#### ОРИГИНАЛЬНАЯ СТАТЬЯ

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## Проблема интеграции бангладешских рабочих-эмигрантов в Италию: что превращает мигранта в предпринимателя

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#### **АННОТАЦИЯ**

В статье рассматривается проблема интеграции в Европу бангладешских рабочих-эмигрантов. Автор использует кейс бангладешской общины, проживающей в Италии, в качестве эмпирического компонента исследования. Исследование проводилось с помощью качественных и количественных опросов бангладешских рабочих, живущих в Италии, с акцентом на экономические и трудовые аспекты их постоянства. Анализ собранных данных показывает, что, помимо уровня заработной платы, сумма денежных переводов мигрантов на родину зависит от того, переезжал ли иммигрант ранее в другую европейскую страну. Это подтверждает теорию обучения мигранта о том, что миграция является процессом, посредством которого низкоквалифицированный мигрант приобретает навыки, которые улучшают его будущий экономический успех. Смысл этого исследования состоит в том, чтобы доказать, что политика, проводимая правительством Бангладеш, направленная на получение резервов иностранных валют путем поощрения эмиграции неквалифицированной рабочей силы, выиграет от привлечения работников, которые с большей вероятностью будут создать малый бизнес в принимающей стране. Это будет сделано путем поощрения повторной или циклической миграции, а не от одноразового перемещения рабочей силы за границу.

**Ключевые слова:** эмиграция; Бангладеш; Италия; интеграция; предпринимательство; повторная миграция; денежные переводы

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#### ORIGINAL PAPER

## Integration of Bangladeshi Emigrant Workers in Italy: What Turns a Migrant into an Entrepreneur

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses the issue of integration abroad and remittances to home by the Bangladeshi emigrant workers in Europe, by using the case of the Bangladeshi community residing in Italy as an empirical study. The research was conducted employing qualitative and quantitative surveys related to the perceived quality of life and integration by Bangladeshi workers living in Italy, with a focus on the economic and work aspects of their permanence. Data analysis of the data collected shows that, besides the level of salary, remittances are well predicted by whether or not the immigrant has previously immigrated in another European country. It seems to confirm the theory of learning by the migrant, according to which migration is a process through which the low-skilled migrant acquires skills that improve their future economic success. Based on his research, the author suggests that government policies that are being pursued by the Bangladeshi government, aimed at obtaining reserves of foreign currencies by promoting the emigration of the unskilled labour force, would benefit by encouraging the emigration of the workers who are more likely to create small businesses in the hosting country abroad. It would be done by promoting repeated or cyclical migration, as opposed to one-time relocation of the workforce abroad.

Keywords: emigration; Bangladesh; Italy; integration; entrepreneurship; repeated migration; remittances

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### INTRODUCTION. ENTREPRENEURSHIP, EMIGRATION, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The preferred survival strategy for the poor segments of the Bangladeshi population has historically been emigration from the country [1]. As a consequence of emigration, the Bangladeshi population has undertaken risks and suffered from exploitation, but has also been able to promote the development of the economy at home, because of the investments funded from household savings created by the foreign remittances of the workers who emigrated abroad [2]. Migration can cause modifications in the means of economic production [3]. On the one hand as a consequence of the departure of workers who leave the national economy to find jobs abroad; on the other hand as a consequence of the specific sectorial knowledge that said workers acquire abroad and then bring back to their home country.

How migration leads to the acquisition of new knowledge by the Bangladeshi population is particularly important today. As the country prepares to adapt to a major change in its ecological environment [4], it has been argued that only through technological advancement the local economy might be able to continue production sustainably [5], by avoiding the pitfalls of development through ecological destruction which has taken place in other developing nations. Within this context, it has been suggested [6] that migration might have the function of encouraging a flow of knowledge to the Bangladeshi economy, and therefore of favouring its sustainable adaptation to a more challenging future environment. Our research, therefore, studies the problem of determining the causes for the development of adaptation strategies by the Bangladeshi workers who emigrate abroad, and in particular the conditions according to which they tend to become entrepreneurs, as this might benefit the country's adaptation to changed conditions in the future [7]. Thus, migration can be studied as a process through which a potential, future entrepreneur learns skills that will aid them in completing their entrepreneurial training, and also stimulate the opening of business activities on their part, thus, in turn, favouring social or economic innovation [8]. Return migration, in particular, favours entrepreneurship in the host and home, and in particular in the development of the agricultural sector [9]. Therefore, this paper is inserted into

the scientific line of enquiry which studies the connection between the experiences which migrants have abroad, and their propensity to open businesses abroad and at home.

# THE SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE CAUSES OF BANGLADESHI EMIGRATION, AND ITS ROLE ON REMITTANCES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Although the emigration of the Bangladeshi labour force has been characterised as one of the most dynamic and ever-changing aspects of the social and economic life of the country [10], empirical analyses and theoretical reasoning regarding its constant, non-dynamic impact on the economic development of Bangladesh have been made [11]. A certain amount of scientific consensus can be identified. It has been suggested that emigration helps the development of the rural areas of the country by reducing unemployment [1], by balancing international payments of the nation, and by forming reserves of foreign currencies for industrial investments. The literature is however not clear as to why the Bangladeshi emigrants tend to be incredibly successful in economic activity in some contexts, such as Italy [12], Finland [13], and Canada [14], but less in others, such as Singapore, United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia [15]. Identifying the reasons why Bangladeshi emigrants are prone to economic success in some countries, but not in others, is required to understand how to best promote the economic development in Bangladesh through the management of migration.

It has been suggested that emigration might be artificially favoured to promote the development of the country as a consequence of its unintended effects [16]. That type of proposal has also been included in a policy proposal [17]. It could be the theory that underlies the attitude of the Bangladeshi government towards migration. It has been argued that it could be possible to promote the emigration of the unskilled labour force through constructing specialised agencies [18], to favour the economic development at home. To this regard, however, we known desire of the Bangladeshi government to decrease the number of unskilled workers who are sent abroad in favour of the skilled workers [19], under the expectation that an increase in the qualifications of the workers sent abroad would result in overall higher

remittances sent home. This idea has already been proven wrong long ago [10] since skilled migrants tend to remit less money to Bangladesh, and if they have savings, these tend to be invested in the foreign countries of residence rather than in their home country. More recent studies also confirm the old finding [20], leading to the belief that remittances are maximised if the largest number of unskilled Bangladeshi workers are sent to find jobs abroad. It is, for instance, the rationale behind the political management of migration of Bangladeshi unskilled workers to Saudi Arabia [21].

In this paper, we propose instead that remittances can be increased by favouring the integration into the hosting communities of the unskilled workers with an entrepreneurial attitude, to have them create a business around themselves. The theory suggests that this is the case [22], and we submit this theoretical prediction to empirical verification for the case of Bangladeshi migrants residing in Italy. Such theoretical prediction suggests that entrepreneurial activities conducted by some well-integrated Bangladeshi citizens would pull further workers from Bangladesh. It, therefore, increases the remittances to home employing a non-linear process through which Bangladeshi entrepreneurs residing abroad remit more, and also pull more workers abroad. We, therefore, propose that the workers who emigrate multiple times as employees of some entrepreneurs will eventually turn into entrepreneurs themselves and repeat this self-reinforcing process.

#### **BANGLADESHI EMIGRATION TO ITALY**

The constitution of Bangladeshi enclaves in Italy is a specific case of success of the broader process of integration of migrants which is taking place in European societies. Integration of foreign citizens into European societies is a subject of particular importance for social scientists because it changes the political identity of their country of origin, as well as that of their hosting country. In the case of Italy, it appears in the fact that the Bangladeshi migrants have formed associations which changed the socio-cultural environment in which these associations operated [23], and this, in turn, might explain why their community has a high level of integration in the Italian society. The question still stands, however, as to what makes a Bangladeshi immigrant to Italy turn into a successful entrepreneur. The empirical limit of a theory on Bangladeshi entrepreneurship in Italy is that unusual effectiveness by Bangladeshis has been noted, with regards to them opening and owning businesses in Italy. The statistical data available shows that 8.3 per cent of the total companies owned by foreigners in Italy are owned by Bangladeshi citizens, which makes them one of the largest demographic groups of foreign entrepreneurs 1. We propose, in accordance to the literature, that the role of family ties [24], and the previous acquaintance by older generations of immigrants to Italy with the Italian reality [25], explains the formation of enclaves of Bangladeshi citizens in Italy, within which then the potential entrepreneur can achieve economic success. We additionally theorise that, if such potential entrepreneur is subject to a repeated migration to Europe [26], then the knowledge and experience acquired in previous periods of emigration helps them develop the knowledge capital required to open businesses. It, in turn, would explain the relatively high level of remittances sent home by Bangladeshi families residing in Italy [27].

## METHODOLOGY. QUESTIONNAIRES FOR THE STUDY OF THE INTEGRATION OF THE WORKFORCE ABROAD

We collected the data required for the research in February 2020, by administering surveys (*Fig. 1*), with N = 40, in the area of the city of Palermo with the highest concentration of Bangladeshi migrants, the city centre<sup>2</sup>. Here we report the content of the survey first and then discuss its methodological and conceptual bases.

The methodology which was employed for the developing of the questionnaires is consistent with the indications contained in Brown et al. [28], whose considerations have already been employed to prepare other studies on remittances [29]. The surveys were administered by hand, to people stopped on the streets, and then filled by the interviewer by using the answers dictated by

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Anpal Servizi. La comunità bangladese in Italia. 2017. URL: http://www.integrazionemigranti.gov.it/rapportiricercaimmigrazione/Rapporti%20Nazionali/2017RCBangladesh. pdf#search=comunit%C3%A0%20bengalese%20in%20italia (accessed on 20.02.2020).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Municipality of Palermo. "Stranieri a Palermo nel 2017" (Foreigners in Palermo in 2017). 2018. URL: https://www.comune.palermo.it/js/server/uploads/\_07052018160252.pdf (accessed on 20.02.2020).

#### Anonymous survey on the Bangladeshi immigration to Italy

- 1) Are you a Bangladeshi citizen immigrated to Italy?
- □ Yes □ No
- 2) When did you arrive in Italy?
- $\hfill\Box$  Less than 1 year ago  $\hfill\Box$  Between 1 and 3 years ago
- □ More than 3 years ago
- 3) Have you immigrated to other European countries before coming to Italy?
- □ Yes □ No
- 4) How old are you?
- □ Younger than 18 □ Between 18 and 25
- □ Between 26 and 35
- □ Between 36 and 45 □ Between 46 and 65
- □ Older than 65
- 5) Do you work or study in Italy?
- □ Yes □ No
- 6) What is your current job or study?
- 7) What do you find hardest about living in Italy?
- 8) How do you rate from 1 (very bad) to 7 (very good) your experiences in Italy?
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 9) If you have a job, what is your salary range?
- □ Less than 100 euros per month
- □ Between 100 and 200 euros per month
- □ Between 200 and 500 euros per month
- □ Between 500 and 1000 euros per month
- □ Between 1000 and 2000 euros per month
- ☐ More than 2000 euros per month
- 10) If you have a job, how many hours do you work per week?
- $\hfill\Box$  Less than 5  $\hfill\Box$  Between 5 and 18  $\hfill\Box$  Between 18 and 36
- □ More than 36
- 11) How much money do you send to Bangladesh in a normal month?
- $\hfill\Box$  Less than 100 euros per month  $\hfill\Box$  Between 100 and 200 euros per month
- □ Between 200 and 500 euros per month
- □ Between 500 and 1000 euros per month
- $\hfill\Box$  Between 1000 and 2000 euros per month
- □ More than 2000 euros per month
- 12) How many people from your family live in Italy?

Fig. 1. The survey that we developed

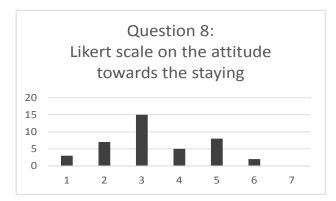
Source: The author.

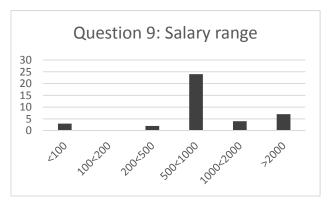
the interviewees. The survey sample comprised 40 interviews, which cover approximately 1 per cent of the total population of Bangladesh residing in the city<sup>3</sup>.

The questions are structured as follows. Questions 8 and 11 address, respectively, the level of integration of the migrant into the local community and the level of remittances sent home, which are the two dependent variables in our study. Question 8 uses the Likert scale, which has already been employed in the study of integration in the context of migration [30]. Question 11 maps the continuous variable *remittances* into an ordinal variable, which allows the conduct of regression analysis between categorical and continuous variables, which would otherwise not be possible. The rest of the questions contained in the survey represent either independent variables or control variables.

Question 1 is required to verify that the respondent belonged to the social segment, which is subject of our research. All interviewed subjects reported to belong to the target category: this is because the interviewer could identify the potential subjects of Bangladeshi origin based on their ethno-somatic appearance. Question 2 addresses the temporal dimension of the phenomenon of integration of the migrants. The expectation is that integration should generally increase over time, as a function of the education of the immigrant through the local educational institutions. This variable allows then to control whether temporal factors were affecting the other variables being analysed. Question 3 addresses the problem of whether the previous permanence of the migrant in another European country and not specifically their experiences in Italy are the factor which influences the target variables. The theoretical expectation that we made, as discussed above, is that repeated migration would be correlated with economic success, integration, and remittances. Question 4 corresponds to the age category of the interviewee and requires no further explanation. Question 5 addresses the purpose of the stay in Italy. Some of the interviewees, 3 women specifically, reported to be housewives and neither be working nor study and therefore were excluded from the subsequent analysis. Question 6 has been used to determine whether or not the migrant self-identifies as an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ibidem.





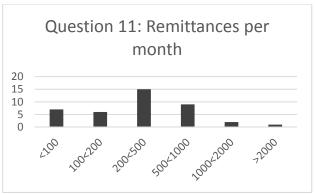


Fig. 2. Distribution of the variables Integration\_Likert, Salary\_range, Remittances\_monthly, associated to questions 8, 9 and 11

Source: The author.

entrepreneur. Based on the answer provided, a derived variable, 'is entrepreneur', was encoded by us. Question 7 refers to the hardships encountered by the migrant during their stay. Question 9 relates to the level of salary by the migrant. The naive theoretical prediction is that, as the salary increases, so does the level of remittances sent to Bangladesh. Question 10 relates to the relationship between time worked and salary earned, but also to the remittances sent home. A migrant who spends most of their time working is expected to send home more money, as they have less time to enjoy the fruits of their labour. Question 12 lastly identifies the number of people from the household of a migrant who resides in Italy, to determine whether the absence of a family in Italy was related to an increased level of remittances sent to Bangladesh.

The three most important variables for our study are those encoded by question 8, 9, and 11, whose answers, or rather their related distributions, we report here (*Fig. 2*).

The answers given to the surveys were then used to populate a dataset, which was analysed with the popular SPSS tool by IBM for statistical analysis. The dataset itself is public and has been

uploaded online<sup>4</sup>. The SPSS tool is commonly used in political science and international affairs, for the conduct of statistical analysis on migration in general, and on the migration of Bangladeshi citizens in particular [31]. The data was then tested for ordinal regression, which allows the fitting of a model which learns the relationship between the dependent and independent ordinal variables. Not enough dependent variable levels were however present in the dataset in combination with predictor variable values, which is a problem that we solved by treating the dependent variable remittances monthly as a scalar, as opposed to an ordinal. That means, all the following results correspond to the projection of the ordinal variable on a scalar space. The result of the application of a linear regression model on the variable remittance monthly converted to a scalar, by using as predictors all ordinal variables in the dataset, shows the following graph (Fig. 3).

The analysis shows that having immigrated to Europe for the second time is the second-best

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> URL: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tknNlvs8W9NjhNMHq OM5knq0Z4ywPaec/view?usp=sharing.

# Predictor Importance Target: Remittances\_monthly Salary\_range Second\_country Age Discrete the second of the se

Fig. 3. The relative importance of the predictors of remittances by the interviewed Bangladeshi workers

Source: The author based on SPSS statistical software.

Least Important

predictor of the level of remittances sent home, which seems to confirm the theory of learning by the migrant, discussed above. The accuracy of the linear regression model is however limited and accounts for only  $R^2 = 0.413$ . We, therefore, performed correlation analysis on the variables measured by questions 8, 9, and 11; that is, on *Integration Likert*, *Salary range*, and *Remittances monthly*, to understand whether more simple models would better predict remittances, and found the following.

The correlation between the salary range and remittances is 0.0685, which would make the two variables not related; the reason for this seems, however, to be that remittances are related not to the gross salary, but the available income: correlation between remittances and the salary range shifted by one results in a correlation value of 0.7266, which suggests that available income, not the gross salary, is the variable which predicts remittances. A more interesting result is, however, the one obtained by computing the correlation between Integration Likert and Salary range, shifted by one, which shows a value of 0.9605. It seems to suggest that the self-assessed level of integration of the migrant into the local Italian community well relates to the level of salary that that immigrant receives and confirms the theory according to which integration and economic success of a migrant go hand in hand.

#### DISCUSSION

In confirmation of the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of remittances, it appears that the salary of the immigrant predicts well the amount of money they send home monthly. In contrast with the theoretical prediction, however, we did not observe a higher likelihood of sending more money by the people who self-identify as entrepreneurs, as opposed to the others. We additionally found a slight preference for immigrants with previous experience in other European countries to send higher remittances home, and therefore suggest the following conclusions as a generalisation of the findings of our study.

The number of Bangladeshi workers who selfidentify as entrepreneurs is significantly larger than the number of workers who conduct entrepreneurial activities. Many of those who consider themselves as entrepreneurs do perform sales or services for other Bangladeshi or Italian citizens, who receive rent as a consequence of the economic activity conducted by the self-declared entrepreneurs. On the other hand, though, the migrants who classify themselves as entrepreneurs because of their owning legally registered enterprises tend to have a significantly higher salary than the other immigrants, and as a consequence remit more money home. We also noted during our research that if a migrant has previously been in another European country, this will increase the likelihood of that migrant sending more remittances home. It is an argument in favour of the idea that through repeated or cyclical migration the migrant acquires migration-general skills via a process of learning, which in turn

make them more economically successful at any future migration cycle. It, in turn, would be reflected in the salary they receive, which would be further affecting the level of remittances by that migrant. The research we have performed seems to suggest that the emigration of a specific subset of unskilled workers, the one with an entrepreneurial spirit, could be favoured for maximising their medium to long term remittances.

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#### ИНФОРМАЦИЯ ОБ АВТОРЕ

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