



Brief on Work in Freedom Programme in Bangladesh



Women and girls on the move in Bangladesh

For many in Bangladesh, migration is an important alternative to the realities of home. People move long distances in pursuit of jobs for varying reasons ranging from economic aspirations or loss of habitat resulting from processes of economic transformation, poverty, climate change or gender based violence. While some migrate internally, many also migrate abroad. For women and girls, especially of indigenous or low-income backgrounds, the experience of further impoverishment and discrimination makes migration a viable option. While many are able to improve their livelihoods in cities at home or abroad, many also face deception by unscrupulous labour recruiters or exploitation by employers – practices that amount to forced labour.

The Work in Freedom programme adopts an integrated and targeted approach to reduce vulnerability to trafficking of women and girls in South Asian countries of origin (Bangladesh, India and Nepal) and in selected destination countries (India, Jordan and Lebanon). It expects to reach at least 150,000 women and girls by 201



Mobility by choice

The programme consists of tailored interventions to support more informed and prepared migration both by directly targeting migrants and by working with groups and institutions that work with migrants.



On the one hand interventions strengthen both migrants and aspiring migrants' understanding of their own rights in the context of patriarchy, mobility and work. This includes building women's capacity to assert their rights in likely situations of potential disempowerment such as access to entitlements, relations with relatives, labour recruiters, agents of different types, border officials, employers and other stakeholders. From another angle the programme strengthens the capacity of local and regional groups and institutions to better guarantee labour mobility and livelihood options.

The Work in Freedom Programme works in close coordination with the Government of Bangladesh and partners with central trade unions, Global Alliance against Traffic in Women (GAATW), Migrant Forum Asia (MFA) and partner organisations such as OKUP, BRAC and ACD and has scaled up community work in Jessore, Manikjang and Narayanaganj.

More than 67,000 women in Bangladesh have already benefited from interventions such as door to door visits, orientation sessions, referral services, pre-decision counseling sessions, street drama, life skill training and other outreach initiatives to promote more informed migration and livelihood choices. The programme builds-on, rather than adds-on, community groups, structures and programmes that support women's empowerment, employment and social protection.



Fair recruitment to decent jobs

In Bangladesh, the pathways to jobs in domestic and garment work within the region or to the Middle East are intersected by various agents or contractors in an environment shaped by multiple rules and practices determining the mobility of aspiring workers. The fluidity and segmentation of labour supply chains are such that none of the key stakeholders such as labour recruiters, regulators and even employers can guarantee on their own, a fair migration outcome for any worker. In spite of strong public calls to protect migrating women from the pitfalls of trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery, in practice the presumed responsibility of ensuring fair migration outcomes is eroded among multiple formal and informal stakeholders. Migrants therefore face multiple risks and challenges in their efforts to find jobs such as paying exorbitant fees, taking out high-interest loans ahead of their departure that can lead them into debt bondage, deception about the nature and conditions of work, having contracts substituted by less favourable ones on arrival, having passports confiscated, being subject to illegal wage deductions, threats or physical violence.

Work in Freedom works with employers, with labour recruiters, workers and regulators both in the places of origin and destination of migrant workers, to support better regulation and practices of recruitment. It reviews laws and regulations on foreign employment and recruitment, and it also tests and assesses recruitment practices. It also works with migrant rights organizations and trade unions to increase accountability in the recruitment process.

The Work in Freedom programme has engaged the Government of Bangladesh, trade unions and the Bangladesh Association of International Recruitment Agencies (BAIRA) in improving regulations and practices of recruitment. It has developed a training manual in cooperation with INCIDIN and staff of recruitment agencies have received comprehensive training on legal issues related to migration and human trafficking, codes of conduct and ethical practices. Through MFA, the programme has organized a training workshop for migrant right organizations based in South Asia to enhance their capacity to understand recruitment processes and hold labour recruiters and regulators accountable.

Law and policies for dignity and decent work for migrant garment and domestic workers

While the programme provides technical inputs in destination countries to improve laws, policies and practices that affect the safety and dignity of migrant workers, the programme also provides technical guidance on laws, policies and administrative practices in Bangladesh. In response to a request from the government of Bangladesh, ILO developed a Government officer's handbook of laws and policies on 'Current Regulation on Safe Migration and Human Trafficking' in Bangla. The programme has also produced a study on the business of recruitment from Bangladesh to Jordan and Lebanon to inform policy formulation and has reviewed and made recommendations for the Training Manual on Human Trafficking focused on Forced Labour for Law Enforcing Officials and Immigration Officers produced by UNODC.



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