

Strengthening Labour Migration Governance in Pakistan

South Asia, home to one-fifth of the world population, comprises Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The recent recorded outflows from the five major South Asia countries have been in the order of 2 million workers annually. While migrant workers from South Asia can be found in almost all countries of the globe, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries emerged as the primary destination during the oil boom of the 1970s and have remained the number one destination for South Asia labour migrants since then.

Migrant workers make an enormous development contribution to the region's economies – through skills, labour power, services and competitiveness in countries of destination; and financial remittances, skills and knowledge on return to their countries of origin. In destination countries many migrants fill labour market niches by doing jobs that nationals do not want or cannot fill.

Pakistani Migrant Workers

Pakistan is the 2nd among South Asian nations sending migrant workers abroad and describes itself as a country highly pro-emigration. This makes it very important for Pakistan to have a solid and clear policy to support overseas employment for Pakistani youth.

Since 1971 to 2013, more than 7 million Pakistanis have proceeded abroad for employment through the Bureau of Emigration. Out of this total manpower exports about 96% have proceeded to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

Migration from Pakistan peaked in 2012 when 628,452 left the country. The key country of destination is Saudi Arabia followed by UAE, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain as indicated in the table below.

Table 1: Total emigrants from Pakistan 2008-13 per country of destination

Countries	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
Saudi Arabia	138,283	201,816	189,888	222,247	358,560	270,502	1,381,296
U.A.E.	221,765	140,889	113,312	156,353	182,630	273,234	1,088,183
Oman	37,441	34,089	37,878	53,525	69,407	47,794	280,134
Bahrain	5,932	7,087	5,877	10,641	10,530	9,600	49,667
Qatar	10,171	4,061	3,039	5,121	7,320	8,119	37,831
Kuwait	6,250	1,542	153	173	5	229	8,352
Total:	419,842	389,484	350,147	448,060	628,452	609,478	2,845,463

Source: Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment

Female Migration

In line with global trends migration in the region is becoming increasingly feminized, with women making up 42 per cent of migrants in Asia (UN DESA, 2013) and there are now increasing calls for promoting greater opportunities for women to migrate. In Pakistan, however, the share of female workers is very low in the overall migration; their percentage of the total number of migrant workers equals 0.12% so there is a lot of scope to substantially increase female migration in occupations considered safe. The Government of Pakistan encourages the participation of women in any sector.

Female workers move abroad for employment, primarily in the field of health services, finance sector, beauty and fashion designing. The main reason behind the small number is religious and social values. Other characteristics of female migration include:

- Women receive lower salaries, but remit higher proportions. They are more likely to finance family needs with remittances.
- The high costs of migration can be particularly challenging for women.
- Women migrant workers are more vulnerable to labour exploitation and abuse.

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Remittances

According to the World Bank, Pakistan has become the fifth largest remittances recipient developing country in 2011. According to Economic Survey of Pakistan 2012-13, workers' remittances increased to \$ 11,569.82 million during the July 2012 - April 2013 time period, up from \$10,876.99 million for the July 2011-April 2012 period (registering a growth of 6.37%).

Enhancing Labour Migration Governance in Pakistan

In late 2013, the ILO launched a sub-regional project aimed to promote the management of labour migration from Pakistan, India and Nepal to selected Gulf Cooperation Council countries. The aim of the project is to ensure effective protection of the rights of vulnerable migrant workers, enhance the development impact of labour migration and reduce unregulated migration. The project is implemented with funding from the EU.

The ILO has also been working with the Bureau of Emigration to promote awareness on HIV & AIDS to the intending emigrants in their pre-departure briefings.

Officials of the Ministry of Labour are providing in-country and overseas training on safe migration especially the issues relating to contractual arrangements and recognition of skills of migrant workers as well as on maximizing development benefits and minimizing adverse impacts, such as: loss of educational investment, skill depletion, social breakdown.

The National Emigration Policy

In 2013, the ILO supported the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis (now merged with Ministry of Human Resource Development) in developing and finalizing the draft National Emigration Policy. The Policy was passed by the interim government, but may have to be reviewed and approved by the new government. National Policy for Overseas Pakistanis makes the following recommendations:

a. Pakistan should ratify ILO Conventions (97 and 143) regarding rights of Migrant Workers and UN Convention on protection of migrant workers and the national Policy should be aligned to the provisions of these conventions.

b. At present, only 0.12 per cent Pakistani women work abroad – very low by all standards. There is a need to take proactive steps to increase women's participation in overseas employment.

c. The Policy should recognize Social Protection as a basic human right of Overseas Pakistanis as per Constitution of Pakistan and make necessary efforts to include OPs in existing Social Protection schemes available for Pakistani workers. Similarly, a scheme should be announced for protection and insurance of 'deported workers' and help them in reintegration.

d. The Government of Pakistan should include 'Overseas Pakistanis and their rights' in all international negotiations with developed countries.

e. The Pakistani Embassies in OP-destination countries should actively support 'Social Networks and Associations' of Overseas Pakistanis and use this platform to provide necessary legal aid and other facilities to OPs at their workplaces.

f. Special training institutes be established to impart vocational and technical training courses according to the standards of overseas employments

h. Mutual skills and certification recognition agreements should be pursued and put in place for immigrant workers.

The draft Policy is a major step in increasing welfare and empowerment of Pakistani migrant workers with social protection, legal aid, right to vote and representation in parliament.