Dynamics of Emigration: Bangladesh Case

Sabnam Sarmin Luna[*]
Atul Sood[**]

Abstract

Overseas migration has attracted a lot of attention from policymakers and academics in Bangladesh. The writings and debates on migration in Bangladesh have centred around the economic benefits of migration as well as its social implications. This paper is a contribution to this literature. The detailed analysis of emigration patterns using the data provided by the BMET, but not aggregated and complied before, adds to the ongoing debates on overseas migration in Bangladesh. Disaggregate analysis is provided in this paper, from the 2004 till date, on the overseas migration of men and women over the years, along with their occupation, age, and skill profile. In addition, this paper brings a regional dimension into the discussion of the migration literature in Bangladesh. The sharp variation in the intensity of overseas migrations across the different districts of Bangladesh gives us new insights for policy that links overseas migration as a panacea for some of the development challenges that the country faces. The reach of overseas migration to give gains to households that are in highly underdeveloped regions remains limited and, in some ways, continues to keep them trapped in a vicious circle of underdevelopment.

Key words: Migration policy; regional variation of migration; migration trends and patterns; gender and migration; Bangladesh

Overview of labour market, poverty and migration

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the number of people living outside their own country has touched 281 million in 2020. In the last three decades, the number of international migrants increased by about 119 million from 1990 to 2019. Between 1990 and 2005 the number of migrants increased only 39 million whereas, between 2005 to 2019, it was 80 million. In the last decade (2010-2020), the number increased by 60 million, despite a decrease of 27% in international migrants due to COVID-19 pandemic in the year 2020. Currently, international migrants constitute about 3.6% of the world's

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* Associate Professor, Department of Geography and Environment, Jagannath University, Bangladesh, and Research Fellow, Centre for the Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

** Professor, Centre for the Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

population.[1] Among the total migration stock, the number of international labour migrants was 169 million in 2019 which equates 4.9% of the labour force of host countries and this number is highest at 41.4% in the Arab States.[2] Whereas 41.5% of them were women and 58.5% of them were men migrant workers in 2019.[3] According to the ILO report, women are less likely to be employed in foreign labour market mainly due to two reasons: for working age and, their lower labour force participation than men migrants. In addition, larger economic and non-economic obstacles faced by women may also be the causes of their lower migration probability. For instance, gender discrimination in the labour market, like gender pay gap, lack of social networks and difficulties in integration of work and family life in a foreign country are probable factors reducing women's labour force participation along with expected benefits from labour migration. Labour force is an integral part of world economy. Labour migration benefits not only the migrant workers but also the communities, society and families in the origin countries they become part of.[4] In Sustainable Development (SDGs) Agenda for 2030 United Nations recognizes migration as a significant aspect of development policy.[5]

As per the Bureau of Manpower, Employer and Training (BMET) record labour migration from Bangladesh was initiated formally in 1976 beginning with a scanty number of around six thousand workers.[6] Within a very short time between 1990 and 2017, Bangladesh secured fifth place worldwide as a country of origin to export migrant workers.[7] And between 2000 and 2020 Bangladesh stood as the 6th highest origin country for international migrants.[8] The demographic dividend has given Bangladesh a favourable position to export workforce abroad and by 2019 around 12 per cent of the labour force was working in the overseas labour market.[9] Many

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1   UNDESA, International Migration 2020 Highlights (ST/ESA/SER.A/452), (Population Division, UN New York 2020).

2   UNDESA, *International Migrant Stock 2019 Documentation*, 2019c.

3   ILO, ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers – Results and Methodology, Third edition (Geneva 2021).

4   Ibid; IOM, *Migration Crisis Operational Framework, (*IOM, Dhaka 2020).

5   IOM, Bangladesh Migration Governance Framework, (Dhaka 2019); IOM, Migration Governance Indicators (Mgi): Bangladesh, (Dhaka 2019); UN and GoB, United Nations Development Assistance Framework: UNDAF 2017–2020, (United Nations 2016).

6   M. Nurul Islam, (n.d), *Overseas employment from Bangladesh*, (BMET), p.1.

7   IOM, *Bangladesh Migration Crisis Operational Framework,* (IOM, Dhaka 2020)*,* pp. 7-8.

8   UN DESA, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

9   IOM (2019), *op. cit.*

foreign countries need to import workforce from other countries and Bangladesh meets such needs. Bangladesh is an important low-priced labour exporting country in the world, and there was a huge demand for labour force from Bangladesh in the newly emerged oil-rich countries of the Middle East since 1970s.[10] That time in 1976, the goal of the formation of the BMET was to facilitate the migrant workers from Bangladesh leaving mainly to the Middle East for employment.[11]

It is also true that Bangladesh has had high rates of unemployment over the years. Therefore, migrating out of country for work is an attractive and, in some ways, inevitable option for the country's workforce. The proportion of employment as a proportion of working age population (15-65 years of age) has been low during the last three decades in Bangladesh.[12] Evaluating the labour market performance the 8th Five Year Plan (FYP) Document reports –

> … total job creation of 7.4 million during the first 4 years of the 7FYP suggests that actual job creation for the full plan would have fallen much short of the targeted 12.9 million even if there was no COVID-19.[13]

This document also spells out some important features of the labour market in the country which can help understand the dynamics of migration and development in Bangladesh. The Plan document says that during the seventh five-year plan period, the actual number of new participants to the job market was only 1.1 million annually compared to 2 million anticipated in the 7FYP. And the key reason for this is the stagnation of female labour force participation (around 36%) which is explained in the plan document. So slow job creation and specific challenges for women workers are clearly underlined in the document. Highlighting the slowdown in the share of the employed population to the total population the paper also brings attention to an increasing share of the young age population that is not in employment, education, or training (NEET). Overall, it concludes that "given substantial underemployment and the fact that 10% of employment is unpaid family labour, the domestic job creation performance of the 7FYP was below the target."[14]

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10 IOM (2020), *op. cit.*

11 Ibid; S. A. Ali, A. A. Arif, A. K. M. Habibullah, A. R. M A. Hossain, R. Islam, W. Mahmud, S.R. Osmani, Q.R. Rahman, A.M.A.H. Siddiqui, "Labour migration from Bangladesh to the middle east," *World Bank Staff Working Paper Number 454,* Washington DC, USA, 1981.

12 UN Women, Pathways for empowering Employment: Diversity and challenges for women Migrant workers of Bangladesh (Dhaka 2018), pp. 83-184.

13 GED, *8th Five Year Plan June 2020-June 2025: Promoting Prosperity and Fostering Inclusiveness. (*Bangladesh Planning Commission 2020), p. 6.

14 Ibid, p. 7.

Looking at sectoral employment opportunities, we find that labour employment in the agricultural sector shrunk in numbers and exodus from agricultural sector continued during the seventh plan period. On the other hand, there was no expected growth of employment in the manufacturing and construction sectors. Because of mechanization, scale economics, buyer-induced regulations, RMG enterprises, the Ready-made Garments (RMG) Sector which was once a vibrant sector for young women that created some 4 million jobs between 1990 and 2012 now experiencing virtual stagnation and come down despite its rapid growth of production and exports. And by implication puts greater reliance on international migration as a way out of the domestic labour market squeeze. This appears particularly significant for women workers. Employment gains even in other industries where trade restrictions are still prominent have not been impressive. The ratio of youth unemployment also increased to 10.6% in 2017 from 8% in 2013 due to a rapid slowdown in the capacity of the manufacturing sector to generate occupations.[15] The Plan document clearly acknowledges that because of such conditions in the labour market advancement of overseas labour migration, particularly to the Middle Eastern Countries, was a crucial element of the 7FYP employment policy compared to domestic job creation. And in fact, the results of this strategy have proved to be productive. The actual annual average outflow of migrant labour (0.7 million) substantially exceeded the target (0.4 million) in the 7FYP. This extra overseas employment from the Governments point of view offered a big cushion and relaxed the drawback of a slowdown in local job creation.[16]

Despite the low job creation and stagnation in manufacturing employment, real wage growth increased in Bangladesh. The government attributes this increase in real wages to "the migration of rural labours to international workplaces, thereby shrinking of rural labour market, and aiding the growth of real wages." In the context of discussion on reduction in rural and urban poverty, overseas migration again is seen in a favourable light. The Government says that the inflow of remittances has a direct influence on reducing poverty by growing the income and consumption of the rural poor.[17]

Bangladesh was the 9th highest remittance recipient country in the world in 2017 (Bangladesh Bank, 2018), and in 2019 Bangladeshi migrant workforce contributed

15 Ibid, p. 10.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid, p.13.

around USD 19.8 billion to the national reserves and became the eighth-highest recipient of remittance among the 10 countries in the same year.[18] Remittance was seen as the highest source of foreign currency in terms of net earnings.[19] Overall, remittance inflows have increased over the last six years, moving from approximately US$14 billion in FY2013-2014 to US$16 in FY2018-2019.[20]

The paper is based on completely secondary data. Data was collected from Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) head office detail from the year 2004 to 2018. BMET started incorporating case by case migrants' data from 2004. The total range of data from 2004 to 2018 was 6966881 which was not collated and aggregated. Disaggregate analysis of data was provided in this paper for last 15 years. According to the concentration of migrants from 2004 to 2018, sixty-four districts of Bangladesh was divided into 4 migration intensity areas using statistical Quartile method. GIS technique was used to show the distribution of migration in four intensity areas. The sharp variation in the intensity of overseas migrations across the different districts of Bangladesh will give us new insights for policy that links overseas migration as a panacea for some of the development challenges that the country faces.

This paper is divided into four sections. Besides the introduction, migration policy and regulatory regime, trends and characteristics of migrants and regional dimension of migration in Bangladesh are discussed in this paper. The final section discusses the scope and potential of migration as an instrument for addressing the development challenges of Bangladesh.

Historical context of migration and migration policy in Bangladesh

Historically Bangladesh has been a country of emigration rather than a destination for immigrants. The government of Bangladesh has been taking various actions to facilitate the process of migration for Bangladeshi labour to guarantee the maximum profit from migration to the national economy. In the discussions on gender equality, social protection, and social inclusion in the plan documents there is hardly any mention of overseas migration. This is an interesting fact and needs further analysis:

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18 "Rise in remittance in 2020: Bangladesh one of three large recipients", *The Daily Star,* (February 20) 2021, Retrieved on April 25, 2021.

19 Bangladesh Bank, *Quarterly Report on Remittance Inflows,* (July-September) 2018.

20 UN Migration Network, *Significance, scope and contributions of migration in the context of Eighth-Five Year Plan of Bangladesh,* Seminar on Position Paper on Migration for 8FYP, held on GED, Planning Commission, Dhaka, Bangladesh (March 12, 2020).

Why the social externalities of overseas migration do not get much significance and why it is seen more for its economic gains than its socio-cultural influence. Could overseas migration not play any role in gender empowerment? The historical context of migration in the country provides a good entry point on how patriarchy and other social-cultural presuppositions have filtered the government policy for overseas migration.

The missing migrant women: the history of migration policy

Historically migration and migration policy has been important in Bangladesh since its inception. The formal policy framework was articulated much later, mostly post 2006. However, indirectly the government did think and intervene in the processes of migration. In Bangladesh, though, international labour migration formally started in 1976, but female migration started substantially after 15 years, closer to 1991.[21] The key reason for this was the government policies of the times prevented labour migration of women from Bangladesh.[22] By excluding a large part of the population from migrating, not only gender relations were impacted but also in purely economic terms the gains from migration were limited with overall rates of migration remaining low till as late as early 2000.

After the independence of Bangladesh, there was no concrete policy to either encourage or discourage female migration. So, women could only migrate either individually or through the channel of private recruitment agencies. However, in early 1981, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) put a ban on overseas employment on semi-skilled and un-skilled women workers.[23] It has been claimed that a memorandum was placed by the Bangladeshi association of migrant workers of Kuwait to the visiting minister of Bangladesh in Kuwait, asking to put restrictions on female migration from Bangladesh and the government of Bangladesh to oblige. The motivation to secure this decision was to protect women's safety and dignity by this policy. Later between 1988 and 1997 total ban was replaced by discretion, where the government took flexibility in its own hand to allow women workers to migrate under specific conditions. However, this did not last long. In November 1997, GoB again re-executed a complete ban on the migration of women including un-skilled,

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21 M. Nurul Islam, (n.d), *op. cit.*

22 N. Oishi, *Women in Motion Women in Motion: Globalization, State Policies, and Labour Migration in Asia*, Stanford, (CA: Stanford University Press 2005); D. Belanger, & M. Rahman, "Migrating against all the odds: International labour migration of Bangladeshi women", *Current Sociology,* 61(3), 2013, pp. 356- 373. doi:10.1177/0011392113484453.

23 MFA, *CEDAW and the Female Labour Migrants of Bangladesh,* (CEDAW UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 2011), p. 7.

semi-skilled domestic aides or cleaners along with nurses, typists, secretarial assistants, garments, or factory workers in the name of protecting women. The exception to the international mobility of women workers was limited to only very few 'highly qualified professional women' like doctors, engineers, and teachers. This unconstitutional and discriminatory decision was contested by numerous civil society organizations and recruiting agents because it could even contribute to the illegal trafficking of women. Thus, in December 1997 the ban was lifted for all above-mentioned categories of women except un-skilled, semi-skilled domestic workers with some exceptions.[24] In 2003, the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE) revised the migration policy and permitted unskilled or semi-skilled women to migrate who were above 35 years of age and in 2006, the government again relaxed the age limit of female migrants and reduced it from 35 to 25 years except for the cleaners.[25]

The impact of this regulatory change and the opening of the migration market for women was dramatic. Within few years of this regulatory change female migrants amongst total migrants in Bangladesh increased from 1% in 2004 to 5% in 2009. The women migrant workers who were invisible from 1991 to 2002 were now beginning to become visible. This visibility had nothing to do with the choice of women to work or not rather the control of the State, through its regulatory control, over women's labour to work. This change happened in stages. In 2003 when the government amended its policy to allow migration of women workers from professionals to skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers up to the age of 35 years women showed up in the migrant numbers. After that, in 2006, the removal of the restriction of age from 35 to 25 gave a huge impetus to women workers to join the global supply chains in the overseas garment sector.[26] This historical background of women's overseas migration in Bangladesh has to be kept in mind when this paper discusses the trends in migration, across gender using the BMET data.

Governance framework: Policy framework post-2006, legislative framework, government departments/ authorities and programs and policy

The prominent laws and policies initiatives that are associated with overseas migration in Bangladesh includes the Overseas Employment Policy of 2006, the Overseas Employment and Migrants' Act of 2013. The purpose of these initiatives

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24 Ibid, pp. 7-8.

25 Ibid, pp. 8-9; H. Sultana, A. Fatima, "Factors influencing migration of female workers: a case of Bangladesh." *IZA Journal of Develop Migration* 7(1), 2017. doi.org/10.1186/s40176-017-0090-6.

26 Ibid, p. 6.

comprises: to reduce the cost of migration, provide better information to the potential migrant, provide security against exploitation, reduce cheating by middlemen.[27] Formally, Bangladesh adopted Overseas Employment Policy in 2006 which was revised in 2016 to encourage overseas employment. Likewise, in other few countries, Bangladesh has incorporated migration into its national planning process since the Sixth Five Years Plan (FY2010-FY2015) onwards.[28] Whereas, 6th FYP focused on increasing the number of skilled labour force and the 7th FYP recognized "migration as an integral part of development process of the country by creating employment for a large number of workers."[29] The 2030 Agenda which sets various development priorities outlined through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030 comprises many targets devoted to migration (IOM, 2019). In the vision 2021 document, (the Perspective Plan 2010-2021) among its 12 specific development goals, four of them were directly related to migration.[30]

In addition, Bangladesh as a member state of IOM welcomed Migration Government Framework (MiGOF), the internationally agreed document to administer migration coherently and comprehensively. The government of Bangladesh has laid out its Governance Framework in a document entitled 'Bangladesh Migration Governance Framework, 2019'. The key objectives, especially concerning overseas migration that the document identifies are to promote the socio-economic welfare of migrants; to facilitate the movement of people; to ensure migration in a safe, arranged and decent way.[31] The government has been encouraging citizens to sell their labour overseas, it is therefore expected that the government will provide full support to the migrants. This support entails both the creation of institutional framework as well as policy programs. The institutional framework involved creating the legislative framework as well as government departments and authorities. Not only this, the Government is also dovetailing the labour market in the country to meet the skill labour requirements abroad. In addition, to provide quality training government has integrated all technical and vocational education and training institutions under BTEB (Bangladesh Technical Education Board). The GoB has also developed a BMET Action Plan on Skills Development and Migration Management approved in

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27 S.A. Ali *et al., op. cit.* p. 9.

28 IOM (2019), *op. cit.*, p.12.

29 GED, 7th Five Year Plan FY2016-FY2020: Accelerating Growth, Empowering Citizens. (Bangladesh Planning Commission 2015), p. 48.

30 UN Migration Network, *op. cit.*

31 IOM (2019), *op. cit.*, p. 45.

November 2017. Moreover, formal partnerships between financial and non-financial institutions are being built to draw out the best advantages of remittances and to create more balanced and geographically dispersed foreign exchange centres in the country of destination. Bilateral labour agreements are also part of these efforts, taking initiatives in establishing such agreements with more governments. The government's view was that labour agreements are the primary driving force providing legal frameworks for labour migration.—Bangladesh has signed some bilateral labour agreements (BLAs) which are formal treaties, and less formal memorandum of understandings (MOUs). Such initiatives government believes are significant for not only creating potential markets for different types of skills, but also for creating opportunities for better negotiations on worker's rights in the host countries.[32]

### Migration trends and characteristics of migrants

Using the published but not collated and aggregated data provided by BMET this section captures the trend of migration in Bangladesh from 1976, and in much greater detail from the year 2004. Between the years 2004 to 2018 Bangladesh sent 6966881 migrants. The overall stock of overseas migrants from Bangladesh from 1976 is provided in Table 1 below. One can see that on a decadal basis, the total stock of migrants has grown at the rate of 10, 7, and 4 per cent per annum in the last three decades. (Table 1). If we look at the year-wise data, not decadal change, the positively sloping trend line in the graph suggests (Figure 1) that the total number of migrants has steadily increased from 1976 onwards.

Table 1: Total migrants and rate of migration in Bangladesh between 1976 and 2020

Year	Total Number	Compound growth rate (%)
1976-1990	827700	
1991-2000	2154983	10
2001-2010	4149326	7
2011-2020	5984943	4

Source: Compiled data from BMET website, 2021

32 UN Migration Network, *op. cit.*

Figure 1: Total number of migrants from Bangladesh from 1976-2020
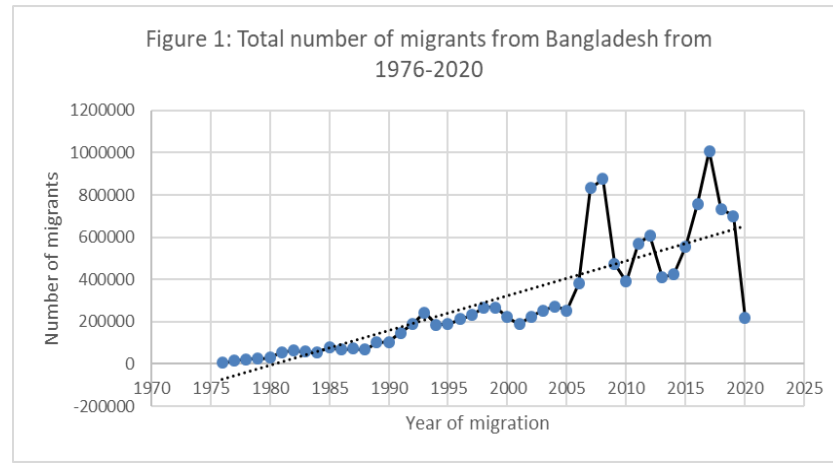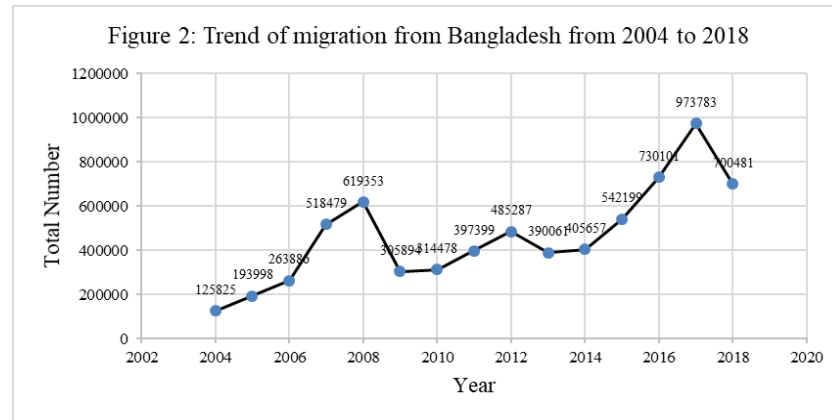
Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2021

Figure 2 reveals the year-to-year changes where the migration has been different from the trend rates of migration. From a total of 125825 migrants in 2004 the numbers increased to a total of 619353 migrants in 2008. After a brief blip, the upwards flow of migrants again resumed from 2010 onwards crossing the 2008 levels in 2016. It is a bit premature here to go into the major reasons behind these changes in numbers but suffice it to say here that there were restrictions in labour migration to several top destination countries in Bangladesh that made this difference. For example, labour mobility restrictions were prominent for Malaysia between 2007-2012, for Saudi Arabia between 2010-2016, for UAE from 2012 onwards, and for Kuwait from 2016 onwards. By 2017 total migrants in Bangladesh almost reached the government target of one million labour migration per year. These restrictions to mobility may explain some year-to-year variations but finally, it is the demand of labour in the destination countries that is the key factor that can explain the aggregate numbers and changes therein. By 2018, the flow of migrants had again declined to 700481. If we look at the aggregate stock of migrants, we find that 8.4% of Bangladesh's overseas workers migrated between 2004 and 2006 and 21% of them migrated between 2006 and 2009. Some of the factors that are discussed in this paper to explain the aggregate numbers, year to year variation in these numbers and distribution across age, gender, skill, origin area and destination are the restrictions to mobility of labour in destination countries, the impact of demand factors, in particular the global economic and financial crisis, that would inevitably impact the

outflow of migrant workforce[33] and the role of regulatory policy and labour market conditions in Bangladesh. We will discuss the role of these factors in different sections of this paper.

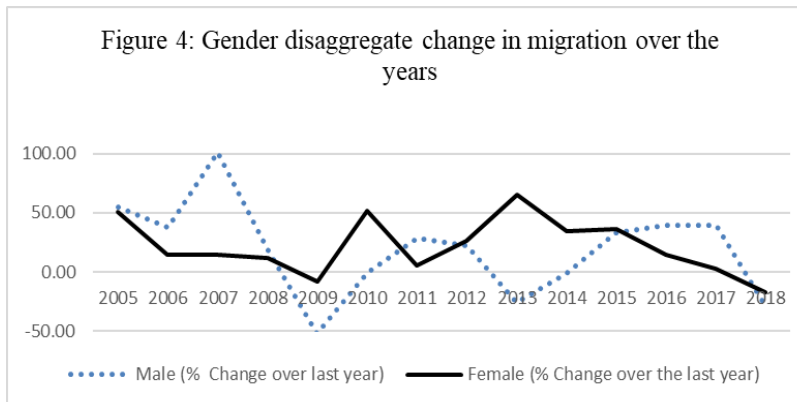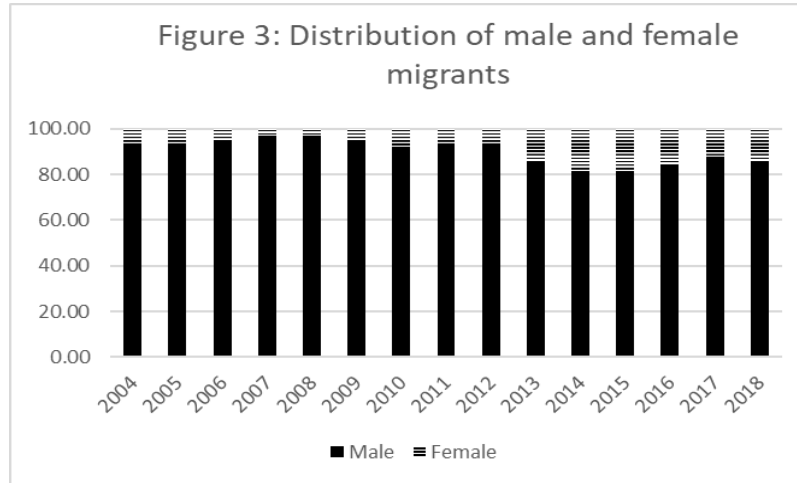Figure 2: Trend of migration from Bangladesh from 2004 to 2018

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

To get real insights about labour mobility and assessing its impact, this paper will look at migration at three levels of disaggregation – gender, origin region and destination.

Gender disaggregation

Disaggregation of migrants across gender adds much richer dimension to understanding migration in Bangladesh. It is interesting to notice that how in recent years it is the increase in female migrants that is substantially impacting the migration trends and numbers from Bangladesh. This is a very significant shift because, as mentioned earlier, the government has only very recently allowed women from the country to migrate, and their mobility was curtailed earlier. It is a fact in Bangladesh that men started migration in 1976, which is officially 15 years earlier than females, and women's international mobility officially started from 1991 but continued to suffer numerous restrictions till 2006 (as we mentioned earlier in this paper). When we look at the distribution of male and female migrants amongst total migrants from 2004 onwards, we find that from 2013 women migrants cross the 10% mark (Figure 3).

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33 BBS, "International Migration from Bangladesh: Socio-economic and Regional characteristics", *Population Monograph of Bangladesh*, vol. 3, 2015.

Figure 3: Distribution of male and female migrants

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

Figure 4: Gender disaggregate change in migration over the years

Source: Compiled data from BMET 2019

From Figure 4, it is also quite clear that the increase in female migration was higher than rates of male migration between 2008 to 2010 and between 2012 to 2015. This higher growth of women migrants was on a very small base, as the previous graph shows. Women migrants were only a small percentage of total migrants, reaching their peak in 2015, close to 19% (Figure 3). It was the outcome of bilateral agreement with Saudi Arabia in February 2015. The government of Saudi Arabia agreed to take women migrants without any cost since Bangladesh government was dedicated to 200,000 female labour over two consecutive years in 2015 and 2016. This sinking

migration cost also affects the labour market in the Middle East and encourages women to take advantage of migration more positively than men.[34]

The fall in migration in 2018 to the growing trend of later years could perhaps be an outcome of the fact that a significant number of women migrants had to return from Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia sent back 1500 women workers in 2018 and above 1000 in 2019.[35]

The age structure of migrants further reveals the gender-disaggregated characteristics of migration from Bangladesh. The majority of male migrants (more than 80%) who went overseas were from the age group of 18 to 40 years. On the other hand, sixty per cent of the total women migrants were between the age of 31 and 40 years (See Table 2). This suggests that the demography that got a significant representation in overseas migration was predominantly in the age group between 30 and 40 for women and for men even the younger cohorts of less than 30 gained mobility along with those in the age group of 30 to 40 years.

Table 2: Age distribution of migrants

Age range	Male	Female	Total
18- 30	44.09	30.85	42.68
31-40	42.70	60.25	44.56
41-50	11.60	8.43	11.27
50+	1.61	0.46	1.49

Source: Compiled data from BMET 2019

Table 3: Age distribution of migrants in three years interval from 2004 to 2018

Age range	2004-2006		2007-2009		2010-2012		2013-2015		2016-2018	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
18-30	61.66	70.47	32.68	41.15	44.91	30.84	34.77	16.91	51.64	34.77
31-40	29.93	23.96	47.26	44.49	42.59	60.05	51.23	72.51	38.53	58.04
41-50	7.40	5.14	17.58	13.46	10.70	8.58	12.25	9.90	8.83	6.96
50+	1.01	0.44	2.48	0.90	1.80	0.53	1.75	0.68	1.00	0.23

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

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34 ILO, Migration and gender in Bangladesh: An irregular landscape, (Geneva 2021).

35 A. Ara, "Migration of skilled workforce Bangladesh's future choice", *the Financial Express,* (December19), 2019. Retrieved on August 23, 2021.

A closer look at the data, at the three-year interval, starting in 2004, shows that from 2007 onwards among the women migrants, the share of women in the age group between 30 and 40 has consistently increased, while for men the pattern is more varied (Table 3).

Regional variations of migration
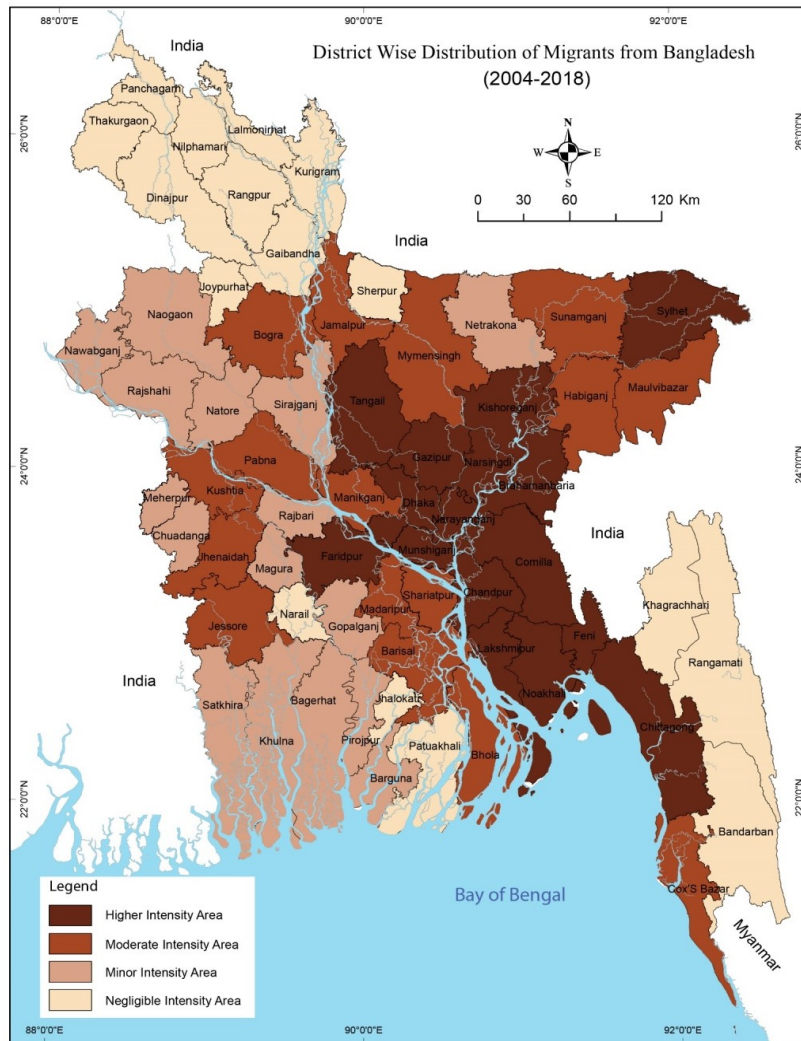
Map 1: Geographical spread of migration in Bangladesh

Using Quartile method, the sixty-four districts of Bangladesh has been divided into 4 areas according to the intensity of migrants, namely, Higher intensity areas; Moderate intensity areas; Minor intensity area and areas with Negligible migration (See Map 1).

According to BMET data, out of the total stock of migrants who have migrated overseas for work between 2004 to 2018, 63% are from higher intensity area and 23% are from moderate-intensity area, the remaining 10% are from Minor intensity area, and 4% are from Negligible intensity area (See Figure 5).

Figure 5: Distribution of total migrants across different intensity areas between 2004 and 2018
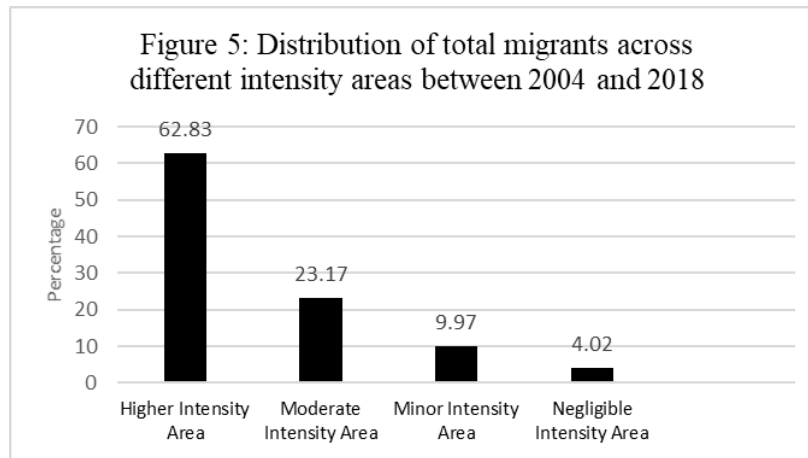
Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

The higher and moderate migration intensity areas cover most of the districts from Dhaka, Cottogram and Sylhet divisions. On the other hand, minor and negligible intensity areas comprise mainly the North-West part of Bangladesh. Compiled data from BBS and BMET indicates that the lower the poverty rate, the higher the migration rate across different intensity areas (Table 4).

In addition, mapping of the migration intensity areas with development levels and nature of development reveals some interesting insights. Geographical location, climatic situation, socio-economic condition, and historical background of different regions together can perhaps explain the migration variance in different regions.

Dhaka the capital city and the major port city Chottogram have appeared as the two growth centres in Bangladesh, directing both economic growth and urbanization process. On the other hand, historically, the North-West part of the country is characterized by higher incidence of poverty. Because of the natural border by two major rivers, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, the poor connectivity between the North-West part of the country and these two metropolises Dhaka and Chottogram (explicitly known as the home to domestic and international trading hubs) was not smooth.[36]

Table 4: Average poverty rate (HCR) and migration rate across different migration intensity areas

Migration Intensity Area	Poverty Rate	Migration rate
Higher Intensity Area	16.06	62.83
Moderate Intensity Area	22.85	23.17
Minor Intensity Area	31.38	9.97
Negligible Intensity Area	39.58	4.02

Source: Compiled data from Poverty Maps of Bangladesh 2016, key findings, BBS, page 19.
        And compiled data for migration rate from BMET.

If we have a look at the socio-economic conditions in areas that provide minimal overseas labour, one can notice that they are mainly agricultural and that too of the kind that is highly dependent on seasonal factors. These regions are more often impacted by floods, drought and other natural calamities. The low economic opportunity in these regions compels labour from these regions to migrate mostly to large cities like Dhaka and other urban centres. Much of this internal migration is seasonal. These are also the regions that have low household incomes, high rates of unemployment, inadequate infrastructure in terms of transport, communication, banking and microcredit facilities, low wages, and low levels of public expenditure, etc.[37] The unpredictability of nature combined with low development provisioning limits the possibilities for the households in these regions to build the necessary financial stability that is needed to explore overseas migration and sustain them through the period of negotiating and exploring the distant job market. This is quite

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36 The World Bank, *Migration, Sorting and Regional Inequality: Evidence from Bangladesh*. Policy Research Working Paper 4616, (Washington D.C. 2008).

37 N. Islam and A.N.K. Noman, "Estimated Regional Disparity for Northern Bangladesh." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* Vol. 20 (11), 2015, pp. 59-63. DOI: 10.9790/0837-201115963.

consistent with the understanding coming from the migration literature. Thomas Faist in his study, argues that social and economic inequality limits cross-border migration and at the same time if migration begins from these regions, then the impact of migration on society is also tremendous.[38] The implication of this insight for policy is significant. If the policy regime sees migration as an effective way to decrease the unemployment rates and boost the economic growth rate in Bangladesh, what the above evidence suggests is that additional initiatives are needed in these backward regions for them to gain from overseas migration. Without specific initiatives only households in better-off geographies can afford the migration cost that is required to enter the overseas labour market.[39] This phenomenon of households in remote, less developed areas losing out in the race of overseas migration is historically true for Bangladesh. Similar finding is reinforced by another study[40] "A profile of the Bangladeshi community in East London*."* It is found that the Sylhet region was the pioneer region of migration from Bangladesh. The *Sylhetis* (people of Sylhet) who went to Britain were not from the poorest sections rather most of them came from middle-income groups who could at least afford the cost of the sea passage. Now, the migrant families enjoying their status and living standards in their neighbourhood in Bangladesh as landlords. So clearly gains have been made by migration but the gains have percolated and contributed to improving the lot that was not the most disadvantaged to begin with.

Not only the socio-economic development of the regions but the social capital of a region is also an important determinant of migration of people. A region that sends migrants abroad creates a source of information for aspiring migrants. This information can be on important aspects like working conditions, accommodation, salary, skills, etc. that can substantially make a difference in competing for jobs overseas. It is well known from the experience and literature both that migrants help their friends, relatives and acquaintances in searching and getting job and settling down once they reach their destination. Mostly, the network is not same everywhere as it depends on the total number of migrants from any particular region in a given period. Thus, the lack of a threshold number of migrants from the less developed

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38 T. Faist, "Cross-Border Migration and Social Inequalities", Annual *Review of Sociology*, vol. 42(1), 2016, pp. 323–346. doi:10.1146/annurev-soc-081715-074302.

39 Ibid.

40 S. Carey and A. Shukur, "A profile of the Bangladeshi community in East London", *New Community,* 12(3), 1985, pp. 405–417. doi:10.1080/1369183x.1985.9975918.

regions, in absence of social networking, supportive persuasion and exchange of information for migration, further reinforces, the regional gap of migration.[41]

Along with connectivity, development levels, and threshold numbers of migrants another important factor reinforcing the disadvantage of far-flung North-West regions for migration is the dynamics of migration and the very nature of international labour market. The remoteness of these regions gives them minuscule opportunities to deliver on time the short notice that recruitment delegates give to individuals and agents to arrange for the human resources. The short turnaround demanded by those seeking workers is more easily met by the labour market in Chottogram, Sylhet, Noakhali, Cumilla and Dhaka. Sometimes the foreign agents arrive without adequate prior announcement and the complete recruitment process is so fast that prospective candidates from the distant region cannot even compete. The significance of these factors can also be judged from the fact that the high-intensity regions categorized using the contemporary data are also the ones that have been historically labour exporting regions from Bangladesh, much before the official recording of migrant information from 1976 onwards. Study shows how Noakhali districts along with Sylhet were the first to avail the prospect of overseas employment as crews of the steamship companies operating in the Far East. After the independence of Bangladesh, Cumilla and Noakhali districts of Chottogram division had a significantly established rural formal sector and a large supply of skilled tradesmen. So, the skills required by foreign employers were easily available in these districts, which contributed to the increasing size of manpower export from these districts. World Bank staff working paper on "Labour migration from Bangladesh to Middle East" suggests that even before the oil resource boom, more than thirty years ago, people from Bangladesh, especially from the district of Chottogram, started to migrate in large numbers to the Middle East countries in search of work. Even before that people from Chottogram had trade relations and communications with Arabian traders. Most of these Bangladeshis have been staying in the UAE countries, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Qatar.[42]

What is being suggested here is that migration remains concentrated in few districts and this concentration remains unchanged. Various historical and contemporary factors that have contributed to these dynamics have been discussed here. From a policy perspective, the lack of spread of government's migration agency offices away

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41 BBS, *op. cit.*
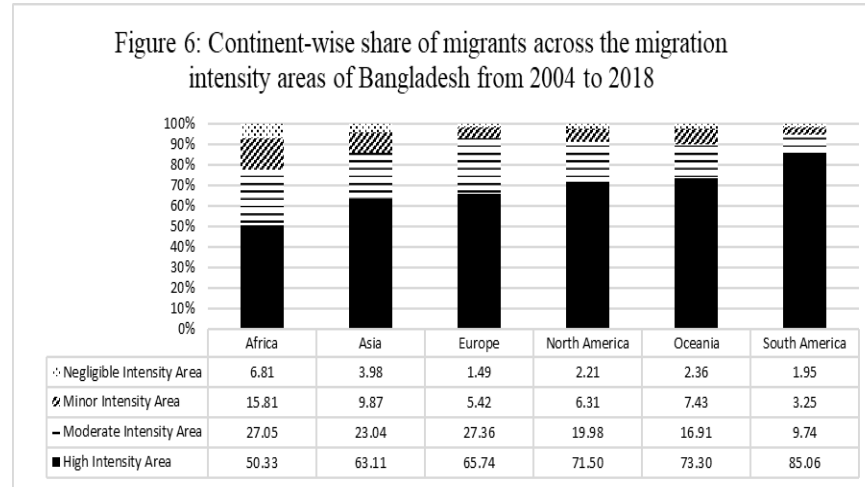42 S.A. Ali *et al., op. cit.*

from the key urban centres to the distant less developed regions adds to the limited reach of overseas migration as an option in the most underdeveloped regions in the country. Although, BMET, the central migration agency in Bangladesh has taken various steps to enhance the roles of DEMOs (District Employment and Manpower Offices) still, migration services at citizen's doorsteps in remote and distant areas are still a dream. It needs to be mentioned here that amongst the women migrants, the spread across regions is a bit more dispersed compared to men, particularly after 2012 (Table 5).

Table 5: Share of male-female migrants across migration intensity areas.

Year	Sex	Higher Intensity Area	Moderate Intensity Area	Minor Intensity Area	Negligible Intensity Area
2004-2006	Male	69.54	19.92	7.73	2.81
	Female	62.83	25.35	8.12	3.7
2007-2009	Male	60.47	23.81	11.32	4.4
	Female	58.66	27.21	10	4.12
2010-2012	Male	67.72	21.18	7.74	3.36
	Female	56.7	27.61	10.29	5.4
2012-2015	Male	64.02	21.91	10.2	3.87
	Female	50.36	30.41	12.46	6.77
2016-2018	Male	63.29	22.91	10.08	3.72
	Female	49.52	31.27	12.47	6.74

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

Figure 6 below gives the share within each continent across various regions in Bangladesh. More than two-third of workers went overseas from higher and moderate migration concentration regions and the distribution among the four intensity areas is more dispersed in case of Asia and Africa compared to other continents.

Figure 6: Continent-wise share of migrants across the migration intensity areas of Bangladesh from 2004 to 2018

	Africa	Asia	Europe	North America	Oceania	South America
Negligible Intensity Area	6.81	3.98	1.49	2.21	2.36	1.95
Minor Intensity Area	15.81	9.87	5.42	6.31	7.43	3.25
Moderate Intensity Area	27.05	23.04	27.36	19.98	16.91	9.74
High Intensity Area	50.33	63.11	65.74	71.50	73.30	85.06

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

The dynamics of labour market between source and host countries: Destination and skills
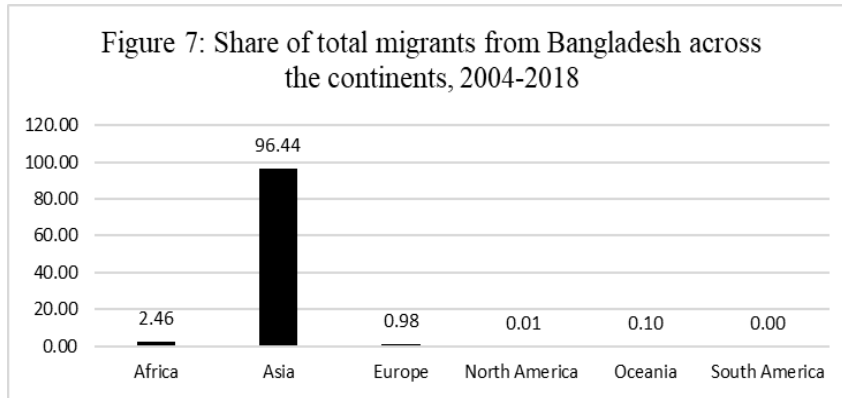
Asia hosts 96.44% of men and women migrants from Bangladesh. Other continents attract just a minuscule number of migrants; Africa (2.46%), Europe (0.98%), North America (0.01%) and Oceania (0.10%) (Figure 7). This percentage varies between men and women across the continents. Out of the total migrants going to Asia and Africa, approximately 90% were men and 10% were women. For North America, the share of male and female were 93% and 7% respectively. However, for other continents, the female share was very less (only around 1%) compared to the male share (around 99%) overall during this period (Figure 8). The pattern of male and female was not very different if we look at the migration numbers in three-year intervals in these fifteen years. In the last fifteen years, it can be observed from Table 6 below that males were always more than women across continents but in different time intervals, the proportion varied.

Table 6: Year-wise distribution of migrants across continents

Year	Gender	Africa	Asia	Europe	North America	Oceania
2004-06	Male	85.88	94.06	98.45	94.92	99.04
	Female	14.12	5.94	1.55	5.08	0.96
2007-09	Male	91.96	96.56	98.46	91.27	97.77
	Female	8.04	3.44	1.54	8.73	2.23

2010-12	Male	89.1	92.9	99.08	92.11	99.1
	Female	10.9	7.1	0.92	7.89	0.9
2013-15	Male	86.46	82.47	98.72	92.28	98.97
	Female	13.54	17.53	1.28	7.72	1.03
2016-18	Male	93.75	85.94	97.26	93.8	99.44
	Female	6.25	14.06	2.74	6.2	0.56
2004-18	Male	89.88	89.28	98.64	92.85	99.19
	Female	10.12	10.72	1.36	7.15	0.81

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

Figure 7: Share of total migrants from Bangladesh across the continents, 2004-2018

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

Figure 8: Ratio of male-female migrants from Bangladesh to different continents, 2004-2018

	Africa	Asia	Europe	North America	Oceania	South America
Male	89.88	89.28	98.64	92.85	99.19	99.35
Female	10.12	10.72	1.36	7.15	0.81	0.65
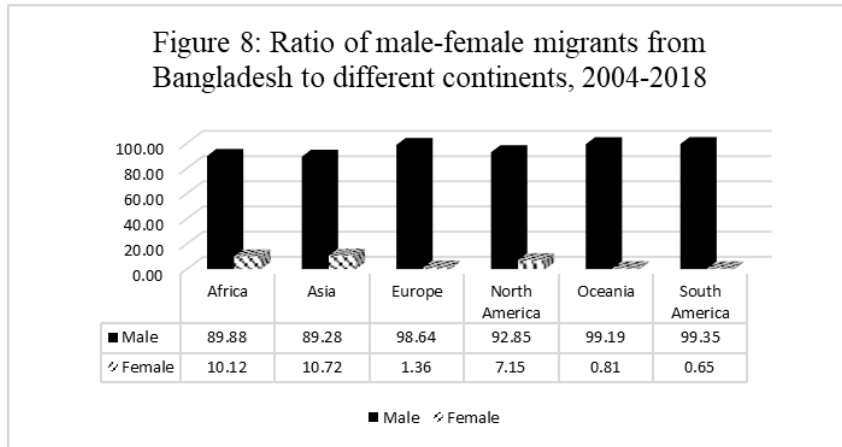
Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

Unlike other Asian countries, the key common destinations (for both men and women) of Bangladeshi migrants are GCC countries because of low cost of migration and political candor.[43] and a lesser proportion go to South-East and South Asian countries. In particular, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman, where, Malaysia and Qatar were additional important destinations for men and Jordan and Lebanon for women migrants. (Figure 9 and 10 and Table 7). Men are migrating to Middle East and East Asian countries, while women are attracted mostly to Middle East. Unlike the men, women migrants are concentrated in one destination country. Saudi Arabia is the top-rank host country for 35% female migrants and Jordan is in the second position with an 18% share of female migrants. This seems to be a direct outcome of the bilateral agreements with Saudi Arabia and Jordan which focus on women domestic workers. Apart from these two destinations, UAE (16%), Lebanon (12%), Oman (10%), and other countries (9%) are the other destinations for women migrants from Bangladesh.
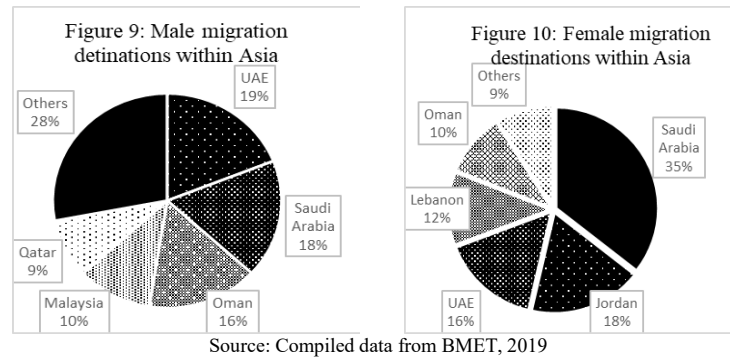

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

Table 7: Top five destinations, 2004-2018

Male		Female	
Destination Countries	Total	Destination Countries	Total
UAE	1181071	Saudi Arabia	262795
Saudi Arabia	1111027	Jordan	133060
Oman	978994	UAE	115782
Malaysia	661019	Lebanon	86444
Qatar	552462	Oman	73910
Others	1743859	Others	66458
Total Male	6228432	Total female	738449

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

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43 Rahman, *op. cit.,* pp. 209-210.

If we look at numbers for male and female migrants across the top 5 destinations, it varies from year to year (Table 8 and 9). The destination for migrants is dependent on domestic and destination factors. Some of the factors that are outside the ambit of Bangladesh's own policies but yet they have influenced the number of overseas workers from Bangladesh is discussed below. For men, Saudi Arabia is a major country of destination. However, labour market of Saudi Arabia was open for Bangladeshi labour, except those willing to work as domestic help, from 2010 to 2016. That is why Saudi Arabia was not present among the top five destinations between 2009 to 2014 for both men and women. However, in 2009 few women (373) were employed in Saudi Arabia. The drop of migrants to Saudi Arabia can also be related to the ongoing "Saudization" policy, which was first introduced in 2011 and its key aim was to reduce countries' dependence on overseas workers.[44] The United Arab Emirates was the top destination for Bangladeshi male migrants for consecutive 5 years (2008- 2012) and before in 2006 also. The labour market of the United Arab Emirates banned Bangladeshi male workers since 2012.[45] As a result, from the following year, the share of male workers declined fast, while the share of female labour migrants to the UAE increased. Kuwait was also a dominant destination for migrants and was among the top four from 2004 to 2006. However, Kuwait stopped employing Bangladeshi labour in 2007, after they claimed they had found anomalies in the recruitment processes and participation of some workers from Bangladesh in unlawful activities. In 2014, Kuwait decided to remove the ban and permit Bangladeshis to work, but in May 2016, following security reports of irregularities Kuwait again declared a prohibition on male household workers.[46] Therefore, after 2006 Bangladesh lost the Kuwaiti labour market. However, in recent years labour migration to Oman and Qatar increased rapidly both for males and females. Qatar attracted Bangladeshi migrants and placed it gained prominence in 2011 for males and from 2013 for female migrants (Table 8 and 9). South-East Asian countries are popular as a destination for male migrants of Bangladesh. In particular, it is seen as a vital destination for temporary migrant workers of Bangladesh in most years, except 2017. Perception is that the Malaysian labour market is unstable for Bangladeshi

44 ADBI, OECD and ILO, Labor Migration in Asia: Increasing the Development Impact of Migration through Finance and Technology, (Manila 2018).

45 "UAE labour market still closed to workers from Bangladesh" *The New Age,* (February 13), 2020. Retrieved on April 24, 2021.

46 T. Habib, "Kuwait re-instates ban on Bangladeshi workers Residency permit irregularities cited as major reason for ban", *World Gulf,* (March 5), 2018. Retrieved from https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/kuwait/kuwait-re-instates-ban-on-bangladeshi-workers-1.2182735.

migrants. It was in the top rank in 2007 and 2008 and again in 2017 and 2018. In between the flow of migration declined significantly and Malaysia was not the top destination for Bangladeshi labour. This is often attributed to Malaysia's banned hiring of labour from Bangladesh on numerous occasions. First, the ban was placed in 1999 and lifted in 2007. The Malaysian government stopped importing labour from Bangladesh between 2009 and 2012 and resumed it again in 2014. In 2018, government of Malaysia again restricted labour recruitment from Bangladesh. There was a bilateral agreement between Bangladesh and Libya regarding labour migration in 2008. As a result, a vast number of Bangladeshi migrant workers started going to Libya in 2009 and 2010 (Table 8 and 9). However, the flow has declined significantly since the war in Libya in 2011. In its place, Lebanon and Jordan have become gradually significant destinations, especially for female domestic workers or cleaners (Table 9). Apart from Saudi Arabia and UAE, these are the other two countries that have facilitated the significance of female labour migration in Bangladesh.[47]

What the above discussion suggests is that the destination, as well as the quantum of labour going out of Bangladesh for overseas employment, is very significantly influenced by the labour market policies in the destination countries. The United Arab Emirates has been out of bounds for Bangladeshi workers since 2012.[48] Saudi Arabia banned the employment of Bangladeshi labour for 6 years from 2010 to 2016, except for those working as domestic help.

Table 8: Top five destinations for male migrants year to year (parenthesis shows the percentage)

Destination rank						
Year	1	2	3	4	5	others
2004	KSA (46)	UAE (20)	Kuwait (18)	Singapore (4)	Bahrain (4)	Others (8)
2005	KSA (32)	UAE (26)	Kuwait (20)	Bahrain (5)	Singapore (5)	Others (12)
2006	UAE (32)	KSA (27)	Kuwait (10)	Singapore (7)	Malaysia (6)	Others (18)
2007	Malaysia (38)	UAE (24)	KSA (22)	Singapore (5)	Oman (2)	Others (9)
2008	UAE (45)	Malaysia (19)	KSA (13)	Singapore (7)	Oman (7)	Others (9)

47 B. Etzold, *op. cit.*
48 UAE labour market, *op. cit.*

2009	UAE (49)	Oman (10)	Singapore (9)	Libya (7)	Bahrain (6)	Others (18)
2010	UAE (52)	Oman (13)	Singapore (11)	Bahrain (6)	Libya (4)	Others (14)
2011	UAE (50)	Oman (24)	Singapore (10)	Qatar (3)	Bahrain (3)	Others (10)
2012	UAE (36)	Oman (29)	Singapore (10)	Qatar (6)	Bahrain (4)	Others (15)
2013	Oman (37)	Singapore (17)	Qatar (16)	Bahrain (7)	Maldives (6)	Others (17)
2014	Oman (28)	Qatar (24)	Singapore (16)	Maldives (7)	Bahrain (7)	Others (18)
2015	Qatar (26)	Oman (25)	Singapore (12)	KSA (8)	Malaysia (7)	Others (22)
2016	Oman (28)	Qatar (18)	KSA (12)	Bahrain (11)	Singapore (9)	Others (22)
2017	KSA (53)	Malaysia (11)	Oman (9)	Qatar (9)	Kuwait (6)	Others (11)
2018	KSA (29)	Malaysia (28)	Qatar (12)	Oman (10)	Singapore (7)	Others (14)

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

Table 9: Top five destinations for female migrants year to year (parenthesis shows the percentage)

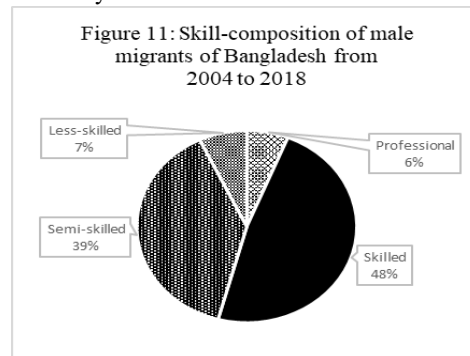| Destination rank						
Year	1	2	3	4	5	Others
2004	UAE (35)	KSA (25)	Kuwait (16)	Jordan (12)	Bahrain (10)	Others (2)
2005	KSA (42)	UAE (27)	Jordan (11)	Kuwait (7)	Mauritius (6)	Others (6)
2006	UAE (41)	KSA (37)	Lebanon (5)	Oman (4)	Kuwait (4)	Others (9)
2007	KSA (39)	UAE (25)	Lebanon (16)	Oman (7)	Mauritius (5)	Others (8)
2008	Lebanon (37)	UAE (30)	KSA (18)	Malaysia (6)	Mauritius (4)	Others (5)
2009	Lebanon (53)	UAE (30)	Mauritius (10)	Jordan (3)	KSA (2)	Others (2)
2010	Lebanon (53)	UAE (26)	Mauritius (10)	Jordan (8)	Libya (1)	Others (2)
2011	Lebanon (48)	UAE (25)	Jordan (16)	Mauritius (6)	Oman (4)	Others (2)
2012	Jordan (32)	Lebanon (32)	UAE (17)	Oman (12)	Mauritius (5)	Others (3)
2013	Jordan (38)	UAE (24)	Lebanon ()19	Oman (11)	Qatar (4)	Others (5)
2014	UAE (30)	Jordan (26)	Lebanon (16)	Oman (15)	Qatar (9)	Others (4)
2015	UAE (23)	Jordan (21)	KSA (20)	Oman (16)	Lebanon (8)	Others (11)
2016	KSA (58)	Jordan (19)	Oman (11)	Qatar (5)	UAE (4)	Others (3)
2017	KSA (68)	Jordan (16)	Oman (8)	UAE (3)	Qatar (3)	Others (3)
2018	KSA (72)	Oman (11)	Jordan (9)	Qatar (3)	UAE (2)	Others (2)

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

Malaysia too banned hiring of labour from Bangladesh on numerous occasions, from 1999 to 2007; 2009 to 2012 and again in 2018. Kuwait stopped employing Bangladeshi labours from 2007 to 2014 and again imposed restrictions in May 2016. In addition to the policies of the host countries, the demand in the host countries is
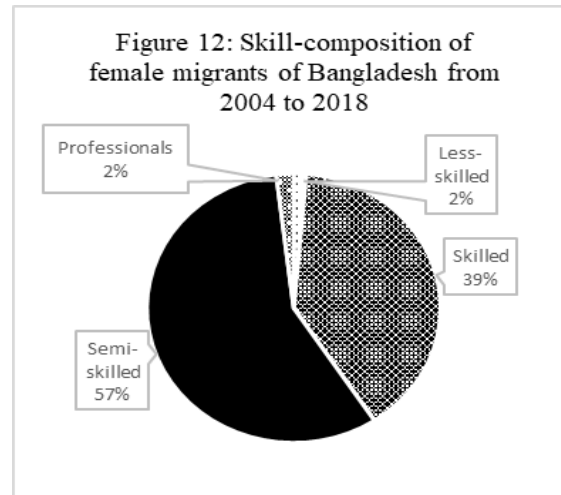
also influenced by the global economic conditions and competition from other countries. Recently, Nepal, Cambodia, and Vietnam have witnessed competitive migrant labour sending countries in Asia. The decline in oil prices and its consequences on the economic situation in the Middle East has also significantly influenced the demand for workers in the main destination regions for Asian workers.[49]

Needless to add that not only the demand side but the supply side (i.e., the conditions of labour market in the host country) also needs to be taken into account to fully comprehend the patterns of overseas migration. Skills have been used as an entry point to understanding this dimension here. Keeping in mind the skill composition of Bangladeshi labour migrants given by BMET, ten major- group categories have been aggregated into 4 categories in this paper. Namely, these are Professional, Skilled, Semi-skilled and Less-skilled migrants. In this paper, the three-digit code International Standard Classification of Occupation (ISCO-08) has been converted into a single-digit ISCO 10 major group to categorize the occupations of migrants from Bangladesh and these ten major- group categories have been again aggregated into 4 categories.

During the period 2004 to 2018, among male migrants, the number of skilled labour was highest, 48.11%, followed by semi-skilled (38.75%) and Less-skilled migrants (7.04%). And the female migrants most of the migrants were semi-skilled (57.36%) and skilled was 39.36% of the total women migrants (See Figure 11 and 12). Professionals constituted 6.11% of the total migrant pool among men and just 1.37% among women. The mobility of labour across skills varied over the years.

Figure 11: Skill-composition of male migrants of Bangladesh from 2004 to 2018

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49 ADBI, OECD and ILO, *op. cit.*

Figure 12: Skill-composition of female migrants of Bangladesh from 2004 to 2018

Professionals 2%

Less-skilled 2%

Skilled 39%

Semi-skilled 57%

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

Over time it is noticeable that men professionals from Bangladesh have increased, particularly after 2013 (Table 10). Skilled workers going overseas have by large gone down over time amongst men and semi-skilled have gone up. Amongst women workers move to overseas market by professionals have come down, skilled women workers finding job abroad have remained nearly the same over the years, except showing sharp fall between 2010-12. Semi-skilled women workers are finding more overseas work and less skilled are losing out. Notwithstanding the differences between men and women, overall, one can see that semi-skilled workers are finding jobs overseas from Bangladesh over time.

The growing demand for some professional categories in few high-demand destinations countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman has triggered the increase in the share of professional male migrants. Interestingly, the detailed data collected from BMET reveals that among the professional category, more than 90% of them are specialist doctors, engineers, translators, and IT consultants. Amongst the women migrants, professional category consists HSE manager, industrial engineer, public relations officer, etc. Overall, women migrants are mostly those who are semi-skilled. Labour market within the country is deeply linked with what happens in the overseas labour market for Bangladesh workers. In the opening section of this paper, it is noted how there is an exodus of labour from the agricultural sector not finding enough avenues domestically in manufacturing and services. This pool of perhaps

less skilled workforce is finding some outlets in the overseas market. If this is true, it could perhaps be one reason for the seventh Plan to suggest that overseas migration provides 'a big cushion and softens the adverse effects of a slowdown in domestic job creation.

Table 10: Distribution of migrants by skill from Bangladesh between 2004 and 2018

Categories	SEX	2004-2006	2007-2009	2010-2012	2013-2015	2016-2018	Total
Professional		3.95	2.44	2.15	8.56	9.97	6.11
Skilled	Male	57.82	60.21	47.46	36.41	43.99	48.11
Semi-Skilled		24.72	28.01	46.6	50.58	39.14	38.75
Less- Skilled		13.5	9.34	3.78	4.45	6.9	7.04
Professional		5.32	3.71	1.17	1.69	0.43	1.37
Skilled	Female	45.73	52.41	19.94	31.64	47	39.36
Semi-Skilled		43.92	35.52	74.59	65.94	51.77	57.36
Less skilled		5.03	8.36	4.3	0.73	0.8	1.91
Professionals		4.03	2.48	2.08	7.37	8.64	5.61
Skilled	All Migrants	57.1	59.93	45.49	35.58	44.41	47.18
Semi-skilled		25.87	28.28	48.6	53.24	40.9	40.72
Less skilled		12.99	9.31	3.82	3.81	6.05	6.49

Source: Compiled data from BMET, 2019

The gains in poverty reduction could also be understood via this connection of overseas markets complimenting the domestic labour market. The loss of semi-skilled jobs in urban areas in sectors like garments, especially for women around 2012, could be another source of this pool of semi-skilled now seeking jobs abroad. The proportion of semi-skilled women workers going overseas does show a big jump in Table 10 from 2010 onwards. The seventh Plan also talks about specific challenges of youth employment. From amongst the women migrants, we know from the above discussion that overall sixty per cent of the total women migrants were in the age group of 31 to 40 years but specifically during the period between 2010 and 2012, women up to the age of 30 were more significantly seeking overseas employment. The limited gain to women as professionals in the international labour market is a reflection of low levels of professional education in the country. The restrictions on women to migrate and the control over age group that can migrate from Bangladesh is clearly the most significant reason explaining the limited presence of women from Bangladesh in the overseas labour market.

Conclusion

Studies on overseas migration from Bangladesh have looked at the overall patterns of international migration and examined the gender, age, occupation, and skill specificities of the migrants. This paper begins by suggesting that to understand the trends and characteristics of migration, we need to also examine the history of migration policy in Bangladesh. This history has immense significance for the women of the country. The paper establishes how the option for women from Bangladesh to use overseas migration as an instrument to find job and address poverty has been policy circumscribed, especially after the major policy shifts of 2003 and 2006. Besides the specific policy context of overseas migration, this paper explains migration patterns in terms of the restrictions to mobility of labour in destination countries and the impact of demand factors. The paper brings out another interesting fact. At the sub-national level, the BMET data reveals that the lower the relative poverty rate in a geographical area in Bangladesh the higher is the migration rate from these areas. Inter-temporally migration remains concentrated in a few districts and this concentration remains unchanged. Various historical and contemporary factors that have contributed to these dynamics are discussed in this paper. The lack of spread of government's migration agency offices away from the key urban centres to the distant less developed regions is identified as a policy lucane to explain the limited reach of overseas migration for the underdeveloped regions of the country. The paper also suggests that the unpredictability of nature combined with low development provisioning limits the possibilities for the households in these regions to build the necessary financial stability that is needed to explore overseas migration and sustain them through the period of negotiating and exploring the distant job market. On the supply side, the pool of less-skilled workforce pushed out from the agricultural sector and not finding avenues domestically in manufacturing and services, is finding an outlet in the overseas market. The gains in poverty reduction could therefore also be understood via this connection of overseas market complimenting the domestic labour market. The limited gain to women as professionals in the international labour market reflects low levels of professional education in the country. The restrictions on women to migrate and the control over age group that can migrate from Bangladesh is clearly the most significant reason explaining the limited presence of women from Bangladesh in the overseas labour market.