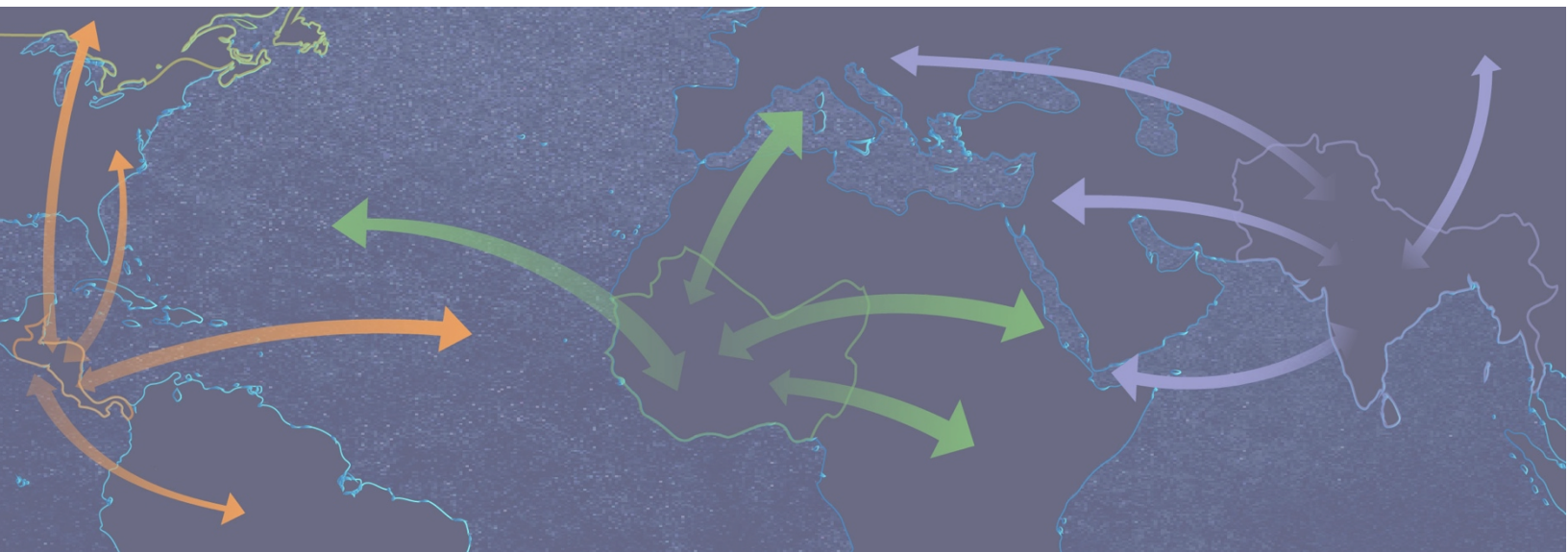


MEMO

Complex Migration Flows and Multiple Drivers in Comparative Perspective

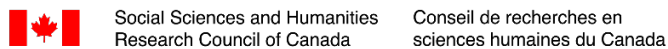


Background country report on Bangladesh within the migration system of Asia

The MEMO research partnership is led by:



And is supported by:



The MEMO Research Project

MEMO is a **multidisciplinary project** to develop a socio-ecological system framework that integrates drivers (main contextual factors) and individual determinants of migration; its primary objectives are:

To map the links between internal, intra-regional and intercontinental migration along complex population dynamics and migration systems;

- To describe and interpret the interplay among migration drivers (environmental conditions, demographic and health factors, economic development dynamics, socio-political issues), accounting for cultural and emotional processes that can shape individual decisions to migrate;
- To provide evidence to inform policy and support an efficient and rights-based governance of international migration.

Differences and analogies of migration drivers and determinants are comparatively established across (and within) the following regional migration systems:

- **The Americas** – focusing on migration flows from the northern countries of Central America (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador) to Mexico and further North to the USA and Canada.
- **West Africa** – focusing on Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal and Ivory Coast and their inter-related flows to each other, to neighbouring countries in West Africa and towards Europe and Canada.
- **South Asia** – focusing on Nepal and Bangladesh, internal and cross border flows within South Asia, as well as to Malaysia and Canada. The migration system and population dynamics are described and modelled to capture the plurality of (multi-directional) population flows.

MEMO will contribute innovative analytical tools to support a rights-based governance of migration and related drivers.

Research partner organizations



Background country report on Bangladesh within the migration system of South Asia

Tasneem Siddiqui¹
(University of Dhaka, Bangladesh)

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0.0 Abbreviations

BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BMET	Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training
DV	Diversity Visa
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
HH	Household
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MoEWOE	Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment
MPI	Migration Policy Institute
OP	Opportunity Visa
RMMRU	Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
WEWB	Wage Earners' Welfare Board

1.0 Introduction

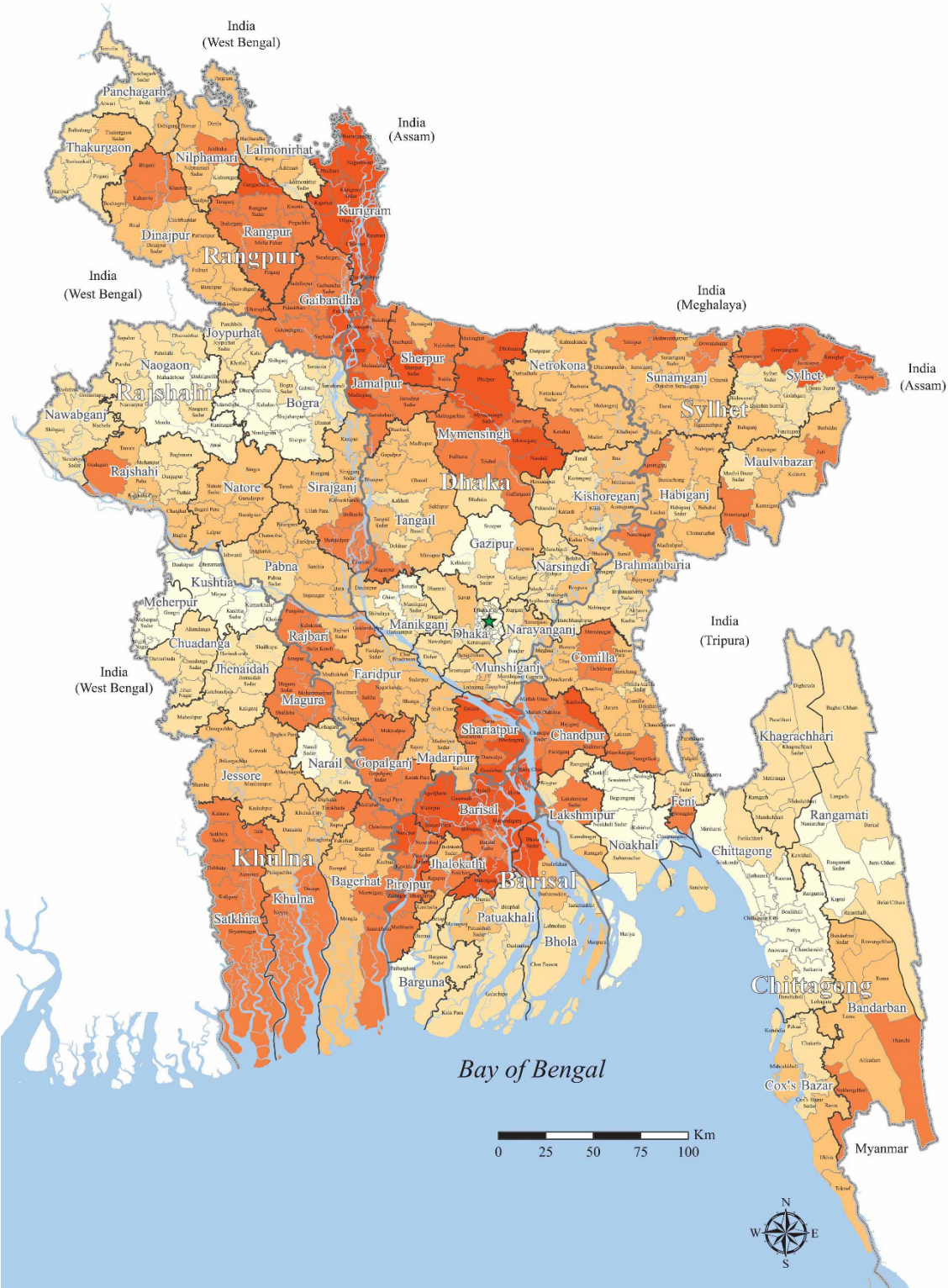
The 21st century has been described as “the age of Migration” (Castles and Miller 2003). Almost all countries are now involved with and benefit from migration as origin, destination, and transit countries. It is generally accepted that migration leads to transfer of skills, ideas, knowledge, creating links and inter-personal networks. Migration is now recognised as contributing to economic development of origin, destination, and transit countries, as well as employers, migrants and their left-behind household members (Siddiqui 2005; Siddiqui and Mahmood 2015). Over the years, however, migration has become extremely complex and costly. A large group of aspirant migrants fail to migrate when they fall prey to fraudulent recruiters. Some end up in detention centres or jails of transit and destination countries; some even die while migrating or in the countries of destination (Siddiqui and Abrar 2019). Decent work conditions (i.e., right to work, rights at work), social protection, or opportunities for social dialogues are either fully or partially unavailable to a large section of those who have been successful in reaching their destination. Of course, the complexity of migration differs according to type, policies, and governance practices of origin and destination countries, as well as the migrant’s skills, gender, age, and so on. An important question to address is why people still decide to migrate given the above challenges migrants face in fulfilling their migration dreams.

Having diverse types of population movements, Bangladesh represents an example where dynamics of migration, as well as dynamism in the environment in which migration is taking place, can be examined. This paper aims to understand the drivers of different migration streams from Bangladesh. It is divided into seven sections including the introduction. Section 2 deals with internal and cross-border migration. Section three highlights intra-regional migration dynamics. Section four presents the intra-continental migration from the country. Section five analyses the decision-making process of different types of migration, and the final section summarises major findings to set a new research agenda. The paper is based on secondary materials such as journal articles, books and book chapters, research reports, policy papers, and grey literature.

Bangladesh has a population 169,828,911 with a land mass of only 147,570 square kilometres. It is situated at the north-eastern part of south Asia. It shares borders on three sides with India and a small stretch with Myanmar; the Bay of Bengal is on its south. Bangladesh’s population is 87 per cent Muslim and 12 per cent Hindu; the remaining one per cent is Buddhist, Christian. and other religions. The country has a strong record of growth and development. The literacy rate is 75 per cent and life expectancy 72 years. By 2016, it had reduced the percentage of people living below poverty line from 41.9 in 1991 to 13.5 in 2015 based on the International Poverty Line of \$2.15 a day². In 2015, it reached lower middle-income country status. Exports of ready-made garments, remittances, and services are the three sectors driving Bangladesh’s economic growth.

² Using purchasing power parity exchange rate of 2016

Figure 1.1: Map of Bangladesh



Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), 2023

The migration history of people from the area that now constitutes Bangladesh has been quite long in the making. Migration has remained an integral part of Bangladesh's society and economy. All types of migration flows are visible in Bangladesh – within and beyond borders, forced and voluntary, regular and irregular,³ as well as for temporary labour or for permanent settlement.⁴ Cross-border migration from and to Bangladesh from the neighbouring state of India is quite common, but the majority of the flow is irregular in nature because of the lack of legal regimes that allow labour movements. Bangladesh is also a major participant in intra-regional labour migration. From 2007 to 2022, an average 644,479 males and females per year have taken part in intra-regional migration (BMET 2023). Their main destinations are the Gulf and other Arab and southeast Asian countries. Professional workers from south-eastern and eastern Asian countries also migrate to Bangladesh on a temporary basis to work in infrastructure development projects, manufacturing industries, and the service sector. The country also has a strong diaspora presence,⁵ particularly in Europe and North America. Bangladesh provides an example where all forms of population movement dynamics can be studied.

The following three sections offer an overview of internal and cross-border migration, intra-regional migration, and inter-continental migration from Bangladesh. It then explores the issue of how migration decisions are made based on data generated through a panel survey⁶ of 6,100 households (HHs).

2.0 Internal and cross-border migration

This section highlights the internal and cross-border migration trends of Bangladesh. It is mostly drawn from secondary sources.

³ Voluntary migration refers to a situation where individuals, households, or communities choose to leave their place of residence on their own volition. Forced migration includes internal displacements due to climate and other stresses, refugees, and trafficked migrants, etc. Temporary international migration includes those who move internationally with a work contract and return to their place of origin once the contract ends. Migration to the Gulf and other Arab countries is an example of temporary contract international migration. Regular migration is what takes place under the legal frameworks of the origin and destination countries. Irregular migration includes situations where migration occurs outside the legal purview of the origin and destination countries as well as overstaying visas and losing regular status due to contract substitutions by the employers. Most irregular migrants from Bangladesh to the Gulf and other Arab countries are to the last category.

⁴ Permanent settlement refers to a situation where people take up residency or citizenship of another country. People of Bangladeshi origin who went to Europe, North America and have settled there are examples of this type of migration.

⁵ There is no concrete data available on the total number of diaspora. Monem (2018) estimated that there could be 23,670,00 people of Bangladeshi origin residing in 13 developed European and North American countries and one Asian country.

⁶ SDC and RMMRU panel Survey-Third Wave- 2020

2.1 International migration

The Bangladesh Population and Housing Census 2011 (BBS 2012) reported that 9.71 per cent of the population has migrated internally at least once in their lifetime. Since independence in 1971, Bangladesh has been experiencing rapid urbanization. Once dominated by a rural-agrarian society, from 1961 to 2011 the country experienced a rapid surge in urban populations, which grew from 2.6 million to about 43.43 million. It is projected that by 2030, 44 per cent of the population will be living in cities⁷ and that by 2050 more Bangladeshis will be living in urban areas compared to rural areas. Trends of urban growth in Bangladesh are not driven by growth of natural population rather by intensified rural-urban migration (GoB 2020).

Rita Afsar (2003) analysed datasets on internal migration in Bangladesh generated by the United Nations, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and observed that rural-urban and urban-urban migration accounts for around 90 per cent of the population growth in cities. Greater Dhaka (including Dhaka city), Naraynganj, and Gazipur are some of the major destinations of internal migration. These cities are the major growth centers of Bangladesh that pulls labour from different parts of the country. The second largest destination areas are the environs of the port city of Chattogram. Migrants in urban locations mostly work in service, construction, and transportation (rickshaw and van-pulling), trade, waste collecting, among other mostly informal sectors. The garment industry and other manufacturing are some of the major formal sectors for migrant employment,⁸ while some also work in glass, steel, and leather factories. Participation of women in the manufacturing sector has been very high in the past; however, over the years the gender gap is narrowing. For example, in garment manufacturing, the share of women workers has decreased from 80 to 65 per cent.⁹ No research is available that explains this reverse trend. The government generally attributes this to the fact many women who went back to rural areas during the Covid-19 pandemic did not return. Another explanation cited is that the current trend of automation in the garment industries may have been preferencing male workers in more senior positions.¹⁰

⁷http://udd.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/udd.portal.gov.bd/page/5f558762_f3f0_47bf_aa03_32b609dcae45/UN%20HABITAT%20III%20BANGALADESH%20COUNTRY%20PAPER_reviewed%20_210516_for%20website.pdf

⁸ The formal economic sector is operated under the legal framework that follows the presence of contractual employment relationships, labour laws and regulations, and unions. Informal economic sectors include the agricultural sector, small and medium companies (SMEs), and micro firms. According to studies, between 35 and 88 per cent of Bangladesh's workforce is employed in the informal economy, which contributes an estimated 49 to 64 per cent of the country's GDP.

⁹ Keynote presentation by Dr. Md. Abdur Razzaque on 'Labour market issues and the national employment policy' organized by Labour Market Policy Department, ILO, Geneva and the Ministry of Labour and Employment of GoB, 20 June, 2023

¹⁰ Address by the main speaker, Monnujan Sufian, former minister of Ministry of Labour and Employment of GoB on a workshop, 'Labour market issues and the national employment policy' organized by Labour Market Policy Department, ILO, Geneva and the Ministry of Labour and Employment of GoB, 20 June, 2023.

Outside this rural-urban migration flow, short- or long-distance rural-rural seasonal migration is also common in Bangladesh (GoB 2020) during agricultural seasons and has historically been a traditional livelihood strategy in certain regions of the country. Migrants from the north of Bangladesh migrate to rice-producing regions such as Sylhet, Mymensingh, and Tangail. Men take part both in long- and short-distance migration during sowing and harvest seasons; women are mostly involved in short-distance migration during the same seasons. Usually, every season both men and women stay in destinations areas for roughly one month.¹¹

2.2 Cross-border migration

At the end of the second world war, the British colonial power handed over rule of the Indian subcontinent to two different states, Pakistan and India as inability to accommodate the rights of religious minorities resulted in the formation of two separate countries based on religion¹² Research and administrative measures could not be ensured before drawing the two countries' borders. This resulted in some families and homesteads being divided between India and the then-Pakistan. The subcontinent's decolonisation saw one of the world's largest refugee situations: about 15 million people moved or were forced to move between two newly-formed states on the basis of religion. The Pakistan state comprised two provinces, East and West Pakistan.

Due to their pre-existing relationships and the arbitrary nature of their shared border, population movements between the two newly-independent countries did not stop. During the initial period, institutional arrangements for migration between the two countries were in place under which naturalisation could be obtained with relative ease (Siddiqui 2006). During the 1960s some major riots took place in both India and Pakistan. Migration of religious minority communities from both sides of the border took a distinct form during this period. Gradually by 1965, stricter migration control regimes emerged in both countries but did result in reduced flows. People continued to migrate informally by bribing border security forces of both countries. Along with religious minority migration flows, labour movement also continued. Nonetheless, movements particularly for labour remained mostly irregular (Siddiqui, 2005).¹³

¹¹ There are three agricultural seasons in Bangladesh during which women migrate three or four times a year for a short period. Their migration is termed as seasonal migration.

¹² The spread of clashes between Hindu and Muslim communities in different parts of the sub-continent encouraged the British to hastily declare the two countries' independence, with borders drawn hurriedly to further reduce riots between two religious groups.

¹³ Regular migration is defined as movement of persons to a new place of residence or transit that takes place within the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries. Irregular migration is when the movement takes place outside the regulatory norms or when a person overstay their visa. Since there was no legal regime of labour movement between India and Pakistan as well as between India and Bangladesh, most of the labour flows are irregular. For this reason there is hardly any authentic data on cross border irregular migration among these countries.

In 1971, East Pakistan broke away from Pakistan and became an independent state: Bangladesh. India and Bangladesh share a 4,096.7 km land border. Nonetheless the migration control regimes between Bangladesh and India remained the same as between India and then-Pakistan. Therefore, migration between the two countries continued through informal channels.

The cross-border population movement between India and Bangladesh has always been controversial. Successive Indian governments generally explained migration between the two countries in terms of economic migration and a refugee situation. The Hindu community's migration from Bangladesh to India has been categorized by Indian state authorities within a refugee framework, while Muslim migration is perceived as a pursuit of livelihood (Siddiqui 2006). The refugee framework cites Hindu communities' persecution in Bangladesh therefore, leading them to migrate to India. Muslims migrate to India to seek livelihood; therefore, they are labelled 'economic migrants'. Such a demarcation, however, misrepresents the drivers of migration for Hindus and Muslims. Marriage, student migration, and voluntary migration driven by the desire to access increased economic, cultural, and religious opportunities contribute to migration flows of both Hindus and Muslims between India and Bangladesh¹⁴.

Before 2000, successive Indian governments treated migration between Bangladesh and India as a political and administrative problem, but it was not perceived as an existential threat that necessitated intervention beyond the political and administrative bounds. The government of Bangladesh has always denied that there is a major flow of labour migration to India from Bangladesh. According to the government of Bangladesh, migration between these two countries does take place, but it is not unidirectional (Siddiqui 2006); people from Bangladesh migrate to India and people from India also migrate to Bangladesh. Moreover, these flows merely represent the normal migration pattern that exists between any two neighbouring countries. Successive Indian governments have sought to include migration in formal bilateral discussions, but Bangladesh has refused to acknowledge it as an issue.

Since 2000, when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in India, informal labour migration from Bangladesh to India has become highly securitized.¹⁵ The BJP government, Indian defence establishment, a section of civil society, electronic and print media, intelligence agencies, and judiciary became the major securitising actors. They identified migrants from Bangladesh as a threat to their state and societal security. The languages used by different securitizing actors of Indian state include: 'Bangladeshi migrants are causing demographic invasion'; 'they can influence the electoral outcome of assembly seats of east Delhi and Assam'; 'Bangladeshis are behind most of the robberies and stabbings in the capital city of Delhi'; 'they are involved in drug peddling'; 'they exert pressure on civic amenities'; and they 'hijack scarce job opportunities';

¹⁴ This statement is not applicable to migration to the Assam province of India as migration to Assam from Bengal has different drivers.

¹⁵ Securitization of migration is a part of communal agenda of a section of political elite represented by BJP; its ally Rastri Sevak Shangha (RSS) has sought to appeal to the anti-Muslim psyche of a section of voters of India.

(Siddiqui 2006). Such securitization gradually resulted in stricter border regimes. Before the Covid-19 emergency, there were multiple efforts by the ruling national government as well as the Assam state government to register all Indians with papers proving their citizenship. However, the pandemic somehow stalled the process. Border fencing may have also contributed to reduced discussion on cross-border population movement between India and Bangladesh.

Over the last 30 years, a sizeable number of Indian migrants has also been working in Bangladesh. They are mostly skilled and professional workers employed mostly by NGOs, and in the garments, textile, and IT sectors, among others. There is no firm figure regarding their number. As early as in 2009, the Ministry of Home Affairs Bangladesh estimated that there are 500,000 Indians working in the country. According to a newspaper report, by 2019 the total number of Indian immigrants living in Bangladesh had topped one million. The flow of remittances from Bangladesh to India gives some idea of the extent of their workforce participation. India is the largest remittance-receiving country in the world, with Bangladesh as the fourth-largest remittance source for India. Indian workers from Bangladesh have been remitting annually over US\$10 billion since 2017, up from US\$8.3 billion in 2016 and US\$4.5 billion in 2014.¹⁶ According to the Reserve Bank of India, the remittances were sent through informal channels but deposited with declaration to different Indian banks.¹⁷

There is a grey area surrounding this group's migration status. Indian migrants initially arrive in Bangladesh on a regular visa but in many instances, remain there and continue working even after their work permit has expired, technically making them irregular migrants. The migration of these workers, both professional and skilled, from India to Bangladesh has not been labelled as posing a security threat to the country by the government, opposition, or media. There could be various reasons behind this. For instance, longstanding experience of cross-border migration, may have shaped a positive mindset among Bangladeshis with respect to migration. Also a few employers have stated that they prefer Indians or Sri Lankans in their management structure given their observed tendency of Bangladeshi employees to start a new business after a few years with the connections they developed through their job.¹⁸

¹⁶ Daily Industry, 7 June 2022, <https://dailyindustry.news/bangladesh-becomes-4th-largestremittance-source-for-india/>

¹⁷ Daily Industry, 7 June 2022, <https://dailyindustry.news/bangladesh-becomes-4th-largestremittance-source-for-india/>

¹⁸ Interview of Abul Momen, Director, Pride Textile Ltd. and Director of IBA, University of Dhaka, 14 October 2022.

3. Intra-regional migration dynamics

This section highlights the intra-regional migration dynamics of Bangladesh which is also linked with its colonial past. While participating in the British Merchant Navy since 1900, some of the workers jumped ship in different ports. Within the Asian region, these ports include Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia. Gradually people of Bangladeshi origin became naturalized citizens of those countries and their ties with their country of origin has been very thin (Mahmood, 1990).

A new form of intra-regional migration flow began in the early 1970s, known chiefly as short-term international contract migration.

3.1 The Context

In the late 1960s, when labour migration to the Gulf and other Arab countries began, Bangladesh (known then as East Pakistan) did not participate in that market. Because of geographical proximity only the people of then-West Pakistan were involved in the newly emerging labour market in the Gulf under the framework of short-term contract international labour migration. The foremost characteristics of this type of migration is its short duration and specific job contract. Typically, these migrants stayed and worked abroad for a period of three to four years. Nearly all individuals engaged in this labor market were obligated to return home upon completion of their job contracts.

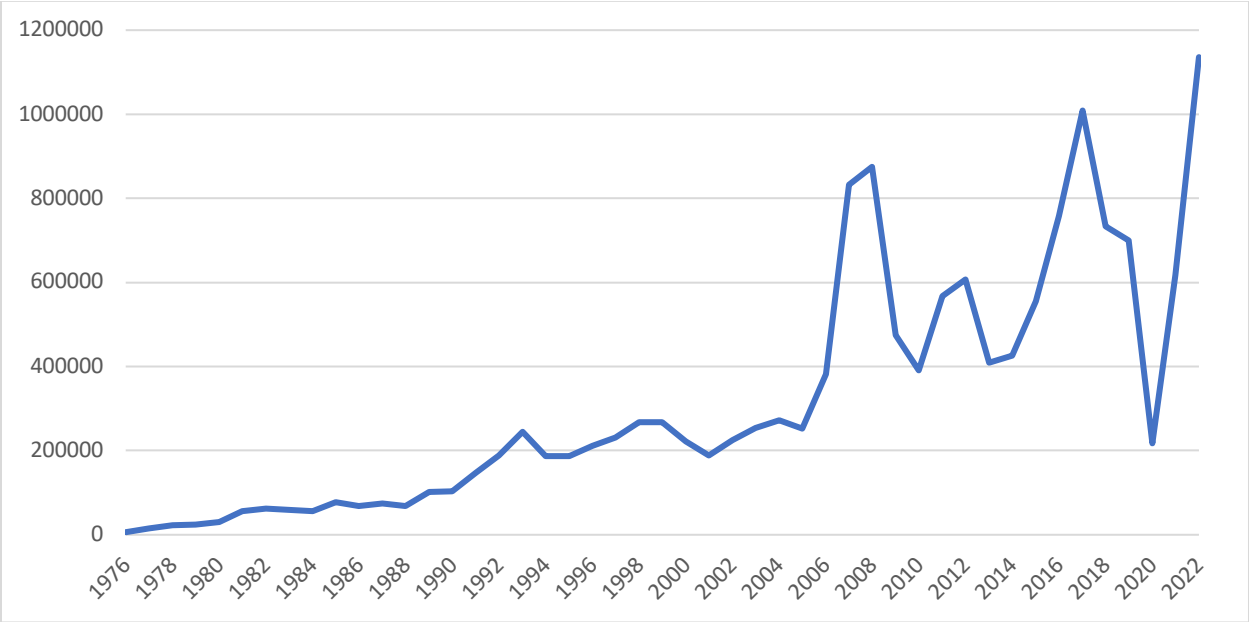
When Bangladesh became independent in 1971, new opportunities emerged for in in the Gulf labour market. Initially these opportunities were limited to the Gulf and other Arab countries but from the late 1970s onwards, southeast Asian countries also started employing overseas migrants under similar job contract arrangements.¹⁹ Based on BMET data, Figure 3.1 illustrates the gradual growth of short-term international labour migration of Bangladeshis in the region.²⁰ It shows that in 1976, some 6,000 workers migrated; by 1989, their numbers had crossed the 100,000 mark and by 1996, more than 200,000 Bangladeshis migrated abroad for employment. Migration grew exponentially and by 2007 Bangladesh was sending more than 800,000 workers abroad. From 2009 to 2016, migration flows dwindled quite a bit. Downward trends in growth are linked to the global financial crisis of 2009-2010. Still, the flow hovered between 400,000 and 700,000. In 2017 a major spike in migration is visible; that year more than one million people went abroad for employment. In 2020, the world experienced the Covid-19 pandemic. Movements of people came to a near standstill. From January to March 2020, before the pandemic restrictions, almost 200,000 workers went abroad to take up jobs.

¹⁹ The Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) of Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas and Employment (MoEWOE) maintains the record of migrants who are going abroad under short-term employment

²⁰ [https://bmet.gov.bd/site/page/1baff8ec-27eb-48e0-9ec6-1751cd5411d8/-](https://bmet.gov.bd/site/page/1baff8ec-27eb-48e0-9ec6-1751cd5411d8/)

Since the pandemic measures were lifted, international migration flows have gradually gained pace. BMET figures show that the total number of workers who migrated mostly to the Gulf and other Arab and south-east Asian countries from Bangladesh stood at 1,135,873 in 2022.²¹ This is almost an 84 per cent rise from the previous, Covid-19-affected year.

Figure 3.1: Labour migration from Bangladesh, 1976-2022



Source: data from BMET elaborated by RMMRU

3.2 Female migration

Initially mostly male workers migrated from Bangladesh. Women hardly participated as principal migrants. There were either restrictions or bans on the migration of un-skilled and semi-skilled women workers from Bangladesh. Evidence-based research and civil society movements resulted in the lifting of restrictions on the migration of these female workers in 2003 (Siddiqui 2016). Once caps were lifted, a significant number of women started participating in the short-term international labour market. By 2016 female workers comprised 16 per cent of the total labour flow from Bangladesh. Between 2016 and 2022 – excluding the Covid-19 period – more than 100,000 female workers have been migrating overseas for work annually. In 2022, 1,05,466 female workers migrated from Bangladesh (BMET 2023).

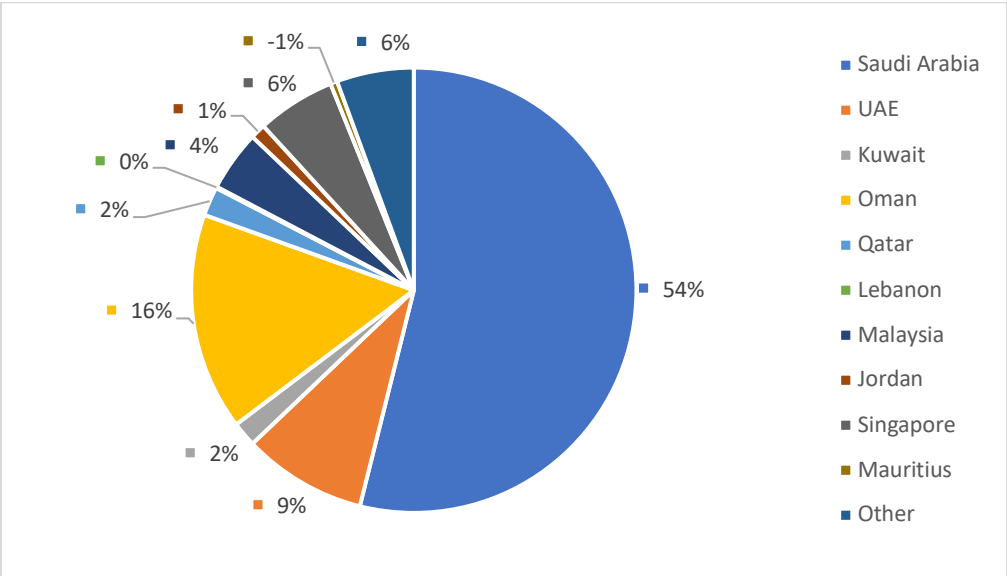
²¹ <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/viewStatReport.action?reportnumber=24>

3.3 Countries of destination

Major short-term migration flows from Bangladesh are toward Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Libya, Bahrain, Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Brunei. From 1999 to 2004, Saudi Arabia was the dominant destination country, receiving between 60 and 70 percent of Bangladeshi migrants during this period, (RMMRU 2024). From 2005 onwards migration to Saudi Arabia has gradually fallen. Saudi Arabia imposed complete or partial bans on the migration of male workers from Bangladesh on the grounds of predominance of Bangladeshi workers. However, female migration mostly for domestic work continued. The experience of the continuation of female migration in tandem with caps on male migration sheds light on the power dynamics and feminisation of transnational care/domestic work. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Malaysia are the two other major labour-receiving countries of Bangladeshi migrants.

A total of 1,135,873 migrants joined work abroad in 2022. Figure 3.2 shows that Saudi Arabia again has been the principal destination for the Bangladesh labour migrants, accounting for 612,418 workers, or 54 per cent. The second-largest flow was to Oman (179,612 migrants, 16 per cent). That same year, the United Arab Emirates was the third-largest destination country (101,775 workers, 9 per cent) and Singapore was fourth, receiving 64,383 (6 per cent) workers. The other major countries were Malaysia (50,090 workers, 4.41 per cent) and Qatar (24,447 workers, 2.15 per cent).²²

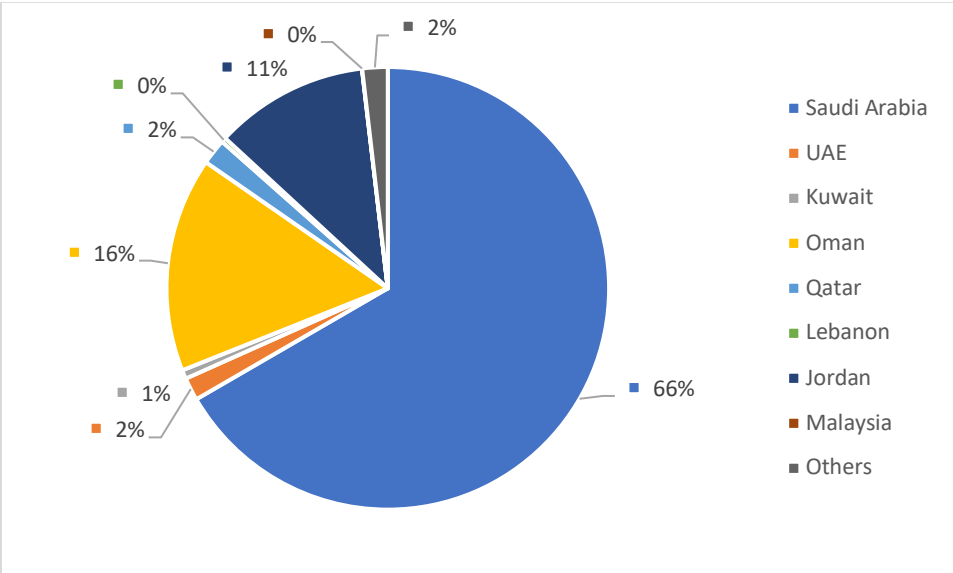
Figure 3.2: Intra-regional Destination Countries of Bangladeshi Migrants, 2022



²² <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/viewStatReport.action?reportnumber=11>

For female migration Saudi Arabia was also the main destination country in 2022, receiving some 67 per cent of all female migrants from Bangladesh (70,279). The second-largest flow was towards Oman (16,544 workers, 16 per cent), followed by Jordan (11,879 workers, 11.26 per cent), Qatar (1,982 workers, 2 per cent) and United Arab Emirates (1,761 workers, 1.67 per cent).²³

Figure 3.3: Intra regional Destination Countries of Bangladeshi Female Migrants in 2022



Source: data from BMET elaborated by RMMRU

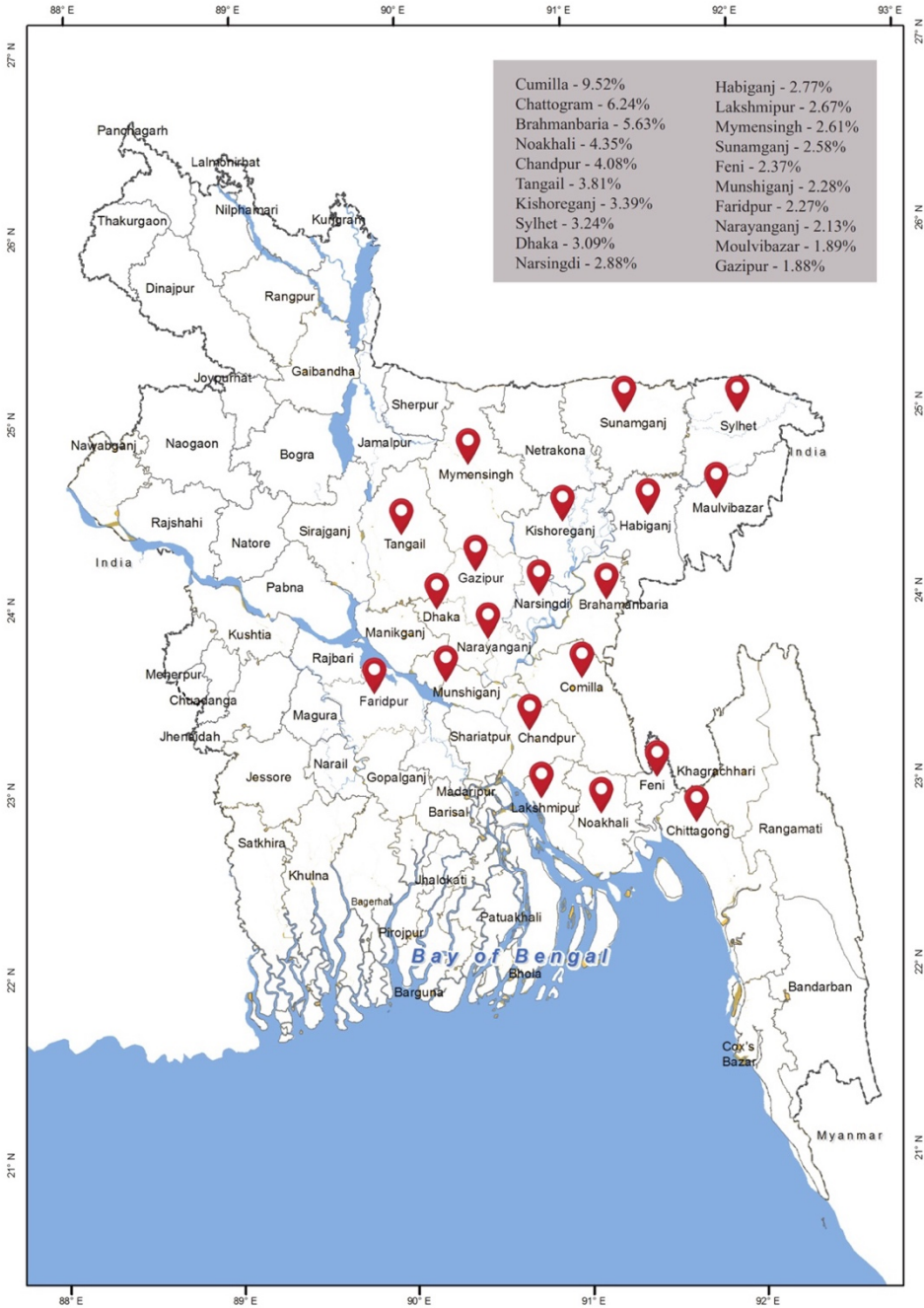
3.4 Districts of origin

While Bangladesh is divided into 64 administrative districts, it is interesting to note that majority of the migrants originate from only five or six districts: Cumilla, Chattogram, Tangail, B. Baria, Noakhali, and Chandpur. In 2022, the largest outflow of internal and international migrants originated from Cumilla district, which accounted for 9.52 per cent of the total flow (105,997 migrant workers). Chattogram ranked second with 69,448 workers, or 6.24 per cent of the total flow, while 62,698 migrant workers (6 per cent) originated from Brahmanbaria, 48,393 (4.35 per cent) were from Noakhali, 45,455 (4.08 per cent) (45,455 migrant workers) from Chandpur, 42,379 (3.81 per cent) from Tangali, and 37,785 (3.39 per cent) from Kishoreganj (RMMRU 2023). In Bangladesh, migration is mainly through social networks: 80 per cent of the work permits are procured by migrants residing in the country of destination or by friends and relatives of those migrating (Siddiqui 2010). Migrants working in the destination countries purchase work visas in exchange of money from informal intermediaries engaging in visa-trading to make some extra money. Migrants then send the work visas to family members in Bangladesh or to the sub-agents

²³ <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/viewStatReport.action?reportnumber=38>

who send people abroad from their localities. Obviously, family members or sub-agents sell those work visas at a higher price to those interested in migrating abroad (Siddiqui 2012). This is why migration is higher from areas with high numbers in the destination countries.

Figure 3.4: The map of Bangladesh indicating the major source districts of migration

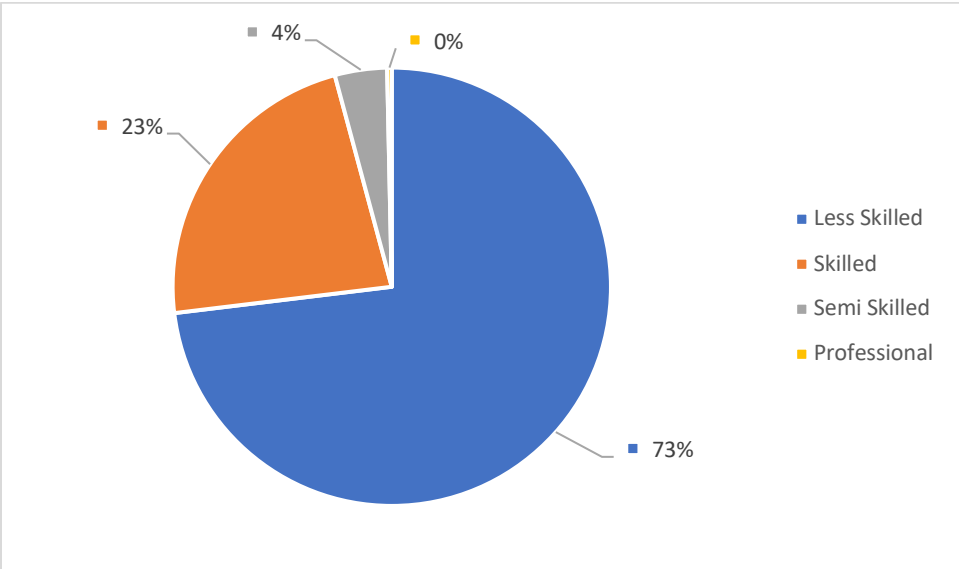


Source: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), 2023

3.5 Skill composition

BMET classifies labour migrants into four categories: professional, skilled, semi-skilled, and less skilled. Doctors, engineers, nurses, and teachers are considered professionals. Manufacturing and garment workers are skilled; tailors and masons, for instance, are classified as semi-skilled, while domestic workers, cleaners, and labourers are classified as less- or un-skilled. Most migrant flows from Bangladesh are in the un-skilled and semi-skilled labour market. In 2022, only 0.32 per cent of the migrants were categorised as professionals; four per cent were in the semi-skilled category of semi-skilled and as 74 per cent of migrants were categorized as less-skilled/un-skilled.

Figure 3.5: Skill Composition of Intra-regional Bangladeshi Migrant Workers in 2022



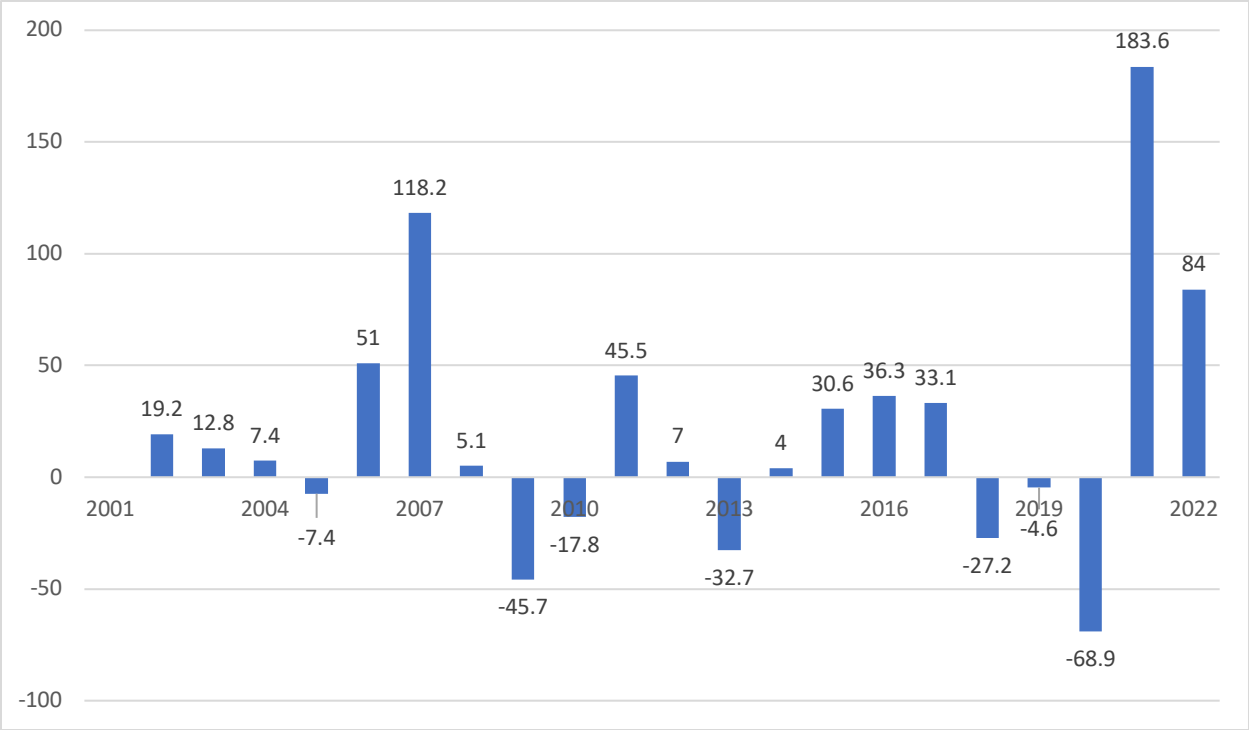
Source: data from BMET elaborated by RMMRU

3.6 Remittances

Since the year 2000, remittance flows to Bangladesh have grown significantly. During the years 2002 to 2009, 2011, 2012, 2018, and 2019, the annual growth rate of remittance flows fluctuated between 10 per cent and 37 per cent (See Annex 1, Table 4.6). Although Bangladesh received US\$21.28 billion in remittances in 2022, this figure represents a negative growth of four per cent over 2021 (RMMRU 2023). Both international and domestic factors have contributed to the decline of remittances. On the international level, these include the effect of the Russia-Ukraine war, the Covid-19 pandemic, inflation, adverse effects of global price hikes in the real income of the migrants, non-payment and irregular payment of wages, wage theft in destination countries. Domestic factors affecting remittance flows are requirements of foreign currency to purchase work visas, differences in exchange rates in formal and informal markets (both kerb and hundi), the practice of under invoicing to evade taxes, currency smuggling, and the erosion of trust of the

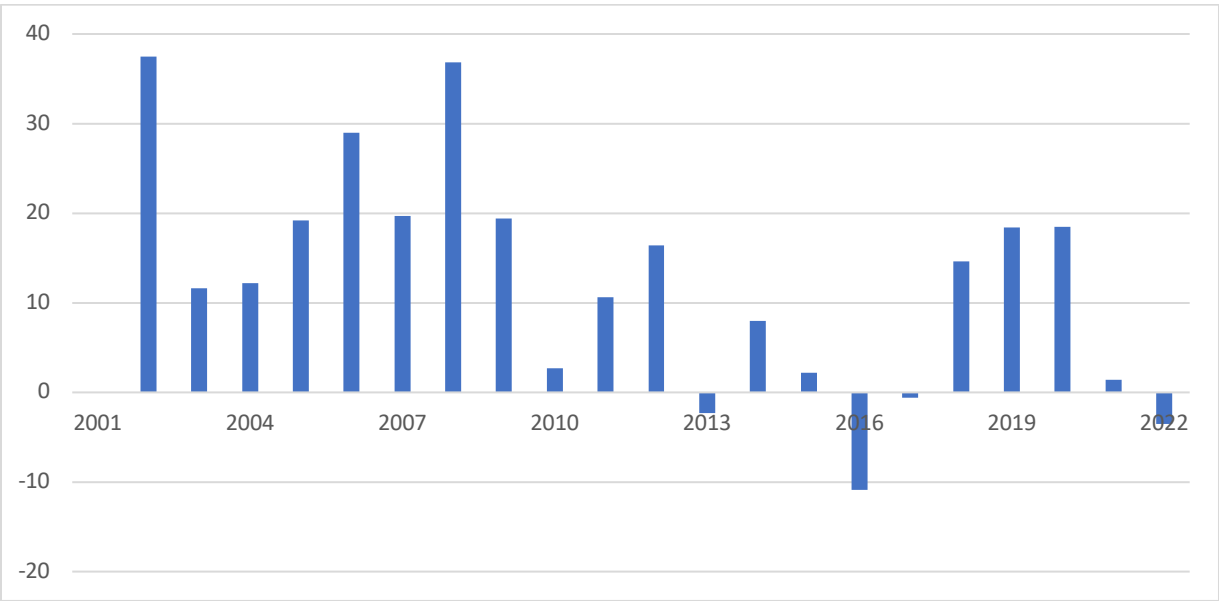
migrants and their families in the banking system. Figure 3.6 shows the annual change (in percentage) of migration and remittance flows from 2001 to 2022.

Figure 3.6: A Annual growth of Migration flows in Percentage, 2001-2022



Source: data from BMET and Bangladesh Bank elaborated by RMMRU (2023)

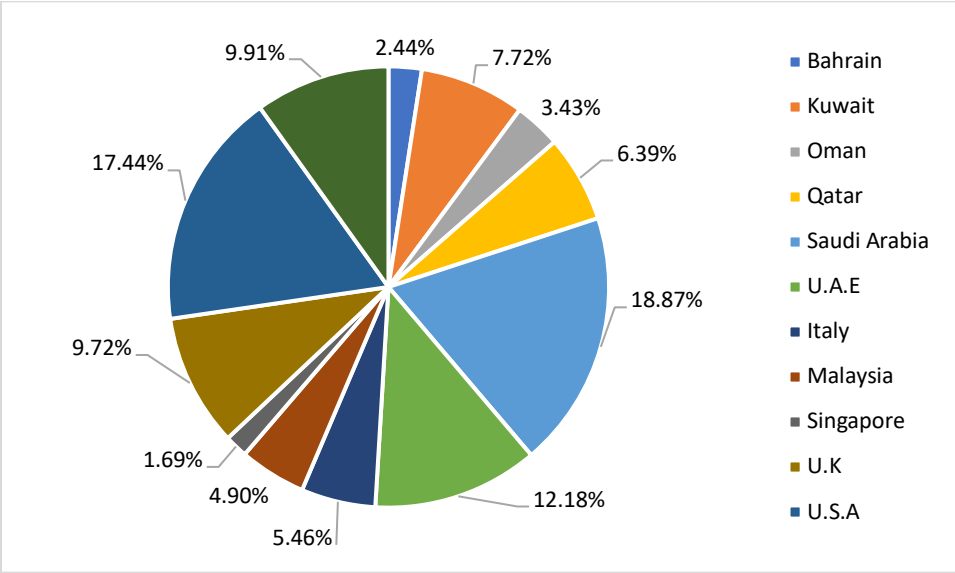
Figure 3.6: B Annual growth of Remittance (US Dollars) in Percentage (2001-2022)



Source: data from BMET and Bangladesh Bank data elaborated by RMMRU (2023)

Figure 3.5. illustrates that the growth in percentage of migration flows does not not automatically result in the increase of remittances. In 2008, migration only grew by five per cent but remittances grew 37 per cent. In 2015, migration grew by 31 per cent but remittances grew by only two per cent. In 2022, migration grew by 84 per cent but remittances declined by 3.5 per cent. Figure 3.7 gives an idea of remittance flows from the major labour-receiving countries in 2022.²⁴

Figure 3.7: Remittance Flows by Country of Employment, 2022



Source: Data from Bangladesh Bank elaborated by RMMRU (2023)

3.7 Migrant worker deaths in countries of destination

According to the Wage Earners’ Welfare Board (WEWB) of the Ministry of EWOE (Siddiqui 2023), 46,503 dead bodies of migrant workers were repatriated to Bangladesh over the last three decades. From 2017 to 2022, a total of 19,495 Bangladeshis died abroad – 96 per cent were male and 4 per cent were female. Information about the causes of death is received from the death certificate provided by the destination countries. An analysis of the death certificates (ibid.) found that 32 per cent female migrant deaths abroad were officially recorded as ‘unnatural’ and 68 per cent as ‘natural’. Unnatural deaths include suicide, murder, and accidents. The average age of the deceased at different destinations²⁵ was 37 years. The high percentage of unnatural

²⁴ <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/viewStatReport.action?reportnumber=23>

²⁵ Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, and Mauritius

death of young female migrants does pose questions about the work conditions and accountability of employers in those countries, revealing the dark side of labour migration (ibid.).

The government of Bangladesh takes a cautious stand when it comes to the labour markets of the Gulf and other Arab countries. It fears that taking a rights-based approach may result in losing the labour market. Some steps are taken with respect to protecting female migrants in destination countries. Indicatively, female migrants in Saudi Arabia are now allowed to keep personal mobile phones and hotlines were established so that they can reach the welfare desk of government during emergency situations. The government is also thinking of conducting second autopsies in Bangladesh in suspicious cases. In the case of Abiron, an underage girl who was sent to Saudi Arabia as a domestic worker, the government took a strong stance when it was found that she died as a result of being brutally tortured by members of her employer's family. In October 2019, the Wage Earners Welfare Board brought Abiron's body to Bangladesh seven months after her death. On her death certificate, there was a clear mention that she had been murdered. The National Human Rights Commission recommended legal action, compensation for the murder, and punishment of the accused. The Bangladesh embassy in Riyadh represented her family in the Saudi court, which later sentenced the employer's wife to death; the employer received a sentence of three years and two months in prison and his son was sentenced to seven months in a juvenile correction center (ibid.).

4. Intra-continental migration dynamics

A large number of people of Bangladeshi origin reside in different countries of the world as long-term migrants. They are also known as the diaspora population of Bangladesh. The Government of Bangladesh defined diaspora as communities of migrants settled permanently in and owing allegiance to host countries while at the same time aware of their origin yet identity and maintain varying degrees of linkage with Bangladesh and other diasporic communities of Bangladeshi origin (GoB and IOM 2004).

4.1 History of emigration

Migration from Bangladesh to developed western countries began with the migration to the UK in the late-18th and early 19th centuries. Migration on an organized scale to the UK and the US was intimately connected British colonialism. Bengalis in particular, gained a reputation as '*Lashkar*' or seamen in the late-19th and early 20th centuries. In the Bangladeshi context, seamen mostly originated from the south-eastern part of the country, i.e., Chattogram and Noakhali, which face the Bay of Bengal. People from those areas found jobs on British ships carrying goods from Kolkata around the world. People from Sylhet region that was not adjoining the sea also joined the British merchant navy as '*Khalashis*' or sailors, cooks, cook-mates, and cleaners. Experts on

Sylheti²⁶ migration speculate that this group did not have much experience with the sea and jumped ship at the first opportunity. Due to the 'ship-jumping' tendency of the seamen, small settlements of the Bengalis, especially Sylheti persons, have been established near ports in a number of countries including Burma, Singapore, Hong Kong, US, and UK. Those who jumped ship in the UK ended up settling in London, Liverpool, and Bristol. These Sylheti seamen are identified as pioneer migrants of Bengal. Literature on Bengali migration to the US also shows that in the 1920s and 1930s a small number of Bengalis jumped ship in Detroit and Michigan. Many immigrants from Bengal also ended up in different South American countries thinking they had made port in the US.

The pioneer migrants of Bengal who landed in the UK were predominantly of Sylheti origin. Information about the area from where the pioneer migrants to the US originated is not available. However, Sylhetis and people from Swandip constitute a large segment of the current Bangladeshi communities in the US. The early migrants to the UK found jobs as labourers in different industries. Those in the US were employed as shopkeepers and security guards. Early migrants in both the UK and US were mostly illiterate. They represented landless peasantry and all were male. In the case of the UK, most of the early settlers married locals and established their families in the host country. The second wave of migration to the UK started in the 1950s; in the case of the US, it gained momentum in the 1960s. The British government adopted a policy to encourage labour migration from its erstwhile colonies due to the acute labour shortage after World War II. Britain's new immigration policy allowed the sponsoring of workers to participate in the textile industries. A section of the sea-faring migrants who had by then settled in the UK started sponsoring their kith and kin from their villages. Young men arriving in the post-war period lived and worked mostly in the northern cities such as Birmingham and Oldham. They found employment in heavy industries. Some went to London to work in the garment trade as pressers or tailors. During the 1970s, the heavy industry sector of the UK was declining, and a large number of Bangladeshis lost their jobs. This brought many Sylhetis to London from the north of the UK. In the 1980s, they started bringing their wives and children to the UK on a large scale.

A small number of highly educated people representing the upper and middle class of Bangladeshi urban society also migrated to Europe even before the second world war. They came to the UK for higher education. Gradually, they entered professional life in the UK and changed their legal status into citizens. Nonetheless, the number of those who came as non-economic migrants is relatively small. The nature of Bangladeshi migration to the US during the second wave is significantly different compared to that of the UK. Professionals and skilled migrants dominated the second wave of migration. Students started arriving in US in the 1960s and many

²⁶ People who originate from Sylhet are referred as Sylhetis. Sylhet is located at the north-eastern part of Bangladesh. During the Colonial period it was part of Assam province. People of Sylhet joined Pakistan instead of India through providing 98 per cent vote in a referendum in favour of joining Pakistan. People from Sylhet have their own dialect and are very conscious about their Sylheti identity.

did not return to then-East Pakistan after finishing their studies but chose to remain in the US by changing their immigration status from student to permanent residents. According to the 1986 immigration data, 61 per cent of Bangladeshi aliens who switched to permanent resident status were students. By 1992, it was estimated that 90 per cent of the total population of Bangladeshi immigrants were professionals (GoB and IOM 2004). It should be noted, however, that people who migrated before 1971 from the territory that now comprises Bangladesh are not included here; until 1947 they were counted as Asian Indian and during the period from 1947 to 1971 they were counted as Pakistanis (ibid.).

Since 1990s Bangladeshis have also entered the US under the 'Opportunity Visa' (OP-11990-91) and the Diversity Visa (DV 1995-96).²⁷ The majority of those who came to US under these visa schemes are relatively less educated compared to the earlier skilled professionals and students who later gained permanent resident status. Most of the immigrants under the latter two categories have a secondary education; they settled in large cities such as New York, Boston, Dallas, Houston, and Newark. These new immigrants prefer to live in cities where they have relatives or acquaintances (GoB and IOM 2004). The majority of these professionals have not been able to manage professional jobs. They find jobs in small businesses such as gas stations, restaurants, small construction companies, small stores, security companies, and car services, including driving taxis.

4.2 Recent migration trends

In recent years, the Bangladeshi diaspora has become more diversified. Along with the UK and US, migrants are now staying in countries such as Italy, Japan, Australia, Greece, Canada, Spain, Germany, South Africa, France, Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland. They are also located in almost all the erstwhile federated states of the former Soviet Union and the eastern European states of Bulgaria, Hungary, Czech and Slovak Republics, Romania, and Poland. Bangladesh is a riverine country. Its people are used to moving residences due to river erosion, floods, flash floods, and so on. During the colonial period as well, a large group of people moved from East Bengal to Assam. Migration is perceived by Bangladeshis as a way of livelihood and establishing better homes and a better standard of living. Migration to Western countries is an extension of such a migration pattern. However, there is a relatively small presence of Bangladeshis in Africa and Latin America, South Africa being the only exception in this regard (Siddiqui 2004).

No data is available to assess the Bangladeshi diaspora. Siddiqui (2004) made the first attempt to collect information and document the long-term Bangladeshi migrants living in some of the economically-developed countries. Estimates were based on the educated guess made by the

²⁷ The Diversity Immigrant Visa programme, also known as the DV lottery, is a US government lottery program for receiving a United States Permanent Resident Card. The Immigration Act of 1990 established the current and permanent Diversity Visa (DV) program.

government officials. Following the same methodology, Monem (2018) released new estimates, again using the educated guess of community members and government officials.

Figure 4.1 Number of Bangladeshi migrants residing in industrial countries

Country	Number of Bangladeshi migrants 2004	Number of Bangladeshi migrants 2018
United Kingdom	500,000	900,000
USA	500,000	800,000
Italy	70,000	400,000
Canada	35000	60,000
Japan	22000	40,000
Australia	15000	25,000
Greece	11000	80,000
Spain	7000	20,000
Germany	5000	10,000
South Africa	4000	12,000
France	3500	7,000
Netherlands	2500	6,000
Belgium	2000	5,000
Switzerland	10400	2,000
Total	1,178,400	23,67000

Table 4.1 presents the estimates of Bangladeshi migrants in 14 industrial countries based on guesstimates for 2004 and 2018. In 2004, about 1.178 million Bangladeshis were living permanently in the selected countries either as citizens or with other valid documents. In 2018, this estimate stands at 2.367 million. South Africa is the only country in the African continent that has some information on Bangladeshi expatriates. In 2018 the number of Bangladeshis in South Africa stood at 12,000. In 2004, some 22,000 Bangladeshis were living in Japan, with this number increasing to 40,000 by 2018. All the countries except Japan and South Africa are in western Europe and North America. The ethnic Bangladeshi press claims that in 2004 there were 500,000 Bangladeshis in the UK and roughly the same number in the US. Comparing the two snapshots in 2004 and 2018, the highest growth is observed in the case of Italy, from 70,000 to 400,000.

An MPI (2014) study shows that Bangladeshi immigrants in the US have a median age of 39, with 84 per cent of working age. The children of Bangladeshi immigrants born in US (the second generation) have a median age of nine. Seventy–nine per cent of the second generation have both a mother and father who were born in Bangladesh. The same study further states that the Bangladeshi diaspora population is better educated than the general US population and has a higher household income level. Diaspora members are more likely to have bachelor’s degree than the US population overall, and are more than twice as likely to hold advanced degrees.

Bangladeshi diaspora households have a median income of US\$54,000, that is, US\$4,000 above the median for all US households (ibid.).

The Bangladeshi community in Italy has grown since the 1990 passage of the [Martelli Law](#), which offered a path to regularisation for irregular migrants in the country. It is estimated that by 2018, 400,000 of people of Bangladeshi origin were residing in Italy. Bangladeshis are predominantly involved in managing grocery stores, street vending, and other small businesses in Catania as well as in the capital, Rome. Between 2019 and 2022, persons of Bangladeshi origin in Italy remitted nearly US\$3.7502 billion, according to Bangladesh's central bank.

5. Decision-making for migration

This section aims to develop a new understanding of the dynamic interplay between different factors that shape migration decisions (Black et al., 2011; Giorguli-Saucedo et al. 2016, Veronis et al. 2018). It attempts to examine how internal and international migrant households arrive at decisions to send one or more members of their family outside their localities for work. It also analyses why non-migrant households in the same localities facing similar social, economic, and political realities decide not to take part in migration. Section 5.1 analyses recent advances in the theoretical understanding of migration decisions. Section 5.2 presents the factors that contribute to the migration decisions of internal and international migrant households. Section 5.3 identifies factors that are associated with the decisions of non-migrant households to remain in their communities of origin.

5.1 Theoretical understanding

Traditionally, the neo-classical macroeconomic theory of push and pull, microeconomic models of human capital, historical-structuralist theories, social capital theory, and cumulative causation theory are some of the major conceptual frameworks that explain why people decide whether to migrate or not. The push-pull theory showed that during the colonial period, migration was triggered by a change in relative attractiveness, whether real or perceived, of the usual place of residence with respect to the destination (Lee 1966; Thomas 1973). It overlooks the role of environmental factors and how such factors interact with economic and political drivers of migration. The Foresight Report (2011) shows that migration decisions are influenced by macro, social, political, economic, demographic, and environmental factors. The same report also highlights those micro level realities such as household characteristics as well as the desire or motivation of individuals and meso-level facilitating or intervening factors that play a role in inducing or restricting the migration of individuals, households, or communities (ibid. The report created a socio-ecological systems framework that pays special attention to environmental conditions and climate stressors that may alter local and regional systems of production thus affecting the migration decision. Black et al. (2011) show how environmental factors influence

migration not as push or pull on their own, but in combination with other socio-economic and political processes. They look at migration decisions as one of the methods of adaptation to environmental change. However, they also caution that often, those who are most affected by the combination of social, political, and environmental influences do not have the means to migrate and thus get trapped in their areas of origin. Schmidt (2016) shows how climate stressors aggravate socio-economic inequalities.

Over the last decade, social scientists have also established that the drivers of migration and conditions under which migration decisions take place are themselves in a state of flux. Migration decisions are shaped to accommodate the needs of changing circumstances along with other factors. The literature on the drivers of migration now looks at the role of desire, hope, and imagination; biased perceptions of risk; the type of agency that migrants develop; and the interplay between motivation, opportunity, and ability to migrate within social, political, economic and structural constraints (Koikkalainen and Kyle 2016; Carling and Collins 2017; Belloni 2016; Erdal and Oeppen 2017; Triandafyllidou 2019). These scholars have taken a more interactive approach to identifying the drivers of migration. This exercise can be bracketed as part of the overall process of theory-building beyond push-pull factors of migration. This group of studies analysed the causes behind migration flows despite high costs, extreme hardship, and fraudulence thus highlighting the mixed motivation of migrant decision-making. Zickgraf (2018) and Gioli and Milan (2018) demonstrate that the decision of moving or staying is highly gendered and also determined by age and the composition of household members.

5.2 Factors for migrating

Based on a panel dataset of 6,100 households generated by SDC and RMMRU in 2014, 2017, and 2020, (Siddiqui ed. 2022) explored why some people of Bangladesh decide to migrate and some other prefers stay put in their origin. Based on the panel dataset, an analysis is provided below on factors influencing migration decisions.²⁸

Table 5.1 notes factors that contributed to taking the migration decision by the returned migrants as well as left in-charge members of current migrant households. The most dominant perception relates to economic factors. Also, the degree of access that households have to different social networks that either provide household members with migration information or with access to the migration processing network is also important.

²⁸ The empirical basis of the study is three detailed household surveys in 20 districts of Bangladesh in three-year intervals. The selection of districts was based on a combination of randomization and purposive methods. It included three types of households: internal migrant, international migrant, and non-migrant. Along with the surveys, qualitative data were also collected through key informant interviews and case studies.

Table 5.1: Influencing factors of migration decision by migration type and gender, 2020

Factors	International (%)			Internal (%)		
	M	F	T	M	F	T
Environmental	9.8	6.4	9.4	23.5	14.9	22.9
Demographic	22.5	29.3	23.4	29.7	34.0	30.0
Social	67.9	62.1	67.1	70.1	68.1	70.0
Political	1.7	0.0	1.5	1.5	0.0	1.4
Economic	96.6	96.7	96.6	93.9	90.3	93.7
Access to social network	52.2	52.1	52.2	47.1	45.7	47.0
Total no. of cases	2323	357	2680	1182	94	1276

Source: SDC and RMMRU Panel Survey 2020

Note: Each cell represents percentage of total number of responses

Note: M= Male, F= Female, and T= Total

Influences of economic factors

Migrants or left-behind household members usually articulate their family's participation in migration as a means of earning income to sustain the household. Therefore, in any research, the overwhelming majority of migrant households primarily identify economic reasons for migration. In their own analysis, macroeconomic realities and microeconomic experiences can hardly be separated. In Wave 3 of the SDC and RMMRU panel survey (2020), 97 per cent of international migrant households and 94 per cent of internal migrant households identified economic considerations as the major determining factor for the migration decision. However, there are different types of economic determinants: a lack of work in local areas, access to better jobs with higher income opportunities at destination areas, improved asset holdings (homestead, land etc.), the alleviation of poverty, and the accumulation of capital to start a business, among others. The SDC and RMMRU panel survey data further probed into each category of response and located various dimensions of reasons which are bracketed in that category. For example, in the case of economic reasons, there could be both positive as well as negative factors influencing migration decisions. Such breakdown shows that 79 per cent of the international and 75 per cent of internal migrant households who cited positive economic reasons mentioned that better jobs and higher income-earning possibilities in the destination drove their migration decision; 27 per cent of international migrant households sent their family members abroad to accumulate resources to start a business. This is followed by the desire to alleviate poverty. Among international migrants, 53 per cent also expressed negative reasons such as work was not available locally. For internal migrants, the accumulation of resources or asset accumulation were not that important. This may indicate that a large number of internal migrant households

participate in migration to earn a living, but a large number of international migrants take part in migration with a view to facilitating upward economic mobility. Table (5.1) also highlights gendered nuances. A high proportion of both female international migrants (85 per cent) and female internal migrants (80 per cent) identified poverty alleviation as their major goal. The percentage of male migrants in both groups is lower compared to females in this regard. There is variation between districts as well. Satkhira and Chapainawabganj are two areas where there were substantial climate change effects. There are clear differences between these two districts and others that were less affected by climate change. In these two districts, 85 to 90 per cent of the respondents (men and women) identified a lack of work in the locality as the major economic driver, whereas for other districts the rate was much lower.

Social factors

Along with economic determinants, migration decisions are also underpinned by social factors: 68 per cent of international migrant households and 70 per cent of internal migrant households identified different social factors that contributed to their or their household members' migration decisions. Social circumstances include changes in marital status, family responsibility, obsession with going abroad or living in cities, the desire to avoid socially unacceptable behaviour (drugs, unwanted sexual relationships), ensuring security, improving social status, and improving image. Both groups identified family responsibility as a major social driver (internal 92 per cent and international 90 per cent).

Members who earn relatively little in comparison to other family members often decide to migrate as it may also be a path of earning respect or social status. In many rural areas, there is an obsession with going abroad or going to urban areas to experience city life. Thirty per cent of the sampled heads of household of the male international migrants thought that their sons were obsessed with the idea of migration. They stated that it was as strong as an addiction to drugs. In the context of Muslim migration from Hyderabad, Ali (2007) identified an obsession with the culture of migration; a similar finding was made by Horváth (2008) while analysing drivers of migration of Romanian youth. Interestingly, relatively low numbers of female migrant households, both internal and international, felt the same way. Another gendered difference with respect to the social determinants of migration decisions is that the percentage of female migrants who migrated due to marriage is higher than that of male migrants. With respect to the social factors of migration, there is hardly any difference between migrants from climate change affected areas and less climate change affected areas. In both cases family responsibility is the most important social reason.

Political factors

Migration decisions take place in a dynamic context; the political environment is part of that. Migrant households, however, have hardly linked the dynamics of local or national politics with

their migration decisions. Only two per cent of international migrant households and one per cent of internal migrant households linked their family members' migration decisions with politics. The political reasons that households identify are often entangled in local political problems, participation in local conflicts, and a desire to escape police harassment.²⁹

Influence of climate change and disaster

The SDC and RMMRU Wave 3 survey (2020) placed a particular emphasis on understanding whether climate change and disaster-related events contribute to the migration decisions of a section of households. Ten per cent of international migrant households and 23 per cent of internal migrant households identified climate change and disasters as a factor influencing their migration decision. Floods, flash floods, riverbank erosion, cyclones, drought, and so on, have been identified as climatic events that contributed to the loss of income or made agriculture unviable, ultimately pushing households or individual migrants to decide to look for work outside the village. A share of respondents also had to move as they lost their homestead in riverbank erosion and floods or flash floods. Compared to international migrant households, internal migrant households identified more environmental and climatic stresses. A comparison of male and female migrant households reveals that environmental influences are concentrated among male migrant households. Climate-related challenges are not faced by all 64 districts of Bangladesh – some are more affected, some less. Chapainawabganj, Satkhira, Sunamganj, Faridpur, Shariatpur, and Brahmanbaria are some of the districts more severely affected. Survey respondents were from 20 districts; 76 per cent of those interviewed who identified climate change and natural disasters as a factor are from the above six districts.

Satkhira suffers from cyclones, flooding, and salinization. Chapainawabganj is a typical example of slow-onset climate change processes. It experiences seasonal drought. The ground water level of Chapainawabganj has been decreasing continuously over the last 15 to 20 years. Due to river siltation, Chapainawabganj also experiences floods in the monsoon season. Shariatpur and Faridpur are prone to riverbank erosion; major displacement is experienced by the respondents of these two areas. Sunamganj belongs to the Haor-affected area of Bangladesh. For around six months of the year, certain areas of Sunamganj remain submerged under water. Furthermore, the loss of crops due to flash floods is an important phenomenon in Sunamganj. Nabinagar of Brahmanbaria is located along the Meghna River, and people living in this area experience floods and riverbank erosion. More than three-quarters of respondents in these six districts experienced income loss due to some form of natural disaster, and half of migrant households in these areas said agricultural production has become problematic due to disasters. Roughly one-fifth of the

²⁹ Bangladesh politics is dominated by two major parties. When one party comes into power, it tries to shrink the space for other party to participate. Filing cases against party workers of other parties as well as imprisoning opposition leaders and workers are common practice. If there is a possibility of a member facing such situation, the family attempts to avoid such repercussions by sending them abroad for work or study.

migrant households in these districts lost their homestead land due to natural disaster, while some also lost non-homestead land.

Respondents from districts not affected by climate change did not identify it as an important factor contributing to migration decision. Therefore, the overall percentage of 20 districts where the survey took place is low (10 per cent) but, a significant share (76 per cent) of migrant households from the six districts struck by natural disasters identified climate change as a major factor influencing their migration decision.

Demographic factors

Table 5.1 shows that 23 per cent of the international migrants and 30 per cent of internal migrants highlighted the influence of demographic factors in their migration decisions. Education and marriage are the two determinants in the case of demography: 65 per cent of international migrant households and 64 per cent of the internal migrant households who identified demographic reasons mentioned marriage. Furthermore, 53 per cent of the international migrant households and 38 per cent of internal migrant households stated that better educational opportunities for their children was another important factor. A few mentioned that they migrated as they did not want to continue with their studies. Around two per cent of migrants moved with parents, while some moved to live with a close relative.

Social networks

Both internal and international migrants emphasize the role of social networks in their migration decisions. Nearly half (52 per cent) of both international migrant households and internal migrant households (47 per cent) identified social networks as contributing to their migration experience. Such social network include: the presence of close relatives at destination, information on the benefits of migration from others at destination, encouragement from middlemen to migrate, following the footsteps of friends, and inspiration from social media (Facebook, IMO³⁰). The presence of close relatives at the migration destination is important for both internal and international migrants: 54 per cent of the international migrants and 41 per cent of internal migrants had close relatives at destination. Moreover, 35 per cent of the international and 49 per cent of the internal migrants learned about the advantages of that particular location from known persons before they migrated.

The role of sub-agents is more prominent in the case of international migrants; 41 per cent said they were lured by sub-agents. Surprisingly, 24 per cent of internal migrants were approached by contractors. Migration of friends inspired 29 per cent of internal migrants and 12 per cent of international migrants. Social media still plays a very small role in migration decisions. Among

³⁰ IMO is a proprietary audio/video calling and instant messaging software service. It supports encrypted group video and voice calls with up to 20 participants.

international migrants, just two per cent of male migrants and one per cent of female received information through social media. This is slightly higher among internal migrants as ten per cent reported receiving information about migration destinations through social media, although this figure is higher for female internal migrants. Thirty per cent of male internal migrants used social media to learn about their migration destinations.

5.3 Factors for not migrating

In understanding why people migrate, it is important to explore why some households decide not to send any family members outside their area of origin for work or some individuals decide not to migrate. Similar queries were pursued with non-migrant households to understand their decision of not taking part in migration. We attempted to explore demographic, social, economic, and environmental influences in their non-migration decision. We also studied the effect of social networks. Table 5.2 shows that 72 per cent of non-migrant households identified economic reasons, while 53 per cent identified demographic reasons, and 40 per cent highlighted social reasons for their decision not to migrate. Environmental hardship and lack of social networks were also each cited by 14 per cent of respondents as hindering their possibilities to migrate.

Table 5.2: Influencing factors of non-migrant households for not taking part in migration in 2020

Factors	Non-migrant (%)
Environmental	13.6
Demographic	52.6
Social	39.5
Economic	72.3
Social network	44.1
Total no. of cases	1913

Source: SDC and RMMRU Panel Survey 2020
Note: Each cell represents percentage of total number of responses

Environmental influences

Not all the districts of Bangladesh face climate change-related events to the same extent. Breaking down the responses of 14 per cent who cited ‘environment’ as one of the reasons behind their family members’ migration decision on the basis of the district of origin offers a better understanding of how this factor impacted their choice. Interesting differences are observed when the household data are divided into high climate change and disaster-affected districts and lesser

climate change and disaster-affected districts.³¹ Over half (54 per cent) of non-migrant households in climate change and disaster affected areas experienced major income losses due to slow or rapid onset climatic events. However, even when due to other support structures, either they did not feel it necessary to consider migration or they could not engage in migration due to a lack of information or networks to pursue the decision.

Demographic factors

Demographic profiles seem more pronounced in the case of non-migrant households. In the context of Bangladesh, females from some districts migrate more, while in others, it is males who migrates in greater numbers (Siddiqui 2022). In districts of predominantly male migration, 46 per cent of non-migrant households did not have an adult male member who could take part in migration; this was also the case in areas with pockets of female migration where 33 per cent of the households did not have an adult female member to take part in migration. This indicates that even if a household is interested in engaging in migration, the decision is based on the availability of a working-age adult for the project. Finally, 47 per cent of households were happy with the current arrangement of staying together as a family in the rural areas and thus not interested in sending international or internal migrants from among their family members.

Economic factors

Economic factors were cited by 72 per cent of respondents to explain their decision to not send family members outside the village for work. These responses included both negative and positive situations. Positive situations include families that have reasonable holdings of land, a good homestead, or a business in the locality. Such households do not have the economic compulsion to migrate. On the other hand, some did not have the money to cover the migration costs. The first situation demonstrates economic power, the second demonstrates economic vulnerability. Sixty-two percent of respondents said overseas migration entailed a substantial sum that they did not have. This suggests that more than half of the non-migrant households may have the desire to participate in international migration if they had the resources to cover the expenses. In other words, only 38 per cent of households did not participate in migration because of a lack of interest in migrating. Finally, 42 per cent of the total households felt that employment was available in the local area and so there was no need to migrate for work; 25 per cent expressed satisfaction with village life as they had a reasonably good homestead.

Social factors

The decision to not migrate is also determined by social realities; 61 per cent of non-migrant households (762) mentioned social reasons for not participating in migration. These include

³¹ Climate change affected areas are identified on the basis of Bangladesh National Delta Plan 2100

insecurity of left-behind female youth, dislike of city life, and no one to oversee children's education. Almost 70 per cent of respondents stated that if the adult male or female members of the household migrate then there will be no one in the village to take care of the family. Also, 37 per cent of the non-migrant households did not appreciate city life and preferred staying in their rural homes and 22 per cent believed that if the adult member migrated, children's education would be affected. Twenty per cent felt that women and female children may face insecurity in the absence of the adult member who could have migrated.

Social networks

Lack of access to social networks influences the migration decision outcome in a major way: 44 per cent of non-migrant households discussed different dimensions of their lack of access to social networks as having influenced their migration decision. Sixty-six percent of non-migrant households who responded to this question said the information required to process migration was not available to them, and 51 per cent stated that they did not know anyone in the destination who could help them to get settled. Thirty-four per cent stated that they had very little information on migration avenues as no recruiting agencies or agents were operational in their areas. A lack of information on the availability of migration processing services is also more pronounced among households from climate change-affected areas. When the data are sorted by more and less climate change affected areas, interesting differences emerge. The absence of recruiting agencies or their sub-agents was more important for people from climate affected areas compared to people from non-climate affected areas; 41 per cent of non-migrant households from climate change and disaster affected areas identify this as a challenge, whereas only six per cent of non-migrant households from less climate change affected areas perceive this as a problem.

6. Major findings and setting the research agenda

Major findings

All types of migration flows are experienced in Bangladesh – within and beyond borders, forced and voluntary, regular and irregular as well as for temporary labour or for permanent settlement. Internal migration is the most dominant form of migration, and nine-tenths of urban population growth is due to rural-urban and urban-urban migration. Therefore, urbanization is the major driver of rural-urban migration.

Migration has been taking place in the region that constitutes South Asia from time immemorial to independence of India and Pakistan and, at a later stage, Bangladesh, with such flows falling under cross-border population movement. Unprecedented flows of cross-border population movement took place during the years of 1946-1947 due to the formation of two separate states, India and Pakistan, which were initially together under British colonial rule. Migration of religious

minority communities from both parts dominated the migration pattern of the 1950s and 1960s. Labour migration between India and Bangladesh is predominantly irregular due to the lack of a legal labour migration regime.

Intra-regional labour migration trends in Bangladesh show that both male and female workers migrate mostly to the Gulf, other Arab and southeast Asian countries. Such migration used to be dominated by men. Since government restrictions on the migration of unskilled and semi-skilled women were lifted, a significant number of women are also taking part in international migration. Saudi Arabia is the predominant destination for both male and female Bangladeshi migrants, while over the last three decades, major destination countries number around ten to 12. Migrant source areas are also concentrated among five to seven administrative districts in Bangladesh. Over the last three consecutive years, Bangladesh received more than US\$21 billion in remittances. Untimely and unnatural deaths of migrants is a phenomenon that has emerged in a few recent studies.

Bangladesh has a sizeable number of diaspora populations all over the world. First-generation Bangladeshi diaspora members in the region have assimilated in their countries of residence. Currently, Bangladeshi diaspora populations can be found in the UK, US, Italy, Canada, Japan, Australia, Greece, Spain, Germany, South Africa, France, Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland and Scandinavian countries. They are also present in countries of former Soviet Union and eastern Europe, although the data regarding their numbers is scant.

Pioneer migrants of Bangladesh to the West were the 'ship jumpers'. However, migration patterns changed significantly since the 1960s. But these changes have not occurred in different destination countries in the same way. The opportunity to migrate to the US was mainly available to skilled and professional individuals, whereas in the case of the UK, during the second wave, it was the kith and kin of first-generation migrants from similar rural socio-economic backgrounds who migrated to work as labourers in heavy industry. By the 1970s, such migration again was restricted in the UK and family reunification remained as the only major avenue for migration. With respect to the US, since the 1990s, new opportunities for migration under OP-1 and DV opened up. In both the UK and the US there are British and American citizens of third-generation Bangladeshi origin. Italy has also become a major destination for Bangladeshi workers since the 1990s. Although remittances mostly come from intra-regional short-term contract migration some diaspora countries are also important sources of remittances. The US has been the second-largest remittance-sending country for the last couple of decades; in 2022, the UK ranked third and Italy ranked seventh.

From the discussion on migration decision-making, it is apparent that economic, political, social, and environmental factors interact with each other to influence the migration decisions of individual households or individual members of a household. Along with such influences, the desire, hope, and imagination of individuals or households about life in the destination, accompanied by motivation, opportunities, and financial ability produce migration decisions.

However, not all the factors are equally important in migration decisions. In some cases, one or a few influencing factors may become more prominent than others. Most of the literature on migration decision-making finds that migrants tend to highlight economic reasons over all other reasons. But a deeper analysis reveals that economic reasons are shaped by the operation of many other social, environmental, and demographic factors. This study also demonstrates that the choices of moving from a place and staying in a place are gendered. Thus, migration decisions also depend on gender, age, ability, and other aspects of household composition.

Climate change and disasters interact with economic and social drivers to influence the migration decision, but their influence varies by location. Migrant households in those areas that are less affected by climate change hardly identified climate and disaster events as contributing factors, whereas a significant share of people from areas that are vulnerable to climatic events and disasters identified climate stressors as important influencing factors.

Setting a research agenda: This report highlights that data on migration is only available with respect to intra-regional short-term contract labour migration. No data is available on internal migration, cross-border population movements, and diaspora populations. A major research agenda should be finding a way to generate data on all forms of migration.

Research on drivers of migration is available on internal and intra-regional contract migration flows. There is hardly any research that looks into drivers of cross-border labour migration and diaspora migration. Studies need to be conducted to understand the drivers of these two distinct forms of migration flows. There is an interest in studying migration of Bangladeshi workers in India, however; there is little interest in Indian migration to Bangladesh. Any research on cross-border migration should cover both from and to these countries. Comparative analysis of migration decisions of highly skilled migrants and semi- and less-skilled migrants can be an important area of investigation.

Bangladesh studies on drivers of migration tended to start from the premise of a static reality where migration decisions are being taken. However, recent global research shows that migration decisions are dynamic as is the situation where the decision is being taken and continuously changing. The static approach fails to explain the complexities of contemporary migration, taking into account the reality of irregular flows, migrants' dependence on fraudulent intermediaries, and so on. New approaches should be innovated to study drivers of migration respecting the dynamic environments within which migration decisions are made.

Migration decisions of male and female migrants or their household decision-makers are very much gendered. A deeper understanding of the gendered differences of the migration decision-making process can be an important area of research.

In understanding migration decisions more studies are needed on reasons driving households to not engage in the migration project. This may reveal the fact that many of these households lack of the means to participate in migration. This may bring up the issue of trapped populations in the

context of climate change, particularly with respect to those who desire to move but cannot due to economic or demographic reasons.

Different governments of climate-affected countries are interested in learning more about the migration decisions of those who move in the context of climate change. Forced migration situations could be more pronounced with regard to those who move from climate change-affected areas. Cross-country and cross-continent comparative research is needed to understand which types of socio-economic and educational background push which types of migration.

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Annex 1

Table 4.6: Changes in Numbers of Migrant Workers and Remittance Flows, 2001-2022

Year	Number of International Migrants	Percentage Change	Remittances (US#)	Percentage Change
2001	189060		2071.0	
2002	225256	19.2	2847.8	37.5
2003	254190	12.8	3177.6	11.6
2004	272958	7.4	3565.3	12.2
2005	252702	-7.4	4249.9	19.2
2006	381516	51.0	5484.1	29.0
2007	832609	118.2	6562.7	19.7
2008	875055	5.1	8979	36.8
2009	475278	-45.7	10717.7	19.4
2010	390702	-17.8	11004.7	2.7
2011	568062	45.4	12168.1	10.6
2012	607798	7.0	14164.0	16.4
2013	409253	-32.7	13832.1	-2.3
2014	425684	4.0	14942.6	8.0
2015	555881	30.6	15,271.0	2.2
2016	757731	36.3	13609.8	-10.9
2017	1008525	33.1	13526.8	-0.6
2018	734181	-27.2	15497.7	14.6
2019	700159	-4.6	18354.9	18.4
2020	217669	-68.9	21752.3	18.5
2021	617209	183.6	22,063.8	1.4
2022	11,35,873	84	21,284.86	-3.53

Source: Prepared BMET and Bangladesh Bank data by RMMRU