

4th Migration Trends Analysis Report for Pakistan

1st Quarter 2024 (incl. December 2023)

This migration trends analysis includes analytical considerations as well as data generated by the [Migrant Resource Centres in Pakistan](#). With over 240 million people, Pakistan is world's fifth most populous country.¹ In terms of migration trends, it is an important country of origin, transit and destination for migrants. This report focuses on highlights and important information on trends/patterns and insights regarding the migration and mobility of potential, current or returning migrants within the covered period.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Emigration to the United Kingdom:** the surge in direct employment to the UK has continued to rise, specifically in the care sector, whereby workers and dependents move to the UK.
- **New modalities for emigration to UAE:** in light of the work visa suspension, Pakistan emigrants move to the UAE on direct employment visas and are supported by friends and family in accessing employment there.
- **MRC in UN Women report:** There is evidence that women are looking for employment alongside their husbands in Europe. The MRCs spoke about MRC work in Pakistan during the event, specifically pre-departure briefings which support female migrants' safe travel abroad. Quote from report "An MRC coordinator said that many women call to find ways to reunite with their husbands working in Italy and Greece. Some highly educated women call to find out about higher education opportunities in Europe. Female nurses call about employment opportunities in Europe."(P.27 of the report)²

SITUATIONAL OVERVIEW

Pakistan is a well-known emigration country with some 800,000 people leaving annually³, the majority of who choose to seek employment opportunities in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.⁴ Some of the **long-standing drivers of migration out of Pakistan continue to be economic, political and security challenges**, including disasters triggered by natural hazards and climate impacts and the overall security situation in the region, **further exacerbated by current socio-economic and political realities**.

The country's economy has struggled to keep afloat with the help of the IMF programme and financial assistance from traditional allies China, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Currently, Pakistan faces an external debt repayment of \$24.6 billion due by the end of June 2024, with the new government seeking yet another IMF loan which will require additional austerity measures.⁵ The Pakistani rupee continued to feature as the worst-performing currency in 2023, with depreciation of 20% against the US dollar and losses seen extending into 2024. Official unemployment rate has reached a record-high of 8.5% and inflation amounted to 30%, pushing many below the poverty line.

¹ United Nations Population Fund: [World Population Dashboard -Pakistan | United Nations Population Fund \(unfpa.org\)](#).

² UN Women Gender Assessment of Skills Development and Overseas Employment Opportunities for Women in Pakistan with the aim to increase understanding the existing skills development opportunities for Pakistani women and their access to international labour migration

³ Government of Pakistan, statistics available at: [Reports & Statistics - Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment \(beoe.gov.pk\)](#).

⁴ Government of Pakistan, statistics available at: <https://beoe.gov.pk/files/statistics/2024/country.pdf>.

⁵ For more information, see IMF: [Pakistan and the IMF](#).



Gallup surveys conducted ahead the February 2024 general elections show Pakistanis' discontent with challenges threatening the country's stability rising to record high in the past 18 years, with the respondents strongly emphasising the deteriorating economic conditions and living standards.

The first months of 2024 have been marked by developments around the country's general elections which took place on 8 February. Prior to the elections, the country has been ruled by a caretaker government led by Shehbaz Sharif of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN), following Imran Khan's (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)) dismissal as Prime Minister in April 2022. PTI was banned from using the party logo, casting a shadow on the legitimacy of the vote considering that many illiterate voters could not recognise their choice on the ballot. **On 3 March, the new Parliament approved Shehbaz Sharif (PMLN) as Prime Minister.** Despite the low public confidence in the government, the Prime Minister is perceived as agreeable to the Pakistan's powerful military, which continues to play an important role in steering the country's politics.

Apart from being a country of origin for a significant population of migrants worldwide, **Pakistan has been an important country of destination for Afghans seeking refuge.** Over the past four decades Pakistan hosted a large Afghan population, becoming among the largest refugee-hosting countries.⁶ Pakistan accommodates over 3 million Afghans. Most of the documented Afghans came in one of the previous waves and include second and third generation, living in protracted displacement. Additionally, Pakistan hosts 830,000 people with Afghan Citizen cards, as well as 1 million undocumented Afghans, including 600,000 who have sought refuge after the Taliban takeover in 2021.⁷ In addition to being exposed to high level of vulnerability, compounded by uncertainties surrounding their legal status, limited livelihood opportunities, as well as the lack of legal or administrative mechanisms addressing the housing, land and property rights of refugees in Pakistan (especially women, girls and children)⁸, **many Afghans residing in Pakistan are currently faced with an imminent risk of being forcibly returned to Afghanistan.**

Amid securitisation of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan, which features prominently in the country's internal affairs discourse, recent policy changes in Pakistan have led to the institutionalisation of the decision to repatriate over one million foreigners without valid documents, predominantly affecting undocumented Afghans. Notably, under the Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan (IFRP), on 3 October 2023, Pakistan's national Apex Committee endorsed a repatriation programme of 'undocumented aliens', requiring them to leave the country by 1 November.⁹

The first round of implementation of the repatriation plan started in November 2023. According to UNHCR, from 15 September until 7 March over half a million Afghans have returned from Pakistan to Afghanistan. Most of this movement took place during the month of November, with a significant decrease afterwards, with January and the first half of February registering the lowest numbers.¹⁰ Undeterred by concerns voiced by human rights bodies and the UN, Pakistan seems determined to continue with its repatriation programme. A strong indication that the new government will continue the same course is found in the fact that the repatriation programme has also found its place in the 100-Day Work Plan.¹¹ Considering the aforementioned developments, **migration from Pakistan is likely to increase as individuals seek better economic opportunities and safety abroad.** Furthermore, for many Afghans in Pakistan facing an imminent threat of going back to a country undergoing serious humanitarian issues and human rights violations, the continuation of the repatriation policy could mean resorting to irregular means to reach other destinations in search for safety, potentially adding to the existing migration flows towards Türkiye and Europe.

⁶ UNHCR refugee statistics, available at: [unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/](https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/)

⁷ [Document - Regional Refugee Response Plan 2024-2025 - Afghanistan Situation \(unhcr.org\)](#), Situational overview for Pakistan, page 29.

⁸ See ICMPD's PARIM-II Final Report, March 2023.

⁹ See ICMPD's Parim-II Background Report "Migration Insights: Understanding onward migration dynamics among Afghan nationals in Pakistan", available at: [Migration Insights: Understanding onward migration dynamics among Afghan nationals in Pakistan \(icmpd.org\)](#).

¹⁰ See UNHCR's [Document - Pakistan-Afghanistan - Returns Emergency Response #11 \(unhcr.org\)](#)

¹¹ See Gallup poll at: [Pakistanis' Discontent Reaches Record High Before Election \(gallup.com\)](#)."



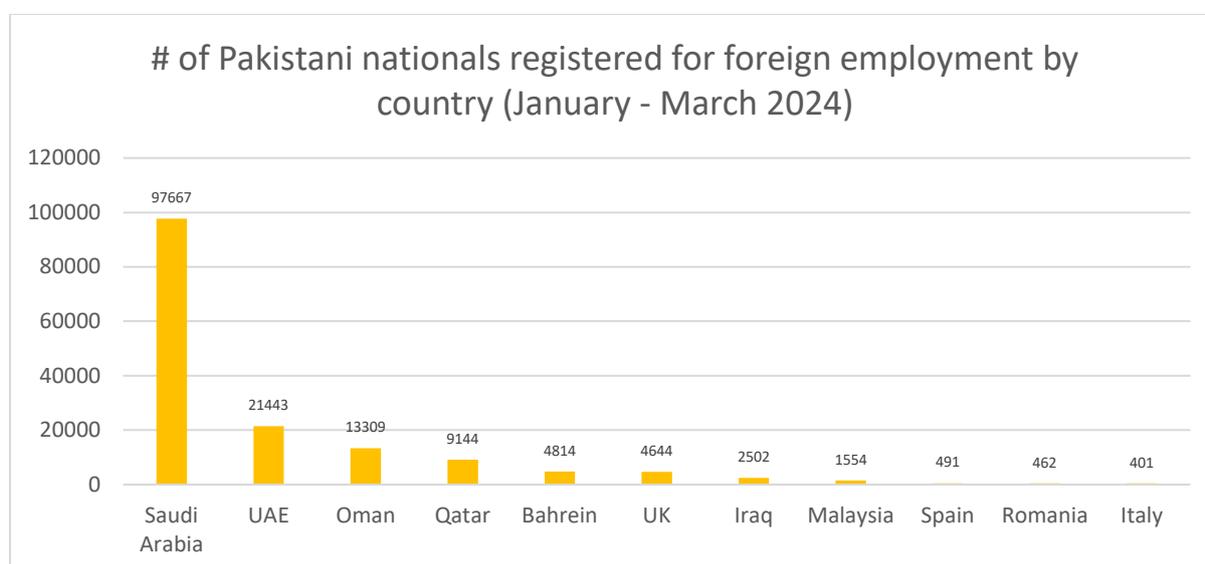
ENQUIRIES AND EMERGING TRENDS

Enquiries made to MRCs are a good indicator of possible trends. This is particularly relevant when it comes to topics of enquiry (and interest) as well as countries of interest. In addition, a lot of enquiries on processes and procedures highlight the importance of information sharing and awareness raising on regular pathways for migration, and what does not fall in that category.

Geographical related trends and enquiries: countries of interest

Enquiries related to specific regions and countries provide a good basis of interest and emerging trends. The most common countries to travel to for work are the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. However, there is an increase in travel and interest to Europe and other countries. (Source for the below: <https://beoe.gov.pk/reports-and-statistics> and MRC counsellors).

Figure 1: Number of Pakistani nationals registered for foreign employment by country (January-September 2023)



Source: BEOE

- **Middle East:** Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain are the common destinations (and listed from most to least popular). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia sees substantially more Pakistanis registered for employment abroad (Figure 1).
 - **UAE:** The BEOE data corroborate data gathered from the MRCs, that suggest an increasing trend in the number of queries from Pakistani nationals related to employment in the Gulf countries, even though the UAE had announced discontinuation of the labour visa in November 2023. MRC reports that there are still many workers from Pakistan moving to the UAE through direct employment visa and for entrepreneurial work. This method is more costly for the emigrant in essence and often implies support from family and friends as well.
- **Europe:** Italy, Romania, Spain and the UK
 - **United Kingdom:** A trend of outgoing migrants going to the UK on a care worker visa through direct employment after securing jobs through online applications, specifically women is noticed. The trend has continued to increase as well as the trend of dependant visas for the UK. This is corroborated by an [article](#) and [report](#) (“An inspection of the immigration system



as it relates to the social care sector” by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration) whereby the surge in care workers to the UK has been met with some issues in processing. Page 5 of the report mentions “The Home Office provided inspectors with numerous examples of organisations that had been granted a sponsor licence in questionable circumstances.” This indicated that the surge in movement to the UK could then lead to some workers not receiving the proper permits once they arrive in the UK.

- **Spain & Italy:** Most less skilled workers go to Spain and Italy whereas high skilled workers go to Australia.

REACH

Through the Migrants Resource Centres, there is a wide and varied reach to potential migrants which are presented into three categories: social media outreach, community/university outreach and counselling.

Social media outreach

The MRCs continued to reach Pakistani and Afghan nationals via a myriad of social media platforms. The MRCs reach out through the combined platforms of Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter and WhatsApp. **Facebook** continues to be the platform through which most people are reached. Some of the most seen posts are listed below as the most popular social media posts from December 2023 to March 2024. **The topics of interest are skilled labour, skill certification and scholarships.**

Date	Topic of post	Total reach
18/3/24	Reshare: Skilled workers Japan	5,345
22/01/24	European Commission Delegation along with ICMPD and participation in MRC Pakistan community outreach activity at Gujrat, District Punjab	3,630
27/12/23	Information about skill certification program RPL (Recognition of Prior learning)	9,930
19/12/23	Information about scholarship opportunities for Pakistani Students at Saudi Arabia	6,202

Counselling

In addition to in-person outreach, MRCs also individually counsel potential migrants on various emigration-related topics. These migrants typically reach out after hearing about the MRC through its social media campaign or after attending an MRC outreach event. From January to March 2024, the MRCs counselled a total of 1,222 people, of which 5% were women. The most queries in counselling focus on : Study abroad, MRC information, Family reunification/settlement/immigration and processes for safe and legal migration.

Contact information

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/PAKMRC>

Tel / Viber / Whatsapp Lahore: +92 300 0116671 | Islamabad: +92 306 0191919

Free hotline: 0304 1112123 **Skype:** mrcislamabad

Email: info@mrc.org.pk **Website:** <https://www.mrc.org.pk/en/>

