

GENDER ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT & OVERSEAS EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN PAKISTAN

GENDER ASSESSMENT OF
SKILLS DEVELOPMENT &
OVERSEAS EMPLOYMENT
OPPORTUNITIES
FOR WOMEN IN PAKISTAN



This publication is based on the Gender Assessment of Skills Development and Overseas Employment Opportunities for Women in Pakistan commissioned under the Governance of Labour Migration in South and Southeast Asia (GOALS) programme. The GOALS programme is jointly implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The views expressed in this publication are of the author alone and are not necessarily the views of SDC.

Authors:

Dr. Muhammad Saifullah Chaudhry

Technical review:

Fareeha Ummar, Huma Gul, Nansiri Iamsuk and Zarene Asif Zuberi

Copy Editor:

Peter James

Design:

Mercari Asia Limited

Acknowledgements

Under the overall supervision of UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in collaboration with UN Women Pakistan Office, the assessment was conducted by Dr. Muhammad Saifullah Chaudhry. UN Women is grateful to the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development of Pakistan for their advice and inputs to the study, and to Dr. Chaudry for his dedication to data collection and analysis and preparation of this report.

The assessment further benefited from invaluable contributions from key labour migration stakeholders in Pakistan from the government, expert organizations, civil society and the private sector. This includes Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment, Protectorate of Emigrations, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH, Migrant Resource Centre, National Vocational & Technical Training Commission, Overseas Employment Corporation, Overseas Employment Promoter, Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority in Karachi and in Lahore, Pakistan Overseas Employment Promoters Association, Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority, and Private Skills Training Providers, Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi, and importantly former and aspiring women migrant workers and their families and several other stakeholders.

Also, UN Women gratefully acknowledges the technical contributions of ILO and IOM colleagues and support from UN Women regional and Pakistan teams. Lastly, UN Women would like to thank the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) for their generous support for the assessment and the Governance of Labour Migration in South and Southeast Asia (GOALS) programme.

Table of Contents

List of Acronyms	8
Executive Summary	9
1. Introduction	12
2. Research Objectives	13
3. Research Design	13
4. Research Methodology	14
5. Literature Review	14
6. Key Findings: Destination Countries	15
6.1 GCC countries: Employment trends for overseas workers	15
6.2 Unique challenges of Pakistan women migrant workers in GCC countries	16
7. Key Findings: Supply-side gender barriers	16
7.1 Gender lens on public- and private-sector skills training providers	16
7.2 Training gender gaps in Punjab and Sindh provinces	21
7.3 Skills training for overseas employment	22
7.4 The gender gap in the training sector's community outreach	23
7.5 Marriage and women's skills training and employment	23
7.6 Gender training for skills training providers	23
7.7 Women's views about the quality of skills training	24
8. Gender Issues among Regulators of Overseas Employment and Stakeholders	24
8.1 Gender lens on overseas migration and destination countries	24
8.2 Demand for women workers in destination countries	26
8.3 Regulatory bodies of overseas migration	28
8.3.1 Processing of women's overseas work applications	28
8.3.2 Complaint mechanisms	28
8.3.3 Male family member's written consent	28
8.3.4 Excessive documentation	29
8.3.5 Skills recognition for returned migrant workers	29
8.3.6 Migrant Resource Centres	29
8.3.7 Gender training for Protectorate staff	29
8.4 Age barrier for women overseas care workers	29
9. Gender Considerations among Recruiters of Overseas Workers	30
9.1 Private-sector recruiters	30
9.1.1 Securing demand for Pakistan workers and gender barriers	30

9.1.2	Gender perspectives among workers recruiters	31
9.1.3	POEPA collaboration with other stakeholders	31
9.2	The public-sector recruiter and higher demand for health-care workers	32
9.2.1	Emerging demand for home care workers	32
9.2.2	Linking workers and employers online	32
9.2.3	Need to strengthen workers' soft skills	32
10.	Key Findings: Society's Expectations of Women	33
10.1	Gender roles and responsibilities	33
10.2	Women's access to skills training opportunities	34
10.3	Access to overseas employment information and opportunities	34
10.4	Decision-making about skills training and overseas employment	35
10.4.1	Decision-making about skills training	35
10.4.2	Decision-making about overseas employment	35
10.5	Social norms	36
10.5.1	Men's honour vs. women's employment	36
10.5.2	Women's incomes	36
10.5.3	Gender-based violence	36
10.5.4	Marriage vs. employment	37
10.5.5	Moral duty bearers	37
11.	Conclusion	37
12.	Recommendations	38
12.1	For government policymakers	38
12.2	For the regulator of overseas migration	38
12.3	For promoters of overseas employment	38
12.4	For skills training providers	39
12.5	For trade unions, women's rights organizations, and other stakeholders	39
13.	Annexes	40
	Annex-A: List of research participants	40
	Annex B-1: Percentage share of Pakistan women migrant workers to GCC countries	43
	Annex B-2: Jobs Pakistan women workers found abroad, 2019-2022 up to 15 August	44

List of Acronyms

BEOE	Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MRC	Migrant Resource Centre
NAVTTTC	National Vocational & Technical Training Commission
OEC	Overseas Employment Corporation
OEP	Overseas Employment Promoter
Punjab TEVTA	Punjab Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority
POEPA	Pakistan Overseas Employment Promoters Association
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
Sindh TEVTA	Sindh Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
TEVTA	Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Executive Summary

Fewer women from Pakistan migrate for overseas employment than from any other country in South Asia. In 2017, women accounted for 12.1 per cent and 21.8 per cent of the total number of migrant workers from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, respectively.¹ On the other hand, the Pakistan Government's Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE) says that during 2008-2013 only 6,444 Pakistan women went abroad for employment, a mere 0.1 per cent of the country's total migrant labour flow. **In 2019, of the total 620,000 Pakistanis who went abroad for employment, only 4,079 were women.**² Most of these women worked in Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates as cleaners, housemaids, accountants, salespeople, beauticians and health professionals.

Even domestically, few women engage in formal work in Pakistan. According to the Pakistan Labour Force Survey 2020-21, **the labour force participation rate for women is 21.4 per cent; 77.7 per cent of women workers do informal labour in rural areas; and 41.8 per cent of women workers are unpaid.** Even among young women (ages 15-29), **only 21 per cent are part of the labour force, compared to 72 per cent of young men.**

This research, done during May-July 2022, aimed to understand the gender-based barriers that limit Pakistan women from benefiting from overseas employment. Such an understanding can help efforts to empower women economically and socially. Women migrant workers can contribute to Pakistan's social and economic development through remittances and knowledge, skills and experience acquired abroad.

The researcher did several focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with a total of 56 women in Lahore, Karachi and Rawalpindi (Pakistan), and in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia) who could potentially work abroad or currently work abroad. The

researcher also interviewed 25 policymakers and managers of institutions involved in overseas migration and the Government's Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority.

The research found that deep-rooted patriarchal norms about the role of women in family and society act as the main barriers to women's labour force participation, and make overseas employment unimaginable for many women. These norms operate in five domains:

Roles and responsibilities

The gender norms around roles and responsibilities may not affect girls' access to primary education but they do affect their access to skills training. Parents do not attach much importance to their daughters' career planning and instead focus on getting them married. Even when the daughters do get skills training, their choices are narrowed to gender-stereotypical options like cooking, stitching and beautician work. One elderly woman said: **"Many girls during my grandmother's time were not allowed to go to school. During my mother's generation, education for girls and skills like stitching and cooking were socially accepted, but not jobs that much. Now many girls can even learn non-stereotypical skills and do jobs too. However, household management and childcare remained with women and girls. Men's roles over the generations have not changed."**

Access and control

Several gender-based barriers hinder women's ability to access skills training. These include lack of financial resources, harassment while commuting alone to and from training centres, and gender stereotypes around the type of training women should take. **"There are so many girls who will never have an opportunity to learn a skill like this due to financial constraints and mobility concerns,"** one woman said. Overseas

¹International Labour Organization, *Labour Mobility between Asia and the Arab States: Sharing of Experiences and Progress under the Bali Declaration with Specific Focus on Women Migrant Workers* (Geneva, 2020). Available from https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS_754661/lang--en/index.htm.

²Pakistan, Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment, "Annual Analysis of Manpower Export 2019," Islamabad, 2020. Available from <https://beoe.gov.pk/files/statistics/yearly-reports/2019/2019-full.pdf>.

“Men do not like to see their women sitting in front of other men. Most men do not like other men to see their female family members. Men think that other men will always cast a lewd look at their women. It is why most men do not want their women to go out for anything or allow them to interact with other men. Therefore, men do not want their women to do employment where women need to interact with other men.”

employment was not on the minds of almost all the women participants of this research who were either doing or had just completed skills training. Typically, many families defer even local employment decisions to their daughters’ future husbands.

Decision-making

Most of the young women participants in this research were not able to independently decide the type of skills training to take. More often than not, they would end up doing courses aligned with stereotypical roles. One young woman said, **“My family asked me to take a beautician course instead of computer skills, and with much difficulty, I managed to convince my father otherwise.”** Families do not readily allow young women to find employment at all, much less overseas employment. Another young woman summed it up: **“Most girls are not even allowed to go outside the house alone. How can you talk about going outside the country for a job?”**

Social norms

The women said that parents and young women prefer marriage over employment and careers. A Punjabi nurse said: **“Marriage has become a hurdle for women seeking overseas employment. In-laws can block such choice of a woman. However, if the husband also comes abroad, then it is different.”** The women said that in most cases, the family’s decision about marriage hinders their ability to work locally or overseas. Women who are engaged to be married must obtain permission from their future husbands and in-laws if they wish to work.

The women research participants also said

Pakistan society does not approve of women making incomes. One woman migrant worker said, **“The men whose female family members do employment or earn an income are stigmatized and demeaned -- they depend upon payments from their women and hence are less of a man.”**

Some of the older women were candid about the central construct of patriarchy – men’s “honour”. One woman migrant worker said: **“Men do not like to see their women sitting in front of other men. Most men do not like other men to see their female family members. Men think that other men will always cast a lewd look at their women. It is why most men do not want their women to go out for anything or allow them to interact with other men. Therefore, men do not want their women to do employment where women need to interact with other men.”**

Role of moral duty bearers

The say of male family members (father, brother or husband) is central to any decisions women make about skills training or overseas employment. A male family member’s permission is necessary for a woman to take an overseas job. If the husband does not allow it, it is impossible for a married woman to go abroad.

The Government’s National Skills for All Strategy 2018 identifies several barriers limiting women’s participation in skills training. These include gender norms about women’s roles and suitable occupations; limited mobility of women and girls; their lack of access to information about training opportunities and career guidance; and employers’ attitudes.

The Government over the years has tried to improve the technical and vocational education

and training system. Still, more efforts are needed to make the system meet the needs of the local and international labour markets and to make the system more gender-responsive.

The skills training ecosystem reflects society's gender norms. In 2017-2018 total enrollment in public- and private-sector technical and vocational training institutes in Pakistan stood at 433,237, **34 per cent of them women**. The few women in technical skills training were concentrated around non-engineering-related courses. **In vocational training, women were concentrated in courses perceived as suited to their gender, such as stitching and cooking.** Skills training providers do not necessarily include the real decision makers on women's skills training -- the fathers, brothers and husbands -- in their community outreach.

Since 2021 the Government of Pakistan has taken several measures to enable skills training providers to help workers acquire quality skills and find overseas employment. However, these measures have primarily enabled the export of male workers to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries for construction and related work.

The Government also has taken measures to facilitate processing women's applications for overseas work. The Government's Protectorate of Emigrants Offices, which are responsible for checking if a worker privately secured overseas employment contract adequately protects the worker, now fast-track the applications of women and highly qualified workers.

Still, some regulations and practices hinder women from working abroad. People must submit several official documents to the Protectorate office to get clearance for employment abroad. Women must present a "no-objection" certificate from male family members, even though it is not part of any legal requirement. BEOE says that this is done to protect the women. Also, the Emigration Ordinance 1979 only allows women 35 and over to go abroad to work as housemaids, nannies or governesses, whereas there is no such age restriction on men for overseas migration.

BEOE maintains that older women are more likely to be able to understand their contracts and working conditions while illiterate young women would find it more difficult.

The private companies that recruit people for overseas work seem to have two competing views on women's overseas employment. One view is grounded in rigid patriarchal norms that disapprove of women's overseas employment. The other is more progressive and promotes such employment. The recruiters need systematic gender-sensitivity training to proactively seek employment opportunities for women and to help them get trained and apply for those jobs while mobilizing support from their male family members.

Opportunities for women abroad appear to be expanding. For example, demand for Pakistani women health-care workers in GCC countries has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. The public-sector Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC) says that the emerging sector for workers from Pakistan is the care sector in Germany, Italy, United States of America, and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, countries with ageing populations.

In conclusion, any effort to promote skills training and overseas employment for women must consider the gender-based barriers that women in Pakistan face in family and society. There is a need to engage families, particularly male family members, to support women in skills training so they can participate in the labour market locally and abroad. At the same time, skills training providers need to offer training in those trades where women can find gainful employment locally and abroad.

OEC and recruiters need to obtain a better share of women's employment opportunities from the GCC market and beyond and more strongly support women in getting those jobs. The practice of Protectorate offices asking women to provide no-objection certificates from their male family members to grant them permission for overseas employment needs to be revised, along with the ban on under-35 women for household work.

1. Introduction

In collaboration with International Labour Organization (ILO) and International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) is implementing a three-year programme (August 2020 – January 2024), Governance of Labour Migration in South and Southeast Asia (GOALS), supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The programme aims to enhance safe, orderly and regular labour migration from the Colombo Process Member States through strengthened collaboration among labour-sending and destination countries and effective labour migration governance, both national and regional. As part of the programme, the Gender Assessment of Skills Development and Overseas Employment Opportunities for Women in Pakistan was conducted with the aim to increase evidence to inform dialogues, policymaking and programming.

In a 2018 report, ILO said in 2017 there were 23 million migrant workers in countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), 39 per cent of them women.³ Asia continues to be the largest source of women workers in the GCC countries and over three-quarters of Asian women migrants there do domestic work. The GCC countries also host the highest proportion of men in household work globally. Men generally perform segmented roles such as drivers, guards, gardeners, and to a lesser extent, cooks. On the other hand, women are overwhelmingly employed as general household workers with duties such as cooking, cleaning and care work. Some women migrants do play critical roles in business management and administration, health care, and education.

Several departments deal directly or indirectly with overseas migrant workers. Under the

Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE) and its nine Protectorate of Emigrants offices directly manage and regulate overseas employment.

Data from BEOE show that during 2011-2022 up to June, more than 6.77 million people migrated for overseas employment, almost all of them men. Of the total, 97 per cent went to the GCC countries, mostly Saudi Arabia (50 per cent) and United Arab Emirates (37 per cent).⁴ BEOE says that during 2008-2013 only 6,444 women went abroad for employment, a mere 0.1 per cent of all workers who went abroad during that period. Most of these women went to Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates to work as cleaners, housemaids, accountants, saleswomen, beauticians and health-care professionals.⁵

The public-sector Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC) maintains sex-disaggregated data that show that during 2012-2022 up to June, it sent 11,223 workers (22 per cent of them women) overseas for employment. In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic increased demand for Pakistani health-care workers in GCC countries; of the total 1,632 workers (of all kinds) OEC sent abroad in 2021, 75 per cent were women health-care workers.⁶

Policy, structural, sociocultural and other barriers might have caused the dismal participation of Pakistan women in overseas employment. The policy barring women under 35 from seeking household care work jobs abroad is one such structural barrier.

This gender assessment of the skills training and overseas employment ecosystem in Pakistan identifies supply-side barriers that limit skills training providers and overseas employment recruiters from delivering gender-responsive

³International Labour Organization, ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers – Results and Methodology – Second edition (reference year 2017) (Geneva, 2018). Available from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_652029.pdf

⁴Calculated using data provided by Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment. Available from <https://beoe.gov.pk/files/statistics/2022/country.pdf>.

⁵Sabur Ghayur, *From Pakistan to the Gulf Region: An Analysis of Links between Labour Markets, Skills and the Migration Cycle* (Islamabad, GIZ and ILO, 2016). Available from https://www.ilo.org/islamabad/whatwedo/publications/WCMS_532696/lang--en/index.htm.

⁶Data provided by the Overseas Employment Corporation to this research.

services. On the demand side, this assessment identifies the patriarchal barriers that inhibit women from seeking appropriate technical and vocational skills training and from obtaining overseas employment.

In Pakistan, rigid patriarchal norms promote inequalities for women in diverse domains of their daily lives. These domains include inequalities in the distribution of roles and responsibilities inside and outside the household; access to and control over resources; and participation in family decision-making. This research analyses the social norms around women and technical skills training. It also examines how women benefit or do not benefit from overseas employment opportunities. It examines the role of male family members (“moral duty bearers”) of the women and institutions responsible for delivering skills training and overseas employment services (“formal duty bearers”).

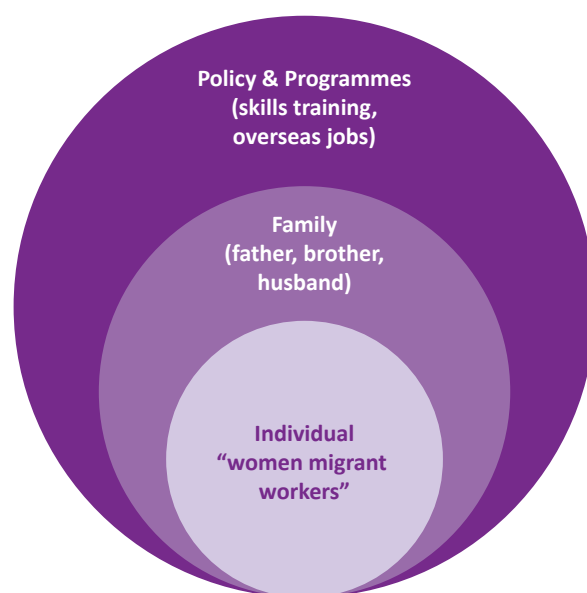
2. Research Objectives

The research for this report was done during May-July 2022. It aimed to:

- Assess current skills development opportunities and the gender dynamics within occupational and skills categories
- Examine gender barriers within the public- and private-sector recruiting systems for overseas employment, focusing on GCC countries
- Analyse the specific challenges and experiences of women currently working in GCC countries and potential women migrant workers (those qualified to find overseas employment if they wished to do so)
- Examine gender-based barriers and norms that women experience in family and community, in terms of accessing overseas employment
- Establish evidence to contribute to inclusive and gender-responsive policymaking on skills development and labour migration to GCC countries

3. Research Design

This research followed a social-ecological model that considers the multifaceted and interactive effects of personal and social environment factors in determining behaviours. The model suggests that individual behaviour is affected by multiple levels of influence, and that individual behaviour shapes and is shaped by the social environment.⁷ This research used this model to understand the root causes of the dismal numbers of Pakistan women going overseas for employment by examining the issue at three levels:



- **Individual:** the woman’s knowledge, skills and self-efficacy in seeking appropriate skills training that would enable her to obtain overseas employment and the challenges experienced while working overseas
- **Family and community:** the immediate male family members (moral duty bearers: fathers brothers and husbands) who influence women’s behaviour and life choices, including about education, skills training and employment
- **State policy and institutions:** the public- and private-sector skills training providers, recruiters for overseas employment, and policymakers who formulate and govern overseas jobs and skills training.

⁷Kenneth R. McLeroy and others, “An ecological perspective on health promotion programs”, *Health Education Quarterly*, 15(4) 1988). Available from https://www.cceb.med.upenn.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/chbr/1988-McLeroy-An_Ecological_Perspective_on_Health_Promotion_Programs.pdf.

4. Research Methodology

The researcher used a qualitative research methodology. Using a gender lens, the researcher did a literature review and a desk review of national quantitative data on the technical and vocational skills training system and on overseas migration. To collect primary data, several qualitative tools, discussions and interviews with women trainees/workers and officials were done in close collaboration with and technical inputs from UN Women. Since BEOE data show that about 90 per cent of women overseas migrant workers come from Punjab and Sindh provinces and are more likely to come from the urban centres, the researcher interviewed and held focus group discussions with women from Islamabad/Rawalpindi, Lahore and Karachi.

The researcher did six focus group discussions with a total of 54 women. Four of these discussions were done with a total of 46 women in Lahore and Karachi who were skilled or were about to graduate from training in range of occupations and so were qualified to go abroad for employment if they wished to do so. The other two discussions were done in Rawalpindi with a total of eight women who were going to work in GCC and European countries in a range of occupations including domestic care, health care and information technology. In-depth interviews were done with two Pakistan women currently working as nurses in hospitals in Saudi Arabia. Three in-depth interviews were done with male family members of women who were getting or had finished skills training.

The researcher also interviewed a total of 25 key policymakers, managers of skills training providers, regulators of overseas employment, private-sector overseas employment promoters, and representatives of civil society organizations.

For details on the people involved in the interviews and focus group discussions, please see annex A of this report.

5. Literature Review

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2022 placed Pakistan second last among 146 countries, marginally ahead of Afghanistan, in the four areas of educational attainment, economic participation, health and political empowerment. Pakistan is the world's fifth most populous country, with 229 million people, 49 per cent female. According to the Pakistan Government's Labour Force Survey, 2020-2021 the total labour force numbered 71.76 million, with 67.25 million employed and 4.51 million unemployed. The overall labour force participation rate was 45 per cent -- 67.9 per cent for men and 21.4 per cent for women.⁸ The survey indicates that 77.7 per cent of women workers are in informal labour in rural areas, and 41.8 per cent of all women's work is as unpaid workers contributing to the family. Even among young women (ages 15-29), only 21 per cent are part of the labour force, compared to 72 per cent of young men. Moreover, only 3 out of 10 cell phone owners are women, and 95 out of 100 women do not own a bank account.⁹

Pakistan's National Skills for All Strategy 2018 underlines the deteriorated state of the public infrastructure in technical and vocational skills training, with limited training capacity, outdated workshops and laboratories, training equipment, teaching methods, and curricula -- rendering the system unfit to meet domestic and international skilled labour market needs. The strategy notes that there were only an estimated 437,000 training places available in 3,740 public- and private-sector training institutes as per the National Skills Information System survey of 2016-2017, with 18,207 trained teachers in the formal technical and vocational education training (TVET) sector.¹⁰

Historically, in Pakistan far fewer women than men have taken up overseas employment. The share of women has been less than 1 per cent of total migrant workers. During 2019, there were only 4,079 women of the total 620,000 people who went overseas for employment.¹¹

⁸Pakistan, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force Survey 2020-21* (Islamabad, 2022). Available from <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/publication/labour-force-survey-2020-21-annual-report>.

⁹Pakistan, Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, *National Gender Policy Framework* (Islamabad, 2020, pp. 22-23). Available from <https://www.pc.gov.pk/uploads/report/NGPF.pdf>.

¹⁰Pakistan, Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, *National "Skills for All" Strategy* (Islamabad, 2018). Available from <https://navttc.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/National-Skills-for-All-Strategy-2018.pdf>.

¹¹Pakistan, Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment, op. cit.

Existing research highlights four main factors leading to the low women’s migration for employment: the country’s low female labour force participation rate; challenging working conditions and vulnerability to high risk and abuse; low levels of skills; and family constraints due to childcare responsibilities. The Pakistan Government’s ban on women under 35 from overseas employment in domestic care work (in some cases the Government can grant a five-year exception and allow a woman of 30 to go) is also a major factor in reducing the number of women migrant workers.¹²

Pakistan does not have a formal labour emigration policy. There have been three attempts to draft such a policy, most recently in 2017 under the aegis of the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development. This draft focused on three areas: labour emigration and recruitment, the welfare of overseas migrants, and the return and reintegration of overseas migrants. The draft has not yet been approved.

6. Key Findings: Destination Countries

6.1. GCC countries: Employment trends for overseas workers

BEOE maintains and regularly updates an online database of overseas jobs. On 12 September 2022, the database showed 141,912 overseas jobs available.¹³ The system allows people to access information about the jobs including salary and benefits. However, it does not include a filter that allows users to sex-disaggregate available jobs or to quickly jump to jobs where employers sought only women workers. Nonetheless, in the job search field, a search for “women” generated a total of 651 available jobs that stated that women were eligible to apply; all were in GCC countries. Most of these jobs were only for women; some accepted both men and women, such as openings for doctors. Of the 651 jobs, 36 per cent were in the health-care sector (mostly nurses) and most were in Saudi Arabia. Another 30 per cent were in the security sector, mostly in United Arab Emirates and some in Qatar, 18 per cent were in household care (mostly maids), and 10 per cent were in office work. This shows that a diverse range of overseas job opportunities are available to Pakistan women, and private-sector recruiters of overseas workers should seek more such opportunities and not simply slot women into “women’s work” such as housemaids.

Table 1

Occupations for sample of 651 openings for Pakistan women workers in GCC countries, 12 September 2022

Occupational sector	Category	No. of jobs-subtotal	No. of jobs	% of total jobs
Health	Doctor	11	236	36
	Nurse	219		
	Pharmacist	6		
Security	Guard		196	30
Care work	Maid		119	18
Office work	Staff	66	66	10
Waitress	Waiter	15	15	2
Aircraft cleaner	Aircraft cleaners	15	15	2
Auditor/accountant		2	2	0.3
Labour	Labourer	2	2	0.3
		TOTAL	651	100

Note: Sector and category names are those used by BEOE site.

Source: BEOE database of foreign jobs, see <https://beoe.gov.pk/foreign-jobs>.

¹²Amer Ahmed, S. and Laurant Bossavie, eds., *Toward Safer and More Productive Migration for South Asia* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2022). Available from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/37444>.

¹³Pakistan, Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment, online database. Available from <https://beoe.gov.pk/foreign-jobs>.

6.2. Unique challenges of Pakistan women migrant workers in GCC countries

This research found that some women working in GCC countries experience lack of compliance with the terms of the initial contract offer that was made through Pakistan-based Overseas Employment Promoters (OEPs), which are licensed private companies that recruit people for overseas work. Although the foreign employer had already covered the cost, the OEPs still charged the women for visa and air travel. One of the nurses working in Saudi Arabia said: **“I paid 230,000 Pakistan rupees (\$1,500) to the agent for my nursing job travel to Saudi Arabia. However, when we arrived in Saudi Arabia, the hospital informed us that 5,000 Saudi Riyals were to be settled against each of our salaries (to cover travel and associated costs). The hospital claimed that they had already paid the agent in Pakistan for our visa and ticket for bringing nurses from overseas. He should not have charged me more than 60,000 rupees (\$390) for arranging each nurse, as he was already covered. When I complained to the Protectorate officer in Pakistan, he expressed sympathy with me but also tried to find a ‘settlement’ with the agent over the telephone [so as to avoid] initiating an inquiry.”** (The Protectorate offices are responsible for checking if a worker’s privately secured overseas employment contract adequately protects the worker. They have a mandate to launch an inquiry if an applicant complains about an OEP.) Women migrant workers said that because they did not know Arabic language, they could not launch any complaints against their employers. The other nurse working in Saudi Arabia said: **“We do not know Saudi (labour) laws. If we complain, there will be no help. They will always protect their citizens.”**

7. Key Findings: Supply-side gender barriers

7.1. Gender lens on public- and private-sector skills training providers

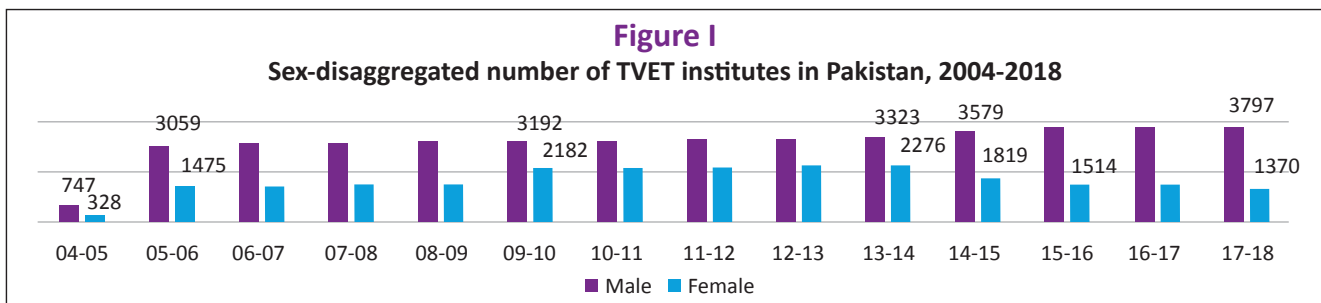
The population of Pakistan is 229 million, of which 49 per cent are women,¹⁴ and in 2019-2020 the female labour force participation rate was merely 21.4 per cent, as compared to 67.9 per cent for men.¹⁵ Between 2004-2005 and 2014-2015, the labour force participation rate for women 20-24 years of age increased from 18 per cent to about 26 per cent and for women 25-34 years of age from 18 per cent to about 27 per cent. The large majority of highly qualified women do not participate in the economy as they are restricted to domestic work due to gender roles; only 25 per cent of women holding master’s degrees work outside of their homes.¹⁶

Over time, the gap in the number of skills training centres for men versus those for women has widened. In 2004-2005 the number of skills training centres for women was less than half of that for men, and despite the Government’s investments, in 2017-2018 the number of women’s centres was about one-third of that of men’s centres, as shown in **Figure 1**. The gender gap in TVET instructors also has substantially increased. In 2004-2005 there were 1,450 female instructors, one-fifth of the number of male instructors, and in 2017-2018 there were 4,043 female instructors, still about one-fifth of the number of male instructors, as shown in **Figure 2**. The same gender gap has persisted in TVET enrollment. The number of women enrolled in training institutes increased from 21,000 in 2004-2005 to 121,000 in 2017-2018, but still that was one-third of men’s enrollment, as shown in **Figure 3**.

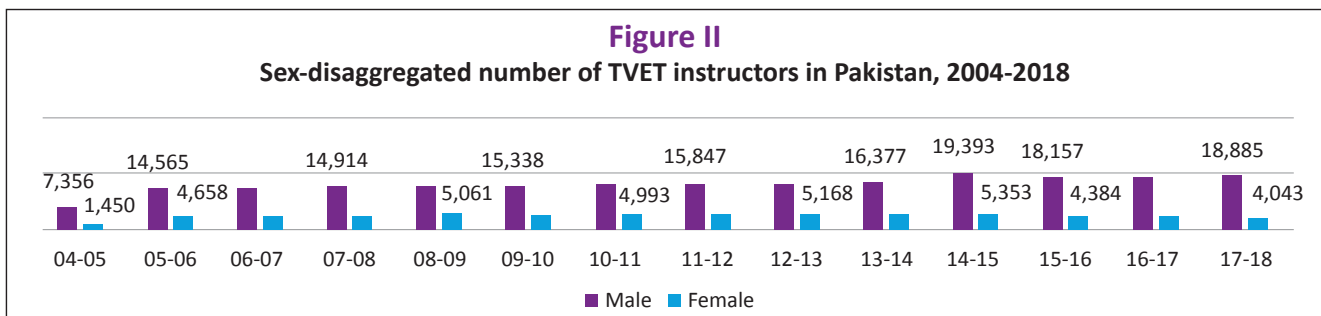
¹⁴Pakistan, Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, op. cit.

¹⁵Pakistan, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, op.cit.

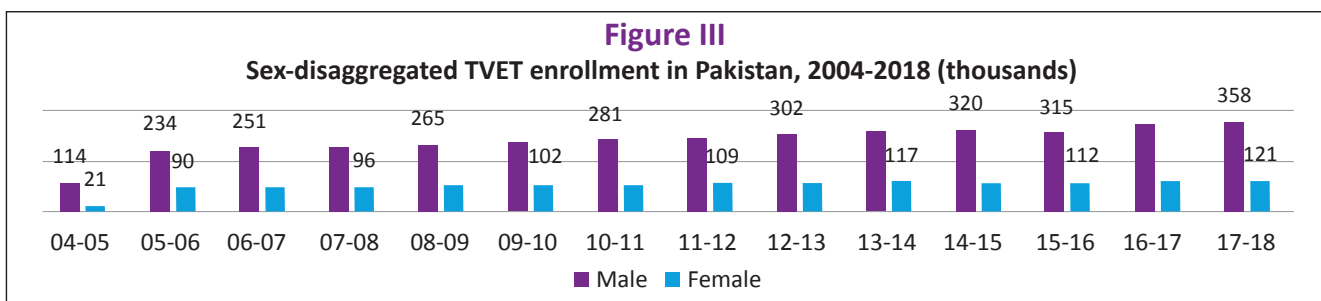
¹⁶Atiq ur Rehman, *Organizational Assessment of Women TVET Institutes in Pakistan* (Islamabad, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, 2019). Available from <https://tvetreform.org.pk/reports-and-publications/>.



Source: Data derived from NAVTTC & GIZ (2019), Organizational Assessment of Women TVET Institutes in Pakistan, p. 21.



Source: Data derived from NAVTTC & GIZ (2019), Organizational Assessment of Women TVET Institutes in Pakistan, p. 21.



Source: Data derived from NAVTTC & GIZ (2019), Organizational Assessment of Women TVET Institutes in Pakistan, p. 21.

The National Skills for All Strategy 2018 of Pakistan estimated that each year, 1.82 million people who had formal schooling and 4.4 million who never went to school or dropped out entered the labour market for the first time. To cater to the needs of these youths, Pakistan needs at least 45,000 more training institutes and 200,000 more TVET teachers.¹⁷

The strategy identified several barriers to women’s participation in skills training: social and cultural attitudes about women’s roles and suitable occupations; unavailability of male family members to accompany women during the commute to and from the training centres or the high cost of public transport; threat of harassment during commuting; male family members preferring women to stay busy in household chores; in-laws dictating what young women can do, even starting with their engagement; and many families not wanting coeducation for their daughters. Additionally, for many married women, the timing of training clashes with their household chores and childcare duties, including the timing of children’s schooling. Moreover, there is a widespread social belief that girls cannot do “tough jobs” (like a mechanic’s), thus limiting options for skills training. Women also receive limited or no information about skills and vocational training opportunities, and no career counselling. The private sector offers low wages to women who complete technical or vocational training.

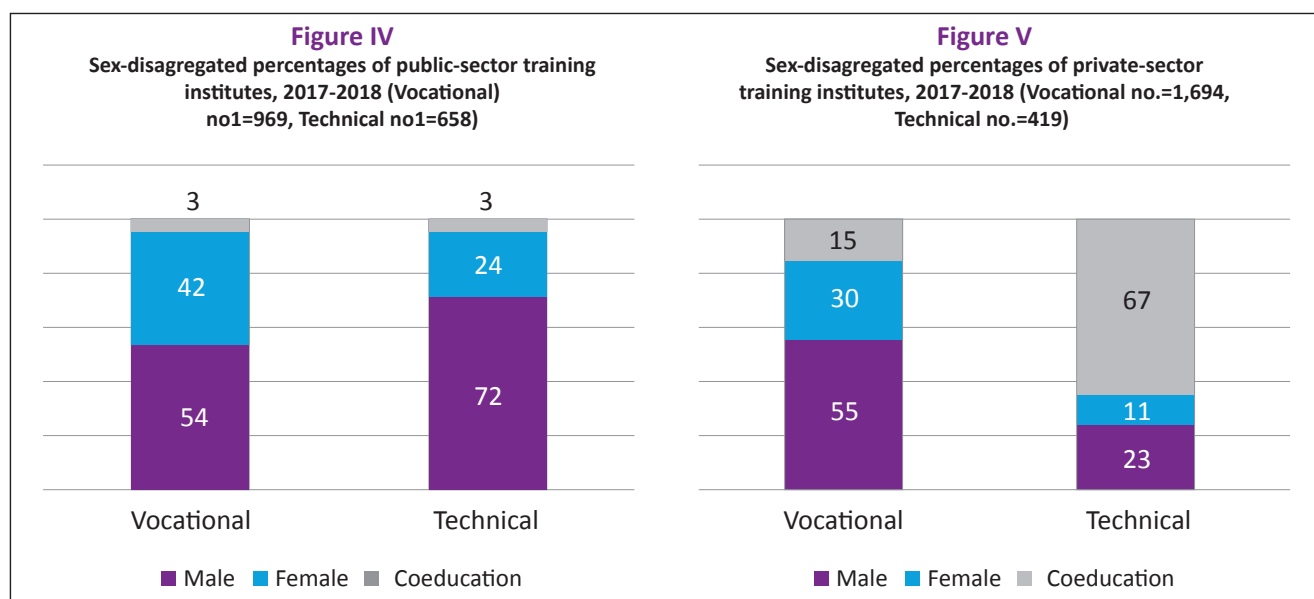
¹⁷Pakistan, Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, *National “Skills for All” Strategy* (Islamabad, 2018.). Available from <http://www.mofept.gov.pk/Policies> (accessed 18 June 2022).

To increase women’s participation in skills training and overseas employment, the National Skills for All Strategy 2018 recommended increasing the share of female students in TVET institutions from 10 per cent in 2018 to 30 per cent by 2023 and removing legislative obstacles preventing women from seeking foreign employment.

The National Vocational & Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) estimated that in 2017-2018 the public and private sectors combined had a total of 2,663 vocational and 1,077 technical skills training centres, including men’s, women’s and coeducation centres.¹⁸ The public-sector centres are run by the Technical Education and Vocational Authority (TEVTA) and other public-sector bodies in the provinces and the territories and supported by many private-sector centres. During 2003-2018 the number of women’s training centres and women trainers increased, mostly in the vocational centres.

The vocational centres offer short-duration diplomas of six months, one year, or a little longer.¹⁹ They offer a range of courses including for beautician work, tailoring, stitching and MS Office. The technical training centres mostly offer a three-year diploma in associate engineering that focusses on electrical, electronic, civil, mechanical or chemical engineering; refrigeration and air conditioning; printing and graphic arts; textile; fashion design; marketing; and other specialties.

However, the NAVTTTC 2017-2018 data showed that women’s centres made up only 24 per cent of the total number of public-sector technical training centres and only 11 per cent of the private-sector technical training centres. This structural gender barrier limits opportunities for women to get long-term skills training. The percentage share for women was much better in the vocational training stream, as shown in figures IV and V.²⁰ Women’s centres made up 42 per cent of the total number of public-sector vocational training centres and 30 per cent of the private-sector vocational training centres.



Source: NAVTTC website.

<http://www.skillingpakistan.org/analysis/country-wide>

Source: NAVTTC website.

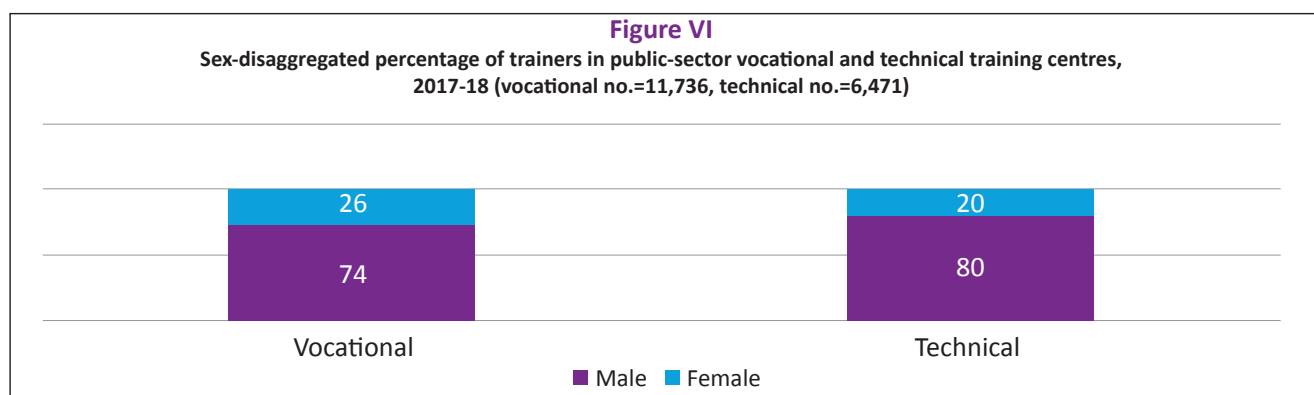
<http://www.skillingpakistan.org/analysis/country-wide>

¹⁸ Calculated from NAVTTC data of 2017-18. Available from (<http://www.skillingpakistan.org/analysis/country-wide>).

¹⁹ Pakistan, Punjab and Sindh Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority, online advertisement for diploma of associate engineering. Available from https://tevta.punjab.gov.pk/dae_admission and <https://www.sbte.edu.pk/diploma-of-associate-engineer/#>.

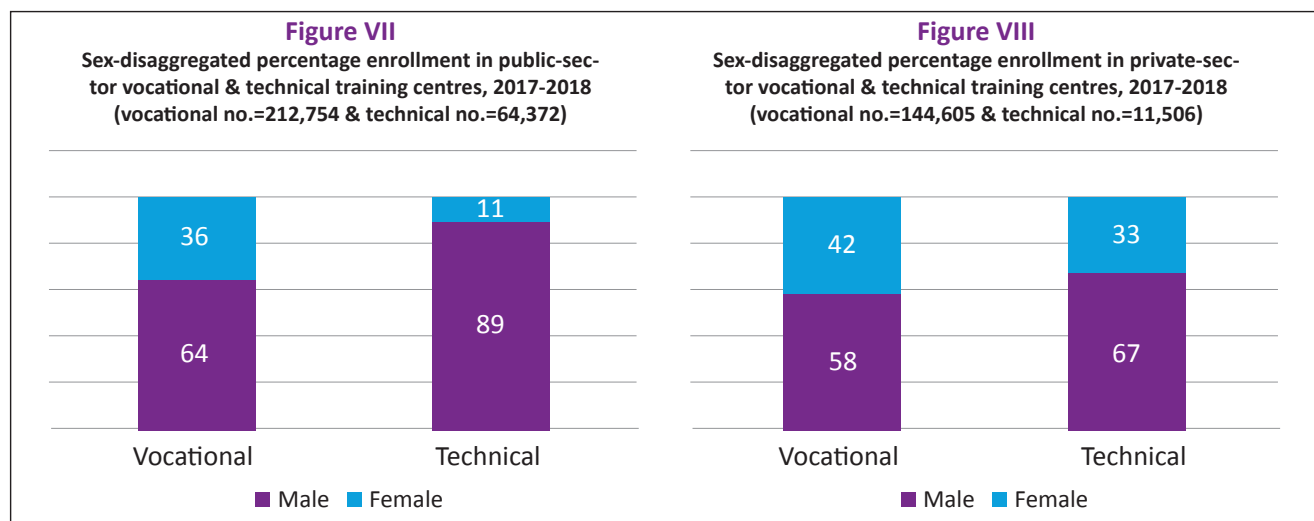
²⁰ Pakistan, National Vocational and Technical Training Commission, Analysis – country wide (2017): enrollment gender, level and ownership wise 2017-18. Available from <http://www.skillingpakistan.org/analysis/country-wide>.

A wide gender gap also existed among public-sector TVET trainers. Women made up only 20 per cent of the total 11,736 vocational skills trainers and 20 per cent of the 6,471 technical skills trainers.²¹



Source: NAVTTC website, <http://www.skillingpakistan.org/analysis/country-wide>.

In 2017-2018 the total TVET public- and private-sector enrollment in skills training stood at 433,237 (34 per cent women). Of that total, 357,359 (38 per cent women) were enrolled in vocational training courses and 75,878 (14 per cent women) were enrolled in technical training. Of the total enrollment of 64,372 in the technical streams of the public sector and 11,506 in technical streams of the private sector, women’s enrollment accounted for merely 11 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively. Women were relatively better represented in the vocational streams. Of the total enrollment of 212,754 in the public-sector vocational streams and 144,605 in the private-sector vocational streams, women’s enrollment accounted for 36 per cent and 42 per cent, respectively, as shown in figures VII and VIII.²²



Source: NAVTTC’s website, <http://www.skillingpakistan.org/analysis/country-wide>.

Most of the women enrolled in vocational training took non-engineering-related courses that are perceived as appropriate for their gender, such as stitching and cooking.

In Punjab province, in 2017 women could enrol in courses in 35 different trades but more than 80 per cent were enrolled in only five trades that are largely in sync with stereotypical gender roles. Out of total women’s TVET enrollment in 2017, 30 per cent were enrolled in beautician courses, 28 per cent in

²¹Ibid. Percentages derived from data on NAVTTC website.

²²Ibid. Percentages derived from data on NAVTTC website.

tailoring, 12 per cent in MS Office, 6 per cent in cooking, and 5 per cent in fashion design.²³ Except for food and hospitality-related trades, the labour market for all these trades was highly saturated and yet the TVET system continued to train women in these trades.²⁴

In Sindh province, in 2017 the enrollment share of women in technical institutes and vocational training institutes was 5 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively. However, about 30 per cent of the women, after completing training in one trade, again enrolled themselves in training in another trade instead of seeking employment.²⁵ Women’s enrollment was concentrated in three trades: dressmaking and fashion design, beautician work and skin care, and IT and office management. The first two are, of course, aligned with gender stereotypes. Most of these trades have limited employability due to labour market saturation. However, women are now increasingly interested in AutoCAD training, which has better prospects for employment. A 2018 study that traced what women did after graduating from skills training centres in 22 districts of Sindh found that 25 per cent were employed, 37 per cent were self-employed, and 38 per cent were unemployed,²⁶ indicating women with these skills had limited marketability.

Table 2

Categories and duration of skills training courses in Punjab and Sindh

Training providers	Technical training	Vocational training	Soft skills
		6 months to 12 months+	Short course
	3-Year diploma in associate engineering		
Punjab TEVTA	Electrical, electronic, civil, mechanical or chemical engineering. Refrigeration & air conditioning, printing and graphic arts, textile, fashion design & marketing, etc.	Beautician, tailoring, MS Office, cooking, and fashion design (In Punjab, 80% of women enrolled in these 5 trades.)	Communication, conflict resolution, negotiation, & collaboration
Sindh TEVTA		Dressmaking & fashion design, beautician work & skin care, IT & office management (In Sindh, majority of women enrolled in these trades.)	

Source: Interviews with officials of Punjab TEVTA and Sindh TEVTA.

Clearly, additional investment in TVET infrastructure is required to overcome institutional gender gaps and impart quality training that would make women qualified for local or overseas employment. The patriarchal underpinning of the TVET sector in Pakistan has largely restricted it to an extension of women’s stereotypical roles, although TEVTAs have tried to diversify courses for women.

²³Atiq ur Rehman, op. cit., p. 39.

²⁴Atiq ur Rehman, op. cit., p. 53.

²⁵Atiq ur Rehman, op. cit., p. 79.

²⁶Atiq ur Rehman, op. cit., p 85.

7.2. Training gender gaps in Punjab and Sindh provinces

The National Skills for All Strategy 2018 identified several barriers to women's participation in skills training. These include gender norms about women's roles and suitable occupations; limited mobility of women and girls; lack of women's access to information about skills training opportunities and career guidance; and employers' attitudes. During the course of this research, training providers said that another barrier to women's interest in technical skills training was its heavy focus on construction work and the neglect of service industries like childcare, office and restaurant management, automation, hospitality and tourism. However, the managers of public-sector technical training providers²⁷ said they have strengthened focus on skilling women and have met and even exceeded the goal of 30 per cent women trainees.

There are several gender gaps on the supply side of Punjab province's TVET sector. In recent years, the provincial government has made concerted efforts to improve the quality and relevance of the TVET sector for both male and female students. However, as previously discussed, the quality of the training may not necessarily enhance the employability of women in the local market, and their overseas employability is not explicitly considered in planning. In 2017-2018 Punjab had 1,672 registered technical and vocational training institutes, with 58 per cent operated by the public sector. Women's training centres numbered 517 (31 per cent of total), 381 of them vocational and 136 technical. Women's enrollment in the technical training centres was 24 per cent of total enrollment, and in the vocational centres it was 35 per cent. There were 2,586 women teachers in the TVET system, with 89 per cent of them in the vocational training

centres.²⁸ The Punjab Growth Strategy 2023 indicated that a wrong policy choice was made to train a higher number of youths in a shorter time period, in trades that did not meet market needs, instead of focusing on longer-duration training to match market needs. During 2014-2018, for example, 44.9 per cent of the courses offered by the Punjab Vocational Training Council were short-term courses in basic computing, 21 per cent were in textile and garments, and 11.6 per cent were in beautician work – a curriculum that may not have suited market demands for skilled workers in diverse occupations.²⁹

Punjab training providers said they plan to review the entire range of courses and upgrade curriculums to respond to market needs. They also plan to introduce a modular approach in training programmes. Module 0 would cover the most common skills in a particular occupation, followed by modules covering more advanced skills in that occupation. Module 0 also would teach soft skills and offer career counselling on the types of subsequent training courses that would be required. The Punjab Growth Strategy 2018-2023 aims to train 2.5 million skilled graduates.

In Sindh province, local government has made concerted efforts to make the skills training system more relevant to industry needs. A World Bank study in 2017 said that the TVET sector in Sindh was chiefly supply-driven, with limited interaction with the private sector, obsolete curricula and materials, and instructors with little industry experience. As a result, there was a mismatch between the skills required in the labour market and those taught in training programmes, and many trainees did not find employment.³⁰

Sindh also has gender gaps in TVET opportunities. In 2018 Sindh had 620 registered training institutes, 17 per cent of them for women. There were 714 female teachers in the 196 technical and

²⁷These include National Vocational Technical Training Commission, Punjab-TEVTA, Punjab Vocational Training Center, Punjab Skills Development Fund, Sindh TEVTA, and Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Human Resource and Research Development Board.

²⁸Atiq ur Rehman, op. cit.

²⁹Pakistan, Planning and Development Board, *Punjab Growth Strategy 2023*. Available from https://pnd.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/PGS_2023%2019-21-145.pdf.

³⁰World Bank, "World Bank inputs to the Sindh Growth Strategy: Overview of the Sindh Growth Strategy," 2017. Available from <https://pnd.sindh.gov.pk/storage/resourcePage/TyMyMhAjzp6d6LwHzh7o7pLipwHfgKjzaVKCuXr.pdf>

424 vocational institutes. The institutes offered a diverse range of courses including graphic design, interior design, hospitality, food preservation, electronics, architecture, and secretarial technology. Most young women (18 and above) enrolled in the vocational institutes (40 per cent of total enrollment) and a few in the technical institutes (5 per cent of total enrollment).³¹

Since 2013, under a national TVET programme supported by the European Union, Sindh TEVTA has improved its skills training curriculum by linking up with industries and developing competency standards, student assessment packages, and learning guides in different trades for teachers and students. Teachers were trained, and new equipment and machines were purchased. Sindh TEVTA has developed extensive industry linkages, including career counselling and job placements for its graduates. Sindh TEVTA introduced a range of three- and six-month training programmes for women, including market-driven courses like daycare centre management, health, safety and environment, sales, customer services, front desk operations, chef's work, textiles, and AutoCAD. In Sindh, the Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Human Resource Research & Development Board during 2008-2021 provided free training to 423,393 youths (41 per cent of them females) in 89 occupational sectors with the support of public- and private-sector training providers.³²

The managers of the public- and private-sector skills training providers said that they train young women in soft skills, albeit in relatively short sessions. These skills include communication, conflict resolution, negotiation and collaboration. The NAVTTC is also implementing a new initiative to offer a technical skills stream to schoolchildren in grades 9 and 10 so they can decide to join a technical or a vocational training centre and find employment in early youth. The pilot programme is being run in Islamabad, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and Gilgit Baltistan. It offers several

courses in 15 schools to 1,500 students (50 per cent of them females). The courses are in building construction services, hotel management and tourism; fashion design; dressmaking; and information and communications technology.³³

7.3. Skills training for overseas employment

One reason Pakistan women are hugely underrepresented in their country's overseas migrant labour flow is that skills training providers do not equip many of their trainees with what they need for overseas jobs.

Since 2021 the Government has taken several measures to enable training providers to help workers acquire quality skills and find overseas employment.

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, which receives the majority share of Pakistan overseas workers, have signed two agreements on workers' recruitment and skills verification. The agreement on recruitment aims to streamline the process of receiving workers in diverse professions in Saudi Arabia while safeguarding their due rights and providing comprehensive legal protection. NAVTTC and Takamol, a subsidiary of the Government of Saudi Arabia, have established a Skills Verification Programme for Pakistanis who want to work in Saudi Arabia. Accreditation is for 40 courses taught at TVET centres in Pakistan, primarily in the construction sector, which male migrant workers typically dominate. The only accredited communications courses (ICT, graphic design, AutoCAD, etc.) offer qualified women the potential to work in Saudi Arabia. This is a good start and may create more space for women to benefit from this programme.

Through the Punjab Skills Development Fund, Punjab Vocation and Training Council, and Punjab TEVTA, the Punjab government plans to link up with the Pakistan diaspora community in United Arab Emirates and elsewhere in the Middle

³¹Atiq ur Rehman, op. cit.

³²Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Human Resource Research & Development Board provided data on number of youths trained in different skills Available from <https://bbshrdb.sindh.gov.pk>.

³³Pakistan, National Vocational & Technical Training Commission. "Matric-Tech program." Available from <https://navttc.gov.pk/matric-tech/>.

East to determine the key current and future demands for skills in those regions and to develop specifically targeted labour export programmes. In 2021, Punjab TEVTA signed a memorandum of understanding with OEC to explore foreign job placement opportunities for TEVTA graduates through online platforms. Data on Punjab TEVTA graduates is available online and linked with the OEC job portal. Last year, Punjab TEVTA also established a Foreign Placement Center that connects its graduates with foreign companies for possible overseas employment. Punjab Vocational Training Council set a target of training 75,000 people for overseas employment during 2018-2023. Sindh TEVTA plans to train youths to find employment in Saudi Arabia, the Philippines and United Arab Emirates.

7.4. The gender gap in the training sector's community outreach

The skills training providers do extensive traditional media and social media campaigns and community outreach, including visiting government schools to tell girls about training opportunities and encourage them to enrol. Many of these opportunities are free as both the Punjab Vocational Training Council and Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Human Resource Research & Development Board receive grants to award skills training scholarships.

However, the managers of public-sector training providers said that many parents do not allow their daughters to receive vocational training or, after the training, do not let them find employment. One manager said the common myth that **“women cannot perform hard manual tasks”** compels parents to keep girls at home after school. Or they only allow them to enrol in gender-stereotypical professions like beautician work, stitching and cooking.

Nonetheless, in their school outreach programmes, the training providers primarily target students and their teachers and do not necessarily include the real family decision makers -- the fathers, brothers and husbands. In

focus group discussions, women who received skills training said that their fathers made the decision to allow them to enrol. Others said it was their own decision, supported by their fathers.

7.5. Marriage and women's skills training and employment

A Punjab TEVTA official said that in 2018 Punjab TEVTA arranged for a group of women trained in industrial stitching to get well-paying jobs and transport to and from work at a private apparel company in Faisalabad. However, all members of the group gradually left the company. Punjab TEVTA did an inquiry and found that most of the women got married and their husbands or in-laws did not allow them to continue working.

Sindh TEVTA said that parents only send to skills training centres those children who did not qualify for higher formal education. As discussed earlier, people follow the stereotype that women and girls are primarily responsible for care responsibilities at home. Parents will send their unmarried daughters to learn a skill that would help them in managing their homes after marriage. They may not focus on their future employment. Or they may focus on their daughters' learning skills that would enable them to be self-employed and earn a living from home. Women who are engaged to be married accept the demands of their fiancés and soon-to-be in-laws to discontinue skills training or employment.

7.6. Gender training for skills training providers

The training providers in Punjab and Sindh said their managers and teachers get gender-sensitivity training from different development partners/international organizations. However, the managers of the public-sector training providers said they recognized the need to further train their staff on gender equality and on how to overcome gender barriers that women and girls experience in accessing skills training.

7.7. Women's views about the quality of skills training

In focus group discussions, most of the women who were about to migrate overseas for work and those who had received skills training and could potentially migrate for work expressed confidence in the quality of the skills training they received from public- or private-sector training centres in the large urban centres of Lahore and Karachi. The potential migrants received training at a range of private-sector training institutes in several occupations including food technology, accounting, social media marketing, computer graphic design, web design, e-commerce, computer animation, digital graphics, and digital filmmaking. In the case of digital graphic design, some had already started doing freelance work for local small businesses. Those women who were going abroad (computer software engineers) or already working abroad (nurses) said that their training and subsequent employment experiences in Pakistan enabled them to secure employment overseas. Women who were going overseas as housemaids did not receive training but had worked as housemaids in Pakistan and were going to be employed by Pakistani families living in the GCC countries.

8. Gender Issues among Regulators of Overseas Employment and Stakeholders

8.1. Gender lens on overseas migration and destination countries

BEOE data show that during 2011-2022 up to June, more than 6.77 million Pakistanis migrated overseas for employment, 97 per cent to them to GCC countries.³⁴ As mentioned, historically women have accounted for less than 1 per cent of total migrant workers from Pakistan. BEOE data show that during 2008-2013 only 6,444 women workers went abroad, primarily for low-skilled employment. Between 2019 and 2022 up to 15 August, the numbers increased, with 4,129 going during the first 7 ½ months of 2022. Table 3 shows the women migrant labour flow.³⁵

³⁴Percentages were calculated using data from Pakistan, Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment table, Statement showing number of Pakistani workers registered for employment abroad during 1971 and 2022. Available from <https://beoe.gov.pk/files/statistics/2022/country.pdf>.

³⁵Sabur Ghayur, *From Pakistan to The Gulf Region: An Analysis of Links between Labour Markets, Skills and the Migration Cycle* (Islamabad, International Labour Organization and Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, 2016). Available from https://www.ilo.org/islamabad/whatwedo/publications/WCMS_532696/lang--en/index.htm, p. 13, and data for 2019-2022 (15 August) provided by BEOE to researcher.

Table 3

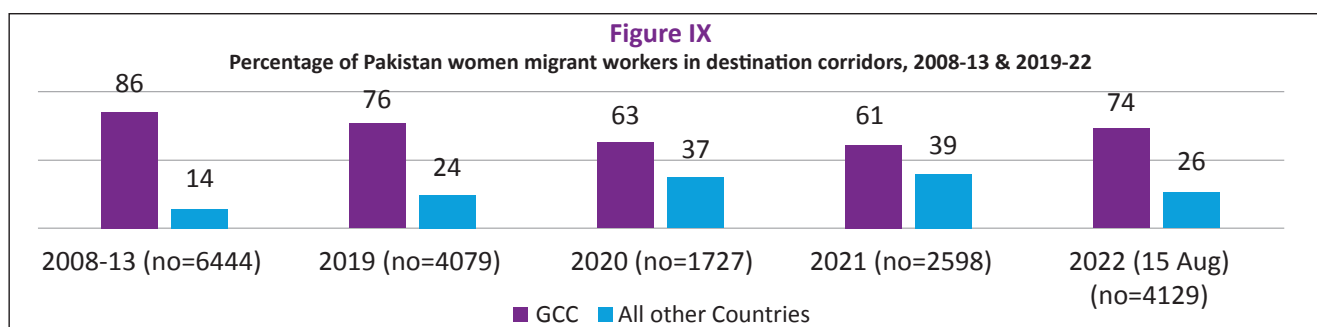
Number of women and their percentage share of all Pakistan overseas women migrant workers, 2008-2013 and 2019-2022 up to 15 August

Destination countries	2008-13		2019		2020		2021		2022 (up to 15 August)	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
United Arab Emirates	3860	60	1440	35	511	30	273	11	935	23
Saudi Arabia	1153	18	1218	30	363	21	892	34	1476	36
Qatar	142	2	144	4	54	3	151	6	466	11
Oman	205	3	164	4	63	4	98	4	129	3
Bahrain	115	2	151	4	89	5	163	6	70	2
Kuwait	99	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
GCC countries	5574	86	3117	76	1080	63	1577	61	3076	74
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	170	3	229	6	200	12	292	11	321	8
Canada	118	2	122	3	81	5	138	5	92	2
China	0	0	94	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
United States of America	175	3	85	2	67	4	126	5	100	2
Spain	-	-	-	-	42	2	82	3	-	-
Ireland	-	-	-	-	34	2	68	3	78	2
Germany	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	62	2
Malaysia	96	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other non-GCC countries	311	5	432	11	223	13	315	12	400	10
All non-GCC countries total	870	14	962	24	647	37	1021	39	1053	26
Grand total, including GCC countries	6444	100	4079	100	1727	100	2598	100	4129	100

Note: 2020-2021 decline in numbers due to COVID-19 pandemic.

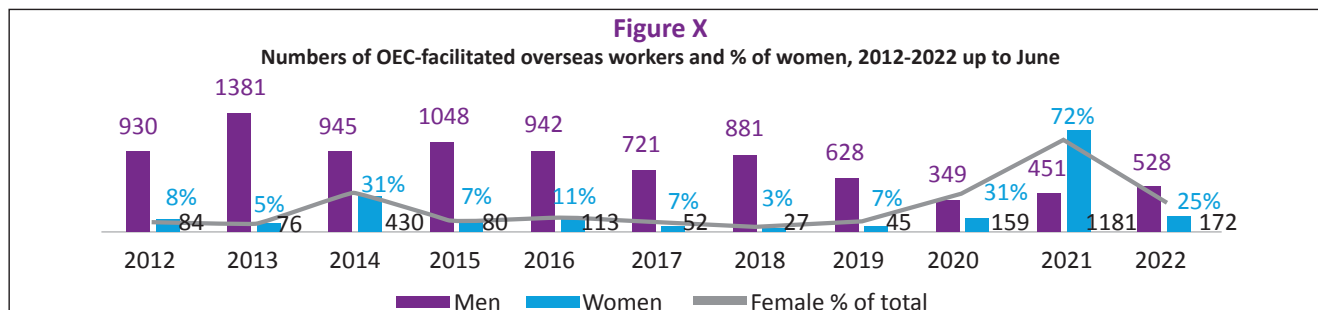
Source: BEOE, see <https://beoe.gov.pk/files/statistics/2022/country.pdf>.

During 2008-2013 and 2019-2022, more women found employment in the GCC countries than in all other countries combined, as shown in figure IX. Within the GCC countries, most of these women found jobs in two countries, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (see figure in annex B-1).



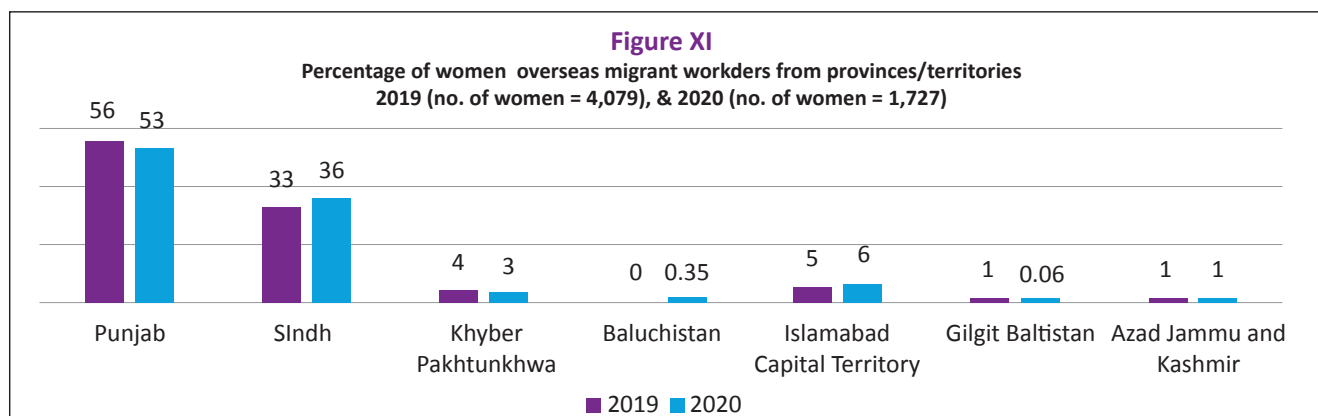
Source: Author calculated from BEOE data for 2019-2022, for 2008-13 see https://www.ilo.org/islamabad/whatwedo/publications/WCMS_532696/lang--en/index.htm.

OEC maintains sex-disaggregated data on overseas migration. During 2012-2022 up to June, it sent 11,223 people (22 per cent of them women) overseas for employment. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increased demand for Pakistan health-care workers, nurses in particular; in 2021 for the first time OEC sent a proportionately large number of women for overseas employment -- 72 per cent of the migrant workers it sent were women, mainly to the GCC countries, as shown in figure X.



Source: OEC provided data for this research.

BEOE data shows that most of the country's overseas migrant women workers come from two provinces, Punjab and Sindh. During 2019 Punjab and Sindh accounted for 56 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively, of the total number of women overseas workers. The trend was similar in 2020 despite the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure XI shows provincial and territorial disaggregation of women overseas migrant workers in 2019³⁶ and 2020.³⁷



Source: Calculated from data provided by BEOE.

8.2. Demand for women workers in destination countries

Over the years Pakistan women workers have found jobs in GCC countries and elsewhere, mostly as low-skilled workers, but also as high-skilled workers in health care, education, management and engineering. Between 2019 and 2022 up to 15 August, a total of 12,577 women went abroad to work, as housemaids (15 per cent), doctors (13 per cent), general workers (13 per cent), nurses (11 per cent), and managers (11 per cent). Women also worked in security and as drivers and engineers. The table in annex B-2 shows the full range of jobs during 2019-2022.³⁸ However, in recent years more high-skilled women workers found jobs abroad as doctors and nurses than housemaids and table 4 provides a

³⁶Pakistan, Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment, "Annual Analysis of Manpower Export 2019", Islamabad, 2020. Available from <https://beoe.gov.pk/files/statistics/yearly-reports/2019/2019-full.pdf>.

³⁷Pakistan, Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment, "Labour Migration Report 2020", Islamabad, 2021. Available from <https://beoe.gov.pk/files/statistics/yearly-reports/2020/2020-full.pdf>.

³⁸Data provided by Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment to researcher.

summary of occupations in which women found overseas employment during 2008-2013 and 2019-2021.

It is evident that the TEVTAs-led training programmes in Pakistan are not fully geared to train women for jobs in GCC and other countries in recently emerging major areas of demand like instructors, CCTV operators/technicians and security guards. Women trained in professional health care and education have been more successful in finding overseas employment.

Table 4

Number of women migrant workers, occupations and percentage share across all occupations, 2008-2013 and 2019-2021

Overseas Occupation	2008-13		2019		2020		2021	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Doctors and nurses	717	11.1	619	15.2	457	25.5	957	36.8
Other occupations	768	11.9	706	17.3	304	16.9	402	15.5
General workers	-	0.0	600	14.7	214	11.9	281	10.8
Housemaid (or Cleaners for 2008-13)	1,437	22.3	704	17.3	339	18.9	262	10.1
Manager (or Investors for 2008-13)	607	9.4	469	11.5	155	8.6	243	9.4
Teachers (or Professors for 2008-13)	462	7.2	186	4.6	55	3.1	109	4.2
Engineers	-	0.0	-	0.0	50	2.8	84	3.2
Beautician (barber for 2020)	284	4.4	123	3.0	51	2.8	80	3.1
Accountant	753	11.7	116	2.8	-	0.0	70	2.7
Saleswoman	662	10.3	217	5.3	57	3.2	63	2.4
Clerks or typist (Office staff for 2019)	606	9.4	339	8.3	112	6.3	47	1.8
Baby care	148	2.3	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0
Total	6,444	100	4,079	100	1,794	100	2,598	100

Source: Sabur Ghayur, op.cit., and data provide by BEOE to researcher.

8.3. Regulatory bodies of overseas migration

8.3.1. Processing of women's overseas work applications

The Government has taken several measures to facilitate processing of women's overseas work applications. The Protectorate offices now follow a code of conduct to fast-track applications from women and highly qualified migrant workers. An official at the Karachi Protectorate office said: **"We try to process cases of women migrant workers in half an hour to forty-five minutes. They are not required to stand in a queue and are ushered expeditiously to the director or deputy director's office to handle their application."**

An official at the Rawalpindi Protectorate office said the office briefs women on their employment contracts and their arrangements for accommodation and commute to and from work in the destination country. **"In the case of women migrant workers above 35 going for housemaid jobs, our counsellors particularly brief them about protection issues and how to complain if needed,"** the official said. Another Protectorate official said they give the women complete briefings through lectures and printed literature to make them aware of their rights and responsibilities in the destination countries. The official said they also make sure the women knew which country they were going to and the details of their remuneration packages.

A focus group discussion with women going abroad at the Protectorate office in Rawalpindi confirmed that their application process was smooth and the staff expeditiously processed applications and documentation verification. Nonetheless, some said that it took a few hours to complete process. (It should be noted that the large multistorey building in which the Protectorate office is housed does not have sex-segregated toilet areas. Women have to wait for men to clear the corridor leading to small sex-segregated toilet cabins.)

8.3.2. Complaint mechanisms

Officials of BEOE and Protectorate offices say that overseas migrant workers have several avenues to make complaints against OEPs that violate the rules. Workers can register a complaint with community welfare attachés posted at Pakistani embassies in the destination countries, Protectorate offices, the Bureau of Emigration, or the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis. BEOE runs an online portal for overseas migrant workers to register complaints. BEOE and the Protectorate offices take strict action against the OEP if a woman makes a complaint. BEOE can cancel the licence of an OEP that violates the law and rules, so OEPs do fear complaints from women.

However, many overseas women workers are not fully aware of the role of community welfare attachés and how to register complaints. Both the women nurses working in Saudi Arabia said that the conditions of their contracts were not fully implemented or that the OEP had overcharged them, but they were unaware of the complaint mechanisms available to them.

8.3.3. Male family member's written consent

People must present several official documents to a Protectorate office to get clearance for employment abroad. Women are required to present a written "no-objection" certificate from a male family member (father, brother or husband). A BEOE representative said that this was for the women's protection. While such a condition is not a legal requirement, it is practiced at Protectorate offices nationwide. An official at the Rawalpindi Protectorate office said that the office discontinued the requirement in December 2018.

During a focus group discussion with officials of the Pakistan Overseas Employment Promoters Association (POEPA), all insisted that women going abroad need to submit a no-objection form from a male family member. An OEP said the Saudi Embassy in Islamabad also requires consent from male family members. This requirement might

have the effect of reducing the number of women going overseas for work.

8.3.4. Excessive documentation

Women nurses going overseas for work are required to obtain a no-objection certificate from the Pakistan Nursing Council. One Protectorate official said that this takes up a lot of unnecessary time, and it could be simplified, done online, or simply abandoned.

8.3.5. Skills recognition for returned migrant workers

In June 2020, OEC launched online registration of returned workers, and as of August 2022, it had registered 95,692 returnees.³⁹ (Previously only the Federal Investigation Agency maintained a record of returnees.) BEOE helps to reintegrate returnees by facilitating employment, upskilling/certification, entrepreneurship, and social inclusion. Many of the returnees tend to go back for new overseas employment. BEOE said policymakers are studying how to replicate the Sri Lanka practice of issuing a “national skills passport,” a digital portfolio of a returned migrant worker’s skills and qualifications acquired abroad.

8.3.6. Migrant Resource Centres

Since 2016 the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, in collaboration with the International Center for Migration Policy Development and European Union funding, has been managing two Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs), in Islamabad and Lahore, to promote legal channels for overseas labour migration. The MRCs provide counselling (through social media, hotlines and walk-ins), predeparture briefings (at Protectorate offices), orientation sessions about legal channels for migration, and referrals to resources for help with legal migration. The MRCs focus on preventing men’s illegal migration to Europe and other countries. During community outreach, MRC staff make women aware of the dangers their male family members face if they illegally migrate. The MRCs also do sessions at the

skills training centres to inform trainees about legal channels. 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. Another MRC coordinator said that during the MRC predeparture briefings at the Protectorate offices, MRC staff focus on legal migration and settlement issues. The coordinator said “99.9 per cent” of those present are men, so these sessions do not focus on issues specifically concerning women migrant workers.

8.3.7. Gender training for Protectorate staff

Officials of BEOE and Protectorate offices said that their staff had received some gender-related training from development partners/international organizations in recent years. BEOE said that the quality of services at the Protectorate offices would improve if additional, comprehensive training were given on gender-equality and how to facilitate women’s overseas work applications.

8.4. Age barrier for women overseas care workers

An OEC representative said the demand for women workers has increased in health care, house care, teaching, and especially in nursing since the COVID-19 pandemic began. However, under the Emigration Ordinance 1979, the Government only allows women 35 and over to go abroad to work as housemaids, nannies or governesses. There is no such age restriction for male migrant workers.

A BEOE representative said that a 35-year-old woman is more likely than an illiterate young woman to be able to understand her contract and working conditions. A Protectorate officer said that if a say, 32-year-old woman applied for overseas employment as a housemaid, she would be simply rejected because there is widespread sexual harassment of women abroad. Another Protectorate officer said that most women opting

³⁹Data provided by Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment to researcher.

for that occupation are illiterate, lack proper training, and do not know about their rights and thus would get exploited by their employers. Another Protectorate officer said there is a need to develop a mechanism to protect housemaids overseas.

Saudi Arabia accepts women overseas workers who are 21 and over. All other countries take workers over 18.

A representative of a leading women's rights organization, Aurat Foundation, said that discussing age can be sensitive in Pakistan because of the religious connotations. (Some religious groups consider the age of maturity to be when a girl reaches puberty, though the legal age for marriage is 16.) The representative suggested lowering to 25 the age for women migrating as home care workers. A representative of the Employers Federation of Pakistan said that given the high inflation rate in the country, many women from poor households would benefit if the age were lowered to 18. POEPA said the age limit for women overseas home care workers should be relaxed.

An OEC representative also said there was a need to consider relaxing the age limit. OEC has received from Saudi Arabia a demand for about 1,000 housemaids; however, it is difficult to find many older women interested in going abroad for home care work. To take advantage of the youth bulge in Pakistan, many women under 35 can be trained in home care work and made aware of their legal rights in the destination country.

An OEC representative said that Bangladesh recently signed an memorandum of understanding with Saudi Arabia to regulate the employment of housemaids and ensure the protection of migrant workers. Pakistan can follow the practice of other Muslim countries of setting up a mechanism to ensure the protection of female maids or care workers abroad.

9. Gender Considerations among Recruiters of Overseas Workers

In Pakistan, recruitment by OEPs, which are private-sector entities, account for most of the workers going abroad. Other people arrange visas themselves or through friends and family abroad. And a small number are sent by the public-sector OEC. In 2019, out of the total 600,000 migrant workers, 60 per cent went through OEPs, almost 40 per cent through direct visa, and only 673 workers went through OEC.⁴⁰ OEC only facilitates migration through government-to-government arrangements, hence the low numbers.

9.1. Private-sector recruiters

POEPA, the representative body of OEPs, has been registered as a trade body with the Ministry of Commerce since 1974. The association's management is elected for two years and has 10 per cent female representation. In August 2022, POEPA had 2,836 OEPs (including about 12 owned by women) as members and 1,758 as associate members.⁴¹

9.1.1. Securing demand for Pakistan workers and gender barriers

POEPA said most of the demand for overseas workers comes from GCC countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, and that demand is primarily for low-skilled men. The owners of OEPs have contacts with private-sector companies in the destination countries that engage migrant workers or they travel there to secure contacts with such companies.

POEPA said that overseas companies tell OEPs in Pakistan whether they need a man or a woman for a particular job they advertise and the OEPs simply respond to the demand. However, many OEPs seem to only accept demands for male workers because they can easily find semi-literate or illiterate men willing and eager to work in GCC countries. But many OEPs find it challenging to

⁴⁰Pakistan, Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment, "Annual Analysis of Manpower Export 2019", Islamabad, 2020. Available from <https://beoe.gov.pk/files/statistics/yearly-reports/2019/2019-full.pdf>, and data provided by Overseas Employment Corporation to this researcher.

⁴¹Data on the BEOE website in August 2022 listed 2,378 OEPs with valid licenses, 147 with invalid licenses, 1,251 with expired licenses, 173 with cancelled licenses, and 274 with surrendered licenses.

locate skilled and trained women for overseas employment. One woman owner of an OEP said, **“There is demand among employers in different countries who want to hire women from Pakistan to do house care jobs. Earlier, in Malaysia, they required 100 women workers for hotel jobs, and I refused as it was difficult to meet that demand from Pakistan. I do not think skilled women want to go abroad for employment, (there’s) zero interest among them.”**

OEPs said that male family members discourage women from overseas employment. One OEP officer said, **“Once, a woman submitted her application for an overseas employment opportunity in the health sector in a GCC country. Her bother, when he found out, came to the OEP office demanding to return the women’s application.”** Moreover, married women find it difficult to leave their small children and work overseas because many GCC countries do not allow family visas during the first two years of employment, said one of the Pakistan nurses employed in Saudi Arabia. OEPs also said that cases of women migrating are sensitive and if there is even one complaint, BEOE may suspend or even cancel their licence.

In sum, OEPs hesitate to make efforts to get overseas employment for women because of sociocultural gender roles and women’s lack of interest in overseas jobs; the availability of men eager to work overseas and the demand for them in GCC countries; and the fear the BEOE will cancel the license of an OEP if it mishandles a woman’s case.

9.1.2. Gender perspectives among workers recruiters

During a focus group discussion with POEPA members, two competing perspectives on women overseas employment emerged, one rigidly patriarchal, the other more feminist. A couple of male representatives passionately stated that they should not promote overseas employment as housemaids for women due to negative connotations. A male representative

said: **“Employers (in destination countries) want women workers to be ‘liberal’, wear Western clothes and mix with their male colleagues. That is why we do not get demand for Pakistani women workers.”** A vocal woman OEP owner objected, saying: **“This is not the case. Foreign companies do not push their workers to wear any revealing clothes, and they also respect the religious values of their workers. It is only our misperception.”** Another woman OEP representative said, **“There are laws and regulations in the destination countries, and it (harassment of women) does not happen.”** The vice chair of POEPA stated the organization’s position: **“We need to promote female overseas employment. It is our primary duty to promote and encourage women to seek overseas employment opportunities.”**

POEPA said it does not offer gender-related or other training to its member OEPs or their staff. POEPA needs to demonstrate decisive leadership to promote gender equality and train its members to think beyond patriarchal norms and to support women’s overseas employment.

9.1.3. POEPA collaboration with other stakeholders

Under the Emigration Ordinance 1979, OEPs need to work closely with BEOE and its Protectorate offices. POEPA said the Protectorate offices were doing an excellent job in providing full briefings and educating the migrant workers. POEPA collaborates with BEOE in policy-level dialogues and makes recommendations while protecting its members’ interests.

But while POEPA members identify employment opportunities for men and women abroad, they do not reach out to NAVTTC or TEVTAs to share this information. The absence of such collaboration erodes opportunities to pivot skills training towards specific overseas employment demands. POEPA also has never reached out to female students or graduates of TEVTA centres to educate them about overseas employment and its benefits. POEPA has not engaged with traditional or social media to create awareness

among women and their family members about this. It does not collaborate with public- and private-sector training institutes to educate the large number of women studying health and medical care, education, hospitality, Information technology, and beautician work about overseas employment.

POEPA officials said they knew little or nothing about the work of the MRCs in Islamabad and Lahore. The MRCs said that they do coordinate with a few OEPs. Perhaps this is not at an institutional level.

9.2. The public-sector recruiter and higher demand for health-care workers

In 1975, OEC was established under the Companies Act. OEC is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development. As per the Emigration Ordinance 1979, OEC is responsible for emigration of workers under government-to-government arrangements. During 2012-2022 up to June, OEC sent abroad 11,223 workers (22 per cent of them women), mainly to GCC countries.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, under government-to-government arrangements, there has been a sudden spike in demand for Pakistani health-care workers, particularly nurses, from GCC countries including Qatar and United Arab Emirates. An OEC representative said that during 2021 OEC sent more than 1,100 nurses and doctors to Qatar. He said that the Pakistan health-care sector could send several women doctors and nurses to GCC countries.

BEOE data on migration through OEP and through personal arrangement with relatives or friends abroad show that the share of women doctors and nurses among all Pakistan women who went abroad for employment increased from 11.13 per cent during 2008-2013 to 15.18 per cent in 2019, 25.47 per cent in 2020, and 36.84 per cent in 2021. This increased demand in 2020 and 2021 made health care the single biggest sector

absorbing highly educated and skilled Pakistan women in the GCC countries. It surpassed the share of women in the domestic work sector, which hovered around 20 per cent until it dipped to 10 per cent in 2020; see table 4 for details.

9.2.1. Emerging demand for home care workers

An OEC official said the emerging sector for workers from Pakistan is the home care sector in Germany, Italy, the United States of America and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, countries where populations are ageing. The official said: “These countries are willing to offer a two-year employment contract. For example, in the U.S., there is a demand for 1,500 care workers, who can be men or women, from Pakistan.” In a meeting with the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, the OEC representative indicated that his organization is examining what standards are required for a woman or a man to qualify as home care workers. He also said that since women in home care work have to be educated and trained, the 35-year age rule under the Emigration Ordinance 1979 would not apply to them.

9.2.2. Linking workers and employers online

OEC has an online job portal linking Pakistan job seekers and foreign and local employers. TEVTA has linked to the portal 500,000 women and men that it has trained. Employers can register, post jobs, and browse the database of TEVTA graduates and others. Qualified and skilled workers can seamlessly review and apply for overseas positions, and employers can interview shortlisted candidates over Skype and hire them. All overseas jobs available through OEC or OEPs are advertised on the portal.⁴² A significant advantage of the portal is that it reduces the role of middlemen.

9.2.3. Need to strengthen workers’ soft skills

An OEC representative said that many Pakistan women workers lack the soft skills necessary for overseas work environments. He said OEC has

⁴²On 22 July 2022, the Overseas Employment Corporation website posted 69,261 active jobs. Available from <https://jobs.oec.gov.pk/jobs>.

heard complaints from employers in Saudi Arabia that they were reluctant to hire Pakistani nurses as they tend to be less productive and willing workers than their Bangladesh or Philippine counterparts. He said skills training providers need to focus on strengthening soft skills.

10. Key Findings: Society's Expectations of Women

In Pakistan, family and society stigmatize and punish those who deviate from gender norms. The term patriarchy is used “to refer to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterize a system whereby women are kept subordinate in several ways.”⁴³ Patriarchy places the highest importance on the “honour” of men and, by default, women associated with them. Male honour requires respect and recognition from other men. Since group recognition is critical to honour, individual actions and how these actions are perceived within the social group become important, and in such societies, male family members are the custodians of women and girls and their lives.⁴⁴

Pakistan society restricts women's roles to the home by using the concept of honour. It limits women's mobility and ability to decide about employment. Patriarchal norms shape the roles and responsibilities of girls, boys, women and men. Society expects girls to learn the necessary skills to manage household chores and care responsibilities. Families value those girls who have mastered these skills because they are then ready to become “good” wives and mothers. Parents tend to invest more resources in their sons than in their daughters because the sons are expected to be the family breadwinners and compete in the outside world.

To try to understand how gender norms impact potential and current women migrant workers, the researcher did six focus group discussions with a total of 51 women in Lahore, Rawalpindi and Karachi. These women had graduated from skills training or were doing skills training or were about to leave to work in GCC and European countries. The researcher also did two in-depth interviews with two Pakistan nurses working in Saudi Arabia and with male family members of potential migrant workers.

10.1. Gender roles and responsibilities

All of the women reported strict gender distribution of roles and responsibilities.

In Lahore, Christian Punjabi single women who were getting computer training gave several examples. One woman in her early 20s said, **“Girls provide lots of support in cooking, cleaning, washing, and even managing guests in addition to their school education.”** Another woman in her early 20s said, **“Boys are required to pay attention to their studies, buy something from the nearby market, take tuition to improve in studies, and play with their friends.”**

In Karachi, Urdu-speaking Muslim single women who were getting advanced computer training said girls are taught to not laugh loudly, to sit modestly, and to help their mothers with household chores. **“Any deviance would bring taunts from the extended family members and even a bad name for your mother,”** said a woman in her late 20s.

Women in different focus group discussions said that gender norms have changed over the generations and women are now also doing full-time employment. However, they said that most men have not changed in so far as they still do not share household chores.

In an interview, a Christian Punjabi man whose daughter was getting computer training in Lahore

⁴³Kamla Bhasin, “Understanding Gender” (New Delhi, Women Unlimited, reprinted 2014). Available from <https://www.arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/kamla-gender1.pdf>, p. 20.

⁴⁴Arash Heydari, Ali Teymoori, and Rose Trappes, “Honor killing as a dark side of modernity: Prevalence, common discourses, and a critical view,” in *Social Science Information*, February 24, 2021, 60(1), pp. 86–106. Available from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0539018421994777>.

said: **“It is girls’ responsibility to help the mother in cooking, cleaning, washing and serving while also studying. The boys’ role is to study, buy kitchen items from the market, and accompany their sister during commuting. A man’s role is to earn a livelihood, make decisions and protect his family.”**

10.2. Women’s access to skills training opportunities

Women in different focus group discussions identified several gender-based hindrances to women’s ability to access skills training: lack of financial resources; harassment while commuting alone to and from skills training centres; and gender stereotypes on what types of skills training courses women should take.

Cost of skills training: Women in Karachi who were getting advanced computer training at a private training centre said the training is expensive. Women receiving advanced digital graphic and filmmaking training said that after first the semester, most of them were able to do freelance work and self-finance their training. That is not always possible for many women. One woman said, **“There are so many girls who will never have an opportunity to learn a skill like this due to financial constraints and mobility concerns.”**

Both nurses working in Saudi Arabia said that it is not easy for women and girls to access skills or professional training in Pakistan. One said, **“To get admission to a nursing school, one needs both a reference to get enrolled in the nursing school and money to pay for the fees.”**

Commuting: Most of the women said that commuting to the training centre was a challenge because of harassment and safety risks. One Christian woman in her early 20s who was getting computer training in Lahore said, **“Every day my brother or father has to accompany me to and from the training centre.”** Women getting computer training in Karachi said that they could manage their commute, but their families worried about their safety. One woman said: **“During recent political protests on the roads in Karachi, my public transport bus stopped mid-way and**

asked all passengers to disembark. I took refuge in a hospital and after a couple of hours, my father rescued me.” Fathers interviewed in Lahore said that in allowing their daughters to enrol in training, they had to be sure about their safety during commuting. Because of this concern, many parents ask their daughters to instead focus on house chores and to get ready for married life responsibilities.

Gender-stereotypical skills training: Women said they had to fight and overcome social stigma to choose advanced computer training, which is considered more appropriate for men. One single woman said, **“There is a general perception that a girl can ‘get out of hand’ if she learns IT technology.”** Another single woman sarcastically said, **“Mostly, my family and friends disapproved of me opting for an advanced computer diploma. They kept suggesting I learn a beautician or baking course instead.”**

10.3. Access to overseas employment information and opportunities

Overseas employment was not on the minds of almost all women who had either just completed or were currently enrolled in skills training. These women’s priorities -- if they were not married off by their parents -- were to find a job in the local labour market or do freelance work from home.

Although the women in a Karachi focus group discussion had skills training in diverse professions, only one or two mentioned the possibility of overseas employment. None of the women had received any information about overseas employment opportunities from their training providers. One young woman said, **“We do not have any guidance about overseas employment. We do not have any information about how to obtain overseas employment and the migration process.”** Almost all said yes when asked if they would explore such an opportunity. Nonetheless, gender roles and responsibilities are so ingrained that these women agreed that “only men are supposed to go abroad for employment and not girls,” as one of the women put it.

All of the women who were going abroad to work said that it was not easy for women to find overseas work. One woman said, **“Many women do not have access to internet facilities to obtain information, and rely on male family members who typically do not encourage overseas employment for women.”** They said it was a challenge to access correct information among the plethora of fake overseas jobs advertised. All the women said that there were a lot of bad people trying to deceive aspiring migrant workers. None of the women had heard about the MRCs.

The Punjabi nurse working in Saudi Arabia said: **“There were five of us (nurses) who came here for jobs, and we all found overseas migration a difficult process as exaggerated incentive information was falsely provided, the OEP charged us extra money, and 99 per cent of the time the overseas employment information was fake.”** The Pashtun nurse said some OEPs provide helpful information while others dish out fake information. She said, “The agents simply want to make money. Once you give the OEP the money, then they would not respond to your calls or messages.”

10.4. Decision-making about skills training and overseas employment

10.4.1. Decision-making about skills training

Women in all the focus group discussions said they needed permission from their parents, particularly their fathers, about the kind of skills training to pursue. Several women said that they identified a course and won their father’s support for it, or their father identified a course and encouraged them to enrol. Single women reported such support from a father or brother. All the young women in the Lahore discussion said their fathers and mothers decided on the training course. One woman said, **“Even though times have changed due to TV dramas and the media, young women still need the approval of their parents and even brothers to get admission in skills training.”** Another said, **“My family asked me to take a beautician course instead of computer skills,**

and with much difficulty, I managed to convince my father otherwise.” However, women in their mid- to late-20s said in a focus group discussion in Karachi that single women can decide on the skills training they want, and their parents would support them. One woman said, **“Still there are stereotypes about what course or profession a girl may take. Girls’ preference for skills training revolves around professions like teaching, health, medical, stitching, computers, etc.”**

10.4.2. Decision-making about overseas employment

The women in all the focus group discussions said the decision about what jobs to take were primarily made by their fathers or husbands. Women in Lahore and Karachi said that it would be easy for a single woman to get employment once her father approves it, but for a married woman, permission from her husband and in-laws may not be easy to get. The Pashtun nurse said that, **“As per Pashtun culture, all decisions in the family are made by the men -- father, brother or husband -- including employment.”** The Punjabi nurse said that for a married woman, it has to be a couple’s decision.

All the women in the focus group discussions said that approval from the father and a brother was a must for a single woman to work overseas, and from the husband for a married woman. The women in Karachi believed that one factor in parents’ minds would be **“How extended family and social circle will react if they allowed their daughter to go abroad for employment,”** as one of the women put it. Another woman said, **“Parents tend to agree to their daughter going abroad for education but not for employment.”** **“It is almost impossible for a married woman to go abroad for employment without her husband’s support,”** another woman said.

One woman said that she was teaching computer science at a prestigious university in Islamabad and was offered jobs from universities in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and in Qatar. **“It was my father who decided for**

me to accept the offer from a university in Qatar because it was a Muslim country, and I had to obey his decision,” she said.

Most of the women who were going abroad to work or were already working abroad come from middle- and upper-middle-class families. They reported relatively gender-equitable norms in their homes around roles and responsibilities. They had bachelor’s or master’s degrees, were working in the sector in which they studied, and had the support of their male family members to go abroad. Their male family members are highly educated and have white collar jobs.

One of the male family members interviewed did not approve of overseas employment. **“No, I do not want to send my daughter abroad for employment,”** said a Christian man whose daughter was getting IT training. He wondered if she could earn money while working from home. But a Muslim Punjabi man whose niece was going abroad to work was relaxed and said, **“If a woman can work here, she can also work abroad.”** He said women from his family in Jhelum District traditionally have gone abroad to work.

10.5. Social norms

Social norms that emerged very clearly in the discussions with women included those on men’s “honour”, women’s incomes, gender-based violence, and marriage. These norms govern the lives of women and set the course of their futures.

10.5.1. Men’s honour vs. women’s employment

Some of the older women were candid about the central construct of patriarchy – men’s “honour”. A more senior woman migrant worker said, **“Men do not like to see their women sitting in front of other men. Most men do not like other men to see their female family members. Men think that other men will always cast a lewd look at their women. Therefore, men do not want their women to do employment where women need to interact with other men.”** Another woman migrant worker said, **“Our society is structured in a way that accepts women to stay at home.**

It empowers men to have control over their female family members.” These women were saying that men think their control over women will allow them to keep their construct of honour intact.

Male family members of both the women nurses had objected to them going abroad for employment. The Punjabi nurse said that parents fear that if something happened to their daughter – she is sexually harassed or she finds herself a partner – it would bring massive disgrace to the family. This fear keeps male family members in control over women’s mobility and employment, particularly overseas. The Pashtun nurse said that among Pashtuns, a strong honour code that aims to “protect” women gives male family members control over women’s mobility, their views, and even their lives.

10.5.2. Women’s incomes

Rigid patriarchal norms stigmatize men of families in which women earn incomes. The Pashtun nurse said, **“My father also faced the same social stigma when I started my overseas job, and he never took money from me.”** One woman in a Karachi discussion said, **“Such a man will be taunted, suggesting he doesn’t earn enough to provide for his family, and his social status is compromised in the eyes of other men!”** Another woman said that older women may raise the question, **“Who will take care of the children if women work?”**

10.5.3. Gender-based violence

Women in several focus group discussions said that if a woman decided to seek overseas employment against her husband’s or in-laws’ wishes, she may be subjected to physical violence. One OEP officer said that the brother of a Punjabi nurse who had applied for overseas employment demanded that the office withdraw his sister’s application. Women migrant workers going to GCC and European countries said there have been many instances of gender-based violence in those countries.

10.5.4. Marriage vs. employment

In the discussions and interviews, women said that parents and young women themselves primarily prefer marriage over employment and careers. The Punjabi nurse said: **“Marriage has become a hurdle for women seeking overseas employment. In-laws can block such a choice of a woman themselves. However, if the husband also goes abroad, then it is different.”** The Pashtun nurse said: **“In Pashtun culture, girls are mentally prepared to get married from a young age and are married off by the time they are 17 years of age. ...I am the only girl from my family who went against this norm, got a full education, did my nursing training and found overseas employment, and now I am in Saudi Arabia. I became a rebel. My mind opened up. My ideology got changed. Marriage must be with a man who respects and values his wife. Men should not create a hell for women but must create a heaven for them.”**

10.5.5. Moral duty bearers

Men primarily support their female family members to obtain skills, but mostly in traditional trades associated with gender roles -- beautician work, stitching and cooking. Many men are also okay with female family members obtaining skills in IT as that may allow them to earn income from home. One woman said, **“Men would prefer if a woman stays home, or work from home, or work near home if at all.”** Women in a discussion in Karachi all said that very few men support a woman for overseas employment. The Pashtun nurse said: **“No male family member encourages a woman for overseas employment. My brother does not support my decision to get overseas employment. ... I quietly applied for my overseas employment and visa application and informed my father and mother. The Bureau of Emigration’s Protectorate office asked for my father’s written permission. Had my father not permitted me, I would not have come abroad for employment!”**

11. Conclusion

In sum, multiple gender-based barriers combine to limit Pakistan women’s overseas employment, including:

- Patriarchal norms constrict many aspects of women’s daily lives and options for the future. Parents weigh skills training against their desire to get their daughters married, and rarely give permission for overseas employment. Many men may only support their female family members to obtain gender-stereotypical skill that allow them to work from home. A married woman’s husband and in-laws prefer that she nurture the family at home instead of going abroad for employment. Social norms stigmatize men who rely on income from female family members, thus making it further challenging for married women to seek overseas employment.
- The TVET system is plagued with systemic gender inequalities in terms of numbers of women enrolled, institutes for women, women instructors, courses for women, etc. Few women are enrolled in technical training and most of those in vocational training take courses that are perceived as fitting women’s roles, like stitching and cooking. The skills training providers do not necessarily try to reach out to the real decision makers: the male family members (fathers, brothers, husbands).
- Some regulations and practices are discriminatory. Women seeking overseas employment need to present no-objection certificates from a male family member. The Government only allows women 35 and over to do house care work abroad.
- Staff members of some OEPs have rigid patriarchal views and disapprove of women working overseas.

12. Recommendations

12.1. For the Government

- Build capacity of relevant government offices enabling them to provide reliable information and necessary assistance for aspiring women migrant workers to access support services and protection
- Establish a programme to create awareness about the advantages of women's participation in overseas employment and mobilize support from male family members;
- Review and ensure relevant fees related to overseas employment are reasonable; provide interest-free soft loans to women to finance their efforts to obtain overseas employment; and support arrangements for their family members to visit the women during their employment abroad.
- Eliminate the need for no-objection certificates from male family members of women going overseas for employment and the 35-year age limit for domestic care work. Also, simplify the process for nurses to obtain a no-objection certificate from the Nursing Council.
- Conduct regular labour market analysis to capture emerging demands (within the next 3-5 years) for migrant workers in the GCC countries.
- Promote coordination among skills training providers, overseas employment promoters and regulators to target skills training around those emerging demands so as to create a ready pool of workers.
- Set up a call centre in Islamabad for women working overseas to register their complaints. Have the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development systematically follow up with community welfare attachés at embassies abroad to provide timely support to the women.
- Establish/improve bilateral and multilateral labour agreements based on gender-

responsive and human rights standards with destination countries to increase opportunities of employment in those countries and provide appropriate skills development training to equip aspiring women migrant workers to respond to the labour market demand.

- Increase migrant resource centres at provincial level to promote overseas employment of women workers. Encourage the centres to reach out to skills providers such as TEVTA institutions, colleges and universities to promote overseas employment among trainees/students.

12.2. For regulator of overseas migration

- Arrange comprehensive training on gender equality for staff of BEOE and its Protectorate offices.
- Provide technical support to BEOE to study good practices from countries in the region on ways to promote women's overseas employment.
- Collaborate with NAVTTC to create a mechanism to certify the overseas work experience of returned migrant workers, following the model of the "skills passport" in Sri Lanka.
- Study how other labour-supplying countries protect women workers abroad, especially in the care sector.
- Redress women migrant workers who were overcharged by OEPs.

12.3. For promoters of overseas employment

- OEC should give its staff gender-sensitivity training so they can promote overseas employment for women and encourage their male family members to support them. POEPA can replicate this training for all of its members.
- OEC and POEPA should closely coordinate to improve and promote the online job portal maintained by OEC.

- MRC and POEPA should closely coordinate to promote women’s overseas employment with male family members of the women.
- OEC and POEPA should do outreach programmes to promote women’s overseas employment, using electronic media (talk shows, dramas, etc.) and social media to target educated and skilled women workers and their male family members.
- POEPA and BEOE should jointly give annual awards to OEPs that support women’s employment, in order to create awareness about regular, safe channels for overseas employment.
- OEC, POEPA and BEOE should jointly prepare educational materials on gender-responsive migration, including short videos, and distribute them widely through social media and electronic media.

12.4. For skills training providers

- Enhance capacities of TEVTAs, and other skills providers, public and private to understand the rights of women migrant workers and gender-based discrimination practices, violence and harassment during migration and enable them to provide appropriate information and reassurance for women to

make informed decision in participating in overseas employment.

- Offer comprehensive training on soft skills, and guide private-sector providers to offer such training.
- Skills training providers need to offer training in those trades where women can find gainful employment in local or overseas markets
- Public-sector training providers should offer career counselling for graduates on overseas employment opportunities and guidance on safe migration, along with counselling for male family members of women who want to work overseas.
- NAVTTC and TEVTAs should develop a cadre of master trainers to build the technical capacity of private-sector training providers in occupations where women can find overseas employment.

12.5. For civil society, women’s rights organizations, and other stakeholders

- Civil society and women’s organizations should engage in awareness raising on safe migration and protection and available support and services should women wish to participate in overseas employment.

13. Annexes

Annex-A: List of research participants

Focus Group Discussions Women overseas workers										
	Facilitated by	Location	No. of participants	Ages	Marital status	Religion	Ethnicity	Education	Overseas employment sector	Destination country
1	Protectorate Office, Government of Pakistan	Rawalpindi	5	26-44	Married & single	Islam	Punjabi	Matric (10 years of education) to PhD	Housemaid, caregiver (health), IT security, family care, higher education (PhD)	Qatar, Saudi Arabia, U.K., Netherlands, Spain
2	Protectorate Office, Government of Pakistan	Rawalpindi	3	35-39	Married & single	Islam	Punjabi	Matric (10 years of education) to PhD	Housemaids, computer sciences	Qatar, Saudi Arabia

In-depth Interviews Women overseas workers										
	Facilitated by	Location	No. of Participants	Ages	Marital status	Religion	Ethnicity	Education	Overseas employment sector	Destination country
1	Overseas Employment Promoter, Rawalpindi	Makkah - via imo call	1	25	Single	Islam	Punjabi	Nursing	Staff specialist nurse/health	Saudi Arabia
2	Overseas Employment Promoter, Karachi	Makkah - via imo call	1	24	Single	Islam	Pashtun	Nursing	Nurse/health	Saudi Arabia

Focus Group Discussions Potential women overseas workers										
	Facilitated by	Location	No. of participants	Ages	Marital status	Religion	Ethnicity	Education	Skills training	
1	Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Human Resource Research Development Board, Government of Sindh (two groups)	Karachi	24	19-29	Single	Islam	Sindhi, Urdu-speaking, Punjabi, Bhoja	Majority done FA (12 years of education), few done master's	Food technologist, computerized accounting, social media marketing, computer graphic design, web design & development, e-commerce	
2	Sindh TEVTA, Government of Sindh	Karachi	3	19-21	Single	Islam	Sindhi, Urdu-speaking	FA (12 years of education)	IT/computer operator	
3	Arena Multimedia (a private computer training school)	Karachi	8	19-40	Single	Islam	Urdu-speaking	Matric (10-year education), couple with masters	Computer animation, digital graphics, digital filmmaking	
4	PVTC, Government of Punjab	Lahore	11	19-25	Single	Christian	Punjabi	Matric & FA (10 & 12 years of education)	Microsoft Office	

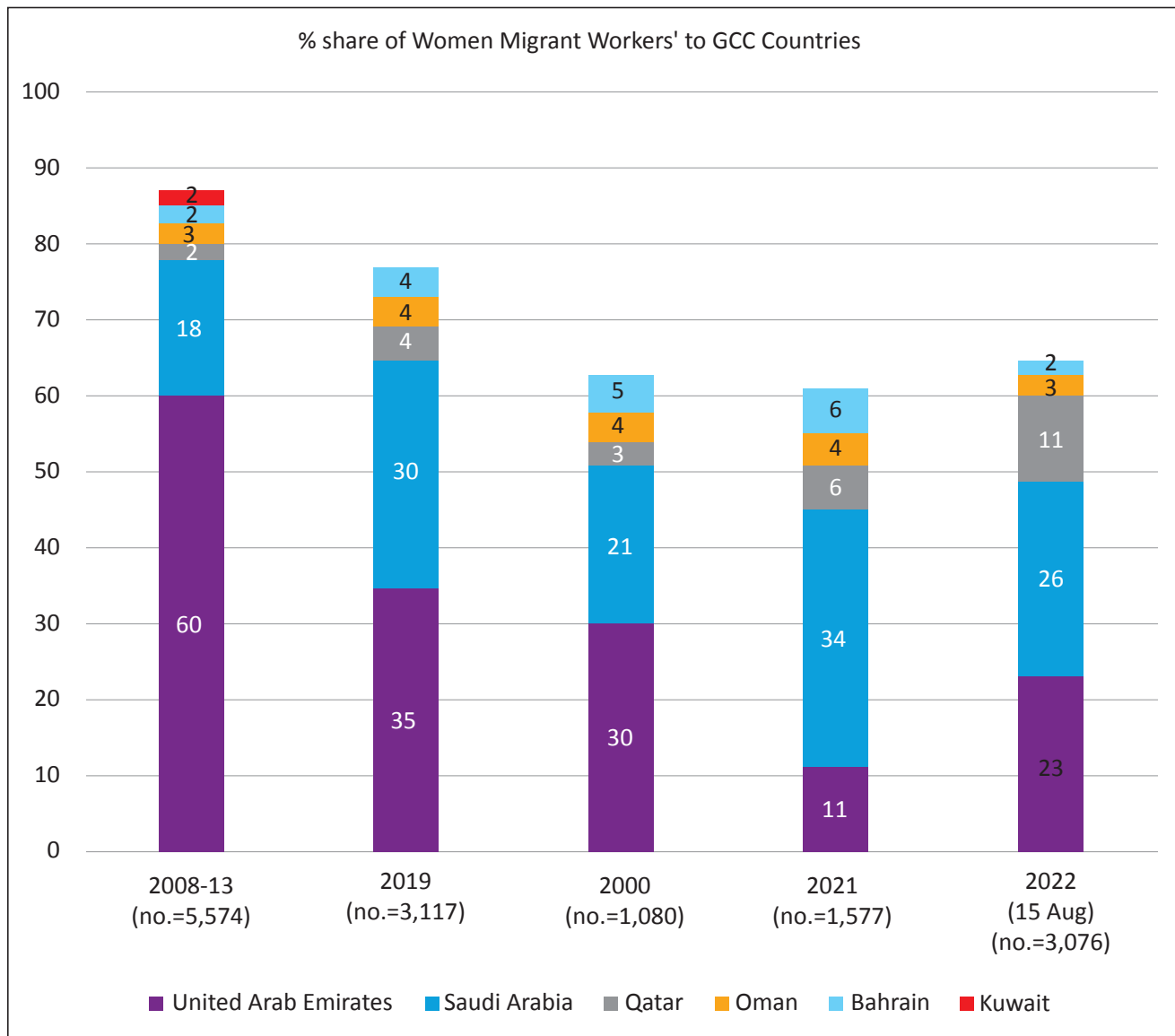
In-depth Interviews
Male family members of women migrant workers

	Relation of Male respondent with migrant women worker or potential migrant women workers	Location	No. of participants	Ages	Marital status	Religion	Ethnicity	Education	Employment sector of women migrant worker or potential migrant worker	Destination country of woman
1	Uncle (telephone call)	Jhelum	1	37	Married	Islam	Punjabi	Bachelor's	Caregiver health	U.K.
2	Father	Lahore	1	48	Married	Christian	Punjabi	Matric	Microsoft Office	Father may explore
3	Father	Lahore	1	48	Married	Christian	Punjabi	Under Matric	Microsoft Office	Father not interested

List of key officials interviewed						
	Category	Interviewee	Gender	Designation	Organization	Location
1	Policy	Muhammad Zubair	M	Joint Secretary (Emigration)	Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis & Human Resource Development	Islamabad
2	Skills	Hafeez Abbassi	M	Director (NSIS)	National Vocational Technical Training Commission	Islamabad
3	Skills	Hina Zaidi	F	Deputy Director	National Vocational Technical Training Commission	Islamabad
4	Migration	M. Akhmal Khan	M	Executive Director (Ops)	Overseas Employment Corporation	Islamabad
5	Migration	Farrukh Jamal	M	Director (Research)	Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment	Islamabad
6	Skills	Aamer Aziz	M	Director General (OPS)	Punjab Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority	Lahore
7	Skills	Liaqat Jamro	M	Director	Sindh Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority	Karachi
8	Skills	Shafqat-ur-Rehman	M	Manager (R&D)	Punjab Vocational Training Council	Lahore
9	Skills	Zafarullah Khawaja	M	Director	Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Human Resource Research & Development Board	Karachi
10	Migration	Umer Saleem Chema	M	Deputy Director	Protectorate of Emigrant Office Rawalpindi	Rawalpindi
11	Migration	Muhammad Imran	M	O&B Officer	Protectorate of Emigrant Office Rawalpindi	Rawalpindi
12	Migration	Muhammad Afzal	M	Director	Protectorate of Emigrant Office Lahore	Lahore
13	Migration	Muhammad Afzal Memon	M	Director	Protectorate of Emigrant Office Karachi	Karachi
14	Migration	Nadeem Chandio	M	Deputy Director	Protectorate of Emigrant Office Karachi	Karachi
15	Migration	Umer Wazir	M	Coordinator	Migrant Resource Centre Rawalpindi	Rawalpindi
16	Migration	Nadia Kashif	F	Coordinator	Migrant Resource Centre Lahore	Lahore
17	Migration	Qaiser Kiani	M	Vice Chairman	Pakistan Overseas Employment Promoters Association	Islamabad
18	Migration	Osama Kamaran Qureshi	M	Managing Director	Manpower Project Services (Overseas Employment Promoters)	Lahore
19	Migration	Mehtab Hussain	M	Chief Executive Officer	Syed Ijlal Enterprises (Overseas Employment Promoters)	Karachi
20	Migration	Aiman Khan	F	Chief Executive Officer	Al Badri International (Overseas Employment Promoters)	Rawalpindi
21	Skills	Mussarat Missbah	F	Chief Executive Officer	Depilex Group	Karachi
22	Skills	Tariq Habib	M	Master Franchiser	Arena Multimedia Pakistan	Karachi
23	Skills	Iram Tahir	F	General Manager	Arena Multimedia Pakistan	Karachi
24	Civil society	Naeem Ahmed Mirza	M	Executive Director	Aurat Foundation	Karachi
25	Civil society	Syed Nazar Ali	M	General Secretary	Employers Federation of Pakistan (ILO-recognized body)	Karachi

Annex B-1 Percentage share of Pakistan women migrant workers to GCC countries

Percentage share of women to GCC countries among all Pakistan women migrant workers, 2008-2013 and 2019-2022 up to 15 August



Source: BEOE provided data for this research.

Annex B-2: Jobs Pakistan women workers found abroad, 2019-2022 up to 15 August

Number of jobs in each sector and percentage share of total jobs Pakistan women workers found abroad, 2019-2022 up to 15 August

Job Category	2019		2020		2021		2022 (15 Aug)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1 Housemaid	704	17	272	16	262	10	682	17	1,920	15
2 Doctor	394	10	339	20	459	18	397	10	1,589	13
3 Gen. Worker	419	10	214	12	281	11	487	12	1,401	11
4 Nurse	225	6	118	7	498	19	560	14	1,401	11
5 Manager	469	11	155	9	243	9	525	13	1,392	11
6 Clerk/typist	339	8	112	6	47	2	135	3	633	5
7 Salesman	217	5	57	3	63	2	128	3	465	4
8 Teacher	186	5	55	3	109	4	100	2	450	4
9 Barber	123	3	51	3	80	3	127	3	381	3
10 Accountant	116	3	36	2	70	3	140	3	362	3
11 Labour/helper	181	4	45	3	49	2	78	2	353	3
12 Engineer	77	2	50	3	84	3	93	2	304	2
13 Foreman/supervisor	58	1	18	1	24	1	88	2	188	2
14 Auditor	53	1	23	1	26	1	52	1	154	1
15 Air Hostess	29	1	8	0.5	6	0.2	104	3	147	1
16 Security Guard	44	1	17	1	19	1	65	2	145	1
17 Receptionist	52	1	21	1	18	1	37	1	128	1
18 Computer programmer	32	1	18	1	30	1	42	1	122	1
19 Technician	13	0.3	7	0.4	35	1	60	1	115	1
20 Designer	41	1	18	1	20	1	31	1	110	1
21 Advisor	42	1	19	1	16	1	21	1	98	1
22 Financial analyst	33	1	15	1	20	1	24	1	92	1
23 Waiter	24	1	12	1	23	1	29	1	88	1
24 Cook	17	0.4	7	0.4	44	2	17	0.4	85	1
25 Artist	33	1	1	0.1	13	1	25	1	72	1
26 Driver	34	1	9	1	8	0.3	11	0.3	62	0.5
27 System analyst	18	0.4	8	0.5	13	1	23	1	62	0.5
28 Guard	37	1	3	0.2	2	0.1	4	0.1	46	0.4
29 Tailor	11	0.3	4	0.2	9	0.3	13	0.3	37	0.3
30 Pharmacist	16	0.4	0	0	2	0.1	5	0.1	23	0.2
31 Operator	7	0.2	4	0.2	6	0.2	6	0.1	23	0.2
32 Security officer	12	0.3	1	0.1	3	0.1	5	0.1	21	0.2
33 Store keeper	3	0.1	1	0.1	0	0	2	0.05	6	0.0
34 Others	20	0.5	9	1	16	1	13	0.31	58	0.5
Total	4,079	100	1,727	100	2,598	100	4,129	100	12,533	100

Source: BEOE provided data for this research.

