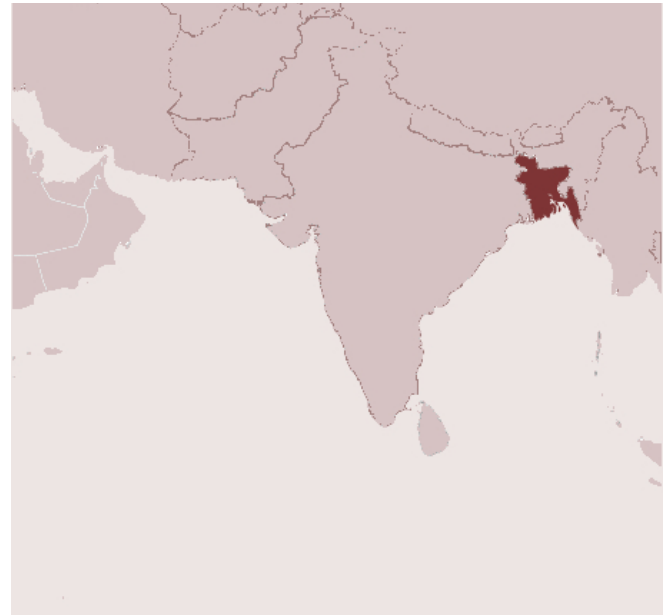


Bangladesh

Bangladesh at a Glance

Benjamin Etzold, Bishawjit Mallick

Bangladesh is a country of 161 million people that is situated right at the heart of the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Delta in South Asia. The People's Republic of Bangladesh was founded in 1971, after the Bengali speaking population of the – back then – eastern province of Pakistan had fought for independence from West Pakistan. The political system is a parliamentary democracy, which is marked by deep rifts between two major parties (Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Awami League) and an extreme politicization of the economy and public services that shows in systems of political patronage at all governance levels and regular outbursts of political violence. Since the Awami League won the parliamentary elections in 2009, Sheikh Hasina Wazed has been prime minister and thereby head of the national government.



Background Information

Capital: Dhaka

Official language: Bengali

Area: 144.000 km²

Population (2015, estimated):³ 161 million

Population density (2015): 1,237 inhabitants/km²

Population growth rate (2010-2015): 1.2%

Working population (2010, economically active population over 15 years of age):⁴ 56.7 million

Unemployment rate (2010): 4.5%

Religions: Muslims 89.5%, Hindus 9.6%, other 0.9%

Migrants of Bangladeshi origin abroad:⁵ 7.8 million

Migrants of foreign origin in Bangladesh: 1.4 million

The nation has taken enormous steps forward in recent years in terms of human development. Access to education and health services has improved remarkably; life expectancy at birth rose from 63 years (in 2003) to 71 years (2013) in only ten years. Bangladesh's economy grew steadily at a rate of four to six percent per annum over the last three decades, in particular due to a growing service industry and the country's growing importance as a production hub in the international garments industry. In 1984-85, Bangladesh's export of textile products amounted to US\$ 116 million (12 percent of all exports, 0.5 percent of the GDP), while it was almost US\$ 25 billion in 2013-14 (81 percent of all exports, 17 percent of the GDP).¹

Bangladesh has left the ranks of the world's least developed countries, but remains one of the poorest nations in South Asia. With a gross national income of US\$ 2,700 per person, people's purchasing power is a lot smaller than in India or Sri Lanka. Inequality in terms of wealth and income remains striking. 43 percent of the population has less than US\$ 1.25 per day. One third lives below the national poverty line. Every fifth person suffers from acute poverty. While 84 percent of men and 57 percent of women in working age are in employment, 85 percent of all workers are in "vulnerable employment", which means that they are trying to meet their needs with insecure and informal jobs. Child

labor is widespread. Thirteen percent of children between the age of five and 14 work and try to contribute to their families' income. Even though Bangladesh increased its agricultural production substantially and managed to meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG 1) of halving the proportion of people who suffer from hunger, chronic and temporarily acute food insecurity still prevails: 16 percent of the total population and even four out of ten children below the age of five are undernourished. In Bangladesh, hunger is still a key indicator of poverty.²

In recent years, the vulnerability of people in Bangladesh has been prominently discussed even in German media for two major reasons. First, the fire in the garment factory Tazreen Fashion in 2012 and the collapse of the garment factory Rana Plaza in 2013 caused the death of more than 1.200 garment workers – most of them women. Both incidences revealed the exploitative working conditions in the global textile industry. Second, Bangladesh is considered as one of the countries that are most severely affected by the impacts of climate change as natural disasters occur frequently. Tropical cyclones hit the coastal regions almost biannually. Sea level rise and heavy floods contribute to riverbank erosion and the loss of arable land. Prolonged heat waves reveal an increased variability of weather conditions. Both natural disasters and more subtle environmental changes can jeopardize the lives and livelihoods of the Bangladeshi people who predominantly rely on agriculture. And yet, the people in the country endure daily hardships with vigor and cope surprisingly well with the multiple challenges they are confronted with. They have learned to quickly adapt in times of economic insecurity and political turmoil. Migration plays an important role in people's adaptation strategies and people's everyday life.

Since the 1980s, migration patterns in and from Bangladesh were affected by three major trends: first, the "export" of labor migrants, in particular to the Gulf States, and subsequent international migrations (see chapter International Migration from Bangladesh); second, the rise of Bangladesh's garments industry, which spurred internal migration and rapid urbanization (see chapter Urbanization, Migration Systems within Bangladesh, and Translocal Social Spaces); and third, disruptions of rural livelihoods by natural hazards and people's adaptation in the context of climate change (see chapter Climate Change and Internal Migration in Bangladesh). International migration, temporary labor mobility within the country, and translocal livelihoods, that have emerged over time, play a crucial role in Bangladesh's national development and for the increasing resilience of its people.

Historical Developments of Migration Patterns

Benjamin Etzold

In Bangladesh, migration is a normal part of everyday life and closely connected to the country's political and economic development. People and goods have been moving

throughout the Bengal delta for centuries. It is a "cross-road" between Tibet and Nepal in the North, the Ganges Plains in the West and the Brahmaputra valley in the East. Local traders, pilgrims, missionaries, and adventurers, and since the 16th century also Portuguese, Dutch and British trading companies, have shaped the society and economy of the Bengal delta and its emerging urban trading hubs such as Kolkata, Dhaka and Chittagong. During the Mughal Empire (1612 to 1757), an aristocratic territorial system was introduced, which led to the concentration of power and land control in the hands of large landholders. This marked the beginning of feudal labor relations. Until today, land ownership is the basis of social inequality and a key driver of migration in the country. Landless laborers were always (forced to be) more mobile than families that controlled and cultivated a significant size of land.

In 1757, the British East India Company gained control in the Bengal delta. During almost 200 years of British colonial rule the feudal system of land control intensified. Agricultural land, on which rice, cotton, sugar cane and many other crops were commercially cultivated, was expanded significantly. Large-scale production of export-oriented cash crops such as jute, silk, tea, and indigo was introduced under systems of coerced labor. The British recruited thousands of laborers from Assam to work in tea plantations in what is now north-eastern Bangladesh. Meanwhile, many landless peasants and sharecroppers, who had to give away most of their harvest to their landlords, found it difficult to feed and meet even the basic needs of their families. They had to diversify their livelihood activities. Many then started to work as petty traders in commercial centers or seasonally migrated to other regions – in particular from the more densely populated eastern parts to western and northern parts of the delta – in search for a more secure and better life. Today's patterns of the informal urban economy and temporary labor mobility were thus already initiated in the 19th century. Young men from the south-eastern parts of the Bengal delta also found employment in the British merchant navy. Bangladeshi men are still working as sailors on the world's oceans. Former colonial ties thus continue to shape the migration patterns of many Bangladeshis. The United Kingdom (UK) is still one of the favorite migration destinations, in particular for the educated elite.

Independence from colonial rule and the Partition of India in 1947 triggered the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. One million Hindus were forced to leave or left the territory because they feared discrimination and political violence in the newly created and Muslim dominated eastern province of Pakistan. Most of them went to Bengali speaking regions of India, in particular to Kolkata. By early 1948, around 800,000 Muslims, who previously lived in the Indian regions of West Bengal, Assam and Bihar, had settled in East Pakistan. The borders between the two newly created states remained porous. This became obvious during the civil war in 1971 when the population of Bengali origin of Pakistan's eastern province fought for independence from West Pakistan, and also during the huge famine in 1974. More than ten million Bengali refugees temporarily sought refuge in India. Ever since,

a high cross-border mobility of people between India and Bangladesh has been the norm rather than the exception.⁶

International Migration from Bangladesh

Benjamin Etzold, Bishawjit Mallick

Labor Migration

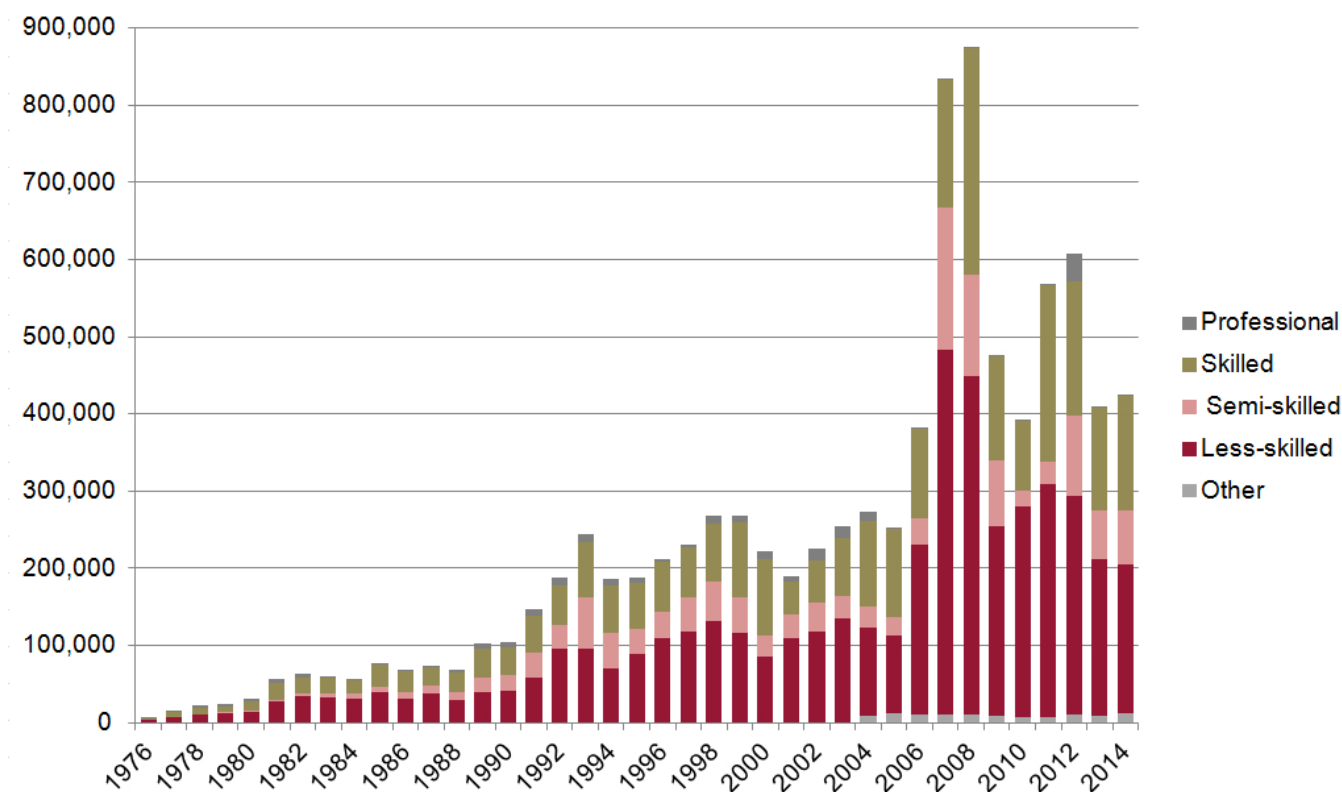
After the Second World War, the United Kingdom faced labor shortages and therefore began to attract labor migrants of the Commonwealth states. Young men from Bangladesh, in particular from the Sylhet region, thus left for the UK, mostly settled in London, and contributed to meeting the increasing demand for cheap labor. This initiated chain migration of further workers and family members to the UK in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and led to close transnational connections between Bangladesh and the UK.⁷ The officially recorded flow of people from (back then) East Pakistan to international destinations was, however, still quite small. The increasing outward orientation of Bangladeshis after national independence in 1971 as well as the 1973 oil boom and thus an increasing need for cheap labor in the Middle East then led to a rapid growth of international labor migration from Bangladesh (see Figure 1). In 1976, only 6,000 Bangladeshis left to work abroad. Since then, the number of both temporary expatriate workers and permanent out-migrants has increased dramatically.

Between 1990 and 1995, 1.2 million Bangladeshis left the country to live and work abroad. Out-migration increased to almost three million between 2005 and 2010. In the year 2008 alone, 875,000 migrant workers were recruited from Bangladesh.⁸

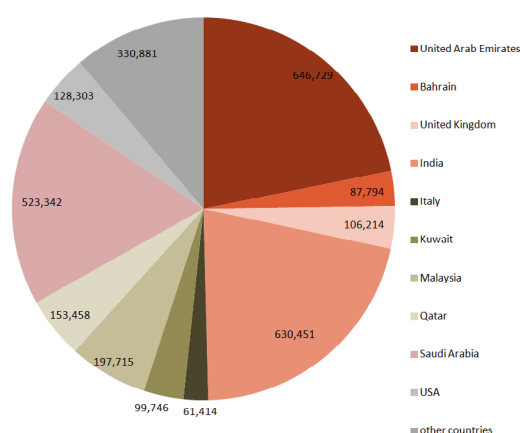
According to the National Population and Housing Census, 2.8 million Bangladeshi household members were living abroad in 2011. 95 percent of them were men. The fact that these migrants are still considered “household members” and not “emigrants” indicates the temporary nature of these labor movements. The survey shows that more than 500,000 migrant workers had returned home between 2006 and 2011, a time period in which 3.5 million had left the nation.⁹ In 2014, 426,000 people migrated to work in another country – most often on temporary labor contracts.

The states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are the most important destinations for Bangladeshi laborers. From 1980 to 2010, the number of migrants who annually left for work in the Gulf States increased tenfold from 25,000 to more than 250,000 per year.¹⁰ From 2005 to 2010 alone, the Gulf States attracted more than 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers, that is 52 percent of all international movements from Bangladesh. Most of them migrated to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (647,000), Saudi Arabia (523,000), and Qatar (154,000) (see Figure 2). Since the United Arab Emirates introduced further restrictions for male labor migrants in 2012, the number of male Bangladeshi workers going there decreased rapidly, while the number of female labor migrants to the UAE quadrupled.

Figure 1: Annual out-migration of laborers from Bangladesh between 1976 and 2014 according to their skill status



Source: BMET database, Category-Wise Overseas Employment from 1976 to 2014, <http://www.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/viewStatReport.action?reportnumber=27> (accessed: 8-17-2015).

Figure 2: Major destinations of migrants from Bangladesh, 2005–2010

Note: Only countries with more than 50,000 Bangladeshi arrivals are considered individually.

Source: calculated from Abel/Sandner (2014), additional online dataset based on UN (2013).

Table 1: Top ten countries of migrant overseas workers from Bangladesh, 2014

Rank	Country	Number of labor migrants	Share of female labor migrants
1	Oman*	105,748	11.0%
2	Qatar*	87,575	7.4%
3	Singapore	54,750	0.2%
4	United Arab Emirates*	24,232	95.8%
5	Bahrain*	23,378	0.5%
6	Jordan	20,338	99.0%
7	Lebanon	16,640	72.1%
8	Iraq	13,627	0%
9	Saudi Arabia*	10,657	0.1%
10	Mauritius	5,938	30.6%
	World total	425,684	17.9%

* Member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

Source: BMET database, Overseas Employment of Bangladeshi Workers from 1976 to 2015 (up to July).

Both male and female labor migration to Oman and Qatar increased rapidly in recent years. These two states were the two most important destinations for short-contract migrant workers from Bangladesh in 2014.

Besides the Gulf States, other important destination countries are Malaysia with 198,000 immigrants as well as the United States with more than 128,000 and, still, the United Kingdom with 106,000 arrivals from Bangladesh in the period 2005 to 2010. More than 631,000 Bangladeshis have been registered in India in the same time period. Many more arrive and leave undocumented as the 4,000 -km-long border between India and Bangladesh is difficult to control and irregular border crossings of members of both states are frequent. Conflicts about “illegal migration”, the militarization of the border – India has finished building a barbed-wired fence on three quarters of the borders’ length – and the rising share of Bengali-speaking Muslims in the Indian states West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, and Tripura are subject of diplomatic tensions between the two states. In total, about 3.2 million people of Bangladeshi origin lived in India in 2013 (see Table 2).

In the past five years, more and more laborers left to work in Singapore’s construction industry. In 2014, Singapore was the third most important destination for short-contract migrant workers. While Libya has decreased in significance as a destination for Bangladeshi workers since the war in 2011. Instead, Lebanon, Jordan, and Mauritius have become increasingly important destinations, in particular for female migrants who work there as domestic workers or cleaners. Besides the UAE and Saudi Arabia, these three countries exemplify the growing significance of female labor migration. The share of women in Bangladesh’s overseas labor force increased rapidly from only one percent in 1994 to 18 percent in 2014 (see Table 1).¹¹

The Bangladeshi Diaspora

According to UN data, more than 7.8 million people of Bangladeshi origin were living in 89 countries of the world in the year 2013. The main host countries are India (3.2 million Bangladeshi migrants), Saudi Arabia (1.3 million), the United Arab Emirates (1.1 million), Malaysia (350,000), Kuwait (279,000), and the United Kingdom (240,000) (see Table 2).

The Bangladeshi diaspora community includes people who have migrated to a foreign country as well as their children who have been born either in Bangladesh or in the host country. The size of the diaspora population is thus much bigger than the immigrant population of the respective country. For example, 154,000 immigrants from Bangladesh lived in the United Kingdom in 2000, while the UK’s national census in 2001 recorded 283,000 British citizens of Bangladeshi origin. Many Bangladeshi diaspora members are well established in their host countries. Many have started off as workers in factories, and now run their own restaurants, corner shops and other businesses. Third or even fourth generation Bangladeshi diaspora members in the UK are represented in the mainstream economy and the political system of the British government. Similar ob-

Infobox: Labor conditions of Bangladeshi migrant workers in the Gulf States

As other migrant workers from South Asia, Bangladeshis often face quite harsh working conditions and inhumane treatment at their respective destinations. Most of the labor migrants from Bangladesh who work in the Gulf States are unskilled or low-qualified. Male migrants are employed in the construction industry and in informal business services, such as cleaning, driving, or tailoring. They also work in manufacturing, agriculture, and retail. Women are employed as housemaids in private homes or cleaners in public buildings and offices. Most of the Bangladeshi migrant workers have come to the Gulf through recruitment agencies that earn their money with selling the workers' labor to construction, industrial or service companies; some also came through personal connections. In both cases, the migrants have to bear the costs for the processing of visas and workplace permits as well as for travel upfront. The contracts under which laborers from Bangladesh, Nepal, India or Sri Lanka are – most often temporarily – employed are often highly exploitative. The workers have little formal rights and largely depend on their “sponsor”, a citizen of the respective Gulf State who manages the visa process and their workplace recruitment and with whom the migrant workers' passports remain during the contract period.¹² Many are forced to work overtime. The workplace security standards are very low, which frequently leads to illness, injuries and has already caused the death of hundreds of foreign workers – in 2013 more than 600 migrant workers from Bangladesh lost their lives in accidents at their workplace at various destinations. Moreover, the payment for labor migrants is often delayed and, in general, far below that level of national citizens. They are lodged in poor mass accommodation and do not have adequate access to health and other social services.¹³ Female migrants who work as maids and domestic helpers at their employers' homes are often subject to sexual harassment and even rape. Nonetheless, most Bangladeshi migrants are willing to pay the exorbitant fees that recruitment and travel agencies charge and endure these – too often – exploitative labor conditions. The income they can generate in the Gulf States is far higher than what they could ever expect to earn at home. Their remittances play a crucial role for their families and the economy back home.

servations are also reported for the USA.¹⁴ People of Bangladeshi origin are also active in the media, for example, in the UK, the USA, Canada, Germany, and in Malaysia, where Bangladeshi newspapers are published on a regu-

lar basis. Bangladeshi national festivals are arranged by the diaspora community as a part of cultural exchange in the host countries. Such cultural festivals, the Bangla language, Bengali food and also Muslim religious practices, for instance fastening during Ramadan, are crucial for reproducing Bengali identities. It is also important to note that many Bangladeshi immigrants have not cut their ties to family members “back home” in Bangladesh. Frequent communication with family and friends, regular visits to Bangladesh, the transfer of financial resources, and the maintenance of international social networks and kinship relations has led to the emergence of “transnational social fields”, which shape the everyday life of both the diaspora communities “abroad” and the family members “back home”. In the past four decades, international labor migration and transnational ties have contributed significantly to transformations inside Bangladesh,¹⁵ not only, but in particular through money remittances.

Table 2: Top ten countries of Bangladeshi migration stocks, 2013

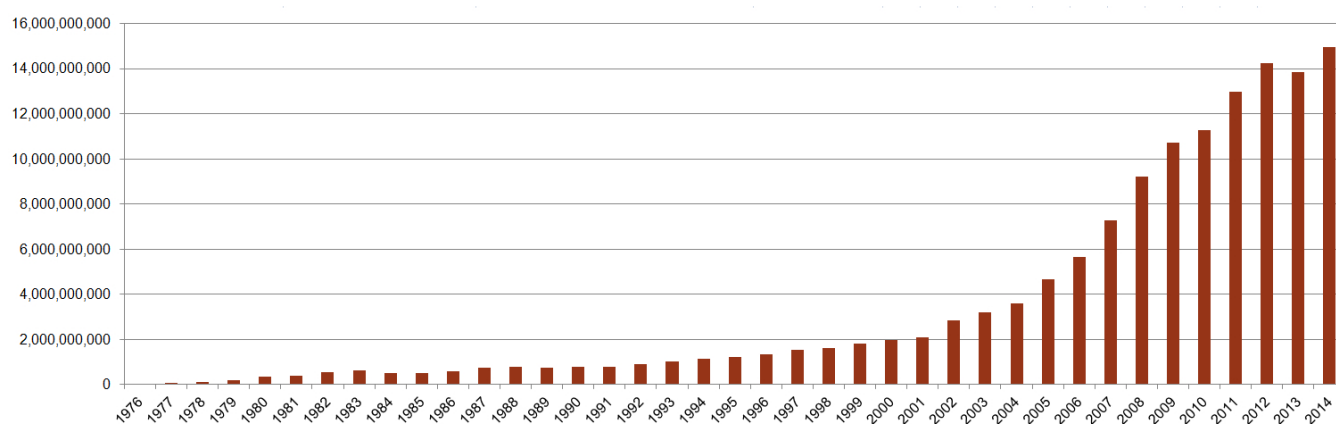
1	India	3,230,025
2	Saudi Arabia*	1,309,004
3	United Arab Emirates*	1,089,917
4	Malaysia	352,005
5	Kuwait*	279,169
6	Great Britain and Northern Ireland	239,608
7	Qatar*	220,403
8	United States of America	204,065
9	Pakistan	186,114
10	Oman*	148,314
	World total	7,757,662

* Member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

Source: Calculated from UN (2013).

Remittances

Bangladesh ranks seventh in the list of the world's top remittance-receiving nations. The remittances Bangladeshi migrants and diaspora members send home to their relatives contribute significantly to household incomes and to Bangladesh's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). According to the Bangladeshi government, remittances amounted to US\$ 13.8 billion in 2013, they accounted for more than nine percent of the country's GDP. The total sum of remittances has steadily increased from 1980 (US\$ 339 million) to 2012 (US\$ 14.2 billion). 2013 was the first year to register a decline (2.3 percent less compared to the previous year). In 2014, remittances re-increased to US\$ 14.9 billion (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Remittances sent to Bangladesh, 1976–2014

Source: World Development Indicators, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT?page=1> (accessed: 6-12-2015), update for 2014 according to BMET database, Overseas Employment and Remittances from 1976 to 2015, <http://www.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/viewStatReport.action?reportnumber=20> (accessed: 6-12-2015).

The national economy and migrants' families are highly dependent on the regular financial transfers by migrants, and they are thus vulnerable to ruptures of the money flows. Ninety percent of the money that is being sent to Bangladesh by its migrants and the diaspora comes from ten countries, 58 percent from the Gulf States alone (see Table 3). Economic crises and rising unemployment in the destination countries; unsuccessful negotiations of the sending government with migrant-receiving nations about labor recruitment, payment levels and labor standards; political changes that limit the access of Bangladeshi migrants to overseas labor markets, such as the restriction of male labor migrants in the United Arab Emirates (in 2012); or political crises, such as the civil war and economic breakdown in Libya, where tens of thousands of Bangladeshis had worked before 2011 – all of these factors can lead to an abrupt reduction of temporary labor migrants in a country and thereby impact the overall flows of remittances. Decreasing remittances can also be partly explained by the changing role that remittances play for diaspora communities. On the one hand, upward social mobility of migrants in the host society connected to access to higher paid jobs can increase the overall volume of remittances. On the other hand, as the case of the UK indi-

cates, better social and economic integration of the second and third generation of people with Bangladeshi origin may lead to a stronger social identification with the host country, to the loosening of transnational ties and a decreasing willingness to send money to Bangladesh.

Table 3: Top ten remittances flows from host countries to Bangladesh, 2014

Host country	Remittances in million US\$	Share of all remittances
Saudi Arabia*	3,246	21.72%
United Arab Emirates*	2,793	18.69%
United States of America	2,392	16.01%
Malaysia	1,213	8.11%
Kuwait*	1,100	7.36%
United Kingdom	846	5.66%
Oman*	831	5.56%
Bahrain*	518	3.46%
Singapore	455	3.04%
Qatar*	284	1.90%
Sum from these countries	13,677	91.53%
Total remittances in 2014	14,943	

* Member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

Source: BMET database, Wage Earners Remittance Inflows: Country Wise (Monthly) in 2014.

Migration Policies

Bishawjit Mallick, Benjamin Etzold

Bangladesh is rather a country of emigration than a may- or immigrant destination. Therefore, a political framework has only been created for the management of out-migration. The “export” of laborers plays a significant role in Bangladesh’s long-term development strategy. The nation’s migration policies and its governmental institutions therefore aim at enhancing the number of Bangladeshi migrant workers and seek to increase and better utilize their remittances. In 1976, the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) was established as an attached department of the – back then – Ministry of Manpower Development and Social Welfare, which ought to care for the manpower requirements of, and thus the reproduction of labor in, the country. In 1982, a new Emigration Ordinance replaced the previously existing Emigration Act from 1922. To-date, it provides the legal framework for regulating recruitment and placement of migrant workers from Bangladesh. On the basis of this law, the government created a welfare fund for migrant workers. The fund has been used to enhance language skills of outgoing laborers, to introduce service desks for migrants at Dhaka’s international airport, to support migrant workers at their destinations through the labor attachés of the respective Bangladeshi embassy, to cover the costs of repatriating the bodies of migrant workers who died overseas, and to compensate their families for their loss. In 1998, Bangladesh signed the UN’s International Convention on the “Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families”, which

is one of migrant-sending countries’ most important political tools in negotiations with countries that rely on foreign labor, and ratified it in 2011.

Since 2002, the government grants licenses to individuals and agencies who wish to be engaged in the recruitment of manpower for overseas employment. The government may cancel, suspend or penalize the recruitment licenses in the case of violating the prescribed code of conduct. In 2015, 900 agencies were registered. Although the management and recruiting policies of most of those agencies are under suspicion of being corrupt and violating the code of conduct that is also meant to protect migrant workers’ rights, the government has not yet taken any significant action against them.

An important change has been the withdrawal of restrictions for unskilled female labor migrants in 2003. Under the ban that had been introduced in 1981, lowly skilled female workers were not allowed to out-migrate. Only highly educated women did formally have access to foreign employment. Nonetheless, many unskilled women migrated to countries like Malaysia in order to work there as housemaids, for instance. The undocumented status at their destination even enhanced their vulnerability. The law also reflected the social stigma of women who worked abroad. Since lowly skilled women may – again – legally work abroad, the gender composition of out-going migrants has changed significantly (see section on labor migration).

Most of the Bangladeshis working abroad only have access to the labor market for unskilled or low-skilled workers and are trapped in low-paid jobs – often under exploitative conditions (see Infobox). “Decent work” in terms of better access to employment – both at home

Table 4: Chronological development of migration laws and institutions regulating labor migration from Bangladesh

1976	Establishment of Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET)
1982	A new Emigration Ordinance replaced the 1922 Emigration Act
1990	Establishment of Welfare Fund for Migrant Workers
1998	Signature of the UN’s International Convention on Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
2002	Government starts to grant licenses to agencies for recruiting overseas employment
2003	Government relaxes restrictions on female labor migration
2011	Establishment of Migrant Welfare Bank (Probashi Kallyan Bank)
2012	Memorandum of Understanding between Bangladesh and Malaysia on sending and receiving workers
2013	Enactment of the Overseas Employment and Migrants Act 2013

and abroad –, the recognition of fundamental rights at work, and higher incomes with which workers can better meet their families' basic needs, is now high on the political agenda of international organizations. Bangladesh's government has recognized the need to better protect its migrant workers and to enhance the skills and qualifications of both its domestic workforce and migrant workers. This should pave the way for improved labor conditions and higher remittances. A better coordination of and higher educational standards at the almost 3,000 public and private institutions that provide technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is aimed at. The BMET operates 47 Technical Training Centres (TTCs) in the country, which seek to enhance the professional skills of Bangladeshi workers in trades that are in particular demand both domestically as well as internationally. In 2011, the government also established a "Migrant Welfare Bank" with a starting capital of 100 million Bangladeshi Taka (BDT)¹⁶ in order to further support international labor migration. The bank provides loans to prospective migrants who can thereby pay the significant costs of labor recruitment, it seeks to reduce the costs of and facilitate international remittances for expatriate workers, and it provides investment loans for returnee migrants and their families.

In 2012, the governments of Bangladesh and Malaysia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in order to better regulate and control the sending and receiving of migrant workers and to reduce incentives for irregular migration between both countries. The MoU did, however, not lead to a significant increase of skilled labor migration from Bangladesh. In contrast, irregular migration flows in the Andaman Sea reached new heights in 2014 and 2015. In 2013, the government of Bangladesh passed the "Overseas Employment and Migrants Act". Under this law, migrant workers can lodge criminal cases for deception or fraud against recruiting, visa, and travel agencies as well as employers. In civil cases they can seek compensation from these actors. Despite numerous reports on fraud by recruiters and employers, on extortion by people's smugglers en route to Malaysia, for instance, and on inhumane working conditions at various destinations, no cases have been filed under this law yet.¹⁷

Emigration from Bangladesh is often discussed in terms of the question whether it presents a "brain drain" or "brain gain" for the country. On the one hand, the emigration of professional and skilled Bangladeshis is a loss for the country with regard to human resources (i.e. skills and knowhow). On the other hand, migrants' remittances are an important contribution to Bangladesh's GDP and therefore a development tool. Moreover, emigrants gain knowledge and skills abroad that can contribute to Bangladesh's development in case of their return to the country. The diaspora community is thus also increasingly recognized as an important driver and facilitator of development. Members of the diaspora not only support their families and home communities. Many have also made significant contributions in different sectors, particularly in construction, agriculture, technology and banking.¹⁸

International Migration to Bangladesh

Benjamin Etzold

Compared to the significance of international out-migration of workers from Bangladesh for the nation's economy and its long-term development strategy, immigration and refugee protection are not high on the political agenda. Since the 1960s, Bangladesh always had a negative net migration rate – emigrants continuously outnumbered immigrant flows.¹⁹ In 2013, approximately 1.4 million foreign nationals lived in Bangladesh, which accounts for only 0.9 percent of the population. Malaysia, Myanmar, China, Indonesia and Laos are the top five countries of origin (see Table 5). Immigration statistics do not reveal whether the more than 45,000 people from the USA, for instance, are expatriates who work in the fields of development, science, technology or the garments industry, or former Bangladeshi emigrants who acquired US citizenship and returned to Bangladesh. The Government of Bangladesh passed visa regulations for tourists and expatriate workers, but has not explicitly defined an immigration policy.

The problems of two minority groups in Bangladesh need mentioning. First, there are the *Biharis*, Urdu-speaking Muslims who migrated from the Hindu-dominated Indian state of Bihar to former East Pakistan at the time of India's Partition in 1947. During the civil war in Bangladesh they fought alongside troops from West

Table 5: Top 10 countries of origin of international migrants living in Bangladesh, 2013

1	Malaysia	229,245
2	Myanmar	197,625
3	China	174,487
4	Indonesia	154,945
5	Lao People's Democratic Republic	86,526
6	United States of America	45,158
7	Nepal	38,337
8	India	33,795
9	Great Britain and Northern Ireland	32,852
10	Bahrain	29,603
	World total	1,396,514

Source: Calculated from UN (2013).

Pakistan. After Bangladesh's independence in 1971, they remained in the newly formed nation, but still opted for a Pakistani citizenship. They were settled in numerous refugee camps all over the country, and since then have been excluded from society and from access to social and educational services. In 2008, the 250,000 *Biharis* who live all over the country were granted national identity cards with which they could participate in the elections. Even today, however, some of them are not recognized as full Bangladeshi citizens. Many still consider themselves as "stranded" or stateless people.²⁰

Second, there are the *Rohingya*, who have always lived in the region of the present-day border of Bangladesh and Myanmar. In Myanmar, they are regarded as a minority of Bengali-speaking Muslims. They do not have full citizen rights and are subject to repressive state practices, political harassment and social exclusion. In 1978, some 200,000 and in 1991/92, over 250,000 *Rohingya* fled to Bangladesh, which never signed the 1951 Geneva Convention for the protection of refugees. The support that the refugees received in Bangladesh was minimal. Some of the refugee camps that were established in the district Cox Bazar by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) still exist today and host some 2,600 people. Around 236,000 of all *Rohingya* refugees were repatriated to Myanmar in the mid-1990s, but returned "illegally" straight away. In total, about 200,000 refugees and undocumented migrants from Myanmar live in Bangladesh (see Table 5). Both recognized refugees as well as the "self-settled" *Rohingya* face economic exploitation, political harassment and social exclusion in the country. Between 2012 and 2014, the number of migrants and refugees from Myanmar and Bangladesh who tried to reach Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia by boat tripled from 20,000 to 63,000. In May 2015, tens of thousands of these "irregular" migrants were trapped in the border region between Thailand and Malaysia or spent weeks floating in boats in the Andaman Sea. Besides ongoing violence against the Muslim minority in Myanmar, this humanitarian crisis can partially be explained by Bangladesh's unwelcoming attitude towards the *Rohingya* refugees.²¹

Urbanization, Migration Systems within Bangladesh and Translocal Social Spaces

Benjamin Etzold

In 2015, Bangladesh had an estimated population of 161 million people. Two thirds of the population still lives in rural areas; one third resides in urban areas (see Table 6). But due to prevailing poverty and food insecurity in some parts of the country, regular disruptions of rural livelihoods by natural hazards such as cyclones and floods, more economic opportunities in cities, centralistic educational structures, and improved transportation networks, more and more Bangladeshis have become mobile. The 2011 population census revealed that 13.5 million people have left the administrative district in which they were born, which is ten percent of the population. Most movements

take place within the country and over shorter distances. 44 percent of these 13.5 million internal migrants have moved from rural to urban areas, another 43 percent from rural to rural areas, nine percent from one city to another, and only four percent from urban to rural areas.²² Internal migration is thus an everyday practice in Bangladesh. Nonetheless, nine out of ten people have not (yet) been mobile themselves.

The growth of the garments industry triggered rising internal migration to Bangladesh's large cities. The production and export of textiles started in the early 1980s, which gradually changed Bangladesh's role in the global economy fundamentally. In 1985, roughly 120,000 people worked in 380 garment factories, while it was around 1.6 million workers in 3,200 factories in 2000, and even four million workers in 4,200 factories in 2014.²³ This industrial boom also led to social transformations as young rural women, who did not migrate in large numbers before, gained access to livelihood opportunities in the urban factories.²⁴ The garment factories are predominantly situated in and around the capital city, which fueled the growth of Dhaka's economy and population (see Table 6). Other major cities could not compete with Dhaka's extensive population growth. Chittagong, for instance, once the major harbor city of Bangladesh, not only lost economic weight, its share of the total urban population also decreased significantly.

Inside Bangladesh, migrants move in order to earn extra cash-income that is needed for their family's daily consumption, to overcome livelihood crises such as hunger during the annual lean season, to diversify risks and buffer shocks such as failed harvests, or to invest in their own future through better education or better jobs. Several migration systems coexist: permanent rural-urban and urban-urban migration, temporary migration to cities, and seasonal labor migration to agricultural regions. People's access to migration opportunities and their choice of destinations reflects existing patterns of social inequality: Members from more affluent households move to urban destinations for secure employment in the formal economy or for higher education. The rural "middle class" (and "lower class") either goes to cities like Dhaka to work in the garments industries, the construction sector or the informal economy, or temporarily moves to other rural regions in order to work as agricultural laborers during the harvest seasons. The poorest people often cannot afford the initial investments needed for migration, nor do they have access to necessary networks or even the physical capability to migrate at all. They remain locally "trapped" in poverty.²⁵

Bangladeshi families who have migrants among their members nowadays organize their livelihoods dynamically across different places. Their life is characterized through their experience of migration, their social networks across and their "simultaneous embeddedness" in specific places. They are living translocal lives and those who have migrated internationally have built "transnational social spaces".²⁶ The translocal or transnational relations between migrants and those that are left at home are carefully maintained through money transfers, regular mobile

Table 6: Population and city development in Bangladesh (in thousand people)

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Bangladesh								
Total population	37,895	49,537	66,309	82,498	107,386	132,383	151,152	169,566
Urban population	1,623	2,544	5,035	12,252	21,275	31,230	46,035	64,480
% of the total population	4%	5%	8%	15%	20%	24%	31%	38%
Dhaka	336	508	1,374	3,266	6,621	10,285	14,731	20,989
% of the total population	1%	1%	2%	4%	6%	8%	10%	12%
% of the urban population	21%	20%	27%	27%	31%	33%	32%	33%
Chittagong	289	360	723	1,340	2,023	3,308	4,106	5,155
% of the urban population	18%	14%	14%	11%	10%	11%	9%	8%
Khulna	61	123	310	627	985	1,247	1,098	1,039
% of the urban population	4%	5%	6%	5%	5%	4%	2%	2%
Rajshahi	39	56	105	238	521	678	786	943
% of the urban population	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%

Source: UN (2014).

phone or skype calls as well as facebook and other social media. The home village is visited regularly, in particular for traditional festivities that play an important cultural role for a community and for family life, for instance marriages, funerals or Eid-ul-Fitr at the end of the Ramadan.²⁷

Climate Change and Internal Migration in Bangladesh

Benjamin Etzold, Bishawjit Mallick

Natural disasters such as floods, tropical cyclones, and droughts are expected to increase in frequency in Bangladesh in the future, whilst creeping processes such as riverbank erosion, sea level rise, and salinity ingress are likely to continue unabated. More rainfall and run-off are expected during the monsoon months, while the already scanty rainfalls in the dry season are likely to decline further. Together, these changes add to persisting patterns of stress on marine and terrestrial ecosystems, and to local water scarcity and land degradation. Climate change thus has the potential to damage lives and livelihoods of millions of Bangladeshis. The rural population living at the

coast and along the major rivers is particularly exposed to cyclones and flooding; the people in northern regions are particularly affected by dry spells and heat waves. Small-scale farmers and landless laborers are most sensitive to climatic risks as they are already facing chronic poverty and food insecurity.²⁸

Migration is often discussed as a possible coping strategy against rapid-onset natural hazards and as an adaptation to slow-onset processes. If people leave a place because their livelihoods have been negatively affected by natural hazards or environmental changes, one might speak of “environmental migrants” or “environmentally-induced migration”.²⁹ In order to understand migration in the context of climate change, one should first investigate pre-existing mobility patterns and livelihood systems, and then assess the “additional burden” that climate-related risks pose for people. Considering the above sketched migration patterns, climatic changes cannot be considered as *the* major causes for migration in Bangladesh. Nonetheless, natural disasters and environmental change have altered the ways in which rural people are pursuing their livelihoods, and have contributed to people’s decision to migrate. Climate change might thus impact the patterns

of internal migration in Bangladesh, whilst large-scale international movements of Bangladeshis are not to be expected for this reason.

Mobility can serve as a temporary post-disaster coping strategy. The floods of 1987, for example, led to the temporary displacement of 45 million people in Bangladesh. Yet, a high susceptibility to natural hazards does not necessarily lead to an increase in permanent migration. Most survivors of heavy tropical cyclones are also only temporarily displaced and return quickly. Often also only men move to nearby cities to work, whilst their families stay back home and rely on the migrants' supporting transfers. Social networks and, in particular, good translocal relations have proved to be crucial in a post-disaster situation.³⁰ Disasters can, however, also reduce mobility by increasing the labor needs at places of origin or by removing the resources necessary to migrate. Many families living under conditions of extreme poverty may experience significant barriers to migration: They have neither adult male family members who could work as labor migrants, the required resources to facilitate migration, nor access to the necessary migration networks. These "trapped populations", among them many elderly and many female-headed households, are often the people who are most severely affected by a disaster, because they are forced to live with the resources that are locally available to them. They largely depend on post-disaster aid, mutual help and solidarity within the community. Their immobility is an additional source of their vulnerability.³¹

Besides natural hazards that may "hit" a particular area suddenly and often unexpectedly, there are also more subtle environmental changes that force people to (temporarily) leave their place of residence. River bank erosion and coastal erosion due to sea level rise are two examples of such slow-onset processes. Since 1973, over 158,780 hectares of land have been eroded by Bangladesh's major rivers. More than 16,000 people living on the banks of the Ganges and Brahmaputra have allegedly been displaced in 2010 alone. Besides economic and political factors, rising sea levels, coastal erosion and soil salinization will contribute to the displacement of people from the coastline and the densely populated delta region.³²

The 2011 census revealed that the population already decreases in those rural regions that are most severely affected by floods, cyclones and riverbank erosion.³³ For Bangladesh, estimates are that 26 million people would be affected and displaced by storm surges and sea level rise by the year 2050. Annually, 250,000 people might be displaced as a consequence of climate-induced hazards under a moderate climate change scenario.³⁴ Yet, such estimates have to be treated with caution because the exact reasons why people are displaced – or do they migrate voluntarily? – are often not considered adequately. Also, the underlying assumptions are quite simplistic. People are displaced *by nature* for good: they leave once and for all, they do not come back, they do not move forward. Migration is thereby portrayed as a singular and linear process. This is not only environmentally deterministic as all other social, cultural, economic, political and spatial fac-

tors that contribute to migration decisions are simply not considered. It also denies people their capacity to cope with shocks to their livelihoods and to adapt to environmental changes and other structural transformations. And lastly, compared to the 500,000 labor migrants who have left (and mostly returned to) Bangladesh each year in the past decade in order to work abroad and who sent home remittances, a number of 250,000 people who move within the nation and settle in cities and do seasonal labor in other parts of the country does not seem to pose a too big of a problem for the Bangladeshi people. In contrast, increasing internal mobility and translocal lives might pave the way for future developments and enhanced resilience against natural disasters.

Notes

¹ According to the data provided by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, http://www.bgmea.com.bd/chart/total_product_export#.VY0ackY71LE (accessed: 5-21-2015).

² All data for 2013; UNDP (2014) and FAO (2015).

³ Source of population data: UN (2015).

⁴ Source of employment market data: BBS (2011).

⁵ Source of international migration data: UN (2013).

⁶ See van Schendel (2009) for a detailed account of Bangladesh's history and the role that migration plays in it.

⁷ van Schendel (2009); Zeitlyn (2012).

⁸ Abel/Sandner (2014), additional online dataset based on UN (2013).

⁹ BBS (2012), p. 19, p. 322.

¹⁰ Siddiqui (2005); Afsar (2009); Rahman (2012).

¹¹ Abel/Sandner (2014); Siddiqui et al. (2015)

¹² In the so called *kafala* system, a migrant is sponsored by a GCC citizen who takes on full economic and legal responsibility for the foreign employee during the contract period. Changes in labor contracts relate directly to changes in immigration status. Migrant workers cannot simply leave one job and take on another as they are "tied" to their sponsor. The *kafala* system sets the structural foundation for the exploitation of migrant workers in the Gulf (Afsar 2009, Siddiqui 2005, Rahman 2012, Winckler 2012 [http://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/laenderprofile/150973/gulf-states]).

¹³ See Siddiqui (2005), Afsar (2009), and Rahman (2012) for Bangladeshi labor migration to the Gulf. See also Danneker (2005) and Rudnick (2009) for an analysis of labor migration of Bangladeshi women to Malaysia, and Baey/Yeoh (2015) for Bangladeshi migrant workers in Singapore's construction industry.

¹⁴ Zeitlyn (2012); ILO (2014c).

- ¹⁵Gardner (1995); Garbin (2005); Zeitlyn (2012); Danneker (2005); van Schendel (2009).
- ¹⁶About US\$ 1.3 million at exchange rate in mid 2011.
- ¹⁷Siddiqui (2005); ILO (2014a; 2014b); Siddiqui/Reza (2014); Siddiqui et al. (2015).
- ¹⁸ILO (2014c).
- ¹⁹UN (2015).
- ²⁰See Bertuzzo (2009) on the situation of *Biharis* living in the “Geneva Camp” in Bangladesh’s capital Dhaka.
- ²¹See UNHCR (2007; 2015); Newland (2015); Peer (2015); Siddiqui et al. (2015).
- ²²BBS (2012), p. 322.
- ²³According to the data provided by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, <http://www.bgmea.com.bd/home/pages/TradeInformation#.Uo2-l-Ly-no> (accessed: 3-21-2015).
- ²⁴Afsar (2005); World Bank (2007); Siddiqui et al. (2010).
- ²⁵See Afsar (2005), Etzold et al. (2014), and Peth/Birtel (2015) for more insights into the relation between social inequality and (seasonal) labor migration.
- ²⁶See, for instance, Steinbrink (2009), Brickel/Datta (2011) or Greiner/Sakdapolrak (2013) for an introduction to the academic literature on transnationalism, translocality and translocal livelihoods.
- ²⁷See Gardner (1995), Danneker (2005), and Zeitlyn (2012) for vivid descriptions of Bangladeshi international migrants and the diaspora’s transnational lives, and Etzold (2014), Peth/Birtel (2015), and Sterly (2015) for explorations into the translocal lives of internal migrants and seasonal workers.
- ²⁸The Government of Bangladesh (2008), recent IPCC reports (e.g. 2014) and the World Bank (2010) illustrate the already experienced and expected impacts of climate change in Bangladesh.
- ²⁹cf. McLeman/Smit (2006); Warner et al. (2010); IOM (2010), Black et al. (2011) or Piguët et al. (2011) for an introduction to the debate about climate change and migration, and its contested terminology.
- ³⁰IOM (2010); Poncolet et al. (2010); Findlay/Geddes (2011); Mallick/Vogt (2012); Mallick/Etzold (2015).
- ³¹Gray/Mueller (2012); Poncolet et al. (2010); Black et al. (2013); Etzold et al. (2014).
- ³²IOM (2010); Poncolet et al. (2010); Penning-Rowsell et al. (2013); Etzold et al. (2014).
- ³³BBS (2012).
- ³⁴For estimates see, for instance, Biermann et al. (2010), Ahmed et al. (2012), and Siddiqui (2015).
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