

POLICY BRIEF

Ensuring Active Inclusion of Diaspora in Bangladesh's National Development

January 2022

This policy brief summarizes the findings of the "Ensuring Active Inclusion of Diaspora in Bangladesh's National Development" assessment organized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) under its Sustainable Reintegration and Improved Migration Governance (Prottasha) project, funded by the European Union. IOM commissioned the Human Development Research Centre (HDRC) to conduct this study. The full report is available at www.bangladesh.iom.int

OVERVIEW

The significance of diaspora groups is undeniable. Bangladesh's migration discourse is primarily concerned with short-term migration, with issues around diaspora less explored. The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has, however, made efforts across multiple sectors to link diaspora national development. To do this effectively requires strong endorsement, comprehensive integration mechanisms, and an appropriate institutional structure. Based on an in-depth assessment, this study identifies measures which could be taken to ensure the active inclusion of the Bangladeshi diaspora in accelerating national development.

BANGLADESHI DIASPORA

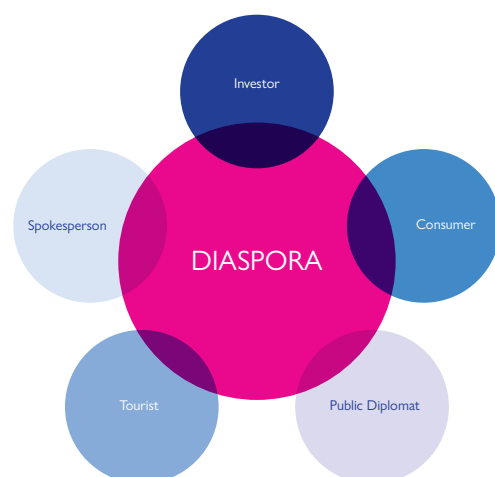
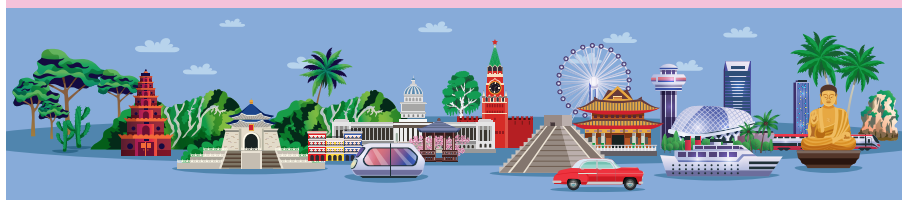
While there is no formally recorded data on its size, it is estimated that there are 2.4 million members of the Bangladeshi diaspora across the globe. The UK and the USA are the two key hosts, and a large group resides in Italy.

POLICY CONTEXT

Global frameworks such as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) explicitly highlight the need to engage the diaspora in sustainable development. Inspired by the principle to "leave no one behind" in the 2030 Agenda, the GoB has attempted to integrate diaspora communities into the national development process. Bangladesh's national legal framework recognises the significance of diaspora inclusion in national development. The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE), in its Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy 2016, includes the diaspora community in its purview. The 8th Five Year Plan stresses designing innovative tools for development financing by tapping into the wealth of the diaspora population. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and its overseas missions liaise with diaspora associations in host countries. Relevant government authorities are also tasked to consider diaspora rights to citizenship, voting and national identity cards.

DIASPORA'S CONTRIBUTIONS

The Bangladeshi diaspora contributes to its image abroad by increasing its social and political footprint in host countries. They contribute to the country's development in numerous ways - they play manifold roles such as "Investor", "Consumer", "Public Diplomat", and many more.



¹ There is no universal definition of diaspora. In this study, Bangladeshi diaspora is defined as Bangladeshi persons who have citizenship of another country or are in the process of getting it or living there permanently or was born or raised in another country as a Bangladeshi-descendant.



Economic Contribution

National economic tracking shows that 20.7 per cent of national remittances received in the Fiscal Year 2019-20 came from the 13 per cent of expatriates residing in the USA and UK, who constitute the most significant portion of the diaspora.² It is also noticeable that during the COVID-19 pandemic, diaspora members have continued their financial contributions. The GoB have offered a cash incentive on remittance since 2019, which, according to the interviews with diaspora members, contributed to enhancing remittance flows. It is estimated that 70,000 to 80,000 potential diaspora investors could make USD 9.9 to 11 billion worth of investment.³



Social Contribution

The diaspora's social contribution has three broad aspects: civic, intellectual, and philanthropic. Diaspora naturally transfers social remittances between host and origin countries.⁴ The 8th Five Year Plan recognises that an insufficient skilled and productive workforce holds back national development. There has been increased recognition of migrant professionals, and their enhanced knowledge and skills that may be transferred back to Bangladesh in the long run. Estimates suggest that 21,000 to 30,000 Bangladeshi diaspora professionals could contribute technical knowledge and skills across multiple sectors and business areas.⁵ Diaspora associations and online & offline networks have a significant role in 'brain gain' and circulation.

CHALLENGES

Activating a dynamic and updated diaspora database is essential for comprehensive policy and decision-making. The Government-initiated diaspora registration process is moving slowly. Another challenge is inadequate strategies, plans, or programmes in place to facilitate diaspora inclusion in national development planning. A policy framework is required to recognise and address the economic and non-economic contributions of the diaspora categorically. There are definitional issues to solve, particularly recognising the diaspora's descendants. Often diaspora associations' efforts remain unacknowledged. Institutional mechanisms underperform to address the return and reintegration of diaspora. Endeavours to uphold diaspora rights in host countries are sporadic. Despite any concrete number of diaspora investors, business associations confirm that only a tiny portion of the diaspora invests in Bangladesh—it requires improved accountability and transparency to stimulate diaspora financial contributions. Exclusive financial products like savings bonds for Non-Residents Bangladeshis are not attractive to the diaspora community, primarily due to the lack of targeted promotional campaigns. Diaspora members' enrolment in the capital markets is still negligible. It lacks a philanthropic fund built upon the contribution of the expatriates and others, aiming at welfare of bereaved expatriates and their families. Bangladeshi diaspora could play a more prominent role if better supported. The difficulty arises from the absence of a guiding, facilitative, and responsive mechanism to support these endeavours, backed by a formal system of regular and output-driven communication with the diaspora networks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A "5-R approach" may be adopted for formulating and implementing the national policies and strategies to ensure the active inclusion of the Bangladeshi diaspora in national development. The first 4-Rs (Recognition, Respect, Rights, and Return and Reintegration) are pertinent for ensuring the 5th "R" (Resources—financial and human) from the diaspora communities. It requires a strengthened coordination mechanism among the Government agencies to oversee the process. A "Diaspora Engagement Strategy" (including a reintegration mechanism) will play a pivotal role in establishing the pathway to include Bangladeshi diaspora more comprehensively in national development. The "Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy 2016" needs to be revisited to address the definitional issues. Bangladeshi diaspora can contribute meaningfully to national development only if a politically accommodative culture is established at every level towards establishing an inclusive-decent society



The following recommendations categorised in 13 groups guide suggestions to ensure the active inclusion of the Bangladeshi diaspora in national development. The concerned authorities could prioritise the recommended actions.

⁴ In this study, "Social Remittance" is referred to as transferable/exchangeable/interchangeable socio-cultural ideas, beliefs, values, traits, behaviours and practices from host to origin country. Essentially, social remittances account for feasible public knowledge, cultural learnings, and social skills traded between host and origin countries through diaspora using public spaces.

⁵ Estimates made based on the discussion with diaspora organisations and other key informants.



I. Recognition

- Organising an online portal (for registration) to provide diaspora cards by categories (including the descendants). It requires synchronisation with the Wage Earners' Welfare Board's diaspora registration process.
- Establishing a self-administered one-stop online platform to serve as a comprehensive database, communications, and knowledge-sharing platform for the diaspora and relevant organisations.
- Launching campaigns and sensitisation activities by Bangladesh missions in host countries to ensure diaspora members' and organisations' registration in the online platform (initially in USA and UK).
- Ensure participatory diaspora representation in developing the relevant national policies, plans, and programmes.
- Ensuring diaspora representation in Civil Society-led national platforms.
- Prioritise diaspora agenda by the Parliamentarians' Caucus on Migration and Development.
- Engaging Bangladeshi diasporic politicians to gain moral support in pertinent bi-lateral and multi-lateral diplomacy (both formally and informally), including lobby doors for protecting and promoting the reasonable national concerns of Bangladesh.



II. Respect

- Ensuring smooth entries at immigration points, explicitly focusing on the new generation diaspora.
- Engaging notable Bangladeshi diaspora members as "Goodwill Ambassadors" and facilitating the pertinent activities—to promote the country's image, establish the rights of the migrant workers, strengthen soft diplomacy platforms, and realise investment potential.
- Preparing a guideline to routinely recognise diaspora members/organisations with salutation and award.
- Establishing and promoting a "Diaspora Engagement Cell" in the MoEWOE and initiating a one-stop service point with a hotline number.



III. Rights

- Streamlining the process of issuing Dual Nationality Certificates.
- Ensuring voting rights of the Bangladeshi diaspora.



IV. Return and reintegration

- Mapping existing and probable crises applicable to the Bangladeshi diaspora communities, including utilising the Bangladesh Migration Crisis Operational Framework and Migrants in Countries in Crisis (MICIC) Initiative.
- Engaging diaspora communities for providing inputs for return and reintegration policy.
- Establishing a system for the diaspora for accreditation of the skills training certificates and recognition of skills acquired abroad.
- Accommodating diaspora investors with need-based facilities as part of the reintegration initiative.



V. Boosting financial accessibility

- Preparing an action plan to promote investment opportunities and remittance channels for the diaspora (initially in selected host countries).
- Introducing and promoting financial products targeting the diaspora.
- Initiating a one-stop service point with a hotline number for the diaspora regarding all banking issues and related services.
- Disseminating the benefits of CIP (Commercially Important Person) status through sending a certain amount of remittance.



VI. Knowledge and skills remittance

- Preparing an action plan to utilise the skilled and professional diaspora's knowledge & networks to develop the science and technology sector.
- Organising online and offline courses, lecture series by the diaspora in educational institutes (including Technical Training Centres), focusing on the diaspora from that district.
- Developing a programme for fellowships to members of the new generation diaspora.
- Collaborating with diaspora organisations to facilitate safe labour (skilled and semi-skilled) and professional migration from Bangladesh.
- Involving the diaspora members to the relevant government mechanism (i.e., District Employment and Manpower Office-DEMO; Technical Training Centre-TTC) in their respective origin districts to help facilitate safe labour migration.



VII. Country branding

- In addition to observing the "International Migrants Day", declare "Bangladeshi Probashi Divash" and celebrate worldwide through thematic events showcasing the beauties and prospects of the country engaging the diaspora members.
- Stocktaking the best practices of Bangladesh overseas missions through a systematic review and establishing a mechanism to use the learning.
- Developing a standard format for the Bangladesh overseas missions' websites with necessary content ensuring updating, which can act as one-stop information dissemination and networking hub.



VIII. Support diaspora diplomacy

- Designing a social media engagement strategy to build long-term relationships with diaspora communities, particularly the younger generation of diaspora.
- Establishing a well-coordinated longer-term diplomatic vision to capitalise on the skills and strengths of the good offices of selected diaspora professionals (Initiating formal partnership with Bangladeshi diaspora business chambers will facilitate economic diplomacy).
- Organising regular programmes for the new generation of the younger diaspora members to visit Bangladesh, thus making the public diplomacy process sustainable (initially targeting 5 to 6 cities of diaspora concentration).
- Setting up a Cell to incorporate Bangladeshi diaspora associations, Bangladeshi origin politicians and professionals for advocacy groups in the host countries to advocate for the protection and promotion of the national interests of Bangladesh.
- Organising networks of Bangladeshi diaspora engaged in different fields to extract all possible inputs to manage pandemic time global politics and economy-related concerns of Bangladesh.



IX. Fostering trade linkages

- Conducting extensive market research to map product needs (including mapping the vital diaspora business chambers and personnel) and financial feasibility in trading those products and facilitating the relevant export.
- Organising educational and cultural exchange programmes targeting the next-generation diaspora.
- Facilitating Online Bazar of heritage products through connecting with international carrier services.



X. Promoting diaspora tourism

- Designing attractive and economical tour packages targeting the different segments of the diaspora communities—nostalgia trips for the older generation, adventure trips for the younger generation, and ethnic, nature and heritage trips for those interested.
- Ensuring community involvement to promote diaspora tourism. It requires sensitisation through local government and local community-based organisations.
- Establishing a department in the National Archives on genealogical data with exposure to online research and access to information of inheritance records.
- Promoting medical tourism among Bangladeshi diaspora towards Bangladesh, particularly dental health, and facilitating relevant technical skills exchange initiatives.



XI. Facilitating investment

- Strengthening the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA) to provide one-stop services - create a cell designed to facilitate investment by the diaspora.
- Developing a dynamic "Diaspora Investment Index" to support potential investors from the diaspora community.
- Approaching and facilitating the diaspora to help advocate for Special Economic Zones (SEZs)
- Organising "Business Summits" and "Investment Summits" in critical host locations.
- Approaching and facilitating diaspora IT professionals to invest in Bangladesh Hi-Tech Park Authority (BHTPA).



XII. Social remittances

- Organising and promoting diaspora's social development role in Bangladesh (in particular— peace education, multicultural harmony, women-children-youth welfare).



XIII. Philanthropy

- Initiating and promoting an "Expatriate Development Fund", in which anyone, including the diaspora, could support welfare activities for distressed expatriates and their families (both in host countries and Bangladesh).
- Promote diaspora-led infrastructural development initiatives through government matching grants.

Research team

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