



Website:
www.ypsa.org



Address:
House # F10 (P), Road #13,
Block-B Chandgaon R/A,
Chattogram- 4212
Bangladesh
Cell: +01711025096



E-mail:
asabur.ypsa@gmail.com
info@ypsa.org

Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Returnee Migrants in Bangladesh

BACKGROUND

The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak is causing a global health emergency and economic slowdown. Trade, investment, growth, and employment are all being affected. Labour Market and Migrants is currently one of the most affected sectors due to outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. The International Labor Organization (ILO) predicts that Corona will lose about 190 million jobs worldwide. It is reported that more than 5 lakh migrants have returned to Bangladesh in the last couple of months (February-May 2020). Most migrants have returned from the Middle East and Europe. And about one thousand migrants have died of coronavirus at home and abroad. Research revealed that migrants who remain abroad are at risk of unemployment, hunger, housing crisis and infection as a result of lockdowns or blockades. As well as migrants who returned they faced social discrimination, isolation, economic crisis, extreme uncertainty and instability. Meanwhile, governments and developing partners have taken several steps and action which have created trust and comfort among the people. But many feel that these initiatives are not enough and should be worked out in more comprehensively.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative and quantitative approaches were adopted to conduct this research. For the secondary sources of information, the books and journals, daily news and online published articles were reviewed. A semi structured questionnaire was developed at Google forms. This questionnaire survey was conducted online. Only the returnee migrants and their family members participated in this survey. Total 55 returnees were participated in the survey. Another major tool of this research was qualitative survey which was comprised of Key Informant Interviews (KII). In that research, three KII's were conducted.

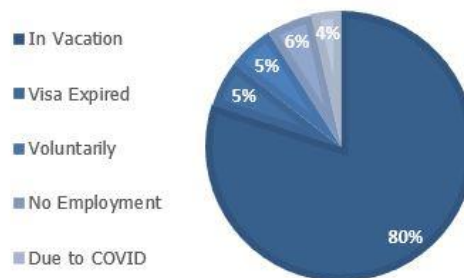
PERSONAL PROFILES OF THE RETURNEES

Average age of the respondents was in between 18 to 40 years corresponding to 87% of the total respondents. All of the respondents were male and hailed from Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Cumilla, and Rangamati districts. It is important to note that about 83% returnees' education level was up to Secondary School (S.S.C). These returnees were usually worked as salesmen, gardeners, driving, cook, construction workers, part-time labours or hotel/restaurant boys in the destination country. This research revealed that about 30% respondents were working informal sectors, and only 3% were doing business at destination country. About 95% of the respondents returned from Middle East. About 80% of the respondents expressed that their reasons behind returning home were vacation and short leave got from their respective employers. However, due to COVID-19 pandemic, they were not in the position to be able to back the destination countries again.

Returnee Country of Work



REASONS OF RETURN

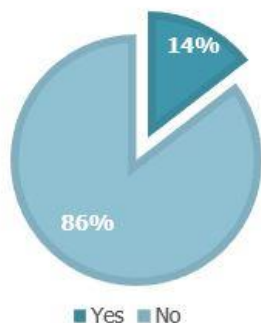


The respondents were working outside of Bangladesh for five years on average. The majority of the respondents returned from January to March 2020.

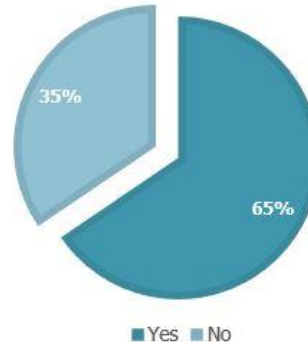
SOCIAL PROFILES OF THE RETURNEES

Generally, when the migrants return to the country, they get a lot of respect and affection from their families, relatives and neighbors. But this research findings show that, most of returnee migrants were stigmatized as they have been accused of spreading coronavirus. Red flags have been raised at their homes to socially isolate them. It is revealed that no migrant and their family members of this study were reported infected by the coronavirus. About 65% of the returnees maintained 14 days home quarantine. A major portion of the returnee migrants said that they did not receive any aid or support during COVID-19 outbreak.

FACED SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION



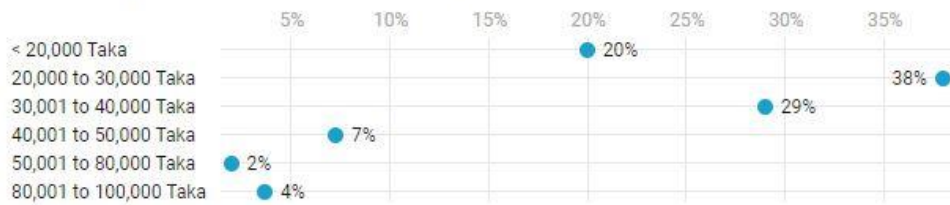
MAINTAIN HOME QUARANTINE



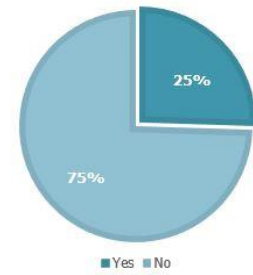
ECONOMICAL PROFILES OF THE RETURNEES

This research findings show that the average monthly income of returnees were about 30,000 BDT. The migrant workers remitted 30 - 40% of their income back home. Most of them got accommodation and transport facility from their employers. Most of these returning migrants were found sunk in high debt. About 40% of returnees took loan to go abroad. Till now about 49% of the returnees could not repay the loan amount. It is surprising that 75% of the respondents could not save any money or make assets from their income. About 75% of the respondents were found being the only earning members in their own families. Their savings and the liquidity were found running out. They were found not getting any work at the local level due to the blockade which made them fall in the dire financial straits.

Monthly Income of Returnee (while at abroad)



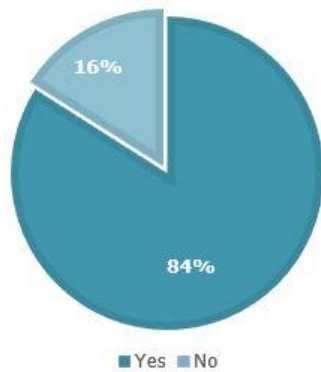
RETURNEE SAVE MONEY OF ASSESTS



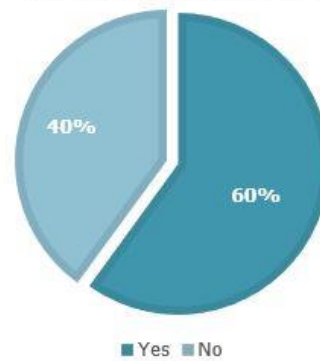
VULNERABILITY SITUATION ANALYSIS OF THE RETURNEES

This research indicate that about 80% of the respondents came home (Bangladesh) on vacation and short leave from their employers. However, due to COVID-19 and long lockdown they got trapped and no longer went back. About 90% of respondents wanted to go back to the countries again where they were working before COVID-19 outbreak. It was a hopeful finding that 84% of respondents reported to have work permits when this study was being conducted, but 40% of the respondents could not contact with the employers. It is important to reconnect them with their respective employers.

VALIDITY OF VISA/WORK AGREEMENT



CONTACT WITH EMPLOYER



Due to long government holidays, all government offices and recruiting agencies are shut except some emergency service providing departments/agencies. The returnees cannot contact with District Employment and Manpower office (DEMO) and Recruiting Agency. As a result, they have fallen into extreme uncertainty and instability.

Most of the returnees are only earning members of their families and they have minimal property such as only homestead or in some cases – small agricultural land. Many of them have mortgaged these assets for their migration processing. Till now they have not been able to pay their loan. So, they have again fallen in the vicious circle of poverty.

About 60% of the respondents said that they spent all their money which was brought from abroad. About 20% of the respondents think that they could support their families and bear household expenses for over a month. For that reason, the returnees are running out of money they brought from abroad. Many migrants have started borrowing again from their relatives, sold assets, and others are trying to cut down the expenses.

Socially many returnees are isolated, victimized and accused of spreading the disease.

PRIORITY ISSUES

Government has taken several steps and actions on prioritizing the wellbeing of the returnees and their family members. This research has identified some priority issues. These issues should be considered for the wellbeing of the returnees and executed as soon as possible.



Emergency food and cash support should be provided to vulnerable migrant workers who do not have savings, who are yet to pay back their loan used for migration and also who do not have food stock at home. The safety net program of the government should be brought for the vulnerable migrants and their family members. A reliable database of the returnee migrants should be developed.



Migrants who have visa or work agreement validity but unable to contact their employer, immediately they should be facilitated to connect with their employer and ensure necessary proceedings. Migrants whose visa have expired should be needed to work to renew their visa.



Returnees are running out of their money which may constrain their ability to migrate once the situation gets back to normal. They should provide financial support (flight cost, visa renew fee, two month livelihood cost) when they decided to go abroad again.



Many migrants' visas are expired, and they are planning to be rehabilitated locally. These returnees need economical and small business support. Many returnees demand job assurance on the basis of their expertise.



Rebuild the image of migrants and not blame the returnees for spreading Coronavirus. As well as it is necessary to ensure the 14 days quarantine of all returnee.



Bringing back all the migrants who want to come to the country. Protect all regular and irregular migrants in abroad in case of emergency or pandemic situation. More research is needed on this issue.



YPSA (Young Power in Social Action)

An Organization for Sustainable Development

House# F10 (P), Road # 13, Block-B, Chandgaon R/A, Chattogram

E-mail: info@ypsa.org **Tel:** +88-031-671690

Web: www.ypsa.org **Facebook:** @YPSAbd **Linkedin:** ypsa-bd