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Qualitative Insights into the Relocation of European Union Ethnic Minorities to the United Kingdom: Economic Blessing or Burden?

Abstract

Purpose: This research investigates whether relocating European Union (EU) Bangladeshi ethnic minorities (BEMs) to the UK is either a blessing or a burden to the UK economy.

Design/methodology/approach: The authors conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 20 Bangladeshi ethnic minorities of the EU in London from September 2023 to December 2023. The thematic analysis technique was applied to the interview scripts to identify the themes of either a blessing or a burden of EU Bangladeshi ethnic minorities' relocation to the UK economy.

Findings: Despite the new English environment and culture for BEMs, 85% have started jobs, and 15% have a new business in the UK out of 20 samples. Only 25% depend on social security benefits (SSB) due to the financial crisis and their inability to manage living costs. Some 95% are not a burden to the UK economy, and 100% believe that they are a blessing to the UK economy as they create new employment opportunities through new business, pay taxes, and NI regularly. The key findings show the EU Bangladeshi ethnic minorities came to the UK because (1) Offspring study British institutions and build future careers motivated relocation to the UK, (2) 'We are not a burden; we are a blessing' to the UK economy, (3) Become the human capital of the EU Bangladeshi ethnic minority's next generation, and (4) Distinctive working life in the EU rather than the UK. It was evident that Bangladeshi ethnic minorities had a good life in the EU; however, for the betterment of their next generation, who would benefit from studying in the British academic environment and pursuing global career opportunities, they have decided to relocate to the UK.

Originality/value: The results indicate that the EU Bangladeshi ethnic minorities are not a burden to the UK economy. They have started to opt out of social security support; they are working, and the next generation will become professional job holders (e.g. human capital) who positively impact the UK economy (e.g. social capital, and labor market segmentation).

Keywords: Ethnic minority, Bangladeshi ethnic minority, European Union, UK economy, Blessing or burden.

1. Introduction

The history of Brexit began on 23 June 2016, when the United Kingdom held a referendum, commonly known as the Brexit referendum, to decide whether to remain in or leave the European Union; the result was 51.89% in favour of leaving and 48.11% in favour of remaining (Sampson, 2017). As a result, the freedom of movement of EU citizens to the UK was restricted after the implementation of the Brexit process on 31st January 2020. Moreover, after the implementation of the Brexit policy, EU citizens are not be able to claim UK citizenship under EU law. This was a concern for EU citizens, especially ethnic minorities from the EU, who have long aspired to settle in the UK. The main reason to settle in the UK is for their children's studies and career development in the British environment. Nearly 9.6 million EU citizens arrived in the UK before the execution of Brexit on 31st January 2020, and almost 3.51 million stayed in the UK permanently, including EU ethnic minorities such as Bangladeshi, Indian, Chinese, and Pakistani (Sampson, 2017). Approximately 100k Bangladeshi ethnic minority (BEM) families, with roughly 250k to 300k members of these families, have arrived from the EU, especially Italy, Portugal, Austria, Germany, and France. There are some debates about the new arrival s from the EU to the UK and its impact on the UK economy, either positively or negatively. Therefore, this research focuses on this issue and intends to investigate whether the EU Bangladeshi ethnic minority in the UK are either a blessing or a burden to the UK economy.

Brexit reduces economic integration between the UK and its main trading partners (Sampson, 2017). According to Minford (2019), Brexit reduces UK GDP based on untenable assumptions, and it undoubtedly impacts the UK economy, whether short-term or long-term. Existing trade analysis indicates that unless the UK can maintain nearly complete access to the EU market without incurring significant costs, Brexit may result in a prolonged economic decline for Britain (Chang, 2018). However, BEMs significantly contribute to the UK economy, contributing between £25-£32b annually (Kambona, 2016; Carter et al., 2013; Ram and Jones, 2008). Khandaker (2013) emphasizes that Bangladeshi SMEs significantly contribute to this initiative, with Bangladeshi restaurant businesses alone generating over £4 billion. Hence, this research emerged to explore whether it is a blessing or a burden to the UK before Brexit. To achieve the aim, the research has set two research objectives: a) to analyse new immigrants of BEMs from the EU and their contribution as a blessing to the UK economy, and b) to evaluate new immigrants of BEMs from the EU and whether it is a burden to the UK economy. Therefore, this research has developed two research questions: 1) *How are new*

immigrants of BEMs from the EU to the UK a blessing? and 2) *Why are new immigrants of BEMs from the EU a burden to the UK?*

The paper is organised as follows: Section 2 presents the existing literature on BEMs' positive trends, their contribution, the relocation of EU Bangladeshi ethnic minorities, and their contribution to the UK. Section 3 discusses the methodology and empirical data, and Section 4 discussion, the conclusion and implications of the research.

2. Background

In the UK, ethnic minorities have a significant impact on every sector. Consequently, the UK economy has experienced consistent growth. The UK government welcomes ethnic minorities. It has recently been observed that many EU nationals arrived in the UK to relocate here permanently before Brexit. A sizable portion of these EU citizens are ethnic minorities, such as Bangladeshi, Indian, Chinese, and Pakistani, who came to the UK for the same reasons as other EU citizens. An issue has been raised about new immigrants of BEMs from the European Union to the United Kingdom, which is a blessing or a burden to the UK economy. Therefore, the literature reviews BEM and other ethnic minority immigrants and their contributions to the UK.

2.1 Positive immigration trends of Bangladeshi ethnic minorities in the UK

Bangladeshis are among the most prominent immigrant groups in the UK, and their numbers have gradually increased in recent years. Working as dish cleaners (DCs) and onion cutters (OCs) in Britain throughout the 1960s and 1970s was a way of life for thousands of Bangladeshi immigrants (Wilson, 2017). Many Bangladeshi immigrants came to the UK in the 1970s, mostly settling in London. The nation's largest percentage of Bangladeshis is in the Borough of Tower Hamlets (Gillan, 2002). Wilson (2017) noted that the curry house's heyday, the 1970s and 1980s, saw an increase in the number of chefs from Bangladesh. Of the 283,063 persons of Bangladeshi ethnicity living in the UK, 154,362 were born in Bangladesh, according to the UK Census 2001 (Office for National Statistics, 2001). 447,201 Bangladeshis were living in the UK per the 2011 Census (Office for National Statistics, 2014). 644,900 Bangladeshis are living in the UK, according to the 2021 Census (Office for National Statistics, 2021). According to the report, the population of Bangladesh has increased by around 44.20% (644,900) compared to the 2011 Census (447,201), and the Census 2021 shows 644,900

Bangladeshis (Office for National Statistics, 2021). It indicates that the BEM's population in the UK is rising.

2.2 Contribution of Bangladeshi ethnic minorities to the UK economy

Given the extreme diversity of the ethnic minority population in the UK, it is challenging to spot broad trends. Business problems like size, industry, and location impact EMB business attitudes and behaviours (Carter et al., 2013; Ram et al., 2000). In the UK, Bangladeshis own and run almost 80% of Indian eateries in the UK (Gillan, 2002). Indian and Pakistani companies are more likely to be retailers, whereas Chinese and Bangladeshi companies are concentrated in the catering industry (Carter et al., 2013). Despite that, the EMBs are thought to have substantially contributed to the small business population in the UK. In the UK, there are more than a quarter of a million EMBs (Ram and Jones, 2008). Ethnic minorities make up 8% of the British population (Ekwulugo, 2013). Moreover, recent census 2021 data shows that ethnic minorities comprise about 9% of the British population (Sturge, 2023). Nonetheless, ethnic minorities comprise over 50% of the local population in various areas of London. This regional concentration impacts their economic contribution to the local economy. Accordingly, BEM brings between £25 and £32 billion a year to the UK economy (Kambona, 2016; Carter et al., 2013; Ram and Jones, 2008).

2.3 Relocation of European Union Bangladeshi ethnic minorities to the UK

The UK is home to people from a wide range of backgrounds, including ethnic minorities like Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, and Pakistani. According to the most recent census, 6.0 million (about 9% of the population) were foreign-born and lived in the UK. 3.4 million EU citizens reside in the UK (Sturge, 2023).

Since the ONS's most recent immigration estimates are experimental, the process used to create them is currently being developed and probably be changed. They estimate that approximately 1,163,000 people moved to the UK and 557,000 left in the year that ended in December 2022, for a net migration of 606,000. According to the currently available data, approximately 785,000 British nationals resided in other EU nations outside of Ireland in 2017. In contrast, over 3.4 million EU nationals, including members of ethnic minorities, lived in the UK in 2021 (Sturge, 2023).

Table 1 below shows that 52% of EU nationals in the UK were employed in the third quarter of 2022, which is greater than the percentage of British nationals in the UK (42%).

Additionally, EU migrants were more likely than British citizens to work for themselves (9% and 6%, respectively).

Table 1: Basic economic activity of EU nationals in the UK Thousands, Q3 2022.

Basic economic activity of EU nationals in the UK Thousands, Q3 2022				
Basic economic activity	EU citizens in the UK		UK population	
	Estimate	%	Estimate	%
Employee	2,033	52%	28,348	42%
Self-employed	331	9%	4,295	6%
Government employment & training	1	0%	59	0%
Unpaid family worker	1	0%	60	0%
ILO unemployed	102	3%	1,286	2%
Inactive, seeking work	24	1%	283	0%
Inactive, not seeking, would like to work	86	2%	1,563	2%
Inactive, not seeking, would not like work	663	17%	18,061	27%
Under 16	646	17%	12,900	19%
Total	3,887	100%	66,856	100%

Source: Sturge, 2023. Percentages have been rounded and do not include decimal points.

By late September 2021, an estimated 5.2 million EU nationals had applied for the EU Settlement Scheme, though some may have already left the UK. Additionally, around 2.1 million individuals have secured a pre-settled status to remain in the UK permanently (Sturge, 2023). About 7% of UK workers in 2020 were EU-born (The Migration Observatory, 2022). About 250k BEMs from Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, and Germany have arrived in the UK to live permanently.

2.4 Theoretical relationship between Bangladeshi ethnic minorities

The phrase “**Human Capital**” was first used in contemporary economic literature by Schultz (1961), who categorised spending on human capital as investments instead of consumption. The human capital theory includes knowledge, skills, aptitudes, attitudes, and other acquired characteristics contributing to production (Goode, 1959; Becker, 1964). Bangladeshi immigrants to the UK, particularly those from EU nations, have industry-specific knowledge, work experience, linguistic abilities, and cultural flexibility that make them desirable to the UK labour market. They became the UK’s **human capital**.

Over the years, social capital has emerged as a potential paradigm for study (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). The resources accessible within and through personal and professional networks are described by the “**Social Capital**” (Baker, 2000; Liou and Chang, 2008). Any element of a social system that adds value and makes it easier for people to behave within it is

considered social capital (Coleman, 1990). When domestic workers are either unable or reluctant to work in segmented labour markets, migration frequently fills the void. In the UK, BEMs establish businesses, such as those in the food and hospitality sectors, to create new jobs and enhance cultural diversity and social cohesion. They are becoming a ***social capital*** in the UK.

Human capital and ***labour market segmentation*** theories complement each other well and should be given equal weight in the economist's toolkit (Dickens and Lang, 1993). Several scholars in the early 1970s promoted labour market segmentation theory as an alternative to human capital theory (Wachter 1974, Cain 1976). Labour market segmentation theory accounts for the experiences of the working class and ethnic minorities (Fevre, 1992; Clairmont et al., 1983; Bauder, 2001). This theory also reveals that migration frequently fills the void when domestic workers are unable or reluctant to work in segmented labour markets. Therefore, BEMs focus on retail, hospitality, healthcare, restaurants, hotels, and first food industries. Particularly after Brexit, BEMs' presence helps address employment shortages in specific sectors (***e.g. Labour market segmentation theory***).

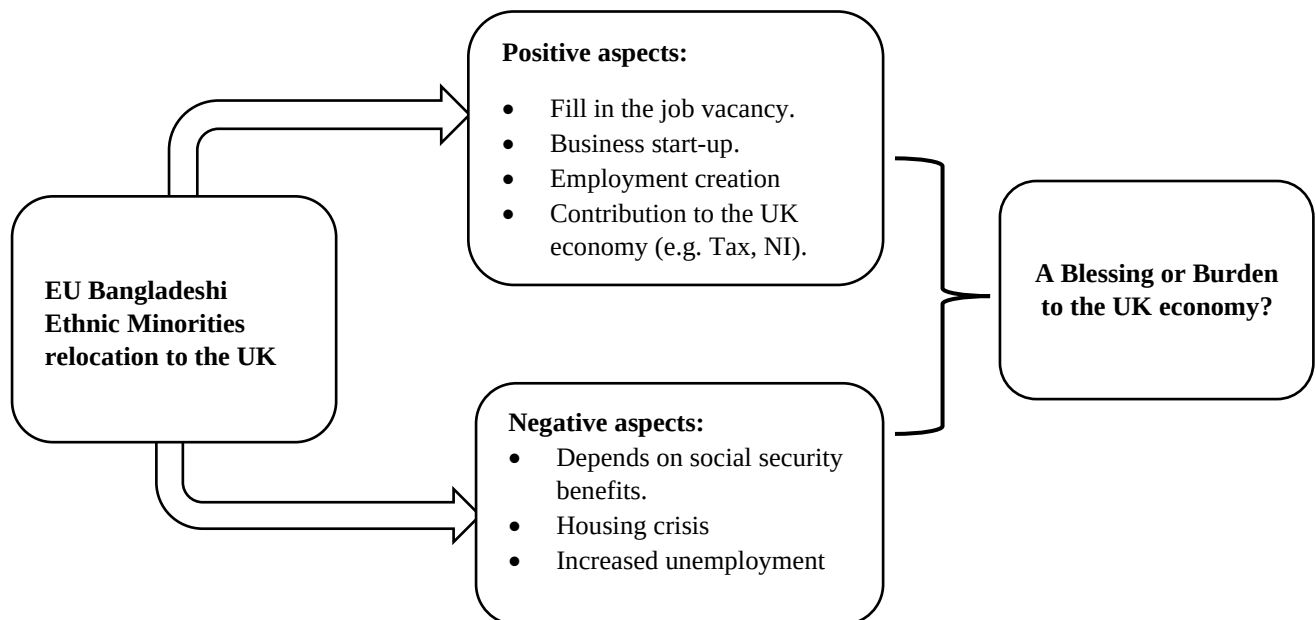
Based on the above literature review, there is a dearth of research and insufficient data on whether BEMs are a blessing or a burden to the UK economy. Hence, this research aims to investigate this issue, particularly BEMs. The findings are expected to benefit the government, businesspeople, and policymakers. Furthermore, this research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge. Therefore, we intend to investigate this contemporary issue.

2.5 Research Framework

Reviewing the prior research and recent research findings (e.g., Razzak et al., 2024; Sturge, 2023; The Migration Observatory, 2022; National Office for Statistics, 2021; Wilson, 2017), we developed the following framework, depicted in Figure 1. It shows that the relocation of EU Bangladeshi ethnic minorities to the UK has both positive and negative aspects. The positive aspects that they bring skills and experience make them valuable to the UK labour market and contribute to economic growth by paying taxes and NI (i.e. *Human capital theory*); they fill UK current job vacancies (i.e. *Labour market segmentation theory*), creating new businesses, employment and overall contribute to enhancing cultural diversity and social cohesion (i.e. *Social capital theory*). However, the negative aspects are increasing

unemployment, dependence on social security benefits, housing, and the NHS crisis. So, it is unclear whether they are a blessing or a burden to the UK economy.

Figure 1. Research framework.



Source: Author's work.

3. Data and Methodology

This is qualitative research. This study is on social research related to the relocation of EU Bangladeshi ethnic minorities to the United Kingdom: how does a blessing or burden to the economy? We use the convenience sampling method following Razzak et al. (2024), Hasle et al. (2011), and Pajo et al. (2010). Convenience sampling is one of the most widely used strategies for qualitative research (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Convenience sampling is thus one of the most commonly used sampling strategies. Robson (2011) asserts that convenience sampling involves selecting respondents who are conveniently located and accessible.

3.1 Sample

For sampling, the authors first visited the East London area, where many EU Bangladeshi ethnic minorities live and established businesses such as café shops, restaurants and grocery shops. So, in the first 2 weeks, we visited that area and talked to different groups of people in the cafés, restaurants and grocery shops. We discussed the importance of our research issue and requested an interview. Through this face-to-face conversation, we approach

them when they are available for the face-to-face interview and set a date and time. The authors also discussed recording consent then and found no problems because the BEMs were cooperative and had strong emotions to support people. Initially, the author set a meeting schedule with 20 participants, and all respondents provided their face-to-face interviews except 2 respondents as they had an urgent family responsibility, but they apologised for the inconvenience. Later on, the authors requested another 2 , Bangladeshi ethnic minorities, for this interview and found that they agreed. So, the sample selection process (Razzak et al., 2023) was:

- a) The authors visited the East London area in August 2023 and spoke with BEMs, who are from the EU.
- b) We explained the importance of this research, who will benefit, and the impact of the study.
- c) Compiling a list and setting a date and time for those who are interested to attend this interview.
- d) We also agreed on the location, and all interviews were conducted in a coffee shop, a corner shop, and the first food restaurant, which the BEMs own.
- e) Finally, selecting 20 participants and achieving a total sample size of 20. Non-probability convenience sampling was used to select participants, accommodating both researchers and respondents. A random sampling method was not considered appropriate because of the research questions and objectives.

3.2 Data collection

One of the authors is from the same BEM background as nearly two decades ago in London, and he is familiar with this group of people's emotions and feelings. So, before the interview, the author kept in touch with them so that there would not be any absence or missed. The authors have also reminded the date, time and location prior to the interview. This is how the authors conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 20 EU Bangladeshi ethnic minorities in London and completed data collection from September 2023 to December 2023. The participant's profile is presented (See Table 2 and Table A1 in the Appendix) below. The interview was recorded with the consent of each participant, and the authors encountered no issues during the recording process. The average interview time was 30 to 60 minutes. The authors found that the participants were supportive and willing to participate in this research

because of the national culture that appreciates researchers doing something that brings positive outcomes.

Table 2: Participants' profile.

Participants (EU Citizens)	Number	(%)	How long have you lived in EU (Ave yrs)	How long have you lived in UK (Ave yrs)	Previous Profession in EU		Present Profession in UK	
					Business	Job	Business	Job
Italy	15	75%	20	9	25%	50%	13%	62%
German	1	5%	22	11	0%	5%	0%	5%
Sweden	1	5%	16	12	5%	0%	5%	0%
Belgium	1	5%	22	11	5%	0%	5%	0%
Portugal	1	5%	20	09	0%	5%	0%	5%
Spain	1	5%	20	04	0%	5%	0%	5%

Source: Author's own creation.

3.3 Data analysis The data were analysed using the thematic analysis technique (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which is a widely used method of analysing qualitative data. Thematic analysis can be defined as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79; Quinlan, 2011). According to Ayres (2008), the thematic technique helps reduce the data through categorisation and summarising the key concepts. We followed previous research methodologies (e.g., Razzak et al., 2024; Razzak et al., 2023a; Razzak et al., 2021b; Hasle et al., 2011; Pajo et al., 2010) to analyse the data. We follow the six phases of thematic analysis, which involve becoming a) familiar with the data, b) generating initial codes, c) identifying themes, d) reviewing themes, e) defining and naming themes and f) producing reports (Robson, 2011; Braun and Clarke, 2006). Following this, the researchers developed initial codes that support the development of 10 sub-themes (See Figure A1 in Appendix 1). Finally, researchers identified 4 key themes from 10 sub-themes. These themes are presented below. Therefore, the process of data analysis demonstrates the credibility of this data analysis and findings.

Theme 1: *Offspring study British institutions and build future careers motivated relocation to the UK.*

Theme 2: *‘We are not a burden; we are a blessing’ to the UK economy.*

Theme 3: *Become the human capital of the EU Bangladeshi ethnic minority's next generation.*

Theme 4: *Distinctive working life in the EU rather than the UK.*

4. Results

4.1 Offspring Study British institutions and build future careers motivated relocation to the UK

4.1.1 Studies in UK Universities

The UK's history of education and well-established academic institutions are prevalent worldwide (Jones, 2016; Harvey and Williams, 2010; Shattock, 2010; Deem, Mok, and Lucas, 2008). Thousands of international students come to the UK yearly for higher studies. A recent report shows that students from nearly 140 countries come to the UK to study (Home Office, 2024; Bolton, Lewis, and Gower, 2024). In the year ending March 2024, 446,924 sponsored study visas were granted to principal applicants (Home Office, 2024). Data reveals that the intake of international students in the 2021/22 academic year contributed a massive £41.9 billion to the UK economy (UK Universities, 2023). In 2022/23, 758,855 overseas students studied at UK universities, 95,505 from the EU and 663,355 from outside the EU (Bolton, Lewis and Gower, 2024). There are many reasons to come to the UK; for example, teaching and delivery methods are contemporary, English medium teaching, multicultural backgrounds, equality and diversity, and overall develop employability skills for a global perspective. Moreover, after graduation, job opportunities are available not only in the UK but also around the world. This information was also familiar to the EU Bangladeshi ethnic minorities, who took this advantage before Brexit and relocated to the UK. One of the respondents replied, *'The main reason for relocating to this country is our children's education and their careers. Now, we are happy that our children are being admitted to a renowned university in the UK' [Kalim, 45 yrs]*.

English is an international language that is accepted worldwide. Students feel proud and boastful when they become British Graduates. There are immense examples of British graduates who got prestigious jobs around the globe and are enjoying their professional lives (Tholen, 2017; Tholen et al., 2013). Hence, one of the research participants replied, *'I came to this country because of the next generation's studies, especially in English. You know this language is in high demand all over the world. You may know our children did very well in GCSE, and many students were admitted to Oxford, Cambridge, and UCL' [Nazrul, 50 yrs]*.

4.1.2 Religious practice, culture, and Bangladeshi community

The United Kingdom has a good reputation for all religious groups, their culture, and religious practices. It is open to all, and its culture and spiritual practices are committed to the BEMs.

Bangladeshi businesses in the UK are influenced by religion and family tradition (Basu and Altinay, 2002). Similarly, Ram et al. (2000) point out that there are ‘religio-cultural’. One of the participants, Abul [50 yrs] stated, *‘If I consider culture, religious practice, and education for my child, then it is the right decision to relocate to the UK. However, it is not the right decision if I consider my business life in Sweden. I was successful there but sacrificed because of my daughter’s studies and future career’*. Similarly, another respondent replied that he preferred the Islamic community and culture in the UK and relocated to this. *He said: ‘It was wise to relocate to the UK because my children could study at good academic institutions. Moreover, I understood that different backgrounds, Islamic communities, cultures, practices, and governments have no intervention’ [Pavel, 50 years]*. The research also found that several respondents are unhappy with their business and working lives and always compare their previous lives in the EU. Despite that, they would like to continue their lives in the UK because of the culture, sizeable Muslim community, and higher education of children in the UK. Mojib [48 yrs] succeeded in the EU and said, *‘I came to this country because of my culture and my children’s studies. I do not like my present job, but I have to do it because of my survival in this country.*

4.1.3 Popular in education and established society

The UK has an enormous reputation in education, research, innovation, and information technology. The country has top-ranked academic institutions and universities, such as Oxford, Cambridge, University College of London, Imperial College, and Kings College (Salmi, 2021; Stack, 2020). The UK has more than 300 years of success history in these sectors (Jones, 2016; Nurse, 2015; Stone, 1969). These positive factors motivated the EU Bangladeshi ethnic minority to relocate to this country. So, one of the participants of this research mentioned that *‘The UK education system is well-established and reputed around the world. We believe our children will be admitted to good schools, colleges, and universities and have a bright future in this country’ [Zabed, 60 yrs]*.

Innovative teaching tools and technology-based teaching are key priorities in the UK. University funding is allocated based on research outcomes and publications. Hence, UK higher education institutions are keen to research and develop new tools and technology for students and the learning process (Qu and Cross, 2024). Furthermore, the university is concerned about using artificial intelligence, which was discussed in various topics, including perceptions of academic misconduct, authorial integrity, and issues about university policies

(Duah and McGivern, 2024). Thus, another respondent to this research stated that *'England is very popular in education and technology, so our children will have this opportunity. For this reason, I came to this country. I believe it was a wise decision'* [Didar, 55 yrs].

4.2 'We are not a burden; we are a blessing' to the UK economy

4.2.1 Opted out of social security benefits willingly

The UK government cares about health, food, and accommodation as part of well-being and a standard of living. It has a long-standing policy for social security benefits (SSB). The SSB means that UK and EU nationals can apply for housing and child tax credit benefits if they have no job or earn less than their living cost (Welfare rights, 2024; Gov. UK, 2024). So, they can apply for this via the Universal Credit scheme. Under the Universal Credit scheme, nearly 5.5m people benefit and survive in the country (Gov. UK, 2024). The EU Bangladeshi ethnic minority came to this country before Brexit and faced challenges such as a new culture, English environment, and communication skills. As a result, they cannot maintain living and accommodation costs at the very beginning. So, they applied for the SSBs. This research found that 25% of participants were still under the SSB scheme. It is a remarkable finding that 75% of respondents opted out of this scheme (i.e. 15 respondents out of the 20 samples). One of the participants replied, *'I applied for social security benefits as the UK was a new country, so I did it for my initial survival and well-being. I was under this for nearly 5 years. This is for those people who have financial problems. However, I already bought a property, and my financial position is better than it was previously. I left the social security benefits'* [Nazrul, 50 yrs].

The research also found that while BEM lives in the EU, 60% in Business and 40% in Jobs are involved. However, we found a slightly different profession in the UK, and it reveals that 15% of Business and 85% of Job holders (See above Table 2). They are becoming settled and self-dependent in the UK without the SSB scheme. We have found another participant who replied, *'In the beginning, I was dependent on government support, but currently, I am not getting any Social Security benefits. It is a bit challenging to maintain all family expenses due to the very high cost of living'*. [Alam, 55 yrs]. Similarly, Mojib [48 yrs] replied, *'I pay my taxes, and my wife also pays her income tax and NI. I have withdrawn my social security benefits'*. 25% of the European Union of BEM depends on the SSB scheme due to poor levels of income or health issues (i.e. 5 respondents out of the 20 samples). We found a respondent, and he replied, *'I am not 100% self-dependent; I have a job, but that is not sufficient to maintain*

my family. So, I need some government support to survive in this country' [Shan, 60 yrs]. Therefore, this analysis shows that the majority of the BEMs are self-dependent; however, a minority of them are still dependent on SSB due to their household income.

4.2.2 Bring savings and investments for business in the UK

We have collected primary data from 20 participants from EU Bangladeshi ethnic minorities in Italy, Germany, Sweden, Belgium, Portugal, and Spain. The primary data shows that the BEMs lived in the EU for an average of 20 years before relocating to the UK (See above Table 2). They have established a business or job in their respective country and have some savings for any business or investment. We have found a respondent who replied, *'I brought my savings to this country, and I started a business with a partnership where 5 people work as employees. So, I contribute to the UK economy by employing people and helping the government. Therefore, I am not a burden; I am a blessing to the UK economy'* [Bahar, 45 yrs]. The research also found a similar response from another respondent. He replied, *'My whole life savings were brought to the UK, and I established a business. So, we are not a burden. We are a blessing to the economy. However, comparing working life in the UK and Italy, I will say Italian life was better than in the UK as I had a good business there, and other facilities were more convenient than in the UK'* [Nazrul, 50 yrs]. Similarly replied to Zabed [60 yrs] *'I am not a burden to the UK economy as I work and pay taxes and NI to the UK government. Moreover, I brought all my savings here and invested in this country'*.

This research finds that most participants replied that they are not a burden to the UK economy. The primary data reveals that 95% were not burdened, 5% were burdened, and 100% replied that they are a blessing to the UK economy (See Table A1 in the appendix). We found a respondent and replied, *'I am not a burden because I am doing business. I import vegetables from Italy and sell them in the UK. Hence, I support the communities and contribute to the UK economy'* [Enamul, 60yrs].

4.2.3 Paying taxes, NI and contribution to the UK economy

Most of the developed country's income taxes are at a higher level. The UK is no different, as most employed, self-employed, and business owners must pay income taxes and National Insurance (NI) regularly. According to a BBC report (2024), the basic rate tax (20%) applies to earnings over £12,571 yearly but less than £50,270. This rises to 40% when anyone earns

more than £50,271. However, the minimum NI is 9%. The EU Bangladeshi ethnic minorities are no exception in that case, and they have to pay income taxes and NI according to their level of income. We have found a respondent and replied, *'I think those who have lived in this country for more than 10 years have a job and support for the government. We are paying taxes to the businesses that ultimately support the government. So, we are not a burden in this country'* [Mojib, 48]. So, the BEM significantly contributes to the UK economy between £25-£32 billion annually (Kambona, 2016; Carter et al., 2013; Ram and Jones, 2008). They firmly believe they are not a burden to the UK economy but a blessing to the economy. One of the respondents stated, *'I am not a burden to the UK economy as I have a business. I employ people and pay taxes and NI to contribute to the UK economy accordingly'* [Nazrul, 50 Yrs]. However, recent data shows that the combined Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups had the highest rate of economic inactivity (33%), and the white 'other' group had the lowest (15%) (Gov. UK., 2023).

The primary shows that 15% of BEM started a business and created employment opportunities. This significantly contributes to the UK economy as it supports reducing the employment rate. Bahar [45 yrs] replied, *'I think yes, as my people left this country after Brexit. So, we contribute a lot, as this country has many vacancies, which we fill. Besides, many new businesses started here and employed many people.'*

4.3 Become the human capital of the EU Bangladeshi ethnic minority's next generation

4.3.1 Future career and family support

EU Bangladeshi ethnic minorities are not highly educated but have skills and knowledge for jobs and business. The key point is that they care very much about their children's studies and future careers despite their lower-level education. This is the culture of BEM, as there is a tradition that the old-aged children are fully responsible for their parent's caretaker. This practice is also visible in the EU and the UK. We found a respondent who replied, *'We are not a burden to the UK because we are hard workers and efficient. We are giving our best effort to improve our workplace and business organisation. Besides, we provide our children with the best support for their future careers because they will support us while we are old. Moreover, they will contribute to the economy. So, we are a blessing to the UK economy'* [Kallol, 48 yrs]. Moreover, we found that another participant stated his opinions similarly. He said that *'Our religious beliefs, values, and traditions plainly state that we spend all our savings on our children's future careers, which ultimately benefit our future lives. Our children will*

take care of and support us while we are unable to work. This is our firm belief, values, and culture' [Bahar, 45 yrs].

4.3.2 Professional job and human capital in the UK

Bangladeshi ethnic minorities are hard workers who are determined and highly dedicated to reaching their targets. They like jobs but do not think about high- or low-class jobs. However, they have grand ambitions for their children and their future careers. They do not think about saving, but they spend all their money on future generations' studies because they believe that if we invest in our children, they will get professional jobs. As a result, their children will also care for their retirement or old age. They also believe our children will get a prestigious job and contribute to the UK economy. We have found a respondent who replied, *'I aimed to support my children's higher studies in the UK, and now my son is a University student. My children will get professional jobs after their studies, support our family, and contribute to the UK economy. So, it was a wise decision to relocate to the UK'* [Ali, 50 yrs]. Similarly, another participant in this research mentioned that we are not the same as other EU nationals. We are working, and our children are doing very well. They will be further capital in this country. He stated, *'As Bengalis, we come from different EU countries but contribute better than other EU citizens. Besides, our children are doing very well, and in future, they will get a good job and contribute to the UK overall'* [Abul, 50 yrs].

4.4 Distinctive working life in the EU rather than the UK

4.4.1 Convenient working environment and financial benefits

The working environment and working life are significant for employees. Employees prefer a convenient and collegial working place where there is mutual respect and a relationship between employers and employees, management and employees, and employees to employees. Employees' working lives include work hours, annual leave, flexible working arrangements, and pay (Truss et al., 2006). Job satisfaction (JS), working environment, organizational culture, management attitudes, opportunities for promotion, pay, and other benefits are all crucial determinants of working life (Smeaton and White, 2016; Chinomona and Dhurup, 2014). The research has found different views of their working life in Italy and the UK. Pavel [50 yrs] replied *'I have a job. I am not getting my salary as I expected. I got the expected salary in Italy, and we can save some money, but in the UK, it is not possible at all. Besides, we would have a good opportunity to earn money but not in the UK'* [Pavel, 50 yrs]. The research found that the workload in Italy is comparatively lower than in the UK. Moreover, employees can enjoy

weekends like holidays. They are happy with their financial support. Regarding this, one of the respondents replied, *'I had a better life in Italy. I did 5 days job in a week and 2 days fully enjoyed as holidays. Pay and other benefits were very good, and the weather was good'* [Mojib, 48 yrs].

Several respondents replied that they were not happy with medical services. They replied that they had an excellent experience in Italy but were disappointed in the UK. One respondent was a journalist from Italy who replied, *'I am a journalist and a self-employed. I had a good life in Italy, where medical services were world-class, but it is not like that in the UK. So, I consider my second homeland to be Italy.'*

4.4.2 Income savings in Italy are feasible but, in the UK challenging

People work in different organisations, such as small, medium, and large. Other types of businesses exist, such as national, international, multinational and global organisations. People have specific aims and objectives, such as establishing careers and financial solvency. It is a widespread phenomenon that people are working or doing any business; they intend to save something at the end of the month to secure their business and future. We have found that EU Bangladeshi ethnic minorities relocated to the UK with great ambition, such as a better working life and savings. However, we have seen a bit different finding. One of the participants was a businessman in Italy. Nazrul [50 yrs] replied, *'If I compare working life in the UK and Italy, I will say Italian life was better than in the UK as I had a good business there, and other facilities were more convenient than in the UK. Main point at the end of the month, we have some savings in Italy; however, it is quite challenging in the UK'*.

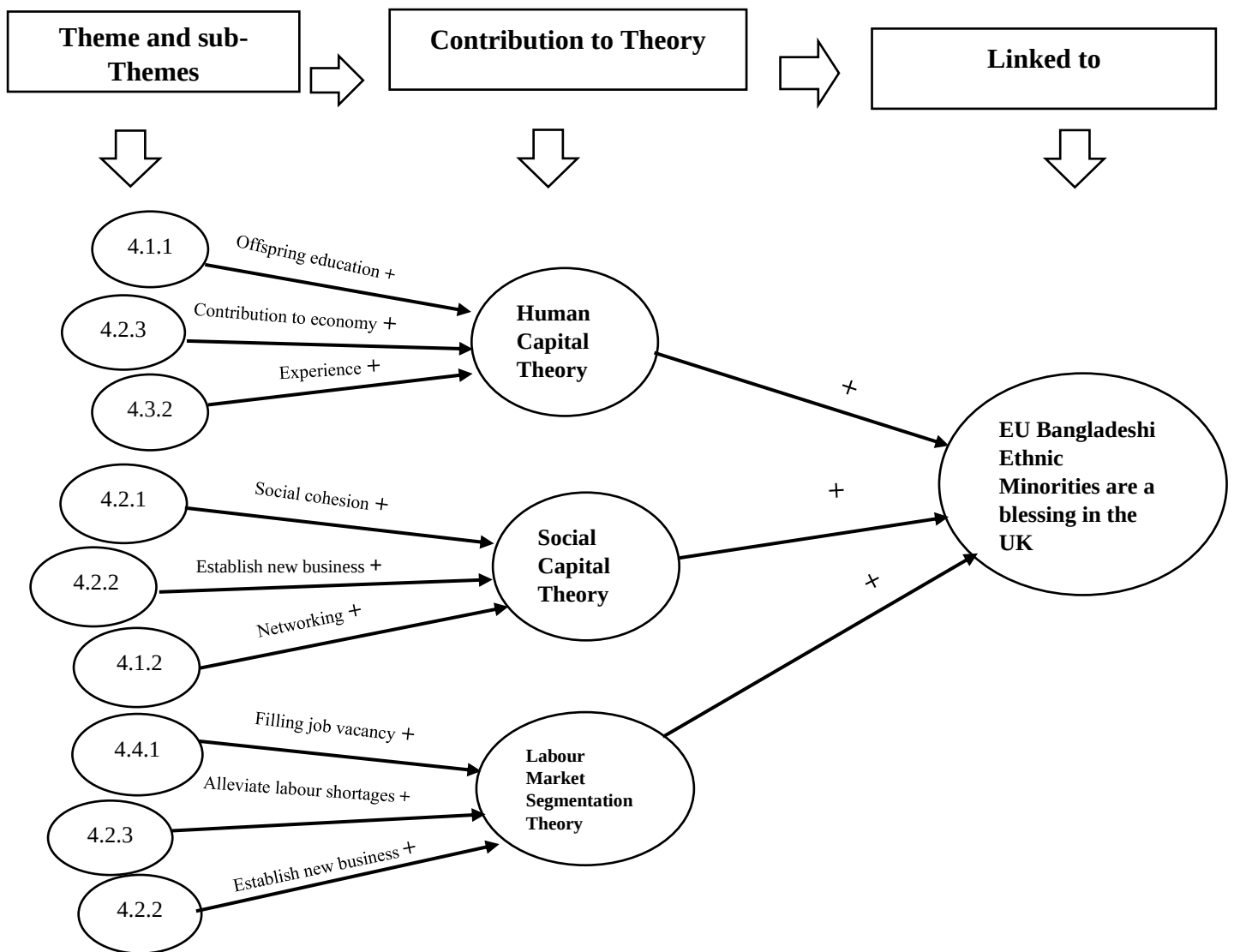
The workload and schedule play a significant role, as all employees have different expectations. The UK government is keen on workload, and there is a firm policy for weekly working hours of 37.50 hours and a maximum of 48 hours (Gov. UK, 2024) for full-time employees. There is also an established National Minimum Wage Act 1998 (Gov. UK., 2024), and all organisations must apply without any argument. If any organisations have failed to do these, they must face consequences. Despite these established rules and regulations in the UK, our research has found different findings. One of the respondents replied, *'I have a job in the UK. I have a different life in Italy because I never work Saturdays or Sundays. However, in the UK, I have to do it. Besides, we have a decent life in Italy, for example, working from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and giving family time, but it is very challenging in the UK. In the UK, restaurants are*

open 24 hours, but in the EU, it is impossible, as everything will be closed after 8 p.m. ' [Kallol, 48 yrs].

5.1 Primary findings related to theories

The primary findings are linked to the existing theories (Figure 2 below). First, we have found that EU Bangladeshi ethnic minorities bring long experience from the EU (*See sub-theme 4.3.2*), pay taxes and NI from their jobs, and contribute to the UK economy (*See sub-theme 4.2.3*). Their children study at well-reputed Universities (*See sub-theme 4.2.3*). These contribute to the existing **human capital theory**. Second, our empirical findings show that Bangladeshi Migrants contribute to the host society by building networks and enhancing cultural diversity (*See sub-theme 4.2.1 and 4.1.2*). They bring their whole life savings to this country and start new businesses (*See sub-theme 4.2.2*). Hence, these findings contribute to the **social capital theory**. Third, the primary findings found that BEMs fill job vacancies in sectors like restaurants, retail, hospitality, and health care (*See sub-theme 4.4.1*) where domestic workers are unavailable or unwilling to work. This alleviates labour shortages in the UK labour market (*See sub-theme 4.2.3*). This research also found that 15% started a new business, such as a café, restaurant, or grocery shop (*See sub-theme 4.2.2*). Therefore, these findings contribute to the labour market segmentation theory. Based on the analysis, this research contributes to **the human capital theory, social theory, and labour market segmentation theory**, which provide robust arguments for the BEMs from the EU who arrived before and during Brexit. So, it is significant and substantial evidence that EU Bangladeshi ethnic minorities in the UK are a blessing to the UK economy.

Figure 2: Themes, theory and links.



Source (s): Author's own creation/work.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Research shows that the BEMs in the UK have a long history dating back to 1946. BEMs in the UK are a significant, growing feature and play a key role in economic and social life (Razzak et al., 2024; Ram and Jones, 2008). Due to Brexit, approximately 250-300k new BEMs were in the UK [Nazrul, 50 yrs]. The data shows that EMBs (6% of all privately-owned businesses) contribute nearly £30b to the UK economy (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015). Bangladeshi-owned restaurant business contribute to the UK economy £4b yearly (Khandaker, 2016). BEMs have a good reputation in the restaurant sector and have a popular voice, 'British Bangladeshi curry houses', which serve Bangladeshi traditional foods

(Razzak et al., 2022). This ethnic group is famed in curry houses, the food industry, education, care service, and entrepreneurship (Wilson, 2017). Despite that, there is limited research on BEMs in the UK, although recently, there has been little research on employees' work life, job satisfaction, working conditions and well-being (Razzak et al., 2024; Razzak et al., 2022). Moreover, approximately 250-300k new BEMs from the EU have already settled in the UK and started new jobs and small businesses. However, no research exists about this new arrival and their anticipated contribution. Still, there is a 'rumour and word of mouth voice' that new BEMs burden the UK economy. Thus, our research investigated whether EU Bangladeshi ethnic minorities in the UK are a blessing or a burden.

Our research can significantly contribute to the existing research on BEMs. **First**, the existing research finds that the percentage of families receiving state support by white British and ethnicity and type of support such as British white state support 54%, tax credits 5%, income-related benefits 16%, non-income related credit 51% while Bangladeshi ethnic minorities state support 52%, tax credits 18%, income-related benefits 24%, non-income related credit 48% (Gov. UK, 2022). However, our primary data shows that 25% (5 respondents out of 20) are under Universal credit benefit, 75% are non-SSB (15 respondents out of 20), and 95% are not a burden to the UK economy (*such as 'Not-Burden'*) (See Appendix Table A1). Also, it noted that 77.5% of people on Universal Credit in April 2024 were from the white ethnic group. All other high-level ethnic groups combined 22.5% of Universal Credit claimants in April 2024 (Department for Work & Pension, 2024). **Second**, previous research shows BEMs from the EU are not a blessing to the UK because the combined Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups had the highest rate of economic inactivity (33%), and the white 'other' group had the lowest (15%) (Gov. UK, 2023). Our primary findings show that 100% benefits the UK economy as they created new businesses, employment opportunities, paid taxes, and NI, and their children's studies at the university became assets for this country. Moreover, the result reveals that they are filling the employment crisis of different sectors and intend to opt out of social security benefits (25%) (*such as 'Blessing to UK economy'*). Hence, the BEMs in the UK argued that *'We are not a burden; we are a blessing to the UK economy'*.

Our research findings offer an original understanding of BEMs and their intention and contribution to the UK economy, rather than the concept of misunderstanding as a burden. The general research findings of BEMs are in line with the existing literature. Data shows that in

2022, 61% of people aged 16–64 from the Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups were employed (Gov. UK, 2023). EMBs contribute nearly £30b to the UK economy (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2015), and the UK restaurant business contributes £4b yearly (Khandaker, 20216). Our research is the first work on BEMs' relocation in the UK, and it explores their business life, professional life, future planning of offspring, and expected contribution to the UK economy. They also argued that they are not a burden to the UK but a blessing to the UK. There is a lack of theoretical arguments for BEMs. So, this research contributed to fill in the gap.

The EU relocation since 1999, and there was a question of whether they are a blessing or burden in the UK. EU immigrants contributed 34% more to the fiscal system than they received in benefits, while recent non-EU immigrants contributed approximately 2% more (Lisenkova, 2017). McNeil (2023) finds that EU nationals make up around 8% of employment in the UK, though their numbers have decreased since 2019. Our qualitative evidence points that relocation of BEMs from the EU is not a burden to the UK because 95% of respondents believe that they are not a burden to the UK economy, and 100% believe that they are a blessing to the UK economy as they created new businesses, employment opportunity, paid taxes, and NI, and their children's studies at the university becoming capital for this country. Four major themes have emerged through our research, each with significant applications and ramifications. Therefore, it is now visible that the UK government, previous Bangladeshi ethnic minorities, recent BEM arrivals from the EU, and other ethnic minorities, including Indians, Chinese, Pakistanis, and Afro-Africans, can all benefit from our research findings. Instead of a mythical idea of burden for the UK, they can provide an actual image of the BEMs and how they are *human and social capital*.

The findings of this research have practical implications. They will help the UK government, policymakers, businessmen, critics, and other ethnic minorities (for example, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, African, and Caribbean) make decisions in the UK. They will also help other ethnic minorities who live in different places around the world.

The study has certain limitations, and we acknowledge that a large-scale investigation is required for generalisability to achieve statistical significance and validate the theoretical predictions of the four themes. Hence, this is a further research gap. It is suggested that more comprehensive research is necessary to comprehend the contributions of other ethnic minorities

(such as Chinese, Indian, Pakistanis, and Afro-Africans) to the UK's various sectors and geographical areas that would help to generalise the findings.

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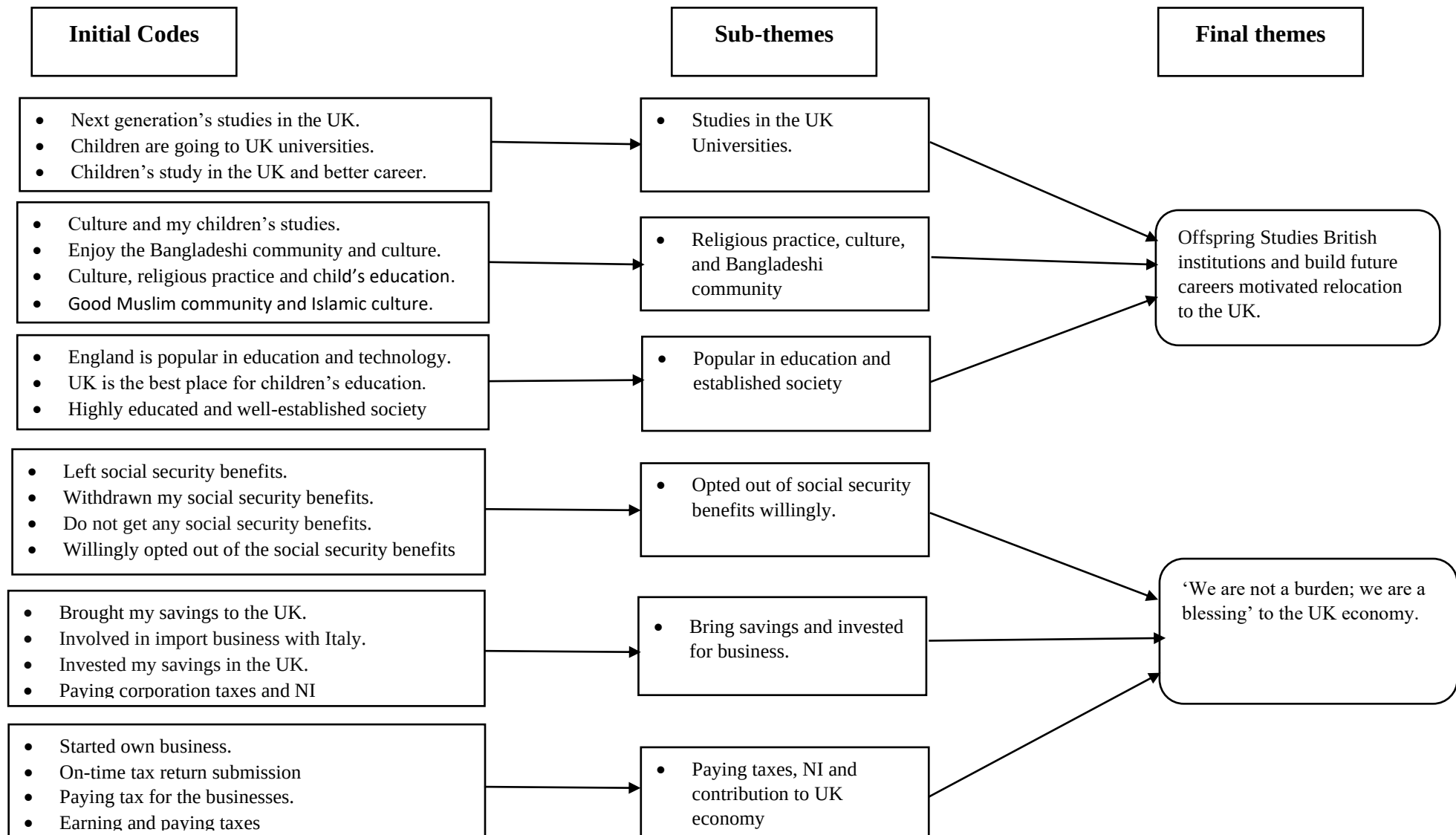
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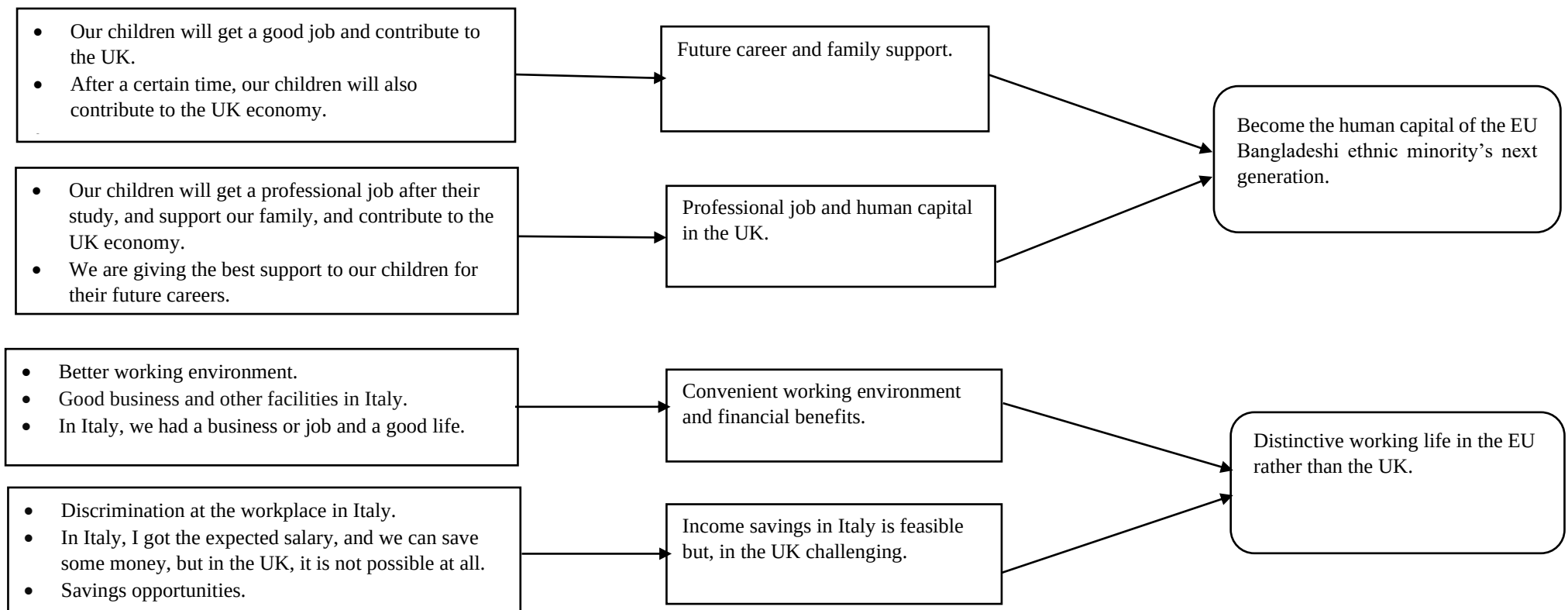
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Table A1: Summary of Primary Data.

Respondents	Anonymous Name	Age	Which country from EU	When you came to UK	How long lived in EU	Previous profession in EU	Present profession in UK	Burden to UK	Blessing to UK	Social security benefits
R01	Nazrul	50	Italy	2013	18	Business	Business	No	Yes	No
R02	Bahar	45	German	2013	22	Job	Job	No	Yes	Yes
R03	Mojib	48	Italy	2014	20	Business	Job	No	Yes	No
R04	Shan	60	Italy	2016	18	Business	Job	No	Yes	Yes
R05	Enamul	60	Italy	2015	26	Business	Business	No	Yes	No
R06	Kamrul	62	Italy	2019	30	Business	Job	No	Yes	Yes
R07	Didar	55	Italy	2017	20	Business	Job	No	Yes	No
R08	Alam	55	Italy	2015	18	Business	Job	No	Yes	No
R09	Zabed	60	Italy	2012	25	Business	Job	No	Yes	No
R10	Kalim	45	Italy	2013	16	Business	Job	No	Yes	No
R11	Abul	50	Sweden	2012	16	Business	Business	No	Yes	No
R12	Sham	45	Italy	2015	16	Business	Job	No	Yes	Yes
R13	Nazrul	50	Belgium	2013	22	Business	Job	No	Yes	No
R14	Hannan	52	Italy	2019	26	Job	Job	No	Yes	Yes
R15	Mataleb	50	Portugal	2015	20	Job	Job	No	Yes	No
R16	Mamun	55	Spain	2020	22	Job	Job	No	Yes	No
R17	Kallol	48	Italy	2016	18	Job	Job	No	Yes	No
R18	Rashel	45	Italy	2016	18	Job	Job	Yes	Yes	No
R19	Pavel	50	Italy	2012	20	Job	Job	No	Yes	No
R20	Ali	50	Italy	2014	18	Job	Job	No	Yes	No

Figure A1: Data coding Thematic Analysis.





Source: Author's own creation/work.