

The Pakistani Diaspora

Corridors of Opportunity and Uncertainty

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Preface

The essays in this volume are a valuable contribution to the growing literature on the Pakistani diaspora. The book is being published at a time of mounting debate over the future of international migration and ensuing anxiety among migrants – including those from Pakistan – as this debate takes on racial and religious overtones. In the Middle East, where a majority of the Pakistani diaspora works (albeit as temporary workers), the slowing down of the region’s economies and envisaged structural changes have raised concerns as to whether these labor flows will slacken and return migration will accelerate. This would likely have negative consequences for Pakistan in terms of domestic employment and, more important, the flow of remittances, which play a critical role in supporting its growing external account deficit.

With its focus on the Pakistani diaspora, this volume breaks new ground in many respects. It does not merely analyze the growth of this diaspora in a historical context, but also provides valuable insights into the cost and benefits of migration – to migrants, their families in the new host country and the families they leave behind.

The essays in this volume were first presented and discussed at an international conference organized by the Lahore School of Economics in 2016, which brought together a range of scholars and analysts from Pakistan and abroad. We owe a debt of gratitude to the authors who, despite their pressing engagements, developed their presentations further and incorporated the editor’s comments and suggestions.

Several background papers were also prepared for the conference, including one on the British Pakistani diaspora (by Laraib Niaz and Sidla Nasir) and one on the Pakistani diaspora in North America (by Naimal Fatima). These are being published separately as working papers.

I would also like to acknowledge the valuable contribution of Maheen Pracha who has done an excellent job in preparing the manuscript; her editing has drawn praise from all the authors.

Finally, my hope is that the publication of this volume and the establishment of the Centre on International Migration, Remittances and Diaspora (CIMRAD) at the Lahore School of Economics will provide a much-needed boost to the nascent field of diaspora studies in Pakistan.

Rashid Amjad
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