



# IID Policy Breakfast on Fairer Labour Migration



## Regulation of informal intermediaries will reduce illegalities in migration

### The Event

IID Organized a Policy Breakfast on labour migration on 10 May 2017 in Dhaka. This event entailed a discourse on policy priorities for implementing fairer labour migration. The participants for the event consisted of relevant stakeholders including public representatives from the Parliamentary Caucus on Migration, top level government officials from the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, researchers, activists, and representatives from national and international organisations.

### The Issues

One of the most stable sources of foreign exchange reserve for Bangladesh is through remittances sent by migrant workers. International labour migration takes care of Bangladesh's limited capacity to absorb the number of labours that enter the domestic job market each year. However, high migration cost and violation of migrant workers' rights curb the benefits that is and can be derived from international migration.

In this context policy breakfast addressed the following issues:

### Issues discussed



Factors contributing to the high cost for labour migration



Ways of disseminating necessary information among aspirant migrants



Steps to promote safer and fairer migration

Legal and policy issues for safer migration





## The Discussion

To create a candid and conducive environment for open discussion, IID Policy Breakfast follows a set of rules similar to Chatham House Rules where discussions during the event remain private without media and comments are not quoted outside. Visit [www.iidbd.org/pb](http://www.iidbd.org/pb) for details. Following these rules, the summary of the discussion highlighted here does not include everything that was discussed and opinions are not attributed to any participants.

### Intermediaries

Prospective migrants tend to take assistance from informal intermediaries for entry and integration within the foreign labour market rather than directly go to the formal network of recruitment agents. There exist two types of informal intermediaries in the market one group is known as the “Sub-agent”, who are informally connected with the recruiting agents and another group is popularly known as the “Broker (*dala*)”.

Since these intermediaries operate without any legal basis, it enables them to exploit migrants by charging them hefty sum of money for their services. As the system is informal, it is extremely difficult to regulate their activities.

### Information

A lack of access to information prevails among migrant workers about the process of migration, available government assistance, finding the formal recruiting agents, rights of migrants and available benefits at the destination countries. All these combined with corruption within and ineffectiveness of the public and private service providing agencies

further push migrants to seek assistance from informal brokers.

### Collusion

Collusion between some actions within the service providing public agencies and informal intermediaries/brokers, and informal activities within government organisations plague the whole migration process. A prospective migrant has to experience difficulty during passport and visa processing, police verification and other proceedings. All these push migrant workers to seek informal intermediaries. Such informal mechanisms allow migrants to deter rejections at the cost of additional money to brokers. Enough anecdotal evidence exists that show that the money extorted gets shared between the public institutions and informal intermediaries/brokers.

### Visa Permit

Around 75 per cent of the migrants’ visa come from the destination countries. Visa trading is a prevalent practice in countries like Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, the top two destination countries for Bangladeshi migrant workers. The Kafala system, for example, allows employer (individual or organisation) from the destination country to be a sponsor. They trade visas that enable prospective migrants to work or reside in the destination country. The visas traded are usually purchased by an intermediary who quotes the highest price, and then resold to one or more recruiting agents. As a result, the entire process hikes the cost of visa permit.

### Skill Recognition

Due to a lack of formal education and training, a



prerequisite for certification or skill recognition, many Bangladeshi migrant workers have to accept low-skilled jobs. Therefore, aspirant and returnee migrants are unable to provide well-documented evidence of their competencies even though the latter may have been equipped with new skills acquired from their work and experiences abroad.

### Proper Monitoring

Policy incoherence between origin and destination countries provides agents and intermediaries in origin country and employers at the destination country to take advantage of migrants' rights. In order to protect migrants, Bangladesh and many destination countries have set limits on recruitment fees that can be charged. However, migrants continue to be charged as the laws are not

exercised properly and the regulatory and monitoring measures taken by the country fails to address corruptions within the migration process.

### Global Issues

A number of global issues were identified at the event. However the participants requested a separate policy breakfast with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, along with MEWOE. Issues highlighted in the discussion include—potential of International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS) to shift the migration cost from employees to recruiters; engaging the civil society organisations in some destination countries to promote the rights of the migrants; leading multi-lateral negotiation at the global forums such as Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD); and creating mutually favourable policies which will support the migrants both at country of origin and destination.

## The Suggestions



Develop coordination between origin and destination countries and local organisations to counter inefficiency within the migration process.



Strengthen the Information and communication mechanisms of the District Employment and Manpower Offices so that migrants can attain complete information.



Improve regulations to include intermediaries within the policy structure and enhance government oversight to increase accountability of individuals or institutions that provide services to migrants.



Reduce the steps of migration process which would help to reduce the informal cost of migration paid at each level.



Follow up with the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MEWOE) on the issues discussed at the Policy Breakfast.



## The Policy Breakfast

The policy breakfast series by IID promotes evidence-informed and solution-driven debate among key influencers of policy community.

To create a candid and conducive environment for open discussion, policy breakfast follows information sharing rules that are very similar to the Chatham House Rules. Discussions during the event remains private and summary of the discussion are shared without attributing any opinion to any participant.

IID has been partnering with national and international institutions to organize policy breakfasts as a top level policy discussion forum. For more information on policy breakfast visit: [www.iidbd.org/pb](http://www.iidbd.org/pb)

Fairer Labour Migration (FLM) is an issue-based initiative that aims to make labour migration fairer and safer. It is being implemented by five organisations— Institute of Informatics and Development (IID), Young Power in Social Action (YPSA), WARBE Development Foundation, Bangladesh Ovhobashi Mohila Sramik Association



## The Participants

Participants from the following organisations attended the Policy Breakfast-

Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA); Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS); Bangladesh Ovhobashi Mohila Sramik Association (BOMSA); British Council Bangladesh; Charity Foundation; Institute of Informatics and Development (IID); International Organization for Migration (IOM); International Network of Alternative Financial Institutions (INAFI); Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF); Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MEWOE); Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU); The Daily Star; The Welfare Association for the Rights of Bangladeshi Emigrants (WARBE); and Winrock International.

(BOMSA), and Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU). The initiative is part of PROKAS (Promoting Knowledge for Accountable Systems) programme that brings together the Government of Bangladesh, civil society and the private sector to bring about positive change to improve the lives of Bangladeshis.