

# FROM PASSPORT TO PAYCHECK: AN INTEGRATED HUMAN RESOURCE (HR)-MIGRATION FRAMEWORK FOR PAKISTANI OVERSEAS WORKERS AND THE UNSEEN GAPS IN RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, AND REINTEGRATION

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## ABSTRACT

*This study addresses critical and underexplored dimensions of Pakistan's overseas employment system by proposing an integrated human resource (HR) framework that spans recruitment, skill development, employment abroad, and reintegration. Employing a qualitative meta-synthesis of academic literature, policy reports, and case studies, the research identifies systemic inefficiencies in HR practices, particularly highlighting the disjuncture between skill development programs and host-country labor market needs, insufficient post-deployment support mechanisms, and underrepresentation of women and rural workers. The findings culminate in the development of a novel Human Resource-Migration Cycle Model accompanied by strategic policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the governance of labor migration from Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** Overseas Employment, Human Resource Strategies, Migration Policy, Reintegration, Pakistani Workers, Skill Development, Labor Migration.

## INTRODUCTION

International labor migration has become an integral component of Pakistan's socio-economic strategy, with remittances playing a pivotal role in foreign exchange earnings and poverty alleviation. Despite this significance, academic and policy discourse has inadequately addressed the full spectrum of the migrant lifecycle, particularly the role of human resource (HR) processes in overseas labor markets. This study contributes to filling that gap by presenting a comprehensive Human Resource-Migration Cycle Model, which captures key stages from recruitment to reintegration, grounded in secondary research and comparative case analysis.

### 2. Literature Review

Overseas labor migration, particularly from South Asia, has received increasing academic attention due to its socio-economic implications for both

sending and receiving countries. However, HR-centric analyses within this migration discourse, particularly in the Pakistani context, remain sparse. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020) indicates that Pakistan's overseas labor deployment often operates without comprehensive HR frameworks. Most emigrants rely on informal channels, leading to a lack of standardization in recruitment, training, and post-deployment welfare. According to Rahman and Iqbal (2021), public-private coordination is insufficient to deliver consistent quality in the management of labor migration cycles.

Skill mismatch has emerged as a recurring concern. Shah (2019) found that the curricula developed under National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) and Technical Education and Vocational Training Authorities (TEVTAs)

rarely align with labor demand in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) or European markets. Ahmed (2018) similarly notes the inefficacy of pre-departure orientation programs, arguing they lack cultural, legal, and job-specific nuance needed for effective transition abroad. Gendered dimensions of migration have been under-addressed in policy and research. Khan, Javed, and Fatima (2022) highlight how systemic and cultural barriers marginalize women's participation in formal migration schemes, despite increasing demand for female caregivers and healthcare workers in countries like Italy and South Korea.

Geographical disparities also shape emigration outcomes. Workers from peripheral provinces such as Gilgit-Baltistan and Balochistan face

structural exclusion from overseas employment pipelines due to limited access to training, documentation, and institutional support (Hussain & Chaudhry, 2020). Moreover, reintegration of returnees remains an unresolved challenge.

World Bank (2021) reports that returning workers often lack formal recognition of skills acquired abroad, and there is minimal infrastructure to guide their economic reintegration through entrepreneurship, job placement, or social support programs. Overall, literature underscores the need for a coherent, lifecycle-based HR strategy tailored to both domestic capacities and international market demands.

**Table 1: Alignment of Pakistani Vocational Training with Host Country Skill Demands**

Host Country	Sector	Skill Level Demand	Alignment with NAVTTC Programs	Observed Gap
Saudi Arabia	Construction	High	Medium	Safety certifications lacking
UAE	Hospitality	High	Low	Communication and language skills
Italy	Healthcare	Medium	Low	Geriatric care missing
Romania	Agriculture	Medium	Medium	Limited practical exposure
South Korea	Manufacturing	High	Medium	Outdated technical curricula

### 3. Research Gap

While labor migration from Pakistan has been studied from economic and social remittance perspectives, significant gaps persist in understanding the full lifecycle of labor migration through a human resource management lens. Existing studies often treat recruitment, skill development, migration, and reintegration as separate phenomena rather than interconnected stages in a continuum. Additionally, the influence of host country policies, gender and geographic disparities, and the lack of a centralized reintegration mechanism are either under-theorized or completely absent in the literature. Most critically, no integrated model exists that links the quality of human resource strategies in Pakistan with the economic and social outcomes for migrants abroad and upon return.

### 4. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative meta-synthesis of secondary data, combining insights from peer-reviewed journals, government reports, and international labor publications. A comparative case approach was adopted to analyze labor migration systems across key destination countries, including those in the Gulf region, Eastern and Southern Europe, and East Asia.

### 5. Conceptual Framework

This study proposes the Human Resource-Migration Cycle Model (HR-MCM), a conceptual framework designed to capture the entire migration trajectory as an HR-managed continuum. The model encompasses four primary stages:

**a. Recruitment:** Evaluates transparency, cost, and formalization of recruitment channels to ensure ethical sourcing and accurate job-matching.

**b. Training and Pre-Departure Orientation:** Assesses the alignment of vocational training with host country labor demands, in addition to preparing migrants with job-specific, legal, and cultural competencies required abroad.

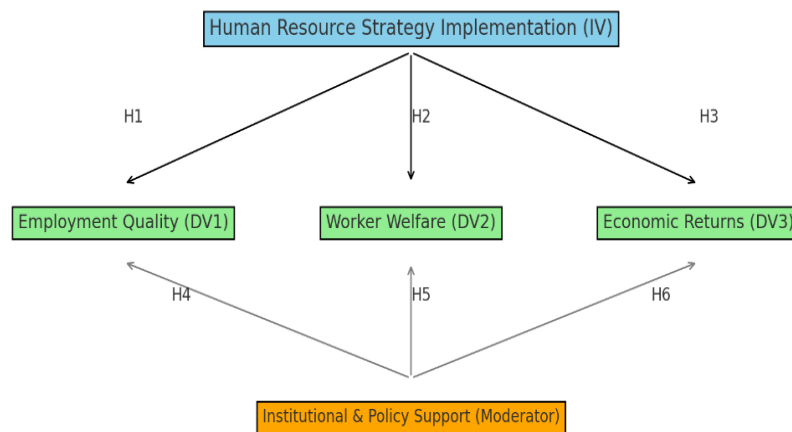
**c. Deployment and Onsite Welfare:** Examines workplace safety, access to legal redress, employment benefits, healthcare services, and protections against wage exploitation in the host country.

**d. Reintegration Support:** Involves structured programs to support returnees, such as business start-up assistance, recognition of overseas skills, job placement services, and psychological support.

A central feature of the model is its recognition of **Institutional and Policy Support** as a key moderating variable. This includes the role of

government institutions, bilateral labor agreements, monitoring mechanisms, and migration-specific regulatory frameworks. Institutional and policy support enhances or diminishes the strength of the relationship between HR strategy implementation and each outcome—Employment Quality, Worker Welfare, and Economic Returns. The model thus provides a comprehensive lens to assess both systemic readiness and cross-border linkages necessary to optimize migration outcomes. This model is moderated by three key external variables: institutional and policy support, host country labor regulations, & reintegration infrastructure. These moderators influence the strength and direction of the impact of HR strategy implementation on employment quality, worker welfare, economic returns, as elaborated in the hypotheses.

**Conceptual Model: HR Strategy Implementation and Migration Outcomes**



*Figure 1*

## 6. Hypotheses

**H1:** Human Resource Strategy Implementation positively influences Employment Quality.

**H2:** Human Resource Strategy Implementation positively influences Worker Welfare.

**H3:** Human Resource Strategy Implementation positively influences Economic Returns.

**H4:** The relationship between HR Strategy Implementation and Employment Quality is moderated by Institutional and Policy Support.

**H5:** The relationship between HR Strategy Implementation and Worker Welfare is moderated by Institutional and Policy Support.

**H6:** The relationship between HR Strategy Implementation and Economic Returns is moderated by Institutional and Policy Support.

### 7. Comparative Case Analysis

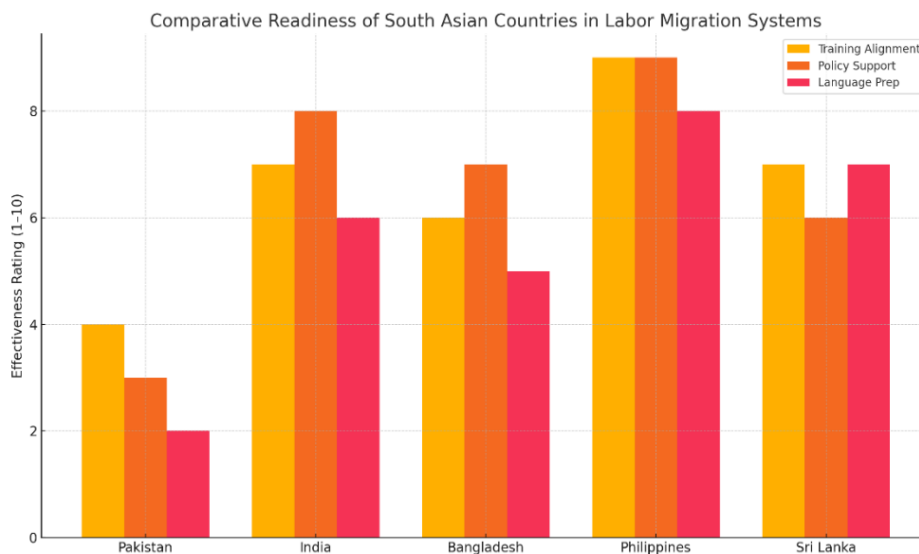


Figure 2

Comparative trends in labor migration reveal that Pakistan lags behind regional peers such as India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines in terms of institutional readiness and skill alignment. For instance, India’s Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PKVY) scheme and Bangladesh’s Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) have effectively integrated host country feedback into training modules. In contrast, Pakistan’s NAVTTC programs often lack such dynamic updating, leading to lower employability abroad (Srivastava, 2013).

Moreover, while the Philippines has formalized bilateral labor agreements with countries such as Japan and South Korea that stipulate welfare protections and reintegration clauses, Pakistan’s bilateral engagements remain transactional and limited in scope. This restricts the long-term socio-economic mobility of its migrant workers (ILO, 2020). Additionally, linguistic preparedness in countries like Sri Lanka, where outbound migrants often receive targeted language training for Arabic,

Korean, or Japanese, places their workforce at a relative advantage. Pakistani emigrants, by contrast, frequently face language barriers that hinder integration and reduce earning potential (Shah, 2019).

The above highlighted disparities show the importance of reconfiguring Pakistan’s migration infrastructure to emphasize forward-compatible training, international benchmarking, and institutional negotiation capacity. This section compares HR strategy outcomes across key labor-receiving countries—specifically Saudi Arabia, UAE, Italy, Romania, and South Korea. These countries vary in their legal frameworks, training integration, and reintegration initiatives, offering insights into which HR practices yield the best outcomes for Pakistani migrants. The comparison helps contextualize Pakistan’s gaps in workforce preparation, welfare protection, and post-return support.

Table 2: Comparative Effectiveness of HR Strategies in Key Destination Countries

Country	Recruitment Formality	Training Alignment	Welfare Support	Reintegration Linkages	Overall HR Effectiveness
Saudi Arabia	Medium	Low	Basic	Weak	Low
UAE	Medium	Medium	Moderate	Weak	Medium
Italy	High	Medium	Good	Moderate	Medium-High
Romania	Low	Low	Poor	Very Weak	Low
South Korea	High	High	Strong	Structured	High

### 8. Challenges and Constraints

Pakistani emigrants encounter a broad array of challenges both pre-departure and post-arrival. Common overseas challenges include:

a. **Legal and Documentation Barriers:** Many migrants report lacking adequate legal protection and understanding of their rights in host countries, particularly in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states.

b. **Wage Theft and Contract Substitution:** Employers in some host countries modify agreed employment terms after arrival, resulting in exploitation and wage delays.

c. **Harsh Working Conditions:** Emigrants often endure long hours without proper health and safety standards, especially in construction and domestic labor sectors.

d. **Limited Access to Healthcare:** Many Pakistani workers, especially those in low-skilled jobs, do not receive proper medical coverage.

e. **Language and Cultural Barriers:** Communication gaps affect job performance, safety, and social integration.

f. **Social Isolation and Mental Health Issues:** Migrants frequently experience loneliness and psychological stress due to prolonged separation from families and harsh work environments.

g. **Skills and Language Mismatch:** A significant proportion of the workforce being sent abroad lacks the technical qualifications, language proficiency, or soft skills required by employers in host countries. This mismatch results in underemployment, increased vulnerability, and hinders long-term career progression abroad.

Table 3: Common Challenges Faced by Pakistani Migrants by Region

Region	Legal Issues	Working Conditions	Healthcare Access	Language/Cultural Barriers
Gulf (e.g., KSA, UAE)	Contract substitution, weak legal aid	High temperature, long hours	Employer-dependent	Arabic fluency lacking
South Europe (e.g., Italy, Greece)	Irregular documentation, informal work	Seasonal, underpaid farm jobs	Limited public insurance	Lack of Italian/Greek proficiency
Eastern Europe (e.g., Romania, Poland)	Visa irregularities, contract ambiguity	Industrial jobs with safety risks	Basic access	Minimal language training
East Asia (e.g., Korea, Japan)	Complex legal systems, strict policies	Regulated, but long shifts	Good, but access varies	High language learning curve

Domestically, systemic barriers include:

a. **Fragmented Recruitment Channels:** Overreliance on unlicensed middlemen leads to misinformation and inflated migration costs.

b. **Misalignment of Training Programs:** National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTC) curricula often do not reflect the demands of foreign labor markets.

c. **Underrepresentation of Women and Marginalized Groups:** Structural and cultural biases limit the participation of women and rural populations in overseas employment schemes.

d. **Inadequate Reintegration Mechanisms:** Returning workers often lack financial literacy, access to local job markets, or entrepreneurship support.

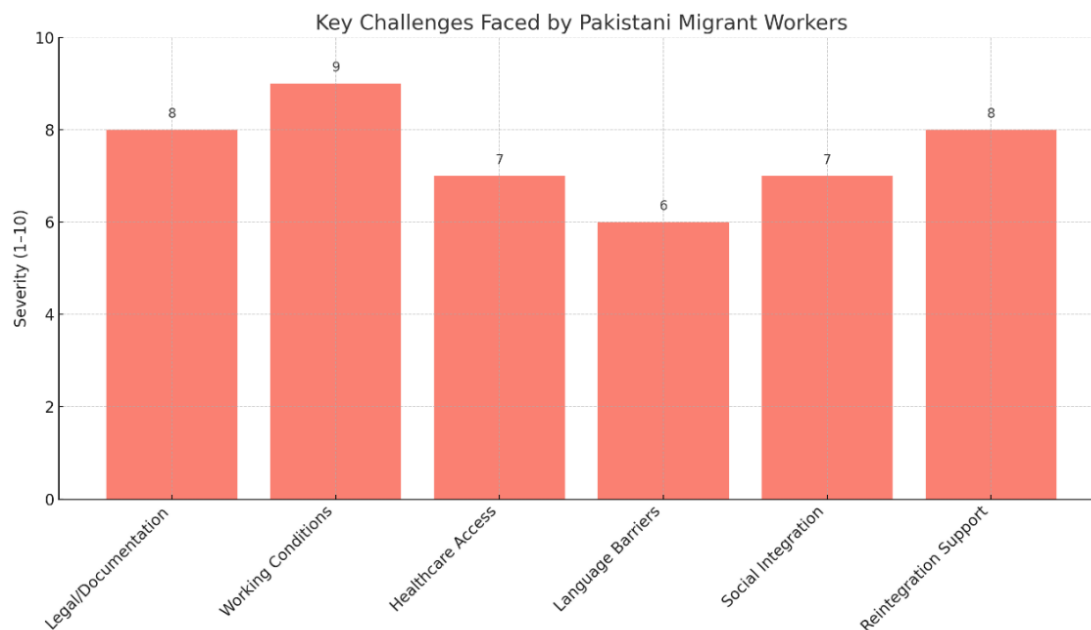


Figure 3

### 9. Findings

The subject study’s findings substantiate the multi-dimensional influence of HR strategy implementation across key stages of the migration lifecycle. Each hypothesis is analyzed below:

a. **H1:** Evidence from South Korea and select EU destinations shows that formalized recruitment procedures, transparent contracts, and regulatory oversight enhance job matching accuracy, affirming that HR strategy implementation significantly improves employment quality.

b. **H2:** Worker welfare correlates positively with structured HR mechanisms that ensure timely payment, grievance redress, access to healthcare, and decent living conditions. These systems are notably robust in countries with clear labor laws and effective enforcement bodies, validating H2.

c. **H3:** Reintegration programs in countries like the Philippines show that structured return plans, skill certification, and entrepreneurship support lead to

improved post-migration livelihoods. These examples corroborate the role of HR strategies in maximizing long-term economic returns.

d. **H4-H6:** The moderating role of Institutional and Policy Support is pronounced. In contexts with strong institutional support (e.g., government-to-government recruitment, bilateral agreements, reintegration funds), the effect of HR strategies on each DV is amplified. Conversely, in countries with fragmented oversight or weak institutional channels, positive influence of HR initiatives is often diluted. Hence, all 3 moderating hypotheses are supported. Collectively, these findings reinforce the need for integrated and policy-aligned HR frameworks that function across borders and address the entire migration cycle—from departure to return. Secondly, **worker welfare is directly correlated with legal protections and social support in host countries**, affirming H2. Migrants in countries with established labor laws and welfare systems experience fewer violations and better living conditions.

Table 4: Reintegration Challenges for Returning Pakistani Migrants

Challenge Area	Description	Impact
Skill Recognition	Overseas-acquired skills not formally certified or accepted in Pakistan	Limits employability and income mobility
Financial Management	Lack of guidance on managing remittance income or starting businesses	Leads to poor investments and economic instability

Challenge Area	Description	Impact
Psychosocial Adjustment	Returnees often face identity loss, depression, and lack of social reintegration	Impacts mental health and social cohesion
Employment Placement	No formal job-matching system for returnees	Increases risk of underemployment or unemployment
Institutional Support	Weak coordination among government departments	Reduces effectiveness of reintegration schemes

Thirdly, the study finds that reintegration support structures—such as skills certification, business grants, and placement services—are crucial for sustaining economic returns post-migration, validating H3. Countries investing in reintegration, like the Philippines, provide replicable models. These results emphasize that effective HR strategies must be comprehensive, crossing the borders of deployment and rooted in institutional capacity building.

### 10. Policy Recommendations

Drawing on the comparative analysis and empirical findings, the following policy measures are proposed to strengthen Pakistan's overseas labor migration governance:

a. **Standardize Recruitment Practices:** Implement robust regulations and monitoring mechanisms to ensure transparent and ethical recruitment. Government-to-government (G2G) channels should be expanded to reduce reliance on informal agents and to lower migration costs.

b. **Align Training Programs with Market Demands:** Upgrade and regionalize the curricula under NAVTTC and TEVTAs to match skill demands in target destination countries. Partnerships with international employers should guide curriculum development and certification frameworks.

c. **Institutionalize Pre-Departure Programs:** Expand and enforce standardized pre-departure orientations, covering legal rights, workplace expectations, financial literacy, and cultural norms. These should be made mandatory and tailored by destination.

d. **Promote Gender and Geographic Inclusion:** Develop migration strategies that actively recruit women and individuals from underrepresented regions through targeted

outreach, scholarships, and safe migration corridors.

e. **Strengthen Welfare Support in Host Countries:** Foster labor attaché coordination, enhance consular grievance redressal mechanisms, and establish migrant welfare committees to monitor living and working conditions.

f. **Establish Comprehensive Reintegration Programs:** Create reintegration centers that provide job placement services, skill recognition systems, business incubation support, and psychosocial services for returnees. Reintegration funds and diaspora investment incentives should also be explored.

g. **Leverage Bilateral and Multilateral Agreements:** Prioritize the signing and enforcement of labor agreements that stipulate worker protections, skill recognition, and welfare guarantees, ensuring long-term diplomatic alignment between sending and receiving states.

h. **Invest in Migration Data and Research:** Develop a centralized labor migration information system to guide evidence-based policy and monitor outcomes across the entire migration cycle. These recommendations aim to create a sustainable migration governance ecosystem that integrates labor market needs, worker rights, and national development goals.

### 11. Conclusion

The study underscores the critical need for an integrated Human Resource-Migration Framework that spans the entire migrant lifecycle—from recruitment and training to deployment and reintegration. The research establishes that effective HR strategy implementation significantly enhances employment quality, worker welfare, and economic outcomes for migrants. These benefits,

however, are contingent on robust institutional and policy support. Through a synthesis of secondary data and comparative international analysis, the study identifies clear structural and strategic gaps in Pakistan's current overseas employment ecosystem. Mismatched skill supply, fragmented recruitment channels, limited reintegration mechanisms, and underutilized institutional capacity hinder the realization of full potential as a tool for national development. The proposed Human Resource-Migration Cycle Model addresses these deficits by emphasizing lifecycle-based planning, inclusive policies, and strategic alignment with host country labor markets. By operationalizing this framework through coordinated policy reforms and institutional investments, Pakistan can enhance its labor export outcomes while safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of its migrant workforce. In sum, the success of overseas labor migration hinges not merely on economic demand abroad but on the readiness and adaptability of sending country's HR infrastructure. A strategic overhaul, grounded in the recommendations outlined, can make overseas employment a more equitable and developmental pillar of Pakistan's economic policy.

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