



# Pakistan: Incoming and Outgoing Migration

Framework for a Discussion on Resettling Afghans  
in Pakistan after the Taliban's Victory

Fatemeh Kamali-Chirani



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October 2021

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## Preface

For Pakistan, migration is highly relevant. On the one hand, more than 6 million Pakistanis have emigrated, mostly to the Middle East and to Western countries, while at times approximately 5 million Afghan refugees and other migrants from Afghanistan have lived in Pakistan, to name just the two most important cross-border migration flows.

Currently, after the fall of the Afghan government and the Taliban's rise to power in Kabul, many observers and also many governments in different parts of the World fear or expect a new mass exodus from Afghanistan – either for political reasons or because of a potential economic breakdown, which might lead to humanitarian crisis. In this context, the lime-light is on Pakistan, again. International organizations and foreign governments have started to discuss whether Pakistan could again host major numbers of future Afghan refugees, either with or without international assistance. The European Union and several European countries, Germany among them, have already offered financial support for the region, with a special eye on Pakistan. Such a discussion may be unavoidable. But any such debate should be based on a deeper knowledge of the historical and current situation of migration to and from Pakistan. Only this can make sure, that the abilities and limits of Pakistan as a host country will not be ignored. This applies to infrastructure, economics, and the political context in Pakistan.

We are happy that Dr. Fatemeh Kamali-Chirani, a German-Iranian political scientist currently working for the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Islamabad, is providing us with the basic facts on incoming and outgoing migration to and from Pakistan. SDPI is an old partner of FES, and we very much appreciate that it has approached us with the suggestion to prepare this paper. We think it can provide solid ground to discuss Pakistani migration, including potential future migration from Afghanistan. We are optimistic this paper will enrich and provide relevant information for the debates in Pakistan, as well as internationally.

**Abdullah Dayo**

Programme Coordinator

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October 2021



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# 1. Introduction

After the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan in mid-August 2021, more than 122,000 Afghan nationals were transported to several Western countries till the end of the month (Crane 2021). Some Afghans flee the country through "land routes" into the neighbouring countries (Sanderson, 2021); the exact number is not known. After the US troop withdrawal deadline of 31st August, many eyes are on Afghans, watching for their likely migration to neighbouring countries. The UN has urged these neighbouring countries to keep their borders open in the wake of a potential Afghan refugees' crisis (Kenny 2021). Nevertheless, Iran and Pakistan, already sheltering more than three million Afghan refugees each, evinced no interest in hosting more Afghan refugees. Instead, they have tightened security on their borders. Meanwhile, the pressure on Pakistan as the old ally of the US in the war on terror is mounting. Pakistan is even expected to help return normalcy to Afghanistan in the new scenario. Jens Stoltenberg, the Secretary-General of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), in a press conference on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2021, said:

*... I think Pakistan has special responsibility to make sure that Afghanistan may live up to its international commitment, and that Afghanistan, not once again, becomes a safe haven for international terrorists. Stable Afghanistan is in the interest of all countries not just neighbours as Pakistan. (Farooqui 2021)*

Mr Stoltenberg's statement and UNHCR's expectation are not representing the whole of the international community, still they reflect a social and political pressure on Pakistan to take care of the new situation in Afghanistan. The pressure on Pakistan to host big numbers of Afghan refugees will increase if a mass migration out of Afghanistan will begin.

Currently, many Afghans are facing an extreme situation and saving their lives must be the priority agenda of the world for humanitarian reasons. At the same time, Pakistan is not just a destination or transit point for external migrants, but also a major source of out-migration. Pakistan's economy illustrates that the country heavily depends upon remittances of its migrant workers. The country falls among the top 10 emigrant countries with 6.3 million migrants, which is about 3% of its total population (UNDESA, 2019).

Emigration is so important for Pakistan that the government always tries to develop more legal and institutional frameworks, and it even has a dedicated ministry, the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development.

Despite the great significance of the issue, the information on migration from Pakistan is generally incomplete. Quantitative data, in particular, is either unreliable or outdated. Partly, the issue is raised when it comes to illegal or undocumented migration, for which only estimates can be made. However, complete set of data about legal migration is also not available.

This report aims to enhance the understanding of experts and civil society members who work on South and Central Asia as well as the Middle East or follow the news about Pakistan and the region closely. Its key goal, however, is to provide an overview of incoming and outgoing migration to and from Pakistan as a solid base of discussion for policy makers and journalists when considering the possibility of a major number of additional Afghan refugees in the future. It gives an overview of different types of migration in Pakistan and discusses the consequences of a possible influx of Afghans to Pakistan in the future. In this regard, following questions will also be addressed.

1. What types of migrations exist?
2. What are the push and pull factors behind outgoing and incoming migration of Pakistan?
3. What have been the background, challenges and difficulties of Afghan refugees in Pakistan since the 1980s till now?
4. What may be the consequences of outgoing and incoming migration for Pakistan?

## **Methodology**

This report analyzes primary and secondary data from various sources. Secondary data has been collected to identify the specific thematic areas while primary data has been collected mainly through interviews of experts, Pakistani officials and Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Germany, who have contacts in Afghanistan.

## **2. Types of Migration in Pakistan**

During the past few decades, Pakistan experienced migration in different ways. Generally, migration can be categorized as incoming and outgoing. Emigrants use different routes to reach their countries of destinations. More specific types of migrants are:

1. Those who migrated from Pakistan and settled in Western Europe, the United States, Canada, and to some extent, East Asia;
2. Those who migrated from Pakistan and settled in the Persian Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Iran.
3. Those who used to live on the border areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan as part of a traditional population exchange between the two countries;
4. Those who migrated from Afghanistan and settled in Pakistan since the beginning of the 1980s, in addition to return movements;
5. Those who migrated from neighbouring countries, particularly Bangladesh, India and Burma, and settled in Pakistan
6. Similarly, there are internal migrants of Pakistan such as: internal labour migrants, people displaced due to climate change and natural disasters, and victims of violent conflicts.

Migratory movements are diverse in nature. First of all, a distinction must be made between immigration and emigration flows, and of Pakistan as a transit country for refugees or migrants from other countries. Internal migrants and internally displaced persons should not be ignored, as well. It is also significant to differentiate between the reasons for migration: some people migrate to find (better) jobs, some for study, some for socio-economic or security reasons (due to war or other violent conflicts), or some seek political asylum due to individual, family or tribal oppression. There are additional reasons for internal migration, particularly climate change and natural disasters. For instance, in 2010 floods in Pakistan affected the lives of over 20 million people, wherein at least 12 million became homeless and migrated to other areas of the country (Lom 2010, p.4).

There are additional factors, which shape the decision-making to migrate. Home and destination countries provide different potentials for movement. The individual and family connections of migrants also play a role. Education, job skills, job

market conditions, and employment arrangement on the one hand and democratic capacities of the destination countries on the other can determine the success of migrants. Three main points are important in the decision making process of potential migrants:

**Belongings that migrants lose in their home country:** Migrants lose moral and material belongings. Material belongings include property, transportable and non-transportable goods whereas moral belongings include social status, kinship, peer groups, social networks, identity, etc. If a person has a good reputation in his village or vicinity, it is not easy to transfer this to another, alien country.

**Problems and difficulties that migrants face:** The difficulties of migrants can be both material and immaterial. Poverty, hardships, unemployment are some of the factors that make people's stay in their home country less attractive, especially if migrants assume that these conditions will not change in the foreseeable future. There are also political and social factors, i.e. discrimination, exclusion, repression or racism. Also, the risk, difficulty and high cost of migration are highly important.

**Attractions of destination countries for migrants:** The attraction of a potential destination country depends on of the motivation of potential migrants. For those who are primarily interested in attractive or at least adequately paid jobs, economic opportunities of the destination countries will be more important. Those who leave their home country for political persecution will generally value personal security and political rights higher. Migrants who flee from a war zone to save their own life will go to a country that is easy to reach (or at least an accessible transit country). Overall, there is a certain hierarchy of destination countries (most migrants would certainly prefer the USA to Sudan). Countries have different prestige and reputation in the migrants' eyes. However, economic opportunities in the destination country, the degree of personal freedom, language or cultural affinity, the legal situation at entry, and possible residence are of paramount importance.

### **3. Outgoing Migration**

Generally, emigration refers to people's movement from their original country/area to a different state or country.

Pakistan has at least 6.3 million outgoing migrants (UNDEAC, 2019), who constitute approximately 3% of the total population. The number of Pakistani emigrants in the last decades remained on the rise from 140,000 (annually) in 2005 to one million in 2015. In 2019, the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE) registered more than 600,000 Pakistani emigrants (IOM, 2020: 4).

Outgoing migration of Pakistan can be categorized into (1) refugees and asylum seekers, (2) environmental and labour emigration, and (3) irregular migrants.

#### **3.1. Pakistani Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

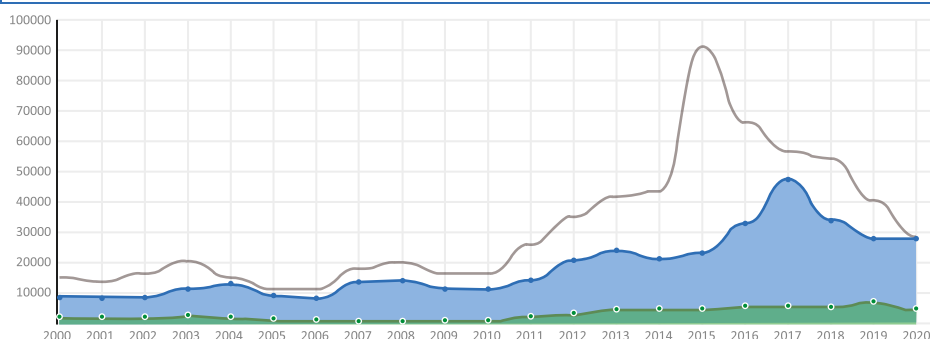
In 2020, there were 20,253 Pakistanis, who applied for asylum in different countries. It is a very small number that corresponds to approximately 0.009% of the population. Italy, Greece, and France were the most favored countries for Pakistani asylum seekers. However, 85 % of the applications were rejected, whereas in Thailand and Hungary, most of the applications were approved. Similarly, 147 out of 1,016 Pakistani refugees in Germany were granted asylum. Figure 2 shows that the number of refugees in 2020 decreased because of COVID-19. Even if after lifting the virus-related travel bans, the numbers go up, the total number of applications will remain very small.

The West is not the only destination. Though very few Pakistanis did flee to India or Afghanistan, there are 243 Pakistani refugees in India (Tripathi, 2020). These are mostly Hindu and Sikh, who have acquired Indian citizenship (based on the rules of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of India). There are also some refugees in Afghanistan. In 2019, about 750 Pakistani refugee families (in the Durand line), and approximately 72,000 individuals (in the Gulan camp area) lived in Afghanistan (Azad, 2019). Both Afghan and Pakistan governments claim their citizenship, but not a serious action providing them with citizenship. These refugees mostly moved to Afghanistan after Pakistan's military operation in North Waziristan in 2014. Many Pakistani civilians as a result of this operation fled into Khost and Paktika provinces of Afghanistan.

Figure 1 summarizes the situation of Pakistani asylum seeker applications from 2000 to 2020.

Figure 1: Pakistani asylum applications – 2000-2020

The top line represents the total number of asylum applications (first applications + reviews). Below there are the number of recognized refugees (green) and the rejected applications (blue).



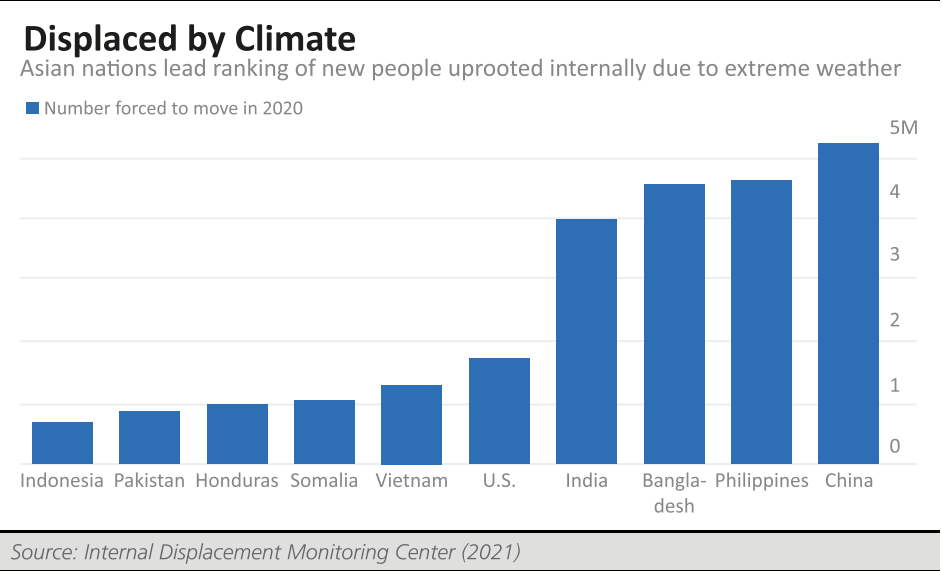
Source: World Data: Asylum applications and refugees from Pakistan 2020

Reasons for seeking asylum by Pakistanis are diverse. War and conflict, as it was mentioned in the case of Pakistani refugees in Afghanistan, can be reasons. Lack of religious freedom can be another reason, as declared in the case of the few Pakistani refugees in India. There are Christians, Shias and Ahmadis, as well, which seek asylum in countries such as the USA, UK and Germany (Ashraf, 2016). There are also gender issues that push Pakistanis to seek asylum like LGBTI cases (Śledzińska-Simon & Śmiszek, 2013: 16, and Wolman, 2013: 30). A majority of Pakistani asylum applicants in Germany in 2015 were men (Abdullah Mazhar, 2018: 18).

### 3.2. Environmental Migrants

Pakistan ranked 5 among the top 10 countries most affected by climate change between 1999 and 2018 (German Watch, 2020: 9). There are plenty of repercussions due to climate and environmental change which have shown themselves clearly in Pakistan, such as sea erosion, extreme weather patterns, reduction of agriculture, and lasting dry spells. These are one cause of migration within and from Pakistan. About 700,000 people migrated from rural Pakistan to big cities in 2020 as shown in Figure 2. Experts say that this estimation is a yearly average of environmental migrants of Pakistan.

Figure 2: Number of displaced people by Climate change - 1999-2018



The very first reaction of those facing climate change problems is that they try to solve them in their own villages or areas. The push for migration is the result of the inability to solve the problems. According to an SDPI study, Pakistanis who face environmental challenges “have limited adaptive and response capabilities to face multiple challenges posed by climate change to their lives, livelihoods, and property. The current level of social and institutional preparedness and capabilities are inadequate to counter the challenges posed by extreme climatic events and their immediate and long-term impacts”. The study, which focuses on drivers and impact of displacement and migration in Tharparkar and Muzaffargarh districts of Pakistan, concludes that even the same climate hazards force people to migrate in different ways based on “the community’s level of preparedness” and its capacity to cope with and adapt to the changes: “Sharecroppers of Tharparkar are facing a decline in farm productivity due to water scarcity caused by frequent and intense droughts. On the other hand, recurrent floods in Muzaffargarh damages crops, livestock, and housing, causing loss to farmers and landless farm labors in terms of livelihood assets” (Salik, Shabbir / Naeem 2020: 40). The level of preparedness which has a variety of gaps such as “the government’s failure to carry out early and effective evacuation of the vulnerable population” can shape the decision of migration of the affected persons in different ways.

Estimating the number of Pakistani emigrants due to environmental changes is not easy or multiple reasons.

*“It is not like you wake up one day and say ok, this year the weather is so hot, so I am going to pack my things and leave. Environmental changes affect mostly those people who are working on agriculture or tourism. Thinking about the social and economic dynamics and possibilities of people in these sectors, they might not afford to migrate internationally, but they might choose firstly a near destination. Firstly move to cities, for instance. Step by step. Then maybe go to abroad. If they can afford it. That is the trend. But suddenly you cannot expect that a person from a village goes to abroad. If there is already a culture of migration in the region or district, then going abroad for environmental reasons is an option. It is very contextual.”*

(Ayesha Qaisrani, personal communication, 23 August 2021)

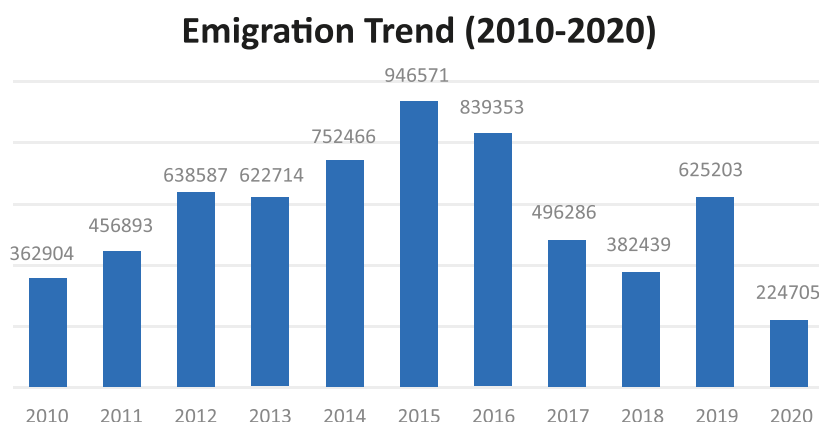
### **3.3. Pakistani Labour Migrants**

Compared to Pakistani refugees, asylum seekers and environmental migrants, the number of Pakistani labour migrants is much higher.

This group has a major impact on the domestic employment and labour market situation, domestically and internationally. The exact number of labour migrants (including their family members accompanying them) is difficult to estimate. But, based on the information of those who were registered between 1971 and 2019, the number was 11.3 million (BEOE, 2020: 5). Pakistani labour migrants mostly (95%) go to the Persian Gulf for work. The Pakistani global diaspora was estimated at 9.1 million in 2017, but this number still appears low with figures as high as 12-13 million often mentioned (CIMRAD, 2020: 1).



Figure 3: Annual Outflow of Pakistani labour migrants, 2010-2019



Source: (Pakistan) Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment, 2020: 5

The changing trends in outflows are mainly because of fluctuations in global oil prices. The number of labour migrants in 2020 dropped (by 64%) due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Most countries, including Pakistan, at this time, imposed restrictions on travel (BEOE, 2020: 6).

There are new destinations, including Malaysia and China in the last years, as seen in table 1.2015 2019

Table : Top ten countries to which Pakistani labour migrants went in 2015 and 2019

2015		2019	
Country	Percent	Country	Percent
Saudi Arabia	55.23	Saudi Arabia	53.22
U.A.E.	34.54	UAE	33.78
Oman	5.05	Oman	4.54
Malaysia	2.14	Qatar	3.09
Qatar	1.35	Malaysia	1.81
Bahrain	0.95	Bahrain	1.31
Iraq	0.07	Iraq	0.37
Cyprus	0.05	China	0.20
Sudan	0.05	Cyprus	0.16
Italy	0.05	UK	0.14
All Others	0.52	Sudan	0.10
		All Others	1.28

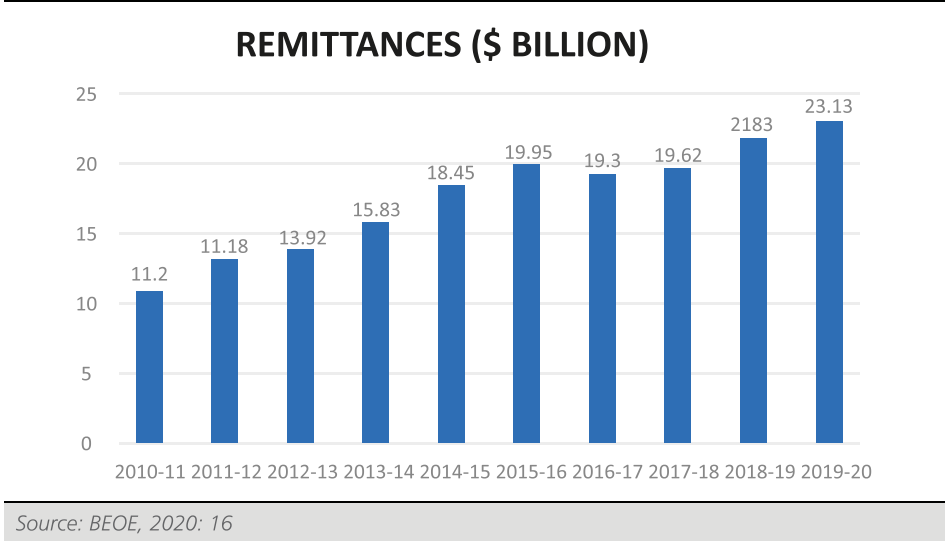
Source: CIMRAD, 2020: 3

In Table1, the oil producing countries remain the main destinations for Pakistani migrant workers in recent years. Prior to the 1970s, the flow of Pakistani migrant workers was mostly towards European countries particularly the United Kingdom and to the USA. In the early 1970s, the oil boom in the Persian Gulf region “was the era of economic and infrastructure development in the region which changed the pattern of international migration. The South Asian countries especially Pakistan, India and Bangladesh were major origin countries from where majority of the workforce proceeded” (BEOE 2018: 7) towards oil producing countries.

One main difference of the migration of Pakistanis to the Persian Gulf and migration to the Western countries is the potential to receive citizenship: the oil countries in the Persian Gulf offer work and income opportunities, but the migrants have no chance of ever obtaining citizenship there. Immigrants usually need a company as a “sponsor” in order to be allowed to stay in the country. This even applies to children of foreign workers (including Pakistanis) born in these countries. As soon as they themselves need a job, they have to have a sponsor, as well. Therefore, they remain extremely insecure and mostly it is difficult for them to deal with issues psychologically and socially. That keeps them more closely attached to their country of origin. One effect is that remittances coming from the oil producing countries to Pakistan are much higher than those from western countries. Obtaining citizenship is relatively easy there, which means that secure legal relationships open up the opportunity to permanent prospects for life.

Pakistan’s economy to a large degree is dependent on remittances. The changing trend of remittances over 10 years is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Remittances coming to Pakistan 2010-2020



The remittances received by Pakistan during the last 10 years illustrate a continuing increase. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has put severe pressures on the economy of many countries, including Pakistan, still remittances towards Pakistan did not decrease. It means that despite a drop in number of yearly labour migrants' (from 600,000 to about 200,000), the money sent back from the labour migration increased. Dr Shafqhat Munir, Senior Research Fellow of the SDPI, describes this phenomenon in the following words:

*"The remittances are increasing because those who work overseas are sending more money to support not only their families but also relatives and friends. In the pandemic, the needs of people for medication, and food have increased that cost more money. So, remittances are increasing not because of the migration from Pakistan grows higher but because of the higher needs of families and social networks of the migrants. . So, more money will be sent home. Formerly they would send some money to charity in their destination or other countries. Now they send charity too. So amount of charity is at least double than they used to send previously."*

(Shafqat Munir, Personal Communication, 28.Aug.2021).

Pakistani labour migrants, who want to emigrate legally have to pay a fee and some costs of accommodation in the destination country at the beginning. For working in the Persian Gulf countries, they would pay to an overseas work promoter between PKR 21,125 (US\$ 201) and PKR 31,524 (US\$ 301) for a range of costs. According to a study done in 2016, this can be more expensive when migrants want to secure employment directly. Then they pay between PKR 45,575 (US\$ 435) and PKR 48,524 (US\$ 463). These are government mandated rates. But the survey shows that "that many emigrants are paying potentially up to 20 times official rates for the right to work abroad" (Engblom, 2016).

Pakistani labour migrants overall can be distinguished into three groups: First of all, there is a labour migration to the Arab oil countries on the Persian Gulf, which has been an important economic factor for Pakistan since the 1970s. They work as construction workers, drivers, auxiliary workers of all kinds, but also office staff or middle management specialists. These Pakistani labour migrants work a few years in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar or elsewhere in order to be able to support the family in Pakistan financially, or to save money for a later business start-up. For Pakistan, this type of emigration has three main functions:

1. it represents a social safety valve, for example on the labour market;
2. it is an important source of convertible currency revenue that benefits the Pakistani economy through remittances of migrants; and
3. it sometimes leads to the importation of a conservative or Wahabi/Salafi version of Islam by returnees. One can see the impact in their style of dressing especially in women from Shalwar Kameez<sup>1</sup> to Abaya<sup>2</sup> or black Niqab<sup>3</sup> in Pakistan.

A **second** group of migrants consists of people who migrate to western countries, for example to the UK, Europe, Canada or the USA. They usually have different reasons for migration: some have socio-economic reasons or lack of prospects in Pakistan; for some violence is the reason. Some of them hope for an easier or better life in an industrialized country. However, a part of this group has personal relationships through family or friends in a destination country, which makes the step of emigration psychologically and practically easier. This form of migration offers Pakistan a certain degree of relief from the demographic pressure. Considering that Pakistan has a very high birth rate. It also provides economic relief for Pakistan (albeit to a lesser extent comparing to the first group), and opens up opportunities for economic exchange between the domestic economy and Pakistanis abroad. A study in 2014 reports that in Silicon Valley “12,000 to 15,000 Pakistani Americans” work, including those who are employed by “Apple, Cisco, Google, Intel, and Oracle” (South Asia Investor Review, 4. May 2014). In recent years many Silicon Valley Pakistanis assisted in entrepreneurship programs that facilitate learning business skills for young interested citizens of Pakistan. A cultural effect of this migrant group lies in modernizing Pakistan.

A **third** group of Pakistani migrants consists of people who have to leave the country due to political or religious persecution, discrimination, loss of a perspective in life or psychological pressure and physical danger and related reasons. We described this group earlier in the section on Pakistani refugees and asylum seekers. As mentioned before, Christians, Shias and Ahmadis are among the Pakistani asylum seekers. This group change the cultural image of Pakistan abroad by representing it as a radical or conservative country or having no tolerance for different beliefs and religions, although this might not be always the case. Mallala Yousufzai is a good case. She left the country to get medical treatment after the TTP attempted to assassinate her in 2016. In her long-term staying in the UK she initiated activities to help women

- 
1. (women) Shalwar kameez is a traditional combination dress worn by women in South Asia, and Central Asia, including Pakistan. Shalwar is trousers and kameez is a long shirt or tunic mostly colourful and stylish.
  2. Abaya or abayat is black and may be either a large square of fabric draped from the shoulders or head or a long kaftan. It is used to cover the whole body of women.
  3. Niqab or Nighab is a veil worn by women in public, covering all of the face apart from the eyes.

and children to get education. Her activity is counted as a movement against radical Islamism rather than a counteraction making a negative image for Pakistan. She visited Pakistan once in 2018.

### **3.4. Irregular Outgoing Migration**

Another category of migration has some overlaps with the other three types discussed. Irregular migration according to IOM is the “movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the state of origin, transit or destination” (IOM, n.d.). Pakistan due to its geographical location is considered a source, transit and destination country for irregular migrants.

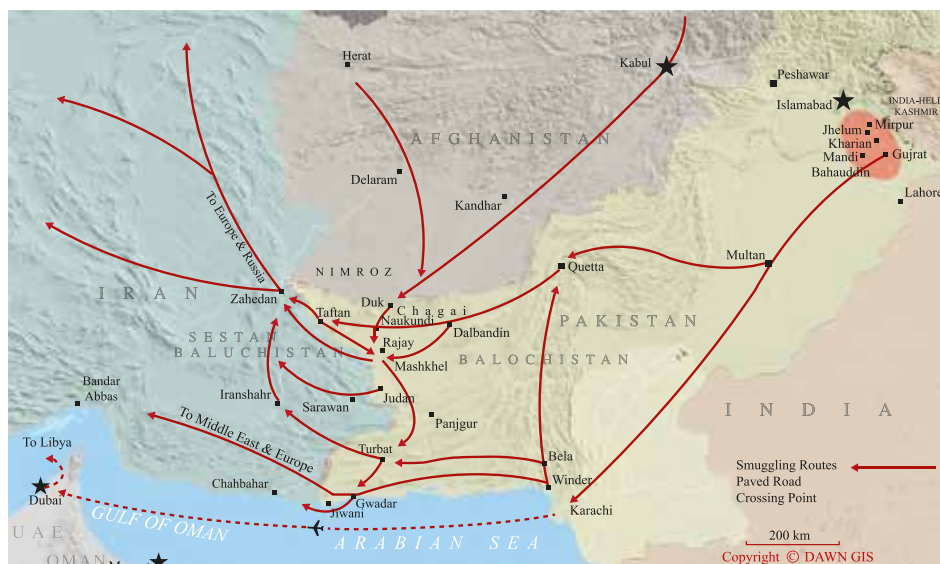
The number of those who illegally come to Pakistan to stay (for some time) and/or pass through it to go to a third country is not reliably known, but it is estimated at around 300,000 per year who mainly use smugglers’ networks (National Initiative, 2020: 1).

Types of individuals who illegally migrate from Pakistan according to Kusar (2008: p. 7) are as follows:

- Afghans and Pakistanis who want to go to the UAE and the West
- Young boys who want to go to the UAE and Saudi Arabia for forced labour and as ‘camel jockeys’,
- People who use Pakistan as a transit country for being smuggled and trafficked between the Far East and the Middle East,
- Women, in particular, who are trafficked from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Central Asian Republics and Myanmar for prostitution,
- ‘Internal trafficking’, girls for forced marriage, boys for labour, and some girls and women for prostitution.

Irregular migration from South and Central Asia to Western Europe usually takes place via a variety of networks and different routes. The following map, Figure 5, displays the routes which are crossing Pakistan:

Map: International human smuggling routes.



Source: Dawn, April 24, 2018

Generally, the illegal migration from Pakistan to Western Europe are as follows:

- Pakistan - Middle East (Iran) - Turkey / Greece / Italy - Western Europe
- Pakistan - Central Asia - Russia - Eastern Europe - Western Europe
- Pakistan - Western Africa - North Africa - Western Europe (no longer used)
- Pakistan - Western Europe

The first route, which has attracted attention in recent years, usually begins in Quetta in Pakistan and leads via Iran to Turkey. It is about the same route that most Afghans use, who either (if they live in the south or east of the country) also travel via the Pakistani Quetta, or (if they live in the west) cross the Iranian border directly. Crossing the borders of Iran and Turkey is mostly done on foot or by car. According to a female Afghan refugee crossing the borders Afghanistan to Iran – Turkey - Italy – Germany, in 2016, using expensive cars inside Iran was a safer method:

*“To rent an expensive car for driving enroute to Iran, extra cost is required. But my husband paid it because he was told that Iranian police barely becomes suspicious of expensive cars. We sat 18 hours in a Maxima (a luxury car in Iran) without even having a break for washroom, till we reached Turkey’s border”*

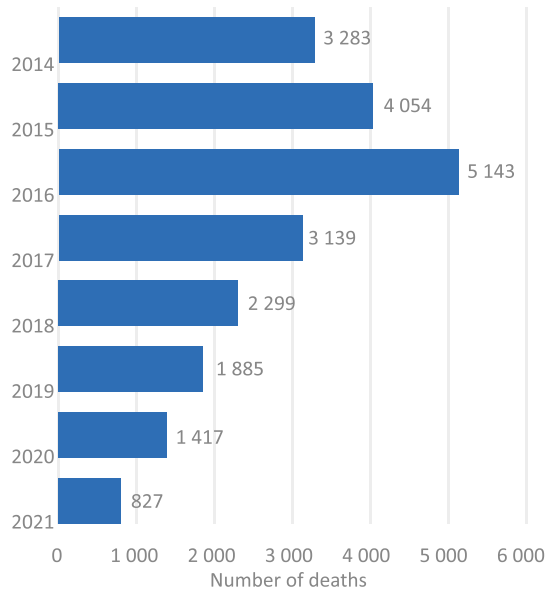
(Informant #1, personal communication, 24. Aug.2021).

Irregular migration is costly and includes direct and indirect costs. Those who migrate from Pakistan with the help of 'smugglers' have to pay considerable sums of money and go through high risks and difficulties.

Some irregular migrants face severe hardships that affect their physical and mental health. Passing through areas that are subject to conflict or other violence, without proper documentation and support can lead to life-threatening consequences. They may be victims of kidnapping and sexual violence as well. Routes and ways of irregular migration are not the safest. As shown in

Figure 6 in 2016 alone, over 5,000 lost their lives in the sea (Statista 2021). A proper risk assessment by the migrants is important, especially when families with children are traveling together.

Figure 6: Number of recorded deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea from 2014 to 2021



Source: Statista 2021

Irregular migration can also be very expensive. Migrants have to spend money on bribes and covering other expenses. Illegal migration to Western Europe can result in expenses for Pakistanis up to US\$ 14,000 per person, although prices can fluctuate considerably depending on demand (Kusar, 2008: 16). For Afghans, for example, the costs are usually higher because the demand there is greater than in Pakistan. The illegal migration of entire families can result in considerable costs. The expenses affect which groups of people can become migrants to which countries.

There are also smugglers who offer full-service and arrange visas to specific destinations using a variety of fraudulent means. According to UNODC "a legitimate visa to the UK obtained by fraudulent means can cost between PKR 1,400,000 and 1,600,000 or USD 14,000 to 16,000. Such visas are obtained using false statements and fake supporting documents. In comparison, a forged visa on an authentic passport would cost significantly less at between PKR 200,000 and 300,000 or USD 2000 to 3000" (UNODC, 2013: 35).





## 4. Incoming Migration

A small portion of the population of Pakistan has foreign origin. According to estimates of the UNHCR (UNHR-sheet, 2020: 1) there are very few immigrants from Somalia (181 refugees), asylum seekers<sup>4</sup> (9,717), other (341 refugees). Pakistan also has irregular incoming immigrants. These are people who are neither citizens of Pakistan, nor legally resident foreigners. The National Aliens' Registration Authority (NARA) which is called NADRA since 2015, registers such persons as "illegal aliens" and regularizes their status by issuing them with a special renewable identity card for foreigners. According to NARA's estimates, the number of irregular immigrants stood at 3.35 million in 2004 (ICMPD 2013). A majority of such irregular immigrants originated from the former East Pakistan, and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. The number of Bengalis was estimated to be 1,030,000 and of Burmese as 100,000 in 2009, according to EBDM (Shah, 2020: 61). The ethnic Bengalis and Burmese live mostly in Karachi.

Some of the immigrants are also a part of transit migration through Pakistan to the Persian Gulf or to Europe or North America. In addition to entry by air and sea, which overall is only of secondary importance for migration to Pakistan, there are in particular the following entry options by land: Wagah border (India), Wagah railway station (India), Khokaropar railway station (India), Taftan (Iran), Chaman (Afghanistan), Torkham (Afghanistan), Sust (China), BP 250 (Iran).

By far the largest group of immigrants to Pakistan are refugees from Afghanistan. Because of the new situation of Afghanistan and the possibility of having more Afghans in Pakistan, the issue of Afghan refugees is discussed here in more details.

### 4.1. Four Decades of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

According to UNHCR (2021), around 1.4 million Afghans are officially registered in Pakistan. Adding to that those Afghans who are not documented (about half a million to 1.5 million) and the new waves of Afghans coming after the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan (some experts expect approx. 700,000), one can estimate

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4. An asylum seeker is someone who is seeking international protection but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined. In contrast, a refugee is someone who has been recognised under the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees to be a refugee.

above 3 million Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. Consequently, Afghans in Pakistan are the second-largest refugee population in the world after the Syrians in Turkey.

Afghans, who enter Pakistan from the land usually use Torkham (province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and Chaman (province of Baluchistan) border crossings. These borders formerly were open and had no fences, but now they are fenced. The main entry points are now under strict control.

Based on a survey of 2020 the number of female Afghan refugees is less than men. 54% of Afghan registered refugees are men and 46% women (UNHCR- update, 2020). Most of Afghans are living in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (58.1%) and the rest in Baluchistan (22.8%), Punjab (11.7%), Sindh (4.6%), Islamabad/Federal Capital Territory (2.4%) and Gilgit-Baltistan (0.4%) (UNHCR-overview, 2021).

UNHCR supported building 54 Refugee Villages for registered Afghan refugees. 444,439 registered Afghans are living in and 990,947 are living outside such villages. That means 69% are out and 31% are in the Refugee Villages (UNHCR-overview, 2021). UNHCR offered different programs for improving community-based protection, education, health, livelihood situation of Afghan refugees during the last four decades. Projects like voluntary repatriation (since 2002), and Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) programme (since 2009) are among these efforts (UNHCR-Pakistan, 2020).

Most Afghans in Pakistan are Pashtuns (or “Pakhtuns” or “Pathan”) (85.1%). The rest are from the ethnicities of Tajik (6%), Uzbek (3%), Hazara (2%), Turkmen (1%), Baluch (1%), and other ethnicities (2%) (UNHCR-update, 2020).

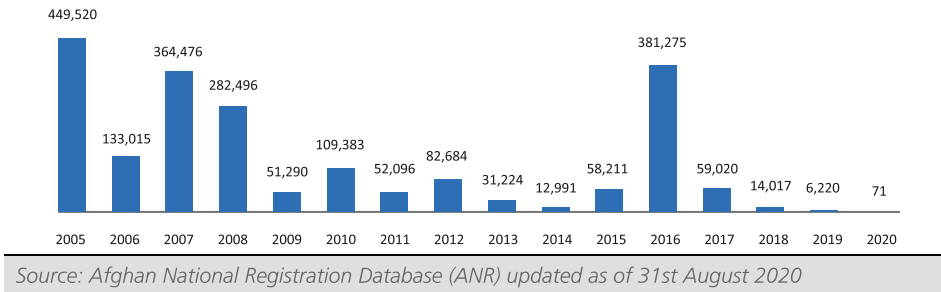
Pashtuns being the largest ethnic groups of Afghan refugees is partly the reflection of the demography in Afghanistan. The Pashtun ethnic group is the main ethnic group (42%) in Afghanistan (Minority Rights Organisation, n.d.). Additionally, in Pakistan the Pashtuns are the second-largest ethnic group (15%) (Yousaf, 2019: 1).

Millions of Afghan refugees have been living in Pakistan for the last 40 years. Initially, the Pakistani state provided them with permission to work and live. At other times Afghan refugees were accused of putting pressure on services and the labour market. They also sometimes were blamed for bringing or developing terrorism inside Pakistan, especially since 2014.

Pushing Afghans to return to their country of origin through a repatriation programme started in 2002. It highlights the skewed relationship between Afghan refugees and people and government of Pakistan.

The repatriation programme was launched in cooperation between Pakistan and international organizations, mainly UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to assist Afghan refugees returning to Afghanistan in a safe and dignified manner. The UNHCR took care of the repatriation of registered Afghans, and the IOM dealt with undocumented Afghans. Figure 7 shows the number of registered Afghans who left Pakistan in the years between 2005 and 2020.

Figure 7: Voluntary repatriation by years (2005 — 31 August, 2020)



The total number of Afghan refugees who returned voluntarily according to UNHCR, as shown in Figure 7 during years between 2005 and 2020, was 2,158,918. Voluntary repatriation centers, located in Quetta (Baluchistan) and Nowshera (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), facilitate voluntary return, providing the returnees with a cash grant “averaging US\$ 200 per person (based on their area of origin) to support their immediate humanitarian needs and transportation costs” (UNHCR-voluntary return, 2019: 2). In a report analyzing the statistics of repatriation’s results of 2019 an interesting point about the gender aspect of the program is observed. Women were more than men among the returnees: “During the January-June six-month period in 2019, 54% of the returnees were women while 46% were men. This uneven distribution raises questions about the return of entire families, or a higher return of the female headed households, such as widows with children” (Shah, Amjad, Hameed & Shahzad, 2020: 55).

The number of returning Afghans from Pakistan to Afghanistan changed yearly. After the fall of Taliban rule in 2001, many refugees attended the repatriation program to return to Afghanistan. Jelena Bhelica analyzes that till 2005 Afghans had a hope of development in Afghanistan because Afghanistan’s new government was popular at that time. After the Pakistani government started to release Proof of Registration (PoR) as identity cards for Afghans in 2007, the number of voluntary returns dropped. The PoR had advantages for Afghans such as the possibility to opening bank accounts, purchasing mobile phone SIM cards and getting a driving license. As seen in figure 7, there was a high number of returnees in 2016. The reason according

to Bhelica is that a push to return Afghans happened after an attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar, Pakistan, at the end of 2014. Although Pakistani Taliban, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, accepted the responsibility for the attack, still Pakistani “authorities said its masterminds were operating from safe havens on the Afghan side of the border (in Nuristan or Kunar) and that Afghan citizens had been among the attackers”. Therefore, Afghans faced a pressure from Pakistani society to leave the country. Nevertheless, the pressure was not just culturally and socially but also systematically by the authorities. A mechanism that Bhelica mentions is “changing the PoR cards extension policy”. The PoR cards validity duration changed from three years to six months and then, more recently (March 2017) to just three months. Abuses and harassments by the Pakistani police is another mechanism happened mostly in 2015 and 2016 and are well documented (Human Rights Watch, 2015 and 2016). The Afghanistan-India cooperation increased the difficulty of the situation for many Afghans. For instance, after the inauguration of Salma Dam, a hydro-power station in Herat province of Afghanistan, by Ghani and Modi in June 2016, some Pakistanis started calling Afghans “Son of Hindus”. The push to return Afghans was so harsh that the Afghanistan government started to initiate activities to encourage Afghans to return home from Pakistan in dignity. The social media campaign of “Khmel Watan, Gul Watan” [One’s own homeland, a dear homeland] was among those initiatives.

From what has been discussed it can be realized that there were not only hostile sentiments about Afghans in Pakistan but also systematic mechanisms to push them back to Afghanistan. Although according to a retired military general, who was well aware of the situation, there has never been a plan or policy regarding Afghan refugees in Pakistan:

*“There is no systematic plan for the return of Afghans. Frankly speaking, there is no refugee related law at the national level nor is(Pakistan) a signatory to international laws and agreements. Yes, Pakistan even hosted Afghan refugees for a long time but that was because there was no other solution. Pakistan could not turn the face to other side when the neighbor needed help. The situation became very intensive after the TTP’ attack (December 2014). The Pakistani authorities on a personal level became stricter regarding Afghans. There was no policy”.*

(Informant#2, personal communication, 25.Aug.2021).

## 4.2. Taliban's Takeover Situation

Following President Ghani's flight from Afghanistan on August 15, Kabul came under the control of the Taliban again. At a press conference Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban's spokesman, promised an "inclusive government, security for aid agencies and embassies and women's rights to work and go to school — within his group's interpretation of sharia law" (Baluch, 2021), still there are thousands of Afghans who do not trust the promises and are trying to save their lives. Some Western countries evacuated approximately 122,000 Afghans from the Kabul International Airport. There have been Afghans trying to leave overland to neighbouring countries, including Pakistan. However, it is not easy. The main border crossing points with Afghanistan's neighbours are controlled by the Taliban, while they have officially declared that they do not want Afghans to leave the country. At the same time, Pakistani officials expressed concerns about the financial costs of having more Afghans in the country.

Despite all arrangements to control the borders (Chaman and Torkham), still there are Afghans trying to enter Pakistan. With Pakistan and Afghanistan sharing a 2,700 km border, checking all the spots is not easy.

Based on information from an Afghan refugee who lives in Islamabad, Afghans who do not have a Pakistani visa and PoR are trying to come to Pakistan but they are mostly unsuccessful:

*"I have some relatives who tried to come to Pakistan through Chaman border. Formerly, it was possible to come by paying 5 to 6 thousand rupees. Now, it is so difficult because firstly the borders are fenced. There are very few points, which are guarded by Pakistan army"*

(Informant#3, personal communication, 24. Aug.2021).

It seems that some Afghans have a chance to cross the border depending on having money or being from a specific ethnic group. The interviewee insisted that Pashtuns have a good chance to cross the border:

*"Besides my relatives there were some Pashtun families from Afghanistan who without paying money finally could cross the border. My relatives were Hazara. They returned"*

(Informant#3, personal communication, 24.Aug.2021).

The estimate of the number of Afghans entering the country currently through the two border crossings is 600 per day. Pakistani officials are concerned about a

new refugee crisis. It is expected that “up to 700,000 could flee to Pakistan if the situation in Afghanistan worsens now that the Taliban are back in control. It’s a crisis that the government said it is unprepared to handle without international assistance and financial support” (Toppa / Zia ur Rehman, 2021).

Pakistan’s government has recently estimated that the expense of dealing with this situation is over \$ 2 billion for a two to three year period. According to Vaqar Ahmed, SDPI Joint Executive Director, “this may not be possible to cover for Pakistan from internal resources and could result in Islamabad sending requests to development partners” (Ahmad, 9.Aug. 2021). In Ahmed’s view, the refugee-related expenses are not the only costs, but “the real casualties will be trade, investment, and cultural linkages at a bilateral and regional level”. He mentions that bilateral and regional cooperation in the following examples have been promising and the new situation can weaken them:

- bilateral trade volumes between Pakistan and Afghanistan, mainly in provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan,
- work of sectors such as transport, warehousing and distribution which earn revenues from providing transit services to Afghan-bound merchandise,
- trade agreements between Pakistan and countries of Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan.

In his view the current situation of Afghanistan can threaten success in these areas.

## **5. Consequences of Migration for Pakistan**

The extensive migration from and to Pakistan has positive and negative effects on the country. Some positive aspects have already been mentioned: There is a labour market advantage which creates over 1.2 million new jobs every year in the country. The remittances help boost the fragile economy. These are considerable inflows without which the country's balance of payments problems would worsen. That is probably the main reason as to why Pakistan actively promotes labour migration. On the contrary, there are some negative effects as well. The biggest one is brain drain.

Equally significant for Pakistan are the effects of legal and illegal immigration to Pakistan, especially of Afghans, whose role in the economy (especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Karachi) is crucial, but they also compete for scarce resources and jobs. In recent years, and particularly in connection with terrorist attacks (even if Afghans are rarely involved), Afghan refugees and migrants have also become a point of contention in Pakistani politics. As discussed above, a new wave of displaced Afghans may be on its way to Pakistan in the future, depending on the future development in Afghanistan, which raises serious concern in the (or at least a large part of) Pakistani society. The country is already under great strain due to economic and political imbalances. At times when the country is looking for more remittances for which the labour migration is the only way, hosting the newly displaced Afghans would add to Pakistan's economic woes.

The benefit of hosting displaced Afghans by Pakistan would indirectly benefit Europe, as the flux would not move to European countries. Migrants, as this paper highlights, look for a dignified and safe life. If there is a possibility of a better life for them in Pakistan, there would be no need to move anywhere else.





## **6. Conclusion: Developing Cooperation-based Migration Policy in Pakistan**

Pakistan is one of the 10 top countries<sup>5</sup> having 6.3 million emigrants (more than 3% of country's population) across the world. It is not only an outgoing but also an incoming migration country with over three million registered and unregistered Afghan refugees. Currently, after the takeover of the Taliban in Afghanistan and a potential new wave of displaced Afghans, all eyes are on Pakistan again. Pakistan, which itself is a developing country and dependent on its labour emigrants, is supposed to be a geostrategic place to give shelter to displaced Afghans. To receive new Afghans to its land, Pakistan requires not just the necessary resources, but also proper policies fitting to its economic, social and migration trends.

Overall, it should have become clear that emigration from Pakistan primarily occurs due to four reasons.

- Violent conflicts, group-specific persecution (especially by non-state actors) and political insecurity, although the number of violent conflicts had been decreased considerably since 2009, with the exception of Baluchistan.
- Socio-economic deficits, lack of economic prospects, problems in the labour market,
- Environmental changes do not work alone, but in combination with other social and economic factors,
- Weaknesses in the Pakistani governance system, which is partly responsible for the political and socio-economic challenges, cannot be overcome, rather multiplied.

Migration policy with regard to Pakistan cannot equally treat all forms of migration, but it must differentiate between the different forms and migrant groups, as all are not equally undesirable. It is better not to deal with migration as a whole, but with certain aspects or its negative consequences. Labour migration is playing a positive role in Pakistan's economy on the one hand and on the other it has negative consequences like brain drain.

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5. The ten countries that have the highest number of emigrants, are: 1. India (15.9 million); 2. Mexico (12.5 million); 3. Russia (10.4 million); 4. China (9.7 million); 5. Bangladesh (7.2 million); 6. Syria (6.2 million); 7. Pakistan (5.9 million); 8. Ukraine (5.8 million); 9. Philippines (5.4 million); 10. Afghanistan (4.9 million)

Pakistan's migration policy should be based on two basic approaches, which are not easily or directly accessible to processing by traditional development cooperation:

- to work on the general conditions that create migration or asylum seeking's pressure, and,
- to work on specific negative aspects, as far as they can be addressed.

The first of these two approaches would be the central one in the long-term. However, it has the peculiarities of being unsuitable for the short-term control of migration, for which it can only be effective in the long-term. Firstly, the political violence and persecution, socio-economic deficits and weaknesses in the Pakistani governance structure are decisive factors - but they cannot be remedied in a few months or years. Secondly, it should also be pointed out that reaching political and development goals are not migration-specific goals, but still are very relevant to migration policy. This is no coincidence: if Pakistan could function well socially, economically, and politically, there would hardly be any reasons for temporary or permanent migration or asylum seeking. It also would be possible to accommodate more incoming migrants, like Afghans. It can, therefore, only be recommended here to continue to strengthen a development-oriented policy. This would make the country as a whole more stable and resilient in the core areas (e.g., politics, society, economy). In this sense, it should be emphasized and explained why a successful development policy also makes a contribution to migration policy.

There are good examples in this regard: stimulating the Pakistani labour market and reducing open and hidden unemployment; overcoming the energy crisis that stands in the way; providing a framework for addressing environmental and climate change issues; an improvement in the social and legal position of minorities; pushing back a culture of religious extremism; developing anti-corruption policies; or fundamental reform of the judiciary and police. All of these would reduce the pressure to migrate and to flee in the medium and long- term, especially if they were carried out in parallel.

Beyond the long-term and indirect combating of the causes of migration, there are specific measures for the better management of migration. This includes a meaningful improvement of the placement system for migrant workers in order to reduce the exploitation of those affected (through corruption, etc.); the socio-political support of the families of migrants, especially if they now have to live without their male head of the family; the development of better border management, especially on the Pakistan-Iran borders; Training programme for future migrant workers (crafts, office work, IT, etc.) in order to have better opportunities and higher income on the future labour market and to be able to contribute more to the Pakistani economy after their return.

Moreover, the limits of the possibilities have to be reflected in order to be able to achieve direct contributions to control (or even reduce) migration from Pakistan through development cooperation. As long as development policy is effective, it will reduce the pressure of migration in the long-term by helping to reduce economic, social and governance problems in Pakistan. This is not to be underestimated in the long-term. However, development cooperation can only serve to manage migration in the short- term in exceptional cases.

Finally, the international organizations and Western stakeholders need to cooperate with Pakistan in the formulation of a proper Afghan-refugee policy. But this is not enough. Some programs such as housing and repatriation which have been implemented by UNHCR, IOM and Pakistani authorities are excellent, but cannot adequately address the multiple problems. There should be projects to connect people of Pakistan and Afghanistan culturally and socially. There is a crucial need to initiate dialogue. Although dialogue cannot solve all problems but at least it can emphasize on what both countries have in common and clarify misunderstandings about sensitive issues such as Afghanistan-India relationship and terrorism.



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## Interviews

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Informant #2, 24.Aug.2021, personal communication, telephone call to Germany (a female Afghan refugee)

Informant #3, 24.Aug.2021, personal communication, Islamabad: in-person interview (a former Pakistani military general)

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Informant #5, Shafqat Munir, 27.Aug.2021, personal communication, telephone call to Pakistan

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In Germany, Fatemeh was active as volunteer advisor, translator for refugees, language-mediator for migrants and researchers (2016-2019). In Pakistan (since September 2019) Fatemeh works as university lecturer and development researcher, focusing on sustainable development, SDGs, gender-responsive policy making, local government, migration and Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

Writing on cultural and social issues have been the center of Fatemeh's work. She won a prize as the best journalist of the BIMUN, a UN Model Conference, in Bonn (2014), wrote a book "Does Intercultural Dialogue matter?: The Role of Intercultural Dialogue in the Foreign Cultural Policy of Iran and Germany" (2019) and published different book chapters, papers and policy briefs on themes such as refugees in Germany, Pakistan-Afghanistan dialogue and Foreign Cultural Policy and book reviews for academic international journals.

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