

Beneficiary Vulnerability Analysis and Engagement for Bangladeshi Overseas Labour Migrants

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**Global Fund to End Modern Slavery
BRAC Institute of Governance and Development**

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

BAIRA	Bangladesh Association of International Recruitment Agencies
BDT	Bangladeshi Taka
BHRS	Bangladesh Household Remittance Survey
BIGD	BRAC Institute of Governance and Development
BMET	Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training
FGDs	Focussed Group Discussion
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GFEMS	Global Fund to End Modern Slavery
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OKUP	Ovibashi Kormi Unnayan Programme
RED	Research and Evaluation Division
RMMRU	Refugee and Migration Movements Research Unit
RSC	Reintegration Services Centre
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UAE	United Arab Emirates

Definitions

1. **Migrant**¹: Any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is.
2. **Vulnerability (within a migration context)**²: The diminished capacity of an individual or group to resist, cope with, or recover from violence, exploitation, abuse, and violation(s) of their rights. It is determined by the presence, absence, and interaction of factors and circumstances that (a) increase the risk of, and exposure to, or (b) protect against, violence, exploitation, abuse, and rights violations
3. **Modern Slavery**³: Modern slavery is an overarching term including practices of exploitation in the form of forced labour, trafficking, child abuse etc. The term has come into vogue partly because of the complexities surrounding concepts that are typically subsumed under its umbrella, namely: slavery; servitude; trafficking in persons; forced labour; debt bondage; forced marriage; and sale of or sexual exploitation of children. The latter terms are defined in international legal instruments to which most States are party.
4. **Forced Labor**⁴: All work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of a penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily. Forced labour refers to situations in which persons are coerced to work through the use of violence or intimidation, or by subtler means such as accumulated debt, retention of identity papers or threats of denunciation to immigration authorities.
5. **Bonded labour**⁵: Bonded labour refers to a long-term relationship between employee and employer which is cemented through a loan, by custom or by force, which denies the employee various freedoms including to choose his or her employer, to enter into a fresh contract with the same employer or to negotiate the terms and condition of her/his contract. International Labor Organization (ILO) recognizes bonded labour as a special form of forced labour.

¹ International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s definition of a migrant: <https://www.iom.int/who-is-a-migrant>

² Protection of the Human rights and fundamental freedoms of migrants and the specific needs of migrants in vulnerable situations. IOM. Available at: https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/ODG/GCM/IOM-Thematic-Paper-Protection-of-Human-Rights-and-Vulnerable-Migrants.pdf

³ Defining and measuring modern slavery: Parliament of Australia.

⁴ ILO Forced Labor Convention, 1930 definition. Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/definition/lang-en/index.htm>

⁵ Bonded labour in India: Its incidence and pattern. ILO. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_081967.pdf

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Executive Summary

Each year, more than 400,000 workers depart from Bangladesh to seek employment abroad and better their lives. Many of the migrants migrate without a job contract in hand, without knowing their salary, hours of work they are supposed to work for, job description and employment conditions. This makes them highly vulnerable to exploitative work conditions in the destination countries and, thereby, to forced labour. Estimates from the International Labour Organization (ILO) suggest that 24.9 million men, women and children are living under forced labour in the Asia Pacific region alone. This calls for an urgent need to address the determinants of forced labour, factors influencing the vulnerability of migrants to forced labour and how the vulnerabilities can be reduced.

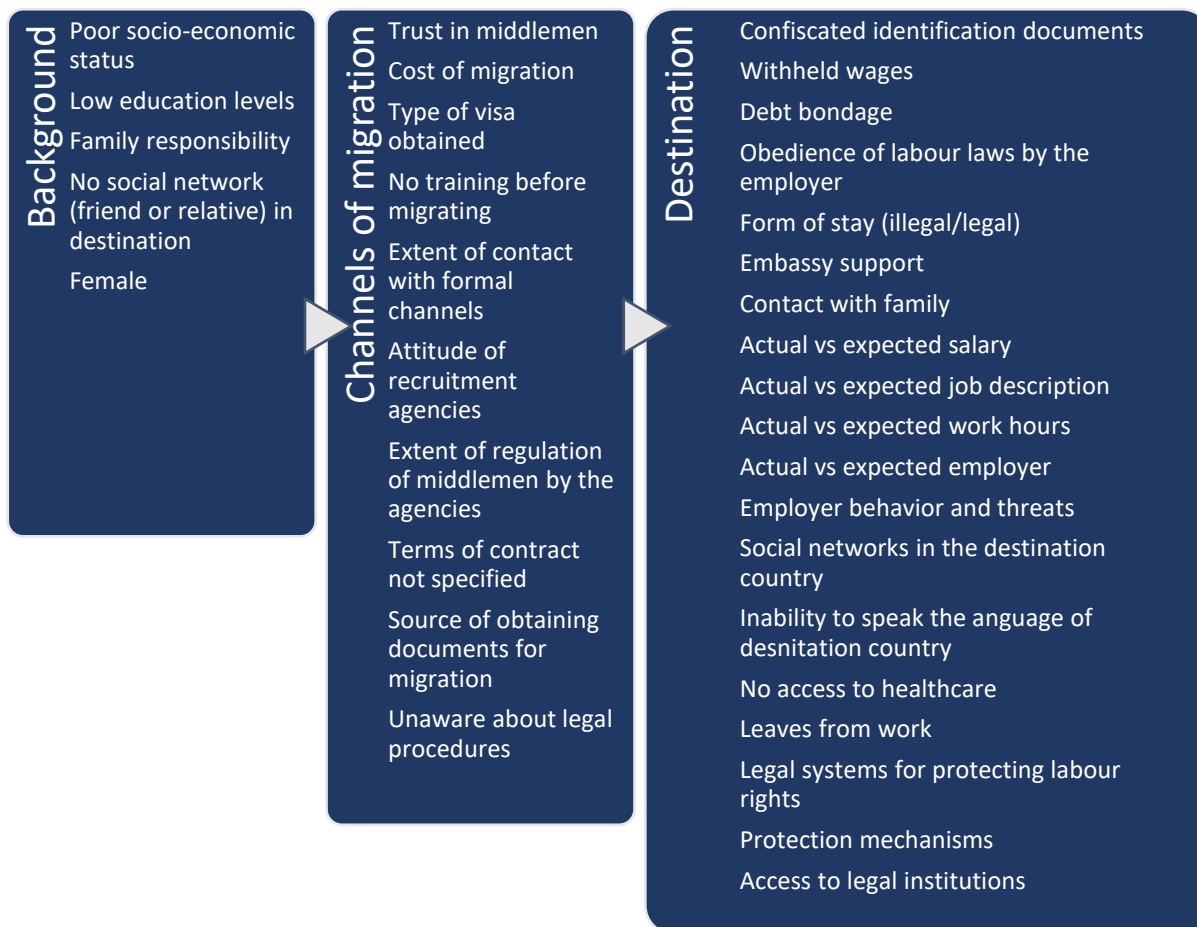
This study, undertaken by BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), together with the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS), aims to analyse the factors affecting the vulnerability of Bangladeshi overseas migrants/potential migrants and document the experiences of modern slavery from returnees. The study also aims to evaluate the suggestions from the migrants to identify the possible intervention areas for GFEM. The study followed a mixed-method: i) Qualitative tools such as Focussed Group Discussions (FGDs), stakeholder workshops and case studies, and, ii) quantitative survey to analyse the indicators of vulnerability towards forced labour.

The factors analysed include the assessment of the work hours of the overseas migrants, actual and expected salary, channels of migration, abusive working and living conditions faced by the migrants in the destination countries, forms of abuse experienced (including physical, mental and psychological), deception in terms of work and living conditions, restriction of movement, isolation from the social networks, withheld wages, confiscated documents, intimidation and threats received by the migrants, the disparity in salary, unregulated labour laws, socio-economic pressure and awareness about the migration procedure. The study also analyses the role of middlemen, recruitment agencies and the government in ensuring that the migration process is followed properly, and laws and regulations are in place to prevent forced labour.

Findings of the study suggest that Bangladeshi overseas migrants are highly vulnerable to forced labour and face dire conditions in destination countries. Many of them, who migrate through middlemen, tend to pay high costs for the migration process. Due to lower education levels and lack of skills, the migrants lack important information regarding overseas migration and are highly vulnerable to becoming victims of forced labour. Many migrants in our study experienced mental, social and physical abuse; female migrants experienced sexual abuse at a large scale especially when working as domestic help. We also observed that the migrant workers tend to work extra hours without pay in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

This report identifies that low education, channels of migration, trust in the middlemen, socio-economic status, employer behaviour, information regarding the migration process, knowledge of the employment terms, social networks in the destination countries, knowledge of the language spoken in the destination country are some of the important indicators of vulnerability to forced labour. Future strategies by GFEM and the Government of Bangladesh should target greater emphasis on training, regulation on the number of middlemen recruited by recruitment agencies, sensitizing migrants of migration-related information with the help of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as BRAC, building safety and protection mechanisms through Bangladeshi Embassies in the destination countries and cautioning the migrants about the losses of migrating through middlemen. The government should also take steps to establish accountability mechanisms for recruitment agencies, the Government of Bangladesh and the middlemen. A mechanism to hold the relevant agencies accountable for information asymmetries among migrants would help ensure effective delivery of training and knowledge building activities.

Figure 1: Dimensions of and contributors to the vulnerability of migrant/ potential migrant workers



1. Introduction

According to the Global Slavery Index, 40.3 million people were living in modern slavery in 2016, including 24.9 million men, women and children in forced labour in the Asia Pacific region; this translates to 4 out of 1,000 people engaged in different forms of forced labour. Out of the 24.9 million people, 16 million are exploited in the private sector such as domestic work, construction, apparels, agriculture, etc.⁶

The number of overseas migrants from Bangladesh is increasing every year with around 614,585 migrants in 2018 alone⁷. With the large number of Bangladeshi overseas migrants, there is an increasing need to assess the conditions of modern slavery among them. BRAC's experience from its Safe Migration Program elucidates the extent of abuse faced by 7,000 women, who returned from Saudi Arabia because of physical torture, sexual abuse, limited contact with the outside world, violence and irregularities in payment. In 2017 alone, BRAC witnessed the return of 2,641 women after experiencing various forms of abuses.

Different studies shed light on the forms and extent of coercion on forced labours in destination countries. Benach et al, (2010) show that migrant workers experience serious abuse and exploitation at the workplace. They find that the migrant workers face social exclusion, have limited health and safety training, have limited effectiveness because of linguistic and cultural hurdles and get minimum support or compensations when injured. Verbal abuse is a regular experience for many migrant workers. Female migrant workers face a higher degree of discrimination in some Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries than male workers. Domestic workers are not provided with the basic labour rights in national labour laws because of the informal nature of their work. Moreover, women are subject to mandatory HIV/pregnancy test every year and if either result is positive, they undergo punishment while employers do not face any acquisition (Siddiqui, 2003). In some countries, it is evident that women, both working in homes and factories, are subject to physical, verbal and even sexual harassment (Blanchet, 2002). Evidence (Sönmez, et al., 2011) also suggests that domestic workers, mostly women, lived with their employers and thus had little autonomy whereas company workers could dispose of their time after work hours. The majority of domestic workers admitted that sex work was an integral part of their job, and about 10% stated that sex work was their only occupation.

Overall, studies have shown that the prevalence of the incidences of forced labour is very high among the migrants from the Asia Pacific region to GCC countries (Sonmez et al, 2011). Evidence (Sonmez. Et al, 2011; De Bel-Air, 2017) suggests that migrants to GCC countries have been subjected to different forms of forced labour such as restrictions on freedom of movement, withholding of wages or identity documents, physical or sexual violence, threats and intimidation or fraudulent debt from which workers cannot escape.

The high incidences of forced labour result from high levels of vulnerability of migrants. Factors influencing the vulnerability of migrants may be personal or circumstantial, including disability, age, gender, family situation and socioeconomic status. Other factors influencing vulnerability include the skills of migrants, current and expected income from migration, the medium of migration, source of money for bearing the costs of migration, knowledge about the migration process, information about labour laws and so on.

To achieve Target 8.7 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly related to countering incidences of forced labour, there is an urgent need to tackle modern slavery through a public-private partnership, geographic and industry programming, innovative technologies and improved monitoring.

⁶ Global Slavery index: <https://www.globallslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/regional-analysis/asia-and-the-pacific/>

⁷ <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/viewStatReport.action?reportnumber=20>

An analysis of the vulnerability of overseas migrants can help identify the dynamic factors influencing forced labour and the scope and types of possible interventions targeting the most vulnerable.

BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), in collaboration with Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS), undertook a Beneficiary Vulnerability Analysis for Bangladeshi overseas labour migrants going to GCC countries. The findings from the assessment will feed into the formulation of more effective interventions for tackling modern slavery in the migration context. The two important workstreams involved (1) analysing the vulnerability of victims, potential victims, and survivors of forced and bonded labour among overseas migrants in low-skilled occupations, and (2) facilitating inputs from survivors and those vulnerable to forced/bonded labour to inform intervention strategies of GFEMS. The study aimed to assess the reasons and processes of the exposure of migrants to conditions of forced labour, the areas of vulnerability, key factors affecting vulnerabilities, the perceptions of the victims of forced labour on their exploitation and areas for intervention and government attention. The findings from this study will help shape intervention strategies to build capacities of the government, recruitment agencies, criminal justice system, international agencies. The findings will also help empower migrant returnees who were victims of forced labour.

2. Migration Context and Process in Bangladesh

A large majority of the migrants are male although the number of female migrant workers is increasing each year. Around 10% of the national male labour force being migrant workers, this is an important sector for the national economy. A significant proportion of these migrants are poor, work as casual wage labours, are employed in unskilled occupations and earn lesser income than workers with formal employment contracts (Das et al, 2018). International migration plays an important part in the economy of Bangladesh and offers an opportunity for unskilled labourers to escape poverty and unemployment. Successful migration has contributed to reducing poverty among rural households (Raihan et al 2009). According to the Bangladesh Household Remittance Survey (BHRS) (IOM, 2010), overseas migrants earned almost double the amount of income as compared to the income of an average resident household in Bangladesh. But, the income of migrant workers is mostly temporary as they work fixed contracts. Irrespective, the survey witnessed 70% of the respondents from households with migrant worker expressing confidence in sustaining the increase in income through skills and assets acquired, and 88% indicated enhanced education opportunities for their children.

However, Das et al (2018) estimate that overseas migration is a risky enterprise for approximately 30% of the potential migrants. They show that the earnings of migrants abroad are a multiple of the earnings in the domestic labour market and, thus, despite high risks of failures and high costs of migration, overseas migration remains a powerful attraction.

The Bangladesh government is intricately involved in the migration process and regulates the migration through the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET). BMET authorises the recruitment agencies in Bangladesh to recruit and train the migrants (Rahman 2010, Das et al, 2018).

The migration process involves recruitment agencies in a country of destination sending a request to the recruitment agencies in Bangladesh. The recruitment agencies in Bangladesh have to get initial clearance from BMET which allows them to recruit and send migrants to the recruitment agencies in destination countries. Sometimes, the recruitment process involves interviews, for which an aspiring migrant needs to travel to the city where the interviewing takes place. The recruitment agencies in the destination and host country are responsible for visa processing and other immigration formalities.

Middlemen act as an important link between prospective migrants and recruitment agencies. Middlemen in rural areas are in contact with potential migrants. They are also connected with the middlemen in urban areas, who are in contact with recruitment agencies in the city. Some rural

middlemen are returnee migrants themselves and their personal migration experience abroad is one of the main drivers of the migration decision of other people (Akram 2007, Das et al, 2018).

Migrants have to bear the complete cost of the migration process, which involves fees to the brokers, middlemen, recruitment agencies and formal fees and expenses such as passport fees, air tickets, travel insurance, etc. The migrants often pay for the entire cost of migration to the immediate middleman; this makes the process opaque as migrants do not know the break-up of the fees. This allows the middlemen to misguide and overcharge the migrants, provide them with fake documents or keep them waiting for a long time after collecting the fee from them to make a profit. In addition, since the migrants are mostly unskilled and have low levels of education, they are mostly unaware of the migration process and modalities and they are easy targets for the fraudulent middlemen. Therefore, it is important to better understand these vulnerabilities and inform intervention and policies..

3. Objectives and Research Questions

The two core objectives of this study are:

- (1) to examine the vulnerability of victims, potential victims, and survivors of forced and bonded labour among overseas migrants in low-skilled occupations
- (2) to facilitate input from survivors and those vulnerable to forced/bonded labour into GFEMS' intervention strategy

To meet these two objectives, the study identified the following research questions:

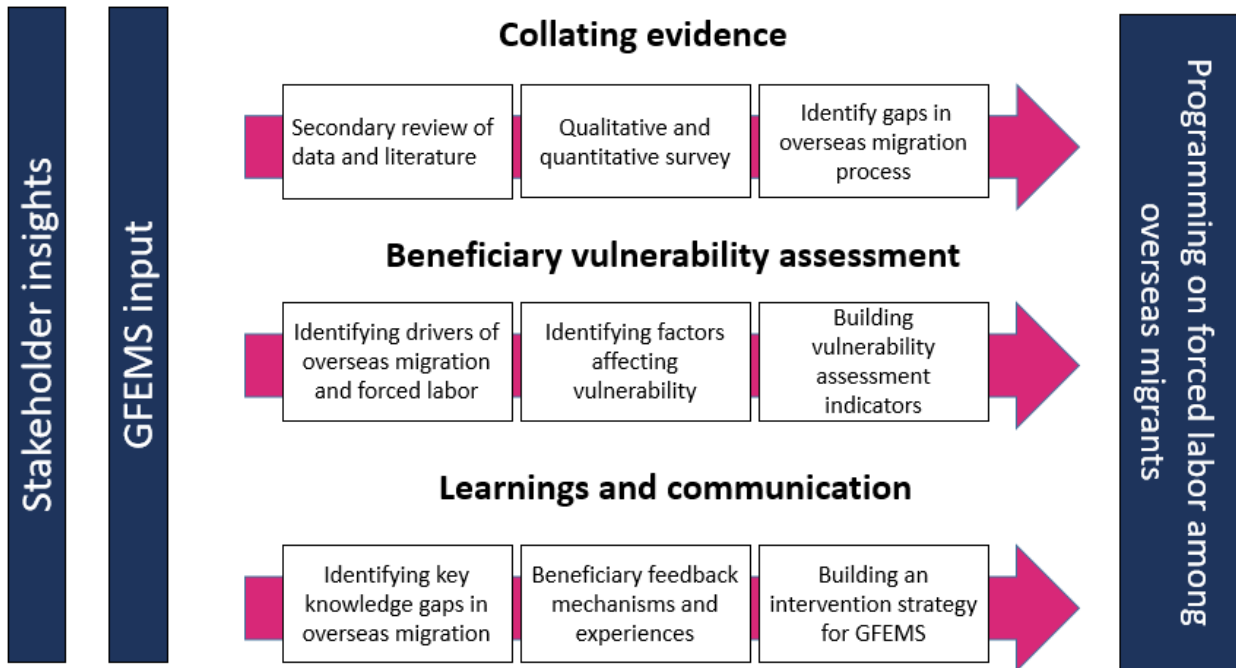
1. What factors affect the vulnerability of victims, potential victims and survivors of forced/bonded labour among overseas migrants in low-skilled occupations?
2. What are the important gaps in the overseas migration process that turn some migrants into victims and how other migrants avoid falling prey?
3. Which occupations, countries, migration channels report high incidences of forced/bonded labour among men and women?
4. What is the impact of exploitation in the form of forced/bonded labour among the lives of victims and their families?
5. How can the vulnerability and incidences of forced labour be reduced?
6. What factors should the GFEM'S intervention strategy address in the migration process for reducing the vulnerability of victims, potential victims and survivors of forced/bonded labour in the areas of study?

4. Methodology and Data

4.1. Approach

To answer all our research questions, we followed an **iterative approach** to beneficiary vulnerability assessment through qualitative and quantitative research methods. We used qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to fill the gap in the evidence. We gathered the perceptions of local and international stakeholders for gaining insights on the drivers of high vulnerability among the migrants and the gaps in the processes which cause forced/bonded labour. Our team also consulted GFEMS during research for gaining inputs on datasets, methods and other necessary support.

The team aims to develop a beneficiary vulnerability assessment framework for a better understanding of the dynamics of vulnerability among men and women in apparels, construction work, domestic and hospitality sectors. The findings of this research will act as an entry point for informing GFEMS programming and future research on forced labour among migrants.



4.2. Stocktaking of evidence

We tried to collate relevant secondary datasets, the literature on migration and forced labour, case studies, contact numbers of the migrants who returned from GCC countries and available data on potential migrants. BIGD has a large dataset from the Safe Migration Program (discussed in Section 4.4) which was useful for quickly reaching the victims and potential victims of forced labour. BRAC currently has 466 active migration forums in 252 upzilas under 42 districts. The migration volunteers in the field enabled BIGD to leverage their contacts to kick start the assignment. As a part of the evaluation of BRAC's Safe Migration program (Das et al, 2017), a census was conducted to identify potential migrants in 2014. The potential migrants' families were followed up through phone calls to know if they were able to migrate (it was found that out of 3000 potential migrants, 800 migrated after two years). In addition, BIGD has a resource of 100 case studies on the victims of forced labour from GCC countries (from the BRAC Safe Migration Program), the results of which were reviewed for including the most relevant cases to this assignment.

4.3. Qualitative data

Our team evaluated and reviewed the 100 pre-existing Case Studies from the BRAC Migration programme to examine the factors affecting the vulnerability of the migrants. We conducted four FGDs with men and women in two districts of Bangladesh with a high level of migration (Munshiganj and Narsingdi) and 16 in-depth case studies of male and female migrants in 3 districts of Bangladesh (Munshiganj, Tangail and Narsingdi).

We used the database of migrant workers from BRAC's Migration Programme to quickly reach migrants who would be willing to give us time to talk to us frankly and in detail.⁸ BRAC's Migration Programme

⁸ In our proposal, we mentioned our plan for using programmatic case studies for qualitative sample selection. However, after reviewing the case studies, we did not find the necessary variations we anticipated to adopt that as

has 10 Reintegration Services Centres (RSCs) at the district level across Bangladesh, which maintains data and contact with return migrants in that area. With the help of the Migration Programme, we randomly selected three RSCs (Narsingdi, Munshiganj and Tangail).

In the first step, the RSCs helped us in organizing the Focussed Group Discussions (FGDs) with 8-10 male and 8-10 female migrants in Narsingdi and Munshiganj. The group was a mix of migrants who migrated to GCC countries and had both positive and negative migration experiences. In two out of three RSCs, we first conducted FGDs to understand the different processes and issues around migration. The discussion aimed at examining the context in which the migrants decided to migrate, the migration processes, actors involved, experiences, repatriation, re-integration, aspirations of the victims/potential victims and survivors. We also tried to understand the migrants' perspective of vulnerability to forced labour, and to validate the assumed indicators of vulnerability to better design the quantitative survey. We did not hold FGD in the third RSC (Tangail), because the four FGDs conducted in Munshiganj and Narsingdi (for men and women) yielded similar results. From the 8-10 participants of each FGD, we selected a few participants to follow up for in-depth interviews. We selected these participants based on their destination country, the sector they worked in and the kind of experience they had in the destination countries. We selected eight male and seven female migrants from the three RSCs for the in-depth interviews. One female migrant who migrated as a garment worker was separately selected from a government training institute.

The qualitative interviews helped us build victim profiles and estimate their age, gender, economic status, disability status, family status, etc. (as analysed in Section 5). The interviews enabled the assessment of victims on various levels of vulnerability and helped understand the reasons for migration, factors affecting forced/bonded labour, escape mechanisms and sector-specific work environments in GCC countries.

4.4. A quantitative survey of migrant workers/family members

In 2014, BRAC-RED conducted a census in 605 villages from 50 sub-districts of Bangladesh. The census identified potential migrants (i.e. those who were trying to migrate) as well as current and past migrants from 89,266 households. After the census, a baseline household survey was conducted in 2014. It covered 3,106 potential migrants from 3,051 households. The household survey collected detailed information on the potential migrants identified by the census. Specifically, the survey collected information on demographic characteristics, asset holding, income, occupations, number of attempts for migration, costs of migration, the medium of migration, asset holdings with the migrant family, source of income to finance migration expenditure, salary mentioned in the contracts, type of job contracted for, documents required for migration, etc.

After completion of the baseline household survey, BRAC-RED conducted a phone call survey with the potential migrants covered in the baseline household survey. The objective of the phone survey was to document whether the aspiring migrants succeeded in their attempt at migrating. In total 2,851 aspiring migrants were successfully surveyed by telephone. The phone survey was conducted from January 2015-December 2016. It identified that out of 2,851 potential migrants, 864 individuals migrated as of December 2016 and 656 individuals stopped trying. In 2017, we conducted a household survey on a sub-sample of 400 migrants out of the 864; we collected information on migrants' employment and earnings abroad, expected salary, the channel of migration, name of the destination country, etc.

our sampling frame. Instead of that case studies as the sampling frame, we used BRAC's migration program platform for the sample selection.

We conducted a follow-up survey with 170 migrants to gulf countries from the list of 400 migrants identified by RED's phone survey. The survey was conducted during 17-25 January 2019. The survey collected the vulnerability related information for migrants and potential migrants from Bangladesh to the country of destination (after migration) through a structured questionnaire. In addition to acquiring information on the household's socioeconomic status, income sources, migration history, social relationships, occupation, borrowing sources, costs for migration, we obtained information on specific factors indicating vulnerability. These factors included experiences of forced labour, debt bondage, job satisfaction, contract amendments by the employer, withholding of identity documents, the experience of abuse and exploitation, gender disparity and mental health status.

We collected data using the SurveyCTO software. We surveyed the migrants who are still living in destination countries (108 respondents) using were surveyed over phone/IMO/Skype. Among the total sample, only four are women and one female worker is still living abroad. We did not find any respondent who reported any form of disability.

4.5. Stakeholder consultation workshop

We conducted a multi-stakeholder FGD on 17 January 2019 at the BRAC Centre. Participants included representatives from two recruitment agencies (Montage and Leeds HR Solutions), two migrant workers' rights organizations - Bangladeshi Ovibashi Mohila Sramik Association (BOMSA) and Welfare.

Representatives from the Association of Repatriated Bangladeshi Employees (WARBE), an organization developing training modules for migrant workers, Centre for Development Communications Ltd, (Dev Com), Manusher Jonno Foundation and two NGOs - BRAC (Migration Programme) and Ovibashi Kormi Unnayan Programme (OKUP). Invited participants who did not attend at the last moment were from the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA) and Refugee and Migration Movements Research Unit (RMMRU).

The stakeholder workshop included conversations about (i) the role of brokers (*dalals*) or middlemen, (ii) lack of information among the workers regarding the migration process, employment contracts and job responsibilities, (iii) issues related to Kafala system of employment, (iv) need for sensitization and education among the migrant workers, (v) partnerships among various stakeholders, especially among the recruitment agencies and the NGOs which have outreach activities at the local level, (vi) role of the government agencies and private sector, (vii) the challenges faced by recruitment agencies in terms of recruiting the migrants through formal channels ,(viii) role of family members and relatives in obtaining visas for migrant workers (ix) vulnerability of female migrants and perceptions of the recruitment agencies regarding female migrants in particular (x) limitations of the trainings provided to migrants, (xi) limitations of the migration process for skilled workers, and, (xii) role of shelter cells, embassies and protection systems.

The stakeholder workshop helped us to:

- Identify the current roles, responsibilities and levels of influence of the stakeholders on the vulnerability of overseas migrants
- Explore practices of recruitment agencies for recruiting in sectors including apparels, construction, domestic work and hospitality (as potential victims)
- Examine the intermediaries involved and social networks available to migrants when they are subjected to forced labour and exploitation
- Identify the legalities and bilateral agreements between the governments

4.6. Analysis

Our team used the evidence from stocktaking exercise and stakeholder interviews to identify the core vulnerability indicators across the parameters including socio-economic standing, geographical location, proximity to quality services, gender dynamics, education levels, health, demographics, wages, work hours, sector-wise employment policies, etc. These indicators were used to develop a vulnerability assessment framework for our analysis. This framework includes indicators across which the vulnerability of victims or potential victims can be assessed and rated. It also the role of the actors responsible for increased vulnerability levels, limitations in government policies and migration-related information among the migrants.

Where relevant, gender dynamics in migration patterns and vulnerability levels have been analysed across sectors. The results of BRAC's Safe Migration Program depict that women are extremely vulnerable to other forms of modern slavery (e.g. sexual exploitation and trafficking), in addition to forced labour. This assignment has focussed on understanding gender dynamics affecting vulnerability patterns by using the above-mentioned methods. Suggestions and recommendations are also provided for guiding programming interventions.

5. Qualitative Findings

“If only they gave me my salary properly, my experience abroad would have been good. If only they let me sleep a little, let me go out, talk to other Bengalis, I would have been fine. This is what is needed for a person to be happy. No one is there with you. It feels good to talk to other Bengalis.” Female migrant, 24 years, Saudi Arabia.

The destination countries covered by the qualitative research include Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Dubai, Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji and Iraq in the case of male migrants; in the case of female migrants, the destination countries were Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Lebanon, Jordan, Bahrain and Malaysia. Male migrants included construction workers, electricians, plumbers, cleaners, factory workers, sawmill workers, etc. Female migrants included mainly domestic workers and cleaners and garment workers.

It should be noted that the FGDs with the migrant workers and the 16 case studies conducted were done in the rural areas with the assistance of the BRAC Reintegration Service Centre (RSC) at the district level. As such, there was a dominance of migrant workers who experienced varying degrees of forced labour and a few migrant workers who had returned with a positive experience. Therefore, the qualitative research is not evidence of the prevalence of forced labour. Neither does it represent migrant workers across economic classes. It should be used to understand indicators and processes that facilitate vulnerability to forced labour.

Two broad issues emerging from the qualitative research are:

- i) It is difficult to determine a destination or a sector of work that indicate vulnerability to forced labour, as indicators of forced labour in differing intensities are found across destination and sectors. However, there are a few conditions that make migrant workers particularly vulnerable in general.
- ii) There is no single pathway that increases vulnerability to forced labour. Our findings indicate that, most often, regular and legitimate journeys and work turn into illegal and forced labour situations. The reverse is also true where illegal migrants get legalized, but that is a rarity rather than the norm.

5.1. Characteristically vulnerable

5.1.1. Low education contributes to vulnerability

One of the common characteristics of male and female migrant workers in this research is that they have very little *education*. In fact, while the male migrant workers were more likely to have some education, though mostly primary education and one or two with slightly higher levels of education, most of the female migrant workers had no education at all. The lack of education has far-reaching consequences. From the details of the stories, it appears that those with no or very little education are more likely to unquestioningly believe what they are told regarding the kind of work they will be doing, the salary they will receive, the amount needed for their migration, etc. They fully depend on the middleman or broker to undertake all the processes regarding their migration, making them vulnerable to deception and forced labour. They do not know how to access information, what kind of visa they have received, what their passport details are, what is written in their contracts. On the other hand, it seems, in the case of women with some education, they were able to get company visas that afforded them the formal structure of work with defined hours and salary. That is not to say that education on its own insures against vulnerability but perhaps reduces it to a certain extent.

Lack of education works as an impetus for migration. Particularly when questioned about why they aspired to migrate, a common response was that due to the lack of education or adequate qualification, men are not eligible for most jobs. The kind of jobs or work they are eligible for, do not earn them enough income to run their household or is not available throughout the year. Migrants also believe that there is a high level of unemployment in the country and large amounts of bribe or connections are necessary to access those jobs.

5.1.2. Poverty as a driver for migration and vulnerability

Another common characteristic is poverty. In the case of men, however, it is not the hard-core poor who aspire to migrate. They have some or little asset or financial support, but they have to sell assets (land, jewellery), borrow large amounts of money (from relatives or NGOs/ banks) and spend savings to pay for the high costs of migration, which leaves them in a vulnerable economic condition. Case studies show that female migrants are often extremely poor with no assets. The cost of migration is less for them, so they usually borrow the entire amount. Because of their economic vulnerability and debt burden, these migrants are often compelled to continue work under unfair, harsh and abusive conditions. The debt often forces them to continue after their visa expired or change work illegally for higher salaries, putting them at greater risk.

5.1.3. Lack of social support for women as a driver of vulnerability

Female migrants seemed to be further vulnerable in terms of family support. In most cases, the female migrants were abandoned, divorced or widowed, with children to bring up and parents who cannot support them. Their desperation, in many cases, translated into vulnerability to deception by middlemen and forced work. Even amongst those who had husbands, their husbands were likely to be drug addicts, unemployed, have incurred huge debts or are physically abusive towards their wives.

“My husband used to do drugs. He also had a problem with his hand so he could not work. He used to beat me a lot. He beat me every day for the six months that I was married to him. I used to do domestic work outside, then come home and do all the household work. He expected me to have sex every day, and, if I refused or if I was ill, he would beat me. I even wanted to commit suicide.” Female migrant worker, 24 years.

5.2. The perceived necessity of *dalals*

5.2.1. Role of middlemen in dealing with paperwork and formalities

“People migrate based on trust. I, too, went based solely on trust”. Male migrant, 30 years, Malaysia

The entire process of migration is shrouded in mystery. Or that is how it is sold to the poor who want to migrate. The migration process involves many institutions, offices, training centres – some of which are at the sub-district level or the district level and some in Dhaka. For people living in the villages with no clear directions, it is like navigating unknown territory. This is what the middlemen or brokers bank on. A 28-year old female migrant worker said, *“Can you go abroad without the help of dalals? There is no other way to go.”*

People rely on middlemen even when they go on a “calling visa”, which is understood to be when the government of the destination countries invites the recruitment of migrant workers through formal channels and issues visas. A 35-year old male migrant to Malaysia stated that,

“I don’t know any offices. I don’t know the office I have to go through. I know that “calling visa” is a government visa but I don’t know the office where I have to submit my papers, where to do what. We don’t know these things.”

For the migrants, the middleman holds the key to this convoluted process; he is the first person of contact and the one who has all the information about the job they are getting into. He is the one who lives in the community and can be tracked, if necessary. Therefore, he is the person to trust. The main financial transaction with the middleman occurs even before a potential migrant arrives at the recruitment agency or the training centre. By that time, even if they did not receive correct information regarding the type of visa and travel costs, it is too late because the money has already exchanged hands.

Even the recruitment agencies depend on the *dalals* due to limited outreach in the villages. In addition, the agencies do not consider opening offices at the local level due to financial constraints. Middlemen enable easy access and communication with the potential migrants in the villages, lowering the incentive for the agencies to open field offices. A recruitment agency described the recruitment process as follows:

“A supplier chain functions in the Dhaka base. Whenever recruiting agencies publish the demands for migrant workers, these Dhaka-based suppliers work with the local suppliers in villages, to collect workers. After this, in the fourth level, dalals enter the scenario who then carry forward the collection process. The dalals then hand over these workers to the agencies. Each process of migration is centred around the role of dalals.”

5.2.2. Trust on the middlemen as the factor of vulnerability

It is clear from the FGDs and the case studies that, potential migrants are well-aware that migration may not be successful, that is, they may return empty-handed. But they believe it will not be the case for them. This trust is surprising, given the fact that the stories of the return migrants are varied. Some of the case study respondents stated that the middleman is a resident of their village or the next village, and, therefore cannot cheat them. Some go to middlemen who are well-known and have sent many others before. Some go to middlemen who are in some way related to them. But there is no general attempt among the migrants to verify the credibility of the middlemen.

A woman who was sent to work in a brothel said,

“The dalal said you will work in a company and live in a house. You will work from 7 in the morning to 7 in the evening. The dalal was a tenant in our area. His home district is in Rangpur or somewhere. Apparently, the dalal used to live abroad. He started sending people after he returned. That’s why I

thought the man is good. I had no idea he would send me to a bad place". Female migrant worker, 28 years old, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Malaysia

5.2.3. Middlemen as the source of misinformation and lies

From the case studies done by BRAC's Migration Programme, it is clear that there are middlemen who are frauds and who run away with the money. But it is difficult to distinguish between good and bad middlemen or those who provide authentic information on the terms and conditions of work, and those who give misinformation. Often the migrants have different experiences in their separate attempts using the same middleman. This is why both male and female migrants believe that their migration experience depends on their fate – it is something that no one can control. One female migrant stated,

"Did the dalal go to the house I was sent to work in? Did he see my employer's face? Did he know how she would behave with me? He sent me in good faith." Female migrant worker, 30, Qatar.

The middlemen are the liaisons for the recruiting agency at the local level. They are paid by the recruiting agencies to find potential migrants for them. As a 30-year old male migrant stated,

"Mainly, the employers get people through the agents. Dalal is a profession, they work for the agencies. The dalals lie to send people abroad. They lie to recruit people. For instance, suppose workers are needed for a furniture business. Now an electrician wants to go abroad. The dalal tells him that he has a job for an electrician. But the visa is for the furniture business. Sometimes workers are demanded urgently. So dalals lie in order to supply migrants urgently."

The case studies and the stories from the FGDs are rife with experiences of being lied to by the middlemen. The most common lie is the exaggeration of salary. Nearly all respondents, even those who believe they had a positive experience as a migrant, stated that they were not given the salary they were promised. The middlemen also lie about the costs of food and accommodation, water and electricity bills, health insurance, assuring the potential migrants that their employer or company will bear these costs. They also lie about the rate of overtime, which is sometimes not paid at all. These are common grievances that the migrants have but they do not complain much about these. What constitutes deception for them is not getting the job at all when they reach there, not getting the promised job, the nature of the job that awaits them, and, the volume of work they have to do. The latter is specific to domestic workers. There are also cases, though fewer, of being given fake visas, wrong visas, taken by illegal routes (by boat and walking), and even being held for ransom.

The most common complaint among male migrants was that the *dalals* lied to them about the duration of their visa. Sometimes it was two years instead of three years. Sometimes it was a visa that was about to expire, and they were deported. Apart from these, there are also cases where the *dalals* cheat them and give them a tourist visa which they find out only after reaching the destination country. They are then sent back from the airport and they lose all the money they spent. It is not uncommon that a migrant does not know what kind of a visa he had.

"I think mine was a "labour" visa. I am not sure. Nothing was written about the work I was going to do there. I didn't even have a copy of my passport with me". 29-year old migrant to Malaysia.

5.2.4. Middlemen responsible for illegal migration

Often, *dalals* take the migrants by boat and on foot through various countries. There is a lot of evidence in the case studies, conducted by BRAC Migration Programme, of the plight of these migrants. Sometimes these migrants do not know that they would be taken by boat or by foot, as was the case of one of the FGD participants. He starved, walked for miles through mountains and forests, was tortured

by the people leading them, was held for ransom, escaped and went to the police who sent him to jail. He was later deported to Bangladesh. This is still common and many of these migrants are trying to reach EU countries spending 7-8 lakh taka for this journey. One female case study respondent spoke of her aunt who gave the same amount of money that she did and had submitted papers along with her but who happened to get her visa before her and left. She ended up on a boat from Indonesia to Malaysia and later held for a ransom of two lakh taka.

5.2.5. Getting a passport – racket by middlemen

All FGD participants and case study respondents unequivocally agreed that the process of getting a passport is a large racket. The migrants are already overcharged by the *dalal* they hire to undertake the migration process. However, even if they try to get the passport on their own, there are crowds of *dalals* outside the passport office who offer to fill the application form for a sum of money.

“The first point of corruption in the journey to go abroad is when you go to get your passport done. You cannot get a passport without a bribe. There are more dalals at the passport office than there are officers.” 32- year old male migrant to Oman and Dubai.

The migrants mentioned several instances where they attempted to fill the application form themselves and submit it, but they were rejected every time because of mistakes. The application was accepted only when they used a *dalal*. Next, they are asked if they want police verification or would rather pay an amount so that the police would not visit their home. Most choose to pay to avoid police visit to their home. Thus, typically a migrant ends up paying twice or more than the regular fees to get a passport.

There are further dangers to getting a passport through a *dalal*. Sometimes they falsify the age, and even the name, unbeknownst to the migrants. For instance, one female migrant worker migrated when she was only 12 years old, though her passport said she was 18. Another female migrant who had given her old passport to the *dalal* to renew, received her passport when she was about to board and found that it was in another person’s name. Sometimes, of course, the migrants know that their passport is being created with false information. For instance, one male migrant who failed his medical exam twice used false information to get a passport the third time.

According to the recruitment agencies, in order to curb these tendencies, the Bangladesh government has taken a new initiative where they individually match the worker to the passport through a brief interview. Earlier, recruitment agencies would collect the passports – the applicants did not need to appear.

5.2.6. A dearth of accountability of the middlemen

Case studies done by BRAC’s Migration programme indicate that sometimes migrant workers try to hold the middlemen accountable by holding social arbitrations at the community level to retrieve the money they had given to the middleman, especially in cases where the migrant workers were not able to work at all, were jailed or deported. However, in many cases, the middlemen are not brought to justice because sometimes they flee the area or for other reasons.

“OKUP (NGO) told me to bring the dalal to justice. But I said there is no need. It will lead to my loss of reputation. It will end up putting my honour on the line. The dalal’s house is near my sister’s house. If my sister’s husband and his friends hear about it, they will talk about it. All I did was to go and ask the dalal, why did you do this to me? He said, let me send you to another country. I can send you to Qatar and it will not cost you a penny.” 28- year old female migrant who was sent to a brothel in Malaysia after working in Saudi Arabia and Qatar as a domestic worker.

5.3. The role of recruitment agencies – a mixed bag

5.3.1. Relatively positive experiences through direct recruitment by agencies

From the case studies examined and the case studies conducted, we find a positive association between directly approaching recruitment agencies, bypassing the middlemen, and enjoying a positive migration experience, that is, paying the actual (or near about) cost of migration, knowing the type of job, terms and conditions, getting a contract and doing work that matches the contract.

A 31-year old male migrant who went to Saudi Arabia as an electrician stated,

“I went through an agency called Blue Star. A lot of people from my area had gone through that agency. At the very beginning, they took one lakh taka from me as security money. Then they gave me three months of training. Then my visa came. I paid one lakh and fifty thousand taka more and went abroad. I did quite well going through them. I got the job that they had promised me.”

Even women who went as domestic workers to Saudi Arabia had a better experience going directly through the recruitment agency, although they usually need someone to guide them.

“I went to the recruitment agency through my friend’s brother-in-law. I asked him, how to go abroad, how much it costs. He said that I would not need any money. He took me to get my passport done, to get my medical check-up done. He did everything. The recruitment agency paid for everything. I didn’t need to pay for anything.”

Women who went on a company visa and garment work visa also reported going to the recruitment agency themselves, although they were introduced to the agency through a relative or an acquaintance. In such cases, their job and terms and conditions were close to what they had been promised.

5.3.2. Different types of recruitment agencies

However, different types of recruitment agencies operate in this context. From the case studies examined, there is a type of recruitment agency for which the interaction with migrants is limited to one visit by the migrant to pay the fees. These migrants are often deceived, cheated or abused. There is no information about whether these recruitment agencies are licensed or registered.

“I was taken to the recruitment agency one day. They didn’t say much to me. They just told me to work properly and not steal anything.” A 40-year old female migrant worker in Saudi Arabia

Some agencies interview the migrants and discuss contracts, etc., but demand payment upfront. Others follow ethical recruitment; they do not take any payment from the clients until their papers, visa, etc. are ready and handed over to the client with a briefing on the rules and customs of the destination country. Leeds HR Solutions Ltd was cited by a few stakeholders as one example of such a socially responsible recruiting agent.

5.3.3. Recruitment agencies and middlemen drive up the cost of migration

Recruitment agencies are mainly based in Dhaka. They do not have local offices, most likely because of cost considerations, and, rely on middlemen or *dalals* to get the workers. According to some recruitment agencies, the recruitment of one worker may involve 4-5 *dalals* at different stages. They pay one *dalal* a certain amount for one worker, then that *dalal* may ask another *dalal* to get a worker in exchange for more money. The more hands the workers change, the more the workers have to pay and the less transparent is the system. By the time a worker reaches a recruitment agency, he or she may have spent lakhs of taka but may have received very different information about the terms and conditions of the job and the cost of migration. As one male migrant said

“They tell us, it’s your loss if you do not go. They take the money before they give us information. Our hands are tied.”

Multiple middlemen involvement not only drives the costs up but also makes it almost impossible to get the money back if a worker changes his/her mind after they become more aware of the risks. During

the multi-stakeholder FGD, there was a discussion about creating a partnership between recruitment agencies and NGOs who have a wide outreach at the village level – a partnership that may allow potential migrants to easily access recruitment agencies, reducing the vulnerability to deception and forced labour. However, there are constraints to this. The NGOs fear that if the migrant has a bad experience, then their reputation in the field will be lost, jeopardizing not only their partnership in the recruitment programmes but also all other services that the NGO provides. There was also talk about an attempt to register the *dalals* as a way of creating accountability.

5.3.4. Some recruitment agencies at the destination country exacerbate vulnerability

In addition, there are issues with recruitment agencies in the destination country. Some women migrants who went abroad for domestic work mentioned that they were taken to the recruitment agency in the destination country after arriving there. While some were kept under relatively secure conditions, there are allegations against some for using these women for sex work. There are one or two cases where the women speak of seeing other women there who had fled their employer's house, refusing to work there anymore and were being beaten up.

“My employer’s wife took me back to the recruitment agency office when my employer made sexual advances towards me. The officers of that recruitment office beat women. I was not beaten because someone told the owner I was indeed helpless with no husband and small children. But they would beat other girls. They would give them electric shocks. They would whip them with electric wires. There were girls from Sri Lanka and the Philippines living in that office and working on “free visas”. I worked for them. I stayed there for a month. Afterwards, my son borrowed Tk.30,000 from his uncle and sent it for my ticket.” 40-year old Female Migrant to Lebanon.

A rights organization posed the question to recruitment agencies: *“However, why do you not have any initiatives for the grassroots? SMS services cannot always be effective. Why are you not conducting advertisements or campaigns at grassroots levels? Why are you not including NGOs in this? We want ethical recruitment. We are not at all against agencies.”*

During the Stakeholder workshop, the representatives of the recruitment agencies themselves mentioned that they cannot afford local offices: *“Agencies think that if they are receiving workers by staying at Dhaka, why they would take the hassle of going to the fields.”* Another reason identified by an NGO was that *“Among 100 agencies, only 20-30 become successful. The rest are frauds, and it will be tough to maintain such a huge number when setting up an office there (local level).”*

Recruitment agencies were also accused of not pursuing the registration of middlemen, which would aid accountability. But the representatives of the recruitment agencies say that they cannot register the brokers as the government does not recognize the word “middleman” – it is not in the government dictionary. Recruitment agencies offered a negative aspect of getting clients directly without the involvement of middlemen. According to them, if they come through *dalals*, the financial transaction is secured. But when they come directly, fees are not taken until the client is ready to pay, which is often on the day of departure. They have had clients who have decided not to go at the last moment, which caused the agency financial loss.

5.3.5. Women and recruitment agencies

The findings from the stakeholder analysis workshop indicate that female migrants are particularly vulnerable. Most of the women who become migrant workers are divorced or come from female-headed households. The recruitment agencies are under tremendous pressure to supply female domestic workers to Saudi Arabia. *“If you have a recruiting license, you have to send housemaids to Saudi Arab and the Middle East. The government of Bangladesh imposed this decision because of the pressure from the receiving countries. When the receiving countries realized that, besides their need for labourers, there is a high demand for housemaids as well, they demanded it from the home countries.”* An agency’s ability to send male migrants is contingent upon their meeting the quota for female domestic workers.

In terms of women migrants, it was stated that recruitment agencies pay *dalals* tk.30,000- 70,000 for female workers. Some recruitment agencies provide training, but women try to get out of it with the help of middlemen. As a result, women do not know that they will have to work 18-20 hours and not get any leave or bonus.

The training of female migrant workers on language and using household appliances are also often not sufficient. Women are not cautioned about the isolated lives they will lead, differences in lifestyles, sleep cycles, food habits, lack of socialization and not being able to speak in Bengali even though the 30- day training is supposed to address these issues. In addition, fake training certificates are also available. Between 80 and 85 per cent of the visas of women are “individual visas” through agencies, meaning the employer or sponsor for the visa is an individual rather than any company. The recruiting agency either in Bangladesh or the destination country take no responsibility of their work and working conditions. Apparently, the recruitment agencies at the destination countries do not have responsibility for these workers after they have worked for three months.

It was discussed that female workers who return pregnant from abroad are often not accepted by their families. The recruitment agencies were quick to respond that women often do not know they are pregnant when they leave for their home country. In addition, there was some reluctance on the part of the recruitment agencies to concede that there is sexual abuse of female workers. Representatives of the recruitment agencies made comments such as: *“why would someone rape a 40-year old woman? Why would someone have sexual relations with a domestic worker from the villages of Bangladesh when he has a beautiful wife?”*

Female migrants’ desire, demand or plea to be returned home were also seen as their inability to adjust to the new circumstances, living without their children and misunderstanding friendly gestures by men. The representatives of the recruitment agencies further noted that the percentage of abused is insignificant, terming it as “system loss”. *“If 5,000-10,000 women workers are harassed among the 170,000, is the ratio very big?”*. This received a lot of criticism in the workshop and demonstrated the neglect of their agencies for the realities of modern slavery faced by the women migrants.

The recruitment agencies have to bear the cost of replacing a domestic worker if a worker wishes to return within three months of her departure. This is probably one of the reasons behind the recruitment agencies denying allegations of abuse.

Rights-based organizations posed questions to the intent of the government at the stakeholder workshop. *“Singapore and Malaysia withdrew from this, whereas, the pressure was given to our government. The male market was closed for a long time. Later it was opened for male as well as female workers. We are now sending our women to this sector where others have walked out of.”* Another said, *“Government should find new markets then. Why only send to Saudi Arab? Target different countries. Why shall not recruiting agencies look for markets? Japan is now interested.”*

5.4. Illegal migration leading to increased vulnerability

From the case studies, it seems that illegal migration occurs mostly when migrants, mainly male migrants, travel with tourist, student or hajj visas. However, not all of them are failures and because of that, people continue to take the risk. For instance, one male migrant in a case study said that he went to Saudi Arabia on a Hajj visa because at that time Saudi Arabia was not giving work visas and his uncle who was living there promised him a job. Although he did not stick to the job his uncle arranged for him, he was comfortably living for a few years working as a cleaner in a school, which had a lot of illegal migrants working there. He was finally caught because of his own mistake while trying to get a work permit; he was jailed and sent back after nine months. However, his friend, who went through the same process, is successfully living in Saudi Arabia.

In many cases, the migrants do not know what kind of visa they are travelling with. They sometimes discover it only as they are about to embark on the plane. Sometimes the visas are one or two days from expiring. In such cases, the migrants stated, they have no other option but to try their luck on that visa because they have already spent so much money which they need to work and recover.

5.5. Information around visa shrouded in confusion

5.5.1. Language barriers influencing vulnerability

There is plenty of confusion regarding the visas. The migrant workers complain that the visa is often in Arabic or a different language. Therefore, they have to rely on what the middlemen say about the kind of visa they have and the duration of the visa. A female FGD participant said,

“The visa is written in Arabic which we don’t understand. If it was in English, then we would have found a way. We could ask someone else to read us what is written in the visa.”

Most of the male migrants stated that the actual visa is not given from Bangladesh. They are only given a temporary visa. *“The visa is not given in this country. They give the visa in that country after doing the medical exam. I was given the visa after I went there. They did a medical exam in that country and then gave the visa after three months. No, I was not without a visa for the first three months. They give everyone a temporary visa.”* 35-year old male migrant to Malaysia.

5.5.2. The concept of “free visas”

There is also what is called a “free” visa⁹. There are differing opinions about this. A female migrant worker who migrated with a “free” visa said that she liked working on that visa because it gave her the freedom to work if and when she wanted. The work permit would be with her. But the passport would remain with the *kofil* or the “employer” who provides the visa. She had to pay the *kofil* a certain amount for providing the visa and for renewing it. However, other female migrants at the FGD said that there is nothing called a “free” visa. Women who migrate with the “free” visa, in most cases, either choose to or end up doing sex work. Male migrants who travelled on “free visa” also had mixed experiences. According to one of the migrant workers, if someone is on a “free” visa, it is not possible to hold anyone accountable if the employer refuses to pay. When you are with a company, you are at least assured of a salary even if it is less than what you would make independently.

⁹ ‘Free visa’ is a term employed by agents and some unscrupulous company bosses to entice migrants to come to GCC countries for work. When they arrive, they soon realise there is no defined work. Having paid a lot of money to agents in home countries, they find themselves working on daily rates – with no legal protection – at the whim of corrupt ‘labour contractors’ and company bosses.

5.6. The high cost of migration and indebtedness

All male and most female migrants reported paying huge sums of money to go abroad. The men reported paying at least 180,000 taka, but most paid 250,000-300,000 taka depending on destination and type of work. They sold land, assets, jewellery, took interest-bearing loans as well as loans from relatives to amass the necessary amount for migration. In most cases, they either realized how much was their overpayment was during the briefing at the recruitment centre, which is practically the last stop before they leave the country or at the last moment when they sign the contract paper before embarkation.

Recovering the high cost of migration is one of the reasons why they often illegally change companies to work somewhere with more salary when they find that their salary is too low, or the working conditions are abusive. They do so illegally because their passports are kept by the company. Otherwise, they have to spend years working for low wages and poor terms and conditions to recoup the money. Sometimes men get involved in illegal activities to make money in order to recover some of their debt. The migrants think that it is the failure of the government that it cannot prevent such exploitation. One migrant worker stated that they were jeered by others because of this.

“The Nepalis laughed and said, we paid Tk.60,000/ 70,000 to come here and you paid Tk.250,000 – 300,000. On top of that, you are treated so poorly! Really, your government is not good at all.” 28-year old male migrant to Oman.

The female migrants also spoke of how much more they had to pay.

“It costs Tk.25000-26000 to get a visa. I did not know that it was possible for women to go abroad for less than tk.150,000 – 200,000 because that is what the dalals in our country take. It was only after I went there that I heard from others that the actual cost is Tk.25,000-26,000. The dalals take so much money! Even knowing all this, I gave a dalal tk.400,000 for a visa for my husband. There was no other way. We won’t be able to arrange for the visas ourselves. It is the dalals who bring the visa and we are forced to go through them.” 30-year old female migrant to Saudi Arabia.

Like the men, women also have to continue working under terms and conditions that they do not like so that they can recover at least some of the money they have spent.

“I was in Saudi Arabia for two and a half years. After the hospital closed down, my employer said if any of you want to leave the country, I will buy your ticket. Or you can go into domestic service. At first, I decided to come home. Then I thought, I spent so much money to come here, let me stay back. The kind of work and treatment I received in the house that I worked in! There were 16-17 children in the house and I had to do all the work.” Female migrant, 25 years, Saudi Arabia and Qatar

5.7. Vulnerability in the type of employer – company vs. individual

At the multi-stakeholder discussion, the recruitment agencies admitted that company visas and jobs are much better than visas to work for a single employer. The latter is risky, whether for men or women.

An examination of the male migrant case studies reveals that company visas sometimes do not work for men. Male migrants are usually lured by middlemen who promise them company jobs in construction sites, various types of factories (e.g. juice and biscuit factories), and they charge a lot of money for the company visas. In many cases, the male migrants reach their destination to find that there is no job awaiting them. They are then forced to do whatever they can find, which is often poorly paid, irregular, or labourious. They are often unable to renew their work permit and find themselves opting to or being forced to return to Bangladesh. One of the case study respondents of the BRAC Migration Programme stated that he paid a middleman 250,000 taka for a job in a construction factory in Dubai. When he reached Dubai, no one came to pick him up at the airport for two days, after which he was taken by a man to a desert and left there with bread and water for 21 days. He was then taken back to

the city but was not given any work. Ultimately, the migrant worker contacted the police and was deported. There are also instances where migrants pay for company visas but reach their destination to find that they were given a tourist visa.

Nevertheless, company visas do ensure a minimum adherence to the contract and offer the worker some security. This is particularly pertinent to female migrant workers. Female migrant workers who went on company visas, as cleaner in hospital or school or as garment worker stated that they lived very well when they worked for a company as opposed to individual employers.

“Company visas are better than domestic work or free visas. The company gives a work permit for 8-10 hours of work. You can move around freely with the work permit. You can’t do that working in a house. And there is of course the abuse of men in the house. My main problem was the enormous workload I had while working in the house.” Female migrant, 25 years, Saudi Arabia.

Working under individual employers, as in the case of domestic workers, leaves them exposed to many risks including sexual abuse. However, the catch is that they have to pay more for company visas than for domestic service (or at least that is what the middlemen tell potential female migrants) and, as discussed earlier, it is usually the extreme poor with little means who opt to migrate for work and end up in domestic service.

“The dalal told me that I would have to pay a lot more if I want a cleaner visa and it would cost me less to go on a visa for domestic work. That is why I went for domestic work”. Female migrant, 40 years, Saudi Arabia.

Sometimes, women too are cheated and sent for domestic service with the promise of a job in a company and *dalals* often do so for making a profit.

“I didn’t fall in the racket of dalals. That is why I had a safe migration. Good dalals give you work in good places. But a lot of times, dalals promise you to work in a garment factory but send you for domestic work. This is because dalals are paid 50,000 taka if they can provide a woman for domestic service.” Female migrant worker, 27 years, garment factory worker, Jordan.

Discussions during the multi-stakeholder meeting revealed that recruitment agencies are under pressure to provide a certain number of female domestic workers to Saudi Arabia. Acceptance of male migrant workers from Bangladesh in Saudi Arabia is contingent upon this condition. Therefore, the recruitment agencies monetarily incentivize middlemen to recruit female workers to fulfil the quota. The director of a recruitment agency stated that it is unfortunate that he ever entered the recruitment business because the imperative of providing female migrant workers in domestic service and their subsequent experiences of abuse has led to a loss of reputation and integrity.

However, the female migrants interviewed who went on a company visa as cleaners in Saudi Arabia or to work in the stadium in Qatar also cautioned about other kinds of problems. First, there is a risk that the company may fold after a few months. Second, their visa may expire before they can get a work permit. These are risks for both men and women. In the case of women, it pushes them to go into domestic service under uncertain terms to recover the cost of migration.

Female migrant workers also run the risk of being used in sex work by their employers.

“The last time I went abroad, there I had to stay in the house of the Bangladeshi employer who had sent the visa. There were lots of other girls living there. The girls used to be given to men for the whole night to stay outside. I said that I will not do this work, send me home.” 28-year old female migrant work, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Malaysia.

5.8. Vulnerability in terms of destination country and sector

5.8.1. The ubiquitous nature of forced labour

If we consider the entire gamut of what constitutes forced labour – not getting promised job, lower actual salary than in contract, greater working hours, less or no overtime, harsh or abusive working and living conditions, etc. – then this research fails to pinpoint specific destinations or sectors that indicates vulnerability to forced labour. In particular, male migrants in various countries including Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Qatar, Oman, and Malaysia working in different sectors experienced varying degrees of forced labour. However, some migrants stated that labour laws in Dubai are very strict and believe that migrants in Dubai are much better off than migrant workers in other countries. One migrant worker also suggested that terms and conditions are much better in large companies – it is the smaller companies that try to exploit the workers.

It is worth mentioning, even when male migrants face a lot of hardship and are deceived into forced labour, they say that they are satisfied with their work, salary, terms and conditions, etc. as long as they can earn some money. They have a tendency not to reveal their sufferings. In many case studies, the male migrants admitted that they did not tell their family of their plight as it would cause only distress. They only admitted it under extreme conditions.

5.8.2. Saudi Arabia – the plight of female domestic workers

However, if we consider only female migrants, then the destination country of Saudi Arabia and sector of domestic service or house-keeping emerge as a predictor of vulnerability to forced labour, though all experiences in Saudi Arabia and domestic service are not negative.

“The people of Saudi are very caring towards women. I used to quickly finish all my chores so they would give me baksheesh. They gave me a gold bangle. If you worked to their satisfaction, then they would buy you a lot of things.” 25- year old female migrant to Saudi Arabia.

Nevertheless, the case studies of female migrants in this research and BRAC’s Migration programme show that, in most cases, it is women who went for domestic work in Saudi Arabia, reported being subjected to forced labour and in particularly abusive conditions. They return physically and, at times, sexually abused and psychologically traumatized. As mentioned earlier, there is a demand for female domestic workers in Saudi Arabia, which keeps recruitment agencies as well as middlemen under pressure to provide. Middlemen often use the sentiment of Saudi Arabia being the birthplace of Islam to convince women to migrate there.

“Everyone says, Saudi is good. It is the land of our dear Prophet. I thought I would be able to perform Hajj if I went to Saudi Arabia. The dalal told me and I too thought that Saudi is a pure and sacred country, that is why I agreed to go there.” female migrant, 25-year, Saudi Arabia

One female domestic worker described what many female migrants in the FGDs told about Saudi culture and their attitude towards Bangladeshi domestic workers.

“Saudi men grow old but cannot get married. This is because they have to be able to provide a car, house and other things to their wives. That is why Saudi men are very bad. They “disturb” female domestic workers. They are attracted to Bangladeshi women. Old Saudis “get married” to Bengali women. The people of Saudi are bad. Even though they are from the Prophet’s land, they are bad. If I couldn’t do a chore, they would beat me, scold me. They would beat me if I didn’t understand what they are saying. They would beat me if I wanted to have rice and not roti. Even if 10 people worked in a Saudi household, their work would not get done.”

5.9. Vulnerability related to employment, identification documents, assets and work environment

5.9.1. The story of misleading/absent contracts

While most men stated that they signed a contract, most women did not.

Even though male migrants stated that they signed a contract, they invariably signed it at the last moment when they are at the airport waiting to embark. This of course makes them vulnerable to forced labour in a sector they did not sign up to work for, with little/no information on salary than stated in the contract.

“No, actually we are village people and we don’t know very much. At the last moment, they brought a paper and said it was the contract form. I said, what is a contract form? They said it has the address of the company that you will be working for and the terms and conditions of your work. They had so far given the information to us verbally. There I saw it written, Tk. 84,000. The paper bore a stamp of three hundred taka and signatures of two witnesses. They are supposed to take us abroad for Tk. 84,000 but I paid Tk. 210,000.” 30-year old male migrant worker to Malaysia

In some cases, male migrants were not given any contract at all.

“At first they told me they would give me a contract. Then they took the fingerprint of four fingers in the computer. Then I said, where is my contract form? They said this is your contract. They did not give me any contract papers. They deceived me.” 29-year old migrant worker to Malaysia.

Only one out of all the female migrants who went for domestic work at the FGD and the case studies stated that she had a contract. She went to Lebanon as a domestic worker with a contract and had a very positive work experience. But most domestic workers stated they had no contract, and many did not know what a contract is. They went completely based on trust in the words of the middleman. Some of the female migrants eventually learnt about contracts from NGO awareness programmes provided by BRAC and OKUP.

On the other hand, the female migrant worker who went for garment factory work in Jordan said,

“Yes, there was a contract. It was written there that I am going on a three- year contract. If I returned before my three years is up, then I would have to pay the company two or three lakh taka. But if someone really wants to return after going there, it does not take that much money. They send you back if you give them Tk.30,000. It was written that I would have to work 10 hours a day. I can’t remember if the salary was written. But it was written that overtime will be for two hours. When I went to pay the money at the bank, I signed the contract.”

Instead of a contract, migrants spoke of signing another sort of documents like a declaration or promise.

“I don’t know what was written on that paper. There was a stamp. It had my signature and the signatures of the middlemen and the person from the office which sent me. Later I came to know that it said that if I faced any problem in that country, then the office people would help me. But if I committed any wrong, then they would not take the liability. That is, if I created any problem, they would not take the risk.” 24-year old female migrant to Saudi Arabia.

The absence of any contract for female domestic workers creates the basis for a multitude of infringements of their rights including human rights.

5.9.2. Passport and ticket given immediately before embarkation

As with the contract paper, all male and female migrants received their passport and ticket immediately before embarkation. Till then, the migrants do not have the scope to check their papers. According to

the recruitment agencies, they do not give the passports ahead of time because there is a chance that the migrant will not turn up at the airport and they will lose money. This is also the rationale they give to the migrants.

“They didn’t hand me my passport and ticket. Apparently, five girls had taken their passport from the office, but they did not go abroad. It was because of that suspicion that they did not give it to me.” 24-year old female migrant to Saudi Arabia.

This of course exposes the migrants to the risks of travelling on an invalid or incorrect visa. The risks are even greater with the woman who was sent to work in a brothel.

“I had given my passport to the dalal to get the visa. When I was at the airport on the day I was leaving, I took it and saw that it was someone else’s passport. It had my picture but another name. The name was Bithi. I asked the dalal, where is my passport. This is someone else’s. The dalal said there is no problem. You will get your passport back when you get to that country.” 28-year old female migrant to Malaysia.

5.9.3. Migrants’ passports at the possession of employers

Whether male or female, migrant workers reported that they were not given their passports after it was taken from them to be checked by immigration at the destination country. In the case of male migrant workers who went on a company visa, after immigration, all workers for the same company wearing the same clothes or caps would wait till the company came for them. The name of the company would be called, and the workers and their passports would be handed over to the company representative. In the case of the female migrant workers who went for domestic workers, their name was called when their employer came, and the passport and the worker were handed over to the employer. Most migrants would see their passports only when their work permit had to be renewed.

“Passport and papers were with the employer. As soon as my employer came to the airport, they handed over my papers. I did not see them all the time I was there. They gave it to me only before I returned fearing that if they give me my passport, I may run away to work in another company? That is why they would not give me the passport. The passport is my strength. It tells people that I am a citizen of a country. They did so to stop me from changing the job if the pay was less or if the work was bad.” 28-year old female migrant worker to Saudi Arabia.

Male migrants were not given their passports or papers either. One of the male migrants said that he was told that unless he dies, he will not get his passport before three years are up. This was apparently the company policy. He had to abide by it even though he had no written contract with the company.

As a result, most male and female migrants who faced forced labour or abuse and wanted to leave their employment had to do so without their passports or papers. In the case of male migrants, they escaped and remained without papers until other arrangements could be made or they were arrested by the police. Male migrants described a couple of attempts to get their passport back. In one case, a male migrant to Dubai stated that they were being paid much less than other workers and the site manager who was a Bangladeshi was taking the money from the company but was paying them less. This worker along with others caught and beat up another worker who was the manager’s nephew and tied him up until the manager came and returned their passports. In another case, some of the workers got together and went on strike unless they were given their passports. The strike resulted in a slight increase in their salary. Some of the male migrants reported that when they left the company to work elsewhere, in some instance, the company filed a case against them.

Faced with forced labour or abusive situations, women, and particularly the domestic workers, would often escape at night or while the employers were out. They tried to go to the recruitment office or the embassy. Sometimes, they ended up on the street or surrendered themselves to the police. Ultimately, they were sent back with a document in the absence of their passports.

5.9.4. Confiscation of mobile, phone numbers, medicine through searching bags

Female migrants who worked as domestic workers also spoke of how their bags would be checked when they reached the house as well as periodically and before they returned home. Their possessions would be confiscated. One domestic worker stated that they found a burkha in her bag and took it out of her bag saying, Bangladeshis do not need burkhas.

“They had told me during the training, where I should go if I was in danger. The problem was that I couldn’t go there. Nor could I phone them. They had given me a card at the training with a number on it. But when I reached there, my employer’s daughter checked my bag and took away all the papers. I had taken some medicine for cold, cough and pain from here. She took the medicine and threw it away.” 40-year female migrant worker to Saudi Arabia.

Domestic workers were not always allowed mobile phones, and some were allowed only specific types.

“I had taken a smartphone from here. When I went to that house, my madam took away my phone and gave me a small one with buttons. She thought that if I made video calls, I would feel homesick and cry. That is why she took it away.” 28-year female migrant to Saudi Arabia.

5.9.5. Limited or controlled communication with family members

Another common complaint by domestic workers was that their communication with family members was controlled by their employers.

“My employer had taken away my mobile when I reached there. She would put in a card in her phone and then I could talk to my family. The money would run out after 10 or 15 minutes. She would allow me to talk twice a month. My father would call from Bangladesh. She would allow me to talk once every 5/6 times he called.” 18-year old female migrant worker to Jordan.

Not all employers however did this. But this was a problem that none of the male migrants had to face. They all reported being able to talk to their family when they wanted, provided they had money.

5.9.6. Socialization and communication with others or other Bangladeshis

Male migrants, in general, spoke of a communal lifestyle – living, working and eating with other workers and in most cases other Bangladeshis. Although men’s passports would be kept by the company, their work permit remained with them; as a result, they could go anywhere they pleased and create and maintain their social networks. In most cases, the male migrants already had friends, relatives or people from their communities living and working in the country they migrated to. And, in times of trouble, they were able to call on these networks for support, whether it be money, work or friendship.

Unlike male migrant workers, none of the female migrant workers knew anyone in the destination country that they were already in touch with.

“No, I didn’t have anyone I knew there. Even if I had anyone known they would not have been able to help me, because my employers did not allow me to meet or talk to anyone.” 28-year old female migrant worker to Saudi Arabia.

Female migrant workers, particularly those in domestic work, are given little, if any, opportunity to socialize or meet other Bangladeshis. Sometimes, when they first arrive, they are taken to a house with a Bangladeshi worker or a Bangladeshi’s house or a Bangladeshi is brought over to the house so that they can explain what she needs to do and other terms and conditions. But they are later never allowed to meet. In the case of one or two of the female domestic workers, they were allowed to go out for running errands. This allowed them to meet and make friends with others and sometimes other Bangladeshis such as shopkeepers. According to them, this freedom made their life bearable.

Some of the domestic workers said that they were not allowed to go anywhere, were locked in their rooms, and sometimes under the surveillance of CC TVs. Others said that they were taken out to markets or parks but were not allowed to talk to other Bengalis.

“When we went to a park, I saw a girl there from Jhenidah (a district in Bangladesh). She was talking to a Bengali boy there. My madam saw this and went and fetched a policeman and told him to take the boy away. Why should a girl speak to a boy? This is what she said to the policeman”. A 24-year old female migrant worker in Saudi Arabia.

But one of the main reasons why female domestic workers are constrained is the confiscation of their papers.

“I couldn’t go out anywhere on my own. Because both my passport and my work permit were with my employer”. 24- year old female migrant to Saudi Arabia.

The right to carry one’s work permit is the reason why many female migrants stated that company visas are preferable.

5.9.7. Low/No salary and the vocabulary of being “bought” and “sold”

The absence of a contract or the signing of a contract, which is different from what was promised, means that not getting the expected or agreed salary is a common feature of forced labour, whether among male or female migrants.

While there are cases where men reach destination countries to find that there is no work waiting for them and thus, for them, the issue of salary does not arise at all, in most cases male migrants spoke of being paid lower salaries than promised and sometimes having their salaries withheld. Male migrants also spoke of how systematically they earned much less than workers of other countries.

“An Indian will get a starting salary of 1200 Riyal per month. The Indian government sets the condition that they will provide workers if they are paid a minimum of 1200 Riyal, otherwise they will not. The same rule is maintained by Pakistan. They come only paying the airfare. But people in our country spend two and a half to three lakh taka to come here. But they don’t get that salary. In my company, newcomers from India get 40,000-50,000 taka per month, but Bangladeshis don’t get the same salary. On the other hand, Bangladeshis borrow large amounts of money and sell their land to go abroad. They don’t earn enough, but they cannot come home either.” 30 -year old migrant worker to Dubai.

In the case of female migrant workers, the most common complaint was that they were not paid regularly, their salaries were withheld. In fact, many returned without having been paid or paid for only a few months out of the period that she worked there.

“I used to be paid every three months. I had to work at my employer’s son’s house after I finished working in her house. I was supposed to get 1000 but they paid me 800. The dalal told me that they would provide me with soap, oil and mobile but they gave me nothing. I had to save and buy a mobile. They gave me no clothes.” A 28-year old female migrant worker in Saudi Arabia.

Sometimes female domestic workers were kept in a state of confusion regarding whether and when they will be paid their salary.

“They never told me that I would not get paid in that country. They told me, my salary would be 20,000 taka. When they did not pay my salary, I called the office in that country. They told me to be patient and that I would soon get my salary. After two more months, I told my employer that I have to send money home. He said you don’t have to go. Give me the bank details and I will send them. I gave it to him, but even after that my brother had to come back from the bank empty-handed.” 24-year old migrant worker to Saudi Arabia.

Sometimes they were advised by the recruitment agency in the destination country or the middlemen that they should stop working to force their employer to pay the salary.

But the reason for the non-payment of the salary of female domestic workers is tied to the conception that the domestic workers have been “bought” by their employers. This is a term that came up again and again in the testimonies of the domestic workers regardless of which country they were working in.

“I wasn’t paid a salary for ten months. Then I said if you are not going to pay me then what is the point of my staying here? I have come from Bangladesh out of poverty to earn some money. When I asked my employer for money, she said, what money? I have bought you. I have bought you from Bangladesh for four lakh takas. Who could I turn to? I didn’t know anyone in that country. So, I spoke to the recruitment agency in that country. And they confirmed that my employer had bought me.” 18-year old female migrant worker to Jordan.

Repeatedly, women spoke of somehow contacting the recruitment agency in that country and asking them to change their house. But the agencies told them that they had been bought by their employer and they would have to work there. They sometimes told the worker to call the people back home who had sent her because they had taken the money for her. According to one of the domestic workers, the employers go to recruitment agencies and look through pictures of potential migrant workers, select one and pay them for her. That is why they believe that they have bought her and thus she must work until the employers get their money’s worth. This is the reason cited by many of the female migrant workers as to why their employers do not buy their return ticket. In such cases, they have to ask their families at home to send money to buy their ticket so that they can return home.

Many female migrants at the FGD used the words “buying” and “selling”. They said that they were bought by their employer. If unsatisfied, the employer would “sell” her to another employer. Sometimes the worker would not even know that she was being sold and would leave her clothes and belongings at the first employer’s house.

One of the male workers in the FGD said that similar things also happen to men.

“Sometimes middlemen in the destination country create a ring of small middlemen in Bangladesh. They take some men from Bangladesh with visas. Then they make contracts with different companies and sell the men to them. Those men are then bound to work for them. Sometimes they are not even paid.” 30-year old male migrant to Dubai

5.9.8. Working hours, overtime and work pressure

Male migrant workers generally reported working 8-10 hours a day, consistent with their contracts. Some reported, they had to work extra hours without pay or not at the appropriate overtime rate. Some also reported that they were made to do tasks that were beyond their scope of duty and which they disliked but was forced to do.

“They make us work for longer hours, but they do not pay us extra. This happens more in construction companies. Our company often made us do a lot of extra work. If we asked for wages for these extra hours, they would say, what wages! You are not going to get any money for doing some extra work for your own company.” 32-year old male migrant to Dubai and Oman.

Female migrant workers who went on a company visa also stated that they had to work a specific number of hours and received overtime for extra hours worked. The garment worker stated that it was very comfortable because she did not have to cook or do any household chores there as she lived in a dormitory, but she would have to do these if she worked in a garment factory in Bangladesh. The situation of domestic workers is however different. Only Bangladeshi domestic workers had to work an undefined number of hours unlike domestic workers from some other countries.

“The Arabs are afraid of the women from Kerala and the Philippines. This is because their governments write everything down in a contract and then send them abroad. It is written there that they will work for eight hours. So, the Arabs only make them work for eight hours. They give them time to rest during A’sr prayers. They give them time to say their prayers. But they would not give me any time to rest. They made me work 24 hours a day.” 18-year old female migrant to Jordan.

Many of the female domestic workers complained that they had to work long hours at a stretch without any time to rest and little time to sleep at night. One of the reasons for their long hours of work was the fact that many of these households, particularly in Saudi Arabia, had 6-7 children of varying ages and needs. Family sizes were very large, some with as many as 25 members.

“In that house, there were five daughters, two sons, and wives of the two sons, three grandchildren, the employer and his wife.” 28-year old female migrant worker to Saudi Arabia

5.9.9. Lack of food and sleep – vulnerability to psychological trauma

Most of the male migrant workers stated that they could cook and eat what they wanted. Some said it took some time for them to get used to the culinary preparations of that country. So, the Bangladeshis would group and cook. Most male migrants also did not complain about their living arrangements.

“We were constructing a building in the middle of the desert. The temperature was 49 or 50 degrees centigrade. We used to have nosebleeds from the heat. But we lived in rooms built of plywood in the middle of the desert with no air-cooling system.” A 32-year male migrant worker in Dubai.

Another migrant worker stated that 16-17 of them had to sleep in steel containers like the train carriages in which carry cargo.

Female domestic workers seem to have the most difficult time with food. Many could cook their food but many of those who returned complained that they were not given enough food and most importantly, not allowed to eat rice because to the Arabs it smelled. Given that rice is the staple food for Bangladeshis, and, often these women lived only on rice to survive at home, this was most distressing.

Many women at the FGDs stated that their employers were not allowed to eat rice because they feared it would make them fat and unable to work.

“I used to work so hard but, they would not let me eat. I told them, give me a few grains of rice, I will cook and eat it, but they wouldn’t. They said I would get fat if I ate rice. When I asked for food, they slapped me. After that, I stopped eating for three days.” 40-year old female migrant in Dubai.

Their enormous workload and their sleeping arrangements – often in public places like a sitting room, kitchen, dining room, room where various members of the family would sleep – meant that domestic workers, in most cases, suffered from sleep deprivation. Several female migrant workers stated that their desperation to sleep was the worst and it was during times like these that they felt like committing suicide. One female migrant worker said that she wished she would die in her sleep so that she would not have to wake up and work again.

“I had to wake up at 3 am. I had to do all the housework. After I finished working at my employer’s, I would be sent to her son’s house where I would do all the housework again. Then I would come back to my employer’s house and continue with housework. I slept in the room where many members of the family would sleep, so I could not sleep until they fell asleep which was at 1/1:30 am.” 40- year old female migrant worker in Saudi Arabia.

5.10. Vulnerability to verbal, physical and sexual abuse

The abusive behaviour suffered by many migrant workers, male or female, is unfortunately not related to contracts, terms and conditions. It is a manifestation of the attitude towards those who are poor, powerless and vulnerable, though not all migrants in the research were subject to abuse and some received decent behaviour from their employers. However, many male and female migrants believe that Bangladeshis, in particular, bear the brunt of misbehaviour and abusive behaviour. They believe that the governments of workers from other countries such as India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, etc. make better deals with the governments of destination countries, ensure the rights of their workers and monitor the welfare of their workers. Employers in the destination countries have realized that there is no one to look out for Bangladeshi workers and therefore they are subject to abuse and exploitation.

Both verbal and physical abuses are common among both male and female migrant workers, but physical abuse may not be as pervasive as verbal abuse. Male migrants are reluctant to admit that they suffered physical abuse but report other Bangladeshi workers are beaten for various reasons. Both male and female migrants stated that they are slapped or beaten mostly when they try to protest an injustice, refuse to do heavy work that they are not supposed to do or demand salary or overtime. Asking for their salary was one of the main reasons cited by female domestic workers for being slapped or beaten. Domestic workers in particular are beaten if too many phone calls are made from Bangladesh. They reported being slapped and beaten mainly by the female family members as well as the children.

One female domestic worker who worked in a household where there were 7 daughters and 2 sons said,

“The girls used to punch me, slap me, kick me. The girls used to beat me up. Their father used to tell them, don’t beat her, it is sinful. She is poor. Allah will consider it a sin if you beat the poor – she is a Bangladeshi beggar.” 35-year old female migrant worker to Lebanon.

Many female migrant workers also reported being beaten by the people at the recruitment agency in the destination country, sometimes after they went there to escape abuse at the house.

“The man from the office gave me to work at his sister’s house. There was a bad incidence in his sister’s house (sexual abuse by husband) so madam took me back to the office. I was there for three months. I used to work for the man. The man used to beat me and would not feed me. After three months he gave me to another house. He kept my three months’ salary.” A 32-year old female migrant worker in Lebanon.

None of the male migrants reported sexual abuse. According to them,

“No, sexual abuse only happens with women. There were no female workers where we worked. So we did not see it.” 30-year old migrant worker to Oman.

Female domestic workers in the FGDs and the case studies reported quite a few incidences of sexual misconduct, many by the employer’s unmarried brothers or older sons. None of them reported being raped but attempts to rape and, more commonly, groping and tugging clothes. In most cases, reporting to the “madam” resulted in being scolded or slapped. But after repeated incidences, women said they were taken back to the recruitment office. Sometimes they fled from the employer’s house. Female migrants also tried to develop tactics to prevent abuse.

“Madam’s brother used to disturb. He used to try and touch me. He would call or signal me to come to his room. I would loudly say, what do you need? Do you want tea? Do you want bread? In that country, men get the courage to attack if women speak softly or show they are afraid. You have to speak loudly and protest. Then they fear that she is going to tell everyone and therefore do not get the courage to do anything.” 25-year old female migrant worker to Saudi Arabia.

The viciousness of physical and sexual abuse is evident from the case studies collected by BRAC’s Migration Programme that offer emergency services at the airport. They collected the report from 1,207 female domestic workers who returned from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia between January and November 2018, and who were subject to severe physical and sexual abuse. Many of these women were so traumatized that they had become mentally unstable. Some could not say where they want to go. Some were not picked up from the airport by their families.

5.11. Lack of knowledge of labour laws and grievance mechanisms

There is a general lack of awareness about the labour laws of the destination country. Only one male migrant worker suggested that labour laws in Dubai are very strict and it is better for Bangladeshi workers than the laws in other countries. Knowledge of labour laws and grievance mechanisms to report the abuse of law would certainly reduce vulnerability to forced labour. In the absence of such knowledge, intimidation from employers prevents workers from complaining.

“A worker cannot complain if the employer makes him work for eight hours instead of four hours and pays him for four hours, The worker is not allowed to do overtime so the worker cannot earn any extra income. If he makes a mistake, he is punished, humiliated. He is fired. They put a lot of pressure on him so that others get scared seeing his situation and therefore do not get the courage to complain.” A 32-year old male migrant worker in Malaysia.

Female domestic workers wanted to know from us what they can do and who they can turn to if the employer does not pay them. Female domestic workers said that their lack of knowledge forces them to put up with abuse.

“The Filipino girls know and understand everything about the process to migrate, the terms and conditions of their work, their salary. That is why they can protest, that is also why their salary is higher. We don’t know anything, understand anything. That is why we fear them and suffer abuse in silence.” 35-year old female migrant worker to Lebanon.

They receive no help from recruitment agencies in the destination countries or the middlemen in Bangladesh who sent them. Though they are promised that they will change their employer if there is any problem; it often does not happen. Moreover, recruitment agencies in the destination country support the employers, saying that it is true the employers have bought them and therefore do not need to pay them. Female domestic workers thus often turn to the police.

“I climbed over the wall and went to the police with the help of someone. There I told the police everything – that my employer has not paid me for three months and that she beats me. The police took the number and address of the employer and called them over. The police questioned my employer. But when my employer promised not to beat me anymore, they sent me back to the employer’s house. She did not beat me after that, but she wouldn’t give me food properly.” 40-year old female migrant worker to Saudi Arabia.

5.12. Lack of support from the Bangladeshi embassy in the destination

Nearly all the migrant workers in the research stated that the Bangladeshi embassy plays no supportive role. In fact, many suggested that the embassy people misbehaved with them, asked for money or simply ignored them when they went to them for help.

“But if we go to the embassy, they shoo us away. They behave so badly that if you go once you wouldn’t want to go again” 32- year old male migrant worker to Dubai, Oman.

When Bangladeshi migrant workers informed the embassy that their company is not paying them their due salary, often the officials promised to visit but never did. Male migrant workers also accused the embassy of receiving bribes from their employers to speak or act against the workers. When it comes to monitoring the condition of Bangladeshi workers, the embassy plays no role. They believe, because of proper monitoring by respective embassy officials, workers from other countries are not mistreated.

“I was in such an awful situation and endured such hardship, but no one from the embassy came in all that time to see how we were doing, what condition we were in. But people from the Indian Embassy came often to check on their workers. That is why Malaysian people treated Indian workers well. They treated us Bangladeshis like dogs.” A 30-year old male migrant worker in Malaysia.

Being a woman does not help in terms of support from the embassy. If women go there and say that their company has folded but they do not want to return home unless they have earned enough to pay their debt, the embassy officials simply advise them to start domestic work. If women say that they want to return home, but they have no money because their employer has not paid them, the officials ask them to pay for their ticket. The embassy makes no attempt to solve their problem.

“I went to the embassy, but it is no use going there. The embassy people want money. Sometimes they tell us to go back to the Arab’s house. If we don’t want to, they beat us with their shoes. They tell us to arrange money from home to buy tickets. And if we can’t arrange the money, they tell us to go back to the Arab’s, save money and go home.” 35- year old female migrant worker to Lebanon.

When migrant workers are forced to leave their jobs or employers’ homes, they end up without passports, sometimes without work permits and often, specifically in the case of female domestic workers, without the money to buy their air ticket home, and therefore end up in jail. There is no proactive role of the embassy to look after their citizens stranded in foreign jails.

5.13. Migration through relatives – safer than other options?

There were a few cases, mainly of male migrants, who migrated on visas sent by their relatives living and working abroad. In fact, at the multi-stakeholder meeting, it was discussed that many migrants go on such visas sent by relatives. In most cases, these migration experiences turn out to be positive. However, in some cases, these also result in deportation if they cannot find a job there and if they are unable to get their work permit.

5.14. Participation in training – important in reducing vulnerability

Most women who migrated for domestic work did a one-month or two-month training at a training centre in Dhaka. According to one female migrant, earlier training was only provided by centres in Dhaka, but now there are training centres in every district. Also, earlier the training did not provide any information about what to do if one gets into trouble in the destination country; but now they do.

“I really benefitted from the training. I learnt all the necessary words in their language at the training centre and what was in the book. However, the training did not inform me what to do if I got into trouble in that country. It would have been good for us if they had given the information. Now they say all these are there in the trainings”. 35-year old female migrant worker to Saudi Arabia.

Women spoke of intensive training without which it would not be possible for women to go for domestic service. The female case study respondents who went on company visa as cleaners also had training. However, the female migrant workers who went to work in a stadium in Qatar and the ones to Jordan on a garment worker visa did not feel the need to take the training.

At the training, women are taught the names and operation of various machineries they would have to use for housework. They are also taught elementary Arabic. All female migrants agreed that knowing the language is crucial. Without knowing the language, one is more likely to be when not understood. But many women complained that the language that they were taught and the language that was spoken in the house that they worked in were not exactly the same.

The female migrants stated that they were told what to do if they faced any problem in the destination country at the training.

“If we faced any problem, we were told to contact the office in that country. They even gave us the number. But there was no use calling that number. The call would not go through. The number was wrong. And if we called the Bangladesh office, the number would always be engaged. Or they would say they are busy and we should call back later. They had told us in the training that there is good and bad everywhere. If we are in trouble, we should better go to the police. We should then ask the police to take us to the embassy.” 24-year old female migrant to Saudi Arabia.

Many women from the case studies conducted and the case studies examined, did exactly that – fled to the streets where either they convinced a taxi driver to take them to the embassy or contacted the police who either took them to the recruitment office or the embassy.

Not all men took training before they went abroad. However, all agreed that one should gain some skills before going abroad as they can always get work if they are skilled. Some of the male migrant workers took a three-day training at the district level office of the Bangladesh Manpower and Employment Department (BMED), and some took training at the Overseas Welfare Office. There, they were mostly taught the language. However, they were only taught Arabic even if the migrants were going to non-Arab countries such as Malaysia. So, the language training was not that useful. However, male migrant workers said that learning the language is not essential –they can learn it while working there.

Some men were recruited through the training centre.

“There was an advertisement for jobs in Hyundai company. It was necessary to know the computer. So, I went to a computer training centre. When I was taking a course there. Someone offered me an

opportunity to work in Dubai. I agreed to go to Dubai. A foreigner came to the centre and took my interview and I got the job. They said that it would cost me 80,000 taka though I ended up paying 120,000 taka.” 32-year old male migrant worker to Dubai.

Others went to the training centre on the same day that their flight was due to leave. In some cases, they were simply given something like a “smart card”, which they had to show at the immigration. In some cases, they gave a briefing at the training centre.

“You have to work in a disciplined manner, maintaining social etiquette. You must do whatever you are ordered. You cannot show any “reaction” to what they say. You cannot talk back to them. You cannot have any relations with women. You cannot take an infant in your lap. They told us how to go about on the streets and instructed us to carry our papers all the time. They told us about how to behave in that country. We are in their country as their servants. We cannot “react” to anything that they say. They told us not to protest or go on strikes.” 28-year old male worker to Dubai.

6. Quantitative Findings

6.1. Analysis of secondary data

In this section, we provide some basic characteristics of the 400 migrants covered by a household survey conducted by BRAC-RED in 2017:

6.1.1. Characteristics of migrants/potential migrants

Table 1 reports the baseline (2014) characteristics of the Bangladeshi migrants covered by the 2017 survey who could successfully migrate (departed), those who failed to migrate (failed) and those who are trying to migrate (trying). At the baseline, on average a migrant/potential migrant was 28 years old with approximately 98% were male.

It is worth noting, of the prospective migrants, those who succeeded to migrate had low levels of schooling, on average, compared to those who failed and were still trying. While the percentage of migrants with no formal education was greater for the migrants who failed (9.34%) compared to the migrants who departed (7.36%), the percentage of migrants with education above level 10 was higher for prospective migrants who failed (11.49%) and those who were trying (9.14%) compared to migrants who departed (6.55%). This indicates that high education levels were not directly linked to success in migration.

Those who succeeded to depart were also less likely to be married as compared to others. In addition, the percentage of unemployed people was greater in the group that succeeded (18.85%) as compared to those who failed (14.02%) and those who were trying (12.06%). Migrants who succeeded to depart were also less skilled (11.72%). In addition, only 27.24% of successful migrants were working in the service sector before migration while more than a third worked in service in the other two groups. A larger proportion (22.87%) of the succeeded group worked in agriculture compared to the group who failed (16.01%).

Thus, the overseas migrants in the sample had more unemployed men with less skill and educated, as compared to those who failed to migrate.

Table 1: Baseline (2014) profile of migrants/potential migrants

Variables	Migrated	Failed	Trying	Total
Age	27.52	27.97	28.11	27.90
Sex (male)	97.48	98.78	98.65	98.33
Year of Schooling	6.51	6.75	6.65	6.63
Marital status	49.89	51.82	55.87	53.12
Level of education (%)				
No formal Education	7.36	9.34	7.25	7.76
1-5 grade	35.29	31.55	34.14	33.9
6 -10 grade	50.8	47.63	49.47	49.46
Above 10	6.55	11.49	9.14	8.89
Occupation (%)				
Unemployed	18.85	14.02	12.06	14.58
Farmer	22.87	16.01	20.22	20.06
Day Labour	5.86	7.16	7.94	7.13
Skilled Labour	11.72	12.35	12.36	12.16
Service	27.24	35.67	34.53	32.58
Economically Non-active	6.44	7.93	6.22	6.68
Transport Worker	6.67	6.71	6.29	6.5
Others	0.34	0.15	0.37	0.31

Source: BRAC-RED survey 2014

We observed from the baseline data collected in 2014 that 42.75% of prospective migrants went to GCC countries and the rest went to other countries.

6.1.2. Occupations of migrants in destination countries

Table 2 represents the distribution of occupations the migrants engage in in the destination countries. The common occupations for overseas migrants include construction, hospitality, cleaning and other services. The percentage of migrants engaging in skilled occupations (as a mechanic, carpenter, tailor, mason, electrician, etc.) are low. This validates the findings of Table 1 and indicates that most people engage in unskilled occupations as they come from less educated backgrounds and low skill levels.

Table 2: Occupations of migrants in the destination countries

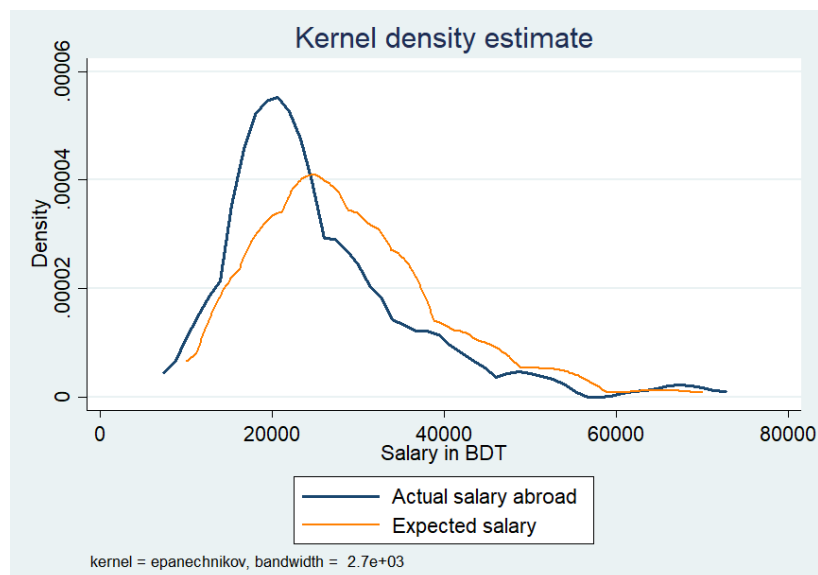
Occupation	Per cent
Construction	21.57
Cleaner	13.07
Hotel/shop worker	9.15
Service	9.15
Driver	7.19
Electrician	5.88
Welding	3.92
Caretaker	3.92
Building Painting	3.27
Cook	3.27
Mason	3.27
Mechanic	2.61
Carpenter	2.61
Others	11.12

Source: BRAC RED survey conducted in 2017

6.1.3. Differences in actual and expected salary

Figure 2 shows the distribution of actual and expected salary of the migrants travelling to GCC countries covered by the 2017 survey. The two distributions demonstrate that majority of the workers get paid a monthly salary of around Tk. 20,000 whereas the majority of the workers have their expected salary of Tk. 25,000 and higher. There are very few workers who are paid a high salary (Tk. 40,000 or higher) indicating that most of the workers in low paid jobs that are most likely low skilled work.

Figure 2: Distribution of actual and expected salary (in BDT)



Source: BRAC RED survey conducted in 2017

6.1.4. Channels of migration

The phone call survey 2017 also collected information on the percentage of migrants engaged in different occupations. Table 3 shows that a majority of migrants migrated with the help of middlemen (54.25%) and only 5.75% went through recruitment agencies. Thus, it is interesting to look at these dynamics and identify the factors responsible for higher recruitment through middlemen as compared to recruitment agencies and suggest areas of intervention.

Table 3: Channels of migration followed by migrants to GCC countries

	Per cent
Middleman	54.25
Friends/relatives/neighbour	36.5
Recruitment Agent	5.75
Others	3.5

Source: BRAC RED survey conducted in 2017

From the pool of 400 migrants covered by BRAC RED Survey in 2017, this study identified 170 migrants and interviewed them again with a newly-developed questionnaire inclusive of some indicators of vulnerability towards forced labour. These include information on education levels, document status, actual vs expected salary, confiscation of documents, mental health assessment, occupations, channels of migration, type of visa obtained, job contracts, information on the employment, debt bondage, hours spent working, overtime allowances and abuse undergone at the workplace.

6.2. Survey results (BRAC Survey 2019)

6.2.1. Descriptive Statistics: Education, age and occupation levels

Table 4 reports education, age and employment in the destination countries of 170 sample migrants by their destination country. It is important to note that the number of respondents for UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait are very small and hence the percentages need to be read with caution. In general, the migrants have little education; about 40% have education up to primary level (i.e. up to 5 years of education) and only four per cent of migrants have an education level of Higher Secondary or more. Country-wise analysis reveals that less-educated workers (primary class 1-5) were more likely to migrate to UAE and Oman compared to other Gulf-countries. An average migrant in our sample was 27 years old.

With respect to the last occupation in destination countries, construction work is the largest sector of employment. More than a third worked as construction workers while 12% as cleaners, 3% as tailors, 3.53% as domestic workers, 4% as agricultural day labourers and the rest were engaged in a wide range of activities. The workers in domestic help are almost exclusively women migrants. Migrants in Qatar, Oman and Bahrain were more likely to be working in the construction sector while migrants to Saudi Arabia were more likely to be engaged in cleaning activities (36%). In the survey, we also found a few cases who migrated to Bahrain illegally and were put in jail. Although the sectoral distribution does not show it clearly, the majority of the workers are doing low skill jobs.

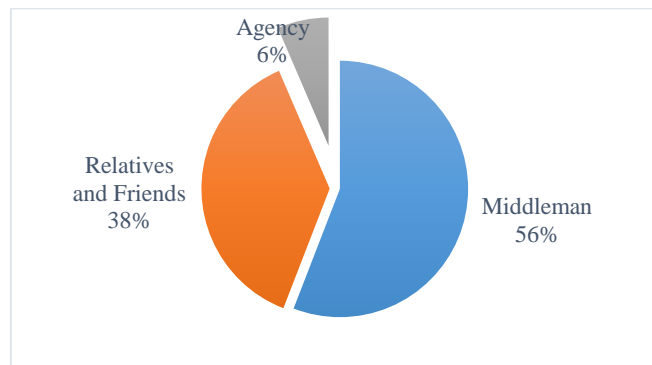
Table 4: Education, age and employment in destination countries

	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Qatar	Oman	Bahrain	Kuwait	Total
Level of Education and Age							
No formal education	11.4	20.0	3.9	2.4	6.7	0.0	5.9
Class 1-5	27.3	60.0	25.5	54.8	33.3	30.8	35.3
Class 6-10	54.6	20.0	66.7	38.1	60.0	69.2	54.7
Higher secondary	6.8	0.0	3.9	4.8	0.0	0.0	4.1
Age (mean)	25.3	32.4	27.6	25.9	31.5	27.3	27.1
Last Occupation at the country of destination							
Construction	15.9	20.0	54.9	40.5	46.7	7.7	35.9
Cleaner	36.4	0.0	0.0	4.8	0.0	23.1	12.4
Welding	4.6	0.0	3.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.4
Electrician	2.3	0.0	7.8	4.8	0.0	0.0	4.1
Housemaid	0.0	20.0	3.9	2.4	6.7	7.7	3.5
Painting	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.8	6.7	15.4	2.9
Mechanic	4.6	0.0	2.0	7.1	0.0	0.0	3.5
Salesman	9.1	0.0	0.0	11.9	26.7	0.0	7.7
Office assistant	0.0	0.0	3.9	2.4	0.0	0.0	1.8
Tailor	0.0	20.0	3.9	4.8	0.0	0.0	2.9
Carpenter	2.3	0.0	5.9	2.4	6.7	0.0	3.5
Driver	2.3	0.0	3.9	4.8	0.0	15.4	4.1
Agri labour	6.8	0.0	0.0	4.8	0.0	15.4	4.1
Labour	6.8	0.0	3.9	0.0	0.0	7.7	3.5
Jail/illegal	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.4	6.7	0.0	1.2
Others	9.1	40.0	5.9	2.4	0.0	7.7	6.5
Number of workers (n)	44	5	51	42	15	13	170

6.2.2. Channels of migration

Information in Figure 3 shows that more than half of the sample migrants arranged migration through middlemen (56%). And the rest migrated through relatives and friends (38%) and directly through a recruitment agency (six per cent). This indicates a large preference for going through middlemen by the migrants and very little preference for going directly through the recruitment agencies. It can be partly explained by the lack of reach of recruitment agencies in the rural areas as discussed in the qualitative findings.

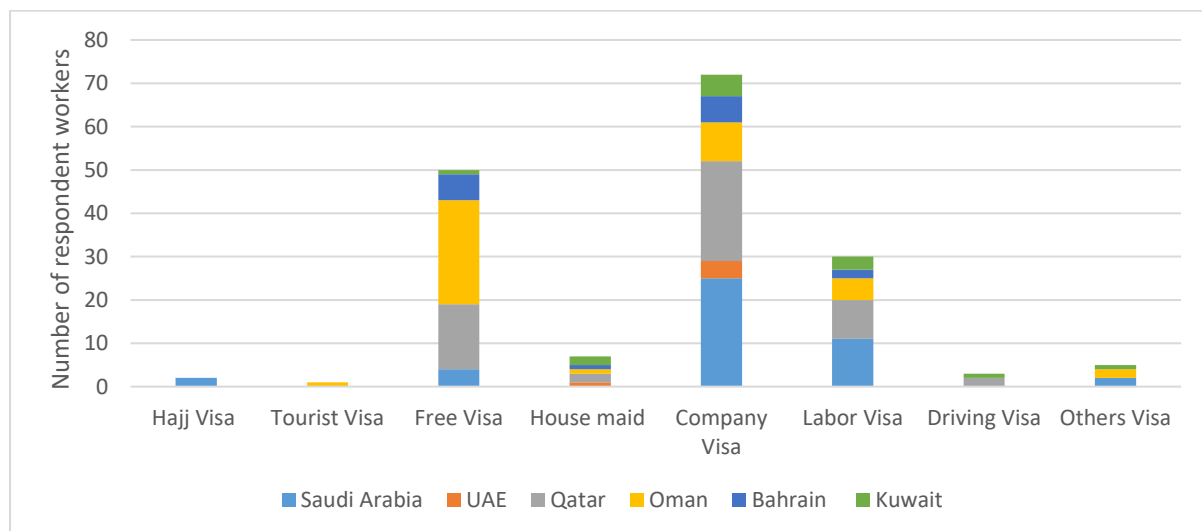
Figure 3: Channels of migration



6.2.3. Type of visa obtained by the country

Migrants migrating to UAE and Bahrain were more likely to obtain a company visa. We found in our qualitative study, company visas tend to be more secure, more formal and binding compared to other visas. Migrants with company visa also typically get clearly stated terms and conditions. Interestingly, migrants going to Oman had the highest number of “free visas”, which does not mention the employer or profession associated with the visa and the holder of the visa are free to work on contracts and obtain daily rates. Qatar and Saudi Arabia also have many migrants with free visas (Figure 4). A few migrants went on tourist and Hajj visas to Oman and Saudi Arabia and remained there illegally.

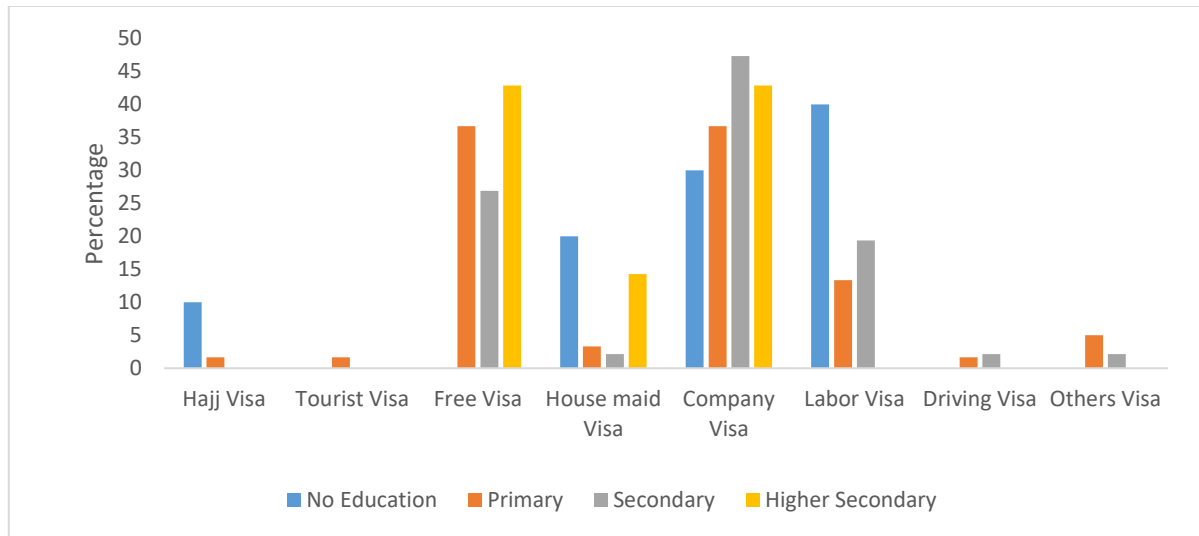
Figure 4: Types of visa by country



The types of visa the migrants procured are highly correlated with the level of education (Figure 5). Specifically, those that had no education were more likely to have a labour visa while those with higher education levels were more likely to obtain a company visa. Interestingly, more migrants with higher secondary level education opted for free visas. Migrants with low or no education migrated illegally

through Hajj and tourist visas. Even many migrants with no education went on a company visa. Women with little or no education opted for the housemaid visa.

Figure 5: Level of education and type of visa



6.2.4. Employment, job contract, hours worked

a) Job contracts

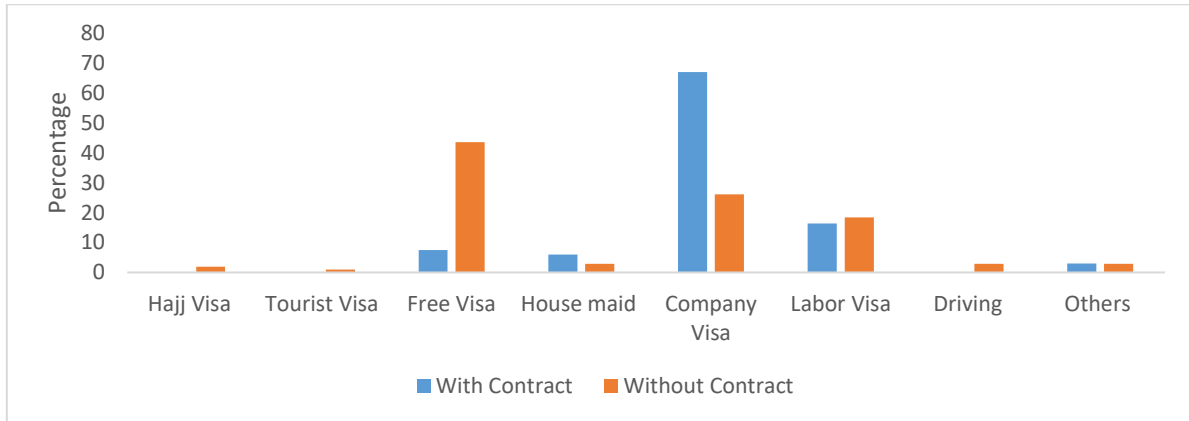
The majority of our sample migrants did not get a job contract before migration as only 39% had seen any written job contract (Table 5). Eighty per cent of migrants had a job contract before migrating to UAE and 54% had one before migrating to Saudi Arabia. Unlike UAE and Saudi Arabia, workers migrating to Oman and Bahrain were less likely to have a contract before migration. As noted in Figure 4, it is likely that the workers go to Oman on free visas and therefore, do not have predefined contracts.

Table 5: Having a job contract before migration

	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Qatar	Oman	Bahrain	Kuwait	Total
Got written job contract (%)	55	80	45	12	33	46	39

Figure 6 depicts the visa type obtained by migrants and whether they received contracts against that visa type. It is alarming to see that a significant proportion of those that procured a company visa did not get a job contract. However, likely, the respondents from the quantitative study did not understand what a job contract is as they sign many documents before departure. Therefore, these findings should be interpreted with care, as there should always be a contract for getting a company visa. But this finding helps us substantiate the claim that most migrants are unaware of what they sign up for. This means that these individuals could not know before what benefits they would get abroad. Among those who got a labour visa, only half received job contracts. Even for those who went to perform manual labour, the number of people without a contract was greater than those with a contract.

Figure 6: Visa Type and Contract



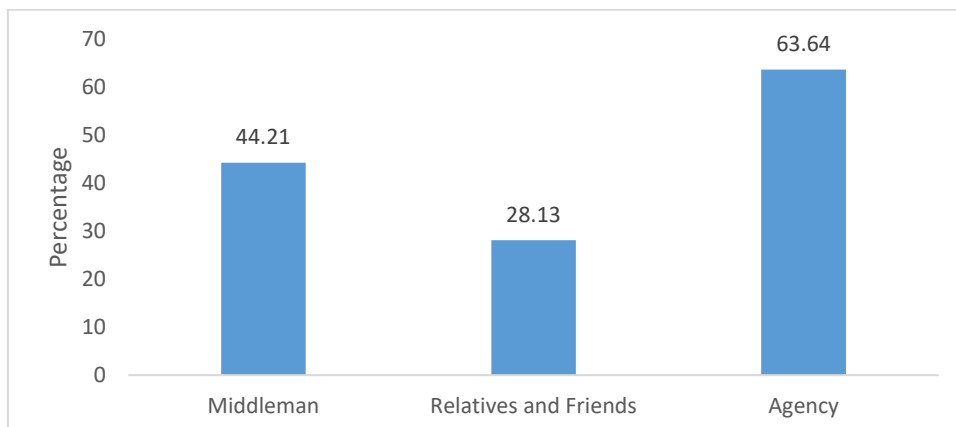
Analysis of job contract paper by the channel of migration however reveals that among those that migrated through personal networks were less likely to have job contract paper which indicates that the migrants are more likely to obtain a free visa through personal networks (Table 6, Figure 6). Around 63 of migrants that migrated through agency got job contract paper before migration.

Table 6: Type of visa obtained through personal channels.

Type of visa	Number	Percentage (%)
Free Visa	29	45.31
Housemaid Visa	3	4.69
Company Visa	23	35.94
Labour Visa	7	10.94
Driving Visa	1	1.56
Others Visa	1	1.56

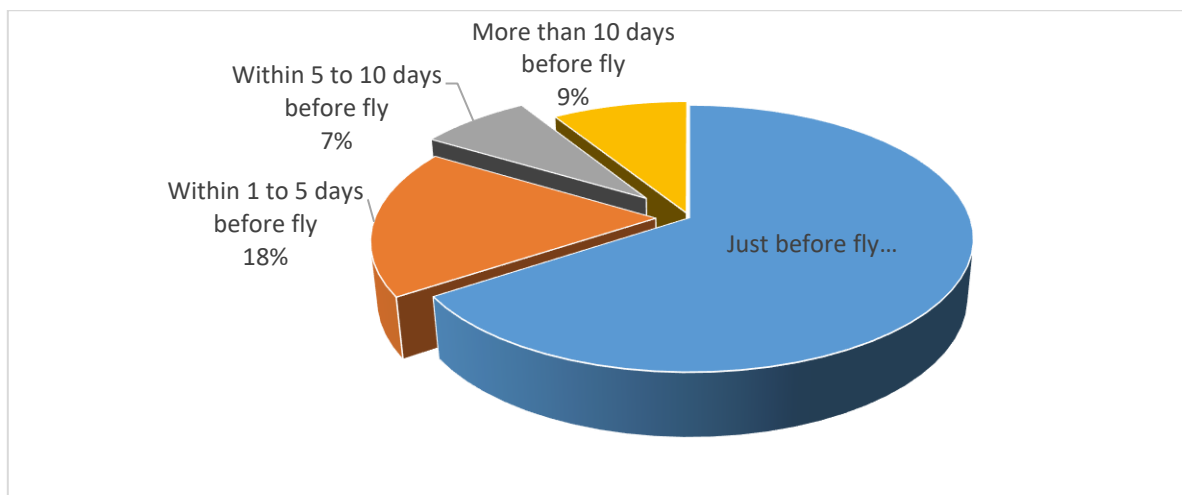
Of the migrants who obtained company visa, 36% obtained through private channels. Similarly, of the migrants who obtained a free visa, 45% obtained through personal relationships and relatives.

Figure 7: Channel of Migration and got written contract



Among those that got job contract papers before migration, 66% received them just before flying (Figure 8). This indicates that the migrants did not get a chance to negotiate with middlemen or others through whom they migrated in case there is a discrepancy between job contract paper and verbal contract. This also indicates that ex-ante migrants know little about what benefits they would receive abroad, which affects their vulnerability to a large extent.

Figure 8: When did migrants obtain the job contract letter?



b) Perceptions relating to middlemen

Table 7 reports the perception of the respondents about the deceptions by middlemen or employer. Around 44% and 24% of migrants perceived that they are victims of deception by middlemen and employers in the country of destination respectively. The rates are however lower among those that migrated to Saudi Arabia and the highest among the migrants migrating to Bahrain. The statistics indicate that migrants are often fooled by the middlemen and feel deceived, given the employment structure, contracts and job type shared with them once they arrive at the country of destination.

Table 7: Perception of deception by the middlemen or employer

	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Qatar	Oman	Bahrain	Kuwait	Total
Deceived by middleman	31.82	40.00	47.06	42.86	66.67	46.15	43.53
Deceived by employer	6.82	20.00	27.45	30.95	33.33	30.77	23.53

c) Work hours and salary

Information presented in Figures 9 and 10 indicates that migrants work more than what was contracted/promised before migration while they earn less than what was contracted/promised before migration. This implies that migrants are doubly exploited. Interestingly, a large majority of the workers are informed about working hours being around eight hours, which is a global norm of daily work hours. However, only a fraction of the workers actually work eight or fewer hours. On the other hand, 50% of migrants reported that they get less than what was contracted/promised before migration.

Figure 9: Actual and contracted hours of work

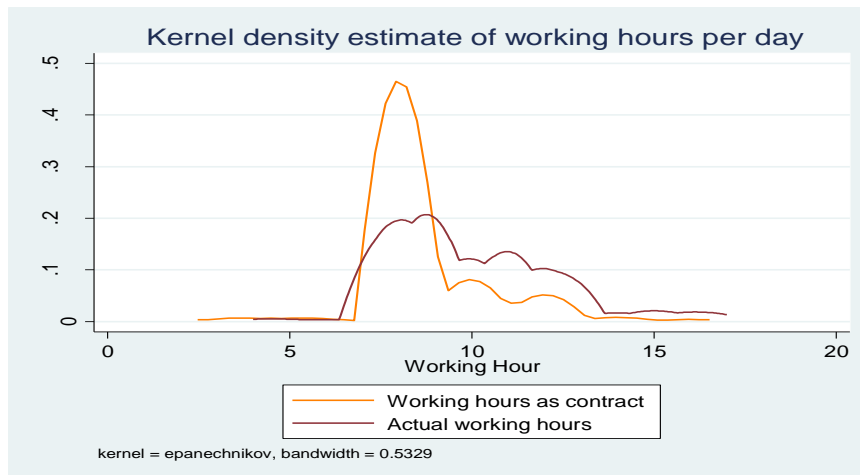
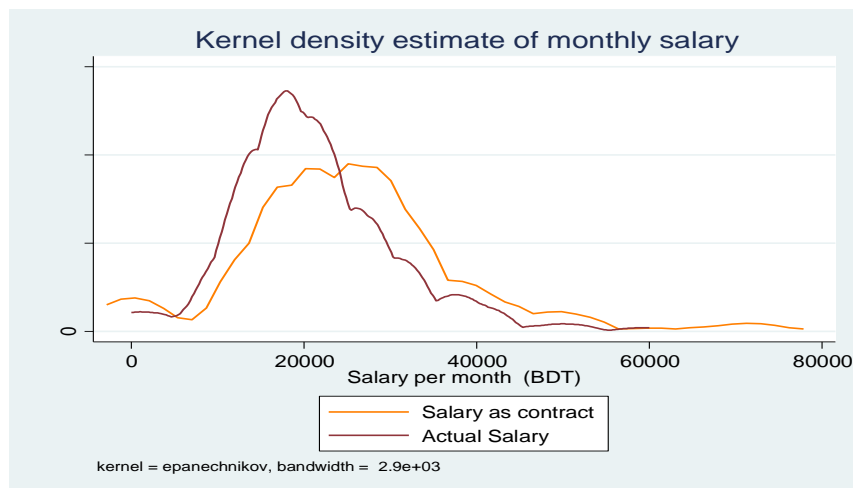


Figure 10: Actual and contracted salary



Thus, differing contractual information, gaps between actual and expected salary, gaps between actual and working hours, deception by middlemen and type of visa make the migrants more vulnerable to forced labour.

6.2.5. Vulnerabilities related to employment work hours, salary, overtime

Table 8 shows more detailed information on jobs and salaries. The average working hours of a migrant is 10 hours per day that ranges between 4 and 17 hours a day. Those who are in Oman work longer hours than others. The average working days in a month is 26, which implies that the migrants enjoy four days of leave per month. However, in every GCC country, some migrants work throughout the month. The average salary of migrants is around BDT 21,000 that ranges from nothing to BDT 60,000. The minimum salary of BDT 0 indicates that often migrants get paid late or do not receive their salary at all/in time. Migrants work five hours of overtime almost daily.

Most migrants were satisfied with the behaviour of their supervisors. UAE migrants witnessed no visit from Bangladesh embassy officials to work sites, while the migrants in Kuwait witnessed the highest number of visits by the embassy staff. A visit from the embassy officials ensures that working conditions are according to the labour laws and increases the likelihood that the complaints of the workers will be heard. Thus, an increased number of visits is a positive indicator of reduced vulnerability.

We observe that despite the higher number of visits by embassy officials, the average hours of overtime worked by workers is four hours. However, longer overtime does not necessarily indicate forced labour. If the migrants are willingly working overtime and are getting paid for the extra work, they are not subjected to forced labour.

Table 8: Vulnerabilities related to Job

	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Qatar	Oman	Bahrain	Kuwait	Total
Working hours daily (average)	10	10	9	11	11	10	10
Minimum Working Hours	8	8	5	8	8	4	4
Maximum Working Hours	16	12	16	17	16	16	17
Workdays per month	27	29	26	27	25	27	26
Minimum Working days	25	26	20	20	16	22	16
Maximum Working days	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Monthly average salary (BDT)	20,109	20,000	22,771	19,738	19,667	22,430	20,956
Minimum (BDT)	0	15000	0	0	0	15000	0
Maximum (BDT)	42,000	30000	60000	36000	50000	50000	60000
Work(s)ed overtime (%)	40.91	20.00	45.10	32.50	40.00	53.85	40.48
Daily overtime hours	3	0	3	4	5	4	3
Minimum hours	2	0	2	2	2	2	2
Maximum hours	6	0	8	9	10	8	10
Days with overtime per month	24	.	21	23	21	20	22
Minimum days	5	.	2	6	8	3	2
Maximum days	30	.	30	30	26	26	30
Satisfied with supervisor's behaviour (%)	79.55	60.00	80.39	78.57	73.33	61.54	77.06
Visitors from BD embassy to work place (%)	11.36	0.00	5.88	4.76	6.67	15.38	7.65
Number of workers (n)	44	5	51	42	15	12	170

6.2.6. Indicators of forced labour

Table 9 describes the extent of forced labour experienced by migrants in the destination countries. Around 70% of respondents reported that they submitted their documents to the employers once they arrived at the country of destination; these numbers are higher for Kuwait, Oman and UAE. Around 37% got the documents back during their stay in those countries. However, within-country contrasts are informative: As most people go to UAE with a company visa, the process is more formalised and they get the contracts and 100% of the workers in UAE get their documents back.

However, for countries such as Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Oman, migration through company visa is still rare and the workers face greater risks of confiscation of documents. More specifically, 73% got those back just before flying back to their home country. For Bahrain, the workers do not get back the documents even before flying back to Bangladesh.

Another important issue is the delay in getting the salary. On average, employers delay by 63 days to pay the salary to the migrants, the highest number of delays happen in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. On average, 11.7% of migrants worked beyond contract in Qatar and did not get paid for the work, while 30% worked did so in Kuwait and 25% of them got paid for the work. It is noteworthy that even though the conditions are much favourable in the UAE, only 40% reported that they wanted to get back to the

same job, the lowest among the GCC countries. Overall, 59% of migrants were willing to go back to the same job, indicating the conditions of forced labour did not provoke them to leave their jobs.

Table 9: Extent of Forced Labour

	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Qatar	Oman	Bahrain	Kuwait	Total
Documents submitted to employer	70.45	80.00	66.67	78.57	46.67	76.92	70.00
Get the documents back ^a	19.35	100.00	44.12	36.36	14.29	60.00	36.97
Got it back just before flying back to BD ^b	66.67	100.00	86.67	50.00	0.00	83.33	72.73
Received salary on time	88.64	100.00	74.51	71.43	66.67	92.31	78.82
Average days delay of salary	75.00	na	71.69	56.36	43.75	75.00	62.97
Forced to work during sickness	13.64	20.00	31.37	30.95	20.00	38.46	25.88
Work beyond contract	4.55	0.00	11.76	14.29	13.33	30.77	11.76
Got Salary for extra work	0.00	0.00	0.00	16.67	50.00	25.00	15.00
Interested to go back to same job	68.18	40.00	66.67	40.48	46.67	76.92	58.82
Would suggest the job to others	63.64	40.00	60.78	30.95	40.00	61.54	51.76

^a among those who submitted documents.

^b among those who received their documents back (44 respondents in total)

Table 10 shows the statistics by the type of their occupation including categories with at least 5 observations. Examples of excluded occupation are illegal worker, welder etc. All the migrant who worked as housemaids, labourers, office assistants and tailors got the documents just before flying back to Bangladesh. With limited access to documents, that exit options for these migrants working in these professions are also limited. Across all occupations, migrants submit their document to the employer. In occupations including construction, housework, tailoring, sales and agriculture, many migrants were made to work even when they were sick. Only 46% of migrants working in the construction and sales profession recommend the jobs to others. In addition, a mere 16% of the casual wage labourers recommend the job to others.

Table 10: Forced labour by occupation

	Construction	House maid	Mechanic	Salesman	Tailor	Cleaner	Agri labour	Labour
Documents submitted to Employer	68.85	100.00	100.00	69.23	60.00	76.19	100.00	100.00
Get the documents back ^a	42.86	83.33	66.67	0.00	33.33	0.00	57.14	33.33
Got it back just before flying back to Bangladesh ^b	55.56	100.00	50.00	.	100.00		75.00	100.00
Received salary on time	70.49	83.33	83.33	84.62	100.00	100.00	57.14	83.33
Forced to work when sick	50.00	20.00	7.69	33.33	33.33	0.00	33.33	0.00
Worked beyond contract	13.11	16.67	16.67	7.69	0.00	0.00	42.86	50.00
Got Salary for extra work	12.50	0.00	0.00	100.00	NA	NA	0.00	33.33
Interested to go back to same job	52.46	50.00	66.67	69.23	60.00	71.43	42.86	16.67
Would suggest the job to others	45.90	66.67	66.67	46.15	60.00	71.43	0.00	16.67
Respondent (n)	61	6	6	13	5	21	7	6

^a among those who submitted documents.

^b among those who received their documents back (44 respondents in total)

6.2.7. Abuse and exploitation

Our results (Table 11) show that although the majority (92%) of the migrants, overall, reported that they are not physically abused, mental abuse is significant (26%). However, between 13% and 20% of respondents reported physical abuse in Bahrain, Kuwait and UAE. Mental abuse is consistently high across most GCC countries. High rates of physical and mental abuse are observed in UAE compared to other countries. Sexual abuse is reported by one respondent and it is highly likely to be underreported. The data may reflect the limited number of women in the sample. We could find only four women out of 170 migrants. From our qualitative findings, we conclude that sexual abuse among men is not common, but physical and verbal abuse is still common.

In most cases, medical treatment costs are not borne by the employer for the injuries experienced at the work station. About 20% of the respondents reported that they were not able to move freely in the country where they worked. All migrants from UAE believed that there are huge restrictions on obtaining leave from work, and, on average, 27% of migrants from other countries also believe that it is true. Agitation at a work station is reported by 30% of migrants, on average, indicating tensions between the migrants and employers.

Table 11: Abuse and Exploitation

Abuse (%)	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Qatar	Oman	Bahrain	Kuwait	Total
Physical Abuse	4.55	20.00	5.88	7.14	13.33	15.38	7.65
Mental Abuse	20.45	40.00	23.53	33.33	26.67	30.77	26.47
Sexual Abuse	2.27	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.59
Any kind of injury at work station	9.09	20.00	7.84	4.76	6.67	7.69	7.65
Employer did not pay treatment cost	25.00	0.00	75.00	100.00	0.00	100.00	53.85
Freely movement at country of destination	81.82	60.00	88.24	73.81	73.33	84.62	80.59
Limited Leave from work	25.00	100.00	25.49	19.05	26.67	46.15	27.65
Agitation at work station	20.45	20.00	25.49	40.48	46.67	30.77	30.00

In addition, the majority of the migrants who were physically and mentally abused wanted to come back to Bangladesh. Ninety-two per cent of the migrants who underwent physical abuse and 85% of the migrants who underwent mental abuse wanted to return to Bangladesh.

6.2.8. Psychological well being

For assessing the psychosocial well-being of migrants, we collected information on their emotions and how they feel in day to day lives. The findings from this analysis will guide us on their mental health status (Table 11).

We find that most migrants in 51.76% of migrants on average feel like crying frequently (62% in Oman). 71% of migrants thought they are sleeping properly and only 3% thought of committing suicide on average. However, 64% of the migrants reported feeling stress about their stay in the country of destination, the number being highest in Kuwait (77%). There is no difference between the migrant workers who have returned (62 workers) and those who are still working abroad (108 workers) in terms of their likelihoods of reporting mental stress (figures not shown in table). A large majority (more than 80%) reported being happy to have travelled abroad for work, but this is itself does not indicate that their migration experience has been fruitful or that they are not victims/potential victims to forced labour. We validate this claim by citing that 47% of migrants still wanted to go back home, the highest from Oman. 91% of the migrants ate proper meals in a day, numbers being lesser for Oman and Bahrain.

Overall, we find that the migrants' mental health status is mixed; while they feel like crying frequently, feel stressed about their stay, they are happy to have come out of Bangladesh, they are less willing to go back home. However, among the 108 migrant workers who are still working abroad, 47% reported that they would like to come back to Bangladesh soon.

Table 12: Psychological wellbeing

Psychosocial Indicators (%)	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Qatar	Oman	Bahrain	Kuwait	Total
Do/did you feel like crying frequently?	40.91	40.00	54.90	61.90	46.67	53.85	51.76
Do/did you feel you had less sleep at night?	18.18	0.00	33.33	38.10	40.00	15.38	28.82
Have you ever thought of committing suicide?	2.27	0.00	3.92	2.38	6.67	0.00	2.94
Do/did you feel any kind of stress about work?	59.09	60.00	62.75	64.29	66.67	76.92	63.53
Do you feel happy to have migrated for work?	88.64	100.00	86.27	78.57	60.00	92.31	83.53
Do/did you eat enough meals in a day?	93.18	100.00	90.20	85.71	86.67	100.00	90.59
Number of workers (n)	44	5	51	42	15	12	170

6.2.9. Perceptions on the treatment of migrants in general

We were interested to learn about the migrants' general perception regarding the situation of migrants in destination countries. More often than not, people shy away or fail to admit that they were abused for many reasons. So general perceptions may reveal the actual scenario to an extent as they have an opportunity to describe their own situation in general terms without specifying the identity.

Table 13 depicts that 85% of migrants believe that migrants do more work than usual. 80% believe that migrants are victims of violence and work under threats and intimidation. Eighty-seven per cent believed that women are victims of sexual abuse. Ninety-five per cent felt that better social networks improve the well-being of overseas migrants. Ninety-two per cent strongly believed that knowledge of legal rights will prevent migrants from exploitation.

We further feed-in findings from this section in Section 7 to evaluate the suggestions/recommendations for beneficiary targeting strategy.

Table 13: General statements about violence against migrants

Statement (%)	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Qatar	Oman	Bahrain	Kuwait	Total
Migrants do more work than usual	75.00	80.00	82.35	92.50	100.00	84.62	84.52
Migrants are victims of violence	80.49	100.00	78.43	75.61	73.33	92.31	79.52
Migrants work under threat or intimidation	83.72	100.00	78.00	67.50	80.00	84.62	78.31
Female migrants are likely to be victims of sexual abuse	88.10	80.00	89.36	84.62	73.33	91.67	86.25
Migrants with social network in the destination are better-off	95.45	100.00	96.08	90.24	100.00	100.00	95.27
Migrants would be less exploited if they know about their rights	93.18	100.00	96.08	85.37	93.33	92.31	92.31
Migrants work for long hours against their will	88.37	100.00	84.00	80.49	86.67	92.31	85.63

7. Analysis and Formulation of Vulnerability Assessment Indicators:

The discussion from the qualitative and quantitative findings informs us of a variety of indicators of the vulnerability of migrants/potential migrants towards forced labour. In this section, we summarize the findings by answering the research questions outlined in Section 3 of the report. We also aim to list down the indicators of the vulnerability identified in this study in the form of a vulnerability assessment matrix, which can be readily used by the programme team at GFEM to undertake beneficiary vulnerability analysis exercise in the future.

Answering the research questions:

Q1. What factors affect the vulnerability of victims, potential victims and survivors of forced/bonded labour among overseas migrants in low-skilled occupations?

From our analysis in quantitative and qualitative parts, we conclude, the following key factors affect the vulnerability of victims, potential victims and survivors of forced/bonded labour among overseas migrants in low skilled occupations:

- a) **Education level:** We observe from the qualitative and quantitative findings that the migrants often have low education levels (up to primary schooling). Therefore, they tend to look for low-skilled occupations abroad and are more vulnerable to exploitation. In addition, low education levels impede access and understanding of the information regarding overseas working conditions, labour laws and migration procedure. This makes them vulnerable to fall victim to the (i) exploitative employers, who pay them less, confiscate their documents and make them work for longer hours, and (ii) extractive middlemen who make money from the migrants who do not know much about the costs related to migration process and are not educated enough to arrange documents themselves.
- b) **Socio-economic status of the migrant and his family:** Socio-economic status highly influences the vulnerability levels of the migrants, especially the ones coming from the rural areas. Since the migrants are poor and desperate to earn (hence to migrate), they are easy prey for the middlemen and the corrupt relatives/friends who often misguide them and extract a lot of money. If the migrant does not have enough money to pay at once, she is often trapped in a system of debt bondage where she is exploited and a certain portion of her salary is deducted in the country of destination. If the poor migrant sells assets, his and his family's economic vulnerability increases manifold. Also, if the socio-economic status of the migrant's family is not good, the migrant is more likely to continue facing the challenges at the country of destination and is less likely to revolt against the improper working conditions, thinking of the cost he has incurred and the expectations of the family.

For a woman, socio-economic status is a critical factor if she is divorced, widowed or abandoned or if she is a single parent. As validated during the qualitative findings, the female migrant workers often become victims of sexual abuse and violence. A lower socio-economic status put a young woman in greater misery as the pressure of earning money and lack of family support makes her endure the suffering at the destination countries.

- c) **Channel of migration:** The vulnerability of migrants is largely influenced by the channels of migration (e.g. through middlemen, recruitment agencies, relatives etc.). From the quantitative findings, we infer that the workers who migrate through formal channels (recruitment agencies) on a company visa are more likely to travel with formal contracts mentioning the status of employment, work hours, salary, health insurance, etc. Workers who travel through formal

channels are less likely to be exploited by employers and are more likely to know their rights. Thus, they are less vulnerable to forced labour. Also, for such workers, it is easier for the regulatory authority to identify and track abusive employment conditions.

However, as mentioned in the qualitative and quantitative findings, the migrants who go through middlemen often suffer from deception. Usually, the costs charged by the middlemen are very high, the chances of getting fake contracts or fake passports are high. Also, middlemen hold no accountability if the migrant who went through them falls victim to forced labour, is not given his salary in time or is made to work for long hours under abusive conditions.

Similarly, women who go through private contacts or relatives are less likely to be sexually abused compared to those who migrate through middlemen. This is because the relatives and private contacts are more likely to be mindful of the safety of women in the destination country and often have ready contacts for linking the female migrant to the destination country. However, women who migrate through middlemen are often on their own, and, have limited social relationships and exposure, thus are more vulnerable to face abuse at the workplace.

- d) **Trust in the middlemen:** It is noted in the qualitative findings that the migrants who are less educated heavily entrust the middlemen concerning their identity documents, legalities of migration procedure, money, salary negotiations etc. The greater is their trust, the greater is their vulnerability to be deceived by the middlemen and becoming a victim of forced labour.
- e) **Information and awareness regarding the migration process and labour laws:** Vulnerability regarding information and awareness is often influenced by the migrant's level of education. However, the quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that information and awareness remain a common problem among the victims of forced labour, irrespective of their education levels (information continues to be an issue for migrants who have completed either secondary or primary levels of education).

The information and awareness levels among migrants depend on the socio-economic status of the family, interaction with successful migrants, the channel of migration as well as social networks shared by the migrant. In general, migrants in our sample come from rural areas and have little information about the migration process, labour laws and employment terms. Limited information and awareness of these migrants increase their vulnerability to being a victim of forced labour.

- f) **Language:** As discussed in the qualitative analysis, language is a barrier for migrants in the destination countries as they often do not understand what type of visa they are being given. In addition, communication at the destination country is tougher and often restricts the victims from communicating their situation. Besides, without language skills, working in the domestic service and hospitality sectors becomes difficult. In an FGD a woman shared her concern about being beaten up because of not knowing the language properly. Thus, not knowing the language of the destination country proves to be a problem. This is particularly true for women domestic workers who do not have a large social network outside the home they are working in. This makes them vulnerable and restricts their potential to speak against abuse.
- g) **Job contracts:** Defined job contracts enable the migrants to know more about their job responsibilities, working hours, pay packages, date of receiving the salary, medical and health insurance benefits and so on. However, migrating without a job contract, or those who agreed to a job contract without understanding its details can increase the vulnerability of the migrant to forced labour. As stated in the quantitative and qualitative findings, many migrants were

given a job contract only at the time of the departure, and some of them were never given any contracts. This creates information asymmetry between the employer and the migrant, and the employer gets the power to exploit the worker by making him do extra work and by paying less. Thus, the absence of job contracts allows the (i) middlemen to exploit workers by charging them extra and (ii) the employers to exploit them by making them work more and increases their vulnerability levels.

- h) Employment conditions:** Vulnerability is highly influenced by the employment conditions and work environment in which the migrants operate in. The quantitative and qualitative analysis proves that abusive working conditions, long hours without pay, lower actual salaries as compared to the expected salary increase the vulnerability of migrants to be victims of forced labour.

Some migrants may be working for long hours at a lower salary willingly. Some migrants would also not mind receiving a lower actual salary compared to the expected salary. However, if the migrants are being forced to work for long hours in a day and they are forced to accept the pay they did not sign up for, they are being subjected to forced labour. These factors affect the vulnerability of migrants because often migrants are unaware of the labour laws and work regulations in the company and thus do not protest. Since they usually engage in low-skilled occupations, there is much less regularity on hours worked and wages received. A lack of information along with the exploitative work conditions might affect their ability to leave/withdraw the employment contract and continue working as a forced labourer, making them vulnerable to further exploitation.

- i) Employer behaviour and threats:** Employers' attitude and belief about worker rights make their employees vulnerable. Sometimes, employers can be hostile and abusive. They might threaten the migrant worker about lay-off if s/he does not perform well or does not do overtime. Employers ability to withhold payment contributes to workers' vulnerability. The worker, with limited options due to a low socioeconomic status, then becomes vulnerable to forced labour. To breakeven with the costs incurred for migration, the workers might keep working in abusive conditions fearing that otherwise the employer will deport them or stop paying them. This may increase their vulnerability. As outlined in Section 6, sexual, physical and verbal abuse is common among women working as domestic maids; the behaviour of the employer makes her victim of forced labour because of her low bargaining power. The situation becomes worse if the employer has the victim's identification documents.
- j) Identity documents:** Vulnerability is highly influenced by the status of identification documents, especially passports. Our study findings suggest that passports and other identification documents are often withheld by recruitment agencies, employer companies or the middlemen/dalals. This leaves the immigration situation of the migrant worker in the hands of the middlemen/employers/agencies and makes the migrants vulnerable to exploitation. As mentioned in the qualitative part, if the passport is in the hands of the employer, the employer can turn hostile, perform various kinds of physical/mental/social abuse; thus, confiscation of the documents puts the employees in a powerful position to prevent the less-educated migrants from reaching out to authorities.
- k) Absence of social networks:** The absence of social networks prevent the exchange of ideas, communication between the migrants and other members of the society at the destination country. It also restricts communication with fellow migrants. Exchange of ideas and communication also foster awareness about the legal rights of the migrant and an absence of these social relationships increases the vulnerability of the migrant to continue facing abuse.

We observe from the qualitative findings that victims who had social networks or fellow Bangladeshis working with them were more aware of their rights and the high costs charged by middlemen in sending them. However, women who worked in the domestic sector with little/no communication with other migrants/neighbours continued to face abuse for a longer period.

- l) **Abusive living and working conditions:** Abusive living and working conditions is a symptom of general vulnerability and could be an indicator of vulnerability to forced labour. If the migrant is being abused repeatedly, the chances are high that the migrant is continuing the job because of forced labour. Thus, the higher the amount of physical, verbal and mental abuse experienced by the migrant, the higher is the vulnerability of the migrant to be a victim of forced labour. Findings from the quantitative part also suggest that most migrants believe that overseas migrants face abuse and they often feel like leaving the job.

- m) **Gender-based sexual abuse:** Findings from the study suggest that most of the women face sexual abuse at the workplace, many are sent to brothels without their knowledge and some are abused as domestic maids. Thus, we consider that gender, in itself, is an indicator of vulnerability towards sexual abuse and forced labour.

- n) **Government regulations:** We find from the quantitative and qualitative analysis, limited regulations and attention paid by the Bangladeshi embassy at the country of destinations make the migrants more vulnerable to fall as a victim of forced labour. Lack of attention by the Embassy officials towards the conditions of abuse faced by Bangladeshi migrants restricts their fallback and rescue options and makes them more vulnerable to continue facing the abusive conditions they are in. Many respondents during the FGDs pointed out that if the embassies paid more attention to their conditions and had helped the migrants, their situation would have improved.

However, the findings from the stakeholder workshop indicate that this situation is changing slowly as the embassies are apparently getting more involved in reducing the vulnerability of workers. For the last four months, the Secretary, Director General, Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) and the Saudi High Commissioner have been meeting with every month or two. Previously, certificates were only required for BMET, now embassies require that as well. There are shelter cells in the destination countries established by BMET and the Labour Ministry at four places: Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam and Medina. The Director General of the Ministry is fully committed to developing this sector.

We express the list of indicators of vulnerability along with their relationship with vulnerability as below. However, this list of the indicator should not be considered as definite indicators and should only be considered as a starting point for assessing vulnerabilities:

Indicators	Assessing Vulnerability
Education levels	Higher the education, lesser is the vulnerability towards forced labour
Trust in the middlemen	Higher the trust, greater the vulnerability towards forced labour
Socio-economic status of the family	Higher the status, lesser the vulnerability towards forced labour
Channel of migration	Higher the migration through formal channels, lesser the vulnerability towards forced labour
Type of visa obtained	While there is no fixed rule on the indication of vulnerability by profession, findings suggest that migrants obtaining company visa are less likely to be vulnerable to forced labour as compared to other visa types.

Information and awareness about the migration process and labour laws	Higher the levels of information present with the migrants before departure, the lesser the vulnerability towards forced labour
Language	Greater knowledge of the language reduces the vulnerability towards forced labour
Job contract situation	Greater the knowledge of the job contract and the possession of the job contract lower the vulnerability towards forced labour
Job salary	The smaller the gap between actual and expected salary, the lesser the vulnerability towards forced labour
Working hours	The smaller the gap between actual and expected work hours, the lesser the vulnerability towards forced labour
Work environment	The less hostile the work environment is, the lesser the vulnerability towards forced labour
Withheld wages	The greater number of times wages are withheld, the greater the vulnerability towards forced labour
Abusive (Physical, mental and verbal) living and working conditions	Higher the amount of abuse experienced, higher the vulnerability towards forced labour
Gendered sexual abuse	Higher the amount of abuse experienced, higher the vulnerability towards forced labour
Employer threats	The higher the number of threats experienced, the higher the vulnerability towards forced labour
Identity documents	Greater the chance of identity documents not being with the migrant, greater the vulnerability towards forced labour
Absence of social networks	Lesser the exposure to social networks, the higher the vulnerability
Government regulations	Lesser the regulations by the Government, the higher the vulnerability

Vulnerability assessment score which can be used: 1= Low vulnerability, 2 = Moderate vulnerability, 3= High vulnerability, 4= Severe vulnerability

Q2. 1. What are the important gaps in the overseas migration process that turn some migrants into victims and how other migrants avoid falling prey?

Important gaps in the overseas migration process which make some migrants victims of forced labour and how other migrants avoid falling prey:

- a) **Influence of personal relationships:** Most importantly, personal relationships play a crucial role in connecting with the middlemen, selecting the country of destination, occupation and deciding on the costs of migration. Our findings suggest that migrants who are better connected, have relatives who are migrants and those who have good connections with middlemen are less likely to be victims of forced labour. Those with limited connection with other migrants face disadvantages. There should thus be a uniform system of access to basic information for all.

- b) **Non-uniform channels of migration:** Even though agencies are responsible for carrying out the migration process, they outsource the work to brokers because of limited capacities. This gives middlemen a platform to mislead and exploit poor migrants. Our quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate strongly that the migrants who went through recruitment agencies were more likely to obtain job contracts and undergo pre-migration trainings. Again, the selection of the migration channel is influenced by the personal relationships and socio-economic standing of the migrant's family. As middlemen were largely believed to be deceptive, the stakeholder meeting indicated possibilities of further collaborations between

recruitment agencies and the NGOs to make the recruitment process more ethical, less costly and fair.

- c) **Information asymmetries in the migration process:** Some migrants tend to know better about the process than others. While the extent of information is largely influenced by the education level and personal relationships, our findings suggest that there are inconsistencies in the type of training provided to the migrants before they leave. Some women who obtain visas with the help of relatives and friends, do not even undergo the training. Women complained that they were not cautioned about the differences in lifestyles, sleep cycles and food habits, lack of socialization during the training process. Most women also did not undergo the trainings. Therefore, the migration process should entail consistent trainings for all the people who migrate through similar channels.
- d) **Lack of uniform access to recruitment agencies:** Our findings suggest that the procedure to access the services of recruitment agencies is not straight forward and equal for all potential migrants. The migrants who have better geographical access to the agencies, often end up paying less and learning more compared to their counterparts. Recruitment agencies also have ties with the middlemen and the agencies often prefer getting clients from middlemen as upfront payment by the client is more secure. Whereas the migrants pay the recruitment agencies at the end of the process and some migrants even refuse to go on the last day. This results in financial losses for agencies and deepens the role of middlemen. However, regulation is required where all migrants have equal access to information and ethical recruitment procedure. Uniform levels of access to the services provided by recruitment agencies are important.
- e) **Limited/no regulations of the middlemen:** As most middlemen operate in an informal economy, they often mislead people into making a profit by overcharging. Thus, the migrants who migrate through middlemen become more vulnerable as they pay a high cost for migration to the destination countries, because of which they have limited options to leave the country even if the circumstances are not favourable. The migrants end up working in dire conditions to earn the money spent on the migration process. Thus, there is a significant need for bringing some of these middlemen into the formal economy and regulate their activities.
- f) **Accountability issues:** Even though the vulnerability levels of migrants who migrate through recruitment agencies is lower, there is a gap in defining accountability if the migrant becomes a victim of the forced labour. Some migrants tried to hold the middlemen accountable in their villages, but there is an urgent need for establishing some monitoring and accountability mechanisms in order to hold the agencies/middlemen accountable if the migration experience is not pleasant, especially when the experience is not pleasant because of information asymmetries before migration.
- g) **Limited obedience and monitoring for labour laws:** While various employers and recruitment agencies have legal contracts on the migration process and migrant circumstances, the actual implementation and monitoring of these laws is limited. The stakeholder workshop identified that the recruitment agencies often end up denying the allegations made by women towards their employers because the agencies have to bear the cost of replacing a worker if a worker wishes to return within three months of her departure. Thus, external regulations in these processes and additional fallback mechanisms are required for encouraging the monitoring of these laws.
- h) **Kafala system of employment:** The *Kafala* system of employment of female migrants was seen to be exploitative as workers cannot change their employers. This increases the

vulnerability of women to forced labour at a tremendous level. In the stakeholder workshop, there was a recommendation to stop sending workers through the *Kafala* system and promote accommodation of female workers in dormitories and hostels instead of houses. Lack of monitoring of workers was identified as another reason for exploitation.

- i) **The different migration process for skilled migrants:** It was noted during the stakeholder workshop that the migration process of skilled workers is very different. The workers are sent after training. When the agency gives training to the workers, the “foreign buyers” come to them. They prepare resumes of the workers and attach copies of their passports. The buyers review them, select the workers they want and write down the type of work, salaries, living expenses and insurance on the documents. The workers are then asked whether they would like to join the work, and if they agree, their signatures are taken. The agency keeps a copy and the worker gets a copy.

Many recruitment agencies also do not give travel documents to the workers. This creates a gap in the experiences of successful and unsuccessful migrants. Thus, uniform procedures and recruitment patterns are the need of the hour.

Q3. Which occupations, countries, migration channels report high incidences of forced/bonded labour among men and women?

Overall the analysis concluded that there is no defined occupation where an increased vulnerability of migrants is observed and the factors influencing the vulnerability of migrants are common against all the occupations. We found that women are the most vulnerable to sexual and physical abuse in domestic work and most cases of abuse came from Saudi Arabia. Migrants working as housemaids, construction workers, labourers, tailors, cleaners were more likely to submit their documents to the employers and receive them only when they were leaving for Bangladesh. Fifty per cent of the migrants working in the construction sector and as agricultural wage labourers even do not get their documents back before flying back to Bangladesh. In addition, since the jobs, they are engaged in are low-skilled, the situation is meant to be similar across all occupations, especially when it is informal. Besides, only 16% of the casual wage labours recommend the job to others.

The quantitative findings indicate that migrants to UAE usually have job contracts before migration, their documents are returned timely by their employers, get regular salaries, they migrate on a company visa. However, migrants to UAE are also found to be working the highest number of days in a month and working overtime, largely dissatisfied with the employer’s behaviour and often forced to work during the sickness. They also got limited leave from work and felt less free to move around freely in the country; the cases of mental and physical abuse were also high in UAE.

Similarly, for Oman, the findings suggested that the migrants do not receive treatment support from employers even for work-related injuries, received irregular salaries, were forced to work during sickness and were less interested to go back to doing the same job. we also find a high adoption rate of free visas in Oman, where migrants end up visiting without formal contracts and are at high risks of being exploited.

Findings from the stakeholder workshop suggest that migrants to Hong Kong, Singapore and other countries were more likely to have a smooth process of migration and have better experiences. While cases for physical and mental abuse are common across countries, they are observed to be highest among Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait and UAE. Fewer cases are observed from Saudi Arabia, but this could be because of the limitation of the sample of migrants from Saudi Arabia.

Higher incidences of forced labour among men and women can occur if the migrants go through middlemen. The highest number of migrants from Bahrain complained that they felt deceived by the

employers and the middlemen. This is explained at a greater depth in Section 5.2. However, the vulnerabilities of migrants to be a victim of forced labour is by and large common and depends on the indicators discussed in the answer to Q1.

Q4. What is the impact of exploitation in the form of forced/bonded labour among the lives of victims and their families?

The vulnerabilities that await the victims of forced labour range from psychological to physical to social and economic vulnerabilities.

The male migrants who were victims of forced labour now live in various degrees of vulnerability. Some are completely dependent on their parents without physical, psychological or financial ability to do anything. Some were able to get employment in their relative's businesses. Some have managed to repay their debts by selling their land and house as well as remaining assets and started doing wage labour. Some, such as rod mechanics, sanitary mechanics, have been able to put their skills to use and got jobs or daily wage work. A few were able to set up a small business such as a small grocery store or tea stall.

Most female migrants were abandoned, divorced or widowed before they left. Upon return, some had to go back to their parent's house with their children, most of whose parents have very little income. They live hand to mouth. A few female migrants who had husbands returned to find that their husbands have either squandered or suffered a business loss and nothing remained of the money she sent. Some returned to find out that their husband had remarried. A few female migrants try to engage with some income-earning work, such as embroidery and agricultural daily wage work. But many of both male and female returned migrants nevertheless are willing to take the chance to migrate again for earning better. Some of the men want to try their luck in Europe the next time.

Both male and female migrants suffer psychologically either because they were mistreated and abused in the destination country and/ or because they returned empty-handed and the thought of how they are going to repay their debts and run their household makes them feel very stressed. Both male and female migrants also become socially vulnerable. The fact that they have returned empty-handed, makes them a subject of jokes or gossip by their friends and neighbours and sometimes even their families. A young male migrant said, *"I am not the kind of person to stay at home. But now, I don't go out of the house at all. I don't give any time to my friends. I don't go and chat at the tea stall around the corner as I used to. I feel like dying."*

Female migrant workers who are believed to be sexually abused in destination countries face acute vulnerability as they are often not accepted by their families. The social stigma of being sexually abused ruins all chances of her having a normal family life. The case studies collected by BRAC's Migration programme from their emergency services at the airport reveal conditions of extreme trauma of female domestic workers returning from Saudi Arabia which include screaming and shouting if anyone goes near them, complete silence and non-communication and inability tell where they want to go/ which village they are from. Their families often do not want to receive them from the airport or do not take them for treatment to the hospital after taking them home. A returning migrant from Saudi Arabia said, *"My husband and mother-in-law had supported me when I went abroad, but now they have turned their backs on me,"* she said. *"They have asked me not to go home as they want to avoid public gossip."* Ostracized from her own family, she is now living in the airport area of Dhaka.

Extremely vulnerable are those too who had to spend time in jail before returning. Some of the case studies shared their experience of jail life; they had no idea how long they would have to be there, no one to look out for them or ask about them, had no visit from the embassy, had no change of clothes and were mistreated by the jailers. They return to Bangladesh not only empty-handed but starved and in poor mental and physical condition. A female migrant worker who served two and a half months in jail said, *"I found a man at the airport and called my mother from his phone. I asked my mother to send me a set of clothes. She sent me clothes and a burkha. When my father came, I said, father, I have not*

eaten for two days. He went across the road and bought me rice and curry. I sat down by the side of the road and ate.”

Both male and female workers cannot tell their families what they have been through and suffer from mental trauma. One female migrant who came back because she was not paid and physically abused said, *“After coming back, I did not say anything. When people asked me how I was, I said I was very well. If I say that my employer was not good, they would immediately think that madam’s husband sexually abused me. People will say all kinds of hurtful things. So, I do not tell anyone how much I have suffered, I keep it to myself.”*

Those who returned empty-handed face not only economic vulnerability but also psychological trauma and social embarrassment. Many of the case studies examined reveal the stories of men who are now facing greater debt than before. If they were poor before, now they are penniless. Some even sell their house to repay the loans. Many settle for the kind of work which they never would have done before they left. A male migrant who returned from Qatar said, *“Many people come back from abroad and go crazy. They spent seven or eight lakh taka going abroad, but couldn’t do anything. They return completely helpless, panicked and disoriented as to what they should do now. No one supports them to get back on their feet. Relatives who helped with migration cost won’t lend money for business because he is a failure.”*

Sometimes, economic vulnerability through forced labour becomes a reason for the spouse to try their luck with migration, as they feel they will not be able to pay off the debts with their paltry income in the country. A female return migrant said, *“Now my husband has gone abroad. It cost four lakh taka to send him. I took a loan of two lakh taka and borrowed the rest from others. Now he sends Tk.18,000 every month. I am repaying our debts with that money.”*

One of the male migrant workers correctly identified that people who have lost everything and have returned need the most help. *“This is the time that these people need the most help. I could do it because my family was here to support me. But many do not have families or anyone beside them. It is important to stand by them.”* The emergency service that BRAC provides at the airport takes care of short term needs such as food, emergency medical assistance, transportation cost, immediate psychosocial counselling and telecommunication support. One of the female migrants interviewed received one lakh taka from BRAC to get medical treatment. More long-term support is provided by BRAC’s reintegration programme which offers psychosocial counselling, social re-integration and economic re-integration through providing skills or matching skills with resources.

Q5. How can the vulnerability and incidences of forced labour be reduced in future (Direct inputs from the migrants)?

The male and female migrant workers encountered during this research spoke of various safeguards to prevent vulnerability to forced labour. Based on their inputs, we recommend the following for reducing the vulnerability and incidences of forced labour in the future:

At the level of migrants, recruitment agencies and NGOs:

- Migrants should directly go through the recruitment agency and the role of middlemen should be reduced
- Migrants should be sensitized by the Government, NGOs or recruitment agencies for demanding the job contract paper, information on the terms and conditions and
- Migrants should be trained properly and should get all papers and visa checked and verified by the recruitment agencies before migration.
- NGOs and the recruitment agencies along with the Government of Bangladesh can help in reaching out to the migrants living in rural areas and informing them about the migration

process, documents required, the procedure for obtaining the documents, costs involved and advising them on not to trust the middlemen.

- If one must rely on the middleman, the migrants should be able to verify his credentials and the papers he is given.
- Migrants should be informed on running Google search on the destination country to know how many workers the country is taking, how much salary they are offering and information regarding cost and visa. This can be done with the help of recruitment agencies (BMET in particular) and the NGOs
- Migrants should also find out about the companies they would be employed by. This should be done in terms of how big or small it is, how new or old it is, and its financial status
- Training offered to the migrants should involve learning the language properly, skill training on the occupation in demand and on the kind of work environment they will be subjected to.
- Migrants should be encouraged to take contact information of such NGOs such as BRAC, OKUP, who help migrant workers and to leave behind a copy of the visa and the passport at home
- Recruitment agencies should work with NGOs for reaching out to the poor people and look for collaborations for outreach purposes. In addition, the agencies should regulate the operations of middlemen from time to time to prevent fraud and high costs.
- NGOs can help identify the victims of sexual abuse and explore how migration agreements between the countries can incorporate the punishments for such an abuse

At the level of authorities (particularly, BMET and Bangladesh Ministry of Manpower Development and Social Welfare):

- The government of Bangladesh can send out government circulars for migrant work and interviews and arrange for contract papers.
- The government of Bangladesh can also instruct embassies in the destination countries to support Bangladeshi workers and to monitor workers at their workplace every three months.
- The Government can also launch training programmes/ skill development schemes for developing the skills of these migrants. It can also set up training centres where all workers will receive training and through which migrant workers will be sent abroad within a reasonable cost of migration.
- BMET and other Government bodies for recruiting migration should act on developing a standard protocol for employers to hire the workers at fixed terms and conditions, failure to follow which can have repercussions at the country level.
- The government of Bangladesh should also explore new labour markets (e.g. Singapore, Hong Kong) where the migration process is much smoother and transparent. Exploring new markets can be done with the help of recruitment agencies. *“If female workers are asked whether they will go again (to the Middle East), they refuse. They carry forward a horrible experience. If you look at the case of Hong Kong, it is completely different. Everything is polished and well managed. The training centres are different from many equipments. The workers are well and clean dressed, I asked a few of the female workers whether they will go again and they agreed to go. They have a well-managed migration system.”*

7. What factors should the GFEM’S intervention strategy address in the migration process for reducing the vulnerability of victims, potential victims and survivors of forced and bonded labour in the areas studied?

The following steps should be addressed by the GFEM’S intervention strategy in the migration process for reducing the vulnerability of victims, potential victims:

- a) **Strengthening the information levels among migrants** in terms of equipping them with the right knowledge about documentation, migration process, labour laws, knowledge about immigration rules, job contracts, the value of the identification documents, the protection mechanisms available, etc. The information has been identified as the key indicator for vulnerability towards forced labour. Thus, enhancing the channels of information and making sure that the migrants are benefitted from it can highly reduce their vulnerability towards forced labour.
- b) **Developing capacity of the recruitment agencies, NGOs and the Government to be able to monitor incidences of forced labour and modern slavery.** Monitoring and tracking the incidences of forced labour and abuse is extremely important and is one important factor through which the responsible employers/agencies/people practising forced labour can be brought out. Thus, programmes keeping track of the names of agencies and middlemen through which victims of forced labour migrated, will enable better enforcement of laws and caution the employers practising forced labour. Capacity-building support can be provided by GFEMS in partnership with other international agencies such as ILO, International Organization for Migration (IOM), World Bank etc. for ensuring better monitoring and tracking.

Additional capacity-building support can be provided through training, conferences and workshops to (i) bring out the situation of migrants in the GCC countries, (ii) learning from the policies of other countries (Philippines), (iii) emphasizing the international labour laws in place and (iv) developing tools for BMET and the Government of Bangladesh to better monitor the incidences of forced labour

- c) **Influencing the recruitment agencies for regulating the number of middlemen they engage with and the costs charged by middlemen to the migrants.** GFEMS can work together with the NGOs, BMET and the Ministry of Manpower Development and Social Welfare, Government of Bangladesh to regulate middlemen. Middlemen play an indispensable role in linking migrants to the recruitment agencies and often overcharge and exploit the migrants. This increases the vulnerability of the migrants to continue working in challenging work conditions, to cover the costs incurred during the migration process. Interventions from GFEM should aim at regulating this situation with the help of the Government and other partners.
- d) **Influencing the employers at the destination countries on negotiating standard protocols and procedures regarding the employment terms and environment.** This can only be achieved through an international effort for making sure that the laws are followed within the destination countries. Greater partnerships with the bilateral and multilateral organizations and negotiations between the Government of Bangladesh and those of the Governments of destination countries is required for influencing policies.
- e) **Working together with the Government of Bangladesh for finding new markets except for GCC countries.** Our study elucidates that there is a potential for migrants to move away from GCC countries and look for opportunities in other countries. This requires efforts from the Government in terms of enhancing relations with other countries and efforts from the NGOs/GFEM to educate migrants on the ground about the benefits of migrating to countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong, where the migration experiences are much more pleasing.
- f) **Assisting the NGOs in the protection programmes** for the victims/survivors of forced labour through financial and technical support can be another area where GFEM can contribute. This will in turn contribute to building the capacities of NGOs to work on the ground level for

sensitizing the migrants about the migration process, standard costs and the employment conditions at the country of destination

8. Conclusion

According to ILO, 20.9 million victims of forced labour, trafficking and slavery are in the world today¹⁰. Forced labour is a form of modern slavery that can highly impact the lives of the most vulnerable and least protected, perpetuating a vicious cycle of dependency and poverty. It also disproportionately affects women, the disabled and the migrants working in low skilled occupations. It thereby is important to identify the factors affecting the vulnerability of these migrants which make them a victim of forced labour.

BIGD, together with GFEM, has undertaken a Beneficiary Vulnerability Analysis to identify the indicators of the vulnerability of migrants/potential migrants towards forced labour. It has also identified the inputs from migrants for shaping the beneficiary engagement strategy of GFEM. Key indicators of the vulnerability identified through this study include education levels, socio-economic status of the migrant and his family, channel of migration, levels of trust in the middlemen, information about the migration process, proficiency in the language of the destination country, awareness about the employment terms and conditions, the status of the identity documents, social networks, abuse experienced at the workplace and government regulations of the labour laws. With the rising numbers of victims of forced labour in the GCC countries, this study has examined the role of recruitment agencies, middlemen, NGOs and the Government is working in reducing the incidences of forced labour. Some of the gaps identified through this study are lack of information among the migrants, unregulated migration channels, lower capacities of the recruitment agencies and NGOs, unregulated labour markets at the destination countries and limited monitoring mechanisms in place by the Government and BMET.

Given the seriousness of the impact forced labour has on the lives of the victims, there is an urgent need to address the root causes of forced labour both by empowering vulnerable people to resist coercion at work and by addressing the factors that allow unscrupulous employers to profit from their exploitation. Future work on the issue of forced labour experienced by Bangladeshi migrants at the GCC countries can thus, target (i) strengthening the levels of information among the migrants to GCC countries, (ii) increasing the capacities of the NGOs and the Government for monitoring the employers indulging in forced labour and tracking the cases of forced labour by surveying the returnee migrants (iii) working with the recruitment agencies for regulating the number of middlemen engaged in the migration process and the costs charged to the migrants, (iv) leveraging international support from Governments and international agencies for better tracking of the labour markets in destination countries.

Continual steps by GFEMS and other institutions for reducing the incidences of modern slavery can go a long way and will also enable us to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals 5.2, for eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation and 8.7 for taking immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking.

¹⁰ ILO website: ILO's strategy on forced labour

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