



**SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION 8 – SUPPORT FOR
RETURNING MIGRANTS DURING COVID**



Report on LaMP Small Group Discussion 8 – Support for Returning Migrants During COVID

The GFMD Small Group Discussion was held on 23rd September (Wednesday) via Webex, as part of the strengthening regional collaboration and partnership in returnee migration perspectives.

The virtual discussion explored the critical scenario of the returned migrants' and potential partnership support approach that may help to resolve the problems they are facing. 23 participants attended the discussion from regional governmental institutions, non-governmental institutions, policy think tanks and other relevant stakeholders. The primary focus of conversation was to develop the collaboration of experts, practitioners, policy makers, state actors and development partners in the pandemic situation.

The event was co-organized by Mr. Kashif Noor, DG Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment, Pakistan and Mr. Syed Saiful Haque, Chairman, WARBE Development, Bangladesh with the support of Labor Mobility Partnerships (LaMP) of GFMD UAE 2020 with the specific focus on the approaching GFMD Summit.

The methodology of the webinar was a mixture of open discussion on thematic issues and extensive group discussions. The discussion brought together major actors and partners in the field of the overall returnee migrants' scenario in the pandemic, facilitating a rounded discussion with multiple viewpoints.

The Small Group Discussion was held to examine the possible recommendations and way forward for developing partnerships in the GFMD UAE 2020 summit. One of the GFMD's goals this year is to establish partnerships among various actors interested in addressing certain pressing migration and development related issues. After a review of participants' comments and reactions during the regional consultations, Labor Mobility Partnerships (LaMP) has divided participants into twelve groups who expressed interest for participation in the discussion. These informal small groups are meant to further formulate ideas and partnerships to address the migration related challenges.

List of Our Distinguished Attendee

Organizers

Mr. Syed Saiful Haque	WARBE Developmetn Foundation
Mr. Kashif Ahmed Noor	Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment Islamabad, Pakistan

Participants

States

Ms. Mienye Badejo	Ministry of Labor and employment, Nigeria
Mr. Md. Nazrul Islam	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh
Ms. Rahnuma Salam Khan	Ministry of Labor and Employment, Bangladesh

International Organizations

Ms. Melisa Aytekin	Food and Agriculture Organization
Mr. Andre Saramago	Food and Agriculture Organization
Mr. Ion Bulgac	Food and Agriculture Organization
Ms. Cristina Rapone	Food and Agriculture Organization
Mr. Shabarinath Nair	International Labor Organization

Local authorities

Mr. Wilfredo Prilles Jr	City Government of Naga, Philippines
Ms. Ramona Lissa Villegas	United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) - Asia Pacific

Civil Society, Business, others

Asif Ayub	Bangladesh Employers Federation
Syeed Ahamed	Civil Society for Global Commitments on Migration (CGCM)
Jabir Maliyakkal	Indian Social Club Oman/Kerala Pravasi Welfare Board (Government of Kerala, India)
Mahjabeen Khaled	Bangladesh Parliamentarians' Caucus on Migration and Development
Dr. Md. Nurul Islam	Asian Development Bank
Shirin Lira	British Council Bangladesh
Shameem AC Norman	Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies
Dilshad Zaman	Institute of Informatics and Development (IID)
Jasiya Khatoon	WARBE Development Foundation
Sunjida Rahman	Institute of Informatics and Development (IID)
Sumiyea Akter Tanjima	WARBE Development Foundation

Group Discussions

The group discussion started with the welcoming note of the Co-organizer, Mr. Kashif Ahmed Noor, Director General, Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment, Government of Pakistan, expressed gratitude to the Government of United Arab Emirates (UAE), Abu Dhabi Dialogue and Labor Mobility Partnerships (LaMP) for invitation to organize the group discussion. He highlighted that return and reintegration is a major issue/challenge faced by all the countries. He apprised about type of actions we have to take to facilitate the returnee migrant workers. He talked about the social and financial integration of migrant workers, when they come back to the country of origin. He pointed out that some of the issues are cross cutting both in origin and destination countries. He requested all the esteemed colleagues to share their views for making consensus to proceed further in overall migration perspective in future. Concluding his brief notes, he requested Mr. Saiful Haque, Co-Host of the webinar for his opening remarks.

Co-Organizer Mr. Saiful Haque, Chair, WARBE Development Foundation, Bangladesh, thanked and expressed gratitude to the GFMD UAE 2020 Chair and Labor Mobility Partnerships (LaMP) for invitation to organize the group discussion for highlighting the current state of return migrants in the region. He expressed that joint efforts and collaboration is required to look after the interests of returnee migrant workers. Since March, hundreds of thousands of international migrant workers were forced to return to home countries due to limited access to income-generating activities, social services, healthcare systems, social security and social support networks in the countries in which they were working. At this critical time, evidence based research and usage of social media can be used to reintegrate the returnees. He mentioned that partnership methodology needs to be adopted to develop a comprehensive reintegration strategy to tackle the challenge both in origin and destination countries. For this purpose, a regional multi stakeholder collaboration is the need of the hour. This regional consultation will help to raise this issue at various international platforms. He also shared the activities and advocacy program of WARBE to facilitate the migrant workers. He concluded his remarks with the expectation that all the distinguished participants will share concrete suggestions on how we can choose our partners to make some effective and practical activities with respect to returnee migrant workers.

Ms. Mahjabeen Khaled, Member of the Parliamentarian Caucus of Migration and Development in Bangladesh, opined that the COVID Vaccine will be available to citizens very soon. But it is unclear that how migrant workers are going to be vaccinated, either in origin or destination countries. The cost of vaccination will be very high. Both governments of origin and destination country need to develop a strategy to facilitate the migrant workers through creating a supportive group and the Embassies should come forward to play their roles. She suggested the usage of technology and social media to bring together all migrants' as well as stakeholders for information/knowledge sharing in local language. In the context of returnee migrants, she suggested to develop a ten years plan under public private partnership. She further proposed to collect the data of returnees and its connectivity with relevant stakeholders.

Ms. Shirin Lira, Sr. IBP Manager, British Council introduced herself as a partner of WARBE and civil society supporter in safe migration process in Fairer Labor Migration program. She said women migrant workers faced various challenges like flight refusal, wage protection, fraudulent and biased approaches, which caused psycho social and financial problems. She further suggested developing reintegration strategy for their upskilling and re-settlement.

According to Mr. Sayeed Ahmed, CEO, IID, there is a need to develop the public private partnerships among governments and all relevant stakeholders in COO and CODs to address the issues faced by migrant workers like wage protection and low skills etc. There is also need to develop a mechanism to train the human resources through research work in accordance with future of work requirements.

Mr. Asif Ayub from Bangladesh Employer Federation (BEF) focused on importance of re-skilling to fulfill the future job requirements. He suggested developing a “Mobile App” for visa facilitation and related information for migrant workers in native languages. Moreover, there is need to develop a reintegration strategy with special focus on entrepreneurship training.

Ms. Cristina Rapone, a migration specialist with FAO, had brought two main critical issues on behalf of the FAO Global headquarter discussions. First issue relates to agricultural workers and the other is the challenge of internal migration. She further stressed the upskilling of migrant workers through training and entrepreneurship skills. There is a need to develop partnerships to achieve this goal.

Mr. Jabir Maliyakka from Indian Social Club Oman/Kerala Pravasi Welfare Board (Government of Kerala, India) stated that the experience with the returnee migrant workers was very difficult through COVID. They were providing food, medicine and assisting in repatriation. The recognition of migrant groups is very important especially at grass roots level. Many migrants didn't get any wages for months. He added that many Trade Unions didn't include migrants. If the Trade Unions could recognize the migrants then they would get their back wages through the Trade Unions.

Ms. Liz Villegas from UCLG Asia-Pacific pointed out the involvement of youth in migration framework. Some issues that come in ADD are generational employment and employment of returnees. For this purpose, she mentioned to look forward to knowing how we can strengthen support mechanisms.

Dr. Md. Nazrul Islam, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh indicated that remittances are cornerstone for the socio economic development of every country. He suggested that return process should start from destination countries. He stressed that migration is a right based issue and migrant workers face various socio cultural problems in destination countries. He stated that COVID-19 badly affected the rights of migrant workers and they faced issues of non-payment of wages etc. These issues must be resolved on priority basis. He further shared the plan of Bangladesh regarding skill development of migrant workers in terms of their age bracket. He also shared that Bangladesh is also developing a database to meet the demand

from overseas jobs and developing skills as per requirements. Efforts are underway to explore new job markets for Bangladeshi migrant workers. He further added that COVID-19 crisis has created some opportunities in the sectors like medical and agriculture etc.

Then Ms. Melisa Aytakin, from regional office for sub-Saharan Africa, FAO, focused mainly on rural areas on creating opportunities as alternatives to migration and also to capitalize on gains of migration. According to her point of view, Partnerships are very important within regions but also across regions. She highlighted the importance of internal migration, also in the case of COVID, from cities to rural areas. She suggested to invest in skilling, reintegration and social protection programs. Migrants need to be included in government (development) programs through labor-matching platforms. In order to facilitate the families of migrant workers, partnerships with telecom companies for transfer of remittances may be beneficial for them.

Ms. Jasiya Khatoon, Director, WARBE Development Foundation stressed to collect the returning migrants' data as it is very important for the origin countries. Migrant women need a lot of support, and we need partnerships for psychosocial support, job support, rehabilitation and reintegration programs, etc. Social protection for migrant workers, especially returning, is very important so is skills development. She suggests that UN/International organizations should play their part to facilitate the migrant workers.

Ms. Mienye Badejo from Nigeria highlighted that there is need to develop a support mechanism to facilitate the migrant workers who were affected due to COVID-19 crisis through engagement of CSOs. She stressed the importance of shelter to migrants, re-skilling and psychosocial support/counselling to emigrants. She suggested developing the capacity of migration officers for effective management/migration governance.

Ms. Rahnuma Salam Khan from Ministry of Employment, Bangladesh raised two issues- reintegration, and the responsibility of the destination countries. The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the importance of social protection mechanism to support the emigrants in crisis like situations through mandatory insurance coverage. For this purpose, partnership development among key stakeholders is required to facilitate the migrants. She further added that wage protection must be ensured before return process.

Mr. Wilfredo Priles Jr, from the city government of Naga in the Philippines, brought the perspective of a local government functionary to this discussion. He stated that they have many returning Philippine migrants, they have to act to ensure that they have appropriate quarantine and livelihoods in this interim period until the pandemic is dealt with. He highlighted lack of funds with local governments to tackle the crisis like situation and it is one of the biggest challenges faced by the governments.

Mr. Shameem Noman from Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA), talked about the reintegration of returnees through data collection and upskilling. He further highlighted the problems faced by returning migrant workers like travel cost,

expiry of visas especially for those who intend to go back to their work in CODs. There is a need to develop a financial mechanism to support the migrant workers in this situation.

Mr. Shabari Nair from ILO pointed out the importance of data collection while developing their profiles and role of labour ministries is highly significant for this purpose. He appreciated the policy of Sri Lankan government to manage this situation. He stated that COVID-19 crisis has also affected the transfer of remittances. He further described that the government of Qatar introduced reform program regarding minimum wages, making it easier for employees to move from one employer to another.

At the final stage, Mr Kashif, DG BE&OE summarized the overall discussion and highlighted the importance of data collection of returnees by both COOs and CODs for better planning, reintegration and job protection. He also emphasized that wage protection, skill development and health protection mechanism may be made the part of discussion in Colombo Process and Abu Dhabi Dialogue.

After that participants shared their views on the overall discussion and Mr. Shabari Nair stated some concrete recommendations about reintegration should be included in the Colombo Process Thematic Area Working Groups on Remittances and Recruitment which are incidentally being chaired by Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively. CIOP platform of Abu Dhabi Dialogue has reintegration as its fourth pillar which can be used to effectively handle this crisis. Moreover, return/reintegration should also be the part of MOUs/Bilateral agreements. He further suggested that there should be the public private partnerships for better migration governance. Further, reintegration should also get due weightage in migration laws/policies for practical implementation.

Mr. Syeed Ahamed emphasized the importance of upskilling/reskilling and psycho social needs. He highlighted that partnerships should be developed at each stage of migration to resolve the issues faced by migrant workers.

At the end, it was agreed that there is a need of strong regional collaboration to tackle the issues faced by migrant workers and mutual collaboration of GFMD partners for institutional efforts is very much imperative to develop the durable way out.

Problems Identified during the Lamp Small Group Discussion **8 – Support for Returning Migrants During COVID**

Commitment to the international and regional processes	All the destination countries are signatories to migration-related commitments, for example- ILO convention, GCM, etc. Multilateral and bilateral approach is required to ensure protection of rights of workers.
Wage Protection	Migrant workers are coming back from the destination countries without receiving their due wages. Even those who are working abroad are not receiving their payment. During the lockdown, many migrants could not find their employers and recruiting agents to ask for their wages or documents they have confiscated. COO governments have instructed the missions to take action to retrieve due wages of workers if proofs or documents have been found on wage protection.
Health protection	Who will provide vaccination to the migrants living abroad, host countries or missions, and how they will get it have not been decided yet. Financing vaccination is also an important matter as migrants are usually low paid.
Returnee Migrants network	Facilitating a network system among the returnees can help them feel more comfortable to open up their challenges, add them to the profiling system. By adequately narrowing down their actual challenges, it becomes easier to know the areas where they need support.
Returnee migrant profile	Profiling of returnee migrant workers, recording their age, skillsets, gender, and where they would be living is important to ensure their proper reintegration. Different groups of people have different needs. We need a separate plan accordingly to their needs. For instance, female migrant domestic workers, after returning, do not want to work as a domestic help in the countries of origin as there is some social stigma attached to this job. At the same time, they do not have any other skills to become eligible for any other type of job. Thus these returnee domestic workers cannot be economically integrated if proper steps are not taken. Along with planning for reskilling according to their capability, this will enable the government to reach them in remote areas with government facilities and to be able to find them when job opportunities open up in the country.

Reintegration based on age	Workers who are less than 45 years old are able to adapt to reskilling than the older ones. It can be planned to provide training to returnees younger than 45 years and utilize the experience of those who are older
Services and support for the returnees	Governments need to provide returnee workers social protection programs, entrepreneurship training, incubation period, reskilling programs and to prepare them for future of work. The returnee and aspirant migrants need to be trained with other categories of employment which are more in demand now, for example, jobs in the medical and agricultural sectors.
Internal migration	Not only international migrants are returning, but internal migrants are also coming back from cities to rural areas. How to absorb this increased labour supply in rural areas need to be addressed.
Acquiring new skillsets	Because of the fourth industrial revolution, the skills workers now have will probably become obsolete in ten years. So returnee migrants and aspirant migrants must be prepared for the 'future of work' to avoid unemployment in the future.
Language gap	As migrants do not know the native language of the destination counties, they become more vulnerable. Language training before departure, translating government laws/rules in native languages and use of social media is needed to reduce the language and information gap.
Finding newer markets	Labour migration is heavily dependent on very few countries, newer markets need to be explored to reduce uncertainty. For instance, potential markets in Africa need to be explored but very few migrant workers go to 52 countries in Africa

Reintegration Strategy for Returned Migrant Workers

Social Protection	Skill Development	Entrepreneurship	Social Inclusion	Re-Employment Abroad
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory Insurance coverage • Health insurance • Social Security agreements with CODs. • Wage protection mechanism • Referral mechanism for wage protection • Psycho social counselling • Safe return of migrants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill Recognition • Skill upgradation • Re-skilling as per needs of future of work • Skill Certification • Placement in local job market • Language courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitation for establishing small business • Microfinance/small loans • Public Private Partnerships • Role of Small and Medium enterprises • Involvement of commercial banks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Returnee migrant profile • Age based reintegration • Financial Assistance • Establishment of special fund for returnees • Integration/connectivity with national economic support programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redefine the commitments through regional processes (CP, ADD) • Bilateral Agreements • Accreditation of institutes • Online linkages with CODs • Support for women emigration especially in domestic sector • Connectivity of returnees with potential jobs • Explore new job avenues/markets • Efforts to reduce migration cost

Way Forward:

- Government of COO to collect data of returnee workers with the help of COD and through partnerships with trade unions and CSOs both in COO and in COD.
- Protection of rights and wage protection of the migrants in COD through bilateral agreements. Involvement of multilateral forums like ADD and CP, CSOs and technology-based solutions would help in the same.
- Governments of COO with the help of private sector to upskill/reskill the returning migrants and ensure future employment in COO and COD to ensure social inclusion.
- An International understanding must be developed to create a special fund for migrant workers in such crisis.
- The partnership between telecommunications companies, remittances sending agencies can also facilitate the families of migrant workers.
- Women migrant workers need shelter support, counselling, psychosocial support and health support. The private sector and civil society organizations can come forward with these services through public private partnerships.
- Many developing and middle-income countries are managing the returnees with national efforts, however efforts from the UN and other international development partners and stakeholders are also needed for returnee migrants.
- Countries have existing policies and laws on employment and labour issues. Using the partnership model we can review these policies to identify how to integrate these according to our needs. CSOs, trade unions, UN organizations, NGOs, and others can collectively support for reviewing all the policies.
- A partnership mechanism for the implementation of global commitments and policies needs to be created by identifying the actors involved.
- Partnership for immediate support for the returnees involving government institutions, financial institutions, psychosocial & health organizations, NGOs, skills, and employment providing organizations.
- Partnership for cross border support between recruiting agencies, government, and CSOs in countries of origin and destination
- The group suggested that they should continue discussions in future.
