

The reintegration programme for Bangladeshi returnees

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When evacuated Bangladeshi migrants arrived home, the government, civil society, international organisations and the private sector cooperated to help them.

In 2011, during the first three weeks of March, 36,594 Bangladeshi migrants fled the violence in Libya and returned to Bangladesh. Returnees were greeted at the airport by IOM staff who provided assistance with registration and immigration processing and immediate medical attention – round the clock, seven days a week for the entire period. The government provided each returnee with food and water on arrival, registered all returnees, gave 1,000 taka (approximately US\$12) for onward transport and arranged for shuttle bus services to the main bus and train terminals in the city. Despite the logistical nightmare, constant liaison between IOM Dhaka, IOM field missions in Tunisia and Egypt and the government resulted in a fairly systematic processing of all returnees.

While most were exhausted, they were nonetheless happy to have returned safely and were eager to see their families. However, they have returned to large debts and have left behind possessions and months' worth of unpaid salary in Libya. Many had large suitcases filled with whatever they could carry but many others returned only with the clothes they were wearing and perhaps a blanket.

As soon as the majority of the Bangladeshi migrants had returned safely to Bangladesh, talks about reintegration programmes began. The government, civil society, international organisations and even the private sector held meetings to discuss ways in which over 35,000 returnees could be supported. The government agreed that the returnees would be given priority for overseas employment opportunities and the private sector

also agreed to employ some of the returnees; most, however, remained unemployed with little means of supporting themselves and their families. Ultimately, the government obtained a loan of US\$40 million from the World Bank with which it reimbursed IOM for the air-travel costs of 10,000 of the approximately 31,000 Bangladeshi IOM had repatriated. With the rest of the loan, each Bangladeshi returnee from Libya was provided with a one-off cash grant of 50,000 taka (approx \$600) to meet their immediate needs.

The reintegration programme was implemented in several stages. Firstly, through an extensive outreach campaign the returnees were informed of the programme and what documents they would need, including the need for a personal bank account. A comprehensive database of all returnees was developed by IOM from the registration conducted by the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training at the airport. A call centre was set up and its numbers disseminated through print and electronic media and texts to returnees' phone numbers obtained at the airport. Each returnee used the call centre to make an appointment. Then the Verification Centre went into operation for in-person verification with all relevant documents. This was the last step in the exhaustive process of identification of actual returnees before the cash grant of 50,000 taka was transferred directly to their accounts.

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