

THE WORKING CONDITIONS OF FOREIGN WORKERS IN ISTANBUL: A STUDY ON BANGLADESHI MIGRANT WORKERS

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Abstract

Migration has long been a defining global phenomenon, with millions moving across borders for diverse reasons, both legal and illegal. Recent increases in international conflicts and violence have further intensified migration and asylum-seeking worldwide. Due to its strategic geographical position, Türkiye remains a key destination and transit country, receiving migrants mainly from the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia. While Bangladeshi migration has not yet become a significant concern for Turkish authorities, their presence in Istanbul is steadily growing, comprising both documented and undocumented workers. This study investigates the working conditions of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Istanbul. It draws on secondary sources to contextualize existing literature and employs primary data collected through a survey of Bangladeshi workers. Data were processed and analysed using SPSS. The research considers working conditions as the dependent variable, examining their relationship with key independent variables: type of work, workplace rules and regulations, formal versus informal employment and salary and benefits. Age, gender and duration of employment were included as control variables. Findings indicate that working conditions among Bangladeshi migrants vary significantly across these factors, underscoring the diverse experiences and vulnerabilities faced by this migrant community in Istanbul's labour market.

Keywords

Working conditions, foreign workers, migration, Bangladesh, Türkiye.

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1. Introduction

The phenomenon of migration, which has existed since the existence of humanity, is defined as the movement of people from one place to another for various reasons. People have always migrated for economic, political, military, religious and environmental reasons. German economist Lösch (1940) argues that we cannot choose when we exist in the world, but we do have the freedom to choose our place in the world and choosing the right place opens the doors to a successful and happy life. In general, migration is closely linked to the social, cultural, economic, political and overall structure of society (Tekeli, 2008). Due to its multi-layered nature, it attracts the attention of

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various sectors of society, particularly anthropologists, sociologists and lawyers. Conceptually, migration can be divided into two types: internal migration and external migration (Gönüllü, 1996). Internal migration can be briefly defined as the movement of people from one region to another within a country's borders (Sağlam, 2006). As can be seen from this definition, people who have migrated to and work in another region, as well as those in the area from which they migrated, who share the same nationality, are subject to the same national legal system and already enjoy the same legal protection. International migration refers to population movements from one country to another to stay, work or settle (Gönüllü, 1996).

In recent decades, Türkiye's unique political, economic and strategic position has turned it into a magnet for people from all over the world. Today, the country is home to around 5.7 million immigrants from 192 different nations (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2019). Despite this rich cultural diversity, many Turkish citizens still hold the common belief that most immigrants come to Türkiye to find work, which they fear worsens local unemployment (Aracı, 2018; Tören, 2018). When it comes to jobs, Türkiye's labour market draws a clear line between the formal and informal sectors (Aydın, 2009; Türk, 2019). In practice, this means that many foreigners end up working informally, essentially because securing a work permit can be so difficult (Rittersberger, 2015). This highlights the everyday struggles many immigrants face as they try to build a life and livelihood in Türkiye.

When discussing foreign labour in Istanbul, the discourse predominantly centres on Syrians, Iraqis, Turkic nationals originating from Central Asia, Afghans and various African nationals who are employed across a range of sectors, both formally and informally. Since the onset of the Syrian conflict and the subsequent influx of Syrian refugees into Türkiye, scholarly attention has predominantly centred on Syrian refugee studies. A limited number of studies have also explored the working conditions of other migrant populations, such as Afghans and Africans, particularly within Istanbul's informal labour market. However, there is a notable absence of research specifically addressing the experiences and labour conditions of Bangladeshi migrant workers in the city.

Currently, there is no bilateral agreement between Türkiye and Bangladesh that facilitates labour migration. As a result, Bangladeshi nationals are not eligible to apply for work visas to Türkiye through official channels. Broadly, Bangladeshi workers in Istanbul can be categorized into two distinct groups. The first comprises individuals who have entered Türkiye through legal means, typically for educational purposes, business endeavours or through the acquisition of property and who are engaged in lawful employment. The second group includes undocumented workers who have entered the country irregularly, often via neighbouring countries such as Iran, Iraq or Syria. Many of these individuals use Türkiye as a transit point with the ultimate aim of reaching Europe; however, they often engage in temporary employment in Istanbul to finance their onward journey.

Irregular Bangladeshi migrant workers are commonly employed in small-scale industrial sectors as well as in restaurants, retail outlets and hotels. These workers typically lack formal work permits and are excluded from access to social protections or workplace benefits. There also exists a subset of migrants who enter the country legally but overstay their visas, subsequently transitioning into undocumented labour. Although the Bangladeshi migrant population in Istanbul is relatively minor compared to other foreign national groups, their presence and labour contributions are significant, especially

within informal economic sectors. This study aims to investigate the working conditions of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Istanbul, focusing on key indicators such as workplace and tasks, skills development and training opportunities, occupational health and safety, psychological and physical well-being, working hours and overall work-life balance.

2. Literature Review

Despite the growing presence of Bangladeshi nationals in Türkiye in recent years, arriving through both legal and irregular channels, they remain largely absent from academic discourse, particularly within refugee and migration studies. Existing literature tends to concentrate on the labour integration of refugees and asylum seekers from more prominently represented nationalities, thereby marginalizing other foreign worker populations. Furthermore, while several works focus on the employment conditions of refugees and migrants in general, research on foreign workers who do not fall under formal refugee or asylum classifications remains scarce.

This section reviews existing literature on foreign workers in Istanbul, Türkiye. Much of the current research has primarily focused on integrating refugees into the host society. Numerous studies have examined the broader ramifications of migration on the Turkish labour market.

Recent research has examined several aspects of foreign employment and migration dynamics in Türkiye, uncovering both structural factors and personal experiences that influence this intricate domain. De Castro et al. (2006) provided a conceptual model that highlights the substantial impact of work organization, emphasizing how the organization of tasks and roles can affect it. Their research highlights how the organization of tasks and roles can impact perceptions of inclusion or exclusion in the workplace.

Deniz (2020) examined the growing trend of academics engaging in transnational migration. While academic mobility has historically favoured more prosperous nations, this study indicates that countries such as Türkiye have recently experienced an influx of international academics. Employing a socio-spatial approach, Deniz examined the manifestation of this international academic movement inside the Turkish environment.

In their study, İçli and Sever (2012) investigated the reasons why immigrants, especially individuals from post-communist nations transitioning to market economies during the geopolitical changes of the 1990s, opted to relocate to Istanbul. Their research elucidates the adaptation processes that these communities experience as they traverse new social and economic environments.

Ertürk (2015) enhanced the comprehension of labour migration trends by providing quantitative data on demographic changes among foreign workers possessing valid work permits in Türkiye, analysing variations in gender and national origin. Ceritoğlu et al. (2017) examined the substantial effects of the Syrian refugee inflow on Türkiye's labour market, revealing that numerous Syrians engage in informal employment without licenses, resulting in pay reduction and the displacement of local workers in low-skilled positions.

Other research has delved into the specific challenges faced by foreign workers. Alnajjar and Alsaman (2020) studied the experiences of Arab migrants in Turkish workplaces, noting patterns of discrimination and a tendency among foreign workers to seek employment with non-Turkish employers or start their businesses to avoid unequal treatment.

Child labour within migrant communities has also attracted scholarly attention. Lortoğlu and Kurtulmuş (2020) documented the harsh realities faced by Syrian child labourers in Istanbul's textile sector, based on interviews with young workers in the Çağlayan district.

Bayraktar and Gülle (2018) surveyed Turkish workers to elucidate their perceptions regarding the increasing presence of foreign labour, providing insights into the potential impact of these beliefs on social cohesion and workplace dynamics. Legal and regulatory structures are another essential domain of inquiry. Horuztepe (2021) conducted a comprehensive analysis of Turkish Labour Law regarding foreign employees, highlighting the disparities in rights and obligations compared to Turkish residents, as well as prohibitions on certain professions. The study examined the ramifications of utilising foreign workers lacking legitimate licenses, especially on contract enforceability.

Numerous studies have focused on the legal framework for individuals under temporary or international protection. Yıldız and İzmirlioğlu (2022) examined work permit laws, professional licenses and equivalence processes, while İzmirli and İzmirli (2022) concentrated on the particular circumstances affecting Syrians under temporary protection. Likewise, Emir (2021) examined the ongoing legal obstacles faced by these individuals, particularly in engaging in illegal professions or lacking the appropriate authorization.

İçduygu (2013) argued for more inclusive labour policies that could facilitate refugee integration, emphasizing the need for education and vocational training to enhance access to formal employment. Addressing broader structural problems, İşçiçok (2010) discussed irregular foreign employment as a longstanding challenge, citing international data and recommending policy interventions to curb undocumented work. Korkmaz (2017) focused on the labour market outcomes of Syrians under temporary protection, examining the effects on employment, unemployment and wages and identifying the barriers that prevent many from entering the formal sector.

Ullah (2018) examined the circumstances of undocumented migrants from Bangladesh, detailing how many landed in Türkiye with aspirations of reaching Europe but eventually remained. These individuals frequently contend with significant adversities, including financial instability, homelessness, unemployment, language barriers and challenges in adapting to unfamiliar cultural norms. Güler (2021) conducted an empirical analysis of work permit applications in Istanbul, examining data from 825 immigrants who applied via a commercial agency between 2012 and 2019. This study emphasized an increasing trend towards formal employment among migrants, particularly marked by a rise in female participation, indicating a shift in gender dynamics within the migrant labour force.

Despite these contributions, a significant gap remains in the literature concerning Bangladeshi migrant workers in Türkiye. Their experiences, labour conditions and migration patterns have not been the subject of focused academic inquiry, underscoring the need for the present study to fill this void in migration and labour research in Istanbul.

3. Operational Definition

A migrant worker is defined as an individual who relocates, either within or beyond the borders of their home country, for employment. Typically, migrant workers do not intend to settle permanently in the host country or region where they are employed. Those who migrate internationally for work are often referred to as foreign workers and

in specific contexts may also be described as expatriates or guest workers, particularly when they are recruited or assigned to work abroad prior to departure from their country of origin.

Horáková (2007) suggests that migrant workers generally fall into two broad categories based on how long they plan to stay. The first group consists of individuals who move abroad to live and work in their new country for many years, often with the hope of eventually settling there permanently. Over time, these migrants, along with their families, might qualify for permanent residency and even citizenship if they meet the legal requirements set by their host country.

In contrast, the second group includes those who migrate with short-term goals in mind. These are typically temporary workers, such as seasonal labourers or cross-border commuters, who travel abroad for limited periods. They usually receive temporary work permits and are often restricted to particular industries or types of jobs under national labour laws (Kara, 2016). It is also important to recognize that people in both of these groups sometimes find themselves living or working in a country without proper legal status. As Cholewinski (1997) explains, undocumented or so-called “illegal” migrant workers might have entered a country without authorization, used false documents or overstayed a visa, for example, arriving on a tourist visa and then taking up work without permission. Such situations leave migrants in a legally precarious position, making them especially vulnerable and frequently excluding them from labour rights protections and access to essential public services.

The term ‘illegal foreign worker’ encompasses various definitions, reflecting the complexity of irregular labour migration. According to Karadeniz (2001), illegal foreign workers are individuals who enter a country through official or unofficial channels and reside there either temporarily or indefinitely, while their employment and/or residence status remains unregistered with the relevant public authorities. For Karadeniz (2001), “undeclared foreign workers are non-citizens who lack the necessary legal permits for residence, employment or accommodation in the host country, thereby falling outside the scope of lawful status”. A primary theme in both definitions is the non-citizen status of the individuals involved and their absence of proper legal authorization to remain or work in the host nation, regardless of whether they entered through formal or informal channels. These individuals generally lack valid residency, housing or employment permits; therefore, they function beyond the confines of legal acknowledgement and regulation.

In Türkiye, the issue of illegal foreign workers is especially complex, reflecting a wide range of legal and administrative circumstances. According to Turkish law, any foreign national who engages in work - whether in the formal or informal economy - without the proper residence and work permits is deemed an illegal worker. However, this group is far from uniform. For some, the problem lies in the complete absence of essential documents, such as a valid passport, residence permit or work authorization. Others may have initially entered Türkiye through legal channels but later overstayed their visas or allowed their permits to lapse, slipping into irregular status over time. Due to this diversity, illegal foreign workers in Türkiye are often categorized into subgroups that reflect the specific gaps in their legal standing, whether related to residency, employment authorization or both. This layered reality underscores the need for carefully crafted legal and policy approaches that can address the specific challenges posed by different segments of undocumented migrant labour. Such nuanced understanding is crucial for shaping effective labour market regulations, social policies and broader migration management strategies in Türkiye.

4. Method

The primary objective of this study is to examine and evaluate the working conditions of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Istanbul. To achieve this aim, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. In which sectors are Bangladeshi migrant workers predominantly employed in Istanbul?
2. Do Bangladeshi migrant workers have equitable access to workplace opportunities, including job roles, advancement and training?
3. To what degree are Bangladeshi migrant workers satisfied with their wages and other employment-related benefits?

In this study, the working conditions of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Istanbul are conceptualized as the dependent variable. To assess the factors influencing these conditions, several independent variables have been identified: (1) type of work; (2) presence and enforcement of workplace rules and regulations; (3) the nature of employment, whether formal or informal and (4) salary levels and access to additional workplace benefits. The primary aim is to evaluate the extent to which these independent variables impact the overall working conditions experienced by Bangladeshi migrant workers.

Additionally, the study incorporates a set of control variables, namely (1) age, (2) gender and (3) duration of employment in Türkiye. While these variables may also exert influence on the dependent variable, they will be statistically controlled to isolate the specific effects of the identified independent variables.

This study utilized a structured questionnaire to collect quantitative data on the working conditions of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Istanbul. Structured questionnaires, characterized by standardized wording and sequencing, are widely recognized for their reliability in survey-based research. To reach participants, a combination of sampling methods was employed. While simple random sampling was initially used to ensure an equal selection probability, non-probability techniques, including snowball sampling and voluntary response sampling, were also employed due to the difficulty in accessing the target population. Snowball sampling facilitated the recruitment of additional respondents through participant referrals, whereas voluntary sampling targeted individuals with a strong interest in the topic. The unit of analysis is the individual Bangladeshi migrant worker residing in Istanbul. A total of 47 respondents were surveyed in January 2023 using both Google Forms and face-to-face interviews, each lasting approximately 10-15 minutes.

5. Findings and Discussions

This section presents the key findings derived from the data analysis and offers a comprehensive discussion of their implications for the research objectives. The findings are organized according to research questions to ensure clarity and coherence.

Table 1 presents the age distribution of the survey participants. The majority of respondents fall within the middle-aged demographic. Specifically, the data show that only one participant was born in the 1970s, ten participants were born in the 1980s and the largest group, comprising 29 participants, was born in the 1990s. Additionally, two respondents were born in the 2000s. This distribution highlights a concentration of participants in the 1980s and 1990s cohorts, reflecting a predominantly middle-aged sample.

Table 1. Year of birth

	Frequency	Percent
a. 1970-1979	1	2.1
b. 1980-1989	10	21.3
c. 1990-1999	29	61.7
d. 2000 and above	2	4.3
Valid Did not answer	3	6.4
Refused	2	4.3
Total	47	100.0

Table 2. Legal status in Türkiye

	Frequency	Percent
Short-term residence permit	9	19.1
Long-term residence permit	10	21.3
Got citizenship	3	6.4
Do not have any legal status	16	34.0
Valid Student residence permit	4	8.5
Not sure	2	4.3
Not applicable	1	2.1
Refused	2	4.3
Total	47	100.0

Table 2 presents the percentage distribution of residence status among Bangladeshi workers in Istanbul who participated in the survey. The findings reveal a diverse range of legal statuses within this population. Specifically, 19.1% of respondents reported holding short-term residence permits, while 21.3% possessed long-term residence permits. A small proportion, 6.4%, had acquired Turkish citizenship. Notably, 34.0% of participants reported having no legal status, representing the largest subgroup. These results suggest that a significant proportion of Bangladeshi workers in Istanbul are residing in the country without legal authorization.

Table 3 presents data on the length of residence of Bangladeshi workers in Istanbul. The findings reveal that the vast majority, 78.7% reported having lived in the city for more than one year. These results indicate that most Bangladeshi workers in Istanbul have established a relatively long-term presence, with the majority having resided in the city for over a year.

Table 3. Duration of stay in Türkiye

	Frequency	Percent
a. One to three months	1	2.1
b. Three to six months	4	8.5
c. Six to twelve months	3	6.4
d. More than one year	37	78.7
Refused	2	4.3
Total	47	100.0

Table 4. Current employment status in Türkiye

	Frequency	Percent
a. Employed	39	83.0
b. Unemployed	6	12.8
Refused	2	4.3
Total	47	100.0

The Table 4 presents the employment status of Bangladeshi workers in Istanbul. The data indicate that a substantial majority (83%) of respondents are currently employed, while 12.8% reported being unemployed. This suggests a high level of labour market participation among the surveyed population.

Table 5. Do you have an official work permit issued by the Turkish authorities?

	Frequency	Percent
a. Yes	13	27.7
b. No	26	55.3
c. Not applicable	6	12.8
Refused	2	4.3
Total	47	100.0

When respondents were asked whether they possessed an official work permit to be employed in Istanbul, only 27.7% indicated that they held the necessary legal authorization to do so. In contrast, the majority, comprising 26 individuals, reported lacking the required work permit. These findings underscore a significant level of undocumented labour among Bangladeshi workers in Istanbul.

Table 6 presents the types of workplaces where Bangladeshi workers in Istanbul are employed. According to the survey data, the majority of respondents (61.7%) are employed in regular workplaces. Additionally, 8.5% reported working from home, while 4.3% indicated employment in non-permanent or temporary workplaces. A further 8.5% of participants did not specify the nature of their workplace. These findings highlight a predominant trend toward permanent employment settings among the surveyed population.

Table 6. Workplace

	Frequency	Percent
a. Regular workplace (Factory, bureau, shop, etc.)	29	61.7
c. At home (own or somebody else's home)	4	8.5
d. No stable workplace	2	4.3
e. Others	4	8.5
Not applicable	6	12.8
Refused	2	4.3
Total	47	100.0

Table 7. Are you facing any of the following issues at your workplace?

	Frequency	Percent
a. Failure to meet the vocational health and safety requirements, d. Low wages	1	2.1
b. Not receiving wages regularly/not receiving the agreed wage, c. Insufficiency of career development opportunities	2	4.3
c. Insufficiency of career development opportunities	1	2.1
d. Low wages, Long working hours	15	31.9
e. No contract	13	27.7
f. No	3	6.4
g. Others	3	6.4
h. Not sure	1	2.1
Not applicable	6	12.8
Refused	2	4.3
Total	47	100.0

Table 7 seeks to examine the working conditions experienced by Bangladeshi workers in Istanbul. The findings reveal a range of challenges faced by this population. Specifically, 2.1% of respondents reported working in environments that are unsafe, unhealthy and characterized by low wages. A further 4.3% indicated that they do not receive their wages regularly, are paid less than the agreed amount and lack opportunities for career advancement. Notably, 31.9% stated that they work long hours yet receive inadequate compensation, while 27.7% reported not having a formal employment contract. These results suggest that the most pressing issues confronting Bangladeshi workers in Istanbul include extended working hours, low wages and the absence of formal contractual agreements.

Table 8 outlines the perceived work environment of Bangladeshi workers in Istanbul, categorised as ranging from very friendly to unfriendly. According to the survey data, 40.4% of respondents described their work environment as friendly, while 17.0% characterized it as somewhat friendly and 12.8% as very friendly. In contrast, 12.8% indicated that their work environment was unfriendly. These findings suggest that a substantial proportion of workers experience generally favourable workplace conditions.

Table 8. How would you describe the environment in your workplace?

	Frequency	Percent
a. Friendly	19	40.4
b. Somewhat friendly	8	17.0
c. So friendly	6	12.8
d. Unfriendly	6	12.8
Not applicable	6	12.8
Refused	2	4.3
Total	47	100.0

Table 9. Do you face any discrimination at your work?

	Frequency	Percent
a. Never	16	34.0
b. Rarely	8	17.0
c. Sometimes	8	17.0
d. Frequently	3	6.4
e. Always	4	8.5
Not applicable	6	12.8
Refused	2	4.3
Total	47	100.0

Table 9 examines the extent to which Bangladeshi workers in Istanbul experience workplace discrimination. The data indicate that 34.0% of respondents reported never encountering discrimination, while 17.0% stated they rarely faced such experiences. Another 17.0% indicated that they sometimes experienced discrimination, whereas 6.4% reported encountering it often. Notably, 8.5% of participants disclosed that they constantly faced discrimination in their workplace. These findings suggest that although a significant proportion of workers do not perceive discrimination in their workplaces, a considerable share nevertheless experiences it with varying frequency.

Table 10. Are you satisfied with your work in Türkiye?

	Frequency	Percent
a. Satisfied	13	27.7
b. Somewhat satisfied	8	17.0
c. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	7	14.9
d. Not satisfied at all	11	23.4
Not applicable	6	12.8
Refused	2	4.3
Total	47	100.0

This table presents the levels of job satisfaction reported by Bangladeshi workers in Istanbul. According to the data, 27.7% of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their work, while 17.0% reported being somewhat satisfied. Additionally, 14.9% expressed a neutral stance, stating they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the service. Conversely, 23.4% of participants reported being completely dissatisfied with their work. These findings highlight a diverse range of satisfaction levels within the surveyed population, with a notable proportion expressing dissatisfaction.

Table 11. Are you satisfied with your work in Türkiye?

What is your legal status in Türkiye?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Short-term residence permit	9	23.2222	32.09664
Long-term residence permit	10	20.9000	31.13572
Got citizenship	3	1.3333	.57735
Do not have any legal status	16	3.3125	.70415
Student residence permit	4	1.7500	1.50000
Not sure	2	3.0000	1.41421
Not applicable	1	2.0000	.
Refused	2	99.0000	.00000
Total	47	14.6383	27.95604

This table presents an assessment of average work satisfaction scores among Bangladeshi workers in Istanbul, categorised by their legal status. The results demonstrate that those holding either short-term or long-term residence permits report significantly higher levels of job satisfaction, with average scores of 23.22 and 20.90, respectively. By contrast, workers lacking any legal documentation display a markedly lower average satisfaction score of just 3.31. These findings indicate a strong correlation between legal residency status and perceived job satisfaction, suggesting that having formal legal standing may lead to greater job security, improved working conditions and enhanced access to employment opportunities.

This study's findings underscore the precarious and challenging employment conditions encountered by Bangladeshi migrant workers in Istanbul. A significant number of respondents indicated challenges that reflect established trends in international migrant labour markets. For instance, 31.9% reported working extended hours without adequate compensation, whereas 27.7% noted the absence of a formal employment contract. These conditions align with international studies indicating that migrant workers frequently encounter substantial workloads and precarious employment situations (Anderson, 2010; Castles *et al.*, 2014).

Further, 4.3% of the workers surveyed reported receiving their wages irregularly or being paid less than what had been agreed upon - an experience that aligns with broader studies of wage theft and underpayment among migrants (Fudge & Strauss, 2014; Kahveci & Acun, 2022). The lack of dependable wage structures contributes not only to economic vulnerability but also to a sense of social insecurity.

Despite these pervasive problems, many employees nevertheless had positive things to say about their workplaces: 40.4% reported that it was friendly and 17.0% described it as fairly friendly. This is demonstrated by the importance of working relationships in helping workers cope with challenging situations. Migrant workers

frequently depend on social ties at work to alleviate the stress linked to exploitative work settings, as pointed out by Parreñas (2001).

The data on workplace discrimination further reveals the diverse experiences of Bangladeshi workers. While 34.0% reported that they had never faced discrimination, roughly 31.9% indicated that they had experienced it to varying degrees - sometimes, often or always. These findings align with the broader literature on migrants in Europe and the Middle East, which documents how ethnic, racial and national differences often shape unequal treatment in the workplace (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992; Ruhs & Martin, 2008).

Finally, levels of job satisfaction within this group appear to be quite mixed. While 27.7% of respondents expressed satisfaction with their work, a notable 23.4% reported being entirely dissatisfied. This ambivalence reflects a common tension in the experiences of migrants. Despite harsh or uncertain conditions, many continue to value overseas employment for its economic benefits and the opportunity to support families back home through remittances (Massey *et al.*, 1993).

Findings reveal that the majority of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Istanbul face multifaceted challenges, including difficulties securing employment, low wages and long working hours (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Labor and Social Security, 2004) and concerns over job security and general livelihood. Many participants, particularly those residing temporarily in Türkiye to move to Europe, rely heavily on networks of people smugglers (Ullah, 2018). These smugglers often control critical aspects of daily life, from housing to food access. As a result, it was found that up to ten individuals are frequently compelled to share a single small room, given their inability to secure housing independently due to their refugee status. Employment conditions are similarly precarious. Most participants reported working illegally in factories (Candan, 2007), enduring shifts of at least 12 hours a day, six days a week and receiving low wages (Cholewinski, 1997). Many expressed a preference for a week-on, week-off work pattern to cope with the physically demanding nature of their jobs (İzmirli & İzmirli, 2022).

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the complex and often precarious working conditions of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Istanbul, shaped significantly by their legal status and sector of employment. While Türkiye's economic prospects and strategic location continue to attract foreign workers, rising populism and nationalism make it imperative to scrutinize the lived realities of these migrants. Our findings reveal significant differences between Bangladeshi workers who are legally employed and those who are undocumented. Legal workers, typically employed in the formal sector, report more favourable workplace environments, regular salary payments and a general intention to remain in Türkiye. In contrast, undocumented workers, who predominantly occupy informal sector roles, face irregular pay, unfriendly or unsafe work environments and harbour aspirations to migrate onward to Europe. These variations highlight the substantial impact of legal status and type of employment on the experiences and plans of migrant workers. They also highlight broader challenges, including integration, labour rights protection and social inclusion, within Türkiye's evolving socio-political climate. Addressing these issues requires not only policy interventions that safeguard the rights of all workers, irrespective of status, but also more robust bilateral and consular support mechanisms. Ultimately, ensuring fair and humane working conditions for migrant

workers is essential for both the sustainability of Türkiye's labour market and the upholding of fundamental human rights.

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