

Pakistan Migration Report 2025

The Policy Challenge



GCC



SAUDI
ARABIA



UNITED
KINGDOM



EUROPEAN
UNION



UNITED
STATES



CANADA



AUSTRALIA

Pakistan Migration Report 2025

The Policy Challenge

**Fareeha Zafar
Rashid Amjad
Zahra Mughis**

**Centre on International Migration, Remittances and Diaspora
(CIMRAD)**

Lahore School of Economics

April 2026

© 2026 Lahore School of Economics

All rights reserved

First printing: April 2026

The views expressed in this volume are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Lahore School of Economics.

Lahore School of Economics

Intersection of Main Boulevard, Phase VI, DHA, and Burki Road

Lahore 53200, Pakistan

Tel.: +92 42 3656 1230

www.lahoreschoolofeconomics.edu.pk/

Migration powers economic growth, reduces inequalities and connects diverse societies. Yet it is also a source of political tensions and human tragedies.

— *António Guterres, ninth secretary-general of the United Nations, 11 January 2018*

Migration is an expression of the human aspiration for dignity, safety and a better future. It is part of the social fabric, part of our very make-up as a human family.

— *Ban Ki-moon, eighth secretary-general of the United Nations, 3 October 2013*

The act of deporting people who in many cases have left their own land for reasons of extreme poverty, insecurity, exploitation, persecution or serious deterioration of the environment, damages the dignity of many men and women, and of entire families, and places them in a state of particular vulnerability and defenselessness...What is built on the basis of force, and not on the truth about the equal dignity of every human being, begins badly and will end badly.

— *Pope Francis, 10 February 2025*

Preface

The *Pakistan Migration Report 2025: The Policy Challenge* is the fourth in a series of biennial reports published by the Center on International Migration, Remittances, and Diaspora (CIMRAD) at the Lahore School of Economics. The reports provide data and analysis of migration outflows and trends for the period under review and identify key areas for more in-depth analysis. The *2020 Migration Report*, the first in the series, examined the extent of the Pakistani diaspora, remittances, in-migration of Afghans, and irregular migration. The *2022 Migration Report* focused on remittance inflows and government efforts to attract them. The last *Migration Report* in 2024 highlighted remittance trends, the issue of brain drain, and irregular migration in greater detail.

Migrants and asylum seekers face critical human and security issues as receiving countries adopt increasingly restrictive policies

Starting in 2025, the *Migration Report* will be published annually with a focus on a particular theme or area. The current report analyzes migration flows and remittance trends from two regions, the Gulf and the Rest of the World, for a deeper understanding of the direction of migration from Pakistan and its ramifications. The report's main focus is on identifying key issues impacting migration determinants in the context of policy changes taking place in receiving countries and the challenges arising from this, both now and in the future.

Migrants and asylum seekers face critical human and security issues as the policies of receiving countries become more stringent and restrictive, resulting in irregular migration as the only option for the unskilled. At the same time, as traditionally welcoming hosts in the West close their doors, new avenues are opening up in Asia for those seeking opportunities away from Pakistan.

My special thanks to Maheen Pracha for editing and designing the report. I also extend thanks to Filza Khalid for her assistance in the chapter on remittances and Fariya Hashmat for the cover design. Acknowledgements are also due to Mubarik Nasir and Saeed Tahir for printing the report.

Fareeha Zafar

Professor
Graduate Institute of Development Studies
Lahore School of Economics
March 2026

Table of Contents

Preface	iii
List of Figures	vii
List of Tables	viii
List of Boxes	ix
Abbreviations.....	x
Key Findings	xi
The Future.....	xv
1. Introduction	1
2. Migration Outflows and Trends	5
2.1 Yearly Migrant Outflows from Pakistan: Trends and Key Years	5
2.2 Characteristics of Pakistani Migrant Workers (2024 and 2025)	6
2.3 Destinations for Pakistani Migrant Workers.....	8
2.4 Overview of Irregular Migration from Pakistan, 2024 and 2025.....	13
3. The Gulf and the Globe: A Closer Look at Pakistani Migrants’ Destination Profiles ..	15
3.1 The Imperative of Work: The Gulf Region	15
3.2 Moving For a Better Life: The West and the Rest	18
4. The Surge in Remittances.....	29
4.1 Remittance Trend	29
4.2 Why the Rise in Remittances?.....	35
4.3 Regional and Global Rise in Remittances	36
4.4 The Role of Remittances in Pakistan’s Economy: Benefits and Costs.....	38
5. Issues and Policies.....	41
5.1 National Emigration and Welfare Policy (June 2024).....	42
5.2 Migration, Human Security, and Rights.....	44
5.3 Asylum Seekers	46
5.4 Conditions of Migrants in Recipient Countries.....	47
5.5 The Demand for Skills.....	48
5.6 Steps Taken by Pakistan	51
5.7 Shrinking Spaces	52
5.8 Restricting Students.....	53
5.9 Immigration Cutbacks.....	54
5.10 US Policy Under the Trump Administration	55
5.11 Irregular Pathways: Dying to Leave	56

5.12	Policy Regarding Irregular Migrants and Return Migrants	59
6.	Looking to the Future	61
6.1	Students: Changing Destinations	61
6.2	Tighter Visa Restrictions.....	62
6.3	The Beggar Phenomena: A New Type of Migrant.....	63
6.4	The Gulf.....	64
6.5	The United Kingdom	64
6.6	Demand for Care Workers	64
6.7	New Opportunities	65
7.	Conclusion	67
8.	References.....	69

List of Figures

Figure 1: Annual outflows of migrants from Pakistan (millions) (2011-2025)	6
Figure 2: Skills profile of Pakistani migrant workers (2024 and 2025) (percentage)	7
Figure 3: Top five jobs taken by Pakistani migrant workers (2024 and 2025) (percentage).....	7
Figure 4: Annual migrant outflows from Pakistan to the GCC region (millions) (2011- 2025).....	9
Figure 5: Annual migrant outflows from Pakistan to the rest of the world (thousands) (2011-2025)	9
Figure 6: Irregular border crossings by Pakistani nationals by border type (2009-June 2025) (percentage).....	13
Figure 7: Most frequently used routes for irregular border crossings by Pakistani nationals (2024 and 2025) (percentage).....	14
Figure 8: International departures at a Pakistani airport	18
Figure 9: Pakistani university students	21
Figure 10: Total remittance inflows to Pakistan (USD billion) (2020-2026*)	30
Figure 11: Remittances are a significant contributor to Pakistan’s GDP	31
Figure 12: Country-wise remittance inflows to Pakistan from major countries (USD billion) (2022-2026*)	34
Figure 13: Remittance inflows to Pakistan from selected mid-range countries (2022- 2026*)	34
Figure 14: A Pakistan-Afghanistan border crossing	45
Figure 15: Amounts spent by applicants on rejected UK visas and visa rejection rates (by nationality).....	53
Figure 16: Irregular border crossings by border type (2024) (percentage)	57
Figure 17: Migrant trafficking routes from Pakistan.....	58
Figure 18: Refugees on a boat crossing the Mediterranean Sea.....	59
Figure 19: Refugees and migrants awaiting asylum in France	60
Figure 20: Emerging study destinations for international students	62

List of Tables

Table 1: Regional distribution of annual outflows of Pakistani labor migrants (2024-2025).....	8
Table 2: Distribution of migrant workers by province of origin (2024-2025).....	10
Table 3: Districts in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with the highest outmigration in Pakistan (2024-2025)	11
Table 4: Top five districts with the highest outmigration in Punjab (2024-2025).....	12
Table 5: Top five districts with the highest outmigration in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2024-2025)	12
Table 6: Distribution of annual Pakistani outmigration to the GCC region (2024-2025).....	16
Table 7: Distribution of annual Pakistani outmigration to the rest of the world (2024 and 2025)	19
Table 8: Remittances as a percentage of GDP (FY 2022-2026*).....	31
Table 9: Country/region-wise worker remittance inflows to Pakistan (USD million) (percentage of total).....	32
Table 10: RDA, NPC, and Roshan Equity inflows and usage (USD million).....	36
Table 11: Remittance inflows for major South Asian countries (USD million)	37
Table 12: Major non-South Asian countries receiving remittances (USD million).....	37
Table 13: Beggars deported (2024 and 2025)	63

List of Boxes

Box 1: Asylum applications from Pakistan	27
Box 2: India’s remittances: A major turning point	37
Box 3: Pakistan: National Immigration and Welfare Policy, 2024.....	43
Box 4: The kafala system	47
Box 5: Agreements with provinces to modernize TVET institutes across Pakistan	51
Box 6: In-country training programs	52
Box 7: The UK’s immigration white paper policy regarding students (2025)	54
Box 8: The UK’s immigration white paper policy (2025)	55

Abbreviations

ACC	Afghan Citizen Card
BEOE	Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment
Frontex	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LAGO	Lessen Data Access and Governance Obstacles
MRC	Migrant Resource Center
NAVTTTC	National Vocational and Technical Training Commission
NCHR	National Commission for Human Rights
NPC	Naya Pakistan Certificate
RDA	Roshan Digital Account
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal (United Nations)
TEVTA	Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Key Findings



Labor migration continues to be the major type of outward migration from Pakistan. From more than 800,000 in 2022–2023, the number of labor migrants declined to 725,672 in 2024, and then increased to 762,499 in 2025.



Over 50 percent of Pakistani migrant workers came from the province of Punjab in 2024. However, there was a decline of 4 percent in 2025.



Unskilled and semi-skilled workers continue to dominate the skills profile of migrants. Their combined share in 2025 increased by 12 percent to around 67 percent.



The Gulf countries remained the predominant destinations, hosting 91.7 percent of registered migrant workers in 2024 and 92 percent in 2025, with Saudi Arabia ranked as the leading destination.



More remittances are sent by countries outside the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) despite their low ranking in terms of numbers, indicating the presence of high-wage-earning migrants and/or underreporting of migrant numbers.



Beyond the Gulf, the UK was the primary destination of choice for Pakistani migrant workers in 2024. However, its share declined by over 15 percent in 2025. Education- and skills-based immigration has dominated outflows to the US.



Movement to Canada is primarily under family sponsorship programs, followed by worker and student programs. Presently, Pakistan is one of the top sources of permanent skilled talent migration to Australia in the 2024–2025 cycle.



Some Asian countries have also emerged as migrant destinations. Iraq, which ranked second in 2024 with an 11 percent share, took the lead in 2025. Türkiye is the only other country that retained its place among the top five non-GCC destinations in both years.



China lost its place in the top five non-GCC destinations, while Greece increased its share to 6 percent.



Malaysia is emerging as a destination for high-skilled professionals in digital technology, artificial intelligence, and education.

Japan's aging population and workforce shortages have prompted some favorable policy shifts that are driving the newest wave of migration. Almost 2.5 percent of Pakistan's non-GCC worker outflows in 2024 were destined for Japan, a share expected to double by the end of 2025.



Irregular migration, especially to European countries, continued to witness an increase. According to the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), 5,680 illegal border crossings involving migrants of Pakistani origin were recorded in 2024, and 3,203 during the first half of 2025. The numbers show a significant decline from the post-COVID-19 peak of over 12,000 crossings in 2022. Italy and Greece recorded the largest number of irregular flows.



The number of Pakistanis apprehended at various European borders was 5,680 in 2024 and 3,203 in the first half of 2025, with about 90 percent trying to enter by sea. Mediterranean Sea routes have become two of the top three routes preferred by Pakistani nationals to cross into Europe.



Afghan refugees constitute a major part of in-migrants dating back to 1979. In September 2023, the Pakistani government decided to expel all 'illegal aliens,' resulting in the voluntary and forcible departure of more than 900,000 Afghans by 15 April 2025.



There was a surge in remittances during 2024–2025 to USD 38.3 billion, as compared to USD 30.2 billion in 2023–2024—a rise of over 25 percent, surpassing the increase over the past two years of 10 percent.



The migration policy environment has become more frenzied during 2024–2025. Policies are constantly being reviewed, revised, and made more stringent. In this context, countries have moved to develop national migration policies.



Pakistan has changed its policy from a humanitarian approach to one of law enforcement in the second phase of repatriation of Afghans launched in March 2025 against Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders whose documentation had been canceled and who were told to leave by the end of March. As of 30 June 2025, Proof of Registration (POR) cardholders are also being sent back.



Germany and the US have reneged on their plan to relocate Afghans from Pakistan. Women asylum seekers are among those adversely affected.



The condition of emigrants, especially those on temporary visas or those classified as labor migrants under the Kafala system in the GCC countries, is an area of concern. The system is set to be reformed as of June 2025.



The demand for skilled and highly skilled workers is rising globally, creating challenges for Pakistanis.



The UK's free movement policy has been replaced by a to accommodate the most highly skilled workers, skilled workers, students, and a range of other specialist work routes, including routes for global leaders and innovators.



The UAE discontinued labor visas in November 2023, and Saudi Arabia's demand for skilled professionals is growing amid a wave of giga-projects. Expatriates seeking employment will be assessed under a newly introduced skill-based work permit system as of 1 July 2025.



Pakistan is attempting to meet the skills challenge by upscaling and increasing access to its Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA)-based programs.



Migrants are seen as a security threat by the US and UK. Stringent policies to curtail their entry, higher visa fees, and visa rejections are making entry for Pakistanis into these countries uncertain and difficult.



The clampdown on migration includes the UK's policy of taking back control of borders, reducing categories of skilled workers, especially in the area of social welfare and care, and a focus on return migration.



The creation of migrant 'hubs' outside Europe in third countries is underway as the EU is no longer housing irregular migrants and those seeking asylum.



Under the Trump Administration, the US instituted greater security and vetting procedures, extended the period for acquiring green cards and citizenship, and curtailed student intake.



Greater restrictions on regular migration are forcing migrants to take irregular routes via land and sea to Europe. Owing to the conflict in the Middle East, land routes are being replaced by more dangerous sea routes, resulting in an increasing number of deaths.

The Future



Unskilled and semi-skilled migrants are likely to face greater hardships and obstacles in their search for lucrative destinations and asylum. This will lead to more workers moving to countries such as Malaysia, Japan, South Korea, China, and the Central Asian republics.



Discrimination against students based on ethnicity, religion, and political views, especially in the US, along with overstaying in the UK, will drive them to seek new avenues for education in Asian universities.



The focus on return migration and migration hubs outside Europe will create more uncertainties and increase the use of irregular pathways by migrants.



The demand for care work in the Gulf and the aging economies of the West and Japan can encourage more women to migrate. With the curtailment of historic migrant destinations in the West, new opportunities in the East and Central Asia are likely to be targeted.

1

Introduction

The *Pakistan Migration Report* is published by the Centre on International Migration, Remittances and Diaspora (CIMRAD). Three biannual reports released in 2020, 2022, and 2024 provided valuable data on the extent and direction of migration and its impact on Pakistan. Major changes in the migration policy environment have taken place over the last two years. Therefore, this report focuses on the impact of recent policy changes on current migration trends and their implications.

Overseas migration has become a defining characteristic of Pakistan's demography and economy over the past four to five decades. While Pakistani nationals migrate for various reasons, overseas employment is the primary driver. The government has recorded the outflow of migrant workers since 1971, who must register with the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE). The BEOE maintains an active database, updating several tables every month. It is important to note that the outflow of BEOE-registered workers may exclude certain labor migrants, such as those leaving on emigrant visas from developed countries or those securing employment in host countries while visiting or studying. Irregular migrants are also not captured by existing data sources. However, we believe that BEOE data captures the majority of total outflows.

Approximately 92 percent of labor migrants move to the Gulf region.

Section 2 provides data on annual outflows and migration trends. Fluctuations in outflows are common; the downward trend due to COVID-19 in 2021–2022 was replaced by a rebound to 800,000 in 2023. The number fell again in 2024 by 15.6 percent, with the BEOE recording an annual outflow of 762,499 in 2025. Approximately 92 percent of labor migrants move to the Gulf region.

Pakistani migrant workers come from various parts of the country, with Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa contributing the largest numbers. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa sends a larger percentage of overseas workers relative to its share of Pakistan's population (16.9 percent). Conversely, Balochistan sends a smaller percentage relative to its population (6.2 percent).

At the district level, the geographical origin of Pakistani migrants is diverse. The top four districts of origin are in Punjab, with Sialkot at the top for the last several years. This was

followed by Lahore, Gujranwala, and Rawalpindi in 2024. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Swat sent out the most workers.

Consistent with past trends, about half of those leaving in 2024 were unskilled. Highly qualified and highly skilled workers accounted for just 6.7 percent. This number declined to 4 percent in 2025. In terms of occupational breakdown, half of migrant workers were classified as laborers. This number increased to 61 percent in 2025. About 35 percent of overseas workers possessed skills suitable for the occupations of driver, electrician, plumber, and carpenter. Thus, most Pakistani migrant workers continue to be concentrated in low-skill occupations.

Section 3 is divided into two parts. The first examines the GCC, as the bulk of Pakistani migrants are categorized as labor migrants who move to the Gulf region on temporary work permits.

The second part reflects on the appeal of Western and other developed countries for highly skilled individuals, such as doctors, other professionals, and students. For unskilled workers, irregular pathways are the only means to reach Europe. In 2024, a total of 5,680 Pakistanis were apprehended at the borders of various European countries. Most had attempted to enter by sea.

Section 4 examines remittances, which are vital to Pakistan's economic wellbeing. Remittances are a financial lifeline for Pakistan and the families of migrant workers. In 2024, the Gulf region accounted for more than half of all remittances sent to Pakistan. While this aligns with the significant outflows to the Gulf, other countries also contributed sizable remittances, with 15 percent from the UK and 10 percent from the US, along with substantial amounts from Italy and Spain.

Remittances are a financial lifeline for Pakistan and the families of migrant workers.

In light of rapid geopolitical changes, section 5 focuses on international migration policy shifts that are already impacting migration trends from Pakistan. Migrants face threats of deportation/repatriation, stringent emigration rules, and outright rejection.

In the humanitarian and human security domain, policy changes regarding amnesty claims and the repatriation of Afghans have occurred. Despite efforts to give refugees documented status, many remain undocumented in Pakistan. Their identification cards expired on 31 August 2025, leading to forced expulsions. The failure of various European countries to honor commitments to granting amnesty to selected Afghan refugees (among others) has exacerbated the problem.

Migrants are increasingly being viewed as security risks, resulting in a reduction of migration categories. The demand for unskilled workers has declined globally. Policies to this effect have been instituted in both GCC and non-GCC countries, with a reduction in skilled categories. In particular, students are facing hardship in obtaining admission, especially in the aftermath of the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Stricter border controls and return migration policies are increasing risks, detention, and deaths at sea.

Migration restrictions through strict border protocols and an emphasis on return migration are increasing, limiting opportunities for migrants, especially in developed countries, resulting in more cases of irregular migration, detention, and deaths at sea.

The future of migration is discussed in section 6. Students are already feeling the impact of limited admission opportunities in the US and UK and are seeking alternative destinations across Asia. Stricter migration controls are expected to persist, with irregular migrants and asylum seekers housed in 'return hubs' outside the UK and Europe. This reflects rising negative attitudes toward migrants in general. At the same time, the demand for care workers, including women, is likely to increase. While the Gulf region will remain the primary destination for migrant workers, their composition may change due to the demand for skilled labor. The search for new destinations in the global East and Central Asia, linked to China's Belt and Road initiative, could indicate future migration paths.

2

Migration Outflows and Trends

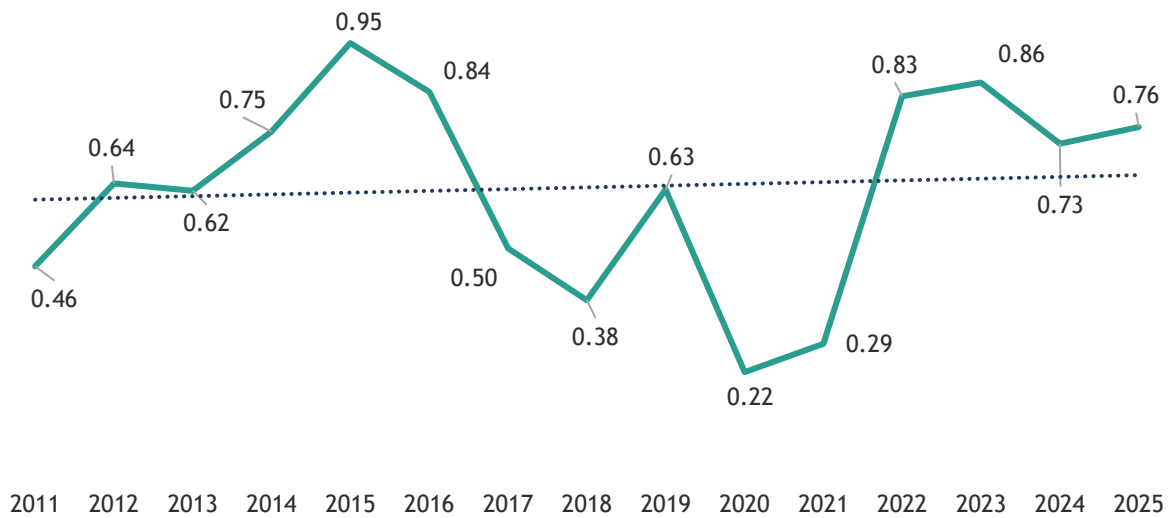
2.1 Yearly Migrant Outflows from Pakistan: Trends and Key Years

According to BEOE data, an average of 629,962 Pakistani nationals left the country for work each year between 2011 and 2025. Annual outflows during this period fluctuated significantly. The total annual outflow peaked in 2015 when nearly a million individuals went abroad, then declined to a 13-year low of under 300,000 during the COVID-19 pandemic, before rebounding to more than 800,000 in 2023. The number fell again in 2024 by 15.6 percent, with the BEOE recording an annual outflow of 725,672.

Migrant outflows are volatile and episodic, reflecting shifting economic conditions and policy environments.

While these inconsistencies can generally be attributed to economic conditions at home and abroad (Shah et al. 2020), the recent decline may also be linked to visa restrictions and policy shifts in host countries (section 5). However, it does not appear to indicate that a downward trend is emerging, as the migrant worker outflow for 2025 totaled 762,499, an increase of 5.07 percent from the previous year. The rebound fell short of the post-COVID-19 peak and reflects the volatile nature of migrant outflows, which appear irregular and episodic rather than linear over time.

Figure 1: Annual outflows of migrants from Pakistan (millions) (2011-2025)



Note: The data used in this report does not account for numbers from the Overseas Employment Corporation, which generally approximates less than 0.5 percent of total annual registered outflows.

Source: Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment.

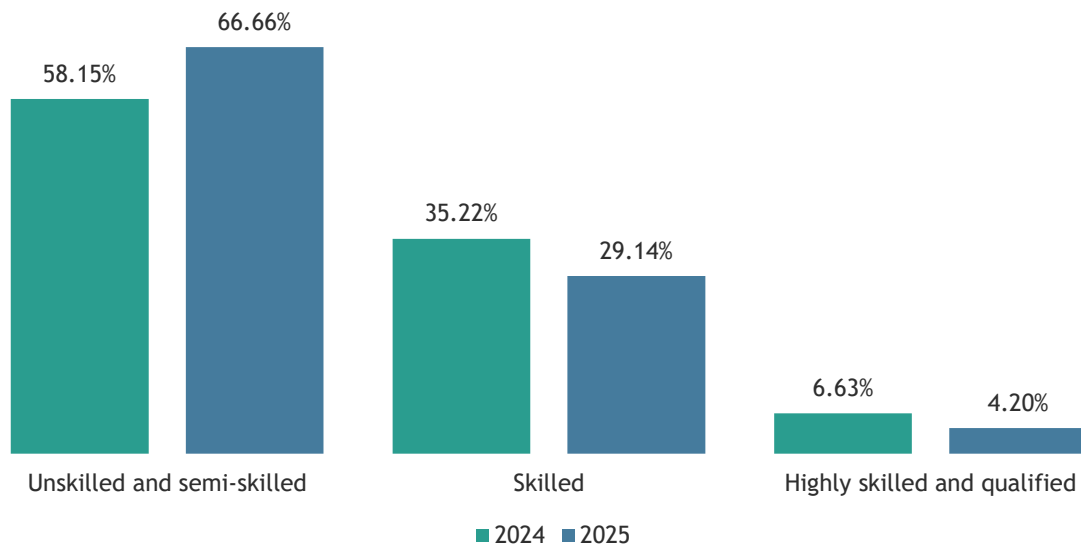
2.2 Characteristics of Pakistani Migrant Workers (2024 and 2025)

Beyond numbers, migrant worker outflows reflect the demographic and skills profile of a segment of the national workforce that is in demand in international labor markets. This section examines the composition of worker outflows from the last two years by destination, place of origin, skill levels, and occupational category. It also discusses the nature of outflows through irregular channels. However, the scope of the analysis is limited by data availability.

2.2.1 Skills and occupational profile of Pakistan’s migrant workers

The skills profile of Pakistani nationals who moved overseas for employment during 2024 and 2025 continues to reflect the historical dominance of unskilled and semi-skilled workers. In fact, their combined share in 2025 increased by 12 percentage points. As noted by the Migrant Resource Center (MRC) in its second quarterly brief for 2025, infrastructure projects—which generally require semi- or unskilled laborers—in non-traditional destinations besides the GCC region are increasingly attracting workers from Pakistan (MRC, 2025). While skilled and highly skilled migration has gradually increased over the years, a substantial shift in the country’s overall migrant skills profile does not yet seem imminent.

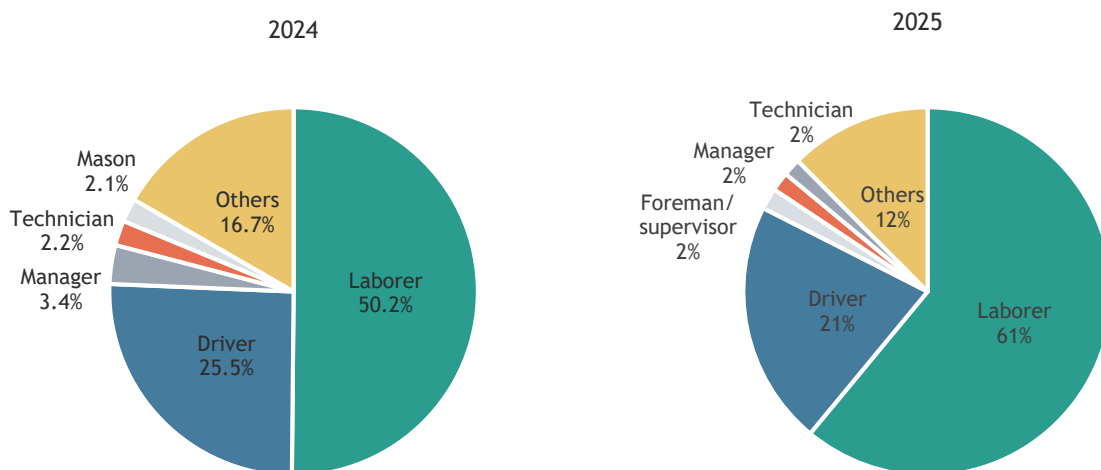
Figure 2: Skills profile of Pakistani migrant workers (2024 and 2025) (percentage)



Source: Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (2024 and 2025).

The distribution of migrant outflows by occupational categories indicates that Pakistani nationals continue to take jobs requiring lower skill levels, predominantly in the construction industry. General labor remained the leading category in both 2024 and 2025, as it has been for the past five decades. ‘Manager’ is the only occupation among the top five in both years classified under the ‘highly qualified’ skills profile by the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment. However, its share declined from 3.41 percent in 2024 to 1.54 percent in 2025. Overall, the composition largely reflects the skills profile discussed above.

Figure 3: Top five jobs taken by Pakistani migrant workers (2024 and 2025) (percentage)



Source: Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment Data (2024 and 2025).

2.3 Destinations for Pakistani Migrant Workers

Official data for the past two years shows that the top five destination countries are members of the GCC, with Saudi Arabia receiving over 60 percent of the country's total annual outflows. A cumulative comparison of the outflows to GCC countries and the rest of the world shows that approximately 8 percent of total migrants in 2024 moved to non-GCC member countries. The share declined by 9.6 percent in 2025.

Saudi Arabia receives over 60 percent of Pakistan's total annual migrant outflows.

These distributions essentially mirror historical migration trends, as the oil-rich GCC countries have consistently been the primary destination for Pakistani migrants. With gradual yet fluctuating growth, the non-GCC share of total outflows increased from less than 2 percent in 2011 to nearly 5 percent in 2022. However, a notable uptick was observed in 2023 when the non-GCC share was approximately 8.5 percent of the total. This peak aligned with the overall migration trend observed over the past five years (as shown in Section 3.1).

Overall, while migration to the GCC region continues to define international mobility patterns for Pakistani workers, outflows to the rest of the world have consistently increased over time.

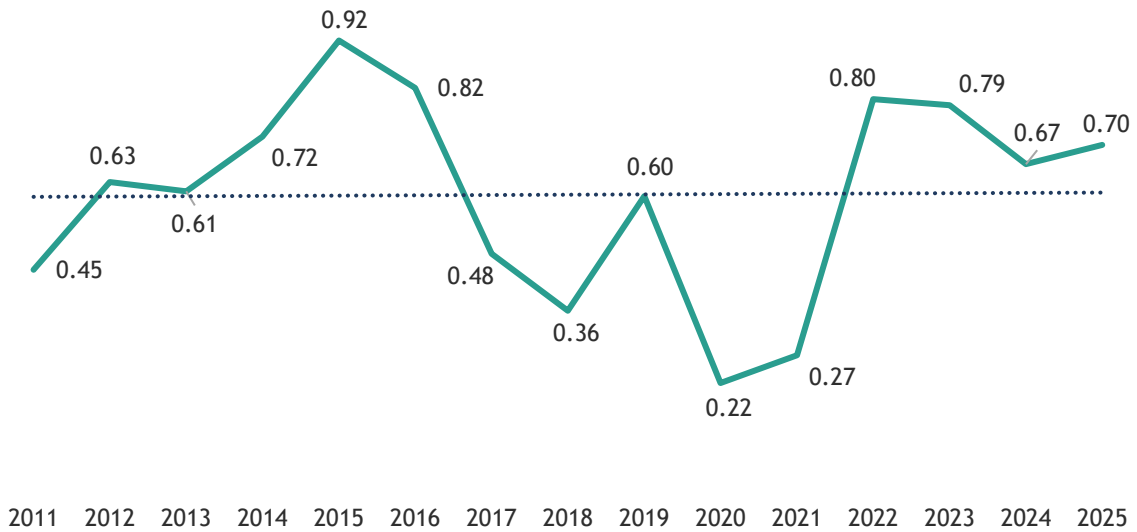
Diversification of destination countries and regions may reflect a combination of economic conditions in both home and host countries, government policies and support, and individual preferences.

Table 1: Regional distribution of annual outflows of Pakistani labor migrants (2024-2025)

Region	2024		2025	
	Outflows	Percent	Outflows	Percent
GCC	665,141	91.66	704,987	92.46
Rest of the world	60,531	8.34	57,512	7.54
Total	725,672	100.00	762,499	100.00

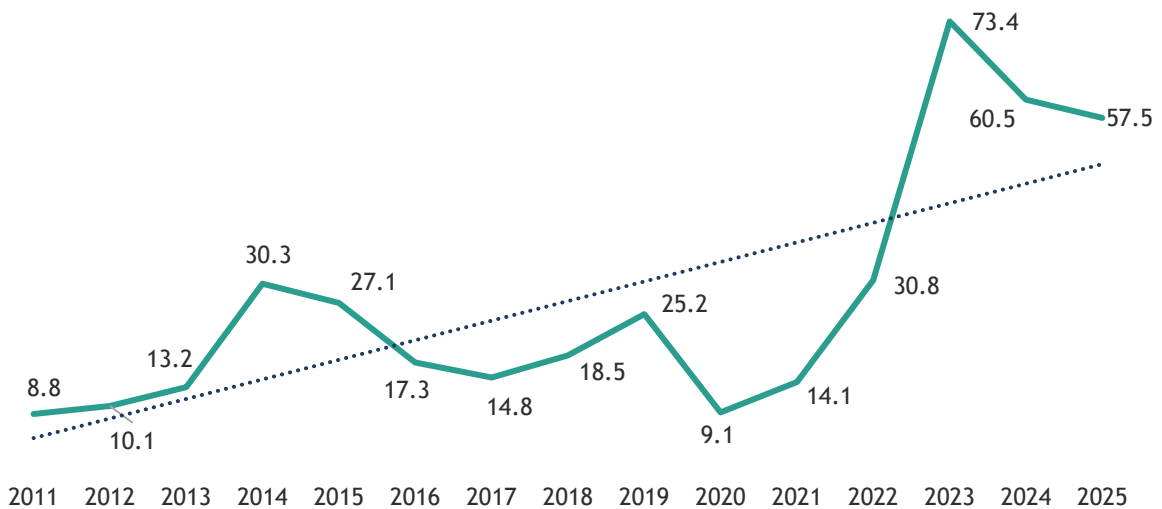
Source: Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment.

Figure 4: Annual migrant outflows from Pakistan to the GCC region (millions) (2011-2025)



Source: Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment.

Figure 5: Annual migrant outflows from Pakistan to the rest of the world (thousands) (2011-2025)



Source: Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment.

2.3.1 Place of origin of Pakistan’s migrant workers

By place of origin, over 50 percent of Pakistani migrant workers came from Punjab in both 2024 and 2025, although the share declined by 4 percentage points in 2025. This pattern is not only a continuation of the historical migration trend but also proportional to the overall national distribution of the country. Punjab is the most populous province, accounting for approximately 52 percent of the total population. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, however, has traditionally sent a disproportionately higher share of migrants relative to its share of the

total population (around 17 percent). Nearly 26 percent of migrant workers in 2024 and 30 percent in 2025 originated from this province. Sindh, on the other hand, continues to send few workers abroad (7–8 percent of the total outflows each year) compared to its share of around 23 percent of Pakistan’s population. With minor changes, Azad Kashmir and the former Tribal Areas maintained their stable shares of under 5 percent each in both 2024 and 2025. Outflows from Balochistan, Islamabad, and Gilgit-Baltistan together constituted approximately 2 percent of the total in both years (Table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of migrant workers by province of origin (2024-2025)

Province	2024		2025	
	Outflows	Percent	Outflows	Percent
Punjab	403,282	55.57	393,729	51.64
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	186,788	25.74	227,858	29.88
Sindh	60,157	8.29	58,733	7.70
Tribal Areas (former)	29,931	4.12	39,598	5.19
Azad Jammu and Kashmir	29,571	4.07	27,422	3.60
Islamabad	8,610	1.19	8,092	1.06
Balochistan	5,667	0.78	5,441	0.71
Gilgit-Baltistan	1,666	0.23	1,626	0.21
Total	725,672	100.00	762,499	100.00

Source: Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment.

The distribution of annual outflows by district confirms Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as Pakistan’s leading migrant-sending provinces. In both 2024 and 2025, the top ten origin districts, comprising almost one-third of total outflows, were located in either Punjab or Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Notably, four of the top five districts were in Punjab, with Sialkot recording the highest share in 2024 at 4.2 percent of national outflows, and Swat (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) in 2025 with an approximate share of 3.9 percent. Given this pattern, it is useful to examine the district-wise distribution in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Table 3).

The top five sending districts from Punjab account for one-third of the total provincial outflows in both 2024 and 2025. The central region of the province dominates this list, with Rawalpindi being the only exception. Moreover, with minor fluctuations in ranking by percentage shares, the same five districts sent the most workers for employment overseas during the period in question. In the case of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the top five sending

districts constitute nearly half of the total provincial outflows. Notably, these districts not only recorded largely similar percentage shares of total outflows in both years, but their rankings also remained unchanged. The top two districts are located in the northern region of the province, while the next three are from the central belt. Thus, strong spatial patterns exist within the province, which can be attributed to the existence of strong migrant community networks, normative support for migration, and conducive economic conditions such as employment opportunities in home districts.

Table 3: Districts in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with the highest outmigration in Pakistan (2024-2025)

		2024		2025		
	District	Outflows	Percent	District	Outflows	Percent
1	Sialkot	30,978	4.27	Swat	29,403	3.86
2	Lahore	28,382	3.91	Sialkot	29,160	3.82
3	Gujranwala	28,277	3.90	Gujranwala	28,049	3.68
4	Rawalpindi	26,453	3.65	Rawalpindi	25,743	3.38
5	Swat	24,532	3.38	Lahore	24,940	3.27
6	Faisalabad	24,336	3.35	Lower Dir	23,897	3.13
7	Lower Dir	18,477	2.55	Faisalabad	23,327	3.06
8	Mardan	17,985	2.48	Mardan	20,688	2.71
9	Rahim Yar Khan	17,177	2.37	Peshawar	19,628	2.57
10	Gujrat	16,238	2.24	Dera Ghazi Khan	17,773	2.33
	Others	492,837	67.91	Others	517,866	67.92
	Total	725,672	100.00	Total	762,499	100.00

Source: Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment.

Table 4: Top five districts with the highest outmigration in Punjab (2024-2025)

		2024		2025		
	<i>District</i>	<i>Outflows</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Outflows</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1	Sialkot	30,978	7.68	Sialkot	29,160	7.41
2	Lahore	28,382	7.04	Gujranwala	28,049	7.12
3	Gujranwala	28,277	7.01	Rawalpindi	25,743	6.54
4	Rawalpindi	26,453	6.56	Lahore	24,940	6.33
5	Faisalabad	24,336	6.03	Faisalabad	23,327	5.92
	Others	264,856	65.68	Others	262,510	66.67
	Total*	403,282	100.00	Total*	393,729	100.00

Source: Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment.

Table 5: Top five districts with the highest outmigration in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2024-2025)

		2024		2025		
	<i>District</i>	<i>Outflows</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Outflows</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1	Swat	24,532	13.13	Swat	29,403	12.90
2	Lower Dir	18,477	9.89	Lower Dir	23,897	10.49
3	Mardan	17,985	9.63	Mardan	20,688	9.08
4	Peshawar	16,023	8.58	Peshawar	19,628	8.61
5	Charsadda	12,206	6.53	Charsadda	15,904	6.98
	Others	97,565	52.23	Others	118,338	51.93
	Total	186,788	100.00	Total	227,858	100.00

Source: Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment.

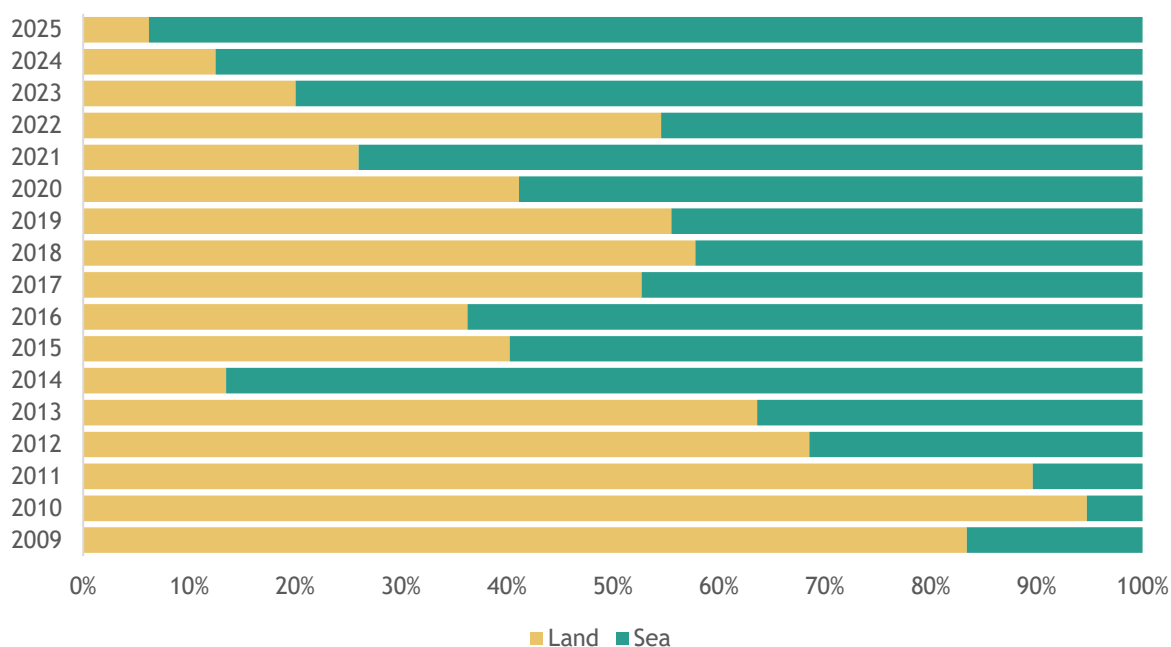
2.4 Overview of Irregular Migration from Pakistan, 2024 and 2025

Movement across international borders without formal authorization or documentation is a significant but insufficiently documented form of international migration. Europe maintains a reliable database compiled by Frontex on illegal border crossings by border type (Figure 6).

Frontex recorded 5,680 illegal border crossings involving migrants of Pakistani origin in 2024, and another 3,203 in the first half of 2025. The numbers show a significant decline from the post-COVID-19 peak of over 12,000 crossings in 2022.

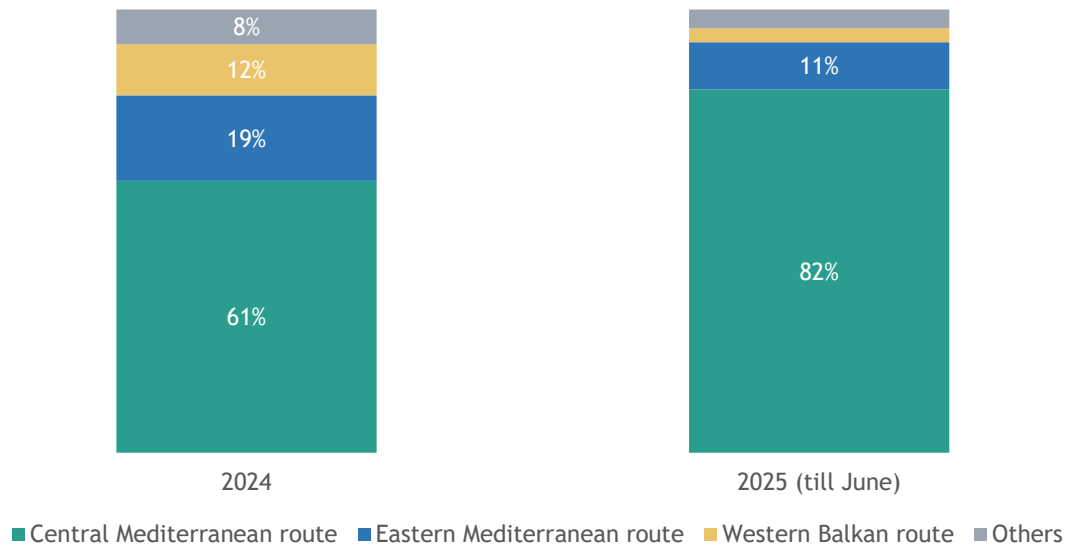
Nearly 90 percent of these crossings were via sea routes, which are increasingly preferred over land routes by Pakistani nationals illegally crossing into Europe. Historical data indicates a complete trend reversal. As explained by Shah et al. (2024), irregular migrants depend on agents to illegally cross international borders. Thus, factors such as agent networks, logistical bases, financial costs, and variations in the rigidity of monitoring and security measures may be responsible for this shift. A breakdown by routes shows that Mediterranean Sea routes comprised two of the top three routes preferred by Pakistani nationals to cross into Europe in 2024 and 2025.

Figure 6: Irregular border crossings by Pakistani nationals by border type (2009-June 2025) (percentage)



Source: Frontex data.

Figure 7: Most frequently used routes for irregular border crossings by Pakistani nationals (2024 and 2025) (percentage)



Note: Central Mediterranean route = Italy and Malta sea borders; Eastern Mediterranean route = Cyprus-Greece sea border and Greece and Bulgaria land borders with Türkiye; Western Balkans route = Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Croatia at land borders with countries from the Western Balkan region.

Source: Frontex (2024, 2025).

3

The Gulf and the Globe: A Closer Look at Pakistani Migrants’ Destination Profiles

This section extends the previous regional overview with a country-level analysis of major regional migrant destinations. The objective is to understand the gradual diversification of destinations of choice for Pakistan’s migrant workforce.

3.1 The Imperative of Work: The Gulf Region

The primary destination for worker migration from Pakistan has remained consistent for over five decades. Saudi Arabia continued to rank as the leading destination in 2024 and 2025, receiving 69 percent and 75 percent of total Pakistani outmigration to GCC countries during these years, respectively. This share was significantly higher than that of the second-ranking destinations: Oman in 2024 (12 percent) and Qatar in 2025 (9 percent). Kuwait, accounting for less than 1 percent of annual outflows, consistently has the smallest share of annual outflows to the GCC region.

The demand for general labor, high income differentials, and established social networks attract Pakistanis to the GCC region.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have historically been the principal destinations for low-skilled Pakistani workers (Shah et al., 2020). While the UAE’s share has recently declined due to visa restrictions and policy changes (Ahmed, 2025a), Saudi Arabia’s dominance remains unchallenged. Overall, Pakistanis are drawn to the GCC region due to its sustained demand for general labor, high income differentials compared to their home country, and well-established social networks.

Table 6: Distribution of annual Pakistani outmigration to the GCC region (2024-2025)

		2024		2025		
	Country	Outflows	Percent	Country	Outflows	Percent
1	Saudi Arabia	452,416	68.02	Saudi Arabia	530,256	75.22
2	Oman	81,587	12.27	Qatar	68,376	9.70
3	UAE	64,130	9.64	UAE	52,664	7.47
4	Qatar	40,815	6.14	Bahrain	37,726	5.35
5	Bahrain	25,193	3.79	Oman	9,375	1.33
6	Kuwait	1,000	0.15	Kuwait	6,590	0.93
	Total	665,141	100.00	Total	704,987	100.00

Source: Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment.

Pakistani migration to the GCC region has historically reflected domestic economic conditions more than individual migration agency. It is a choice between unemployment and sponsored wage labor that risks limited mobility and exploitation, rather than between comparable opportunities at home and abroad. According to the latest data, Pakistan’s employment-to-population ratio is less than 50 percent, indicating structural barriers such as skill mismatches and a lack of job creation, i.e., the labor market’s failure to accommodate the country’s growing workforce (BEOE, 2025). Moreover, some estimates suggest that migrant workers are likely to earn three times their expected income in their home country. The lack of formal employment opportunities for low-skilled laborers in the domestic market, and, therefore, limited earning potential and safety nets, pushes households toward migration (World Bank, 2018).

Simultaneously, worker migration has become a key policy response to Pakistan’s macroeconomic constraints. Export stagnation and declining inflows from other sources have increased the country’s dependence on remittances, which now serve as a cushion for foreign exchange reserves and external deficit stabilization. Remittances reportedly accounted for a significant portion of Pakistan’s gross domestic product in 2024, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, both GCC countries, leading the inflows (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2025).

Domestic push factors have coincided with pull factors in GCC labor markets since the 1973 oil boom. Large-scale infrastructure and urban development projects have created sustained demand for low-skilled labor across the region. Through governmental agreements and systematic recruitment networks, Pakistan has integrated into these labor markets via sponsorship-based employment regimes, thus institutionalizing a migration corridor that has

not only persisted but expanded since the initial oil shock (Arif et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2020). This corridor's economic viability has been reinforced by the religious affinity between the home and host countries, particularly Saudi Arabia (home to the two holy mosques), which reduces the social and cultural barriers to assimilation commonly faced by Muslim migrants (Shah et al., 2020).

While low-skilled Pakistani migration to the GCC is primarily driven by structural economic necessity, high-skilled mobility along the same corridor is becoming increasingly multi-dimensional and reflective of individual agency. High-skilled professionals from Pakistan are choosing to move to the region, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as an

Pakistani outmigration to the GCC serves as a household survival strategy.

intermediary stage in multistage or stepwise migration to other regions, primarily North America, Europe, and Australia. Temporary contractual employment in these countries allows professionals to accumulate skills, social connections, and financial capital, which can then be leveraged to enter countries with more restrictive migration regimes. Some migrants move serially between countries within the Gulf region before proceeding to their preferred destination, primarily to attain permanent residency or citizenship (Valenta, 2022).

Historically, Pakistani outmigration to the GCC has served as a household survival strategy and has been promoted as an economic adaptation over several decades. However, observed trends suggest that it is increasingly becoming an aspirational choice, predominantly among highly skilled professionals.

Figure 8: International departures at a Pakistani airport



Source: Reuters/Faisal Mahmood.

3.2 Moving For a Better Life: The West and the Rest

3.2.1 Countries that matter beyond the rankings

An analysis of the distribution of annual outflows to non-GCC countries reveals notable changes between 2024 and 2025. The UK was the primary destination for Pakistani migrant workers in 2024, receiving over 23 percent of total non-GCC outflows. However, in 2025, its share declined by 15 percentage points, dropping it to third place. Iraq, which ranked second in 2024 with an 11 percent share, took the lead in 2025, maintaining a similar share of total non-GCC outflows as the previous year. Türkiye also retained its position among the top five non-GCC destinations in both years, with its share doubling in 2025, moving it from fifth to second place. While Malaysia's share declined by 3.3 percent in 2025, China fell out of the top five non-GCC destinations and was replaced by Greece, which accounted for almost 6 percent of total non-GCC outflows.

Although Iraq and Greece may seem like unexpected destinations, both countries have seen a notable inflow of irregular migrants of Pakistani origin, who often take religious pilgrimage routes or use them as transit points. Recently, the governments of Iraq and Greece engaged with Pakistan to regularize migration flows ("Pakistan, Iran and Iraq unite," 2025; Mian, 2025).

This may explain the increase in officially recorded movement to these non-GCC destinations.

Collectively, five destinations (Table 7) absorbed more than half of non-GCC outflows in 2024. However, their combined share dropped to less than 40 percent in 2025, suggesting growing diversification in destinations.

Table 7: Distribution of annual Pakistani outmigration to the rest of the world (2024 and 2025)

		2024		2025		
	Country	Outflows	Percent	Country	Outflows	Percent
1	UK	13,695	22.62	Iraq	6,128	10.66
2	Iraq	6,650	10.99	Türkiye	5,288	9.19
3	Malaysia	5,790	9.57	UK	4,355	7.57
4	China	1,886	3.12	Malaysia	3,609	6.28
5	Türkiye	1,557	2.57	Greece	3,367	5.85
	Others	30,953	51.14	Others	34,765	60.45
	Total	60,531	100.00	Total	57,512	100.00

Source: Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment.

3.2.2 The UK and the US

Outside the GCC region, the UK and the US host the largest and oldest Pakistani diaspora, which continues to grow through sustained yearly inflows. Migration to the UK is deeply rooted in colonial ties. Initially driven by post-war labor shortages in the UK, it later expanded when people from Mirpur displaced by the construction of the Mangla dam in the 1960s were offered compensation in the form of labor and housing. Following policy shifts in the host country, Pakistani outmigration to the UK from the 1970s onward was shaped by spousal immigration and family reunification (Niaz & Nasir, 2018; Samad, 2013).

Naturally, early migrants were primarily working-class individuals who settled in mill towns and manufacturing hubs like Bradford, Birmingham, and Manchester, and now constitute a significant portion of the British-Pakistani community. According to the latest estimates, around 1.8 million people of Pakistani origin reside in the UK, 1.5 million of whom are based in England and Wales (UK Government, 2024). London hosts the most socially diverse, well-educated, and high-skilled Pakistani professionals (Samad, 2013). This stratum of skilled professionals is gaining political and social visibility and contributing to upward mobility for

at least a part of the diaspora, contrasting with the structured social inequalities faced by many unskilled, often marginalized British-Pakistanis (Niaz & Nasir, 2018).

*13,000–15,000
students migrate to
the UK for permanent
residence each year.*

In this context, students and skilled professionals continue to move to the UK in search of better opportunities, supported by extended family and kin networks that provide crucial economic and social support. According to sources, 13,000–15,000 students migrate to the UK for permanent residence each year. BEOE data also shows that the UK has remained one of the top five destinations outside the GCC region over the past two years. However, changing visa restrictions regarding work permits and tightening asylum policies may affect new migrant flows as well as the existing British-Pakistani diaspora in the future (Momand, 2025).

Across the Atlantic, the promise of the ‘American Dream’ has long attracted Pakistani students and skilled professionals. Early migration flows, following Punjabi-origin Muslims who had migrated from pre-partition India and settled largely in California, averaged around 100 per year for about a decade. However, the numbers increased significantly after the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act, 1965, which provided opportunities for family reunification and protection from religious persecution, along with skills-based immigration (Kugelman, 2017; Samad, 2013).

The steady upward trend continued until the post-9/11 period, when policy shifts and visa restrictions reduced average annual outflows from a peak of 16,500 in 2001 to below 10,000 in 2003 (Samad, 2013). Despite this tightening, the Pakistani diaspora in the US has grown steadily. The number of American residents who identify solely as Pakistanis, without claiming any other race or Asian descent, increased by 254 percent between 2000 and 2023. The share of Pakistani-born immigrants to the US has notably declined by 14 percentage points over the same period, reflecting a growing presence of second-generation Pakistani-Americans. Furthermore, Pakistani-Americans constitute a distinct Asian community in the US, with a 70 percent naturalization rate in 2023 (Im, 2025).

Since education- and skills-based immigration has dominated outflows to the US from the beginning, it is natural that the Pakistani-American community boasts high human capital. About 59 percent of US citizens identifying as Pakistani hold an undergraduate or advanced degree, a slightly higher proportion than the aggregated 56 percent among all Asian-Americans (Im, 2025). The community is also relatively affluent, with approximately 90 percent concentrated in suburban areas of New York, Texas, California, and Illinois. Compared to British-Pakistanis, Pakistani-Americans are more integrated and excel both economically and socially (Kugelman, 2017).

Recent trends indicate that the US remains an important destination for Pakistani migrants. BEOE data shows that worker migration has steadily increased in the post-pandemic years, while education-driven mobility has regained momentum. Student immigration, through enrollment in undergraduate and graduate programs, has also grown. The number of international students of Pakistani origin in the US grew by nearly 20 percent in the 2024–2025 cycle. Graduate students constituted 44.2 percent of the enrollments, while undergraduate numbers saw the largest annual increase at 26 percent (Institute of International Education, n.d.). These trends suggest that education will continue to be a key driver of Pakistani immigration to the US.

Figure 9: Pakistani university students



Source: Areej Amin.

3.2.3 Canada and Australia

Two destinations that have historically attracted Pakistani talent are Canada and Australia. Skilled professionals and students sought economic and educational opportunities in Canada as early as the 1960s. However, the Pakistani presence across the northern US border was minimal. It was the skills and English and French proficiency-favoring points system introduced in 1967 that opened immigration pathways for Pakistanis in both their home country and abroad. Subsequent policy changes that encouraged family reunification, as seen in the UK and US, increased the average annual flow of Pakistani migrants to Canada (Fatima, 2018).

By 2001, Pakistan was the third-largest sending country to Canada, accounting for over 6 percent of total inflows. Despite the post-2001 slowdown due to revised policies encouraging human capital influx, the Pakistani-Canadian community continued to grow steadily, comprising over 303,000 individuals in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2026). Visa statistics indicate that over 81,000 individuals of Pakistani origin moved to Canada between 2015 and 2024, primarily through family sponsorship programs, followed by worker programs (Gallup Pakistan, 2024).

By 2001, Pakistan was the third-largest sending country to Canada, accounting for over 6 percent of total inflows.

Canada's Pakistani diaspora differs notably from its US counterpart, even though occupational skills-based immigration set the foundation for both. The early mass migration patterns to each country explain this divergence. Skilled or semi-skilled Pakistanis who had worked temporarily in the Middle East or lived in regions like East Africa or Britain drove early migration to Canada. These migrants had lower skills and occupational profiles and represented a different socio-cultural outlook compared to the highly skilled individuals or graduate students from Pakistan's major cities who initially moved to Canada in the 1950s and 1960s or continued to migrate to the US. Consequently, a large section of the Pakistani diaspora in Canada also faced assimilation challenges and structural inequalities (Fatima, 2018).

It should, however, be noted that the Pakistani-Canadian community nearly doubled between 2011 and 2021. In addition, about 70 percent of Pakistani-origin residents were classified as first-generation migrants in the 2021 Canadian census (Statistics Canada, 2026). Approval rates for study permit applications from Pakistan steadily increased in the pre-COVID-19 years (Gallup Pakistan, 2024). These figures indicate that career prospects continue to attract Pakistani youth to Canada. While the host country aims to reduce its temporary migrant population and there is a dearth of recent data on country-specific education migration, Canada is seen as an emerging competitor for Pakistani talent compared to traditional destinations like the UK (Ilieva et al., 2024).

Tracing historical pathways for skills-based migration leads to an English-speaking country in the southern hemisphere, Australia. People from present-day Pakistan played a significant role in developing logistical routes in the Australian plains during the late 19th century (Baloch, 2022). However, racism and the 1901 introduction of the White Australia Policy forced this thriving community of cameleers and transporters to return home. Although migration resumed shortly after independence, it remained negligible until the 1970s when Australia replaced discriminatory policies with a multicultural, skills-based migration framework (State Government of Victoria, 2024).

Migration from Pakistan to Australia pivoted from unskilled labor flows to highly skilled professionals during the last quarter of the 20th century. Educated, middle-class urban families began relocating to Australia in the late 1970s, bringing expertise in fields like engineering, medicine, and education, and settling in the coastal economic hubs of Sydney and Melbourne. Compared to other overseas Pakistani communities, including Pakistani-Americans, the Australian diaspora possesses notably high human capital and demonstrates significant economic mobility (Malik, 2009).

Pakistan is one of the top sources of permanent skilled migration to Australia.

Driven by state-sponsored skills programs and family reunification considerations, Pakistani migration to Australia increased in the 1990s and continues to rise. From nearly 12,000 Pakistani-born residents in 2000, the number grew to over 120,000 in 2023. Currently, Pakistan is one of the top sources of permanent skilled migration to Australia, recording a 39 percent annual increase in visa grants in relevant categories for the 2024–2025 cycle (Australia, Department of Home Affairs, n.d.).

Student migration has become a pathway to permanent residence in Australia for Pakistanis. They transition from student visas to temporary graduate visas, which allow them to work in the host country for a few years after graduation while applying for permanent visas. Pakistan has consistently ranked among the top ten countries from which former students secure permanent visa grants for nearly a decade. However, due to the recent tightening of criteria, both temporary student visas and permanent visas for individuals of Pakistani origin have declined over the past year. Nonetheless, the recruitment of Pakistani talent through state and regional programs is showing a promising positive trend (Australia, Department of Home Affairs, 2025). In other words, the demand for Pakistani talent in Australia remains strong and is likely to continue in the future through various pathways.

3.2.4 Malaysia and Japan

Pakistani migrants are increasingly looking east, as countries like Malaysia and Japan emerge as viable alternatives to traditional destinations.

Pakistani migrants have been looking east for some time now. Two countries that stand out are Japan, which has an aging workforce, and Muslim-majority Malaysia. Malaysia has attracted Pakistani workers seeking better employment opportunities, higher wages, and safer living conditions for over two decades (Tasleem et al., 2021). Migrants of Pakistani origin have traditionally worked in agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and services (Pakistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). However, bilateral talks in October 2025

and increasing cooperation in digital transformation may create more opportunities for skilled Pakistani professionals in information technology and AI (Pakistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025).

Malaysia has also emerged as an important nontraditional destination for education migrants, with Pakistan accounting for the third-largest share of Malaysia's international student body. The combination of quality education at relatively lower costs and cultural openness makes Malaysia an attractive choice for Pakistani students, who often find studying abroad financially taxing and culturally alienating. According to Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (n.d.), an estimated 160,000 Pakistanis were living in Malaysia as of mid-2024, including 3,800 students enrolled in various higher education institutions across the country.

In East Asia, Japan has hosted a modest but growing Pakistani community comprising both low- and high-skilled professionals and students since the 1980s. The first wave of mass Pakistani outmigration to the island nation consisted mainly of male laborers who entered on short-term, visa-free stays. However, this privilege was revoked in the 1990s as Japan addressed illegal migration issues. While many Pakistani workers were deported during this period, a significant number obtained permanent residence through marriage and went on to establish a tightly networked diaspora.

Traditionally, skill requirements, language and cultural barriers, and restrictive visa and employment policies have hindered migrant integration into Japanese society (Morita, 2017). However, Japan's aging population and workforce shortages have prompted favorable policy shifts that are driving the newest wave of migration. According to official sources, over 25,000 Pakistani nationals resided in Japan in 2023 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2025). BEOE data further shows that nearly 2.5 percent of Pakistan's non-GCC worker outflows in 2024 were destined for Japan, a share expected to double by the end of 2025.

The Pakistani community in Japan is largely concentrated in major industrial centers, such as Tokyo and Osaka. However, increasing student mobility and bilateral cooperation, including the 2019 Specified Skilled Workers framework, are likely to diversify the destinations and opportunities available to Pakistani migrants in Japan.

3.2.5 Italy, Greece, Spain, and beyond

In search of a better future, many migrants now risk their lives on dangerous routes across land and sea.

Labor migration to Europe has evolved through distinct phases over the past 50 years and has drastically changed since the turn of the century. It began as a search for better economic opportunities for young, low-skilled male workers in a continent accessible via land routes and nearly non-existent border controls in the 1960s. This migration increased due to labor shortages in aging host

countries, followed by family reunification, and later transformed into a struggle for dreams against stringent policies through irregular channels (Zafar, 2017). In search of opportunities and a better future, many take unsafe routes, risking their lives on migrant agent networks; some endure harsh European conditions, while others drown in despair or in the waters in between (Zaman, 2025).

Outside the UK, Italy hosts the largest Pakistani community in Europe, with around 140,000 legal residents at the end of 2022 (IOM, 2024). Drawn by economic conditions and social support networks, Pakistanis continue to settle in small, rural industrial towns that welcomed earlier migrants (Bonizzoni & Marzorati, 2015). Through irregular border crossings by land or sea or asylum routes, Italy remains the preferred destination for Pakistani migrants entering Europe through non-traditional pathways. It received 84 percent of the irregular flows from Pakistan to Europe in 2023 (IOM, 2024) and had more asylum applications from Pakistan than any other country in 2024 (Box 1). Thus, Italy serves as both an entry or transition country and a favored destination for irregular migrants of Pakistani origin.

Another southern European country that attracts significant irregular migrant flows from Pakistan is Greece. It received 13 percent of total Pakistani migrants to Europe in 2023 (IOM, 2024). While Greece primarily serves as a transit destination for many low-skilled, irregular migrants, numerous undocumented Pakistani workers choose to stay due to border controls and changing migration trends in their preferred destination countries. It also receives Pakistani migrants traveling through the Iran-Türkiye irregular channel. Pakistanis arrive in Greece mainly in search of better economic opportunities and to escape unemployment at home, demonstrating considerable migrant agency despite stringent policies. They typically pursue the asylum route to formalize their stay in Greece (Triandafyllidou, 2019). With Greece implementing measures to restrict irregular migration, it has emerged as one of the top five non-GCC destinations for worker migration through formal channels in 2025 (Table 7).

Arguably, Catalonia, Spain, is home to the most concentrated Pakistani community outside the UK. Currently numbering around 100,000, this low-skilled cohort faces language barriers and assimilation challenges (IOM, 2024). Pakistanis in Spain mainly work in services and run small businesses that primarily serve their own communities. However, assimilation is increasing over time as second-generation migrants have more cultural contact with the host society (Repke & Benet-Martínez, 2018). Unlike Italy, Spain does not report significant instances of irregular border crossings from Pakistan. However, it does receive a considerable number of asylum applications each year (Box 1).

Beyond the southern entry points, Pakistanis have a visible and growing presence in several countries across the continent. Germany and France in Western Europe and Norway and Denmark in the Nordic region are among the most notable destinations. Early migrants were generally low-skilled laborers seeking economic mobility and arrived during lenient immigration regimes. However, newer cohorts, arriving through educational pathways and family reunification, along with second-generation migrants of Pakistani origin, generally have higher education levels and better economic prospects and face fewer integration barriers, such as language skills (Zafar, 2017). Moreover, Pakistani migrants in southern countries also seek to transition to western and northern regions, including the UK, at some point. These aspirations stem from a desire to preserve identity and find socio-cultural, economic, and welfare support (Cristo & Akwei, 2022). While uncertainty looms over Pakistani migration to Europe amid tightening policies and stricter border controls, the young and skilled may continue to find opportunities in the aging continent.

Aside from Greece and Spain, Pakistanis have a growing presence in Germany, France, Norway, and Denmark.

Regardless of the destination, it is evident that the trends and dynamics of outmigration from Pakistan are not static. They are shaped by various factors: economic demands, policy regimes, and social networks that define opportunities at any given time. From skill-oriented career pathways and educational mobility to irregular channels, migrants navigate complex institutional and social structures and contribute to the communities they join. As host countries shift paradigms, Pakistan's global footprint will evolve accordingly, adjusting profiles, preferences, and patterns.

Box 1: Asylum applications from Pakistan

Some irregular migrants who successfully bypass border security tend to seek asylum in their chosen destination country. Pakistani asylum seekers primarily target Europe and North America, motivated by stronger economic prospects and a better overall quality of life. In 2024, a total of 43,113 Pakistanis applied for asylum, with nearly 30 percent of the applications approved that year. Italy ranked as the top destination, receiving 12,362 new applications during the 12-month period. In terms of acceptance rates, Canada surpassed all other countries, approving 89 percent of the asylum applications from Pakistan reviewed in 2024 (yearly acceptance rates account for both newly received and pending applications reviewed during that specific year, as reviews are often time-intensive). The US and UK were the other two countries with acceptance rates above 50 percent.

Among the top ten asylum destinations, South Korea, the only Asian country on the list, received the lowest number of applications. It also recorded the lowest acceptance rate of 2.5 percent. Although the data covers 2024 only, this may indicate changing preferences for asylum destinations among Pakistani applicants, who are now looking east as well.

Top ten destinations to which Pakistani nationals applied for asylum (2024)

Destination	Applied	Accepted	Rejected	Acceptance rate (percentage)
Italy	12,362	344	8,446	3.9
UK	10,542	2,871	2,745	51.1
Canada	5,610	2,543	314	89.0
Germany	1,797	176	1,629	9.8
France	1,459	222	1,947	10.2
US	1,427	112	66	62.9
Ireland	1,390	77	270	22.2
Spain	1,154	42	642	6.1
Greece	1,074	32	835	3.7
South Korea	775	5	195	2.5
Others	5,523	1,958	2,580	
Total	43,113	8,382	19,669	29.9

4

The Surge in Remittances

In 2025, the surge in remittances played a critical role in averting a balance-of-payments crisis as exports stagnated and imports rose with the introduction of a more liberal import policy under the ongoing three-year International Monetary Fund extended fund facility program and pressing debt repayments.

Remittances were critical to the economy in 2025, helping restore macroeconomic stability.

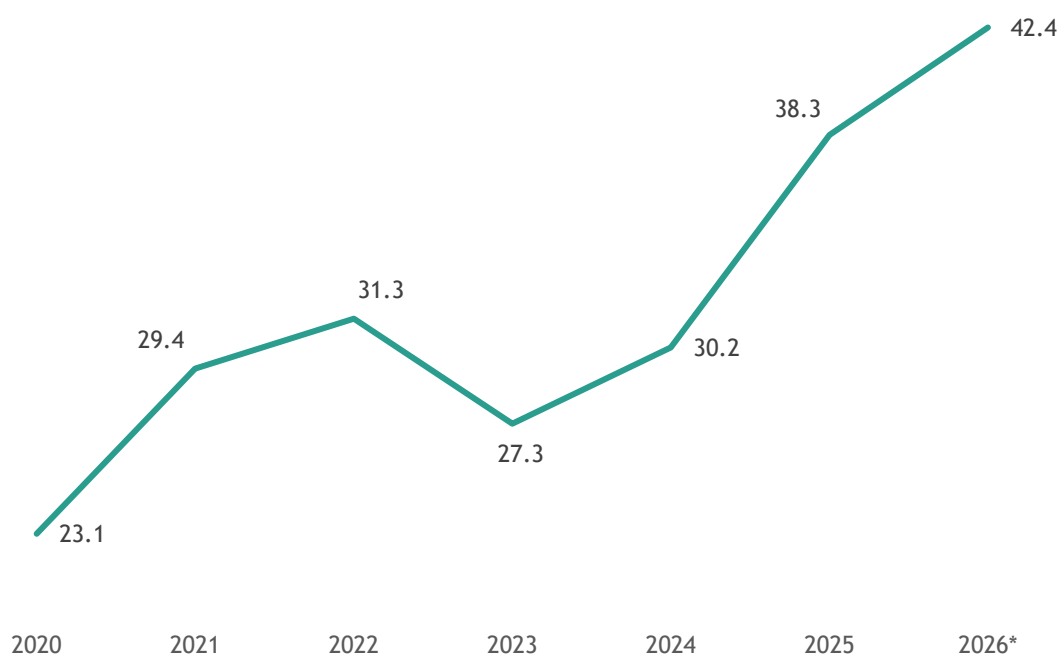
While economic growth and new investments, both domestic and external, remained elusive, remittances created the space to restore macroeconomic stability, including maintaining a stable exchange rate.

This chapter explores the major contributors to this surge in remittances, keeping in mind that other South Asian countries and many others also benefited from this rise in remittance inflows.

4.1 Remittance Trend

Remittances during 2024–2025 increased to USD 38.3 billion compared to USD 30.2 billion during 2023–2024—an increase of over 25 percent, surpassing the increase of ten percent over the past two years (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Total remittance inflows to Pakistan (USD billion) (2020-2026*)



Projections for 2026 are based on applying FY 2025 intra-year growth (14.6 percent) to H1 FY 2026 inflows.

Source: State Bank of Pakistan. (n.d.2). *Country-wise workers' remittances* [Data set].

https://easydata.sbp.org.pk/apex/f?p=10:211:::NO:RP:P211_DATASET_TYPE_CODE,P211_PAGE_ID:TS_GP_BOP_WR_M,210&cs=1F743692A58FE97CD791417EFAE146503.

Projecting remittances for 2025–2026, based on actual inflows from the first six months (July–December) and maintaining the same growth rate, they are expected to rise to USD 42.43 billion or by around 11 percent.

The impact of remittances on the domestic economy can be gauged from its share in GDP, which increased to 9.34 percent in 2024–2025, up from 7.61 percent in 2023–2024 (Table 8).

Given the high share of consumption expenditure from household remittances, their multiplier effect on the domestic economy would be significant, although the exact impact would depend on State Bank of Pakistan policies of sterilizing corresponding rupee inflows.

Figure 11: Remittances are a significant contributor to Pakistan’s GDP



Source: Aqeel Ahmed Zia.

Table 8: Remittances as a percentage of GDP (FY 2022-2026*)

Fiscal year	Remittances (USD billion)	GDP (USD billion)	Remittances (percentage of GDP)
2022	31.28	376.53	8.31
2023	27.33	387.61	7.05
2024	30.25	397.82	7.61
2025	38.30	410.12	9.34
2026*	39.47	421.57	9.36

Note: Remittances and GDP figures for FY 2026 are annualized projections based on first-half remittance inflows and trend-based GDP growth using official SBP statistics.

Source: State Bank of Pakistan, *Balance of payments statistics and national accounts*.

4.1.1 Country-wise remittances

Table 9 shows that the significant rise in remittances during 2024–2025 was evenly distributed among the GCC countries in the Middle East, as well as the UK, US, and EU.

In the Middle East, the most significant increase was for Saudi Arabia, which rose from USD 7.4 billion in 2023–2024 to USD 9.3 billion in 2024–2025—an increase of 26 percent.

In the UAE, both Dubai and Abu Dhabi showed significant rises, with the former increasing from USD 4.2 billion to USD 6.1 billion between 2023–2024 and 2024–2025 (45 percent) and the latter increasing from USD 1.3 billion to USD 1.6 billion (23 percent).

Among other major remittance-sending countries, the most significant increases were for Italy and the UK, while the US and other countries, particularly Australia and Canada, also showed increases, contributing to the factors responsible for the surge in remittances in 2024–2025.

Remittances from Saudi Arabia increased by USD 1.9 billion between FY 2024 and FY 2025.

Table 9: Country/region-wise worker remittance inflows to Pakistan (USD million) (percentage of total)

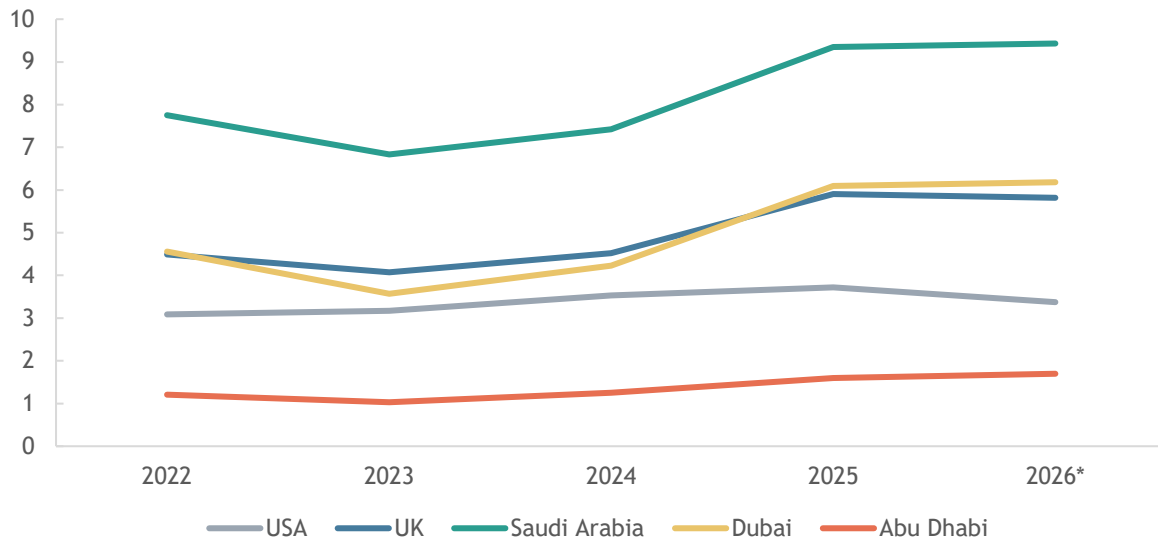
Country/ region	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026 (1st half)
GCC	\$ 17,225 (55.2%)	\$ 14,687 (53.7%)	\$ 16,140 (53.4%)	\$ 20,886 (54.5%)	\$ 10,682.5 (54.1%)
Saudi Arabia	\$ 7,754 (24.8%)	\$ 6,833 (24.8%)	\$ 7,424 (24.5%)	\$ 9,345 (24.4%)	\$ 4,715.2 (23.9%)
Dubai (UAE)	\$ 4,558 (14.5%)	\$ 3,570 (13.06%)	\$ 4,230 (13.9%)	\$ 6,093 (15.9%)	\$ 3,091 (15.6%)
Abu Dhabi (UAE)	\$ 1,208 (3.9%)	\$ 1,030 (3.8%)	\$ 1,251 (4.13%)	\$ 1,596 (4.2%)	\$ 848.4 (4.3%)
Oman	\$ 1,132 (3.6%)	\$ 1,013 (3.7%)	\$ 1,034 (3.4%)	\$ 1,316 (3.4%)	\$ 641.0 (3.2%)
Qatar	\$ 1,028 (3.3%)	\$ 916 (3.3%)	\$ 902 (3.0%)	\$ 1,057 (2.8%)	\$ 539.7 (2.7%)
Kuwait	\$ 935 (2.9%)	\$ 815 (3.0%)	\$ 802 (2.7%)	\$ 855 (2.2%)	\$ 427.3 (2.1%)

Country/ region	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026 (1st half)
Bahrain	\$ 530 (1.7%)	\$ 454 (1.7%)	\$ 443 (1.5%)	\$ 484 (1.3%)	\$ 269.5 (1.36%)
Other major countries	\$ 14,054 (44.9%)	\$ 10,804 (39.5%)	\$ 14,114 (46.7%)	\$ 17,414 (45.5%)	\$ 9,051.5 (45.8%)
UK	\$ 4,493 (14.3%)	\$ 4,073 (14.9%)	\$ 4,522 (14.9%)	\$ 5,905 (15.4%)	\$ 2,907.6 (14.7%)
US	\$ 3,087 (9.9%)	\$ 3,168 (11.6%)	\$ 3,531 (11.7%)	\$ 3,720 (9.7%)	\$ 1,686 (8.5%)
Italy	\$ 856 (2.7%)	\$ 840 (3.1%)	\$ 978 (3.2%)	\$ 1,301 (3.4%)	\$ 784.9 (3.9%)
Spain	\$ 513 (1.64%)	\$ 490 (1.8%)	\$ 601 (2.0%)	\$ 780 (2.0%)	\$ 453.3 (2.3%)
Germany	\$ 509 (1.62%)	\$ 553 (2.0%)	\$ 587 (1.9%)	\$ 740 (1.9%)	\$ 389.0 (1.9%)
France	\$ 488 (1.56%)	\$ 444 (1.6%)	\$ 482 (1.6%)	\$ 564 (1.5%)	\$ 310.7 (1.57%)
Greece	\$ 365 (1.2%)	\$ 336 (1.2%)	\$ 405 (1.3%)	\$ 505 (1.3%)	\$ 297.7 (1.5%)
All other countries	\$ 3,743 (11.9%)	\$ 1,842 (6.7%)	\$ 3,008 (10.0%)	\$ 3,899 (10.1%)	\$ 521.4 (2.6%)
Total	\$ 31,279 (100.0%)	\$ 27,333 (100.0%)	\$ 30,251 (100.0%)	\$ 38,299 (100.0%)	\$ 19,733 (100.0%)

Source: State Bank of Pakistan. (n.d.2). *Country-wise workers' remittances* [Data set].

https://easydata.sbp.org.pk/apex/f?p=10:211:::NO:RP:P211_DATASET_TYPE_CODE,P211_PAGE_ID:TS_GP_BOP_WR_M,210&cs=1F743692A58FE97CD791417EFAE146503.

Figure 12: Country-wise remittance inflows to Pakistan from major countries (USD billion) (2022-2026*)

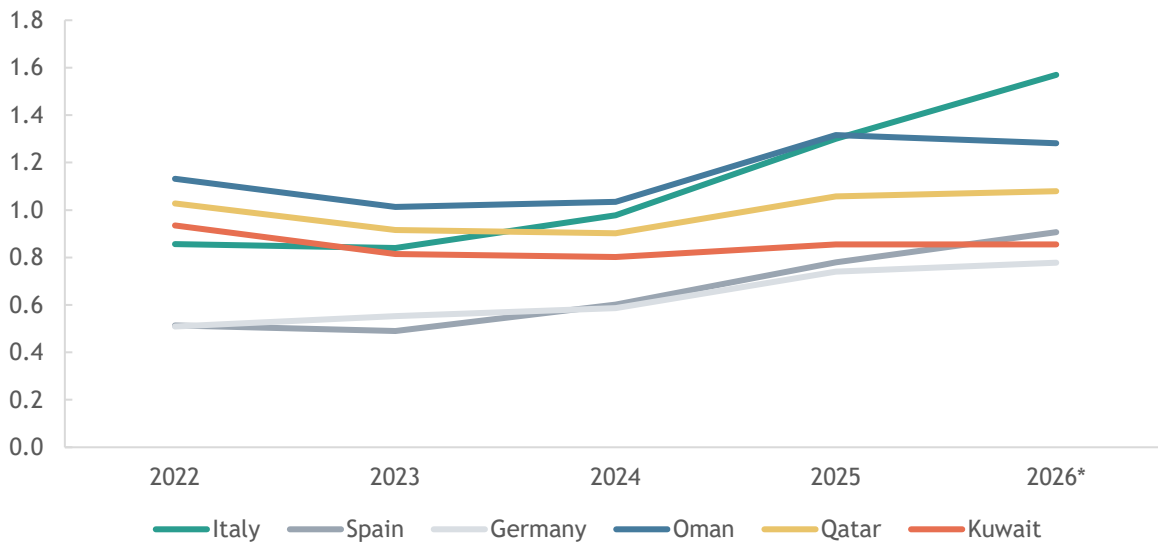


*Values for 2026 are annualized estimates based on first-half remittance inflows.

Source: State Bank of Pakistan. (n.d.2). *Country-wise workers' remittances* [Data set].

https://easydata.sbp.org.pk/apex/f?p=10:211:::NO:RP:P211_DATASET_TYPE_CODE,P211_PAGE_ID:TS_GP_BOP_WR_M,210&cs=1F743692A58FE97CD791417EFAE146503.

Figure 13: Remittance inflows to Pakistan from selected mid-range countries (2022-2026*)



*Values for 2026 are annualized estimates based on first-half remittance inflows.

Source: State Bank of Pakistan. (n.d.2). *Country-wise workers' remittances* [Data set].

https://easydata.sbp.org.pk/apex/f?p=10:211:::NO:RP:P211_DATASET_TYPE_CODE,P211_PAGE_ID:TS_GP_BOP_WR_M,210&cs=1F743692A58FE97CD791417EFAE146503.

4.2 Why the Rise in Remittances?

The significant rise in remittances in 2024–2025 is attributed to the following:

1. An increase in the number of outmigrants post-2022–2023 after the end of COVID-19;
2. A shift to higher-skilled migrant workers, including IT and AI professionals;
3. A stable exchange rate with no significant differences between the official and market (informal) exchange rates;
4. High inflation leading to a fall in real incomes and wages for households left behind, increasing pressure on migrants to support their families;
5. Ongoing government incentive schemes encouraging overseas Pakistanis to send remittances through official channels.

However, the precise reasons vary across countries. For example, the rise in outmigration to Saudi Arabia is clearly reflected in increased remittances, but this is not the case for other countries that also experienced a significant rise in remittances. Indeed, a simple regression analysis based on a sample of 12 countries showed no significant relationship between the increase in remittances and the rise in outmigration.

There is a clear need to study this increase in remittances and the specific reasons for changes in remittances from individual countries. This is being conducted at CIMRAD, and the results will be shared in the 2026 edition of the *Pakistan Migration Report*.

4.2.1 Government initiatives

Initiatives taken by Pakistan to facilitate diaspora savings include the Roshan Digital Account (RDA), Naya Pakistan Certificates (NPCs), and Roshan Equity.

In 2020, facing COVID-19 and a potential decline in remittances due to reduced outmigration, the State Bank of Pakistan, in collaboration with local commercial banks, launched a major initiative to integrate the Pakistani diaspora more closely into the country's banking system. This would allow them to open individual accounts in Pakistani rupees in commercial banks and also transfer their savings in host countries in foreign exchange to Pakistan and earn (in most cases) higher interest rates. The overall aim was to boost these flows through official channels and encourage overseas Pakistanis to conduct banking and investment activities from abroad.

These schemes have been extremely successful since their inception, with 901,764 accounts opened and reaching USD 11.92 billion by 1 January 2026 (Table 10).

Table 10: RDA, NPC, and Roshan Equity inflows and usage (USD million)

Years	RDA net inflows	Locally utilized	Investments (NPC & Roshan Equity)*	Balances in account
FY 2021	1,518	391	883	244
FY 2022	2,286	1,731	336	219
FY 2023	1,087	1,655	-488	-80
FY 2024	1,747	1,435	262	37
FY 2025	2,107	1,550	484	63
FY 2026**	1,206	893	233	55

* Including a small number of investments in government securities, real estate, and mutual funds.

** Figures are shown for a seven-month period (July 2025–January 2026).

RDA = Roshan Digital Account, NPC = Naya Pakistan Certificate.

Source: State Bank of Pakistan. (n.d.3). *Progress on Roshan Digital Account: Key statistics on Roshan Digital Account*. <https://www.sbp.org.pk/RDA/Progress.html>.

However, recently, some concern has been expressed that this inflow has been used more as a means of channeling remittances for domestic consumption rather than for investments in Pakistan, as originally envisaged, since only 20 percent has remained within Pakistan, while the rest has either flowed out or been consumed.

4.3 Regional and Global Rise in Remittances

The increase in remittances in 2025 in Pakistan must be analyzed in the context of a rising global trend for low- and middle-income countries, especially in South Asia, compared to other major non-South Asian countries (Tables 11 and 12).

In Bangladesh, remittances rose by 20 percent from USD 27.1 billion in 2024 to USD 32.8 billion in 2025, and in India, by 14 percent from USD 118.7 billion in 2024 to USD 135.5 billion in 2025. India's remittance inflows have seen a major shift from the Gulf countries to the US, UK, and other developed countries (Box 2).

Box 2: India's remittances: A major turning point

India's remittance inflow in recent years has seen a major turning point, with the US and UK emerging as top remittance sources, displacing the long-standing dominance of Gulf countries, according to a recent Reserve Bank of India report (2025). These changes reflect deeper shifts in global mobility, economic opportunity, and diaspora engagement.

The most significant of these changes includes:

1. The US becoming the largest source of remittances since FY 2021, with its share increasing to 27.7 percent in FY 2024.
2. The UK's share rising to 10.8 percent in FY 2024 compared to 3 percent in FY 2017.
3. Rising remittance inflows from Canada, Australia, and Singapore.

This turning point reflects a broader trend of highly skilled Indian professionals settling in these nations and contributing financially to families back home (Gajbhiye et al., 2025).

Table 11: Remittance inflows for major South Asian countries (USD million)

Country	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Bangladesh	21,752	22,206	21,505	22,168	27,122	32,800
India	83,149	89,375	111,222	119,526	118,712	135,461
Pakistan	23,130	29,450	31,280	27,250	30,250	38,299
Sri Lanka	7,140	5,520	3,819	6,023	6,722	8,706

Source: World Bank. (n.d.). *Personal remittances, received (current US\$)* [Data set].
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT>.

Table 12: Major non-South Asian countries receiving remittances (USD million)

Country	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Mexico	39,834	43,978	55,067	61,458	66,238	67,638
Nigeria	23,209	17,208	19,483	20,128	19,550	21,293
Philippines	35,167	34,883	36,685	38,049	39,097	40,279
Thailand	8,162	8,257	9,065	8,917	9,692	9,584

Source: World Bank. (n.d.). *Personal remittances, received (current US\$)* [Data set].
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT>.

4.4 The Role of Remittances in Pakistan's Economy: Benefits and Costs

Over the last 50 years, starting with the tripling of oil prices in 1973 and the subsequent outmigration to Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia, the resulting remittances have played an important role in Pakistan's economy. Indeed, these inflows have provided critical support in overcoming the persistent balance-of-trade deficit and relieving the pressures on the labor market, given the high growth rate of the labor force (driven by population growth) and low demand for labor, as economic growth in most years has not been sufficient to create enough productive, livable jobs. Post-2000, the significant rise in remittances played an important role in reducing poverty until at least 2018 (Amjad, 2017). In addition, there are social remittances, a term coined over 20 years ago to describe the circulation of ideas, practices, skills, and social capital between labor-sending and labor-receiving communities (Shah, 2024).

'Social remittances' describe the circulation of ideas, practices, skills, and social capital between labor-sending and labor-receiving communities.

Despite this significant injection of external resources over the past 50 years, Pakistan's economy has continued to experience recurring boom-bust cycles—growth nearly halved during the period post-1990 until 2025 compared to the previous 30 years (1960–1990). This raises the question: aside from their positive impact, have remittances unleashed negative forces that pull the economy down and are perhaps a factor in Pakistan not generating sustained and higher growth?

In a recent article, Husain (2026) listed several concerns regarding the expanding role of remittances in the economy, alongside their positive impacts. He noted that these concerns typically focus on the rise in "brain drain, excessive consumption, import leakage, exchange-rate overvaluation and the possibility of Dutch Disease."

In recent years, remittances have exceeded Pakistan's total earnings from exports of goods and services. This has resulted in an overvalued exchange rate (a form of the Dutch Disease) and negatively impacted the country's export competitiveness. Hussain (2026) disputes this, arguing that despite the surge in remittances in the past few years, the exchange rate, particularly the real exchange rate, has remained stable and not overvalued. In addition, he argues that the Dutch Disease does not apply to remittances as it may to the export of natural resources like oil. The International Monetary Fund is building a strong case for including remittances under exports of services in a country's total exports of goods and services, rather than including them separately later in the current account balance.

In addition, it is difficult to prove the argument that remittances encourage consumption, decrease the country's abysmally low domestic saving rate, and are responsible for increased imports of luxury goods and consumer durables. Most remittances are received by low-income rural households who spend primarily on food and basic needs, mostly locally produced or grown, rather than on imported luxury items. The accumulated savings they bring upon return are often invested in small businesses, home improvements, or acquiring agricultural land for self-cultivation.

Most remittances are received by low-income rural households who spend primarily on food and basic needs.

An issue Husain (2026) does not discuss is the frequent allegation that remittances are used to 'whiten black money,' transfer export earnings, or transfer money abroad through asset sales in the home country. However, the precise mechanism through which this income is transferred through remittances or its quantity is difficult to prove. In addition, banking authorities around the world have strictly monitored and controlled international fund transfers since 9/11—by all accounts, the amounts of remittances transferred through *hundi* or other illegal means have substantially declined.

Nonetheless, there is considerable merit in the argument that the presence of a large diaspora, both permanent and temporary (estimated at around 12 million–15 million), combined with significant remittance flows and assets owned by Pakistanis abroad, suggests that Pakistan has experienced 'premature globalization' to a greater extent than it otherwise would have. This issue warrants further research and study.

5

Issues and Policies

An international migrant is defined as a person who moves away from their place of usual residence across an international border, either temporarily or permanently. The term, which is not defined in international law, encompasses a range of categories, including migrant workers, international students, humanitarian migrants, and individuals who move abroad for lifestyle or family reunification reasons (Paez-Deggeller, 2025).

International migration trends, politics, and policies have become more frantic than usual since 2024 and continue to be so. The more prominent of these include immigration fears leveraged by populist and far-right political parties for political gain, denial of asylum, misinformation fueling anti-immigrant sentiment, rising cases of xenophobia and prejudice, crackdowns on irregular and illegal migration, and changing demands for skills. While the overall space for immigrants is shrinking, the need for those with specialized skills, such as in care work, is on the rise. Migration policies are constantly being reviewed, revised, and made more stringent. Moreover, they lack consistency and are subject to frequent changes, leading to greater uncertainty and concern for existing and potential migrants. Issues of human security and rights are, today more than ever, central to the debate on international migration. In this context, countries have been encouraged to develop national emigration policies.

Migration policies lack consistency and are subject to frequent changes, leading to uncertainty and concern for migrants.

Pakistan follows a pro-emigration policy and has taken a number of initiatives regarding emigrants, such as the enactment of laws, the signing of international conventions, and liaising with both international and national institutions. The Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018, and the Prevention of Smuggling of Migrants Act, 2018, focus on strengthening border and law enforcement agencies to curb undocumented migration while simultaneously protecting the rights of victims of human trafficking.

The two laws, drafted by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) with the assistance of UNODC, are in line with international standards and are based on United Nations model laws on Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants.

Pakistan is also a signatory to two conventions related to labor migration, the Dubai Process and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, in addition to being part of the Budapest Process. Key institutions that track undocumented migrants include the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Federal Investigation Agency, the National Database and Registration Authority, and the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, which is responsible for overseas Pakistanis, particularly in the context of labor emigration.

5.1 National Emigration and Welfare Policy (June 2024)

In development since 2019, the Pakistan National Emigration and Welfare Policy was finalized in June 2024. It has been aligned with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator 10.7.2, which aims to describe the state of national immigration policies and how they change over time. SDG target 10.7 calls on countries to facilitate the orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies. This target is most explicitly and directly related to international migration among all the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, the formal adoption of the policy is still pending.

Box 3: Pakistan: National Immigration and Welfare Policy, 2024

1. Vision and objectives

- Promote safe, orderly, and regular emigration. Enhance the contribution of overseas Pakistanis to national development. Align emigration governance with international standards, including the Global Compact for Migration and SDG 10.7 (facilitating migration).

2. Key pillars

- *Governance and regulation:* Strengthen institutional frameworks, including the BEOE, and streamline recruitment processes.
- *Skills development:* Match emigrant skills with international demand; expand technical and vocational education and training (TVET).
- *Protection and welfare:* Ensure the rights and welfare of emigrants, including legal aid, pre-departure orientation, and grievance redress mechanisms.
- *Reintegration and development:* Support returning migrants with reintegration programs and encourage their investment in Pakistan.

3. Crosscutting themes

- Promote gender-responsive policies to increase female participation in overseas employment.
- Create public-private partnerships to improve services and employment facilitation.

4. Implementation mechanism

- Multi-stakeholder coordination—federal, provincial, and international.
- Monitoring and evaluation through key performance indicators aligned with national and global migration targets.

Even though the policy requires formal adoption, areas in which some progress has been made include the establishment of MRCs in major cities in Pakistan that provide migration-related information and referrals to institutions such as the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC), TEVTA, and the Skill Development Council, which work toward improving the skill levels of potential emigrants. Some pilot projects are also underway for returning migrants. However, little progress has been made in protecting migrants in destination countries.

5.2 Migration, Human Security, and Rights

Pakistan's track record in human rights is not noteworthy. It has ratified key international treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, signaling its commitment to civil liberties and protection. However, it has yet to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990), which weakens its ability to advocate for its citizens abroad. United Nations treaty bodies and Pakistan's Universal Periodic Review have repeatedly flagged concerns regarding migrant exploitation and consular inefficiency, but recommendations remain largely unimplemented (Kashif, 2025).

5.2.1 Repatriation of Afghans: Policy changes

Until 2022, the government of Pakistan was fairly consistent in its policy of accommodating Afghan refugees. A major policy shift occurred in September 2023 when it enacted the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan, declaring that all 'illegal aliens' should leave the country voluntarily or face deportation by 1 November 2023. IOM has maintained

Two-thirds of the Afghans affected have never lived in Afghanistan.

a data-tracing matrix to record the number of refugees returning to Afghanistan. During the period 15 September 2023–15 April 2025, a total of 939,045 individuals returned to Afghanistan. Fourteen percent (133,054 individuals) of this total have returned since 1 January 2025. A majority (71 percent) of the returnees were undocumented persons, while 24 percent were ACC holders and 5 percent were POR cardholders.

Pakistan's crackdown on Afghan refugees since late 2023 indicates that, at that time, Pakistan was hosting an estimated 1.3 million POR cardholders (documentation issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] confirms refugee status), 800,000 ACC holders granted temporary residence but not formal refugee status, and 1.3 million undocumented Afghan immigrants. This total included 600,000 Afghans who fled to Pakistan after the Afghan Taliban retook Kabul in 2021.

A second phase was launched in March 2025 against ACC holders whose documentation had been canceled and who were told to leave by the end of March. For now, no plan has been announced against POR cardholders. However, their documentation expired on 30 June

2025. This reflects a change in Pakistan's policy from a humanitarian approach to one of law enforcement.

Figure 14: A Pakistan-Afghanistan border crossing



Source: Reuters/Fayaz Aziz.

Since the announcement of the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan in September 2023, 1.1 million Afghans have returned to Afghanistan as of 30 June 2025. This includes 89,400 individuals deported by Pakistan, with 51 percent of the total returns being women and girls. Available information indicates that at least 17 percent of the returnees crossed back into Pakistan, based on UNHCR's protection return monitoring. The same survey reveals that while male returnees see gradual economic improvement, women face worsening barriers, deeper vulnerabilities, and growing food insecurity. This contrast underscores the fragile reintegration progress and the urgent need for targeted support in return areas (UNHCR, 2025).

5.2.2 Suspension of the German humanitarian admission program

Currently, 2,400 Afghans are waiting for repatriation to Germany, and young women are particularly at risk.

Plans to relocate Afghans from Pakistan to Europe, especially Germany, were curtailed due to the suspension of the German humanitarian admission program in March 2025. In the February 2025 elections in Germany, migration dominated public debate and led to a change of government. Previously, the Merkel government had an open migration policy. The admission program began in 2022, intending to bring up to 1,000 Afghans per month to Germany who were at risk because of their work in human rights, justice, politics, or education, or due to their gender, religion, or sexual orientation. However, fewer than 1,600 arrived over two years due to holdups and flight cancellations. Currently, 2,400 Afghans are waiting for repatriation to Germany, and young women are particularly at risk. For them, the situation is more alarming as Pakistan intensifies efforts to forcibly return Afghans.

Kimia, a 25-year-old visual artist and human rights activist who fled Afghanistan in 2024 after being accepted into a German humanitarian admission program aimed at Afghans considered at risk under the Taliban, is stuck in Islamabad due to the suspension of the program by the center-right coalition government in Germany. Another 35-year-old woman journalist, Haseina, who fled Kabul, is under threat from the Taliban and her ex-husband's family, who have threatened to kill her and take away her daughter ("Germany looks to shutter," 2025).

Afghans have been repatriated in several phases, according to the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan, with thousands being repatriated every month during 2025. Since April, 57,300 Afghans have been arrested and detained primarily from three districts—Chagai and Pishin (Balochistan) and Islamabad (federal capital) (UNHCR, 2025). Meanwhile, Afghans live in precarious conditions in Pakistan, often being forced to sleep in the open.

With a large number of Afghans still living in Pakistan, international organizations such as UNHCR, along with the US, continue to pressure Pakistan to extend their stay, while European countries are reneging on their agreements to accept Afghans. The US has also reversed its policy of welcoming Afghans who had worked for them (Ahmed, 2025b).

5.3 Asylum Seekers

The US, UK, and European countries, in particular, are instituting stringent policies curtailing the entry of those seeking asylum by banning their permanent residence and punishing nongovernmental organizations that aid them. The EU signed a new pact for migration and asylum at the end of 2024 that allows for the deportation of migrants and asylum seekers to

a third 'safe' country. In the US, the asylum process and private sponsorship of refugees have been paused, and the UK intends to end the use of asylum hotels by 2029.

Greece is discouraging asylum seekers from sailing out of North Africa ("Greece draws criticism," 2025). While this primarily affects refugees fleeing conflict and war in Africa, illegal migrants from Pakistan also use this route. Such migrants usually arrive in Crete, the home island of Kyriakos Mitsotakis, the prime minister of Greece. However, this move has been considered a violation of the right to seek asylum under international and EU law (International Rescue Committee, 2025).

5.4 Conditions of Migrants in Recipient Countries

A key area of concern is the condition of emigrants, especially those on temporary visas or those referred to as labor migrants. Policy areas include the nature of work contracts and other related conditions. They also encompass attitudes toward migrants, not just those of the parties listed in the contracts but the public's as well.

5.4.1 The Gulf and Saudi Arabia

Box 4: The kafala system

The kafala system (Arabic for 'sponsorship') was initially designed to regulate foreign labor in GCC countries, including Saudi Arabia. Under this framework, a migrant worker's legal residency and employment rights were tied exclusively to a local sponsor or employer (*kafeel*). This system aimed to shift state administrative responsibilities to private individuals or companies, simplifying visa and residency management. However, over time, it evolved into a structure marked by severe power imbalances. Employers gained absolute control, effectively preventing workers from changing jobs, leaving the country, or seeking legal assistance without explicit consent. Such conditions often led to exploitation, abuse, and the denial of fundamental rights. Human rights organizations widely criticized the system for enabling forced labor and conditions akin to modern-day slavery.

In a historic move toward labor reform, Saudi Arabia has officially abolished the kafala system. Announced in June 2025 and implemented in 2026, the abolition fundamentally reshapes the labor landscape for approximately 13 million foreign workers, granting them improved working conditions and greater freedom and legal rights. Many have faced limited job mobility, withheld wages, abuse, and exploitation without legal recourse. By dismantling these constraints, Saudi Arabia aims to significantly enhance the working and living conditions of a vast labor force crucial to its economy (Impact International, 2025).

As of May 2025, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that 23,456 Pakistanis are incarcerated overseas, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE accounting for over 17,000 of these cases. Of these, 68 individuals are on death row in ten different countries. Many face charges

of immigration violations, theft, drug offenses, or minor infractions they do not fully understand due to legal illiteracy and language barriers. Most lack legal aid, experience consular neglect, and endure harsh prison conditions. Despite Pakistan's claims of proactive consular outreach, the scale of the crisis raises doubts about the effectiveness of these interventions (Kashif, 2025).

5.4.2 The United Kingdom and European Union

In the UK and most European countries, low-skilled migrant workers are increasingly viewed as pariahs and a threat to society. Muslim migrants, in particular, are disliked for allegedly eroding local culture. Incidents of violence against them are rising, leading to further social polarization. Undocumented and irregular migrants from Pakistan face harsh living conditions as local communities react negatively to their housing in hotels, pressuring governments to seek alternatives outside their borders.

5.5 The Demand for Skills

The news for unskilled and low-skilled workers is not good, as global demand for skilled and highly skilled workers is rising. This is evident in Pakistan's migrant center report for the first quarter of 2025, which shows a clear skill-based destination trend in migration patterns (MRC, 2025).

5.5.1 The United Kingdom

Since 2020, the UK's free movement policy has been replaced by a points-based system to attract highly skilled workers, skilled workers, students, and various specialist work routes, including options for global leaders and innovators. Consequently, a general low-skilled or temporary work route will not be introduced. The UK's recent immigration policy clearly states that only highly skilled individuals can contribute to the economy. Government promises include reducing net migration, decreasing reliance on overseas workers, addressing smuggling gangs, clearing the asylum backlog, and expediting the removal of individuals without legal status in the UK.

The UK's white paper (UK Government, 2026) on immigration, published in May 2025, outlined several policy changes, including the closure of the skilled worker route for social care, stricter English language requirements for migrants and their dependents, and longer residence requirements for some visa holders before they can apply for settlement (Migration Observatory, 2026). The Home Office estimates these measures could lead to around 100,000 fewer visas granted each year. However, many policy details are still being finalized, and the ultimate impact on net migration remains unclear.

The UK government's immigration white paper policy document 2025 (UK Government, 2026):

- *New visa controls requiring foreign skilled workers to have a university degree to secure a job in the UK.*
 - *Reduce lower-skilled migration—aim to cut 50,000 lower-skilled worker visas this year.*
 - *High-skilled individuals “who play by the rules and contribute to the economy” could be fast-tracked.*
-

5.5.2 The UAE

The UAE discontinued labor visas in November 2023. However, many workers from Pakistan are still moving to the UAE through direct employment visas and entrepreneurial opportunities. This method is often more costly for emigrants, typically requiring support from family and friends.

5.5.3 Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia rolls out skill-based work permits to attract global talent—Al-Kinani, Arab News (2025)

“The Kingdom’s demand for skilled professionals is growing amid a wave of mega-projects, including NEOM, the Red Sea Project, Qiddiya, and Diriyah Gate, which span sectors ranging from construction and design to technology and tourism. These developments require a high concentration of specialized foreign talent to meet tight delivery timelines and global standards.”

“The move is part of a broader strategy to enhance productivity, mitigate skill mismatches, and support Saudi Arabia’s long-term economic objectives under Vision 2030.”

“The decision...classifies foreign workers into three categories—high-skill, skilled, and basic—based on qualifications, experience, technical ability, wage level, and age.”

“Expatriates seeking employment in Saudi Arabia will now be assessed under a newly introduced skill-based work permit system as the Kingdom moves to streamline its labor market and attract global talent.”

“The system took effect for new incoming workers on July 1, while the reclassification of existing expatriates began on June 18...”

“The measure aims to enhance worker performance, attract global talent to transfer expertise and experience to the Saudi labor market, improve operational efficiency, benefit from international experience, and build an environment that supports innovation and the development of business models.”

“Designed to match worker capabilities with market needs, the reform introduces a unified digital evaluation mechanism via the Qiwa platform, aligned with the Unified Saudi Classification of Professions and Educational Levels.”

“The new classification is expected to enhance transparency in workforce planning and help businesses access better-qualified workers while encouraging a gradual shift away from reliance on low-skilled labor.”

“The move comes amid improving employment indicators. The overall unemployment rate, which includes both Saudis and expatriates, fell to a record low of 2.8 percent in the first quarter of 2025, a 0.7 percentage point decrease from the previous quarter, according to the General Authority for Statistics. Among non-Saudis, the rate declined to 0.8 percent, reflecting strong private sector demand and targeted recruitment aligned with workforce needs.

Expatriates remain a critical part of the labor market, accounting for 15.7 million people, or 44.4 percent of the total population, according to GASTAT data for 2024. Among the working-age group—15 to 64 years—89.9 percent of non-Saudis fall within this range, underscoring their role in the Kingdom’s productive sectors.

The reclassification also ties into the Professional Verification Program, launched in 2021 and expanded in 2024. The initiative, currently covering 128 countries and set to expand to 160, verifies the educational and professional credentials of foreign workers in key fields, such as engineering, healthcare, and education, before they enter the Kingdom.”

5.5.4 Oman

As part of its 'Omanization' policy, Oman suspended visa issuance for many lower-skill jobs for all foreign nationals starting September 2024, impacting labor migration flows to the country (Asian Development Bank Institute, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, & International Labour Organization, 2025).

5.6 Steps Taken by Pakistan

To meet the demand for skilled workers, the Punjab TEVTA and the NAVTTC have signed a memorandum of understanding for the international accreditation of TEVTA's 27 institutes by two different accreditation bodies.

The Skills Development Council aims to enhance training quality to meet international standards, bridging the gap between national and global markets. As a result, TEVTA Punjab will produce a skilled workforce that meets international demands, contributing to the country's economic growth. The NAVTTC will cover all costs for international accreditation, ensuring a brighter future for Pakistan's skilled workforce (TEVTA-Punjab, 2024).

Box 5: Agreements with provinces to modernize TVET institutes across Pakistan

A major step in developing employable skills for youth in Pakistan was the signing of agreements to transform selected model TVET institutes into four centers of excellence in Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

With modern equipment, improved curricula, and trained teachers, these centers will provide state-of-the-art skills training to youth aligned with labor market requirements.

The establishment of the centers of excellence in Pakistan is a recognized flagship initiative under the EU's Global Gateway program, where the EU leverages public and private sector investments worldwide.

Co-funded by the EU and the Federal Republic of Germany, the initiative is being implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit and the British Council in collaboration with the NAVTTC as part of a broader strategy to strengthen the TVET sector and enhance youth employment opportunities (Delegation of the European Union to Pakistan, 2024).

The NAVTTC organized an international dialogue in collaboration with the EU, British Council, and German Cooperation to enhance access for skilled Pakistani youth to the global market, focusing on white-collar and management jobs. Participants included representatives from the UK, UAE, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, along with industrialists, education experts, and government officials. With 60 percent of Pakistan's population being youth, it was reported that 600,000 young people had registered on the Prime Minister's Youth

Programme portal, alongside 700,000 national and international companies (“Markets being explored,” 2025).

Box 6: In-country training programs

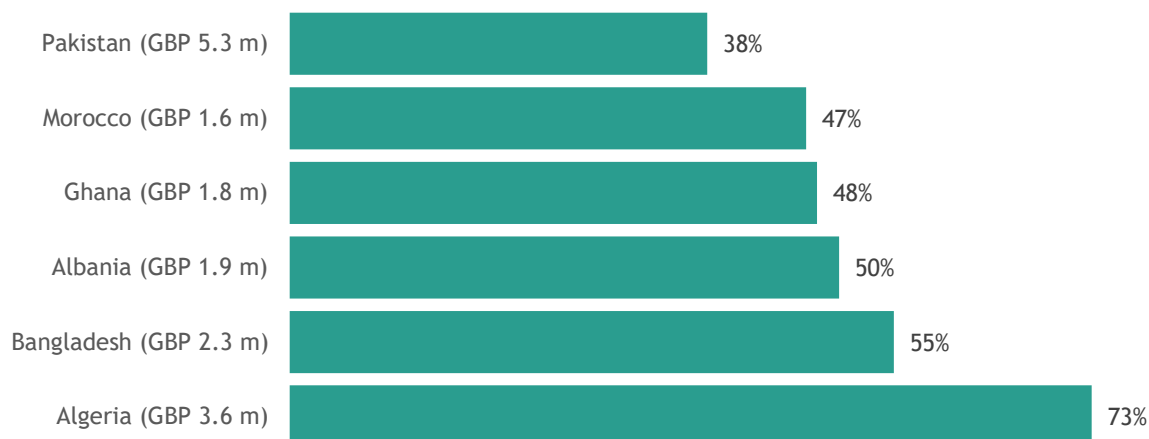
A partnership has been established between Finland and Pakistan to strengthen training and employment opportunities in hospitality and care work. The EUR 1.5 million (USD 1.6 million) project will train 500 students in these fields for an initial six-month period in Pakistan, using a curriculum developed jointly by the National University of Technology (Islamabad) and the Turku Vocational Institute (Aninkaistenkatu), aligning the former with Finnish vocational education standards. After this, students will complete an additional six months of practical training, along with lessons in Finnish language, culture, and society. Finally, 150 students will receive advanced training and hands-on experience in Finland through a three-month internship.

5.7 Shrinking Spaces

Once known for welcoming visitors, families, students, and workers, European countries, the UK, and the US are instituting stringent policies to limit their entry. Higher visa fees and increased rejections are making it uncertain and difficult for Pakistanis to enter these countries.

UK and Schengen states make millions on rejected visas: Data shows that Pakistanis spent GBP 5.3 million on UK visa applications and EUR 3.344 million on EU visa applications that were unsuccessful (Rehman, 2024).

Figure 15: Amounts spent by applicants on rejected UK visas and visa rejection rates (by nationality)



Source: Lessen Data Access and Governance Obstacles (LAGO).

5.8 Restricting Students

Major study destinations are tightening policies, making access to international education increasingly restrictive.

Policies were tightened across major study destination markets in 2025. For example, Canada introduced ‘hard caps’ in 2024, leading to a year-on-year decline in international student enrollments, with study permit approvals falling to 262,100—nearly 48 percent below 2023 levels and about 100,000 permits short of the government’s target. The cap has since been extended through 2026, imposing a new limit of 408,000 permits, more than half of which will be allocated to extensions for existing students rather than new entrants.

The UK experienced a decrease in new international entrants following changes to dependent rights in January 2024. Additionally, starting in 2027, the government will shorten the graduate route from 24 months to 18 months.

In Australia, policy changes over the past two years have led to slower visa processing for some providers, tighter regulation of education agents, higher visa application fees, and increased financial requirements for international students. Despite hosting over 497,000 international students in higher education, Australia has seen a noticeable slowdown in new student applications.

Even the US, while achieving record total international student enrollments, recorded declines in new commencements and graduate-level students. Based on responses from over 825 US higher education institutions, data from the Institute of International Education

shows a 12 percent decline in graduate international students and a 17 percent drop in overall commencements for the 2025–2026 academic year (Baer & Ekin, 2025).

According to the Foreign Office, 13,000–15,000 students travel to the UK for permanent residence each year. The majority prefer remaining in the UK to join the British labor market, often willing to work for minimum wage. Although an e-visa scheme has been launched for students and workers, and the two nations have signed a trade dialogue mechanism agreement, it is likely that the British government will restrict visa applications from Pakistani students who are most likely to claim asylum. Discussions around potential new restrictions follow local elections in England, where the opposition Labour Party was reportedly penalized by voters over issues like illegal migration (Momand, 2025).

Box 7: The UK's immigration white paper policy regarding students (2025)

- Exploring a levy on English universities' income from international student fees (UK Parliament, n.d.).
- Making it harder for universities to maintain their licenses to sponsor student visas by introducing tougher compliance rules.
- Reducing the standard length of the graduate visa for international students to stay on and work in the UK from two years to 18 months (UK Government, n.d.2).
- Stricter English language rules: Higher standards for those already taking language tests and requiring the partners of people moving to the UK on work visas to have basic English to qualify for a dependent visa.
- Increasing the standard qualifying period for permanent residence (also known as settlement or indefinite leave to remain) from five to ten years, with some people qualifying sooner based on criteria yet to be decided.

5.9 Immigration Cutbacks

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer vowed to “finally take back control” of Britain’s borders as his government unveiled policies aimed at reducing legal immigration and countering the rising support for the hard right (“UK govt toughens immigration plans,” 2025).

The UK government announced the end of an ‘experiment in open borders’ that saw net migration rise to nearly one million people under the previous Conservative government, which lost last year’s general election. Every area of the immigration system, including work, family, and study, is to be tightened.

Box 8: The UK's immigration white paper policy (2025)

- Cutting overseas care workers and ending an existing exemption for social care workers: Employers will no longer be able to recruit from abroad.
- Increasing the length of time people will have to live in the UK before qualifying for settlement and citizenship from five years to ten years.
- Strengthening English language rules, with all adult dependents required to demonstrate a basic understanding of English.
- Implementing new powers to deport foreigners who commit offences in the country. All foreign nationals convicted of offences will be flagged to the government.
- Shortening the list of jobs for which employers can sponsor a worker from overseas for a skilled worker visa (UK Government, 2025b).
- Not allowing the sponsorship of jobs assessed as medium-skilled (RQF levels 3–5) unless the Migration Advisory Committee recommends an exemption and the industry demonstrates efforts to recruit domestically.
- Making it easier for people to come to the UK on certain visas aimed at highly skilled migrants, such as the global talent route (UK Government, n.d.1) and high potential route (UK Government, n.d.3).

From encouraging care workers through direct employment in 2024, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has been critical of Britain's immigration system that allowed businesses to bring in lower-paid workers rather than investing in its own young people. The government is under pressure to stop the flow of migrants crossing the Channel from France to England in flimsy rubber dinghies—more than 36,800 made the journey last year, according to British government figures, with several dozen dying. Separate legislation, called the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, is underway to tackle irregular immigration and is currently going through Parliament.

5.10 US Policy Under the Trump Administration

US policy regarding emigrants is erratic, inconsistent, and constantly changing. A new travel ban by President Donald Trump could prevent people from Afghanistan and Pakistan from entering the US based on a government review of the security and vetting risks of these countries (Landay et al., 2025).

Reporting by students to the Department of Homeland Security has now become mandatory. Students, in particular, are facing uncertainty with the crackdown on visas, which are being linked to traffic violations and participation in pro-Palestinian protests. Everyday activities such as working, driving, and going out are under threat for Pakistani students.

Pakistan sent 10,988 students in 2024, a figure lower than those sent by Bangladesh, Nepal, and India. Their social media activity is now being reviewed as part of a broader vetting process to gauge signs of hostility towards US citizens, culture, government, or institutions.

5.11 Irregular Pathways: Dying to Leave

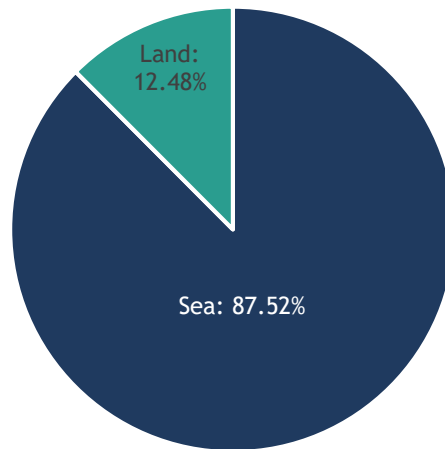
There has been an increase in inquiries from Pakistanis about irregular migration pathways, as reported by MRCs, which aligns with broader trends highlighting a growing desire to leave the country. This rise reflects the escalating challenges faced by Pakistanis, as detailed by the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), which identified economic hardship, political instability, limited educational opportunities, high inflation, and terrorism as key drivers of the increasing number of people seeking to migrate (Inam, 2024).

According to the NCHR's report, Pakistan's surge to the fifth position in 2023 on the list of countries with the most irregular immigrants in Europe is particularly alarming, considering that just a year earlier, it was not among the top ten nations for irregular migration. The report indicates that nearly 40 percent of the Pakistani survey respondents wanted to leave, with many turning to perilous routes through Dubai, Egypt, and Libya to reach Europe (MRC, 2024).

In 2024, a total of 5,680 Pakistanis were apprehended at the border of a European country.

The outflow of irregular migrants trying to reach Europe and other countries has increased in recent years. In 2024, a total of 5,680 Pakistanis were apprehended at the border of a European country. Most of them were young males, with women and children constituting 5 percent each. The majority (88 percent) attempted to enter by sea (Figure 16) (Frontex, 2024).

Figure 16: Irregular border crossings by border type (2024) (percentage)



Source: Frontex (2024).

While many irregular Pakistani migrants are apprehended at various borders and manage to survive, numerous others meet a tragic end. Over the years, several incidents have been reported where overcrowded boats capsize, migrants suffocate in containers, or fall victim to perilous conditions.

Most irregular migration takes place from Balochistan, with some routes originating in central Punjab, extending to Quetta, and then to Iran through the Taftan border. In hopes of reaching Europe via Türkiye, many migrants perish along the way, while others are apprehended at the Iran border after enduring inhumane conditions (Shakeel, 2024). These incidents highlight the persistent dangers faced by migrants and underscore the need for coordinated action by the Pakistani government, law enforcement agencies, and international bodies. Due to the conflict in the Middle East, the route through North Africa, particularly Libya, is now more frequently used.

Figure 17: Migrant trafficking routes from Pakistan



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Federal Investigation Agency. (2014). *Annual report on human trafficking and migrant smuggling: 2014*.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20211012154543/https://www.fia.gov.pk/files/immigration/544998833.pdf>.

A series of migrant boat tragedies has underscored the deadly risks of irregular migration from Pakistan to Europe.

In 2023, a series of devastating migrant boat tragedies highlighted the perils of irregular migration from Pakistan to Europe. In June 2023, the tragic sinking of a fishing trawler captured widespread domestic and international media attention. Over 300 Pakistani migrants, including women and children, drowned off the coast of

Greece after boarding a ship in Egypt. Two months earlier, in April, approximately 57 bodies, including those of Pakistanis, were recovered along the shores of western Libya after two migrant boats sank in the Mediterranean Sea. In December 2024, at least five Pakistanis were killed when a boat carrying migrants sank off Greece's Gavdos island.

Figure 18: Refugees on a boat crossing the Mediterranean Sea



Source: Mstyslav Chernov.

The top choice for irregular migrants from Pakistan is Italy (77 percent). However, one-third of those interviewed were open to the idea of settling in a transit country if certain conditions, such as employment assurance, were met (UNHCR, 2025). Nevertheless, undocumented migrants are finding it difficult to secure jobs.

MRCs have reported the continued and increasing use of AZAD visas by semi-skilled and unskilled emigrants to work in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. This is evidenced by recent reports of individuals engaging in informal labor.

5.12 Policy Regarding Irregular Migrants and Return Migrants

5.12.1 The UK and France: One in, one out return scheme

The UK and France have agreed to a migrant return deal in which Britain will deport undocumented people to France. In a political move to boost his declining popularity, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer addressed the issue of high levels of immigration, including asylum seekers arriving by small boats, in return for accepting an equal number of legitimate asylum seekers with British family connections (“Starmer, Macron unveil ‘one in, one out’ deal,” 2025).

Figure 19: Refugees and migrants awaiting asylum in France



Source: Reuters.

5.12.2 The EU's pact on migration and asylum

The Council of the EU adopted the EU's pact on migration and asylum on 14 May 2024, which will be applied after two years. This establishes rules to manage arrivals in an orderly way, create efficient and uniform procedures, and ensure fair burden-sharing among member states. It aims to create a database, screening mechanisms, border procedures, and return and crisis protocols. Clearly, the EU's migration policies are aimed at curtailing migration and asylum requests and focusing on the return of migrants to their places of origin.

6

Looking to the Future

Migration policies are constantly changing and being reviewed, creating uncertainty and despair. Promises made by the developed Western world are no longer reliable, putting the lives of thousands of potential migrants at risk.

Migrants are increasingly becoming targets of public outrage. Commonly cited reasons for policy change include threats to jobs or dominant culture, social norms, and traditions, and in some cases, pressure on resources. Instances of protests and violence against migrants, often for political gain, are rising and are likely to increase as the number of migrants grows. Housing migrants in hotels in the UK is particularly a point of contention.

6.1 Students: Changing Destinations

A specific category under threat is that of students who have historically tended to overstay their visas, especially as quotas for new student admissions are likely to be reduced in high-student recruitment countries like Canada, the UK, the US, and Australia.

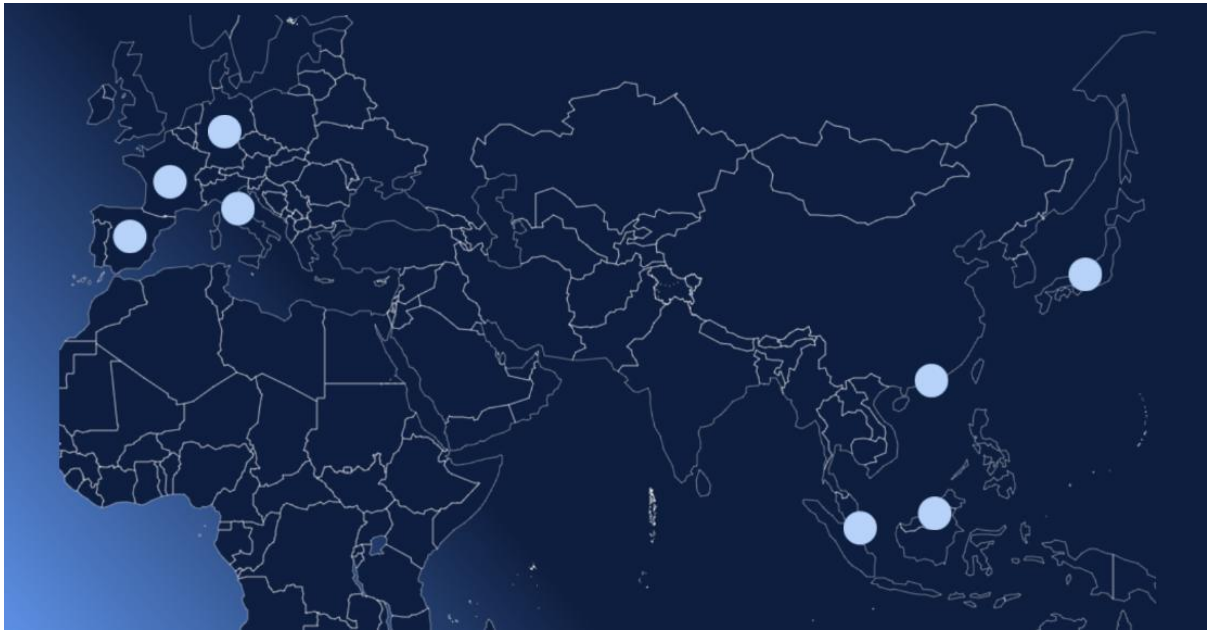
The US will likely continue to cut foreign student enrollment, as the Trump Administration is threatening to cut federal funding for colleges and universities over a range of issues, including pro-Palestinian protests against US ally Israel's war in Gaza, transgender policies, climate initiatives, and diversity, equity, and inclusion programs.

Germany, Ireland, France, and Spain are attracting students because of lower costs and clearer work pathways.

Students are, therefore, looking for safe and stable environments, quality education, work rights, and affordability in their choices (Bartosik, 2025). Germany, Ireland, France, and Spain are attracting students specifically because of lower tuition and living costs and clearer work pathways.

Other destinations emerging as alternatives include China, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan, Kazakhstan, Vietnam, and the UAE (Figure 20).

Figure 20: Emerging study destinations for international students



Source: Bartosik, I. (2025, December 17). *2025 in review: What the data tells us about international student mobility in 2026*. Bonard Education. <https://www.bonardeducation.com/insights/2025-in-review-what-the-data-tells-us-about-international-student-mobility-in-2026>.

Migration patterns in 2025 show a clear skill-based destination trend. MRCs have reported that TEVTA students pursuing vocational courses seek employment opportunities in GCC countries and South Korea, while those enrolled in three-year diploma programs are exploring study and work options in the UK, Australia, Germany, Italy, Japan, and China.

6.2 Tighter Visa Restrictions

The human rights of migrants and asylum seekers are increasingly under threat. Changes to human rights laws, such as the European Convention on Human Rights, including Britain's withdrawal, are being suggested, especially by the Anti-Reform Party. Asylum seekers, such as those entering by small boats, are being targeted in the UK and most European countries. Furthermore, the US and European countries, especially Germany, are reneging on offers to take in Afghan refugees, leaving the onus on Pakistan to continue to house them. This issue is not likely to be resolved in the near future.

As regular migration channels become restricted, irregular migration is likely to increase despite associated risks. The perception that irregular migration is cheaper than regular migration may also encourage this trend.

Step migration is another route to reaching desired destination countries. Migrants are using religious visits and visas to countries in the Middle East as a means of reaching Libya and then traveling to Europe by boat. Transit countries like Türkiye are also likely to become destinations for more permanent migration.

The Convention for Overseas Pakistanis, a government initiative, demonstrates a strategic shift toward greater diaspora engagement in addressing immigrant issues.

6.3 The Beggar Phenomena: A New Type of Migrant

According to the Federal Investigation Agency, 66,154 passengers were offloaded from flights in 2025, a significant increase from the 35,000 offloaded in 2024. These included beggars, for whom the major destination was Saudi Arabia. Most were from Sindh and Punjab, followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Table 13: *Beggars deported (2024 and 2025)*

2024							
Province	Iraq	Malaysia	Oman	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Total
Sindh	115	14	0	0	2,428	47	2,604
Punjab	85	39	2	4	1,098	2	1,230
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	39	2	0	0	819	0	860
Balochistan	2	0	0	0	117	0	119
Azad Jammu and Kashmir	0	0	0	0	32	0	32
Islamabad	1	0	0	0	4	0	5
Total	242	55	2	4	4,498	49	4,850
2025							
Punjab	4	–	0	1	198	4	207
Sindh	1	–	1	1	185	3	191
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	0	–	0	0	140	2	142
Balochistan	0	–	0	0	6	0	6
Islamabad	0	–	0	0	5	0	5
Azad Jammu and Kashmir	0	–	0	0	1	0	1
Total	5	–	1	2	535	9	552

Source: Wasim, A. (2025, May 15). Over 5,000 Pakistani beggars deported from Saudi Arabia so far, NA informed. *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/amp/1911076>.

6.4 The Gulf

Visa restrictions in the GCC countries are likely to lead to a decline in Pakistani immigrants, both through direct employment and other means. In this scenario, irregular migration, especially via the AZAD visa, is unlikely to decrease.

The abolition of the kafala system is expected to create a fairer labor market, attract skilled global talent, and support Saudi Arabia's Saudization policy by balancing opportunities between expatriates and nationals. The flexibility now granted to workers should also boost workforce morale and productivity. However, successful implementation is crucial. Stakeholders emphasize the need for robust monitoring mechanisms to ensure these legal changes result in tangible improvements on the ground, as past promises have sometimes fallen short.

The demand for skilled workers is likely to rise further, with Pakistani workers facing stiff competition from other developing and developed countries.

The Pakistani Consulate in Dubai has released a video to inform Pakistani workers in the UAE about their employment rights and responsibilities (Abbas, 2025).

6.5 The United Kingdom

The skilled worker route will be primarily for graduate jobs, and adult dependents of work migrants will face language requirements for the first time in the UK. Middle-skilled jobs in industries like construction will qualify only for temporary visas under strict conditions, with no right to bring dependents. The first set of changes (UK Government, 2025a) outlined in the white paper—such as the closure of the care route, the raising of skill thresholds for skilled worker visas, and the introduction of a new temporary shortage list for other occupations—will take effect on 22 July (UK Government, 2025b). Other details are yet to be announced (Migration Observatory, 2025).

6.6 Demand for Care Workers

The UK health and care worker visa was introduced in August 2020. Since 2024, there has been a surge in direct employment in the UK, particularly in the care sector, with workers and dependents relocating to the UK. MRCs report receiving calls, especially from nurses, seeking employment opportunities.

The Labour government has upheld restrictions introduced by the Conservatives in the first half of 2024. The route was restricted in 2023, leading to a reduction in approvals, and closed in May 2025. This included the ban on partners and children of care workers and most overseas students, increasing the general skilled worker salary threshold from GBP 26,200 to GBP 38,700, and removing the 20 percent going rate discount for migrants in shortage

occupations. Planned increases to the GBP 29,000 threshold for family migrants remain frozen pending a final decision by the government after the Migration Advisory Committee (2025) published its review of the issue in early June 2025 (Migration Observatory, 2025).

The government announced further restrictions on work migration in the white paper (UK Government, 2026). The care worker route will close to new overseas applicants, though individuals will still be able to switch into it from within the UK until 2028, provided they have a visa with the right to work.

The backlash against care workers is also a concern, particularly in the Gulf region, where care workers initially employed in Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia move to the UK, Europe, and the US after upgrading their skills.

6.6.1 Opportunities for Pakistani nurses

Despite strong global demand, Pakistani nurses face significant barriers to accessing international opportunities.

Although there is high global demand for Pakistani nurses, particularly females, due to affordability and supply, new opportunities in Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia present several hurdles for nurses seeking international employment. These include delays in document verification by Pakistani nursing boards, costly accreditations, pre-departure training, exams, as well as intense competition from more abundant Filipino and

Indian nurses who possess better soft skills and are more willing to exceed job descriptions.

In addition, Pakistani missions and government bodies often fail to support and promote nurses abroad. Other challenges include the reluctance of female nurses to relocate without family, difficulties with cultural integration and foreign accents, and vulnerability to fraudulent schemes. National curriculum barriers and inconsistent terminology frequently hinder Pakistani nurses from passing international licensing exams. With limited data on Pakistani nurse migration, strategic planning is difficult (Pakistan Business Council, 2025).

6.7 New Opportunities

6.7.1 Women and migration

Very few women in Pakistan and India migrate through official channels. In 2024, women represented just 1 percent of deployments from Pakistan. This figure excludes high-skilled or irregular migrants, as well as those using free movement arrangements like the India-Nepal border.

However, there is evidence that women are seeking employment in Europe alongside their husbands. MRCs are receiving calls from women looking to reunite with their husbands

working in Italy and Greece and inquiring about higher education opportunities. There is also evidence of a continued rise in female emigrants to the UAE, UK, and Qatar during 2024.

6.7.2 Moving east

The number of Pakistanis migrating for work to Malaysia, Japan, South Korea, China, Hong Kong, and Central Asian republics like Kyrgyzstan is increasing. However, in some of these countries, such as Malaysia, the demand is for skilled workers. Students are also targeting these countries for higher education.

Malaysia has raised the cost of its Malaysia My Second Home initiative, which provides long-term renewable multiple-entry visas for residence in Malaysia.

6.7.3 Moving to uncommon destinations

Emigrants, particularly mid- and low-skilled workers, are moving in small numbers to Libya, Iran, Romania, Spain, New Zealand, Cyprus, Türkiye, Albania, Lithuania, Croatia, and Portugal.

Emerging labor corridors include Kyrgyzstan, Albania, and Lithuania. China's expansion of its Belt and Road infrastructure initiative is creating new migration routes for Pakistani workers.

7 Conclusion

Despite stringent migration policies in receiving countries, emigration from Pakistan is increasing. The Gulf countries will likely remain the primary recipients of workers. While migration is generally seen as a positive process due to remittances, the exodus of accountants, IT personnel, doctors, engineers, and other skilled professionals is increasingly viewed as a failure of national policies to retain them. The emigration of skilled workers and professionals is expected to continue due to low wages and high taxes in Pakistan, along with stricter regulations on unskilled and low-skilled workers in destination countries. Consequently, some may resort to irregular means of leaving their homeland.

8

References

- Abbas, W. (2025, October 2). UAE: Pakistan consulate reminds expats of laws on salary, leave, labour contract. *Khaleej Times*. <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/uae/pakistan-consulate-expats-laws-salary-leave-labour-contract>.
- Ahmed, A. (2025, April 15). Pakistan sees sharp decline in worker emigration to UAE: Report. *Business Recorder*. <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40357750>.
- Ahmed, A. (2025b, December 10). Pressure mounts on German govt over Afghans stranded in Pakistan. *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1960234>.
- Al-Kinani, M. (2025, July 7). Saudi Arabia rolls out skill-based work permits to attract global talent. *Arab News*. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2607118/business-economy>.
- Amjad, R. (2017). Remittances and poverty: A comparison of Bangladesh and Pakistan. *The Bangladesh Development Studies*, 40B(3–4), 75–103. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26572777>.
- Arif, G. M., Farooq, S., & Iqbal, N. (2020). Labour migration from Pakistan to the Gulf countries: An investigation of regional disparities in outflows of workers, remittances and poverty. In S. I. Rajan, & G. Z. Oommen (Eds.), *Asianization of migrant workers in the Gulf Countries* (pp 189–217). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-32-9287-1_11.
- Asian Development Bank Institute, Organisation for Economic Co-operation, and Development, & International Labour Organization. (2025). *Labor migration in Asia: Fair recruitment, training, and development*. <https://doi.org/10.56506/MXNX3325>.
- Australia, Department of Home Affairs. (2024). *Student visa and temporary graduate visa program report*. <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/student-temporary-grad-program-report-dec-2024.pdf>.
- Australia, Department of Home Affairs. (2025). *Australia's migration trends, 2024–25*. <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/migration-trends-2024-25.pdf>.

- Australia, Department of Home Affairs. (n.d.). *Country profile - Pakistan*.
<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-statistics/statistics/country-profiles/profiles/pakistan>.
- Baer, J., & Ekin, S. (2025). *Fall 2025 snapshot on international student enrollment*. Institute of International Education. https://iie.widen.net/s/xd9xrsft6q/iie_fall-2025-snapshot_full-report.
- Baloch, S. A. (2022, December 15). Tracing the identities of Baloch cameleers in Australia. *The Friday Times*. <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/15-Dec-2022/tracing-the-identities-of-baloch-cameleers-in-australia>.
- Bartosik, I. (2025, December 17). *2025 in review: What the data tells us about international student mobility in 2026*. Bonard Education.
<https://www.bonardeducation.com/insights/2025-in-review-what-the-data-tells-us-about-international-student-mobility-in-2026>.
- Bonizzoni, P., & Marzorati, R. (2015). Local immigrant incorporation pathways in small-scale cities: Pakistani immigrants in a province of northern Italy. *Sociologia*, 2.
<https://www.rivisteweb.it/doi/10.2383/81430>.
- Cristo, N., & Akwei, C. (2022). 'Wish to dream' fulfilment: The motivations for onward migration. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 24, 989–1016.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-022-00988-5>.
- Delegation of the European Union to Pakistan. (2024, September 24). *Agreements signed with provinces to modernise TVET institutes across Pakistan* [Press release].
<https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2024/DRAFT%20Press%20release%20230924%20-%20FINAL%20%28002%29.pdf>.
- Fatima, N. (2018). *The Pakistani diaspora in North America* (CIMRAD Working Paper No. 02-18). Graduate Institute of Development Studies, Lahore School of Economics.
https://www.gids.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CIMRAD_WP_02_2018.pdf.
- Gajbhiye, D., Kundu, S., George, A., Vinherkar, O., Anees, Y., & Baby, J. (2025). *Changing dynamics of India's remittances: Insights from the sixth round of India's remittances survey* (RBI Bulletin March 2025). Reserve Bank of India.
<https://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/rdocs/Bulletin/PDFs/03AR190320254C8A48EE0679434B89E59CB5D5CDA361.PDF>.
- Gallup Pakistan. (2024, December 10). *Canada visa issuance statistics* [Press release].
<https://gallup.com.pk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Canada-Visa-Issuance-Statistics-2.pdf>.

- Germany looks to shutter its Afghan relocation drive. (2025, July 4). *Dawn*.
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1921948>.
- Greece draws criticism over tougher asylum stance. (2025, July 11). *The Express Tribune*.
<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2555283/greece-draws-criticism-over-tougher-asylum-stance>.
- Husain, I. (2026, January 8). Remittances: Boon or bane? *Dawn*.
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1965744>.
- Ilieva, J. B., Killingley, P., & Tsiligiris, V. (2024). *Mapping international student mobility from Pakistan at the province/territory and city level*.
https://www.britishcouncil.pk/sites/default/files/mapping_international_student_mobility_from_pakistan_research_report.pdf.
- Im, C. (2025, May 1). *Facts about Pakistanis in the U.S.* Pew Research Center.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/race-and-ethnicity/fact-sheet/asian-americans-pakistanis-in-the-u-s/>.
- Impact International. (2025, October 18). *Saudi Arabia abolishes kafala system: A landmark reform for migrant workers*. <https://impactpolicies.org/news/629/saudi-arabia-abolishes-kafala-system-a-landmark-reform-for-migrant-workers>.
- Inam, Z. (2024). *Perilous journeys: Unravelling irregular migration from Pakistan*. National Commission for Human Rights. <https://nchr.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Perilous-Journeys.pdf>.
- Institute of International Education. (n.d.). *Country fact sheets: Pakistan*.
https://opendoorsdata.org/fact_sheets/student-mobility/.
- International Organization for Migration. (2024). *Nationals from Pakistan in Europe 2023: Snapshot: Flows - DTM Europe*.
https://pakistan.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1121/files/documents/2024-05/pak_2023_migrant-presence_fms_final.pdf.
- International Organization for Migration. (2025). *Remittance inflows to Pakistan: January 2020–May 2025*. <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/remittance-inflows-pakistan-january-2020-may-2025>.
- International Rescue Committee. (2025, July 9). *IRC calls on Greece to uphold the right to asylum for people arriving by sea* [Press release]. <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/irc-calls-greece-uphold-right-asylum-people-arriving-sea>.

- Kashif, H. (2025, July 3). Profiting from pain: Pakistan's migrant workers deserve rights, not just remittances. *Eurasia Review*. <https://www.eurasiareview.com/03072025-profiting-from-pain-pakistans-migrant-workers-deserve-rights-not-just-remittances-oped/>.
- Kugelman, M. (2017). The Pakistani diaspora in the United States. In R. Amjad (Ed.), *The Pakistani diaspora: Corridors of opportunity and uncertainty* (pp. 47–73). Lahore School of Economics. <https://www.gids.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/The-Pakistani-Diaspora-Complete.pdf>.
- Landay, J., Hesson, T., & Pamuk, H. (2025, March 6). New Trump travel ban could bar Afghans, Pakistanis soon, sources say. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/new-trump-travel-ban-could-bar-afghans-pakistanis-soon-sources-say-2025-03-06/>.
- Malik, N. (2009). Religion, gender and identity construction amongst Pakistanis in Australia. In V. S. Kalra (Ed.), *Pakistani diasporas: Culture, conflict, and change* (pp. 171–190). Oxford University Press.
- Markets being explored for skilled Pakistanis. (2025, October 3). *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1946161/markets-being-explored-for-skilled-pakistanis>.
- Mian, B. (2025, October 30). Greek envoy vows to streamline visa procedures for Pakistanis. *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1952039/greek-envoy-vows-to-streamline-visa-procedures-for-pakistanis>.
- Migrant Resource Center. (2024). *Migration trends and analysis: Pakistan (October–December 2024)*. <https://www.mrc.org.pk/en/resources/migration-trends-analysis/mrc-trend-analysis-pakistan-october-december-2024/preview>.
- Migrant Resource Center. (2025). *Migration trends and analysis: Pakistan (April–June 2025)*. <https://www.mrc.org.pk/en/resources/migration-trends-analysis/mrc-trend-analysis-pakistan-april-june-2025/preview>.
- Migration Advisory Committee. (2025, August 12). *Family visa financial requirements review (accessible)*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-visa-financial-requirements-review/family-visa-financial-requirements-review-accessible>.
- Migration Observatory. (2025, May 12). *Labour signals more restrictive approach to work visas, family and settlement* [Press release]. <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/press/labour-signals-more-restrictive-approach-to-work-visas-family-and-settlement/>.
- Migration Observatory. (2026, February 10). *Changes to settlement: What do they mean?* <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/commentaries/changes-to-settlement-what-do-they-mean/>.

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2025, April 18). *Japan-Pakistan relations (basic data)*. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pakistan/data.html>.
- Momand, A. (2025, July 18). 13,000 to 15,000 Pakistani students go to UK for permanent residence every year, Senate panel told. *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1925023>.
- Morita, L. (2017). Why Japan isn't more attractive to highly skilled migrants. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 3(1), 1306952. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2017.1306952>.
- Niaz, L., & Nasir, S. (2018). *The Pakistani diaspora in UK: Evolution, integration and challenges* (CIMRAD Working Paper No. 01-18). Centre on International Migration, Remittances and Diaspora, Lahore School of Economics. <https://www.gids.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/CIMRAD-Working-Paper-01-18-Complete.pdf>.
- Paez-Deggeller. (2025, August 26). *Top statistics on global migration and migrants*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/top-statistics-global-migration-migrants>.
- Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. (2025). *Labour force survey 2024–25*. <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/LFS-2024-25-Annual-Report.pdf>.
- Pakistan Business Council. (2025). *Pakistan's nursing workforce: Export potential, challenges and recommendations*. <https://www.pbc.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/Pakistans-Nursing-Workforce-Export-Potential-Challenges-and-Recommendations.pdf>.
- Pakistan, Iran and Iraq unite to prevent 'illegal migration.' (2025, July 15). *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1924289>.
- Pakistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2025). *Joint statement between the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Malaysia on the occasion of the official visit of His Excellency Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, to Malaysia from 5–7 October 2025*. <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/joint-statement-between-the-islamic-republic-of-pakistan-and-malaysia-on-the-occasion-of-the-official-visit-of-his-excellency-muhammad-shehbaz-sharif-prime-minister-of-the-islamic-republic-of-pakistan-to-malaysia-from-5-7-october-2025>.
- Pakistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (n.d.). *Pakistan-Malaysia relations*. mofa.gov.pk/kuala-lumpur-pakistan-malaysia-relations.
- Rehman, A. (2024, June 11). UK, Schengen states make millions off rejected visas. *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1839140>.
- Repke, L., & Benet-Martínez, V. (2018). The (diverse) company you keep: Content and structure of immigrants' social networks as a window into intercultural relations in

- Catalonia. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 49(6), 924–944.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022117733475>.
- Samad, Y. (2013). The Pakistani diaspora: US and UK. In J. Chatterji, & D. Washbrook (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of the South Asian diaspora*. Routledge.
- Shah, N. M. (Ed.). (2024). *Social remittances and social change: Focus on Asia and Middle East*. Lahore School of Economics.
- Shah, N. M., Amjad, R., Hameed, M., & Shahzad, A. (2020). *Pakistan migration report 2020*. Centre on International Migration, Remittances and Diaspora, Lahore School of Economics. <https://www.gids.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Migration-Report-2020-V1-Complete.pdf>.
- Shah, N. M., Shahzad, A., Quddus, S., & Qazi, M. (2024). *Pakistan migration report 2024*. Centre on International Migration, Remittances and Diaspora, Lahore School of Economics. <https://www.gids.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/document-pressed-compressed-compressed.pdf>.
- Shakeel, A. (2024, September 1). Perilous passages out of Pakistan. *Dawn*.
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1856155>.
- Starmer, Macron unveil 'one in, one out' deal to discourage migrants. (2025, July 11). *Dawn*.
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1923384>.
- State Bank of Pakistan. (n.d.1). *Economic data - real sector - gross domestic product of Pakistan*. GDP Annual 2024-25.xlsx.
- State Bank of Pakistan. (n.d.2). *Country-wise workers' remittances* [Data set].
https://easydata.sbp.org.pk/apex/f?p=10:211:::NO:RP:P211_DATASET_TYPE_CODE,P211_PAGE_ID:TS_GP_BOP_WR_M,210&cs=1F743692A58FE97CD791417EFAE146503.
- State Bank of Pakistan. (n.d.3). *Progress on Roshan Digital Account: Key statistics on Roshan Digital Account*. <https://www.sbp.org.pk/RDA/Progress.html>.
- State Government of Victoria. (2024, March 27). *Pakistani community profile*.
<https://www.vic.gov.au/pakistani-community-profile#pakistan-community>.
- Statistics Canada. (2026, March 27). *Census profile. 2021 Census of population*. *Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001* [Data set].
<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?LANG=E&GENDERlist=1&STATISTIClist=1%2C4&DGUIDlist=2021A000011124>.

- Tasleem, Z., Muhammad, S. A., Ajis, M. N., & Abidin, N. A. Z. (2021). Pakistan to Malaysia: What expectations behind migration? *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 23, 569–590. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-021-00860-y>.
- Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority-Punjab. (2024, June 5). *TEVTA Punjab and NAVTTC has signed an MoU for international accreditation of 27 institutes of TEVTA*. <https://tevta.gov.pk/tevta-punjab-and-navttc-has-signed-an-mou-for-international-accreditation-of-tevtas-27-institutes/>.
- Triandafyllidou, A. (2019). The migration archipelago: Social navigation and migrant agency. *International Migration*, 57(1), 5–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12512>.
- UK Government. (2024, May 21). *Population of England and Wales*. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/population-of-england-and-wales/latest/>.
- UK Government. (2025a, July 1). *Major immigration reforms delivered to restore order and control*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-immigration-reforms-delivered-to-restore-order-and-control>.
- UK Government. (2025b, July 22). *Skilled worker visa: Eligible occupations and codes*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skilled-worker-visa-eligible-occupations/skilled-worker-visa-eligible-occupations-and-codes>.
- UK Government. (2026, January 20). *Restoring control over the immigration system: White paper*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/restoring-control-over-the-immigration-system-white-paper>.
- UK Government. (n.d.1). *Apply for the global talent visa*. <https://www.gov.uk/global-talent>.
- UK Government. (n.d.2). *Graduate visa*. <https://www.gov.uk/graduate-visa>.
- UK Government. (n.d.3). *High potential individual (HPI) visa*. <https://www.gov.uk/high-potential-individual-visa>.
- UK govt toughens immigration plans as hard right gains. (2025, May 12). *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1910551>.
- UK Parliament. (n.d.). *Higher education: Taxation question for Department for Education*. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2025-05-12/51662>.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2025). *A panoramic/route-based approach: Refugees and migrants from south-west Asia to Europe*. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/117722>.

- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Federal Investigation Agency. (2014). *Annual report on human trafficking and migrant smuggling: 2014*.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20211012154543/https://www.fia.gov.pk/files/immigration/544998833.pdf>.
- Valenta, M. (2022). Itinerant labour: Conceptualising circular, serial and stepwise migrations to the Arab Gulf and onwards. *Migration and Development*, 11(3), 674–696.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21632324.2020.1810897>.
- Wagle, U. R. (2024). Labor migration, remittances, and the economy in the Gulf Cooperation Council region. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 12, 30. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-024-00390-3>.
- Wasim, A. (2025, May 15). Over 5,000 Pakistani beggars deported from Saudi Arabia so far, NA informed. *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/amp/1911076>.
- World Bank. (2018). *A migrant's journey for better opportunities: The case of Pakistan* (Report No. 127990). <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/540841530861637430>.
- World Bank. (n.d.). *Personal remittances, received (current US\$)* [Data set].
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT>.
- Zafar, F. (2017). The Pakistan-Europe corridor. In R. Amjad (Ed.), *The Pakistani diaspora: Corridors of opportunity and uncertainty* (pp. 75–90). Lahore: Lahore School of Economics. Retrieved from <https://www.gids.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/The-Pakistani-Diaspora-Complete.pdf>.
- Zaman, S. (2025, February 25). Dying to leave: Why Pakistanis are risking their lives to reach Europe. *VOA*. <https://www.voanews.com/a/dying-to-leave-why-pakistanis-are-risking-their-lives-to-reach-europe/7987593.html>.

Icon Credits

Icons (Noun Project, CC BY 3.0)

Migration — Wahid Ilham M. Rifai, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/migration/>

Pakistan (Punjab) — Vectors Point, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/minar-e-pakistan/>

Unskilled — BnB Studio, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/hammer/>

Saudi Arabia — Linseed Studio, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/saudi-arabia/>

Remittances — Santerabos, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/online-remittances/>

United Kingdom — Luke Peek, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/united-kingdom/>

Canada — Dolly Holmes, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/canada/>

Asia — Leonardo Henrique Martini, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/asia/>

Malaysia — Dolly Holmes, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/malaysia/>

Japan — Leonardo Henrique Martini, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/japan/>

Border — Suprihatin, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/country-border/>

Apprehension — Adrien Coquet, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/handcuffs/>

Afghanistan — Leonardo Henrique Martini, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/afghanistan/>

Policy — Bambang G, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/policy/>

Law enforcement — Circlon Tech, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/law-enforcement/>

Asylum — Arkinasi, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/refugee-rights/>

Visa — Alhaliza Risma Elvariani, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/visa/>

Skilled labour — Sulistiyono1986, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/brain/>

Points system — LAFS, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/points/>

Expats — Stefan Parnarov, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/expat/>

Technical education — M. Oki Orlando, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/mechanics/>

Security — Ricons, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/security/>

Border control — Zach Bogart, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/barbed-wire/>

Hub — Dańku Sobieraj, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/hubs/>

U.S. government — P. Thanga Vignesh, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/congress/>

Sea route — Vectors Point, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/sea-route/>

Hardship — Muhammad Yusuf, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/poverty/>

Discrimination — Diyah Farida, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/discrimination/>

Care work — Nico Bökenkröger, <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/compassion/>

Centre on International Migration, Remittances and Diaspora (CIMRAD)

The *Pakistan Migration Report 2025: The Policy Challenge* is a data-driven examination of one of the most defining forces shaping Pakistan's economy and society: migration. Drawing on the latest evidence, the report traces shifting migration patterns—from the continued dominance of Gulf-bound labour flows to the growing diversification toward Asia, Europe, and beyond—while unpacking the complex interplay between global policy changes and migrant decision-making.

At a time of tightening borders, evolving visa regimes, and rising geopolitical uncertainty, this report highlights the increasing pressures faced by migrants, including the expansion of irregular pathways and the human costs they entail. It also analyses the critical role of remittances—now a cornerstone of macroeconomic stability—and the structural challenges posed by a workforce still largely concentrated in low- and semi-skilled occupations.

This report assesses current trends and future trajectories in light of labour mobility, human security, diaspora dynamics, and policy reform. An essential resource for researchers and policymakers alike, it illustrates how migration shapes Pakistan's economic resilience, global engagement, and social fabric in an increasingly restrictive world.

The report is a publication of the Centre on International Migration and Diaspora (CIMRAD), Lahore School of Economics.

CIMRAD Advisory Board

Prof. Dr. Andrew Geddes

Director,
Migration Policy Centre,
European University Institute, Florence, Italy.

Dr. G. M. Arif,

Ex-Joint Director,
Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE),
Islamabad, Pakistan.

Mr. Manolo Abella,

Co-chair, KNOMAD,
Thematic Working Group on Low-Skilled Labor Migration,
World Bank.

Prof. Phillipe Fargues,

Co-Scientific Director,
Gulf Labour Markets and Migration Programme.

Dr. Ibrahim Awad,

Director,
Center for Migration and Refugee Studies,
American University in Cairo.

Piyasiri Wickramasekara,

Vice-President,
Global Migration Policy Associates.

Dr. Anna Triandafyllidou,

Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC)
in Migration and Integration

Dr. Marta Erdal,

Co-Director
Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)
Migration Centre