

# Skilling Migrant Workers: Administrative Structures, Strategies and Good Practices in South Asia

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# Skilling Migrant Workers: Administrative Structures, Strategies and Good Practices in South Asia\*

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## Abstract

*With the proposition that skills could be a key enabler in improving migration outcomes, this paper seeks to address two issues: to what extent skilling migrant workers figures as a policy concern in labour-sending countries and the strategies that are currently underway to enhance the skills of migrants. The paper focuses on three major labour-sending countries in South Asia: Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. It argues that not only does skilling of migrant workers deserve stronger articulation within the administrative structures that manage labour migration, it is also important to create efficient and effective skill delivery mechanisms, programmes and partnerships that are responsive to the requirements of international migrant workers.*

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## 1. Introduction

Skills are receiving increasing prominence in both academic and policy circles due to their potential to provide decent work and to enhance social protection (World Bank, 2010; 2012; International Labour Organization [ILO], 2014a). With labour outflows emerging as an indispensable feature in the world of work, there is an increasing recognition that even in the case of transnational workers, skills could be a key enabler in enhancing migration outcomes. In fact, the prescription of skilling migrants accords well with recent discourses on migration and development,<sup>1</sup> and has been vigorously incorporated into labour migration policies of major labour-sending countries in the last few years. There exist a plethora of studies looking at the interrelationship between migration and skills; some capture the positive impact of skills on migration outcomes (Asian Development Bank Institute [ADBI], 2014; ILO, 2008), while some point out the existence of a skills mismatch at the destination and suggest ways to bridge them (Sasikumar, 2008; Hultin, 2012; Satija and Mukherjee, 2013; GIZ and ILO, 2015). Within the discussion on migration and skills, a critical topic that is recently receiving much scholarly attention is an analysis of existing administrative structures and strategies adopted to skill migrants.

Imparting skills as a means to enhance migration outcomes seems to be particularly relevant for transnational workers for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the demand for skills has undergone drastic changes during the last decade due to economic development, technological advancement and demographic transitions in labour-receiving countries. This has huge implications for labour-sending countries, particularly in terms of how they assess skills demanded at the destination and how they impart relevant skills, with both impacting migration outcomes. Secondly, with countries increasingly relying on restrictive immigration policies to regulate labour flow (Ruhs, 2013), workers without appropriate skills are rendered vulnerable. Thirdly, equipping workers with skills that are in demand at the destination is evolving as a plausible way to facilitate orderly migration (ILO, 2014b). Fourthly, skills increase the chance of decent work for migrants at the destination, with a possibility of better wages and better development impacts of migration. These issues deserve critical attention from the major labour-sending countries in South Asia, which have so far made limited attempts to incorporate emerging skill

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<sup>1</sup>Over the years, the migration–development nexus has evolved from a concept that merely defines a ‘triple win situation’—which benefits migrants, and their countries of origin and destination—to one that acknowledges the heterogeneity of migration and development interactions (Appleyard, 1989; United Nations, 2006; Skeldon, 2008). Recent debates situate labour migration within a structure—‘the constraining or enabling general political, institutional, economic, social and cultural context’—and agency—‘capacity of individuals to overcome constraints and potentially reshape structure’ (de Haas, 2010). Within this framework, skills could be critical for migrants to negotiate in the international labour market.

requirements at destination countries in their skill development programmes (Sasikumar, 2008; GIZ and ILO, 2015).

In the context of South Asian countries, migration of low- and medium-skill workers continues to dominate and the skills expected from these categories of workers are undergoing a sharp change in the major destination countries. The increasing demand for low-skilled workers in certain European Union (EU) countries, particularly in paramedics, construction and hospitality, is a case in point (Sasikumar and Timothy, 2012). This also seems to be true for Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, as their economies are diversifying from oil-based to high-end services and construction (Sasikumar and Timothy, 2015). This would essentially mean that 'skills' expected from low-skilled workers are undergoing a drastic change, a trend that is important for labour-sending countries in South Asia. In the case of women workers, despite the fact that the mobility of women across all skill categories has increased over the years (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2013), the stereotypical notion of them being low skilled and therefore difficult to incorporate within the legal and social protection systems continues to prevail (Ghosh and Chanda, 2015). Migrant women workers from South Asian countries are often regarded as a category whose movement needs to be regulated, despite evidence that restrictive policies to control their mobility merely increase their vulnerabilities in the migration cycle (Timothy and Sasikumar, 2012). Equipping workers with skills to improve their migration outcomes thus appears to be a more feasible strategy.

With the proposition that skills could be a key enabler in improving migration outcomes, this paper seeks to understand the degree to which administrative structures in labour-sending countries are geared towards addressing the skilling requirements of prospective migrant workers and the strategies that are currently underway to skill migrants. The paper will focus on three major labour-sending countries in South Asia: Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. As inter-country variations exist in institutional structures in place to skill migrant workers as well as the strategies they use, this paper undertakes a comparative analysis of the three countries on their linkage of labour migration and skills. In the process, the paper also documents good practices on skilling migrants.

Interestingly, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka demonstrate several commonalities and distinctions with respect to international labour flows. Notable similarities include: (a) in all these countries labour migration has been largely driven by low- and medium-skilled workers; (b) Gulf countries figure as one of the main destinations, although recent trends indicate labour outflows are diversifying to other regions as well; (c) over the years the foreign employment policy regimes in these countries have been transforming from regulatory systems to state-facilitated

ones (Gamburd, 2010; Rajan, 2014; Siddiqui, 2008); and (d) due to the emerging demographic and labour market situation in these countries (explained in the next section), labour flows from these three countries are likely to increase in the short to medium term. The major differences across these countries are: (a) in comparison with India and Bangladesh, Sri Lanka has feminised labour flow; and (b) in Sri Lanka, administrative and legal structures to manage labour flows are more attuned to the contemporary requirements of labour migrants (IOM, 2011a).

### *Methodology and Data Sources*

The paper builds on the premise that skills play a major role in improving migration outcomes and intends to examine structures and strategies followed in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka as well as good practices on skilling migrant workers. In the first stage, the paper will explore to what extent the skilling of migrant workers is envisioned by the administrative structures—policies and institutional set-up governing skill development and skill accreditation—in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. In the second stage, the paper will analyse programmes<sup>2</sup> implemented to skill prospective migrants in the countries under consideration. Such programmes could be run either by the state or the state in collaboration with private entities or civil society organisations (CSOs). The paper will examine to what extent the skills imparted are in sync with the requirements in destination countries.

The paper adopts a comparative perspective and essentially relies on a review of secondary literature. Annual reports of Ministries dealing with migration (Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment [MEWOE] in Bangladesh, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs [MOIA] in India and Ministry of Foreign Employment [MOFE]<sup>3</sup> in Sri Lanka), policy documents related to migration and skill development, the legislative framework on migration, including recent amendments, reports by international organisations and academic studies were consulted. As part of the study, a limited number of in-depth interviews were also conducted with subject experts, policymakers, trainers in skill development institutions and representatives of job placement agencies to understand the degree to which skilling has been synergised with the policy framework on international labour migration. Taking into consideration the time frame and data limitation, the study does not attempt to evaluate skill development programmes for migrant workers but approaches the issue from an analytical perspective. However, wherever possible, empirical evidence is provided.

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<sup>2</sup>In each of the three countries under consideration, there exists a comprehensive institutional set-up for skill development. Here, analysis is limited to those institutions and programmes that exclusively target potential migrant workers.

<sup>3</sup> Earlier the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare (MOFEPW).



The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a regional overview of labour outflows from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. Section 3 examines to what extent skilling of migrant workers is acknowledged by administrative structures that manage labour flows while Section 4 explores strategies adopted to enhance skills of migrant workers. Section 5 provides key lessons and directions, drawing on the skill programmes of international migrants in the three countries under consideration and also based on international literature.

## 2. International Labour Mobility: Regional Overview

To clearly understand the relevance of imparting skills to migrant workers, it is critical to examine trajectories of labour flows from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. These countries, which have a shared history of colonialism and underdevelopment, display common migration experiences in recent decades, although with significant discontinuities. The main reasons for migration in general—lack of viable opportunities in the home country, widespread poverty, desire for a better future, and high remuneration at the destination—hold true for labour migration from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka, although the impacts of such factors vary across countries.

The main direction of labour flow from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka is to West Asia. This started with the economic development that followed the oil boom of the 1970s, which initially generated a huge labour demand for construction activities and the economic development that followed. To meet the labour demand in construction, and other booming sectors, it was thought best to rely on short-term migration of foreign labour, rather than to train the natives (Dito, 2010). South Asia emerged as a major labour-sending region to the Gulf, a trend that continues even today, as indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Stock of South Asian Migrants in GCC by Country of Origin**

Country of Origin	1990	2000	2010	2013
Afghanistan	16,690	16,451	26,324	28,320
Bangladesh	832,299	1,147,461	2,922,335	3,147,251
India	2,395,693	3,152,719	6,334,374	6,828,957
Nepal	17,712	17,459	27,939	30,057
Pakistan	1,087,910	1,388,615	2,707,694	2,915,556
Sri Lanka	244,090	196,127	302,826	326,088
South Asian migrants in GCC	4,594,394	5,918,832	12,321,492	13,276,229
Total migrants' stock in GCC	8,856,887	10,549,781	20,758,167	22,357,811

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), *International Migrant Stock 2013: By Destination and Origin*, retrieved from the website <<http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/index.shtml>> on 22.08.2015.

Among the South Asian countries, India continues to send the largest number of migrants to GCC countries, followed by Bangladesh and Pakistan. Of late, the oil-reliant economies of the GCC are moving towards economic diversification to protect their economies from oil price fluctuations (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2011). Major diversification efforts have focused on expanding the petroleum product value chain and investing in energy-intensive industries (ibid.). Several conglomerates have successfully diversified into finance, telecommunication and tourism. While such changes do not seem to reduce the demand for migrant workers in the GCC, at least in the short to medium term, recent studies caution about firms becoming more specific about the type and nature of skills and validity of certificates possessed by prospective migrants (GIZ and ILO, 2015).

The share of South Asian migration seems to be increasing in OECD countries as well, as indicated in Table 2. For instance, of the total migrants in Australia the percentage of South Asians increased from 7.7 per cent in 2000 to 19.8 per cent in 2012. The corresponding figures for India are 4.3 and 11.5 per cent respectively. Although it is difficult to ascertain what percentage of such population movement constitutes labour migrants and their skill categorisation, in-depth interviews conducted as part of the study suggest that recent years have witnessed an increased outflow of low-skilled migrants to Australia and EU countries. Studies also indicate that the demand for migrant workers in the EU is primarily for certain occupations, such as care for both children and elderly, hospitality services, retail sector, cleaning and maintenance workers, and agriculture and construction activities (OECD, 2008)—sectors that are unattractive to native workers as they neither require high skills nor offer high wages. Further, it needs to be noted that the demand for low-skilled workers in many of these sectors is higher than can be fulfilled by increased native workforce participation of the elderly and women, investment in capital equipment or reorganisation of production (ibid.). Such pull factors attracting migrant workers also seems to hold for Australia and New Zealand in Oceania, which has witnessed an increase in the inflow of South Asians, particularly Indians, in the last few years.

**Table 2: Inflow of South Asians to Selected OECD Countries by Nationality (in per cent)**

	South Asia		Bangladesh		India		Sri Lanka	
	2000	2012	2000	2012	2000	2012	2000	2012
Australia	7.73	19.76	0.29	1.04	4.28	11.50	1.39	2.54
Canada	22.86	19.00	1.19	0.95	11.48	11.24	2.57	1.22
France	3.67	4.70	0.24	0.51	1.09	1.53	1.47	1.51
Germany	3.00	3.80	0.10	0.16	1.01	1.87	0.38	0.13
Italy	8.14	11.97	1.83	3.16	2.42	3.47	2.16	2.22
Japan	-	5.15	-	0.39	-	1.85	-	0.48
Republic of Korea	7.06	6.06	2.31	0.62	1.20	0.86	0.70	1.56
New Zealand	15.56	16.72	0.68	0.19	11.40	13.65	1.89	1.16
United Kingdom	13.25	16.71	1.18	0.52	6.59	9.40	1.39	1.04
United States	7.89	11.73	0.86	1.43	4.98	6.44	0.13	0.19

Source: OECD, International Migration Database, retrieved from the website  
<http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=MIG> on 07.09.2015.

Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka are presently going through a significant phase of demographic transition. Currently, the proportion of the productive age group (15-59 years) is relatively high, thereby implying a low dependency ratio, as indicated in Table 3. It signifies that a larger number of persons are expected to join the labour force in the short to medium term. It is critical to note that although all three countries have registered impressive economic growth during the last three decades, there is a disconnect between economic growth and employment generation in the sense that the high income growth has not resulted in high employment growth. Such a demographic and employment situation is leading to mounting unemployment, particularly for youth and women job seekers, as noted in Table 3. International migration therefore continues to be an important livelihood option in these countries. The economic impact of migration seems to be significant in all three countries under consideration, as captured by the figures of remittance as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP). The rest of the section provides an overview of the country-specific migration situation.

**Table 3: Selected Demographic, Economic & Labour Market Indicators:  
Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka**

Description	Bangladesh			India			Sri Lanka		
Demographic Indicators									
Population (in thousands), 2015	1,60,996			13,11,051			20,715		
Population growth rate (in per cent per annum), 2015–2020	1.14			1.15			0.42		
Population aged 15–59 years (as percentage of total population), 2015	63.6			62.3			61.5		
Economic Indicators									
Per capita GDP(at current prices in USD), 2015	1,284			1,808			3,818		
Annual GDP growth(in per cent), 2015	6.6			7.6			4.8		
Remittances as percentage of GDP, 2014	8.7			3.4			8.9		
Labour Market Indicators									
Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) (in per cent), 2015	62.2			53.7			51.8		
Employment to population ratio (in per cent), 2015	59.4			51.9			49.3		
Unemployment Rate (in per cent), 2015	4.4			3.5			4.7		
Youth Unemployment (15–24 years, in per cent), 2015	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
	11.6	11.3	12.1	9.7	9.6	10.2	20.2	15.3	29.3

Source: Demographic Indicators from UNDESA, *World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision*, retrieved from the website <<http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/DVD/>> on 04.09.2015; Economic indicators from the World Bank website <<http://databank.worldbank.org>> and <<http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTDECPROSPECTS/0,,contentMDK:21352016~pagePK:64165401~piPK:64165026~theSitePK:476883,00.html>> retrieved on 02.06.2016 and; labour market indicators from the International Labour Organization (ILO), *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*, 9th Edition, retrieved from the website <<http://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/research-and-databases/kilm/lang--en/index.htm>> on 02.06.2016.

## Bangladesh

Unlike other South Asian countries, Bangladesh was not successful in capitalising on the labour demand in the Gulf immediately following its oil boom. However, migration to the Gulf slowly picked up in subsequent decades. During the 1990s, the newly industrialised countries of South East Asia and East Asia began to attract migrant workers from Bangladesh. The data on international migration flows from Bangladesh indicates that there has been a significant growth in the annual outflows during the last three decades: beginning with a modest number of 6,087 people who migrated for overseas employment in 1976, the annual outflows of migrants have increased to nearly 3.29 million in 2015.

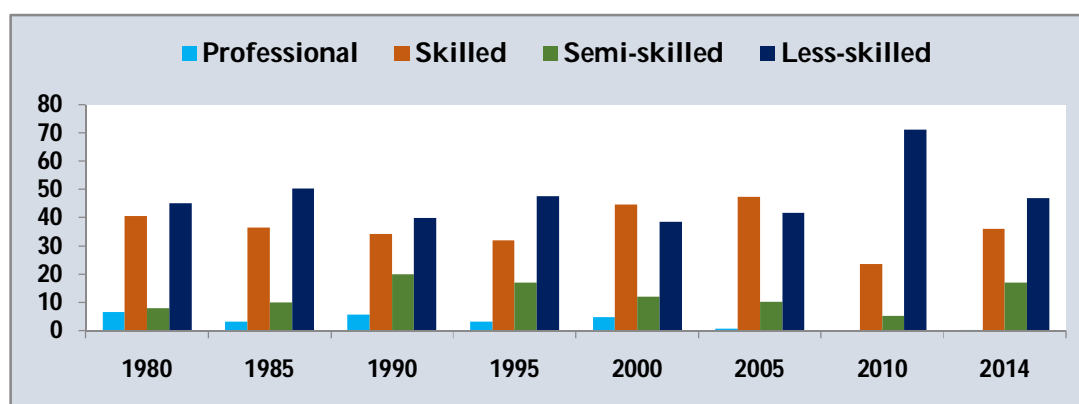
**Table 4: Percentage Distribution of Labour Outflow from Bangladesh**

Country	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2012	2014	2015
Bahrain	4.4	1.6	2.1	4.2	5.6	3.6	5.5	5.0
Kuwait	5.7	9.3	0.3	18.6	0.0	0.0	0.7	3.4
Oman	13.5	11.2	2.4	1.9	10.9	28.0	24.8	22.8
Qatar	7.4	0.0	0.6	0.8	3.1	4.7	20.6	22.1
Saudi Arabia	55.4	44.8	64.9	31.8	1.8	3.5	2.5	6.0
UAE	8.0	7.8	15.3	24.5	52.0	35.4	5.7	5.8
Lebanon	-	0.2	-	0.0	4.4	2.4	3.9	3.9
Libya	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.4	3.1	2.5	1.0	0.1
Malaysia	1.3	18.8	7.7	1.2	0.2	0.1	1.2	3.1
Singapore	0.7	2.0	5.0	3.8	10.0	9.7	12.9	11.0
Republic of Korea	-	1.8	0.4	0.1	0.7	0.2	0.4	0.4
Italy	-	-	-	0.4	1.7	1.5	0.2	0.0
Brunei	-	1.4	0.6	0.1	0.6	0.8	1.6	1.3
Others	3.1	0.5	0.2	12.1	5.8	7.4	19.0	15.1

Source: Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), *Statistical Reports*, retrieved from the website<<http://www.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/statisticalDataAction>> on 04.09.2015.

As indicated in Table 4, the majority of the migrants—an estimated 65 per cent—travelled to the Gulf countries. In recent years, Bangladeshi migration to Singapore shows a steep increase. For the most part, labour migration from Bangladesh, whether destined for West Asia or South East Asia, has involved workers with low skills. In 2014, the share of professionals was merely 0.4 per cent, in comparison to 47 per cent less skilled workers, as indicated in Figure 1. Incidentally, over the years, a clear shift has occurred in the skill composition of workers towards the less-skilled category.

**Figure 1: Skill Composition of International Migrants from Bangladesh (in per cent)**



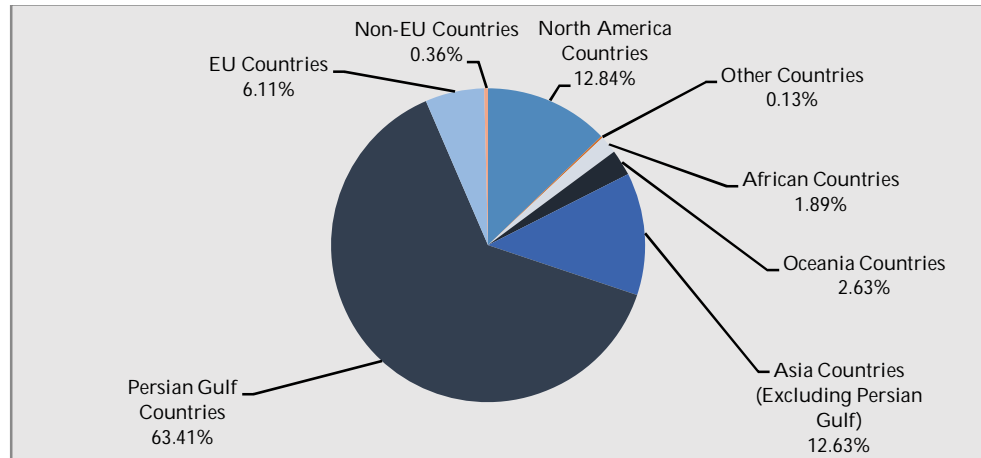
Source: BMET, *Statistical Reports*, retrieved from the website<<http://www.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/statisticalDataAction>> on 04.09.2015.

Women's participation in the overseas labour market is increasing gradually, although the migration of women for work continues to be stigmatised. Before 1980, women's migration was largely limited to doctors, nurses and teachers. Since 1980, semi- and less-skilled women have started migrating, although there was a partial ban on women's migration in the name of protection. In 2003, the government withdrew this restriction on the migration of semi- and less-skilled women workers. In 2015, 64,201 Bangladeshi women migrated abroad for work. Most of the women migrant workers are poorly skilled, and work in Lebanon, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia or Mauritius as housekeepers, cleaners or readymade-garment workers.

## India

Despite being one of the major labour-sending countries in the world, India possesses limited information on population movement from the country. The most preferred destinations of Indian emigrants continue to be countries in the Persian Gulf, North America and Europe (Figure 2). At the same time, the emergence of new destinations, such as Australia, New Zealand and certain countries in East and South East Asia, is reshaping the migration landscape for India.

**Figure 2: Indian Population in Major Regions, 2015\***



Note: \*As on January 2015.

Source: Government of India, retrieved from the MOIA website <<http://moia.gov.in/services.aspx?ID1=300&id=m8&idp=59&mainid=23>> on 07.09.2015.

Apart from providing estimates of the stock of Indian population, the MOIA collects data on the outflow of workers. This annual data depicts the number of migrants in the emigration check required (ECR) category—those who must obtain clearance from the Protector of Emigrants (POE) to migrate abroad for employment as per the

present provisions of the Emigration Act 1983.<sup>4</sup>As this data mainly pertains to low-skilled workers, it only provides partial information on labour outflows from India. As indicated in Table 5, among countries that require EC, the majority of the labour flows are directed to Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Oman.

Trends and patterns drawn from scattered evidence indicate that the trajectory of labour flows from India is at an interesting juncture. Apart from an increase noted in the magnitude of labour flows from India, an emerging trend is the variation in the skill composition of workers across destinations. For instance, labour migration from India to the Gulf countries started as a movement of low-skilled workers following the oil boom of the 1970s, while migration to developed countries in the West was associated with the outflow of health-care professionals during the 1980s and of information technology (IT) experts during the 1990s. In a significant turnaround, trends towards the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century indicate an increase in the share of medium- and high-skilled workers migrating to the Gulf, although the migration of low-skilled workers continues to dominate; labour migration to advanced economies in the West, on the other hand, is marked by an increase in the share of low-skilled workers (Lum, 2012; Sasikumar and Timothy, 2012).

**Table 5: Labour Outflow from India by Destination (in per cent)**

Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Saudi Arabia	26.9	46.1	42.9	46.2	47.9	43.4	41.0
UAE	41.3	21.4	20.4	22.2	18.9	24.7	27.8
Oman	10.6	12.3	16.5	11.8	11.3	7.8	6.4
Qatar	9.8	7.6	7.1	6.7	8.4	9.6	9.4
Kuwait	4.2	6.9	5.9	7.2	7.5	8.6	10.0
Malaysia	2.5	1.9	3.2	2.9	2.8	2.7	2.8
Bahrain	3.8	2.9	2.4	2.3	2.7	2.1	1.8
Jordan	0.2	0.1	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3
Sudan	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0
Others	0.7	0.8	1.1	0.5	0.2	0.9	0.5
<b>Total Labour Outflows</b>	<b>847,994</b>	<b>610,270</b>	<b>641,355</b>	<b>626,565</b>	<b>747,041</b>	<b>816,655</b>	<b>804,878</b>

Source: Government of India, 2013a and 2015a.

## Sri Lanka

International labour migration from Sri Lanka peaked following the oil boom of the 1970s. Although unskilled male workers initially constituted the majority of the migrants, there was a decline in their demand during the 1980s. This was followed

<sup>4</sup> As per the existing provision, POE clearance is required for workers who have not completed matriculation and are migrating to the 17 countries included on the ECR list (mainly those in West Asia).

by a phase of female migration from the country to meet the growing demand of the care economy in the Gulf and in South East Asian countries. The unstable political and economic situation, due to the civil war in Sri Lanka that continued for almost three decades till 2009, has also promoted labour migration.

In 2013, the total stock of Sri Lankan migrant workers was estimated to be around 2.9 million (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2014), which connotes a considerable increase over the years, from the 14,456 registered in 1986 (ibid.). As indicated in Table 6, low-skilled workers and domestic workers constitute the largest segment of migrant workers from Sri Lanka. The Middle East, particularly the Gulf countries, remains the major destination for Sri Lankan migrant workers. In 2013, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar together accounted for 86.2 per cent of labour outflows from Sri Lanka. Of late, the Republic of Korea has become an attractive destination for Sri Lankan youth, particularly technical trainees.

**Table 6: International Labour Migration from Sri Lanka (in per cent)**

Description	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013*
<b>Migrants by Sex</b>						
Male	51.2	48.3	55.3	51.8	51.0	59.7
Female	48.8	51.7	44.7	48.2	49.0	40.3
<b>Skill Composition of Migrants</b>						
Professional	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.5	1.6	1.7
Middle Level	3.5	2.6	2.6	2.3	3.3	5.6
Clerical & Related	2.7	2.7	3.0	3.8	5.7	9.1
Skilled	26.0	27.2	28.5	27.4	25.0	26.3
Semi-Skilled	2.1	2.4	1.8	1.6	1.2	-
Unskilled**	23.6	20.3	22.6	24.2	22.3	24.2
Domestic Workers	43.1	46.0	42.1	40.9	42.1	33.1
<b>Major Destinations</b>						
Saudi Arabia	26.9	31.5	26.5	26.1	34.7	27.6
Kuwait	18.7	17.2	18.0	19.3	15.7	14.6
UAE	20.4	16.0	15.8	15.0	13.6	16.5
Qatar	15.8	17.8	20.4	20.1	20.4	27.5
Others	18.2	17.5	19.3	19.5	15.6	13.8

Note: \*provisional; \*\*excluding domestic workers.

Source: Government of Sri Lanka, 2011 and 2012a; Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2014.

Analyses of trends and characteristics of migration from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka indicate a labour flow dominated by low-skilled workers, directed primarily to the GCC. Considering the emerging demographic and labour market situation in these labour-sending countries, migration is likely to increase in the near future. Skilling migrants would be a significant measure to improve migration outcomes



and thereby social protection, particularly considering the limited formal social protection coverage they presently have.

### 3. Administrative Structures to Skill Migrants

This section examines to what extent skilling of migrant workers is envisaged by the administrative structures that manage labour migration in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. Key issues that will be addressed include: Does skilling of migrant workers figure in the government policy documents? If yes, what concerns do they intend to address? What is the institutional mechanism in place to impart skills to migrants? What initiatives are underway to obtain international recognition of skills imparted to migrant workers? The key responses to the skilling of migrant workers by the administrative structures in the three countries under consideration are summarised in Table 7.

**Table 7: Administrative Structures to Skill Migrants: Bangladesh, India & Sri Lanka**

	<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>Sri Lanka</b>
<b>Policies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overseas Employment Policy 2006</li> <li>• National Skill Development Policy 2011</li> <li>• Sixth Five Year Plan (FY2011–FY2015)</li> <li>• Seventh Five Year Plan (FY2016–FY2020)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Labour Migration Policy 2008</li> <li>• Mahinda Chintana 2005</li> <li>• National Policy for Decent Work in Sri Lanka 2006</li> <li>• National Human Resource and Employment Policy 2012</li> </ul>
<b>Institutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Skills Development Council (NSDC)</li> <li>• Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET)</li> <li>• Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB)</li> <li>• Bangladesh Overseas Employment &amp; Services Limited (BOESL)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship</li> <li>• National Skill Development Mission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE)</li> <li>• Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Agency (SLFEA)</li> <li>• Ministry of Labour and Labour Relations</li> <li>• Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skill Development</li> </ul>
<b>Accreditation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Technical &amp; Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF) 2011</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) 2013</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF) 2005</li> </ul>

Source: Compiled by the author.

#### **Policies to Skill Migrants**

In Bangladesh, an early reference to the linking of migration and skills can be found in the Overseas Employment Policy 2006, which voices the need for skill development

programmes conducted by the state or the state in cooperation with other skill providers, for instance in the private sector, to enhance migrant workers' skills. However, it was the National Skill Development Policy 2011 that stated the necessity of providing skill development to migrant workers (Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2011a) in unequivocal terms. The policy gave thrust to four areas: assessing skills demanded in the major destination countries; providing appropriate training to match new and emerging skill demands; developing a national qualification framework that is internationally recognised; and setting up an efficient recruitment mechanism. A commitment to skill migrant workers is also visible in the Sixth Five Year Plan (FY2011–FY2015) document. The plan categorically asserted that in addition to the current strategy to send less-skilled workers abroad, there is a need to increase out-migration of skilled and semi-skilled workers to existing and emerging destinations. In fact, it also provides a target: the share of skilled labour flows from Bangladesh is to be increased to 50 per cent from the current 35 percent by 2030 (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2011b). With a vision of strengthening the development impacts of migration in different parts of Bangladesh, the plan recommends encouragement of labour outflows from remote and economically backward regions of the country. A similar sentiment is echoed in the Seventh Five Year Plan (FY2016–FY2020) document, which offers more concrete steps to enhance the skill component of potential migrants—such as providing scholarship to pursue skills that are in demand at international destinations, say IT courses—and underlines the need to strengthen skill development infrastructure as well as to develop a better statistical data base on labour flows (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2015a). A recent policy level initiative is the cabinet approval of the draft of the Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy 2016, which includes key features addressing the skill requirements of migrant workers. The policy has also tried to build coherence with the interventions on skilling migrant workers suggested in the National Skills Development Policy 2011 and the Seventh Five Year Plan.

Despite being a major country of origin for migrant workers, India till date does not have a migration policy that lays down a road map for international labour mobility. Generally, the existing legislative framework and various amendments made to it, along with government notifications, are treated as the policy contours on labour migration. Of late, efforts that would enable Indian workers to move up the value chain are receiving increasing attention in policymaking related to international migration. The initiative to replace the Emigration Act 1983 with the proposed Emigration Management Bill could be a step in this direction. The need to provide workers with skills that are competitive in the international market figures strongly in the National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015, in contrast to the National Skill Development Policy 2009 which does not focus on the issue. The

National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015 states that 'national standards and quality for skilling' need to be globally aligned so that Indian youth can aspire to national and international jobs (Government of India, 2015b). The policy acknowledges that considering the demographic transformation occurring in many parts of the world and the consequent skill shortage that will confront several countries, there is an opportunity to reap the demographic advantage enjoyed by India and export skilled labour. To that purpose, it proposes to identify countries and also specific trades which experience skill shortages. The policy acknowledges that 70 per cent of Indian emigrants are unskilled or semi-skilled labourers, and possession of low skills pushes them into a vicious cycle of vulnerabilities during the migration process. To address the issue, the government plans to institutionalise skill development for migrant workers and also to equip them with basic knowledge about laws, language and culture of the destination countries. To facilitate the mobility of skilled migrants, the policy also aims to build Human Resource Mobility Partnerships (HRMPs) with key countries in collaboration with concerned parties.

In Sri Lanka, the skill development of migrant workers is well acknowledged in several policy documents. To begin with, the National Labour Migration Policy for Sri Lanka 2008 has laid down a detailed plan to skill migrant workers. The policy addresses three themes: governance of migration; protection and empowerment of migrant workers and their families; and linkage of migration and development (Government of Sri Lanka, 2008). It highlights the need to provide men and women migrants opportunities for 'decent and productive employment in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity'. The policy recognises that 'a key element in the protection of all migrant workers is the possession of skills'. This will require appropriate human resource development plans which aim at a globally competitive workforce, provision of skills, networking to maximise training and recruitment benefits, language learning and exchange programmes, and the protection of rights and freedoms of migrant workers. The policy acknowledges the role to be played by Sri Lankan diplomatic missions to improve the skill of migrant workers by collaborating with host country agencies and the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) for recruitment and skills training programmes. Considering the high share of 'domestic workers', MOFE plans to provide them training to make them 'skilled domestic workers' so as to enhance their bargaining power in destination countries. Apart from the National Policy on Labour Migration, several other policy documents in Sri Lanka recognise the importance of labour migration for the economy and suggest ways to enhance the skill of migrant workers. For instance, the National Human Resource and Employment Policy 2012 acknowledges the need for special, targeted programmes to protect and assist

migrant workers and to develop their skills in order to promote safe migration, and proposes appropriate strategies to meet the objectives (Government of Sri Lanka, 2012b). The National Policy for Decent Work in Sri Lanka 2006 recognises that the concentration of labour migration in low-skilled categories, particularly true for females, is a major challenge which leads to low remuneration and increased vulnerabilities in the migration cycle, and urges ways to change the situation by skilling migrants (Government of Sri Lanka, 2006). Mahinda Chintana 2005, a document that lays down a roadmap for Sri Lanka's development for ten years (2006–2016), also highlights 'safe, skilled migration' as the basic strategy to guide overseas labour migration (Government of Sri Lanka, 2005).

### *Institutional Framework to Skill Migrants*

In Bangladesh, several agencies are involved in collating labour market information and in formulating skill development programmes for migrant workers. For instance, exploring foreign employment opportunities and markets is an important mandate of MEWOE, Bangladesh. The Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) also collects data on international migration. However, the responsibility to coordinate and monitor technical and vocational education and training (TVET) rests with the National Skills Development Council (NSDC) established in 2008. In an action plan by NSDC that mentions targets to be achieved in 2015, skilling of migrant workers figures prominently (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2011a). Some of the suggested measures include: encouraging youths to acquire skills for overseas employment; assessing labour demand in foreign and local labour market by occupation; updating curriculum and modernising training infrastructure; and obtaining international accreditation for the training imparted. The NSDC operates through various government bodies; prominent among them are the BMET and Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB). The BMET<sup>5</sup> envisions good governance in the recruitment process of overseas employment, creating a skilled workforce in line with the demands of local and global labour markets, and ensuring the overall welfare of migrant workers (BMET website). On the other hand, the BTEB regulates training providers to ensure the quality of training by specifying admission criteria, developing curricula and learning materials, accrediting courses, and awarding diplomas and certificates (BTEB website). There is also the Bangladesh Overseas Employment & Services Limited (BOESL), established by the Government of Bangladesh in 1984 for recruiting and placing skilled personnel for overseas employment. Although the BOESL is government-owned, it is a fully autonomous organisation and runs commercially to fulfil overseas requirements in skilled manpower.

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<sup>5</sup>Under the administrative control of MEWOE, Bangladesh.

In India, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship was created in 2014 to better coordinate skill development efforts of all concerned stakeholders. The National Skill Development Mission was launched to implement and coordinate skilling efforts as laid down in the National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015 (Government of India, 2015b). The Mission operates with a well-defined institutional set-up which can be categorised into three levels: Governing Council at the apex level, an executive arm (consisting of Steering Committee and Mission Directorate) and State Skill Development Missions (SSDMs) at the state level. In addition, the Mission is supported by three institutions with clear functions: (a) the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) to focus on quality assurance and policy research; (b) the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), the nodal organisation for all private sector initiatives in skill development; and (c) the Directorate General of Training (DGT), to execute Mission activities through Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), Advanced Training Institutes (ATIs) and other national institutes. It is also the responsibility of the DGT to develop the structure of courses, assessment, curricula creation, affiliation and accreditation of institutes, under the National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT). Sector Skill Councils (SSCs), industry-led autonomous bodies, have also been set up by NSDC. They create occupational standards and qualification bodies, develop competency frameworks, conduct skill gap studies, and assess and certify trainees on the curriculum aligned to the National Occupational Standards developed by them. Till date, the NSDC Board has approved proposals for 38 SSCs.

From the perspective of skilling migrant workers, the sub-missions constituted under the National Skill Development Mission deserve attention; 'overseas employment' features as one of the seven sub-missions (Government of India, Undated). With an objective of encouraging skilled labour outflows from the country, the sub-mission clearly states a need to train Indian youths in global standards. The Mission also suggested measures such as assessing skill demands in different destinations, taking steps to improve international acceptance of skill certification in India, partnerships with leading vocational training institutions in other countries to train master trainers, etc. to improve the mobility of skilled workforce from the country. Maintaining information on international labour outflows from India is the responsibility of the POE that functions within the MOIA. As noted in the previous section, the POE data on Indian migrants is patchy and this is becoming a major block in devising policy responses to international migration in India.

In Sri Lanka, the SLBFE<sup>6</sup> is the regulatory authority for the foreign employment industry and works with the vision of becoming a global leader in providing quality and skilled manpower for the overseas market. It has a marketing division to identify emerging skill requirements at the destination and prepares a market intelligence report. SLBFE also maintains data to monitor the flow of Sri Lankans for employment outside Sri Lanka and their return after such employment. Recognising the necessity of strengthening the existing administrative structure of the SLBFE to meet emerging challenges, the MOFE has taken a decision to convert the existing administrative body of the SLBFE into the Sri Lanka Employment Migration Authority.<sup>7</sup> Provisions in the proposed Act highlight 'safe, skilled migration' as the basic strategy to guide overseas labour migration and expand opportunities for Sri Lankans for employment, apprenticeship or training with employers outside Sri Lanka (Thimothy et al., 2016). Another facilitating organization is the Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Agency (SLFEA) that seeks to be the 'provider of competent, talented & quality employees for foreign job markets'. Several key ministries and government agencies are also concerned with governing international labour flows from Sri Lanka, particularly in the context of promoting skilled migration. For instance, the Ministry of Labour and Labour Relations is an active partner in the formulation of labour migration policies. The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skill Development conducts vocational training programmes for prospective migrant workers, and provides certification and accreditation of vocational skills. In 2012, the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare signed an MOU with the Ministry of Youth and Skill Development Affairs (Government of Sri Lanka, 2012c) to establish fully equipped training centres in all provinces to produce better qualified skilled workers for foreign jobs.

### ***Towards Better Accreditation of Skills***

Bangladesh introduced the National Technical & Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF) in the National Skills Development Policy 2011 to provide a national benchmark on the qualifications acquired in the country's TVET institutions, so as to ensure that skills and knowledge of Bangladeshi workers are also recognised in the international market. The NTVQF is designed to implement competency-based training and assessment (CBT&A).<sup>8</sup> This includes: registration of all skill providers; developing nationally recognised qualifications and competency levels; accreditation of learning and assessment programmes; auditing of training

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<sup>6</sup>Established in 1985 and currently under the purview of MOFE, Sri Lanka.

<sup>7</sup>As mentioned in the proposed Sri Lanka Employment Migration Authority Act, which will replace the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment Act 1985.

<sup>8</sup> This is a shift from traditional theory-based approaches to skills training and places greater emphasis on achievement and demonstration of the practical skills required to perform at a specified standard demanded by industry.

providers for compliance with quality standards; validation of assessment tools against units of competency; and development and implementation of quality procedures and manuals (Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2011a). The government in partnership with industries has developed the Industry Sector Standards and Qualifications Structure to specify competency standards for each industry sector, which will be grouped into clusters that reflect occupations and key skill sets prioritised by employers and workers in that sector. As per the provisions of the policy, skill-training providers need to ensure that vocational components are based on industry competency standards and students only receive NTVQF qualifications if they are assessed as competent. In order to ensure that training providers in Bangladesh maintain minimum standards in operation, the National Skills Development Policy 2011 has also introduced the Bangladesh Skills Quality Assurance System. Implementation of the NTVQF and associated quality arrangements, monitoring and inspection are the responsibility of the Bangladesh Accreditation Board (BAB),<sup>9</sup> while the periodic review of the NTVQF will be the responsibility of the BTEB, under the directions provided by NSDC. The National Skills Development Policy 2011 looks towards skill certification of overseas migrant workers as per the NTVQF to facilitate better recognition and remuneration in overseas markets.

India introduced the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) in 2013, which organises qualifications according to skills, knowledge levels and aptitude. Under the NSQF, a learner can acquire competency certification at any level through formal, non-formal or informal learning. Based on an outcomes-based approach, each level in the NSQF is defined and described in terms of competency levels that would need to be achieved by the learner (Government of India, 2013b). The NSQF is anchored at the NSDA and is being implemented through the National Skills Qualifications Committee (NSQC). The introduction of NSQF is significant considering that the majority of Indian qualifications are not recognised internationally, which creates considerable difficulties for Indian job seekers abroad. With its provision of a framework to compare skills acquired in India at the international level, the NSQF is envisaged to facilitate the employment mobility of Indian NSQF-aligned qualification holders in other parts of the world. As per the existing provisions, it is mandatory for all training/educational programmes/courses to be NSQF compliant by 2018.

Sri Lanka established the National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF) in 2005 to develop a nationally consistent technical and vocational education and

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<sup>9</sup> This national authority also offers accreditation programmes for training institutions that are compatible with the International Organization for Standardization (IOS), International Electro-technical Commission (IEC), and other relevant regulatory and national standards.

training system of an international standard in Sri Lanka. The NVQF set uniformity in skill certification by providing centrally developed curricula and assessment procedures (ADB, 2011a). It aims to make formal training reflective of industry requirements and standardise formal training delivery in Sri Lanka. As in the case of Bangladesh and India, NVQF in Sri Lanka places importance on the acquisition of competencies in performing specific jobs (Government of Sri Lanka, 2009). The Vocational Training Centres under the Ministry of Vocational and Technical Training, and accredited private and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) imparting skill development programmes can provide courses within the NVQF. The Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) play a major role in implementing the NVQF in Sri Lanka, working with major destination countries for overseas Sri Lankan workers to ensure mutual recognition of competency standards and national vocational qualifications introduced in the country. The NVQF is aimed at developing an internationally competitive workforce in Sri Lanka.

#### 4. Skilling Migrant Workers: From Rhetoric to Reality

This section details strategies adopted by Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka to impart skills to migrant workers. The analysis aims to examine: skill development programmes specifically targeting migrant workers; existing partnerships with relevant stakeholders in skilling migrants; and cooperation with destination countries on training prospective migrants. Table 8 summarises strategies adopted by the three countries under consideration to skill migrant workers.

**Table 8: Strategies to Skill Migrant Workers in Bangladesh, India & Sri Lanka**

	<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>Sri Lanka</b>
<b>Programmes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orientation training at TTCs</li> <li>• Recognition of prior learning (RPL)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Swarna Pravasi Yojana Pravasi (Kaushal Vikas Yojana)</li> <li>• Recognition of prior learning (RPL)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPICK)</li> <li>• Programmes by Open University of Sri Lanka</li> <li>• Pre-departure programmes</li> </ul>
<b>Stakeholder Partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private institutions</li> <li>• NGOs</li> <li>• ILO, World Bank, SDC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inter-ministerial cooperation</li> <li>• Initiative by provincial governments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private recruitment agents</li> <li>• CSOs like Caritas, ACTFORM, NTUF</li> </ul>
<b>Cooperation with Destination Countries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course on marine technology in cooperation with Singapore</li> <li>• Regional Model Competency Standard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labour Mobility Partnership Agreement with Denmark</li> <li>• Skill Development, Documentation &amp; Recognition with Kuwait and the UAE</li> </ul>	MOUs with destination countries

Source: Compiled by the Author.

#### **Skill Development Programmes for Migrants**



In Bangladesh, the BMET conducts orientation training for migrant workers moving to Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Hong Kong and the Republic of Korea at the Technical Training Centres (TTCs), in addition to their regular skill development courses<sup>10</sup> (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2015b). The BMET also provides a 21-day housekeeping course at the TTCs for women migrating as domestic workers. Usage of modern home appliances, culture, law and regulations, language, etiquette, and safety and security are taught in the TTCs (ILO, 2014c). In 2002, the BMET established an English Language Laboratory at their Dhaka training centre to offer language training for nurses and hotel workers migrating overseas for work. Recognition of prior learning (RPL), to assess and certify skills acquired through non-formal training or skills acquired through work, was introduced in the National Skill Development Policy 2011. Under this scheme, 'returning workers will be offered an opportunity for skills testing, skills upgrading and skills certification at a higher-level certificate or part thereof before returning [from] abroad' (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2011a), so as to ensure better remuneration. From 2008, all aspirant migrants must be registered with the BMET and attend the pre-departure briefing before their departure.

In India Swarna Pravas Yojana, a scheme to skill migrant workers, proposes a skill development framework with standardised training, testing and certification. The scheme aims to train 5 million youth over the next ten years commencing from 2014-15 (Government of India, 2013a). The project will be implemented with the financial support of USD 27 million (Government of India, 2012). Three primary objectives of the programme are: (i) positioning India as a preferred source country for skilled and trained workers in select sectors that face skill shortages in the international labour market and in which India enjoys a competitive advantage; (ii) diversifying India's destination country base with a focus on geographies or countries that are expected to experience skill shortages and are of strategic interest to India; and (iii) enhancing the employability of Indian youth by providing training and certification that are internationally recognised to enable young workers to move up the wage chain. Accordingly, a Labour Market Assessment (LMA) has been carried out for selected European countries, namely Sweden, Denmark, France, the Czech Republic, Poland and Romania. Findings from the LMA indicate that key sectors expected to witness significant migration opportunities in the target countries are health and personal care, hospitality, education, construction and IT. A pilot project of the Swarna Pravas Yojana, titled 'Skill Development Initiative for Potential Migrants

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<sup>10</sup>The BMET provides skills development training in 45 trades in 38 TTCs. The annual capacity of these centres is about 65,000 individuals. Trainings provided at the TTCs include four-year diploma courses in engineering, two-year certificate courses in marine trades, two-year senior secondary certificate (SSC) vocational courses and one-year skill certificate courses. The BMET also offers some modular courses with durations of seven days to six months.

from the North-Eastern States of India', is currently being implemented by the Ministry.<sup>11</sup> A Skill Training Certification Resource Centre (STCRC) has also been established in Guwahati, Assam. The pilot project also envisages a state-of-the-art skills portal, which will function as a Labour Market Information System (LMIS) on overseas employment, qualifications and requirements for the Indian youth. It will also connect the youth to prospective employers and provide pre-departure orientation. Recently, the Swarna Pravasi Yojana was renamed the Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PKVY) and brought under the joint initiative of the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (Ministry of External Affairs website). For the implementation of the PKVY, an MOU was signed on 2 July 2016 by the two Ministries. As per the current provisions for the implementation of the PKVY, customised International Skill Centres will be established and assessment of training will be through an internationally recognised assessment and certification system. RPL is a key component of India's NSQF 2013, which is important considering that the majority of the workforce has not received formal training—a point relevant in the case of international labour migrants from India as well. RPL would facilitate people without necessary formal certifications to get their skills attested.

**Table 7: Training Programme for Prospective Sri Lankan Migrant Workers, 2015**

<i>Training Course</i>	<i>Target Group</i>	<i>Duration (Days)</i>	<i>Programmes</i>	<i>Participants</i>
Training for Middle East-bound workers	First-time migrating women domestic workers	21	422	6,856
Training for domestic workers migrating to the Middle East	Women workers	7	59	670
Literacy training for prospective female migrants (Sinhala & Tamil mediums)	Women domestic workers	18	54	692
Training for non-domestic workers	Male and women workers	5	1,590	54,835
Domestic sector training—Cyprus	Women domestic workers	30	25	534
Domestic sector training—Singapore	Women domestic workers	30	15	248
Caregiver training—Israel	Experienced male & women health-care workers	30	40	929

Source: Government of Sri Lanka, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Focuses on seven different job types in the healthcare, hospitality and education sectors and targets to train 10,200 youth over a two-year time period. The courses developed under the pilot are of 3-6 months duration, modular in nature, and can be taken up by any person who is either 10<sup>th</sup> class pass or has prior learning. The project also covers training of local trainers.

SLBFE provides training in Korean language (Test of Proficiency in Korean [TOPIK]) for workers bound for the Republic of Korea, under the Employment Permit Scheme (EPS) introduced by the Republic of Korea in 2004. The 13<sup>th</sup> EPS TOPIK programme conducted by SLBFE was chosen by the Republic of Korea as a best practice in 2015 and received the Excellence Award in a contest to identify best practices implemented by labour-sending countries. As per the figures available for 2011, 50,733 admissions were issued to attend the Korean language test and the number who passed was 11,213. Of them, 10,956 got registered under the Korean employment licence system and 5,346 left for the job (Government of Sri Lanka, 2012c). In addition, pre-departure orientation programme is also provided to workers migrating to the Republic of Korea. In 2012, an MOU was signed between the MOFEPW and Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skill Development, Sri Lanka to establish fully equipped training centres in all provinces to provide suitable training for Sri Lankan youths in selected trade to gain employment in foreign countries. Further, an MOU has been signed by the SLBFE with the Open University of Sri Lanka to train workers who want to migrate to EU countries as caregivers. The course follows international standards for qualified caregivers and covers both theory and practical sessions on taking care of elderly (Government of Sri Lanka, 2012c and 2013).

The pre-departure training<sup>12</sup> provided by the SLBFE for prospective migrant workers also deserves a mention here. In comparison with pre-departure training programmes conducted in other countries, say the Philippines, where the training is for a day, in Sri Lanka the pre-departure programme, particularly that for domestic workers, functions more like a skill development programme. Table 7 indicates the main features of the training programme conducted for migrant workers from Sri Lanka. The duration of programmes and the course content vary depending on the target groups. For instance, the main topics covered by the training programme for domestic workers include: domestic housekeeping, cleaning methods, operating household appliances, preparing food, table arrangements and serving of food, language skills, caring for the elderly and children, financial literacy, laws and customs of host countries, safe migration, migrant workers' rights and responsibilities, and arrangements for family left behind. Recently, the domestic housekeeping training programme conducted by the SLBFE was upgraded to NVO Level 3. After completion of training, an evaluation test is conducted to assess the trainees, and a certificate is issued jointly by the SLBFE and TVEC. The reported frequency of different training programmes and number of participants is impressive.

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<sup>12</sup> From 1996 pre-departure training was made compulsory for domestic workers and a training certificate is mandatory to register with the SLBFE for foreign employment.

### *Stakeholder Partnership in Skilling Migrants*

In Bangladesh, private agencies are actively involved in providing training to migrants, although many of them are not affiliated with the BTEB (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2015b). Incidentally, some of these centres are run by recruitment agents. A few of the recruiting agencies also coordinate with foreign employers or their counterparts in destination countries to organise demand-based training. Representatives of foreign recruitment agencies sometimes visit the training centres in Bangladesh to monitor courses and examine trainers (ILO, 2014c). Private vocational training schools usually target less-skilled prospective migrant workers who are already registered as overseas employment seekers or are in the process of completing the official formalities related to migration. Several NGOs also provide skills training to migrant workers, while some specifically target women migrants. For instance, the Ovivashi Karmi Unnayan Programme and Sheikh Fazilatunnessa Mujib Technical Centre provide orientation training to female workers migrating to Middle East countries. These are short training courses that provide life skills and language skills training (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2015b). The Mirpur Agricultural Workshop and Training School offers various modular courses for people who intend to go abroad.

Bangladesh also collaborates with international organisations to provide skills training. For instance, the TVET reform project is supported by the ILO and funded by the EU (ADB, 2011b). The goal is to make Bangladesh a competitor in the global employment market and to reduce poverty by improving the quality of vocational education and training. Under the TVET reform project, Course Accreditation Documents<sup>13</sup> for 12 occupations and 52 courses have been finalised. The Skills Training Enhancement Project (STEP) implemented in Bangladesh is a World Bank initiative aimed at addressing the existing gap between the skills being provided at training institutes and the requirements of employers. The STEP has undertaken an initiative for scaling up the RPL system. A skill development project funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation works towards strengthening the capacity of the TVET system and making it more demand-driven. Experts from the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, Japan International Cooperation Agency

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<sup>13</sup> Include competency standards, a list of materials, entry requirements for students, required qualifications for trainers, etc. The 12 occupations currently covered are: transport equipment (welder, fitter, and electrician); agro-food processing (food processing and quality control, food packaging, baking); IT (graphic design, web design, IT support); and leather and leather goods (machine operator, supervisor, machine maintenance).

and Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) are also engaged in improving the BMET's training standards. KOICA, for example, helped to modernise the Bangladesh–Korea Technical Training Centre. Most of its instructors are trained in the Republic of Korea, with financial assistance from KOICA (ADB, 2015).

In India, the government has initiated commendable efforts at the provincial level, particularly in high migration pockets, to facilitate labour migration. Efforts made by the governments in Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, two states with high levels of out-migration, deserve special mention. The Government of Kerala set up the Non-Resident Keralites' Affairs (NORKA) Department in 1996. NORKA-Roots, the field agency of the Department of NORKA, was set up in 2002 to act as an interface between non-resident Keralites and the Government of Kerala. The primary activities carried out by NORKA-Roots include conducting pre-departure orientation programmes, recruiting workers, facilitating the upgrading of skills, attesting the educational certificates of migrant workers, and resettling and reintegrating return migrants. In Andhra Pradesh, the government has launched a recruiting agency, the Overseas Manpower Company Andhra Pradesh Limited, to provide training to workers in line with international standards, facilitate skill testing and certification, and extend pre-departure orientation programmes to familiarise workers with overseas working conditions.

Considering that very limited efforts are made to incorporate the skill demands of major migrant-receiving countries in the curriculum of government-run skill development institutions that provide low- to medium-end skills, private training institutions play a crucial role in imparting skills to potential overseas workers (Sasikumar and Timothy, 2015). In some instances, the curricula of certain courses offered by private skill development institutions are designed or modified in accordance with the emerging skill needs in destination countries. Private skill development institutions also establish direct contact with potential employers, hotel management training institutes being a case in point. They offer training for jobs considered low- to medium-skilled and connect with small hotels and restaurants in GCC countries to supply the required personnel. However, there is considerable scope for migrants' associations and NGOs that are involved in skills training to target potential migrant workers and offer courses and certification that are recognised in major destination countries.

The Government of India engages with several international organisations to improve skill development institutions and the certification system. Although existing initiatives do not directly address issues of overseas job seekers, an improvement in the skill development landscape in the country is expected to benefit migrant workers in the long run. The ILO provides technical support for the

operationalisation of the National Policy on Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015. It also provides support to strengthen the governance and coordination of the skills system, improve employment services and LMIS, to mention a few areas of focus. The Government of India also cooperates with the EU to increase the capacity of NSDA, NSDC, SSCs and SSDMs to efficiently implement the policy agenda in the area of skill development. Cooperation of the ADB is sought for better coordination of the skill development efforts of the government at the national level (i.e. through ministries) and state level (i.e. through SSDMs) to ensure convergence, reduce duplication of effort and minimise wastage of resources. Operationalising the NSQF is yet another area where the ADB and Indian government collaborates.

In Sri Lanka, CSOs play a critical role in the skill development of migrant workers. Apart from the 23 SLBFE-operated training centres, there are training centres run by licensed recruitment agents (15 centres), and also by NGOs like Caritas (a social arm of the Catholics Bishops Conference of Sri Lanka) and the Action Network for Migrant Workers (ACTFORM). The National Trade Union Federation (NTUF) also conducts a training programme for female domestic workers under the supervision of the SLBFE. In Sri Lanka, the ILO plays a key role in the skill development landscape. For instance, it has provided technical assistance to the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission in formulating a National Policy on Vocational Education and Training Provision for Vulnerable People in Sri Lanka 2009 and supported the government's implementation of the National Labour Migration Policy 2008. The ILO also played a key role in formulating the NVQF that unifies technical and vocational education and training in Sri Lanka.

### *Cooperation with Destination Countries in Skilling Migrants*

Major labour-receiving countries are important partners in skill development of migrant workers. In Bangladesh, training in marine technology conducted by the BMET is a case in point. Acting in collaboration with employment agencies in Singapore, a major destination country for overseas migrant workers from Bangladesh, local recruitment agencies have set up 15 training centres in Bangladesh. On completion of the marine technology course, assessment tests are held under the auspices of authorities from Singapore. This ensures acceptability of Bangladesh's marine technology certification among Singapore-based organisations, facilitating workers' migration and better outcomes (ILO, 2014c). Bangladesh is in the process of adopting a national standard recognition system and plans to introduce a Regional Model Competency Standard in collaboration with destination countries that have national qualification frameworks, such as South Africa, Hong Kong (China), Malaysia and Singapore. By this arrangement, both countries of origin

and countries of destination could set up a benchmark and bilaterally develop a common, acceptable framework (ILO, 2014c).

In India, the MOIA has signed a bilateral Labour Mobility Partnership Agreement (LMPA) with Denmark in 2009 that provides for labour market expansion and employment facilitation between the two countries. Both states agree to cooperate in the field of vocational training by standardising testing and certification especially methodology, studies and research, systems of measuring skill levels and their methods of application in accordance with the requirements of the job market in both countries. The governments also agree to cooperate in mutually sourcing technically skilled personnel and benefiting from the training facilities available in both countries. The agreement also aims to facilitate legal migration by removing undue barriers and securing labour market access; combating and preventing all forms of irregular migration; and enhancing the protection and welfare of migrants. The agreement is aimed at promoting direct contact between employers in Denmark and state-managed or private recruiting agencies in India, without intermediaries. It will also protect the welfare of all categories of Indian workers under Danish labour laws and other legislation. The Danish embassy in New Delhi has set up a Work in Denmark Centre, which provides a window for Danish companies to tap the Indian labour market directly. The centre is also helping Indian professionals with issues related to work permits and residence permits. The labour agreement will provide the framework for a larger Indo-EU mobility partnership that will address skilled labour shortages in EU countries facing a demographic shift and an ageing workforce. India is also a partner in a pilot project on skill development, documentation and recognition under the regional initiative of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, conceptualised in November 2014. The governments of Kuwait and the UAE, in cooperation with the governments of India, Pakistan and the Philippines, will implement the project, on an experimental basis, for construction and service workers recruited by the private sector. The project aims to develop collaborative policies and schemes that empower workers through training certification, which would facilitate recognition of initial and acquired skills of workers and help employers to improve their labour productivity. The project will be implemented with technical support from the ILO, IOM and World Bank.

Although the government of Sri Lanka has signed several bilateral agreements and MOUs with major labour-receiving countries, there are relatively few that incorporate aspects of skill development and recognition. For a decade Sri Lanka has been sending workers to the Republic of Korea under the EPS, which is governed by an MOU (renewed every two years) which has clear guidelines on the Korean language proficiency tests as well as various types of skills to be acquired by a

labour migrant from Sri Lanka (Government of Sri Lanka, 2013 and 2015). In 2011, an MOU was signed between Sri Lanka and Italy, featuring provisions for linguistic and vocational training of Sri Lankan workers. A special MOU was signed to establish links with the British Council, Colombo, in 2014 to provide Sri Lanka workers with English skills.

## 5. Key Lessons and Conclusions

In Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka, labour outflows continue to be significant and evidence suggests that the majority of migrant workers are either low skilled or do not possess certification of their skills. This requires critical attention, considering the importance of skills to improve labour market outcomes and recent policy changes in major labour-receiving countries that show clear preferences for migrant workers with certified skills. Analysis of administrative structures—policies, the institutional set-up governing skill development and skill accreditation—in all the three countries under consideration indicates a clear recognition of the need to skill migrant workers so as to improve their migration outcomes. However, when it comes to strategies to skill migrants, there seems to be considerable scope for improvement, as in most cases sentiments stated in policies have not been translated into clear programmes. The rest of the section summarises key points and presents good practices that could be replicated.

### a. Strengthening Labour Market Information

To ensure better linkages between migration and skills, the first requirement is to strengthen labour market information. This would entail availability of two sets of data: (a) detailed information on migrant labour outflows and inflows by age, sex, destination, skills, sector of employment, etc. and (b) information on emerging skill demand in the major destinations by sectors, and occupational levels. Such information is essential for building synergy between policies on migration, labour market and skill development. It is equally important to ensure that information on emerging skill demands at destination countries is available and accessible to migrants to facilitate informed decision-making. While the MEWOE and BMET in Bangladesh and the SLBFE in Sri Lanka are making considerable efforts to develop a comprehensive information set-up on labour migration, much needs to be done in the case of India. None of the countries in this study has comprehensive LMIS; availability of information pertaining to the labour market and migration varies across countries. Application of labour market information to policymaking appears to be problematic as well. What is required is an integrated system generating a full set of information, sharing it across institutions and ensuring its thorough analysis for policymaking purposes.



**Box 1: Integrating Data into Policymaking**

Migration Profile is a tool developed by the IOM in 2011 based on the recommendations of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) in 2009 and 2010. It provides a framework for aggregating, in a structured and systematic manner, existing data and information from international, national and regional sources to support government policies on migration and development, and improving policy coherence. Migration Profile offers an internationally compatible yet nationally relevant template and a predesigned report structure. There are detailed guidelines on how interested governments can prepare Migration Profiles. In cooperation with the IOM, GFMD has established a Migration Profile Repository to improve data collection and evidence-based policymaking to strengthen the development impacts of migration.

Source: IOM, 2011b.

**b. Imparting Market-responsive Skill Training**

Labour market-responsive technical and vocation skills training are the need of the hour. A first step towards this is an assessment of emerging labour demands in major destination countries and skills training requirements of potential migrants. While initiatives in this direction are visible in Sri Lanka, efforts to provide market-responsive skills are not yet apparent in Bangladesh and India. Considering that the majority of labour flows from these countries tend to be in the low-skill category and a high demand for such workers exists, specific programmes need to be formulated for low-skilled workers. In fact, there is considerable scope to upgrade the skills of those in the low-skilled category, a fact that is not adequately recognised in the policies of these two nations. Skills training imparted to migrant domestic workers is a case in point. While this is well acknowledged in policies in Sri Lanka and implemented through customised training programmes, such efforts are inadequate in the case of Bangladesh and India. Considering the increased mobility of women workers within the low-skill category, efforts should be made to provide training in skills that experience labour shortage, old age home care for instance, to facilitate women workers to move up the value chain. Information campaigns targeted at migrant workers need to create awareness of emerging skill demands, training and certificates recognised at the destination countries to improve their employability.

**Box 2: Market-responsive Skill Development for Migrants: The Case of the Philippines**

A major labour-sending country, with an estimated labour outflow of 1.8 million in 2014 (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration [POEA], 2015), Philippines has one of the most well-developed skill development programmes for migrant workers in Asia. A distinguishing feature of migration from the Philippines is the high share of sea-based workers in labour outflows; out of the total deployed workers in 2014, 22 per cent were seafarers. The Overseas Workers and Welfare Administration (OWWA), a government agency responsible for protecting the interests of migrant workers, offers a range of skill development/upgradation programmes to equip Filipino seafarers to meet the skill demand of major destination countries. Some of the important programmes include: (a) the Seafarers' Upgrading provides training assistance to seafarers for upgrading and updating of knowledge and skills through sponsorships; (b) the Mariners' Dugtong-Aralis offers scholarship to qualified graduates of Mechanical Engineering and Electrical Engineering who wish to graduate in Marine Engineering and board ocean-going vessels as qualified marine officers; (c) the Incentive Program for Top 200 Maritime Cadets (Cadetship Program) provides financial incentive to the top 200 graduate cadets of BS Marine Transportation and BS Marine Engineering who passed the Maritime School Assessment Program (MSAP) as part of the education for development scholarship program of OWWA; and (d) the Maritime Educational Development Loan Program is an interest-free financial assistance to defray costs of tertiary education of prospective marine officers and engineers.

Source: Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) website <<http://www.poea.gov.ph/>> and Overseas Workers and Welfare Administration (OWWA) website <<http://www.owwa.gov.ph/>> retrieved on 01.06.2016.

**c. Improving the Skill Certification System**

An issue that deserves urgent attention is accreditation of skill training providers and ensuring their skill certification is recognised internationally. Acknowledging this fact, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka have recently introduced a qualification framework at the national level to improve its acceptance internationally. In all the three countries under consideration, there are also efforts to certify prior learning of workers. While these initiatives are in the right direction, evidence suggests that more efforts are needed. For instance, in the case of Bangladesh, it was noted that private training institutions are incompetent to adopt CBT, as introduced by the National Skills Development Policy 2011, due to lack of proper trainers and infrastructure, and RPL assessment centres are not functioning properly (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2015b). A similar problem is confronted by India; with the proliferation of private skill providers, there does not seem to be a single set of national competency standards or a quality assurance system to monitor the processes and outcomes of assessment (British Council and ILO, 2014). Even in the case of Sri Lanka, NVQ implementation is considered problematic, a large number of private skill development institutions are not

registered nor accredited, and there is no mechanism to continuously monitor the quality of skill development institutions (Dundar et al., 2014).

**Box 3: Regional Cooperation in Recognising Skills: The Case of ASEAN**

In Asia, there are several regional cooperation initiatives on skill qualification that could be explored by major labour-sending and -receiving countries. For instance, at the 12th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in January 2007, the ASEAN leaders affirmed their strong commitment to transforming ASEAN into a region with free movement of goods, services, investments, skilled labour and freer flow of capital. Recognising that development of a 'mutually recognised skills framework' is critical for achieving the free movement of skilled and low-skilled labour within ASEAN, a joint ASEAN, Australia, and New Zealand task force developed the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) in May 2010. The AQRF would act as a mechanism to benchmark national qualifications frameworks into mutually comparable regional standards. Eight levels of competencies were designed under the framework, which all ASEAN member states have agreed to. The AQRF is voluntary. It consists of two labour mobility tools: Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs), which facilitate the mobility of skilled professionals in ASEAN; and Mutual Recognition of Skills (MRS), which focuses on technical/vocational skills. To implement the tool on MRS, the ILO has collaborated with the ASEAN states in developing the policy outcomes (e.g. action plans) and assisting them in addressing mutual skills recognition nationally and regionally in selected occupations.

Source: Adopted from the ILO website <[http://www.ilo.org/dyn/migpractice/migmain.showPractice?p\\_lang=en&p\\_practice\\_id=98](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/migpractice/migmain.showPractice?p_lang=en&p_practice_id=98)> on 02.08.2016.

**d. Cooperation with Labour-receiving Countries**

Cooperation between labour-sending and -receiving countries is emerging as a policy option to skill migrant workers. International experience shows that there are several ways to do it, ranging from seeking the cooperation of labour-receiving countries in skill development of migrant workers at the country of origin to labour-receiving countries imparting skill upgradation programmes for migrant workers and certifying skills acquired at the destination. Currently, such initiatives are undertaken in a piecemeal way and there is an urgent need to seek better cooperation between labour-sending and -receiving countries in skilling migrant workers. One way of doing this is to include skill development and certification

issues under bilateral negotiations or build them into MOUs signed between labour-sending and labour-receiving countries.

**Box 4: Certification of Migrant Skills by Labour-receiving Country**

In Singapore, it is mandatory for migrant workers employed in the construction sector to pass the Skills Evaluation Certificate (Knowledge) or SEC (K), a test that assesses a worker's competency and skill in a particular construction trade. The certificate is issued by the Building and Construction Authority (BCA), Singapore. The SEC (K) consists of a one-hour written test and a four- to five-hours practical test component. The written test component consists of multiple-choice questions in English with translations in Chinese, Tamil and Thai. It ensures that the workers possess essential trade knowledge, including of the materials, tools and equipment used in the trade; work sequence; good practices to be adopted; and safety requirements. Prior to the test, the workers may opt to enrol in the SEC (K) training courses, which are offered by the BCA Academy and BCA's appointed Approved Training and Testing Centres. It is also possible for migrant workers to obtain SEC (K) certificate from their home country, through overseas testing centres (OTCs) approved by the BCA. Currently, there are 34 OTCs spread across Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar, Thailand and Sri Lanka. All workers in the construction industry are also required to attend and pass the Construction Safety Orientation Course to ensure that they have attained key knowledge to work safely. In 2014, the BCA introduced the Multi-Skilling scheme, in response to the demand from the industry for more upgrading pathways for construction workers to progress from 'Basic Skilled' to 'Higher Skilled' work category under the Ministry of Manpower's skills framework for the construction sector. Currently, the construction firms mainly upgrade their workers through the Construction Registration of Tradesmen (Core Trade) scheme. While Core Trade recognises workers specialising in key construction trades, the Multi-Skilling scheme complements the Core Trade scheme by registering workers who are competent in multiple trade skills. From the perspective of labour-receiving countries, such certification of migrant workers skills goes a long way towards enhancing productivity.

Yet another good practice is the Happy Return programme introduced by the Republic of Korea in 2009 as part of the EPS. The programme (i) provides free 40-hour training at a training centre near workplaces; (ii) issues certification of work experience for migrant workers to facilitate their job applications to Korean companies or multinational corporations in their home country; and (iii) provides guidance and support for insurance benefit claims, such as departure guarantee insurance. In the post-return phase, migrant workers are informed of employment opportunities at local Korean-owned companies through job fairs as well as online and offline job placement services. The programme also extends counselling services to migrants to cope with difficulties during the resettlement process.

*Source:* BCA, 2015; Kim, 2015.

e. *Partnering with Relevant Stakeholders in Skill Delivery*

Partnership with stakeholders like CSOs and international development agencies is emerging as an important mechanism to skill migrant workers. Efforts outside the state mechanism are significant, considering the existing infrastructure to skill workers in all the three countries under consideration. Currently, technical support is actively sought from international development agencies such as the ILO and World Bank to improve skill development infrastructure, quality of training provided and qualification frameworks. However, what would be crucial is streamlining the skill development initiatives of NGOs, migrants' associations and trade unions for migrant workers. Labour-sending countries could also build partnerships with CSOs in labour-receiving countries to upgrade migrant workers skills.

**Box 5: NGOs in Skill Development of Migrant Workers**

Different format exists by which NGOS deliver skill training to migrant workers, with or without government partnership. Migrant domestic workers are one category of workers often targeted in such intervention programmes. In Singapore, the Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics (HOME) provides vocational skills courses for migrant domestic workers in English language, computer literacy, cooking, baking, sewing, aromatherapy, cosmetology and caregiving. Training is provided to enhance livelihood options, particularly once they return to their home country. In detailed interviews, participants of training courses run by HOME cited cases of domestic workers from the Philippines and Indonesia starting beauty parlours and pastry shops once they return to their home country at the end of their contract.

The state may also partner with NGOs in destination countries to enhance the skills of migrant workers while they are abroad. For instance, the Philippine government partners with the Bayanihan Centre in Singapore and the Filipino Workers Resource Center in Kuala Lumpur offers entrepreneurial and skills training programmes, for the eventual reintegration of migrants into their respective families and communities.

*Source:* HOME website <<http://www.home.org.sg>> retrieved on 03.06.2016 and van Milink, 2011.

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