

A BRIEF STUDY ON THE

Women Migrant Workers' Working Situation Post Covid-19 Period



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Disclaimer : The study was commissioned by Badabon Sangho. The opinions expressed in the document do not necessarily represent the official view of Badabon Sangho.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GO	Government Organization
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UP	Union Parishad
VAW	Violence Against Women
KII	Key Informant Interview
PKB	Probashi Kallayan Bank
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development
MoWCA	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs
DYD	Department of Youth Development
DEMO	District Employment and Manpower Office
NPA	National Plan of Action
MoEWOE	Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment
RAISE	Recovery and Advancement of Informal Sector Employment
WEWB	Wage Earners' Welfare Board
OKUP	Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program
PKB	Palli Karmashangstan Bank
RMMRU	Refugee and Migratory Movement Research Unit
SP	Social Protection
DD	Deputy Director
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
TTC	Technical Training Center
OEMA	Overseas Employment and Migrants Act
UDC	Union Digital Center
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
IOM	International Organization for Migration
USD	United States Dollar
RPL	Replication of Prior Learning
Badabon	The Sundarban (indigenous name of Sundarban)
BRAC	BRAC is a world largest NGO
BCSM	Bangladesh Civil Society for Migration

PREFACE

The protection of women migrant workers has received renewed attention in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This report depicts how unpreparedness, inadequate social security and support services, and pre-existing socio-economic disparities disproportionately impacted Bangladeshi migrant workers during the pandemic. Adopting a qualitative approach based on findings from existing literature and surveys and primary data collected through interviews with returnee Bangladeshi migrants from Keranigonj Dhaka, the article argues that the dearth of institutional, legal, social, and political understanding of the needs of migrants remains the main impediment to a comprehensive social protection system. The findings call for designing a crisis response and recovery policy, preparing a returnee database and leveraging bilateral, regional, and global processes to ensure migrants' uninterrupted protection at home and abroad. The report also underscores the importance of a nuanced understanding and practice of gendered social support, and above all, adopting a rights-based approach to labor migration. The study mainly draws attention on the Theory of Changes of returnee women migrants' workers action for determining the approach as an effective way of social protection.

I would like to thank the Consultant for her hard work to accomplish the study in time. I also like to thank the study team of Badabon Sangho for assisting the Consultant. I also extend my cooperation to the Ministry, Upazila government officials, representative of union Parishad and finally the returnee women migrants and their family's Local community, NGOs for extending all their cooperation.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Migration is a cornerstone of Bangladesh's economy, with remittances from migrants forming a significant portion of the national income. Despite this reliance, the human rights of migrants and their families often go unaddressed both at home and abroad. Each year, nearly two million young Bangladeshis enter the workforce, with migration offering a promising pathway to livelihood. According to the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), approximately 16 million Bangladeshis have migrated to various countries through documented channels, including both men and women.

Women's participation in overseas migration has become increasingly significant, particularly in domestic care work and garment industries abroad. While their remittances substantially benefit the country, migrants face challenges at every stage of the migration cycle, including reintegration.

Bangladesh stands as one of the major labor-sending countries in the Asia-Pacific region, with women comprising almost 20% of all Bangladeshi migrant workers in the last decade. Beyond financial contributions, women migrants bring back valuable social capital that contributes to socioeconomic development, human rights advancement, gender equality, and women's empowerment.

The country has implemented several laws and policies to protect workers both domestically and internationally. The Overseas Employment and Migrants Act (OEMA) 2013 ensures migrant workers' rights to seek criminal prosecution for offenses under the Act. In 2023, the Overseas Employment and Migrants (Amendment) Bill was passed, aiming to enhance accountability for middlemen in international migration and strengthen women migrants' rights. A National Reintegration Policy for Migrants, which emphasizes the rights of women returnee migrant workers, is pending parliamentary approval. To build upon these initiatives, the Government of Bangladesh must ensure that gender-sensitive and rights-based migrant worker policies and practices are effectively implemented throughout the migration journey – before departure, during their time abroad, and upon return.

Badabon Sangho, a women-led rights organization, focuses on marginalized groups including lower-caste individuals, Dalits, single mothers, widows, divorcees, religious minorities, and girls. Using a feminist approach, the organization has implemented various development projects to ensure the rights of marginalized women, including women migrants rights. Considering the rights of women migrants workers Badabon Sangho feels that, women migrants workers have to returned to country of origin after working certain number of years and faced some differently oppressed. In relation to reintegration, they are stigmatized and face hate speech. Gained skills are not recognized and less access to services and jobs. Ground level work assists them to be reintegrated and raise their demands to policy actors. Therefore recognizing the unique challenges faced by women migrant workers upon their return, including stigmatization, hate speech, lack of recognition for acquired skills, and limited access to services and jobs, Badabon Sangho initiated a study in migrant-prone areas such as Keranigonj, Dohar, and Savar. The objective

was to understand the real-world scenario and explore tailored solutions to support returnee migrants, especially women, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study aims to generate information and data to advance new discussions and approaches in supporting women migrant workers, including returnees. It seeks to influence the primary role of various state departments, recognize and invest in the third sector, and regulate the roles of different actors in the migration ecosystem.

The research explores the complex interactions affecting women migrants in Bangladesh, focusing on their experiences as return migrants in the post-COVID era. The pandemic has significantly disrupted global migration patterns, forcing many migrant workers to return home and highlighting the numerous challenges faced by women who have worked overseas.

Despite government initiatives emphasizing safe migration, workplace safety, fair wages, and decent living conditions abroad, challenges persist. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues, with many returnee migrant workers facing financial crises, social stigma, family problems, and difficulties in rehabilitation and reintegration.

To address these challenges, a comprehensive approach involving government policies, institutional initiatives, and support from organizations like Badabon Sangho is crucial. This research, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, aims to provide insights that can inform policy decisions and advocacy efforts, ultimately contributing to safer and more secure migration experiences for women, including their reintegration and rehabilitation upon return, combat hate speech and stigma surrounding women's migration. In addition, bring out policy points and conducting advocacy for safe and secure women migration including reintegration and rehabilitation- is one of the key activities of Badaban. To understand the circumstances of returnee migrants, their families, and their communities, qualitative and quantitative research targeted areas Keranigonj through multi-stage systematic random sampling. Therefore, a systematic methodology has been used to conduct the research work properly.

The study is desk-based research and made by relevant literature review, secondary data analysis; collected opinion from consultation meetings, key informant interviews (KII). Views and data from the ground from various informal consultations with national trade union representatives, civil society organizations and so on. A team of 5 members have conducted the study as planned. In this regard, the consultant team has arranged a systematic process to conduct the study properly.

Though the research was conducted successfully, minimum time was being given by the respondents during the interview. In addition, few returnee women migrants regret their response as they already provide information earlier to many organizations and persons. Some representatives also collected information and photographs from them to provide support, but they did not yet get any support. The research only includes returnee women migrants due to Covid'19 and does not therefore include other categories women and men both returnees. In addition, the relevant stakeholders were very busy during the entire period of field work and the only available time they were free was during weekends and evenings.



However, though there were a few limitations during the research conduction, nevertheless the following the key recommendations agreed from the study findings-

- The importance of reintegration needs to be disseminated to each outbound migrant worker during his/ her pre-departure period. Without the inclusion of safe return and reintegration during negotiations and agreements between two countries, the process of sustainable reintegration would be very difficult. The designing of reintegration program entails needs assessment surveys by considering various needs of returnee migrant workers.
- The national social protection coverage should consider specific vulnerabilities of returnee migrant workers and should allocate resources accordingly. An effective reintegration program would be designed in an inclusive manner for considering all migrant workers regardless of sex, age, skills and migratory status of return.
- The Government of Bangladesh should focus on the social, economic, and psychosocial reintegration into society once the migrant workers especially women migrant workers come back home. And the reintegration policies and frameworks should be articulate with other relevant national policies.
- Relevant NGOs, CBOs and CSOs should come forward/ advocate for policy on reintegration and referral supports for returnee migrant workers including the implementation of reintegration policy for migrants' community specially returnees.

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Keraniganj Upazila (DHAKA DISTRICT) covers an area of 166.87 sq km located in between 23°37' and 23°47' north latitudes and in between 90°13' and 90°29' east longitudes. The town of Keraniganj stands on the southwest side of Dhaka City on the bank of the Buriganga river. Keraniganj Upazila covers an area of 166.87 km² and is bounded by Savar Upazila and Mohammadpur, Hazaribagh, Kamrangir Char, Lalbagh, Kotwali and Sutrapur Thanas to the northeast, Shyampur Thana and Narayanganj and Sadar Upazilas to the east, Serajdikhan Upazila to the south, and by Nawabganj and Singair Upazilas to the west. The Bangladesh government has a plan to integrate Keraniganj Upazila into Dhaka municipality in the near future to accommodate the expansion of the capital.

Keraniganj Upazila has 2,50,970 households and a population of 10,09,651. Keraniganj had a literacy rate (age 7 and over) of 58.5%, compared to the national average of 51.8%, and a sex ratio of 883 womens per 1000 males. The entire population lived in rural areas.

Keranigonj prone to emigration and most of the migrants migrated to gulf countries. The ratio of women migrants is also higher than any other part of the country. Most of the returnee migrants work as housewives in Keranigonj due to high land prices and living expenses and a competitive workforce. Few women engage themselves as house maids and as local level factory workers.



1.2. BACKGROUND

Labor migration plays a significant role in the growth of Bangladesh's economy. In 2023, there was a significant increase in labor migration. Bangladesh set a new record for the number of workers sent abroad in 2023, surpassing the previous high by 15%. By the end of the year, 1.31 million workers had found employment in 137 countries, which is a significant increase from the previous record in 2022, according to data from the Bureau of Manpower, Employment, and Training (BMET). Among them a total of 76, 519 were women labour migration has long been a prominent poverty alleviation and development strategy for Bangladesh since its independence in 1971 (Siddiqui, 2016). The re-structuring of the global economy has increased contract labour migration from Bangladesh to the Gulf and South-East Asian countries. Annually, around half a million Bangladeshi leave the country to work overseas, and the remittance sent by the migrants is pivotal for Bangladesh's economy. There has been a consistent growth in remittance, and in 2020, it stands at \$21.75 billion—an increase of 18.4% from 2019. International remittance accounted for 6.6% of Bangladesh's GDP in 2020, placing it at the eighth position among the largest remittance-receiving countries of the world, which underlines the importance of labour migration in the Bangladesh context. However, since mid-2020, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, this consistent flow of migration and the remittance- development nexus has come to across road. With its all-encompassing impact on mobility and labour, the pandemic has prompted a significant change in Bangladesh's status on migration. The country has observed a staggering 69% decrease in sending labour forces overseas compared to 2019, the year before the pandemic. While in 2019, more than 700,000 Bangladeshi citizens migrated as guest workers, this figure dropped to 217,669 in 2020. In the case of women's migration, the drop in statistics is even more substantial. A total of 21,934 women workers migrated from Bangladesh as guest workers in 2020, compared to 104,786 in 2019—almost four times lower migrants, which is relatively lower than in 2022. Over the last two years, remittances have stagnated at just below \$22 billion. Bangladesh received \$21.92 billion in 2023, compared to \$21.29 billion the previous year (Source: BMET). During the same period, Bangladesh has also received a record number of returnee migrants owing to job loss, arbitrary dismissal and forced deportation. According to the



BMET data, a total of 408,000 migrant workers returned to the country in 2020. Thus, around 2000 migrant workers returned to Bangladesh daily since the beginning of the pandemic. Moreover, approximately 100,000 potential migrants who had completed all of the migration procedures before the pandemic, eventually failed to migrate overseas due to the global disruption. Though international labor migration from Bangladesh is a major pillar for the nation's economy, the migration cycle has become a challenging process, especially for women migrants.

Consequently, Badabon Sangho has hired a consultant to conduct research to understand the status of returnee women migrants, advance approaches to support women migrant workers, and influence the primary role of different state departments to support women's rights.

1.3. BADABON SANGHO: SAFEGUARDING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The organization Badabon Sangho was founded in 2016 in the southern region of Bangladesh, the Rampal and Mongla area, next to the Bay of Bengal and Sundarban (the largest continuous mangrove forest in the world). The organization was formed as a result of rural women, including fisherwomen and Dalit women, gathering together as they came to collect drinking water and discussing shared issues. The women mostly discussed the abasement of women's land rights induced by the thermal power plant and overall climate changes issues i.e., salinity in water and soil, natural disasters, and commercial shrimp cultivations that group members were also facing public and private land investment doubled their sufferings. After a series of meetings, this women group evolved and took the formation of an organization named 'Badabon Sangho'. Badabon refers to the indigenous name of the Sundarban. Since its inception, Badabon group members have organized various actions including rallies, protests, coaching, consultation, and assemblies in response to rights abuses, racial injustice, and violence against women and girls etc. At present, Badabon Sangho is a national NGO focusing on:

- Women Group and feminist leadership development
- Land Agriculture and Water-bodies rights
- Indigenous and Dalit women rights
- Women Migrants Workers Rights
- Women Actions for Climate Justice
- Combat violence against women/girls

Badabon Sangho recognizes that women migrant returnees who have worked abroad face challenges with reintegration, including hate speech and stigmatization. Their skills are not recognized and they face reduced access to jobs and services. Grassroots work can assist these women to be effectively reintegrated and supported in society and elevate their concerns to policy actors. Therefore, Badabon Sangho has developed efforts to support women returnee migrant workers. These actions include:

- Returnees' women groups, federation and network
- Learning sessions for groups' members and leaders
- Training to returnees on economic empowerment

- Training to potential migrant women on pre-departure preparation
- Documentation of cases stories, evidence
- Policy advocacy on safe migration

To develop relevant and effective programs to support returnee migrants, especially women migrants following the challenges posed by COVID-19, Badabon Sangho decided to study areas inclined to high female migration including Keranigonj, Dohar, and Savar.

1.3.1. Study Objectives

- Generate information and data to advance new approaches to support women migrant workers including returnees.
- To influence the primary role of the different departments of country, recognize and invest in the third sectors and/or regulate the role of actors.
- Explore status of the returnee migrants and support required. (Remigration/ economic and social reintegration) and explore way forward and tailor-made strategies.
- Explore the linkages between service providers including capacity building, trade base skill development training, entrepreneurship development, linkages with safety-net programs, soft loan and success to finance and other rehabilitation support.

STORY 01 : Poly's Successful Story

Poly Khatun (24) is the daughter of deceased Shamsul Islam of Keranigonj Upazila under Dhaka district. Shamsul Islam was the imam (Religious leader) of a local mosque. He sent his first daughter Poly Khatun to The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) in 2002 as it became difficult to support the family with his salary. Poly Khatun started earning a living by working there. After a few days, she involved herself in business. She was able to become a good businessman in a short time. She was operating a residential hotel in the city of Makkah and became self-sustaining.

In 2012, her father passed away and she had to take care of the whole family. She came to the country temporarily in 2016, got married and started her married life. After the wedding, she moved to her business address in Makkah and continued the hotel business. However, due to the pandemic, to the pandemic, she suffered a lot in business. Umrah and Hajj are major sectors of residential hotel business in KSA, especially in Makkah. As a result of the pandemic, the KSA government imposed a ban on umrah, hajj and Saudi travel, and the business of hoteliers collapsed. As a result, Poly faced unexpected losses. She returned to her homeland without finding any employment. She was hopeful that she would return to KSA again if the situation normalized. Unfortunately, the effects of the pandemic were severe and prolonged and Poly could not return quickly. After the business situation in Makkah normalized, she did not return to KSA due to legal complications.

In the meantime, Poly, who is now the mother of two children, has been unable to find employment in Bangladesh due to severe economic hardships in the country. As a result, this once independent women now faces a challenging life.

1.3.2. Methodology and Approach

The study uses quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the status of women returnee migrants due to COVID-19 of Keraniganj upazila of Dhaka district. This research also explores the access to public and private support that women returnee migrants face and the scope of programs protecting women returnee migrant rights.

4 FGDs, 12 KIIs and about 200 respondents were interviewed through semi-structured interview schedule. Tools such as a questionnaire and checklist for FGD, a guideline for KIIs were developed to ensure that the quantitative and qualitative information are collected from a variety of targeted stakeholders including relevant ministry focal, local administration, union parishad, representative from IGOs and NGOs, migration activist, family member of women returnee migrants, social activists etc.

The sample size of the study

Types of respondents	Method	Unit	Total respondents
Returnee women migrants workers	Survey	200	200
Upazila level government official	KII	3	3
Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment	KII	3	3
DEMO Dhaka	KII	1	2
NNGO representative	KII	3	3
INGO representative	KII	1	1
Returnee Women Migrants and their family	FGD	2	36
Union Parishad members	FGD	2	28
		Total	275

Secondary sources/document review

A desk review was conducted, collecting data from relevant national and international documents. The includes-

- News dailies, paper clippings, journals
- National policies, NPA, Act, SOPs
- Research reports
- Web portal of different development partners
- International instruments and Convention etc.

1.3.3. Challenges & Limitations

The research faced barriers and time constraints due to heavy monsoon and Muslim festive holidays, among other factors. Returnee women migrants were also hesitant to participate in interviews and interviews were often cut short due to distrust as these women provided information and photographs to other organizations who failed to provide them the promised support they regret to response as they already provide information earlier to many organization and person. Some representative also collect information and photographs from them to provide support, but they did not yet get any support. Further time constraints were imposed for the study as local elites were busy during the period of field work and could only devote evening or weekend time to the study. Other challenges faced by the assessment team include:

- Data and information relating to gender base violence is not available in the source entities (community, Union parishad, Government departments, etc.)
- Establishing contact with communities for FGDs and time matching.
- Difficulty identifying the specific women returnee migrants due to COVID-19 (most of them re-migrated internally as they are the main bread earner of the families)
- This research was focused on only the women returnee migrants' workers. Bangladeshi male returnee groups are not included in this research.

1.3.4. Ethical considerations

Respondents were informed about the research objectives, purpose and importance of their contributions during interviews. Each respondent gave their consent to participate in the FGD/KII and was informed about the option to withdraw from the research process at any time. Entirely measures were taken such as women friendly timing, use women friendly space, use of photo consent etc. to ensure participants' privacy, safety and secrecy.

1.4. REPORT STRUCTURE

The study report has 05 Chapters. The first chapter presents an introduction and detailed methodology of the assessment. The second chapter is literature review. The third chapter includes the findings of FGDs and KIIs. The fourth chapter deals with data analysis. The fifth chapter reflects the overall study findings and recommendations.

1.5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Key discussion issues for FGDs

- Status during migration at country of destination (country, profession, duration, income, sending remittance, savings, etc)
- Factors behind return to home/ country of origin
- Status of current compassion; Support received after returned back to home; Involvement with any safety-net activity or any support provided by public and private entities.

- Support needed at present
- Barrier to access to information about support available involvement of Badabon Sangho
- Role of Union Parishad and support and information available for the women returnee migrant workers.

Key discussion issues for KIIs

- Government data base system, support system, support available, government policy for the returnee migrants workers etc.
- Any special provision in the NPA and National Reintegration Policy, lack of current support system, capacity building of PKB, BMET, WEWB and DEMOs
- Ongoing activities to address returnee women migrants workers and challenges
- Support system of NGOs and private sector.

Key questions for survey

- Demographic profile (family composition, monthly income and expenditure, marital status, education, household status etc.)
- Status during migration at country of destination (country, profession, duration, income, sending remittance, savings, etc)
- Influencing factors for migrating abroad
- Factors behind return to home/ country of origin
- Involvement with any safety-net activity or any support system
- Experiences regarding received assistance after return home
- Support needed at present and access to information about support available for the returnee women migrants workers
- Suggestions regarding pre-decision, decision, departure, during migration and after returned home/ reintegration stage.

2.1. SITUATION OF WOMEN RETURNEE MIGRANTS WORKERS

Labour migration and migrant workers play a significant role in the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. Remittance is the second-largest source of foreign currency income (Bangladesh Bank, 2020) after exports, including goods and services. From the mid-1970s to 2020, more than 13 million professional, skilled, semi-skilled and less-skilled Bangladeshi migrant workers went to more than 140 countries as per BMET. Of them, 5.9 million Bangladeshis were deployed during the last 10 years. Additionally, according to BMET, in 2019 700,159 Bangladesh workers migrated across the world, most notably to the Gulf and other Arab and Southeast Asian countries. In 2019 a total of 104,786 women workers migrated from Bangladesh for work. The highest number of Bangladeshi workers had migrated to Saudi Arabia. A total of 62,578 women workers migrated to Saudi Arabia in 2019. The percentage of women to male migration rate of Saudi Arabia is 15.68 per cent. However, exact figures are not available on the number of women workers who have returned to Bangladesh during that period. Newspapers and private organization sources claim that there have been estimated 3,000 women workers who returned from Saudi Arabia in 2019. The figure stood at 399,000, which is about 56.99% of the total flow of migrants. The second-largest flow was to Oman of 72,654 migrants, constituting about 10.38% of the total flow. However, the government has reiterated that women workers will not migrate if they are not guaranteed respectable jobs. A total of 21,934 Bangladeshi women workers migrated for work purpose in 2020 (BMET, 2020).

COVID-19 Pandemic and Migration Scenario of Bangladesh

A total of 21,934 Bangladeshi women workers migrated for work purpose in 2020 (BMET, 2020). According to the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, in 2020 a total of 408,000 migrant workers returned to Bangladesh.

As recorded in the Welfare Desk, Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, Dhaka around 350,000 were male and 50,000 were women migrant workers.

Due to COVID-19, a large number of Bangladeshis who had returned home for a holiday were unable to go back and resume their work in various destination countries. From Saudi Arabia alone, 150,000 migrants were stranded during the initial months of the COVID-19 outbreak. Since the beginning of October 2020, migrants who were stranded in Bangladesh have started to return overseas. By the end of December 2020, 284,000 Bangladeshi migrants had returned to their destination country and resumed their jobs.

After COVID-19 pandemic, about five lakh expatriates have been forced to return to Bangladesh from March 2020 to April 2021. Many of them have returned in panic, many have lost their jobs, some have returned permanently and some have returned to the country on vacation. 19 percent lost their jobs and were forced to return home. 17 percent have been forced to return as stated in the reports of BMET.

It has been said that in 2020, the remittances of Bangladesh have increased by 16.4 percent on an average. During normal times, an average of 6 to 7 lakh people migrate from Bangladesh every year for employment. But after the outbreak of COVID-19 in Bangladesh in 2020, this number came down to only 2,17,000.

According to RMMRU, an organization working to support migrant workers, the rate of Bangladeshi migrant workers going abroad has decreased by 70 percent since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, especially since those migrants forced to come home during this time could not return abroad.

47 percent of returnee expatriate workers were unable to find jobs even after one year due to the COVID-19 situation (Brac, 2021). Many of them had to rely on family income or loans from relatives to meet their daily expenses. On the other hand, 53 percent engaged in agriculture, small business or as a labourer to support the family. 22.33 percent engaged in day labour or some such work and 35.35 percent started a small business and 17.67 percent found other employment. 98 percent of the repatriated workers reported feeling extremely worried about their future.

The dire situation following the COVID-19 pandemic unveils how the gendered, economic and social asymmetry in labour migration has profound consequences on women migrants' labour market experience. The narratives of the migrant women reveal how their entitlements and rights are further compromised and ignored pushing them towards adapting with the family and society.

Trend of Bangladeshi Women migrant workers

Women's migration from Bangladesh started to rise in 1980. During 2000 to 2002, women migrant workers were almost 1 percent however, in the year 2003 a slight increment was seen due to relaxation given by the government: women of age 35 years were allowed to migrate. In 2006, the age limit was further relaxed from 35 to 25 years. Migration further rose when ban was lifted for all occupational categories. However, in 2007–2008, the global economic crises and in the Middle East both affected the migration trend. However, since 2009-2010, women's workforce migration began to rise again. Currently 13 percent of total Bangladeshi migrants are women. According to the source of BMET, nearly 16 million nationals, including 12,00,000 (approx.) women, are working in different countries as migrant labour or overseas employees.

Situation of Migrant Workers, Women Migrant Workers and Returnee Migrants Workers

Unemployment and low wages prevailing in the domestic market push women workers to look for better employment abroad. Investment in the shape of remittance further builds human capital, financial capital, and the social capital. Low wages in RMG and domestic work in the country is another push factor for women migration from Bangladesh. In 2019, the total number of women workers who migrated from Bangladesh was 104,786. Women migration halted from April to December. Migration of 21,934 women workers was possible in the year 2020. Women migration from Bangladesh fell by 79 percent in 2020 compared

with the previous year with the previous year. During the COVID-19 outbreak, the focus was on the return rather than the flow of out-migration. In 2021, a total of 80,143 women workers migrated from Bangladesh. BMET estimates 1,050,819 women migrated from Bangladesh during 1991-2022. However, the number of returnee women migrants is a key area of concern. A total of 6 million workers have gone abroad in 10 years from 2011 to 2020. The highest number was seen in the year 2010 which saw 1,08,525 people going abroad.

More than 46,000 women migrants returned to Bangladesh between 1 April to 17 December 2020 (Somoynews, 2020). 20,238 returned from Saudi Arabia, 10,461 from the United Arab Emirates, 4,328 from Qatar, 2,916 from Oman, 2,803 from Lebanon, and 1,876 from Jordan during this period. Majority of returnee women migrants occurred between September to December (Probash Barta, 2020).

According to BRAC Migration Program databased- after the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, about 49,924 women migrant workers returned home from 21 countries up until March 2022,.

According to the Wage Earners Welfare Board (WEWB) under the Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Ministry in Bangladesh, a record number of 17,182 women migrants returned to Bangladesh between April 1 and 3 October 2020, mainly from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Lebanon and Qatar (Bhuyan, 2020). However, there is a lack of clear information on how many workers were deported and how many returned voluntarily.

Oftentimes, women that are vulnerable, divorced, and who lack financial resources, have many dependent family members and have no means of securing a source of earning in the country choose to migrate. Women migrant workers mostly return due to the difficulty in language, lifestyle differences which make it extremely difficult for them to adapt. They also return due to lack of wages, unfair workload and other poor working conditions. One of the main reasons is abuse in its many harrowing forms which women are particularly vulnerable towards. This is largely because of the severe absence of a protection mechanism.

Upon returning during and following the pandemic, women and dependents faced immense complications and challenges. A study conducted by a local Bangladeshi NGO suggests that 64% of women were unemployed after returning to Bangladesh. They could not find work and, due to economic unrest in the country, they could not invest their money safely. Additionally, migrant worker returnees did not receive the same access to aid as individuals residing in Bangladesh. Members of their families, particularly their husbands and in-laws, found it difficult to accept them. Dependents of the returnee women migrants also struggled because of cutbacks in their salaries. Moreover, women Bangladeshi migrants have been suffering from discrimination, as well as physical and mental ill-treatment.

Despite the reintegration problems and social stigmatization, there are also positive aspects of migration. Some women migrate to escape unhappy personal and social situations, including bad marriages, harassment, violence, and lack of employment opportunities for themselves and their spouses (Barkat and Ahsan, 2014).

Most of the returnees face psychological issues induced by the traumatic events which

they are compelled to endure. These traumatic events include both physical and mental abuse in addition to the shock of having to forcibly return to Bangladesh. Unmarried returnee women migrant workers don't receive any marriage proposals because they worked abroad and they often face in humanitarian comments. Facing a financial crisis as they no longer have access to a sustainable income source or a job that pays enough to sustain their basic expenses. There is no systematic process to help these women find an alternative source of income and after return, most of the women migrant workers find out that their family members have already spent their remittances.

Life of Women Migrant Workers after Returning Home

According to UNIFEM & ILO (2010), returning migrant women are considered by some to be in need of moral rehabilitation and may be rejected by their families because of their exposure to outside influences. When this happens, they need socio-economic support. There are some effective strategies for the social and economic reintegration of these returning women migrants that are being offered by the Government and the private or NGO sectors, but reintegration into society still is a major problem for these returning women workers. After returning home, the women migrants workers face various uncertainties and are not always accepted back into their family and the society (The Daily Star, 2017).

A study titled "Social and Economic Reintegration of the Returnee Women Migrant Workers: Success and Sorrows," conducted by Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS), has found some shocking facts about returnee women migrants' socio-economic conditions. According to the study, 60.4 percent of women returnee migrants are currently unemployed and 65 percent don't have a regular monthly income. Moreover, 61 percent of these women are plagued with huge debts, which have made them even more vulnerable in their families.

According to a study titles "Social and Economic Reintegration of the Returnee Women Migrant Workers: Success and Sorrows" Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, some 55 percent of 323 women migrant workers' return to the country was either unexpected or forced. As many as 22.6 percent of the women migrants returned less than a year after their migration, 17.6 percent between one and two years and 17.3 percent within two to three years. The data was collected between July and December 2020.

Another notable revelation is that women returnee migrants are also having trouble in their married life. According to the study, 14.7 percent of the returnee women migrants got divorced, while 10.5 percent were simply left by their husbands.

According to Karim, Islam and Talukder (2020), these returning migrant women find themselves in a vulnerable position and lower status within their family after coming back home. Many keep repaying the loans they took before going to abroad with the money brought back home. As a result, some of these migrant women find themselves in a similar economic condition as they were before they left. Some women were treated as "immoral" individuals who might have earned money by sex work or other sorts of "sinful" acts (GAATW, 2019). According to one Bangladeshi returnee in an OKUP Report (GAATW, 2019), her neighbors accused her of sleeping with men for money as she came back home with substantial savings.

According to Nawaz and Tonny (2019), criticism from family and society, and unwillingness of families to welcome the women migrants back are a common phenomenon for Bangladesh. In their study they suggested that almost 98 percent of the returnees coming back from the Middle East think they are treated as unwanted by the society.

1 out of every 3 women workers who return to the country have deteriorated economically in comparison to their past. 85 percent of returning workers reported feeling depressed about their current job and 57 percent about their life and livelihood (BILS, 2021).

According to a Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS) report, an insignificant portion of returnee migrant women struggle in their marriages after coming back home. This study found 14.7 percent of the returnee migrants divorced and 10.5 percent were left by their husbands.

A study in 2021 by RMMRU found that 52 percent of the women coming back mostly from the Middle East were subjected to some sort of harassment or abuse at their workplace (The Business Standard, 2021). Some of these women came back with the help of the Government after launching complaints (Abrar and Reza, 2021), and some of them kept on working and finished their contracts despite the abuse and harassment in the hopes of money and better lives when they return home.

Furthermore, the stigmatization of women migrants often makes it extremely difficult to reintegrate financially and socially due to the prejudice associated with women migration as domestic workers that are often characterized as cheap, intimate, disposable, and sub-standard jobs.

The social costs of migration are mostly borne by the individual household members: the left behind husbands, wives, children, elderly and siblings. The social costs borne by the individual groups vary significantly. Therefore, interventions to reduce the harmful social costs should be targeted towards for different groups. So far, the government and civil society organizations including the NGOs have failed to incorporate the issue of the left-behind family members of the migrants in the mainstream policy and program activities.

Government and NGOs Supporting Women Migrant Workers

Essentially, NGOs form a bridge between the government and returnee migrant workers. All forms of government processes are bureaucratic in nature and returnee workers are seldom able to navigate through these complications. NGOs are playing a key role to help make the reintegration process easier for them through support, advocacy, and also work as pressure group. NGOs are also engaged in widespread advocacy work to ensure basic rights, fair wages, humanitarian assistance, training provision for capacity development etc. NGOs like BOMSA tried to create linkages with shelters and embassies to ease the plight of returnee women in addition to engaging in heavy advocacy work.

NGOs working in the field play a more direct role influencing the experience of women in their journey to the Middle East and their reintegration in the home society. Research organizations also produce data for NGOs and the Government, playing a crucial role in policy formulation and decision-making. There are different kinds of services available for

women, including psycho-social counseling, combating violence against women program, special guidance on how to operate a small business, training on farming, legal guidance for women filing for divorce or if women's basic property rights are violated, special scholarships for the children of the migrant women (in collaboration with local schools), awareness campaigns and economic support and special low interest loans etc.

Most of these NGOs have local offices in various districts of Bangladesh and employees go home to home to find out if the migrant workers are experiencing difficulties and sorrow, and provide them with knowledge on investment, small business and employment.

One of the most important tasks conducted by NGOs are awareness campaigns to increase knowledge about safe migration practices for women. Through these programs, various migration stakeholders convene to discuss safe migration practices, playing an important role in policy development. However, one main criticism of these programs is that they involve minimal representation from the women living abroad.

Some NGOs help the women form groups and start their own business. Organizations like the Bangladesh Nari Sramik Kendra (BNSK), the Bangladeshi Ovibashi Mohila Sramik Association (BOMSA) and the Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP) help these women to establish their own businesses. NGOs like BRAC place a volunteer pool in the Hazrat Shahjalal Int'l Airport to provide immediate need-based support to returnee women. BRAC's volunteers also made a database of the returnees in addition to installing signboards, leaflets and other IEC materials to disseminate information regarding services of the project. Organizations such as RMMRU, OKUP, WARBE, BCSM platform and Migrant Forum Asia also continued their advocacy work to ensure fair wages for forcibly returned migrant women.

In many cases, many returnee women are yet to be successfully integrated into society and self-directed activism has not proved effective. NGOs have the resources and capacity to aid these women and are doing so effectively. In fact, some migration-focused NGOs in Bangladesh continue to engage in various forms of activism that has drawn the attention of international actors and the government.



CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS FROM FGDS & KIIS

3.1. OVERALL SCENARIO

A total of 4 FGDs and 12 KIIs were conducted to identify what all the project locations are with various relevant stakeholders at Dhaka. The average number of participants in each FGD was 18 and there was a total of 64 participants in all FGDs. A checklist was followed to discuss with the participants. KIIs were conducted with Keranigonj Upazila level government officials, officials of MoEWOE, PKB, DEMO Dhaka, NNGOs and INGOs. Information about the FGDs and KIIs as follows:

FGD detail

Respondents	Address	Conducted date	Total participants
FGD with women returnee migrants workers	Ruhitpur union	24 April 2024	16
FGD with women returnee migrants workers	Ruhitpur union	25 April 2024	19
FGD with Union Parishad Chairman and Members	Sakta UP Complex	08 May 2024	14
FGD with Union Parishad Chairman and Members	Kolatia UP Complex	09 May 2024	12



KII detail

Respondents	Name and Designation	Date
Upazila Nirbahi Office	Md. Abu Riad UNO, Keranigonj	24 April 2024
Upazila Youth Development Officer	S M Jashim Uddin Upazila Youth Development Officer	24 April 2024
Upazila Women Affaires Officer	Mala Boral UWAO, Keranigonj	24 April 2024
Focal person for national reintegration policy develop, MoEWOE	Dr. Nashid Rejwana Monir Deputy Secretary	05 May 2024
RAISE Project (Ex In charge of RAISE and Information & Communication Focal) , MoEWOW	Md. Zahid Anwar DD (Research Planning & Training) WEWB and RAISE focal	09 May 2024
Focal Person, Probashi Kallyan Bank	Md. Noor Alam Sarder General Manager	05 May 2024
AVP & Secretariat Focal, Probashi Kallyan Bank Head Office	Md. Kamal Hossain Senior Principal Officer)	10 May 2024
DEMO, Dhaka	Jannatul Ferdows Rupa Assistant Director	24 May 2024
ICMPD	Subrata Das Apu Associate Project Officer Silk Routes Project, ICMPD	12 May 2024
WARBE DF Jasia	Khatun, Director WARBE Development Foundation	12 May 2024
BOMSA	Shekh Rumana ED, BOMSA	12 May 2024
Karmojibi Nari (KN)	Sanjida Sultana Executive Director, KN	12 May 2024
Total	12	

3.2. FGD FINDINGS

General Findings from the FGDs

- Returnee migrants are largely unaware and do not have information about support systems available for the women returnee migrants workers
- With regard to data base, Union Parishad representatives claimed to not have any data regarding overseas employment and returnee migrants.
- Union Parishad does not have any data on activity related to migration, remittance management and reintegration
- People who want to migrate abroad do not come to Union Parishad for any purpose.
- Union Parishad arranges local mediation efforts to solve some fraud cases related to migration, but these are very informal.

- There is a coordination gap between service providers, other government departments, and Union Parishad.
- Government officials, NGOs, Union Parishad representatives, community leaders, and women returnee migrant workers lack a clear understanding of the nexus between trafficking and migration.
- Most women returnee migrant workers are not involved in any income-generating activities.
- Very few women returnee migrant workers have received or been linked with safety-net programs.
- Very few women returnee migrant workers are involved in small businesses or trading, such as food production, tea stall operation, mini garments, and tailoring. All these activities are by their own initiative; they do not get any support from the government or NGOs.
- Lack of access to finance, capacity building, and opportunities to use their skills is a major concern.

Specific findings from women returnee migrant workers' group:

Most of the women participants expressed that many NGOs repeatedly collected their information. Some organizations even took copies of their National ID cards and photographs, ostensibly to provide assistance. However, these women did not receive any actual assistance or support. Furthermore, the NGOs did not maintain contact with them after collecting their information.

The exception to this pattern was Badabon Sangho, which maintains regular contact with these women and provides ongoing support. Before their involvement with Badabon Sangho, these women were unaware of their rights as migrants. Through this interaction, they have come to realize that they are not merely reproductive elements within their families, but can also be productive resources for society.

As a result of this newfound awareness, these women now want to utilize their time productively by exploring and developing their skills in areas such as handicrafts and small businesses. This shift in perspective represents a significant change in how these returnee migrant workers view their potential contributions to their families and communities. As a result of this newfound awareness, these women now want to utilize their time productively by exploring and developing their skills in areas such as handicrafts and small businesses. This shift in perspective represents a significant change in how these returnee migrant workers view their potential contributions to their families and communities.

3.3. KII FINDINGS

- Some NGOs are working on returnee migrant workers, such as returnee-focused NGOs namely BOMSA & BNSK, which worked for the economic empowerment of COVID returnee women migrant workers (FMW). They provided BDT 10,000/- to each returnee with the support of MJF. BOMSA is also working for FMWs' entrepreneurship development and has provided revolving funds to 39 FMW groups. Each group contains 30 members.
- Some of the returnee migrants are involved with Foodpanda and Berger Paints with direct support from the Department of Social Services, Department of Youth Development, and also the Department of Women Affairs.
- It was revealed during discussions with migration-focused NGOs that many returnees' economic and health conditions (both mental & physical) are very vulnerable. Health support from the government is essential for them along with family counseling.
- Due to lack of information and capacity, women returnee migrants are unable to avail loans from PKB.
- It's difficult to include them in social safety net programs due to age and permanent residence issues. BOMSA submitted 60 FMWs' names to Savar UP, but benefits have not yet been arranged for them. UP said if any existing beneficiary dies, then they will include a name from the list. They also submitted the list to DSS, DYD, Department of Women Affairs, UNO office, UP, and Ekti Bari Ekti Khamar Project.
- Women returnee migrant workers do not have any knowledge about the RAISE project and its facilities.
- Although it was mentioned in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) that MoWCA will provide migration loans, they did not do so.
- There are no specific training programs for women returnee migrants by the Ministry of Women Affairs; they have only focused on widows, abandoned women, etc.
- MoWCA has some social safety-net programs like Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB), Mother and Child Benefit Program, Investment Component for VGD women, etc.
- They have provisions for training in skill development, entrepreneurship development, and entering the job market for unemployed youths aged between 18-35 years.
- The Department of Youth Development has completed 14 batches of 6-day-long training, with each batch containing 30 participants. Women returnee migrants can also be incorporated into these trainings. The training includes, but is not limited to, food making, tailoring, block-batik, entrepreneurship development, poultry & cattle rearing. Even after completion of training, each participant can get loan support at 5% interest. To get the loan support, a strong guarantor is a mandatory criterion. Training certificates from the Department of Youth Development can be used in other countries.
- Wage Earner's Welfare Board (WEWB) under the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE) is implementing the "Recovery and

Advancement of Informal Sector Employment (RAISE)" project with a soft loan from the World Bank. The primary goal of the project is to facilitate the reintegration of returnee migrants (both male and female), particularly those who have returned after January 2015 and onward, especially those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The intervention of RAISE is mainly focused on a comprehensive reintegration process with dimensions of economic, social, and psychosocial approaches at individual, community, and structural levels. This project is also providing support to returnee migrants through Psychosocial First Aid support (PFA), economic and social reintegration by referral to service providers, especially departments of DYD, Agriculture, Livestock, TTC, PKB, and other private sectors that are providing skill training and help to secure jobs. Finally, it entitles them to get cash incentives after receiving referral services. The project also disseminates safe migration information, assists returnee migrants' registration during camp-based activities, and helps with advocacy and community mobilization. The overall goal and objective of this project is to create a sustainable reintegration model with a holistic approach for Bangladeshi returnee migrant workers.
- Probashi Kallyan Bank (PKB) is the state-run bank which has started special loans for women returnee migrants too. The interest against loans is a maximum of 7%. However, the limitation is that PKB is not providing any training for the startup businesses of returnees but is referring them to training-providing institutes like DYD, TTC, Social Welfare Department, and others like NGOs and private sector skills projects.
- At present, DEMO has countrywide offices (64 in 64 districts), with major activities including pre-departure orientation, data collection, toll-free call center support, etc. According to discussions, it was revealed that counseling is an essential part, but due to lack of manpower, DEMO is unable to do it.



- There is a huge lack of mechanisms to cover returnees under social safety-net programs.
- DEMO also conducts some awareness sessions with NGOs, UDCs, etc. DEMO Dhaka also conducts some sessions in Keraniganj.
- Union Parishad has a budget for reintegration, but due to lack of awareness and capacity, Union Parishads are unable to utilize the allocated budget.
- Returnee migrants face difficulties due to the lack of one-stop support centers.
- The National Migration Policy 2016 needs to be revised and updated.
- There is a huge lack of coordination between ministries, and there is a significant lack of coordination at the ministry level on returnee migrant workers' reintegration.
- There exists a district-level Counter Trafficking Committee (CTC), but there are no District and Upazila level Migration and Reintegration Committees.
- During discussions with ICMPD, it was revealed that age is a major barrier for reintegration, especially for women returnee migrant workers.
- Loan support from any source is difficult due to recovery policies, and livelihood support is expensive and requires a longer time.
- Only a few trades such as tailoring, small shops, tea stalls, poultry, etc., are mostly favorable for returnee women migrant workers.
- Job placement is very convenient for returnee women migrant workers related to their experiences abroad, such as caregivers, helpers, housemaids, etc.
- There is a lack of manpower to prepare and maintain a database, and returnees are not very willing to put their data in the database system.

STORY 02 : Farhan's Successful Story

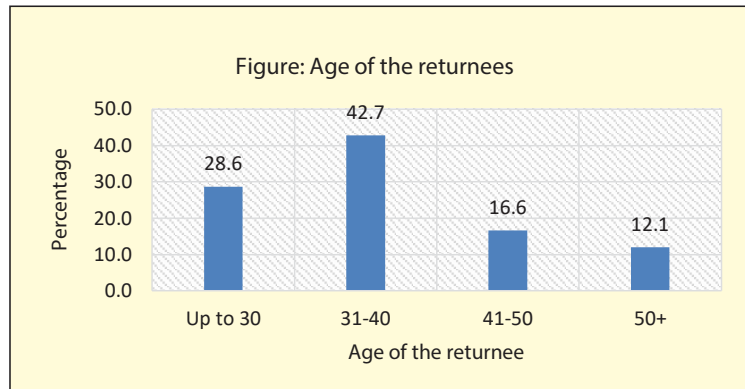
Farhana Akter Suma (27), is a daughter daughter of a farmer family of Keraniganj Upazila of Dhaka district. She has 5 siblings and parents who were extremely poor. She could not finish her studies due to their extreme poverty. To reduce the burden, her father got her married. Her husband married once again after she gave birth to a daughter.

Given such circumstances, she left her husband and returned back to her father's house with her daughter. In 2013, she moved to Jordan as a domestic worker through BMET for better livelihood purposes. After working for 5 years, she went to Saudi Arabia and worked for 2 years there. When she returned to Bangladesh in 2020, Farhana tried to go overseas again but was unable to procure an authentic visa. She is now working as a computer operator in a computer training center. She has sent her younger brother abroad and her daughter is pursuing her academics.

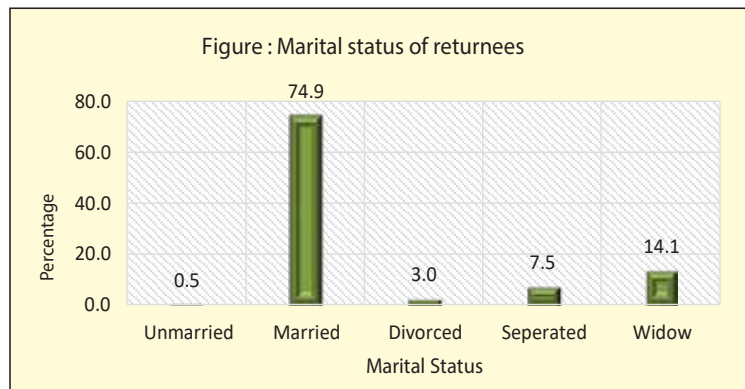
All these have become possible as she is earning a lucrative and knows the safe migration process. Farhana is now living a happy life.

4.1 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS:

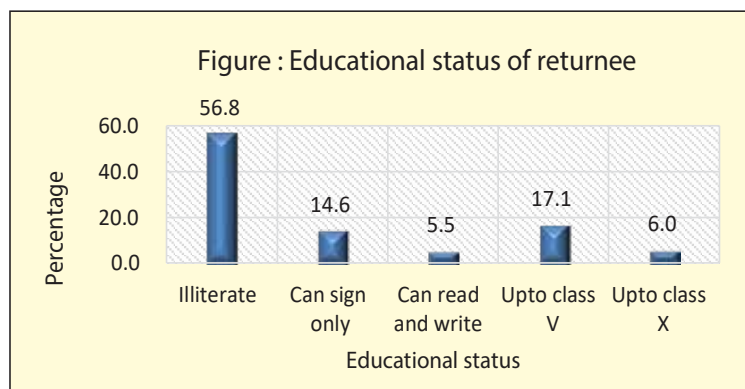
Most returnees (42.7%) are 31-40 years old, 28.6% of returnees are less than 30 years old, 16.6% of returnees are 41-50 years old, and 12.1% of returnees are more than 50 years old.



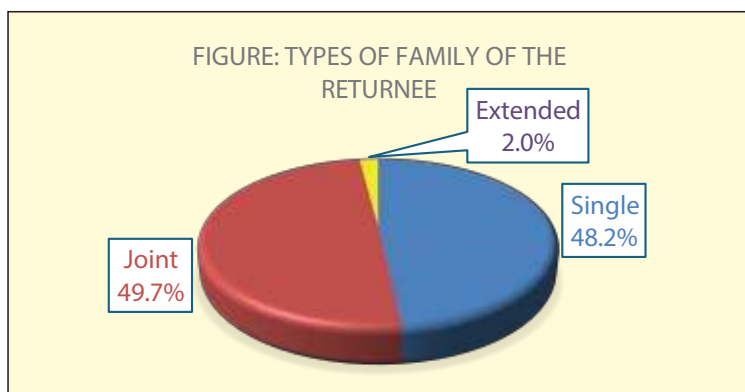
Most returnees (74.9%) are married, 14.1% are widows, 7.5% are separated, 3% are divorced, and 0.5% are unmarried.



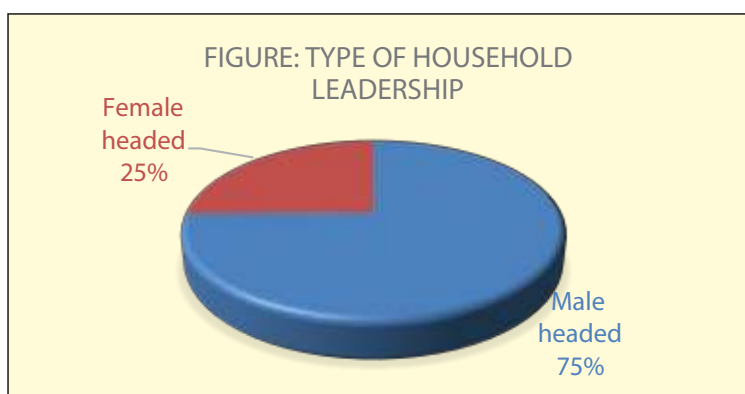
More than half (56.8%) of returnees are illiterate, 14.6% returnees can only sign, 5.5% returnees can read and write, 17.1% returnees read up to class V standards and 6% of returnees read up to class X standards.



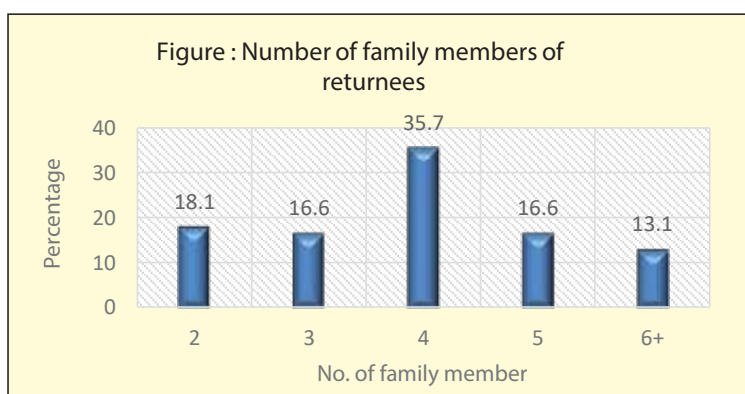
Around half (49.7%) of the families of returnees are joint families, 48.2% of families are single and a few (2%) of families are extended.



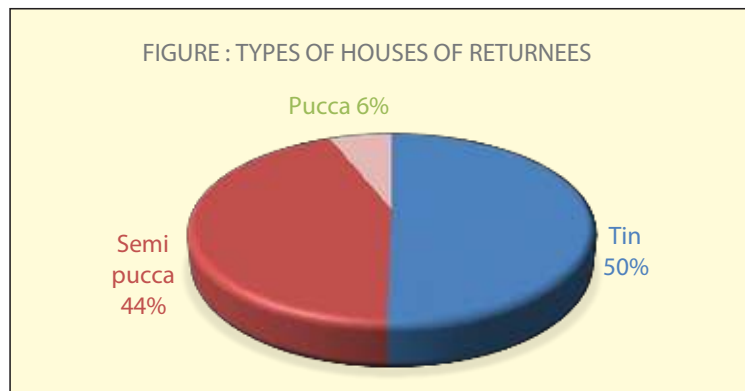
Three-fourth (75%) of families of returnees are male-headed and 25% of families are women-headed.



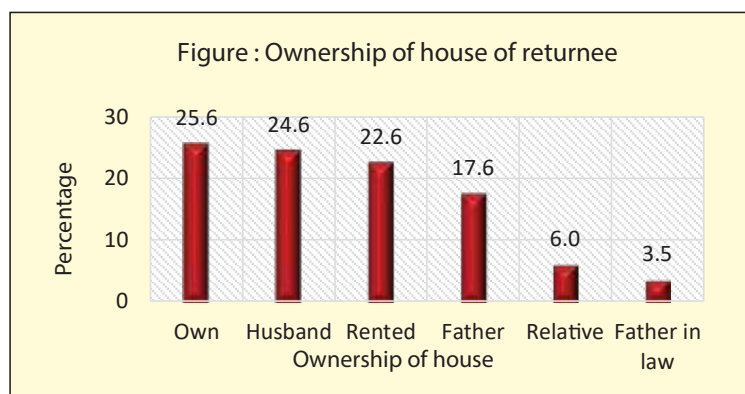
35.7% of families of returnees have 4 members, 16.6% have 3 members, 18.1% have 2 members, 16.6% have 5 members, and 13.1% have 6 members and above.



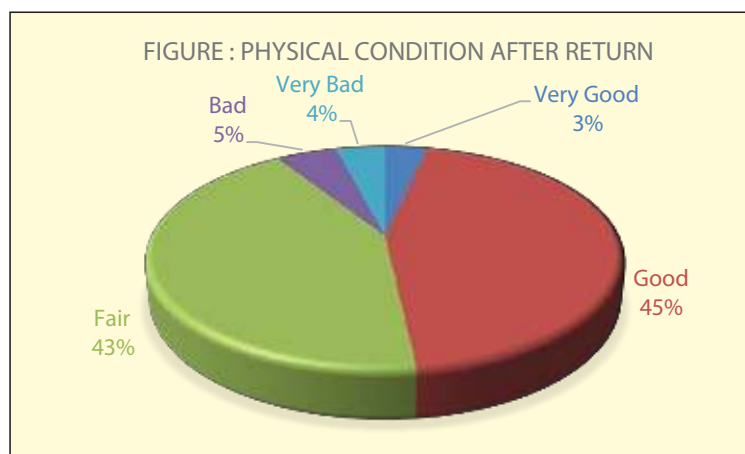
Half (50%) of the returnee's houses made of tin, 44% of houses are semi-pucca, and 6% of houses are pucca.



25.6% of houses occupied by returnees are owned by returnees themselves, 24.6% are owned by husbands of returnees, 22.6% are rented, 17.6% are owned by fathers of returnees, 6% houses are owned by relatives of returnees, and 3.5% are owned by father-in-laws of returnees.

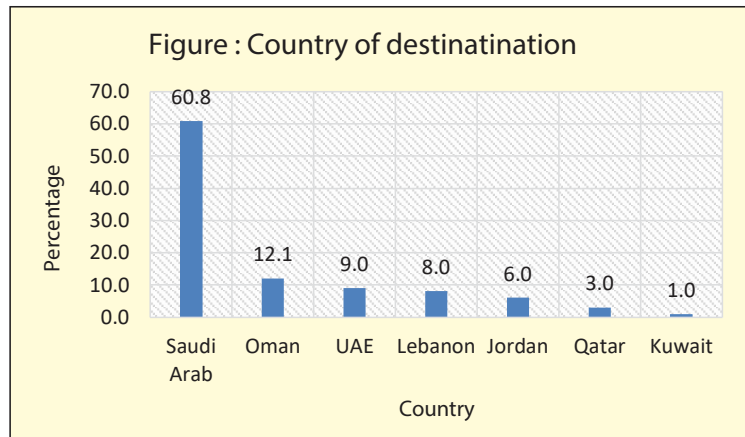


45% of returnees report having good physical condition after return, 43% report a fair physical condition, 5% report a bad condition, 4% report a very bad condition, and 3% report a very good condition.

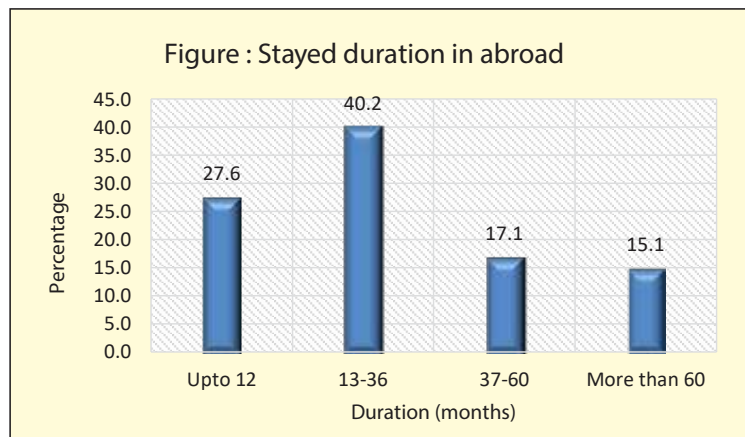


4.2 STATUS DURING MIGRATION:

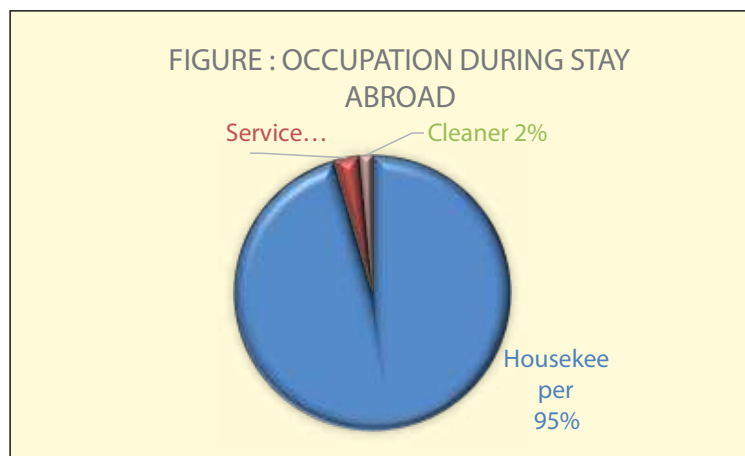
Most (60.8%) of respondents immigrated to Saudi Arabia, 12.1% to Oman, 9% to UAE, 8% to Lebanon, 6% to Jordan, 3% to Qatar, and only 1% to Kuwait.



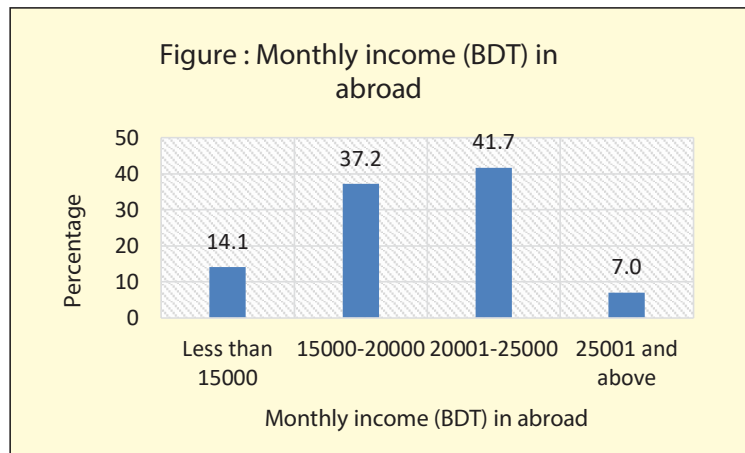
Most (40.2%) of the respondents stayed abroad for 13-36 months, 27.6% stayed for 12 months or less, 17.1% stayed for 37- 60 months and 15.1% stayed for more than 60 months.



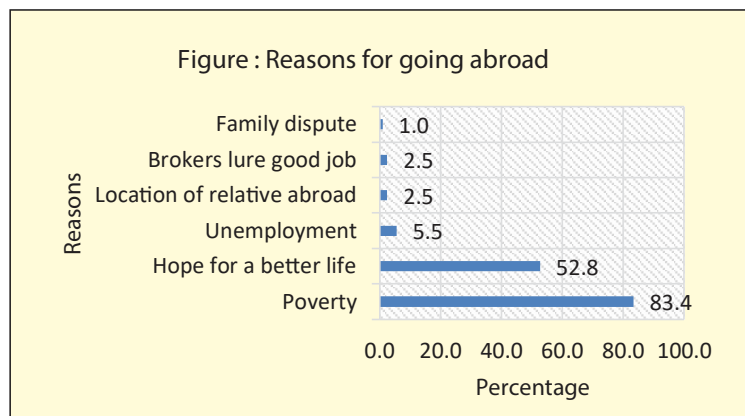
Most (95%) respondents worked as housekeepers, 3% were service holders, and 2% were cleaners during their stay abroad.



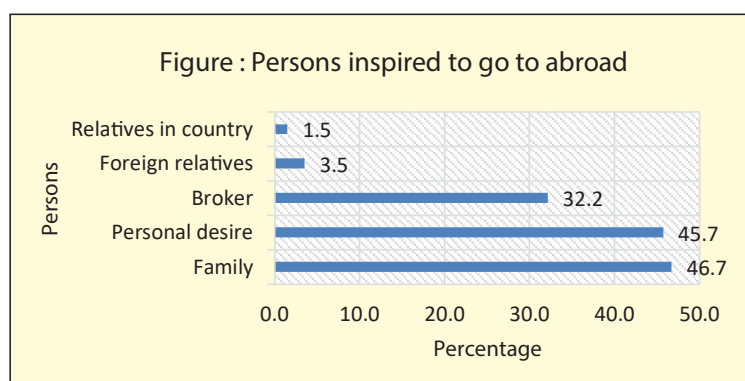
41.7% of respondents had a monthly income between 20001-25000 BDT, 37.2% of respondents' income was between 15000-20000 BDT, 14.1% of respondents' income was less than 15000 BDT and 7% of respondents' income was more than 25000 BDT during their stay abroad.



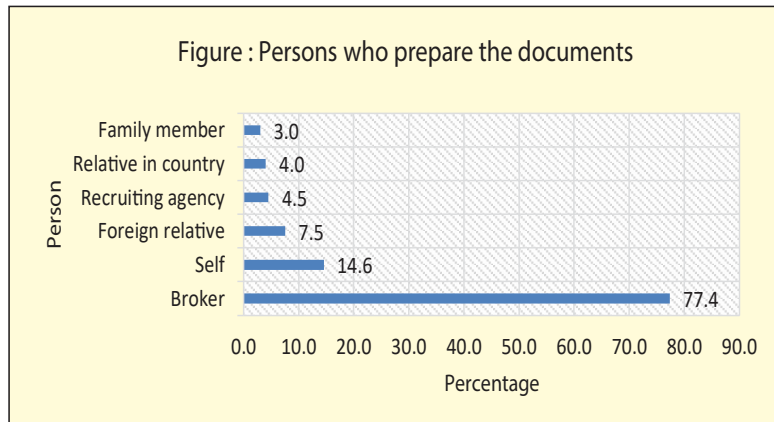
83.4% of respondents reported moving abroad due to facing poverty at home, 52.8% of respondents went abroad to seek a better life, 5.5% of respondents went abroad due to unemployment at home, 2.5% of respondents went abroad due to insistence of foreign relatives and brokers and 1% of respondents went abroad due to family disputes.



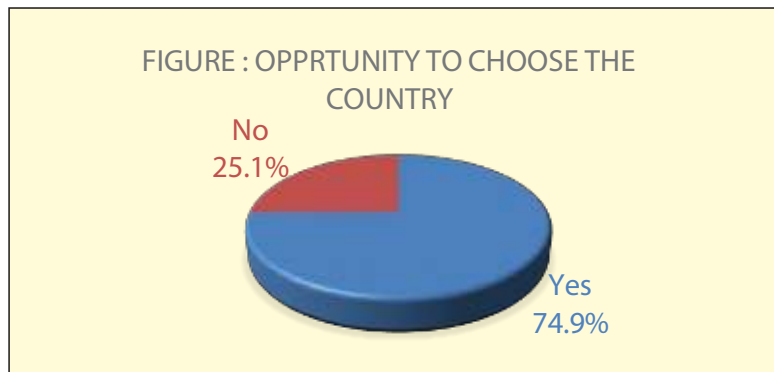
46.7% of respondents reported that family members inspired them to go abroad, 45.7% of respondents went abroad due to personal desire, 32.2% due to brokers, 3.5% due to foreign relatives, and 1.5% due to relatives in the country.



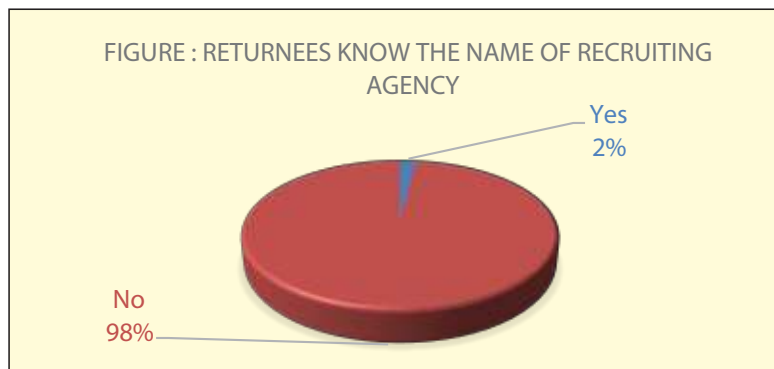
77.4% of respondents' documents to travel abroad were prepared by the broker, 14.6% were prepared themselves, 7.5% were prepared by foreign relatives, 4.5% were prepared by recruiting agencies, 4% were prepared by relatives in the country, and 3% were prepared by immediate family members.



Around three-fourths (74.9%) of respondents had the opportunity to choose the country they were moving to, but 25.1% respondents had no opportunity to choose their destination country.



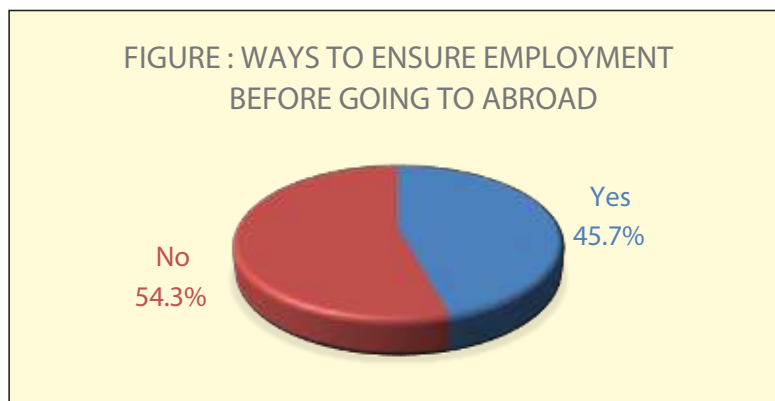
Most (98%) of respondents did not know the name of the recruiting agency and 2% of respondents knew the name of the recruiting agency.



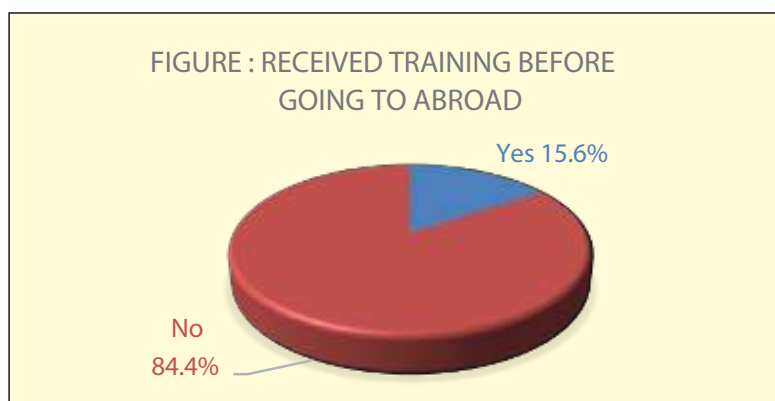
Most (91%) of the respondents did not meet with the recruiting agency before going abroad, and 9% respondents met with the recruiting agency before going abroad.



Most (54.3%) respondents reported that they had no way to ensure employment before going abroad, and 45.7% respondents said that they had some ways to ensure employment before going abroad.

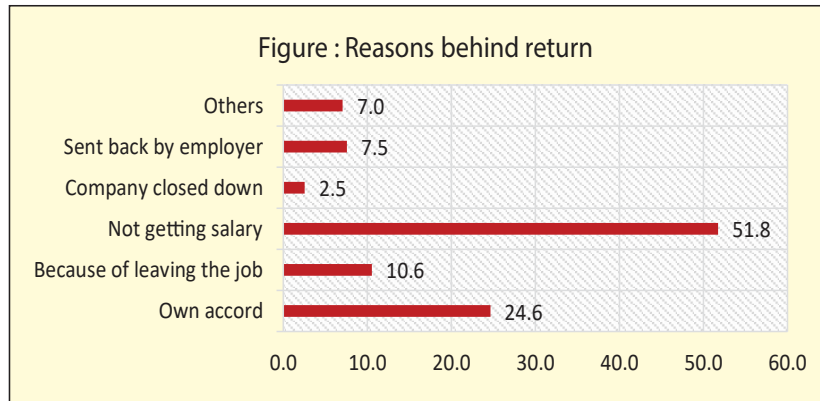


Most (84.4%) respondents did not receive training before going abroad. 15.6% respondents received training before going to abroad.

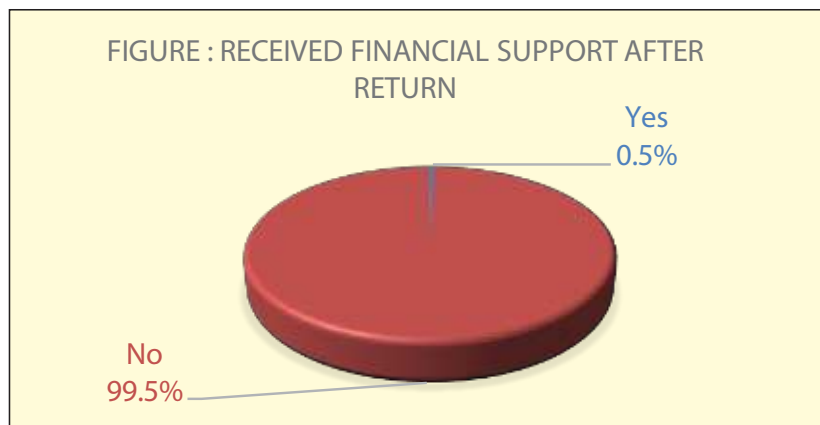


4.3 STATUS AFTER RETURN TO COUNTRY OF ORIGIN:

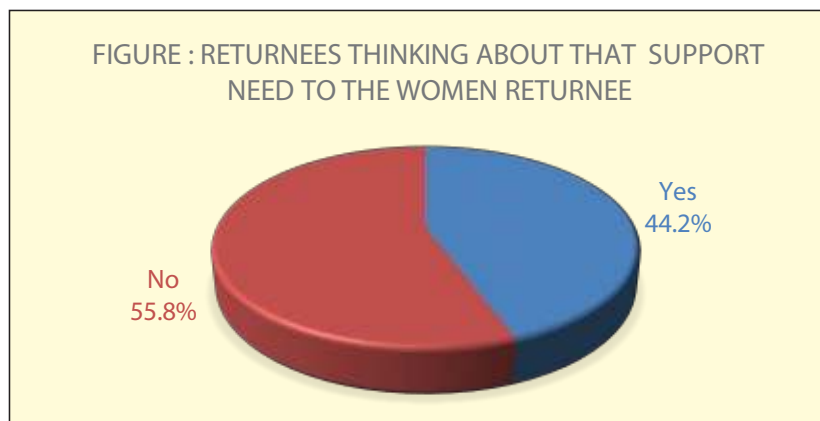
Around half (51.8%) of the respondents reported that their main reason for returning from abroad was that they did not receive a salary. 24.6% of respondents returned of their own accord, 10.6% returned because of leaving their job, 7.5% were sent back by their employer, 2.5% returned because their company closed, and 7% for other various reasons.



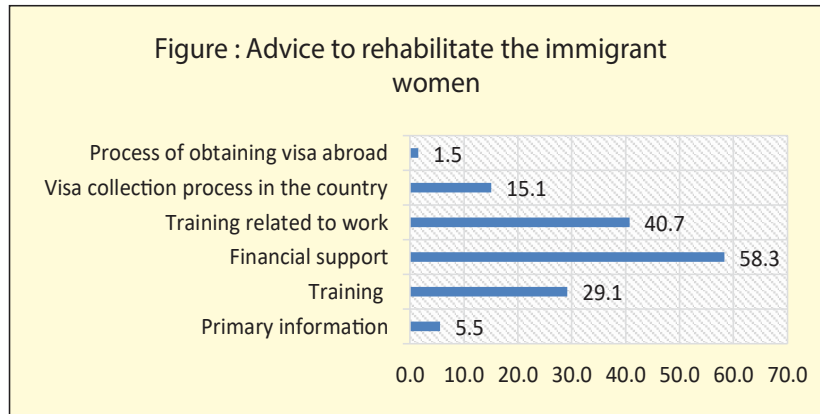
Almost all (99.5%) respondents didn't receive any type of financial support after returning from abroad and 0.5% respondents received financial support after return from abroad.



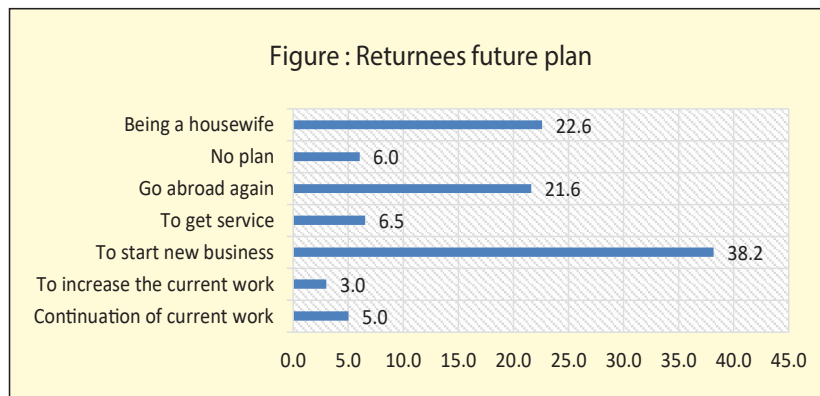
44.2% of respondents reported feeling that women returnees need support, and 55.8% of respondents reported feeling that women returnees do not need any type of support.



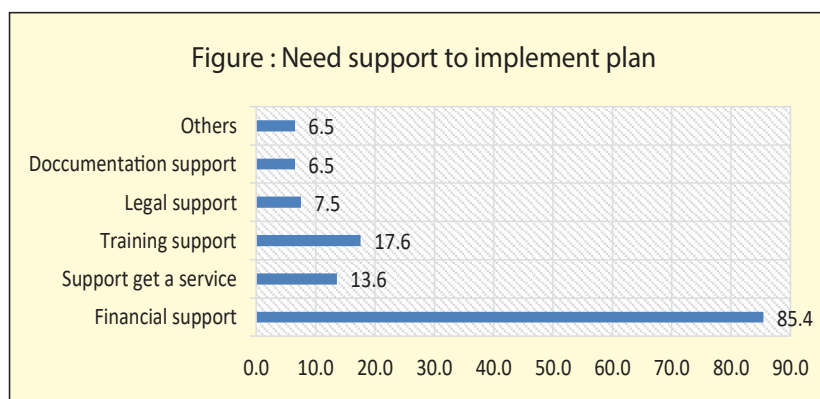
58.3% of respondents received advice on financial support during their rehabilitation, 40.7% of respondents received work-related training, 29.1% of respondents were advised on training availability, 15.1% of respondents were advised on visa collection in the country, 5.5% respondents received primary information advice and 1.5% of respondents were advised on the process of obtaining a visa abroad.



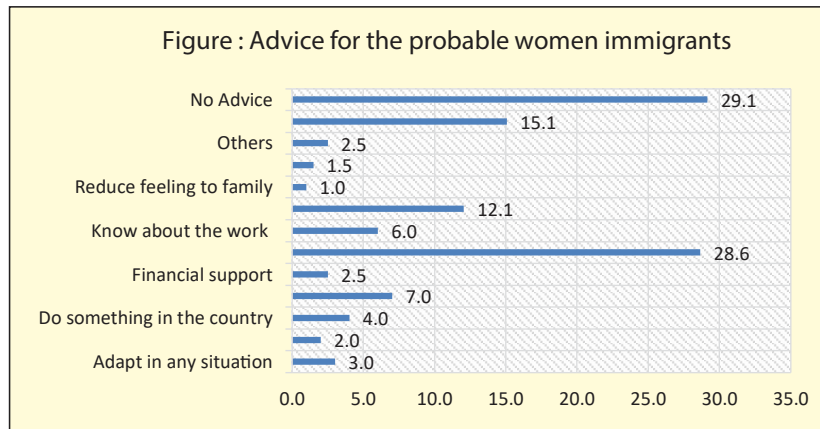
38.2% of respondents have future plans to start a new business, 22.6% want to be a housewife, 21.6% want to go abroad again, 6.5% want to get a service, 5% want to continue their current work or business, 3% want to expand their current work or business, and 6% of respondents have no identified future plans.



Most (85.4%) respondents need financial support to implement their future plans, 17.6% need training support, 13.6% need support to get a service, 7.5% need legal support, 6.5% need documentation, and 6.5% need other support.



28.6% of respondents advised probable woman migrants to inquire about their salary and employer before going abroad, 15.1% advised to take work-related training, 12.1% advised to learn the language of the country they were migrating to, 7% advised to ensure they had proper documentation, 6% advised to know the responsibilities and how to perform their work, 3% advised to take precautions and prepare to adapt to any situation before going abroad. 29.1% of respondents reported that they have no advice for the probable women immigrants.



5.1. OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

An effective reintegration program would be designed in an inclusive manner for considering all migrant workers regardless of sex, age, skills and migratory status of return. The importance of reintegration needs to be disseminated to each outbound migrant worker during his/ her pre-departure period. Without the inclusion of safe return and reintegration during negotiations and agreements between two countries, the process of sustainable reintegration would be very difficult. The designing of reintegration program entails needs assessment surveys by considering various needs of returnee migrant workers.

However, the national social protection coverage should consider specific vulnerabilities of women returnee migrant workers and should allocate resources accordingly.

5.2. SECTOR BASE TAILOR-MADE RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to the CBOs, NGOs and CSOs

- Raise awareness in communities to end the stigma attached to returnee women migrants and maintain a positive attitude towards them.
- Support the government in providing psycho-social counseling and other training programs.
- Plan for the inclusion of repatriated migrant workers in micro-credit programs through the NGO sector.
- NGOs & CSOs should advocate for policies on reintegration and rehabilitation for returnee migrant workers, including the implementation of a reintegration policy.
- Take measures to ensure proper utilization of resources by migrant workers.
- Conduct research on migrant issues and the situation of returnee migrant workers.
- Implement training activities for skills development, reskilling, and upskilling of migrant workers, and utilize Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).
- Provide counseling and set up counseling centers for returnee migrant workers.
- Engage and maintain partnerships with local, national, international, and regional networks for knowledge sharing and gathering. Apply best practices learned from these networks to support returnee migrant workers in Bangladesh.
- Arrange long-term livelihood support for vulnerable women returnee migrants.

Recommendations to the Government and Relevant Policy Makers

- Form and strengthen Migrant Workers Committees at the District and Upazila levels.
- Establish Migration Committees at district and Upazila levels, and develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) along with Terms of Reference (ToR) for these committees.

- Mainstream returnee migrant workers as they are one of the prime sources of income for the country. While reintegration loans for starting small businesses are offered, the application process should be simplified to make credit more accessible.
- Establish a strong monitoring system to ensure proper utilization of the allocated budget for reintegration by Union Parishads and Union Digital Centers (UDCs).
- Probashi Kallyan Bank (PKB) should play a more vibrant role in supporting the economic reintegration of returnee women migrant workers. The provisions of PKB need to be more flexible for returnee women workers.
- Ministries and relevant government bodies should take steps to engage sufficient manpower to collect data from returnee women migrant workers.
- As most women returnee migrants are unable to re-migrate, they should be included in a special package of safety-net programs.
- Implement counseling programs to aid in the reintegration of women returnee migrants.
- Design long-term, residential, practical, and applicable training programs for women returnee migrant workers.
- Union Parishads should be more accountable for utilizing the allocated budget, with monitoring by DEMOs and TTCs. UPs should be accountable to UNOs in this regard.
- Establish counseling cells where migrant or returnee migrant workers can receive services according to their needs and demands.
- Promote employment through local entrepreneurship development for returnee migrants in market segments that have potential to link with district and national value chains.
- Undertake rapid skills demand and supply assessments, organize stakeholder dialogues involving employers, workers, and government to promote sustainable employment. Work with government agencies to promote employment-intensive programs, considering the public works underway in different districts.
- Ensure reintegration policy frameworks are coherent with other relevant national policies.
- Provide support to both returnee migrant workers and their dependents.
- Reform and strengthen the existing social security system of the country. Introduce a unique social security system specifically for returnee migrant workers. Allocate a portion of the national budget for returnee migrant workers.
- Create a comprehensive and robust database of returnee migrant workers.
- Take initiatives to raise awareness about the linkages between trafficking and migration.
- Encourage self-employment among repatriated migrant workers. Provide psycho-social counseling, entrepreneurship training, and loans on easy terms for migrant workers after their return to the country.
- Negotiate better agreements with countries where women migrant workers are employed, focusing on their physical and mental well-being.

- The Government of Bangladesh should ratify the following International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions: Convention Concerning Migration for Employment (Revised), No. 97 of 1949. Convention Concerning Migrants in Abusive Conditions and the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Migrant Workers, No. 143 of 1975.

5.3 CONCLUSION

The study's findings underscore the critical need for a comprehensive reintegration initiative for women migrant workers. Reintegration is not just a process, but an essential component in upholding the rights of migrant workers.

Every respondent in the study expressed appreciation for Badabon Sangho's initiatives, recognizing the urgent need for reintegration support specifically tailored for returnee women migrant workers. Stakeholders across the board commended Badabon Sangho for their timely and necessary intervention in this area.

A significant outcome of the study was the discovery of a wide-ranging motivational impact among women returnee migrant workers. This positive effect was observed as these women became more engaged with mainstream society and economic activities. The reintegration efforts appear to be fostering a sense of belonging and purpose, helping these returnees to reconnect with their communities and explore new opportunities.

This finding highlights the potential long-term benefits of well-designed reintegration programs, not just for the individual workers, but for their families and communities as well. It suggests that effective reintegration strategies can play a crucial role in harnessing the skills, experiences, and potential of returnee women migrant workers, contributing to both their personal development and the broader socio-economic landscape.



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