



EXPLORING THE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN EAST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES FOR LESS-SKILLED, SEMI-SKILLED AND SKILLED MIGRANT WORKERS OF BANGLADESH: PROSPECTS, CHALLENGES & WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper intends to explore the employment opportunities in East European countries (EECs) for less-skilled, semi-skilled and skilled migrant workers of Bangladesh through prospects, challenges & way forward. This study, using qualitative approach, has utilized the purposive and snowball sampling technique for executing thirty in-depth interviews along with two FGDs. Data has been analyzed by content analysis and thematic analysis. The findings reveal some lucrative job sectors in the labor market of East European countries, along with a few financial and nonfinancial prospects for Bangladeshi migrants. Some of these prospects include attractive compensation packages, medical allowances, public health facilities, and prompt remittance-sending facilities. Nevertheless, some highly weighted challenges, such as high migration costs, limited knowledge about government services, lack of access to finance, language barriers, cultural differences, and legal support, pose hindrances also. To overcome these challenges, policies and actions such as increasing tax incentives, affordability, easy access to loans, ensuring financial transaction protection, education and awareness campaigns, economic incentives, community building initiatives, easy access to services, and anti-discrimination laws and policies can assist a lot. The government of Bangladesh is providing some support, but most current and prospective workers are not well aware of these services. However, the result of this paper has found EEC to be a prominent source of overseas employment for the less-skilled, semi-skilled, and skilled labor force of Bangladesh.

Keywords: Employment prospects, Migrant workers, East European countries, Less-skilled, Semi-skilled, Skilled workers

Introduction

The paradoxical issues between development and labor migration are a prominent concern among the researchers (Taylor, 2006). Nevertheless, a number of them corroborate that international labor migration ameliorates the economic development of the labor sending, underdeveloped, and developing countries through greater remittance flow (Brzozowski, 2012; Wise, 2009; De Hass, 2007; Rapoport & Docquier, 2006). These inflows of money reduce poverty, increase household consumption and standard of living, and make it easier to fund investments in healthcare and education, thus leading to economic development (Adams & Page, 2005).

Moreover, labor migration, especially in situations where there is an excess supply of skilled or unskilled labor, can help to create a more balanced labor market, which lowers unemployment rates and boosts the productivity of the home economy (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012; Walmsley et al., 2016). In the context of Bangladesh, labor migration became a key strategy to address poverty and unemployment issues in the 1970s (Siddiqui, 2003). As the demand for construction workers rose in Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Oman, they became the major destinations for migrant labor of Bangladesh during the 1970s and 1980s. During the 1990s, Bangladeshi migrant laborers started migrating to Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia, besides the Middle East, to work in the palm oil industry and the construction industry. (Oommen, 2016). “In the last decade,

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that in 2012, 35.45 percent of total overseas employment was in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) which decreased to 8.96 percent in 2022. On the other hand, manpower exports to Saudi Arabia in 2012 were only 3.49 percent of the total manpower export, but in 2022 it increased to 53.92 percent. Manpower exported in Oman was 28.02 percent of total manpower export in 2012 which is declined to 15.81 percent in 2022. Manpower exports to Qatar and Singapore declined in 2022 compared to 2012. Thus, the overseas labour market of Bangladesh is continuously changing” (Bangladesh Economic Review [BER], 2023, p.26). Furthermore, Bangladesh, with 6.35 crore workers, is experiencing a period of demographic dividend. Bangladesh came of age at this period in 2012. (Rahman & Hossen, 2019). The latest data from the national population and housing census (BBS, 2022) shows that 65.50 percent of the total population belongs to the age group of 15–64 years. However, ensuring employment opportunities for this potential large bulk of working people within the country is quite impossible. So overseas employment is a welcome door for us.

Due to the volatile nature of the overseas labor market (BER, 2023) it has been imperative to explore the diversified option for the sustained inflow of remittances into the economy of Bangladesh. In this regard, East European countries are one of the potential sources of employment for less skilled and semi-skilled workers, especially in Poland, Romania, Croatia, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and other East European countries (Atoyán et al., 2016). Because the aging population is increasing and the negative growth rate is creating a labor shortage for manual jobs (Petrakis, 2020). After the COVID-19 pandemic, a few East European countries are trying to manufacture their own apparel and garment products (Saylon, 2022). So, they are trying to manage employees from different countries at low labor costs (Dorn & Josef, 2021), further creating ample opportunities for our men and women garment workers. Although there are ample employment opportunities in East European countries (Poor et al., 2021), a few research has been conducted yet to assure whether those East European job markets are suitable for the less-skilled, semi-skilled, and skilled employees of Bangladesh. Keeping this context in consideration, this study has been organized to answer the following three questions, which have been explained using several tools throughout the study. These questions are depicted below:

1. What types of prospects are available for less-skilled, semi-skilled, and skilled employees of Bangladesh in East European countries?
2. What kinds of challenges are they being confronted for exploiting the existing employment opportunities in East European countries?
3. What types of possible measures are crucial to overcome those challenges in case of grabbing existing employment opportunities in EECs?

It is highly demanding to provide adequate evidence-based policy guidelines for making Bangladesh capable of understanding the suitable labor market of East European countries and creating a sustainable competitive advantage in the labor market of those countries. To do so, the researchers have tried to achieve the following three specific research objectives, including:

1. To investigate the prospects for less skilled, semi-skilled, and skilled employees in the labor markets of East European countries.
2. To explore the challenges faced by Bangladeshi migrant workers in exploiting the prevailing employment opportunities in East European countries.
3. To figure out recommendations in order to address the challenges faced in utilizing existing job opportunities in EECs.

Through achieving these objectives, it can contribute to bringing more remittances to boost our economy in the near future, so the country will go one step ahead to achieve Vision 2041 and the SDGs (especially Goals 1 and 8) by creating employment opportunities and removing poverty.

Literature Review

Bangladesh has abundant manpower resources, but the country struggles to effectively utilize its skilled, semi-skilled, and less-skilled employees, leading to a need for exploring overseas employment opportunities, as highlighted by Hossain et al. (2006). However, the future job prospects for Bangladeshi migrant workers in abroad have been perceived to be quite promising and Bangladesh may get benefit by sending its workers in abroad and earning foreign remittance. (PIC-CASSED CONSORTIUM, 2022). Generally, those who move to another country or region in order to find employment, particularly seasonal or temporary work, are referred to as migrant workers (Chattoraj, 2022). Bangladesh is ranked sixth among the top 20 nations for international migration, according to the

World Migration Report 2022, while it is ranked eighth among the countries that receive remittances. Our less-skilled personnel are the cause of this.

Less Skilled, Semi-Skilled, and Skilled Workers

The NSDA Act 2018 defines skill as follows: “Skill includes the knowledge and technique acquired for doing any specific work, or the capability and ability to produce goods and services as per the required standard of industrial and professional demand in national and international market.” The OECD (2020) report highlights that less skilled workers often perform manual tasks with limited training and experience, potentially at risk of displacement due to automation and technological advancements, but may benefit from lifelong learning initiatives. (Strayer et al., 2018). But semi-skilled workers are those with basic training and education but no advanced or specialized skills, having completed vocational training or certification in a specific area but lacking the expertise or experience required for highly skilled positions. They may have acquired some basic knowledge and skills through formal education or on-the-job training, but they are not considered specialists in their field (Gielen et al., 2016). On the other hand, skilled workers are individuals who have acquired a certain level of education and training that enables them to perform complex tasks that require analytical and critical thinking skills. They have a high level of expertise and are capable of adapting to new technologies and changing work environments (OECD, 2019; ILO, 2018). Furthermore, the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2021) explains skilled workers as individuals who possess a broad range of technical, cognitive, and interpersonal skills that enable them to perform complex tasks effectively. These skills include problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration.

Current Status and Employment Prospects of Bangladeshi Migrants’ Workers in East European Countries

Bangladeshi employees are employed abroad, often in East European countries, and this trend is anticipated to continue for the foreseeable future (Sirkeci et al., 2017). A report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2021) showed that Bangladeshi migrant workers are still working in seven Eastern European countries, including Poland, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Russia, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. Most of them (718) are working in the Czech Republic, while the least (21) are working in Slovakia. The report also reveals that 81% of Bangladeshi migrants in Eastern Europe are male, with 19% being female.

MENA1 (Middle East and North African) countries and Southeast Asian countries mainly employ Bangladeshi migrant workers. As the labor market changes rapidly, the country is searching for a new market, and East Europe is being considered a potential source of employment because of its negative growth rate and internal migration to West Europe (Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, 2022). Eastern European labor markets have evolved dramatically in recent years. The lack of managerial, legal, economic, and administrative posts has significantly lessened. However, there is still a serious scarcity of technicians, information technology engineers, medical professionals, and trained laborers (Poór et al., 2021). According to the most recent survey, labor shortages have had the greatest impact on the high-tech industry, construction, hotel enterprises, services, the shipping industry, and the IT sector (Darvas & Raposo, 2018). Besides, PwC’s survey (2019) reveals 25% of 600 businesses in Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, and Lithuanian countries experienced a 5% or higher income loss due to labor shortages. Most Eastern European countries, such as Croatia, are suffering from a lack of skilled employees to perform the necessary jobs (Nielsen et al., 2019). The Croatian government has shown its eagerness to hire Bangladeshi medical professionals, nurses, IT specialists, and workers in the tourist and construction industries (“Croatia Keen to Recruit,” 2019). At present, most European countries are facing similar types of problems, like Croatia and Germany, and they need skilled employees so that they can continue their necessary jobs. In this regard, a quote from Gerhard Huemer, economic policy director at SME United, is prominent: “A skilled workforce is missing across Europe.” In Poland, for example, the unemployment rate is at its lowest in 32 years, and more than half of the companies are concerned about the labor shortage (Ammann, 2022). Polish companies are experiencing a severe shortage of labor in the construction industry due to a significant exodus of Ukrainian workers who left Poland to defend their country against Russian invasions and for more promising jobs abroad (Amman, 2022). Thus, Eastern European countries might be a great source of employment for the migrant workers in Bangladesh. Bangladesh may have a great opportunity to protect its labor market by forging cordial bilateral or multilateral partnerships with those nations through our foreign ministry.

Current Employment Challenges for Bangladeshi Migrant Workers

Siddiqui (2005) argues that most labor-receiving nations have not ratified international agreements on migrant worker rights, and there are insufficient institutional mechanisms to guarantee rights for Bangladeshi migrant workers, despite numerous national rules enacted since 1976. The International Labor Organization (ILO, 2010) observed that migration is fraught with mistreatment and exploitation, including exorbitant charges, loyalty to a predetermined employer, and discrepancies between contractual duties and actual working circumstances. Employees with little education or experience, as well as women employed in domestic assistance, are especially vulnerable. According to recent research by the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2018), Bangladesh has the highest migration cost among a few nations in the world. It brought attention to the fact that prospective immigrants rely more on middlemen than they do on contacting recruiting firms directly. The high expense of moving merely increases a migrant's vulnerability. The inability to seek skilled occupations in their destination nations, combined with a lack of adequate knowledge and the influence of mediators, frequently forces migrants to accept low earnings and unfavorable working conditions (Al Masud, 2019).

The ILO (2017) identified 13 obstacles to migrant workers' access to justice, which are commonly faced by many Bangladeshi expatriate employees. These are language barriers, a lack of written evidence, a high cost of legal assistance, an irregular legal status, a lengthy legal process, employer-sponsored visas and work permits, fear of retaliation, movement restrictions, discriminatory attitudes, a lack of coverage by labor law, unclear statutory obligations, ineffective complaint mechanisms, and a lack of knowledge about the rights of foreign employees. Wickramasekara (2014) found that the absence of a formal contract, an inferior contract promising lower pay, and a significant discrepancy between promised and actual working conditions before and after the departure are causing lots of suffering for the migrants.

Existing Government Support for the Employment of Bangladeshi Migrant Workers in East European Countries

The government of Bangladesh is trying to support and enhance the migration of qualified, youthful, and basic-skilled Bangladeshi migrant workers by providing them with excellent support for visa-making (Siddiquee, 2016), relevant training facilities through MoEWOE (Sikder, 2008), reliable data, registration assistance both online and offline, and other support from the District Employment and Manpower Office (DEMO) (Ahmed, 2021).

Besides, the government has established numerous technical institutes, vocational education centers, and facilities for hand-to-hand training so that the migrants can prepare themselves to use their full potential (Siddiqui 2010). It also ensures wage security, death compensation for the migrants, emancipation of imprisoned overseas workers, taking care of the migrants' families after the death of the migrant, and so on by establishing the Wage Earners Welfare Board (WEWB) (Rashid et al., 2022). Moreover, the government is providing support for transiting the earnings of the migrants along with 2% incentives (Chowdhury & Chakraborty, 2021), and they also get loan facilities such as migration loans and rehabilitation loans from Probashi Kallyan Bank (Dilruba, 2021). According to Christ and Helliard (2021), the government of Bangladesh introduced a smart card to aid migrant workers, facilitating immigration and assisting them after migration. The card, issued by BMET, contains passport data, job seekers' fingerprints, images, and other important information and helps Bangladeshi migrant workers abroad legalize their existence, secure better employment opportunities, and recognize migrant workers' dead bodies in a few uncertain accidents. All the above-mentioned support opens a large window for all migrant workers who would like to pursue their employment opportunities in East European countries.

Methodology

This study has been executed utilizing the qualitative method to meet the aforementioned three objectives mentioning prospects, challenges, and ways to combat those challenges regarding the employment opportunities of less-skilled, semi-skilled, and skilled workers of Bangladesh to the East European countries. It is comprised of in-depth interview with a semi structured questionnaire and two consecutive focus group discussions for collecting primary data.

Sampling and Sample Distribution

The target population of this study was the Bangladeshi labor force that has migrated to European countries, primarily Poland, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Russia both those who are currently residing and those who have returned. In this single study, the researcher has utilized the nonprobability purposive

and snowball sampling techniques. For instance, Goulropolis et al. (2019) used both purposive and snowball sampling in their qualitative study to explore ‘Attitudes and beliefs of Australian emergency department clinicians on antimicrobial stewardship in the emergency department’.

However, due to the lack of an adequate, reliable, and comprehensive list of study populations, the nonprobability purposive and snowball techniques have been used in our research, which is also evident in the studies of Hatley (2009) and Mokoena (2022), respectively. Besides, generating a representative sample in destination countries is challenging due to the geographical distance, rarity, and undocumented nature of the population, so to mitigate this challenge, the snowball is the best technique (Beauchemin et al., 2011), wherein the name of at least one more possible interviewee is provided to the researcher by one interviewee. The name of at least one further possible interviewee is then provided by that interviewee, and so on (Bhattacharjee, 2012). And in order to find out the participant initially, the researchers have utilized the purposive sampling technique.

In the aforementioned sampling technique, the researchers reached 30 labor migrants as respondents, constituting 40%, 36.67%, 23.33% of them are less skilled, semi-skilled and skilled consecutively, who are either residing in EEC countries or recently returned to Bangladesh. Moreover, for conducting FGD-1, this study has approached eight government officials belonging to the Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and the Ministry of Labor and Employment who are qualified, accessible, and willing to provide data. Besides, the researcher has arranged another FGD-2 composed of nine academicians and experts who are engaged in migration-related research and training activities.

Justification of sample size

This study has used a non-probabilistic sampling technique for collecting data. But there are no evident guidelines for determining non-probabilistic sample sizes. So, the size of the sample typically relies on the concept of “saturation” (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson 2006), which helps to ensure the validity of the findings. It indicates no additional information or themes are observed in the data from the completion of additional interviews or cases. That’s why saturation has become the globally accepted standard by which purposive sample sizes can be determined (Clive Roland Boddy, 2016). A number of authors have proposed rules of thumb for sample size in qualitative research, based on methodological considerations and past experience with similar studies. As mentioned by the minimum for saturation in qualitative research, these are: 20 to 30 (Creswell, 2019), 25 to 30 (Charmaz, 2006, 2003), 30 to 50 (Bernard, 2000), at least 6 (Morse, 2000), 15 to 20 (Morse, 1994) and 12 to 20 (Kuzel, 1992). In this study, the researcher could determine the level of saturation after conducting 30 interviews and two focus group discussions. So, from the aforementioned witness, it can be inferred that the sample size for this study is appropriate to justify the findings’ validity.

Data Collection

To reach the respondent, the researcher at first tried to get information from a database of different ministries, but because of the lack of an organized, published database, the researcher has taken the help of social media. In this case, snowball sampling is becoming more common when it comes to enlisting sample members using social media (Whitehead et al., 2020). However, at the initial level, they have managed to access different WhatsApp groups of migrants’ workers in East European countries. Then, after sending a formal request, the respondent’s consent was obtained. The research team scheduled a convenient time and day for the respondent’s interview after getting in touch with possible respondents. After that, interviews were held at the prearranged time and location. Thus, one respondent has helped the researcher find others. The focus group discussion method supported by the FGD checklist, as well as the in-depth interview and telephone interview methods backed by a semi-structured questionnaire, have been applied to get primary data from the sample and the FGD participants. This semi-structured questionnaire has been prepared based on the findings from the focus group discussion and literature review.

In-Depth Interview

As the questionnaire was semi-structured, the respondents have been given ample time to share their views. Thus, this study has found better insights from every respondent. The respondents to this study reside in East Europe. In-depth interviews have been conducted by telephone (video calling method) and face-to-face conversation in the month of March 2023. Each interview took more than 40 minutes. The respondents were asked the questions following the order of the questions in the questionnaire. Each question has been organized with some

predetermined options along with an open-ended option. So that detailed information can be gathered from them. The entire conversation has been recorded with the consent of the respondent so that no information is lost. Initially, in times of conversation, the views of the respondents have been denoted by the interviewer using the paper-pencil method.

Data Analysis

Along with the field notes and interview summaries, the interview transcripts were first carefully reviewed. A thematic coding technique has been used that involves identifying and coding key themes or patterns in the interview data. Here, the researchers have read through the interview transcripts and identified recurring topics, concepts, or ideas that are relevant to the research objectives and assigned descriptive codes to them accordingly. The coding process involves categorizing the content into predetermined categories or developing new categories based on emerging themes. Thus, the codes have been organized into a coding framework or a codebook that guides the analysis. After that, to create an overview of the interviews gathered, thematically coded data was recorded on a spreadsheet. The researcher also recorded direct quotations from original interviews in the spreadsheet to preserve the actual terminology, expression, and connotation used by the respondents to describe and define their experiences without any deviation. At last, the filtering tool in MS Excel has been used to determine the value of the responses for understanding the ranking of the theme along with its importance. Besides the researcher has used participants' names without disclosing their names.

To execute the research in a meaningful way, qualitative tools have been used. Besides, this study has used descriptive statistics, content analysis, and tabular tool for representing the analyzed data. In a few cases, narrative and counter-narrative have also been used as qualitative research tools. The following table depicts how the data have been analyzed on the basis of objectives and data types.

Table 1. Research tools on the basis of objectives

Objectives	Qualitative and quantitative research tools
Current status and prospects	Descriptive statistics through SPSS, content analysis of secondary sources, tabular tool
Challenges for Bangladeshi migrant workers in Eastern Europe	Thematic analysis of data collected through FGD, in-depth interviews over telephone, Excel, and descriptive statistics through SPSS
Suggesting prerequisite measures to combat these challenges.	Thematic analysis of data collected through FGD, in-depth interviews over phone

Source: Prepared for the current study

Results and Discussion

Socio-Demographic Information of the Respondents

Under the socio-demographic information, this study has collected some information about the participants regarding their age, education, length of service in the present job, destination country of the respondents, existing job sector and current income level also.

Job Sector and Income Level

The respondents of the current study are occupying various job sectors like construction (13.33%), hotel and restaurant (26.67%), shop and commercial (6.67%), tourism (16.67%), driving (16.67%), garments (3.33%), public health sector (6.67%), and airlines (3.33%). This may indicate that Bangladeshi migrant workers are working in diversified sectors, but the hotel and restaurant sector, construction sector, driving job, and tourism sector constitute a significant portion of the current jobs of the migrants. So, these sectors are showing luminous opportunities for our migrant workers to get jobs easily. That is why policymakers may focus on this sector-based skill development for our remittance fighters. For better understanding, a pie chart is depicted in figure 1.

Age, Education Level, Length of Service, and Destination Country of the Respondents

Table 2. Socio-Demographic Information (*Age, Education Level, Length of Service, and Destination Country*)

	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Age (N=30)	18 - 30 Years	7	23.33
	31- 40 Years	18	60.00
	41 – 50 Years	4	13.33
	51 Years and Above	1	3.33
Education Level (N=30)	Below SSC	1	3.33
	SSC and Equivalent	8	26.67
	HSC and Equivalent	9	30.00
	Undergraduate and Equivalent	5	16.67
	Graduate and Equivalent	3	10.00
	Vocational Education	4	13.33
	Romania	9	30.00
Destination Country of the Respondents (N=30)	Poland	8	26.67
	Russia	2	6.67
	Hungary	3	13.33
	Ukraine	3	10.00
	Bulgaria	2	6.67
	Czech Republic	3	13.33
	Less than 6 months	8	26.67
Length of Present Job	Between six months and a year 2	4	13.33
	Between 1-5 years 3	8	26.67
	Between 5-10 years 4	5	16.67
	More than 10 years 5	5	16.67

Source: Field Study 2023

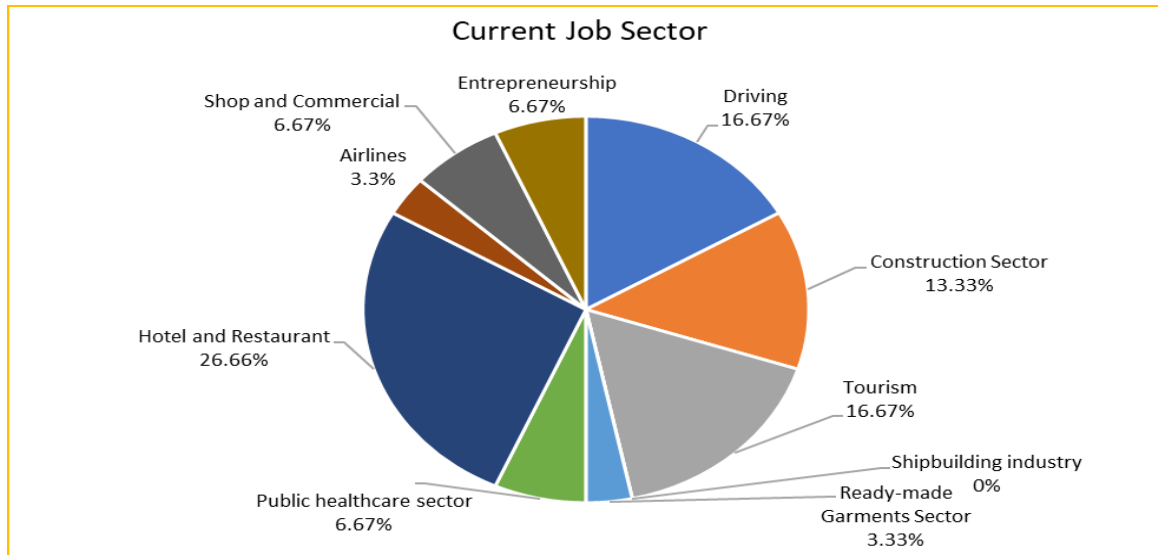


Figure 1. Present Job of Our Migrant Workers in East European countries

Source: Field Study 2023

However, the income level-related data gives a push factor for choosing East Europe as an enticing overseas employment sector at present and in the future. The income level data of the Bangladeshi migrants shows more than 60% of the respondents earn between 1001-3000 Euros per month which is 150000-350000 BDT equivalent. This

clarifies that the government can focus on this area as a potential region for sending migrants to cope with the changing trends of our labor migration.

Prospects of Bangladeshi Migrants in East European Countries

This part of the study discusses the prospects for Bangladeshi migrant labor in East European countries. This section will help to understand the available job opportunities, financial prospects, non-financial prospects, and other dimensions of the labor market of East European countries. Bangladesh will be able to understand the existing opportunities in order to make an evidence-based decision about expanding the overseas labor market by ensuring competitive advantages.

Perception of the Respondents Regarding Existing Jobs in EEC

The discussion of FGD and the findings of qualitative data reveal that there are huge job opportunities in EEC. Experts and government officials shared that skilled employees have high potential to be settled for a long time in overseas countries, but semi-skilled and less-skilled employees can do better if they have at least language training. The respondents think so. The majority of the respondents (87.00%) perceive that the EEC is a new door for Bangladeshi migrants seeking overseas employment. So, the policymaker may focus on a specific country for identifying potential challenges and making policies to meet those challenges.

Employment Prospects (Available Job Opportunities)

This study tries to cover all the countries in East Europe for searching for available job opportunities that are suitable for Bangladeshi migrants. The researcher has investigated several employment sectors that are shown below under the three categories of less-skilled, semi-skilled, and skilled employees based on information from the members of the two FGD groups and interviews with migrant workers. There are some sectors where job opportunities are available for both semi-skilled and skilled workers. So therefore, the authority may view this area positively and may arrange prerequisite measures to grasp those sectors for Bangladeshi Migrants.

Table 3. Job Opportunities in East European Countries

Types of Workers	Job opportunities Available		
Less-skilled Worker	Washing and cleaning garbage and dishes in different factories, offices and restaurant		Construction Labour
	Restaurant staff		Construction Labour
	Food Packaging		Agriculture Warehouse
Semi-Skilled	Packaging job (Shrimp, Agro-food, Fruits)	Factory Worker (Manufacturing)	Agricultural sector (farming)
	Lather factory	Metal Worker, Welder	Health-Care Sector
	Garments Sector	Restaurants	Mechanical
	Construction Sector	Driving	Green-house labour
	Motor Repair	Day Care centre	
Skilled	(Specific task), Driving, Crane Operator, Sanitation		Restaurant manager
	All industry (Farming, IT, Industrial Production)		Hotel management
	Construction Sector		Lather factory
	Business		Green-house labour
	Garments job		Chef

Source: Field Study 2023

Country-Wise Job Opportunities for Different Types of Workers

The researcher has tried to identify a few demanding job sectors, depending on the country in the EEC. Based on the in-depth interview of the respondents from the particular country, these available countrywide job opportunities have been identified for a better understanding of the stakeholders in the report.

Table 4. Country-Segmented Job Opportunities

Country	Available Job	The nature of the skill shortage
Poland	Construction Sector, Tourism, Gastronomy (the practice or art of choosing cooking and eating good food), Greenhouse labour, welder, and driver.	Skilled
	Green-house labor, agricultural sector, food packaging, driving	Semi-Skilled
	Cleaning, restaurant, and agricultural warehouse	Less-skilled
Romania	Driving, Crane Operator, Sanitation, Business, Hotel Management, Lather Factory, Garments Sector, Tourism Industry (Specially Tourist Guide)	Skilled Worker
	Garments, Mechanical Jobs, Driving, Firming, Shrimp and Agro-Food Packaging, Welding	Semi-skilled
	Construction, in-factories manual labor jobs, cleaning garbage and washing dishes, helping hand of the prime chef, day-care center. The government provides training for less-skilled people according to their choice.	Less-skilled
Russia	Driver, Construction Labor	Skilled
	Agricultural	Semi-Skilled
	Cleaner, food packaging	Less-skilled
Hungary	There is very little opportunity, but they can get the job in the following sector: Work as a bartender, waiter, or car cleaner.	Less-skilled
	Factory Worker	Semi-Skilled
	High opportunity to get any job	Skilled

Source: Field Study 2023

Though the findings from the discussion of the FGD group comply with the finding of in-depth interview in terms of available job opportunities, there have some differences also regarding the nature of employment opportunities. All this have been presented in the following table:

Table 5. Country-Segmented Job Opportunities (Results of FGD discussion)

Country	Available Job	The nature of the skill shortage
Poland	Tourism, Construction Sector, driver and welder.	Skilled
	Green-house labor, food packaging.	Semi-Skilled
	Cleaning, restaurant, and agricultural warehouse	Less-skilled
Romania	Garments Sector, Crane Operator, Sanitation, Business, Hotel Management, Lather Factory.	Skilled Worker
	Welding, Garments, Mechanical Jobs, Shrimp and Agro-Food Packaging.	Semi-skilled
	Construction, in-factories manual labor jobs, cleaning garbage and washing dishes, helping hand of the prime chef, day-care center.	Less-skilled
Russia	Driver, Construction Labor	Skilled
	Agriculture , Cleaner, Food packaging,	Less-skilled
Hungary	Factory Worker	Semi-Skilled
	High opportunity to get any job	Skilled

Source: Field Survey

Financial Prospects

There are some financial prospects that are working as motivating factors for the Bangladeshi migrants in EEC. The ranking of the financial prospects as per the corroboration of the respondents assists in understanding the most important to least important one in the following consecutive order: high and attractive compensation package (76.67%), medical allowance and public health facilities (66.67%), prompt remittance sending facilities (63.33%), insurance and other financial protection facilities (46.67%), high job security (46.67%), taxation, and financial planning policy (43.36%). However, the respondent's assessment of the financial prospects was shared by almost all of the participants. A highly relevant statement from FGD participant 7 has been quoted here:

"Even our women garment workers have the chance to earn 5 to 6 times more in Bulgaria than in their native home country."

Non-Financial Prospects

The study tried to go through the respondent's perceptions of some statements regarding non-financial prospects. All of them share their points that lead to finding out the most promising to least promising nonfinancial prospect in the following consecutive order, mentioning internal migration from East to West European countries, shortage of skilled labor, shortage of less-skilled labor, shortage of semi-skilled labor, easy to switch jobs, and high standard of living. The FGD participant has shown their consent to the denoted points through narrative and counter-narrative discussion. So, the authority may focus on developing skilled manpower to secure this prospect of a shortage of skilled labor and less-skilled labor through arranging specific initiatives as suggested in the further part of the study.

Challenges

To materialize the above-mentioned prospects, the policymaker may face a few challenges, which have been classified into three major parts: lack of awareness about government institutions' support for migrant workers, financial challenges, and nonfinancial challenges.

Challenges Regarding the Awareness of Government Institutions' Support for Migrant Workers

The Government of Bangladesh has established several organizations, institutions, and boards (some of which are imparting training; some of them are rendering welfare fund facilities, consular purports, real-time information facilities, and pre-departure training) to capitalize on the demographic dividend by sending them abroad through formal job contracts. Besides aligning with digitalization, the government is offering smart facilities for visa processing, migrant smart cards, and consular support. But the question arises whether the target manpower of our countries is well aware of all the facilities of the government.

This study has also tried to clear up this confusion by collecting data from the respondents to this research. Most of them (18, 15 out of 30 respondents) were only well aware of the PKB and BMET, respectively. Few of them know about the services of BOESL, ITC-ILO, WEWB, and BSDI. One of the key findings is that the respondents have little knowledge about the recent services of a few institutions, including Safe Migrate for Bangladeshi Workers (SMWB), District Employment and Manpower Service (DEMO), the available training program offered by MoEWOE, and the Wage Earner and Welfare Board (WEWB). So, the FGD participants have agreed upon a point of raising the campaign about the existing support of the aforementioned organization to let the targeted manpower know about all services and remove their fear and negative impression toward that organization. This organization may raise their hand to make the potential worker understand the current service and benefits; they may also try to gain their confidence.

Financial Challenges Faced During Migration

Some financial challenges have been identified to show the actual challenges of availing of the prospects of EEC. The respondents claim high migration costs are the first and foremost challenge for availing job opportunities abroad, and the second most severe challenge is lack of access to finance, as well as high recruitment costs and fluctuation of the exchange rate, which are some other financial challenges getting lower value in ranking order consecutively. They occasionally suffered as a result of illicit channels, like Hundi's deceptive practices.

So, the concerned authority may ensure easy access to loan facilities and reduce migration costs like airfare and visa processing costs as well. The authority, by providing real-time information about currency exchange rates, may remove the exchange rate fluctuation challenge.

One highly relevant statement is stated below:

"In this total process of migration, I have spent 5,45,000 BDT to start earning, so I have to repay the loan first and make my land free from mortgage."

Non-Financial Challenges Faced by Migrants (Social, Legal, and Environmental)

This study has included social, legal, and environmental challenges under the category of nonfinancial challenges. These are directly and indirectly creating different types of obstacles for the migrant worker in EEC. In response to this question, the respondents prioritized their challenges in the following order: language barriers, cultural differences, limited social networks, limited access to legal support, food problems, religious differences, environmental constraints, accommodation problems, and so on.

Some respondents have shared their misery regarding their overseas life in the EEC. One relevant quote is stated for better understanding.

"Here (Romania), I am working as a construction worker. Before coming here, I was asked that I would have to work a light labor job on the construction side, but after reaching here, I have been bound to deal with lifting heavy instruments and materials that are causing my back pain."(Respondent 17)

"I am severely suffering from food problems and a cold, which is gradually leading me toward depression."(Respondent 24)

Valuable quotes from FGD Group 2, participants 8 and 5----

"The getting process is too complex, and they are not fairly treated at the airport. Even after coming back, they don't get reintegration support, even after having the 'Wage Earners' Welfare Board Act, 2018."

*"Women constitute half of the total population, yet their participation in the overseas labor force is quite negligible because of **societal barriers**. Even their participation in administrative positions is lower than their qualifications. There are huge opportunities in Bulgarian and Romania for women garment workers and the nursing sector, but they don't get permission from their families to go abroad as migrant workers"*

So, by regular monitoring of the migrant in home and overseas countries, as well as offering language and cultural integration training, making the visa-getting process easy, and giving them proper information about food and environment, this problem can be solved. The following figure clearly mentions the nonfinancial challenges that need to be addressed.

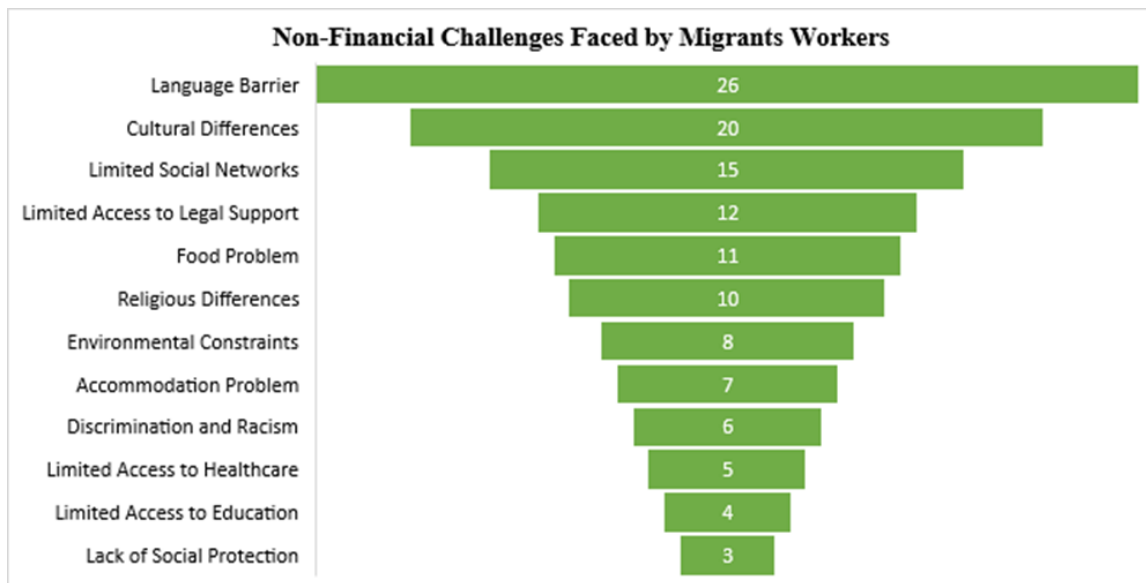


Figure 2. Non-Financial Challenges Faced by Migrants (Social, Legal, and Environmental)

Source: Field Study 2023

Ways Forward

To face the above challenges, this study has explored few measures which has been divided as initiatives of authority to remove financial barriers, to remove non-financial barriers, suggested area of training, and respondents’ perception to combat the overall challenges.

Initiatives of Authority to Remove Financial Barriers

The FGD participants and the respondents think that the increasing of tax incentives on inward remittance, affordability and easy access to loan, ensuring protection of financial transactions and reduction of process cost should get highest priority to remove financial barrier.

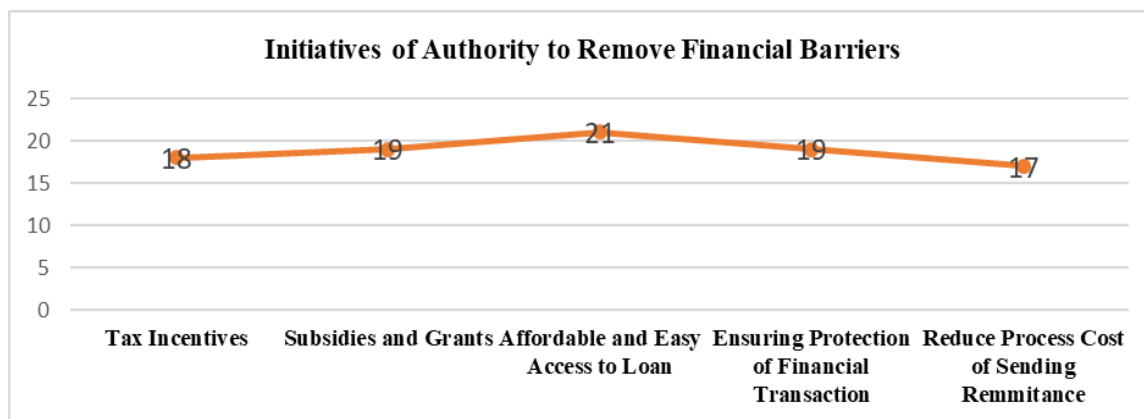


Figure 3. Initiatives of Authority to Remove Financial Barriers

Source: Field Study 2023

Measures to be taken by the Authority to Remove Non-Financial Barriers

This study reveals that almost all of the respondents perceive education and awareness campaigns as the best option to remove the nonfinancial barrier, along with some specific training mentioned under the subsequent heading. They also assumed economic incentives are the second-best option for these cases because high incentives may outweigh societal and familial negative perceptions. In order to address those non-financial difficulties, they also mentioned community-building initiatives, simple access to various services, anti-discrimination laws, and regulations consecutively.

Suggested Area of Training for Developing Competitiveness in the EEC

The participant in the FGD and the respondent shared their opinion about the specific training program that they feel is needed to secure employment opportunities in East European countries. Most of them suggested language training and skill-based professional training. There are some other sectors found after discussion with the FGD and respondents, which have been depicted below:

The above table shows the specific training programme that may assist the Bangladeshi remittance fighter to face both financial and nonfinancial challenges. So, the policymaker may arrange and impart the above T&D to enhance the competitive capability of the migrants. An interesting fact is that a few training programmes are being offered by the MoEWOE which has been denoted by *Italic Font*. In these cases, the authority may enhance the participation of the migrants in the above programme before going abroad. The participants of the study have also given their responses on the structured questionnaire which also complies with the above training programme explored by the researcher through FGD discussion.

Table 6. Suggested Area of Training for Developing Competitiveness of Human Capital

Suggested Training and Development Area	Specific Area to Be Focused
Language Training	Country-specific training along with <i>English Language Training</i> , Regional based behavioural training, Cultural integration training.
Construction	Masonry works, <i>Welding and fabrication, Architectural drafting with Auto CAD, Electrical house wiring, Plumbing, Construction/ Civil construction, Rod binder.</i>
Culinary	Regional-specific food cooking training.
Hotel Management	Professional course on hotel management, <i>Housekeeping.</i>
Driving	Only qualified person has to be certified, Crane operators.
Tourism and Hospitality management	Diploma course in Tourism and Hospitality Management.
Garments	Sewing, Sewing machine maintenance, Over-locked related training, Dress Making, Keeping them updated with new technology, <i>Building and architecture, Drafting, Welding (6G), and Quality Control Management.</i>
Training in the aviation sector	Ground Handling, Airport service training
Green-house service	Specifically, Agro-food production

Besides, this respondent also suggested training on the following areas including, food packaging, warehouse management service, day care centre service, healthcare sector training, Mechanical job in the manufacturing sector, *General Electronics, Automotive/ Auto mechanics, Carpentry/ Wood Works, Fruit & Food processing.*

Source: Field Study 2023

Measures Suggested by the FGD discussants and participants for the Betterment of Bangladeshi Migrant Workers in Foreign Countries

The researcher has found several key measures for the betterment of Bangladeshi migrant workers in EEC from the respondent's answer and the FGD discussion. These has been presented in the following table on the basis of the priority:

Table 7. Suggested measures by the respondents and participants demanded from concerned authority

Sl. No.	Suggested measures by the respondents
1	Developing skilled employees according to the demand of respective countries and examining the economic prospects of destination countries
2	Existing training facilities need to be upgraded
3	Lower migration cost
4	After coming back ensuring job security
5	Raising awareness regarding new employment facilities EEC
6	Ensure local government support for prospective migrant workers
7	Preference from the government for getting further employment and reintegration in abroad and developing internationally recognized qualified employees
8	Minimize abuse and exploitation from middlemen
9	More effective bilateral contract, research and investigation in EEC for the betterment of migrated workers

Source: Field Survey 2023

By focusing on the above-recommended measures, the concerned authority can adopt prerequisite actions for the betterment of Bangladeshi migrants in East European countries.

Policy Recommendations

This study proposes some recommendations, expecting that their successful implementation will help Bangladesh ensure the development of competition in the labor market of the EEC. At first, a well-structured national strategic plan should be formed and implemented to avail the job market of the EEC. In addition, country-specific cultural

and language training program, the development of a national digital skill inventory for storing the required skills, the inclusion of returnees for utilizing their skills and experience in the training program arranged for new one, mutual skill recognition by both the home and host country, and the removal of illegal middlemen can help the country be more successful in terms of overseas employment.

Regularly assessing destination nations' economic prospects and expatriate worker needs is crucial for maintaining desirable employment levels. Proactive measures, bilateral contracts, and discussions can help capitalize on potential prospects (Swe and LU, 2019). Moreover, Bangladesh needs to create globally recognized credentials, upgrade training facilities, and eliminate its reputation as a low-skilled labor source. This can be achieved through sustainable bilateral contracts and partnerships with the government agencies of East European countries, skill promotion, and advanced training facilities (Mujeri and Mujeri, 2020). The high cost of migration for Bangladeshi employees in abroad is a significant issue, with significant costs attributed to facilitators. Migrant workers are often abused and exploited, necessitating significant efforts to reduce or eliminate these atrocities (Shamir, 2012). Moreover, to address the various phases of the migration cycle, District Employment and Manpower Offices (DEMOs) should collaborate with nongovernmental organizations and community-based organizations to provide alternative information sources and promote knowledge about many elements of foreign employment at the grassroots level, where the process begins. (Babar, 2021). At a more advanced level, BMET might potentially collaborate with hiring companies that have expertise finding demand for people to create a system of hiring that would lessen (and ultimately remove) the role of subagents. It is necessary to enhance and improve the labor wings of Bangladesh embassies abroad in order to implement contracts more successfully. However, the fundamental concepts and standards contained in the ILO MFLM are not legally binding, but they could serve as the foundation for more specific instructions in bilateral agreements (Ali et al., 2012).

Bangladesh should collaborate with other labor-sending nations and promote shared policies for hiring foreign employees in host countries. Research on foreign employment is crucial, including monitoring labor markets, domestic labor supply, remittances, return migration, and domestic labor supply. The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment should enhance its research unit and establish links with national research organizations and international donors. A strong coordinating mechanism is essential for improving migration governance, and existing structures should be reinforced to manage safe migration and safeguard migrant workers' rights and welfare. (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2016)

Not only this, but Bangladesh may also work with other labor-sending countries in different regional forums and push for common frameworks for employing expatriate workers in destination countries. Along with the above recommendations, adequate information to the citizens, especially the youths, regarding the opportunities in East European labor markets should be provided by generating a database of existing Bangladeshi migrant workers staying in the EEC in order to use their network to export more labor. Lastly, reintegration initiatives for returnee migrants should be implemented by the government to utilize their skills, capital, and technology for further training of aspirants. After all the awareness-raising program about existing government support should be spread to the union level.

Conclusion

This paper, using a qualitative approach, outlines the job market of East European countries (EEC) available for Bangladeshi migrant workers, along with prospects, challenges, and a way forward. This study reveals that there are a notable number of job opportunities available for less-skilled, semi-skilled, and skilled workers in the labor market of East European countries. Among these, some demanding job sectors include construction, hotel and restaurant, shop and commercial, tourism, driving, garments, the public health sector, and airlines. This study also finds that this is the right time for Bangladesh to avail itself of the opportunities and prospects in the EEC labor market. Not only do they have job opportunities, but they also have a large number of financial and non-financial prospects, including a high and attractive compensation package, medical allowance, public health facilities, and prompt remittance sending facilities. In spite of having those opportunities and prospects, some minor challenges are generating some impediments. A few highly weighted challenges include a lack of awareness about government-specified services for overseas employees, high migration costs, lack of access to finance, language barriers, cultural differences, legal support, etc. However, these challenges can easily be approached by some policies and actions, such as increasing tax incentives on inward remittance, affordability, and easy access to loans; ensuring protection of financial transactions and reducing process costs; an education and awareness campaign; an economic incentive to outweigh societal and familial negative perception; a community-building initiative; easy access to different services

and anti-discrimination laws and policies; and arranging different training and development facilities for migrants. Though the Bangladeshi government already has some mechanisms that are capable of solving the problems, the issue is that most of the migrant workers and prospective migrant workers in the country hardly know about the government-facilitated opportunities and support.

Limitations and Scope of the Future Research

In spite of exerting utmost effort to make this study free from bias and error, it confesses a few limitations also. The researchers acknowledge that truly representative samples can only be obtained through random sampling techniques, but within the context of our exploratory study, snowball techniques have been used that may influence the main purpose. Besides, the in-depth interview of thirty to forty minutes with only thirty respondents, because of having time and budget limitations, may not reveal the real scenario. Not only this but also generalization of some findings irrespective of the countries may not be accurate for each country. So, by focusing on the above limitation, other researchers can conduct a country-specific, longitudinal study covering more sample size by utilizing some advanced tools and techniques.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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