

MEDIA ANALYSIS REPORT

Trends on **Labour Migration** in Pakistani Media



International
Labour
Organization



CEJ

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Overview

Pakistan is among the globe's top migrant-sending countries.¹ Since the oil boom of the 1970s, more than 11 million workers from Pakistan have traveled abroad for work,² and the country sends South Asia's second-largest group of migrant workers abroad after India. While the Pakistan-Gulf labour corridor has emerged as a major migration route for millions of low and middle-income Pakistanis, some migrants also travel to Europe through irregular – or unauthorized and unregulated – channels via Iran and Turkey, drawn by human smuggling networks.³

Pakistan's economy is heavily dependent on migrant labor – approximately 7% of Pakistan's GDP⁴ is drawn from remittances from overseas workers.⁵ Today, [96%](#) of all migrants go to the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia,⁶ the top two destination countries for overseas employment, through legal channels.

Despite the economic benefits of migration, the labour recruitment process is fraught with high risks, with some workers paying excessive fees to middlemen, many of whom are unlicensed recruitment agents banned from operating in the country. This can place migrants in unsafe work conditions, driving debt bondage, human trafficking, and forced labour.

The purpose of this media review report is to produce a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the overall coverage of labour migration in Urdu and English-language media outlets from 2017 to 2020. Using media content analysis of print newspapers, TV clips, and social media channels, as well as qualitative interviews with journalists producing stories for the aforementioned media outlets, the report looks at how the current Pakistani media landscape has covered the topic of labour migration.

¹ [“International Migration 2019 Report.”](#) United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

² [“Annual Analysis of Manpower Export 2019,”](#) Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment.

³ Triandafyllidou A., Maroukis T. (2012) Human Smuggling from/via Asia and Turkey. In: *Migrant Smuggling. Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship Series*. Palgrave Macmillan, London

⁴ [“International Migration 2019 Report.”](#)

⁵ [“International Labour Migration Statistics in South Asia.”](#) (2018) International Labour Organization

⁶ [Annual Analysis of Manpower Export 2019.](#)

Methodology

Based on publicly available Urdu and English-language news reports published between January 2017 to May 2020, the researchers examined print, digital, and television news stories covering fair recruitment and labour migration across media outlets. The researchers also included public service messages on migration (including on topics like migrant worker helplines, NGOs working on migration, or government assistance programmes for migrant workers) and migration-related TV programmes outside of traditional news that were relevant to the study.

Given the media's role in agenda-setting, or shaping and informing public opinion on migrant workers, researchers examined three significant clusters of data: (1) print newspapers, TV news clips, and online news reports on migration, (2) semi-structured interviews with journalists covering migration, and (3) public service messages that were targeting migrant workers for outreach, as well as non-news programmes that had migration themes and helped shape public attitudes toward migration.

News Stories

The framing of news stories is often determined by headlines, the selection of sources, and introductory language appearing in news reports. Collectively, these elements play a vital role in how the public forms opinions on migrants (De Vreese 2004) or comes to a decision to pursue international migration.⁷

Pakistani media tends to accord limited, marginal coverage to the topic of fair recruitment and international labour migration relative to other topics like politics, the economy, sports, and entertainment news. In the news hierarchy, labour migration ranks low, owing to a confluence of factors ranging from (a) the lack of a news peg easily assigned to migration stories, (b) a perception among editors that audiences are not interested in migration stories, and (c) journalists' limited specialized expertise on the subject. To understand why labour migration is so deprioritized in the news agenda, the researchers relied on Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) theories of influences on the content of mass media, which enumerates five types of influence ranging from (1) individuals, (2) media organizations, (3) routine practices, (4) social institutions and (5) social systems.⁸

The primary methodological tool employed by researchers was media content analysis, which involves deep textual analysis of newspapers and scripts from electronic media to assess how the topics of fair recruitment and labour migration are conveyed to audiences. Relying on media content analysis

⁷ De Vreese, Claes H. The Effects of Frames in Political Television News on Issue Interpretation and Frame Salience. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* (March 1, 2004)

⁸ Shoemaker, Pamela and Stephen D. Reese, Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content (Longman, 1996)

allowed us to understand how labour migration issues are communicated in the world's fifth most-populous country.

We initiated the process by conducting a sampling of media content across newspapers, TV, and online media published between January 2017 to May 2020, ensuring that we only selected news reports that covered migrant workers going abroad. In some limited instances, we also included stories of non-Pakistani migrants in the Gulf published by Pakistani media outlets in order to assess how migration topics were conveyed to audience generally. We excluded refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants seeking paths to the United States or Western Europe through legal channels, focusing instead on regular migration to the Gulf countries – the main destination region for Pakistani workers – and irregular migration to highly-industrialized regions such as Western Europe.

We compiled each news report in a spreadsheet according to the media outlet and language and listed:

- The story title,
- Date of publication,
- A link to the story,
- Which section of the newspaper the story appeared in (if data on this was available)

Initially, a quantitative analysis occurred by tallying the volume of news reports in the given period, followed by a qualitative analysis of the central themes and overall context of the reports. The researchers specifically looked at several key areas, such as whether the news reports:

- Interviewed migrant workers,
- Referenced a Pakistani government department (particularly those concerned with overseas labour),
- Included women migrants,
- Contextualized migration by providing a historical background or broad trends of migration from Pakistan to the Gulf or Europe, including how migration impacts workers in countries of destination or their families in the country of origin,
- Included references to remittances,
- Referenced migration data in news stories, including where this data was drawn from,
- Featured the working conditions and challenges encountered by migrant workers abroad,
- Featured Pakistani government initiatives to promote or protect workers,

- Examined migration from an awareness angle of promoting safe and regular migration or merely sought to report migration-related crime statistics,
- Referenced human trafficking and irregular migration.

Where possible, the researchers evaluated the location or placement of migration stories in print newspapers, TV programmes, and online media. However, not all media outlets clearly stated which section originally published stories. In those instances, this data was not captured by this media analysis.

A note on keyword searches: For newspapers, TV, and digital news outlets, the researchers used the following keyword search strings to collate articles.

Common Keyword Search Strings		
GCC, Pakistani, worker	FIA, migrant OR FIA, worker, overseas	Stranded Pakistanis
Iqama, UAE	The Prevention of Smuggling of Migrants Act 2018	Bureau of Overseas Employment
Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis	Overseas Pakistanis Foundation	Recruitment, Pakistani, worker
Expats	Visa scam	Fake job OR fake papers OR fake visas OR fake passports
Job Promoters	Expatriates	Iran, Europe
Manpower, Pakistani	Human trafficking, Europe	Recruitment agencies or FIA

Newspapers

In 2018, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics identified almost [700](#) newspapers⁹ and periodicals published nationwide. The largest Urdu newspapers by circulation figures are *Daily Jang*, *Daily Express* and *Nawaiwaqt*. Likewise, the most-read English newspapers are *Dawn*, *The Express Tribune*, *The News*, and *The Nation*.

For the purpose of this study, the following English newspapers were selected for review based on their high circulation. Data collection yielded the following number of articles relevant to the themes of labour migration and fair recruitment:

- *Dawn* (168 articles)

⁹ "Newspapers and Periodicals by Province." (2019) Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. URL: <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/tables/Newspapers%20and%20Periodicals%20by%20Province.pdf>

- *Express Tribune* (105 articles)
- *The News* (173 articles)
- *The Nation* (112 articles)
- *Daily Times* (107 articles)

Likewise, the following Urdu newspapers were included in this study and the following number of articles were categorized as relevant to labour migration and fair recruitment:

- *Jang* (23 articles)
- *Nawaiwaqt* (10 articles)
- *Daily Jasarat* (5 articles)
- *Daily Khabrain* (3 articles)
- *Daily Express* (14 articles)
- *Dunya Newspaper* (6 articles)

Television

With nearly [two-thirds](#) of all Pakistani households owning a TV set, television remains an influential medium to transmit messages about fair recruitment and labour migration. State-controlled television channels like Pakistan Television (PTV) have a [90%](#) coverage rate. Researchers scraped relevant TV programs from a mix of YouTube, Facebook, Google and other digital platforms using keyword searches. The researchers also conducted qualitative interviews with reporters and editors at the country's most influential Urdu and English-language TV channels, selected by their rankings in Medialogic's list of top channels.

The following TV channels were examined for their coverage of fair recruitment and labour migration:

Urdu TV channels

- *Geo*
- *ARY*
- *Dawn News*
- *SAMAA TV*
- *Express News*
- *BBC Urdu*

English TV channels

- *Indus News*

Researchers relied on broad set of questions to unearth answers around migration:

- (1) Did programmes include migrant workers voices during coverage? If so, what time was allotted to their voices?
- (2) What was the overall length of time dedicated to news reports on migration?
- (3) Which government entities were cited in video reports?
- (4) Were women migrants mentioned in stories?
- (5) Were the broader legal structures governing migration referenced, such as the Gulf's *kafala* or labour sponsorship system (if the story was about the Pakistan-Gulf labour corridor)?
- (6) What language did TV reports employ when referring to migrant workers? Were emotionally-charged labels like “illegal immigrants” or “deportees” used? If so, what was the frequency of usage in a single news report?
- (7) What was the general subject matter of stories concerning migration?
- (8) Given their significance during the job recruitment process, were recruitment agents, sub-agents, or middlemen referenced at all in reports?
- (9) Given the preponderance of news reports linking migration to remittances, was this a common theme that appeared in news stories?

Digital and Social Media Channels

Pakistan's Internet penetration rate is [36%](#)¹⁰ and many citizens increasingly use their mobile phones to access news, information, and entertainment, making the medium an important platform to obtain information on labour migration. The following online media outlets were examined for their coverage of labour migration as a topic.

- *BBC Urdu (16 articles)*
- *Independent Urdu (8 articles)*
- *Soch Media (2 articles)*

¹⁰ “Telecom Indicators.” Pakistan Telecommunications Authority. URL: <https://www.pta.gov.pk/en/telecom-indicators/1>. (Accessed May 21, 2020)

Limitations

Despite their immense audience reach, many television channels do not retain publicly accessible archives that can be studied nor do they offer programme scripts or transcripts to the public. Therefore, the researchers were unable to access scripts for English and Urdu TV broadcasts and radio programmes during the surveyed period, making a content analysis of these news mediums unfeasible. To account for this gap, the researchers increased the number of qualitative interviews conducted with TV journalists to better understand how labour migration stories are placed, framed, and sourced in those mediums. Radio was excluded from this study due to the inability to access scripts.

Where available, researchers used the official YouTube channels of major TV channels to access TV broadcasts concerning migration, but most outlets failed to upload videos, constraining researchers' ability to fully assess the nature of migration coverage on TV. Due to the limited sample of programmes available on YouTube, the researchers do not consider the television results as fully representative and acknowledge that a more focused study of TV broadcasts will be required to assess how labour migration is covered by this medium.

The researchers also included stories published up until May 2020 as part of the study, but the report is not intended to be a fully representative sample of all stories published in 2020.

Key Findings

Overall, English and Urdu news media showed low engagement with labour migration as a reporting topic, and covered the subject in broadcasts or newspapers infrequently. There was an over-emphasis on remittances or crime in most stories, low awareness of laws related to migration or the *kafala* (labor sponsorship) system, and few references to sub-agents or middlemen who play a key role in driving irregular migration. When stories did appear, migrant workers were rarely directly interviewed about their labour experiences, with government sources or government-supplied information often overshadowing and even dominating stories about migrant workers. Ultimately, few stories provided a full account of a migrant worker's labour conditions or the challenges encountered in countries of destination.

Most stories reflected event-based reporting during major events like the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman's 2019 state visit to the country and pledge to release more than 2,000 Pakistanis from Saudi jails. Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has also emerged as a major event impacting migrant workers from South Asia and driving an uptick in reporting. However, the majority of news stories around COVID -19 tend to focus on the Pakistani government's repatriation efforts and the high incidence of COVID -19

infections among migrants — giving the public an image of migrants as carriers of the virus based on their foreign employment.¹¹

Nonetheless, examples of positive migration coverage also appeared in our study, including on how migrants positively impacted and contributed to countries of destination. In many instances, stories that used food or travel as a thematic anchor were more likely to focus on how migrants enrich a country's cuisine, introduce new sports, and provide new music, poetry, or art to the society.

Nonetheless, this type of coverage did not frequently appear in Pakistani news outlets, the majority of which placed migration low on the news agenda and failed to examine migration comprehensively. There was also a notable difference in how TV and print journalists covered migration. Some journalists noted a pattern of overly “sensationalized,” “judgmental” and “exaggerated” TV reporting on migration. TV reporters overwhelmingly pointed to print journalists as having a more neutral vantage point on migration, saying that few television broadcasts failed to accurately or comprehensively cover labour migration. TV reporters for Urdu media said that “stories related to migrant workers are mostly aired at the end of a news bulletin or towards the end of primetime news, unless it is breaking news.” The average time – even for top news items on migration – was not more than two to three minutes.

In general, there was a lack of in-depth, rigorous reporting applied to migration stories, and the topic did not regularly feature in longform, investigative news stories. This could be imputed to the accelerating death of news magazines in Pakistan, and the recent closures of *Herald* and *Newsline* magazines, two of the last publications that still printed longform or investigative features. In our study, the average newspaper report in both Urdu and English spanned only 200-400 words, pointing to the fact that the format itself may be contributing to more cursory reports.

Furthermore, the lack of direct interviews with migrants remains a major shortcoming of most migration coverage in Pakistani media. Given the overall financial weakening of the media industry, most newsrooms are not sending journalists abroad for postings in the Gulf or Europe, limiting their ability to adequately cover labour in the primary regions where regular and irregular migration takes place. Newsrooms also lack resources and funds to spend on travel expenses for reporters to travel to the Gulf or Europe to interview migrants directly. Nor do they provide training on how to report on migration. In our study, this deficiency manifested in the type of language employed by some news outlets to refer to migrant workers. In some cases, there was a high incidence of the phrase “illegal migrants” instead of “irregular migrants” and an over-use of the phrase “deportees.” Additionally, there was also an over-reliance on dehumanizing, abstract language like “manpower” instead of migrants in

¹¹ Naseer, Tahir. “105 passengers repatriated from UAE to Pakistan test positive for Covid-19” *Dawn*. URL: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1554510> (Accessed May 27, 2020)

the business section of English newspapers, which sometimes reduced migrant workers' lives to the remittances they sent back home.

Furthermore, when interviewed, reporters displayed a lack of clarity on fundamental terms like fair recruitment and labour migration, often conflating internal and international migration. This was linked to the fact that labour migration is not covered as a “beat” or assigned coverage area for most reporters. The absence of a dedicated group of migration reporters means that few journalists understand the intricacies of the Gulf's *kafala* system, and most Pakistani newsrooms do not have explicit guidelines for replacing terms like “illegal migrants” or other emotionally-charged language with more sensitive, migrant-friendly terminology.

In our findings, migration stories were largely event-based, timed to appear on key events like International Migrants Day (18 December) or tied to the release of reports by non-governmental organizations. There was a general perception among journalists that stories on labour migration and fair recruitment featured a stock character – often one that experienced economic hardship and exploitation. This presented a challenge for journalists pitching these stories, requiring them to identify a “fresh, unique news angle” to market their stories to editors.

Are migrant workers' voices appearing in stories about them?

In both English and Urdu newspapers, migrants were not central characters in stories about migrant workers. Most news stories failed to directly interview a migrant worker or their family members in Pakistan.

In the case of *Dawn*, Pakistan's most prominent English daily, migrants were used as a source in around 17% of articles. In Urdu media, the picture was not markedly different: For *Jang*, only 8% of articles during the surveyed period used migrants as a source. In Urdu news papers like *Nawaiwaqt*, *Daily Khabrain*, or *Daily Jasarat*, no stories appeared to directly interview migrants. By contrast, seven percent of all stories in the Urdu Newspaper *Daily Express* featured the voices of migrant workers.

A major challenge for Pakistani journalists is that most migrants live in the Gulf or Europe, constraining their ability to conduct face-to-face, in-person interviews. Given the Gulf's surveillance of messaging software, there are also limitations to how journalists can interview migrants via phone without compromising interviewees' safety.¹²

Another important reason for the absence of migrant voices in news reports is the difficulty of obtaining their consent. “Migrants find it difficult to share their

¹² “Popular chat app ToTok is actually a spying tool of UAE government.” *The Guardian*. December 23, 2019. URL: (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/23/totok-popular-chat-app-spying-tool-uae-government>)

stories. It takes a long time to gain their trust.”¹³ At the same time, newsrooms demand “substantial evidence”¹⁴ that wrongdoing has taken place before pursuing stories, as well as multiple sources corroborating allegations of wrongdoing. In many instances, migrant workers request confidentiality to minimize the threat of reprisal from their employers when speaking out against labour abuses. On television, the demand for on-screen interviews is greater, and the inability to air a migrant’s face can sometimes prevent stories from airing. “Most of the time, we have to blur their faces and not mention the real names of sources.”¹⁵

Data and information gaps discourage newsrooms from reporting on migration

Many government departments regularly publish data related to migration on their website, from the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)’s annual [Red Book of the Most Wanted Human Traffickers](#) to the Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment’s data on migration outflows. Not all journalists appeared aware of these resources, or the availability of this data – evidenced by the fact that data from these sources did not regularly appear in our surveyed news reports. When breaking news events (such as COVID-19 and its impact on migrant workers) were published, this data was seldom printed or aired in those stories.

Journalists say that when they approach government departments for information, many departments play ping-pong with them to avoid answering queries. “If you ask the FIA to comment on a certain issue, they will say it’s the mandate of the foreign office. Yet when you ask the foreign office to comment, they put it the court of the foreign embassy (where the situation has occurred). It’s like a circle,” said the *BBC*’s Javed Soomro.

While NGOs were typically easier to collect information from, there were fewer NGOs to approach, and scant NGOs concentrated on the welfare of workers abroad.¹⁶ Among those that worked with migrant workers, the predominant focus was on their detention abroad.¹⁷ To that end, a number of advocacy pieces – mostly written by NGOs like the Justice Project Pakistan – published articles in mainstream English newspapers about Pakistani migrant detainees.

Still, others encountered impediments when attempting to obtain data. “It’s difficult to approach NGOs and government officials,” said the CEO of an English-language social media channel reaching 700,000 followers. “For one story, we tried twice to approach government officials. If you have some personal contacts, that’s how you get information.”

¹³ Interview with Saud Ijaz Butt, Correspondent for Labour Department, Channel 24 and C42, Interview conducted 17th April, 2020.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Interview with Saud Ijaz Butt, Correspondent for Labour Department, Channel 24 and C42, Interview conducted 17th April, 2020

¹⁶ Interview with a Gulf-based correspondent of a major Pakistani TV channel, April 29, 2020. (Declined to be named due to safety reasons.)

¹⁷ There was a flurry of coverage related to Pakistani migrant workers in detention in Saudi Arabia after the Crown Prince’s visit in February 2019.

Some journalists believed the challenge in accessing data amounted to a lack of data itself: “There is not a lot of information,” said the CEO. “If it’s public data, it’s not easy to access. It’s important to train journalists on how to obtain that data.”

In particular, journalists reported difficulty in contacting Pakistani consulates abroad to ask about the welfare of migrants. “Once they know you’re a journalist, they don’t get back to you,” said one Karachi-based freelance reporter covering labour migration. Given the fact that labour welfare attaché in consulates collect valuable data on migrant workers’ conditions – including key data on the number of Pakistanis being deported, repatriated, or detained in the host country – many journalists expressed a desire to gather data from sources in overseas missions. Although email addresses for each labour welfare attaché were listed on appropriate government websites, the lack of response posed a challenge. Many journalists reported being told that overseas missions in countries like Saudi Arabia were “too under-resourced” and had insufficient numbers of staff to respond to inquiries from journalists. This was further reflected in news reports displaying a lack of data sourced from labour welfare attaché in overseas consulates. In both Urdu and English news, there were a very small number of news reports from the studied period that showed data from the labour welfare attaché departments of overseas missions, even though it functions as an important link between migrants and the home country.

Economic pressures in newsrooms limit migration coverage

Journalists report that migration stories are time and resource-intensive compared to other topics, and journalists are weighed down by economic pressures inside newsrooms and time constraints. “It takes a week to do a good story on labour issues. It is not like one can file a story within a day,” said a reporter at *The News*. Journalists are also reporting reduced manpower at most news outlets, a situation that may be worse in Urdu newsrooms. “*Nawaiwaqt* is now totally empty. There is hardly any staff there. *Daily Express* has also suffered from downsizing,” said a senior staff reporter at *Dawn*.

The News’ Karachi office has 10 reporters for city pages, covering the wider Karachi metropolitan area, and six for the business pages, where the vast majority of migration reporting appears, echoed a senior reporter at *The News*. “Even [English] newspapers such as *Dawn* and *The News* – which are sensitive towards covering labour issues – are short-staffed. We only have 10 reporters in our newsroom. These 10 have to cover everything,” said one senior journalist. Journalists are often overextended and juggling multiple deadlines across multiple reporting subjects, heightening the possibility of missing coverage on migration.

The economic downturn buffeting the media industry, exacerbated by COVID-19 economic disruptions, has only intensified the absence of

investigative reporting and resources in newsrooms to allocate to longform reporting projects or deep dives into labour migration. The recent shutdown of outlets like *Newsline* and *Herald* also means there are fewer places for journalists to pursue longer, more in-depth stories. Investigations into the sophisticated, organized nature of labour recruitment scams, the misconduct of labor recruitment companies, or the collusion between overseas manpower agencies and fraudulent middlemen emerge as topics warranting closer scrutiny. However, there is insufficient attention assigned to these topics. In some cases, non-governmental organizations have also highlighted a potential link between migrant workers going overseas and corruption within official channels – but few of these allegations have materialized in news reports.

Moreover, journalists point to insufficient external funding for on-the-ground reporting on labour migration in the Gulf, the primary field site. “We do not have enough money to send reporters to Gulf countries,” said a staff reporter at *The News*.

Audience: impediment or driver of migration stories?

Myriad journalists point to their audience as both an impediment and driver of labour migration stories. Newsroom managers ascribe significant power to audiences for shaping and, increasingly, limiting coverage of the topic. As one example, a perception of audience interest or disinterest can impel newsroom decision-makers to assign migration stories or even seek more prominent placement of stories in their finished news product.

It is important to highlight that the placement of stories is not organically chosen, or individually determined by the journalist. Typically, the level of interest is measured by social media engagement and pageviews for previously published stories on the same topic – quantitative data that newsrooms generate via applications purchased from third-party companies. According to one journalist, TV channels in particular have moved toward an infotainment – a portmanteau of information and entertainment – model. “Since the 90s, we have been cultivating an audience that is depoliticized and culturally impoverished. Serious debate and conversation has been wiped out of TV screens. Such a generation will rarely take interest in [migration] stories.”¹⁸

A lack of encouragement in newsrooms

Within newsrooms, there also exists a negative feedback loop between editors and reporters. Reporters say that newsroom management does not promote migration as a reporting topic, giving an impression that it may not be a viable topic for reporters to pursue. This ultimately diminishes the possibility of labour migration stories being pitched or assigned, decreasing the overall

¹⁸ Interview with journalist Farooq Sulehria editor of Roznama Jeddojehad, an Urdu digital media platform.

probability of such stories being published. “People don’t pitch a lot of migrant worker stories to me,” says Talha Ahmed, Islamabad-based CEO of The Centrum Media, a popular new social media news platform.

Even when journalists are recipients of a migration reporting grant, they face challenges placing migration stories due to a lack of a “news peg.” According to a Karachi-based freelance journalist who received a migration reporting grant, few Pakistani outlets expressed interest in the labour stories of Pakistanis working in the Gulf, despite editors acknowledging that audiences might take an interest in original, on-the-ground field reporting from a Gulf country.¹⁹

In effect, most migrant labour stories are “crowded out” by other stories on the economy, political parties, and the ruling government. In 2019, the main headlines revolved around the country’s economy and decision on whether or not to appeal to the International Monetary Fund for financial assistance. In 2018, news coverage was dominated by election coverage and the former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif’s disqualification from public office, among other top stories. In 2017, the *Panama Papers* took dominance. All of these stories appeared to displace the coverage of labour migration, which was already struggling to compete with other headlines.

Gulf governments’ role in reducing critical coverage of labor migration policies and poor work conditions

It is uncommon for Pakistani news outlets to station a correspondent in the Gulf region, a move that would considerably increase media coverage of overseas workers. Moreover, for the limited number of Pakistani media outlets based in the Middle East, problems are reported in terms of access, censorship, and restrictions placed on Gulf-based journalists. In one interview with a Dubai-based correspondent for a major Urdu news channel that reaches over 10 million viewers, it was told that a critical story on Gulf labour practices might spur the expulsion of a Pakistani bureau.²⁰

Moreover, Pakistan’s strategic economic partnership with Gulf monarchies like Saudi Arabia disincentivizes reporters from pursuing coverage critical of their policies. “Reporting on migrant workers going to Gulf countries and getting stuck there is not done primarily because we have good relationships with those countries,” said a staff reporter at *The News*.

Due to the sensitive nature of the Pakistan-Saudi relationship, it can be difficult for journalists to put forward critical angles on a migration story. According to the journalist Farooq Sulehria, who runs the digital news outlet *Roznama Jeddojehad*: “Most reports of Pakistanis working in Saudi Arabia are viewed from a religious angle. During Eid or other Islamic holidays, the newspapers and TV reports will show Pakistani migrants offering Eid prayers

¹⁹ Interview with freelance journalist Haniya Javed conducted in April 2020.

²⁰ Anonymous interview.

or fasting during Ramazan along with the Saudis, showing the two Muslim countries' solidarity with one another. There is scant attention paid to the working conditions of the labourers or the hardships they endure.”²¹

Saudi Arabia: A no-go area for Journalists

Saudi Arabia emerges as a no-go area for most journalists. Criticism on its labour policies or the government is silenced by authorities or self-censored by journalists themselves. Both the government and Pakistan's powerful military are sensitive towards any kind of negative reporting on Saudi Arabia, limiting comprehensive coverage of migration policies.²² According to one journalist: “Most mainstream journalists, especially those working in Urdu newspapers and channels, have very good relations with the Saudi embassy. In fact, the Saudi embassy cultivates these journalists by offering them free tickets for Hajj and Umrah (annual pilgrimages to the holy sites) to keep them in their pockets. Journalists in Pakistani media have performed 25 or 30 trips, something which has prevented critical stories and columns related to Saudi Arabia from appearing in the Pakistani press.”²³

Other journalists are concerned about how covering a critical migration story may impact perceptions of their work. According to journalist Lehaz Ali at *Agence France-Presse* in Peshawar: “If you do a story on Saudi Arabia criticizing their labour migration policies, you will be called an Iranian agent, which is dangerous for a journalist working in a city like Peshawar.”²⁴

The impact of overseas employment promoters as newspaper advertisers

Overseas Employment Promoters (OEPs) are a government-regulated group of companies that match companies overseas with Pakistani workers. Almost 60% of migrants used an OEP in 2015, while the remaining 40% organized work independently. Urdu language newspapers play a vital role in connecting aspiring migrants to these work opportunities by publishing a large volume of job advertisements. However, not all listings are authentic.

The Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment regularly [publishes notices](#) about "fake" companies in a dedicated media center. In many cases, fake license numbers are printed inside ads, indicating that the OEP is neither registered with the government nor using a legitimate name or license number. Newspapers can minimize the appearance of unlicensed companies by cross-checking the license numbers against the government list displayed on the BEOE website.

²¹ Interview with Farooq Sulehria, Journalist, *Roznama Jedojehad*, Interview conducted on 16th April, 2020.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Interview with Lehaz Ali, Journalist, AFP.

During interviews, several journalists said that the OEP's funding of advertisements in Urdu newspapers played a negative role in how their media outlets covered OEPs and recruitment scams. Some pointed out a reluctance among Urdu news reporters to properly report on the practices of OEPs, particularly labour violations. During the surveyed period, only 5% of stories in the mainstream Urdu newspapers mentioned OEPs. By contrast, 20% of mainstream English newspapers mentioned OEPs.

The absence of a new angle to make the story relevant

Furthermore, journalism places a high premium on the novelty or originality of a news story, often requiring journalists to find a “fresh, unique news angle” to publish on a well-trodden topic like migration. However, journalists repeatedly encounter obstacles identifying such an angle for migration stories, due to the same themes materialising: (1) economic disadvantage, (2) the abuses of the *kafala* system, and (3) labour exploitation. This can make it more challenging to pitch the stories to editors, who complain that the stories have been “done before.” The absence of a differentiating angle can ultimately spur editors to discard story ideas before they are considered fully.

Nevertheless, migrants do enter mainstream news coverage during major news events, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2019 visit from the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman. COVID-19 has been a particularly noteworthy period drawing increased attention to migrant workers.

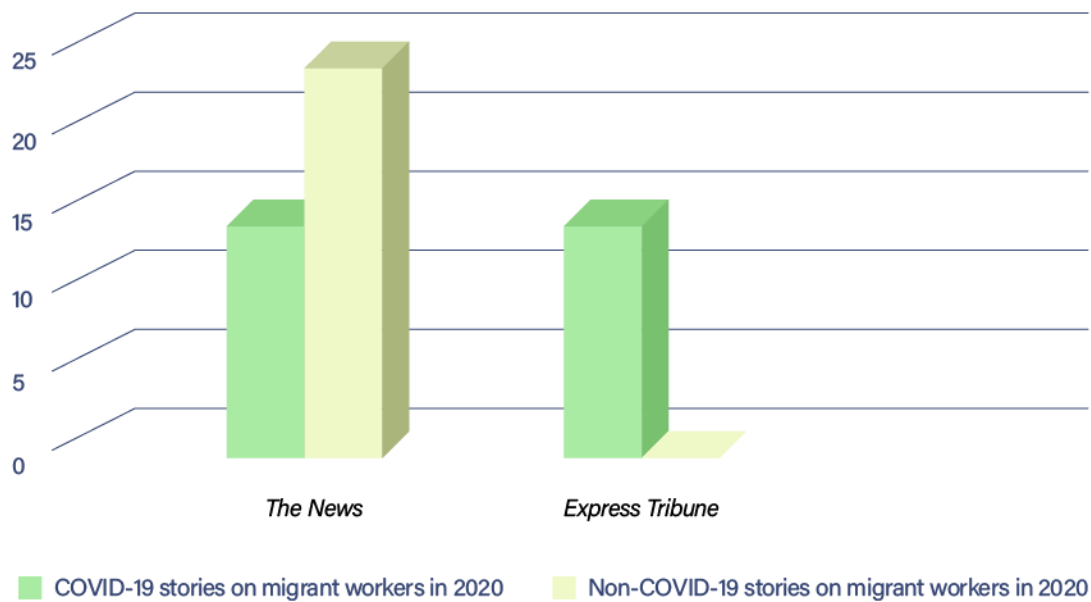
Covid-19: an uptick in event-based reporting

During the COVID-19 pandemic, migrant communities in the Gulf and southeast Asia have seen the virus ravage worker dormitories,²⁵ turning them into major COVID-19 “hot spots.”²⁶ Although Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia have offered free virus testing and healthcare, migrants have also struggled to return home after large-scale layoffs have impacted their communities.

²⁵ Sherlock, Ruth. “Migrants Are Among The Worst Hit By COVID-19 In Saudi Arabia And Gulf Countries.” NPR. May 5, 2020. (URL: <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/05/05/850542938/migrants-are-among-the-worst-hit-by-covid-19-in-saudi-arabia-and-gulf-countries>)

²⁶ Ibid.

Figure 1. Media coverage on impact of Coronavirus on labour migration (January to May 2020)



In our study, the majority of COVID-19 migration stories focused on the Pakistani government's role in repatriating and assisting citizens during the pandemic rather than the problems workers were facing overseas or when they returned home during the pandemic. It was rare for a migrant worker to be directly interviewed, or stories to appear that discussed migrants waiting in limbo as lengthy repatriation processes stalled or failed to evacuate workers from the Gulf. Moreover, the majority of news reports did not spell out the number of Pakistanis awaiting flights or encountering financial, legal, or employment obstacles during COVID-19 lockdowns. Instead, news stories overwhelmingly trumpeted the Pakistani government's assistance to migrant workers and highlighted the repatriation program without mentioning the deficiencies or gaps identified by migrants in service delivery.

This was notable due to the different way the same topic was covered in international media. When international media discussed the Pakistani government's repatriation campaign, it typically noted that workers had lost jobs, faced homelessness, and that some workers feared contacting the Pakistani government or the government of a Gulf country if their visa status had changed.²⁷ Moreover, a May 2020 *BBC* [article](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-52655131) pointed out that Pakistan had repatriated around 9,000 workers from the UAE, but over 60,000 Pakistani nationals were still awaiting flights in early spring,²⁸ indicating that a large percentage of workers were still waiting for government-organized repatriation services. Pakistani media, however, rarely mentioned concrete numerical data

²⁷ BBC News. "Coronavirus leaves Gulf migrant workers stranded." May 16, 2020. URL: [\[https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-52655131\]](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-52655131)

²⁸ Ibid.

and also did not focus on the neglect of workers or deficiencies of repatriation services. As one Pakistani migrant worker told the *BBC*: “I cannot afford the expenses here. I have called the Pakistan embassy multiple times, but I got no answer from them.”²⁹

Moreover, a June 2020 [report](#) in *The News* highlighted that some Pakistanis were engaged in protracted financial disputes with their employers and thus ineligible to take repatriation flights. This type of information was absent in many news stories in Pakistani media, which largely discussed repatriation flights in terms of the number of COVID-19 infections they carried.³⁰ In doing so, the stories were largely panic-driven, with multiple news reports depicting the workers as a group carrying the coronavirus back into Pakistan.³¹ Particularly in the early months before Pakistan had a significant coronavirus case count, many COVID-19 migration stories served to raise alarm in readers that migrants and their foreign employment constituted a crisis to manage, with the group possibly increasing transmission of COVID-19 into the country.

Despite this, some Pakistani news stories deviated from this trend and offered a sympathetic and more nuanced picture of how migrants had been impacted by COVID-19. While not mainstream, some stories emerged of workers on holiday and desperate to return to the Gulf before travel restrictions hardened and made returning to overseas jobs difficult. A good example of this was seen in a March 2020 *Dawn* [report](#) that described Peshawar workers fearful of losing their Saudi work visas if they did not return to the country before *iqama* documents expired. Multiple workers were directly interviewed about their situation, and readers had a clear understanding of how migrants were impacted by COVID-19.³²

Positive Stories vs. Negative Stories

Positive stories

During the surveyed period, there was a dearth of positive stories depicting migrant workers in the national media. Researchers attempted to note where the portrayal of migrant workers was sympathetic or exhibited an awareness of

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Chaudhary, Asif. “259 returning Pakistani passengers out of 3,554 test positive for virus.” *Dawn*. May 1, 2020. (URL: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1553609>) and Naseer, Tahir. “105 passengers repatriated from UAE to Pakistan test positive for Covid-19.” *Dawn*. (URL: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1554510/105-passengers-repatriated-from-uae-to-pakistan-test-positive-for-covid-19>) and Siddiqui, Tahir. “190 stranded Pakistanis among 622 test positive for Covid-19 in Sindh.” *Dawn*. May 2, 2020. URL: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1553816>).

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ali, Manzoor. “Panic in the time of coronavirus.” *Dawn*. March 15, 2020. (URL: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1540971/panic-in-the-time-of-coronavirus>)

the challenges faced by workers when they pursued migration. The following stories emerged as examples of positive stories on migration:

- [How generations of Pakistanis settled in colonial Malaya and Singapore](#) (August 2018, *Dawn*)
- [Chai, Islam and Bollywood: How the Singaporean-Pakistani identity developed](#) (August 2018, *Dawn*)
- [How the Pakistani diaspora in Barcelona established itself in the heart of the city](#) (December 2017, *Dawn*)
- [UAE expats get taste of Ramadan traditional sweets](#) (May 2019, *The News*/AFP)
- [Pakistani Migrants Have Introduced Street Cricket to Greece](#) (Video) (July 2019, Indus News)

Other stories were noteworthy for being human interest stories related to migrant workers. Some stories were able to highlight a challenge migrant workers face (such as high temperatures in the Gulf) and propose a solution.

- [A student of Pakistani origin made cool clothes to save workers from the heat in the Gulf countries](#) (September 2017, *Jang*)

Negative stories

At the same time, there was also a glut of negative stories that had problematic framing or wording related to migrants in irregular work situations. In some cases, reports only reinforced negative characterizations of migrants. According to a January 2020 *Dawn* [story](#) that looked at a parliamentary committee's review of migrants in human trafficking and irregular work situations, politicians were notified by the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF) – a public sector body that looks after the affairs of Pakistanis working abroad – that 50-60,000 Pakistanis scheduled to be repatriated from Saudi Arabia were “non-productive” and “made no significant contributions through foreign remittances.” While the journalist was merely repeating a statement from OPF, the statement was not bracketed in quotes to explicitly indicate that this was a subjective statement instead of a fact. Ultimately, this type of unsubstantiated statement against migrant workers can work against a highly vulnerable group and drive the public to develop negative attitudes toward migrants.

Over-emphasis on remittances

Mainstream newspapers in English overwhelmingly focused on the remittances flowing from migrants, instead of the work conditions, pre-departure recruitment process, or debt bondage migrants experienced. Most of these reports were placed in the business or economy section of newspapers and ranged in length from 200 to 400 words. While remittances can be an important component of a story on migrant workers – highlighting the benefits

they bring to the economy and how they increase foreign exchange reserves – it is recommended that remittance-related stories be contextualized with direct interviews with migrant workers.

Migration coverage on Pakistani radio

Migration is a neglected coverage area on Pakistani radio. “There are 31 radio stations working in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, but the migrant worker issue is not on the radar of any of them.”³³ In the rare instances when it appeared, it tended to take on a negative cast: “The migrant workers are portrayed in such a way that they are seen as a burden on the resources of the host country and are blamed—or even scapegoated – for crimes. Radio channels often forget that the most menial jobs, which actual citizens despise doing, are taken up by migrant workers. Migrant workers are essential for the economy to function smoothly.”³⁴

Furthermore, most of the radio stories lacked a comprehensive lens. “None aim to instruct audiences about the plight of workers or portray them as positive contributors to the economy. Migrants are almost always mentioned in stories of human tragedy, such as when a ship sinks carrying workers.”³⁵ According to radio journalists, the majority of reports featured a short air-time, and reflect event-based reporting. In terms of placement, most stories appeared at the end of a news bulletin because “political coverage and domestic issues are given preference.”³⁶

Depiction of the Pakistani Government, FIA, and overseas missions

According to the reporter Saud Ijaz from Channel 24: “We try our best to hold the government accountable in our stories. Migrant workers need to be blamed less, because it is the responsibility of the government to provide them decent work and living conditions. If that fails, then people opt for desperate measures. So, the government is indirectly responsible if an incident happens or if migrant workers end up in prisons abroad.”

A March 2018 report published by the *Daily Express* Urdu newspaper entitled “The Desire for A Better Life in Europe: Human Trafficking On the Rise” looked at trends in irregular migration.³⁷ In the piece, the author cited an FIA report saying the body lacked manpower, institutional capacity, and infrastructure to curb trafficking. Traffickers were directly interviewed about their views on the FIA, and most said that the FIA only flexed its muscles when directed by a

³³ Interview with Hameedullah, journalist, Voice of America Deewa radio.

³⁴ Interview with Javed Somroo, BBC Radio and Sairbeen, Interview conducted on 19 April, 2020.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ul-Haq, Riaz. “The Desire for A Better Life in Europe: Human Trafficking On the Rise”. *Daily Express*. (March 30, 2018) URL: <https://www.express.pk/story/1132356/1/>

court or higher authorities. Furthermore, there was a belief that the FIA was unwilling or unable to pursue the worst offenders, and often only went after less powerful entities or individuals: “The FIA only touches small fish, while large fish are released after paying a ‘fee.’”³⁸

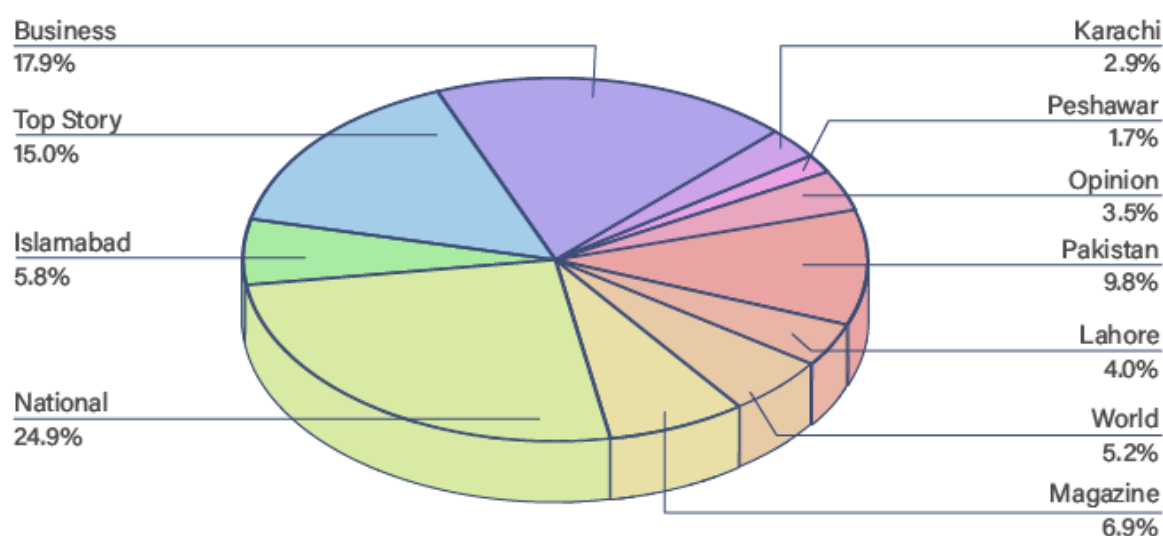
Analysis of Reporting Trends on Labour Migration

NEWSPAPERS (ENGLISH)

The News

From 2017 to 2020, *The News* published 174 stories on fair recruitment and labour migration.

Sections Publishing Migration Stories in The News (2017-2020)



Placement of migration stories

From the pool of 174 stories, nearly 18% of migration-related stories appeared in the business section. The topic itself only appeared among the top stories 26 out of the total of 174 times. When some migration stories rose to prominence and appeared in the top story section, they usually centered on topics like: (1) Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman pledging to release more than 2,000 Pakistanis detained in Saudi jails, (2) a decline in migrants going overseas, (3) Qatar labour law reforms, (4) foreign workers on the frontline of the Gulf pandemic, and (5) a decrease in overseas work for Pakistanis.

³⁸ Riaz-Ul-Haq, “The Desire for A Better Life in Europe: Human Trafficking On the Rise”. *Daily Express*. (March 30, 2018) URL: <https://www.express.pk/story/1132356/1/>

³⁸ Ibid.

The most in-depth coverage of the topic appeared in magazine stories (the *News* publishes a magazine supplement every Sunday), which only accounted for around 7% of all stories on migrant workers. The length of stories was sufficiently longer when it appeared in the magazine rather than the newspaper, changing from 200-400 words (in the business section of the newspaper) to a 1,000 to 1,200-word format in a magazine feature.

In *The News*, only 6% of stories directly interviewed migrants. A mere 5% featured a woman migrant or her voice, showing a very low level of engagement with women migrants and their stories. Around 7% of stories used the phrase “illegal” to refer to migrant workers and their journeys. Recruitment agents were mentioned in only around 18% of reports. Only 13% of reports appeared to be sympathetic to migrant workers. The articles that displayed a sensitivity towards migrants often highlighted that overseas work was fraught with challenges, or that workers would receive unpaid salaries after the Pakistani government intervened.³⁹ A third of all reports published by *The News* discussed remittances and often failed to interview workers or their families, instead viewing workers as abstract export commodities for the state to draw profit from.

Stories that appeared in The News’ “top story” section:

Given the difficulty of migration stories reaching the top of the news agenda, the researchers strove to better understand which stories reached this position. The topics that generated “top story” headlines involved: a Pakistani gang jailed for human trafficking; the U.S. improving Pakistan’s ranking on human trafficking; Saudi Arabia pledging to release Pakistani prisoners; COVID-19 repatriation stories; declining “manpower exports” to Saudi Arabia; and the removal of labour restrictions on Pakistani workers, among other topics. Some of these topics naturally assumed a top position due to their prominence in the news cycle (such as COVID-19 and Saudi Arabia’s pledge to release detained workers), but other stories on migration were considerably less likely to materialize on the list. One top [story](#) concerned the deaths of 20 Europe-bound migrants in the border city of Turbat. This human trafficking story was written about several times by *The News*, detailing how a web of middlemen lured aspiring migrants to the Iranian border en route to Europe, only to abandon them during a violent encounter with separatists.⁴⁰ It is likely that violent crime helps stories reach the top of the agenda.

³⁹ Ghauri, Irfan. “[Workers Repatriated from KSA Will Get Dues](https://tribune.com.pk/story/1648785/1-workers-repatriated-ksa-will-get-dues-minister).” *Express Tribune Newspaper*. March 2, 2018. (URL: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1648785/1-workers-repatriated-ksa-will-get-dues-minister>)

⁴⁰ Gillani, Waqar. “[Twenty Bodies, One Story](https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/564443-twenty-bodies-one-story).” *The News*. November 26, 2017. (URL: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/564443-twenty-bodies-one-story>)

Breakdown of migration stories at The News by year

2017	31 stories
2018	63 stories
2019	56 stories
2020	24 stories

A sampling of news stories is listed below:

STORY TITLES	YEAR
UK to deport 700 illegal migrants to Pakistan	2017
Pakistan Migration Report 2020: Remittances from informal channels on the rise	2020
Over 30 Pakistani migrants found in lorry in France	2019
Gateway to Europe ("Tens of thousands of illegal Pakistani migrants who arrive in Turkey through land route via Iran, in search of a more prosperous future, mostly end up losing what they have.")	2019
Emigration challenges ("Pakistan needs to understand the dynamics of overseas migration and develop appropriate policy response")	2017
UK wants Pakistan to take back thousands of migrants	2019
57 Pakistani migrants rescued, three traffickers detained in Turkey	2017
The world is on the move... (Event-based report on International Migrants Day)	2019
Migrant deaths (Editorial)	2018
Remittances rise 12% as workers rely on legal channels	2019

Furthermore, *The News* had 14 stories covering the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 out of a total of 24 stories, signifying that nearly 60% of this year's migration coverage was tied to the coronavirus crisis. The heavy coverage of migrant workers – including their repatriation flights – during the pandemic shows that there are news events that spur an uptick in migration-related reporting.

Dawn

From 2017 to 2020, *Dawn* published a total of 168 stories. In *Dawn*, migrants were used as a source in around 17% of articles. Women migrants were almost never discussed in news reports. Likewise, the *kafala* system was not frequently mentioned in news reports concerning Gulf workers.

When the Pakistani government was mentioned – in almost 40% of stories – the most commonly-cited departments were the FIA, Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis, and Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment.

Less favourably, 82% of stories were not depicting migrants in a positive light. Remittances were the subject of 30% of stories. Recruitment agents and OEPs were only mentioned in a quarter of the stories. As for language, the phrase “deport” was used in nearly a third of the articles, while illegal immigration was used 17% of the time.

A sampling of stories is reproduced below:

STORY	YEAR
UAE offers Pakistan access to its labour market database	2019
Saudi Arabia deported 285,980 Pakistanis in last five years, Senate told Dawn.com	2020
FIA not to arrest deportees who travelled without documents	2020
Envoy details dire state of Pakistani illegal migrants in Greece, seeks urgent action	2018
High demand for semi-skilled migrant workers in GCC to continue	2018
The time to demand Saudi Arabia to treat Pakistani workers properly is now	2018
650 Pakistanis laid off in Saudi Arabia waiting for salaries	2018
Qatar opens facilitation centre in Islamabad for swift processing of visas	2018
How the Saudi recession is hurting Pakistani labour	2019

Express Tribune

Among a total of 105 articles found in the *Express Tribune*, a large percentage of the stories focused on the coronavirus and how it impacted migrant workers. Migrants were rarely used as a source. Likewise, women were rarely featured or interviewed as migrants. The *kafala* system was also infrequently mentioned in the sample of stories. Seventy percent of stories featured the perspective of the government on migrants. The most common government entities mentioned were the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Pakistan High Commission, and Federal Ministry for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development. In the case of the COVID-19 stories, which primarily focused on repatriation flights, the Civil Aviation Authority also appeared as a government source. Advocacy organizations like the Migrant Resource Centre were mentioned for their work around providing assistance to workers. A third of the stories were about the skills of migrant workers and matching them to quality jobs. There were no stories using the phrase illegal migration, but “deport” was found in three articles. Recruitment agents were rarely depicted in stories. Remittances were mentioned in a third of all stories.

A sampling of articles is reproduced below.

STORY	YEAR
Remittances rise 12% to \$12.8b in seven months	2019
Why Qatar issues fewer 'work visas' to Pakistanis	2017
Pakistan scrambles to repatriate workers after UAE warning	2020
Pakistan seeks to amend MoU with UAE over workers migration, remittances	2019
Thousands of Pakistanis in UAE seek to return home amid coronavirus outbreak	2020
Pakistan needs strategy for manpower export	2019
Pakistan starts repatriating UAE-based nationals	2020
'Govt to facilitate manpower export'	2019
Two former bankers just built an app for migrant workers	2017
Remittances rise 12% as workers rely on legal channels	2019

The Nation

During the surveyed period, *The Nation* focused on a range of migration-related topics, including (1) workers' remittances and the economic benefits brought to the nation by migrants (2) COVID-19 repatriation flights, (3) the deaths of Pakistani migrants in the Gulf, (4) the deportation of workers in Saudi Arabia, (5) labour conditions around Qatar's 2022 World Cup, (6) the detention of workers in Saudi Arabia, and (7) the Pakistani government's work on drafting legislation related to overseas migrants. In total, *The Nation* published 112 stories on migration.

Remittances appeared as a theme throughout multiple stories. When government officials were interviewed for news articles, they were normally from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (most commonly, the Foreign Minister), representatives from the Overseas Pakistanis Commission in Punjab, the Interior Ministry, or the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development. The viewpoint of the government was well-represented on migration, however migrants were rarely directly interviewed for a story. Among the few stories featuring the voice of a migrant worker was a March 2020 report on how migrant workers in Qatar were impacted by the novel coronavirus. In the report, a Pakistani engineer claimed that migrants were increasingly facing hunger under the lockdown.

Likewise, the Migrant Resource Centre and other non-governmental organizations received coverage for their advocacy around migration, and several stories appeared covering migration-related reports by Amnesty International and the Pakistan-based NGO the Justice Project Pakistan, which advocates on behalf of Pakistani prisoners worldwide – including Pakistani migrants detained in the Gulf.

Significantly, *The Nation* did not rely heavily on emotionally-charged language; deportation was not commonly discussed in news reports, nor was the phrase "illegal migrant" frequently used.

However, one area of improvement identified by the researchers was the lack of context or information given about recruitment agents and how they played a role in the migration process – almost no reporting on middlemen or visa scams appeared in the newspaper. Despite this, the overall framing of the reports was largely neutral or sympathetic to migrant workers’ and their economic plight.

A sampling of stories is reproduced below:

STORY	YEAR
Overseas Pakistani workers remit \$1.69b in August	2019
Next phase of repatriating overseas Pakistanis from abroad beginning from today	2020
Coronavirus: PM Khan saddened by deaths of overseas Pakistanis	2020
FM lauds Saudi decision not to deport overseas workers	2020
Workers in Qatar World Cup final city unpaid for months: Amnesty	2018
Ministry to finalise draft of maiden Overseas Policy soon	2017
Overseas Pakistanis – victims of discriminatory treatment	2018
Overseas Pakistanis should avoid visiting Pakistan till April 4: SAPM Moeed Yusuf	2020
Overseas Pakistani playing vital role for fortification of economy: Qureshi	2019
11 migrant workers die in Saudi house fire	2017

Daily Times

From 2017 to 2020, *The Daily Times* published 107 stories on migration. These touched upon a range of topics: (1) Pakistanis in detention in Saudi Arabia and their lack of consular protection, (2) South Asian workers’ conditions in Qatar during the 2022 FIFA World Cup construction, (3) Europe-bound migrants who are smuggled and trafficking via Balochistan and Iran, (4) remittances and their impact on the economy, (4) skills training for migrants, (5) the Pakistani government’s emigration policies, COVID-19 repatriation of migrants, the FIA's handling of trafficking cases, and in some instances, extortion of citizens, deportations, and (6) South Asian workers' evacuation from Iraq.

A sampling of stories is below:

STORY	YEAR
Overseas Pakistani workers remit \$7,478m in four months	2019
2000 Pakistanis still lingering in Saudi jails, only 200 freed	2019
At Riyadh gold souk, ‘Saudization’ spells scarcity of salesmen	2018
Deported Pakistanis (“Saudi Arabia has deported 39,000 Pakistanis in the past four months.”)	2017
Pakistanis in jails abroad - Editorial	2019
Happy Citizens (“ In 2018, Saudi Arabia hosted the largest highest number of Pakistani workers and the highest number of nationals executed on death row in Saudi Arabia were also from Pakistan.”)	2019
Pakistan starts repatriating UAE-based nationals	2020
‘Govt to facilitate manpower export’	2019
Two former bankers just built an app for migrant workers	2017

NEWSPAPERS (URDU)

There was a low level of labour migration coverage in Urdu newspapers. Most of the reports that were published appeared in the back pages of newspapers, except for a few editorials and op-eds.

Daily Jang

In total, *Daily Jang* published 29 stories during the surveyed period. Only three percent of stories featured migrant women or their voices. The government was interviewed in almost 40% of stories. Migrants were only interviewed in three stories. The *kafala* or labour sponsorship system was never mentioned. In one article, the phrase illegal migrant is mentioned 10 times regarding workers. Almost a third of the stories mentioned “illegal” migrants and 20% used the word “deport.” Recruitment agents were mentioned 17% of the time. Remittances were featured in 24% stories. Overall, 13% were positive reports on migrant workers.

A sampling of stories is below:

STORY	YEAR
The tragedies of illegal Pakistani immigrants (غیر قانونی تارکین وطن کا المیہ)	2017
380 Pakistanis from Saudi Arabia and 11 from other countries deported (سعودی عرب سے 380 اور دیگر ممالک سے 11 پاکستانی ڈی پورٹ)	2017
150 Pakistanis return home (150 پاکستانی واپس وطن پہنچ گئے)	2017
Why is there a reduced demand for our labour in foreign markets? (غیر ممالک میں ہماری لیبر کی مانگ کم کیوں؟)	2018
A Pakistani made cool clothes to save workers from the heat in the Gulf countries (خلیجی ممالک میں گرمی سے مزدوروں کو بچانے کیلئے پاکستانی نژاد طالب علم نے ٹھنڈا لباس تیار کر لیا)	2017
77 illegal immigrants arrested in Iran (غیر قانونی طور پر ایران جانے والے 77 پاکستانی گرفتار)	2018
29 Pakistanis handed over to Taftan authorities by Iran (چاغی، 29 پاکستانی تفتان انتظامیہ کے حوالے)	2018
No one should call us immigrants (تھیوے نہ کوئی پردیسی شالا)	2018
How to solve issues related to the decrease of foreign Remittances and the plight of foreign workers (ترسیلات میں کمی اور مزدوروں کے مسائل کیسے حل ہونگے؟)	2018
Saudization of 5 industries started, expatriates won't be able to work (سعودی عرب، 5 شعبوں کی سعودی نائزیشن شروع، تارکین وطن کام نہیں کرسکیں گے)	2019

Dunya Newspaper:

Between 2017 and 2020, *Dunya* newspaper published a total of 10 stories in its pages, and 4 of them were related to accidents, crime and death of migrant workers abroad. Women were never interviewed as migrants. Migrants were only interviewed once.

The phrase “illegal” migrant or “deportee” was never used. Recruitment agents and OEPs were likewise never mentioned. Remittances were never mentioned. Sixty percent of reports were negative.

A sample of stories is reproduced below:

STORY	YEAR
No deportation campaign against Pakistanis residing in Saudi Arabia: Foreign Office (سعودی عرب میں پاکستانیوں کیخلاف کوئی مہم نہیں چل رہی، ترجمان دفتر خارجہ)	2020
The highest number of Pakistanis are executed in Saudi Arabia (سعودی عرب، سب سے زیادہ پاکستانیوں کے سر قلم)	2019
Bus falls from a bridge in Saudi Arabia: 6 Pakistani labourers dead (سعودی عرب میں گاڑی پل سے نیچے جاگری، 6 پاکستانی مزدور جاں بحق)	2020
Negotiations are underway with countries that pay Pakistanis three times more than Saudi Arabia (پاکستانیوں کو سعودی عرب سے 3 گنا زیادہ تنخواہ دینے والے ممالک سے مذاکرات جاری)	2018
Why did a Saudi prince establish a hospital in a Pakistani's name? (سعودی شہزادے نے ایک پاکستانی کے نام پر اسپتال کا حکم کیوں دیا؟)	2019
Traffic accident in Kuwait: 3 Pakistanis die (کویت میں ٹریفک حادثہ، 3 پاکستانیوں سمیت 15 مسافر جاں بحق)	2018
30 Pakistanis died of Coronavirus in Saudi Arabia: 150 affected (کورونا وائرس کے باعث سعودی عرب میں 30 پاکستانی جاں بحق، 150 متاثر)	2020
Pakistan requests Saudi Arabia to extend flight operations deadline (پاکستان نے سعودی عرب سے فلائٹ آپریشن 25 مارچ تک جاری رکھنے کی مہلت مانگ لی)	2020
More than 100,000 Pakistanis wish to return Pakistan: Moeed Yusuf (ایک لاکھ سے زائد پاکستانی وطن واپسی کے خواہشمند ہیں، معید یوسف)	2020
21 thousand Pakistanis lost jobs in Arab countries: PM's assistant on Overseas Pakistanis (عرب ممالک میں 21 ہزار پاکستانی نوکری سے محروم ہو گئے، معاون خصوصی اوورسیز)	2020

Daily Express Urdu

Daily Express published 17 stories total during the surveyed period. In *Daily Express Urdu*, no stories featured the lives or voices of women migrants. The government was only quoted or mentioned in half of all articles. The most frequently mentioned government sources were the FIA in curbing human smuggling, the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis, the Bureau of Emigration, and overseas consulates and visa centres.

Migrants were only used as a source in 8% of articles. The *kafala* system was never mentioned in any news report that mentioned workers in the Gulf, pointing to a lack of awareness of the overall legal structure governing a worker's employment and residence in the Gulf.

The term "illegal migrant" was employed in 33% of articles. In articles where it was used, it often recurred multiple times – in one example, it appeared in four instances in a single article. By contrast, the word "deport" was only mentioned in 8% of articles while overseas employment promoters were mentioned in a quarter of all articles. Remittances came up as a topic in only 16% of articles.

Overall, half of the articles were positive, and 33% of articles were negative. The negative articles centered on crime, looking at:

- Pakistanis arrested in France,
- how the deteriorating economy is tied to a decrease in foreign remittances,
- Pakistanis dying in a ship in Turkey,

- Pakistanis executed in Saudi Arabia for drug trafficking.
- Saudi Arabia suspending Pakistani visas,
- Pakistani migrants losing their jobs during COVID-19,
- and the link between the deteriorating economy and foreign remittances.
-

A sampling of stories from 2017 to 2020:

STORY	YEAR
Kuwaiti visas allowed for Pakistanis (Editorial) (پاکستانیوں کے لیے کویتی ویزوں کی بحالی)	2017
3 Pakistanis decapitated in Saudi Arabia over drug trafficking (سعودی عرب میں منشیات کی اسمگلنگ کے الزام میں 3 پاکستانیوں کے سر قلم)	2017
The desire for a better life in Europe: Human trafficking on the rise (بہتر زندگی کیلئے یورپ جانے کا شوق، انسانی اسمگلنگ عروج پر)	2018
The Slave of the Slaves (غلام کا نشانہ غلام ہی بنتا ہے)	2019
When will expatriates get their rights? (تارکین وطن کو ان کے حقوق کب ملیں گے؟)	2018
Good news for people seeking to work in Saudi Arabia (سعودی عرب میں کام کے خواہش مند پاکستانیوں کے لیے خوشخبری)	2019
31 Pakistanis arrested in France (Editorial) (31 پاکستانی غیر قانونی تارکین وطن فرانس میں گرفتار)	2019
The deteriorating economy and foreign remittances (بدحال معیشت اور زرتریسیلات)	2019
7 Pakistanis die as a ship sinks in Turkey (ترکی میں پاکستانی غیر قانونی تارکین وطن کی کشتی ڈوبنے سے 7 افراد ہلاک)	2019
The need for the release and return of Pakistanis imprisoned abroad (غیر ممالک میں قید پاکستانیوں کی رہائی و واپسی کی ضرورت)	2020
Qatar announces visa centres in Lahore and Peshawar (قطر کا لاہور اور پشاور میں بھی ویزا سینٹرز قائم کرنے کا اعلان)	2020
105 coronavirus cases detected in flights returning from Dubai and Saudi Arabia (سعودی عرب اور دبئی سے آنے والی پروازوں میں کورونا کے 105 کیسز کی تصدیق)	2020
22,000 expats lose their jobs amid Covid-19 (کورونا وائر کے باعث سمندر پار 22 ہزار سے زائد پاکستانی بے روزگار)	2020
Saudi Consulate suspends visa services (سعودی سفارتخانے نے پاکستان میں ویزا سروس معطل کردی)	2020
Saudi Arabia gives 72 hour deadline to foreigners and umrah pilgrims to leave the country (سعودی عرب کی عمرہ زائرین سمیت غیر ملکیوں کو 72 گھنٹے میں ملک چھوڑنے کی ہدایت)	2020
Request to extend deadline to evacuate stranded Pakistanis in Saudi Arabia (مسافروں کا انخلا، سعودی حکومت سے مہلت بڑھانے کی درخواست)	2020

Daily Khabrain

Daily Khabrain only produced four stories during the surveyed period. Among those stories, there were no stories that interviewed migrant workers. Likewise, the *kafala* or labour sponsorship system was never mentioned. The articles did not employ the terms "illegal" migrant or "deportee." Similarly, recruitment agents and OEP promoters were not mentioned in any articles. Remittances were represented in half of all stories. The government was referenced in 75% of all stories – usually the Prime Minister's office or Ministry of Foreign Affairs (such as the foreign minister or Saudi ambassador). Women were never mentioned. Most of the reports were neutral.

A sampling of stories is listed below:

STORY	YEAR
Saudi Arabia's policies and Pakistani workers (سعودی عرب کی پالیسیاں اور پاکستانی محنت کش)	2018

The migrant prisoners of the Gulf (خلیجی ممالک میں قید تارکین وطن)	2018	
Pak-Saudi relations will reach new heights: Imran Khan (تعلقات نئی بلندیوں پر جائیں گے: عمران خان)	2019	
30 Pakistanis have died from the coronavirus in Saudi Arabia: FM (سعودی عرب میں کورونا وائرس کی وبا کے باعث اب تک 30 پاکستانی جاں بحق ہوئے، وزیر خارجہ شاہ محمود قریشی)	2020	

Daily Jasarat

Daily Jasarat produced 16 stories during the surveyed period. No women were featured in migration stories. When the government was mentioned – in almost 57% of stories – the most-commonly cited departments were the Prime Minister’s office and overseas Pakistani diplomatic missions in countries like Saudi Arabia. In particular, the press attaché of the Pakistani consulate in Jeddah was a common source, and the newspaper covered Jeddah consulate’s efforts to help the local Pakistani community.

Industry groups like the Overseas Employment Promoters Association were mentioned in some articles. The newspaper never used the words “illegal immigrant” or “deport.” Recruitment agents were only mentioned in one story. Remittances were the subject of two stories. 10 of sixteen stories were negative in their characterization of migrant workers.

A sampling of stories is reproduced below:

STORY TITLES	YEAR
Migration: From Crisis to a tragedy (مہاجرت: بحران سے المیے تک)	2017
A comprehensive policy is needed for Pakistani expatriates (تارکین وطن کے تحفظ کیلئے جامع حکمت عملی بنائی جائے)	2017
The Days and Nights of Pakistani Gulf workers (خلیجی ممالک میں پاکستانی محنت کشوں کے شب و روز)	2018
The visible decline in Pakistani labour to Saudi Arabia (سعودی عرب میں پاکستانی مزدوروں کی بھرتی میں واضح کمی)	2018
Problems of Pakistani immigrants (پاکستانی تارکین وطن کے مسائل)	2018
Saudi Arabia: Pakistani expats pay tribute to Saudi govt over corona efforts (سعودی عرب: کورونا کے خلاف اقدامات پر پاکستانی برادری کا خراج تحسین)	2020
FM talks to expats in Saudi Arabia via video link (وزیر خارجہ کا سعودی عرب میں مقیم پاکستانیوں سے ویڈیو لنک کے ذریعے خطاب)	2020
250 workers stranded in Saudi Arabia reach Pakistan (سعودی عرب میں پھنسے 250 پاکستانی شہریوں کی وطن واپسی)	2020
The views of the Pakistani diaspora in Riyadh about the efforts of the Saudi government (غیر ملکوں کے لیے سعودی حکومت کے اقدامات پر ریاض میں مقیم پاکستانیوں کے تاثرات)	2020
Coronavirus: One lakh Pakistanis stranded in Gulf (کورونا وائرس: خلیجی ممالک میں ایک لاکھ پاکستانی پھنس گئے)	2020
The Jeddah consulate is aware of the difficulties of the Pakistani community (پاکستانی برادری کو درپیش مسائل سے آگاہ ہیں، قونصل خانہ جدہ)	2020

Nawaiwaqt

Nawaiwaqt only produced 13 stories during the surveyed period. Only one of the stories interviewed a migrant worker directly. Only seven stories interviewed a government department, most commonly the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis, Punjab Overseas Pakistanis Commission, or the Prime Minister's office.

A sampling of stories is reproduced below:

STORY	YEAR
The worried citizens in Saudi Arabia (سعودی عرب میں پریشان حال اہل وطن)	2020
Why are overseas Pakistanis facing so much hardship? (اوورسیز پاکستانیوں کے ساتھ اس قدر زیادتی اور ظلم کیوں؟)	2019
Passport (پاسپورٹ)	2018
Prime Minister Imran Khan addresses the Pakistani community in Qatar (وزیر اعظم عمران خان کا قطر میں پاکستانی کمیونٹی سے خطاب)	2018
The terrible working hours of labour (بہن تلخ بہت بندہ مزدور کے اوقات)	2018
HumantTrafficking (سمگلنگ انسانی)	2018
Saudi Arabia gives deadline to illegal immigrants (سعودی عرب نے غیر قانونی تارکین وطن کو 60 دن کی مہلت دیدی)	2017
The joys of overseas Pakistanis and the perils of terrorism (اوورسیز پاکستانیوں کی خوشیاں اور دہشت گردی کا غم)	2019

Independent Urdu

During the surveyed period, *Independent Urdu* published three stories related to migration. These touched upon labour violations in Qatar, Pakistanis in a human trafficking situation in France, and worker deportation from Saudi Arabia. Only one story mentioned the government. Sixty percent of stories employed the term “illegal” when referring to migrants, although the media outlet never used the word “deport.” The outlet never discussed the role of recruitment agents or overseas employment promoters, and never published a story related to remittances.

A sampling of stories is reproduced below:

STORY	YEAR
I was sent home barefoot from Saudi Arabia (مجھے سعودی عرب سے ننگے پاؤں پاکستان بھیج دیا)	2017
Qatar: Severe violation of rights in Qatar's labour camps (قطر: کورونا وائرس سے مزدور کیمپوں میں ہونے والی سنگین خلاف ورزیاں)	2020
France: 21 Pakistanis hidden in lorry arrested (فرانس: لاری میں چھپے 31 پاکستانی تارکین وطن برآمد)	2019

TELEVISION (URDU)

ARY News

During the surveyed period, *ARY News* aired six stories related to migration that were accessible on its YouTube channel. The majority of news reports concerned Pakistanis stranded in the Gulf during the coronavirus pandemic, and the salary improvement for housemaids in the UAE. When the Pakistani government was mentioned in a news report, it was often the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (the Foreign Minister) or the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resources. Most videos spanned from as little as 43 seconds to as high as 14 minutes. The longest video was a speech by the Foreign Minister to Gulf migrants. Half of the reports were sympathetic to migrants. Women were not featured as migrant workers in any of the surveyed clips. The terms “illegal migrant” and “deport” were not used. Although the majority of reports concerned Pakistanis in the Gulf, the *kafala* system or labour sponsorship was not mentioned once.

A sampling of stories is reproduced below:

STORY	YEAR
Good news for Pakistani citizens in Saudi Arabia	2020
Pakistanis stranded abroad look towards PIA for repatriation	2020
How many Pakistanis are stuck in foreign countries?	2020
1.1 million is the minimum salary for hiring maids in UAE	2020
Qatar bans entry of people from Pakistan and 13 other countries	2020
Saudi Arabian aviation authority granted permission to resume flights till March 2	2020

Geo News

During the surveyed period, *Geo News* aired nine stories related to migration that were accessible on its YouTube channel. The topics covered a range of issues from Pakistani migrants in the Gulf testing positive for coronavirus to newly-elected politicians pledging to serve Pakistanis in the Gulf. Three of the stories were about the coronavirus’ impact on migrants, including the suspension of Saudi flights, Qatar’s decision to ban the entry of Pakistanis, and the high incidence of coronavirus cases among returnee migrants from the Gulf. The term “illegal” migrant was only used in one story, while “deportees” were never mentioned. Despite the fact that *Geo News* overwhelmingly covered the stories of Gulf-based migrants, the labour sponsorship system of the region – the *kafala* system – was not mentioned once. When government officials were interviewed or referenced, they were usually from the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Recruitment agents were never mentioned, nor was the recruitment process a subject of any of the stories.

A sampling of stories is listed below:

STORY	YEAR
A tragic traffic accident in Saudi Arabia	2019
Release of Pakistanis from Saudi prisons was an unusual decision	2019
Saudi Arabia suspends flights	2020
Dubai: PTI UAE's Newly Elected Members Vow To Serve Pakistani Immigrants (Gulf)	2020
The Pakistani government takes notice of the workers in Saudi Arabia and their hardships)	2020
Qatar bans entry of 14 countries, including Pakistan	2020
Migrants coming back from Dubai and Saudi Arabia test positive for Coronavirus	2020
New difficulties for people abroad	2020
Coronavirus pandemic: Pakistan starts evacuating nationals from UAE	2020

SAMAA News

During the surveyed period, *SAMAA News* aired eight stories related to migration that were accessible on its YouTube channel. Stories ranged in duration from 59 seconds to 4 minutes. These stories concerned migrant prisoners released from Malaysian and Saudi jails and changes to the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resources' policies. No women were featured in stories about migrant workers. Migrants were never directly interviewed in stories. The term "illegal" migrant was referenced in one news report concerning migrants imprisoned in Saudi Arabia. Recruitment agents were not the subject of any of the news coverage. The *kafala* system was not mentioned once in any of the eight stories. Five stories were sympathetic to migrant workers and their plight.

A sampling of stories is listed below:

STORY	YEAR
Package For Overseas Pakistanis	2019
Minister of State for Overseas Pakistanis Zulfi Bukhari Media Talk	2019
PM Imran Khan request to HRH Crown Prince for Special Overseas Pakistanis	2019
125 Pakistani Prisoners Freed From Saudi Jails	2019
Woh Family Jinke Piyare Saudi Arabia Mein Qaid Hain - 7 se 8	2019
Saudi Jail Mein Qaid Pakistanio ki Rihai ka Sun Kar Ghar Wale Khushi se Nihal	2019
Zulfi Bukhari Special Message for Overseas Pakistanis	2019
320 Pakistani prisoners return to Pakistan from Malaysia, chant slogans in favour of PM Imran Khan	2019

Express News

During the surveyed period, *Express News* aired three stories related to migration that were accessible on its YouTube channel. These were related to the Saudi Crown Prince's decision to release Pakistani prisoners in the kingdom and coronavirus-related repatriation flights for migrants stranded in the Gulf. Women were not featured in any of the stories on migrant workers. When the government was quoted, it was often from the Ministry of Information

or Prime Minister’s Office. The terms “illegal migrant” or “deportee” were never used in any story. Despite all the stories covering migrants in the Gulf, the *kafala* or labour sponsorship system of the region was not once mentioned for context. Recruitment agents were not the subject of any stories covered by *Express News* during the surveyed period.

A sample of stories is reproduced below:

STORY	YEAR	
Saudi Prince Orders Release of 2,107 Pakistani Prisoners in KSA	2019	
Saudi King orders Release of Pakistani Prisoners in Saudi Arabia	2019	
PIA To Operate 2 Special Flights (Repatriation flights)	2020	

TELEVISION (ENGLISH)

Indus News

From 2017 to 2020, *Indus News* aired four stories related to migration that were accessible on its YouTube channel. The first story touched upon the war in Yemen and the Ethiopian migrants trapped there. The second story looked at Pakistan’s visa issues with Kuwait. The visa story did not provide any context for what the visa issues were, how they impacted migrant workers, or how long Kuwait had chosen to restrict visas – the viewer had almost no context for the story.

In 2019, *Indus News* also aired a story on Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia’s strategic blueprint to develop and diversify its oil-based economy, and how it might impact workers. Nonetheless, the story did not delve deeply into these impacts or provide thorough context for how workers would be affected.

Additionally, women were not the subject of any of the migration coverage aired on *Indus News*. Migrants were only used as direct interviewees in one of the stories. When the government was quoted, it was often Pakistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The terms “illegal” and “deported” were not used once. The *kafala* system was also not mentioned, nor was there any coverage given to the recruitment system bringing migrants to the Gulf. The surveyed clips ranged in length from 36 seconds to two minutes.

Stories are reproduced below:

STORY	YEAR
Migrants Trapped In Yemen On Way To Gulf States	2019
Pakistani Migrants Have Introduced Street Cricket to Greece	2019
Vision 2030 of Saudi Arabia and Opportunities for Pakistan	2019
Pakistan’s visa issues with Kuwait	2019

ONLINE MEDIA (URDU)

BBC Urdu

In total, *BBC Urdu* produced 20 stories on labour migration. Across *BBC Urdu* stories, women were interviewed as migrant workers in 10% of stories. Migrant workers were interviewed in 36% of all stories. The *kafala* or labour sponsorship system was mentioned in two news reports. The government was a source in 80% of stories.

Less favourably, almost a third of all stories used the phrase “illegal” migrants. The word “deport” was only used in one story. Recruitment agents were mentioned in 40% of stories.

In general, *BBC Urdu* moved away from other Urdu media outlets by producing human features on migration instead of short 200-word news reports. In selecting this format, stories were often more character-driven, context-rich, and multi-sourced. According to BBC Urdu journalists, labour migration topics performed well with their audiences, and two of the highest-trafficking stories of last year were migration stories.⁴¹

A sampling of news stories from 2017-2020 is reproduced below:

STORY TITLES	YEAR
Reforms related to foreign workers in Qatar: Minimum wage set for the first time (قطر میں غیر ملکی مزدوروں سے متعلق قوانین میں اصلاحات، پہلی بار کم سے کم اجرت کی حد مقرر)	2017
"If they are willing to die, no one is stopping them" – (In Balochistan, young people who were dying to go to Europe illegally had similar dreams in their eyes, like a young man who was recently stranded at Istanbul Airport in Turkey.) (مرنے جاتے ہیں تو جانے انہیں کون روک رہا ہے؟) (In Balochistan, young people who were dying to go to Europe illegally had similar dreams in their eyes, like a young man who was recently stranded at Istanbul Airport in Turkey.)	2017
57 Pakistanis recovered from smugglers in Turkey (ترکی میں اسمگلروں کی قید سے 57 پاکستانی شہری بازیاب)	2017
"Libyan Ship Tragedy: the greed for money took their lives" (لیبیا کشتی حادثہ: پیسہ کمانے کے لالچ نے ان کی جان لے لی)	2018
The trials and tribulations of Pakistanis locked up in the Saudi justice system (سعودی عرب کے نظام انصاف کے جال میں پھنسے پاکستانیوں پر کیا بیٹتی ہے؟)	2018
Why are Pakistani workers returning from Saudi Arabia? (پاکستانی مزدور سعودی عرب سے واپس کیوں لوٹ رہے ہیں؟)	2018
Saudi Crown Prince's visit to Pakistan: More than two thousand Pakistanis working in Saudi Arab to be released (سعودی ولی عہد محمد بن سلمان کا دورہ پاکستان: سعودی عرب میں قید دو ہزار سے زائد پاکستانیوں کی رہائی کا اعلان)	2019
A diary of a Pakistani engineer working in Saudi Arabia: "This country is closed to us" (سعودی عرب میں مقیم پاکستانی انجینئر کی ڈائری: اب یہ ملک ہمارے لیے سمٹ رہا ہے)	2019
Pakistanis imprisoned in Saudi Arabia: 'Tricked by umrah into death' (سعودی عرب میں قید پاکستانی کو عمرے کا جھانسنہ دے کر موت کے منہ میں دھکیل دیا)	2019
Women workers on sale in the Gulf's online slave market (خلیجی ممالک میں غلاموں کی آن لائن منڈی میں ملازمائیں برائے فروخت)	2019
21,000 Pakistanis lost jobs in Arab countries due to Covid-19 (کورونا وائرس: عرب ممالک میں 21 ہزار پاکستانیوں کی نوکری ختم)	2020

⁴¹ Baloch, Sahar. "Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman's visit: 'Pakistani workers no longer want to go to Saudi Arabia'." *BBC News Urdu*. February 15, 2019. (URL: <https://www.bbc.com/urdu/pakistan-47249493>) and Baloch, Sahar. "Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman's visit to Pakistan: The release of more than 2,000 Pakistanis imprisoned in Saudi Arabia has been announced." *BBC News Urdu*. February 18, 2019. (URL: <https://www.bbc.com/urdu/pakistan-47271934>)

Public service messages and migration-related programming outside of traditional news

In addition to traditional news media, researchers also examined public service messages and TV programmes that prominently featured themes of migration.

Tv as an advocacy tool for fair and regular migration



FIGURE 1: A POSTER FOR *DALDAL* (HUM TV).

In entertainment, there were also fictionalized accounts of irregular migration, such as the Hum TV series *Daldal* (*Swamp*). The plotline, as described by the TV show itself, centers on the struggle of aspiring migrants to Europe:

“Daldal reflects on the evil practices of society that are still being carried out to this

day. It tells the story of a man who belongs to the lower strata of society and wishes to settle in the West through whatever means he can. But once he makes it to the West, life isn't as smooth as he thought it would be.”

The TV show includes discussion of the risks and challenges entailed in irregular migration, such as the hazards of undertaking perilous border crossings without identity documents. During interviews with Pakistani media outlets, the lead actors described speaking to the technical staff and production crew about their family's experiences pursuing irregular migration abroad. “I didn't even have to go past my filming crew to meet people who have been directly impacted by the issue,” said Zahid Ahmed, the lead actor. “We had workers who had a cousin or a brother who had been a part of illegal immigration. Some of them told me how they had travelled illegally to the UK and then sought asylum.”⁴²

Promotional media appearances by the lead actors also provided another method of encouraging attitudinal shifts on labour migration. “It's nice to be

⁴²Ajaz, Mahwash. “Living abroad isn't for legal immigrants, let alone illegal ones: Zahid Ahmed.” *Express Tribune*. November 3, 2017. URL: (<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1548736/4-living-abroad-isnt-easy-legal-immigrants-let-alone-illegal-ones-zahid-ahmed/>)

able to provide that information, because sometimes I fear people make choices without knowing the consequences,” said actress Armeena Khan in a 2019 [interview](#) with *BBC Asian Network*. “It’s not as rosy, it’s not the land of milk and honey as it seems to be there.. [Y]ou’re absolutely risking everything that you have, from your dignity to your safety... You could be stuck in limbo in a system [and] you may never get to see home again.” Researchers see these interviews as serving a dual informational and promotional role, underlining both the risks and opportunities of overseas migration.

Migrant Resource Center: Public Message Campaigns on Safe Migration

Moreover, in addition to television programmes and traditional news media, some public message campaigns were also initiated by the Migrant Resource Centre (MRC), a help and awareness center established jointly by the government of Pakistan, European Union, International Labour Organization, and International Centre for Migration Policy Development.

Often taking the form of animated videos, MRC produced a series of informational guides in Urdu and English to promote safe and orderly migration. In total, the MRC had more than 85 videos on its social media channels, which ranged in length from nine seconds to four minutes. Some of the videos were a mix of original content while others were repurposed news stories created by international news organizations like *Al Jazeera English* and *BBC*. These videos covered a mix of topics from human smuggling to the hazards of irregular migration. In some cases, Pakistani social media influencers were recruited to sensitize the public on the perils of migration through irregular channels, generating views in excess of 37,000 people on Facebook.

A sample of videos released by MRC:

FACEBOOK VIDEOS	VIEWS
Famous social media influencer Zeeshan Shafqat telling people about benefits of adopting safe migration methods (2020) - Urdu	37,000
Famous Instagrammer and Vlogger Hamza Bhatti wants people to adopt safe migration (2020) - English	38,000
Consequences of Irregular Migration: Journalist Azaz Syed/Geo News (2020) - Urdu	105,000
With the dream of going abroad, many Pakistanis fall prey to fake agents. (2020) – English/Urdu	47,000
“In the last 5 decades, over 10 million Pakistanis migrated to foreign countries in the hope of a better future. But only those who opted for the legal way of migration could get what they wanted.” (2020) – English/Urdu	27,000
Ayaz lost a lot of money to an agent who promised to send him to Brunei on a work visa. (2020) Urdu	33,000
Hazards of Irregular Migration (2018) – Urdu	390
Verify Recruitment Agencies (2018) – Urdu	250

Wherever you go, whenever you go, go legally! (2018) – Urdu	261
Be Aware Migrants (2017) - Urdu	98
Safe and Regular Migration (2020) - Urdu	2020

The vast majority of these videos focused on promoting safe and orderly migration and highlighting the hazards of irregular migration. According to the MRC, social media has emerged as one of the most effective forms of reaching audiences, and showing audiences Urdu-language videos outlining the pitfalls of using middlemen has contributed to better understanding of the perils of irregular migration.

Conclusion

Overall, media content in Pakistan from 2017 to 2020 delved into labour migration by focusing overwhelmingly on event-based reporting. Two major events that triggered a wave of migrant stories during this period were: 1) COVID-19 migration reporting, and 2) the 2019 state visit of the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and his pledge to release over 2,000 Pakistanis from jails. Despite the opportunities to plunge deeper into the topic of migration – including under-covered subjects in Pakistani media like the Gulf’s *kafala* or labour sponsorship system and how it impacts workers – most reporters failed to pursue follow-up stories or use the events as a jumping-off point to look at the larger structural forces at play in driving migration. Part of this stemmed from the fact that most newsrooms failed to assign a dedicated journalist to cover labour migration, making it difficult for journalists to build expertise on the topic or go deeper into the story to publish more rigorous storytelling.

During this period, there were also few stories on how Pakistan has been impacted by migrant workers leaving the country in the short or long-term, particularly in terms of how Punjabi or Pashtun towns or family structures have undergone changes or transformations during the migration process.

Additionally, there was also an exceptionally low number of investigative stories looking at irregular migration and human trafficking, partly due to the difficulty of obtaining on-the-record sources and the perils involved with uncovering underground trafficking networks.

The sensitive nature of the Saudi-Pakistani partnership also presents a major challenge for critical reporting on labour migration, with some journalists suggesting that the Saudi state uses its financial power to influence media content or even dissuade coverage of Saudi labour policies.

Alarmingly, there was also a dearth of voices from migrant workers themselves in the vast majority of stories covering their lives. Government perspectives tended to overshadow and dominate news stories on migrants. While this played a positive role in ensuring that the government's work on labour migration was covered, it did not provide audiences a clear glimpse into the experiences of migrants in the Gulf or Europe. Failing to include direct migrant voices only ensured that reports remained cursory and superficial, sticking to soundbites or pithy quotes that did not fully capture the migration experience.

Furthermore, many journalists claimed that the low level of coverage was partly due to the lack of reader interest in the subject, as well as the lack of encouragement from newsroom managers and editors. Other journalists, however, pointed out that there was a high level of reader engagement with stories on migration relative to other topics,⁴³ and that journalists could play a vital role in promoting stories on safe, regular migration: "With proper training and guidance, journalists working on migrant labor issues can be instrumentalized for educating the public," said Lehaq Ali at *AFP*, though he cautioned that reporters require more training to do this effectively. "Currently, I don't feel that there is enough knowledge among journalists. In fact, most of the journalists working on this topic need to undergo more training."

Overall, the coverage of labour migration in news stories requires a greater focus on the voices of migrant workers. Workers are not only well-placed to narrate their work experiences and the challenges they undergo, but when their perspective is added to stories, it contributes to greater public understanding of regular and irregular migration, recruitment practices, and remittance flows. Without this vital context, stories on labour migration and fair recruitment remain deeply absent of the main actors involved in migration and ultimately diminish the public's knowledge on safe, orderly migration.

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GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMINOLOGIES FOR MEDIA REPORTING IN PAKISTAN

Forced Labour and Fair recruitment of migrant workers

Urdu Word	English Word	Definition
اقامہ	Residential permit For the worker	The overseas employment promoter / recruitment agency / employer gets the foreign service agreement signed by workers before departure to pursue residential permit for the worker in the country of destination
امتیازی سلوک	Discrimination	Any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, or national extraction or social origin
امیگریشن حراست	Immigration Detention	Immigration detention is the policy of holding individuals suspected of visa violations, irregular entry or unauthorized arrival, and those subject to deportation and removal in detention until a decision is made by immigration authorities to grant a visa and release them into the community, or to repatriate them to their country of departure.
انسانی سمگلنگ	Human Smuggling	Human Smuggling refers to the facilitation, transportation or irregular entry of a person across an international border, in violation of one or more countries' laws, either clandestinely or through deception, such as the use of fraudulent documents
انصاف تک رسائی: بیرون ملک ملازمت کے دوران پیش آنے والے مسائل کے حل کے لیے شکایت درج کروانا	Access to Justice: Grievance/ complaints registration	It refers to support mechanisms/services for migrant workers to access justice through registering complaints/ grievances against the employer, overseas employment promoter/ recruitment agency or work related problems
بیرون ملک ملازمت کا معاہدہ	Foreign Service Agreement	The Foreign service agreement is legal document which specifies the nature and duration of work ,terms and conditions and rights and responsibilities of workers ,it is important for the worker to carefully read and understand the agreement/ contract before signing it..
پناہ کے متلاشی	Asylum Seekers	An asylum seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it.
پیشہ ورانہ صحت و حفاظت	Occupational safety and health	It refers to measures taken to ensure safety and health at the workplace. These include use of appropriate safety gadgets, caution while handling dangerous machines and tools, safety against harsh weather and hazardous working conditions to avoid injuries and accidents.
پھنسیے ہوئے مہاجر	Stranded Migrants	Migrants who “find themselves legally stranded, because they are unable to remain lawfully in the country in which they are physically present, or move to another country, or return to their home country”
تارکین وطن	Expatriate	A person temporarily or permanently residing outside of the country of which the person is a citizen. The person may be working or not.
تنظیم سازی کی آزاد دی	Freedom of Association	Freedom of association is a fundamental human right and is also at the core of the ILO's values. In the area of employment, it is the right of workers and employers without distinction whatsoever, and subject only to the rules of the organizations concerned, to form and join organizations of their own choosing without previous authorization.

جبری مشقت	Forced Labor	Refers to situations in which persons are coerced to work through the use of violence or intimidation, or by more subtle means such as accumulated debt, retention of identity papers or threats of denunciation to authorities.
جلا وطنی	Deportation	An act of expelling or removing a foreign national from a country, either to the country of origin or to a third country.
دو طرفہ معاہدے	Bilateral Agreements	Legally-binding treaties between a country of origin and a country of destination outlining the agreed terms, principles, and procedures governing labour migration between the two states
ڈونکر	Donker (Slang)	Slang word for a person associated with the business of trafficking people, often a powerful one with a lot of connection. They are described as "International people"
ڈونکی	Donkey (Slang)	A slang which is used in Punjab's those districts which are known as the centers of human trafficking and smuggling. The word is used for those people who aspire to go to Europe through irregular migration channels. The word is a metaphor for the kind of treatment which these migrants receive in Pakistan, Iran and Turkey
رقم کی منتقلی	Remittances transfer	Money earned or acquired by migrant workers that are transferred back to their country of origin.
سفری دستاویزات	Travelling documents	Identity, travel and work documents, such as passport, national or foreign national identity card. These documents are crucial to the mobility and safety of migrant workers through all stages of migration and employment process
غیر قانونی تارکین وطن	Illegal migrant	The word illegal migrant is extensively used in both electronic and print media of Pakistan. The more appropriate word, however, is irregular or undocumented migrant, someone who is not authorized to enter, to stay or to work in the country of destination.
کفالہ	Kafala/ Sponsorship	Several Arab Governments have authorized their citizens/ companies to sponsor / take the responsibility of bringing foreign worker, this process is called Kafala. Worker cannot work with other person/company without obtaining permission of Kafeel.
کفیل	Kafeel	The Arabic word for sponsoring company or employer in Gulf countries
کم از کم اجرت	Minimum Wage	The minimum amount that an employer is legally required to pay workers under the law in those countries in which a minimum wage has been established by law.
گھریلو ملازم	Domestic Worker	An individual who performs domestic duties such as cleaning, cooking and care work (children, elderly and disabled) in a household within an employment relationship (i.e. paid work).
مزدور کا استحصال	Labor Exploitation	A broad spectrum of working conditions and practices that are short of decent work and thus unacceptable. They range from extreme exploitation including forced labour, trafficking and modern slavery at one end, to other unacceptable forms of work
مساوی مواقع	Equal Opportunity	Refers to equal entitlements in pay, working conditions, employment security and social security.
وہ لوگ جو اپنا وطن چھوڑ کر کسی اور ملک میں بس جائیں	Diaspora	Diaspora refers to a people or an ethnic population that leave their traditional ethnic homelands, or countries of origin, and are dispersed throughout other parts of the world.

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