

# The Quest for Decent Work: Issues and Challenges of Bangladeshi Migrant Workers towards Saudi Arabia

Mirza Shakila Dil Hasin

Centre for Higher Studies and Research, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), Dhaka, Bangladesh  
Email: mirzashakila25@yahoo.com

**How to cite this paper:** Hasin, M. S. D. (2025). The Quest for Decent Work: Issues and Challenges of Bangladeshi Migrant Workers towards Saudi Arabia. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 15, 106-130.  
<https://doi.org/10.4236/aasoci.2025.152007>

**Received:** January 25, 2025

**Accepted:** February 23, 2025

**Published:** February 26, 2025

Copyright © 2025 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to utilize the concept of decent work to critically examine the issues and challenges of Bangladeshi migrant workers towards Saudi Arabia. The specific focus is to understand the causes of decent work deficit and the barriers to decent work for Bangladeshi migrant workers towards Saudi Arabia. This study argues that absence of decent work practice makes Bangladeshi migrant workers vulnerable, that leads to violation of human and labour rights. In this regard, qualitative research approach had been incorporated that entailed thirty IDIs (In-Depth Interviews) and ten KIIs (Key Informant Interviews) to secure in-depth details understanding of Bangladeshi migrant worker's situation from decent work perspective. The major findings of this study provide understanding of decent work standard and the precarity of Bangladeshi migrant workers, causes of decent work deficit, challenges of decent work deficit, and the consequences of the sponsorship system. It appears that Bangladeshi migrant workers towards Saudi Arabia experience discrimination, low salary, exploitation and abuse, violation of human and labour rights requirements, unfreedom and coercion, and inadequate rights at work place, insufficient social security support and ineffective social dialogue. The fraudulent practices of labour migration intermediaries, ineffective and insufficient state policy, low socio-economic background of migrant workers, socio-economic hierarchy and socio-cultural barriers impede implementation of decent work agenda. Therefore, it is important to maintain standard labour market operating structure, standard labour contract, and standard bilateral agreement that ensure living wage, access to basic rights at work, protection against unemployment, freedom of movement, freedom of association and trade union and other human and labour rights components.

---

## Keywords

Decent Work, Migrant Precarity, Migrant Rights, Bangladeshi Migrant Workers, Saudi Arabia Labour Market

---

## 1. Introduction

Saudi Arabia is the top destination country for Bangladeshi migrant workers. At the same time labour abuse and exploitation, precarious working situation, deficiency of decent work and modern-day slavery are the common features of their labour market participation in Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately, Bangladeshi migrant workers fail to secure decent employment as most of the workers are engaged in informal private sector that hardly maintain labour standard. According to [Picot \(2014\)](#), unpaid wage, low wage, long working hours, unsafe working conditions, inadequate housing, passport confiscation, lack of freedom of association and lack of collecting bargaining power are prevalent in Saudi Arabia private sector low skilled temporary workers' labour market which indicates complete violation and absence of decent work standards. In fact, in the GCC countries, migrant workers cannot raise their human rights as they are prohibited from participating in any protest, strike and demonstration. Their true consent is not established in labour contract. They are often underpaid or not paid, have accommodation in distance isolated places, work in precarious condition and are tied to employers who are also abusive. In this type of modern-day slavery, the migrant workers do not even know and understand the conditions of the labour contract ([Al Rayes, 2019](#)). On the other hand, female migrant workers are mostly occupied in informal sector and low-paid job like housekeeping, domestic workers, caregivers and so on. Female migrant workers lack opportunities in formal employment due to insufficient policy measures. As a result, they survive with limited economic opportunities ([Sultana & Fatima, 2017](#)). Therefore, migrant workers' socio-economic well-being, freedom of expression, and preservation of basic human and labour rights require in-depth understanding. Against this backdrop, this study focuses on the concept of decent work as is defined by ILO (International Labour Organization), decent work as the sum of the aspiration of people for "opportunity and income; rights, voice and recognition; family stability and personal development; and, fairness and gender equality" (ILO definition cited in [Di Ruggiero, 2014: p. 2](#)). The major objective of this study is to utilize the concept of decent work to critically examine the issues and challenges of Bangladeshi migrant workers towards Saudi Arabia. The specific focus is to understand the causes of decent work deficit and the barriers to decent work for Bangladeshi migrant workers in Saudi Arabia. This research incorporates qualitative research approach that included thirty (30) IDIs (In-Depth Interviews) with returnee Bangladeshi migrant workers (both male and female) and ten (10) KIIs (Key Informant Interviews) with government and non-government officials, labour migration experts, academician, recruiting agents.

This study contributes significantly to academic discourse and policy directives by providing useful insights on the issues and challenges related to decent work for Bangladeshi migrant workers towards Saudi Arabia; this understanding would help in developing migration policies based on decent work standard that support migrant workers' basic rights and privileges.

## 2. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to understand the issues and challenges of Bangladeshi migrant workers towards Saudi Arabia from decent work perspective. The specific objective is to understand the causes of decent work deficit and the barriers to decent work for Bangladeshi migrant workers towards Saudi Arabia. In this regard, qualitative research approach had been applied as this is suitable for in-depth details understanding of the research objectives. This research had incorporated both primary and secondary data. Secondary data consisted of academic journal articles, official reports, newsletters and publications of different national and international organizations, and newspaper reports related to labour migration. Thirty (30) IDIs (In-depth Interview) with returnee Bangladeshi migrant workers (both male and female) and ten (10) KIIs (Key Informant Interviews) with government and non-government officials, labour migration experts, academicians, recruiting agents were conducted to understand the issues and challenges of decent work for Bangladeshi migrant workers towards Saudi Arabia. The focus of this research is to have details in-depth understanding of the existing phenomenon therefore generalization of finding is not sought. The respondents were selected on the basis of purposive sampling that is non-probability form of sampling that ensure correspondence between research objective and research participant. However, the in-depth and details interview with returnee Bangladeshi migrant workers provides useful information about their migration experience, the recruitment process, the working condition, measures and support for their socio-economic wellbeing. A detail interview guideline was prepared in advance to answer specific research objectives. Criteria to measure situation of Bangladeshi migrant workers from decent work perspective had been applied to examine the recruitment process, employment condition, initiative for social support and cooperation. Semi-structured interview questionnaires incorporated information about recruitment opportunity and recruitment cost, employment contract, visa type, salary and other benefits, accommodation, arrangement of medical facility, rights to freedom of expression, opportunity for union and mutual collaboration. Thematic content analysis had been conducted with both primary and secondary data. To maintain ethical code of conduct, respondent's written consent was collected prior to interview and they were sufficiently informed about the research purpose with written information sheet. To maintain privacy the respondents were kept anonymous in reporting their statement. The researcher maintained reflexive approach as it helps to develop a comprehensive set of themes. To ensure reliability and validity, this research adopted trustworthiness criteria (Cuba &

Linkon, 1994 cited in Bryman, 2016) that involves credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Details literature review, consultation with experts made the research findings robust and authentic that entailed realistic responses from specific experiences and observations.

### 3. Literature Review and Research Gap

The Government of Bangladesh had been promoting overseas employment to the Middle East and other developed countries since the 1970s and the trend is still on the rise, most of its overseas workers are unskilled or less skilled migrants who remain vulnerable to job termination, low wage and demeaning working environment (Islam, 2020). There remain a mismatch between training provided and skills requirement in the job market, obsolete training discourses and lack of proper education of the expatriates (Islam, 2020). Bangladeshi workers are employed in the low priority indecent jobs like construction workers, tea boy and the like with low wage and compensation package (City and Guilds & IOM, 2017). Though the deregulation of labour markets has offered different kinds of job for mobile workers it has failed to maintain employment standards as a result, an increase in labour casualization takes place (Mallett, 2018). Therefore, the more labour market flexibility has resulted in conditions that maximize the potential for the exploitation and abuse of the migrants, predominantly the most marginalized segments of the labour market (LeBaron and Phillips, 2018 cited in Mallett, 2018). The new form of labour like unfree labour makes migrant workers specially day labourer and domestic workers victim of exploitation with a means of control like penalizing by employers, debt bondage and abuse and threat of violence (Mallett, 2018). On arrival at the destination, migrant workers often compromise with conditions of decent work to start remitting. Sometimes they accept indecent work as an individual choice to the constraints that visas often impose on their's employment opportunity (Li & Whitworth, 2016 cited in Mallett, 2018). Again, high migration cost increases migrant workers dependency on employer. Dependency on employer to pay the back home loan make migrant workers more vulnerable. The payment of loan sometimes requires several months salaries that makes the migrant workers dependable on employer who usually deduct the recruitment cost directly from the salary with excessive interest rate (Andrees et al., 2015). Jureidini (2018) point out that migrant workers from Asia go into debt to pay recruitment agencies for their overseas employment they are forced to accept wages and conditions that are less than they may have been promised. Besides, workers' access to grievance mechanisms is meager and complicated by an apprehension of fear that to complain may result in dismissal and repatriation or deportation (Gardner, Pessoa & Harkness 2014 cited in Jureidini, 2018). However, complaints particularly to the embassies in the GCC countries concerns wages—low payment (less than promised or less than specified in the contract), delayed payment, and non-payment (Jureidini, 2018). Jureidini (2018) suggests that such practices are hurtful because the vast majority of workers in the GCC are working there to support

their families. Foreign earnings meet their daily subsistence back home as well as pay off their loans usually with high interest rates. Moreover, labour strikes over wages are rare in the GCC because they are illegal if not authorized and often lead to arrest, detention, and deportation (Jureidini, 2018). Though a wage protection system (WPS) in the GCC arises partly because of the vulnerability of migrant workers who can easily be exploited by unethical employers, the system is working with insufficient achievements (Ray Jureidini cited in Fargues & Shah, 2018). In fact, "While a WPS makes it possible to detect late payments, it is not yet adapted to counteract other fraudulent practices such as payments lesser than what the contract stipulates." (Fargues & Shah, 2018: p. 3). Again, Picot (2014) reports that migrant workers experience substantial overwork, exhaustion, torture, food and water deprivation on their job site. It is common practice of the employers to withhold workers' legal documents, denial to pay worker and not allowing holiday rest. In absence of state bound legal protection mechanism the employer over exercise their authority over the workers who are in absence of legal support fail to raise their voice regarding their rights and privileges. Protest for non-payment of salary though protected with wage protection system, minimum wage is not maintained as is the case with the unskilled nationals who enjoy a minimum pay of SAR 3000 (US\$800) and there are grievances among the workers for non-payment of promised salary. Many receive very low salary that cause them difficulties in repaying back home debt. Though Saudi labour law has provision for maintenance of standard working hours according to article 147, in practice the standards are not maintained. Migrant workers experience long working hours along with inadequate safety measures. It is reported that workers are forced to work in risky conditions without safety harnesses, hard hats or protective masks as the company has no such arrangements. And, inspections of work place do not take place on regular basis though it covers only official formalities. In 2011, the government's ban on midday work that prohibits outdoor work between noon and 3:00 p.m. from July 1<sup>st</sup> through August 31<sup>st</sup>. At the same year, the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR) reported to have received complaints about the ban not being enforced. As a result, to protect workers from serious health risks caused by extreme hit the government needs to apply more rigorous enforcement mechanism (zero tolerance). The accommodation and housing situation of migrant workers are also reported as unsatisfactory; the availability of fresh water, proper sewage system and garbage disposal system are not maintained. The situation of women migrant workers is more vulnerable as Fargues and Shah (2018) point out that in the context of a patriarchal society where migration of low-skilled women is generally viewed in a negative manner, Bangladeshi women migrants face the risk of social stigma both before departure and upon return (Belanger & Rahman, 2013). And the abuse in the case of women migrant workers often entail sexual harassment and sexual attack (ranging from propositions, threats of rape and groping to repeated rape), physical abuse (ranging from slaps to severe beatings), verbal abuse (harsh insults, threats, and belittlement), imposition of excessive

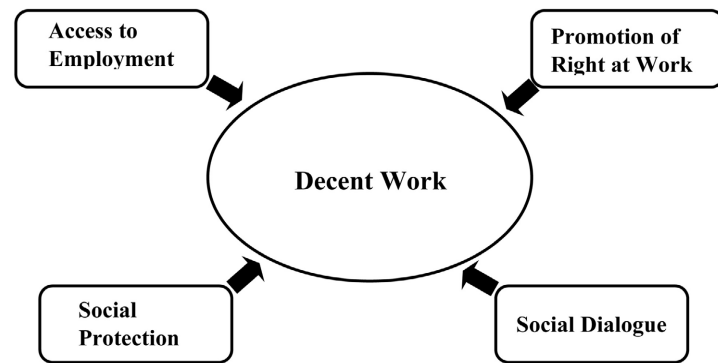
working hours, unfair contractual terms, confiscation of passports, confinement to private homes and it sometime reaches the extend of forcing the housemaids into sex trade (Jarallah, 2009).

However, there has been substantial literature on international labour migration from Bangladesh towards Saudi Arabia (Roy, 2016; Almutairi, 2017; Ullah, 2017; Adham & Hammer, 2019), the existing studies have limited focus on the issues and challenges of Bangladeshi migrant workers from decent work perspective; the existing studies principally focuses on economic and social aspects of labour migration that are not adequate to cover the issues of rights and protection and the challenges that affect the employment situation of Bangladeshi migrant workers towards Saudi Arabia. These studies are inadequate as they do not address the requirement of international labour standard or other human rights requirement to ensure welfare of the migrant worker. Piasna et al. (2021) maintains that since its inception decent work agenda has become a universal directive and has been incorporated in major human rights declarations and United Nations (UN) resolutions. In 2015, decent work agenda (employment creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue) became an integral element of the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs). And Di Ruggiero et al. (2014) suggest that the aspirations of people to enjoy rights and recognition can be achieved through the implementation of decent work agenda to economic and social policy in collaboration with the principal institutions and actors of the multilateral system of the global economy. Therefore, this research is significant since it examines the situation of Bangladeshi migrant workers from decent work perspective following the ILO core standards to secure workers welfare and rights. Investigation on Bangladeshi migrant workers' situation following decent work perspective is essential to understand the precarity of Bangladeshi worker in Saudi Arabia and the remedy and support that are required to overcome the deficiency of decent work. However, this research increases general understanding related to labour market participation of Bangladeshi migrant workers towards Saudi Arabia from decent work perspective with adequate empirical evidence supported by detail analysis of existing literatures.

#### 4. Analytical Perspective

As labour migration entails different socio-economic political considerations that have been incorporated in ILO decent work agenda, this research utilized concept of decent work to understand the realities of Bangladeshi migrant workers towards Saudi Arabia. Decent work agenda is a comprehensive approach that stands on four components; employment opportunities, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue (Siddiqui, 2005), appears suitable to examine the labour migration issues and challenges of Bangladeshi migrant workers towards Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, Bangladeshi migrant workers towards Saudi Arabia experience discrimination, deception, exploitation, wage theft, undue work, contract violation, lack of freedom of movement and freedom of association. This study

examines these issues from the perspective of decent work. According to ILO (International Labour Organization) decent work is productive work that have earning and that ensure migrant workers' right and social wellbeing. Thus, the concept of decent work incorporates the elements; 1) access to employment 2) promotion of rights at work 3) social protection and 4) social dialogue. (Siddiqui, 2005) (Figure 1).



(Constructed by the author with inspiration from Siddiqui, 2005)

**Figure 1.** Concept of decent work.

In this study the following components of decent work agenda (Ghai, 2003: p. 113) has been utilized as the tools of analysis to understand the issues and challenges of Bangladeshi migrant workers towards Saudi Arabia;

1) **Accesses to employment** includes:

a) adequate opportunity for work; b) remuneration; c) safety at workplace; d) healthy working conditions.

2) **Promotion of Rights at work** includes:

a) social security; b) income security; c) protection against unemployment.

3) **Social Protection** includes:

a) fundamental rights of workers; b) freedom of association; c) non-discrimination at work; d) absence of forced and child labour.

4) **Social Dialogue** includes:

a) workers' right to present their voice; b) right to defend workers' interest; c) right to engage in discussions to negotiate work-related matters with employers and authority.

## 5. Findings and Discussions

The quest for decent work of Bangladeshi migrant workers in the KSA hardly meet life aspiration rather they experience unpleasant realities in a context that is governed by principle of survival at any cost by sacrificing and compromising individual's welfare, interest and rights. Deficiencies in arrangement of work contract, wage standard, payment pattern, work time, safety, health and hygiene issues in the workplace are commonly reported by the migrant workers that reflect absent of decent work (Aleksynska et al., 2017). While analyzing interview data of

returnee migrant workers, list of odds has been identified that migrant workers are facing in their overseas employment situation towards Saudi Arabia, such as; irregular payment, reluctance in renewal of Iqama (*resident permit*), hardworking but low salary, additional duty without payment, denial of leave permission for country visit, inadequate health facility in work place, lack of job on arrival, inability to complain to country's labour office, problem in filing complain in labour court, contract violation in terms of facility, salary, work time and duty, denial of payment for overtime, denial of increment in salary, violation of words/instruction, high recruitment cost, problem of food and accommodation, misconduct of employer, a sense of uncertainty and fear of job loss. It is evident that the recruitment of workers involves the activities of different agents and stake holders and the sponsorship system is the central factor that operates the recruitment procedures. Recruitment is important since work contract, visa arrangement, fair remuneration and work condition depend on recruitment. Again, all migrant workers do not face abusive treatment and violation of human and labour rights, the people/ institution engaged in the process are important, their mind set, good will, reputation, sincerity in dealing the activities largely influence the outcome. This research indicates that at the recruitment stage, Bangladeshi migrant workers are vulnerable due to lengthy, complex and multi-layered recruitment process that increases migration cost and time and also causes untimely return and debt bondage. At the work place, Bangladeshi migrant workers are vulnerable at the hand of sponsor/employer who twist the employment contract and labour law in their favour as Bangladeshi migrant workers are ignorant of local law and language and lack necessary skill and communication network to sustain in an unfavourable working condition.

### 5.1. Precarity of Bangladeshi Migrant Workers

Components of decent work are almost absent in case of Bangladeshi migrant workers in the KSA rather their situation can be described as forced labour or engaged in precarious work or 3D (difficult, dangerous and dirty) jobs (Almutairi, 2017). According to ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) forced or compulsory labour refers to "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily." (Art. 2 (1) cited in glossary, Andrees et al. 2015). The ILO has described several types of situations as forced labour, such as physical abuse, restricted movement, burden of debt, withholding of remunerations, retention of passports and identity documents and the threat of verbal abuse (Almutairi, 2017). Though Article 116 of Saudi Arabia's labour law maintains that daily basis workers' wages shall be paid at least once a week and wages of monthly workers shall be paid once a month, the worker's salary very often withholds up to 3 months or more; in some occasions on the pretext of not having adequate money to pay workers' salary (Picot, 2014). Again, Al-Emad and Rahman (2018) study on construction workers, several experts in construction sector suggests that weak

monitoring, unawareness of safety protocols, ignorance of safety measures, unsafe working situation, lack of safety training, disregard to safety standard are prevalent features in construction sector of Saudi Arabia. The construction workers face unfair termination, they are not allowed to form trade union to voice their rights; low wage, delay in payment, variation in wages among different nationalities, disputes between workers and management leads to resentment among workers (Al-Emad & Rahman, 2018). One of the respondents opined:

“I went to Saudi Arabia in company visa, supply company. I worked as garbage cleaner in a Saudi desert. In extreme heat under open sky, I worked for several hours. The company did not give adequate food and water. Within few days I got sick and did not get proper treatment. I returned to Bangladesh with liver disease.”

However, work contract is important to secure promised pay, decent work condition and work type. Seubert et al. (2021) maintain that flexible employment contract generates negative implication that includes precarization risks as it contributes to less security, less integration and social deprivation of the employees (Kalleberg & Hewison, 2013 cited in Seubert et al., 2021). And precarious employment affect individual as well as community by affecting individual health, welfare, family structure and social life in general (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018 cited in Seubert et al., 2021). Ahmed et al. (2019) in their study find that in Saudi Arabia 55% of Bangladeshi migrant workers have written work contract and almost 66% of them get the job contract just before flight. And in regards to perception of deception 31.82% feel deceived by middle man and 6.82% feel deceived by the employers. In work place, the maximum working time is 16 hours, maximum days with overtime per month is 30 and the average monthly salary is 20,109 BDT. The extent of force labour is evident from statistics like delay of salary goes up to 75 days, 13.64% of the study participants were forced to work during sickness and 4.55% migrants work beyond contract. Again, the experience of abuse and exploitation is reported as 4.55% migrant workers experience physical abuse, 20.45% mental abuse, 2.27% sexual abuse and 9.09% any type of injury at work place. Nevertheless, the number of injuries is high in the case of non-Saudi and male workers. The following Table 1 show the number of injuries of Saudi nationals and non-Saudi in different region of Saudi Arabia.

**Table 1.** Distribution of work injury by sex and nationality in 2019.

Region	Total	Distribution of work Injury			
		Non-Saudi		Saudi	
		Female	Male	Female	Male
Al-Riyadh	7052	56	6590	52	364
Makkah	8305	74	7801	83	347
Al-Mokarramah					

**Continued**

Al-Madinah	1853	33	1723	9	88
Al-Momawarah					
Al-Qasem	849	5	810	5	29
Eastern Region	9352	124	8254	136	839
Aseer	3077	1545	1465	7	60
Tabouk	230	0	220	1	9
Hail	141	3	122	0	16

Source: Saudi General Authority of Statistics (2024).

However, inadequate safety measures and compensation are causing migrant worker's physical and financial losses that could be protected by maintaining decent work standards that promote occupational safety and social security measures for the protection and wellbeing of the workers. In Saudi Arabia occupational safety measure and training about safety measure systems is not adequate. Al-Otaibi and Ahmed Kineber (2023) point out that the number of accidents is high in Saudi Arabia's construction sector than in any other. The construction sites are mostly hazardous and prone to crashes and are associated with several risks that lead to accidents, injuries and even the deaths of the construction workers. In the year 2014, there were approximately 69,241 work-related accidents reported in Saudi Arabia and a total of 51.35 percent of these accidents take place in the construction sector. The number of workplace injuries or fatalities rises in absence of implementation of safety programs. Saudi Arabia has poor safety measures in work place; in fact, the safety efforts are either non-existent or not properly implemented because of poor management and a lack of attention to safety. Migrants engaged in informal precarious work are in greater risk as they work without adequate training and protection equipment and unable to complain about unsafe working conditions. Again, Moyce and Schenkaer (2018) mention that migrant workers are at increased risk for occupational fatalities and injuries as compared with local workers, even having the same job in the same company. Globally, migrant workers have higher rates of negative occupational exposures like poor health condition, workplace injuries and occupational fatalities. In 2014, the ILO assessed that there were 2.3 million occupational fatalities worldwide for a variety of different causes including innate risks in the jobs themselves and inadequate training and protection for immigrant workers. They indicate that environmental exposures, unsuitable temperature, unaware use of pesticides and chemicals, unsafe or unregulated working condition, physical hazards (high elevation, large cutting tools, heavy lifting, fall), lack of safety standard, work place abuse and psychological stress are the most common type of incidents contributing to occupational precarity. Language and cultural barrier, no access to health care, gender perception, documentation status, lack of insurance coverage limit migrant access to safety maintenance that can be improved through policy change, fair recruitment policy and improved safety training.

Though the firm outsources semi-skilled technical and unskilled labour, it trains its direct employees for higher skilled jobs such as field operators or engineers. And outsourcing is inevitable because of insufficient numbers of trained Saudis in the labour market and that the firm's requires workers mostly for short periods of time (Adham & Hammer, 2019). Therefore, outsourced workers have limited path to career development and integration facility in the KSA labour market. Again, compared to their male counterparts, women migrants experience various obstacles and discrimination because of their admission procedures and the type of the jobs they perform (Sultana & Fatima, 2017 cited in Choudhury et al., 2023). Women migrant though enter the job market through legal procedures due to their exclusion from Saudi labour policy they experience abuse, exploitation and deprivation in demeaning working condition. Most of the women workforce are occupied in domestic work and services that limit their legal rights and social protection. Their working condition is like modern slavery that confine them in their employer's house and restrict their ability to create social networks. (Choudhury et al., 2023). One of the returnee female migrant workers pointed out:

“The Bangladeshi female migrant workers find themselves helpless as they cannot keep mobile phone with them and cannot contact outside people, they have almost no access to legal redress in the destination country. If there were a hotline or emergency contact number to convey their grievances that may be a help for timely rescue. If they have valid work contract and other migration document with them, they could pursue their rights.”

Socio-cultural barriers in the name of purda or personal safety justified their unfreedom to movement and access to social network. Again, they are mostly ignorant of their rights and government rules and do not know whom and where to complain, they also accept their situation in fear of job loss and deportation. Thus, the migration experiences of women migrant are characterized by human and labour rights violation, low personal and social mobility and higher expectation from the employers. Aldossari and Chaudhry (2024) maintain that in general in Saudi Arabia women experience socio-economic vulnerability and organizational neglect that led to underreporting of sexual harassment and limited protests against exploitation. They view that the interplay of state policies and ingrained socio-religious norms contributes to both structural and subjective precarity of women migrant in workplaces. Though the Saudi government has adopted modernization agenda in public policy since 2016 like emphasizing women's empowerment such as enhancing women's labor market participation to 30% by 2030 as mentioned in Vision, 2030 and Saudisation (job localization) initiatives focused on gender, to promote the active economic participation of Saudi women, the unchanging practices in social norms, influenced by a conservative tribal culture and patriarchal interpretations of religion contribute to precarious live experiences for women. Thus, the patriarchal state and patriarchal culture contributes to gender inequality such as precarious employment, involvement in informal labor

markets, salary inequalities, non-standard and exploitative and occupational gender segregation. This, power imbalance contributes to honour killing in the case of local women therefore, the situation of women migrant workers is easily relatable to the same kind of domination and unruliness.

However, the precarious situation of migrant workers in the Middle East countries has been mentioned as slavery by [Sinha \(2021\)](#) on the ground that maltreatment fulfills the criteria of slavery. She argues that abuse, exploitative working conditions and rejection of freedom are the prevalent forms of maltreatment which are associated with the behaviour that can be mentioned as slavery. She maintains that legal and economic vulnerability and racial bias towards migrant workers are responsible for situation of slavery-like circumstances. She highlights that modern slavery is persistent on the pretext of enormous profit at the expense of demeaning human life. The concept of slavery has been identified in United Nations convention on the Abolition of Slavery that defines slaves as persons who are under the ownership of power exercising entity in such a condition that denies legal rights or freedom; the situation is represented in three major circumstances; abuse (intimidation of violence), denial of freedom of movement and financial deception and exploitation and exploitative working condition. Therefore, the situation of migrant workers in the Middle East sufficiently represents their positionality as slaves. Likewise, the reality of migrant workers is associated to the liberal construction of the concept of freedom and slavery as oppositional categories ([Davidson, 2013](#)). She points out the role of debt in positioning the situation of migrant workers in precarity, even for several years that restrict their freedom from the control of the employer and put them in a slave like situation. [Davidson \(2013\)](#) maintains that migrant indebtedness can be active or voluntary or autonomous choice that may restrict their freedom. Migrants' exclusion from universal equality and freedom as poor and marginalized group in the hand of state's restrictive policy contributes to their deprivation of rights and protection. Migrant indebtedness led to coercive work condition entailing exploitation, ill treatment, violence and abuse. Indebtedness with restriction intensify power imbalance between migrant workers and the employer as kafala system attributes extensive power to the employer and heavy restriction on migrants. Debt bondage led to involuntary servitude as migrant accepts the coercion in fear of job loss or deportation. However, beyond the voluntary/force and freedom/slaves dichotomy there may be individuals who appear as willing slaves who belief in improvement for the future ([Davidson, 2013](#)).

The exploitative workplace also represents aspect of maltreatment in the form of long working hours, wage deduction along with inadequate living conditions. In general, migrant workers do not get sufficient break and rest time, no leave permission and seems like always ready to work on call and their waking hours are mostly working hours who are also deprived of proper accommodation and salary; deception happens regarding salary, hours of work, nature of job, and over-time pay, false promise, false statement as if exploitation is used as a mechanism

for exercising control over migrant workers. Again, maltreatment is also evident in the tendency of denial of freedom of movement with strategies like passport retention, confinement and social deprivation leading to suicide and death. Most of the migrant workers remain confined as without employer permission they cannot visit their friends and relatives, cannot contact with community and thus stay in social and psychological isolation. Most migrant workers are confined to the household, with half being locked in and forbidden to go anywhere without expressed permission. Profit seeking mentality keep the sending and receiving countries inactive who very often ignore and overlook the abusive slave like situation of the migrant workers (Sinha, 2021). Again, Vlieger (2011) focuses on the situation of migrant domestic workers and expresses the helplessness and vulnerability of this group in light of the concept of slavery. She argues that domestic migrant workers experience slave like situation not in a sense of ownership of property but in the situation of power imbalance where workers are under the domination of the employer. The situation of domestic workers is so vulnerable that their circumstances rely on fate or divine mercy that if a domestic worker is fortunate her employer may be good to her and if the worker is not fortunate, she has no way to ensure her wellbeing. As the country laws do not cover the situation, for their protection they can only cry and pray to God for divine safeguard. With reference to the League of Nations definition on slavery: "The state or condition of a person over whom any or all the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised." Vlieger (2011: p. 76) maintains that in Saudi Arabia domestic workers are not legal property of the employer as they sign contract rather, they are victim of imbalance power relation and domination. As Patterson (1982: p. 32) states, "Slavery is one of the most extreme forms of the relation of domination, approaching the limits of total power from the viewpoint of the master and the total powerlessness from the viewpoint of the slave." (cited in Vlieger, 2011: p. 77). The imbalance aspect of power relation between domestic workers and employer is evident in three situations; the first entails the use of threat and violence in the control of one person by another; the second refers to the capacity to influence another person's intention and action to self-interest and circumstances. And the third is the use of traditional norms and practice that allows the way of transforming force into right and obedience to duty (Patterson, 1982 cited in Vlieger, 2011).

Nevertheless, the issue of forced labour is debatable as expert opined that Bangladeshi migrant worker's situation in Saudi Arabia cannot be categorized as forced labour since they are recruited with employment contract and their written consent is indispensable. However, in reality all necessary formalities are completed only to meet the official purpose; contract substitution also takes place and many migrant experience financial, physical, mental loss in the face of forced labour. When domestic migrant worker needs to make 150 or more hand snacks and other Iftar (fast breaking meal) items in the month of Ramadan, the extremity of this inhumane situation is unethical. This type of hard labour is in no way human job, in the holy month of Ramadan they work all day and night; at day time they

look after the kids and at night they prepare and serve food. The women are asked to lift gas cylinder beyond their capacity, some need to wash heavy floor carpet until it is washed properly, they need to perform the same job twice or thrice, one may need to iron 7/8 long shrug at late night; all these works could be done from outside laundry shop but to save money and to forfeit the maid salary they force them to perform all these arduous jobs. As one of the women migrant domestic workers stated:

“I did every kind of works like cleaning, washing, cooking, child care, elderly care. Even sometimes they took me to work in relative’s house. I worked hard but in return I get less salary, lesser than men and domestic workers from other countries.”

Again, in construction site, the workers need to perform works that require machine operation, carrying construction material like heavy and large pipe towards 10 to 12 floor is not a human job; lifting machine (crane) could perform this type of arduous jobs. The reality of the workers is that in Bangladesh they were mostly engaged in informal job, earning little to maintain their family; they risk to work in foreign land for higher salary; most of them have no friends and relatives there and embassy service is poor, in such a situation it is against humanity and ethics to engage vulnerable people in arduous job who have little or no legal escape in practice. This deficiency in decent work jeopardizes their socio-economic situation that includes career break up, financial loss, physical problem, social stigma and so on.

## 5.2. Implication of Decent Work Agenda

According to Khan (2014) international organizations prioritize decent work practices with the objectives of enhancing the performance of employees, projects and people’s lives. Anker et al. (2002) define decent work indicators as effective instrument for upgrading people’s lives through its four-dimensional programme (such as productive work, equity, social security and dignity) (cited in Khan, 2014). The multidimensional and multi-actor focused concept of the decent work is essentially significant that reflects the intention to develop a comprehensive, multifaceted and legitimized approach to protect the rights of the workers and to promote social equality (Budowski et al., 2020). As Khan (2014) mentions that in the construction industry of Hong Kong, Nepalese construction workers experience harsh working conditions, poor wages and in some cases non-payment of wages. They were to buy their own personal protective equipment (PPE) that many failed to manage. In that study about 54% of the construction workers mentioned that they did not have adequate toilet facilities and 47% commented about unfair treatment by the management. Such work practices result in workers’ engagement in criminal activities that affect both the construction workers, their families, and the home and host countries (cited in Khan, 2014). This research found that Bangladeshi Migrant workers towards Saudi Arabia experience health

hazards, financial loss, indebtedness, career break up, physical and mental trauma in disruption of labour standard. According to Sengenberger (2005: pp. 10-12) observance of international labour standard entails specific benefit such as important positive economic, social and political returns. The standardization effort to ensure worker participation, protection and promotion combinedly contribute to more positive effects. The minimum standards give rise to minimum remuneration and other provisions for employment challenge the power of market enterprises. The abolition of sub-standard wages and poor working conditions pave the ground for constructive change as the firm may need to attain a level of production to cover the standard requirement principle. It may create positive competition in a way that principled the firm with improve management, technology, worker's skill and competence can outstand the firms that are not maintaining standard for employment and work condition. Again, implementation of worker's rights of association, collective bargaining power may enhance economic performance at the both micro and macro level. Worker's participation in decision making increase the scope for problem solving capacity based on mutual interest, thus it allows conflict resolution through consultation and negotiation. Again, collective bargaining power contribute in ensuring transparency in settling worker's remuneration that helps to reduce discontent and injustices. Maintenance of standards in occupational health and safety arrangement are instrumental for high economic return as this improves labour's productivity that ultimately contribute to firm's productivity and country's productivity as well. Employment and income security can inspire the workers to take risks, and also to pass on their expertise to other workers and to management. And Social safeguards and labour market flexibility mutually support protection of workers. The abolition of forced labour and child labour as moral imperative save the country's economy in the long run by saving its national from bad impact of illiteracy, infant mortality and human resource development. For inclusive development equal opportunities and equal treatment in employment helps to avoids social conflict and competition over resources that results in social cohesion and democracy. ILO priorities economic integration and social cohesion that consider opinion of employer, employee, and the government. Consultation and negotiation for employment, pay, benefit work condition and security are crucial as basic component of decent work and decent life to overcome poverty and to expedite growth and development. The basic principle is expressed in ILO Declaration of Philadelphia in 1944 that work is not a commodity. Therefore, the nature of a work contract is to be different from a commodity sales contract in principle. As living entity If workers are not treated with necessary considerations related to their income, living condition, health and wellbeing, they usually become less productive and impair growth and development. The ILO views that productive work is the best way to come out of poverty for securing decent livelihood and for fostering participation in society. Decent work not only dictate moral sensibility, but also recompenses from both a micro-economic and macro-economic point of view as companies with the highest social

standards are mostly profitable. The countries that incorporated decent work standards in work, they achieve highest socio-economic development. Again, realization of decent work in the form of gender equity also contribute positively to country's economy. On the other hand, absence of decent work contributes to violation of human rights and worker's vulnerability that can be summarized as: unemployment and underemployment, violation of freedom to organize unions; forced labour; worst form of child labour, prostitution, slavery, inadequate social security against illness and invalidity, increase work-related illnesses and accidents, lack monitoring, grievance redress, regulation and enforcement (Sengenberger, 2001).

### 5.3. The Role of Kafala/Sponsorship System

Kafala or the sponsorship system is at the centre of labour migration and working condition of migrant workers in Saudi Arabia (Azhari, 2017; Fernandez, 2021; Lorenzini, 2021; Beaugrand & Thiollet, 2023). In exiting literature, it has been termed as rentier system (Fernandez, 2021); root causes of human rights abuse (Jones 2016) institutionalized humiliation (Fernandez, 2021); modern day slavery (Davidson, 2013); forced labour and slavery (Al Rayes, 2019); property of the employer (Alzahrani, 2014). The system of kafala could be defined as, "an institutionalized intermediation between locals and foreigners, establishing a relation of protection, dependence, exploitation and hierarchy within and beyond that established by the labour market." (Beaugrand & Thiollet, 2023: p. 346). The GCC countries are bound together by their custom of the kafala system. established in the 1930s (Nelson, 2014). According to Fernandez (2021) the word kafala connotes different sets of interpretation where the employer/sponsor is to provide support, provide bail or guarantee or be the legal guardian of the employee (Longva, 1997 cited in Fernandez, 2021). In theories on the origin of the system has similarities with the Bedouin traditions of hospitality towards visitors (Beauge, 1986 as cited in Damir-Geilsdorf & Pelican, 2019) and the Islamic tradition of a patron providing "an assurance of the fulfillment of an obligation of the guaranteed person" (Jureidini & Hassan, 2020, 94 cited in Fernandez, 2021). And also similarities with colonial mentality as an legacy of the British imperial period in the Middle East that has infused the structure of the kafala placing the white people at the top of this racialized hierarchy (Fernandez, 2021). Azhari (2017) mentions that the kafala system was originated from as a mechanism to facilitate the locals to enjoy their rights and to put some restriction on the entry of foreigner; thus, it allows Saudi citizens to keep foreign workers who are also responsible for the worker as guarantee for the government. According to Lorenzini (2021) the Kafala/Sponsorship System was originated to regulate the relationship between employers and migrant workers. To maximize the economic benefit of foreign labour Kafala system was developed as an instrument to facilitate the easy hiring of temporary workers to support country's development activities who could be easily terminated or deported on redundancy during periods of

economic recession. Under the Kafala system a worker can work only for an employer who exercises enormous control over the employee and at the end of the contract, the migrant worker is required to leave the country except the Kafel agrees to extend the employment contract for further period. Migrant workers cannot change employer without the written consent of present employer even in case of physical or verbal abuse. Thus, the sponsorship system creates highly imbalanced relationship between migrant workers and employer; domestic workers are the worst victim of this system whose situation is particularly vulnerable as they might be charged with “absconding,” which is a punishable crime even with imprisonment.

Nevertheless, by providing widespread powers and errands unilaterally to the employers, the Kafala system puts the migrant workers in abysmal and exploitative working conditions, abuses, and human rights violation (Alzahrani, 2014). The Government’s insufficient administrative capacity leads to the emancipation of sponsorship system for the management of foreigners and their migration in and out of the states by transferring various responsibilities on the sponsor that are embedded in the system. It is the written employment contract submitted to governments, form the interconnectedness between the employer and employee; unfortunately, it is very often reported that employers make alterations on the contract which is violation of the contractual agreement as the new terms are not negotiated rather unilaterally forced and might not be conformed to legislative and regulatory procedure (Alzahrani, 2014). A wide range of exploitation, extortion and deceptive activities take place related to the employment contracts of Bangladeshi migrant workers such as wage theft, job mismatch, salary mismatch, duration of contract and so on (Imam & Munier, 2020). Contract substitution make the migrant workers vulnerable in contesting their grievances before concerned authority. Low socio-economic background of low skilled informal workers keeps them ignorant about work contract and their rights, as a consequence they suffer from exploitation and fail to ensure their rights. Jureidini (2018) argues that kafala or the sponsorship system for migrant worker management remains one of the principal reasons for the vulnerability of migrant workers and causes conditions of forced labour and manipulation of wages that take place due to contract substitution, underpayment, delayed payment or non-payment (Jureidini, 2018). Non-payment of employees strongly contradicts with Islamic ethical principles as the Prophet (pbuh) stated, “You should pay the labourer his wages before his sweat dries” (Sunan Ibn Májah, 2443 cited in Fargues & Shah, 2018: p. 11). And also stated, “I am the adversary of three people on the Day of Requittal: one who gave in my name and then was treacherous, one who enslaved free man and consumed the price and a man who employs a worker but does not pay him his rightful wages” (Bukhari, Hadith no. 2114 cited in, Jureidini 2018: p. 11). One of the respondents of this study was working as driver in Saudi Arabia, faced enormous amount of financial loss for lack of legal support and lack of trade union. As he mentioned:

“My financial loss was heavy, the employer eloped to another country unwilling to pay my bonus and benefit money at the end of contract period. I did not get sufficient time to contest in the labour court as my visa expired. At this situation I had to left Saudi Arabia without the bonus money that was mentioned in the contract. In absence of trade union or any community representative there was no one to follow up my court complain. Embassy personnel also did not follow up my matter.”

However, [Alzahrani \(2014\)](#) argues that migrant workers are able to protect their limited rights by calling on the authorities of the host states. Unfortunately, though they are technically entitled to present charges against the employers for violation of the contractual agreement or other forms of abuse, they face practical barriers that hinder justice and fairness. The major obstacles include language barriers, lack of evidence and the tendency of the court to favour the locals. Theoretically, the migrant employees can also seek help from the home country embassy but practically it is hard to manage time as they are required to perform their duties all day, it is difficult to manage an appointment to contact with embassy, if the embassy is in distance place it becomes more difficult to have access; again, it is not certain whether the embassy would fight for their case considering the matter of bilateral relationship and at the risk of market loss ([Alzahrani, 2014](#)). On the other hand, though, in the receiving countries this group of workers was considered to be “indispensable”; unfortunately, they are treated as to be “disposable” ([Azhari, 2017](#)). As is illustrated by [Nelson \(2014: p. 41\)](#), “The current incarnation of the kafala system is a bastardization of previous forms, replacing generosity with greed, and honesty with deceit.” [Lorenzini \(2021\)](#) argues that the Kafala system is responsible for abuses of power and violations of worker’s rights, creates the conditions of modern slavery that trap the employee in several kinds of exploitations. In their superior position the employers very often retain personal documents, withhold payment or compel to work for long hours. She indicates that migrant workers are vulnerable due to their particular context where they face language barriers, social integration challenges and imbalanced working relationships with unscrupulous employers (kafeel) who take advantage of their lack of knowledge of local legislation and bargaining power. And [Fernandez \(2021\)](#) refers to kafala system as institutionalized humiliation that occurs when social institutions and practices entails disrespect and violates the dignity and respect of any groups or individuals. In an unequal system that allow some to enjoy substantial power over others who exercise it with more or less freedom institutionalized humiliation takes place in a large scale ([Parekh, 2009: p. 31](#) cited in [Fernandez, 2021, p. 4350](#)). And hegemonic ideology degradation, coercion are consequences of institutionalized humiliation that causes racial hierarchy of wages and working conditions, deprivation of people by limiting their opportunities to challenge the social and political structures that forcibly outline their socially inferior status, the state’s dispersion of coercion and surveillance over the migrants to kafeels. Thus, the employer/sponsor is allowed to “act as the guardians of the system and

authorizes them to administer chastisement, dismiss from jobs, ostracize, insult, and use such sanctions and coercive measures as they think appropriate to keep the subordinate groups in their place” (Parekh, 2009: p. 33 cited in [Fernandez, 2021: p. 4354](#)). As [Jones \(2016\)](#) argues that the Kafala system plays into the hands of businessmen who in an exploitative situation take advantage over the poverty-stricken migrant workers to secure their economic benefit. The gaps in the kafala system and labour law act as instrumental through which the wealthy and powerful exploit and abuse the migrant workers who are poor and vulnerable. It is evident that there is a strong correlation between inequality and human rights abuses and that the sponsorship system along with insufficient labour law in the GCC countries are the root cause at the heart of insurmountable abuses faced by migrant workforce. Many workers are forced to perform dangerous task beyond employment contract like excessive working hours as is common among migrant domestic workers.

[Damir-Geilsdorf & Pelicanb \(2019\)](#) point out that though the kafala system is empowering individual and corporate sponsors with extensive control and authority it also has the option of malpractices in visa arrangement. Informal practices of so-called free visa emerges from the loophole of Kafala system that benefit sponsor, employer, migrant workers by providing the visa without specific employment and employer, as a result, the migrant enjoy the freedom to choose and change the employers. The sponsor could earn extra money and get exempted administrative and legal responsibilities. This illegal means contributes to migrants suffering as there is no guarantee of work and salary; mostly difficult to arrange employment and Ikama (residency permit). Migrant of this study reported:

“I went to Saudi with free visa. The agent promised to give a work in restaurant but after arrival he sent me to cleaning mosque. I requested him to change the job but he did not, my salary was very poor 500/600 riyals, I had to take money from my family to buy food. With great hardship, I failed to continue my work, later I surrendered to police. I myself could not find any work as I did not have any friend or relative.”

This research finds that free visa/visit visa is attractive as it does not require visa charge and administration formalities, rather it has option for freedom to change employer; the danger that it involves is the possibility of several sales of the same employee to several employers that results in low salary. Thus, it secures the interest of the employer and force the worker to agree with low wage. As the respondents of this study reported there is no word like free visa in reality; sometimes employer or sponsor issues visa without guarantee for work, the migrants have to find work of their own. Very often it is difficult and almost impossible for the worker to find work without friends and relatives as nobody is known to him and nobody knows him. The tendency to secure overseas employment by any means contribute to migrant workers suffering as sometimes upon arrival they find no job; rather they have to take money from home for their sustenance.

Therefore, migrants experience of Kafala system varies and depends on ability to deal with the odds of the kafala system. “This depends on the practices of individual sponsors and intermediaries as well as on migrants’ educational and economic backgrounds” (Gardner, 2014: pp. 4-5 cited in [Damir-Geilsdorf & Pelicanb, 2019: p. 158](#)). However, [Beaugrand and Thiollet \(2023\)](#) discussed the involvement of the private sponsors involved in the kafala system to implement the hierarchical policy of labour import and that also undermine the state’s objective of labour rotation through the recurrent renewal of “short-term” work contracts for economic gain. To Longuenesse (1988) the kafala could work as a relationship of “protection/collaboration”, particularly for long-term residents (Longuenesse, 1988, p. 3 cited in [Beaugrand & Thiollet, 2023: p. 345](#)) and it is deemed that it might shield migrants from state control particularly in times of anti-immigration policies or severer labour market control. The point is the impact of the use and abuse of Kafala depends on discretion and comprehensive effects in addition to those that are most apparent such as the power asymmetry and rights abuses and that have considerably been objected by the human rights activists. Again, inter-personal relationships of trust between kafeel and employee can influence the continuous renewal of work contracts and residence permits. This relationship can also help the family reunification with financial gain: again, an existing employee can help the kafeel in finding new worker through kinship and network; this emotional attachment helps in employment generation and productivity that is often under presented in the reports of abuses (cited in [Beaugrand & Thiollet, 2023](#)). Similarly in Saudi Arabia the Eritrean migrants have been able to bring relatives and have children grow up in Riyadh or Jeddah even without formal work permits with the intermediation of their kafeel through informal means for the family to gather together. Their personal attachment with their kafeel protect them from hard labour market regulations by allowing them change jobs without leaving the country or without the formal agreement of their employer (Thiollet, 2010 cited in [Beaugrand & Thiollet, 2023](#)). Likewise, Beaugé (1986) mentions that personal relationships between employer and employee also help in developing business enterprise (cited in [Beaugrand & Thiollet, 2023](#)).

[Alzahrani \(2014\)](#) argues that there are number of reasons for the kafala system to survive in spite of criticism. Firstly, the labour sending countries overlooks the migrant worker’s requirement for protection as the country’s economic policy considerably depends on monetary benefits harvested by workers, specially remittance dependent countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, Philippines and Bangladesh overlooks the matter of protection for economic benefit. Secondly, the Gulf states, have no interest in changing the system either as they are getting benefit cheap labour and usually do not have to provide social services, such as child and elder care. Thirdly, many of the international labour laws and convention are ineffective. The GCC states have not ratified many important international conventions to safeguard workers’ rights and have reservation against few conditions; Saudi Arabia is not bound by the treaty ICPPR, ICESCR; have reservation for CERD and CEDAW in case the treaty conflicts with Islamic Law.

**Human Rights Watch (2021)** maintains that recent labour reform initiatives in Saudi Arabia appear insufficient as these initiatives are not enough to dismantle abusive kafala system and domestic workers are not considered in legal protection. Migrant workers' ability to change job, exit permit are still conditional to employer in practical sense as the migrant workers would be able to change job without the consent of the employer after completion of one year service or at the expiry of contract period or if the worker is not paid for three consecutive years and if a labour dispute arises, the employer fail to attend two hearings. The respondents of this research suggest effective reform in kafala system as in extreme abuse and exploitation the government of Philippines puts ban on recruitment of female domestic workers towards Saudi Arabia which was revised within years with improved conditions for workers protection.

## 6. Conclusion

Though Saudi Arabia is the top destination country for Bangladeshi migrant workers, they face deficiency of decent work and insufficient protection that cause precarious employment and rejection of their rights. To incorporate core standard in work, to improve the quality of work and life of the worker, to eliminate inequality and discrimination, and to promote basic protection for workers, ILO aspires to promote decent work concept that stands on four pillars: opportunity to employment, rights at work place, social security and social dialogue. Therefore, according to decent work perspective, employment means productive freely chosen employment, rights at work irrespective of type of employment, social protection for old age, sickness, unemployment, loss of livelihood and social dialogue to resolve differences and to ensure social equity. With this understanding, this research focuses on the quest for decent work of Bangladeshi Migrant workers towards Saudi Arabia. It appears that at the employment stage, Bangladeshi migrant workers towards Saudi Arabia experience discrimination, low salary, exploitation and abuse, violation of human and labour rights requirements, unfreedom and coercion; rights at work place is inadequate; social security support is also inadequate and social dialogues initiatives are ineffective. The fraudulent practices of labour migration intermediaries, ineffective and insufficient state policy, low socio-economic background of migrant workers engaged in informal sector, socio-economic hierarchy and socio-cultural barriers impede implementation of decent work agenda. To bring smile in the face of their family member, migrant worker travels to an unknown destination and stay there as *aznabi* (guest) and outsider. Their small and simple dream get shattered when they are underestimated and treated like disposable product. Dignity of human life lies in equal treatment and acceptance irrespective of colour, caste and creed. Therefore, the effective incorporation of decent work standards in labour migration policy is essential to remove workers' vulnerability to ensure their welfare and protection who are recognized as "Remittance Warriors" or "Heroes of Development". This study recommends concrete guideline for safe migration and workplace safety, standard

operating procedure, robust legal frameworks and enforcement instruments, adequate consular services in destination countries and training of the staff with adequate knowledge of migration management. Institutional development and capacity enhancement is also essential; it requires incorporation and implementation of international treaties and conventions related to human rights, welfare and protection of workers; transparency and accountability in migration management, global governance, multi-lateral framework and specific roadmap for formulation and implementation of decent work agenda to reduce worker's vulnerability and to ensure worker's fundamental rights.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

### References

- Adham, A., & Hammer, A. (2019). Understanding Arab Capitalisms: Patrimonialism, HRM and Work in Saudi Arabia. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 32, 4578-4602. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2019.1695649>
- Ahmed, M. S., Das, N. C., Huq, L., Prabhakar, P., & Sulaiman, M. (2019). *Beneficiary Vulnerability Analysis and Engagement for Bangladeshi Overseas Labour Migrants*. [https://bigd.bracu.ac.bd/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Beneficiary-Vulnerability-Analysis\\_migrants\\_Bangladesh\\_2018.pdf](https://bigd.bracu.ac.bd/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Beneficiary-Vulnerability-Analysis_migrants_Bangladesh_2018.pdf)
- Al Rayes, D. (2019). *Laws without Enforcement: The Case of Unskilled Foreign Workers in Kuwait*. Doctoral Dissertation, London Metropolitan University. <https://repository.londonmet.ac.uk/5396/>
- Aldossari, M., & Chaudhry, S. (2024). Gendered Precarity in Saudi Arabia: Examining the State Policies and Patriarchal Culture in the Labor Market. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 31, 2698-2716. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13119>
- Aleksynska, M., Aoul, S. K., & Petrencu, V. (2017). *Deficiencies in Conditions of Work as a Cost to Labor Migration: Concepts, Extent and Implications*. The Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD): Working Paper 28. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migration/brief/remittances-ksnomad>
- Al-Emad, N. H., & Rahman, I. A. (2018). Issues Engulfed Saudi Arabia Construction Workers. *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, 140, Article ID: 012097. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/140/1/012097>
- Almutairi, A. M. S. (2017). *Protecting the Rights of Temporary Foreign "Low-Skilled" Workers in the Saudi Construction Industry: A Case for Legal Reform*. Doctoral Dissertation, Brunel University of London. <https://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream>
- Al-Otaibi, A., & Kineber, A. (2023). Identifying and Assessing Health and Safety Program Implementation Barriers in the Construction Industry: A Case of Saudi Arabia. *Applied Sciences*, 13, Article No. 2630. <https://doi.org/10.3390/app13042630>
- Alzahrani, M. M. (2014). The System of Kafala and the Rights of Migrant Workers in GCC Countries—With Specific Reference to Saudi Arabia. *European Journal of Law Reform*, 16, 377-400. <https://doi.org/10.5553/ejlr/138723702014016002010>
- Andrees, B., Nasri, A., & Swiniarski, P. (2015). *Regulating Labour Recruitment to Prevent Human Trafficking and to Foster Fair Migration: Models, Challenges and Opportunities*. ILO. [https://www.stopslaverynetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/022\\_-ILO-Regulating-Labour-Recruitment.pdf](https://www.stopslaverynetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/022_-ILO-Regulating-Labour-Recruitment.pdf)

- Azhari, A. (2017). The Kafala "Sponsorship" System in Saudi Arabia: A Critical Analysis from the Perspective of International Human Rights and Islamic Law. *The SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research*, 10, 61-80.  
[https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/24680/1/09\\_AAzhari\\_Kafala\\_Sponsorship.pdf](https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/24680/1/09_AAzhari_Kafala_Sponsorship.pdf)
- Beaugrand, C., & Thiollet, H. (2023). Migration Intermediation: Revisiting the Kafala (Sponsorship System) in the Gulf. In A. Pécoud, & H. Thiollet (Eds.), *Research Handbook on the Institutions of Global Migration Governance* (pp. 341-356). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781789908077.00032>
- Bélangier, D., & Rahman, M. (2013). Migrating against All the Odds: International Labour Migration of Bangladeshi Women. *Current Sociology*, 61, 356-373.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392113484453>
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods* (International ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Budowski, M., Jany, N., & Schief, S. (2020). *Decent Work*.  
[https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as\\_sdt=0%2C5&q](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q)
- Choudhury, T., Morad, M., & Dellapuppa, F. (2023). Lacerated Minds, Stolen Dreams: Experiences of Bangladeshi Women Migrants in Saudi Arabia. *International Sociology*, 39, 50-70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02685809231207035>
- City and Guilds & IOM (2017). *Labour Market Survey in KSA: Skills Development Programme. Final Report: The Construction Sector. Labour Migration Study. The Research Base*. <http://www.ilo.org>
- Damir-Geilsdorf, S., & Pelican, M. (2019). Between Regular and Irregular Employment: Subverting the Kafala System in the GCC Countries. *Migration and Development*, 8, 155-175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21632324.2018.1479215>
- Di Ruggiero, E., Cohen, J. E., & Cole, D. C. (2014). The Politics of Agenda Setting at the Global Level: Key Informant Interviews Regarding the International Labour Organization Decent Work Agenda. *Globalization and Health*, 10, Article No. 56.  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/1744-8603-10-56>
- Fargues, P., & Shah, N. M. (2018). *Migration to the Gulf: Policies in Sending and Receiving Countries* (pp. 1-7). Gulf Research Center.  
<https://cadmus.eui.eu/atmire/handle/1814/56064>
- Fernandez, B. (2021). Racialised Institutional Humiliation through the Kafala. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47, 4344-4361.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2021.1876555>
- Ghai, D. (2003). Decent Work: Concept and Indicators. *International Labour Review*, 142, 113-145. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1564-913x.2003.tb00256.x>
- Human Rights Watch (2021). *Saudi Arabia: Labour Reforms Insufficient*.  
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/25/saudi-arabia-labor-reforms-insufficient>
- Imam, H., & Munier, A. (2020). *Mapping of Labour Migration Recruitment Practices in Bangladesh*. International Organization for Migration-IOM.  
[https://report-mapping-of-recruitment-practices-in-bangladesh\\_iom\\_jan-2020.pdf](https://report-mapping-of-recruitment-practices-in-bangladesh_iom_jan-2020.pdf)
- Islam, M. S. (2020). Need Based Skilled Human Resources for Overseas Employment. *National Defence College E-Journal*, 1, 68-87. <https://ndcjournal.ndc.gov.bd/ndcj>
- Jarallah, Y. (2009). Domestic Labor in the Gulf Countries. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 7, 3-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562940802687132>
- Jones, R. (2016). *Beyond Kafala: Remediating Human Rights Abuses of Migrant Workers in the Persian Gulf*.  
<https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/items/49a0a12b-d828-4ffa-80e2-287476dee15b>
- Jureidini, R. (2018). Wage Protection Systems and Programmes in the GCC. In P. Fargues,

- & N. Shah (Eds.), *Migration to the Gulf: Policies in Sending and Receiving Countries* (pp. 9-32). Gulf Research Center.  
<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Francoise-De-Bel-Air/publication/326045197>
- Khan, A. (2014). *Improving Performance of Construction Projects in the UAE: Multi-Cultural and Decent Work Perspectives*. <https://oulurepo.oulu.fi/handle/10024/36310>
- Lorenzini, A. (2021). *From Informal Economy to Decent Work: Analysis and Observations. The Case of Female Migrant Domestic Workers in Jordan and United Arab Emirates*. Master's Thesis Comparative International Relations, Ca'Foscari University of Venice.  
<http://dspace.unive.it/bitstream/handle/10579/19727/854601-1251650.pdf?sequence=2>
- Mallett, R. (2018). *Decent Work, Migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. ODI. <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/12390.pdf>
- Moyce, S. C., & Schenker, M. (2018). Migrant Workers and Their Occupational Health and Safety. *Annual Review of Public Health, 39*, 351-365.  
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-040617-013714>
- Nelson, J. (2014). The Ethical Implications of the Kafala System. *Pitt Political Review, 11*, 41-44. <https://doi.org/10.5195/ppr.2014.46>
- O'Connell Davidson, J. (2013). Troubling Freedom: Migration, Debt, and Modern Slavery. *Migration Studies, 1*, 176-195. <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mns002>
- Piasna, A., Sehnbruch, K., & Burchell, B. (2021). Decent Work: Conceptualization and Policy Impact. In W. L. Filho, et al. (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals* (pp. 215-224). Springer International Publishing.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95867-5\\_107](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95867-5_107)
- Picot, M. D. (2014). *Advancing the Rights of Migrant Workers in the Gulf Cooperation Council: Reforming the Kafala System*. Doctoral Dissertation.  
<https://repository.gchumanrights.org/items/f3d1b9dc-ad14-4609-944e-b65cefca0432>
- Roy, R. (2016). *The Political Economy of Labour Migration from Bangladesh Power, Politics and Contestation*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Adelaide.  
<https://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au>
- Saudi General Authority of Statistics (2024). <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/>
- Sengenberger, W. (2001). Decent Work: The International Labour Organization Agenda. *Dialogue and Cooperation, 2*, 39-55. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/global/02077.pdf>
- Sengenberger, W. (2005). *Globalization and Social Progress: The Role and Impact of International Labour Standards*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.  
<https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/02980.pdf>
- Seubert, C., Hopfgartner, L., & Glaser, J. (2021). Living Wages, Decent Work, and Need Satisfaction: An Integrated Perspective. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 30*, 808-823. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432x.2021.1966094>
- Siddiqui, T. (2005). *International Labour Migration from Bangladesh: A Decent Work Perspective*. Working Paper, No. 66, Policy Integration Department, National Policy Group, International Labour Office.  
<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=e3ad31efb7b14c1ab6ccd61c37167baedad52541>
- Sinha, M. (2021). Treatment of Migrant Workers in the Middle East: Modern-Day Slavery? *ANU Undergraduate Research Journal, 11*, 144-154.  
<https://studentjournals.anu.edu.au/index.php/aurj/article/view/624>
- Sultana, H., & Fatima, A. (2017). Factors Influencing Migration of Female Workers: A Case of Bangladesh. *IZA Journal of Development and Migration, 7*, Article No. 4.  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40176-017-0090-6>

Ullah, A. A. (2017). Irregular Migration from Bangladesh to the Gulf: Is Combatting It a Governance Challenge? In P. Fargues, & N. M. Shah (Eds.), *Skilful Survivals: Irregular Migration to the Gulf* (p. 203). Gulf Research Center.

<https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/47089/GLMM?sequence=1#page=218>

Vlieger, A. (2011). *Domestic Workers in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates: A Socio-Legal Study on Conflicts*. Dissertation, Amsterdam Law School Legal Studies Research Paper No. 2011-49, General Subserie Research Paper No. 2011-08, University of Amsterdam. <https://books.google.com.bd/books?hl=en&lr=&id=FNzeP2cTIywC&oi=fnd&pg=PA21&dq>