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Institute of South Asian Studies
National University of Singapore
29 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
#08-06 (Block B)
Singapore 119620
Tel: (65) 6516 4239 Fax: (65) 6776 7505
www.isas.nus.edu.sg
<http://southasiandiaspora.org>



Labour Migration from Pakistan: An Overview

Pakistan is one of the largest exporters of labour. Between 1971 and 2016, more than 9.4 million Pakistanis went overseas for employment. The main destination for Pakistani labour was the Gulf, mainly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Almost 90 per cent of Pakistani workers are unskilled or semi-skilled and vulnerable to exploitative recruitment and working conditions. The other destinations include the United Kingdom, Western Europe and North America. The Pakistani diaspora makes a significant contribution to Pakistan's gross domestic product (GDP). In the fiscal year 2014-15, remittance flow from overseas Pakistanis amounted to US\$15 billion (S\$20.4 billion), accounting for seven to eight per cent of Pakistan's GDP.

Riaz Hassan¹

As a manpower-surplus country, Pakistan has a long history of labour migration. Soon after its emergence as an independent country in 1947, the first wave of semi-skilled and skilled Pakistani workers went to the United Kingdom (UK) in the 1950s for work in the textile mills and the transport sector. The Second World War and the loss of thousands of young men had

¹ Professor Riaz Hassan is Visiting Research Professor at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), an autonomous research institute at the National University of Singapore. He can be contacted at isasriaz@nus.edu.sg. The author bears full responsibility for the facts cited and opinions expressed in this paper.

left Britain seriously short of labour. The government and the owners of the mills turned to Britain's populous former colonies in South Asia to redress the labour shortage. Most of these migrants went from northern Punjab and the western parts of Kashmir. Today, they number 1.1 million, constituting the largest Pakistani community in the European Union.

The original wave of migration continued until the 1970s when two developments occurred. First, the British government tightened its immigration policy and, second, a new destination emerged nearer Pakistan in the Middle East, especially in the Gulf States. The resource-rich and labour-deficient Gulf States, following the several-fold increase in the price of oil, had embarked on ambitious development projects which required a large labour force to run them. The migration to the Gulf States was different from that to the UK. It was more programmed. Workers went on contract for a specified period of time after which they had to return to Pakistan. Their recruitment and working conditions in the country of destination were vastly different from those experienced by the workers who had gone to the UK.

Pakistan now is the second-largest exporter of labour, after India to the Gulf States. As Table 1 shows, between 1971 and 2016, more than 9.4 million Pakistanis went abroad for employment, according to official data. The migration from Pakistan reached new peaks after 2011, with more than three million people going abroad for employment until 2016, as per the latest data. Of this total labour migration, about 96 per cent went to the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member-states – with the main country of destination being Saudi Arabia, followed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain. In the same period, more than 50 per cent of all migrant workers from Pakistan originated from the Punjab province, followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh provinces. The share of Punjab in the migratory flows to the GCC countries has been in line with its share in the country's total population, while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has had a much larger share in migration than its share in total population. Sindh and Baluchistan have had a relatively smaller share in the migration stream.

In 2016, among all migrants from Pakistan, about three per cent were highly qualified or highly skilled, 41 per cent skilled, 16 per cent semi-skilled and 40 per cent unskilled (see Table 2). As Table 2 shows, Saudi Arabia, among the Gulf countries, accounts for half of all Pakistani migrant workers, followed by the UAE which accounts for 33 per cent. A majority

of workers in these two countries are semi-skilled and unskilled. The semi-skilled workers are usually employed as drivers, masons and carpenters, while the unskilled mostly constitute the labour segment. These workers are less educated and more vulnerable to exploitative recruitment and working practices. The highly-skilled and professional workers number less than 10 per cent.

Most of the migrant workers in the Gulf States are young men. The migration of Pakistani women has been negligible. The main reason for the small number of female migrants is the conservative social precepts that prohibit women from working outside the household or keep them in family-related work. However, this trend is changing. Even the government regulations prohibiting women workers from migrating for certain occupations or to certain countries are gradually being relaxed.

The remittance income to Pakistan from its overseas citizens has increased very significantly in recent years, growing at an annual rate of 15 per cent between 2000 and 2016. In fiscal year 2014-15, the remittances totalled US\$18 billion (S\$24.48 billion), of which 55 per cent came from two countries – Saudi Arabia [US\$5.6 billion (S\$7.61 billion)] and the UAE [US\$4.3 billion (S\$5.84 billion)]. The remittance income accounted for seven to eight per cent of Pakistan's gross domestic product, and was almost equal to three-quarters of the total value of exports of goods and services. These remittances have contributed greatly to poverty reduction in Pakistan.

The migration to the Gulf countries tends to be highly exploitative of the workers during their recruitment and their employment overseas. The paid-for-by-worker migration costs can be as high as one-third of what low-skilled workers will earn in two or three years abroad. Many workers borrow money at high interest rates from moneylenders to cover their migration costs. Due to the high expenditure incurred on migration, some workers overstay beyond their visa duration, thereby becoming irregular migrants and rendering themselves vulnerable to further exploitation as well as risking imprisonment. The findings of recent studies also reveal that migration costs are regressive – costs fall as workers' skills and wages increase. Hence, the maximum burden of the migration cost lands on the semi-skilled and unskilled workers who mostly come from low-income households. Even though the governments have

put in place institutional arrangements and framed laws, rules and regulations to protect workers from such exploitation, it has been difficult to stop such practices.

Table 1: Number of Pakistani Workers Registered for Overseas Employment, 1971-2016 (By Country)

Countries	1971-	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
UAE	740568	65786	73642	100207	139405	221765	140889	113312	156353	182630	273234	350522	326986	222319	3107618
Algeria	721	4	0	1	5	37	73	37	7	2	7	36	211	109	1250
Angola	70	0	0	10	70	68	379	4	8	6	8	1	22	16	662
Bahrain	68991	855	1612	1630	2615	5932	7087	5877	10641	10530	9600	9226	9029	6118	149743
Brunei	485	107	71	77	56	66	74	62	79	74	67	48	85	47	1398
Gabon	291	0	0	6	1	0	1	0	2	4	1	8	0	0	314
Gen-Island	195	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	197
Greece	438	6	30	36	6	12	14	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	547
Guinea	78	30	2	12	5	5	2	10	15	12	13	6	10	7	207
Hong Kong	127	6	12	16	16	22	20	33	26	17	20	38	29	26	408
Iran	12552	12	6	3	3	3	3	4	14	3	26	5	65	22	12721
Iraq	68133	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	32	951	1041	709	401	71269
Jordan	4656	140	102	43	67	106	55	172	178	279	345	328	321	226	7018
Kenya	35	7	1	7	0	7	6	4	11	8	6	3	11	10	116
Kuwait	122038	18498	7185	10545	14544	6250	1542	153	173	5	229	132	164	676	182134
Libya	66569	375	261	67	450	940	1293	2157	490	1872	4543	2121	8	0	81146
Lebanon	361	0	4	4	8	18	16	21	30	23	15	57	33	33	623
Malaysia	2230	65	7690	4757	1190	1756	2435	3287	2092	1309	2031	20577	20216	8478	78113
Nigeria	2122	14	25	55	57	105	125	162	166	142	117	113	106	87	3396
Oman	222939	8982	8019	12614	32474	37441	34089	37878	53525	69407	47794	39793	47788	34291	687034
Qatar	52961	2383	2175	2247	5006	10171	4061	3039	5121	7320	8119	10042	12741	6596	131982
Saudi	1976721	70896	35177	45594	84587	138283	201816	189888	222247	358560	270502	312489	522750	406441	4835951
Sierra Leone	124	0	0	7	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	140
Sudan	860	93	360	140	128	60	109	324	227	383	368	559	494	321	4426
Singapore	141	3	6	8	11	16	39	58	62	47	42	76	68	20	597
Somalia	63	2	1	1	4	2	4	8	5	21	14	47	23	15	210
Spain	1112	254	290	183	176	85	16	6	3	10	3	7	0	4	2149
Tanzania	398	53	65	39	41	65	75	76	63	55	56	72	126	37	1221
Tunisia	25	0	0	0	3	7	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	1	42
Uganda	303	1	1	0	0	12	4	5	10	0	6	6	37	15	400
UK	3420	1419	1611	1741	1111	756	556	430	308	183	158	250	260	244	12447
USA	2040	130	238	202	297	232	184	196	182	164	226	351	350	225	5017
Yemen	3979	157	81	127	163	151	241	170	57	144	105	137	24	12	5548
West Africa	307	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	3	314
South Africa	94	7	38	65	45	93	314	184	195	302	211	189	140	63	1940
Zambia	842	0	5	1	4	11	30	15	13	7	38	20	12	15	1013
Japan	137	12	22	53	33	45	48	30	48	62	44	69	82	77	762
South	6613	2474	1970	1082	434	1534	985	251	12	7	12	46	13	11	15444
Croatia	44	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	45
Turkmenistan	927	16	109	10	5	97	20	28	0	0	0	0	0	2	1214
Cyprus	210	40	32	111	206	129	144	50	71	129	111	278	500	717	2728
Turkey	156	0	0	2	7	3	2	33	14	13	21	15	57	84	407
China	150	3	154	435	300	172	312	191	180	220	155	254	355	344	3225
Cameroon	44	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	15	0	0	3	2	0	68
Morocco	38	0	0	0	4	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	46
Italy	1405	581	551	431	2765	2876	5416	3738	2875	3361	2068	1563	431	205	28266
Sweden	48	8	15	3	3	8	21	28	84	74	24	16	32	17	381
Switzerland	34	4	2	4	9	15	15	17	18	27	12	17	15	13	202

Syria	245	5	4	80	1	3	7	1	0	0	0	0	0	346	
Germany	147	8	2	8	5	6	9	2	11	23	26	23	43	338	
Azerbaijan	9	7	2	4	3	10	10	6	0	3	98	22	8	186	
Others	4211	381	562	523	706	934	985	952	1258	1117	1288	1857	2206	18530	
Total	3371407	173824	142135	183191	287033	430314	403528	362904	456893	638587	622714	752466	946571	689932	9461499

Table 2: Classification of Pakistani Workers Registered for Overseas Employment, 1971-2016

Categories	1971-2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Engineer	23078	1355	2171	3295	2352	2408	2951	3577	4764	6668	7322	4089	64030
Doctor	6958	509	463	516	589	819	1453	1218	1131	2074	2276	2151	20157
Nurse	5786	128	99	119	219	78	131	449	315	251	223	208	8006
Teacher	5820	421	558	413	458	537	615	956	868	975	1171	869	13661
Accountant	13931	961	1238	2325	1248	1381	1802	2593	3473	3573	4698	3474	40697
Manager	10792	2462	2802	3164	2145	1936	2272	2797	3849	4990	6459	5043	48711
Welder	40353	3098	4429	6069	5352	5120	6361	9891	13135	13604	17745	11380	136537
Secretary/ Stenographer	2596	151	88	77	86	93	109	214	405	926	821	239	5805
Storekeeper	6742	774	485	792	454	504	1056	1965	1740	1719	2316	2390	20937
Agriculture	130689	10780	12809	17584	11420	9155	11128	17114	17102	22325	30967	25477	316550
Clerk/Typist	56406	1676	1639	3047	2086	2661	3716	4261	6376	8763	11354	8329	110314
For/Supervisor	38589	1871	2896	3755	2773	1962	4277	5535	6077	5409	8680	8789	90613
Mason	280369	9700	16213	36254	38085	30612	35328	54493	44170	50677	62945	52459	711305
Carpenter	200983	8861	12787	26673	22555	18544	24568	33822	30849	31093	38002	27548	476285
Electrician	127750	5688	8560	15455	15731	14515	17326	24166	26767	25844	34653	25017	341472
Cook	71066	2787	2526	3330	4245	4034	3886	5340	6130	6860	8442	8547	127193
Plumber	57281	2877	4510	8703	8301	7677	9023	14109	17279	16827	21889	17060	185536
Waiter/Bearer	22971	588	717	879	1727	1147	2146	4335	4612	5347	9579	8654	62702
Steel Fixer	116108	6318	9860	17904	16781	14403	17226	24978	24000	26422	27609	19870	321479
Painter	75249	3307	4978	6471	7747	6505	7623	13252	13999	16890	20409	18447	194877
Labourer	1386856	75098	130890	187844	168519	144111	190854	242202	222422	301425	341314	241857	3633392
Technician	142784	8301	11055	16928	17483	19718	18100	28066	32070	34806	42328	29842	401481
Mechanic	103600	4304	6771	9645	9978	11874	13139	12099	14829	15467	22465	13794	237965
Cable Jointer	3261	131	73	179	705	1072	292	382	288	992	765	1235	9375
Driver	351167	14114	26501	27417	33501	34905	48188	86568	72610	85794	141316	86603	1008684
Operator	46148	3846	5006	9533	8113	8273	9813	12883	12829	14806	17790	10230	159270
Tailor	164403	2748	4067	4527	5264	4050	4567	5919	5342	5635	7958	7653	222133
Surveyor	6665	288	501	897	686	553	811	1972	2063	2512	5595	6851	29394
Fitter	19758	2926	3764	7644	6371	4441	5736	8134	11358	13294	16529	14915	114870
Denter	26120	613	906	1047	2192	1633	2200	2750	2856	3331	3363	3685	50696
Comp/Analyst	3678	672	934	940	624	598	720	1743	2502	2161	2853	2562	19987
Designer	1499	62	59	70	214	68	55	204	709	1287	1478	731	6436
Goldsmith	4519	321	147	76	90	40	94	429	230	286	657	752	7641
Pharmacist	532	31	12	21	18	59	48	167	187	171	335	264	1845
Rigger	1866	718	1048	556	468	129	890	1469	770	1343	2099	1951	13307
Salesman	49216	4115	4893	5655	4401	6647	7461	7496	12824	16017	18241	12557	149523
Draftsman	1785	115	111	226	138	133	207	426	389	739	2259	3125	9653

Blacksmith	1083	176	267	156	260	430	548	486	254	787	1454	1249	7150
Photographer	440	11	14	10	45	16	62	44	116	213	65	19	1055
Artist	2659	289	186	118	104	63	111	83	1025	163	147	17	4965
Others	75810	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	75810
Total	3687366	183191	287033	430314	403528	362904	456893	638587	622714	752466	946571	689932	9461499

Note: The data in Tables 1 and 2 are derived from the official statistics of the Government of Pakistan.

According to an International Labour Organisation Survey in 2016, this appears to be especially true for migration through the South Asia-GCC region corridor. The benefits of reducing these crippling migration expenses, especially for the semi-skilled and unskilled workers, will be enormous. It will enable more people from low-income households to access foreign employment opportunities. It will also prevent asset depletion on the part of migrant households (through the sale of property and other possessions) to finance the migration journey. Lower costs can also prevent migrants from falling into heavy debt traps, which may well absorb a substantial portion of their potential earnings. It might also help protect the workers from forced labour. Fair and low fees for obtaining a work visa in the host country will result in larger remittance flows to migrant households and their communities, which could be used for education and medical care by the family members left behind; this can even result in desperately-needed human capital formation and other productive uses as well as consumer spending that could bolster the economy.

Pakistani Migration to Europe

As mentioned earlier, the very first wave of migration from Pakistan occurred in the 1950s and 1960s when a large number of Pakistani workers went to England to work in factories and the transport sectors to meet the labour shortages in the UK following the Second World War. In the subsequent years, Pakistanis also migrated to other European countries, including Italy, Greece, France, Spain, Germany, Norway and Denmark as economic migrants. Most of them were poorly educated and semi-skilled people from the rural areas. Altogether now, there are around 2.2 million Pakistanis in Europe, with half of them in the UK. The Pakistani communities in Europe maintain close cultural and economic contacts with their homeland. Many have succeeded economically and their children have become successful professionals. One example is Sadiq Khan, a successful lawyer, who was elected as the Mayor of the city of

London in 2016. He is the son of a Pakistani migrant. Twelve members of the UK Parliament are of Pakistani origin.

Pakistani Diaspora in the United States

The Pakistani diaspora in the US is very different from that in Europe. Those who migrated to the US were mostly skilled and came from urban, educated backgrounds. There are nearly 800,000 Pakistanis in the US and Canada. In the US, the number of Pakistani immigrants and their children are estimated to be around 600,000. Pakistan-born individuals account for about 0.8 per cent of the total foreign-born population in the US. The majority of Pakistanis in the US had gone there after the 1980s. The median age of the Pakistani diaspora is 40 years. On average, their educational attainment is higher than that of the total US population itself, as is their income. A far greater proportion of the first- and second-generation Pakistani diaspora possesses undergraduate degrees than the ratio for the US population as whole. They are more likely to work in professional or managerial occupations. In 2014, the median household income of the US Pakistani diaspora was estimated to be around US\$60,000 (S\$81,600), which was US\$10,000 (S\$13,600) above the median for all US households. About 18 per cent of Pakistani diaspora households are in the top-10 per cent of the US household income distribution. The economic and educational status of the US Pakistani diaspora is strikingly different from that of the Pakistani diaspora communities in other parts of the world.

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