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**Emergency return of Bangladeshi migrants
from Libya**



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Abstract

The literature on the consequences of migration largely focuses on the vulnerabilities of migrants during periods of relative political stability in destination countries. Few studies are available on their experience during events such as civil war, regime change or a global financial crisis. This study attempts to fill this gap by looking at the case of Bangladeshi migrant workers who, faced with the political turmoil in Libya in 2011, had to return to Bangladesh. The study uses surveys to understand the socioeconomic profile of the migrants and their migration experience. It aims to identify the vulnerabilities of these migrants as they go from obtaining financing for migration, to arriving in Libya, being caught up in a crisis and having to return to Bangladesh.

The study finds that, during and after the turmoil, the burden of ensuring security and safe return was largely shouldered by individual migrants and their families, with the government of the sending country providing a level of support, and the global community contributing part of the cost of repatriation. Premature return and loss of work opportunity meant that many of the migrants found it difficult to repay the loan that they had taken to finance their journey to Libya. The migrants also suffered losses from unpaid salaries, and from savings and belongings left behind as they fled Libya. The paper thus recommends revisiting the global migration regime, and placing greater focus on issues of sharing of burden and risks by destination countries and employers.

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1. Introduction

Since 2009, many labour migrants working in the Middle East or Southeast Asia have had to return home prematurely as a result of political and economic turmoil in destination countries. When political unrest culminates in civil war and regime change, migrant workers are among the most vulnerable; their lives, livelihoods, incomes and assets become insecure. Origin countries also face the challenge of ensuring the protection and security of their citizens, often in a country where they have hardly any administrative structure in place. Safety and security in the destination country, transit to neighbouring countries, and repatriation, reintegration and rehabilitation after return, are some of the major tasks that an origin country has to organise very quickly with or without the support of the global community.

Such serious challenges have made the emergency return of workers an important area of concern for the global migration regime, and highlighted the need for a better understanding of how to effectively tackle such situations. The experience of migrant workers caught up in the political upheaval in Libya in 2011 could offer some lessons for global, regional and national migration regimes in this regard.

This study hones in on the experience of Bangladeshi migrant workers who were forced to return from Libya as a result of that crisis and the response by governments and other actors as events unfolded. Specifically, this study builds a socioeconomic profile of these workers, examines the impact of the political turmoil in Libya on them and studies their experiences during repatriation from Libya back to Bangladesh. It also discusses the role played by the international community and the government of Bangladesh during the rehabilitation process, with a view to providing policy suggestions for the government of Bangladesh, civil society organisations (both local and international) and multilateral bodies.

1.1 Theoretical and research issues

Assessments of the consequences of migration – the impact of migration on those who migrate, on their family members, on their community or to the national economy of receiving or sending countries – are generally conducted during situations of relative political stability in destination countries.

Crisis situations such as the Arab Spring or the global financial crises expose migrants and their family members, their communities and their countries of origin to new forms of stress and vulnerability. These situations open up new avenues for research on the consequences of migration. How do these families cope when faced with such severe financial setbacks? What are the risk minimisation strategies used by these families, and what role should the state play in helping these families to manage their risks and vulnerabilities? Should employers shoulder some of the burdens of these migrants? Are the international labour standards adequate in ensuring the rights of migrants forced to return to their countries of origin under such circumstances? This study aims to answer some of these questions.

So far, only a few studies have looked into the impact of emergency return situations. One of these is a study of the effects of the involuntary mass return to Yemen and Jordan two years after the Gulf War of 1990.¹ The study, by van Hear, concentrated on the consequences for the national economy of Yemen and Jordan. Its findings reveal that the returnees were wholly responsible for their own reintegration, and that their standard of living declined upon return. Even after two years, most of the returnees were in casual or irregular employment.

1.2 Methodology

This research project was initiated to guide the formulation of evidence-based policy on the Bangladeshi migrant workers who had become the unintended victims of the political turmoil in Libya, and been forced to return to Bangladesh. Hereafter, these workers will be referred to as 'returnees'. The study was designed by the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) of the University of Dhaka. It received financial assistance from the Research Programme Consortium (RPC) based at the University of Sussex, with the assistance of the Department for International Development (DFID), UK.

This study was conducted in three phases. To quickly generate data, the study experimented with an online survey (mid-March 2011 – May 2011). In the second phase, interviewees were contacted through mobile phone (June–August 2011). A follow-up interview with a small group of returnees was later done (February 2012).

Gaining access to the returnees was a challenge since the returnees had on their return from Libya immediately gone home to their villages. The RMMRU decided to experiment with an online channel. It set up a website, www.returnee.rmmru.org, and placed newspaper advertisements requesting that the returnees feed information into the website so that the RMMRU can convince the government to provide reintegration services for them. Within six weeks, 3,000 returnees had furnished their information through the website. However, while reviewing the entries, it was found that some information was not provided.

The RMMRU research team then thought of drawing on the government's database of returnees to obtain more data (by June 2011, the government had already evacuated more than 30,000 workers, and had collected their mobile phone numbers). The research team elaborated on the questions in the original online questionnaire. From the list of mobile phone numbers obtained from the government, interviewees were chosen by taking every third name.

Fifteen full-time and three part-time interviewers contacted the returnees through their mobile phone numbers, working from 9 am to 5 pm six days a week. While trying to get in touch with the returnees, interviewers encountered several problems: some phones were switched off, there were wrong numbers and some numbers were not available at the locations. In such cases, the team contacted the next phone number in the list. After the

¹ Nicholas van Hear, 'The socio-economic impact of the involuntary mass return to Yemen in 1990', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 7, no. 1 (1994); Nicholas van Hear, 'The impact of the involuntary mass "return" to Jordan in the wake of the Gulf Crisis', *International Migration Review* 29, no. 2 (1995): 352–74.

interviews were completed, the answers were subject to in-depth scrutiny and submitted for data entry.

To process the data, a program was designed using the SPSS statistical package. After the data were entered, they were rechecked for errors and dual entries. Initially, there were 10,000 entries – 3,000 obtained through the online survey and 7,000 through mobile interviews. After the review, 2,767 cases from the online survey and 6,859 cases from the mobile interviews were retained. The rest of the cases had to be discarded as they were double entries. In other words, 374 respondents participated both in the online survey and the mobile interview. Finally, the tables were prepared. Only some tables represent data from both the online survey and phone interviews (total of 9,626 respondents). This is because the online survey had fewer questions.

By the end of 2011, the government had finished distributing a one-time grant of BDT50,000 (USD725) to the returnees. Another mobile-phone survey of a small number of respondents was then conducted. The aim of this survey was to understand their current situation and the process of grant disbursement by the government and its implementing partner. The study also collected qualitative information. After going through the questionnaires, some returnees were selected for in-depth interviews, and their experiences are presented as cases.

1.3 Structure of this paper

This paper is divided into eight sections. Section 2 provides an overview of short-term contract migration from Bangladesh in general, with a focus on such migration to Libya. Section 3 presents the socioeconomic characteristics of the Bangladeshi workers who had migrated to Libya. Section 4 reports their migration experience once they arrived in Libya. Section 5 looks at the impact of the political turmoil in Libya on the migrants. Section 6 describes the repatriation process, and analyses the role of the global community, and the government of Bangladesh and its civil society in facilitating the return of the migrants. Section 7 highlights the impact of abrupt return on the workers as well as on their family members. The concluding section discusses new research questions for migration researchers and the global migration regime. It also makes a few suggestions for the development of global, regional and national standards for the protection of the rights of workers in emergency situations.

2. Overview of labour migration from Bangladesh

Bangladesh has been identified as one of the Next-11 countries with potential to become one of the world's largest economies in the 21st century. A major contributor to the country's growth is labour migration and the flow of remittances from migrant workers.² A World Bank study indicates that remittance flow helped Bangladesh cut poverty by 6 per cent in financial year (FY) 2006. Bangladesh's Sixth Five Year Plan highlighted that poverty reduced more in those regions where migration took place. In 2010, remittances represented almost 12 times the foreign direct investment (FDI) into the country and around 6 times more than total foreign aid received. They enabled the country to maintain balance of payment surpluses more than eight years in a row, despite trade imbalances and stagnant FDI inflows. The Gulf and Southeast Asian labour-receiving countries therefore play a significant, if indirect, role in supporting Bangladesh's economic development.

2.1 History of labour migration

International labour migration from Bangladesh has a long history. Migration linked to trade and the spread of religion has been the common experience of those residing in the territory that now constitutes Bangladesh. In the early 1940s, work opportunities on British merchant ships created scope for migration. The migration route has taken various twists and turns since then, but voyages beyond the country's borders in search of better lives and livelihoods continue to be a major feature of Bangladeshi society and its economy.

The present form of contract labour migration³ largely began in the 1970s, in response to the needs of the Gulf countries, and later the countries of Southeast Asia. The foremost characteristic of this type of migration is its short duration. It takes place on the basis of specific job contracts. Almost all who participate in this labour market have to return to the country of origin on completion of their contracts.

2.2 Annual flow of migrant workers

According to data from Bangladesh's Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET),⁴ almost 8.3 million Bangladeshis had gone abroad as short-term migrant workers from 1976 to 2012. Figure 2.1 captures the growth of official labour migration over the last 35 years. In 1976, migration flow from Bangladesh was less than 10,000. By 2008, it had reached a peak of 800,000. In 2009, the global financial crisis led to a major drop in labour recruitment by traditional destination countries. Even so, 400,000 people migrated for work

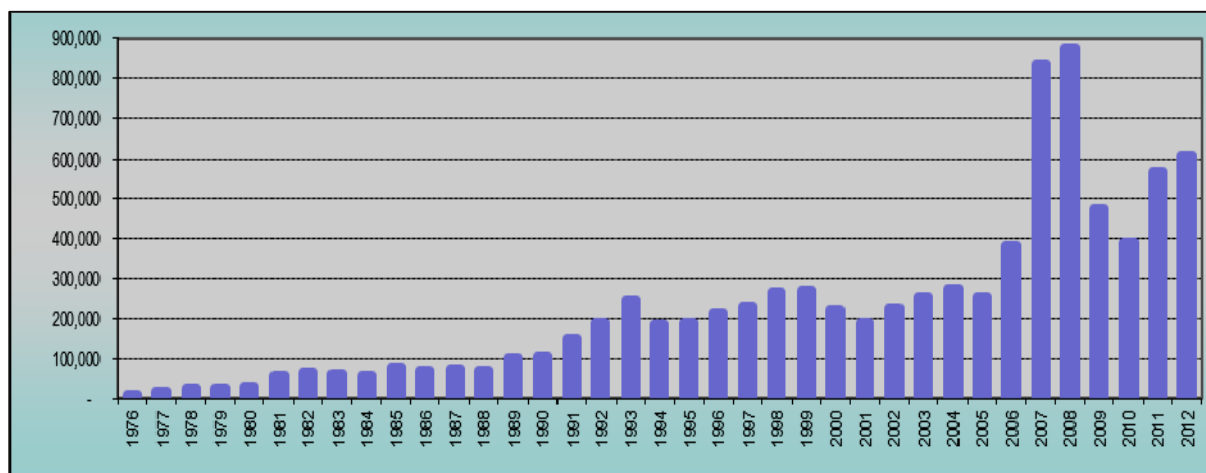
² Hossain Zillur Rahman, *Bangladesh: Strategy for accelerating inclusive growth* (Dhaka: Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), 2010).

³ The UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families defines a migrant worker as a person who had been employed, is employed or going to be employed in a country of which he or she is not a national.

⁴ The Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) is the executing agency of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment. The ministry is responsible for the governance of migration.

from Bangladesh. Migration flow picked up again in 2011. In 2012, migration again grew 7 per cent compared to the previous year.

Figure 2.1: Year-wise trend of Bangladeshis employed overseas, 1976–2012.



Source: Tasneem Siddiqui and Merina Sultana, *Labour migration from Bangladesh 2012: Achievements and challenges* (Dhaka: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), 2013).

The member states of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC countries)⁵ and Jordan, Lebanon and Libya are major receiving countries for Bangladeshi migrant workers. In the late 2000s, 70–80 per cent of the Bangladeshi migrant worker flow went to these countries (Tables A1 and A2, Annex). The Southeast Asian countries of Malaysia and Singapore are also major destinations (Table A1, Annex). Bangladeshi migrant worker flow to different destinations shows marked ups and downs when considered on a year to year basis.⁶

2.3 Women migrant workers

Bangladeshi women migrant workers entered the global contract labour market in the 1980s, though not in large numbers. In the early years, many of those who migrated were doctors, nurses and teachers. Later, semi and low-skilled workers also began migrating, though successive governments put a partial or complete ban on their migration as a protection measure.⁷

⁵ The GCC countries comprise Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

⁶ Tasneem Siddiqui, *Trends and patterns of labour migration from Bangladesh* (Monograph, Dhaka: International Labour Organization (ILO), 2011).

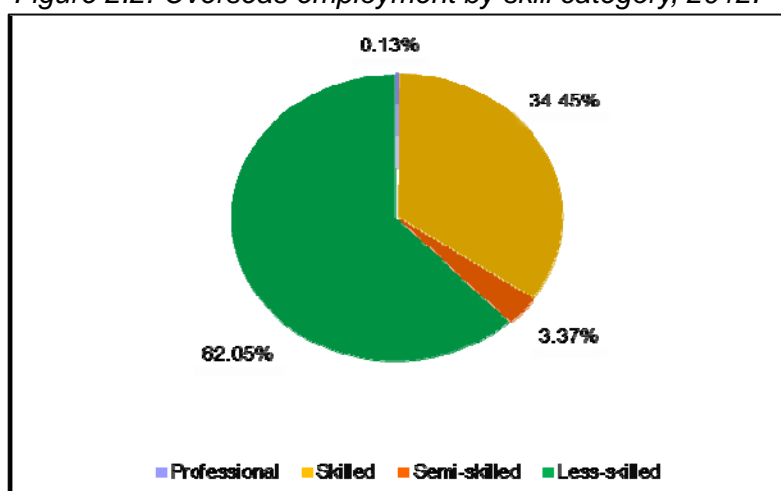
⁷ Tasneem Siddiqui, *Transcending boundaries: Labour migration of women from Bangladesh* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2001).

In 2003, the government relaxed its restrictions, and migration of women workers rose. Between 1991 and 2000, female migrant workers constituted less than 1 per cent of the total migrant worker flow from Bangladesh; in 2005 or 2006, they made up 6 per cent. The number of women migrants has continued to increase. The GCC countries along with Jordan, Lebanon and Libya are major destinations for Bangladeshi female migrant workers, with upwards of 90 per cent of the flow of female migrant workers headed to those countries (Table A3, Annex).

2.4 Skills composition

The BMET has classified the temporary migrant population into four categories: professional, skilled, semi-skilled and less-skilled. Doctors, engineers, teachers and nurses are considered professionals. Workers in the manufacturing and garment industries, as well as drivers, computer operators and electricians are in the skilled category. Workers such as tailors and masons are considered semi-skilled. Domestic workers, cleaners, agro-workers, labourers and hotel boys are classified as less-skilled. In 2012, 62.05 per cent of the Bangladeshi workers who went abroad were less-skilled workers, 3.37 per cent were semi-skilled and 34.45 per cent were skilled. Professionals made up just 0.13 per cent of those working abroad (See Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2: Overseas employment by skill category, 2012.

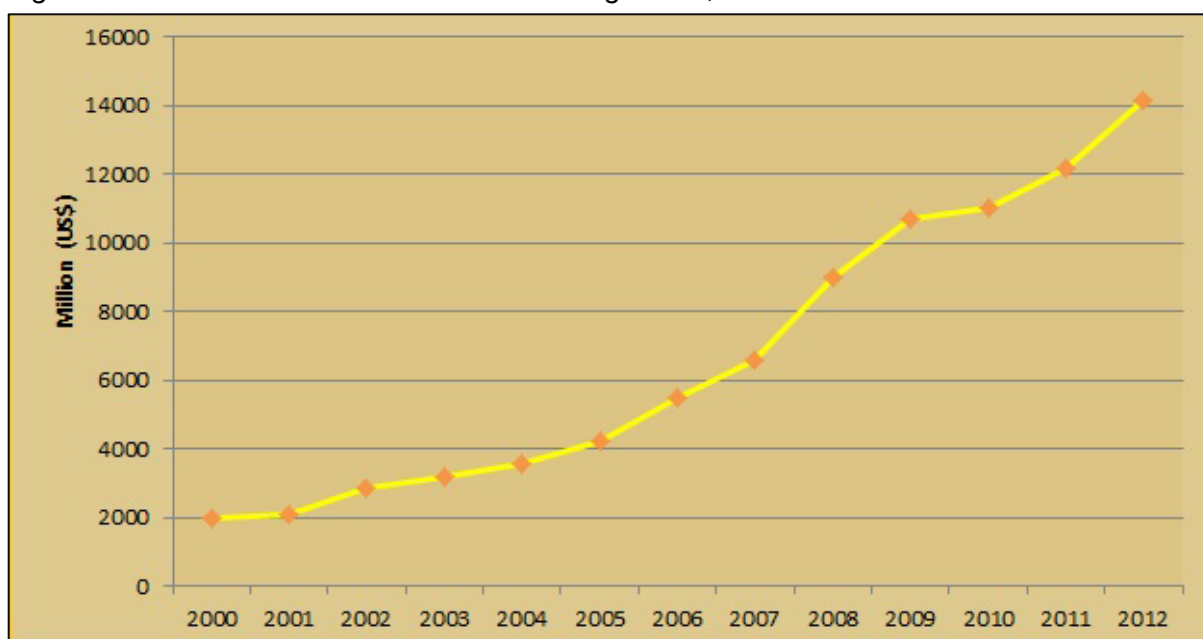


Source: Tasneem Siddiqui and Merina Sultana, *Labour migration from Bangladesh 2012: Achievements and challenges* (Dhaka: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), 2013).

2.5 Remittances

Remittance flow to Bangladesh has grown substantially over time, from a paltry USD23.7 million in 1976 to USD14.16 billion in 2012,⁸ with a substantial part of the increase occurring since 2002 (Figure 2.3). In 2011, 48 least developed countries (LDCs) received a total of USD27 billion as remittance. Bangladesh alone received 47.4 per cent of that⁹. Traditionally, 50 per cent of the remittances to Bangladesh had come from Saudi Arabia. While its share has decreased to around 30 per cent, Saudi Arabia is still the single largest remittance sending country. The Gulf region as whole represented approximately 66 per cent of the remittance to Bangladesh in FY 2010–2011 (Table A4, Annex).

Figure 2.3: Year-wise remittance flow into Bangladesh, 2000–2012.



Source: Tasneem Siddiqui and Merina Sultana, *Labour migration from Bangladesh 2012: Achievements and challenges* (Dhaka: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), 2013).

2.6 Migration of workers to Libya

Libya has been an important destination country since international labour migration began from Bangladesh (Table 2.1). In 1976, the number of Bangladeshi migrant workers employed in Libya was minimal – less than 3 per cent of the total flow of migrant workers from

⁸ Foreign Exchange Policy Department (LDA), Bangladesh Bank, accessed 23 February 2013, <http://www.bangladesh-bank.org/econdata/wageremittance.php>. See also: Table A5, Annex.

⁹ UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), *Least Developed Countries Report 2012: Harnessing remittances and diaspora knowledge to build productive capacities* (New York and Geneva: UN, 2012), http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/lc2012_en.pdf

Bangladesh. From 1978 to 1980, the proportion of Bangladeshi workers heading to Libya increased to approximately 10 per cent of the total migrant worker flow. The flow reversed after the US imposed sanctions on Libya in January 1986 for alleged involvement in terrorist attacks on Europe. From 2001 to 2006, 1 per cent or less of Bangladeshi migrant workers went to Libya.

Migrant worker flow to Libya increased again after the mid-2000s. In 2004, the US lifted the ban; and in September 2006, the economic sanctions on international firms doing business with Libya were also withdrawn. In 2008, Libya launched a five-year, USD130 billion infrastructure development programme that included the construction of 300,000 housing units, 27 university complexes and 10,000km of roads; and the maintenance of 24,000 km of roads. This plan would require over 1 million foreign workers.¹⁰ In October 2008, Libya signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU)¹¹ with Bangladesh to recruit workers. From 2008 to 2010, around 40,000 Bangladeshi workers went to Libya. However, in June 2010, the Libyan government imposed a ban on the recruitment of workers from Bangladesh through a letter to the foreign ministry. The letter stated that, until further orders, recruitment from Bangladesh would be suspended.¹²

In terms of the skills profile, workers migrating to Libya in the 1970s were mainly professionals or skilled workers, such as doctors, nurses, engineers and architects. In 2008, when the new stream began, unskilled and semi-skilled construction workers formed the bulk of those who went, with some skilled workers also in the mix. Very few professionals were recruited. Most of those who went to Libya were men. The few women workers recruited were those in the professional category, such as nurses.

In 2010, Bangladesh received USD1.5 million in remittances from Libya. This amounted to only 0.02 per cent of total remittances received by the country that year (Table A4, Annex). Usually, migrants take a year or two to send remittances regularly. Those who had been there since 2008/2009 had been expected to remit by the beginning of 2011.

¹⁰ 'MoU on manpower export signed: Libya to recruit large number of workers', *The Daily Star*, 1 November 2008.

¹¹ Ibid. Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury and visiting Libyan Labour Minister Maa'touq Mohammed Maa'touq signed the memorandum of understanding (MoU).

¹² 'Manpower export to Libya becomes uncertain', *Priyo News*, 9 July 2010, accessed 25 August 2011, <http://news.priyo.com/story/2010/jul/09/manpower-export-libya-becomes-uncertain>

Table 2.1: Bangladeshi labour migration flow to Libya, 1976 –2012.

Year	No. of those employed in Libya	Percentage of total employment	Total overseas employment
1976	173	2.84	6,087
1977	718	4.56	15,725
1978	2,394	10.49	22,809
1979	1,969	8.03	24,495
1980	2,976	9.89	30,073
1981	4,162	7.46	55,787
1982	2,071	3.29	62,762
1983	2,209	3.73	59,220
1984	3,386	5.97	56,714
1985	1,514	1.94	77,694
1986	3,111	4.53	68,658
1987	2,271	3.06	74,017
1988	2,759	4.05	68,121
1989	1,609	1.58	101,724
1990	471	0.45	103,814
1991	1,124	0.76	147,131
1992	1,617	0.85	188,124
1993	1,800	0.73	244,508
1994	1,864	1.00	186,326
1995	1,106	0.58	187,543
1996	1,966	0.92	211,714
1997	1,934	0.83	231,077
1998	1,254	0.46	267,667
1999	1,744	0.65	268,182
2000	1,010	0.45	222,686
2001	450	0.23	188,965
2002	1,574	0.69	225,256
2003	2,855	1.12	254,190
2004	606	0.22	272,958
2005	972	0.38	252,702
2006	104	0.02	381,516
2007	1,480	0.17	832,609
2008	5,067	0.57	875,055
2009	22,742	4.78	475,278
2010	12,132	3.10	390,702
2011	89	0.01	568,062
2012	14,975	3.02	607,798

Source: Prepared by Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) from Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) data.

2.7 Section conclusion

Since 1976, some 8.3 million Bangladeshi workers have migrated to the Gulf and the countries of Southeast Asia to take up short-term employment. In earlier years, those participating were mainly male. Only recently have a significant number of women been migrating formally as contract workers. The Gulf is a major region for female workers.

Libya has been an important destination country of Bangladesh since the country began to participate in the short-term contract labour market. Political developments have been a key factor in the ebb and flow of migrants to Libya, with the flow decreasing when the UN and the US imposed sanctions on Libya in the late 1980s, and increasing with the lifting of sanctions in the mid-2000s.

The 2011 political turmoil in Libya has also affected labour migration severely. After the regime change, however, the flow of migrant workers to Libya appears to have resumed. In 2012, 14,975 Bangladeshis migrated to Libya although no formal agreement has been signed between Bangladesh and Libya.

3. Who migrated to Libya?

In the aftermath of regime change in Libya, more than 36,000 Bangladeshis were repatriated. This study covers the return and reintegration experience of almost one-third of these returnees, obtained through an online survey and a mobile phone survey. The online survey produced data on 2,767 respondents and the mobile phone survey 6,859 respondents. This section begins by providing a socioeconomic profile of the returnees and it also throws light on their migration processing experience on their return.

3.1 Gender and age

As of May 2011, only 157 of the more than 30,000 returnees were women. Out of the 9,626 respondents in this study, 20 were women. The majority of the respondents were in their prime working age (see Table 3.1). Almost 58 per cent were in the 20–30 age group, which is consistent with the typical migration pattern of Bangladeshi workers. The average age was 28.8 years (one of the returnees, a family member of a migrant who had been residing in Libya for a long time, was only 12 years old).

Table 3.1: Age of respondents.

Age (years)	No. of respondents	%
Below 20	227	2.36
20-30	5,551	57.66
31-40	2,138	22.21
41-50	315	3.28
51 and above	34	0.35
Not provided	1,361	14.13
Total	9,626	100.00

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

3.2 Household size

Many of the respondents were from larger households. Average household size was 6.63, with 61.64 per cent of the respondents having six persons or more in their households (Table 3.2). Another 36.4 per cent had three to five members. Very few, less than 1 per cent, came from households with two members or less. A study by Siddiqui on cost of migration shows that immediate family members play a role in migration decisions and migration financing.¹³ As members of households share the costs and risks, it is expected that the gain (or loss) from migration would also be shared by household members.

¹³ Tasneem Siddiqui, 'Recruitment cost in Bangladesh: Challenges of governing migration in the countries of origin' (paper presented at the Interregional Workshop on Strengthening Dialogue to Make Migration Work for Development in the ESCAP and ESCWA Regions, Beirut, Lebanon, 28–30 June 2011).

Table 3.2: Household size of respondents.

Household size (persons)	No. of respondents	%
Up to 2	53	0.77
3 to 5	2,497	36.40
6 to 10	3,730	54.38
11 and above	498	7.26
Not provided	81	1.18
Total	6,859	100.00

Note: In this study, 'household' is defined as the number of people who eat from the same pot.

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

3.3 Education

The educational profile of the returnees was compiled from the online survey as well as the mobile phone survey. Almost half of the online respondents did not provide the information on their educational background. The data shows that those who went to Libya as migrant workers were among the less educated (Table 3.3). About 10 per cent did not have any formal education, while approximately 60 per cent had up to 10 years of schooling. Just over 16 per cent of the respondents had a Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and above.

Table 3.3: Educational background of respondents.

Level of education	No. of respondents	%
Illiterate	915	9.50
Class 1-5	2,355	24.46
Class 6-10	3,446	35.80
Secondary School Certificate (SSC)	1,037	10.77
Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC)	553	5.74
Technical Diploma	35	0.37
Honors and Masters	89	0.92
Others	23	0.23
Not provided	1,173	12.18
Total	9,626	100.00

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

3.4 Past migration experience

We know that people who migrate once tend to migrate again – almost 13 per cent of the returnees from Libya had previous migration experience (Table 3.4). Approximately 87 per cent of the returnees reported being first-time migrants. Of those with prior migration

experience, 36.84 per cent had been to Saudi Arabia, 22.53 per cent the United Arab Emirates (UAE), 12.03 per cent Malaysia, 7.09 per cent Singapore, 5.70 per cent Kuwait and 15.06 per cent to other countries, i.e., Oman, Qatar, Bahrain and South Korea.

Table 3.4: Past migration experience of respondents.

Any past migration experience?	No. of respondents	%
Yes	880	12.82
No	5,958	86.86
Not provided	21	0.30
Total	6,859	100.00

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

3.5 Previous occupation

Table 3.5 provides a snapshot of the past occupations of the returnees. Immediately prior to working in Libya, many had been employed in the agriculture sector (19.27%) or different construction-related professions (13.74%). Some were unemployed (11.82%) or students (5.57%).

Table 3.5: Previous occupation of respondents.

Previous occupation	No. of respondents	%
Student	382	5.57
Unemployed	811	11.82
Agriculture	1,322	19.27
Trading & Business	948	13.82
Day labour	139	2.02
Construction	943	13.74
Returned from overseas	323	4.70
Others occupation	1,197	17.45
Not provided	935	13.63
Total	6,859	100.00

Note: 'Previous occupation' refers to occupation immediately prior to working in Libya.

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

3.6 Districts of origin

Table 3.6 presents the districts of origin of the interviewees in this research study and also the same recorded in the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) data source. Migrants who went to Libya represent all the 64 districts of Bangladesh. The top three migrant source areas in this case are Noakhali, Tangail and Comilla. Chapainawabgonj, Brahmanbaria, Munshigonj, Kishoregonj and Dhaka are other major migrant source areas. All these districts except Chapainawabgonj are traditional migrant

producing districts. Migration of a good number of people from Chapainawabgonj was facilitated by a few local recruiting agencies. Chittagong and Sylhet are two important traditional migrant producing districts. However, their representation in Libya was not that high.

Table 3.6: Distribution of returnees, by district.

	Districts	RMMRU- RPC data	%	BMET data	%
1	Bagerhat	42	0.43	134	0.45
2	Bandarban	1	0.01	8	0.03
3	Barguna	20	0.21	91	0.31
4	Barisal	86	0.89	320	1.08
5	Bhola	41	0.42	137	0.46
6	Bogra	209	2.17	594	2.01
7	Brahmanbaria	326	3.38	927	3.13
8	Chandpur	245	2.54	721	2.43
9	Chapainawabgonj	250	2.59	1,133	3.83
10	Chittagong	69	0.71	165	0.56
11	Chuadanga	38	0.39	184	0.62
12	Comilla	688	7.14	1,297	4.38
13	Cox's bazar	52	0.54	90	0.30
14	Dhaka	369	3.83	910	3.07
15	Dinajpur	39	0.40	155	0.52
16	Faridpur	278	2.88	707	2.39
17	Feni	75	0.77	237	0.80
18	Gaibandha	104	1.08	232	0.78
19	Gazipur	176	1.82	681	2.30
20	Gopalganj	96	0.99	324	1.09
21	Habigonj	157	1.63	485	1.64
22	Jamalpur	259	2.69	492	1.66
23	Jessore	159	1.65	595	2.01
24	Jhalokathi	23	0.25	86	0.29
25	Jhenaidah	122	1.23	367	1.24
26	Joypurhat	24	0.25	108	0.36
27	Khulna	41	0.42	134	0.45
28	Kishoregonj	255	2.64	957	3.23
29	Kurigram	31	0.32	83	0.28
30	Kushtia	130	1.35	478	1.61
31	Lalmonirhat	36	0.37	110	0.37
32	Laxmipur	117	1.21	470	1.59
33	Madaripur	253	2.63	810	2.74
34	Magura	85	0.88	253	0.85
35	Maherpur	105	1.09	278	0.94

36	Manikgonj	182	1.89	550	1.86
37	Moulvibazar	16	0.17	60	0.20
38	Munshigonj	400	4.15	911	3.08
39	Mymensingh	231	2.39	875	2.95
40	Naogaon	81	0.84	298	1.01
41	Narail	38	0.39	127	0.43
42	Narayangonj	115	1.19	451	1.52
43	Narsigndi	164	1.70	883	2.98
44	Natore	86	0.89	201	0.68
45	Netrokona	46	0.48	155	0.52
46	Nilphamari	31	0.32	69	0.23
47	Noakhali	704	7.31	1,550	5.23
48	Pabna	117	1.21	436	1.47
49	Panchaghar	12	0.12	26	0.09
50	Patuakhali	33	0.34	123	0.42
51	Pirojpur	34	0.35	141	0.48
52	Rajbari	94	0.97	237	0.80
53	Rajshahi	64	0.66	266	0.90
54	Rangamati	1	0.01	2	0.01
55	Rangpur	66	0.68	197	0.67
56	Satkhira	70	0.73	201	0.68
57	Shariatpur	183	1.90	806	2.72
58	Sherpur	36	0.37	111	0.37
59	Sirajgonj	110	1.14	401	1.35
60	Sunamgonj	76	0.79	305	1.03
61	Sylhet	86	0.89	348	1.18
62	Tangail	695	7.22	1,671	5.64
63	Thakurgaon	20	0.21	74	0.25
64	Khagrachhari	1	0.01	13	0.04
65	Not provided	833	8.65	3,374	11.39
	Total	9,626	100.00	29,615	100.00

Note: The top three source areas are indicated in bold italics.

Source: Prepared from list of repatriated migrants compiled by Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) and information from Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

3.7 Land holding pattern

Tables 3.7 and 3.8 show the land-holding status of the returnees. More than 68 per cent did not possess any arable land, and about 30 per cent had less than 200 decimals of arable

land (Table 3.7). Bertocci had concluded from close observation of two villages in Bangladesh that at least two acres (200 decimals) of land would be needed by an average family of 5.5 to maintain a consistent subsistence level of income.¹⁴ Given that the average family size of the respondents was 6.63 (see section 3.2), for all practical purposes the families should be considered land poor.

Not only did a majority not have arable land, about 10 per cent did not even have any homestead land, and a quarter of the respondents reported homestead land size of 6 decimals or less (Table 3.8). Those without homestead land were living on government khas (unused) land or unused railway property; or in slums or the homes of relatives. This indicates that even the poorest of the poor, that is, those who do not possess any homestead land, can manage to migrate internationally. This finding questions the conventional wisdom that 'international migrants are not from the poorest section of the population, as it is difficult to bear the cost of overseas migration'.¹⁵

Table 3.7: Size of arable land belonging to respondents.

Land size (in decimals)	No. of respondents	%
1-10	255	3.71
10-20	259	3.78
20-35	380	5.54
35-50	250	3.64
50-80	354	5.16
80-100	219	3.19
100-150	160	2.33
150-200	127	1.85
200-400	113	1.65
400-1000	38	0.55
1000 & above	9	0.13
No arable land	4,695	68.45
Total	6,859	100.00

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

¹⁴ Peter J. Bertocci (ed.), *Prelude to crisis; Bengal and Bengal studies in 1970* (East Lansing: Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1972).

¹⁵ M. Shahidul Haque, 'Migration trends and patterns in South Asia and management approaches and initiatives', *Asia Pacific Population Journal* 20, no. 3 (2005): 43.

Table 3.8: Size of homestead land belonging to respondents.

Land size (decimals)	No. of respondents	%
0-6	1,752	25.54
6-12	1,735	25.29
12-18	1,057	15.41
18-24	419	6.10
24-30	377	5.49
30-36	253	3.69
36-42	93	1.35
42-48	47	0.68
48-54	71	1.03
54-60	43	0.62
60-66	51	0.74
66-72	15	0.22
72-84	18	0.26
84 and above	273	3.98
No homestead	655	9.54
Total	6,859	100.00

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

3.8 Channels of recruitment

Having developed a profile of those who migrated to Libya, the study looked at the methods by which they were recruited (Table 3.9). Sub-agents or brokers were the most significant channel in the recruitment of workers to Libya. A majority, almost 70 per cent, of the returnees went to Libya through that channel (Table 3.9). About a quarter reported going through recruitment agencies. A much smaller percentage were recruited by the Bangladesh Overseas Employment Services Limited (BOESL) and through direct recruitment by employers situated in Libya. For example, Daewoo recruited a number of Bangladeshis directly.

The survey also reveals that about 7 per cent received services from friends and relatives (Table 3.9). Immediate and extended family and friends had played a greater role in those who migrated earlier, while such social networks were less of a factor for those who migrated in recent years. This could be because the migration of skilled and semi-skilled workers had restarted only after the withdrawal of sanctions from Libya. Since Libya's development plan was launched only in 2008, it would take time for social networks to develop, and chain migration through family networks to occur.

Table 3.9: Channels through which the respondents were recruited for employment in Libya.

Channels	No. of respondents	%
Friends and relatives	485	7.07
Sub-agents	4,685	68.30
Recruiting agents	1,626	23.70
Others (BOESL, employers)	41	0.59
Not provided	22	0.32
Total	6,859	100.00

Note: BOESL is Bangladesh Overseas Employment Services Limited.

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

3.9 Cost of migration

About 74 per cent of those surveyed paid between BDT200,000–300,000 (USD2,899–4,348) to process their migration. The average was about BDT243,000 (USD3,522). Interestingly, poor unskilled and semi-skilled migrants paid more compared to professionals. Those in the professionals category handled the process directly with the employing company and hence paid less. Cost of migration also varied according to district of origin. Those who purchased visas from Dhaka, Noakhali and Tangail paid the most. People from North Bengal, i.e., Chapainawabgonj, Naogaon, Gaibandha and Pabna paid the least.

Table 3.10: Cost of migration to Libya as reported by respondents.

Cost (BDT)	No. of respondents	%
Below 100,000	171	2.49
100,000-200,000	1,179	17.18
200,000-300,000	5,075	73.99
300,000 and above	391	5.70
Not provided	43	0.63
Total	6,859	100.00
Average cost (BDT)	243,416	
Minimum cost (BDT)	30,000	
Maximum cost (BDT)	800,000	

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

3.10 Section conclusion

This section has provided an overview of the socioeconomic characteristics of those who migrated to Libya. They were predominantly men and relatively young. Many were from less-educated segments of society and poorer households. More than half were from large families (five to ten members). One-eighth of them had had earlier migration experience. Compared to previous trends,¹⁶ the returnees represented some new districts of origin: Chapainawabgonj, Gaibandha and Kushtia. In two-thirds of the cases, their migration was facilitated by sub-agents, and they incurred substantial processing costs. The next section presents the migrants' experience of working and living in Libya.

¹⁶ Data on migrant source areas; district-wise overseas employment (major districts) from 2005 to 2012 (graph) available at: Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), 2011, <http://www.bmet.gov.bd>

4. Reaching Libya: Dream and reality

This section highlights the experience of the returnees when they reached Libya: the hardships upon arrival, the types of jobs they were engaged in, their employers and their monthly wages. First, we will discuss the migrants' experiences in adjusting to a new country.

4.1 Experience of adjustment

On arrival in an unknown country, it is natural for a migrant to go through all kinds of adjustment problems, culture shock and homesickness. Almost all the migrants went through these problems, with those migrating for the first time being particularly affected by them. However, almost 50 per cent of the workers faced circumstances that went beyond what can generally be termed adjustment problems or culture shock. These included: confiscation of their passport and other documents; restrictions on their movements; confinement in abandoned buildings until brokers could line up jobs; imprisonment; not getting the promised job; signing of a second contract if at all jobs were found; receiving wages lower than the level promised and receipt of wages via the broker. The following narratives illustrate some of these experiences.

Mokhlesur Rahman Mansur was from Shahjahanpur village in the Bogra district of North Bengal. He landed at Tripoli airport with a group of migrants. They were received by Babul and Sayeed, employees of the agency that had recruited Mansur for employment in Libya. The first thing that these agency representatives did was to take away the migrants' passports. His group of 40 people was then brought to an abandoned warehouse in a suburb of Tripoli and instructed to wait there. He faced various issues during his stay in Libya:

Babul and Sayeed informed us that if we did not listen to them we could be deported. None of us knew any language other than Bangla. We became totally helpless in a foreign country. We waited in a near starving situation in that warehouse for two months. When Babul and Sayeed finally took us to work; we learned that our salary would be paid to them, not to us. We were supposed to be paid USD360 per month. Instead we had to sign a new contract stating that our salary would be USD220 per month. Unfortunately, we did not even receive that USD220 at the end of the month. Salaries were paid to Babul. Each of us received only USD110 per month. And the rest was kept by Babul as cost of our food and accommodation.

Harunur Rashid was in Libya for 16 months, residing in Nalot, adjacent to the Tunisian border. He too faced job and wage issues:

Things were not smooth in Libya. I only worked for six months. I worked in a Korean construction company named Cosmo. I received only LYD180 (around BDT10,465,

or USD147)¹⁷ per month. I spent BDT265,000 (USD3,841) to go to Libya. I was still looking for a job as I wished to retrieve the money that I spent in financing migration with a dream of a better life and future for my family.

Shujon was sent to Libya by a sub-agent named Atiq. Originally from Rajshahi, Atiq runs his recruitment business from Banani, Dhaka. Shujon is also from Rajshahi. However, he was sent to Libya using the passport of a person named Asaduzzaman of Faridpur district. On arrival in Libya, he was not given a permanent job in any specific company. Every now and then he worked for companies (different ones) that his supplier told him to work at. He was so helpless that he attempted to return to Bangladesh. However, he could not do so as he was worried about being caught using the false passport.

Nazimuddin, who was 28, came from Feni. Nazimuddin, who was Muslim, was told just before he left for Libya that his visa was in the name of Gopesh Chandra Nath, a Hindu.

As I already spent a large amount of money I decided to go along with that. After reaching Libya, I did not face any problem regarding job placement. But I had to hide my Muslim identity in front of dormitory boarders or fellow workers. I was always under the fear that if my identity is revealed, I will be deported.

A number of workers worked without payment in the initial period of their arrival in Libya. An example was Nur Nabi of Noakhali district who was sent to Libya by Hossen Mudi, a local broker. Md Khakan Miah from Manikgonj district said his salary was 250 dinars per month but he was paid only 500 dinars for nine months of work. Both Nabi and Khakan worked for Al Nahar, a large company employing thousands of Bangladeshis. Bangladeshi workers faced many problems in this state-run company. Brokers played a major role in securing jobs in this company and they extorted a significant portion of the workers' salaries. Nabi felt that most of the first six months of their salaries was usurped by the sub-agents in collaboration with the administrators of the company.

Professionals migrating to Libya had a better experience. They did face challenges in adjusting to a new cultural setting but were able to settle into their work environment relatively smoothly. Nevertheless, they and other white-collar workers did still face vulnerabilities. Baki Billah, one of the more highly paid of the respondents in this study, was among some 1,000 Bangladeshis working in Hyundai in white-collar jobs. He had been recruited by Hyundai in 2004 to work in Libya as a 'General Affairs Staff'. He had previously worked with Hyundai in Singapore from 1998 to 2001. He noted that Bangladeshis were usually not given administrative and managerial posts, and he made some observations on this issue. He said that, generally, Indians, Thais, and Chinese occupied those mid-level positions, and they played a role in bargaining for good wages for their fellow countrymen. He also suggested that companies were less likely to mistreat workers from those countries whose labour attaches were prompt in responding to workers' complaints.

¹⁷ Incomes are calculated using the exchange rate of February 2011 (USD1=71.15). Costs are calculated using the 2009 exchange rate (USD1=BDT69).

4.2 Types of jobs

About 85 per cent of the respondents were in jobs that can be brought under the broad head of construction (Table 4.1). About 15 per cent of the respondents served as skilled or semi-skilled workers in construction sector while others took on more specialised jobs such as mason, carpenter, electrician, ceramics and tiles fitter, steel fixer, aluminium-shutter worker, rod binder, plumber, painter, etc. The skilled category also included drivers and cooks.

Administrative officers, accountants, engineers, mechanics, lab technicians, computer operators and nurses – or work categorised as ‘professional’ – made up about 1.3 per cent of the respondents. Other jobs reported by the respondents were factory worker, tissue packaging worker, shopkeeper, hotel boy, bookbinder, carpet maker, etc.

Table 4.1: Types of work performed in Libya by the respondents.

Occupation	No. of respondents	%
Skilled, semi and low skilled		
Construction labour	1,050	15.30
Carpenter	1,253	18.27
Mason	1,668	24.32
Electrician	477	6.95
Ceramics and tile fitter	258	3.76
Steel fixer	955	13.92
Plumber	140	2.04
Painter	49	0.71
Security guard	65	0.95
Cook	176	2.56
Cleaner	119	1.73
Agricultural and garden worker	6	0.08
Driver	12	0.17
Office attendant	6	0.08
Professionals		
Administrative officer	21	0.30
Mechanic/Technician	22	0.32
Engineer	18	0.26
Nurse	18	0.26
Lab technician	3	0.04
Interpreter	5	0.07
Computer operator	2	0.02
Business	2	0.02
Others		
Other jobs	52	0.73
Not provided	482	7.02
Total	6,859	100.00

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

4.3 Employers in Libya

Table 4.2: Major employers in Libya, as reported by respondents.

Name of company	No. of respondents	%
Libya and the Middle East		
Al Nahar	316	3.28
Al-Iskan	376	3.91
Sarika Al Talid Libya	223	2.31
Al Saraya	134	1.39
Ramko Qataria (Qatar)	87	0.90
Southeast Asia		
Amona Ranhill Construction (Malaysian)	518	5.38
China and Korea		
Shinhan Engineering & Construction Company	767	7.97
Daewoo Engineering & Construction	576	5.98
China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC)	615	6.39
China Gezhouba Group Company Limited (CGGC)	514	5.34
Hyundai	421	4.37
Isu Korean Company	159	1.65
Hanil Engineering & Construction Company	409	4.25
Won Construction	342	3.55
Others		
Companies from Italy, Turkey, etc.	632	6.56
Company of Indian origin (D. S. Construction)	43	0.45
Labour outsourcing companies	504	5.23
Other companies	2,353	24.44
Not provided	637	6.61
Total	9,626	100.00

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

Respondents mentioned more than 500 companies. Table 4.2 lists those companies that employed more than 40 Bangladeshi workers. The findings show that 15 companies employed more than 57 per cent of the workers, with the rest distributed among other

employers and outsourcing companies. Some of the returnees interviewed were not consistently in employment throughout the year. A few others worked in more than one company. In such cases, only the companies where the migrants worked for the longest period are included in the table. Complaints about work conditions made by the respondents were predominantly towards companies of Libyan origin. Since the names of the companies are available, the government could seek due salaries and compensation in future from these employers. The list also helps in identifying companies that honoured job contracts and provided better work conditions.

4.4 Income while in Libya

Some of the migrants did not receive their salaries during the initial months, and many received much less than what they were supposed to receive. The returnees reported earning, on average, BDT24,000 (USD337)¹⁸ per month. Approximately 6 per cent of the returnees earned less than BDT10,000 (USD140) per month. Almost half of them earned between BDT10,000–20,000 (USD140–281) per month. Although insignificant in percentage terms, 42 (0.5 per cent) of the returnees earned more than BDT100,000 (USD1,405) per month.

Table 4.3: Average monthly income of respondents while employed in Libya.

Monthly income (BDT)	No. of respondents	%
1-10,000	539	5.60
10,000-20,000	4,690	48.72
20,000-30,000	2,939	30.53
30,000-50,000	1,095	11.37
50,000-100,000	189	1.96
100,000 and above	42	0.44
Not provided	132	1.37
Total	9,626	100.00

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

4.5 Section conclusion

The migrants' problems did not end with their arrival in Libya. They faced new types of challenges on arrival, the roots of which lay in exploitation by the formal and informal recruitment sector, as well as middlemen and employers at the receiving end. Some workers were not paid for the initial period of work. Others did not have a job upon arrival.

After a certain period, the majority of migrants did secure jobs, largely in the construction sector. It is interesting to note that a substantial portion of the respondents were skilled workers, though the number of professionals was very low. More than 500 companies

¹⁸ Based on the February 2011 exchange rate: USD1=BDT71.15. Most of the migrants returned in that month.

employed Bangladeshis, but half the respondents were absorbed by just 15 large enterprises. The respondents were working in Libyan, Middle Eastern, Chinese and Korean companies as well as in a few companies of European origin. The following section will present the experience of Bangladeshi migrants during the recent political upheaval in Libya.

5. The political turmoil in Libya: Victims of circumstances

This section highlights the plight of migrant workers during the Libyan political crisis. It illustrates how the migrants lost their assets, cash and in extreme cases their lives as a result of attacks on their camps by rebels or opportunistic miscreants. It also describes their journey to safer locations in border areas.

The Arab Spring in Libya began around February 2011. Anti-government protests soon turned into violent clashes between pro-establishment and pro-democratisation groups. Anarchy appeared to be the order of the day. Lives and livelihoods became insecure and economic activities came to a halt. In their mission to destabilise the economy, rebel groups made foreign companies particular targets. Taking advantage of the situation, they resorted to violence, and looted the assets of foreign companies. At the time, Libya had the largest number of international migrant workers in North Africa. In 2011, of its 6.5 million residents, 1.5 million were foreigners.¹⁹ The migrant workers in Libya became the victims of circumstances and the ultimate losers.

5.1 Looting of migrants' savings and belongings

The majority of migrant workers in Libya originated from Egypt and Tunisia. Libya also hosted migrants from Moldova, Montenegro, Chad, Niger, Sudan, the Philippines, Vietnam, India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. When protesters seized control of many parts of Libya, most foreign companies began to leave the country; leaving the migrant workers who had been working for them in a vulnerable situation.

Violence was a common problem. While the situation remained quiet during the day due to the imposition of a curfew, gun-fights and looting were a common affair at night. 'Rebels' or those taking advantage of the situation attacked migrants in their camps (in Libya, it is usual for employers to provide workers with accommodation within camps) and seized their belongings. They grabbed anything and everything, from heavy equipment to desktop and laptop computers, mobile phones and cash.

Many migrant workers in Libya also faced difficulties as a result of not having their passports with them. As part of their contract, their passports remained with their employers. However, many foreign employers had already left the country; and local employers were not in a position to return the workers their passports. The following are a few testimonies given by the migrants interviewed in this study.

Abdullah Al Mamun of Jalkathi had been working as a safety supervisor in Libya for 12 years, and had been planning a trip to Bangladesh when the troubles occurred. He had saved LYD13,300 (approximately USD11,271); and had a laptop computer, jewellery and a smartphone. However, he had to abandon all these items, including the cash, when his company evacuated him and other workers. Company officials discouraged him from

¹⁹ 'Libya, Tunisia: Migrants', *Migration News* 18, no. 2 (April 2011), accessed 21 February 2013, http://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=3685_0_5_0

bringing those items as such possessions could become a security hazard for other workers should rebels stop them on the road.

Mahbub Alam of Comilla used to work in a Chinese company. On 17 March, rebels attacked his office in Joaara (which is near Benghazi) and looted a huge amount of company cash. On 19 March, the camp he was at also came under attack. The rebels broke the doors and checked every room. They then asked the workers to hand over their cash, mobile phones, laptops, etc. Altogether, 450 Bangladeshi workers were residing in the camp and they were all robbed of their savings.

Harunur Rashid had only arrived in Libya 16 months prior to the tensions. He was working in a Korean construction company named Cosmo in Nalot, situated adjacent to the Tunisian border. Like many Bangladeshis, he did not want to move at first, but as Libyan rebels started looting his company, the company decided to shift its base, forcing Rashid to move.

By 21 February, at least 15 Bangladeshi workers had been injured in Libya – as a result of 500 rioters raiding a South Korean-run construction site 30km west of Tripoli where 1,600 Bangladeshis and 40–50 Koreans had been living.²⁰ Information about Bangladeshi casualties was found in foreign media: the Germany-based *Deutsche Welle* (Bengali Service) reported on its website that 37 Bangladeshis had been killed in Misrata, about 900km from Tripoli.²¹

5.2 Moving to safer locations

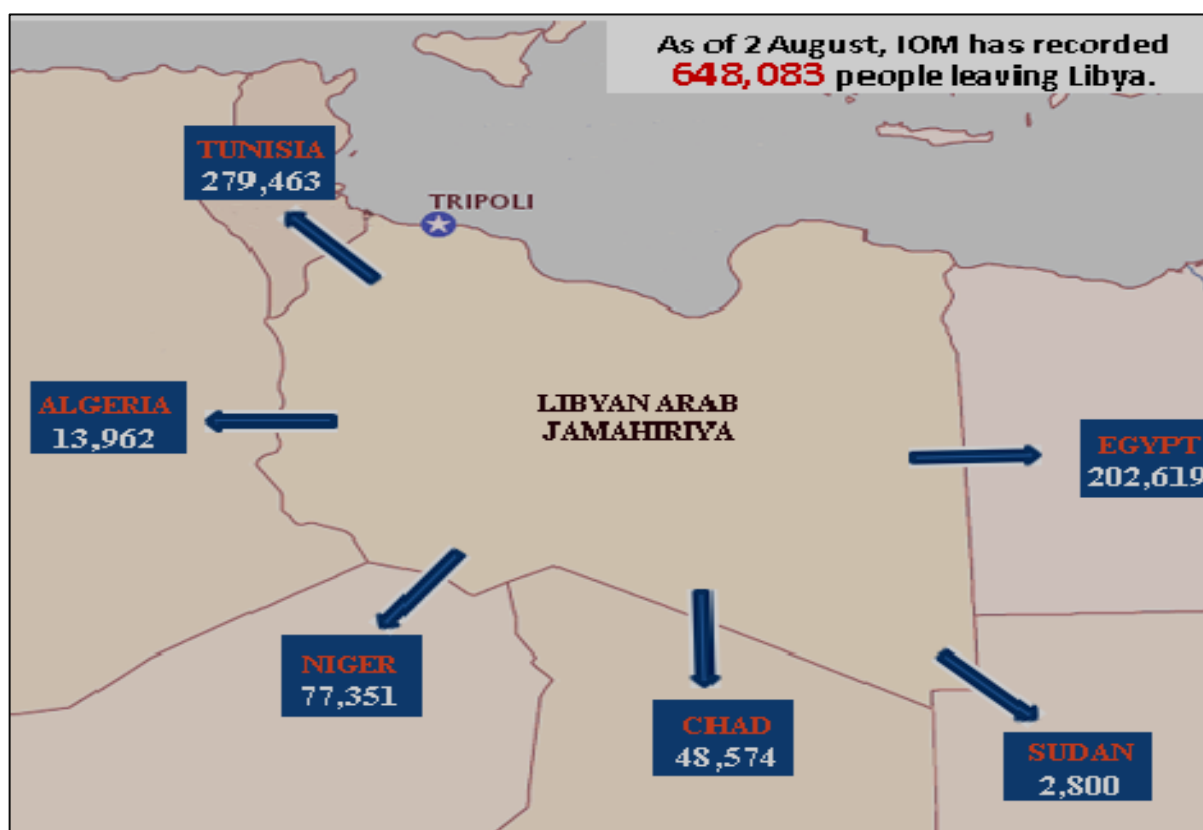
Within a short time, those migrants living in camps realised that it was no longer safe to remain there. In fear for their lives, they began to journey towards safe havens in nearby countries. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 648,083 people had left Libya as of 2 August (Figure 5.1), with the majority of them going to Tunisia (279,463) and Egypt (202,619). Others went to Sudan, Algeria, Niger and Chad.

Among those who sought refuge in those bordering countries, around 36,000 were Bangladeshis. It is estimated that around 30,000 Bangladeshis were residing in Tripoli, 5,000 in Benghazi and the rest in different parts of the country. Those in Benghazi moved towards the Egyptian border. However, those in Tripoli found it difficult to leave as there was a day-time curfew in place and there were clashes at night. Nevertheless, as the fighting intensified, more Bangladeshis moved towards the Tunisian border.

²⁰ ‘15 Bangladeshis hurt in Libya unrest’, *Priyo News / The Daily Star*, 21 February 2012, accessed 1 April 2013, <http://news.priyo.com/life/2011/02/21/15-bangladeshis-hurt-libya-unr-20470.html>; ‘18 people hurt after attack on Korean construction site in Libya’, *Reuters*, 21 February 2011, accessed 1 April 2013, <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/213549/news/world/18-people-hurt-after-attack-on-korean-construction-site-in-libya>

²¹ ‘Govt yet to confirm any death: Foreign media report killing of 37 Bangladeshis’, *Priyo News / The Daily Sun*, 25 February 2011, accessed 1 April 2013, <http://news.priyo.com/politics/2011/02/25/govt-yet-confirm-any-death-20728.html>

Figure 5.1: Cross-border movements as of 2 August 2011.



Source: Rabab Fatima, 'Return and reintegration of returnee migrants from Libya' (presentation by regional representative of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Dhaka, conference on Implementation of Onetime Cash Grants Programme of Government of Bangladesh to Libyan Returnees, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 28 August 2011).

Golam Rabbani, a welder working in a Qatar-based company named Ramko Qataria, described his experience thus:

We were in the truck for three days, like cattle and were under constant threat from the Libyan rebels, whom we saw were killing innocent people, including Bangladeshis, without any reason.

Shawkat Sheik, who had been working in a Korean company named Cosmo, had fled to the refugee camp in Al Saluom on the border of Tunisia. He related the difficulties he faced in the camp:

The queue of Bangladeshi workers was almost a kilometre long, and we were stranded there for 15 days under the open sky, with very little food and water. Our passports were with our employers. Lack of documents made it very difficult for Bangladeshis to enter Tunisia. The Embassy of Bangladesh in Tripoli was not quick enough in providing us with substitute identity documents. We watched people from other countries getting all kinds of support from their respective embassies. Nepali

and Lebanese workers received support from their governments immediately, but we didn't find anyone from our government there.

5.3 Section conclusion

This section demonstrates the other face of globalisation. Due to globalisation, a large number of Bangladeshis had secured employment in different countries. When turmoil hit the country of their employment, affected migrant workers faced negative outcomes. The Arab Spring exposed Bangladeshi migrant workers to various vulnerabilities: they lost their jobs, incomes and assets, and experienced severe hardship and threats to their lives. For all practical purposes, they became refugees. Their investment in migration had turned into failure.

6. The return: Role of global community, government and civil society

This section focuses on the return journey of the Bangladeshi workers. It highlights the role of global and national media in sensitising the world community to the hardships experienced by the returnees. The steps taken by the government of Bangladesh and the country's civil society organisations (CSOs) and the role of International development partners are also discussed here.

6.1 Global and Bangladeshi media

Both print and electronic media covered the plight of migrant workers trapped in the conflict between state forces and the rebels.²² English electronic media such as *Al Jazeera*,²³ *BBC*,²⁴ *Voice of America (VOA)*,²⁵ and *CNN* continuously highlighted the sufferings of migrants. Coverage included direct telecast of mass gatherings of migrants. They showed how people were fleeing and staying under the open sky without food and shelter. Among the Bangladeshi electronic media, *ATN Bangla* was the first to send its reporters to the Tunisian border. From the border, its reporters sent video clippings and news on the ground-level reality for Bangladeshi migrants. *The Daily Star*, a print publication, also sent its reporter to Libya's border areas to cover the problems faced by the stranded Bangladeshi migrants.

Coverage by both global and national media stirred public opinion internationally as well as nationally in favour of providing humanitarian assistance to the affected migrants and led to calls to repatriate them without further delay.

6.2 The global community

6.2.1 Humanitarian assistance

The global community was quick to respond. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP) immediately opened several camps near the Egyptian and Tunisian borders where there was a huge rush of migrant workers. Initially, they provided humanitarian support such as food, water and

²² 'Libya in turmoil – Friday 25 February', blog, *Guardian*, 25 February 2011, accessed 12 September 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/blog/2011/feb/25/libya-turmoil-gaddafi-live>; 'UN says to deliver first food aid in Libya Tuesday', *Reuters*, 8 March 2011, accessed 12 September 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/03/08/libya-food-aid-idAFLDE7271FC20110308>

²³ 'Libya live blog – April 5', *Al Jazeera*, 5 April 2011, accessed 21 September 2011, <http://blogs.aljazeera.net/live/africa/libya-live-blog-april-5>; 'Libya's humanitarian crisis', *Al Jazeera*, 28 February 2011, accessed 12 September 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2011/02/20112289513477110.html>.

²⁴ 'Libya crisis: Thousands of migrant workers "trapped"', *BBC News*, 9 March 2011, accessed 21 September 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12687067>

²⁵ Kim Lewis, 'Thousands of Chadian migrants stranded in Southern Libyan desert', *Voice of America*, 28 June 2011, accessed 12 September 2011, <http://www.voanews.com/content/lewis-libya-migrants-28jun11-124652944/158384.html>

blankets as well as medical and sanitation services to the refugees (which included internally displaced persons).

The European Union (EU) sanctioned 3 million euros for tent, food, clothing and medical services to those affected, channelling this through international organisations (UN bodies, the IOM, the ICRC, etc.).²⁶ International non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Caritas, Islamic Relief, the IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation and the governments of some countries (Sweden and Poland for example) also provided humanitarian aid and sent volunteers.

UK Aid gave funds to the ICRC to provide urgent medical help, food and supplies. It also helped the World Health Organization (WHO) meet urgent medical needs, including supplies, equipment and trained medical staff. Another effort supported by UK Aid was mine clearance in Misrata, Benghazi and other affected areas to help ensure the safety of up to a million people. It also aided the IOM in its efforts to evacuate migrant workers and injured civilians stranded in Misrata. The organisation also facilitated air repatriation of 12,700 migrant workers trapped on the Egyptian and Tunisian borders back to their countries and their families.²⁷

6.2.2 Resistance against repatriation

While repatriation from high-risk areas was an obvious need, it is worth noting that there was some resistance to the idea. At the initial stage, some migrants were taken to the shores of Greece with the plan that they would be repatriated to their own countries at a later stage. However, a number of these migrants thought that the costs that they had paid to migrate would be wasted if they had to return home at that point, so they jumped ship as their vessel approached the shore. Some of them died while doing so.²⁸

The process also attracted concern from at least one government. The foreign minister of Italy highlighted in parliament that the Libyan crisis may lead to the entry of 300,000 workers into Italy. He asked the EU to take immediate action to tackle the situation.²⁹

6.2.3 Various repatriation initiatives

Some countries evacuated their citizens from Libya and neighbouring Tunisia through independent initiatives. The US, the EU, China and Turkey and a few other countries

²⁶ 'Libya live report – 1737 GMT', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 February 2011, accessed 6 March 2013, <http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-world/libya-live-report-20110225-1b8lj.html>

²⁷ Department for International Development (DFID), UK, 'Summary of UK aid in Libya', 16 February 2012, accessed 23 October 2011, <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/news/latest-news/2011/situation-in-libya/>

²⁸ Elena Becatoros, 'Bangladeshi evacuees from Libya jump ship off Greek coast; 3 dead, 11 missing', *Associated Press*, 6 March 2011, accessed 1 April 2013, http://www.startribune.com/templates/Print_This_Story?sid=117484763;

'Greece recovers 4 more bodies', *New Age*, 15 March 2011, accessed 1 April 2013, http://newagebd.com/newspaper1/archive_details.php?date=2011-03-15&nid=11759

²⁹ Nick Squires, 'Libya: Italy fears 300,000 refugees', *The Telegraph*, 23 February 2011, accessed 22 September 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/8343963/Libya-Italy-fears-300000-refugees.html>

arranged for ferries to rescue and transfer their citizens to safer locations such as Italy and Greece. Others approached the IOM and the UNHCR to help them repatriate their nationals. On 25 February 2011, the government of Bangladesh formally asked the IOM for help in relocating stranded Bangladeshi migrants.³⁰

Some Bangladeshi migrant workers, particularly those working with multinational companies, returned to Bangladesh with their company's assistance. The Chinese State Engineering Company (CSCE) evacuated 750 workers from Benghazi to Egypt; from there, it chartered flights to send the workers back to Bangladesh.³¹ South Korean companies such as Shinhan Eng. & Construction Company, Daewoo and Own Construction also evacuated their Bangladeshi workers.³² A Malaysian company, Amona Ranhill, chartered a plane to repatriate 820 workers from Libya to Bangladesh. A few Bangladeshis financed their return themselves.³³

6.2.4 The role of the IOM and the UNHCR

The IOM and the UNHCR were heavily involved in helping those fleeing from the turmoil in Libya. As of August 2011, the two organisations had assisted 156,533 third-country nationals to return to their countries of origin.³⁴ On 1 March 2011, they launched a joint humanitarian evacuation operation that involved both air and sea evacuations. The UNHCR chartered over 115 aircraft and transported some 30,000 people of various nationalities, a vast majority of whom were evacuated from Tunisia.³⁵ As part of the IOM/UNHCR Humanitarian Evacuation Cell (HEC), the UNHCR had, as of 21 March 2011, contracted 17 flights to benefit 5,670 Bangladeshi nationals at a cost of USD6.4 million.³⁶

The UNHCR was also involved, from 9 March onwards, in supporting the IOM in Dhaka in receiving Bangladeshi nationals arriving at the airport. The IOM and the UNHCR facilitated the return of a total of 36,683 Bangladeshi migrants.³⁷ The IOM had generated international funding for the repatriation of 14,000 of those Bangladeshi workers (this included a grant from the UNHCR for the repatriation of 5,670 workers). The IOM was also given the responsibility of processing the one-time USD775 cash grant given by the government of Bangladesh to those Bangladeshis returning from Libya after 25 February 2011.

To process the payments, the IOM opened a call centre from 3 July 2011. The centre verified information from returnees through the telephone. They then sent the details to Sonali Bank,

³⁰ Porimol Palma, 'Bangladeshis in Libya: Dhaka seeks IOM help for evacuation', *The Daily Star*, 26 February 2011, accessed 1 April 2013, http://www.hawker.com.bd/news_details_print.php?news_id=122661

³¹ 'Evacuation of workers from Libya begins: FS', *The News Today*, 27 February 2011, accessed 1 April 2013, http://www.newstoday.com.bd/index.php?option=details&news_id=21119&date=2011-02-27

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ International Organization for Migration (IOM), 'IOM's External Situation Report: IOM response to the Libyan crisis', 4 August 2011.

³⁵ Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'North Africa humanitarian situation: Responding to the Libya crisis', n.d., accessed 1 April 2013, <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4d7755246.html>

³⁶ Interview with Craig Sanders, Head of the UNHCR Regional Office, Dhaka, Bangladesh, September 2011.

³⁷ International Organization for Migration (IOM), 'IOM's External Situation Report: IOM response to the Libyan crisis', 2 August 2011.

which issued cheques to the returnees. A random survey by the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) involving 50 interviewees from 15 districts found that all of them received their cash grants, and none of them paid any extra money or bribe to receive those grants.

6.2.5 The role of the World Bank

The World Bank initiated a project called 'Repatriation and livelihood restoration for migrant workers for the Bangladeshi returnee migrants from Libya'. Project Team Leader Bernice Van Bronkhorst highlighted that 'for those who have only recently migrated, this crisis has not only rendered them penniless but heavily indebted. The project is designed to help them get back on their feet'.³⁸ The World Bank granted a concessional loan of USD40 million to Bangladesh through a fast-track emergency process. The loan carries a maturity of 40 years, including a 10-year grace period, and a service charge of 0.75 per cent.

6.3 Government of Bangladesh

The role of the government of Bangladesh in providing assistance to the Bangladeshi workers in Libya can be divided under three broad heads: ensuring security in Libya at the beginning of the crisis, repatriation of the returnees and their rehabilitation.

6.3.1 Security in Libya

Bangladesh's Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment set up a control room to provide support to stranded Bangladeshis and their families. It also set up 10 coordination teams. The government redeployed its officials from its diplomatic offices in Italy, Iran, Greece, Egypt, Malta and the UK to the border areas of Libya. The Bangladesh Embassy in Egypt looked after those who fled to Egypt.

At the beginning, the government was not thinking in terms of bringing back the workers. However, stranded workers started sharing their hardships with their families through mobile phone. The families then united and organised a human chain spanning different districts in Bangladesh demanding the repatriation of their family members. Some also started blocking highways. The electronic media, through their broadcast of footage showing the plight of the migrants, also played an important role in sensitising the government to the need for repatriation.

6.3.2 Repatriation

In March 2011, the government launched an appeal to international organisations for assistance in bringing back Bangladeshis stranded in refugee-like situations. Responding to the appeal, the IOM and the UNHCR initiated fund-raising. The repatriation of Bangladeshi

³⁸ 'Bringing Bangladeshi migrant workers home from Libya: Interview with project Team Leader Bernice Van Bronkhorst', *World Bank*, 26 April 2011, accessed 15 August 2011, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:22898585~pagePK:34370~piPK:34424~theSitePK:4607,00.html>

nationals from Libya began on 27 February. On 1 March, a flight organised by a Turkish company, Summal Libya JSC, reached Dhaka with 101 Bangladeshis.³⁹ By 29 March, over 30,000 migrant workers had returned to Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh government used USD12.6 million from a concessional loan from the World Bank (see section 6.2.5 for more on the loan) to help pay for the repatriation of 10,000 returnees. From the beginning of repatriation up to 25 April 2011, a total of 131 flights were made. Of these, 113 flights were charters organised by the IOM on a cost-sharing basis with the Bangladesh government. Biman Bangladesh Airlines also organised 18 flights,⁴⁰ with the government paying for them. Of the total repatriated, 4,487 availed of the Biman Bangladesh Airlines flights.

The Bangladesh Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry also organised special booths to facilitate the immigration process for workers and transport to get them back home. They received an allowance of BDT1,000 (USD14.05)⁴¹ and special food at the airport.

6.3.3 Rehabilitation

At Dhaka airport, the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) registered the returnees and recorded their passport and phone number. This database of all returnees created scope for providing long-term assistance. The government used USD26.5 million of the loan from the World Bank to provide one-time cash grants to returnees to help them meet immediate needs and restore livelihoods after returning home. The Bangladesh government had received the grant on condition that the IOM will be assigned the task of disbursing the loan⁴² (see also section 6.3.2).

6.4 Civil society organisations (CSOs)

A few CSOs working on migration also helped provide support and assistance to Bangladeshi migrants in Libya. OKUP (Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program), BRAC and the RMMRU were among those that organised specific programmes.

6.4.1 OKUP

OKUP is a partner organisation of Caritas. OKUP, Caritas Bangladesh, Caritas Lebanon and Caritas Canada under the coordination of Caritas France organised emergency support services at the Tunisia/Libya border transit camps. Caritas Bangladesh and the OKUP team worked there for four weeks starting from the third week of March.

³⁹ '101 fly in first from Libya', *The Daily Star*, 1 March 2011.

⁴⁰ '35,433 Bangladeshis so far repatriated from Libya', *UNBconnect*, 25 April 2011, accessed 1 April 2013, <http://www.unbconnect.com/component/news/task-show/id-46536>

⁴¹ Based on the February 2011 exchange rate: USD1=BDT71.15.

⁴² 'Bringing Bangladeshi migrant workers home from Libya: Interview with project Team Leader Bernice Van Bronkhorst', *World Bank*, 26 April 2011, accessed 15 August 2011, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:22898585~pagePK:34370~piPK:34424~theSitePK:4607,00.html>

Caritas was assigned to help the refugees at Shousha camp through providing information on the services available at the camp. It also helped identify vulnerable cases (the wounded, the sick, unaccompanied youths, separated families and others). Caritas worked to reduce tensions in the camp by listening to the queries and complaints. Caritas Bangladesh and the OKUP representative provided the stranded migrants with specific information on government initiatives and the conditions of their return. They also provided Bangladeshi migrants with psychological counselling to help them cope with the adverse situation.

6.4.2 BRAC

As the only Bangladeshi organisation with a strong presence in Africa, BRAC mobilised its Bangladeshi staff stationed in African countries to travel to Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Greece to provide interpretation services and work with the IOM and other agencies to ensure the workers' general well-being and facilitate repatriation. BRAC mobilised its field officers to collect information from families of the stranded workers. It also worked with the government, the IOM and other agencies at ports of entry, and supplied immediate food relief to returning workers.

BRAC has also undertaken a project entitled 'Rehabilitation, repatriation, re-integration and re-migration' to rehabilitate at least 500 migrants who returned from Libya penniless.⁴³ It has committed BDT1,000,000 (USD14,055)⁴⁴ from its own funds to implement the two-year project. Returnee migrants will be provided with counselling, training and seed money to start income-generating activities such as small- and medium- enterprises or to seek jobs overseas.

6.4.3 RMMRU

To design an effective reintegration plan, it is important to have baseline research data. The RMMRU conducted a study of returnee migrants that covered 9,626 workers. The research programme was supported by Research Programme Consortium (RPC) on 'Migration Out of Poverty' funded by the Department for International Development (DFID), UK.

The research helped the RMMRU to conduct policy advocacy on the need to rehabilitate the returnees. It brought different private sector organisations together and received commitments from them to target returnee migrants in filling their future job vacancies. The initial findings of the RMMRU's online research were widely disseminated in electronic and print media which in turn helped in the process of making the government accountable for providing rehabilitation assistance.

Using the research data, the RMMRU has developed an online profile of 9,626 emergency returnee migrants from Libya. The employers can access the jobseekers' profile at <http://returnee.rmmru.org>. Potential employers' associations or employers such as security services and chain restaurants can recruit skilled workers by accessing this website. A

⁴³ 'Brac responds', *The Daily Star*, 22 March 2011, Front page.

⁴⁴ Based on the February 2011 exchange rate: USD1=BDT71.15.

research report has also been written on the experiences of Bangladeshi emergency returnees from Libya.

6.5 The private sector

Recruiting agencies and the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA) are major private sector stakeholders involved in the migration of workers to other countries. The association and those of its members that have sent migrants to Libya played an important role in sharing information with government and media about the state of migrants in Libya during the mass uprising. Their counterparts in Libya provided useful information on the situation of migrants there. The BAIRA also appealed to the government to take the initiative in repatriating migrants whose lives were in danger.

Private sector stakeholders also made several commitments to assist returnees. BAIRA President Mohammad Abul Bashar said in a press conference that an emergency meeting of the association had approved a proposal to employ the evacuees at various factories owned by its members. It also pledged to look for bank loans for returnees to start small businesses.

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) organised a discussion on the 'Prevailing situation in North Africa and Middle East'. At the meeting, the leaders of the country's business associations pledged to provide the repatriated Bangladeshis with jobs. The then FBCCI President A.K. Azad urged the business community, trade bodies and stakeholders to rehabilitate the returning Bangladeshis. The FBCCI made a commitment to raise funds to provide the repatriated Bangladeshis with immediate financial support. Chittagong Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Monwara Hakim promised employment for 100 people and FBCCI Director Harun Or Rashid promised the same for 500 people.⁴⁵

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and the BAIRA also promised to recruit a 'sizeable number' of the workers returning from Libya.⁴⁶ The then President of the BGMEA, which represents the country's woven knit and sweater garment manufacturers and exporters, was reported as saying that 'the sector could possibly hire up to 50,000 of these returning workers'. He noted that (at that point in time) about 25 per cent of machines in the factories were lying idle due to the lack of skilled operators. According to the BGMEA website, its members have in their employ some 3.6 million workers – mostly women.⁴⁷

On behalf of civil society, the RMMRU met the Governor of Bangladesh Bank to call upon banks in the country, many of which are important stakeholders in migration, to take some

⁴⁵ 'Businesses promise jobs for Libya returnees', *The New Age*, 11 March 2011.

⁴⁶ Naimul Haq, 'Garment industry pledges to employ evacuated labourers', *One World South Asia / Inter Press Service*, 17 March 2011, accessed 1 April 2013, <http://southasia.oneworld.net/todayshheadlines/bangladesh-garment-industry-to-ensure-employment-of-returnees-from-libya>

⁴⁷ 'BGMEA at a glance', *Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)*, 20 September 2011, accessed 1 April 2013, <http://www.bgmea.com.bd/home/pages/aboutus>

role in assisting the returnees; and the Governor requested that public and private banks help the returnees to rehabilitate themselves. The Association of Bankers, Bangladesh (ABB) discussed the issue in their board meeting and agreed to provide some financial assistance for training and other programmes for the returnee migrants. Few banks made individual statements on their responsibility towards the returnees.

Thus, during the crisis and as the migrants started returning, all major private sector stakeholders had expressed their commitment to helping the 36,000 returnees from Libya. The important area of investigation then is the extent to which these commitments were translated into reality. This study followed up with individual institutions, and found that none of them, not even the BAIRA, had developed any relevant programme. Nor had they supported any programme proposed by civil society.

The BAIRA did not pursue the issue. It did not give any target to its member recruiting agencies for creating overseas or local jobs for the returnees. Individual recruiting agencies also did not design any concrete action plan to provide reemployment to the returnees. The other trade bodies also did not pursue the issue of rehabilitation seriously. The BGMEA had pledged to offer 50,000 jobs. By the end of November, only five returnees had been employed.⁴⁸

After the initial discussion at the ABB board meeting, it sought proposals from civil society bodies but later did not make any allocation from their corporate social responsibility funds to those organisations. The banks individually also did not pursue any programme for the returnees.

6.6 Section conclusion

Many actors participated in providing assistance to the migrants. Civil society and the media performed the watchdog role. As a result, the government had to take action to ensure the security of the migrants. It successfully repatriated a large number of workers within a short period of time. International organisations were also quick to respond to the needs of the migrants. The private sector in Bangladesh also stated that they would help with the reintegration of the returnees by providing jobs or other forms of support; however, no concrete initiative has as yet materialised.

⁴⁸ ‘Summary report of the International Organization for Migration’ (Consultation on Reintegration and Remigration of Bangladeshi Returnees from Libya in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 23 November 2011).

7. The impacts of abrupt return

This section discusses the impact of abrupt return on the returnees and their families. Impact assessment is based on the duration of stay, debt situation, status of debt repayment, savings, due salaries and post-migration occupational status.

7.1 Work opportunity lost

Workers going to the Gulf and North African countries are employed under short-term contracts, with specific contract arrangements varying from country to country. In most cases, migrants go on a three-year contract; and when the contract is over, they are supposed to return home. Libya, and Saudi Libya, had a different procedure: migrants were allowed to work for longer periods as long as they renewed their contract annually.

Many of the workers who had gone to Libya had paid a large sum on the understanding that they would stay in the country for some time. Abrupt return disrupted their plan and investment. According to the online survey, about half the workers had been in Libya a year or less; some 20 per cent of them 6 months or less; and approximately 32 per cent six months to a year (Table 7.1). The average stay was 17 months.

Table 7.1: Duration of stay in Libya as reported by respondents.

Duration (in months)	No. of respondents	%
0-6	567	20.49
6-12	883	31.91
12-18	426	15.39
18-24	340	12.29
24-36	122	4.41
36 and above	49	1.77
Not provided	380	13.73
Total	2,767	100.00

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

It is useful at this point to provide scenarios to show in more concrete terms how much the returnees earned during their time in Libya. According to the data, the average stay was 17 months, and the scenarios below take this as the basis for computation. In addition, the qualitative data in section 4.1 suggests that many of the workers did not have any work, or were not paid, in the first few months, so the scenarios factor in 4 months of no pay. In other words, each of the scenarios uses 13 months of earnings to illustrate how much the workers had been able to earn before they were forced to return to Bangladesh.

Scenario 1:
Last-earned income of BDT15,000 (USD211)⁴⁹

The income point of BDT15,000 is selected based on the fact that 49 per cent were earning between BDT10,000–20,000 (USD140–281) per month just before they left Libya (see section 4.4).

Earnings over 13 months: **BDT195,000** (USD2,741)
Average cost of migration (from section 3.9): **BDT243,000** (USD3,522)

Thus, we can see that workers at this income level (i.e., up to half the migrants to Libya) had not earned enough to cover what they had paid to migrate to Libya.

Scenario 2:
Last-earned income of BDT25,000 (USD351)

The income point of BDT25,000 is selected based on the survey finding that 30.53 per cent of the returnees were earning BDT20,000–30,000 (USD281–422) on average when they left Libya (see section 4.4).

Earnings over 13 months: **BDT325,000** (USD4,568)
Average cost of migration (from section 3.9): **BDT243,000** (USD3,522)

Workers in this scenario, who represent approximately a third of the migrants, had earned slightly more than what they had spent as migration cost. However, after deducting the cost of food and lodging, the income earned barely covered the cost of migration.

About 5.6 per cent of workers earned less than BDT10,000 (USD140) per month. Their income over 13 months would only cover half or less of the cost that they paid to migrate to Libya. The experience of Firoz Mia who stayed in Libya for 16 months illustrates the plight of many such workers:

I spent BDT265,000 [USD3,841] to go to Libya and I was paid only LYD180 [around BDT10,465 or USD147] per month. Within these 16 months, I couldn't even retrieve the money that I had spent to go there. Things were not smooth in Libya. We had to work for six months and rest of the time there was no job for us. But, we still wanted to stay there, as we wanted to retrieve the money we had spent to go there in search of a better life.

⁴⁹ Incomes are calculated using the exchange rate of February 2011 (USD1=71.15). Costs are calculated using the 2009 exchange rate (USD1=BDT69).

7.2 Debt situation

In order to finance their migration, 90 per cent of the migrants had taken loans. They had borrowed from relatives, moneylenders and banks. A large group mortgaged part or all of their land. Some borrowed money in exchange for an agreement to give a certain amount of paddy annually. A small number, perhaps those who had stayed for a longer period, were able to repay their loan.

This study's data on loan status upon return shows that 94.46 per cent of the returnees were still in debt. About 40 per cent of the returnees reported owing up to BDT100,000 (USD1,449)⁵⁰ (Table 7.2). The average amount of loan outstanding upon return was BDT143,270 (USD2,014).

Table 7.2: The amount of outstanding loan of the respondents.

Outstanding loan amount (BDT)	No. of respondents	%
5,000-25,000	94	1.37
25,000-50,000	478	6.97
50,000-75,000	550	8.01
75,000-100,000	1,549	22.58
100,000-150,000	1,752	25.54
150,000-200,000	1,321	19.26
200,000-250,000	362	5.27
250,000-350,000	276	4.02
350,000 and above	99	1.44
Do not have loan	378	5.51
Total	6,859	100.00

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

Delwar Hossain from Habigonj was one of the returnees who reported being in debt. He said that he had to pay BDT12,000 (USD174) every month to repay the debt. Over the previous three months, he had managed to repay BDT36,000 (USD522) by borrowing from another source. He had had to pay additional interest on the new loan, thus increasing his debt burden further.

Migrants borrow from different sources at different interest rates. Hanif from Patuakhali district went to Libya just 10 months before the crisis began. He spent BDT275,000 (USD3,986) to go to Libya. He financed his migration through borrowing from different moneylenders. From one, he borrowed BDT50,000 (USD725) at BDT37,000 (USD536) yearly in interest. He borrowed another BDT50,000 at 40 maunds of paddy yearly in interest. He borrowed a further BDT25,000 (USD362) on condition that he would pay interest of BDT28,000 (USD406) yearly until he returns the money. His family thought they would be able

⁵⁰ Based on the 2009 exchange rate: USD1=BDT69.

to pay back the loans and the interest from his income from Libya. In fact, his family did manage to pay back 50 per cent of the loan. Due to the political turmoil, however, he was forced to return. The forced return left him in debt; the five members of his family (including his ageing parents), who were dependent on his income, were also affected. The family was worried about whether he could get a job or whether there would be any opportunity to go back to Libya. His spirits were however still high. He started a small poultry farm, and expressed the desire to receive credit support to run the business.

7.3 Savings and benefits left behind

About 68 per cent of the returnees did not have any savings in Libya (Table 7.3). A significant proportion, about 16 per cent had left some savings in Libya. These were mainly earnings kept by employers as part of a provident fund/gratuity, which had not been returned to them.

Table 7.3: Savings or benefits left behind in Libya due to emergency return.

Savings situation	No. of respondents	%
Respondent who had left some savings in Libya	1,516	15.75
Respondent who did not leave any savings in Libya	6,511	67.64
Not responded	1,599	16.61
Total	9,626	100.00

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

7.4 Unpaid salaries

This section is based on the responses given by both online and mobile-phone interviewees. About 86 per cent of the returnees stated that they had salary still due to them (Table 7.4). About 40 per cent were owed three to five months of salary. Almost 11 per cent mentioned that they had not been paid for six to eight months.

It is interesting to note that some of the interviewees – those who had been working with multinational companies such as Daewoo and Hyundai for example – were paid their due salaries through bank transfer after their return to Bangladesh. According to the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), as of October 2012, 500 returnees have received their due salaries from their employers.

Table 7.4: Unpaid salaries in Libya as reported by respondents.

Period (in months)	No. of respondents	%
0-2	3,081	32.00
3-5	3,815	39.63
6-8	1,046	10.86
9-11	198	2.06
12 and above	116	1.20
No due salary	1,370	14.23
Total	9,626	100.00

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

7.5 Post-migration occupational status

About half of the returnees were unemployed after returning from Libya (Table 7.5). Of those who were either partially or fully employed, about 14 per cent were in the agricultural sector. This included farmers who worked in the field as well as those who were not doing actual work on the farm but receiving a certain income as landowners. Some of them neither worked in the field nor personally owned any land. However, since their family income was from agriculture, they mentioned agriculture as their primary profession. It may be then that those mentioning agriculture as a profession were to some extent underemployed.

Around 11 per cent were employed in the construction sector. Others worked as day labourers both in urban and rural areas, in small family enterprises or as electricians. The survey findings also reveal that skilled workers were able to reintegrate upon return with relative ease.

A small number (0.07%) had already re-migrated (Table 7.6). Hyundai Company, for example, employed a number of the returnees – those who had been with Hyundai in Libya – in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Salam had been working as head cook with Hyundai Company in Libya. He was offered a position with the company in Dubai. He did not however take up that position as the salary was very low. Some other migrants also stated that the salary structure in Libya was better than in some other Middle Eastern countries.

Table 7.5: Post-migration employment status.

Employment status	No. of respondents	%
Employed	3,584	52.25
Unemployed	3,219	46.93
Not provided	56	0.81
Total	6,859	100.00

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

Table 7.6: Current occupation of respondents.

Occupation	No. of respondents	%
Already migrated	5	0.07
Day labour	404	5.89
Agriculture	949	13.83
Small entrepreneur	406	5.91
Fisheries	76	1.10
Unemployed	3,219	46.93
Electrician	111	1.61
Construction labour	728	10.61
Others	905	13.19
Not provided	56	0.81
Total	6,859	100.00

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

7.6 Reintegration experience

When returnees were asked how they were progressing with their reintegration in Bangladesh, a vast majority (approximately 93 per cent) stated that they would like to re-migrate either to another destination or to Libya (Table 7.7). One-tenth of the respondents had already started the remigration process. They had visited recruiting agencies, with most of them negotiating with recruiting agencies to go to the UAE.

However, a large number of the interviewees also stated that they would stay in the country if the government helped them obtain employment in public and private organisations. Only 0.65 per cent of the respondents would like to be self-employed. Most thus appear to be less than keen to take on the risks inherent in starting new enterprises. About 2 per cent would like to re-skill themselves for local or international employment.

Table 7.7: Reintegration preferences of migrants.

Preferences	No. of respondents	%
Remigration	8,970	93.19
Local jobs	396	4.11
Self-employed	63	0.65
Skills training	197	2.04
Total	9,626	100.00

Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit – Research Programme Consortium (RMMRU-RPC) survey data on emergency returnees from Libya to Bangladesh, 2011.

7.7 Current situation

In February 2012, a telephone survey was conducted and 50 returnees in 15 districts were interviewed. The survey was designed to understand their current situation. The survey found that three of the fifty had already re-migrated, one to Dubai, one to Oman and another to South Africa.

During the survey, they were asked about what they had done with the one-time cash grant of BDT50,000 (USD703)⁵¹ from the government. The majority of them used part of that money for loan repayment. Almost all of them used some for day-to-day household expenditure. Five of the interviewees had kept a portion of the money in the bank. Five used some of the money for an existing family small business. Three interviewees leased land for cultivation with that money. Thus, the one-time cash grant did help the migrants meet some immediate needs.

The Bangladesh embassy in Libya restarted their attestation function for recruitment of workers on 27 October 2011. According to the BMET, 14,975 workers migrated to Libya between January and December 2012. During the repatriation phase, the Bangladesh government had said that it would give priority to returnees from Libya in its future deployment of workers. It had also committed to providing the returnees with special attention once migration to Libya restarts. However, when the Libyan job market reopened, the government did not have a targeted programme to enable the returnees to migrate to Libya again. Recruiting agents or sub-agents recruited new groups of people who could finance their migration. The few returnees who migrated there did so on their own initiative and using their own funds.

There are however some efforts by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). BRAC, for example, has initiated a project targeting the returnees. It is providing loans to the returnees to finance their remigration. The RMMRU has also established, in collaboration with BdJobs, an online jobseekers' database with the data on 9,626 returnees that it had generated through online and mobile-phone surveys. This database is being merged with another database that the RMMRU is developing for registration of potential as well as returnee migrants. This pioneering initiative aims to develop a robust job portal with a database of skilled and semi-skilled workers who are interested in the short-term contract labour market. At this stage, it is important to organise campaigns to popularise this database among potential employers such as construction houses, garment manufacturers and security-service providers.

⁵¹ Based on February 2011 exchange rate: USD1=71.15.

7.8 Section conclusion

The discussion of the impact of emergency return shows that a majority of the migrants faced hardships on their return. Their debt burden increased. Also, half of them were unemployed. Although the government and the international community played important roles in repatriation, there has been a dearth of organised attempts to economically rehabilitate the returnees. Public and private commercial banks and other mainstream private sector bodies have also not developed any initiatives to help returnees establish new livelihoods.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

This study covered the span of the migration trajectory of those Bangladeshi workers who had to abruptly return from Libya due to the 2011 political turmoil. The study aimed to understand the impact of emergency return on migrants and their families. It also sought to understand the role of the international community, the government of Bangladesh, the private sector and civil society.

8.1 Summary of findings

The majority of those who migrated to Libya after 2007 belonged to poorer households: two-thirds did not own any arable land, and one-tenth did not own any homestead land. They financed their migration mostly by borrowing from family and other informal sources. Semi- and lowly skilled workers paid more to finance their migration compared to professionals. Sub-agents played a significant role, with two-thirds of the workers going through them.

Life was not easy for many migrants in the first months of their arrival in Libya. The majority had to wait at least three months before obtaining a job. Before their emergency return to Bangladesh, they were earning an average monthly income of BDT24,000 (USD337). When the tide of the Arab Spring reached Libya, the migrant workers were placed in a highly vulnerable position. Some of their employers had left the country without returning their passports. They were also in danger of their lives and some experienced the looting of their belongings by rebel forces or miscreants.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) played a large role in repatriating the workers. Bangladesh's Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment also played an active role. It made decisions quickly and repatriated Bangladeshi workers with the help of the IOM. Upon the return of the migrants, the government provided a one-time cash grant to the returnees. The media, both print and electronic, and civil society organisations (CSOs) also played a positive role. Private sector trade bodies initially made many promises to assist with the reintegration of the migrants, but in reality they did not commit any resources for that purpose.

The experience of the 9,626 returnees surveyed in this study showed that the abrupt return affected the migrants and their communities deeply. A major portion of the one-time cash grant received by the migrants had to be given to moneylenders to repay loans taken to process their migration to Libya. A majority of the returnees were still in debt at the time the interviews were conducted. Half of them remained unemployed, and a good number of them were underemployed. Although the government had made the commitment to give priority to the returnees when opportunities for overseas deployment were created, that did not happen. Also, the new government in Libya has yet to announce any measure with regard to the returnees.

8.2 Recommendations

8.2.1 Research

Global crises like the Arab Spring, a financial crisis or climate change pose challenges to our current understanding of the consequences of migration. In the context of labour migration, the costs of such events are solely borne by the labour migrants and their families. Major studies need to be conducted on the consequences of these events for migrant workers, their families and communities so that effective policy guidelines can be prepared to redistribute the burden among stakeholders.

8.2.2 Origin country

Compared to other South Asian countries, the government of Bangladesh shouldered a fair degree of responsibility by sharing the cost of emergency repatriation with international organisations as well as by providing a one-time cash grant to the returnees. However, the government has yet to take any responsibility for the economic rehabilitation of those who are still unemployed and in debt. The government should create an emergency fund for the migrants. Recruiting agencies and other mainstream private sector organisations and service providers that benefit from labour migration (such as public and private financial institutions) should commit resources to such an emergency fund.

Special livelihood packages targeted at the returnees should be developed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Such programmes should be gender-sensitive, and should include re-skilling the returnees through training for locally available jobs. Special enterprise development programmes with access to credit and business advisory services could also be established. The government should support NGOs in implementing such programmes through the disbursement of resources from the emergency fund.

8.2.3 Destination country

During crisis situations, the responsibility of protecting, internally transferring and repatriating the migrants is left either to the migrants themselves or to origin countries. Destination countries often do not shoulder any of the responsibility. Public opinion at the global level as well as in destination countries has to be mobilised to encourage the destination country to pay attention to the impact of a crisis on migrant workers, and to contribute to efforts to help the workers. A destination country could consider, for example, sharing repatriation costs, providing compensation for lost job opportunities as well as according special priority to emergency returnees when it reopens its job market.

8.2.4 The international community

The global community under the leadership of the UN also needs to be better prepared to organise emergency support for migrant-worker communities stranded in a crisis situation. During the Libyan crisis, some neighbouring countries placed national security above humanitarian concerns. Countries should be encouraged to open their borders to migrants fleeing crisis situations.

During such political, economic and environmental crises, the human rights of the stranded migrants should be upheld. The global community needs to develop a framework for humanitarian support that is respectful towards the human rights of stranded migrants.

The UN should revisit its 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1990 Convention on the Protection of Human Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Family Members. The aim of such scrutiny should be to restructure existing international labour standards to ensure the rights of migrants who have to return abruptly. The Global Migration Group (GMG) should also try to shape public opinion so as to support such legal reform.

The governments of origin countries whose nationals are deployed in a conflict-ridden destination country face the challenge of managing the crisis. In order to inform and bring meaningful changes to the global migration regime as well as the policies of destination countries, origin countries should develop a united voice and use regional forums such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and ASEAN, the Colombo Process and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue Process for negotiating shared responsibilities.

The UN High Level Dialogue and Global Forum on Migration and Development should place the issue of stranded migrants and emergency returnees as an utmost priority in their upcoming meetings. This should be an important agenda item at the UN High Level meeting of 2013.

Global and national civil society organisations (CSOs) should demand the incorporation of the issue of foreign workers caught in internal conflicts in destination countries into various international instruments. CSOs should proactively try to engage with global and regional processes and contribute to the deliberations of those processes.

Annex

Table A1: Flow of migrant workers from Bangladesh, 1976–2012.

Year	KSA %	Kuwait %	UAE %	Qatar %	Libya %	Bahrain %	Oman %	Malaysia %	South Korea %	Singapore %	Others %	Total
76-80	16.35	10.08	27.89	10.13	7.17	4.45	11.03	0.02	0.00	0.35	12.54	99,189
81-85	31.11	11.63	10.70	7.54	4.48	3.56	15.07	0.01	0.00	1.01	14.90	312,177
86-90	45.59	11.08	13.78	8.31	2.74	4.10	8.32	0.50	0.00	0.20	5.38	416,334
91-95	47.66	13.16	7.02	1.13	0.79	2.31	10.11	15.78	0.52	0.71	0.81	953,632
1996	34.35	9.94	11.25	0.05	0.93	1.78	4.11	31.47	1.30	2.51	2.32	211,714
1997	46.10	9.14	23.68	0.81	0.84	2.17	2.59	1.23	0.38	11.86	1.20	231,077
1998	59.30	9.51	14.49	2.54	0.47	2.62	1.79	0.21	0.22	8.12	0.75	267,667
1999	69.26	8.35	12.06	2.09	0.65	1.73	1.51	0.00	0.56	3.58	0.21	268,182
2000	64.94	0.27	15.28	0.64	0.45	2.08	2.36	7.74	0.44	4.98	0.80	222,686
2001	72.63	2.83	8.60	0.12	0.24	2.31	2.41	2.60	0.83	5.09	2.34	188,965
2002	72.48	7.00	11.30	0.25	0.70	2.41	1.71	0.04	0.01	3.04	1.06	225,256
2003	63.78	10.51	14.69	0.04	1.12	2.94	1.59	0.01	1.48	2.09	1.74	254,190
2004	50.93	15.06	17.22	0.46	0.22	3.37	1.62	0.08	0.08	2.55	8.40	272,958
2005	31.83	18.61	24.53	0.84	0.38	4.24	1.91	1.15	0.09	3.82	12.61	252,702
2006	28.70	9.38	34.13	2.02	0.03	4.29	2.12	5.37	0.26	5.28	8.44	381,516
2007	24.51	0.51	27.19	1.82	0.18	1.97	2.10	32.81	0.00	4.60	4.30	832,609
2008	15.10	0.04	47.92	2.92	0.58	1.51	6.04	15.06	0.17	6.47	4.19	875,055
2009	3.09	0.00	54.36	2.46	4.78	5.98	8.77	2.61	0.31	8.33	9.31	475,278
2010	1.81	0.01	52.04	3.09	3.11	5.59	10.91	0.24	0.69	10.00	12.52	390,702
2011	2.65	0.01	49.77	2.32	0.02	2.45	23.81	0.13	0.31	8.57	9.97	568,062
2012	3.50	0.00	35.47	4.74	2.47	3.59	28.04	0.13	0.24	9.66	12.16	607,348

Source: Prepared by the Refugee and Migratory Movement Research Unit (RMMRU) from Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) data.

Table A2: Bangladeshi migrant worker flow to the GCC states, Jordan, Lebanon and Libya, 2005–2010.

Year	% in the GCC states, Jordan, Lebanon and Libya	Total no. of Bangladeshi migrant workers
2005	82.34	252,702
2006	80.67	381,516
2007	58.28	832,609
2008	74.11	875,055
2009	79.44	475,278
2010	79.56	390,702

Source: Prepared by the Refugee and Migratory Movement Research Unit (RMMRU) from Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) data.

Table A3: Bangladeshi female migrant worker flow to the GCC states, Jordan and Libya, 2005–2010.

Year	No. of female migrant workers in the GCC states, Jordan and Libya	%	Total no. of Bangladeshi female migrant workers
2005	13,483	99.35	13,570
2006	17,427	96.57	18,045
2007	17,959	94.05	19,094
2008	18,672	89.58	20,842
2009	20,033	90.14	22,224
2010	21,904	88.18	24,838
Total	109,478	92.34	118,550

Source: Prepared by the Refugee and Migratory Movement Research Unit (RMMRU) from Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) data.

Table A4: Remittances from Bangladeshi migrant workers, 2005 – March 2011.

Country	2005-2006 %	2006-2007 %	2007-2008 %	2008-2009 %	2009-2010 %	2010-2011 %	Total (USD, million)
Australia	0.20	0.19	0.17	0.07	0.08	0.06	53.67
Bahrain	1.38	1.34	1.75	1.62	1.55	1.53	738.94
Germany	0.25	0.25	0.34	0.20	0.15	0.16	102.75
Hong Kong	0.12	0.10	0.10	0.09	0.08	0.09	44.95
Iran	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.02	16.98
Italy	1.77	2.50	2.71	1.93	1.66	1.80	966.24
Japan	0.20	0.17	0.21	0.15	0.13	0.13	75.01
KSA	35.29	29.02	29.37	29.51	31.19	27.80	14,301.17
Kuwait	10.26	11.39	10.91	10.02	9.28	9.05	4,768.21
Libya	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.02	7.21
Malaysia	0.43	0.20	1.17	2.91	5.34	6.09	1,517.08
Oman	3.46	3.29	2.79	2.99	3.18	2.99	1,466.87
Others	2.09	2.09	1.80	2.50	4.13	4.37	1,432.21
Qatar	3.65	3.90	3.66	3.54	3.28	2.79	1,628.75
S. Korea	0.37	0.29	0.25	0.19	0.19	0.22	111.05
Singapore	1.39	1.34	1.64	1.70	1.76	1.66	773.48
UAE	11.58	13.46	14.34	18.11	17.20	17.04	7,565.00
UK	11.69	14.83	11.32	8.15	7.53	7.94	4,601.07
USA	15.84	15.56	17.44	16.26	13.21	16.24	7,437.51

Source: Prepared by the Refugee and Migratory Movement Research Unit (RMMRU) based on Bangladesh Bank data.

Table A5: Remittances earned, Bangladesh 2000–2012.

Year	Total (USD, million)
2000	1,954.95
2001	2,071.03
2002	2,847.79
2003	3,177.63
2004	3,565.31
2005	4,249.87
2006	5,484.08
2007	6,562.71
2008	8,979.00
2009	10,717.73
2010	11,004.73
2011	12,168.09
2012	14,163.99

Source: Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), 'Overseas employment and remittances from 1976-2012',

<http://www.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/viewStatReport.action?reportnumber=18>