

## Impact of COVID-19 on Migration: Challenges and way forward.

**A BASUG Report:** COVID-19 has brought most of the world to a halt. It has already made huge impact on every aspects of our society, economy and our day-to-day lives across the globe. Although some people compare Covid-19 with the Spanish Flu of 1918 we should not forget that the form of migration during that period was different than what is today in 2020. It is needless to say that COVID-19 will have lasting Migration implications long after the situation improves and the people, economy and health systems become normal.

We have already started to seeing the implications of COVID-19, how it has seriously affected the whole cycle of migration. ILO has already predicted that nearly 25 million jobs could be lost worldwide, due to COVID-19. Due to lockdown in all the destination countries, it is the migrant workers who



are the most vulnerable group. Many of them have already lost their jobs and they have not received any financial compensation or support from their employers in the destination countries. This is about the regular migrant workers. The situation of the irregular workers is even worse. It is not only their financial situation, their health is in grave danger, as most migrant workers live in inhuman condition in many destination countries, especially in the Middle East, Malaysia, Italy, Spain in Europe.

**Returned to Bangladesh:** Quoting government source, a senior journalist from Bangladesh informed BASUG that between February and March of this year, before the lockdown started, 200.000 Bangladeshi migrants returned home. This is just in one month. Of them, 100.000 were jobless. During the lockdown, since mid-March, around 3000 were repatriated to Bangladesh, mostly from the Middle East. Most of them were detainees in jails in Bahrain, Saudi Arab, Kuwait and Oman. So, we can see how serious and alarming is the impact of COVID-19, in sending countries like Bangladesh.

**Remittance:** COVID-19 has seriously affected the family members of the migrants back home, as the migrants are not in a position to send remittances to their family members. The migrant families who depend on Remittance- inflows have been hit hard and are getting out of food security due to lack of their remittances. Considering, migrants' financial and health vulnerabilities as well as the forecast recession, a conservative estimate shows that Remittance will register a negative 7% decline in 2020, compared to 2019, from \$76 billion to \$70 billion US dollar. This decline in remittance growth, will have consequences, for the migrants' recipient families who rely on remittances and at the end it will affect country's GDP.

Another impact of COVID-19 is: Huge number of migrants who have already returned home being jobless are depressed, demoralized and in some cases traumatized. Not only that, in Bangladesh in some cases the returnee migrants were isolated by the society on the ground that they brought ‘corona virus’ to the country. In a number of cases they were physically assaulted, harassed and their houses were demolished. They were marked as ‘dangerously-infected people’ and were cornered in the society. In some areas red-flags were hoisted on their houses, so that the surrounding people know that here live returnee migrants, who are harmful. They were even not allowed to go out for shopping and other necessities. Government did little in the beginning to protect their lives and properties.

**Long-term Impact:** Covid-19 will also have long-term impacts on migration. We see that Covid19-related layoffs has targeted migrant workers, many of whom are on temporary visas. For example, New Zealand has around 190,000 people living on temporary visas. And when jobs do become available, the governments of New Zealand, the United States, and many other countries will undoubtedly, encourage businesses to hire citizens over migrants. Such decisions, will have lasting impacts on migrant workers, their families, and their communities. There will be fewer regular channels for migration in post-COVID-19 period. In that case, people will go for irregular migration putting their lives at risk and making managing migration difficult.

## **UN Secretary General urged to create Global Fund to rehabilitate returnee migrants in the face of COVID-19**

Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants (BCSM), a platform of 16 civil society organisations of Bangladesh in a joint statement has appealed to the UN Secretary General to call upon the international agencies such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and other development partners to create a Global fund under the auspices of the United Nations to support the countries of origin in the rehabilitation of the returnee migrants following the outbreak of the coronavirus.

In a joint statement issued in Dhaka BCSM requested the Secretary General to mobilise the Global Migration Group to champion the cause of vulnerable migrants affected by Covid 19. They said, ‘In this grim reality



**Bangladesh Civil Society  
for Migrants**

we consider you the only guardian of migrant workers to make a difference. We are convinced that your timely intervention to protect the vulnerable migrants will only reaffirm the spirit of the SDGs – ‘Leaving No One Behind’.

Commending the statements made by him since the outbreak of the crisis and measures that UN,

particularly the World Health Organization, have undertaken to face the pandemic the Bangladeshi civil society platform drew his attention to the plight of short term international migrant workers and members of Diaspora of Bangladesh in various destination countries. ‘We are doing so with the humble request to exercise your authority on some of the destination countries,’ the statement added.

BCSM expressed its deep concern saying, ‘some destination countries are exerting pressure on the origin countries to take back the latter’s nationals who have been deemed to be in irregular status and those in detention and/or prison. Under international law in any crisis situation it is incumbent upon the state concerned to take care of all people in its land including migrants, irrespective of their status. Moreover, bringing back migrants in the midst of a pandemic will heighten the risk of the spread of the virus that the concerned country can ill afford.’ They urged the Secretary General to call upon those destination countries to refrain from pursuing such policy at this critical juncture.

BCSM said, the destination countries need to ensure appropriate accommodation of migrant workers so that they can live safely in accordance with the WHO guidelines. It further said, global data show that the flow of remittance has substantially reduced since the onset of coronavirus pandemic.

A large number of migrant workers have lost their job. In addition, because of the closure of many remittance transfer outlets in some areas of destination countries migrants who are still earning or have savings are facing difficulty in remitting money. They requested the UN Secretary General to advise the governments of those countries to take appropriate measures so that migrants can transfer remittances to their families.

The BCSM statement further said, ‘a large section of Bangladeshi diaspora is also going through a difficult time due to prolonged lockdown. Many of them require emergency food assistance and access to medical support. We commend the steps of

Spain and Portugal for considering regularization workers for specific period who are in irregular status. We appeal to you to invite other countries to take similar measures; particularly to ensure the food security to those members of diaspora who are in distress’.



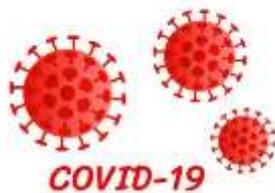
The 16 civil society organisations who signed the appeal to the UN Secretary General include RMMRU, BASUG, WARBE DF, BOMSA, IMA Research Foundation, MJF, ASK, INAFI, BCWWF, YPSA, BOAF, Bastob, Rights Jessore, Devcom, Film 4 Peace and Change Makers.

## **GLAC & GAMF web conference on ‘Impact of COVID-19 on Migration and Development’ held**

The Global Leadership Academy (GLAC) and the Global Academy on Migration and Development (GAMD) held their first joint web conference on the “Impact of COVID-19 on Migration and Development” on May 15, 2020.

The key speakers were: Mai Dizon-Anonuevo, Executive Director of GAMD, Bikash Chowdhury Barua, Director GAMD, Efrain Jimenez, Director GAMD and Paul Asquith of AFFORD, UK.

The web conference discussed in length among others the impact of COVID-19 on the situation of the migrants; challenges and assistance they are being provided; impact of the pandemic on migration and development initiatives and post-COVID 19 scenario. A total of 40 migration and development practitioners, journalists took part in the conference. Among them were: John Bingham, former Director of Policy, ICMC, Fresca Syafitri, Director GAMD, Maksim Roskin of GIZ, Anne-Christine Keienburg of GLAC/GIZ, Gaurav Sharma, Dr. Mojibur Doftori, BASUG Finland, Saiful Islam, Member, ISC GFMD, Saleem Samad and Md Owasimuddin Bhuiyan, both senior journalists from Bangladesh,



It may be mentioned that the Global Leadership Academy (GLAC) is a global program that offers spaces for change and decision makers around the world to enter into deep-dialogue and upon up for innovation. The Global Academy on Migration and Development (GAMD) responds to the gaps in implementing migration policies into concrete action through training conducted by migration and development expert practitioners. GAMD was one of the initiatives that developed from the Migration Laboratory, an initiative of GIZ and GLAC supported by BMZ.

# **BASUG workshop in Dhaka: Government urged to protect migrants, diaspora communities**

Leading migration experts called on the government to protect Bangladeshi migrant workers and diaspora communities from the troubles that they faced abroad. They also called for steps to link the diaspora communities with the development activities in the country to reap the benefits of migration. They described migrants and diaspora community as the great resources of remittances and skills that pushed ahead the country's economy.

The experts made their remarks at a workshop titled 'Advancing Development through Partnership and Collective Action: Enriching Migration Cycle' in the capital Dhaka on 24 February 2020.

The workshop was jointly organized by BASUG and the Bangladesh chapter of the International Network of Alternative Financial Institutions, known as INAFI in collaboration with BURO Bangladesh.



(Photo from right: Prof C R Abrar, Dr. Mojibur Doftori, Bikash Chowdhury Barua, Syed Saiful Haque, Shakirul Haque and Mahbuba Haque). In his welcome address, BASUG International Chairman Bikash Chowdhury Barua highlighted the objectives of the Global Compact on Migration to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration. This workshop, he added, is being organized at a time when migration across Europe and the developed countries, unfortunately and to our utter frustration, is being seen as a 'threat' and not as an 'opportunity'. We ought to change this notion and that has to be done through partnership and collective action. BASUG chair called for concerted efforts to make the migration useful for all.

Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit executive director Professor CR Abrar of Dhaka University highlighted the problems that Bangladeshi migrant workers and diaspora faced at home and abroad. He called for forging partnership and collective actions to protect them. He said that the skills that the migrants learned abroad and returned home with must be utilised properly.

WARBE Development Foundation chairman Syed Saiful Haque said that there was no visible initiative of the government to groom skilled workers for overseas jobs. Due to lack of skills, Bangladeshi workers earn low wages abroad, he said, and recruiting agencies are unduly interested in unskilled workers as they are easily exploitable.

Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program chairman Shakirul Islam said that the government programs for reintegration of the returnee migrants existed in papers only but not in reality. He called on the government to take immediate steps to bring the vulnerable migrants under the social safety-net programs.

BASUG country director in Finland Mojibur Doftori said that the Bangladeshi diaspora communities scattered across the world should also be involved with the country's development activities.

He said that Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Muhammad Yunus and Sir Fazle Hasan Abed were migrants once and they utilised their knowledge and skills earned abroad to change their societies.

INAFI Executive Director Mahbuba Haque thanked all for their support extended to INAFI after the sad and untimely demise of its founder Executive Director Atiqun Nabi. Migration expert Asif Munir moderated the workshop while it was addressed among others by Bangladeshi Ovhibashi Mohila Sramik Association director Farida Yeasmin, Film4Peace foundation executive director Pervez Siddiqui, Solidarity Center's program officer Aysha Akter, Helvetas Bangladesh' representative Farhadul Alam and Sarawat Binte Islam of Manusher Jonno Foundation. Returned migrant workers, their rights activists and representatives of various organisations were present at the workshop. Earlier, one-minute silence was observed in respect of Atiqun Nabi, Executive Director of INAFI who died last year in Saudi Arab while performing hajj. A documentary film on BASUG was also screened at the start of the program.

## **GFMD in Quito ends: Call for development through partnership & collective actions**

The 12th Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) with the theme, "Sustainable approaches to human mobility: Upholding rights, strengthening state agency, and advancing development through partnerships and collective action" was held on 20-24 January 2020 in Quito, the capital city Ecuador. Held at the Centro de Convenciones Metropolitano in Quito nearly 1000 delegates, including the government and



civil society delegates took part in this global summit on migration. It was the first GFMD Summit to host civil society, private sector, local authority, youth and academia representatives as integrated participants in the Summit. Vice President of Ecuador, Mr. Otto Sonnenholzner addressed the official opening ceremony on Tuesday, 21 January. The second day of the Summit witnessed a packed agenda, with four parallel programs of events: a) the GFMD Government Meetings, b) the GFMD Business Mechanism events, c) the GFMD Civil Society Day, and d) the 6th Mayoral Forum on Human Mobility, Migration and Development.

As a member of the civil society organization, BASUG took part in the 12th GFMD. BASUG which is also a member of the International Steering Committee (ISC) of GFMD Civil Society Days has been playing an active part in this summit since its inception in 2007 in Brussels. On the Civil Society Day, Civil Society Co-Chair Stella Opoku-Owusu said, "Many times, civil society is present at the table but not really a true participant. Today, we own the space and need to make the most out of it." She brought to the GFMD

Common Space plenary on 23 January the recommendations from the day of deliberations of the Civil Society leaders. The recommendations covered the five thematic focuses discussed the previous day.



(Photo: Stephan Jaquemet, Director Policy of ICMP speaking at the opening of the GFMD Civil Society Days in Quito) Partnership with different stakeholders, from national and local governments, to businesses, trade unions, international organizations, are key to putting these recommendations in place. Collective action is needed to tackle the effects of climate change; the upholding of shared human values is key to rethink negative narratives stereotyping and criminalizing migrants; mixed migrations movements need to be met with humanitarian action and principles.

### **World Café- a new method of engagement**

In the Common Space on 23 January participants from all stakeholder groups came together and shared perspectives and fostered partnerships. The participants were introduced with a new idea of engagement called, 'World



Cafe' where participants were asked to join in and discuss the featured themes with other participants sitting at their tables during this new and interactive format. The 13th GFMD is scheduled to take place in Dubai, UAE in January 2020. (Photo: In front of the GAMMD stall at GFMD in Quito. From right Mai Anonuevo, John Bingham, former Director of Policy, ICMC, Bikash Chowdhury, Efrain Jimenez and Jose Alonzo Arellano Cortes, Mayor of Florencia de Benito Juarez, Zacatecas México. Mai, Bikash and Efrain are the founder Directors of GAMMD).

## Global Academy welcomes Migration Practitioners

Dhaka: The Global Academy on Migration and Development (GAMD) welcomes anybody engaged in the field of Migration and Development to be in touch with the GAMD, according to one of its founders.

Bikash Chowdury Barua, who is Europe coordinator of the GAMD, made the welcome call while speaking at a workshop held in Dhaka, Bangladesh on February 24.



BASUG International in collaboration with INAFI Bangladesh and Bangladesh Civil Society Organization for Migration organized the workshop on “Advancing development through partnership and collective action: Enriching migration cycle.”

In his welcome address, Bikash Chowdhury said, “Today I am representing not only BASUG but also Global Academy on Migration and Development, an off-shoot of ‘Migration Laboratory’, which was set up in 2017 with 33 development actors both government and civil society, from 18 countries across the globe, in order to find out ways, on how ‘migration can benefit all’.

In this Academy he said that they were a pool of practitioners from CSOs, governments, academe and private sector with expertise in implementing and supporting migration and development initiatives (from policies to actions, from national to local levels) in destination and origin countries.

“The vision of the GAMD is to be the leading network of migration and development practitioners, engaged in capacity building, knowledge exchange, and action research that will contribute to the development of the migrants, their families and communities in origin and destination countries.;

He said that ‘migration across Europe and the developed countries, unfortunately and to our utter frustration, is being seen as a ‘threat’ and not as an ‘opportunity’. Bikash Chowdhury said that they ought to change this notion and stressed that has to be done through partnership and collective action. The key question in the field of migration today is: “What can be done to minimize the risk of irregular migration and how, to better harness the huge development potentials of the migrants”.

This is one of the key objectives of Global Compact on Migration (GCM). And there is no other solution than to forge an increased global cooperation among different stakeholders, including the states, civil society and the private sector, share lessons learned and best practices, in the context of migration governance, directly linked to migration-related SDGs and goals of the Global Compact on Migration (GCM). We hope at the end of the day it will come up with some concrete suggestions.

Academics, civil society leaders, migration rights activists and representatives from different organizations were present at the workshop. (By- Muhammad Owasim Uddin Bhuiyan)

## Project ‘Jute instead of Plastic’ ends with a to stop using plastic, and use jute materials for a better world

The one-year project titled ‘Jute instead of Plastic 2.0’ in Germany ended officially. The project was supported by Stiftung Umwelt und Entwicklung Nordrhein-Westfalen (SUE-NRW).



The overall objectives of the project were to develop and implement a vigorous campaign to raise awareness of the dangers of using plastic products and raise awareness among stakeholders in order to achieve more environment-friendly behavior such as using jute products instead of plastic products. (Photo: Participants at the workshop on ‘Jute instead of

Plastic’ held in the local City Council conference room in Dortmund). In particular, it aimed to make consumers aware of the dangers of their behavior in the area of public health and the environment. It also aimed at raising awareness among decision-makers in order to follow environment-friendly regulations and reduce plastic consumption. ‘We have only one world. Wherever in the world you use and throw plastic particles to the soil, water or air, it will equally harm the living beings across the world in the long run. So, let us join hands together and take integrated initiatives for the sake of our next generation for their better health, better environment and a green planet.’

In addition to these short-term goals, the project also had a long-term goal of poverty reduction among jute producers in Bangladesh. By increasing the demand for jute in Germany, especially in North Rhine-Westphalia, the jute producers can increase the production of the environment-friendly jute materials. A special day event, ‘Climate-friendly Bangladesh Day’ was organized in Bonn under the project. Two separate conferences were also organized under the project where migrant communities from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and African countries and also the Germans took active part.

## ‘Nishpap’- a unique centre for autistic children: BASUG assures support



BASUG officials visited early this year ‘Nishpap Autism Foundation’, a centre for the autistic children in Chittagong, Bangladesh. They held meeting with the officials of the centre and saw for the themselves the activities of the children with the support of their teachers. There are at present 85 autistic students in the centre who are guided by 25 teachers, mostly female. BASUG Germany President and adviser Dr Ahmed Ziauddin and Chairman Bikash Chowdhury discussed the issue of mutual collaboration and assured support to the centre. On behalf of the Nispap, President M. Nasirul Haque, Executive President Dr. Basana Muhuri and General Secretary Engineer Jhulan Kanti Das were present. Dr. Ahmed Ziauddin, who is also one of the founders of the Belgium-based organization, Manobota Collective, assured future collaboration and said, there are organisations in Belgium which are willing to support organisations like Nishpap. Nishpap was set up in 2010 by a group of enthusiastic and parents of individuals with autism with the aim to ensure positive attitude among society towards individuals with Autism spectrum & other Neurodevelopmental Disorders. Extend your support to these children who are born unlike other normal children. [www.nishpap.org](http://www.nishpap.org).

## INTERVIEW

# NEWAGE

## Women with poor skills exposed to abuse: Bikash Chowdhury Barua

(The interview taken by senior journalist Md Owasim Uddin Bhuyan was published in the prestigious newspaper of Bangladesh, New Age on 29 Nov 2019)

Global Academy on Migration and Development director Bikash Chowdhury Barua said that lack of skills and poor access to information had made women vulnerable to abuse in a country, where they had gone for jobs. The situation had changed for the worse thanks to a group of traffickers, middlemen or agents, who took the advantage of poor economic conditions of those women at home, enticed them to a dream of better future and sent them abroad without any proper training or skills, he said. No doubt, he said, migration contributed to women empowerment allowing them to access to employment. It had also contributed to improving gender equality and enabled women to make independent decisions at home, he added.



‘But it comes at a price. We often see inhuman stories of Bangladeshi female workers... they are often being abused, sometimes sexually, by their masters in the countries where they go for work... in recent times we’ve seen a series of such stories from Saudi Arabia,’ he said. In the recent past, the number of Bangladeshi women seeking jobs abroad had dramatically increased when the age limit was reduced from 35 years to 25 years in 2006, he noted. Until 2002 female migrants from Bangladesh was only 1 per cent, he said, adding that migration of female workers had substantially increased since 2010.

In an interview with New Age, he said that most female migrants were uneducated and unskilled, which was one of the key challenges. ‘With little or no education, professional experience and poor access to information, women, in their desperate bid to come out of poverty, fall victim to fraudulent middlemen and suffer,’ he said, adding that a safe and proper channel for migration should be ensured for women. It was the unskilled female workers, who went to the Middle East countries as a housemaid or with low-paid jobs, faced such abuses and at once stage, they were forced to return home empty-handed, said the expert. He insisted that if the government ensures a regular mechanism to monitor the migrant women it will reduce their vulnerabilities.

Bikash said that the female migrant workers should have access to the right information at every stage of migration. ‘Only then the vulnerability of female migrant workers, pre-mature return, physical and sexual abuse and risk of becoming undocumented will be reduced,’ he said. Bikash, the chairman of BASUG, a diaspora organisation based in Europe (registered in the Netherlands and Germany) said that of 235 million migrants globally today nearly 50 per cent are females. ‘In recent years we have witnessed a sort of ‘feminisation of migration’ as the rate of female migration is growing faster than the male migration and this is happening mainly in the developing countries, including Bangladesh. He said that women migration from Bangladesh started in the 1980s when only professionals such as doctors, nurses and teachers were allowed by the government to work abroad. ‘But the challenges could be turned into opportunities if the female migrants could be ensured proper jobs, proper treatment in the hands of their employers and wages,’ he said.

‘This could be ensured by introducing a monitoring mechanism to observe the employer-workers relationship, working condition, health issues, wages, safety and other benefits. And the governments at both the ends should be engaged to ensure this monitoring mechanism,’ he added. He said that there are always demands for other jobs for female workers such as au pair, sales girls and health assistant. ‘Unfortunately, our women are not educated enough to get jobs in these sectors. They need to be trained first and then go for finding out for jobs abroad.’ He said that measures are needed to be taken from the start of the migration process to the workplace abroad. ‘It should be the responsibility of the government to ensure the safety of its female workers, who in return will send the much-needed remittance for the economy of the country.’

(<http://www.newagebd.net/article/92089/women-with-poor-skills-exposed-to-abuse-bikash-chowdhury-barua>)



**(Photos, top left):** Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus (middle) with BASUG Chair Bikash Chowdhury & Board member Bulbul Zaman when they met the former in Amsterdam on 4 March 2020.

**Right:** Chittagong-based organisation, Ekusher Alo Foundation gave a reception to BASUG officials during their visit to Foundation office on 3 February 2020. Picture shows from left: Foundation Chairman Sasim Gouricharan, Bikash Chowdhury, Dr. Ahmed Ziauddin, M. Nasirul Haque and members of the foundation.

**Below:** Members of the development organisations met the founder Executive Director of BURO Bangladesh Zakir Hossain (right in photo) at his office in Dhaka after the conference on 24 February 2020. From left Dr. Mojibur Doftori, BASUG Finland, senior journalist Saleem Samad, BASUG Chairman Bikash Chowdhury, a participant and Executive Director of INAFI Mahbuba Haque.



*“Together we can make this world a better place to live”*

Editor: Riazul Islam. For more information write to: [info@basug.eu](mailto:info@basug.eu) Website: [www.basug.eu](http://www.basug.eu)