

Migrant Workers from Pakistan

A FACTSHEET

Sunita Basnet and Rajita Dhungana

INTRODUCTION

Foreign employment is an important source of livelihood for many households in Pakistan. Both skilled and unskilled workers migrate in search of work, primarily to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Malaysia. Pakistani migrants work in a wide range of sectors including construction, security and manufacturing. Though remittances play a vital role for several families in Pakistan, Pakistani migrant workers continue to face several difficulties and exploitation during migration. This paper gives a brief overview of labour migration from Pakistan, along with the information on the size of migrant workers, destination countries, income and benefits, and working conditions. It also provides some information about the employment situation in Pakistan.

Migration and migrants

Total out-migration

Pakistan saw an exodus of 625,203 migrants in 2019.¹ There were 419,625 Pakistani migrants leaving the country in the fiscal year 2017/18, and 382,439 workers in 2018 alone.² According to the emigration statistics of Pakistan, the GCC countries and Malaysia were the prime destinations for the Pakistani workers, with 332,713 migrants in Saudi Arabia, 211,216 migrants in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), 28,391 migrants in Oman, 19,327 migrants in Qatar, 8,189 migrants in Bahrain, 126 in Kuwait, and 11,323 workers in Malaysia in 2019.³ In 2018, 39 per cent of the total Pakistani migrants were in the GCC region and Malaysia.⁴ Many Pakistani migrants take irregular routes for migrating overseas; as per the estimates of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), about 300,000 Pakistanis migrated via irregular channels in 2012.⁵

1 Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment. 2019. *Reports & Statistics*. Islamabad: Government of Pakistan. <https://beoe.gov.pk/reports-and-statistics>

2 Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment 2019.

3 Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment 2019.

4 Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment. 2018. *Analysis of Manpower Export 2018*. Islamabad: Government of Pakistan.

5 World Bank. 2018. *A migrant's journey for better opportunities: the case of Pakistan*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/540841530861637430/A-migrant-s-journey-for-better-opportunities-the-case-of-Pakistan>

The migration of Pakistani women is significantly lower than that of their male counterparts and accounted for only 0.4 per cent of the total migration from Pakistan between 1971 to July 2019.⁶ During that period, 40,807 Pakistani women migrated overseas, out of which 42.5 per cent went to the UAE, 35 per cent to Saudi Arabia, 5 per cent to Oman and 2 per cent to Qatar.⁷

The majority of migrant workers from Pakistan are mostly employed in construction, security, transport and manufacturing,⁸ while most females are employed in domestic work.⁹ Some of the categories of foreign employment in 2018 include:¹⁰

- Highly-skilled/qualified professionals in international job market: engineer (4,676); teacher (2,211); doctor (1,945); pharmacist (1,346); designer (850)
- Unskilled/low-skilled expatriates: labourer (150,274); technician (11,368); mason (17,130); carpenter (11,629); electrician (12,076); agriculturist (7,596); salesman (8,225); steel-fixer (7,069); plumber (6,352); operator (5,173)
- Skilled (142,486); unskilled (157,870); semi-skilled (56,208); highly-qualified (16,105); highly-skilled (9,770)

Process and cost of recruitment

Labour migration from Pakistan takes place through two channels—the Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC) and Overseas Employment Promoters (OEP). OEC is a public sector body that facilitates migration to countries like South Korea and Oman, which have signed bilateral labour agreements with the Pakistani government.¹¹ However, the OEC only sends about 1,500 to 2,000 migrant workers whereas the total outflow from the country is over 600,000.¹² OEPs are the private recruitment agencies, which need to get registered at and acquire a license from the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BE&OE).¹³ In 2018, there were a total of 2,056 valid OEPs operating from Pakistan.¹⁴ Although prohibited by the Emigration Rules, the OEPs further mobilise unlicensed agents for recruiting migrant workers from the rural and remote areas.¹⁵ Each OEP sends around 800-900 Pakistani migrants for foreign employment every year on an average.¹⁶

The migrant workers have to pay a heavy sum of money to acquire their job overseas. A survey revealed that the cost of migration to Saudi Arabia was around USD 4,290 on an average, and the cost of migration to the UAE was around USD 2,358.¹⁷ Even though the Emigration Rules has set the service charge for facilitating migration at a maximum of Pakistan Rupees 6,000—excluding the cost for

6 Khan, Themrise. 2020. *Female Labour Migration from Pakistan: A Situation Analysis*. Geneva: International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_735795.pdf

7 Khan 2020.

8 Arif 2009, as cited in Hagen-Zanker, Jessica, Richard Mallett, Anita Ghimire, Qasim Ali Shah, Bishnu Upreti, and Haider Abbas. 2014. *Migration from the margins: mobility, vulnerability and inevitability in mid-western Nepal and north-western Pakistan*. Researching Livelihoods and Services Affected by Conflict, Report 5. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, Overseas Development Institute (ODI). https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jessica_Hagen-Zanker/publication/268808993_Migration_from_the_margins_mobility_vulnerability_and_inevitability_in_mid-western_Nepal_and_north-western_Pakistan/links/54772ef0cf2a961e482413f.pdf

9 BE&OE 2019; as cited in Khan 2020.

10 Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment 2019.

11 Hagen-Zanker et al. 2014.

12 Hagen-Zanker et al. 2014.

13 Hagen-Zanker et al. 2014.

14 Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment 2018.

15 World Bank 2018.

16 Hagen-Zanker et al. 2014.

17 International Labour Organization. 2016a. *The cost of migration: What low-skilled migrant workers from Pakistan pay to work in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates*. Islamabad: International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-kathmandu/documents/publication/wcms_514127.pdf

air tickets, medical exams, work permits, levies, visas, and documentation—the migrant workers are paying high recruitment fee for migration in reality.¹⁸

Wages of Pakistani workers in GCC and Malaysia

According to the Emigration Rules, the Pakistani Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BE&OE) is required to ensure that the wages and terms and conditions of work are 'reasonable' before workers migrate for work; the exact amount for minimum wage, however, is not specified.¹⁹ Research showed that the average income of the Pakistani migrant workers was USD 443, with USD 480 for Saudi Arabia and USD 387 for the UAE.²⁰

Remittance to Pakistan

Pakistan received USD 21,014 million as remittances from the migrant workers in 2018, which contributed to a 6.8 per cent share of GDP in 2018.²¹ Pakistan received a total of USD 16.096 billion from Pakistani migrant workers in the first nine months of the fiscal year 2019, with Saudi Arabia as the largest source of remittance at USD 3.74 billion.²² The remittances from the GCC countries accounted for 54.1 per cent of the total remittance—USD 8.69 billion.²³ The remittance received during July-March of the fiscal year 2020 was USD 16,991.6 million, a 6 per cent increase from the remittance received for the same period in the fiscal year 2019.²⁴

Injuries and deaths of migrant workers

According to the data from BE&OE, over 4,000 Pakistani migrant workers lost their lives and 606 migrants suffered from disability between 2008 and 2016.²⁵ In 2018 alone, there were about 900 cases of deaths and 175 cases of disabilities.²⁶ The Pakistani records show the data of complaints and not that of death or injuries, so it is difficult to give the exact numbers.

Compensation received by migrant workers

Migrant workers from Pakistan are only insured for death and disabilities and they should rely on the policy of employers in destination countries for accidents or injuries.²⁷ The Overseas Pakistan Foundation (OPF), a unit within the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis & Human Resource Development, works for the welfare of the Pakistanis living overseas by providing financial assistance in case of death and disability.²⁸ OPF provides Pakistani rupees 400,000 as compensation for death and 300,000 for disability.²⁹ Migrant workers contribute an amount of Pakistani rupees 2000, which is mobilised by OPF as welfare fund.³⁰ As per the data of BE&OE, Pakistani rupees 3,217 million was provided as compensation for deaths, and Pakistani rupees 195.52 million for the disability claims between 2008 to

18 World Bank 2018.

19 World Bank 2018.

20 International Labour Organization 2016a.

21 World Bank. 2019. *Migration and Remittances Data: Annual Remittances Data (Updated as of April 2019)*. Accessed 15 December 2019. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaisues/brief/migration-remittances-data>

22 Ahmed, Khurshid. 2019. 'Saudi Arabia remains largest source of remittances to Pakistan.' *Arab News*, 11 April 2019. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1480941/business-economy>

23 Ahmed 2019.

24 State Bank of Pakistan. 2020. *Press Release on Workers' Remittances*, 10 April 2020. <http://www.sbp.org.pk/press/2020/Pr1-10-Apr-20.pdf>

25 World Bank 2018.

26 Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment 2018.

27 World Bank 2018.

28 Overseas Pakistanis Foundation. n.d. 'Financial Assistance.' Accessed 10 April 2020. <https://www.opf.org.pk/financial-assistance/>

29 Overseas Pakistani Foundation n.d.

30 Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment. n.d. 'Emigrant Fee Structure.' Accessed 10 April 2020. <https://beoe.gov.pk/fee-structure-emigrant>

2016.³¹ In 2018, Pakistani rupees 707 million was paid as compensation for deaths and 71.5 million for disability claims.³² Similarly, according to BE&OE, as of 2018, death and disability claims of Pakistani rupees 108.6 million and 9.5 million respectively are pending due to missing documents like death certificates or bank information.³³

Status of informal and formal employment and the future of work

Pakistan has signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) with Jordan (1978), Qatar (1987, revised in 2008), Kuwait (1995, revised in 2013), Malaysia (2003), the UAE (2006), Republic of Korea (2006), Italy (2009), Libya (2009) and Bahrain (2014).³⁴

Employment and workers

Economic growth rate in the country

The economic growth rate of Pakistan in 2019 was 3.3 per cent, and the expected growth for 2020 is 2.4 per cent.³⁵

Employment and unemployment

Pakistan's total population in 2018 was 212,215,030,³⁶ and the labour force participation rate was 51.9 per cent, with women accounting for 22.8 per cent only.³⁷ The employment to population ratio was 48.9, with 77.2 per cent for males, and 20.9 per cent for females and the unemployment rate was 5.7 per cent, 4.9 and 8.5 per cent for males and females respectively.³⁸

Status of informal and formal employment and future of work in light of technological changes

The share of employment in the informal economy in Pakistan was 71.4 per cent where males constituted 71.5 per cent, and females constituted 70.7 per cent.³⁹ According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the industry sector of Pakistan has 24 per cent contribution in total employment with 26 per cent male, and 16.6 per cent female workers. Similarly, the share of agriculture is 37.4 per cent, with 29.6 per cent male and 66.1 per cent female employees. The share of the service sector in total employment is 38.6 per cent, where the involvement of male and female workers is 44.4 and 17.3 per cent, respectively. The share of wage and salaried worker is 42.9 per cent, with 46.8 per cent male and 29 per cent female workers. The share of own-account workers is 35.7 per cent, with 39.9 per cent males and 20.6 per cent females. The employment to population ratio (15 years and above) is 48.9 per cent, where the majority are males (77.2 per cent). The employment to population ratio (15-24 years) is 36.9 per cent, with 56.3 per cent males, and 17 per cent females.⁴⁰

Working conditions in Pakistan

The minimum wage in Pakistan is Rs 17,500 per month, which was increased by Rs 2,500 since the fiscal year 2019.⁴¹ The labour law of Pakistan makes it mandatory to provide a formal appointment

31 World Bank 2018.

32 Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment 2018.

33 World Bank 2018.

34 World Bank 2018.

35 Chaudhry, Hufsa. 2019. 'Budget 2020: Govt predicts 2.4pc growth, Rs7 trillion in expenditures.' *Dawn*, 12 June 2019. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1484102/budget-2020-govt-predicts-24pc-growth-rs7-trillion-in-expenditures>

36 World Bank. n.d. 'Population, total – Pakistan.' Accessed 25 January 2020. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=PK>

37 Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. 2018. *Employment Trends 2018*. Islamabad, Pakistan: Ministry of Statistics, Government of Pakistan. <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/Pakistan%20Employment%20Trend%20%20Reprt%202018%20Final.pdf>

38 Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2018.

39 Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2018.

40 Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2018.

41 Siddiqui, Salman. 2019. 'Is Rs17,500 minimum wage sufficient amid heavy taxes?' *The Express Tribune*, 13 June 2019.

letter while hiring employers. Any worker, above the age of 18, can work for 9 hours a day and a maximum of 48 hours per week. In case of seasonal factories engaged in the production of cotton ginning; cotton or cotton jute pressing; or the manufacture of coffee, indigo, rubber, sugar or tea, the maximum working hours is up to 56 hours per week. Some other benefits for the workers include:⁴²

- An hour of interval for rest/meal
- Reduced working hours for those involved in manufacturing, commercial and service organisations during Ramadan
- 14 days of annual leave with pay, 10 days of casual leave with pay and 16 days of sick or medical leave on half pay
- Festival holidays as declared by the federal government
- 12 weeks of maternity leave for women, with 6 weeks before and 6 weeks after delivery, with pay
- Right to form associations or unions

Pakistan has also developed a national strategy to eliminate child and bonded labour.⁴³

Ratification of ILO Conventions

Pakistan has ratified 36 International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention in total, of which 31 are in force. All the eight fundamental conventions have been ratified, and two of the governance conventions including the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (C081) and the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (C144) have been ratified. Pakistan has ratified 26 technical conventions, some of which include: the Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919 (C001); the Weekly Rest (Industry) Convention, 1921 (C014) and the Underground Work (Women) Convention, 1935 (C045), among others.⁴⁴

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1991191/2-rs17500-minimum-wage-sufficient-amid-heavy-taxes/>

42 International Labour Organization. n.d.a. 'National Labour Law Profile: Islamic Republic of Pakistan.' https://www.ilo.org/ifpdial/information-resources/national-labour-law-profiles/WCMS_158916/lang--en/index.htm

43 International Labour Organization. 2016b. 'National framework on elimination of child and bonded labour agreed.' 2 May 2016, Islamabad, Pakistan. https://www.ilo.org/islamabad/info/public/pr/WCMS_477252/lang--en/index.htm

44 International Labour Organization. n.d.b. 'Ratifications for Pakistan.' Accessed 20 January 2020. https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11200:0::NO::P11200_COUNTRY_ID:103166

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South Asian Regional Trade Union Council (SATUC)

Secretariat:

P.O. Box 3613, Stone House, Sarsh marg, Kathmandu
Nepal

Phone +977-1-4469954

Fax +977-1-4469959

sartuc.kathmanduoffice@gmail.com . <http://www.sartuc.org>



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