions of these migrant populations may put them at a higher risk of transmission. Many people might not have access to basic services, especially when they most need them, as when they are being subjected to abuse and violence.

The fear of deportation keeps undocumented or irregular migrant immigrants from getting examined, getting health screenings, or getting treatment, which is bad for their own health and the health of others. In addition to the fear that they will lose their jobs if they test positive, migrant workers are more likely to be exploited due to widening wage inequalities, which exacerbates already-existing prejudice in some professions.

Recent research has revealed the stigmatization of migrants both before and after government repatriation, and it has been noted that the migrants were treated as carriers of the COVID-19 virus back home. (What Is the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Immigrants and Their Children?, 2020). Some even faced 'caste-based' discrimination at quarantine centers. Migrants have explained how those belonging to lower castes were kept on floors without facilities. It was even observed that when migrant workers reached their home country, they were treated as outsiders in their own villages, and started to feel discriminated against from their home.

#### **The Lack of Protection by Employers**

Lack of protection from their employers was a significant issue for migrant workers in the nation they were employed. As seen, migrant workers—especially those from other countries—who were pushed to the margins—were the group most severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the abrupt and unanticipated lockdown, migrant laborers who were employed in hand-to-mouth industries including construction, hotels, and workplaces were left jobless and destitute. (*THE PANDEMIC AND MIGRATION CRISIS IN INDIA Stories From the Hinterland*, n.d.). Although wage theft is a long-standing problem, the COVID-19-related migration crisis made it more prominent. Their agony was made worse by the employers' carelessness, widespread salary theft, and forced layoffs of numerous migrant employees from abroad. Despite issuing an advisory promising the internal migrants food and shelter, payment of their due wages, and severe action against landlords who forcibly evict them, the Indian government's warning was ineffective in protecting them. Numerous factors contribute to the insecure conditions of both kinds of migrant labor. First of all, there is no enforceable contract between the worker and the contractor, making them unofficial employees. They lack social networks to rely on in urban areas and other nations, are less educated, are not united or supported by trade unions, and lack knowledge of the employment market. This renders them dependent on their contractors and reduces their bargaining power in the case of exploitation. Describing the work condition of internal migrants, the Periodic Labor Force Survey (2017–18) conducted by the Ministry of Labor & Employment revealed that for more than 70% of the workers in the non-agricultural sector with a regular salary, consisting of mostly migrants, did not have a written job contract and 50% were not enrolled for any social security benefits. (*Report on Employment in Informal Sector and Conditions of Informal Employment (2013-14)*, n.d.)

Additionally, migrants cannot find affordable housing or rental options. Due to ignorance and the costly nature of the legal system, the majority of workers who experience wage theft are unable to register complaints. When international migrants return to their home country, it is even more difficult for them to lodge complaints against their foreign employers. The main reason that migrant workers were forced to return to their villages was that they were not provided with even the most basic social and economic protection. From this research, it may be inferred that workers might have remained in their place of employment if they had a safety net. Additionally, if their return had been well planned, it might have made their reverse migration more smooth and prevented the virus from spreading. But during the lockdown, there was widespread unemployment even among the general population, which has further weakened the bargaining power of migrant workers in the post-COVID economy.

#### **Inability to Provide Financial Support to Families**

As the virus spread, many migrant workers had their employment abruptly terminated or suspended, leaving them without a source of income. While others had salary cuts or were mandated to take leave, other employees were stood down without pay. Some people were not paid for the work they had done. (*Locked Down and in Limbo: The Global Impact of COVID-19 on Migrant Worker Rights and Recruitment*, n.d.).

Lockdowns and border closures frequently left migrant workers stranded. Others were abruptly repatriated without working systems or established processes. The public health law, in some cases, was used to justify their removal. Returnees were then often stigmatized against and forced to spend extended periods of time in quarantine since it was thought that they were COVID-19 carriers.

This was especially true in nations like India that employ large numbers of migrant labor. Due to unexpected contract terminations, Bangladeshi migrant laborers experienced significant employment losses.

Along with losing their jobs, migrant workers were frequently barred, directly or indirectly, from COVID-19 social protection programmes offered to national employees, such as basic healthcare and safeguards against unexpected job and wage losses. They become considerably more vulnerable to the pandemic as a result.

Many migrant workers lost their savings and accumulated extra debt as a result of being unemployed, unable to leave, without any assistance. They utilized their savings to pay for their basic needs and the needs of their families or to try to return home. Debt has consequences for the reintegration of reverse migrants on the financial, social, and psychological levels. After a "failed" migration, migrants may encounter threats, mistreatment, or violence from moneylenders when they return home.

Failing to provide their family with remittances, studies show that migrant workers were not welcome by their families after they returned to Bangladesh. Their families relied on migrant workers to maintain their livelihood, but since the migrant workers were not being able to help them that way, they were isolated. Being back home was not the same for migrant workers without their remittances (Mahmud & Nayyar, n.d.).

Recent research reveals that international migrants returning from India to Bangladesh claimed that their villagers kept their distance for a few weeks even after they had successfully completed the quarantine period in both the origin and destination states and had undergone the required Covid tests (Khan, 2021). According to the studies, they experienced various forms of discrimination in the village, including physical segregation, isolation, and hostility, as well as threats to stop providing migrant workers and their families with the most basic necessities on the suspicion that they may have COVID-19. Similar discrimination was also observed by construction workers who were returning from India to their villages in Bangladesh.

The Bangladeshi migrant workers were stripped of their accommodation at their destination country, and were forced to live in small and unsanitary quarters. Workers had to reside in the most inconvenient and unhygienic places such as under sheds, in parking lots, sometimes for more than two weeks. These migrant laborers, who were returning from Indian areas including Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, and West Bengal, if they were lucky enough, used to receive one meal a day on average, from voluntary organizations. The government support was lacking. When compared to other Indian nationals who could afford to internally reverse migrate within India, the foreign migrants felt discriminated against because they had to pay for their own travel expenses during their repatriation, which they mostly couldn't afford. When these workers thought they would finally feel at ease in their home and destination country, they were still treated as outcasts, which had a detrimental effect on their mental health.

### **Ineffective Public Administration**

The Indian government does not possess accurate data on international migrants. The National Sample Survey 2007–2008 and the Census 2011, the findings of which were made public in part in 2020, were the last official data. The Indian government failed to gather important information during the lockdown on international migrant deaths that took place during reverse migration (*The Plight of Migrants During COVID-19 and the Impact of Circular Migration in India: A Systematic Review*, n.d.). The lack of knowledge culminated in the federal and state governments' lack of a defined plan for managing immigrant mobility, which also led to non-coverage of social security services.

The Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, passed in 1979, was intended to safeguard migrant workers from mistreatment and exploitation by unregistered contractors during the recruiting and transportation of these individuals, but it has not been properly carried out (Sen, 2020). Additionally, since 2020, it has been governed by the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, which is applicable to businesses with five or more employees which means migrants who work in small businesses are no longer subject to the law. Low-income immigrant communities lack security due to exclusion, subpar implementation, ignorance, and a challenging application process for government programmes that

provide affordable housing, food and cooking oil subsidies through the public distribution system, and affordable public healthcare (International labor Organization, 2020).

It should be highlighted that in the case of international migrants, there were no such short-term support packages from the central government. Kerala was the only Indian state to provide them a cash benefit once of Rs 5000. (Mathrubhumi, 2020)

Due to the lack of an effective public administration system, the international migrants were left alone and stranded, which only led to their intensified discrimination and stigmatization.

### III. METHODOLOGY

Data on Bangladeshi international workers' reverse migration trends in the post COVID-19 economy is widely available in recent literature and government publications. Data for this research paper has been drawn from archival methods as well as recent literature. Articles that focus on how social reintegration of reverse migrations has been done in the past were carefully analyzed, and methods that are on par with Bangladesh's foreign policy can be adopted for the social welfare of the workers. Interviews conducted with Bangladeshi international workers to understand their experiences with stigmatization and discrimination were also carefully studied. Data from International labor Organization, OECD, and Ministry of labor and Employment (Government of India) was crucial in formulating results.

I performed the initial screening, data extraction, and title and abstract screening on the papers. The full text evaluation included articles that discussed the plight of migrant laborers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The chosen articles were examined for eligibility after the initial screening and full text reading. The articles were chosen if they emphasized the plight of migrants during the lockdown and also addressed their psychological concerns during this crisis in the Indian setting. They also had to fall under the time period of 2019–20. Additionally, data screening was done for the articles that addressed the issue of Bangladeshi laborers.

### IV. LIMITATIONS

A frequent challenge I faced was the limited availability of data. I was able to find extensive data on the Indian Government and how they dealt with internal migrants, but was not able to do so for international migrants, because the data has not been recollected since 2011. It was also difficult to find data that deeply analyzed Bangladeshi workers' problems. For that I had to view past interviews conducted, and break down the workers' statements to form an argument. Data filtration was also a challenge, as it was hard to determine what data is applicable to my research and what is not.

### V. FINDINGS

#### **Analysis of the ineffective measures taken by both India and Bangladesh's government to reduce the discrimination and stigmatization faced by Reverse Migrants**

The main reason that the Bangladeshi International Workers were deprived of their basic human rights was the governments of both their home country and India neglected them throughout. Even though these workers bring remittances back to the countries and help increase productive economic activities, they are still ignored and not considered a valuable resource for the nation. Reverse migration is seen as a challenge, when it can prove to be an opportunity for nations to do better. Governments themselves treating these workers as secondary citizens is the major reason stigmatization and discrimination is prevalent against them in local areas.

Governments of Bangladesh and India failed to jointly formulate policies for the seamless process of reintegration, which exacerbated the situation. Following points highlight the inadequacies in the system:

**Poor Social Protection Coverage:** Since labor is on India's concurrent list, it is crucial that the central government establishes a standard that the other states comply with. While the international migrant community heavily contributes to their home country's economy, said home countries excluded them from economic assistance. Even though the International Migrants contribute significantly to the Bangladeshi economy through remittances, they were left on their own during the crisis to pay for their survival in their employment country. They were not given instruments to cover their requirements and travel costs upon repatriation. Compared to the internal migrants, this subject matter did not receive considerable media coverage. Workers are not registered bank accounts, pay protection, and registration under social programmes (*Express News Service*, n.d.).

**Faults in the distribution system of stimulus packages:** Even for those who were able to get one-time financial aid, the amount was far too low to cover even the most basic needs for a month. Migrants were left in a tough situation because of the pandemic and frequent lockdowns since they couldn't find work in their village and

were subject to travel restrictions, which made it impossible for them to look for work in urban regions. Creating jobs in the origin states and under rural employment guarantee programmes like MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005) should have come first, even though skill mapping and database maintenance were positive moves in the right direction. Prioritizing the key strategies to fix the situation was not given attention to.

***Lack of data on returnees and their patterns of reintegration:*** Few countries monitor or have the capacity to monitor the return movements of migrant workers or to keep databases on returnees, whereas the majority of origin countries record worker departures. The dissemination of information on deportations and expulsions may be viewed as too sensitive by the countries of destination. It is challenging to deliver targeted services or interventions based on the profiles of returnees and their geographic distribution in the absence of information.

***Stagnant home economic conditions:*** Decisions for returning are significantly influenced by the economic and social environment in the home country. If the structural economic issues, unemployment, poverty, and conflicts that initially encouraged outmigration have not materially changed, migrant workers and the diaspora may have less incentive to return, and the national labor market may not be able to accommodate returning migrant workers. The overall economic, political, and social conditions of the nation of origin have a significant impact on reintegration policies and a person's reintegration process.

***Absence of provisions for skills certification and skills recognition:*** Most returning workers, including low-skilled workers, pick up new social and professional skills while working abroad. However, neither companies in the countries of destination nor the countries of origin upon return have a simplified mechanism for certifying abilities. Recognition of skills and matching of skills to labor market demands help reintegration. Although the ILO issued draft recommendations for returning employees' skill recognition in 2010, there appears to have been no further action (ILO, 2010).

Without a uniform social support system, any reintegration effort will be ineffective for both internal migrants and international migrants upon their return.

This study emphasized the different areas where international migrants' experiences varied from one another, particularly during the pandemic. Because they fell into different groups in terms of their intended job locations and migration routes, there were some evident disparities between them. However, disparities in terms of varying media coverage, participation in assistance packages and reintegration programmes, high migration expenses, and upkeep of accurate databases can all be attributed to the government's disregard of migrants. In this case, both the Indian government as well as Bangladeshi government were at fault. The conclusions reached are crucial for highlighting the vulnerability of all migrants, regardless of their category, despite the fact that migration benefits both the source and the destination countries.

Their experiences overlapped in terms of the lack of preparation and protection for the migrant community that left them stranded, financial difficulties such as wage theft, layoffs, and surviving on meager savings, lack of social security protection, lack of governmental and employer accountability, social prejudice and hostility, mobility issues both before and after repatriation, difficulty accessing justice, ineffective reintegrative measures, and vulnerability. These similarities highlight the general precarity of the Bangladeshi immigrant community as well as evident flaws in the formulation and application of migration policies. Working on these issues is necessary to make migration, both domestically and internationally, a smoother process from which all parties gain, particularly in the wake of a crisis.

## VI. DISCUSSION

The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families (ICRMW) and other universal human rights instruments affirm that the right of citizens to return to their home countries is a human right that is recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Reverse migration has historically been viewed favorably as a popular tactic to "reverse the brain drain" brought on by the long-term relocation of qualified workers abroad. In light of apparent connections between migration and development and the growth of temporary labor migration programmes, the repatriation of migrants and their reintegration in their home countries have recently attracted increased attention. The temporary migration cycle, which includes the pre-departure, employment abroad, and return stages, depends on the return of employees. Assisted return, re-admission, and deportation programmes for rejected workers in irregular status have been introduced by destination nations as a result of forced migration. One of the least studied and enumerated areas is return migration. Return migration was referred to as the "unwritten chapter in the history of migration" by

(Harkins, n.d.) Few nations keep track of migrant workers' returns or keep records of returnees. The wide variety of return and reintegration patterns makes assessment more challenging.

A few general principles should be followed by source and destination countries to ensure that reverse migration takes place smoothly for International Migrants, especially in crisis cases.

The next section provides us with analysis of case studies specific to countries that have faced similar issues like Bangladesh and India before, and how they've successfully dealt with their situation:

1. **Republic of Korea:** *The Happy Return Programme of the Employment Permit System* - In order to prevent people from overstaying, the Republic of Korea introduced the Happy Return Programme to its Employment Permit System (EPS) in 2009. The initiative was laudable, as the majority of Asian agreements or memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with Gulf Cooperation Council nations only included repatriation upon contract termination or repatriation due to contract violations or being a threat to national security. Migrant workers could now take advantage of the Happy Return Programme's vocational training, pre-return recruitment services, such as assistance with job applications for Korean companies with offices in the worker's country, and administrative support for insurance benefit claims, such as departure guarantee insurance, in order to get ready to return home (Khadka, n.d.).

It acknowledges that the responsibility for a successful reintegration lies equally with the country of origin and the Korean EPS. Before returning, workers received vocational training that was not only applicable to their existing jobs, but training that could help them excel in future jobs as well. Training is offered in a variety of disciplines, including computer application, computer graphics, welding (electrical, special, pipe), nail art, skincare, masonry, tiling, flower arranging, personal computer maintenance, and Korean language interpretation (HRD Korea, n.d.).

In the Republic of Korea, training includes lessons in occupational skills, pre-return job placement assistance, and administrative assistance with things like insurance claims. Through placement services and career fairs, assistance is offered in connecting to jobs in the home country. Upon their return, migrants also receive specialized training so they can work for Korean companies or other organizations. Additionally, successful returnees who have established down deliver informative talks. These opportunities are particularly prevalent in the countries of Cambodia, Indonesia, Mongolia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, where enterprises from the Republic of Korea are well-represented. The Republic of Korea government is responsible for paying all costs associated with the training. For accumulated work experience, certificates are issued.

Community networking services are made available to returnees at EPS offices of Human Resources Development Services of Korea, where they can access information about the Republic of Korea after returning to their home country. The Happy Return Programme has implications for migration and development that go beyond "meeting the immediate concerns of domestic labor trends, which opens the potential for the EPS to also serve as a vehicle for regional co-development and as the intersection of Korea's labor migration and foreign development aid policies," according to a review of the EPS (*Korea EPS - Layout*, n.d.).

Only workers with documentation are presently eligible for the initiative. Given their increased need for support, it would be a good idea to include illegal workers in the initiative as well. However, some employees have voiced concerns about the fact that these training sessions take place on Sundays, which is their only day off, or during workdays when they are unable to participate (*ILO*, n.d.).

The next section below discusses regional guidelines on the return and reintegration of migrant workers participating in the EPS.

2. **Republic of Korea:** *Regional guidelines on the return and reintegration of migrant workers participating in the EPS* - These recommendations, which were created in 2015 as part of the ILO-Korea Partnership Programme, aim to provide the EPS origin countries with a framework for the policy actions, institutional frameworks, and programmes or services necessary for the successful return and reintegration of migrant workers. The Guidelines provide information on pre-departure, employment abroad, return, and reintegration phases of temporary migration. To ensure the smooth return and reintegration of workers, it proposes the establishment of a national coordination office in the country of origin. The Guidelines stress the significance of keeping EPS worker databases current throughout the migration period. Pre-departure, onsite

support, before returning to the country of origin, and return are the sections under which the Guidelines are organized.

The discussion of potential choices for starting enterprises, conserving money, and making investments during the orientation session prior to leaving is an intriguing element. The embassies of the worker's home country are expected to play a significant role in preparing them for return after working abroad by offering further training in business and daily living skills before departure. In order to establish a network of support for the returning workers, the Guidelines also encourage the network of government agencies, the local community and its leaders, financial intermediaries, and NGOs to get involved.

According to the Guidelines, the technical vocational government agency of the country of origin is in charge of providing free online competency tests and certifications to represent the skills of workers in the EPS and to get them ready for better positions when they return. Although the Guidelines are regional in scope, they apply to a number of nations in Central, East, South, and South-East Asia. There is no information on how the EPS countries are using these Guidelines or who is in charge of overseeing their use. The ability of the embassies of the countries of origin to perform the duties demanded of them in the destination country is also in doubt.

3. **Sri Lanka:** *Sub-Policy and National Action Plan on Return and Reintegration of Migrant Workers* - The Sub-Policy and National Action Plan on Return and Reintegration of Migrant Workers (NAPRR) was given the appropriate direction by the National Labor Migration Policy 2008 of Sri Lanka. The Ministry of Foreign Employment adopted the NAPRR in December 2015 (*Sri Lanka*, n.d.). Prior to creating the policy, a survey of returnees and an evaluation of their requirements were conducted with assistance from the ILO. Lessons learned through a pilot reintegration programme supported by the ILO also served as the foundation for the policy and implementation plan. Five domains are covered by the sub-policy framework: 1. Social and 2. economic reintegration of returnees, 3. physical and mental health of returnees and their family members, 4. civic and political empowerment of migrant returnees, and 5. effective management of the return.

The policy and action plan's comprehensive approach, as well as the stakeholder discussions, prior research on returned workers, initiative piloting, and learning from lessons learned, are all positive aspects. According to the sub-policy, the implementing agency, the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), has formed a distinct reintegration section. In 2018, a review and gap analysis were conducted, and many concerns were identified. The SLBFE and divisional level actors, as well as the major accountable ministries and agencies, lacked coordination. In order to interact with pertinent sectoral ministries and departments and to engage into agreements with other pertinent institutions, it was advised that the SLBFE reintegration unit be strengthened. The absence of a steering committee framework is the NAPRR implementation's biggest weakness. At the local level, there is no government mechanism to involve labor unions and civil society organizations in the process of reintegrating returnees (*Resolution Concerning Statistics on Work Relationships*, 2018).

Case studies like these can act as a guiding mechanism for countries like Bangladesh and India, so that they can smoothen the reverse migration process.

### **What can be done differently to protect Bangladeshi migrant workers from discrimination and stigmatization?**

Following these principles would make the process easier for them and their families. It would also lead to a reduction in stigmatization and discrimination that they face on a daily basis and they will be able to secure social security packages, bring back remittances home, be protected by their employers, etc.

#### **1. Effective pre-migration preparation to extend through the whole migration cycle and include return and reintegration planning.**

The pre-departure stage plays a crucial role in determining the terms and circumstances of temporary migrant workers' employment abroad. First, ethical hiring practices guarantee that employees do not depart with debt. To prepare and empower migrant workers for employment overseas, effective training in working and living abroad, financial literacy initiatives, raising awareness of their rights and obligations, and return readiness are all important. For successful reintegration, procedures for a return with respect and justice are crucial. Therefore, origin nations must streamline the pre-departure procedure and collaborate with destination countries to ensure that their workers have respectable working and living conditions and may return home in a dignified manner.



**2. Cooperation between the countries of origin and destination to be encouraged to support sustainable return and reintegration during the migratory cycle.**

In associations like ASEAN, the shared responsibility of the countries of origin and destination has been highlighted. However, current practices appear to emphasize required repatriation following the conclusion of contracts without any support systems to help migrants get ready for reintegration. Some areas where nations of destination may be able to help include the portability of social security benefits, certification of skills, and systems for claiming unpaid wages and health benefits after returning to the home country. The majority of current MOUs and bilateral agreements do not mention reintegration. With its Happy Return Programme, the Republic of Korea's Employment Permit System offers best practices in this area.

**3. Within the parameters of national economic, employment, and migration policy, origin nations should create comprehensive reintegration plans for migrant workers who return and their families.**

To ensure policy consistency, return and reintegration plans should be integrated with the current economic, employment, labor market, and labor migration policies in the countries of origin. A subset of general migration policies are reintegration policies. According to Battistella (2018, p. 26), "the best return migration policies might not be those targeting the returning migrants, but overall policies creating an environment that returning migrants can properly utilize." The Article 26 of the ASEAN Consensus calls on countries of origin to implement comprehensive reintegration programmes for returning workers and their families and development of comprehensive reintegration policies. Countries such as Bangladesh and India must go down a similar path to get effective results.

The ideas and elements of reintegration policies and initiatives, especially those for disturbed returns, are currently the subject of an expanding body of information and knowledge. Action plans based on short-, medium-, and long-term reintegration initiatives, as well as associated monitoring and assessment systems, must be included with reintegration policies.

**4. Policies and plans for reintegration should be built on extensive consultation and inclusive processes.**

Governments of the countries of origin and destination, local governments in the countries of origin, social partners (trade unions and employers' organizations), migrant worker associations, local communities, civil society organizations, recruitment firms, and diaspora communities are the key stakeholders. They are essential partners in the planning of reintegration projects and programmes and in ensuring their effectiveness and sustainability. To solve resource shortages, partnerships between the public sector, the diaspora, and the corporate sector must be encouraged.

**5. Reintegration measures should address the needs of diverse returnees.**

While many nations encourage returnees to start their own businesses, some returnees might lack the drive or skills to do so. Such business enterprises fail at a high rate, which has been well-documented. Returning employees should have a variety of options available to them outside starting their own business, such as employment chances, investing opportunities through different financial instruments, and rehabilitation programmes, among others. Some returns could require reintegration strategies for their social, emotional, and medical requirements.

**6. Gender Equality should be prevalent in all reintegration policies and programmes.**

Women returnees face challenges that are different from those faced by other populations. Policies need to take into account the different needs of women since they do constitute a major number of returnees. Upon return, safe lodging and reception services must be arranged as needed. Support must be focused on the backgrounds and migration journeys of women returnees. Women returnees may experience difficulties in accessing information, reintegration services, obtaining bank loans and credit, and receiving public employment services for labor market insertion compared to their male counterparts. To evaluate the difficulties women employees encounter reintegrating, specialized research should be conducted. For the purpose of eradicating the stigma associated with women working abroad, all stakeholders should implement awareness campaigns. For peer support and counseling, associations of female migrant workers and cooperatives may be established. Other nations may use good practice models like the Philippines' "Balik Pinay! Balik Hanapbuhay!" (Special

Programme for Returning Women Migrant Workers). Additionally required are gender-balanced institutions that support reintegration programmes.

**7. Social protection coverage should be provided for every migrant and return migrant worker.**

Migrant workers are among the least protected in social protection coverage and mobility. In accordance with existing national institutions, returned migrant workers and their families should have access to social assistance (including health care). Development of substitute social protection and health insurance systems should be prioritized when existing systems do not cover this demographic. The recovery of social security contributions made by migrant employees in destination countries should be pursued wherever it is practical. Collaboration between the countries of origin and the countries of destination should be used to ensure social protection for migrant workers throughout the migration cycle.

Countries of origin may take unilateral action to fill in the gaps when destination country legislation may not fully provide for social protection. Priority should be given to expanding the coverage in both the origin and destination nations. For example, it is important to uphold and carry out the commitments made in the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection and the associated Regional Framework and Action Plan.

**8. The demands of stakeholders for capacity-building should be met to aid in efforts to promote reintegration.**

Several parties are involved in integration initiatives. There is a need for general and specialized training for implementing organizations and staff in the public and private sectors. Awareness raising and capacity-building aim to enhance stakeholders' understanding of the significance of the reintegration of returning migrant workers. For this reason, assistance may be requested from capable local organizations and global development partners. A capacity building mechanism and a start-up fund are available through the United Nations Network supporting the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration to help nations meet the Compact's reintegration and migration goals.

**9. Opportunities for growth and reputable employment should be offered at home.**

Migration of labor cannot be a long-term solution to the severe employment issues that some nations are currently experiencing. Therefore, policies should prioritize fostering national economic and social development and achieving high growth so that, eventually, migration becomes a choice for their inhabitants rather than a necessity. For many origin countries, this would not be feasible in the near or medium term. The Sending States must ensure access to employment and livelihood opportunities for their citizens as sustainable alternatives to migration of workers. The goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development offer significant alternatives for nations.

"Minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin" is the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration's second objective (UN General Assembly, 2018, p. 5).

**10. Opportunities for migratory workers to work legally abroad should be increased.**

It is widely acknowledged that when there are no regular or authorized channels for migration, some people may look for illegal ones (United Nations, 2017). Accordingly, in accordance with the demands of their labor markets, destination nations might create more legitimate, regular channels and make them easier to access for migrant workers. Objective 5 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration calls for States to: "enhance availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration" (UN General Assembly, 2018, pp. 11–12). According to actionable point 5(d), "Develop flexible, rights-based and gender-responsive labor mobility schemes for migrants, in accordance with local and national labor market needs and skills supply at all skill levels."

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

The aim of this paper was to highlight the stigmatization faced by Bangladeshi international workers and what caused it. Existing studies of reverse migrant movements highlight factors as social protection coverage concerns, lack of data on returnees, lack of proper institutions to deal with problems associated with reverse migrant as determinants of the reverse migration movements' negative outcome. These studies, however, tend to neglect the internal instability within the reverse migrant movements and overlook the instrument of movement participants as they focus on factors external to the movements. To address this gap, this research draws from studies on migrant movements and addresses these gaps in terms of four causes: 1) COVID-19 and stigmatization, 2) Lack of Protection by Employers, 3) Inability to Provide Financial Support to Families, and 4) Ineffective Public Administration. This study argues that the stigmatization caused at the time

of reverse migrant movements was mainly due to the neglecting attitudes of Bangladeshi and Indian Governments. The study then goes on to highlight the findings, which revolved around the analysis of the ineffective measures taken by both India and Bangladesh's government to reduce the discrimination and stigmatization faced by Reverse Migrants. Recommendations were provided to help eradicate the stigmatization faced by Bangladeshi International reverse migrant workers, such as effective pre-migration preparation to extend through the whole migration cycle and including return and reintegration planning, cooperation between the countries of origin and destination to be encouraged to support sustainable return and reintegration during the migratory cycle, meeting the demands of stakeholders for capacity-building to aid in efforts to promote reintegration.

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