

# BILS Bulletin

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## BILS research report sharing on returnee female migrant workers **Immediate steps demanded to alleviate the helplessness of female returnee migrant workers**

In the hope of changing the prosperities of the family, 23% of female workers went abroad and returned home before the time of one year, 18% stayed a little longer than one year, and 55% of them returned home by force. This information has come up in the research report of Bangladesh Institute of Labor Studies-BILS titled “Social and Economic Reintegration of the Returnee Female Migrant Workers: Success and Sorrows.”



BILS disseminated the findings of the study at a press conference on September 27, 2021 at BILS Seminar Hall. BILS Deputy Director (Research) Md. Manirul Islam presented the research findings, while BILS Executive Council Member Shakil Akhter Chowdhury, Md Abdul Wahed, Pulok Ranjan Dhar, BILS Director

Nazma Yesmin and Deputy Director M A Mazid responded to different questions of journalists.

The study was conducted based on the information collected from 323 returnee female migrant workers in three districts i.e. Jashore, Faridpur and Chattogram. The required information were collected from primary sources by applying qualitative research methods. The study said that the economic condition of one in every three returnee female workers deteriorated during the period than their earlier stage of migration. It is also found that a majority of them were worried about their livelihood in the future. About 85 percent of returnee female workers were frustrated over their current occupations and 57 percent were concerned over their lives and income.

The report found 55 percent returns of the female migrants was either unexpected or forced, 61% suffered from lack of food, water abroad, 7% of them got abused sexually and another 38% physically in the destination countries.

The study found that 60 percent returnee expatriate women workers are unemployed, 65 percent of them do not have regular monthly income, 61 percent of women workers are still struggling to repay their debts, 75 percent of them have no savings and 73 percent of them are failing to meet the daily needs of their families.

The physical health condition of female workers returning from abroad is fragile. 55% are physically unhealthy, 29% have a mental sickness, 87% mental patients didn't get any treatment. Female workers returning from abroad are also being socially degraded. Family and society treat them hostilely and inhumanely. 38% female workers say that they are considered as low class women in the society.

The study has also shown that female workers returning from abroad are neglected by their families and society. Among the economically backward families, they made the decision to immigrate on their own. Their opinions have no value in most families or societies today. None of them care for them and none of them believe them. 17% of workers have been subjected to unwanted behavior at the airport by family members while returning from abroad. 15% married returnee women are either divorced or separated. The husbands of 11% women workers have left them and 26% of women workers have experienced adverse effects in their marital life.

However, there are exceptions. Some returnee female workers have been able to change their status. They work in a good environment, earn good amount of remittances and have good savings. They have regular sources of income. They are also physically and mentally healthy.

At the press conference, BILS leaders said that, it was necessary to work on the importance of economic and social rehabilitation of the helpless women workers. There is a need to collect factual information of women workers returning from abroad and to review it continuously. This study is just a small effort. The study highlights the socio-economic status of returning women workers, existing social attitudes towards them, their family relationships, and barriers to social and economic rehabilitation.

BILS research on the development of returning women workers makes some recommendations, i.e. formulate appropriate social security measures for migrant women workers; emphasis on appropriate skills development training and job creation; providing loans on easy terms as well as providing appropriate commercial advice; providing appropriate health care, including psycho-social counseling; emphasis on systematic registration and data collection; introduce appropriate monitoring mechanisms that ensure accountability of the authorities in charge; involve trade unions in the process of organization, registration, awareness raising and monitoring, and gradually take initiative in formulating a comprehensive policy framework. Moreover, it has been recommended to give special importance to the implementation of policies and laws.

### **BILS press conference on the research report on status and way forward to implement DWPWP, 2015**

A study conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies-BILS in 2021 on domestic workers working in Dhaka city found that the average wage in a domestic worker is around 4,500 taka per month and 90 percent is less than 6,000. However, the average income of domestic workers who have technical training is better than that of untrained people. More than 99 percent of domestic workers do not have a written agreement with the employer. There is no provision for compensation for those injured in accidents at workplace. There is no provision for paid maternity leave. In addition, at least 28.2 percent of domestic workers' wages were reduced during the Covid-19 period.

With the support of Oxfam in Bangladesh and Global Affairs Canada, the survey was conducted on 287 domestic workers under the "Sunity" project titled "Assessment of the implementation status of the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy and way forward". Other organisations implementing the project include Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), Hellotask, Nari Maitree, Red Orange and UCEP Bangladesh. Of those surveyed by BILS, 60 percent were non-residents (live out) and 40 percent were residential (live-in) domestic workers. This is to be mentioned that the Cabinet Division of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh approved the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy, 2015 in December 2015. It contains 18 provisions with a clear definition of the responsibilities of employers, employees and the government. However, the survey found that only 14 percent of domestic workers are aware of the policy announced by the government and their employers know nothing about it. The survey also found that 38.6 percent of residential domestic workers are less than 18 years of age.



The information was revealed at a press conference organised by BILS at the Press Club in the capital on September 12, 2021. BILS Advisory Council Member Naimul Ahsan Jewel read out a written statement at the press conference. Among others, Domestic Workers Rights Network (DWRN) Acting Coordinator Abul Hossain, Oxfam in Bangladesh Project Coordinator Geeta Rani Adhikari, Head of Research Mohammad Zakir Hossain Khan, Including leaders of project

implementing organizations, domestic workers' representatives and media representatives were present.

According to the written statement, 72.2 percent of domestic workers' wages are determined by the type of work; In addition, 8.1 percent wages are set based on working hours and 8.1 percent through third parties. The wages of 20 percent of residential domestic workers are determined by mutual agreement; However, it is noteworthy that 13.6 percent of these residential domestic workers do not receive any wages, they only work in exchange for accommodation and food. However, the survey found that the average income of the domestic workers who took part in the training was better than that of the untrained and the domestic workers who received training on various electrical appliances or household items earned more than 9,000 taka, with an average wage of 4,629 Taka.

It further states that only 0.7 percent of domestic workers are employed in written agreements with employers. According to the results of the survey, most of the residential domestic workers (51.3 percent) were employed by their relatives and most of the non-resident domestic workers (43.4 percent) were employed by other domestic workers. In addition, 64% of domestic workers do not have any weekly or monthly leave.

At least 31.58 percent of residential and 36.42 percent of non-resident domestic workers said they had been forced to work against their will due to physical and mental stress, the written statement said. 41.23 percent of residential domestic workers and 24.86 per cent of non-residents said they had been abused. 50 percent of those under the age of 18 have been subjected to some form of harassment. Note that the Domestic Worker Protection and Welfare Policy, 2015 states, No form of indecent treatment or physical injury or mental torture may be inflicted on a domestic worker. However, according to the nature of work of domestic workers, their chances of making a complaint are very limited. The statement further said that the contribution of domestic workers in our country is not included in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Although workers in various formal sectors are covered by the welfare fund, there is no such specific fund for domestic workers.

In this study, the limitations identified in the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy, 2015 are: labour laws and non-recognition of domestic workers in

GDP estimates, non-determination of minimum wages, absence of systematic statistics on domestic workers, formation of trade unions or associations, lack of policy awareness due to lack of media coverage and illiteracy, harassment, torture, lack of authority to take action for forced labour, lack of registration and information in law enforcement agencies, lack of effectiveness of monitoring cell and lack of social rights.

Recommended include recognizing domestic work as a profession as soon as possible, giving them the right to trade unions, taking government initiatives to gather information on the status of domestic workers in national surveys, and raising awareness about harassment complaints. And enable domestic workers to use helpline numbers, set up complaint centers for domestic workers, provide female police responsibilities and introduce one-stop-service at every ward/union level, increase the minimum wage of domestic workers in the garment sector, provide 50 percent festive bonus. Fixing the minimum wage by the government, providing at least 6 months paid leave during pregnancy and after childbirth and setting up of domestic labour training and development institutes etc. As mentioned at the press conference, policymakers and trade unions can work together to make recommendations for enhancing social security. These recommendations could include the Covid-19 crisis and its negative impact on domestic workers.

### **Submission of memorandum on action plan on DWPWP to State Minister of MoLE**

A delegation of Suniti Project led by BILS's Joint Secretary General Dr. Wajedul Islam Khan paid a courtesy call on Hon'ble State Minister for Labour and Employment (MoLE) Begum Mannujan Sufian, MP at the Bangladesh Secretariat on 19 August 2021.

The team met her with a view to submit the National Action Plan for the implementation of Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy, 2015 (DWPWP) to the State Minister, MoLE, to brief State Minister about the project, to place the demand for bringing workers under legal protection and to request



Minister to reenergize the National Monitoring Cell. The delegation team handed over a memorandum to the state minister with various recommendations stating different demands for domestic Workers welfare. Apart from this, under the project, a research report conducted for the purpose of reviewing the current status of implementation of domestic worker protection and welfare policy, a draft national plan for 2015 implementation and a publication on the workplace situation of domestic workers in 2020 were also handed over.

Domestic Workers Rights Network Acting Coordinator Abul Hossain, Oxfam in Bangladesh Senior Program Officer Tareq Aziz, BILS Suniti Project Coordinator Md. Yousuf Al-Mamun were also present.

### **Consultation Meeting with Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union held**

BILS with the support of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) organised a consultation meeting with the Bangladesh tea workers union on September 27, 2021 at District Council Seminar Hall, Sreemongol, Sylhet.

To identify the achievement of the minimum wage board for the Tea Garden workers; Explore the preparation, skill, and challenges of Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union for collective



bargaining and negotiation (in bipartite and tripartite negotiation); To discuss the regular collective bargaining and negotiation procedure, union strategy, preparation, and challenges; To discuss effective collective bargaining and

negotiation; To discuss regular union practice and tasks are the main objectives of the meeting.

Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (BCSU) President Makhon lal Karmaker presided over the meeting while FES Bangladesh Program Coordinator Iqbal Hossain, BCSU Acting General Secretary Nripen pal, BCSU Working President Boishishto Patil, BCSU Executive Advisor, and member of minimum wage board for Tea garden workers Ramvajon Koiri and others central committee leadership were present in the meeting.

### **Workshop held on Summary of EPZ Labour Act, 2019 Review and Recommendations for Development**

BILS organized a workshop titled "Summary of EPZ Labor Act, 2019 Review and Recommendations for Development" on September 18, 2021 at BILS Seminar Hall, Dhaka.



The workshop was organized to review the EPZ Labor Act, 2019 in the light of the standard of decent work, to identify its shortcomings and to take into consideration



the recommendations of labour law experts, BILS and trade union organizations for development, and to determine the role of those concerned in implementing development plans.

The workshop chaired by BILS Advisory Council Member and Bangladesh Labour Federation (BLF) President Shah Mohd. Abu Zafar and BILS Executive Council Secretary Abul Kalam Azad acted as a moderator. BILS Advisory Council Member and Jatiya Sramik Federation President Quamrul Ahsan, BILS Advisory Council Member A M Nazimuddin, Bangladesh Jatiya Sramik Jote President Abdul Kader Hawlader, Jatiya Sramik League Vice President Md. Safar Ali, Labour Law Expert Adv. A K M Nasim, Bangladesh Labour Court Bar Association President Adv. Selim Ahsan Khan, TUC Chattogram District President Tapan Dutta, BILS Director Kohinoor Mahmood and Nazma Yesmin were present at the workshop.

### **Study circle with youth TU organisers held**

BILS with the support of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) organised a study circle with youth TU organisers on "The Second Wave of Covid-19 and Recent Industrial Accidents: Preparing and Acting of Youth Trade Union Organizers" on September 12, 2021 at Ahsania Mission Conference Hall, Dhaka.



The study circle was organised to discuss the second wave of Covid-19 and the recent industrial accident, the ILO guidelines on Covid-19 and return to work, and the preparation and actions of the youth trade union organizers.

FES Residential Representative Felix Kolbitz, BILS Executive Council Member, and Bangladesh Labor Federation-BLF General Secretary Md. Shakil Akhter Chowdhury, BILS Director Kohinoor Mahmood and Nazma Yasmin, Senior Program Officer Monirul Kabir, and youth leaders of national Trade Union federations were present at the study circle.

## **Exemplary punishment demanded to stop violence against domestic workers**

Trade unions and civil society representatives called for end of violence against domestic workers, exemplary punishment against torturers, legal protections, proper treatment of victims and appropriate compensation. Speaker's demanded these at a human chain organised by Domestic Workers' Rights Network (DWRN) in collaboration with the BILS SRDW project on September 23, 2021, at Mohammadpur Bus Stand, Satmosjid Road in the capital.

Speakers at the human chain said that in recent times, incidents of torture, killings, and human rights violations against domestic workers have increased alarmingly. According to BILS newspaper survey, from January to June 2021, at least 22 domestic workers were killed and tortured. Speakers said

that one after another deaths and tortures of domestic workers are taking place in the country due to the absence of implementation of the 'Domestic Workers



Protection and Welfare Policy 2015'. They said the torturers repeatedly dared to torture domestic workers because of the lack of exemplary punishment. If the torturers of these incidents are brought under proper justice and given exemplary punishment, then no one would dare to torture the domestic workers.

Speakers from the human chain demand endorsed ILO Convention-179; implementation of “Domestic Worker Protection and Welfare Policy 2015” to protect the safety of domestic workers across the country; to include domestic workers in labour laws; to ensure safety and secured migration for all domestic workers; to provide fair compensation to the families of workers killed in torture and to injured workers; medical expenses of injured workers to be accepted by the employer; the families of the victim workers and the injured workers demanded permanent rehabilitation.

DWRN Acting Coordinator Abul Hossain led the human chain, while Jatiya Sramik Jote Working President Md. Abdul Wahed, Bangladesh Free Trade Union Congress Secretary Pulak Ranjan Dhar, Jatiya Sramik League Trade Union Affairs Secretary Feroj Hossain and Women Affairs Secretary Promila Podder, DWRN Member Secretary and BILS Director Nazma Yesmin, Jatiya Sramik Federation representative Arifa Akhter also participated. Domestic Workers Rights Network and BILS affiliated organisations representatives, National trade union federation leaders and Civil Society representatives were present at the human chain.

## **Demand to withdraw the government's decision to stop battery-powered rickshaws without creating alternative employment**

Leaders of the rickshaw van trade unions of the National Trade Union Federations have demanded the withdrawal of the government's decision to ban battery-powered rickshaws without creating





alternative employment. This was demanded by the speakers at the human chain organised in front of the National Press Club on 19 July 2021.

Leaders from the human chain demand to issue driver's licenses to rickshaw workers make a list of rickshaw workers affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic and include them in social protection programs, include rickshaw workers on a priority basis in ongoing vaccination programs. It called for revoking the government's decision to ban the operation of battery-powered rickshaws and easy bikes in the human chain and for issuing licenses for mechanical vehicles including battery-powered rickshaws and easy bikes by formulating design modernization and policies.

Jatiya Rickshaw Van Sramik League General Secretary Md. Insur Ali presided over the human chain while Jatiya Sramik League Trade Union Affairs Secretary Firoz Hossain, Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal Finance Secretary Md. Rafiqul Islam, Bangladesh Free Trade Union Congress Secretary Pulak Ranjan Dhar, Jatiya Rickshaw Van Workers League representative Rezaul Karim, Bangladesh Labour Federation representative Golam Mostafa Liton, Jatiya Sramik League Youth Committee Convener Abdul Halim, Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Dal youth committee president Md. Khorshed Alam, Jatiya Sramik Jote representative Mostaq Hossain, Trade Union Center representative Akhter Hossain were present at the human chain. Besides, leaders of rickshaw workers' organizations of national trade union federations, leaders of national trade union federations, leaders of civil society, and rickshaw workers were also present in the human chain.

## **Roundtable held on OSH situation of ship breaking sector and way forward**

BILS organised a roundtable on OSH situation of ship breaking sector and way forward on September 29, 2021 at Hotel Asian SR, Chattogram.

The meeting was organised to analyse the occupational health and safety situation in the ship breaking industry, existing labour quality, to make recommendations for development and to take effective initiatives from the respective positions of the industry stakeholders.

BILS Vice Chairman Anwar Hossain Chaired the meeting and BILS LRSC Center Coordinator A M Nazimuddin acted a moderator. ILO Country Director for Bangladesh Toumo Poutainin, Ministry of Industry Deputy Director Md. Mizanur Rahman, DIFE Chattogram Deputy Inspector General Abdullah Sakib Mubarrat and DoL Chattogram Assistant Director Mohammad Abdus Sabbir Bhuiyan, BSBRA Sr. Member and Ex Vice President Master Kashem. BILS Joint Secretary General Dr. Wajedul Islam Khan, BSBRA Executive Member Saim Sheikh and Sekandar Hossain, JSJ Working President Abdul Wahed, BJSD Joint Secretary Kazi Nurullah Bahar, BSBRA Assistant Secretary Nazmul Hossain, BMSF Secretary Nurul Absar, SBWTF Convenor Tapan Dutta, BILS Sr. Officer Rezwannur Rahman and Assistant Officer Fazlul Kabir Mintu were spoke at the meeting.

## **National Level TU Leadership Consultation Meeting held**

BILS, under its' DGB-BW project organised a National Level Trade Union Leadership Consultation Meeting that has been held hybrid mode (both online & off-line version) on August 19, 2021. Trade Union leadership and project related BILS officials from Chattogram and Dhaka simultaneously joined the meeting while it was also participated by DGB-BW Asia region Consultant Indira Gartenberg from New Delhi, India.



The consultation meeting was presided over by BILS-LRSC Centre Coordination Committee Chairman A M Nazimuddin. BILS Secretary General and Executive Director Nazrul Islam Khan was the chief guest while DGB-BW Asia region Consultant Indira Gartenberg attended the meeting as special guest. Other notable



participants of the consultation meeting were BILS Advisory Council Members Mesbahuddin Ahmed, Quamrul Ahsans, Naimul Ahsan Jewel, Executive Council members Md. Shakil Akhter Chowdhury, Kazi Rahima Akter Shati and Shamim Ara, BTUC office secretary Shahida Parveen Shaikha, BILS-DGB-BW project coordinator Kohinoor Mahmood, Ctg.-based LRSC member-secretary Md. Safar Ali, LRSC member Tapan Datta, local trade union leaders namely Syed Ahmed Badol, Uzzal Bishwash and Nasrin Akter of JSL, M R Monju, Shahenewaz Chowdhury and Advocate Md. Iqbal of BJSD, Nurul Absur of BMSF, Jahiduddin Shaheen of BJSF, A K M Abdul Momin of JSJ, Hassan Shahid Rana of JSJB, K M Shahidullah and Tamanna Binte Azad of BFTUC. The consultation meeting was moderated by BILS-LRSC senior officer Pahari Bhattacharjee.

At the beginning of the meeting, the inaugural speech was delivered by JSL central vice president Md. Safar Ali. Later the aim and object of the consultation was narrated by BILS-DGB-BW project coordinator Kohinoor Mahmood. Then, BILS-LRSC activities under DGB-BW project phase of 2016-2018 and 2019-2021 was presented by BILS-LRSC senior officer Rizwanur Rahman Khan.

After the presentation, program participants took part in the opinion sharing. It was said that, BILS under the DGB-BW phase established a Labour Resource and Support Centre in 2016 and initiated numerous activities including capacity building training, leadership orientation, internship, legal-support to victim workers, organizing youth and women workers camp, voice raise program in terms of right violation, organizing occupational health and safety fair, conducting various survey and study for establishing workers' rights in selected sectors like Railway, Port, RMG, Construction, Hotel-Restaurant and in Private Health and Diagnostics.

Leadership in the consultation meeting expressed their deep concern over the ongoing pandemic issue and illegal lay-off, job-cut and forced termination in RMG and other sectors as the consequences of the Covid-19.

Most speakers expressed their hope and satisfaction over the result of the BILS-DGB-BW project activities and LRSC initiatives of last 5 years especially in terms of capacity building of the trade unionists, formation of new trade unions,

submitting charter of demands, increasing trade union membership and project related some other activities.

Chief Guest of the consultation meeting Nazrul Islam Khan expressed thanks and gratitude to DGB-BW and local trade union leadership for support and assistance in BILS activities over the last 5 years. He said, if we work all together, we can overcome many obstacles in terms of establishing labour rights.

Special Guest of the consultation meeting Indira Gartenberg expressed her experiences about working with Bangladesh and said it was positive in greater sense. She thanked all for keeping continuation of implementing project designed activities amid Covid-19.

Central and local trade union leadership suggested to take initiative all together to stand beside most vulnerable sector workers of Chattogram and the region and to take joint action in terms of eradicating barriers for forming trade union and establishing labour rights.

## **Workshop held on Finalizing and Submitting Charter of Demand**

Following government declared health restrictions amid the rapid rise of Covid-19 situation in the country, BILS under its' DGB-BW project organised a workshop with limited participation for finalizing Charter of Demand on July 31, 2021 at LRSC, Chattogram.

The workshop was arranged in 2 separate phases on the same day. First it was organized with the participants of Railway sector, and then the second phase was organized with the participants of Construction sector workers. The day-long workshop was presided over by BILS-LRSC Chairman A M Nazimuddin and BILS senior officer



Pahari Bhattacharjee acted as moderator.

The meeting was attended by Railway sector trade union leaders and BILS core team members Md. Moklesur Rahman, Abdus Sabur, M R Monju, Kazi Anwarul Huq, Syed Kudrat-E-Bari and Construction sector trade union leaders and BILS Core team members namely Uzzal Bishwash, K M Shahidullah, Javed Alam, Hasibur Rahman Biplob and Md. Mayenuddin.

The meeting reviewed the early drafted Charter of Demands for both the Railway and the Construction sector and added several changes as per discussion of the workshop participants as well as the senior trade union leadership.