



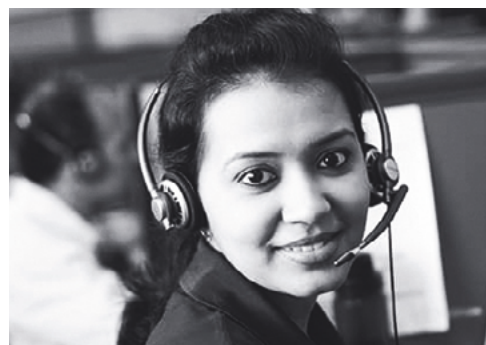
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# FEMALE LABOUR MIGRATION FROM PAKISTAN:



## A SITUATION ANALYSIS



**RE  
FRAME**

GLOBAL ACTION TO IMPROVE  
THE RECRUITMENT FRAMEWORK  
OF LABOUR MIGRATION



# **FEMALE LABOUR MIGRATION FROM PAKISTAN: A SITUATION ANALYSIS**

**Themrise Khan**

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# Foreword

When governed properly, labour migration has the potential to create employment opportunities and support the development of individuals, families and communities. Safe and fair migration policies that protect the rights of migrant women and men and reduce migration costs have the potential to boost economic growth and enhance development outcomes for workers and their families, as well as countries of origin and destination.

Between 1971 and September 2019, more than 10.48 million Pakistanis proceeded for overseas employment. The most recent figures from 2019 suggest that labour migration flows from Pakistan are rising again, following a significant reduction of flows in 2017 and 2018. Nonetheless, remittances sent by Pakistani migrant workers have been rising unperturbed over recent years, and during the 2019 financial year totalled US\$21.84 billion (Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment, 2019).

The vast majority of migrant workers from Pakistan are men. Between 1971 and 2019, women migrant workers accounted for only 0.4 per cent of all migration from Pakistan. Women in Pakistan face a series of economic and social challenges to access the labour market, including opportunities to migrate for work in conditions of safety and fairness. At 21.9 per cent, Pakistan has one of the lowest female labour force participation rates in South Asia (ILOSTAT, 2019). In addition, 75 per cent of women in the workforce have no formal education and only about 25 per cent of Pakistani women who have a university degree work outside the home. Cultural resistance against women working contributes to impeding women's economic productivity both within Pakistan and abroad. Further research is needed to better understand the factors promoting and inhibiting women's migration.

This study aims to address some of these knowledge gaps, by examining the patterns and characteristics of female migration for employment from Pakistan and exploring specifically why the number of Pakistani female migrant workers remains so low. The findings and recommendations of this study will guide the interventions of the ILO, the Government of Pakistan and social partners towards fair recruitment of migrant workers, including women migrant workers, in line with the Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) (2016-20) for Pakistan, and the ILO's Fair Recruitment Initiative. The study will hopefully also be of value to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 5 to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls", Goal 8 to "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" and Goal 10 to "reduce inequality within and among countries", through the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework for Pakistan (2018-2020).

The ILO – working through the DWCP and the European Union (EU)-funded Global Action to Improve the Recruitment Framework of Labour Migration (REFRAME) project – is pleased and honoured to continue working with the Government of Pakistan and social partners to build upon the numerous achievements in the field of labour migration governance, and to ensure that the opportunities they afford are extended equally to all Pakistani men and women workers.

I wish to thank the European Union for supporting the conduct of this study as well as the author and all those who have contributed to the study.

Ingrid Christensen  
Director  
ILO Country Office for Pakistan



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## Executive summary

After India, Pakistan is the second largest country of origin for migrant workers from South Asia to the Gulf region. The vast majority of overseas Pakistani labour migrants are men, and the migration of women on the other hand, is negligible, despite a higher unemployment rate compared to that of men. This is perhaps related to the tendency for Pakistani women not to be perceived or recognized both by public and private sector institutions, as substantial, let alone equal, contributors to the country's overall economic and social wellbeing.

According to the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BE&OE), between 1971 and July 2019, 40,807 Pakistani registered female emigrants, went overseas to work. This figure includes all female emigrants registered with BE&OE and the Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC). Of these, 42.5 per cent of the women went to the United Arab Emirates, followed by 35 per cent to Saudi Arabia. Other prominent destination countries included Oman (5 per cent), the United Kingdom (2 per cent) Qatar (2 per cent) and Canada (1.4 per cent).

The largest category of these women (14 per cent) migrated as domestic workers/housemaids, while over 15 per cent were doctors and nurses (8.4 and 4.4 per cent respectively); 15 per cent proceeded as helpers and general workers; 11 per cent as managers and around nine per cent as clerical staff. The remainder were distributed among a combination of professional categories including accountants, engineers, auditors, computer programmers, financial analysts, supervisors, system analysts, pharmacists and technicians (BE&OE, 2019).<sup>1</sup> This is apparently in contrast with current labour market realities and needs of destination countries, which have several professional prospects for the decent employment of women.

This study aims to examine the patterns and characteristics of female migration for employment from Pakistan and explores why the number of Pakistani female migrant workers remains low. This study also suggests ways to address removing barriers for women that impede opportunities for safe migration and decent work abroad.

Speaking with migrant and non-migrant women from different socio-economic backgrounds, the study found several similarities in the reasons for low labour migration among women in Pakistan. These included:

- Sociocultural factors such as the familiar surroundings of life in Pakistan was reason enough for some women not to uproot themselves and move to a new country. Secondly, marriage was a major factor in restricting women's mobility for overseas employment; as was dependence on whether family members could accompany them, if they could move with their families, or if their husbands were willing to follow them. Lastly, the negative emphasis given by Pakistani media on migration and incidences of exploitation was also a reason provided by female respondents.

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<sup>1</sup> The data collection process was computerized after the implementation of a biometric registration system in October 2018 at Protectorate of Emigrant Offices. These figures represent the female emigrants registered at POEs between October 2018 and July 2019.

- Lack of agency in the decision-making processes regarding migration for work prevented women from being able to individually choose if they wished to go abroad. This occurred whether they had no choice in the matter and needed to support their families financially, or if they wished to pursue a career abroad. In the latter case, respondents, particularly in the high-skilled category, indicated that families are still reluctant to send female family members overseas to work due to cultural factors, as well as familial obligations.
- Expectation of life abroad versus that in Pakistan made many women wonder if moving overseas was “worth it”, particularly women in the high-skilled category. Circumstances in destination countries also played into the limited number of women opting to work overseas. Negative stories about harassment by employers and knowledge of actual cases led women to form negative opinions about life overseas.
- For some, Pakistan has a greater lure as a (high-skilled) professional given the scarcity of, and need for, these skill sets in some sectors. The corporate benefits many highly skilled women receive in the private sector, in addition to the social support system women, particularly those with family, have in Pakistan were also deterrents for moving abroad.
- In order to prevent manipulative and exploitative practices, the Government has set an age limit of 35 years for women housemaids (domestic workers). This limit can be relaxed by five years in special circumstances. However, further social, cultural/perception-based impediments influence migration of women.

Some key areas where change could facilitate opportunities for safe and fair migration opportunities for work, include:

- Strengthening official channels to help women identify opportunities abroad. One of the main obstacles that women face in finding opportunities overseas is lack of awareness and access to recruitment channels and authentic foreign jobs. As a result, it is very common for women to gain employment overseas through informal networks such as with the assistance of friends or relatives who are already working or living abroad.
- Scarce information exists about the economic opportunities available to women in various overseas markets, as remarked by women respondents in this study, and more efforts are required to explore other sectors, especially in the high-skilled category. The federal government could do more to understand the nature and location of demand for women’s labour overseas and invest in adequate training and skill-building. Further efforts could also be made to improve the dissemination of information about available overseas jobs.
- The role of Overseas Employment Promoters (OEPs) is important as they are technically the legal facilitators and procurement specialists for overseas employment. Yet, other than female OEPs, none of the male OEPs interviewed chose to specifically encourage and/or facilitate women’s overseas migration, except in the field of nursing. There is also no culture of women going

through OEPs. Many find their own employment opportunities. Limited representation of female OEPs within the recruitment industry also remains problematic and so their voice is barely heard, even in forums such as the Pakistan Overseas Employment Promoters Association (POEPA).

- Skills training is also an important element. It has repeatedly been pointed out by respondents that while there is a demand for women in various skills categories overseas that demand is difficult to fulfill. Not only are women not coming forward, but there is also a lack of required skills for available positions. This is seen in newly emerging sectors such as hospitality and nursing.

Recommendations to facilitate safe and fair migration opportunities for women who choose to do so, include:

- i. The Pakistan Government, along with other information providers, such as employment agencies, must streamline the availability and access to information for all migrants, for example through portals on the BEOE's website. Other more conventional ways, specifically targeting women, would be to hold regular job and employment fairs at women's colleges and universities across Pakistan.
- ii. It is imperative that Pakistan moves beyond the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries in its search to widen the scope for labour emigration channels. Many women have clearly shown their interest in other regions such as Europe, where both service sector and more professional opportunities are available and where gender and labour rights and protections are more strongly enforced.
- iii. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs must be engaged to conduct on-going emerging market analysis regarding trades, skills and sectors available in countries of destination to help broaden the geographic scope of opportunities. This is highly desirable in countries outside of the GCC region such as in new and emerging markets in Europe and South-East Asia.
- iv. Overseas Employment Promoters must be sensitized to widen their scope to include and encourage more female clients. The GCC countries, the current comfort zone for OEPs in Pakistan, has a high demand for female workers in the services and hospitality sectors. By not addressing this demand, OEPs demonstrate the low level of importance they give to women as labour migrants.
- v. The Pakistan Government should place a stronger focus on "skilling" women for employment, i.e., providing them with not just the opportunities, but with the skills to compete in a global market. In this regard, the role of National and Provincial Vocational and Training Institutions, must be strengthened to include more formal trades that could facilitate women's involvement.

- vi. The Pakistan Government must officially project its labour demands and the needs of destination countries on a forward-planning basis and move away from its current ad-hoc approach to filling overseas labour gaps. It must also strengthen dialogue with destination countries on the rights and protection of its workers, especially in the domestic work sector.
- vii. A major limitation throughout this study and the key to effective women's participation in the overseas labour force, has been the scarcity of publicly available, gender disaggregated labour migration data. Data is lacking on female and returning migrants<sup>2</sup>, and on the potential attributes of women in the workforce in terms of skills available, skills gaps, emerging sectors in various categories, provincial availability of female labour supply, etc.

Women must be given the choice of whether they want to work overseas rather than assuming they cannot. This then includes providing potential female migrants with the correct information about opportunities and the benefits that working abroad could accrue for themselves and/or their families. Whether they opt to work overseas or remain in Pakistan, the decision should ultimately be a personal one. The right to decide should be guaranteed as should options for a safe, orderly and voluntary migration.

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<sup>2</sup> In order to address the issue of lack of data on returned migrant workers, the BE&OE has entered into an agreement with the Federal Investigation Agency to undertake data collection on the topic.



# Acronyms

<b>BE&amp;OE</b>	Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment
<b>BLA</b>	Bilateral Labour Agreement
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
<b>CV</b>	Curriculum Vitae
<b>CWA</b>	Community Welfare Attaché
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>GCC</b>	Gulf Cooperation Council
<b>GFMD</b>	Global Forum on Migration and Development
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>MIGRANT</b>	Labour Migration Branch (ILO)
<b>MOP&amp;HRD</b>	Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>NOC</b>	No-Objection Certificate
<b>OEC</b>	Overseas Employment Corporation
<b>OEP</b>	Overseas Employment Promoters
<b>PKR</b>	Pakistani rupee
<b>POE</b>	Protectorate of Emigration
<b>POEPA</b>	Pakistan Overseas Employment Promoters Association
<b>PSDF</b>	Punjab Skills Development Fund
<b>REFRAME</b>	Global Action to Improve the Recruitment Framework of Labour Migration (ILO)
<b>TEVTA</b>	Technical Education and Vocational Training Authorities
<b>UAE</b>	United Arab Emirates



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background

In 2015, more than 48 per cent of the world's 232 million international migrants were women (UN, 2015). According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (as cited in O'Neil, Fleury and Foresti, 2016) from 2000 to 2015 the migration of women and girls to developing countries (15.8 per cent) increased more rapidly than to developed regions (6.4 per cent). However, although the global share of female migrants has shown only a marginal rise over the last few decades, the proportion of women migrating for work – rather than for family reunification – is growing steadily.

According to the 2017 Census, Pakistan is the world's sixth most populous country with a population of 207 million people. Although labour force participation overall is considered low, it still ranks as the tenth largest in the world. Female labour force participation, however, is in fact, extremely low at only 22 per cent. Women are not only not part of the workforce, but according to the latest International Labour Organization (ILO)-Gallup survey, the majority also prefer not to work outside the home. Of all women in Pakistan asked in the survey if they preferred to stay at home or work at a paid job, only 12 per cent indicated the latter, while 51 per cent preferred staying home. This is despite that when men were asked this question regarding women, 21 per cent responded that they would be comfortable if women in their family worked in a paid job (ILO, 2017a).

Nonetheless, even among male workers, there is a significant gap between the demand and supply, with the number of annual jobseekers exceeding employment opportunities. There are currently 3.62 million unemployed people in Pakistan; 2.31 million men and 1.31 million women (Govt. of Pakistan, 2018a). This has led to an outflow of Pakistanis migrating overseas, particularly to the Middle East and the GCC countries in search of work.

After India, Pakistan is the second largest country of origin for migrant workers from South Asia, mainly to the Gulf region. The vast majority of overseas Pakistani labour migrants are men. Female migration on the other hand, is negligible – despite the high number of unemployed women. According to the MOP&HRD's latest data,<sup>3</sup> the migration of Pakistani women has remained quite low, with only 40,807 women going abroad for employment between 1971 and July 2019. This figure includes all female emigrants registered with BE&OE and OEC. Of these, 42.56 per cent of women went to the United Arab Emirates, followed by 35 per cent to Saudi Arabia. Other prominent destination countries included Oman (5 per cent), the United Kingdom (2 per cent), Qatar (2 per cent) and Canada (1.4 per cent). For both practical and legal reasons, the migration of Pakistani women is limited to a few occupations, primarily in the service sector including health, hospitality, teaching, beauticians, and clerical among others.

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<sup>3</sup> This data has been revised to reflect the most updated information now available from the BE&OE.

This phenomenon of low female migration is apparently in contrast with current labour market realities and needs in countries of destination and of origin alike. Indeed, according to some studies, these countries, primarily GCC countries and other Arab States, have several professions that offer prospects of decent work for women. For example, prospects include work in hospitality, services and elderly care, which are currently dominated by workers from India, Sri Lanka or the Philippines (ILO, 2016b). Therefore, several opportunities exist in overseas labour markets for Pakistani women.

In his report to the 2014 International Labour Conference,<sup>4</sup> the Director General called for an ILO agenda for fair migration and emphasised the growing concern about abusive and fraudulent recruitment practices affecting migrant workers. In response to those challenges, the ILO launched a global 'Fair Recruitment Initiative' to:

- help prevent human trafficking and forced labour;
- protect the rights of workers, including migrant workers, from abusive and fraudulent practices during the recruitment process (including pre-selection, selection, transportation, placement and possibility to return); and
- reduce the cost of labour migration and enhance development outcomes for migrant workers and their families, as well as for countries of origin and destination.

This multi-stakeholder initiative is implemented in close collaboration with governments, representative employers' and workers' organizations, the private sector and other key partners. It is based on a four-pronged approach which puts social dialogue at the centre. The Fair Recruitment Initiative focuses on:

1. Enhancing global knowledge on national and international recruitment practices
2. Improving laws, policies and enforcement mechanisms to promote fair recruitment practices
3. Promoting fair business practices
4. Empowering and protecting workers

The ILO Global Action to Improve the Recruitment Framework of Labour Migration project (REFRAME) is working with the Pakistan Government and social partners to address key recruitment and labour migration challenges.

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<sup>4</sup> ILO (2014) Fair migration: Setting an ILO agenda.

## 1.2. Research objectives

This study aims to examine the patterns and characteristics of women's migration for employment from Pakistan and to explore why this phenomenon is so low in terms of numbers. It also aims to suggest ways to address the challenges and opportunities for removing existing barriers to provide women with both the choice and opportunity for safe voluntary migration and decent work abroad.

The terms of reference for this study, laid out three key research areas/themes to explore:

1. What are the causal factors of this very limited women's migration?
2. What could be planned and implemented to ensure women have equal opportunities to decent working opportunities overseas – while guaranteeing a safe, orderly, and voluntary migration?
3. Recommendations for promoting safe and fair migration opportunities for women.

Furthermore, although there are several studies on labour migration in Pakistan, none of them address female migrants, instead the studies focus solely on men. This study, therefore, also aims to fill this important knowledge gap by laying a basis for understanding the employment and migration scenario for women in Pakistan.

## 2. Research methodology

This study was conducted under the overall supervision of the Global Action to Improve the Recruitment Framework of Labour Migration (REFRAME) project<sup>5</sup> National Project Coordinator for Pakistan, and under the technical supervision of the Labour Migration Branch (MIGRANT) located at ILO headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

A mixed methods approach was taken, combining primary qualitative data collection through interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with key stakeholders with secondary literature reviews to provide supporting evidence of global and national trends.

The study was conducted between March and July 2018 and reflects data primarily available during that period. In subsequent drafts of the report prior to publication, updated data and information received from official sources has been included where relevant.

### 2.1. Literature review

In addition to reviewing the existing literature on women's migration, both globally and in Pakistan, the following subject areas were also reviewed:

- Female labour force participation in Pakistan.
- A comparative analysis with other South Asian countries, particularly Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

A search was conducted for secondary sources that included ILO documents, academic research studies, policy briefs and data by multilateral organizations, including the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, as well as Government of Pakistan statistics. This included the latest Economic Survey of Pakistan 2017-18 (Govt. of Pakistan, 2018b) and the ILO-Gallup survey.

### 2.2. Primary data collection

Primary data collection was qualitative in nature and focused on two primary groups: key stakeholders and female migrants. Key informant interviews were conducted in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad and included federal and provincial government representatives, employers' organizations, trade unions, international non-governmental organizations, academia, civil society, business collectives and employment promotion representatives. The FGDs were conducted with both female migrants proceeding overseas for work, as well as with potential female migrant workers (see Annex 1 for complete list of key informants and focus group discussions). It was tried, as close as possible, for the distribution of professions among both migrant and non-migrant women

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<sup>5</sup> The Global Action to Improve the Recruitment Framework of Labour Migration (REFRAME) project seeks to support the dissemination and operationalization of the ILO General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment, at global, regional and national level, and is implemented under the framework of the ILO Fair Recruitment Initiative.

to reflect the available BE&OE data and to cover a cross-section of professions for which women currently and potentially migrate for.

The Protectorate of Emigration (POE) offices in Rawalpindi and Karachi were engaged to identify and facilitate FGDs with departing female migrants, as well as with a group of female Overseas Employment Promoters (OEPs), respectively. Group discussions with other potential female labour migrants were identified based on some key professions, including nursing, domestic work, entrepreneurs and women in business. These were organized with the help of women's associations such as the Women's Chambers of Commerce and the Pakistan Business and Professional Women's Organizations in Karachi and Islamabad.

In addition, a half-day consultation workshop was held in Islamabad at the ILO Pakistan office that included key stakeholders from the federal government and other relevant agencies (see Annex 2 for full list of participants). This consultation focussed on discussing the three key research questions with stakeholders.

A list of key questions was developed as part of a discussion guide to facilitate interviews and FGDs, covering a range of topics related to the key questions posed by the study (see Annex 3 for qualitative discussion guides).

### **Box 1: Limitations in data collection on female migrants**

In Pakistan, disaggregated data on women in several sectors is lacking at various levels and in national documents. Since the registration of emigrants was administered manually up until October 2018, gaining access to published gender disaggregated data was difficult. Therefore, it is not possible to assess how female migration in Pakistan has changed over time. Data on returnees is equally scant, so it is also extremely difficult to gauge how many women are returning from overseas employment. However, such data is also unavailable for all returnees in general. Given these limitations, it is not yet possible to paint an accurate and longitudinal picture of female labour migration from Pakistan. For more detailed methodological limitations see Annex 4.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Recently the BE&OE has entered into an agreement with Federal Investigation Agency to address the issue of lack of data on returned migrant workers.

## 3. Literature review

### 3.1. Global labour migration – A situational overview

The literature on global migration, including labour migration, covers a very broad area in which the following main themes stand out in relation to women's labour migration.

#### 3.1.1. Feminization of migration

Experts observe that women and men circulate differently in the global economy. Whilst men overwhelmingly constitute most of the skilled professionals in business, information technology and scientific sectors, women have tended to cluster around welfare and care professions, such as education and health care. As a result, the migration of highly skilled women is relatively invisible (CARITAS, 2009).

The literature suggests female labour migration is heavily concentrated in occupations that are deemed natural extensions of women's traditional gender roles, such as domestic and care work. This type of work is referred to as reproductive labour, which is typically undervalued and under-compensated (UN Women, n.d.). Since most of this labour takes place within people's homes, it also is one of the least regulated sectors in which female migrants work overseas (GFMD, 2015). The significance of this sector can be illustrated by its growth. Between 1995 and 2010, the sector grew by almost 20 million and in 2010, it accounted for 1.7 per cent of global employment, nearly 80 per cent of whom were female migrants or members of historically disadvantaged groups (ILO, 2013).

This "outsourcing" of care work in particular to female migrant labour has led to a "feminization" of the foreign low-wage care market (GFMD, 2015). ILO data shows that in many countries this category of domestic work remains one of the least protected under national labour laws. Even when labour legislation exists, migrants – especially those in an irregular situation – might be either excluded from its coverage or face difficulties in accessing redress and justice in abusive situations (ILO, 2015c).

The feminization of migration reflects two other issues that affect women in general; the feminization of poverty and the feminization of work. The expectation that only women are responsible for unpaid domestic and care responsibilities influences the labour market and the economic opportunities open to women, including migrants. Both societal factors and the individual characteristics of women and girls therefore determine migrants' socioeconomic status, the sector they work in and the type of work that they do (O'Neil et al., 2016).

This transforms migration, according to O'Neil et al. (2016), into a phenomenon in which gender norms, power relations among men and women, and unequal rights shape the migration choices and experiences of women and girls as they do men and boys. As a result, it also limits the abilities of women to expand their employment opportunities globally and completely bypasses the availability of skilled migration among women.



### **3.1.2. Female migrant domestic workers**

The ILO Domestic Workers Convention No. 189 (C189), recognizes that domestic work is work just as any other kind and hence guarantees workers, both male and female, a host of rights without discrimination (O’Neil et al., 2016). Nevertheless, research has shown that only 10 per cent of all domestic workers are covered by general labour legislation to the same extent as other workers. In contrast, almost 30 per cent of domestic workers work in countries where they are completely excluded from the scope of national labour legislation (ILO, 2013). Indeed, domestic work accounts for 24 per cent of identified forced labour exploitation cases (ILO, 2017b).

According to 2017 ILO estimates there are 164 million migrant workers worldwide (ILO, 2018). Estimates from an earlier ILO study (ILO, 2015b), indicate that approximately 11.5 million migrant workers are domestic workers and that 73.4 per cent or around 8.5 million of all migrant domestic workers are women. South-East Asia and the Pacific host the largest share, with 24 per cent of the world’s female migrant domestic workers, followed by northern, southern and western Europe, with 22.1 per cent of the total and the Arab States with 19 per cent.

Migrant domestic workers are also subject to bans and other discriminatory restrictions on immigration that hamper the employment of female migrant workers in certain jobs where men predominate, prohibit female migrant workers from getting married to nationals in destination countries, or forbid them from becoming pregnant or securing independent housing outside their workplace (Franck and Spehar, 2010). This is despite several international laws which explicitly discourage restrictions on female labour migration. These include, as referenced in ILO, 2017c, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which contains a mandate for States to repeal gender-specific bans and discriminatory restrictions on female migration; and the 1990 Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

These efforts to control women’s migration often lead to women migrating in irregular conditions and do not ultimately address the working conditions issues at the country of destination. For instance, in response to country of origin migration bans (e.g. for domestic workers) countries of destination in Asia and the Arab States shifted recruitment to other countries of origin, including Myanmar and Cambodia. When cases of abuse were reported, the Myanmar and Cambodia Governments, in turn responded with bans on migration for domestic work in 2014 and 2011 respectively (ILO, 2017c).

At the national level, there is an increasing awareness in labour sending countries, of the need for labour migration policy to be gender-sensitive and have specialized measures and programmes directed specifically at female migrants. Ideally, this is accomplished through bilateral or multilateral labour agreements to ensure that migrant workers are recruited under non-abusive and non-exploitative conditions (Thimothy and Sasikumar, 2012). However a serious concern, especially regarding bilateral labour agreements (BLAs), is that they largely ignore gender issues and only a small number contain provisions specific to women or gender. Some general BLAs/Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) explicitly exclude certain sectors, such as domestic workers from the scope of their coverage. For example, MOUs signed between Viet Nam and Malaysia and between

Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates, differentiate treatment of domestic workers, who are mainly female, from other migrant workers as covered by the general agreements.

### **3.1.3. Contributions of migrant women**

Female migrants contribute to society in a variety of ways. For instance, migrant women are responsible for half of the estimated US\$601 billion in global remittances sent through formal channels (UN Women, n.d.). In addition to improving women's autonomy, self-esteem and social standing, migration can also provide women and girls with new skills and their families with remittances. These new resources can change power dynamics within families and households (O'Neil et al., 2016).

Remittances are an important economic indicator of the strength of labour migration. Women and men, however, show important differences in terms of sending and receiving remittances. For example, women play a leading role as recipients and managers of remittances within the household, thus contributing to development and poverty eradication. But this approach has been criticized in relation to women's access to and control over resources in many countries, which are restrictive and discriminatory and may not necessarily change as a result of migration. For instance, female migrant workers may not retain control over remittance spending once funds are transferred home. Restrictions on women's access to owning property in some countries can also limit their ability to acquire assets once they return (Franck and Spehar, 2010).

Socially, the experiences brought back by migrant women can inform and influence positive social change across households and communities within countries of origin. They can also impact on the investment of skills training in destination countries. Migration of nurses from the Philippines, for example, responds to a demand for skilled medical specialists in destination countries. By bringing in nurses from the Philippines, destination countries gain vital skills without any prior investment in these migrants' human capital. The flip side is that the Philippines, which has invested in the educating these individuals, is left with a human resource gap in its own labour force (GFMD, 2015).

Unlike financial remittances, the ability to measure or predict 'social remittances' is difficult because of barriers to social protection and decent work, such as exclusionary policies to services like health care or legal support; power imbalances between employer and worker; isolation and lack of access to information on rights and protections; family separation; and sector specific risks and language barriers (UN Women, n.d.).

### **3.1.4. Why women migrate for employment**

The literature overwhelmingly points out that most women migrate to overcome poverty and limited employment opportunities in their home country (Kawar, 2004). However, poverty is not the only reason why women migrate. The decision to migrate also includes a woman's age, her power position within the household, including if she is leaving children behind, and the capacity of the household/presence of other women to take over domestic activities (CARITAS, 2009).

Some of the literature also points to reasons that have received virtually no attention by researchers and policymakers but are becoming increasingly important. These include the desire to escape from an unhappy marriage or a violent spouse, the search for new relationship opportunities, or as means to escape family pressure to marry (INSTRAW, 2007). It is important to investigate these reasons further, particularly in low-income contexts.

The most important finding in the literature in terms of women's decisions to migrate, is the role of the household in the overall decision-making process, which is not the case with male migration. Decisions for women to migrate are primarily made by men. Women usually have less input or control over the decided outcome, which is often taken by their family (O'Neil et al., 2016). This minimizes a woman's personal agency and aspirations, while elevating the role men play in migratory decisions (INSTRAW, 2007).

### **3.2. Labour migration in South Asia – An overview**

South Asia has historically been a major labour sending region in the world due to its large number of lower skilled workers and traditionally lower levels of economic growth. Women have predominated the number of internal migrants within South Asia, migrating primarily for reasons of marriage or family association. However, autonomous female migration for employment is now increasing within many countries in the region (Srivastava and Pandey, 2017).

Migrants from South Asia are estimated to have increased from 10.08 million in 1990 to 27.22 million in 2015. The sharp increase in lower-skilled labour migration, initially fuelled by the oil boom in Gulf countries in the 1970s, has been sustained by subsequent growth in these oil-rich, Gulf economies. Subsequently, all South Asian countries experienced a sudden increase in the total volume of interregional emigration after 2000, with India and Pakistan showing the highest increment in the total volume of such emigration. In 2015, 66 per cent of migrants from South Asia were in GCC countries. North America accounted for only 13.7 per cent and Europe for 12.1 per cent (Srivastava and Pandey, 2017).

**Table 1. Percentage of female migrants from South Asia (2010-15)**

Year	Bangladesh		Sri Lanka		Nepal	
	Women	% of women in total migrants	Women	% of women in total migrants	Women	% of women in total migrants
2010	27 706	7.09	130 657	48.84	10 056	3.42
2011	30 579	5.38	126 654	48.16	10 416	2.93
2012	37 304	6.14	138 312	48.97	22 958	5.96
2013	56 400	13.78	118 033	40.25	27 767	6.16
2014	76 007	17.86	110 489	36.78	29 121	5.60
2015	103 718	18.66	110 344	36.76	21 421	4.29

\* Official sources as quoted; BMET; Sri Lanka: SLBFE; Nepal: Labour Migration for Employment: A Status Report for Nepal-2014/15. Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of Nepal.

\*\* The gender disaggregation of emigration from India is not provided by their respective official sources (Ministry of External Affairs, Department of Overseas Indian Affairs).

Source: Srivastava and Pandey; *Internal and International Migration in South Asia: Drivers, Interlinkage and Policy Issues*; Discussion paper; UNESCO, 2017.

Both the global economic and Gulf region crises in 2007-08 reduced the overall rate of migration, but in turn, have increased the demand for unskilled female migrant workers (Sultana and Fatima, 2017). Sri Lanka has the highest levels of female migrants in the region as shown in table 1, followed by Bangladesh.<sup>7</sup> The former has seen a drop in female migration since 2013, whereas the latter has seen an increase. Nepal has the lowest number of female migrants, with a significant drop seen in 2015. All countries primarily send women in the domestic work sector and the care economy to Gulf States and the Middle East.

Most South Asian countries, however, have imposed bans and age restrictions on female labour migration with the stated intent to protect female migrant workers, particularly those working in households, from harassment and sexual exploitation. However, the ban on female workers is thought to promote the irregular migration of women through informal channels (Srivastava and Pandey, 2017).

Some countries have explicitly pointed to international labour migration as a priority area, such as the Perspective Plan (2010-21) and the Sixth Five Year Plan (2011-15) and the Overseas Employment and Migrant Workers Act passed in 2013 in Bangladesh (Barkat and Ahsan, 2014). Nepal developed 'Guidelines Related to Managing Domestic Workers going for Foreign Employment' in 2015. These guidelines include the need for skills training, bilateral agreements and a stronger role for registered recruitment agencies as part of its new migration policy (ILO, 2015a). Sri Lanka is one of the only countries in South Asia that has recognized a child's right to maintain direct and regular contact

<sup>7</sup> India does not provide official data on migration.

with both parents in its Charter on the Rights of the Child. However, some researchers claim that the Sri Lankan Government continues to agree to weak contractual terms for its migrant domestic workers for fear of becoming an unattractive labour source for receiving countries (Jayasuriya and Opeskin, 2015).

## **Box 2: Regional commonalities in female migration in South Asia**

Some of the common themes emerging within the literature on other South Asian countries, resonate with Pakistan as follows:

- Age restrictions on migration of domestic workers and female migrant workers in general.
- Poor working conditions, and evidence of widespread discrimination and abuse of labour and human rights of migrant women at destination, particularly in female dominated sectors such as domestic work (mainly in the GCC countries).
- Weak gender considerations in national labour migration policies and other relevant policies (employment and vocational/education policies).
- High demand for low-skilled workers in sectors that typically experience weak labour protection or exclusion from the labour law e.g. domestic work.
- Lack of access to information on fair recruitment process for female intending migrants.
- Weak protection mechanisms in destination countries and insufficient and not gender-sensitive consular services.
- Concentration of female migrants in traditionally female dominated sectors, mostly in the care economy.

## **3.3. Situational overview of labour and migration in Pakistan**

### **3.3.1. Female labour force participation in Pakistan**

Among South Asian countries, Pakistan has had the lowest female labour force participation rate. According to the Government of Pakistan's Labour Force Survey 2017-18, the male labour force participation rate is 68 per cent, while the female labour force participation rate is only 20.1 per cent. The overall unemployment rate for men is 5.1 per cent and 8.3 per cent for women. Gaps in education, literacy, and school enrolment between men and women are some of the reasons cited for these differences. However, most women are engaged in some sort of market or economic activity, as shown in table 2 (Mujahid, M., Shahbaz, S.M. and Shahbaz, M., 2016).

**Table 2. Employed people in Pakistan – distribution by major industry divisions (2017-18)**

Major industry divisions	Men (employed) (%)	Women (employed) (%)
Manufacturing	16.1	16
Agriculture/forestry/hunting and fishing	30.4	67.2
Construction	9.7	0.3
Wholesale and retail trade	18.7	1.5
Transport/storage and communication	7.9	0.2
Community/social and personal services	14.8	14.6
Others*	2.4	0.2

\* Includes mining and quarrying, electricity, water and gas, finance, insurance, real estate and business services and extraterritorial organizations and bodies.

Source: Government of Pakistan, Pakistan Labour Force Survey 2017-18

However, the informal sector also plays an important role in Pakistan. Total informal employment in Pakistan stands at 82.4 per cent and total non-agricultural informal employment at 70.8 per cent (ILO, 2018). Out of the total employed women in the non-agriculture sector, 71.8 per cent are working in the informal sector and only 28.2 per cent work in the formal sector. In the informal sector, 61.5 per cent work in the manufacturing industry, 35.1 per cent are own account workers (or self-employed), 49.5 per cent are employees and 15.1 per cent are contributing family workers. Agriculture employs 76.4 per cent of female workers, industry 18.1 per cent and services only 5.5 per cent (ILO, 2018). Out of the total amount of employed women, 0.1 per cent are employers, 19.5 per cent are own account workers, 28.5 per cent are employees and 51.9 per cent are unpaid family helpers/contributing family workers (Govt. of Pakistan, 2018a). This last number points towards the vast, oversupply of unskilled, female workers in the economy.

Educational attainment rates in Pakistan also shed some light on the supply of professionals in these categories. For instance, according to 2016 figures, the completion rate of primary school enrolled girls was 64.6 per cent, while it was 77.6 per cent for boys. Lower secondary completion rates were 49 per cent for girls and 58.5 per cent for boys.<sup>8</sup> At the higher secondary/college level, total male enrolment was 60 per cent, whereas female enrolment was 40 per cent. At the higher education/university level, 56 per cent enrolled were men and 44 per cent were women (Govt. of Pakistan, 2017). This also impacts the number of graduates entering the workforce annually, in which the number of men exceeds women.

<sup>8</sup> See: <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/country/pakistan>

### **3.3.2. Labour migration from Pakistan**

Between 1971 and September 2019, more than ten million Pakistanis proceeded for overseas employment (Government of Pakistan, 2019). Between 2008 and 2015 alone, around 4.5 million people went abroad for work (ILO, 2016b). Most recently, 2015 and 2016 witnessed the highest-ever number of Pakistani workers placed abroad (primarily men), at 950,000 and 840,000 respectively, while in 2017, the United Arab Emirates was the largest recipient of Pakistani workers at 275,000, followed by 143,000 going to Saudi Arabia (Govt. of Pakistan, 2018b).

### **Box 3: Labour emigration policy in Pakistan**

The framework for labour rights in Pakistan is founded on the fundamental rights provided in the Constitution of Pakistan, which gives every Pakistani citizen the right to enter any lawful profession or occupation and to conduct any lawful trade or business. It also makes the provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and lays down the right to equality before the law and prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of gender alone. These rights and obligations, especially regarding labour rights and decent work, are part of the stated objectives of key instruments including Pakistan's five-year national development plans, Vision 2025, and the recent China-Pakistan Economic Corridor initiatives.

However, there is no formal labour emigration policy in Pakistan, although institutions and regulations have been in place to manage the emigration of Pakistani labour overseas (see box 5). Two earlier attempts to draft an emigration policy were made under the direction of the then Ministry of Labour, Manpower and Overseas Pakistanis in 2008 and the subsequent Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (MOP&HRD) in 2014, respectively. The first draft focused on labour promotion, while the 2014 attempt focused more on welfare of overseas migrants. Neither of these drafts specifically addressed female migration. However, these drafts could not be finalized for approval due to lack of political will and prioritization. A third attempt at drafting a National Emigration and Welfare Policy was made in 2017 by MOP&HRD. This draft focused on three key themes, promotion of overseas employment, protection and welfare of overseas Pakistani's and the return and reintegration of returning migrants. This Policy is in the process of being finalized for higher approval and raises the issue of greater awareness on and systems for safe and fair recruitment and migration in the overseas market.

Pakistan has also signed and ratified several international legal instruments/conventions that govern labour, protection of migrant workers and prevention of trafficking of women and children (see Annex 5). It is a member of the Colombo Process and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, which specifically target labour emigration from South Asia. It is also responsive towards the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030. Pakistan also participates in the Budapest Process, a consultative forum aiming at developing a comprehensive and sustainable system for orderly migration, which also includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Iran and Iraq.

The ILO Pakistan Decent Work Country Program, 2016-20, also includes several gender-specific outcomes that promote safe migration and decent work. The Program also promotes protection in the area of labour migration for men and women (see Annex 6).

Pakistani migrant workers are currently going to more than 50 countries of destination, with some 97 per cent of them heading to GCC countries.<sup>9</sup> Since 2014, Malaysia has also emerged as a destination country of significance (ILO, 2016b).

In 2015, unskilled workers constituted 39 per cent of the total migrant workers leaving Pakistan, while low-skilled and skilled workers totalled 16 per cent and 42 per cent respectively. Highly skilled workers comprised of only 3 per cent of the total number of migrant workers. In fact, the proportion of overall skilled workers leaving the country has been on the decline from more than 44 per cent during the period 2001 to 2010 to around 40 per cent during the period of 2011 to 2015 (ILO, 2016b).

Remittances sent by Pakistani migrant workers have been steadily rising with the increasing flow of migrants. Pakistan received US\$19 billion from its citizens living and working abroad in 2015-16, and US\$ 21.8 billion during the 2019 financial year (State Bank of Pakistan, 2019). Hence, this is an area of important financial investment and foreign earnings for Pakistan.

#### **Box 4: Defining occupations**

Based on both ILO and Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment occupational classifications, occupations for Pakistanis working abroad are classified into four skill levels — high, middle, skilled and unskilled. In this classification, consideration is given to both the educational endowment and wage characteristics of each occupation. The high level includes engineers, doctors, teachers/lecturers, accountants and managers and executives. The middle level covers typists/clerks, supervisors/surveyors, nurses, and persons engaged in trade and business. Production-related skilled occupations such as masons, electricians, drivers, machine operators, carpenters, mechanics and welders are classified in the skilled level. The unskilled level includes both agricultural workers and non-agricultural labourers. Unclassified occupations, such as household work, are also included in the unskilled level.

Source: Arif and Shahnaz (2000) *Emigration and Skills Acquisition: An Evidence from the Two Surveys of Pakistani Migrants Returned from the Middle East*

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<sup>9</sup> The top five destination countries in the GCC region are Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain and Qatar.



## Box 5: Institutional arrangements for labour emigration in Pakistan

The Emigration Ordinance (1979) and Emigration Rules (1979) provide the key legal framework for safeguarding the rights of overseas workers and regulating the activities of private and public overseas employment promoters (OEPs). The Emigration Ordinance provides guidelines for licensing and regulating OEPs, protecting workers against malpractices and redressing grievances of workers against employment promoters and employers (or vice versa). The Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (MOP&HRD), is currently the custodian of the Ordinance.

The enforcement of the Emigration Ordinance is managed by the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BE&OE), the Protectorate of Emigrants Offices (POE) and the Community Welfare Attachés (CWAs) in the countries of destination. There are currently seven Protectorate Offices in Pakistan.<sup>10</sup>

OEPs initially receive a demand for labour from a public or private employer abroad, which they are required to report to the Protector of Emigrants Office in their respective province. Once this demand is validated, including validation of wages and other terms and conditions, permission is granted to the OEP to recruit the required number of workers, through newspaper advertisements. After the workers have been recruited, contracts and agreements are processed with the foreign employers and workers are required to obtain a stamp from the Protectorate before proceeding overseas. This makes the Government of Pakistan responsible for the protection of its workers overseas, including the welfare of their families through the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation, the welfare arm of the Ministry.

### 3.3.3. Female labour migration from Pakistan

According to the latest data from the MOP&HRD, the migration of Pakistani women has remained very low, with only 40,807 female workers going abroad for employment between 1971 and July 2019 – representing just 0.4 per cent of all migration over this period (BE&OE, 2019). Of these, 42.56 percent of women went to the United Arab Emirates, followed by 35 percent to Saudi Arabia. Other prominent destination countries included Oman (5 per cent); United Kingdom (2 per cent) Qatar (2 per cent) and Canada (1.4 per cent).

Of the women who migrated during the period between 2008 and 2013, 22.3 per cent worked as cleaners or domestic workers, 11.7 per cent as accountants, 10.3 per cent as saleswomen, 11.1 per cent as doctors and nurses and the remainder as beauticians, teachers, and clerical staff (MOP&HRD, 2016).

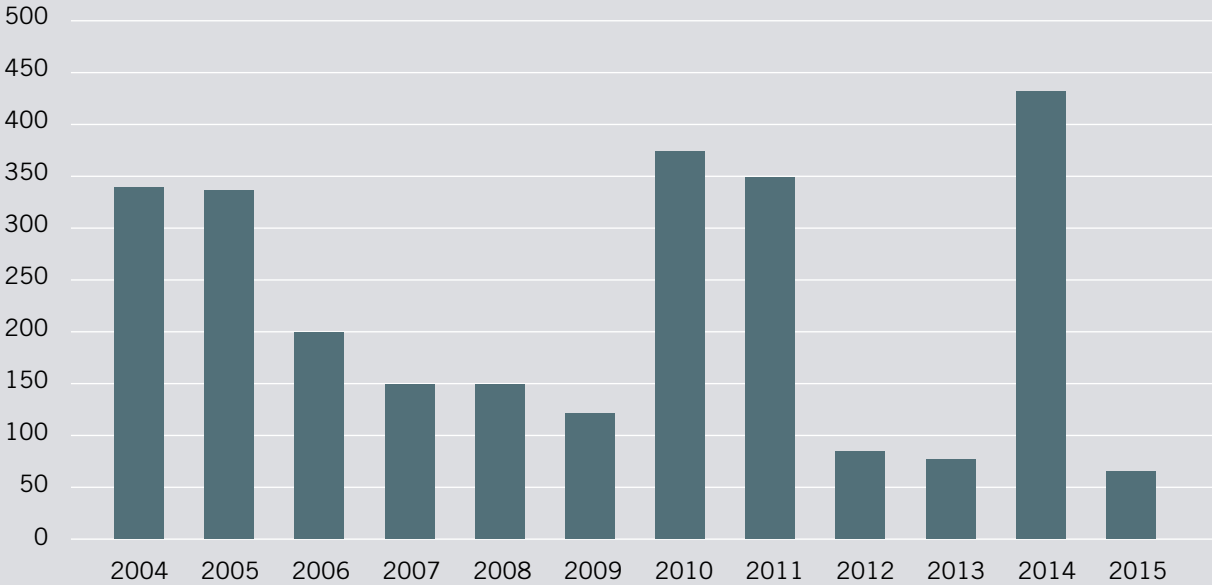
Similarly, the Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC), the only public sector institution mandated to promote overseas employment, also facilitates female migration. According to the OEC data for 2004–15, some 2,659 women went abroad for employment under their facilitation, with the majority (2,256) going to Saudi Arabia as nurses (MOP&HRD, 2016)<sup>11</sup>.

10 The seven Protector of Emigrants offices are in Rawalpindi, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta, Multan, and Malakand. Four additional POE offices in Sialkot, Dera Ghazi Khan, Abbotabad and Sukkar are expected to be opened in the near future.

11 This report uses data from both the BE&OE and the OEC. There is an incongruence between two data sources mainly due to the fact that the two institutions serve different audiences. Specifically only a select group of registered workers migrate through the OEC, and hence the OEC data reflects a smaller group of migrants. There is an urgent need for better official age, gender, region (and occupation, and sector, etc.) disaggregated migration data from the PBS to serve as a baseline against which to compare the BE&OE and OEC administrative data.

The Government of Pakistan has officially acknowledged that, “there is a need to study the prospects for safer women’s employment abroad. Several professions offer higher prospects for women’s employment, such as in the health services, the finance sector and the beautician and fashion designing sectors” (MOP&HRD, 2016).

**Figure 1. Number of female workers going abroad through the Pakistan Overseas Employment Corporation, January 2004–September 2015**

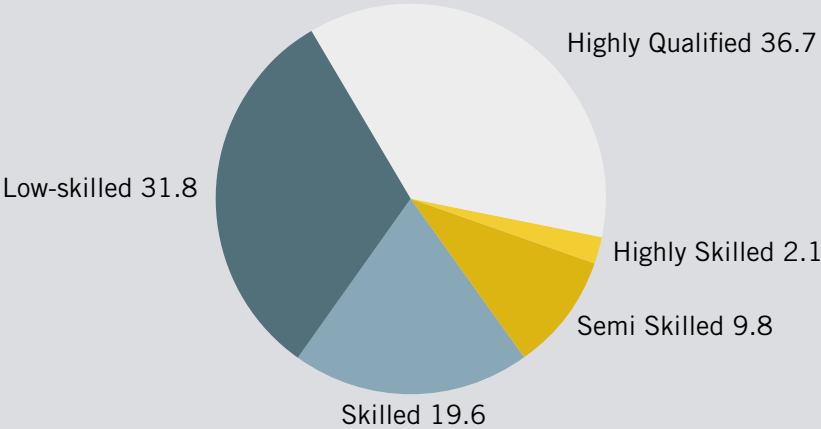


Source: OEC 2015

### Box 6: Data update

Prior to October 2018, and during the course of the field research for this study, the registration data of outgoing emigrants were administered manually, and data and its detailed analysis was hard to come by. However, since October 2018, the registration of emigrants has been digitized. New data analysis shows that between October 2018 and July 2019, a total of 2,962 women went overseas for work. Of those, 14 per cent migrated as domestic workers/housemaids, 15.26 per cent as doctors and nurses (8.4 and 4.4 per cent respectively), 15 per cent as helpers and general workers, 11 per cent as managers and 8.9 per cent as clerical staff. Around 6.3 and 4 per cent of the female emigrants proceeded as sales persons and teachers respectively. The remainder were distributed in professional categories including accountants, engineers, auditors, computer programmers, financial analysts, supervisors, system analysts, pharmacists, and technicians (BE&OE, 2019). Approximately 36.7 per cent of the female emigrants belonged to the highly qualified category; 31.8 per cent belonged to the low-skilled category, and 20 and 10 per cent belonged to the skilled and semi-skilled categories, respectively.

Figure 2. Pakistani female emigrants by skill level



Source: BE&OE-MIS, Directorate of Information Technology, 2019

## 4. Qualitative research findings

This study aimed to investigate three key themes surrounding women's labour migration in Pakistan. These themes include the causal factors surrounding limited women's migration; what could be planned or implemented to ensure equal and decent overseas opportunities for women; and ways to promote safe and fair migration for women.

This section synthesizes the qualitative findings of the primary data collected from interviews and FGDs, under these themes. These findings were based on responses from a mix of women who had never migrated for employment overseas and those women who had worked overseas or were preparing to leave. The interviewees belonged to a range of income groups from low to mid to high income and skills ranging from unskilled to high-skilled (see Annex 1 for a detailed description of respondents).

### 4.1. What are the causal factors of limited female migration in Pakistan?

#### 4.1.1. Sociocultural factors

Reasons for not going overseas for employment varied among women in different income groups. Those who belonged to low to middle income groups, claimed that they had never even considered looking for work overseas, although almost all either knew someone or had a male family member who lived and/or worked overseas. They said they were unwilling to leave their families or their country. Many had heard about life in the Gulf countries and some of the negative stories associated with it. Primarily, the familiar surroundings of life in Pakistan was reason enough not to uproot themselves and move to a new country. One respondent said that it would even be preferable if men were to find jobs in Pakistan instead of going overseas.<sup>12</sup> One respondent stated, "we want to go abroad to see the world, but not to work."<sup>13</sup>

In the upper-middle to high-income categories, professional and highly qualified women had, to some extent, all thought about looking for a job outside of Pakistan. "For some of us, it is just the curiosity of what more?" Speaking to a group of highly qualified women working in the biosciences, marriage after studies put these plans on hold. Perceptions of women's role within marriage is a major factor in restricting women's mobility for employment overseas. Many in the high-skilled category, who had thought about going abroad to study and eventually to settle, all gave up those thoughts after they got married.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> FGD with women in low to middle income jobs, Karachi.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> FGD with bio-scientists/information technology/communication professionals, Islamabad.

## Box 7: The culture connection

“Culture” was cited by almost every woman who was interviewed as the reason why they had not considered emigrating for employment. Here, ‘culture’ was used as a term that could mean anything from traditional and religious values, to patriarchal norms, to simply, “it’s just not the done thing”. Many women repeatedly claimed “*yeh hamary culture ka hissa nahin hai*” (this is not part of our culture), referring to women working outside the home. This also ties into the findings of the ILO-Gallup survey on women’s attitudes to working outside the home. However, this reasoning does not seem to match experience. In the past, many women who went abroad as domestic workers belonged to some of the most conservative parts of the country, where women are virtually invisible in the public sphere, i.e. in villages, small towns etc. Since economic need dictates decision-making, it ultimately also overrides the culture argument.

An interesting response from one group of middle-income working women was that the idea of cultural barriers for women is just an easy excuse. “Have you actually tried to ask for permission from your family? Most women will say no because they just assume they will be told no.”<sup>15</sup>

This speaks to the role of the family in decision-making, something the literature has also pointed out as being a mostly male domain. Given the power men hold, culture is simply a justification used by men to continue to control decision-making processes. Even the Pakistani Government’s insistence of securing consent of a male household member for a female migrant is an acknowledgement that women have virtually no agency over their own futures (see section 4.1.3).

Another example of the danger of the culture argument is the view taken by male OEPs. Some claim women do not come forward even when opportunities are available because culturally it is not appropriate for women to work and/or leave the home. They, in turn, use this argument to justify not actively searching for opportunities for women in destination countries. Female doctors in Pakistan are an example. While parents have no problem with their daughters studying medicine, practising medicine professionally is another issue altogether (see Section 4.2.4).

This makes the culture argument an important one for policy development. Firstly, it is imperative to recognize that women should have complete control and autonomy over whether they wish to migrate or not, and secondly, to offer opportunities to do so without placing any assumed conditions on them, such as cultural constraints or reinforcement of the role of men in their lives.

For others, actively pursuing an opportunity overseas has been limited to “keeping their eyes open”. For women with families, a lot depended on where they could move with their families (i.e. where families were allowed to accompany them), or if their husbands were willing to follow. They spoke of many European countries, where academic and more skilled positions are available for women, but it is difficult to get visas for family members. They felt that the Gulf region is easier in that respect, and it is obviously much closer to Pakistan, though they felt opportunities there are limited to mostly the service sectors.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> FGD with women entrepreneurs and women in business, Islamabad.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

## Box 8: Why women go

The most common reason cited among women who were preparing to leave for overseas employment was to financially support their family. Most of the women citing financial rationales belonged to the low and middle-income groups with existing local earnings ranging from 5,000-25,000 Pakistan rupee (PKR) per month or approximately US\$500-2,500. Those who were married sought work abroad because their husbands were either unemployed or were unable to support their family with their existing income. These women were also leaving children behind in the care of their parents or in-laws.

While the women claimed that they had the full support of their husbands and/or fathers and brothers to go abroad, it was still not clear if the actual decision to go abroad was made by the woman herself. In one case, a woman was being called overseas by her husband, while in another, she was being taken by her employer (see box 9). This is a grey area in the issue of household decision-making, where women do not necessarily go abroad because they have no choice, but because they are given none. This is particularly the case where husbands are unemployed or if there is no other male in the household who has the ability to earn. Even in the latter case, it is perhaps the pressure of extended male family members who play some sort of role in the decision-making process. In either case, the agency issue is one that needs to be explored further and with greater sensitivity to household and family dynamics in Pakistan.

Women from high-income and high-skilled categories had more of a choice in their decision-making, though this too was conditional upon family support. While the reasoning in this category was less about financial stability and more about career prospects and growth, it was often a mix of the two, in some cases, mixed with the prospects of permanent residency in a new country.

Most women admit however, that even though improvements for women at work and at home have been made, there is still resistance towards women joining the workforce. Some felt that this was fueled by the media in Pakistan, which put an emphasis on cases of exploitation, hence giving prevalence to the risks of migration and the exploitation of women going abroad, discouraging many families from permitting female family members to go abroad. According to many in the medium and high-skills category, “success stories are not promoted at all.”<sup>17</sup> This also further validates the finding that the household plays a major role in decision-making regarding a woman’s ability to go abroad.

A common opinion among most of the women spoken to, though not corroborated by any data from Pakistan, was that it was mostly single and unmarried women who were more flexible in moving overseas for employment than those with families. Interestingly, the other side of being single and unmarried was the restrictions imposed by family. Factors as simple as birth order can also influence whether parents give permission to go overseas. Youngest siblings generally are more protected, especially girls.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> FGD with bio-scientists/information technology/communication professionals, Islamabad.

Overall, despite their lack of interest in overseas employment opportunities, many of the women from a cross-section of income groups felt that restrictions on women in general to work are now gradually easing, as families are allowing their daughters to get jobs whether in Pakistan or overseas. “One thing is following a trend. As more women start going overseas, this will encourage others. But it has to be done gradually.”<sup>19</sup>

#### **4.1.2. Destination countries vs. Pakistan**

The assumption that women would be more willing to move overseas for employment because it provides a better life for them was challenged by many of the respondents in the high-skilled category. This makes whether moving overseas is “worth it for women” an important finding. For some, the expectations of life and compensation abroad is very high and so they are not willing to settle for just any sort of position. This was particularly true for those who work in the high-skilled category. The position must be commensurate with their qualifications and have growth potential.<sup>20</sup>

For some, Pakistan has a greater lure as a professional due to the limited availability of skill sets in some sectors. For instance, one respondent was a single mother of an autistic son, who established herself as an autism specialist in Pakistan after being trained abroad. “Anywhere else I would be just another autism specialist. But in Pakistan, I am [sought after]. Plus, here I have the family support to help look after my son.”<sup>21</sup>

This also points to the limited choice available in terms of a job or occupation for more educated and aspiring professional women in the overseas market, particularly in the Middle East.

In the higher skilled categories of work, some respondents claimed that the “perks are better for women here”, referring to the corporate benefits that many women receive in the private sector, in addition to the social support system women have in Pakistan, particularly those who have families and children. “Professional sectors are opening up to women more now, so they have more access to better jobs here than they did before”.<sup>22</sup> This finding is one that needs to be explored further as anecdotally, sectors such as telecommunications, broadcast media, hospitality services and retail banking, have seen an enormous growth in Pakistan in recent years. However, those familiar with the corporate sector, also spoke of the biases against women in those professions and the desire for hiring women for their appearance, rather than as equal to men professionally, “pretty is the type of woman the corporate sector wants.”<sup>23</sup>

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19 *ibid.*

20 FGD with women entrepreneurs and women in business, Islamabad.

21 *ibid.*

22 *ibid.*

23 *ibid.*

## Box 9: Why women return

A common observation quoted during the discussions, but not corroborated by any data in Pakistan, was that women in most categories, particularly in the semi to high skilled categories, had very high expectations of life overseas and when faced with the reality, could not adjust easily enough and therefore returned to Pakistan.

Interestingly, the male perspective on women going overseas and subsequently returning was very different from the one shared by women. Male OEPs spoken to, for instance, were of the opinion that “many women want to run away from their problems here,” and that one of the major reasons why women often returned to Pakistan, was due to “homesickness and missing their children”, while others returned, often in breach of their contract, “once their husbands have started to work”.<sup>24</sup>

Women, mostly in the semi to high skilled categories, cited reasons for returning to Pakistan that were more professionally relevant, such as issues with contract renewals with employers, the end of their work visas, families calling them back or simply a desire to return after having worked abroad for long enough.

For instance, a young woman who went to Sharjah (United Arab Emirates) a few years ago to work as an administrative officer in a supply and logistics firm, returned after a year because she did not see any further growth opportunities for herself. During her time there, she continued to apply for other jobs but was mostly unsuccessful and said that preference was given to other nationalities over Pakistanis.<sup>25</sup>

The question of whether encouraging more women to go overseas in search of work would create deficiencies in Pakistan’s own labour market was not seen as a cause for concern by the more highly qualified women interviewed. “If a void is created by skilled women going abroad, then that void will also be filled by more educated women.”<sup>26</sup> This seems to indicate a sense that more and more female graduates and professionals were emerging in Pakistan.

### 4.1.3. Institutional and legal frameworks

The Pakistan Government has imposed an age limit of 35 years for women workers in the domestic workers category<sup>27</sup>, which can also be relaxed by up to five years in special cases. This age limit was imposed as an the outcome of cases of exploitation of women by their employers specifically in the Gulf region.

This age limit is contentious, particularly since this sector comprises the largest share, or 14 per cent of women recently migrating from Pakistan (as domestic workers). There are arguments in favour of the ‘age limit’ on domestic workers given the prevalence of exploitation, and arguments against, including that it cannot be a moral imperative for a government to make such a decision

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24 Key informant interview with male OEP, Karachi.

25 Key informant interview with returning migrant, Islamabad.

26 FGD with bio-scientists/information technology/communication professionals, Islamabad.

27 The official category used by the BE&OE is “house maids”



on behalf of others. Evidence of the outcome of similar measures such as the outright bans in other countries such as in Nepal, have shown that such measures are not a solution to the actual issue of exploitation, but in fact, exacerbate the situation (ILO 2015a).

In order to address such exploitation and take the issue up with destination countries through bilateral talks and agreements, the Government's draft National Emigration and Welfare Policy expresses the Government's commitment to take measures to increase safe migration for women and ensure adequate protection of female emigrants in terms of safe recruitment practices and legal protection.

### **Box 10: Female domestic workers – a point of contention in Pakistan**

While there is no such official government policy that prohibits women to go abroad for employment as 'housemaids' (domestic work), except for the age limit, some still defy this restriction and proceed for this work on the pretext of working in homes of extended family members abroad as caregivers. Some women were going overseas, primarily to Saudi Arabia, to work as caregivers or domestic workers in the homes of women they claimed, "were known to them". For instance, one woman was going to Saudi Arabia as a caregiver for a family friend who is paralyzed. Her husband is already in Saudi Arabia, so her brother-in-law is making the arrangements for her. She is going voluntarily on a housemaid visa (which is technically restricted) for two years. But since her employer is a private individual, rather than a recruiting firm, she can use a loophole.

Another woman was from a village in the interior Sindh region of Pakistan. Her husband had been unemployed for almost eight years and she has six daughters, two of whom are married. She was going to Saudi Arabia to work as a housemaid for a woman from her village, whose family has been known to her for many years. The woman, a doctor in Saudi Arabia, returned to her village recently and offered her the chance to come and work for her in her house. In essence, she is going to work without a work contract and without any form of agreed salary or benefits. The woman verbally promised to send her family a sum of PKR10,000 (US\$100). She has never travelled outside Pakistan before and cannot read or write. The formalities of her work visa etc. have been completed by her husband.

Besides the age limit of 35 years for the housemaid (domestic work) category, several of the women respondents interviewed for this study reported that intending women migrant workers were required to have the consent of a male guardian (father, brother, husband, son etc.) in order to complete the employment process. In cases where a male guardian was unavailable, a female elder such as a mother, was permitted to provide such consent. This issue of the need for 'permission' by a blood relation,<sup>28</sup> highlighted the inherent gender bias in Pakistani society, leading the Government to remove this requirement.

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<sup>28</sup> The difference between decision-making and consent is a grey area. Decisions made at this point in the employment stage have likely been made by the intending woman migrant worker and presumably her family. The notion of consent, in this case, reinforces patriarchal attitudes. Policy recommendations should focus on changing mindsets and on minimizing rules that are not gender neutral.

## 4.2. What could be planned and implemented to ensure women have equal opportunities to decent working opportunities overseas – while guaranteeing a safe, orderly, and voluntary migration?

### 4.2.1. Overseas Employment Promoters

There are only about a dozen female OEPs in Pakistan, compared to their male counterparts which number in the thousands. In Karachi, there is only one female OEP and she does not actively operate. Rawalpindi has the highest number of female OEPs at eight, however most of them have only recently begun to work and then only in businesses run by their fathers or husbands, as opposed to their own independent operation.

Many of these female OEPs remarked that they lack clarity as to which sectors women can work in overseas. For instance, while domestic workers are discouraged, nurses and doctors are not. Despite this, some women still go to destination countries as domestic workers. In addition to fewer women clients, finding women with the right skills and competencies is very difficult, as one OEP claimed that, “we have a demand for 50 security guards from a company in Qatar, but we cannot find qualified women to fill those positions”. Another OEP had a three-year open visa from Sharjah (United Arab Emirates) for two to three positions in the administrative/clerical sector, which was advertised three times, but no women applied.<sup>29</sup>

There is also no culture of women going through OEPs, as most of them find work through their own means such as through friends or relatives already overseas. An OEP who had been in this profession for more than ten years, felt that, “our women also have an attitude of not making an effort to achieve [and do well]. It also has to do with upbringing in the family and how open they are.” Some OEPs spoke of other nationalities such as Filipinos and Indians, who are in high demand in the Gulf region because they have been in the caregiving profession for many years and make a very good impression on employers. They felt that Pakistan is very behind in promoting its own overall labour overseas, let alone that of women.<sup>30</sup>

In general, it was assumed that female OEPs only had women clients, whereas the role allows female OEPs to work with both men and women. One OEP who had been in the profession for 18 years, initially took over her late husband’s business on the insistence of her family, lest her in-laws take it over and render her without any claim or support. “I had never even left the house before this, let alone worked. My brother encouraged me to go to the office for just an hour a day initially. Unless you have your family’s support, you cannot work.”<sup>31</sup> The female OEPs were also very critical of the government and its general attitude towards women and the importance of their economic contributions. Representation of female OEPs due to their limited number is already problematic, and so their voice is barely heard even in such forums as the POEPA.<sup>32</sup>

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29 FGD with women OEPs, Rawalpindi.

30 *ibid.*

31 *ibid.*

32 Critique of the POEPA was raised in many instances on the part of OEPs in terms of their resistance to exploring new markets, as well as their resistance to exploring opportunities for women. It was regarded as a highly politicized institution with inadequate representation and a conservative mentality.

## Box 11: Beauticians in the Gulf countries

The beauty profession is fast gaining ground as one in which Pakistani women can find opportunities abroad. From the data available, 4.4 per cent of the total number of Pakistani female migrant workers between 2008 and 2013, were in this category. Like nursing, this profession is considered both “respectable” and “acceptable” for women. However, it is also an area where many women work informally on visitor visits according to the Bureau of Emigration.

A respondent in a qualitative interview narrated that she visited Dubai (UAE) and worked in different beauty parlours temporarily, “just to see how it was”. Once she was offered a permanent job by one establishment, she returned to undertake the formal process. She did, however, have many stories to tell about how many beauty parlour owners treated their employees. She experienced first-hand a crackdown by the United Arab Emirate (UAE) law enforcement on informal workers. She was locked into a room by the owner of beauty parlour during such a raid. However, she felt it is more economically beneficial for her to work in Dubai than in a beauty parlour in Pakistan as she can send more money home. She has a two-year contract from her employer on a salary of 1,000 UAE dirhams (US\$275, or PKR31,000), with an agreement that she can resign in six months to a year if she is not happy. The need to support her family is what drives her to repeatedly return to Dubai as an average salary in Pakistan would amount to only about PKR20,000 (US\$133). Otherwise she could work in different beauty parlours in Pakistan if she wishes.<sup>33</sup>

Another respondent was also preparing to go to Saudi Arabia as a beautician. She had trained and worked for 12 years at a beauty parlour in Pakistan. She divorced soon after her marriage and was left to care for four little children, all under 14 years of age. She has been living with her mother and brothers and their families since then and working as a beautician and part-time cook to support her family. She was offered a job by an acquaintance who worked in a beauty parlour in Saudi Arabia and introduced her to the *kafeel*.<sup>34</sup> She successfully completed her interview process and signed an agreement for a salary of 1,200 Saudi Arabian riyal (US\$320 or PKR37,000) a month. The agreement allows her a three-month period during which she can return if she is not happy.<sup>35</sup>

### 4.2.2. Access to information

One of the main obstacles that women in the middle to high income categories put forward in terms of considering employment opportunities overseas was the lack of access to ‘official’ channels to help them identify opportunities.<sup>36</sup> As a result, it is common for women to gain employment overseas through the assistance of friends or relatives who are already there. This was the case with almost all the women spoken to who had secured positions overseas, particularly in the hospitality, beauty and care sectors. One young married woman and a mother of two young daughters, applied for a job in Dubai in a hotel,

33 Key informant interview with female migrants, Karachi.

34 *Kafala* (Arabic for sponsorship) is an all-encompassing collection of laws, administrative regulations, norms and customary practices governing labour migration across the Middle East. Under *kafala*, a migrant worker’s immigration and legal residency status is tied to an individual sponsor (*kafeel*) throughout the contract period, in such a way that the migrant worker cannot typically enter the country, resign from a job, transfer employment, nor – in some cases – leave the country without first obtaining explicit permission from the employer. For more information, see: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms\\_552697.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_552697.pdf).

35 Key informant interview with female migrants, Karachi.

36 At the time of publication of this report the BE&OE has uploaded verified foreign jobs on its website. However, the majority of intending migrant workers are not aware of this and still tend to rely on fake foreign jobs, advertised through informal channels and print and social media.

through the reference of a friend who had been working there. According to many women who have either tried to go overseas or know those who have been, “if you don’t have those personal connections it is very difficult to look for work.”<sup>37</sup>

Awareness of their intended destination and their rights as workers going overseas was spread across the class and income divide. Respondents with lower education or skill levels, from villages and small towns, and mostly going to work as domestic workers, were virtually unaware of what to expect overseas, let alone how to lodge a complaint about mistreatment. For those women going into higher-level professional positions, the issue of rights was more clearly articulated. However, some did acknowledge that they did not know the mechanisms associated with issues like complaints against employers or how the government could provide them with assistance if needed. They were, however, very clear about the terms of their employment and the benefits that employers could provide.

One of the main bottlenecks for women to be more professionally competitive in the job market is a lack of career counseling at the tertiary level. Colleges and universities do not provide students with the knowledge or the opportunities, such as through job fairs etc., of how to search for decent employment, even in Pakistan, let alone overseas. In the home as well, women are still not encouraged to have a “career”, but instead find a “job” to earn money for financial survival.<sup>38</sup>

Another deterrent, which deserves attention was the fear of fake jobs. Many students in university for instance, use the internet to search for jobs, but there is no way of knowing if that job is authentic or not.<sup>39</sup>

### **4.2.3. Skills development**

Many of the respondents spoke about the lack of skills development for women looking to work abroad. This issue is one that cuts across both provincial and national jurisdictions.<sup>40</sup> A sizeable proportion of skilled graduates look for employment. Sindh Province for instance, has trained thousands of people through the Sindh Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (STEVTA), the provincial skills training arm of the government and through programmes such as the Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Youth Development Program.<sup>41</sup> The majority of these graduates feel that they not linked with overseas employers. In addition, provinces remarked that they cannot sign a MOU with a destination country for labour provision, which severely restricts their roles in identifying and training skilled labour. Skills training was once under the responsibility of provincial labour departments, which managed the provincial Technical Education and Vocational Training

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37 FGD with women entrepreneurs and women in business, Islamabad.

38 Key informant interview with academia, Islamabad (by phone).

39 FGD with women entrepreneurs and women in business, Islamabad.

40 The subject of labour emigration is a federal jurisdiction and is regulated by an established governance mechanism, under which the bilateral agreements and MOUs with the countries of destination are signed at the federal level. However the MOP&HRD keeps relevant provincial departments and organizations involved in all matters related to labour migration. Provincial TEVTAs are part of each high-level forum and committees established by the federal government.

41 Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Youth Development Program data shows that between 2008 and 2016, approximately 40 per cent of the trainees who completed various levels of skills training were women (total of 64,946 women). In the public sector, 54 per cent (49,452 women) were trained in eight phases. See: <http://board.bbsydpindh.gov.pk>

Authorities (TEVTAs). However, TEVTA is now under the Ministry of Industries. With this transfer, the opportunity to connect labour with skills and employment at the provincial level was impacted. Provincial departments have no human resource functions left in the provinces. Instead, their mandate is to oversee the enforcement of domestic labour laws and welfare funds.<sup>42</sup>

The province of Punjab has been much more active in this area. In 2019, they started a project in Bhakkar district, conceived by the current District Commissioner, to set up a series of job centres in Punjab for local, national and international jobs. The provincial government is also working with the Migrant Resource Centre, to create awareness to prevent irregular migration.<sup>43</sup> This includes going to women's colleges to create awareness about regular migration. They, like other provinces, believe that if the government is exploring the concept of a lean government by outsourcing, it should consider outsourcing labour to the provinces.

With this said, the federal government could do more to understand the nature and location of demand for women's labour overseas. For instance, given the ageing populations in many countries, aged care is a growing sector. Pakistan may have the human capital to fulfill this need, but it is informal, unskilled and untrained.<sup>44</sup> This applies to many other sectors of work for women where there is very little investment, at least at a public sector level, in adequate training and skilling. This is one of the main issues in meeting overseas demand.

Skills training is also an important element outside the government, which has a heavy focus on women, albeit for the national workforce in Pakistan. The Punjab Skills Development Fund (PSDF), is one such organization that provides skills-based trainings through partner organizations in 36 districts of Punjab. The PSDF also provides women-specific training in trades such as home-based livestock and beauty care that targets over 15,000 women. It recently partnered on a pilot project with one the major hospitality groups in the UAE to provide them with skilled labour from its pool of trained beneficiaries.<sup>45</sup>

This is one way that women involved in skills training can gain access to opportunities overseas. However, even PSDF has observed within its female beneficiaries, that initial employment opportunities also start between the 18-29-year age bracket, which is also an age in which many women get married. This is one of the reasons that they have also faced a lower success rate in recruiting women for their training programmes. Employers are ready to employ women, particularly in the Gulf region where services and retail have high demands. An incentive structure must be created for women, including complete information on the employment package, in a way that can attract them.<sup>46</sup>

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42 Key informant interview with Sindh Department of Labour and Human Resource Development, Karachi

43 Key informant interview with Punjab Department of Labour and Human Resource Development, Lahore.

44 Tripartite consultation, Islamabad.

45 Key informant interview with PSDF, Lahore.

46 *ibid.*

#### 4.2.4. Women in medical services

Female doctors and nurses are in high demand in many countries and currently represent over 12 per cent of the total number of female migrant workers going abroad. Some OEPs specifically specialize in medical professions, such as doctors, nurses and medical technicians due to this high demand. One such OEP in Karachi claimed that there is a high demand from overseas for skilled labour from non-conventional countries like Fiji and Brunei, “but that we have a serious skills shortage and very few institutes that properly train women in the medical profession”. According to OEPs specializing in this sector, there are about 50 to 60 areas of specialization in medicine, but Pakistan does not have proper training in any of these areas. This includes communication in English, which is required, particularly in private hospitals in Saudi Arabia that cater to international clients, as well as interpersonal and other soft skills.<sup>47</sup>

An initial contract for nurses in the Gulf countries is for one to three years and is extendable, as many nurses and doctors have been there for over ten years. However, the administrative procedures for nurses to obtain permission to work overseas causes many issues. The Ministry of Health is the only government department in Pakistan that requires nurses to obtain permission before proceeding abroad. Furthermore, verification of nursing licenses is required from the Pakistan No-Objection Certificate (NOC)<sup>48</sup> Nursing Council, and examinations must be cleared from the Pakistan Nursing Board in every province.

This process was corroborated by a group of nurses going from one of the most reputed private hospitals in Pakistan to a major hospital in Saudi Arabia, a popular destination for Pakistani nurses and doctors due to its international outreach and environment. One nurse had previously worked there for two years. In 2013, at the end of her contract, she returned home and is now returning on a new contract, this time with two other colleagues. The workers are specialized in oncology, gynecology and pediatrics, respectively and their reason for going was to gain international experience in a more specialized environment and of course for better pay. Although they felt that the institution they were working at in Pakistan provides better than the average salaries compared to other private hospitals in Pakistan, overseas they were able to earn twice as much. They pursued these jobs by responding to a newspaper advertisement placed by an overseas recruiter in Karachi who specializes in the medical sector. However, they had to fly to Islamabad at their own cost to get a NOC from the Ministry of Health. They also had to get their nursing licenses verified from the Pakistan Nursing Council which was problematic because the system had just gone online and was causing issues and delays.<sup>49</sup>

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47 Key informant interview with OEP, Karachi.

48 A No Objection Certificate is a document issued by the Pakistan Government to prove that a worker's departure abroad is authorized and supported by the government. The NOC certificate is 'proof of authorization' which can be shown to local authorities during emigration.

49 FGD with migrant nurses, Karachi.

## Box 12: The Overseas Employment Corporation and promotion of female employment

The Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC) is the only public sector Corporation in Pakistan that facilitates foreign recruitment for overseas employment. Under the jurisdiction of the MOP&HRD, it collects Curriculum Vitae (CVs) in a range of sectors and matches them with demand received from overseas clients. It currently has a total of 190,000 registered CVs in 23 trades, with the majority being in medicine and education.

In a group discussion with OEC roster respondents who primarily belonged to these two categories, women were appreciative of the benefits of overseas markets, particularly those who had already worked abroad. These were mostly doctors and nurses who had worked in the Gulf region and had returned, while others in the teaching profession were waiting to receive offers and placement. Most found out about OEC through ads in the newspapers or through friends who had been placed overseas through OEC. Unfortunately, none of the women saw any potential in their professions in Pakistan. They cited limited vacancies, especially in the government, which works on the quota system and where jobs open after a very long time. “There is too much *sifarish* (nepotism), so you are forced to go out [of the country].” The respondents felt that Pakistani women are becoming more confident and aware, but support is conditional on their family. “If we have better conditions here in terms of salaries, environment etc., then we would not want to go anywhere else.”<sup>50</sup>

Nurses at Pakistan’s largest private hospital all aspired to go abroad to work, primarily for reasons related to better salaries and better work environments. Canada, the United States and the Gulf countries were the geographical areas they were interested in going to for work. They felt there was too much competition in Pakistan and not enough benefits. Salaries do not increase according to scale nor do promotions. Without promotions, there are no incremental increases in pay either. They felt there was a need to change the thinking towards nurses and make their career path easier, so they do not have to go abroad.<sup>51</sup>

For doctors, however, it is much harder to find work overseas as Pakistani qualifications are often not recognized in many destination countries. The Gulf is the only region where Pakistani doctors can practice without having to requalify, but for women doctors, “a lot depends on where you decide to go”.<sup>52</sup> Many do not even apply for work outside of Pakistan because of family restrictions or because of marital status. It is difficult for women to take their families with them as opposed to men. “If you have just graduated then it is easier to go abroad through fellowships or residencies, but later in your career your options are very limited,” said one doctor who was getting ready to proceed to the United States with her family, but for non-professional reasons, including pathways to permanent residency and citizenship.<sup>53</sup>

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50 FGD with migrant nurses, doctors and teachers (migrant, returning and potential), Islamabad.

51 FGD with employed nurses, Karachi.

52 Key informant interview with female doctor, Karachi.

53 *ibid.*



## 5. Analysis of findings and proposed recommendations

This section presents an analysis of the findings presented in the previous section, under the three key questions posed in the study.

### 5.1. What are some of the causal factors of limited female migration in Pakistan?

It is important to state at the outset that migration, as pointed out in the ILO Fair Migration Agenda,<sup>54</sup> should be a choice and not a necessity, and hence promotion of decent work opportunities for all in the country of origin should be a key policy objective. This is an important observation given the often opposing interests of countries of origin in promoting migration as a way to lower unemployment and demographic pressure and to attract foreign currency in the form of remittances, and, on the other hand retain key human capital and promote employment growth at home.

However, women in Pakistan face a series of economic and social challenges that cannot be underestimated. Pakistan stands second to last in the Global Gender Wage Gap; women's labour force participation is a mere 22 per cent, the lowest in South Asia; almost 75 per cent of women in the workforce have no formal education (Mahbubul Haq Research Centre, 2016); and only about 25 per cent of Pakistani women who have a university degree work outside the home (ADB Policy Brief, 2016).

Cultural restrictions against women working are an impediment to women's economic productivity, both within Pakistan and abroad. Almost 40 per cent of unemployed women cite the main reason for not working as male family members not allowing them to work outside the home. Another 15 per cent say that they personally do not want to work outside the home (ILO, 2014). The ILO-Gallup Survey (2017) also corroborates some of these findings that women prefer to work either inside the home or not at all. These figures are influenced by several variables including the spread of working-age women across rural/urban population divisions, income groups and different levels of educational attainment. Most importantly, the social norms that exist in a society like Pakistan can have a strong influence on employment opportunities. The idea that a woman's place is in the home has been ingrained since birth and is a key influencing variable on a woman's decision to work.

This ties in with the phenomenon of historically low female labour force participation rates in Pakistan, primarily in the non-agricultural sectors. As figures indicate, most economically active women in the informal sector, are 'unpaid family helpers' or 'contributing family workers' as categorized in the labour force statistics. Their primary motivation to work outside the home, is to earn an income to support their families, rather than any form of professional attainment. Coupled with the resistance faced to working outside the home, this is also a major cause for low overseas female migration.

Given these challenges, it is perhaps not wrong to assume that the sociocultural factors that prevent women from joining the workforce in Pakistan (family resistance, marriage, gender relations), are

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<sup>54</sup> The ILO Fair Migration Agenda (2014, p.6) states "it is crucial to recognize that the first policy response to this situation must be to promote decent work opportunities in countries where they are currently inadequate. The UN post-2015 development agenda is an opportunity to give renewed impetus to the shared responsibility to promote decent jobs and social protection everywhere. There is no corresponding responsibility on any one country to compensate demographic shortfalls in any other. This is what gives meaning to the idea that migration should be an option available to individuals and not an obligation imposed upon them."



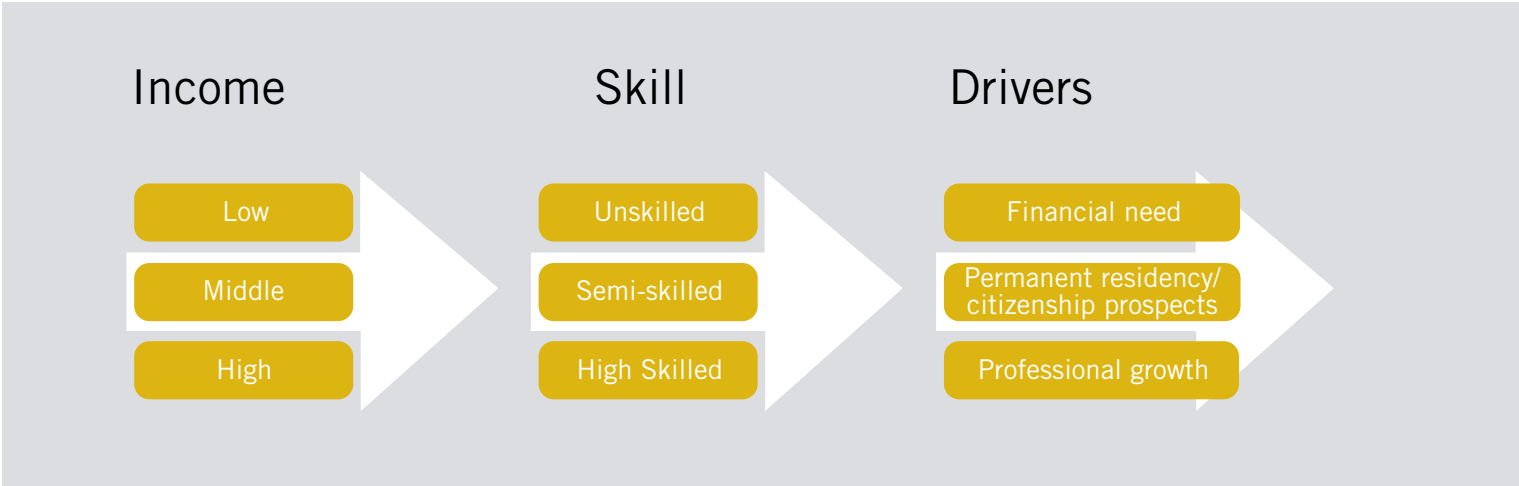
also what impact available opportunities and decisions regarding migration overseas for employment. Currently, with 78 per cent of working age women out of the labour force, there is a lot to be said for preparing and encouraging women to join the workforce in Pakistan first, before proceeding overseas.

From both the qualitative data gathered for this study and the global literature, it is fair to say that Pakistan is an outlier in the area of female migration, unlike its regional counterparts. Given the large gap in female labour force participation and relatively lower educational attainments of women, most women do not migrate for employment. Although the government states that women and men are subject to the same regulations, an important question is, given the opportunity and appropriate support mechanisms, would women migrate for employment?

The answer to this question, according to many female respondents, is that it depends on the individual (see figure 3). For many women in the low-income group, going overseas is less a matter of choice and more a matter of need. Ironically, the domestic care sector is one of the only areas where this mostly unskilled labour can be utilized, but which is now out of bounds for women.<sup>55</sup>

For women in the middle-income group, such as primary school teachers, beauticians etc. the matter of need vs. choice is also a common reason cited for wanting to search for employment overseas, but they remain concerned about having the choice to stay behind or return. Within the high-skilled/high-income category, the issue of choice surfaced as a singular reason for women to go overseas. Beyond financial benefits, a career path and prospects of permanent residency/ citizenship for the individual or their family were considerations.<sup>56</sup>

**Figure 3. Drivers of women’s labour migration**



55 The reasoning given for exploitation of women overseas is contentious. For many, the age restriction on domestic workers is meaningless, as women of any age could experience harassment. It also assumes that harassment will take place regardless of situation and location. This line of reasoning absolves the sending country of responsibility for its workers by addressing the issue through protection, rights and bilateral negotiations.

56 The question of permanent residency/citizenship prospects was not fully explored and requires further attention.

These drivers also point to the issue of decision-making within the household. As highlighted in the literature, as well as noted through some of the respondents, the decision to migrate is not necessarily made alone and often is made by male family members. While personal circumstances have dictated the need to go and find employment, choosing to be the one to leave Pakistan is not always within individual control.

While the literature has pointed overwhelmingly towards poverty being the key driver for women's migration overseas, this resonated the most with Pakistani women within the low/unskilled category. Reasons other than this, such as escaping domestic abuse or persecution, were not explored in any detail, nor were they voluntarily obtained from respondents. However, these issues do need to be explored further before coming to any nuanced conclusion.

## **5.2. What could be planned and implemented to ensure women have equal opportunities to decent working opportunities overseas?**

The qualitative findings show that while many women may be willing to migrate for employment, the opportunities and ways to do so are insufficient, unknown, overly cumbersome and possibly insufficiently promoted and protected in practice and by law. The analysis below points to areas where interventions would be welcomed. Successful interventions would provide women with the tools needed to ensure equal opportunities, as well as decent work options overseas, should they choose to migrate.

One of the findings of this study suggests that there is very little information about the economic opportunities available to women overseas. Pakistan's labour force data also reveals that the job search duration for women in Pakistan is greater than it is for men.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, many women respondents who belonged to the high-skilled category, were often confused about where to look for opportunities. The internet was their only source of information. Not knowing where to look for work was further corroborated by unskilled or low-skilled workers, who mostly accessed opportunities through family and friends already working overseas. For some, these references could lead to unsafe or exploitative working conditions, particularly, if given inadequate, incomplete or incorrect employment information.

The government has cleared a level-playing field for women by not restricting work overseas in any sector, except in the domestic work sector. However, there has been no effort in exploring other sectors for women, especially in the high-skilled category. Male migrants, largely those limited to the manual labour and construction work sector, are affected as well. Yet, as we already know from the global market, there are many areas such as architecture, interior design, information technology, pharmacy, and research and development, where Pakistani women can play important roles. Pakistan's comparative advantage needs to be explored further vis-à-vis these and/or other categories, particularly for women in the high-skilled category.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Key informant interview with academic, Islamabad.

<sup>58</sup> Tripartite consultation, Islamabad.

This ties in to another emerging point from discussions with stakeholders regarding a focus on more professional categories of work. For some, this is about getting a return on investment in higher education, as more women graduate, but do not join the workforce.<sup>59</sup> The role of OEPs is an important one in this case, as they remain a major channel in identifying and providing access to overseas opportunities to the labour force. Yet, none of them choose to encourage women, despite some level of demand.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, sensitizing OEPs to the demand for female workers in sectors other than domestic work, from destination countries other than the GCC countries, is important to expand options for women in different skill categories.

It has been repeatedly shared by respondents that there is a demand for women in various skills categories overseas, but that it is difficult to fulfill this demand. Women not coming forward, coupled with lack of required skills for available positions, compounds the problem. Once again, this needs to be viewed from the perspective of women with varying levels of education and skill sets. Stakeholders have pointed out that for lower and semi-skilled workers, the focus should not only be on trades, but also on social skills such as language classes, rights training and other soft skills. Respondents indicated that Pakistan lags in comparison to other countries regarding these skills, even in areas like domestic and care work.

Impact on the family is also an area which requires greater investigation, as female migrants have all had to leave their children and families behind in one way or another. While they do not do so without arranging adequate care alternatives, such as care through parents, spouses or in-laws, some respondents asserted that homesickness, particularly for their children, was one of the reasons they returned to Pakistan. Appropriate support and family reunification mechanisms should be an important consideration of an inclusive labour emigration policy for female workers.

Growing awareness of negative experiences in destination countries also influences the number of women opting to work overseas. Stories about harassment and abuse by employers and knowledge of actual cases has led women to form negative opinions about life overseas. Furthermore, fears of being cheated by OEPs and fake jobs via the internet has also led to women reconsidering their overseas employment options.

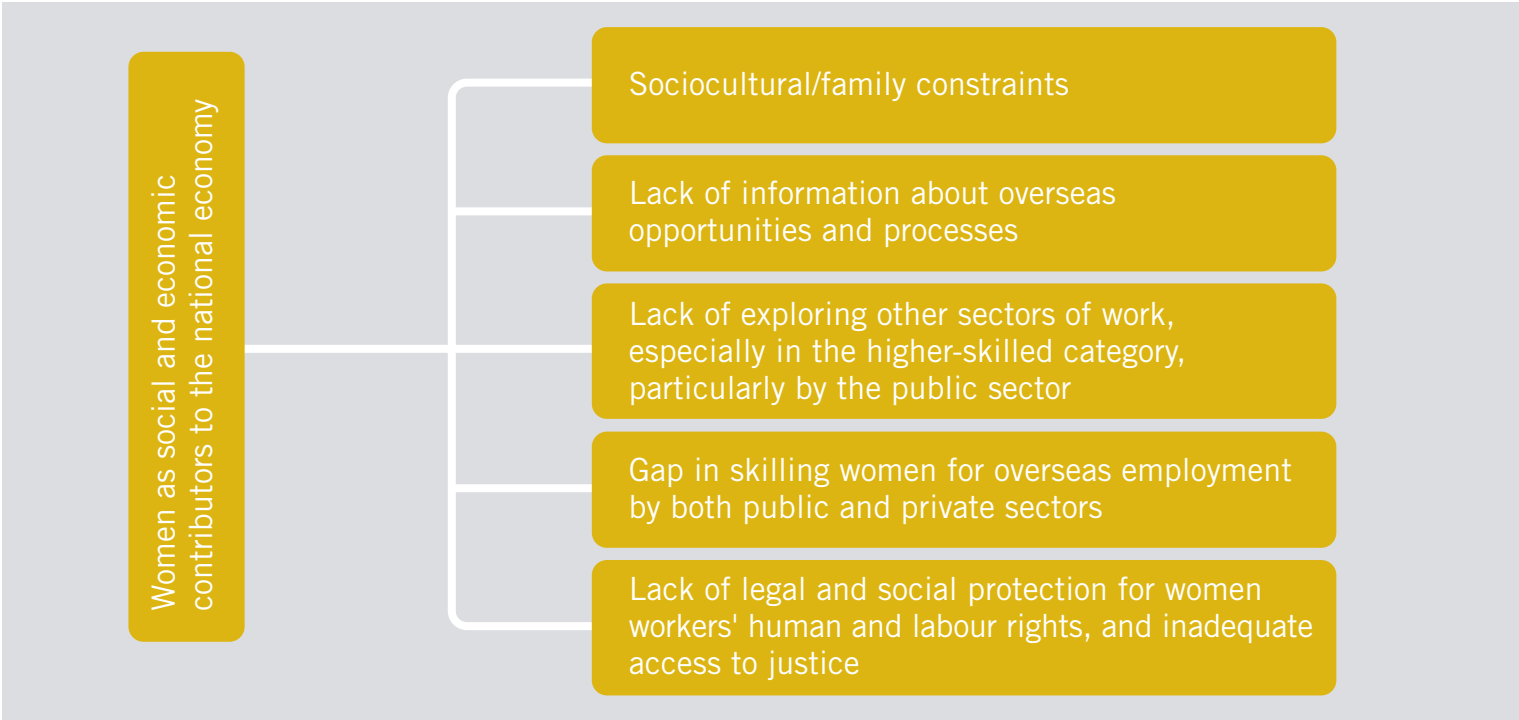
Although the issue of trafficking in persons and irregular migration did not prominently emerge during the primary research, it also remains a clear concern. This especially resonates when it comes to women who go to the Gulf countries, either lured by marriage or fake job prospects or for those who opt to work on visitor visas (which is against regulations), such as was the case of beauticians (see box 10). There has been some media attention towards the problem of trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation, however, relatively little work has been done on the issue of trafficking of women and children to the Gulf countries (Gazdar, 2003). Safe and regular options for migration, if we are to prevent cases of perpetual exploitation, must be prioritized over decisions like age restrictions.

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<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> As presented in the earlier section, some female OEPs claimed that they had received a demand for women security guards but could not find women to fill the request. Similarly, PSDF in Punjab received a request for female workers from a hospitality group in the UAE, but barely any women came forward from their cohort. It appears that there is a demand on paper for female workers, but responsibility falls on the recruiters to search for such openings and make employers in destination countries aware that Pakistan does have female workers willing to relocate.

**Figure 4. Factors limiting female labour migrants**



All these factors point to an emerging theme underlying the findings of this study: Pakistani women tend to not be perceived, either by public or private sector institutions, as substantial, let alone equal, contributors to the country’s overall economic and social wellbeing. This is influenced by a variety of factors (see figure 3) and applies, in fact more so, to the female labour force, both informal and formal, within Pakistan.

This perception perpetuates the lack of effective policies and initiatives specifically targeted at expanding opportunities for decent work for women within Pakistan as well as abroad. In fact, this latter factor is perhaps more significant, as many respondents claimed that if given better opportunities within Pakistan, they would prefer to remain. This opinion does not negate women choosing to go overseas. However, it does raise the issue of creating a more hospitable set of circumstances within Pakistan for female employment, which in turn could create a more favourable environment for women working abroad.

**5.3. Recommendations for promoting safe and fair migration of women**

What, then, is the best policy to secure safe migration and provide better opportunities for decent work abroad for Pakistani women? Should it be, as was suggested by some stakeholders, to set annual targets for female migrants in a certain number of occupations? Or should the focus, as suggested by other stakeholders, be on enhancing migratory routes for highly skilled workers while also promoting work opportunities within Pakistan for unskilled workers? <sup>61</sup>

61 Tripartite consultation, Islamabad.

Whatever the options, the role of the state is essential in making sure that adequate and targeted policies<sup>62</sup> and a clear monitoring system are in place so that migration becomes a positive experience for all involved. Destination countries, including in the GCC region, have projected future population growth and their labour and professional needs decades ahead.<sup>63</sup> Pakistan needs to adopt such an approach as well to replace its current ad-hoc structure of meeting overseas labour requirements.

Provided that the importance of female labour force participation informs national policy, additional elements which surfaced from the study could also inform a comprehensive labour migration process for Pakistan. The benefits of these components, which are geared specifically towards women, form a cycle, (see figure 4) but have the added benefit of strengthening work opportunities abroad for men as well.

- **Access to information** for women about safe migration and decent work opportunities overseas, could for instance, be grouped in terms of skill levels and professions. Work requiring higher skill sets could be shared at women's universities where women in specific degree programs are targeted.
- It is followed by the **identification of appropriate employment opportunities** for women to pursue, either individually, or through third parties such as OEPs. This would mean that those third parties are proactive in identifying areas where workers are needed, rather than women having to look for the work themselves and then approach OEPs.
- Following successful procurement, institutional processes to facilitate migration including workers' rights in destination countries, contractual agreements and pre-departure orientation training, must be gender-sensitive, including meeting the needs of those who are leaving children or aging parents behind, or women who head households.
- Once in the destination countries, women must have access to such **rights and protection** that allow them to live and work safely, including safe accommodation, and access to sexual and reproductive health services in the destination country.
- Finally, upon **return** to Pakistan, women sharing their experiences with aspiring migrants, coupled with devising better information campaigns, should be encouraged.

These components must be collectively supported by changing the social norms of families to build a more positive view of women joining the paid workforce; with an emphasis on building skills which go beyond formal education, e.g. preparing women to meet the social and cultural needs of working in a foreign country and preparing them for emerging needs within the global market. These elements are equally important for women who join the workforce in Pakistan.

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62 The government is in the process of drafting a national emigration policy which includes a focus on women's employment.

63 Tripartite consultation, Islamabad.

**Figure 5. The labour migration cycle**



Based on the interventions identified in the earlier section and what could be planned and implemented to ensure women have equal opportunities to decent working opportunities overseas, the following recommendations are suggested:

- i. The Pakistan Government, along with other information providers, such as employment agencies must streamline access to information for all migrants. Although the information is available on the website of BE&OE, not everyone is able to access technology in the same way and therefore information provision should be a mix of online resources and more traditional methods. One way to improve online access is through portals on the BE&OE’s website where advertisements under various occupations and skill categories could be accessed and where candidates can validate employers’ credentials. Other more conventional ways to share information, specifically targeting women, would be to hold regular job and employment fairs at women’s colleges and universities across Pakistan. This can increase both protective measures required for the safe employment of women as well as address potential vulnerabilities to exploitation or abuse in the recruitment process. An incentive structure should also be created for women, including packaging information in such a way as to support equal access to safe employment opportunities.
  
- ii. It is imperative that Pakistan moves beyond the GCC region in its search to widen the scope on labour emigration. While the GCC region is still a popular destination for many women given its proximity to Pakistan and “women friendly” sectors, many women have clearly shown their interest in other regions. One such example is Europe, where both service sector and professional opportunities are available and where rights and protection of women are given greater credence.

- iii. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs must be brought on board to conduct on-going emerging market analysis in terms of skills and sectors available in countries of destination to broaden the geographic scope of work opportunities. Research cells have been working within MOP&HRD dedicated to higher level labour market analysis and employment forecasting, assisted by reports from Community Welfare Attachés (CWAs) in destination countries. This is highly desirable in countries outside of the GCC region such as new and emerging markets in Europe and South-East Asia.
- iv. Overseas Employment Promoters must widen their scope to include and encourage more women clients. The GCC region, the current comfort zone for OEPs in Pakistan, has a high demand for female workers in the services and hospitality sectors. By not addressing this demand, OEPs clearly demonstrate the low level of importance they give to female migrants.
- v. The Pakistan Government should place a strong focus on “skilling” women for employment, i.e. providing them with not just with opportunities but with the appropriate soft skills to compete in a global market. The role of national and provincial vocational and training institutions must be strengthened, particularly for sectors that attract women such as health care and secretarial occupations. This can also be applied to the domestic work sector, even within Pakistan, so women can be trained to successfully compete given the large demand for this type of work. Currently, within Pakistan, demand for domestic work is being met by the low-wage informal sector.
- vi. Pakistan must officially project its labour demands and the needs of destination countries on a forward-planning basis, i.e. it must project demand and supply on a 10-20 year plan to strategically develop the skill base required. It must move away from its current ad-hoc approach to filling overseas labour gaps. It must also strengthen dialogue with destination countries on the rights and protection of its workers, especially in the domestic work sector, to curb both exploitation and trafficking of women.
- vii. Comprehensive gender disaggregated data on labour migration should be made a priority and collected regularly with other emigration data, including returnees, to report on effective women’s participation in the overseas labour force. This may include data on female emigrants and returning migrants, potential attributes of the female workforce in terms of available skills, skills gaps, emerging sectors in various categories and provincial availability of women labour supply, among others.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> The draft questionnaire for the next national Labour Force Survey (2017-18), for the first time, includes a section on “International Labour Migration”. The section asks detailed questions regarding the demographic and employment status of the migrant via gender disaggregated data questions. This is a welcome step in collecting national data on overseas labour, which includes both men and women.

### **Box 13: Areas for further investigation/research**

- Analyse data gaps in women's labour force participation, particularly data on women who are not employed and inquire as to why.
- Explore reasons why women want to migrate as well as why they do not want to migrate (i.e. women's agency).
- Research household decision-making processes that may influence a woman's ability/choice to migrate – women's agency.
- Investigate escaping domestic abuse or persecution as a reason for women to migrate.
- Review the role of permanent residency/citizenship prospects as a motivation to find work overseas.
- Research the impact of female migration on the family, particularly for children and in female-headed households.
- Identify emerging areas in the corporate sector in Pakistan that are hiring more women, e.g. banking, telecommunications, hospitality and services.
- Provide sectoral analysis of overseas markets outside the GCC region in relation to demand for skilled women.
- Explore rural markets to gauge levels of educational attainment and skills emerging from that sector.
- Further explore the correlation between relatively high female enrolment in vocational training and the skills needs available in the market, both in Pakistan and globally.
- Explore different avenues of how to raise awareness among students in women's colleges and universities regarding migration and options for high-skilled graduates. Efforts should provide information to women not only about the risks of migration, but also about potential avenues for safe migration.



## In conclusion

This is the first time any detailed attention has been given to the involvement of Pakistan's female labour force in the overseas market. For years, female labour force participation has been the subject of discussion, but the overseas market has been largely neglected. Though nowhere near exhaustive, this study does show the great potential for women if they choose to migrate overseas for employment. It also shows that many women, particularly women in middle- and higher-income categories, are willing to search for opportunities provided they have the right tools to do so. However, they would also prefer to remain in Pakistan if they had access to better opportunities in-country.

The overarching factor influencing female migration for overseas employment is the traditional mindset towards women and their role in society in Pakistan. While economic needs and global trends play a large role in making overseas work more attractive, choice or voluntary migration is still not entirely in the hands of women. Before we can work towards providing safer and more fruitful opportunities for overseas employment in the Pakistani context, policy would have to be geared towards first opening the local market for women. Doing so locally could positively influence and help to overcome the traditional and social barriers women face in being perceived as productive workers.

This study is a starting point from which to highlight the under researched topic of female labour and consider more in-depth and quantitative analysis of attitudes towards women's work and labour migration. The findings of this study can, nevertheless, help lay the foundation for future research on the challenges to, and opportunities for, Pakistani women entering the global marketplace.

# Annexure

## Annex 1: List of key informants and focus group discussions

### a) Key informant interviews

Organization/affiliation	Location
Secretary Labour Department, Sindh	Karachi
Director Protectorate	Karachi
Overseas Employment Promoter (1)	Karachi
Overseas Employment Promoter (2)	Karachi
Private sector doctor	Karachi
Dr Aliya Khan (independent expert on labour migration in Pakistan) (by phone)	Islamabad
Managing Director, Overseas Employment Corporation	Islamabad
Secretary Labour Department, Punjab	Lahore
CEO/Gender Program Head, Punjab Skills Development Fund	Lahore
Director Protectorate	Lahore

### b) Focus group discussions

#### Karachi

Organization/Affiliation	No. of participants	Skill category	Migrants/Non-migrants
Migrant women	12*	Unskilled/semi-skilled/ high-skilled	Migrants
Trainees, The Abbasy Foundation	8	Semi-skilled	Non-migrants
Members, Pakistan Federation of Business and Professional Women	6	High-skilled	Non-migrants
Private sector nurses	12	Middle-skilled	Non-migrants

\* Conducted across three different groups in Karachi and Islamabad

#### Islamabad

Organization/Affiliation	No. of participants	Skill category	Migrants/Non-migrants
Employees, COMSATS Institute of Information Technology	8	High-skilled	Non-migrants
Members, Pakistan Federation of Business and Professional Women (Islamabad Chapter)	6	Middle-skilled	Non-migrants
Women Overseas Employment Promoters	8	N/A	N/A
Islamabad Women Chamber of Commerce	7	High-skilled	Non-migrants
Women Beneficiaries, Overseas Employment Corporation	12	Middle-skilled/High-skilled	Migrants/non-migrants

## Annex 2: Participants of tripartite-plus consultation on female labour migration, 27 March 2018, ILO Islamabad

Name/Designation	Organization
Mr Chaudhry Mubarak, Deputy Secretary (Emigration)	Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development
Mr Kashif Ahmed Noor, Director General	Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment
Mr Suleman	National Commission on Status of Women
Mr Javed Zafar Khan, Executive Director	Overseas Employment Corporation
Mr Aqeel Awan	Pakistan Overseas Employment Promoters Association (POEPA)
Ms Rabeea Hadi, Chairperson, Women's Committee	Pakistan Workers Federation
Mr Gul Akbar Khan, Deputy Director	Protectorate of Emigrant Office, Rawalpindi
Mr Irfanullah Khan, Director	Labour Department, Government Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
Mr Shahid Naveed, Coordinator	Migrant Resource Center, Islamabad
Dr Yasmin Zaidi	Centre for Gender and Policy Studies
Ms Fozia Nasreen, Head, Centre for Policy Studies	COMSATS Institute of Information Technology
Mr Jamaluddin Khan, Program Officer	UN Women
Dr Ghulam Muhammad Arif	Migration expert
Mr Saad Gilani, Senior Programme Officer (former)	ILO Pakistan

## Annex 3: Qualitative research guidelines

These questions served as a guide/prompt to facilitate the discussions.

### 1. Stakeholder consultations

- What are the benefits of women in Pakistan to have the opportunity to migrate abroad for work?
- What are the main factors that influence women's decisions to migrate for work?
- What are the main factors that influence women's decisions not to migrate for work?
- What is the current institutional mechanism for women to proceed for employment abroad?  
What is missing in it?
- Under what conditions would individuals and their families be (more) comfortable with women migrating?
- What role can families play in encouraging more women to seek employment overseas?
- What role can men migrants play in encouraging more women to seek employment overseas?
- What role can civil society play in creating a safe and orderly environment for voluntary migration?
- How do socio-economic factors, such as educational attainment, urban/rural divide, provincial/ethnic/religious divide etc. shape responses to women's migration?
- What should be the key sectors of focus to promote safer and fair migration for women?
- Due to restrictions on women's migration for work, is there a potential for irregular migration among women, as in the case with men's migration?
- What would be your key recommendation to promote safe and orderly migration of women for employment abroad?

## 2. Female migrants

### ***For departing/returning migrants:***

- Why did you decide to go overseas to work?
- Did you face any obstacles in your decision?
- How did you choose your employment/employer?
- What was the process you followed? How did you come to know about this process?
- What was experience of this process? How do you think this should be changed/improved?
- Has anyone else in your family (men or women) ever gone abroad for employment? What was their experience?
- What was your experience of working abroad?
- How did your employment abroad help to improve yours and/or your family's lives?
- What was your experience on your return to Pakistan?
- What steps should the Government take to make opportunities for female migrants safer and to encourage decent work?
- Do you think more women should go abroad to work?

### ***For potential migrants:***

- Have you ever thought about looking for employment overseas?
- Has anyone in your family (men or women) ever gone abroad for employment?
- Has any woman known to you ever gone abroad for employment?
- Are you aware of opportunities for employment for women in other countries?
- Are you aware of the recruitment system for employment abroad?
- If you were ever offered a job abroad would you take it?
- What factors would convince you to work overseas?
- Do you think more women should go abroad to work?

## Annex 4: Methodological challenges and limitations

There were several challenges associated with primary data collection for this study:

- The scope of the study, though conceptually vast, posed challenges in that it depended greatly on responses from female migrants themselves. Given the extremely limited number of women going overseas, as well as a lack of a comprehensive system that recruited women, particularly for overseas employment, the study had to rely on identifying women respondents wherever and however possible.
- The data of outgoing emigrants was registered manually up until early October 2018, therefore obtaining and analyzing gender disaggregated data was quite difficult.
- There are virtually no organizations that work on women's overseas employment and their labour rights/protection. Therefore, it was not possible to use their assistance to identify women who were about to leave or had returned. The OEC was the only public sector agency that had contacts of such women on file and was able to assist in identifying a group of potential and/or returning female migrants.
- Some interviewees referred other female migrants, who had returned to Pakistan, to speak with us. Specific sectors were targeted, such as nursing, in which potential candidates for overseas employment were interviewed and were asked to share their experiences. Women's collective associations were also used to meet women in the skilled and high-skilled categories, who could have the potential for overseas employment. However, the process remained ad-hoc, given the limited time frame of the study, as well as the difficulties in identifying relevant groups of women in different cities.
- Due to a lack of time, it was not possible to meet with families of women who had returned from overseas employment, or those who were proceeding abroad, in order to obtain information about household decision-making processes. Given the difficulty of identifying such women in the first place, family interviews would have required an even greater amount of time and resources to include in this study. However, when available, accompanying family members of some migrant women were interviewed at the Protectorate offices.

## Annex 5: International Conventions on labour migration and ratification status for Pakistan

International Conventions	Signed/ratified
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), 1965	Ratified, 1966
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966	Ratified, 2010
International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966	Ratified, 2008
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979	Signed, 1996
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), 1984	Ratified, 2010
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989	Ratified, 1990
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMW), 1990	No
United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000	Ratified, 2010
Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nation Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000	No
Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000	No
ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)	Ratified, 2001
ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)	Ratified, 1961
ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)	Ratified, 1957
ILO Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)	Ratified, 1960
ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)	Ratified, 1951
ILO Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)	Ratified, 1952
ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)	Ratified, 2001
ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)	Ratified, 2006
ILO Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97)	No
ILO Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143)	No
ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)	No
ILO Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181)	No
SAARC Convention on Combating and Prevention of Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution	Ratified, 2002

## Annex 6: The ILO Pakistan Decent Work Country Program (2016-20) – selected gender-responsive outcomes

Outcome	Output	Strategy (gender-specific)
2.2. Gender responsive skills, employment and enterprise development programmes developed in conventional and emerging sectors for youth and vulnerable categories of workers	2.2.1. Employment opportunities regularly identified (including for women) assessed and utilized in mega-development projects in Pakistan and abroad.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improve the range of high-quality skills courses available to women, promoting workplace policies to improve gender equality such as anti-harassment and childcare and developing women's entrepreneurship.</li> <li>- Support capacity of labour departments, TEVTAs and relevant units to review existing labour market, review curriculum for various programmes at different levels of skills development, skills matching with overseas employment opportunities, career guidance and counselling.</li> </ul>
3.3. Workers protected from unacceptable forms of work	<p>3.3.1. Gender responsive federal and provincial policies, strategies, programmes developed and implemented to protect workers from unacceptable forms of work.</p> <p>3.3.5. Data collection and analysis on the gender pay gap mainstreamed into national data collection processes and enhanced to better inform social dialogue on wage equality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthen capacity of tripartite constituents to undertake diagnosis and gender analysis vis-à-vis unacceptable forms of work.</li> </ul>
3.4. Safe and fair labour migration promoted	<p>3.4.1. Compatibility of TVET qualifications between Pakistan and major destination countries enhanced for effective labour migration.</p> <p>3.4.2. Migrant workers including those considering migration, access to timely, targeted and accurate information increased.</p> <p>3.4.3. Migrant workers access to justice in countries of destination and Pakistan enhanced.</p> <p>3.4.4. Linkages between migration and development established including a mechanism to effectively utilize new social, cultural and technical skills of returning migrant workers.</p> <p>3.4.5. The costs of labour migration reduced.</p>	N/A
4.4. Social protection coverage extended to informal sector (e.g. agriculture, domestic home-based workers and migrant workers).	4.4.1. Appropriate and comprehensive legislations for inclusion of informal vulnerable workers into formal economy are in place.	N/A

Source: Compiled from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Decent Country Work Program (2016-2020); ILO Pakistan; Government of Pakistan; Employers Federation of Pakistan



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