

CALL FOR PAPERS: INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

REGULAR LABOUR MIGRATION PATHWAYS FROM PAKISTAN: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Migration Research Cell, University of Peshawar

Conference Date: 26 November 2026

Abstract Deadline: 14 September 2026

Conference Venue: Islamabad, Pakistan

CONCEPT NOTE & BACKGROUND

Migration can be a significant promoter of international development through the exchange of money, knowledge, skills and ideas (Vargas-Silva, 2012; Ahsan Ullah, 2022), and remittances are known to stabilise external sector imbalances, as in the case of Pakistan. While remittances provide a safety net of housing, nutrition and health care to the migrant families, its “multiplier impacts” create employment and higher incomes for non-migrant households, including in the construction industry and through other consumption and investment activities of the migrant households (Taylor, 1999; de Haas, 2007; de Haas, 2010; Ahsan Ullah, 2022). However, claims of a migration-development nexus create new complexities: households may spend money on unproductive, non-development expenditures, such as house construction and feasts; and most benefits are concentrated in urban centres. Additionally, a positive “multiplier impact” is possible only when the local economy is flexible and robust enough to meet new demands; when supply is restricted (farms and factories lacking tools, water, land, or skilled labour), the economic benefits of labour migration also collapse (Taylor, 1999). Ultimately, migration and remittances are not a panacea for structural problems; their ability to foster national development depends heavily on the home country’s investment environment, public infrastructure, and sound macroeconomic policies. Therefore, development in migrant-sending regions is often a prerequisite for migrants to invest their earnings back home, rather than a direct consequence of migration itself (de Haas, 2010; de Haas, 2007; Taylor, 1999). Other criticism centre on “migrant syndrome” of passive reliance, where communities become dependent on external income rather than diversifying their economies and developing local productive structures, creating ‘consumerist, non-productive and remittance-dependent attitudes’ (de Haas, 2010, de Haas, 2007) leading to “Dutch disease”, where the local currency rates appreciate because of large inflow of foreign currency, harming in turn the competitiveness of the country’s export sector (Ahsan Ullah, 2022).

The relationship between migration and development is not linear; rather, it is described by the “migration hump” (Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022). Initial increases in a country's wealth often lead to more emigration because people acquire the financial capability to realize their aspirations to move (de Haas, 2010; Bueno & Prieto-Rosas, 2019). The long-term developmental impacts of migrant remittances are shaped by multiple variables, including: volume and demographics of the expatriate workforce; economic conditions and productivity levels within both the origin and destination nations; disparities in wages, currency exchange rates and interest rates; political stability; and the efficiency of financial transfer systems (Russell, 1992). Local economic conditions (poverty, income and wealth distribution levels) and migrant spending habits dictate how migration and remittances can impact development. But it is even difficult to know exactly how much money is sent because people often use unofficial methods instead of banks (Taylor, 1999). Therefore, as argued, fixating development on labour migration and remittances is unrealistic, as development is a multifaceted process which requires active state interventions and initiatives to bring about structural ‘social, political and institutional reforms’ (de Haas, 2010). Therefore, as de Haas argues, “migrants and remittances can neither be blamed for a lack of development, nor be expected to trigger take-off development in generally unattractive investment environments” (de Haas, 2010: p 255).

Labour migration is said to affect the human capital of migrant-sending countries through both ‘brain drain’ and ‘brain gain’. When highly educated professionals depart, the origin countries are deprived of the human capital necessary for long-term growth, particularly since their training is often subsidised by the home state (Oso et al., 2022, p 120; Vargas-Silva, 2012). And as younger generations are incentivized to pursue education for emigration, those who are left behind in turn increase the level of human capital at home and foster economic development (Mountford, 1997), a process also referred to as ‘brain effect’ and “Beneficial Brain Drain” (BBD) by Beine et al. (2001). Return migrants often bring back specialized business expertise, global knowledge and skills that benefit local industries.

Beyond economics, migration of people is not just about movement of economic resources; it also reflects the “transnationalism” of ideas, norms, and values, often termed “social remittance”, when people remit democratic ideals, influencing voting behaviours, and encouraging greater government accountability and transparency in their home countries (Pries, 2022; Vargas-Silva, 2012). Other social impacts include disrupting patriarchal structures, potentially increasing the autonomy and power of women left behind as they take on new management roles, often with a high social costs on the mental health of left-behind children and spouses and as argued in literature even modern information technology, “distant or skype parent” cannot provide the sense of intimacy to the children (de Haas 2007; Ahsan Ullah, 2022; Kofman et al., 2022).

Pakistan’s share of the total global stock of migrant workers (169 million) is only about 0.45%. While the global average for female migrant workers is 39%, Pakistani females account for only 0.4% of all registered migration from the country (ILO, 2020). Though the country ranks 13th among the top origin countries for new immigrants to the OECD, over 90% of Pakistani labour migrants head to the GCC, leaving the potential of the European Union (EU) largely untapped, with only approximately 350,000 Pakistani labour force working there. The growing demand for labour in the EU has encouraged the Pakistani government to diversify pathways for its labour workforce and partner with the EU on skills development to match the needs of EU destination countries.

This international conference addresses the critical landscape of labour migration from Pakistan, particularly to EU member states. It also aims to generate debate on the socio-economic and political drivers of labour migration, regional disparities in such migration, the intersectionality knowledge gap around inclusion and exclusion barriers faced by youth, women and persons with disabilities, the alignment of Pakistan's skilled labour potential with global market demands to mitigate the dual challenges of “brain drain” and “brain waste”, and the role of the migration industry and recruitment agencies in facilitating soft-skill transfers, including language, cross-cultural awareness and work ethics. Currently, 46% of tertiary-educated Pakistani migrants in OECD countries are employed in low-skilled sectors, highlighting a critical need for better qualification recognition frameworks to make Pakistani qualifications comparable across countries and to support job mobility and lifelong learning. By shifting focus to the entire migration cycle, we aim to move beyond the departure phase to examine the “return migrants” phase, their effective integration, and their impacts on domestic development.

The objective of this conference is to advocate for governance reforms and bilateral cooperation, particularly with EU member states, that promote legal, regular pathways, while also balancing the impacts of brain drain from source countries. With the government of Pakistan's new National Emigration and Welfare Policy (2016) now in effect, we intend to examine how regular labour migration from Pakistan brings socio-economic changes to the country. It also aims to generate critical debates on the “remittance-development linkage,” worldwide and in Pakistan, to understand how far labour migration shapes origin (migrant-sending states) and destination (migrant-receiving nations) countries’ development and why the development context of migration is important in Pakistan.

Thematic Clusters:

1. Migration Landscapes & Pathways

- Labour Migration Landscape of Pakistan
- International labour demand.
- Return Migration, Integration, and Circular Migration

- Environmental factors influencing mobility
- The Labour Migration Industry in Pakistan
- Diaspora Networks and Labour Migration

2. Skills, Labour Markets and Migration

- Skilled vs. Unskilled labour in migration
- Local skills and language development, qualification recognition, recruitment, and skill matching.
- Brain drain, Brain waste, and Brain gain through regular labour migration

3. Migration Governance and Policy

- Labour Migration Governance and Practices: Evidence from around the world
- The National Emigration and Welfare Policy of Pakistan (2026), institutional capacities, and implementation challenges
- Diversification of labour migration pathways
- EU-Pakistan Talent Partnership
- Bilateral cooperation including EU member states
- Visa and mobility processes
- The role of digital platforms in mobility/immobility

4. Socio-Economic & Intersectionality Impacts

- Remittances in poverty reduction/impact on industrial and agricultural sectors
- Socio-cultural impacts of labour migration on left-behind families
- Intersectionality and labour migration: Gender, Youth & Persons with Disabilities

CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS:

The conference is organised by the **Migration Research Cell, University of Peshawar**, in collaboration with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Centres for Migration and Development (ZME) / Talent Partnership with Pakistan (TP-P), co-financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the European Union (EU). Migration Research Network of Pakistan is also a collaborator of the event.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Scholars are invited to submit their research **abstracts** for consideration.

- **Word Limit:** 300 words max.
- **Required Details:** Abstract, Title of Paper, Author Name(s), Email Address(es), and Institutional Affiliation(s).
- **Submission Email:** mrc@uop.edu.pk
- **Queries:** ayub@uop.edu.pk
- **Deadline:** 14 September 2026

We look forward to welcoming you to an engaging and impactful dialogue in Islamabad!