

Chapter-18

Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare & Overseas Employment

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment was established to improve the country's socio-economic condition by ensuring the overall welfare and equal opportunities for the expatriate Bangladeshis, exploring new labor market, creating skilled labour force by providing training according to the demand of the market, reducing unemployment through foreign employment and increasing remittance inflow. To that end, Ministry has been enacting various policies, laws and rules related to these issues. Besides, the Ministry has been taking and implementing various developmental activities to ensure overall welfare of the expatriates, including the creation of public awareness and protection of the rights and interests of migrant workers and safe immigration process, prevention of harassment, offering training to the active manpower, exploring new labor market, and development of overseas employment management. The Ministry has recently formulated 'Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy 2016' and 'Overseas Employment and Migrant Rules 2017' which will provide an overall framework for labor migration, whose main goal is to protect immigrant workers.
- 1.2 Since its inception, the ministry has been regularly monitoring the issue of overseas employment and continuing its efforts to create more decent employment and ensure overall welfare. Due to the various activities of the Ministry, there are now more than 11.5 million Bangladeshi workers employed in 165 countries around the world. As a significant portion of the workforce of the country is expatriate, it plays an important role in keeping the country's economy moving by enabling it to meet import expenditure, including an increase in foreign exchange reserves. Expatriate workers remitted 12.77 billion US dollar in FY 2016-17. With the expansion of labor market, on an average 5-6 lakh workers are going abroad for employment every year. A notable part of the overseas workers are women. In 2017, there were a record number of 10,08,525 workers employed overseas, of whom 1,21,925 were women. With the initiative of safe migration for women taken by the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, the frequency of overseas women workers has increased gradually to 17.8% in 2013-14, 21% in 2014-15 and 18.29% in 2015-16. Despite the number of overseas women workers increased in FY2016-2017, the percentage decreased to 12.43% due to less participation of women proportionately.

2.0 Major Functions of the Ministry

- ❖ To ensure the overall welfare of the expatriates and to protect their rights and contribute to the socio-economic development of the country through overseas employment;
- ❖ To consolidate the existing labour market, explore and expand new labour markets, and manage overseas employment;
- ❖ To provide comprehensive training and modernize the overall training system in order to create a skilled labour force as per the needs of the foreign labour markets;
- ❖ To take measures to bring back the dead bodies of the migrant workers and extend financial assistance to the families of the deceased workers, take care of afflicted migrant workers, provide scholarships to the children of migrant workers through Wage Earners' Welfare Fund and undertake other welfare activities for the migrant workers;
- ❖ To negotiate and sign agreements and MOUs with migration related International Organizations, foreign governments and other international organizations associated with manpower export and training;
- ❖ To provide special privileges to the expatriates and to select Commercially Important Persons (CIPs) among the non-resident Bangladeshis.

3.0 Strategic objectives of the Ministry and their Relevance with Women's Advancement and Rights

- 3.1 Creation of a skilled labour force with technical knowledge as per demand of foreign labour markets:** Women's overseas employment opportunities have been created in the context of the growing demand for female domestic workers in Hong Kong including the Middle East countries. Taking this opportunity, women workers are being trained in the formal sector including house-keeping, language learning, and language education, for the purpose of improving their socio-economic condition, instead of unpaid family work or labor in the informal sector. The training is being provided at Technical Training Centers by selection of women staff through the selection committee comprising the Technical Training Center (TTC) and District Employment and Manpower Office at the district level. It may be mentioned that 30 (thirty) days training for women workers intended for overseas employment has been made compulsory.

- 3.2 **Increase of overseas employment:** Increased opportunity of overseas employment can directly lead to poverty reduction. Through a foreign employment, a young woman herself and her family become financially solvent directly, this results in poverty reduction. Due to the increase in overseas employment, the opportunity of employment for women in various countries, including the Middle East, is also augmenting significantly. Consequently, they are becoming financially self-sufficient. This lead to their higher status by participating in the decision making process of the family, and their position in the society is getting stronger too.
- 3.3 **Ensuring welfare of the expatriates and potential workers:** The expatriates would be able to concentrate more on their jobs if their welfare is ensured. This increases their productivity which leads to higher income. Due to various steps taken by the government for the welfare of the women expatriates and their families, more female labour is being attracted to overseas employment. This plays a positive role for women's advancement.
- 3.4 **Increase in remittance flow:** As remittances sent by expatriates in legitimate ways are involved in the mainstream of the country's economy, it contributes to the rise of foreign currency reserve of the country one side; and a decrease on reliance of foreign aid on the other side. In the last 3 (three) years 3,26,578 (three lakh 26 thousand five hundred and seventy eight) women workers have been employed abroad. The technical, vocational and income generating training for the poor women makes them more productive and enables them for more earning. Expatriate welfare bank has been set up to ensure inflow of remittances by expatriates and effective use of remittances in income-generating and profitable investments. Through this bank, expatriate women workers are also being able to take advantage of improving their financial condition.

4.0 Roles and Responsibilities of the Ministry for Women's Advancement and Rights

- 4.1 To establish women's rights and create opportunities for more overseas employment for women, the "Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment" has taken a wide range of pragmatic steps. These are as follows:
- ❖ To train the labour force in accordance with the demand of the respective foreign country with a view to expanding international labour market and retaining the existing market;
 - ❖ To ensure regular short and long term migration opportunities with minimum cost irrespective of, both male and female from any region of Bangladesh who are willing to go abroad;

- ❖ To safeguard the rights and dignity of expatriates both at home and abroad and give proper attention on security issues of women workers during bilateral discussions regarding new and the existing labour markets;
- ❖ To generate employment for skilled and semi-skilled expatriate workers as well as increase opportunities for migration of other professionals such as house keepers, gardeners and nurses, and undertake various activities and implement projects through Wage Earners' Welfare Fund;
- ❖ To reward recruiting agencies, who succeed in exploring new labour markets, recruit more skilled workers, and are successful in exporting skilled female workers with a minimum cost and arrange high income jobs;
- ❖ To provide soft loan facilities from the newly established Expatriate Welfare Bank to the workers including women willing to go abroad;
- ❖ To encourage remitting through legal channels, assist expatriates and their families in investing remittance in viable projects or income-generating activities, and also assist expatriates in social and financial re-integration. This will result in women's employment, income generation and empowerment, strong presence in the family and the society and eventually, improvement in living standards.

4.2 Different activities related to women's advancement:

- ❖ The way of sending women workers safely to different countries including the Middle East has been facilitated. Training of minimum 30 (thirty) working days of training for women intending to be an overseas domestic worker have been made compulsory before departure. Apart from training on housekeeping, women are oriented with the primary ideas and relevant information about the country's language and social customs. By this, women workers are sensitized about their safety and can engage themselves in their work abroad with confidence;
- ❖ There is a plan to send 50 thousands women workers to Hong Kong within next five years as part of the international labour market expansion. To this and, an agreement has been signed with the government of Hong Kong. A similar agreement has also been signed with the government of Jordan in order to send women workers;
- ❖ In the quest for job creation, both at home and abroad, skill development is progressing through the training to women workers. 64 TTCs and 6 Institute of Marine Technology have been established under the Ministry of Expatriates'

Welfare and Overseas Employment. Besides, a project of establishing 40 TTC's in 40 upazilas in underway. Training to women, workers on various trades alongside male workers will be possible in such institutes that would create an positive impact on women development including opportunity for employment.

- ❖ In accordance with the huge demand for skilled women workers in House-keeping in the Middle East and other countries, training in being provided to women workers on the course curriculum designed with the assistance of the International Migration Organization with this, opportunity has been created in sending women workers to the Middle East and other countries;
- ❖ The Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) arranges pre-departure awareness briefing for women workers.

5.0 Priority Spending Areas and Benefits for Women's Advancement

Serial No.	Priority spending sector/programmes	Impact on women's development (Direct and Indirect)
1	2	3
1.	Overseas employment generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ With a view to promoting overseas employment, the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment licenses and regulates the recruiting agencies. Moreover, the ministry is also taking the necessary steps for the expansion of new labour markets and consolidation of the existing ones. ❖ Part of the increase in overseas employment is from women's employment in various countries including Hong Kong and the Middle East. This is enabling women to become economically solvent and will eventually raise their position in their family and in the society as well.
2.	Human resource development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ There are 64 TTC and 6 Institute of Marine Technology under the Operating budget under the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment. Training on different trades such as T.V. repair, automotive, electronics and information technology, welding, fridge repair, computer training, plumbing, pipe fitting, and garments are being conducted in these training centers. With such training, workers can build up their skills. ❖ Because of the increasing demand for house maids in the Middle East and Hong Kong, women workers, selected with the help of District Administration, are being trained on house-keeping, language learning and different trades in Technical Training Centers for women employment in abroad. By this training, they have the opportunity to become efficient and skilled, and acquire the capacity to look after themselves in the workplace. It also enhances their opportunities for overseas employment and plays a supporting role for the overall women's advancement.

Serial No.	Priority spending sector/programmes	Impact on women's development (Direct and Indirect)
1	2	3
3.	Welfare of Bangladeshi migrants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The provision of legal assistance, pursuit of compensation from foreign employers for deceased migrants, scholarships for children of migrants, assistance to afflicted migrant workers, health services, inspection of workplaces, return of dead bodies of the migrant workers, and financial assistance to the family of the deceased migrant workers are some of the important welfare activities performed by the ministry. ❖ Such welfare activities undertaken by the ministry also assist women workers. These welfare activities benefit the families of the migrants directly, and in addition, migrant women workers can work abroad with greater confidence and less strain. This encourages more women workers to seek overseas employment through this demonstration effect. As a result, there is a positive impact on women's advancement and the socio-economic development of the country.

6.0 Women's Share in Ministry's Total Expenditure

(Taka in Crore)

Description	Budget 2018-19			Revised 2017-18			Budget 2017-18		
	Budget	Women Share		Revised	Women Share		Budget	Women Share	
		Women	percent		Women	percent		Women	percent
Total Budget	464574	136938	29.48	371495	86169	23.2	400266	112019	27.99
Ministry Budget	595	271	45.53	528	182	34.4	688	282	40.99
Development	307	244	79.22	256	153	59.79	412	253	61.41
Non-Development	288	27	9.53	272	28	10.44	275	29	10.55

Source: RCGP database

7.0 Key Performance Indicators (KPI) of the Ministry in relation to Women's Advancement and Rights in the last three years

Performance Indicators	Unit of Measurement	Achievement		
		2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Women's participation in overseas employment	percent	21%	18.29%	

8.0 Success in Promoting Women's Advancement

- ❖ After the establishment of Expatriates' Welfare Bank, 1178 women workers have been provided an amount of 102million TK. as collateral free loans. Receiving these loans from Expatriates' Welfare Bank, women workers went to countries like Jordan, Hong Kong, Dubai, Oman, Bahrain and Lebanon for overseas employment;

- ❖ Recently, Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy, 2016 and Overseas Employment and Immigrant Rules 2017 have been formulated. The main objective of this policy is to enable Bangladeshi migrant workers to face the existing opportunities and challenges;
- ❖ The number of outgoing women workers from 2015 to 2017 was 3,43,731. Compulsory training of women workers and safe migration-friendly steps have resulted in an increase in the rate of outgoing women workers gradually. Remittance inflow recorded \$14.94 billion in 2014, \$15.32 billion in 2015, \$13.61 billion in 2016 and \$ 12.77 billion in 2017.
- ❖ Until March 2017-18, the number of female workers sent abroad was 86,000. Between 2010-11 and April 2018, 49,277 women workers have officially been sent by BOESL to Jordan, Bahrain, Oman and other countries. These workers are mainly engaged in the activities of garment industry operators, supervisors, quality checkers, personal officers, industrial nurses, domestic workers etc;
- ❖ Women workers in Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia are being sent free of cost.

9.0 Recommendations for Future Activities

- ❖ To take comprehensive initiative for the employment of both educated and illiterate women labor force;
- ❖ To provide technical training at upazila level for women's overseas employment;
- ❖ Make matters related to overseas employment easier for women, and arrange low cost migration facilities for women;
- ❖ Creating data bases for expatriate women and regular monitoring of the situation of expatriate women;
- ❖ Ensuring the payment of salary and other allowances of women workers working abroad according to the law of the employer country;
- ❖ To undertake social awareness program on sending women workers abroad;
- ❖ To reduce the oppression of middlemen, ensuring sending of female workers from the data bank.