

Interviews with Refugees and Migrants



Interview#: 6

Name: Rana

Age: 25

Country of origin: Bangladesh

Current location: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Names and identified characteristics are changed, but the story is real.
The interview was conducted in 2020.

Hello, I am working with the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC). This interview is to find out about the experiences of Bangladeshi migrants in Kuala Lumpur. If you are from Bangladeshi community residing in Kuala Lumpur, aged 18 or over, and have arrived in Malaysia for less than 2 years, we would like to invite you to participate! If you agree to participate, we will ask questions about your migration journey, working and living condition, security concerns and plans, among other topics. We will use the information collected to report to NGOs and other actors, so that they can develop interventions adapted to the real needs of refugee and migrant communities in Malaysia.



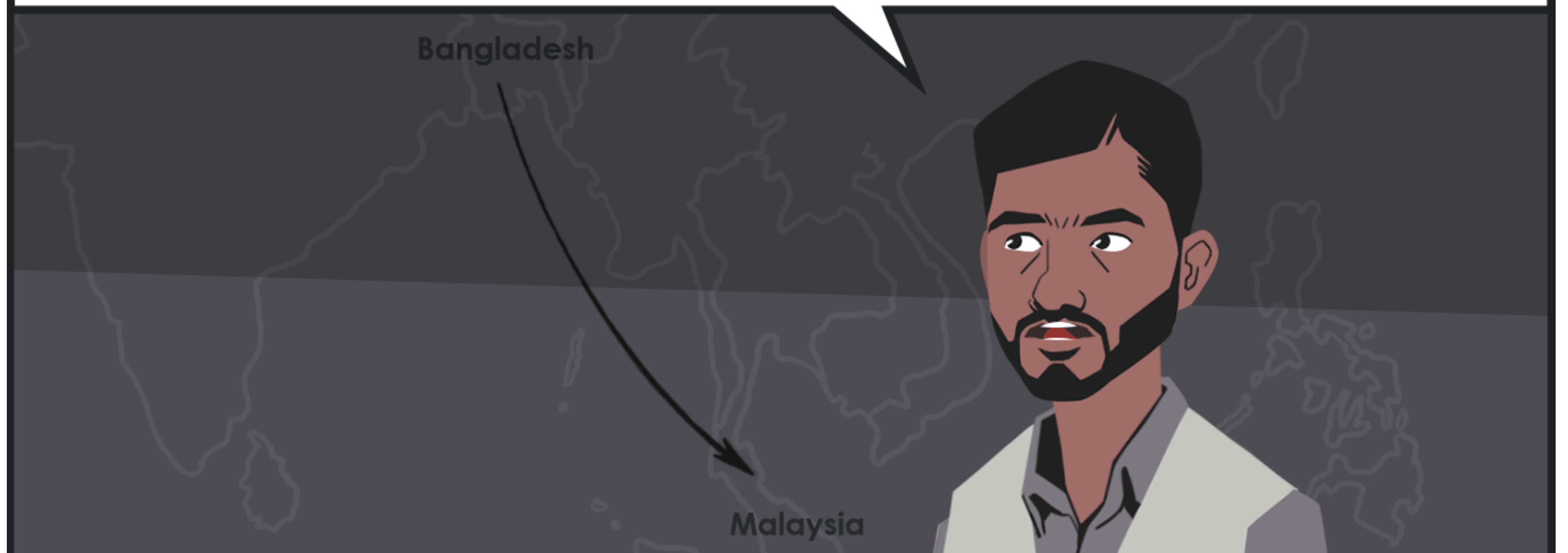
Participation in this project is entirely voluntary and does not provide access to assistance programs or any form of compensation. Our interview will be strictly confidential and anonymous: we will not ask you for personal data during the call.

Many thanks!

How long have you been a migrant in Kuala Lumpur?



I came to Malaysia back in May 2019 and after some months made my way to Kuala Lumpur where I have been since then. My motivation was to find a job.



We are poor people from Bangladesh. In my hometown, it's hard to find work. Only minor jobs are there, and these are not enough to sustain our living.

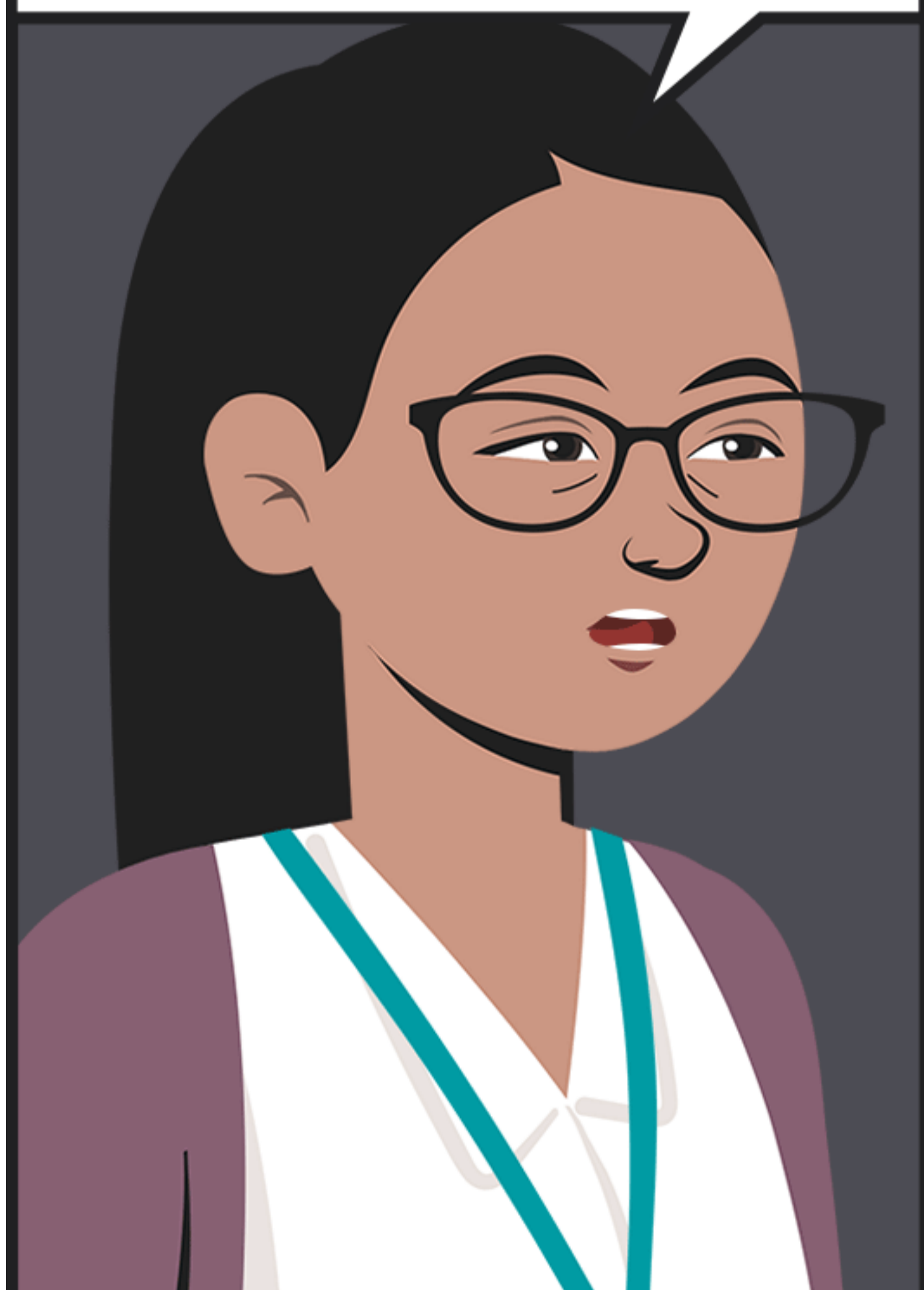
Do you have a job here?



Yes, I'm working at a factory with packaging. We are around 200 employees there, mostly migrants. My guess is that almost three out of four of us are from Bangladesh. There are some Indonesians as well.



How would you describe migration dynamics and patterns in Kuala Lumpur?



There are different types of migrants here. Some stay for really long, like 20-10 years.



How do refugees and migrants choose where to live?



The area I live in is home to a lot of Bangladeshi migrants.



Some work in the same factory as I do, and others work in restaurants.

We don't really have a choice in terms of choosing a location. It's an agent who puts us in touch with the employer, who then tells us where to live. Every month, they deduct around 30% - 25% of our salary to pay for recruitment fees and other costs.



Do you have documents that allow you to stay in this city?



Before I worked for this company, my document was for one year. Then it expired.



My agent failed to renew it, and kept all my documents, including my passport, so I'm now living without legal documents.

All travel agents here are the same, they know other agents back in Bangladesh and they are the ones who bring us here.



Many of us stuck without permits and documents because of those agents.

Are you living a bit under the radar and a bit insecure that you might be caught and given trouble?



Migrants without legal permits and papers like me can't move around in the city. It can be dangerous if we get caught.



Those who manage to move to smaller cities or rural areas are better off. It's less expensive and there are fewer police officers.

I know some who moved from Johor to Kuala Lumpur, and others who moved from Kuala Lumpur to Kuching, because of better job opportunities. But that has changed recently and most people can't travel to rural areas anymore.



Do you experience separation between local residents and migrant communities or among different migrant communities? Or are the neighborhoods more mixed?



We have few opportunities to interact with local Malaysians here. I work 13-12 hours per day. My life is all about going to work and then back to my room.



Each month, I have two days off, sometimes only one. Since, I'm here without documents, the employer never offered me a contract.

Why have Bangladeshi migrants come to Kuala Lumpur?



Many Bangladeshis came to Kuala Lumpur expecting to find a job, but they had no idea what they would find and what daily life would be like. Honestly, I think nothing is of value for migrants here in Malaysia.



Maybe a few find their way around here, especially if they have documents and can feel safer, but for migrants without papers and permits like me, it's tough. My advice is to warn people about moving to Kuala Lumpur. If they have documents, it's ok. If they are all by themselves and with no permits, they shouldn't come.



The way it works is that the company pays the agent, and then the agent pays us. We don't know how much the agent gets, but in the end, what we receive is peanuts. Many of my colleagues are in debt and that's why they are forced to continue working.

Do you plan to move on or perhaps return home?



There is no way back to Bangladesh for me without documents. Last year, migrants were offered by the Malaysian authorities to go back to Bangladesh.



That was in October, but it was too early for me, and I also didn't have my passport then. My agent kept all my documents and there was nothing I could do.

What was your expectation before moving here?



Before I came, I expected to find a good job, and never thought about ending up in this situation.



I do have good memories from back when I still had papers and permits in order. Nowadays, once or twice per month on days off, I talk to my family, and it makes me happy.

What are some concerns you have recently?




I'm always scared of being arrested and feel so distressed. The pressure is high with 14-12 working hours a day, and only one or two days off per month.



Nobody deserves to live like this in Malaysia, and it sometimes feels like being in jail. I haven't received any assistance from NGOs or our consulate.


Did you observe any changes in the behavior of other refugees/migrants from your community since the Covid-19 outbreak in March 2020 and with police raids shortly after?



Discrimination is always there. People look at us as strangers and as if something is wrong. For sure Covid-19 has made it worse, with increasing discrimination at a different level and on a broader scale.




What are some of your concerns recently?



My main concerns now are related to job, salary and safety. I know a few people who lost their jobs, and some got arrested and are still in detention centers. It's been months like this. Kuala Lumpur is a dangerous place with no security for people without the right documents and permits. Locals are skeptical towards foreigners, mostly for those who come from Southern Asia.



How do people in your community keep each other safe?



Bangladeshis do what they can to help each other. We talk to each other and support each other mentally.



If someone lost their job, other people in our community would have information and connections to a new employer. But we don't really celebrate holidays together as all of us only have a few days off every month.

Any final comments?



I wish to go back home safely. Here the agent can harm me. I believe people in different cities may have the same problem as me.



I wouldn't recommend anyone from any country to migrate through agents.

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