



Independent Final Evaluation of “The Application of Migration Policy for Decent Work of Migrant Workers Phase II”

QUICK FACTS

Countries: Bangladesh

Evaluation date: 31 July 2022

Evaluation type: Project

Evaluation timing: Final

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DC Symbol: BGD/18/03/CHE and BGD/15/01/SDC

Donor(s) & budget: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC): Overall budget US \$ 7,549,417 including in kind support from the Government of Bangladesh US \$ 296,377

Key Words: migration; social protection; skills; Bangladesh; Asia.

Background & Context

Background and project description

The present report presents the findings of the *Final Independent Evaluation* of the project entitled ***The Application of Migration Policy for Decent Work of Migrant Workers Phase II***. The project is a 75-month project funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to help the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) in operationalizing migrant-centric policy and legal measures which were developed with the assistance of the earlier ILO initiatives. The project aims to help authorities manage migration better through the provision of research assistance, technical advisory support, negotiation consultancy and protection of the rights of the migrant labourers. The objective of the project is: ‘men and women migrant workers will benefit from safe migration and decent work’ and contribute to the sustainable economic and social development of Bangladesh.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The main purpose of this evaluation is to promote accountability to key stakeholders, including the GOB and the donor and to enhance learning within the ILO and other key stakeholders. The scope of the Evaluation covers all three Outcomes of the project, as well as the entire programme period from April 2016 to 31 July 2022. The geographical scope of the programme covers the country of Bangladesh. The main clients include the ILO the project team and ILO Country Office for Bangladesh, DWT –New Delhi (Migration, social protection, GOB, SDC and other key stakeholders).

Methodology of evaluation

The evaluation used a theory-based qualitative evaluation approach, to interview a wide range of stakeholders through individual and Focus Group Interviews. A total of 50 meetings were held, for discussions with over 78 stakeholders, of which 30 were women. The evaluators conducted an extensive desk review, and completed a field mission to meet returnee migrant workers and hold a validation workshop combined with debriefing to the project team. The draft report was sent to stakeholders for feedback, and these were incorporated in the final report.

Main Findings & Conclusions

Relevance

The project aligns well with the 7th and 8th Five Year Plans of the GOB, which prioritize the employment and protection of migrant workers. The project contributes to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 1, 8 and 10 on poverty reduction, decent work and reducing inequalities. The project is consistent with ILO's DWCP and Programme and Budget outcome on promoting fair and effective labour migration policies, besides holding an important place on the SDC's portfolio nationally and globally, as the project outcomes are focused on improving access to safer migration services, establishing legal frameworks to protect migrants and policies to improve facilitation of remittances. Workers' and employers' organizations also consider the project highly relevant in reducing the vulnerabilities of migrant workers and returnees, especially women workers.

Validity of Design

The project builds on the success of its first phase (2011-2016) that worked on policy formulation, and focuses in the second phase (2018-2022), on policy implementation. The Theory of Change (TOC) envisaged three pathways i.e., governance and legislation, skills, jobs, enterprises, and social protection, but misses out elaborating on gender and disability inclusion. The Project is well aligned with the Theory of Change and benefited from the flexibility of the donor and implementing agency to accommodate new needs, arising due to COVID-19 and government priorities. The project was realistic as there was political will from the government. Yet, institutional reform faced barriers of resistance to organizational change, and vested interests resulted in delayed implementation of the policy changes initiated by the Project.

Coherence

The project has been highly successful in leveraging partnerships. It coordinated with the European Union (EU) funded and ILO-implemented SKILLS21 programme, International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNWOMEN) for discussions, formulating policies and implementation. It collaborated with regional projects, e.g. the Governance of Labour Migration in South and South-East Asia (GOALS) Project, ILO-Malaysia's BRIDGE Project, Work-in-Freedom project and the TRIANGLE projects. It also

collaborated with ILO Sri Lanka, Nepal and Philippines, and the SDC-funded Fairway project. The Project has supported GOB's participation in Regional Consultative Processes such as the Colombo Process, and global processes, Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD) and Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), and leveraged these discussions for learn, e.g., about employer-pay models. The project response to the COVID-19 crisis and added interventions relevant for reintegration of returnee migrants.

Effectiveness

The Project has achieved all its outputs and has contributed to the two outcomes envisaged: better protection of women and men migrant workers, and improved capacities of public and private institutions to contribute to safe migration and decent work for migrant workers. The Project supported the development and revisions of several Acts, Rules and Guidelines, to incorporate International Labour Standards (ILS) in MOUs. The Project capacitated government departments to implement the Migrant Workers Information and Management System (MWIMS). A Recruitment Agencies Information and Management System (RAIMS) was developed, operationalized, capacities of officials built, and registrations completed of over 79% of the estimated RAs in Bangladesh. The complaints mechanism is operational, but not yet fully digitalized. The Project supported a mandatory death and disability insurance, contributing to social protection for all outgoing migrant workers, although the insurance claim ration is currently low.

The project has contributed to development and approval of 8 skill training modules, including two for feminized occupations. A unified tool has been developed for existing Pre-Departure Orientation Trainings (PDOTs) and piloted through 4 courses amongst 26,347 migrants. The project has developed and mainstreamed Labour Migration Module in Bangladesh's Labour Force Survey, which includes a cost of migration survey. The Labour Attaché Reporting System (LARS) has enabled the Labour Attaches in the pilot destination countries (e.g., UAE, Malaysia and Singapore), to keep the Ministry updated and improving the scope and quality of services for migrants in destination countries, though it is not yet scaled up to serve as a performance appraisal system for Labour Attaches. The call centres in Jeddah, Oman and UAE are operational. The Project has developed a Labour Migration Diplomacy Module (LMDM) which is to be offered to the Foreign Service Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Project strengthened institutional capacities through international accreditation of Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) and Bangladesh Overseas Employment and Services Limited (BOESL), especially auditing and documentation processes, which have resulted in greater transparency in these organizations.

Efficiency : Timely Delivery, Efficiency, Monitoring and Follow Up of Recommendations

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic delayed meetings and implementation activities. However, output delivery speeded up by hiring more staff in the last year of the Project. The resource allocation between Outcomes 1 and 2 appears balanced, in view of the expenses on development of systems for migration governance. Most of the MTE recommendation were relevant, and all have been followed by the project, except the recommendation on preparing 6-monthly reports as the annual reporting requirements were considered sufficient in capturing Project's progress.

Cost effectiveness analysis

The Project is highly cost-effective, when valued qualitatively in terms of its potential to enable low or zero-cost migration for Bangladeshi workers, securing higher labour standards through the MOUs and government schemes. The quantitative benefits could be only estimated for a single intervention as the endline study did not yield sufficient data. However, insurance funds for death and disability of migrant

workers care are generated from contributions of the workers themselves with no additional contribution from the GOB or employers, which demonstrate inequitable contributions.

Impact

The institutionalization of the project initiatives under the project such as operational complaints mechanism and mandatory death and disability insurance have high potential to safeguard migrant workers. The cost of migration survey motivated the establishment of a committee of public and private institutions to reduce costs and generate positive impact over time. However, significant impact calls for greater regulation and governance is foreseen for informal dalals and recruitment agencies. The Project has strengthened service provision through improved content and capacity to deliver PDOTs, skills training curriculum development, language trainings, and functioning MRCs and call centres. However, lasting Impact on labour migration will require continued technical support from the ILO to the GOB for filling the existing gaps in ensuring implementation of the governance systems developed during the Project.

Sustainability

The policy changes were made at the instance of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MOEWOE), and are completely institutionalized, and hence sustainable. These include mechanisms and governance tools, e.g., LARS, and RAIMS, skill training modules, ISO standards attained by BOESL and BMET, the Migration Resource Centre (MRC) established in Jeddah, call centre facilities in Oman, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The sustainability of some mechanisms is contingent on some software errors being solved, e.g. the MWIMS, and the Complaint Mechanism. The Labour Migration Diplomacy Module has not yet been piloted, yet given the commitment, MOFA has made to mainstreaming the module, it is likely to sustain when completed. The project has contributed to enhancing national capacity for migration governance, which the GOB is committed to sustaining.

Tripartism, Social Dialogue, Gender Equality and Non-discrimination

The Project addressed gender issues by identifying feminized occupations for development of skill training curriculum and building capacities of BMET to enable women to access these opportunities. The Project developed capacities of trade unions to increase outreach and awareness of women returnee migrants. Most data reporting for the project is disaggregated by gender. The Project worked with all tripartite partners: the government including ministries and institutions, workers', and employers' organizations. During COVID-19 pandemic, the project supported the government with protection initiatives and the design of reintegration policy for migrants returning to Bangladesh in large numbers.

Conclusions

The objective of the project was to achieve safe migration and Decent Work for migrant workers, through two outcomes, one at the policy level and the second at the institutional level. At the policy level, the project has conducted extensive research to build an evidence base, conducting multi-stakeholder discussions and provide technical assistance to support the GOB to draft policies, rules, and BLAs and MOUs with destination countries. Towards the second outcome, the project has built institutional capacities, of its tripartite partners, especially government organizations, through training material development, and training programmes for their staff, and building 4 information systems of which two were fully operationalized. The Project impacts include establishment of a high-level policy environment for safety of migrants, with significant improvements in services piloted in home and destination countries. However, these impacts are mediated by a political and economic power imbalance between countries from which migrants originate and the destination countries. The major

sector-wide challenge faced by the project is the prevalence of thousands of local recruitment agents, dalals, and unaccountable recruitment processes. Institutional capacities to implement the policies, especially management and use of data systems, continue to pose a challenge to effective systems of migration governance. Finally, provision of Decent Work to migrants remains in the domain of political economy: remittances serve as an important source of income for GOB as well as the families of migrant workers, making it difficult for sending countries like Bangladesh to negotiate better wages and working conditions and protections for their workers going abroad for work.

Recommendations

1. Continue to work on the ‘employment’ and ‘protection’ objectives of migration, including regulation and capacity building of informal recruitment agents, building migrant workers’ organizations, strategizing safety and decent work for women migrants, completing the operationalization of the migration governance systems, and building a consensus towards ratification of ILO Conventions C97, C143, C189 and C190.
2. Mainstream gender and inclusion in the project design: This can strengthen protection from forced labour and trafficking, both of which women as well as Persons with Disabilities as susceptible to.
3. Prioritize migrant workers’ organization building: There is a need to work at policy level, and for institution-building, to strengthen workers’ organizations and their voice so that they can unionize and raise concerns related to Decent Work.
4. Operationalize the OEMA Including Dalals in the governance value chain: Investing in their capacity building can enable safer migration.
5. Donors and implementing agencies need to agree on the levels of indicators (policy, institutional, grassroots), processes for doing the baseline and endline measurements, and means for resolving differences within the first 6 months of project implementation.

Lessons Learned and Emerging Good Practices

Lessons Learned

1. Lengthy recruitment practices of ILO led to the full team not being formed in time, and delays in project implementation. 2. Sufficient time and strong monitoring systems are needed to be mainstreamed in policy projects. 3. The One-UN idea can add value but can also result in inefficiencies in terms of time and human resources. 4. In policy projects, early identification of risks can ensure higher success in subsequent phases. 5. The Project monitoring parameters must be agreed upon by the donor and implementing agency and the concerns must be addressed in the early stage of project implementation. 6. The extent to which a technical project can be expected to facilitate political negotiations in favour of migrant workers may be limited, given the biased power balance in favour of the destination countries.

Good Practices

1. The Migration Project was highly mainstreamed, with an office in the relevant Ministry, and a senior official seconded to the Project team, enhancing relevance, coherence and effectiveness of the project’s activities and outputs. 2. Designing the research and information systems within the government departments and organizations, including processes of vendor selection, designing of terms of reference, finalization and testing, enabled better operationalization and sustainability, e.g., LARS, RAIMS, Labour migration module in the Labour Force Survey and the cost of migration survey. 3. Multi-stakeholder meetings, involving all tripartite partners, research organizations, think tanks, and key CSOs and NGOs in the field of migration in Bangladesh, were successful in creating awareness, and inputs from all stakeholders for national policy making and regional discussions.