

*Research Report*

Time to look at Girls  
Adolescent Girls'  
Migration  
and development  
Bangladesh



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**Time to look at girls**  
**Adolescent girls' migration and development**  
**Bangladesh Case Study**

## **1 Introduction**

Between January 2014 and December 2015, the research project entitled “*Time to look at girls: Adolescent girls' migration and development*” was carried out in Bangladesh. This is part of a larger comparative project that includes research in Ethiopia and Sudan that was carried out under the umbrella of the Global Migration Centre of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. The overall research project is funded by the Swiss Network for International Studies (SNIS). The Bangladesh case study has been carried out in partnership with RMMRU, with the logistic and administrative support of Terre des Hommes Italy Bangladesh Country Office and the collaboration of ARBAN (Association for the Realization of Basic Needs) and Aparajeyo Bangladesh (AB). Additionally, the project has been supported by the Terre des Hommes, the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom, Feminist Review Trust and ZXY International.

The research focuses on the experiences, life choices and aspirations of adolescent girls and young women who migrate without their families or guardians, either internally and internationally in and from Sudan, Bangladesh and Ethiopia. It specifically looked at the life course and at how the decision to migrate intersects with other important choices which characterize adolescence: those related to education, marriage and having children, thus aiming to provide insights into young women and adolescent girls' aspirations and decision making, as well as into any changes as a possible effect of migration.

This report on the Bangladesh research addresses four main research questions:

- The reasons for adolescent girls' migration; the circumstances under which the decision to migrate is taken (personal, familiar etc); the role of different events and networks in facilitating the process.
- Girls' life course transition/s and how migration intersects with education, marriage and work's related choices; girls' life at destination and their plans for the future.
- The impact of migration on adolescent girls' life and status and on their families of origin.
- The key implications for policy and intervention of the research findings

## **2 The context**

### **2.1 Women's migration: international and internal migration flows**

Migration is a major feature of Bangladesh's recent and less recent history, with many citizens today migrating internally from rural to urban areas, and internationally. Although this is mainly to the Middle East and South East Asia. countries such as the US, the UK and lately Italy are significant minority destinations.

Migration to the USA, Canada and Australia and the UK in Europe is characterized by being long term and permanent. The latter started in the nineteenth century from

the district of Sylhet and its history and characteristics distinguish it from the contemporary migration to other European countries (Gardner, 2007). From the 1970s, after Western countries adopted more restrictive immigration policies, Bangladeshi workers started moving to the Middle East and South East Asia for short-term labor contracts. Short-term migrants from Bangladesh are predominantly men between the ages of 20 and 25, but the percentage of women has been increasing. In 2002, women workers constituted 0.54 per cent of the total number of Bangladeshi workers who migrated overseas in that year, by the middle of 2013 the percentage stood at 13 per cent (ILO 2014). Lebanon has been the top choice for migrant women workers between 1991 and June 2013, followed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Mauritius, Oman, Kuwait, and Malaysia. Women migrate to be employed as domestics, housekeepers, nurses, and garment workers (ILO, 2014). They go mainly on short-term contracts through agencies and, in some cases, according to quotas decided by the Government, on the basis of international agreements with the destination countries. International women's migration is subject to strict laws and regulations so that formally only women older than 25 can obtain the necessary authorizations from the Government for regular migration. Younger women also migrate irregularly across the border to India, especially from the South Western districts of Jessore and Khulna.

When it is a household choice women's migration is preferred to men's because it tends to be less expensive: agency fees are lower and the government subsidizes the journey. Two FGDs conducted with prospective female migrants to Lebanon in the course of this study found that all the women were in their 20s, both married or divorced, and all were migrating internationally directly from rural areas. However, this is not always the case: in the slums of Dhaka, where this research was conducted, we found cases of adolescent migrants from rural areas, who after a period of work in Dhaka, decided to move on to the Middle East. The requirement of the age limit can be easily manipulated by some adolescents who declare themselves to be older than they are so as to move to the Middle East.

Internal migration has been on the rise, linked to the expansion of the manufacturing sector in more urban areas and to the gradual worsening of livelihood options in rural areas. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the urbanization rate as a correlate of internal rural-urban migration has been 3.03% from 1975 to 2009, one of the highest in the world. From 1980 to 2010 agricultural production dropped from 32% to 19% as a share of GDP and the share of industrial production rose from 21 to 28% (UNDP, 2013). The high proportion of landless households chasing lowly paid agricultural work, together with increasing land scarcity and poor returns to farming push rural people to look for work elsewhere. These vulnerabilities are exacerbated by river bank erosion and seasonal flooding (South West) or conversely drought (North East). The number of migrant women and girls is also on the rise and the increasing demand for female workers in the Ready Made Garment sector (RMG) is an important factor here. According to Ahmed (2009) there were about 1.7 million women employed in the sector in 2009, with 60% of them under 25 (Hossain, 2012).

Moving to Dhaka for garment work is not the only migratory path open to Bengali girls. Another major trajectory is to migrate from rural areas to Dhaka and other district towns to work as domestics. One of our respondent argued that it is usually younger girls and older women who works as maids, if they are too young to be

employed in factories, or too old to be able to bear with the long working hours in garment factories. A recent survey (ILO 2006) reveals that there are about 2 million domestic workers in Bangladesh and that 400,000 of them are children aged 14 and under. Twenty-three per cent of these start working at ages below 8 years, 33% at age 9-11 years and 33% at age 12-14. Girls are the majority: 78%.

According to Phulki, an NGO that works with domestic and garment workers, at puberty some of the young girls that migrated to Dhaka to work return to their villages to get married, but some others move on to work in the garment industry. According to Hossain (2012) the average length of time women do this is four and a half years. Among our respondents we found a few women who had initially come to Dhaka very young to work as maids and then either remained and joined garment work, or went back home to get married and returned to the capital after their marriages had failed. A few of our respondents who had initially worked in garment factories left the job and started working as non-resident maids, or as piecework workers for sari manufacturers (*carchupi*), after having children.

Another group of female migrants are the girls who move from rural villages to district towns and to Dhaka to study, after completing the 10<sup>th</sup> year of school or after year 12<sup>th</sup> to enrol at University. These migrants come mainly from middle class and well-off households, but some of our Garo respondents also migrated with the intention of continuing their studies.

## **2.2 Jobs and Employment for women/girls.**

Employment for women in rural areas fell sharply from 1976 onwards as a result of mechanization of the post-harvest tasks, which provided jobs for men, out of the activities that women used to perform next to home. Nowadays, the scope for wage employment for women and girls in rural areas is extremely limited. Women belonging to poorest landless families may take work as daily labourers in the fields, where they work for very low daily rates, or more often as domestics in neighbouring houses, where they are usually paid in kind. These jobs, apart from having a low return in economic terms, are perceived as contrary to *purdah* norms and women who have to take them are held in very low esteem. A few educated women may find employment in NGOs, or as teachers, but the supply for such jobs is still much higher than the demand. Although the rate of girls' enrolment in secondary school has significantly increased in the 2000s, reflecting a widespread awareness of the importance of education, rural households, especially landless or functionally landless agricultural families, can hardly afford it up to higher levels despite the economic incentives provided by the state such as the stipend program<sup>1</sup>. Completing the first cycle of secondary school and obtaining SSC (Secondary School Certificate) after 10 years of schooling, is expensive and not perceived to lead to any desirable form of employment for girls.

Thus, when a girl reaches a marriageable age, commonly between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> year of schooling, and decisions about her future have to be taken, the respective advantages and disadvantages of different options are considered, as well as their costs. With investment in education not ensuring a return, marriage remains for poor

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<sup>1</sup> In rural areas girls are provided a stipend to cover education costs up to grade 12.

parents the best way to secure a daughter's future. There is consensus however that this scenario has been significantly altered with the expansion of the garment manufacturing industry that has become the first form of mass wage employment for women and girls outside home. Since 1976 there has been an exponential growth of the RMG sector that accounts today for 80% of total exports. There are about 5000 garment factories that employ more than 4 million people (Hossain, 2012). Migration for wage employment in the RMG sector has become a feasible alternative to early marriage and childbearing for rural teenagers.

The personal care industry has also developed and provides employment to about 100,000 women (Akter, 2009) in about 2000 registered beauty parlours, mainly in urban areas all over the country (Rahman, 2010). Although the parlours are usually owned by Bengali Bangladeshi, the workers in them are most often young women belonging to ethnic minorities.

### **2.3 Urban Living conditions**

Most of the internal labour migrants settle down in city slums whose population has been constantly increasing, with migrants constituting 53% of the population of Dhaka city slums (UNDP, 2013). Slums, known as *bustee*, are built on government or private land and are characterised by poverty, very low quality housing, high population density, and limited access to services. Slum conditions are however diverse. According to a survey conducted in 2006 (CUS et al, 2006) in some areas of Dhaka, most *bustee* were affected by poor drainage, flooding and very poor housing, but only a minority of them were affected by even worse conditions such as lack of electricity, cooking gas, tap water, and insecure tenure, threat of eviction, and a need to share water sources and latrines with large numbers of other households.

Slums are usually controlled by local 'leaders' who are well connected to the local police and/or some political party. These 'leaders', who are sometimes associated with mafia-like criminal gangs, known as *mastaan*, control the delivery of services and constitute a well established informal power structure that may act in the name of the *samaj* (society/moral community). They are recognized as having the power to enforce the rules related to social life through a system of informal arbitration where they act in the name of the community's honour and prestige. In our study we found instances where they punished young people involved in premarital relationship and forced people to marry or fined transgressors. When connected to criminal gangs these interventions in the personal sphere are all part of a system of legitimised extortion. NGOs or organizations working in particular *bustee* find they have to negotiate with these informal power structures when employing people, establishing services and so on (Camellia, Khan, Naved, 2012).

The control they exert over young people's behaviour, especially young women's, occurs in the context of widespread parental concerns for the sexual security of girls and the predatory behaviour of men. Parents express these as powerful motivations to marry their daughters when they are very young (Rashid 2011). This resonates with research conducted by Terre des Hommes Italy in the slums where they work. Poverty and the lack of security are the main reasons quoted by parents to withdraw their daughters from school as early as 11-12 years of age and for trying to either employ them as domestics or in garment factories, or to give them in marriage. In the families

living in the slums both parents usually work and, when not at school, girls remain at home without protection and control. Parents fear that they may enter into ‘*prem*’ (love) relationships, or be forced into sexual relationships. These relationships will seriously jeopardize their future marriage prospects. According to teachers and parents, young boys and girls are particularly ‘prone to emotions’ and ‘easily fall in love’, in which case they may get married without their parents’ consent. There is also a common perception that so called ‘love marriages’ are on the rise, with an increasing number of very young couples eloping, hoping to force their parents consent through a ‘*fait accompli*’. Teachers and adults also report that, in their experience, these marriages are unstable.

Some recent research has also shown that, while there is a higher prevalence and social acceptance of gender-based violence in the slums compared to other urban areas (NIPORT et al 2008, Garcia-Moreno et al 2005), migrant women and girls who live away from familiar social networks are more vulnerable to violence and to imposed early marriage than those who were born in the slums, or those who migrated with parents or husbands (Camellia, Khan, Naved, 2012).

#### **2.4 Government Policy on women’s international and internal migration**

The Government of Bangladesh has long recognized the importance of international migration. Overseas migration of both men and women is an important development issue. The Government has taken several steps to promote this kind of migration while protecting migrant workers, through legislative instruments, by stipulating agreements with destination countries and by enacting strict regulations to discipline and control the employment agencies through which workers are employed in Gulf and South East Asian countries. Unlike international migration, the phenomenon of internal migration as a correlate of urbanization and industrialization has not been directly addressed by specific migration policies, although there is some recognition that they raise gender differentiated concerns. The specific issues raised by the internal migration of adolescent girls away from their families is a very neglected area addressed in this study, which aims to identify specific areas of policy intervention.

### **3 Fieldwork Methods and Methodology**

#### **3.1 Choice of participants**

This study of girls and young women who had migrated from rural areas to work in Dhaka as adolescents, focuses on two main groups: those who had migrated with the intention of finding a job in the garment manufacturing sector, and a group who are currently employed as beauticians in ‘beauty parlours’. The first group of 47 migrants includes 6 older migrants who have worked or are working in sectors different from the manufacturing one. The latter group comprises 13 girls and young women belonging to the Garo/ Mandi ethnic minority.

##### *The Garo/Mandi*

The Garo, who also call themselves Mandi (human beings) to distinguish themselves from the Garo who live in India in the hills of Meghalaya, are one of the so-called tribal communities in Bangladesh and occupy mainly the plains of Mymensingh district and the forest area of Modhupur in Tangail district. While they are



Bangladeshi by citizenship, they do not belong to the Bengali-speaking majority of the population. They consider themselves a distinct community, sharing a common cultural identity, language, traditions and experiences. Since partition in 1947, they occupy, like the other 20 to 56 ethnic minorities, a marginalized social, political and economic position in respect to the Muslim majority (Bal, 2007). The Garo living in Bangladesh are between 80,000 to 100,000 and are now scattered all over the country, with more than 2000 of them working and living in Dhaka. They are mostly Christians, either Catholic or Baptists. Women are mainly employed as cooks, housekeepers and babysitters as well as in beauty parlours, in NGOs and church organizations; men as garment workers, drivers, night guards and NGO staff. Many Garo, both men and women, also migrate to Dhaka to study.

### **3.2 Methods and Data Collection**

A mixed multi-methods approach was adopted combining different data-collection techniques, together with a qualitative approach aiming at ensuring the participation and involvement of migrant girls by building rapport and trust between them and the team of researchers. Most of the research was carried out in Dhaka, but some data was collected in the communities of origin of eight of the interviewed migrants.

Survey questionnaire: 13 migrants from the Garo community and 47 from the Bengali community were interviewed using a questionnaire. The survey questionnaire allows to draw a socio-economic profile of the migrants, beside containing basic quantifiable information about their migration history.

Focus Group Discussions: seven FGDs were conducted: one with young girls working in beauty parlours; two with girls who migrated alone who were living in either Bauniabandh or Bhola slums; one with (mainly) young domestic workers who are receiving some assistance from 2 local NGOs in the context of a European Union funded project; two with women who are about to migrate abroad to Middle Eastern countries; one with a mixed group of migrant women who are members and beneficiaries of AWAJ Foundation, an organization that campaigns for garment workers rights.

Key informant interviews: six expert interviews were conducted with representatives of local and international NGOs working on issues related to internal migration and adolescence.

Life stories: 16 life stories have been collected by visiting and talking to some of the girl migrants more than once over 2014. Meetings with these girls took place not only in their homes but also in other locations and occasions such as the botanical garden and cinema hall.

Informal information through participation, field diary and field visits: during the Dhaka fieldwork, insights on the issues around adolescent girl migration were also gained via informal conversations with the research assistants, the interviewees, family members and friends of the interviewees, other migrants, people working in NGOs, slum residents and others. Observations were noted in a field diary.

In the places of origin, besides informal conversation with the parents, relatives and neighbours of the migrants, in each location a high school was visited and a group discussion arranged with students of class 8 and 9 and with some teachers (unrecorded). In-depth discussions and focus group discussions were carried out with the members of migrants' households.

### **3.3 Fieldwork and Research Team**

The field-work was carried out in three phases. The first part was conducted between January and April 2014 in Pallabi and Mirpur *thana* (an administrative subdivision of Dhaka city district, literally police-station) at the outskirts of Dhaka, one of the main destinations for migrants who move from rural areas in search of work opportunities. Most of our respondent resided in two slums: Bauniabandh and Bholā in Pallabi.

The second part of the fieldwork was carried out in the same areas in August 2014. In this phase a number of respondents already interviewed were identified for follow up meetings. This allowed for consolidating information, establishing greater trust and collecting more in-depth life story material.

In the third phase in November-December 2014, the field-work focused on the areas of origin of the migrants and in 5 villages in the districts of Bogra and Netrakona

In the same period a documentary movie was shot in the 2 slums where the interviewed migrants reside and in Bogra district, in 2 migrants' villages of origin.

#### *The research team*

In addition to Nicoletta del Franco, the research team comprised a counsellor from ARBAN and a project coordinator from TDH, Italy, and benefitted from the substantial support of our local partner institutions: Terre des Hommes Italy and their two local partners ARBAN (Association for Realization of Basic Needs) and Aparajeyo Bangladesh (AB). An Mphil student from Dhaka University was employed as research assistant.

In line with our initial intention to involve adolescent girls in the research, 5 girls who had grown up in the slum were identified early on through ARBAN to be part of the research team and to help with administering the questionnaire. The possibility of involving migrant adolescents was ruled out because of their time constraints. A meeting in Buniabandh slum was organized with some teachers of ARBAN primary schools (one in each of the 5 blocks in which the slum is divided), the counsellor employed by ARBAN, and 12 adolescent girls, who had studied in ARBAN school who had said they were willing to help as assistants. 7 of them were chosen to be trained and in the course of a one-day long training workshop, 5 of them were recruited to work in the project.

During the workshop the girls, the research assistant and one staff each from TDH, Italy and ARBAN were familiarised with the objectives and the rationale of the research, the methodology and methods, the requirements of confidentiality and anonymity and how to administer the survey questionnaire. One of the 5 girls worked in the project only during the first three months of fieldwork. The other 4 were involved during the whole year in different ways, their circumstances and their stories

as adolescents and as long-term residents in Bauniabandh slum provided important insights to understand the social context and the ways in which young girls negotiate spaces and opportunities for their aspirations and dreams.

#### *Accessing the migrant girls*

It was relatively easy to access the migrant girls. TDH Italy, ARBAN and Aparajeyo Bangladesh (AB) have been working in partnership in the slum areas of Pallabi for about 10 years and have a well-established presence that consists of 5 primary schools run by ARBAN in Bauniabandh slum and some educational centres of AB. I had worked for TDH Italy in Bangladesh in the past and was familiar with the activities and the areas of work of the NGOs. This facilitated the access to the slums and the 5 adolescents mentioned above were essential in contacting their migrant peers in Bauniabandh area by visiting all the households of the slum and enquiring about the presence of migrants in each of them.

Other respondents were identified through Aparajeyo Bangladesh in whose office a first focus group discussion with 12 migrant girls living in the Bhola slum, was conducted.

With respect to the Garo/Mandi migrants most of those interviewed were already well known to me from previous visits to Bangladesh.

With some migrants the research team established a profound rapport that evolved over the whole year (2014), thus allowing us to follow up the main events in their lives and the changes in their circumstances.

#### *Interviewing*

The interviews with the Bengali girls have all been carried out by myself, always accompanied and supported by either the research assistant, or the counsellor from ARBAN or the project coordinator from TDH Italy. Some questionnaires have been administered directly by the 5 girls with the support of the research assistant. The interviews took place in the residence of the girls in the 2 slums mentioned. This was always in the presence of peers and other slum residents, who commented on what was being said. Four to five women who migrated with their husbands have also been interviewed. The experiences and stories of the 5 adolescent girls who grew up in the slum are also important for a comparison with their migrant peers and because, together with other informal conversations, they give insights about the social context of the slum, including its strong social norms and power relations.

I met up with, girls belonging to the Garo/Mandi ethnic minority directly, by visiting the beauty parlours where they work as aestheticians.

In terms of obstacles encountered, the main problem was the very little free time that garment workers have. Working hours are on average from 9 in the morning to 7-8 in the evenings, including overtime, and six days a week. Almost all the garment factories in Mirpur, where the Bengali respondents were employed, are closed only on Fridays and in some periods not even once a week. This meant that we had to concentrate most of the interviews in one day a week or on holidays.

The respondents however were very interested in the research and eager to participate. They were happy to give us their parents' addresses so that we could visit them. The migrants interviewed in Dhaka were mainly from a wide spread of districts, Bogra, Netrakona, Jamalpur, Mymensingh, Barisal and Bhola and from different villages of the same district.

With limited time available to look at the communities of origin we could only choose initially 5 girls coming from 2 different districts and focus on visiting their households and communities. Netrakona district was chosen because it includes the hilly northern areas where the Garo girls come from and Bogra district was chosen because of the profound rapport that had been established with 2 girls coming from that area. Three more households of migrant girls were also visited in Bogra.

#### *Translating and analysing interviews*

Recorded interviews have been transcribed by the research assistants in Bengali and subsequently translated in English by the research assistants and myself. Preliminary analysis of the interviews and other field data was done at the end of each period of field-work and full analysis from January 2015 onwards.

#### **4 Social profile of respondents**

This section sketches some basic social information about the 60 respondents in the study. I start with three tables showing their age, age at migration and years at destination. It has to be taken into account that some of the girls/women did not remember precisely how many years they spent at destination and some of them, especially the older women, knew their age only approximately. As can be seen from Table 1 a majority of our respondents were over 18 when they were interviewed. More important perhaps is table 2, which gives the age of first migration of the study respondents.

**Table 1 Age of respondents**

	Total	Bengali	Garo
Up to 13	2	2	0
13 to 17	12	11	1
18-24	28	24	4
< 24	18	10	8
	<b>60</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>13</b>

**Table 2 Age at first migration**

	Total	Bengali	Garo
Under 13	11	11	0
13-17	41	30	11
18-20	8	6	2
	<b>60</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>13</b>

As we looked specifically for girls who had migrated as adolescents, all the girls we interviewed had moved to Dhaka when they were under 20. Table 2 suggests that a majority of the adolescent migrants moved when they are aged between 13 and 17, but a significant number were under 13 when they made their first migrations

**Table 3 Years at destination**

	Total	Bengali	Garo
Up to 2	24	22	2
3-5	14	12	2
6-10	5	2	3
More than 10	17	11	6
	<b>60</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>13</b>

The initial plan was to interview 30 recent migrants and 30 older ones who had 10 or more years of residence at destination. As shown in table 3, instead we could interview only 17 (11 Bengali) migrants who had been living in Dhaka for more than 10 years, while the majority of the respondents, 38 (34 Bengali) had migrated up to 5 years before. This is in itself a finding that deserve some considerations:

One of the reasons we couldn't find many older migrants among the Bengali, could be that after some years of work and/or after marriage, with an improvement of their economic situation, the migrants move to a different area of the city. We found this had happened to 5 of our respondents. As we focused our search for adolescent migrants in 2 *bustee* areas, we tended to find there only those who had migrated recently, who were single and whose income is not enough for them to afford better housing.

Secondly, it seems that most of the young girls who move to the city for garment work tend to return home after a few years or move on to migration further afield. The fact that we found a high number of girls who had migrated very recently (24 up to two years before) and that during 2014, 8 of the girls interviewed left their jobs and either went back home or migrated abroad, suggests that for the majority who migrate for garment work this is not a long-term life choice.

The data in the tables are consistent with our qualitative findings that although some adolescents move to Dhaka very early, after leaving school, sometimes to follow older sisters, many return to their village in the space of few months or few years, because of the difficult work conditions, because their health deteriorates, or to get married when their parents find a suitable match. Some of the successful ones migrate internationally. We found also a few examples of respondents' sisters who moved to Dhaka at some point and went back home after few months. The fact that garment work is a form of long-term employment for only for a small percentage women/girls working there is shown also by a number of recent and less recent studies (see Hossain, 2012).

These observations are also consistent with the answers we obtained when we asked the girls their plans for the future. These are synthesised in the following table.

**Table 4 Plans for the future**

	Total	Bengali	Garo
Remain at destination	14	12	2
Return home	31	23	8
Not sure	9	7	2
Further migration	1	1	0
Further migration abroad	3	3	0
Wish to continue education	3	1	2

It must be noticed that only 14 migrants expressed the wish to remain at destination: made up of some who have married after migration, whose in-laws reside in Dhaka and who do not contemplate the possibility of returning home and others whose whole family has moved to the city. Three girls expressed the desire to migrate abroad and in the course of 2015, two of them actually migrated to Lebanon and Oman respectively. Out of three girls who wanted to continue studying, two are actually doing it: one of them is a Garo who went back home and left the job in the beauty saloon, the other one, a Bengali is studying at the Bangladesh Open University.

The situation is different for the Garo, as detailed in tables 3. It was much easier to find Garo girls who had moved some time ago and appear to have settled in Dhaka (9 out of 13 have been in Dhaka for more than 6 years). All these 9 girls are settled with husband and family and plan to go back home only in their old age.

**Table 5 Education**

	Total	Bengali	Garo
Never gone to school	10	10	0
Years 1 to 5	22	21	1
6 to 10	26	16	10
11 to 12	1	0	1
Bachelor Degree	1	0	1
Currently studying	3	1	2

As table 5 shows, most of the study respondents are not currently attending school or college. Only one of the Bengali migrants and 2 of the Garo migrants are combining work with education.

The level of education of the Bengali respondents is rather low. 10 girls haven't gone to school at all and in total 32 have not studied more than 5 years. None of them have studied more than 10 years. Most of them said they stopped studying because the family couldn't afford their education expenses and/or needed another earning member, and most have not studied since they came to Dhaka. Only woman who came to Dhaka, first as a domestic worker and who now works for an NGO has started studying again at the Bangladesh Open University. The other Bengali migrants were not even aware of this opportunity but said that they would be happy to do Friday courses if they were available.

The level of education of the Garo girls is rather higher, with most of them having studied up to class 10, 1 who obtained HSC Higher Secondary Certificate and 1 who obtained a Degree. This probably reflects the fact that some of them claimed to belong to ‘in the middle’ ‘*majhari*’ families. Some of them who did not migrate immediately after leaving school had previously worked locally. Some others had intended to work and study once in Dhaka, but had not managed to do so. One of the respondents, after a few months in the parlour, had realized that studying was not possible, and returned home. One Garo moved to Dhaka to continue studying and is now combining this with working in the parlour part time.

**Table 6 Economic condition of family of origin**

	Total	Bengali	Garo
Very poor	31	28	3
Poor	21	17	4
In the middle	8	2	6
Well-off	0	0	0
	<b>60</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>13</b>

The survey asked respondents about the reasons for migration and about their household’ sources of livelihood at the time of their migration. These answers have been used to provide estimates of the economic status of the migrants’ households of origin in table 6.

‘*Poor*’ (*gorib*): are land-less or functionally land-less rural households, whose members are engaged in seasonal daily labour, share-cropping or minor income generating activities.

‘*Very poor*’ (*khub gorib*): are households who completely lack social and economic resources. These are either female headed households, or families whose adult men suffer from some disability, or are too old or too sick to work, or they are poor households who live in disaster prone areas.

Both poor and very poor households are vulnerable.

‘*In the middle*’ (*majhari*): include households that own some land, with members, usually brothers or sisters of the girls, who either had migrated before our respondent and already contributed remittances to support their parents, or were locally employed. This means that the households are secure, stable, and do not depend only on others to get employment, or land to cultivate. Those who are ‘in the middle’ have land, fruit plants, animals and some of them are employed or run small trades.

None of the migrants households could be classified as ‘*well-off*’ (*borolok*).

As shown in the table the majority of the Bengali migrants come from vulnerable or very vulnerable households, with only two of them who can be considered ‘in the middle’. Among the Garo, 6 out of the 13 households who can be considered in the middle. This classification is, of course, very approximate. The economic situation can change quickly, as, for example, when the sudden death of an earning member can precipitate a poor household into extreme poverty.

**Table 7 Marital status**

	Total	Bengali	Garos
Never married	29	25	4
Married when migrated	2	2	0
Married after migration	14	5	9
Divorced	12	12	0
Married and divorced more than once	3	3	
	<b>60</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>13</b>

As table 7 shows about half of the study respondents are single and have never married. However initially, 3 of the 9 girls who married and divorced before migrating told us that they were un-married. We discovered that they had been or were married when we visited their families in the village. It is possible that others among the 29 girls who told us they were unmarried, had actually married before migrating but didn't want to disclose this (cases discussed extensively in section 7.3).

A total of 16 of our respondents were married women. Fourteen had married after they had migrated. One woman was married at the time of her migration and was married when we interviewed her but she did not tell us this. She left her husband after a quarrel and moved to Dhaka where we met her. After a few months she joined her husband and son again in her village of origin. 1 woman had divorced her husband because he was violent and moved to Dhaka but remarried with the same man after 2 years in Dhaka, where they now live together, Their 8 year old son lives in the village alternating between his maternal and paternal grand-parents.

In all 15 of our respondents were divorced. 8 of them had divorced before they migrated and 4 after that. Three married and divorced before migrating and then married again or were involved in relationships after migration and divorced again or were abandoned. One of them was ashamed of having been married twice and disclosed that only once every one except myself had left the room. The other two had actually been cheated into a second relationship and were left after they got pregnant.

**Table 8 Children**

	Total	Bengali	Garos
No children	39	34	5
Children living with respondent	14	8	6
Children living at origin	5	4	1
Children living with father	2	1	1
	<b>60</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>13</b>

According to the survey questionnaire data, two thirds of our respondents did not have children at the time of the interview. In the case of the Garos most of the children live with both parents in Dhaka, only one at the moment of the interview lived with the grand-parents in the village of origin, where he was sent to college, and one with the father, who was temporarily working and living out of Dhaka. In the case of the



Bengali migrants, only women who stopped working after marriage or those who have older children who can look after the younger ones, can afford to keep their children with them. Otherwise children live with the migrants' parents or in-laws at origin.

## 5 Becoming a migrant

This section discusses the circumstances of the migrant girls before they move to Dhaka and the reasons behind their decision to migrate. The aim is to understand the context in which the decisions to migrate arises and the part our respondents had in the decision making process.

I start by presenting the answers our respondents gave to the question of the survey about the reasons for migration as summarized in table 9 below. However, it is important to underline that to obtain meaningful answers to a question about the motives for migration in a survey questionnaire is very difficult. People tend to reply in a standardized way, quoting the most socially acceptable reasons for their move and the circumstances may be much more complex than this. This section then explores the longer and detailed replies that some of the girls gave to the survey questionnaire and their life stories as they illuminate the complex motivations for migration.

### 5.1 Reasons for migration

**Table 9 Reasons for migration**

	Total	Bengali	Garo
Poverty	43	38	5
Failed marriage	5	5	0
Avoid getting married	4	3	1
Continue education	4	0	4
Had to stop education	5	4	1
Wanting to help the family	17	14	3
Death of one or both parents	19	18	1
Desire for more freedom	2	1	1
Loss of house due to natural disaster/climate change	4	4	0
Learn a job	4		4
Difficult family situation	5	4	1

Poverty was quoted as a reason for migrating by the majority of the girls (43), together with the will to help their families (17). This was cited by proportionally more of the Bengali migrants than Garo. In 15 cases out of the total, the family situation was precipitated by the death of the girls' father. Four girls decided to leave after their mother's death in 3 cases because the father remarried. Five girls decided to leave because of difficult family relations, mainly due to the presence of a step-mother or step-father, and in 2 cases because of physical or psychological abuse.

Another important trigger of the decision to migrate appears to be climate change (mainly river erosion and seasonal flooding). This was mentioned as a reason by girls who come from Southern districts, like Bhola and Barisal, and from some areas of Jamalpur and Shariatpur districts.

By listening to the girls' words it appears clearly how the decision to migrate is due to many interconnected factors. 'Poverty' itself is a condition which includes different situations and circumstances. Most migrant girls talked of poverty as a situation of 'obhab' (lack) that in most severe cases was connected with the death or illness of the family breadwinner, the lack of support from brothers, some environmental disaster, or a sudden emergency such as having to pay a large dowry for a daughter's marriage.

*My father died, the family couldn't survive, with my brothers income the family couldn't survive, so because of 'obhab' (dire poverty) I came. (Mily)*

*My mother had mental problems and my father was dumb, we didn't own land, my brother was a daily labourer, our house was threatened by flooding, I had to leave. (Lima).*

This is consistent with older and recent studies where poverty appears as the driving force of migration for garment work (Amin et al,1997; Kabeer and Mahmud 2004a, Kibria 1995, 1998, Feldman 2009). It also emerges however that girls' do not perceive their choice as a forced one. By saying '*I had to leave*' they want to stress how they felt responsible for their families and that they wanted to contribute to their livelihood. Some of them willingly gave up their studies to look for work. Others expressed hopes in a better future and awareness that migration might open more opportunities for them and their families.

*I had to help my own family, my father died, I don't have brothers, we needed money, there is no possibility to work in the village, I needed to work in garments to make some money, because we were in need, nobody would have given me money if I stayed in the village. (Khaleda).*

Lamia used to work as a house-maid in the village, at some point she realized how this would not secure her livelihood:

*'I was only getting food three times a day and no money, nothing else...in this way my life wouldn't improve. One has to think at the future... there were two of us working there and the other girl said: I am going to Dhaka, are you coming?'*

Difficult family relationships included cases of girls who had lost one of their parents and did not get along with a step mother or step father, felt uncared for or were mistreated and girls who suffered from their parents' abusive relationship

*There was not a good environment at home. My father used to beat my mother, I didn't feel well at home, so I came. My mum told me: you'd better stay in Dhaka (Nilima).*

Nine girls migrated to Dhaka after a failed marriage and 5 of them clearly mentioned the failure of their marriage among the reasons of their decision to leave. They all had similar experiences. They married at a very young age between 12 and 14. Some discovered as soon as they reached their husband's place that he was married already. In other cases the husband took a second wife and abandoned the first one. In the remaining cases the girls decide to leave because their husband and in laws were violent.

As Nurjahan recalls: *They married me off when I was very little. At that time I was just busy playing...My mother in law started from the beginning mistreating me, I was crying a lot. For the wedding they gave me an old sari, old jewellery.*

Nurjahan finally divorced but found herself in a very difficult situation back home. *'Then, I stayed in my home village for 3 months at my elder brother's place, but I didn't like it...my sister in law was looking at me in such a way...so I came to Dhaka'.*

Even in cases in which is not the wife who can be blamed for a broken marriage, her reputation and the prestige of her family are damaged and her chances of marrying again while remaining in the village are very reduced. This explains why some girls did not initially mention having been married: they did not want to jeopardize their future opportunities by letting us and other people in the area know about their first marriage. Moreover, for poor families a divorced young daughter may become a liability. Migration seems to offer multiple advantages: a chance to escape the social stigma at home, the possibility of starting a new life where no one knows your circumstances and the possibility to contribute to one's family well being.

It was only for a small minority that education was a motive for migration. All those (4) who migrated with the intention of continuing their studies were Garo.

*Rina: I thought I would work and study, I wanted to pass SSC and then become a nurse.* Like Rina they were all hoping that they would be able to work and study at the same time but only one of them has had the opportunity to do so, probably favoured by the fact that the owner of the parlour where she works part-time is a Garo herself and a far-relative of her.

## **5.2 The decision to migrate**

By listening to girls' migration stories we understand not just the multiplicity of circumstances behind their migration but also the complexity of the situation in which the decision to migrate matures. The decision is in some way generated by a lack of alternatives, but at the same time it comes after a conscious evaluation of different possibilities and as a response to a chance.

*Sharmin: After the separation I left my child there and I returned to my parents' house and stayed there for 1 and a half month then, I had a cousin in Dhaka, I could not stay without my son, I was crying, I was thinking a lot, I was nervous I was thinking: I have a child, the family is broken, what shall I do now where I would live! My parents are old, they cannot even survive themselves, how would they feed me? Then when I got in touch with my cousin I said: you live in Dhaka, is there any job I*

*could do? Is there anything? She said that she could help me get a job in a garments factory, where she worked.*

The way the girls talk about the decision to migrate also confirms that none of them were sent to Dhaka against their will. At one end of the continuum we have girls who decided to leave without consulting their parents and either lied to them or pretended they were just temporarily going to visit relatives.

*After I stopped studying I came to Dhaka, I thought I would do something for myself. After my father tried to give me in marriage, I came to Dhaka, I stayed at my aunt's and then after sometime I looked for a job and I found it. (Shamima)*

In most cases the decision was discussed with parents and accepted by them. Some also report that their parents tried to discourage them and persuade them not to leave.

At the other extreme we have situations where the parents proposed that their daughters migrate and took the initiative of arranging accommodation and work for them through relatives.

Sangida agreed to move to Dhaka when she was 8:

*...at that time we didn't have land or property, in some way we passed the days without eating, the family was surviving thanks to the occasional help of people. My father said that one of his cousins was living in Dhaka and that they needed one girl to look after their two girl children and that I could go to Dhaka, I would be fine there, what was I doing at home? ...At that time I was little, I though...maybe if I go to Dhaka I'll be fine... here I starve, I don't get good food...*

Social networks are important in the decision making process. Relatives, neighbours or acquaintances living or, in some ways, connected to people living or working in the capital had been essential in providing migrants the concrete opportunity to migrate by facilitating the journey and/or offering them a job and/or in finding an occupation at destination. These networks can also become a source of social control for migrant girls. In line with Heissler (2013) research we found that the migrants who migrated to join relatives, especially married sisters and brothers in law, and were initially living with them, felt very much constrained in terms of mobility.

## **6 Being an adolescent migrant**

### **6.1 Arriving and settling down in the city**

All the Bengali girls migrants had moved from their rural homes directly to the capital city and most of them were still residing in the slum area where they first arrived, but not always with the same people and in the same house. Some of those who moved to Dhaka with a relative, after a few months felt uneasy with his/her family and moved into a rented room alone or with other girls. Another kind of accommodation is what is called 'mess' where one or more girls live with a family and pay them a fixed amount that includes food and accommodation. Some of those who married after migrating, and some of the older migrants, have managed to move to a better area of Pallabi, where both Baunibandh *bustee* and Bhola *bustee* are located. Some of the Garo moved in with relatives or acquaintances initially, but not in slum areas. Most of

them underwent a year-long period of training, or more, when they resided in the parlour and received only some pocket money for food expenses.

Most of the girls reported that, especially soon after arriving at destination, they were badly missing their family in the village and their parents' emotional support. Overall they felt lost at the beginning in the city and found it difficult to adjust to the harsh living conditions in a city slum. Girls complained about the food they are given when we live with a family who hosts them in what they call 'mess', and about their health. In fact many girls have reported having fallen ill after a few months of permanence in Dhaka with jaundice, hepatitis, food poisoning, diarrhoea.

*At first I felt very bad after coming to Dhaka, I was crying for home and for mum, coming was very stressful. I had a lot of problems with food, I could not eat the rice they were cooking (in the 'mess'), the vegetable and the lentils were just water, I could not eat the rice, so I ate only bread for 2 months. (Lamia)*

*We don't like the electricity blackouts, we have problems with the water...in the slum sometimes we can't get water. In summer it is very hot because of the tin roofs. We feel bad sometimes because we had to leave our dear ones at home.(Nurjahan)*

*I did not like Dhaka when I first came, because I did not know any road, nothing. I was just going to the factory with my cousin and after work, I returned back to the house with her. I didn't not know anything of Dhaka so I didn't like anything I could not understand the language of the people. (Ashma)*

After sometime, some of the migrants begin to appreciate some aspects of the social life in the capital:

*Whenever I wanted I could go to the market. When I felt bad I could go to the cinema hall to watch movies with my friends. That means there was no one to impose restrictions upon me. At home, my parents were saying: you can't go here or you can't go there, but here in Dhaka I can go to the cinema hall to watch movie and I walk to the factory with my friends. I like it.(Sharmin)*

*We like Dhaka because we can meet different kind of people, we like to go to the cinema...the children's park...the botanical garden. We like Dhaka even more because we can make money. (Nurjahan)*

We can say that most young migrant girls perceive the opportunities as well as the disadvantages and dangers of living and working in the capital. Dhaka is seen as place where there are multiple occasions of encounter, where different kind of goods are easily accessible, where it is possible to enjoy more freedom of movement because parents are not there to control and forbid. Girls do actually go to visit some of Dhaka attractions, the botanical garden and the children's park, and they go to watch movies at the cinemas. One of their favourite means of entertainment is to go to the market and buy cosmetics and dresses. On the other hand as many have said, especially for those who have just arrived and are at the lowest level of the pay scale in the factory, the salary is just enough to cover one's basic expenses and provide for the family back home. As Jamila powerfully said: *'Sometimes I would like to eat something nice but I can't, If I spend money for myself I will not be able to send money home, so I*

*think that here I can eat in one way or the other but at home if I don't send money they would starve.* The reality is that most of them spend their time between 'office', as they call the factory, and their room in the slum, because of the long working hours and the lack of free time, because they are tired, or because they cannot afford going anywhere for lack of money.

The place of residence in Dhaka, of course matters. Most of the young girls we interviewed live in two *bustee* in Pallabi, in Dhaka city: Buaniabandh and Bhola bustee. The first one was built on government land at the end of the 80s by some NGOs that obtained the land from the state and assigned a small plot to different households. It is better served than the second one where people are on private land at risk of eviction and where living conditions are worse in terms of clean water, toilet facilities, cooking facilities.

The Garo migrants, at arrival, are somewhat in a better situation, especially those who join relatives in different parts of Dhaka, who had been living in the capital for long time and whose economic situation tends to be less precarious. For those who cannot count on already established social networks in the city, accommodation is usually provided at work premises. Big saloons have their own hostels, while smaller ones accommodate the girls in the parlour itself. Girls are given a small monthly amount to cover the food costs, sleep on the floor of one of the rooms and prepare their own food in a small kitchen. This period of apprentice can last for one to two years. Considering that some Garo move to Dhaka hoping to be able to fund their studies through work, finding themselves in a situation where they can hardly go out from a place where they live, and working for up to 10 hours a day every day of the week, can be frustrating.

As Shopna, 15 years old, said:

*When I first arrived, I didn't like anything. I had to leave my parents, alone I didn't enjoy anything, I was missing my brothers and sisters, I was not used to live alone. I had never cooked for myself so I didn't like it. I'd like to go back home. I miss being and playing with my friends. I don't like Dhaka, I feel like being in a zoo, in a prison. I have no freedom, no holidays. I can't walk around, I don't have time for myself. I though I would get one day holiday at some point and on that day I would go out...I was hoping that in Dhaka I would have been able to study at Open University and work...Until now that hope did not come true, but I still have that desire.*

Shopna, in fact, went back home after about one year in Dhaka and enrolled again at school at the end of 2014. In November 2015 after obtaining the SSC, she was considering moving again to Dhaka again to earn some money to continue studying.

## **6.2 Finding a job**

There is a wide literature on work conditions in the RMG sector in Bangladesh, discussing in details all the aspects of this type of employment in the factories both in the Export Processing Zones (EPZ) and in smaller and less regulated factories, evaluating the changes and improvements that have occurred over time and the impact on different aspects of the workers well-being (Hossain, 2012).

Without wanting to draw a comprehensive account, here I focus on the perceptions of the girls we interviewed and on the issues that emerged from our conversations with them.

Most of those who migrated to Dhaka with the intentions of working in a garment factory, managed to find a job soon after arrival with the help of some acquaintances. Some who arrived in Dhaka in their early teens had to wait longer before being employed because of their young age, and worked as house-maids in the meantime. Some others managed to be employed even if visibly underage and reported that they had to hide in the bathrooms if some visitors came to the factory.

The newly arrived, completely unskilled, are employed as helpers, after sometime they are promoted to sewing machine operators and only after some years of experience they become 'quality controller'. The work conditions vary from factory to factory in terms of regularity and punctuality in receiving the salary, working hours and remuneration of overtime, possibility of taking leave, and availability of other benefits.

Lamia, in Dhaka since 2007, worked as quality controller in a factory in Mirpur. She said she was lucky because in her factory they treated her well even if her daily routine was quite physically demanding: including overtime she worked from 8 in the morning to 10 in the evening with one hour lunch break for a salary of about 12000 taka per month (including the overtime pay).

Sharmin recalls how difficult had been her first few months of work:

*I was standing up from 8 a.m. to 11 pm, spinning thread (suta kata) and doing other tasks. Then I would go to my cousin's home. After reaching the house, I would help my cousin to cook and do household chores. I was with her for 6/7 months doing this. I stayed with my cousin for 7 months, my salary was 1260 taka or something like that. I gave money to my cousin for food, I was spending the money to buy soap and oil, I couldn't save a single penny for myself I was just earning enough to eat and sustain myself. Then I got sick with jaundice and I went back home for some time.*

After some years of work, with the acquisition of some skills and the promotion from helper to machine operator, workers obtain a salary increment and their working and living conditions improve. They can afford to send money at home but they still have to make sacrifices in terms of their own consumption. There has been recent legislative interventions in favour of garment worker. After the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013, the minimum wage has been increased, the level of security raised and more controls have been put in place in the factories (although it is difficult to say if in all of them). However, as happened to 2 of our respondents, small factories may open and close in the space of a few months, leaving workers overnight without a job and without any compensation. We learnt from the girls that, without doing overtime, the salary of a machine operator amounts to more or less 6000 taka, 2500 to 3000 have to be spent for food and accommodation. Those who send remittances manage to send 2000 to 3000 monthly. So, there is not much left for oneself or for savings. Many girls complain of being mistreated and reprimanded often and are aware that because of the huge labour supply in the sector, they can lose their job any time if they don't comply with their work environment and conditions.

*When you work in a garment factory, if you are late they reproach you, they insult you, they don't pay you regularly. They give you a daily target, you have to make from 100 to 200 pieces. If you can't they reproach you. (Nurjahan)*

When Lamia asked for a day of leave to accompany us to her village when we visited her mum she was told: *if you don't come to work on that day, you might as well not to come anymore.*

The situation of Garo migrants in beauty parlours is also quite variable, depending on many factors. Big, more structured parlours ensure better working conditions. A newly arrived worker will have to bear with a period of apprenticeship where she will be given just enough to cover food costs, she won't have holidays and will have to live in the parlour or the hostel attached. Usually the workers have a day off during the week and 4-5 days holiday in the Christmas period, when they can go home. In the small parlour where most of the girls I interviewed work, they can be asked to give up the weekly holiday or the Christmas leave if there are very big jobs, such as a wedding, or any sudden need by friends of the owner.

### **6.3 Developing friendships and relationships: opportunities and risks**

*They are shy at the beginning, they don't talk and don't go out much, then they buy a mobile phone and their life starts.*

This quote from a FGD with a group of men and women who had been living in Bauniabandh slum since its foundation exemplifies a common view about the situation of migrant girls in the slum: shy and fearful at the beginning, smart and at the risk of becoming out of control after sometime. The situation is in reality much more nuanced and contradictory than this. Mobile phones are an essential means of communication but social life in the capital presents risks and threats as well as opportunities that girls experiment with.

Friendships easily develop between girls who work in the same factory or live together in a 'mess', or share a room in the slum. They visit each other in the respective houses and despite the limitations discussed above, those who can spare some money enjoy going to buy cosmetics and dresses with friends. Profound affective friendly relationships may also develop that become sources of support in times of need. Lamia for example acknowledged with gratitude, Suma's economic help during her sister's illness. The two friends have recently migrated together to Oman.

Friendships and relationships with boys are also potentially 'easier' in Dhaka than in the villages.

*In Dhaka we have more opportunities to mix with boys. There is more freedom since our parents are not here. We have occasions to talk to boys. For example, say that I am a helper (unskilled worker) in a factory and next to me there is a boy who also works as a helper. Then there are machine operators, input officers, all of them are boys. We talk freely to them .....we can also flirt with them. (Jamila)*



Girls and boys have more occasions and spaces for encounter than in the villages and the use of mobile phones is an important means for getting in touch, and starting a relationship. However the apparent ease with which is possible to entertain phone conversations and fall in love is counterbalanced by the strong social control present in the slum, even if in forms different from the village. The fear of losing one's face and reputation with behaviours that are contrary to the recognised social norms is quite strong, as well as a preoccupation with keeping intact one's good name among relatives and villagers back home.

*If they know that a girl earns 5000 taka per month the people in my village would say: 'she must be a prostitute'. That's what they think, That's why we don't have any more a good reputation in the village. We can't talk to anyone with our head up, we have to talk keeping own head down. (Lamia)*

It is understandable that most of the girls we talked to declared that the main reason they came to Dhaka was to work to help their families and that they are not interested in any forms of entertainment. They smiled and giggled when we asked them if they had boyfriends but the majority admitted only to phone conversations with someone. There is also widespread mistrust in boys/men and fears of being cheated by young and older suitors. This is in many cases justified by their own or other's experiences.

As Lamia said: *In Dhaka..... relationships with boys... there is a different 'system'. Actually they don't have relationships...they just pass their time. After sometime you will realize that they are married and they have children at home, but they flirt -just to enjoy.*

Another girl said that boys run after girls who have money and that they don't consider those who live in the slums: *The bad thing is that this is a slum environment, the good thing is that boys would not disturb girls who live in the slum because they would think that these girls are dirty and that there is no advantage in mixing with slum people.*

As a consequence, most of the migrant girls we talked to do not openly take advantage of the potential opportunities that Dhaka might offer and tend to keep a very restrained attitude. Others do engage in more or less secret contacts and intimacies. Some 'love stories' have all the characteristics of a secret, contrasted, romantic engagement like those seen in TV romantic movies and comedies. Rita and Sanjit for example have been 'in love' for about 2 years during which they met only twice. The boy's father disapproves of their relationship and tried to separate them, first by arranging Sanjit's marriage with someone else and then by sending him to work abroad. Rita is divided between fulfilling her love dreams and trying to help her family. In the first occasion we met Rita she was happy and said that her family was better too after her migration. She said that she wouldn't have been able to advance so much in her life if she stayed with her parents. When we talked to her again, after a few months she was worried and concerned about the future, she also cried while telling us that she didn't know whether to try to pursue her 'love story' or focus on her work and try to help her family back home.

In contrast, Shamima is an example of a fulfilled 'love story'. She married at destination after overcoming her and her husband's parent's opposition. These

marriages are usually labelled as ‘love marriages’ because the bride and the groom, rather than their parents/relatives took the initiative in arranging the marriage. In these cases the migrant settles in Dhaka or were the in-laws reside. Shamima believes that things are changing with respect to premarital relationships and marriage arrangements and talks positively about her own experience:

*Now is the mobile phone era, there is internet, now is not an issue, now much flirting happens through ‘wrong number’<sup>2</sup> Before nothing like this used to happen. There were not mobile phones, people used to write letters, now nobody does...Most of the times the guardians decide about someone’s marriage but nowadays there are more love marriages, this is the ‘era of love’.*

Besides this (and others) ‘happy ending’, the stories of the young migrants we interviewed show also, in line with their own preoccupations about the predatory behaviour of young men, the risks and problems they face, some of which they share with non migrant adolescent.

Kamila, who was born in Baunibandh slum, was forced to get married at 16 to a boy she had been going out with for a while. She had been caught twice in the company of her ‘boyfriend’ in an open area where young people use to meet for tea and snacks, by a group of young neighbours. The gang forced them to get married, after demanding that her parents pay some monetary compensation for the damage to the neighbourhood’s prestige due to Kamila’s illicit behaviour. After two years Kamila decided to divorce her husband and managed to do that only with the support of a local NGO who acted as a mediator with her parents and the local ‘leaders’.

Jamila, a migrant, still bears the consequences of her ‘rebellious’ attitude. In Dhaka, in the first months of 2014, she was learning hip hop in a dance club that turned out to be a recruitment place for girls to be sent to work in ‘night clubs’ and probably also to be trafficked to work in brothels out of the country. After some episodes that convinced her uncle and brother that she was at risk of becoming a sex-worker and being trafficked to India by the people she met in the club, her brother took her back home where she lived for some months under constant surveillance and was forbidden to use the mobile phone to prevent her from getting in touch with her acquaintances in the club.

Some migrants who married at destination also report negative experiences. Jaya is approximately 32 years old and left her village about 14 years ago with her 2 years old daughter after her husband remarried and had a child from his second wife. Jaya’s parents wanted her to leave her daughter with them and remarry but she decided instead to move to Dhaka.

*I didn’t know anything and I didn’t know any one but when my parents decided that I had to marry again and that they would take care of my daughter I said that I would never leave her and that I would never remarry... When I arrived in Dhaka, I didn’t have a house, I didn’t have money, I didn’t know where to go...so I married and I had*

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<sup>2</sup> When a boy sees a girl he likes and manages to get her phone number from some mutual acquaintance, he calls her pretending to have called a wrong number and tries to start a conversation. Girls might do the same if they spot on the road a boy they like.

*two sons. I married him 3-4 days after I arrived in Dhaka, he gave me money, in this way he got hold of me.*

At arrival, Jaya met a man who offered to help her and married him. She is now working as a daily labourer breaking bricks, she doesn't have the strength to work every day and her daughter, who is now approximately 16, is the de facto the main bread-winner of the family that includes also 2 young boys (8 and 11 years old) born from Jaya's second marriage. Jaya's second husband still lives in Dhaka but with a new wife and he doesn't look after Jaya and her sons.

Monira plainly said that the man whom she married and divorced in Dhaka after she came back from 3 years in Lebanon was only interested in her savings.

These findings resonate with the general account in section 2 of the social context of the slums and the particular kind of vulnerabilities that concern adolescent girls and single young migrant women. As we will discuss in section 7.3, there are differences between younger and older migrants and between those who have been married and the never-married in how they are positioned in society. As a consequence there are differences in the more or less wide room for manoeuvre they have in managing their lives and dealing with social norms and obligations.

I have to underline here that what has been discussed so far in this section concerns only the Bengali migrants. All the Garo married migrants had instead married after migrating with men they met at destination, or with old boyfriends. Garo society is matri-local and matrilineal, marriages used to be arranged and the family of the bride had much more negotiating power than the husband's. Nowadays, however, especially those who live in Dhaka, marry whom they chose and parents, most of the time, just ratify the decision. Two of our respondents had married a Muslim man.

#### **6.4 Supporting the left behind**

More than 2/3 of the migrants we interviewed (45 of which 35 Bengali and 10 Garo) have left either both parents, or one of them and some siblings behind in the village of origin. Five migrants (4 Bengali and 1 Garo) left behind their own children, who are living either with their parents or their in laws. Nine migrants do not have any close family member left in the village of origin. This is the case of 4 girls who left behind cousins and 5 girls whose siblings and parents (sometimes only one of them) have all moved to Dhaka, following one of their children.

**Table -10. Remittances**

	Tot	bengali	garo
Currently sending	33	26	7
Not sending but sent	10	7	3
Never sent	17	14	3
	<b>60</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>13</b>

As we can see from the table above a little more than half of the respondents were supporting some family members in the village when we met them. Those who were not sending remittances included:

- a) the youngest migrants who had arrived in the capital only a few months before we interviewed them, who were not in the condition of sending money home, either because they did not work yet (5 of them) or because they earned very little money.
- b) Older migrants like Jaya (see p.23), who hardly earns enough to support herself and her 3 children, and have never sent remittances.
- c) Respondents who belong to households whose members over time have joined those who had initially migrated to Dhaka and now all live in Dhaka: for example young girls followed first by their sisters, and then by a widowed or divorced mother or by both parents.
- d) Girls who decided to migrate to escape abusive situations and conflict with a step-parent and who do not want to send remittances.
- e) Older migrants, settled in Dhaka, who used to send remittances and do not do it anymore either because don't have anyone left back home or because they have stopped working and live out of the husband's earnings.

According to Bengali social norms, with marriage a woman is supposed to become part of her husband's family and does not have any responsibility towards her own. Interestingly, however, many migrant girls said that their parents could not count at all on their married brothers even though these are the ones who should be responsible for their old parents and younger siblings.

Some migrants, like Lamia, and Sangida, and Rita have decided to postpone their own marriage to be able to help their parents and younger siblings in their studies.

*The situation after marriage is different, then I will belong to someone else, I will depend on someone else. Then I will have to do what my husband says. After marriage if my husband allows me to work, I will, otherwise I won't. If I can't work, then I will not be able to help my family. I won't be able to help my mother and to pay for my sister's study. That's why I don't get married, If I did my mum and sister will be in trouble. That's why I came to Dhaka: so that my sister will be able to do what I couldn't do. First I will educate my sister. It's my decision. (Lamia)*

Garo social norms about the responsibilities of grown-up children are different. They frequently keep supporting their parents even after they have married. The newly wed Garo couple usually settles on its own in town and in laws usually live in the village. In the case of Garo in, long-term migration has visibly changed the villages of origin. In some of them every household has one or more members who have migrated either to Dhaka or to other towns and the flow of remittances has been substantial. Brick houses have been built in the villages of origin where in some cases only the elderly reside for most of the year.

## **7 The impact of migration**

### **7.1 How girls evaluate the effects of migration for themselves**

So far we have discussed some aspects of the migrant girls' lives before they migrated and at destination and we have provided an account of their experiences as they became adolescent migrants. In this section, we'll try to understand the impact that

migration had on their lives and on their household of origin, by starting from their own evaluation.

From the answers to the survey questionnaire it emerges that 44 (31 Bengali and 13 Garo) out of 60 interviewees consider their present working and living condition better than before they migrated. In particular: for 45 of them, there has been an improvement from the economic point of view; earning a salary, even if low, allows them to cover their basic daily expenses for food and accommodation (47), to contribute to support their families back home (33), and to provide education to some of their younger siblings (12) or children (3).

A more contradictory picture emerges from the FGD conducted in one of AB centres with 10 migrants, all residing in the Bhola slum. Jamila talks of some improvements:

*Yes, there has been some improvements: before I could eat one day and I had to starve for two, now it's not like that, now I send money also to my parents and they can eat too. My two younger brothers can go to school and they can also attend some events at the school, even if they have to contribute with some money.*

Nurjahan acknowledges that if her target was to help the family, that objective has been achieved but on the other hand, her own life is worse than before:

*I thought that, by working, I would have been able to send money home. That hope has been fulfilled. Actually, I came to work and I am working so that hope is fulfilled. ...but I am worse than before, I can't see my parents and my brothers and sisters...If I stayed my life could have been better, I could have studied...*

About two thirds of the migrants underlined that migration and work had a positive impact on their sense of self-hood and self-esteem, that their mobility has increased, that they have more decision making power in their daily life. Sangida who migrated 19 years before as a maid, at 8 years of age, and is now working as a cleaner in an office, claimed that her family back home treats her as a 'boy'. This means that all the important family decisions are taken by listening to and following her advice. Those who migrated much earlier and earn a higher income seem especially to feel entitled to have more say in all the decisions concerning their own and their family members' lives. Even the youngest claim that with migration they have become more clever, capable of standing on their own feet and of managing their daily lives. Those who married at destination attribute to having married and having had children an improvement in their personal situation.

When this issue of migrant working girls/women' status is considered in terms of how they are perceived more widely, the picture is complex. It is not desirable for a young unmarried adolescent to live far away from her parents and relatives and without guardianship. Young people are considered prone to temptations and transgression and those who live on their own are especially viewed with suspicion. On the other hand the migrants' neighbours that we talked to acknowledged that those who move because of economic necessity do not necessarily become spoiled and that they are actually an important resource for their families. It seems that especially in areas where migration for garment work affects a large number of families, it is becoming more socially accepted than in the past. It remains true, though, that as I already

mentioned, girls' migration is always justified as due to economic necessity and linked to poverty. The lack of means of livelihood and the need to provide for one's family justifies what is otherwise considered an inappropriate decision.

During some meetings with grade 9 students in the area of origin of some of the migrants, the girls were asked if they had relatives or family members who had migrated to Dhaka for garment work and they were all reluctant to admit it. In Birisiri a town in Northern Bangladesh very close to the border with India, where we visited the relatives of some Garo migrants, we were also told by some students that migration is only for those who are so poor that they cannot afford to continue their studies.

## 7.2 Impact of migration on the sending households.

We have seen in section 6.6 that only 33 migrants (26 Bengali and 7 Garo) are currently sending remittances to the left behind households in the villages of origin, while 10 migrants (7 Bengali and 3 Garo) had been sending remittances at one time, but were not currently. Overall 43 migrants are or have been sending remittances and this is consistent with table 11 below, where we can see that two thirds of the interviewees, 39 (31 Bengali and 8 Garo) claimed that their family of origin's condition had improved<sup>3</sup>.

**Table 11 Condition of family of origin**

	Total	Bengali	Garo
Improved	39	31	8
Did not improve	13	11	2

If we look at the following table, we see that 35 migrants claimed that the improvement was economic, but it must be noted that those who mentioned an improvement in the economic situation of their family referred almost exclusively to an increased capacity to cover basic daily expenses and health emergencies. In spite of the fact that most of the migrants claimed that their objective for the future was to save enough money to invest in assets at origin (e.g. in land) there is not much evidence from older Bengali migrants that they have been able to do this.

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<sup>3</sup> Three Garo migrants could not answer the question because they had not been in Dhaka enough to earn money and to be able to send remittances. 5 Bengali girls did not answer either because they had not been in Dhaka long enough or because they did not have anyone they felt responsible for at home.

**Table 12 How the condition of family of origin improved**

		Total	Bengali	Garo
1	Economically	35	28	7
2	Education	19	16	3
3	Social status	8	8	
4	Possibility to respond to emergencies	7	6	1
5	Other	5	4	1

It is significant that in 19 cases the improvement concerns the education of siblings or children left behind and this may improve the longer term prospects of these families.

### **7.3 Migration and marriage choices**

The account so far of the experiences of girls moving to work in Dhaka has drawn attention to the way in which migration intersects in very different ways with marriage and marriage choices. For the Bengali girls we found the following diverse experiences and situations.

#### *Migration can contribute to the postponing of marriage*

All the unmarried migrants expressed their intention to get married in the future, and to do this in their village of origin, according to their parents' choice, and at point in 2 to 5 years time.

*Tasmina: Now I stand on my feet, I like to work, now I understand everything. It's not time to marry yet. When the right time will come my parents will be there. When they will say it's time, I'll marry.*

Even if the migrants said that they expected their parents to arrange their marriage, they also said that they wanted to wait long enough to be able to save some money from their work. Some of them claimed that if they hadn't migrated they would have probably been already married. In rural areas when a girl reaches puberty and stops going to school, the preferred choice would be for her parents to find a suitable partner and marry her while she is young enough not to have to pay a big amount of dowry, but the stories we collected suggest that migration for work may constitute for poor parents a possible alternative to marrying their daughters in their early teens.

#### *A failed marriage together with the lack of economic resources of the family of origin is among the triggers of migration for young women.*

As we described earlier a divorce/separation, even if the girl is not responsible for it, brings shame and damages the reputation of the girl and of the girl's family and diminishes the chances of a second marriage in the same area. Migration thus becomes a means of escaping the social stigma and increases the probability of remarriage for the girl. Once in Dhaka she can easily pretend to be unmarried. Moreover in this way, a divorced woman can become an asset rather than a liability for the family of origin. Some of those who migrated after a failed marriage, however, did not seem so eager to find a new marriage partner: some of them were afraid that they wouldn't been able to support their families anymore and some of them were resigned to the fact that their life had already gone in the wrong direction and wanted

instead to be able to help their younger siblings. Also, some of the older migrants especially were well aware of the negative experiences of some women who had remarried in Dhaka. They were afraid to be spoiled and cheated by a new husband and for this reason ruled out the possibility of marrying again.

*Some migrants marry after migration with someone they meet at destination.*

These marriages are usually labelled as 'love marriages' because the bride and the groom, rather than their parents/relatives take the initiative in arranging the marriage. We found only a few cases like these among the Bengali migrants. Some of these marriages happen sometime after the first encounter and entail negotiations between the respective families. Some others, like those of Jaya and Shima may follow an occasional meeting on the way to the factory or somewhere in the slum. According to Jaya and Shima they had each decided to accept a marriage proposition soon after their arrival in Dhaka, just because they felt in need of protection. Drawing together these different scenarios it seems that marriage and marriage choices assume a different value and have different characteristics in the lives of the migrants we interviewed according to their age and position in the life course and their marital status at migration.

First of all, marriage retains its importance as a social institution and is perceived as a fundamental step in everyone's life trajectory. Listening to the words of the youngest unmarried migrants it is clear the extent to which they foresee getting married as the main short term objective in their lives, only temporarily subordinated to earning an income and contributing to their family's livelihood.

The situation differs for young women who migrate to Dhaka after a failed marriage: in some ways they have already fulfilled a social and religious obligation by having been married at least once and even if a second marriage would be desirable, they feel legitimated to have different objectives, such as supporting their old parents or helping their younger siblings in their studies. Lamia, for example, after divorcing her husband and losing the guardianship of her daughter, repeatedly stressed that she prefers to look after her mother rather than marrying again and in order to secure her mother and herself a better future. After the fieldwork had ended she migrated to Oman where she can earn and save more than by working in Dhaka. Her plan is now to buy some assets in her village of origin and look after her mother and her sister's child.

Yet, for some migrants having a husband is still the best possible choice. Sharmin migrated after divorcing from a violent, abusive husband. Even though she enjoyed many aspects of her life in Dhaka without him, at some point, under pressure from her parents she went back to him. She has become the main breadwinner and the one whose income materially supports the whole family, but Sharmin describes her husband as '*a shadow over her head*', by which we understand that having a husband is a way to be able to retain guardianship over and take care of her son: that he is a protector. Other young migrants approved Sharmin's choice, saying that young women need a husband's protection from other men's attentions and in order to safeguard their honour.

This protective function is much less needed by older women, like Jaya, who after having been married twice, now proudly says, using another significant expression: '*I*



*don't need any umbrella over my head'*. She struggles daily to make ends meet and to feed herself and three children, but she feels realistically that being married would not make any differences. In some way her age (about 32) and her previous experiences socially legitimate her choice of being formally as well as substantially the family head.

## **8 Sources of vulnerability and protection**

From the analysis of the social context of the slum where most of the migrant Bengali girls live and from the daily experiences of both the migrants and the non-migrants, it emerges quite clearly that as adolescents they share the same constraints in terms of mobility, possibility of cross-gender interaction, the same risks in terms of physical and sexual violence and ultimately the same social sanctions when and if they do not conform to the social norms which regulate the transition to adulthood, sexuality and marriage. These norms deny and repress cross gender premarital attraction and intimacy and limit the possibilities of experiencing friendly relationships and developing reciprocal knowledge between boys and girls before marriage. Kamila marriage (see pag. 23) is an example of how strong social control is in the slums even for those who had been born in the area.

There is a significant added source of vulnerability for the migrant working girls. Jamila's story is a powerful example of the further risks that migrant girls can incur if they lack '*an umbrella over their heads*' as one of Jamila's neighbour said, referring to her. The symbolic umbrella missing over Jamila's head is the presence of a close, possibly male, adult who would function as a 'guardian' by disciplining and protecting her. This is a condition common to most of the young migrants we interviewed that distinguishes them from other adolescents who had been born in the slum or had migrated and live with family members. Even more vulnerable among the group of migrants are those who do not have any male relatives (father, brother, uncle) or reliable neighbour in the village of origin who can take care of their female relatives (mother, sisters...etc). Having male siblings or relatives is commonly considered a source of security even if paradoxically many of the migrants who have older brothers residing in the village could not count on them. These relatives also sometimes travel to Dhaka to intervene in the lives of the migrant girls.

A second important source of vulnerability is that migrant girls, as new comers to the slums, live on rent. Thus, unlike the households who are '*istanio*' (local, belong to the area since the beginning) they occupy a lower layer in the power hierarchy of the slum. They can easily become homeless, for example if they do not conform to the unwritten rules that govern the slum. This explains why all the girls interviewed said that one of the most important improvement in their situation would be to have their 'own place' to live.

Thirdly as newcomers to the slums migrants are not aware of the different services that are available (usually provided by NGOs) and sometimes cannot access them because the NGOs opening times do not take into account their working schedule. To our knowledge there are no NGO or charitable organizations that specifically target migrant adolescents in the two slum areas where the research was carried out. In Mirpur, AWAJ Foundation, an organization founded by a garment worker, is active

and works with women garment workers. None of our respondents in Bauniabandh and Bholā *bustee*, however, knew of its existence.

Overall the situation of the migrant adolescents working in the garment industry in Dhaka is characterized by insecurity and precariousness. The factory may suddenly close down, health emergencies may force the girl to leave (and lose) the job and return home, like all those who live in *bustee*, they are at risk of eviction. As we observed by following some of the migrants over more than one year, their situations, as well as that of their families are also quite volatile. The fate and well-being of a girl migrant and those of her family can change overnight. They are affected and by many different factors and events: the sudden death of parents or siblings at home for example, the illness of children, getting married or divorced, the intrusive surveillance of neighbours, all can completely modify the migrant's perspective and objectives.

What has been said so far in this section concerns mostly the Bengali migrants, the main source of vulnerability for the Garo is their belonging to an ethnic minority and the perception of being discriminated as such that translates into the impossibility for example to own and run their own beauty parlour. Only a few of them have managed to do so.

The Garo are more secure in terms of working and living conditions and can usually count on a wider network of relatives and family members who reside in Dhaka. The Catholic and Protestant Church and some missionary congregations active in the capital and in the area of origin of the Garo migrants constitute an important source of social security for the Garo migrants, besides providing employment opportunities. Many Garo women work as maids in expatriates' households.

## **9 Key implications for policy and interventions**

This research has found that rural poverty, a lack of employment opportunities for girls in rural areas, and events related to climate change are among the factors that motivate adolescent girls' migration. Many individual stories also show the impact on adolescent girls of the lack of a system of social protection and insurance to provide against sudden events such as the death of the main earning member of the household. These factors can only be addressed with comprehensive policies for rural development and rural security whose discussion is beyond the scope of this report and that belong to the domain of what can be done to prevent migration from rural to urban areas.

The research also points up the importance of acknowledging that adolescent girls' migration is not just the result of push and pull factors, but rather an expression of agency and a complex choice, which may be motivated by a desire to improve one's life and escape oppressive gender regimes. Thus, we need to focus on what could be done to ensure a safer and positive migratory experience for adolescents. Another essential factor to be considered is the age of the migrants and their position in the life course and the fact that the spatial move from village to the city is linked with other multiple transitions. Our findings also suggest that we need to work towards ensuring a safer transition to adulthood.

This report has shown that migrant adolescents are more vulnerable than their non-migrant counterparts in many respects: they are new to the city and the slums and they

are sometimes fleeing difficult circumstances in their home communities. Being an adolescent migrant in Dhaka means, in most cases, lacking the support of familial networks and a shift from being a 'daughter' to becoming the adult who supports and is responsible for the well-being of one's parents and siblings. While some girls can count on the help of siblings who migrated before or after them and some others manage to make new friends at the work place or in the slum, most of the migrants have very little access to any forms of services and formally provided support. Because of their age, their working status, and their rapidly changing circumstances, they do not normally fall within the categories of beneficiaries targeted by state and non-state actors' development interventions.

A first step towards addressing some of their needs would be to strengthen existing interventions targeting adolescent girls and making them more inclusive; one easy measure in this respect would be to extend service providers and NGOs offices' opening times to Fridays and evenings so that migrant working girls can access them.

In most cases girls are not aware of what kind of facilities and services are available in the area where they live or in the city. Despite in Dhaka there are many clinics and hospitals the girls could turn to for medical assistance, in case of health problems most of the migrants return home. We have also seen how some of the migrants would consider the possibility of continuing their studies, but none of them except one were aware of the opportunities offered in this respect by the 'Bangladesh Open University.

What is needed is both the provision of information about, as well as the actual provision of the following type of services: evening/adult schooling and education, basic skills training, health related facilities, day care centres for the children for the workers. The migrants have to be informed of the presence in their areas of residence of different kind of service providers such as NGOs, Unions, micro-credit groups.

Living far-away from close family members and childhood friends also means that most migrants feel quite emotionally and socially isolated. They undoubtedly need a wider social network of peers and adults to meet their social and emotional needs. There is a particular need to recognise that these young migrants are dealing with a significant life period when many different transitions to adulthood are being made. They have already taken the steps to enter the world of work, but making the other transitions to positive relations that lead to marriage and to child bearing are fraught with difficulty.

For these vulnerable adolescent girls in particular there is a real need to create physical and social spaces for adolescents and young people to meet, to share their experiences and practice different recreational activities. Some of them also need professional psycho-social support and counselling to mitigate their sense of loneliness and isolation, especially in cases of girls who have been the victims of violence, or those at risks of such violence and other forms of abuse.

Finally but most importantly, our research shows that in the social context of urban slums there is no space for the development of a safe adolescent/youth culture other than in the virtual realm of the internet and mobile phones. In order to enable the creation of such space, and ensure a safe transition to adulthood for migrant as well as

non-migrant girls, a sort of ‘cultural’ shift is needed in the way adolescents and young people are commonly regarded.

The first step in this direction would be to acknowledge and accompany rather than sanction and repress the changes that have already occurred. Young people have many more opportunities of encounter with strangers of their own age than in the past. Their circumstances force them to experiment with new forms of social life. Working and living in the city far away from guardians also gives migrant girls a sense of freedom and independence and opens a period in which they feel potentially more in charge of their lives. Cross-gender friendships and ‘*prem*’ (love) relationships do develop in the temporal space created by the postponement of marriage but they cannot be openly explored. Getting married remains the only socially acceptable way of being in a relationship and short-lived ‘love’ marriages (more or less forced) are an emerging reality.

Issues related to gender relations and gender violence, marriage, sexuality that are commonly considered beyond scrutiny and relegated to an untouchable realm of ‘*culture*’ have to be brought to public discussion. An example of this is how sexuality is never mentioned in discussions about adolescents: the focus is always on ‘reproductive health’ rather than ‘sexual health’, and only in relation to married young women. Awareness raising activities, action research and other initiatives are needed to work with mixed gender groups, boys and men, community leaders, parents and social workers on these themes. This would make the hidden and parallel world, so far considered ‘illegal’, of interactions among young people a legitimate and possible reality to deal with. This is essential to respond to and punish violent behaviour, to support the victims of violence and to develop a culture of mutual respect among young people.

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## APPENDIX

### Case Studies

#### 1 Lamia

Lamia is about 22 years old and migrated to Dhaka from a village in Bogra district in 2007 with the intention of finding a job in a garment factory. Once in Dhaka she lived and worked as domestic for a few months in a family, while also working in a factory. After sometime she moved in with another factory worker in a small room in the Bhola slum in Pallabi. In September 2015, after trying without success to migrate to Mauritius, she moved to Oman where she is currently working in a garment factory. We met her several times in the course of 2014 and a profound rapport developed. We are still in contact.

In November 2014 we visited Lamia's mother in her home village and we came to know from some neighbours that Lamia had actually married and divorced at a very young age and gave birth to a girl child who since the divorce had been living with Lamia's in-laws. The high amount of money that Lamia's family paid as dowry was among the reasons they fell into poverty together with the fact that all the family's properties and assets had been over time dilapidated by her father. After the divorce from a violent and unfaithful husband and after her father's death, Lamia decided to move to Dhaka.

The first time we met Lamia was in February 2014 in a centre run by AB during an FGDs with 10 other migrants who were all living in the same slum. In that occasion and during another conversation in her room in the slum, Lamia mentioned that she was in Dhaka to work in order to help her younger sister and her mother by contributing to their current living costs and by paying for her sister's education. She was worried that if something happened to her, nobody would take care of her mother and sister, she also stressed that her family situation was particularly bad because after her father's death there was no male members in the family to count on. She said that she didn't want to marry because this would prevent her from helping her family.

*That's why I don't think about marriage; if I got married my mum and sister could be in danger. I came to Dhaka so that my sister can do what I was not able to do. I want to make my sister educated. That's my decision.*

In August 2015 Lamia's sister fell severely ill with uterus cancer. We met Lamia before the operation and she said:

*My sister will be operated in a few days and if the operation goes well I will marry her off, I cannot manage her studies for much longer, it's difficult, I cannot go on like this for all my life, I told my mum too, it's difficult, if I leave the job we'll suffer a lot, so she also said that I could work for 2 more years and then after marrying my sister off, I could also get married.*

Lamia's sister died 15 days after she was operated. It was clear from the first tests she had in a public hospital that her cancer was at a terminal stage but she was operated in a private clinic where her mother took her after the public hospital's doctors said that she would not survive.

Lamia's objective changed again after her sister's death. She decided she wanted to secure a future to herself and her mother by trying to earn more money. She couldn't see any good future prospects by working in a garment factory in Dhaka and decided to migrate abroad where she hoped to earn more and be able to save money, buy some asset in her home village for her and her mother to live on. Before moving to Oman she said: *'the decision has been taken, if I die I will die abroad, If I live I will live abroad'*. Her plan is now to stay in Oman for at least 2 years and then go back to the village and settle there.

## 2 Jamila

Jamila is from a remote village in Netrakona district, one of the poorest areas of the country. She had to stop studying while she was in grade 8 because her father was severely ill (in fact he died a few months after she migrated) and her family could not afford her education. When she was about 15 she went to Dhaka through an uncle and started working in a garment factory. We met her 1 and a half year later, in January 2014, first during an FGDs with other migrants and the second time in her room in the slum where we had with her a longer conversation. A few weeks after the second meeting we went again to meet her but we found her unconscious in her room and took her to the hospital. Some neighbors told us that the night before after she left the factory her 'boyfriend' stole from her the salary that she just received. Then she managed to tell us that after this, when she tried to react he beat her up and disappeared. She also said that she then went home and out of despair, because she could not pay the rent, she swallowed some tablets. In the hospital the first nurse who saw her commented that she was of course a bad girl and probably addicted and that she didn't deserve to be treated. Finally she was admitted. We convinced her to give us her brother's number and through him we managed to get in touch with her uncle who also lived (and still lives) in Dhaka. He came straightaway and the next day when she was released from the hospital he took her at his house.

By talking to the uncle we came to know that after coming to Dhaka Jamila lived for a few months with her uncle's family before moving in with a friend in the slum where we met her. We understood that she left because she wanted more freedom and that her uncle didn't try to stop here because he thought she was behaving very badly, going out till late in the evening frequently, and he couldn't stand the situation any longer since the reputation of the whole family was at stake.

Contrary to what Jamila told us, the uncle said that he proposed to Jamila's father to take her to Dhaka to work so that she could help her family. The main reason he was so disappointed about Jamila's behavior was that she was sent to Dhaka *'to work and help the family'* but she had been sending very little amounts of money home in the last months. The other main complain was that since the beginning of her stay in Dhaka Jamila used to go out without asking her uncle's permission and according to him she was wasting time and money by going to a 'dance club' which he thought was a very bad place for a girl. So despite her uncle could understand that she was a teenager and as such *'bit rebellious'*, he couldn't accept that her behavior would bring shame to the whole family. This fear of bad reputation also prevented Jamila's uncle from welcoming her back the day she was released from the hospital. He wanted to be reassured by her and by us that she would behave better in the future. Jamila, on the other hand was reluctant to go back at her uncle' because she was afraid of loosing her freedom.

We saw Jamila some other times, she stayed with her uncle for about a week and then she left again, she talked to us twice but after a few encounters she stopped replying to our phone calls.

As we lost trace of Jamila after March, in August 2014, when I went back to Bangladesh for a second period of fieldwork, we went to her uncle place to ask where she was. He told us that he and her brother finally managed to take her back to her village where she was now under constant surveillance, without a mobile and where they made a failed attempt to marry her off. Her uncle was worried that she had done some sex work in the club and that she was falling into a trap and risking to be trafficked to India. So he called her brother and asked him to come and take her back to her village.

In November 2014 we visited Jamila and her family in her home village. We talked to her mother and some relatives as well as with her. Her brother was in Chittagong for seasonal agricultural work. Jamila's mum and neighbours said they wanted Jamila to get married soon but they didn't have the money to pay for her dowry.



After about one year at home, in September 2015, Jamila was married off in Dhaka but after a month into her marriage she left, saying her husband had a relationship with another woman and didn't care about her. After a few weeks at home she was sent again to Dhaka to work as a domestic in a family who had apparently lent some money to Jamila's mother. The last news about her (December 2015) are that she left that family too, claiming that she was being abused by the landlord. She lives now with some neighbour, apparently with the consent of her uncle and hopes to join garment work again.

### **3 Sangida**

Sangida is 27 year old and migrated to Dhaka for the first time at 8 years of age to work as a maid in a family and is now still in Dhaka where she work as 'service staff' in an office.

The first experience of work Sangida had as a domestic worker was very bad, she left after 6 months and went back home where she felt like she had '*just been released from prison*'. After some failed attempts, because of lack of money, to register again in school, her brother found for her another job as a maid in Dhaka. Initially Sangida refused to go but finally she decided to accept and at about 13 she moved to Dhaka again. Talking about this decision and how she felt about migrating again she says:

*I was angry with my parents because when I went to Dhaka the first time I agreed to go, I went and I realized what kind of situation it was.... I decided that I wouldn't do that work anymore, and I wouldn't come to Dhaka anymore. Then when everybody was insisting so much I got angry. I thought that they wanted to send me away again because I was growing up and I was becoming a burden for them and that if I went away they could survive better somehow.*

Surprisingly, Sangida's second experience of domestic work was not as bad as the first one despite her fears. She felt understood and supported by her new 'auntie' who became for her a sort of 'mentor' who encouraged her to be more self-confident and to struggle to improve her own and her family's situation.

*She talked to me sitting very close and touching my head and I liked it, I listened a lot to her words, I haven't heard from anyone such words before, she said very sweet words and after listening to her I felt very good,*

Sangida reflected on her relationship with her new employer and compared it with the relationship she had with her parents.

*With my mum we were not like friends, she could not say everything, she didn't have time since I was not the only child. There were other small children and she had to choose to give time to me or to the others. She had a lot of work, she had to do all the work at home, and then look after the children. We were a poor family. Moreover there was not much that my mum could do, so I understood....I didn't have a kind of relationship with my parents where I could express my feelings and desires. At that time I thought that those things had to be kept inside, and surely not shared with parents. Father and mother are father and mother. At that time I thought that you had to respect your parents. I mean you don't treat them like friends.*

When Sangida turned 15-16 both her 'auntie' and her parents thought that it was time for her to get married. She refuses to return home and decides that she would rather keep working and helping her family.

*When I was 15-16 and they wanted me to marry, I said I didn't want to marry, I want to work. I wanted to work and with the money that the auntie was giving me every month I*

*could somehow find out a way to improve my family's situation, but I needed more time. My sisters were still little, one was in class 3 and one in class 4-5, so there were costs for their education, I could save all the money she gave me because I didn't have any expenses, so with that money I was helping my family and my idea was that I would bring my family to a better position. I wouldn't marry, I would work.*

Finally Sangida found a well paid job in an office and since then she supports her family and in particular her younger sister's schooling.

*Then after joining that office almost 8 years had passed, I started with a salary of 2000 taka, now my salary is 12000 taka and something more, my family is fine. One of my sisters passed the intermediate exam, found a job and probably she will keep studying. My family is more or less in a good situation; my family supported me so I support them. They get more support from me than from my older brother. They respect me so much that, as I took responsibility for the whole family, they feel they have to do according to my will. It goes on in this way: they do what I say without complaining and they never asked: you are a woman, why do you talk? My situation now is good; after I found a job there has been a lot of improvement in my family situation in my personal situation, from all points of view.*