

SHATTERED DREAMS AND THE RETURN HOME: BANGLADESHI MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COUNTRIES DURING COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Shattered Dreams and the Return Home: Bangladeshi Migrant Workers in the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries During COVID-19

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Bangladeshi migrants have returned home, while many others are about to be *repatriated*. Drawing on qualitative research conducted with Bangladeshi migrants who returned from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, this article analyzes the experiences of Bangladeshi laborers overseas during the pandemic to develop a better understanding of why these migrants returned to their home country. The main research questions here are twofold: How did COVID-19 affect the normal socioeconomic lives of Bangladeshi workers in the Gulf Cooperation Council, and to what extent is their return migration related to the COVID-19 pandemic?

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, lockdown, Bangladeshi laborer, Gulf Cooperation Council, return migration

IZVLEČEK

Razblinjene sanje in povratek domov: bangladeški delavci migranti v Svetu za sodelovanje v Zalivu med pandemijo bolezni Covid-19

Odkar se je začela pandemija bolezni Covid-19, se je veliko bangladeških migrantov že vrnilo domov, še mnogim drugim pa grozi repatriacija. Avtorji na podlagi kvalitativne raziskave, opravljene z bangladeškimi migranti, ki so se vrnili iz držav Sveta za sodelovanje v Zalivu, analizirajo izkušnje bangladeških delavcev v tujini med pandemijo, da bi bolje razumeli, zakaj so se ti migranti vrnili v svojo matično državo. Pri tem sta bili njihovi glavni raziskovalni vprašanji, kako je Covid-19 vplival na vsakodnevna življenja bangladeških delavcev v državah Sveta za sodelovanje v Zalivu ter v kolikšni meri je njihovo vračanje domov povezan s pandemijo bolezni Covid-19.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Covid-19, omejitve gibanja, bangladeški delavci, Svet za sodelovanje v Zalivu, povratne migracije

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought drastic changes and challenges to human life around the world. Various restrictions like quarantine, lockdown, restricted movement, closed borders, and curfew have been introduced to reduce the spread of the virus, which have created both economic and social disruption for everyone. Migrant workers are among those most threatened by COVID-19 because they are often employed in dirty, dangerous, and demeaning jobs (ILO, 2020b). As a result of the worldwide economic downturn, the COVID-19 pandemic has variously affected migrants. Regardless of their legal status, many migrants lost their jobs in several sectors, such as construction, manufacturing, and the service industries, and were sent back to their home countries (Karim et al., 2020). Many others remain in constant fear of being repatriated for health reasons that have significantly impacted their economic situation and social life. In particular, the position of undocumented migrants has worsened because they have been deprived of basic needs such as housing, food, health care, and social security benefits (Sorkar, 2020). While migrant workers face isolation, job insecurity, and a reduction in their salaries, their dependents in the country of origin may face financial hardship because of the drop in remittances (ILO, 2020b). Moreover, migrant workers who have returned to their country of origin on vacation and have been waiting to fly back to begin working overseas are not allowed to enter destination countries due to imposed shutdowns or travel bans, even if they do get a work visa (RMMRU, 2020).

The outbreak of COVID-19 highlights that migrant workers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar—are among those most vulnerable throughout the world (Ranjan & Bisht, 2020). The GCC countries are the primary destination for short-term, unskilled, and semi-skilled migrant workers, particularly those from Asian and African countries. The six GCC states alone account for 10% of global migrants, while Saudi Arabia and UAE, respectively, host the world's third and fifth largest such populations (Karasapan, 2020). The United Nations (2019) estimated that in 2019 about 35 million migrants were living in the GCC. Most of these are low-paid and low-skilled workers living in crowded conditions where maintaining a social distance is very difficult, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the pandemic's beginning, many migrants from the GCC have been forced back to their country of origin, often without even being given their legal wages, compensation, and benefits. For instance, in the case of Saudi Arabia, it was roughly estimated that nearly 1.2 million migrants (or about 20%) were expected to lose their jobs and be repatriated by the end of 2020, while 300,000 migrants have already left the country and over 178,000 have been registered in the *Awdah* initiative that facilitates the return of migrants (Alsahi, 2020; Al-Monitor, 2020).

Bangladesh is one of the main sources of labor for the GCC region, with about 4.2 million migrant workers, making them the second-largest group of migrants

after those from India (Sorkar, 2020). Sorkar has reported that these Bangladeshis come from its most poverty-ridden regions and are unskilled or semi-skilled workers who migrate there with short-term contract visas of three to ten years (Sorkar, 2020). It is important to stress that these migrants are playing a vital role in the economy of Bangladesh by sending approximately USD 15 billion of remittances every year (BMET, 2020). However, in recent months, after the COVID-19 pandemic hit the GCC, many Bangladeshis returned home, while many others are about to face forced repatriation (USAID, 2020). Thus, COVID-19 has brought various socioeconomic crises to Bangladesh, such as joblessness, loss of savings, and a reduction in the flow of remittances (Karim et al., 2020).

Drawing on qualitative research conducted with Bangladeshi migrants who have returned from the GCC countries, this article aims to analyze the experiences of Bangladeshi laborers in Gulf countries during the pandemic to understand better why these migrants returned to their home country. The main research questions here are twofold: How did COVID-19 affect the ordinary socioeconomic lives of Bangladeshi workers in the Gulf Countries? To what extent is their return migration a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The next two sections discuss Bangladeshi labor migration to the GCC and the study methodology. The following sections present and analyze the empirical data from fieldwork. Finally, we present a concluding remark and reflections on the implications of our research for policymakers.

LABOUR MIGRATION FROM BANGLADESH TO THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COUNTRIES

Bangladesh is one of the major labor-sending countries in the world. While emigration during colonial times was a silent phenomenon and only occurred in a limited number of areas within a specific group of people, it became one of the most common and widespread aspects after independence in 1971 (Mahmood, 1995; Morad et al., 2014). As in other Asian countries, labor migration from Bangladesh developed when the Bangladesh government started to promote international migration as a part of its overall development plan (e.g., Rodriguez, 2010). Bangladesh established a government agency called the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) in 1976 to make use of employment opportunities in the Middle East and the newly industrialized South-East Asian countries (Rahman, 2012). Indeed, from 1976 onwards, the country emerged as a significant source of migrant labor, and the number of emigrants and the countries to which they migrated rose sharply (Morad & Gombač, 2015, 2018). Bangladeshi migrants are working overseas in more than 170 countries across six continents, and the number is, according to a recent estimation, about 13.12 million (BMET, 2020). Of these, 60% moved to the Middle East and

the GCC, 12% to Europe, 11% to the United States, and 11% are working in many countries in the Asian Pacific region (ILO, 2020a).

Concerning the GCC, reports show that between 1976 and 2019, the highest number of Bangladeshi workers migrated with short fixed-term employment contracts to Saudi Arabia (4.01 million), the United Arab Emirates (2.4 million), Oman (1.5 million), Qatar (0.8 million), Kuwait (0.6 million), and Bahrain (0.4 million) (BMET, 2019). These temporary migrant workers have been categorized as professional, skilled, semi-skilled, and less-skilled (ILO, 2014). After the coronavirus outbreak, according to recent estimates, nearly 666,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers were sent back to their own country, while another two million are facing possible deportation (Karim et al., 2020; TBS, 2020). Most of these returnees were sent back from the GCC region. By October 18, 2020, according to the statistics on the number of expatriates produced by the country's welfare ministry, around 209,345 migrants have returned from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Oman since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ahamad, 2020). In addition, over 150,000 aspirant migrant workers, who had recently received work visas for any of the six GCC states, cannot travel there because of flight cancellations and/or job cuts (ILO, 2020a). There is also tremendous pressure on the Bangladesh government from the authorities in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar to repatriate citizens immediately, especially those migrants without documentation being held in deportation camps (ILO, 2020a). Furthermore, the International Labour Organization estimates that the actual number of possible returnees will be between 800,000 and one million, all of whom would need employment, cash incentives, social protection, and health care (ILO, 2020a). As a result, the country's labor migration was in a deep crisis.

METHODS

This article's empirical material comes from 17 in-depth interviews with Bangladeshi migrants who returned home during the COVID-19 pandemic from the GCC countries. Using snowball sampling, we carried out the fieldwork in two phases using two different data collection techniques; five interviews were conducted remotely through mobile phone-based interviews between June and July 2020. Afterward, when the lockdown was lifted, and the COVID-19 infection rate was lower in Bangladesh, we conducted 12 face-to-face in-depth interviews between October and December 2020. These 12 participants were interviewed in a place of their choosing, such as at their home or a tea stall, by visiting where they lived, namely in the Sylhet, Kishoreganj, Narsingdi, and Tangail districts of Bangladesh. Most of our respondents who returned from the Gulf countries, e.g., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain, and Oman, are Muslim, married, and male migrants.

In the countries of destination, these migrants were employed as unskilled and semi-skilled laborers working as manual workers in various sectors such as agricultural, service industries, and construction. They worked as gardeners, cooks, salesclerks, drivers, bricklayers, and hotel and restaurant staff. Regarding their income, Bangladeshis who worked in the agricultural sectors earned EUR 100–200 monthly; hospitality and construction sector workers earned EUR 200–400, and mechanics working in factories received a monthly salary of EUR 500, depending on the tasks and their work experience. Concerning educational qualifications, workers engaged in the agricultural and construction sectors had primary school certificates, while those who worked in hotels and factories had higher secondary school certificates.

To understand the interviewees' lives during the coronavirus outbreak in the GCC, the interviews gathered data on several issues, such as what changes were introduced at their workplaces during the pandemic, how lockdown affected their permanent work, and the chance of finding alternative jobs, how they managed financially when their employment ceased, what kind of discrimination they experienced in getting treatment for COVID-19 and the reason of their return to their home country. In addition to these 17 in-depth interviews, we also had informal conversations with family members and local people while visiting their homes and having a snack at the local tea stalls. These informal social spaces also helped us collect relevant information and cross-check the findings gathered from the interviews. We used fictional names to maintain ethical standards and followed other ethical practices accordingly (Hennink et al., 2011).

In analyzing data, we listened to audio-recorded interviews at least twice, and then the interviews were translated from Bengali to English and transcribed accordingly. Finally, we analyzed the data following the thematic analysis procedure proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006); here, we first identified different themes and categorized them according to the patterns that emerged.

DAILY LIFE OF BANGLADESHI WORKERS IN THE GULF DURING LOCKDOWN

Our findings have shown that Bangladeshi migrant workers faced numerous hardships in the GCC countries during the pandemic. First, the stories of returnees indicated that Bangladeshi laborers experienced unemployment, the loss of jobs, and unpaid wages. These experiences were especially so for migrants employed in hotels, restaurants, food courts, the construction industry, or as hawkers. The self-employed were badly affected as their work and workplaces were shut down due to lockdown. Salam, one of our interviewees, who returned from Saudi Arabia, describes: "No previous information was supplied about that [lockdown]. Everything happened quickly. We did not know that our work was going to be paused for so

long. They [employers] just advised us to stay at home to avoid spreading the virus. So, we remained inside the room [dormitory] and stopped going to work. We were even fined when we went outside for any necessities" (Interview 9, 20. 12. 2020).

The picture painted by Salam is similar to that of other returnees who stress that they were generally laid off from jobs from March 2020, while their employer stopped paying their salary following a policy of "no-work-no-pay." Some of them were not even paid for the final month they worked. Since the lockdown was strictly maintained, migrants had very little scope to go out and find manual work to provide for their daily living expenses because they were forced to remain inside the houses and dormitories and most economic activities were closed. For instance, Md. Kadir, one of the returnees from Oman, explained this situation: "When the lockdown started, everything closed. As our work stopped, the owner stopped paying our salary. They did not even provide our due salary or other savings we had in the company [the workplace]. Our movement was also forbidden so that we had no chance to go out to do other work to earn our daily living" (Interview 8, 6. 11. 2020).

Reflecting Kadir's experience, our analysis reveals a similar picture for most of the migrants who lost their jobs across the GCC countries and were stuck at home because of the pandemic. While these Bangladeshis migrated to find work to support their families back home, instead of sending remittances, many started to survive by borrowing money from other compatriots who had good jobs and had been able to save some money. However, after a few months, the situation grew worse, and they had to rely on food being handed out by local charities and local people. Some migrants began to starve because they did not have enough food for days or even weeks. A returnee from Saudi Arabia, Md. Atiqur, mentioned: "When we had used our savings, we had nothing left. We then took a loan from other Bangladeshis who had a good job. After this, we had to depend on the food assistance provided by *Shekh* [rich Arabian]. Each month, they provided us with one packet of rice, bread, dal (lentils), oil, and some potatoes. With this food package, we barely managed to feed ourselves for a week" (Interview 10, 21. 12. 2020).

As some research highlights (e.g., Morad & Sacchetto, 2020), Bangladeshi workers in Middle Eastern Countries experienced unexpectedly harsh working conditions such as long hours, low wages, and a lack of freedom. But their everyday lives became more insecure when employers continued to withhold their salaries during the pandemic. Rana, one of the returnees from Saudi Arabia, who had waited more than five months for work to resume, confirmed: "During the lockdown, I did not get my salary. But instead of coming back, I waited there for five months. I lived on my savings. Then I took a loan from my friends. Five months later, the company still said, no-work-no-pay" (Interview 11, 22. 12. 2020).

Secondly, as well as economic hardship, migrants felt depressed about the risk of becoming infected and receiving adequate COVID-19 treatment. Our findings indicated that most company workers, mainly construction workers and agricultural laborers, lived in labor camps and dormitories. These labor camps and dormitories

consisted of eight to twelve people in one room, accommodated in bunk beds without proper ventilation and insufficient toilet facilities. As a result, maintaining proper hygiene and social distancing during a pandemic was often hard for them. There was always a risk of coronavirus spreading if fellow workers became infected. In relation to this, Motin and Amin, two Bangladeshis who worked in Bahrain and Qatar, respectively, describe their experiences:

In the dormitory, a room is typically about 20 x 15 feet [about 6.1 x 4.5 meters]. We were 12 people living in this room. We had 6 bunk beds for 12 people. In total, there were 10 rooms, 10 toilets, and 10 bathrooms (Interview 4, 13. 06. 2020).

We were 10 people in one room, and we had bunk beds. That is two people in one bunk, like a two-storied bed. There was one communal kitchen and three toilets for three rooms. We used to wait and queue to use the toilet. We were always afraid of being infected (Interview 12, 27. 12. 2020).

Migrants highlighted their lack of awareness about the procedures for getting treatment if people became infected. They were also afraid of the short-term and long-term consequences they might face if they became infected by the virus. Sohag Mia, a returnee from Bahrain, explained: “The company officials said only to wash hands, wear masks, and not to go outside. They did not provide any other information. We did not know where to go and how to get the treatment. Some of our co-workers were infected and were then taken away by the police. We were scared and had no idea what happened to them” (Interview 7, 22. 10. 2020).

Sohag Mia’s story is not an isolated case, and the narratives of most returnees confirm his experience. In the interviews, they often mentioned that they had been living with anxiety since the onset of the pandemic because they did not receive proper information about the procedures for getting treatment. In particular, they were scared they might not get adequate treatment if they did catch COVID-19. They only saw that once a fellow worker was infected, the police would come and take them away, and no one knew where they had gone.

In general, this section’s findings underlined that the COVID-19 outbreak has adversely affected the economic and mental well-being of low-paid Bangladeshi migrant workers in the GCC countries. They were also more likely to experience inadequate health care and overcrowded living conditions (Karasapan, 2020).

SHATTERED DREAMS AND RETURNING HOME EMPTY-HANDED

Lockdown and restrictions were imposed and continued throughout 2020 in the GCC region. As the findings have shown, most migrants were not ready to leave the host country despite their financial hardships and the adverse effects on their

mental well-being. They waited for five to seven months, hoping that work would resume, but sometimes their employer told them that work would not resume in the near future. When it was no longer possible to afford rent and food, they registered to be repatriated or arranged their own journey home. While many Bangladeshis were dismissed from their jobs, some also went home, having been assured by their employer that they would be taken back when the situation returned to normal (Mahmud & Hasan, 2020). One of the returnees from Saudi Arabia, Shajib Mia, informed us: "I had a valid Akama (visa). My visa was valid till December 2021. Since I had no work there, I thought I would return home. I had no money to buy a ticket, as my salary was stopped and I had used all of my savings. From Bangladesh, my father sent some money, and I took a loan also from my friends to buy a return ticket" (Interview 13, 27. 12. 2020).

As in the case of Shajib Mia in Saudi Arabia, other migrants' narratives also confirm that although they waited for some time, once they were unable to provide for their daily needs, they decided to return to their country of origin even though they had a valid visa and a job contract. In the process of their return migration, most of the returnees had to arrange their travel by taking money from family and relatives in Bangladesh. However, while, in many cases, migrants had to arrange their own journey, there were very few who did receive air tickets from the company to travel home. In this regard, Tapan, who returned from Oman, describes:

As I had no work for a long time, I thought I could not stay here sitting around without a salary. During these months [after lockdown started], I could not send a *poisha* [penny] to my wife and four children though they depend on my earnings. Then, after several months of waiting, I came back to Bangladesh. I asked my company for the salary and other benefits due to me, but my company only arranged a return ticket to send me back (Interview 14, 28. 12. 2020).

While the migrants had to sell their property and borrow money to pay for migration to the Gulf, they went back empty-handed, even though it was clearly stated in their job contract that they should receive any wages and other benefits due after leaving the company. Most of the migrants were neither paid the four to eight months' salary due to them nor received the amount they contributed to the pension scheme.

Furthermore, some migrants who had no documents were forced by the government to a deportation camp where they were held for a few months awaiting expulsion. Later, with the help of IOM and the Bangladesh Embassy, these migrants were sent back to their home countries. In this regard, Motin, one of the returnees from Oman, informed us: "When Covid started, there was a military check. They looked for undocumented workers. One day, I was caught and taken to a camp where nearly a hundred other people from different countries were living. After three months in detention, I was sent back by a special flight with some other Bangladeshis" (Interview 6, 18. 10. 2020).

It is worth noting that during our fieldwork, we also met some migrants who had come to Bangladesh on vacation or short leave before the pandemic started. They were trapped by the lockdown and did not manage to fly back after the holidays were over. One of the Bangladeshi workers, Rafi, who arrived in Bangladesh from Saudi Arabia in February, described his condition: "I came here on my annual vacation. I have a return ticket, but I am unable to go back. I have a valid visa and work permit as well. My company told me, 'you can come when the coronavirus pandemic is over'. Now it is almost 11 months; I do not see any hope now of returning to my workplace in Saudi Arabia" (Interview 17, 30, 12, 2020).

At home, returnees are now facing an uncertain future since their family expenditure relies entirely on their foreign remittances. Rana, a Bangladeshi migrant who arrived from Saudi Arabia, describes his present situation: "I have no savings left. I came back totally empty-handed. Now, I am searching for a job. But due to coronavirus, no job is available here. Many people here are also unemployed. So finding a job is not easy. Even if I want to drive an auto [taxicab], I will not have many passengers since all schools, colleges, and other educational institutions are closed" (Interview 11, 22, 12, 2020).

The above comments by Rana indicate that for returnees managing to find a job to survive in their home country is very difficult since, everywhere, work has yet to resume after the lockdown. In addition, some of the returnees also mentioned that the work experience they gained in the host country was of no use. Alam, who returned from Qatar, highlights the following:

I used to work for a company making gypsum boards. I cannot find any company here that produces gypsum boards. I am now driving a van (rickshaw) here. I bought it by taking a loan from my relatives and friends. With my earnings, I am struggling to provide for five family members. Also, I cannot afford the tuition fees for my children's school (Interview 9, 10, 11, 2020).

As in the case of Alam, the findings have shown that the skills migrants acquired in the GCC are not transferable to their home country. They often failed to find work similar to that they had in the Gulf. However, some have already started doing manual work to earn a living, such as working as a construction worker or a rickshaw puller. Nevertheless, their earnings are not enough to maintain the expenses of their extended families. For instance, Aman, who recently came back to his village home of Tangail from Qatar, said: "I am now working as a plumber's assistant, a job I did not use to do in Qatar. My daily wage is very low to meet the cost of maintaining my family. But still, I have to do this job as I do not have an alternative" (Interview 15, 29, 12, 2020).

Thus, as most of the returnees are the primary earners in their families, these migrants are struggling and have no source of income or savings because they returned home penniless. As a result, they are searching for a job, while many others plan to move abroad once again when the pandemic is over.

CONCLUSION

This article aims to contribute to the literature on migration by highlighting the impact of the recent COVID-19 pandemic on migrant workers, specifically Bangladeshi migrants in the GCC countries. As the COVID-19 pandemic is a recent world crisis, research on this topic is still limited, and researchers in various fields are trying to focus on the issue more seriously.

This research indicates that the COVID-19 outbreak has adversely affected the economic and mental well-being of Bangladeshi low-income migrant workers in the GCC countries. While most GCC countries have strictly maintained lockdown and workplaces have been shut down, and migrant settlements converted into restricted zones, they failed to ensure that basic facilities were provided for the migrants. The employers stopped paying salaries by following a policy of “no-work-no-pay,” and migrants were not entitled to any guaranteed income or unemployment benefits. Migrants had to survive by borrowing money and with the help of the occasional food assistance programs operated by local charities and local people. In addition to these economic hardships, migrants also experienced depression because of the risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 since they lived in overcrowded conditions without proper ventilation or adequate access to water and hygiene products. Therefore, after waiting five to seven months for work to resume, they decided to return home once they could no longer provide for themselves daily, even though they had a valid visa and job contract.

While many migrants had to sell their property or borrow money to pay for their migration, they returned home empty-handed from the GCC. Often these returnees are the only members of their families at work, and their families depend entirely on foreign remittances to meet their living expenses. The returnees’ lives are now very hard because they cannot find suitable means to earn their living in Bangladesh because of the limited local labor market and widespread unemployment and underemployment. It has become very difficult for them to find work in Bangladesh using the skills they acquired in the GCC, which are not transferable to their home country. Moreover, they do not have sufficient savings to invest in any small business. On the other hand, those migrants still in their destination countries face various crises such as the fear of losing their job and being forced to return home, reduced income, and the absence of proper medical care and social security benefits. Many jobless migrants survive by borrowing money or using their emergency savings. Though it is uncertain how long the situation will continue, they still do not want to leave the country and are trying to cope with the situation.

Overall, our research has shown that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrant labor is very diverse and complex. It has hampered migrants’ personal lives and adversely affected their economic, psychological, and social well-being.

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POVZETEK

RAZBLINJENE SANJE IN POVRATEK DOMOV: BANGLADEŠKI DELAVCI MIGRANTI V SVETU ZA SODELOVANJE V ZALIVU MED PANDEMIJO BOLEZNI COVID-19

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Odkar se je začela pandemija bolezni Covid-19 se je veliko bangladeških migrantov že vrnilo domov, še mnogim drugim pa grozi repatriacija iz držav Sveta za sodelovanje v Zalivu (angl. *Gulf Cooperation Council* – GCC). Avtorji na podlagi kvalitativne raziskave, opravljene z bangladeškimi migranti, ki so se vrnili iz držav Sveta za sodelovanje v Zalivu, analizirajo izkušnje bangladeških delavcev v tujini med pandemijo, da bi bolje razumeli, zakaj so se ti migranti vrnili v svojo matično državo. Raziskava je pokazala, da je izbruh Covid-19 negativno vplival na ekonomsko in duševno blaginjo bangladeških delavcev migrantov z nizkimi dohodki v državah GCC. Čeprav so skoraj vse države GCC striktno izvajale omejitev javnega gibanja, zaprle delovna mesta in spremenile naselja migrantov v območja z omejenim gibanjem, niso zagotovile osnovne infrastrukture za delavce migrante. Delodajalci so sledili načelu »brez dela ni plačila« in prenehali izplačevati plače, migranti pa niso bili upravičeni do zjamčenega dohodka ali nadomestila za brezposelnost. Preživljati so se morali z izposojanjem denarja in s pomočjo občasnih programov pomoči v hrani, ki so jih izvajali lokalne dobrodelne organizacije in lokalni prebivalci. Poleg teh ekonomskih stisk so migranti trpeli tudi za depresijo zaradi nevarnosti okužbe s koronavirusom, saj so živeli v prenatrpanih prostorih brez ustreznega prezračevanja ali ustreznega dostopa do vode in sanitarnih sredstev. Zato so se po petih do sedmih mesecih čakanja na nadaljevanje dela, ko jim je zmanjkalo sredstev za preživljanje, odločili, da se vrnejo v svoje domače države, čeprav so imeli veljavne vizume in pogodbe o zaposlitvi.

Čeprav je moralo veliko migrantov prodati svoje imetje ali si izposoditi denar za plačilo odhoda na delo v tujino, so se iz držav GCC vrnili praznih rok. Ti povratniki so edini člani svojih družin, ki opravljajo plačano delo, in njihovi družinski izdatki so v celoti odvisni od njihovih nakazil iz tujine. Zdaj živijo v zelo težkih razmerah, saj v Bangladešu zaradi omejenega lokalnega trga dela ter razširjene brezposelnosti in podzaposlenosti ne morejo priti do zadostnih sredstev za preživljanje. Poleg tega zdaj v svoji domovini zelo težko najdejo nove načine za preživljanje, ki bi ustrezali njihovim znanjem in veščinam, ki so jih pridobili v državah GCC. Prav tako nimajo zadostnih prihrankov za naložbo v malo podjetje. Po drugi strani pa se migranti, ki so ostali v ciljnih državah, soočajo z različnimi krizami, na primer s strahom pred izgubo zaposlitve in prisilno vrnitvijo domov, zmanjšanjem dohodka ter pomanjkanjem ustrezne zdravstvene oskrbe in socialnovarstvenih prejemkov. Na splošno so izsledki raziskave pokazali, da je pandemija bolezni Covid-19 na delo migrantov vplivala na zelo raznolike in kompleksne načine.