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## Moving to Europe: Bangladeshi Migration to Italy

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### Abstract

*Reformation of immigration policy in Italy has paved the way for the emergence of some non-European emigrant communities in Italy including Bangladeshi community. This study addresses the Bangladeshi migration to Italy by highlighting the context of immigrant reception in Italy, characteristics of Bangladeshi emigrants, their channels of migration, role of intermediaries in the migration process, the economic cost of migration, and inflows of remittances and their implications for family dynamics in Bangladesh. This study draws from the Bangladesh Household Remittance Survey conducted by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) - Dhaka in 2009. The study reports that opportunities in the Italian labour market translate into increased opportunities for the migrant families left behind in Bangladesh.*

Southern European countries especially Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece have been a major migration destination region for both European and non-European migrants in the late 1970s and soaring through the 1980s (King et al., 2000; King, 2001; Anthias and Lazaridis, 2000; Bonifazi et al., 2008). Of these Southern European countries, Italy is a case in point. In the period 1990-2000, the stock of immigrants doubled in Italy; it increased from about 650,000 to almost 1,300,000 (Zontini, 2010: 3). According to another estimate, between 1986 and

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2004, the legally resident foreign population rose from under 300,000 to an estimated 2.6 million, accounting for 4.5 per cent of the total population (Chaloff, 2006: 149). The number of immigrants in Italy reached a little more than 4.8 million in 2009 (Cesareo, 2009:11). With the fall in employment visas and the rise in family reunion visas (SOPEMI, 2010: 214), Italy has indeed transformed from a country of labour migration to that of family immigration and settlement in recent years.

Italy has been one of the major destinations for the Bangladeshi migrants in southern Europe. For instance, Bangladeshi immigrants living in Italy were around 84,000 in 2009 (Blangiardo, 2009: 35). The number of (regular) Bangladeshi migrants is projected to reach 118,000 in 2015, 158,000 in 2020, and 232,000 in 2030 (Blangiardo, 2009: 49). In addition to regular immigrants, Italy also hosts a large number of irregular immigrants from both European and non-European countries (Russell, 2001). The number of irregular Bangladeshi emigrants was reported to have been 11,000 in 2009 (Blangiardo, 2009: 35). However, another source suggests that the number of irregular Bangladeshi emigrants was nearly 74,000 in 2009<sup>2</sup>. This growing presence of Bangladeshi emigrants is indicative that Bangladeshis availed the immigration opportunity in Italy brought about by periodic changes in its immigration laws since the mid 1980s.

Bangladeshi migrants in Italy are predominantly single and male migrants who are living under ‘transnationally split’ (Yeoh, Graham, and Boyle, 2002) conditions and obligated to maintain economic and social relations with their family members back home. The obligation of maintaining sustained economic and social ties with home stems from the dominance of family in the social and economic affairs of the Bangladeshi society. Individual migrant is deeply enmeshed in a complex web of household relations and dependencies: He/she moves internationally for work as an envoy of the extended family that places the well-being of the extended family above the individual migrant’s interests (Rahman, 2011). Whether it is temporary labour migration such as migration to the Middle East or more permanent form of migration such as migration to Italy, maintaining sustained economic relations with left-behind families remain one of the key priorities for migrant members (Ullah, 2010, Rahman 2009). This is more and more evidenced in the annual inflow of remittances to Bangladesh, which has increased from around \$4.2 billion in 2005 to nearly \$11 billion in 2010<sup>3</sup>.

The economic relations between migrants and their families are often the centre of discussion in the migration-development debate. However, existing studies often tend to highlight the migration-development nexus in the context of some selected developed countries such as the USA, Germany, Netherlands, and the UK or of some popular labour migration countries in Asia and Africa (Papademetriou and Martin, 1991; Hermele, 1997; Piper, 2009). Southern

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<sup>2</sup> ‘The number of Bangladeshi migrants in Italy on the rise’, 30 October, 2010, *Amaderdesh*, <http://www.amaderdesh.com/desh/italy-on-rise/> accessed on 29 October, 2011

<sup>3</sup> BMET, Government agency in charge of monitoring outflow of Bangladeshi migrants, Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), accessed on 28 October, 2011 <http://www.bmet.org.bd/BMET/statisticalDataAction>,

European countries, being a new migration destination, are not adequately highlighted in the debate on migration and development. In particular, there is a dearth of research on the linkages between migrants and their families left-behind in some new source countries in Asia. This study attempts to close the gap in existing scholarship by highlighting the Bangladeshi migration to Italy and developmental implications on migrant households left behind in Bangladesh.

After decades of pessimism and concerns, governments of source countries have put renewed hopes on transnationally-oriented migrants as potential actors of development (Schiller and Faist, 2010). Hopes are pinned on transnational migrants sending remittances to their families in origin countries (Faist, 2010). Scholars revisiting the debate on migration-development nexus increasingly see migration as a process and as an integral part of broader transformation processes in the society (Faist, Fauser and Kivisto, 2011). This research highlights migration as a process and explains remittance-induced changes at the household level in terms of development process. This is in the line with Amartya Sen's views on development as a process of increasing the freedoms of the people, in short 'development as freedom' (Sen, 1999). From an empirical perspective, Sen has proposed three capabilities that are the proximate determinants of the basic freedoms: Health, education, and income. This study assesses the implication of migration-induced remittances in terms of these three determinants: Health, education and income.

In particular, this study attempts to address the following research questions: What is the context of immigrant reception in Italy? What are socio-demographic profiles of Bangladeshi migrants in Italy? What is the trend of Bangladeshi migration to Italy? What is the trend of remittance flows from Italy to Bangladesh? What are the channels of Bangladeshi migration to Italy? What is the economic cost of migration? How do migrants finance their migration expenses? What are the implications of remittances on family dynamics? This paper starts by presenting the data sources for the study. The next section provides the context of immigrant reception in Italy in the light of the changes in immigration laws. This is followed by socio-demographic characteristics of Bangladeshi migrants in Italy. Subsequent sections focus on channels of Bangladeshi migration to Italy, and implications of remittances for family dynamics. The final section gives a summary of the findings of the study.

## **Data Sources**

This study is based on the 'Bangladesh Household Remittance Survey (BHRS) 2009 conducted by International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Dhaka with financial support from Department for International Development – the United Kingdom (DFID- UK). In addition to survey data, this study also draws from qualitative interviews of migrants, return-migrants, and activists of migrant organisations in Bangladesh between 2010 and 2011. The Bangladesh Migrant Household Survey interviewed migrant households across the country

through a nationally representative sample of migrant households from all six administrative divisions of Bangladesh. The districts of the six divisions were divided into two strata, with one stratum consisting of ‘More Concentration of Migrant’ (MCM) households and the other stratum consisting of ‘Less Concentration of Migrant’ (LCM) households’. Following this, clusters were formed with one or more *mauzas* (closely synonymous with a village), depending on the cluster’s size as set in terms of number of general households.

These clusters were selected independently from each stratum using the Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) method of selection. The total sample was made up of 457 clusters (i.e. 257 from MCM districts and 200 from LCM districts). All households in every selected cluster were listed, identifying only the migrant households. Household listings were done by taking a complete census of the households in each of the clusters. This involved visiting every household in the designated area. A migrant household has been defined as a household that had at least one of its members living/working abroad during the time of the survey. The selection of the migrant households was made independently of their current status (e.g. regular or irregular) in the country of destination. In total, the number of migrants in the survey was 12,893. The survey covered a wide range of migration issues encompassing socio-economic background, processing and economic cost of migration, remittances, and impacts of remittances on households that serve the scope of this paper. Of these 12,893 migrants, 177 migrants were working in Italy. This paper is based on the experiences of these 177 migrants’ households in Bangladesh.

### **The Context of Immigrant Reception in Italy**

Italy was a major emigration country until the early 1970s when millions of Italians immigrated to North America as well as wealthy northern Europe. In the late 1970s and 80s, this migratory pattern changed dramatically and Italy started to receive foreigners from Eastern Europe, Northern Africa and Asia. Italy is the first country in Mediterranean Europe to acquire a positive migration balance in 1972 (Knights, 1996: 106) and by 1997 the net flow of remittances had reversed (Chaloff, 2006:149). It is often argued that Italy’s position in the centre of the Mediterranean, extensive coastline and important tourism and pilgrimage industry have made the country relatively accessible for potential migrants from non-European countries (King and Andall, 1999; Knights, 1996; Chaloff, 2004; Triandafyllidou, 2007). However, the sharp increase in immigrant population is also attributed to rapid economic and social transformations in Italy (King and Andall, 1999; King, 2001).

Italy has passed several sets of immigration legislations since the mid 1980s to control migration flows, and regularise and integrate new immigrants (Chaloff, 2004; Cesareo, 2009; Blangiardo, 2009; Pastore et al, 2006). The first attempt was made in 1986 when Italy devised policy to control the entry of immigrants seeking employment and regularised immigrants who were already in Italy and could prove they were employed. This immigration

reform facilitated the regularisation of about 105,000 migrants (Cesareo, 2007). The second legislation, enacted in 1990 known as the 'Martelli Law', was broad in scope; it introduced the annual planning of migratory flows (limited admissions of foreigners for work), and certain norms regarding the rights and obligations of foreigners in Italy, stay and work conditions, and other related matters such as family reunion and social integration. The Martelli Law offered immigrants the opportunity to regularise their presence irrespective of their employment status. A total of 217,000 immigrants regularised their status (Knights, 1996: 107)

Immigration became a significant issue in the 1990s, leading to the passage of laws in 1995 and 1998. The 1995 law involved regularisation of 246,000 immigrants (Cesareo, 2007) and introduced the possibility of regularisation for family reunification purposes – a sign of transforming single migration to family and settlement migration in Italy. The reform law of 1998 also known as Turco-Napolitano law or Testo Unico, created a three-pillar immigration policy: (a) fighting illegal migration; (b) regulating legal migration; and (c) integrating resident foreigners (Chaloff, 2006:153). The first pillar focussed on bilateral agreements and criminal penalties, the second on a quota system, and the third on integration of new immigrants. New immigration for work was instituted within the national quotas and with either a job offer or 'sponsorship'. The quota system offered work opportunity for non-European migrants from one to three years.

In 2002, Italy passed the immigration law known as the Bossi-Fini Law that paved the way for regularisation of more than 700,000 immigrants in the country (Cesareo, 2007; Chaloff, 2006). However, the Bossi-Fini law imposed restrictions on two domains: Entry and the conditions of stay. The quota system emerged as a key tool to meet the demand for labour in the country. The quota system was designed to serve both source and host countries, as sending countries would benefit from remittances and Italy from foreign labour. However, soon after the introduction of quota system, it became increasingly evident that the quota system was not producing the desired outcome. Two common causes are often cited for this failure: Limited number of visas allowed under this category (imbalance between demand for labour and supply of labour) and complicated bureaucratic procedures involved in the quota visa processing (Zanfrini, 2003; Chaloff, 2006).

The drawback inherent in quota system created a situation where many potential migrants found their own way to circumvent bureaucratic restrictions. They sneaked into Italy clandestinely and joined the labour market in order to establish a relationship with employers who might be willing to undertake the complicated bureaucratic procedure necessary for legal entry or to support their applications during regularisation drive. When clandestine entry into the country remains a challenge for potential migrants, the availability of work after entry and the possibility of securing regular immigration status during the frequent regularisation drives remain open to them, providing adequate incentive for seeking irregular entry into the country. In addition to quota, another important channel for regular migration is the family

reunion visa. Family reunion visa is allowed to dependents of immigrants, especially spouses and children. The current trend in Italy is the fall in employment visas and the rise in family reunion visas. For instance, between 2007 and 2008, the number of visas issued for family reunification rose 39 per cent from 89,000 to 123,000, while entries for employment fell sharply (SOPEMI, 2010: 214). This trend suggests that Italy has entered a new phase from single migration to family immigration and settlement.

### **Bangladeshi Migrants in Italy**

Bangladeshi emigration to Italy developed, according to King and Knights, as a “form of migratory opportunism provoked by the basic push forces back home and by lax entry controls and regularisation drives in Italy” (King and Knights, 1994:128). Italy’s first three sets of legislation for immigration reform (the laws of 1986, 1990, and 1998) played an important role in the emergence of permanent Bangladeshi migrant community in Italy. Of these legislations, the Martelli Law of 1990 provided a huge impetus for Bangladeshi immigration to Italy. According to Knights (1996:109), the Martelli Law gave rise to three separate immigration processes for Bangladeshis: (i) opportunistic migration - Bangladeshis from other countries came to Italy to seize the opportunity of becoming regular migrants and subsequently permanent or renewable-status residents in Italy; (ii) recruitment migration (formal and informal recruitment business); and finally, (iii) family or kinship migration (because of adoption of family reunion policy).

Thus, changes in immigration laws in Italy since the mid-1980s created an opportunity for both authorised and unauthorised Bangladeshi migration to Italy. The BMET (Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training), Bangladesh Government agency in charge of monitoring outflow of authorised migration for work, started recording the outflow of Bangladeshis to Italy since 2002. As per the BMET source, nearly 33,000 migrants went to Italy through authorised channels between 2002 and 2010 (Figure 1). However, Bangladesh Bank, which is in charge of reporting inflow of remittances into Bangladesh started reporting annual inflow of remittances from Italy to Bangladesh in 2000. As per the Bangladesh Bank, Bangladeshi migrants remitted nearly US\$1 billion from Italy to Bangladesh between 2000 and 2010 (Figure 2). However, before 2000, the inflow of remittances from Italy was predominantly through the informal channel called *hundi* - a popular informal channel of remittances used by global Bangladeshis (Rahman and Yeoh, 2008). The fear of terrorist-financing after 9/11 has mainly contributed to the increasing use of formal channel.

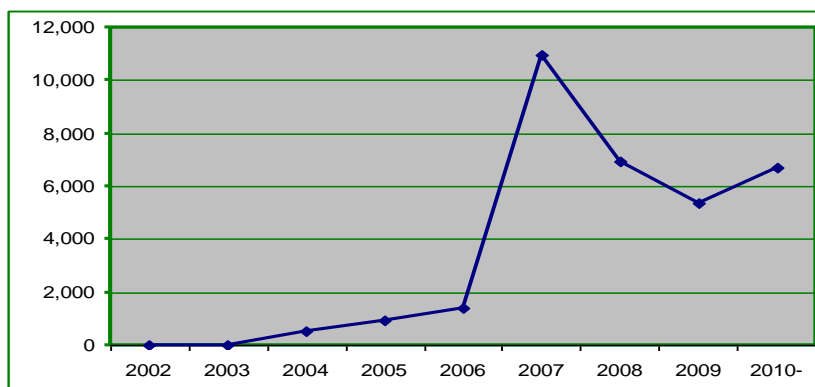
Bangladesh Household Remittance Survey (BHRS) covered 172 male migrants and five female migrants in Italy. However, these females were dependent migrants who joined their spouses in Italy often in the dependent visa category. The mean age of these migrants was 33 years. Although these Bangladeshi migrants in Italy were predominantly single males, not necessarily all were unmarried. In fact, approximately 61 per cent of these migrants were

married. With regard to residence of married migrants' wives, nearly 73 per cent of them were living in Bangladesh. In other words, nearly one-fourth of migrants' wives had so far availed the family reunification programme. However, the rate of family reunification is relatively low because the reunification visa application procedure is complicated and lengthy.

Nearly 30 per cent of these migrants had graduate and post-graduate credentials before their migration to Italy. This educational attainment is exceptionally higher than that of Bangladeshi migrants who are working in Asian countries, for instance, in Saudi Arabia. Approximately three per cent of Bangladeshi migrants had graduate degrees in Saudi Arabia (Rahman, 2011). In another study, Rahman reports that seven per cent of Bangladeshi migrants working in Singapore were graduates (Rahman, 2010:270). Thus, it can be safely concluded that Bangladeshis who choose to migrate to European countries are having higher educational credentials than those who are seeking temporary employment in the Middle East and South-east Asia.

In terms of occupational background, 60 per cent of migrants were employed and the remaining 40 per cent were unemployed before their migration to Italy. After migration to Italy, about 10 per cent could not get jobs in Italy. Major categories of occupations that these migrants were engaged in Italy include factory work (19 per cent), hotel waiter or cook (14 per cent), general labour (24 per cent), agricultural labour (four per cent), business (15 per cent), salesman (four per cent). In total, 45 per cent of the Bangladeshi migrants were living in Italy between one and six years and the remaining 55 per cent between six and 21 years or more. The duration of stay suggests that both the recent and relatively early migrants, including those who migrated in the late 1980s and 1990s, are netted in the survey. In fact, 70 per cent of migrants in the survey were living for less than 10 years. The average duration of stay of migrants in Italy was eight years, which is likely to be sufficient to offer a clear indication of economic benefits of migration for the migrant households left behind in Bangladesh.

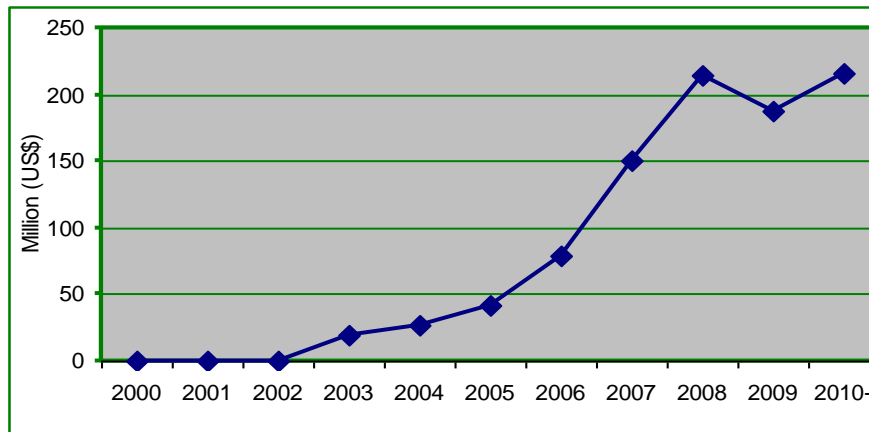
**Figure 1: Outflow of Bangladeshi Migrants to Italy, 2002-2010**



**Source: Bangladesh Bank, accessed on 20 October 2011 and July 2008**

<http://www.bangladesh-bank.org/econdata/wagermidtl.php>

**Figure 2: Inflows of Remittances from Italy to Bangladesh 2000-2010**



**Source:** Bureau of Manpower, Employment, and Training, Bangladesh (BMET), Accessed on 20 October 2011, [www.bmet.org.bd](http://www.bmet.org.bd)

### Channels of Bangladeshi Migration to Italy

As discussed earlier, there are three main channels of migration to Italy: Irregular migration, quota system, and family reunification. It is important to note that migrants who eventually ended up in Italy in the 1980s and even 1990s did not necessarily intend to do so when they first moved to Europe. Many Bangladeshis who were living in other parts of Europe on various status such as refugees, students, short-term trainees, and the last but not least irregular migrants chose to settle in Italy because of Italy's liberal immigration policy and periodic regularisation drives. Most Bangladeshi migrants entered Italy clandestinely in the 1980s and 1990s and a good number of new immigrants still sneak into the country in an unauthorised way through all three routes – air, land and sea.

Migration through irregular channels usually involves the use of more than one route in the migration process. It is often a combination of air and land or air and sea routes and sometimes all of the three. In the journey to Italy, potential migrants typically fly to a nearby transit country first with a visa but later they become irregular in an attempt to enter Italy through land and sea routes. Bangladeshi migrants often use two land routes from the transit country. In the first route, potential migrants fly to south-eastern Europe and then travel overland to Italy. In the second route, potential migrants visit Turkey or north-eastern European countries and use the area of the former Yugoslavia as an entry point to Italy. Some popular transit countries are Poland, Hungary, Albania, Rumania, Russia, Turkey, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria.

Irregular migration to Italy through sea borders involves mainly three routes: The crossing of the Otranto Channel (Valona-Lecce coast), the Sicily Channel (the coast of North Africa to the Sicilian coast); the eastern Mediterranean channels (Eastern Mediterranean ports – Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon - to Apulia, Calabria and Sicily route) (for details, see Pastore



et al. 2006; King and Knights, 1994; UNODC, 2010; Knights, 1996; Monzini, 2007). In the 1980s and 1990s, most Bangladeshis reached Turkey and flew to Morocco first to go onto Italy. However, in the last decade the overwhelming majority of Bangladeshis who used sea routes departed mainly from north African countries, especially Libya. As UNODC report suggests, the importance of Libya as a country of transit corresponds to the decrease in the importance of routes originating in Albania, Tunisia, and Turkey, and to the reduction of flows from Morocco to Spain migration channel (UNODC, 2010:11).

After the opening-up of Italy's immigration policy in the second half of the 1990s, Bangladeshi migrants were allowed to enter Italy under the quota visa system. Since 2006, under the quota visa system, 3,000 Bangladeshis could annually enter Italy for work (IOM: 2006:102). In addition to quota visas, family reunification visas are the popular channel for migration of spouses and children of migrants. Approximately 3,000 family reunification visas are issued from the Italy Embassy in Bangladesh in a year (Zeitlyn, 2006:22). It is important to note that potential migrants are offered 'Italy visa' to land in Italy but not 'Schengen visa' that would have offered the right to land at any European Union country. As a result, all migrants from Bangladesh need to land in Italy first and claim immigration status as per visa offered in Dhaka.

### **Role of *Adam Baparis* in the Migration Process**

Migration to Italy is considered highly desirable but often inaccessible and unaffordable for potential Bangladeshi migrants because of lack of access to networks of *adam baparis* and exorbitant fees that a potential migrant is required to pay in the migration process. This section elaborates the role of *adam baparis* while the next section addresses the economic cost of migration. The role of *adam baparis* or intermediaries is crucial to migration occurrence in the Bangladesh-Italy migration corridor. *Adam bapari* is a Bengali term widely used by Bangladeshi migrants and local media to describe those people who are familiar with migration procedures and cash in on this familiarity, access or connection for economic advantage.

The services of *adam bapari* are unavoidable in the migration process whether it is regular or irregular migration. A prospective regular migrant often requires the services of several *adam baparis* located at both ends of migration – Bangladesh and Italy. In Italy, they provide services to potential dependent visa or quota visa applicants. In Bangladesh, they also provide services to both groups of visa applicants in the area of passport application, air ticket booking, visa application, and so on. In addition to serving the formal visa applicants, they also serve irregular migrants by running transnational syndicates of irregular migration to Italy (Monzini, 2007; UNODC, 2010). More focussed research is needed to understand the transnational syndicate of irregular migration in the South Asia-Southern European migration corridor.

However, *adam baparis* usually emerge from the early migrants and their relatives and friends. The emergence of *adam baparis* from early migrants and their close-knit group makes migration almost a location-specific phenomenon. For instance, there are 64 districts in Bangladesh but migrants in Italy are predominantly from a few districts such as Faridpur, Comilla, Dhaka, and Noakhali. The survey also reveals how important the network of relatives and friends is in the migration process. In a response to a survey question on the people who provided assistance (primarily information and access to networks) in their migration to Italy, nearly 77 per cent of migrants reported receiving assistance from relatives and friends in the migration process. This overwhelming support from relatives and friends suggests why migration to Italy is a location-specific phenomenon in Bangladesh.

To shed light briefly on the monetary benefits that Bangladeshi migration to Italy generates for *adam baparis*, this study examines areas of expenses for migration to Italy (Figure 3). The financial cost of migration to Italy was on average US\$10,000 and this is further explained in the next section. For convenience, the study divides the financial cost of migration into the formal service fees that include government fees, passport fees, travel tax and other fees and the intermediaries' fees that include fees for *adam baparis* at different levels and different locations. A detailed investigation on the expenses for migration reveals that formal fees represent on average only 18 per cent of the financial cost of migration and the intermediaries' fees represent the remaining 82 per cent. In absolute terms, a migrant spent on average nearly US\$1,800 for meeting the formal service fees and nearly US\$8,200 for meeting the informal service fees charged by *adam baparis* in the migration process. In the Bangladeshi migration to the Gulf countries, Rahman also reports almost the similar distribution of expenses across formal and informal services (Rahman, 2011). Bangladeshi emigration thus seems to serve a group of intermediaries who enjoy enormous economic rewards from organising and facilitating migration of labour internationally.

### **Financing Migration to Italy**

The expenses incurred in the migration process are referred to as financial cost of migration. The financial cost of migration for a Bangladeshi migrant to Italy was on average BDT 682,839 or approximately US\$10,000 (as per exchange rate of 2009). The expenses for migration varied sharply. The top 27 per cent of migrants paid more than US\$15,000 and the bottom 27 per cent paid less than nearly US\$4,400 (Table 1). The difference in the cost of migration can be attributed to several factors; (i) relationship with key *adam bapari*, (ii) nature of migration (irregular or regular migration), (iii) nature of visa (work visa, student visa, sponsored seasonal worker etc.) and duration of the visa, (iv) year of migration to Italy, and finally (v) nature of work and potential wages in Italy. Irregular migration is usually cheaper than regular migration. Early migrants who migrated to Italy in the 1980s and 1990s paid relatively small amount of cash compared to new streams of migrants.

**Table 1: Cost of Migration To Italy**

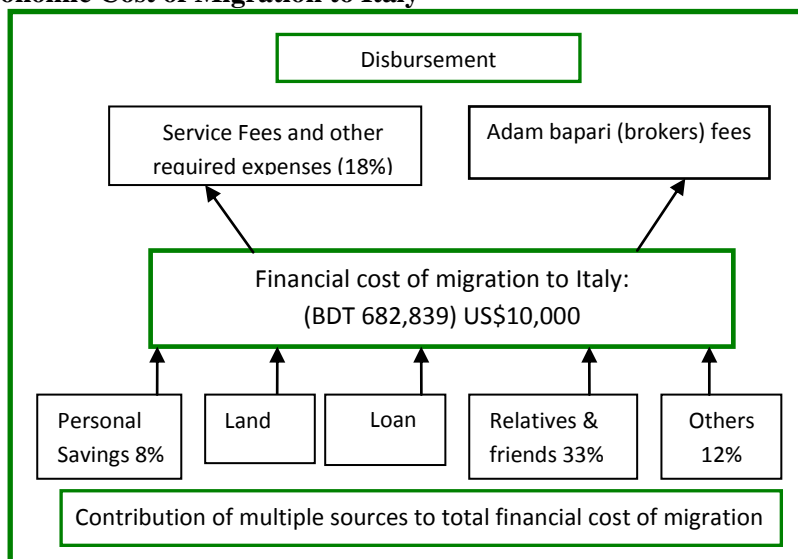
Cost of migration (in BDT)	Percentages
≤150000	11.3
150001-300000	15.8
300001-500000	16.7
500001-700000	13.7
700001-1000000	15.7
1000001 or more	26.8
Total	100.0

**Source: Bangladesh Household Remittance Survey 2009**

**Note: BDT (Bangladesh Taka), Bangladeshi Currency, Exchange Rate US\$1= BDT 68.28 as in the late 2009**

Figure 3 presents the economic cost of migration to Italy from a family perspective. The figure maps out two important layers that constitute the economic cost of migration such as contribution of multiple sources to the financial cost of migration, and the disbursement of financial cost of migration as formal service fees and intermediary fees. The average cost of migration to Italy was virtually beyond the personal and family savings of all migrants. As a result, most migrants had to rely on multiple sources to accumulate the funds for migration such as personal savings, landed property, loan from money lenders and loan from relatives and friends, personal savings, and other sources such as livestock, gold jewellery and so on. On average, land paid off nearly 19 per cent of the cost of migration and loans from money lenders accounted for 28 per cent. Relatives and friends contributed 33 per cent of the cost, personal savings paid off eight per cent and other sources accounted for 12 per cent. Emigration undermines family economics in two ways: The outflow of family’s income-generating assets hampers family incomes and the loans from moneylenders put pressure on available family resources and use of remittances, as we will see in the next section.

**Figure 3: Economic Cost of Migration to Italy**



## Family Remittances and Family Dynamics

Remittances are often shown as the most tangible benefit that international migration generates for migrants and their families (Hugo, 2003). Financial remittances are commonly categorised as ‘family remittances’ and ‘collective remittances’ (Goldring, 2004). Family remittance suggests financial flows from individual migrants overseas to their families in source countries while collective remittance denotes financial flows raised by a group of migrants in the remittance-sending countries for the welfare of a group or community in the remittance-receiving countries. Although collective remittance in the form of group contribution to the community cause is also noticed in the Italy-Bangladesh remittances corridor, this study is more concerned about family remittances, that is, individual migrants’ financial contribution to their families and its implications for family dynamics.

The size and frequency of remittances are important variables for the economic take off of the migrant families, especially when migrant households dispossess family resources and borrow cash from money lenders to finance their migration ventures. The size of the remittances is contingent on the monthly incomes of the migrants overseas. Therefore, this study investigates the monthly remuneration of migrants from family perspective. However, this study does not deny the difficulty of investigating individual migrants’ remittances to their families in Bangladesh but stresses the fact that many migrants indeed share their wages with their immediate family members in a traditional society. On average, the monthly remuneration of the migrants was reported to be BDT 70,680 (US\$1,050). This amount is several times higher than what a comparable job would have offered in Bangladesh. On average, migrants remitted approximately 3.5 times in a year. The average amount of remittances at a time was BDT 36,979 or nearly US\$550. If average remittances and frequency of remittances are multiplied, a migrant household received on average approximately US\$1,900 in a year. In other words, an Italy migrant household had US\$1,900 as remittances for disposal in a year.

Having investigated the annual inflow of remittances, this study moved further to examine the use of remittances at the family level (Table 2). The use of remittances is an important indicator for family development dynamics. Migrant families used the funds for a myriad of purposes, starting from family basic expenses (food and clothing mainly) to religious festivals such as *Eid-ul-Fitr* and *Eid-ul-Azha*. The five major areas of use of remittances, as per frequency of uses, are family expenses, followed by medical treatment, education, repayment of debts, religious festivals. As per frequency, 85 per cent of households used remittances mainly for family basic expenses, 29 per cent for medical treatment as well, 19 per cent for education too, 17 per cent for repayment of debts as well, and finally 12 per cent for religious festivals, too.

The reason behind overwhelming use of remittances for family basic necessities is not surprising; migration is a family-funded project and involves pooling of existing family

resources that curtails family's ability to finance basic necessities. Remittances increase the ability of households to spend on basic necessities. However, in terms of use of remittances for medical treatment, we need to highlight the health care system in Bangladesh. Public health care system in Bangladesh is not adequate to meet the rising demand from rapidly growing population. Apart from this, the quality of public health care is much poorer than that of private health care (Andaleeb, 2000). This has forced people to seek private health care which usually caters to the needs of the privileged sections of the society. Since migrant families had access to disposable resources, many of them sought private health care for better treatment.

In a separate set of questions on the impact of use of remittances on family dynamics, this study discerns that remittances have some visible impacts on the migrant families in terms of food consumption, educational attainment and local income generation. Nearly 72 per cent of families reported having improved food consumption and nearly 59 per cent reported having enhanced educational opportunities too. However, the role of remittances in income generation was mixed. Nearly 39 per cent of migrant families reported an increase in incomes through the generation of new sources of incomes. However, given the percentage of recent migrants in the sample, it is not surprising to see the low use of remittances for income generation. Go back to Amartya Sen's argument that development is a process of increasing the freedoms of people and the proximate determinants of the basic freedom that Sen suggests were health, education and income. Looking at the spheres of remittance use, especially health, education and income, it is obvious that migration-induced earnings (remittances) played substantial role to increase the opportunities of migrant families in an absolute term.

**Table 2: Use of Remittances at the Household**

Expenditure of remittance money	Percentages
For family's basic expenses	84.89
Purchase of land/property	2.88
Paying off debts	17.27
Savings	8.63
Construction/repairing of house	6.47
Repossession of Mortgaged land	0.72
For running a business	0.72
Sending brother abroad	0.72
Marrying off brother/sister	2.16
Education of children	19.42
Medical Treatment	29.50
Eid (Muslim religious) festivals	12.23
Others	3.60

**Source: Bangladesh Household Remittance Survey, 2009**

**Note: The percentages are based on multiple responses and therefore do not add to 100**

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to provide insights into the Bangladeshi migration to Italy and its implications for families left behind in Bangladesh. Of the southern European countries, Italy pursued a liberal policy for migrants from non-European countries as early as the 1980s by introducing the regularisation initiative for unauthorised migrants. In the 1990s and 2000s, immigration laws were gradually reformed to meet the demand for foreign labour under quota system, to invite the dependents of regularised immigrants under family reunion category, and finally to integrate the new immigrants into the Italian society with more rights and privileges. The regularisation drives and subsequent changes in immigration laws paved the way for emergence of many non-European migrant communities in Italy including Bangladeshi community. The size of the Bangladeshi community grew substantially over time through irregular migration, recruitment migration (labour migration) and family reunion migration.

This study has shed light on the routes of immigration for both early and recent Bangladeshi immigrants. In the 1980s and 1990s, Bangladeshi migration was largely irregular and a response to the opportunity created by frequent regularisation drives and immigration law reforms in Italy. Migration through irregular channels usually comprised of combination of air and land routes or air and sea and sometimes all of three. To put the routes in the order of use, in the early 1980s most migrants took air route and land route while in the 1990s and the 2000s, land and sea routes emerge as dominant channels for irregular Bangladeshi migration to Italy. For authorised migration since the late 1990s, the predominant route of travel has been air route. In the immigration process, the key players who facilitate regular and irregular migration are popularly called *adam baparis* (intermediaries) in Bangladesh. They cash in on their familiarity with the routes, access to Italy's labour market and their connections with the local bureaucracy. The profit that migration generates for *adam baparis* is around 82 per cent of financial cost of migration.

The financial cost of migration to Italy is reported on average to be US\$10,000. As international migration is often a family strategy, families use all available resources including selling and mortgaging of arable land, borrowing from money lenders and extended family members. Inflow of remittances to migrant families represents the loyalty to and solidarity with families left behind in Bangladesh. The average amount of remittances was nearly US\$550 and the frequency of remittances in a year was 3.5 times. In other words, a migrant household received on average approximately US\$1,900 as remittances. Migrant households used this disposable resource for myriad purposes starting from basic consumption to religious and cultural ceremonies. This study reports some visible impacts of the use of remittances on food consumption, education, health care and local income generation. Presenting the wide spectrum of use of remittances, this study argues that remittances increase the opportunities of migrant families and contribute to their wellbeing.

This study should be seen as an early attempt to explicate the Bangladeshi migration to Italy and its implications for migrant families. While this study offers valuable insights into Bangladeshi migration to Italy, more research is required adopting two-way surveys -- Italy and Bangladesh - and ethnographic fieldwork for better understanding of the migration and settlement process in Italy and their implications for the left-behind families in Bangladesh.

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