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Sri Lanka – Middle East Labour Migration Corridor: Trends, Patterns and Structural Changes

Dinesha Siriwardhane, Indralal De Silva, Sampath Amaratunge

Abstract—Objective of this study is to explore the recent trends, patterns and the structural changes in the labour migration from Sri Lanka to Middle East countries and to discuss the possible impacts of those changes on the remittance flow. Study uses secondary data published by Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment and Central Bank. Thematic analysis of the secondary data revealed that the migration for labour has increased rapidly during past decades. Parallel with that the gender and the skill composition of the migration flow has been changing. Similarly, the destinations for male migration have changed over the period. These show positive implications on the international remittance receipts to the country.

Keywords—Labour migration, Remittances, Middle East, Sri Lanka.

I. INTRODUCTION

IN past three decades international migration has been rapidly increasing in the world. While USA has recorded as the top immigrant country, Middle East has been getting the attraction of the Asians, migrate for employments. Middle East is the destination for more than 94 percent of Sri Lankan labour migrants. Male and females as well as skilled and unskilled people migrate for these countries for employment. This study focuses on the recent changes in the labour migration and their implications on the international remittance flow of Sri Lanka.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a rich theoretical and empirical literature on migration. However, the literature on the remittances is still at a poor state. The debate on the migration in 1950s was centered on the development impact of labour migration. Theories and models based this debate was first consists with optimistic view. However, gradually it has transferred towards a pessimistic view and then towards a mixed view. Classical and neoclassical views explained the development impact of the migration.

Migration selectivity was explained by integrating the seminal works of Mincer and Becker to the neoclassical explanation of the migration. Neoclassical version of human capital migration model was developed in [8]. He explains the

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migration as an investment decision. Education, skills, talents and the capabilities of the people determines the earning capacities of the people. Prospective wages at abroad is a function of the individual skills of labour [10]. Hence the, development impact of migration depends on the quality of the human capital in the migration flow.

Sri Lankan context of the labour migration has examined in number of studies mentioned in the references [2], [3]-[7], [11]-[13]. However, literature on the migration flow from Sri Lanka to Middle East countries, recent changes in this flow and potential implications of those changes on the remittance flow is at a poor state.

III. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Three decades ago, the labour migration flow from Sri Lanka to Middle East countries was highly represented by the female unskilled workers. However, this has been changing with the discussion of the female and unskilled labour migration and their implications at the national level. Increasing number of complains related to female and unskilled workers were a center for discussion about the profiles of the workers migrating abroad. In the national policy of labour migration, it is stated that “*Sri Lanka is promoting the migration of skilled labour*” [5]. Hence, improving the skills of the people before the migration is considered as a key element in protecting the labour migrants, in the policy.

Even though the Sri Lanka and Middle East corridor of the labour migration is at a very strong level, literature on the changes in the labour migration to Middle East and potential impacts of those changes on the remittance flow has not well explored in the literature. Hence, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring the recent changes in labor migration and their implications on the remittances.

IV. OBJECTIVES

Objectives of the study are to explore the recent trends, patterns and structural changes in the labour migration from Sri Lanka to Middle East countries and elucidate the possible impacts of those changes on the remittance flow.

V. METHODOLOGY

Study is based on positivist epistemology. Secondary data published by the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) and Central Bank of Sri Lanka are used for thematic analyses. Main source of migration data in Sri Lanka is the statistics published by SLBFE. These data may not include the