



Current migration trends from Bangladesh to Italy

Focus on arrivals by sea

Highlights

- Bangladeshi migration to Italy is increasing since the mid-2000s: there are almost 143,000 regular residents (2016)
- 8,131 Bangladeshi migrants arrived by sea in 2016 (4.5% of total arrivals by sea); 7,106 arrived by sea between January and May 2017 (11.8% of the total)
- IOM data show that newly arrived Bangladeshi migrants are prevalently male, single and traveling alone
- Most of those arriving by sea in Italy traveled by air via Dubai or Istanbul to Libya, where they intended to work and spent between 1 and 2 years on average
- Migrants met by IOM reported high travel costs, often afforded through debts and family support
- As conditions in Libya deteriorate, Bangladeshi migrants reported to IOM to have been compelled to leave: cases of forced work or work without payment have been reported.
- Bangladeshi migrants who arrived by sea in Italy and were interviewed by IOM reported that they mostly intend to stay in Italy although their family members are elsewhere, as they feel safe and perceive to have socio-economic possibilities



Bangladeshi migration to Italy

A snapshot

In 2016, Bangladeshi migrants regularly residing in Italy were 142,403. The Bangladeshi presence in Italy has grown from 1.9 per cent in 2008 to 3.6 per cent in 2016 of all non-EU citizens regularly residing in the country (Istat 2017). The Bangladeshi population is concentrated in the North of Italy, followed by the Lazio region, and the province of Rome, in particular.¹

Compared to the average non-EU migrant population in Italy, where men make up 51 per cent of the total, the Bangladeshi population is prevalently male (72 per cent of the total). Nevertheless, 28 per cent of all residence permits subject to renewal issued in 2016 were for “family reasons”, mostly to women. Other renewable residence permits issued that year were for “work reasons” (59 per cent) and for “protection reasons” (11 per cent), which include asylum seekers, humanitarian protection, refugee status (Istat 2017).

A progressive stabilisation of the Bangladeshi population in Italy is ongoing: most Bangladeshis

regularly residing in Italy hold an EU long-term residence permit (54 per cent of the total in 2016) and the number of Bangladeshi citizens who have acquired the Italian citizenship has grown from 1,460 in 2012 to 5,953 in 2015 (3.3 per cent of all citizenships granted in 2015).

Such stabilization is likely to shape the composition of the Bangladeshi population in Italy, the living conditions of Bangladeshi migrants in the country and the migration dynamics beyond Italy. Indeed, the long-term resident status and naturalization of male migrants facilitate family reunification processes, allowing women to reunite with their husbands. Also, long-term residence and citizenship are likely to relieve workers from potential dependency relationships with employers for the renewal of residence permits for work reasons and facilitate intra-EU mobility. Some researchers suggest that the acquisition of the Italian citizenship is perceived as a safeguard against local and national bureaucracy and a means to move freely within the European Union.³ A non-negligible number of Italian citizens of Bangladeshi origin is reported to have moved to the United Kingdom.⁴

¹ Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali (2016). *La comunità bengalese in Italia - Rapporto annuale sulla presenza dei migranti*. Rome, Italy.

² Until recently, Bangladesh had a ban on emigration of low-skilled female workers (see Siddiqui T. (2005). *International labour migration from Bangladesh: A decent work perspective*. ILO, Geneva, Switzerland).

³ Della Puppa, F. (2014). *Uomini in movimento. Il lavoro della maschilità fra Bangladesh e Italia*. Turin, Italy.

⁴ Fondazione Migrantes (2016), *Rapporto Italiani nel mondo 2016*. Rome, Italy.

Compared to Italy, the United Kingdom is a preferred destination due to historical ties, and the perception that there is a more vibrant economic environment and a more prestigious education system in place for their children born in Europe.

In economic terms, Bangladeshis residing in Italy send a considerable amount of officially recorded remittances to their country of origin: 487 million euros in 2016 (Bank of Italy, 2017). Bangladesh is the second most important recipient country of officially recorded remittances from Italy, after Romania. On average, a Bangladeshi resident in Italy is estimated to have sent around 4,000 euros to Bangladesh in 2016 (Bank of Italy, 2017).

In 2016, the employment rate of Bangladeshi migrants was estimated at 59 per cent and the unemployment rate at 11 per cent (Istat 2017). The majority of Bangladeshi migrants are reported to work in the hospitality and retail sectors (62 per cent of the cases), mainly as waiters and cooks, cleaners, porters, salesperson in small shops). Additionally, 22 per cent works in the industry sector and an important share is self-employed or run small retail firms.⁵

Recent trends in arrivals

The number of Bangladeshi migrants arriving in Italy by sea has risen significantly over the last years. The total number of arrivals by sea in 2016 was estimated at 8,131 persons. Between January and May 2017, 7,106 Bangladeshi citizens have arrived by sea; most of them are male adults (around 86 per cent in 2016) and children (14 per cent) (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Arrivals to Italy by sea in 2016.

Nationality	Adult Male	Adult Female	Acc. Child	Unacc. Child	Total
Total	129,080	24,133	2,377	25,846	181,436
Bangladesh	7,001	5	73	1,053	8,131
Bangladesh (%)	5.4%	<0.5%	3.0%	4.1%	4.5%

Source: Italy's Ministry of Interior.

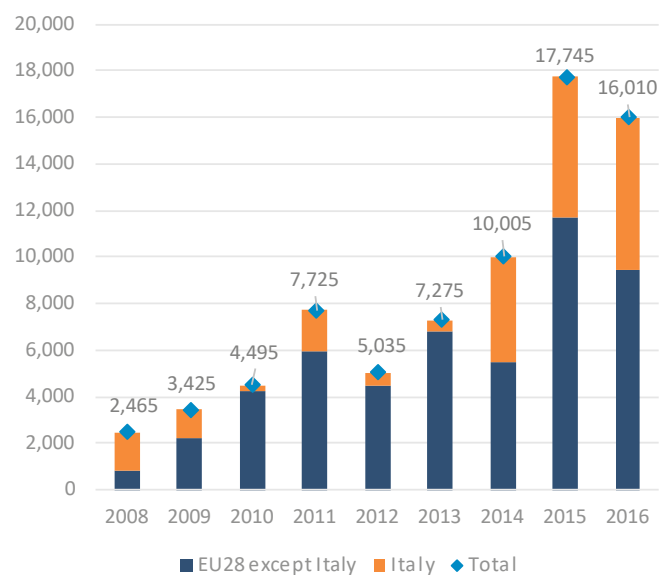
Table 2: Arrivals to Italy by sea in 2017 (Jan-May).

Nationality	Adult Male	Adult Female	Acc. Child	Unacc. Child	Total
Total	45,103	6,156	657	8,312	60,228
Bangladesh	5,881	25	30	1,170	7,106
Bangladesh (%)	13.0%	<0.5%	4.6%	14.1%	11.8%

Source: Italy's Ministry of Interior.

The number of asylum applications of Bangladeshi citizens in Europe has grown significantly, passing from almost 6,000 in 2008 to more than 17,000 in 2016 (Eurostat, 2017). Applications in Italy represented 28 per cent of the total applications lodged in European countries in 2008, and 39 per cent in 2016, when 6,665 Bangladeshi migrants applied for protection in Italy.⁶ Of these, 438 (6.6 per cent) were lodged by unaccompanied children assisted in dedicated reception centres (Ministry of Labour, 2017).⁶

Fig. 1: First-time asylum applications of Bangladeshi citizens. 2008-2016.



Source: Eurostat [migr_asyappctza], last update 29.04.2017

The same year, 75.5 per cent of all first-time decisions⁸ were negative (application rejected) and 24.5 per cent positive, granting mostly a humanitarian permit. Shares of positive results are higher among minors only, where only 22% of the first-instance decisions was represented by a rejection. No updated data on appeals and final decisions are available so far.

⁶ A first time applicant for international protection is a person who lodged an application for asylum for the first time and therefore excludes repeat applicants (in that country). It hence more accurately reflects the number of newly arrived persons applying for international protection in the reporting country (Eurostat 2017).

⁷ Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali (2017). *Report di monitoraggio 2016. I minori stranieri non accompagnati (MSNA) in Italia*. Downloadable [here](#).

⁸ Since the entry into force of Regulation (EC) 862/2007, European statistics on asylum decisions are available for different stages of the asylum procedure. First instance decisions are decisions granted by the respective authority acting as a first instance of the administrative/judicial asylum procedure in the receiving country. In contrast, final decisions in appeal or review relate to decisions granted at the final instance and which result from an appeal lodged by an asylum seeker rejected in the preceding stage (Eurostat 2017).

⁵ Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali. op. cit.



A profile of Bangladeshi migrants arriving by sea

IOM Italy interviewed 619 Bangladeshi migrants between 2016 and 2017 through its Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM),⁹ whose distribution is shown in Table 3. All Bangladeshi respondents in this sample were male.¹⁰ Children (14-17 years old) represented 35 per cent and 22 per cent of the total in 2016 and 2017, respectively. All children but one, reported to be travelling alone or with non-family member(s).

The following sections provide an overview of the characteristics of this sample, comparing systematically male adults and children, as well as the group interviewed in 2016 with that interviewed in 2017. Quantitative information is completed with qualitative information gathered through IOM's direct assistance interventions in the field, carried out by IOM staff operating at disembarkation points.¹¹

Tab. 3: Migrants interviewed by DTM in Italy.

		2016	2017	Total
Total DTM interviews in Italy	Adult Male	4,233	2,158	6,391
	Child	1,563	472	2,035
	Total	6,485	2,769	9,254
Bangladesh	Adult Male	232	204	436
	Child	131	58	125
	Total	357	262	619
Bangladesh (%)	Adult Male	5.5%	9.5%	6.8%
	Child	8.4%	12.3%	6.1%
	Total	5.5%	9.5%	6.7%

Source: IOM DTM Flow Monitoring Surveys in Italy, June-November 2016 & February-May 2017.

⁹ IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix Flow Monitoring Survey (DTM FMS) has been implemented in Italy since June 2016, within the framework of IOM's research on populations on the move through the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes to Europe. The survey gathers information about migrants' age, sex, areas of origin, level of education, employment status before migration, key transit points, cost of the journey, reasons for moving and intentions. DTM FMS have been implemented so far in six Italian regions (Apulia, Calabria, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Lombardy, and Sicily), between June and November 2016, and between February and May 2017. Only migrants arrived since 2016 were interviewed. Surveys are conducted only with persons older than 14 years of age.

¹⁰ According to the Italian Ministry of Interior, between 2016 and 2017 so far, only 30 Bangladeshi women have arrived in Italy (less than 0.4% of total arrivals).

¹¹ IOM Italy provides assistance to vulnerable migrants through the [ADITUS](#) Project, that supports Italian Authorities in the management of migration flows by sea and identify and protect unaccompanied minors and victims of trafficking among others.

Socio-demographic profile

Most Bangladeshis recently arrived in Italy from the sample are male, single,¹² with primary or secondary education.¹³ The average age of children interviewed is 17 and the average age of adults interviewed is 25. Almost half of all interviewees reported to come from the capital, Dhaka, and some (7 per cent) reported to come from the rest of the Greater Dhaka Area. Amongst other districts of origin frequently cited by respondents were Sylhet, Madaripur and Chittagong. Half of Bangladeshi adults in the sample reported to have been employed before leaving; 38 per cent instead claimed to be unemployed prior to departure. Among children, 37 per cent and 47 per cent of those interviewed in 2016 and 2017, respectively, reported to have been studying prior to departure.

Fig. 2: Share of respondents by age (%).

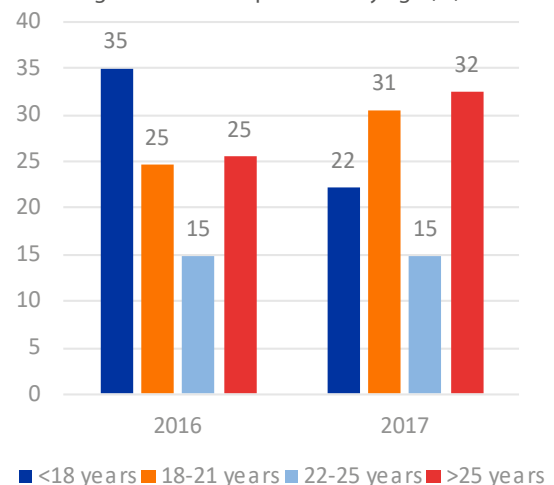
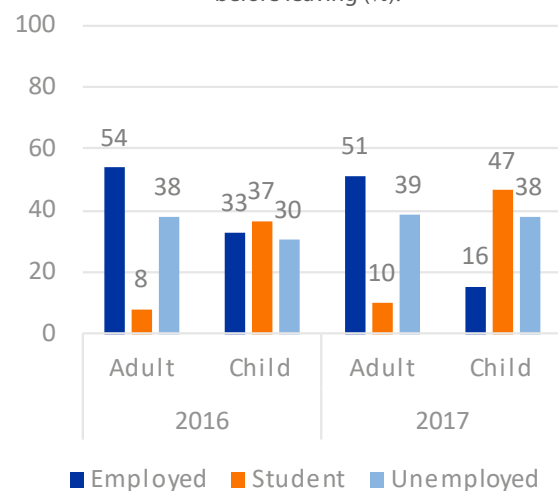


Fig. 3: Share of respondents by employment status before leaving (%).



¹² All children and almost three quarters of adult respondents reported to be single.

¹³ In 2016, 50 per cent of adults and 63 per cent of children, respectively, reported to have completed primary education only. In 2017, most respondents reported to have completed secondary education (53 per cent of adults and 66 per cent of children).



The journey

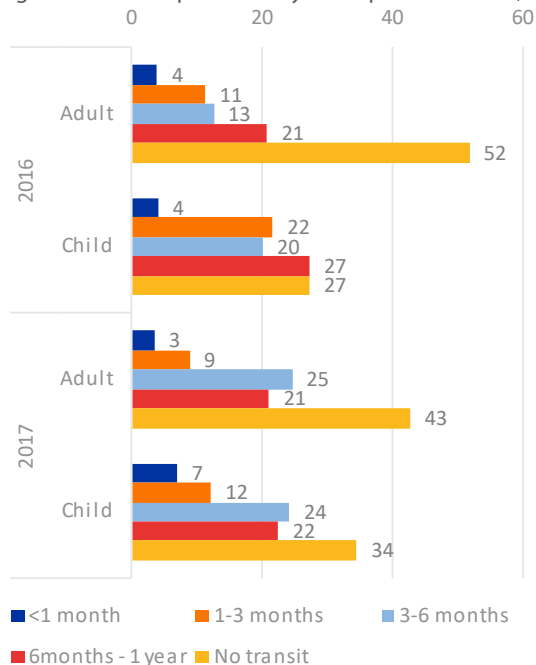
Almost all interviewees reported to have travelled alone or with non-family peers. Also 95% of all interviewees reported to have no family member already living in the intended country of destination, and only a remaining 5% stated to have non-first-line family members at destination.

The survey also gathered information on transit countries and locations from the place of departure: respondents reported all the countries through which they transited, as well as the time spent in transit from one place to another. Short journeys (of less than one month from the point of departure until arrival in Italy) are quite unusual. Respondents spent, on average, 142 (almost five months) in transit. The most frequently reported transit locations are Dubai-Istanbul-Tripoli, Dubai-Cairo-Khartoum-Tripoli, Dubai-Istanbul-Tunis-Libya (by land).

Interestingly, almost half of all adults reported to have re-started their journey towards Europe after having spent one year or more in a country different from Bangladesh. The share is lower but still significant, among children (27 per cent in 2016 and 34 per cent in 2017).

Almost all respondents (98 per cent) reported to have stayed in Libya more than one year before moving again (to Italy), working mainly as domestic workers, cleaners, gardeners and waiters in restaurants and hotels.¹⁴

Fig. 4: Share of respondents by time spent in transit (%)

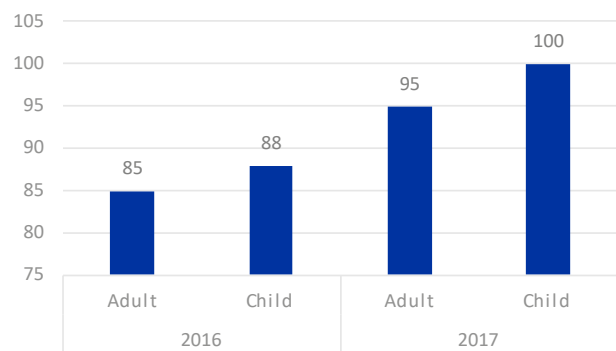


¹⁴ For the DTM survey methodology, the country of departure is considered to be that of habitual residence, either the country of origin or the country where the respondent has spent more than one year. Therefore, for migrants who reported to have spent more than a year in Libya, the DTM survey did not collect information on transit countries prior to arriving to Libya, and recorded information only on the journey by boat from Libya to Italy.

Longer journeys are associated with higher vulnerability of migrants in transit.

Indeed, most Bangladeshi nationals interviewed in 2016-2017, both children and adults, reported to have experienced some form of abuse during the journey¹⁵ including working without receiving the expected payment (75% of the sample), performing manual and low-skilled jobs (cleaning, housekeeping, gardening, shop assistant, waiter); being forced to work against their will (42 per cent); or being held in a closed place against their will by groups or individuals other than official forces (63 per cent).

Fig. 5: Share of positive answers to at least 1 out of 4 exploitation indicators (%)



All children interviewed in 2017 claimed to have experienced at least one form of exploitative practice (unpaid labour, forced labour, arranged marriage, kept against will) in first person.

Additionally, 77 per cent and 12 per cent of all migrants reported to have directly experienced physical violence, and to have witnessed sexual violence.¹⁶ Most of such reported events, according to the respondents, happened in Libya (Tripoli, Benghazi, Sabratah and Misrata mainly).

¹⁵ The DTM surveys contains questions aimed at revealing potential indicators of the prevalence of trafficking in human beings or exploitative practices experienced either by the respondent directly or witnessed during the journey. These are not intended to identify cases of human trafficking as defined in the relevant international and national legal framework. Rather, they are used to understand the prevalence of abuses and exploitative practices that indicate migrants' vulnerability while in transit to Europe.

¹⁶ In 2017, the DTM questionnaire was revised in order to emphasize protection issues, especially in relation to children on the move, as well as human trafficking and other exploitative practices. In Italy, the survey also included two pilot questions referring to physical violence and to sexual and gender-based violence. To gain a broader view on the enhanced questionnaire and the deeper detail on migrants' decision-making process, please refer to the latest DTM Mediterranean publication [here](#).

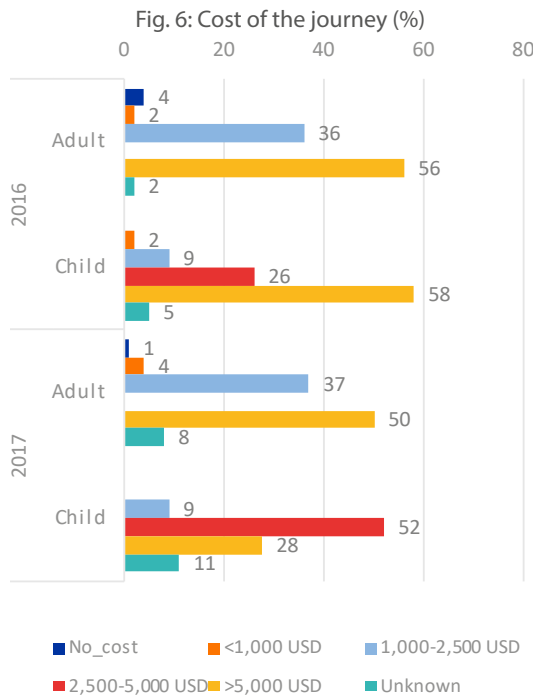


Qualitative data collected during IOM’s direct assistance activities in the field also seem to indicate that the confiscation of travel documents (passport or visa to stay) is a common practice, which tends to happen soon upon arrival in Libya, potentially making migrants more vulnerable to exploitation. While this practice is known to happen also in other transit and destination countries of Bangladeshi migrants, narratives on Libya also include references to kidnappings, and beating associated with migrants’ being kept against their will working in hotels and private houses.

Costs and financing of the journey

Respondents of the DTM survey were asked to estimate the overall cost of the journey, summing up all paid transfers from the place of departure to the arrival in Italy. More than half of respondents reported to have paid more than 5,000 USD, with some differences between adults and children. In some cases, migrants were unable to provide an estimate of the total amount paid (5 per cent of children interviewed in 2016 and 11 per cent of them in 2017), due to the multiple fees, bribes, ransoms paid by migrants at different steps of the journey. Such payments multiply with the number of smuggling services used and with periods of detention experienced while in transit.

Costs higher than 5,000 USD are usually reported by migrants who are able to pay at once the entire journey to reach Libya by flight, often through Dubai or Istanbul, via an initial contact with a co-national broker in Bangladesh.



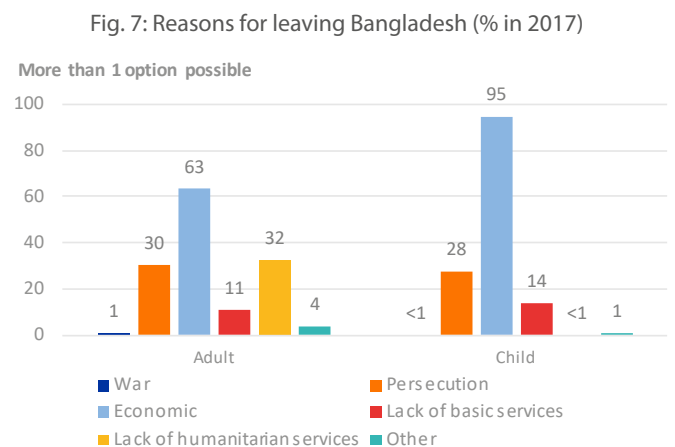
Many reported having moved to Libya with the intention to work there, but having been compelled to leave the country. The cost of the last leg from Libya to Italy is then between 1,000 and 2,500 USD, as reported by about half of the migrants interviewed in 2017.

Most respondents stated that relatives in the country of origin paid for their journey (81 per cent); 36 per cent also incurred into a debt to finance the journey when their own or family savings were not enough to afford the travel. Moreover, 56 per cent of respondents stated to have worked during the journey, to cover unexpected expenses at transit locations.

These patterns in financing migration are also confirmed by the literature on Bangladeshi international migration: the migration decision is taken at the household level to diversify the risk against adverse shocks (unemployment, natural disasters, loss of crops etc.). Migrants are expected to repay the efforts and debts incurred by the family members to organize the journey, and to keep social and economic ties with the extended family left in the country of origin.¹⁷

Reasons for migration

Economic motivations are reported by the majority of respondents in both 2016 and 2017 as the main reason for leaving Bangladesh. Among those interviewed in 2017, when the questionnaire allowed for more than one option among a set of reasons for leaving, economic reasons were reported by 63 per cent of adults and 95 per cent of children. Moreover, personal persecution was reported by 30 per cent of adults and 28 per cent of children, followed by lack of access to basic services mentioned by 11 per cent of adults and 14 per cent of children.



¹⁷ Donato, K.M., Carrico A.R., Sisk, B. and Piya B. (2016), Different but the Same: How Legal Status Affects International Migration from Bangladesh, ANNALS, AAPSS, 666, July.

Intended destination

Migrants' intentions in terms of destination are likely to change during the journey, according to the experiences while *en route* and to the conditions and possibilities in the countries where the survey was carried out.

Most Bangladeshi migrants interviewed in 2016 reported Italy as the intended destination at the time of departure (89 per cent of adults and 95 per cent of children), while none of the respondents mentioned Libya. In 2017, instead, 41 per cent of adults reported, at the time of departure, Italy as the main destination, followed by Libya (39 per cent of adults), whereas 57 per cent of children respondents reported Libya as the intended destination, followed by Italy (36 per cent).

In 2017, the survey also asked about the intended country of destination at the time of the interview: interestingly, 89 per cent of adults and 97 per cent of children reported Italy as the intended destination at the time of the interview, and only a few respondents reported the intention to reach France, the United Kingdom or Germany.

The reported shares deserve some reflection regarding biases in migrants' responses, as well as issues regarding decision-making, which can shift quite significantly along the journey, or even migrants' strategic behaviour. For instance, some migrants may initially go to Libya to work, having Europe as the ultimate destination in mind. Some studies on the Bangladeshi community in Italy suggest that Bangladeshi migrants are well aware of the European legal framework on migration and navigate its rules (e.g. taking advantage of European citizenship to move to the United Kingdom, see above), sometimes even making long-term plans.¹⁸

¹⁸ Della Puppa, op. cit.; Rahman, M.M. and Kabir, M.A. (2012), Bangladeshi migration to Italy: the family perspective, *Asia Europe Journal*, 10:251-265.

DISCLAIMER

The opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.

Data and observations made in this Briefing on Bangladeshi nationals build on DTM surveys conducted mainly in the South of Italy, completed with qualitative information gathered during IOM Italy's direct assistance interventions in the field through the ADITUS project, in specific Italian locations and during the timeframe indicated. The briefing provides an overview of inflows of Bangladeshi nationals who have recently arrived in Italy by sea from North Africa and should not be generalized. It is neither representative of all Bangladeshi migrants arriving in Italy through different routes, nor of the entire Bangladeshi population residing in the Italian territory.

SOURCES

All statistical information presented in this Briefing are taken from the [Bank of Italy](#), [Italian National Institute of Statistics](#), [Italian Ministry of Interior](#), [Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies](#), [Eurostat](#) with the latest figures available for 2016 and 2017.

Primary data are gathered through IOM [Displacement Tracking Matrix](#) and the [ADITUS](#) project in Italy.

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