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Entitled:

Labour Migration to Gulf Countries and the Role of
Brokers in the Recruitment of Workforce in Pakistan

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**Saviors In, Culprits Out: Backing Up the Migrant Workers through Policy
Measures Based on an Institutional Analysis**

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Executive Summary

The current economic decay of the Pakistani society, largely caused by the circular debt, augments the role of migrant workers and foreign remittances for many reasons. Gulf countries have been attracting millions of people around the world especially Pakistan with particular reference to the unskilled laborers in UAE, Qatar Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Oman. Immigration of unskilled labor has its perks and perils; while it opens some new avenues for the development and livelihood of the families on the other hand the lives of migrants themselves remain precarious. Exploitation, lack of institutional frameworks for protection, low-paid rest areas, consumption of unhygienic food to save money, and living in sub-standard environments are some of the factors that need to be addressed for an optimal gain from the migrant workers. Recommendations are provided to address the issues at the institutional level.

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Background

The policy study mainly focuses on two different dimensions of the unskilled migrant's life: Firstly, the government's role in the facilitation of migrants/workforce and the assessment of living conditions vis-à-vis the policies that were established for the betterment of the migrants and the families left behind. Various research tools were administered for data collection at different levels to look into the phenomenon of migration and how the middle man e.g. the recruiters received more benefits from the process of sending individuals abroad. Various issues that are directly or indirectly linked to job performances, facilities, reached at the destination, getting the desired jobs, and then job-related issues e.g. skill, and knowledge deficiency were some of the basic questions that were asked by migrant workers at their job destination and their vacations at with families. Various types of research highlighted the job and residence-related issues of the migrants at the country of destination and their visa processes along with resource utilization at the country of origin

Approach to Institutional Analysis

After an extensive review of the literature and consultation with the stakeholders, four research tools have been developed for data collection. To adequately account for this variation in the quantitative survey, 125 migrant subjects from each city, yielding a total sample of 375 migrants (125 from each district), were identified and selected. The survey was followed by a questionnaire-based ethnographic study focusing on migration agents/brokers, to understand the practices concerning recruitment of migrants. Overall 30 brokers (10 from each

district) were selected; followed by 12 in-depth interviews from each district. The sample size of the study was 375 laborers migrants, out of which 150 migrants were interviewed from their native towns in Pakistan (50 each from districts Swat, Rawalpindi, and DG Khan), while the remaining 225 laborers migrants were interviewed at their destinations (75 each belonged to districts Swat, Rawalpindi, and DG Khan) making in all 375 respondent. Since it was difficult to find labor migrants in Pakistan, it was decided to interview them in UAE at their workplace. Interviews ranged from 21 to 55 years old. The selection criteria for the respondents were a) Pakistani national b) working in the labor category c) belonging to the selected districts at the country of origin, Rawalpindi, Swat, and Dera Ghazi Khan

Core Findings

First structural theme within the vast study is that lack of institutionalization in term of clearly devised regulatory mechanisms caused various miseries to the migrated individuals

- The study clarifies various problems associated with the visa process by the migrants, in selection for particular jobs, type of visa, and the destination placement at their respective jobs.
- The study also found the migrants paid a huge amount to the controlling agents.
- Due to lack of job opportunities, it was observed that migrants were exploited at every step from selecting the job/trade at the destination till reached
- The left-behind family pushed them to remain in the circle in which migrants were portrayed as the savior of the left behind family and the family is living a miserable life.

Apart from the precarious mechanisms and regulatory framework migrant workers suffered from precarious documentation of their working conditions and status

- No particular or written mechanism was shared with the migrants before their joining, and huge deductions were made by the employers in the name of vacations, penalties, and TORs of the particular business sector.
- Provision of wages at a particular time was another important issue; no employer was bound to pay the wages in a stipulated time frame because they worked as might be right.
- The least bothered phenomenon was the mobility in job and rotation for better opportunities, migrants were bound to complete their contracts and then fly out (exit) the country of destination to get a new job contract.

Precarious status, lack of communication and poor living conditions go hand by hand for the majority of the workers

- Living with a previous job contract is not practiced and is considered prohibited for the development of business and Kafala.
- No one is allowed to meet directly with the employers; trans-passing is considered a very heinous crime in the GCC countries, because bosses do not intervene in what is happening at workstations, for they have supervisors from the same community or country who directly use legitimate power to exploit the other workers.
- The data for the present research also revealed that migrants were living in extremely unhygienic conditions of life due to which they were suffering from diseases of an acute nature.
- The antagonistic behavior of the native communities in the destination country is also one of the serious psychological issues of the migrants.

Lack of legal protection almost pushes the workers towards a kind of modern slavery and deepening of their exploitation.

- Results of the study suggested that less legal protection of the migrants made the contract between employers and the migrants vague, document bondage by the employer feels like modern slavery, and migrants do not have the right to leave their jobs with their choices or opt for new opportunities without completing the previous one assignment.
- It was observed that after termination, the migrants did not get any support from courts of law. Therefore the dispute over outstanding wages remained unaddressed.

Policy Recommendations

After the analysis of data, some policy recommendations are made which are as follows:

- **Creating a corroborative system** for the redressed of grievances, welfare, pay protection, and easy access to individual visit protector offices for registration.

- **Data of recruiting agencies and agents** must be updated to address fraud and exploitation. **Pre-departure orientation** must be given under the supervision of the protectors' office. Awareness of labor laws is required so that the workers are more self-conscious and proactive about their rights and duties
- **Devising clear strategies for the communication of risks** involved in the status of the migrants such as an early warning system before the expiry of the Passport-timeline.
- **Maintenance of embassy/public relations** offices in UAE is necessary because most of the time migrants are forced to come back again.
- **Use of ICTS** An APP may be developed to work like an e-portal for complaints by the migrants at their country of destination so that they could easily file their complaints and suggestions for improvements.
- **An area representative system** may be adopted for easy access to legal and moral support. Legal support against employers may please be provided by the government or relevant NGOs under serious circumstances.
- **Occupational safety** and health risk mediation measures must be created Those who are working in very harsh-hazardous environments may be asked for medical checkups and medical advice after three months.
- **Free medical checkups** and advice must be free of cost and provided by the government of Pakistan.
- **Residential issues may be resolved**, by offering them cheap accommodation under government supervision which fulfills two objectives one is revenue generation and second is a healthy environment for the migrants.
- **Public opinion offices may be established** at embassies that may hire Social Mobilizers to document and record the problems.
- **Government-hosted Job expo** and cultural and legal events may be provided by the government.
- **Job switching should be made easy**. It is not easy to move from one trade to another is not easy as we discussed in the visa process section, some serious efforts are to be required for processing more efficiently, in less time, and more consuming manner.
- **Abolishing undocumented penalties and fines** is a very important aspect which directly linked to the earnings and the departure of the migrants, most of the time remaining undocumented.
- **The transaction charges of remittances** may be revised according to the capacity of the migrants not as per the international policy to motivate them to send remittances through banks rather than other channels.
- **Investment plans** are there (BEOE) but no particular policy has been adopted to convince the migrants to invest that must be incorporated.
- **Pay protection in the case of adverse events**. Migrants faced issues regarding the wages or fewer wages paid by employers or the contractors, a mechanism for standard salary according to work may be devised for them.
- **Awareness of legal and social** support may be initiated so that every migrant must avail that they work under contract to reduce exploitation

Conclusion

The life of immigrants who are the sustainers of the basic livelihood of their families back home is precarious, to say the least. Given the importance of the foreign remittances in alleviating the burden of the circular debt an urgent policy aimed at the regulation of dynamics surrounding the precarious occupational, contractual and institutional conditions is the call of the hour. The policy brief explains why these migrants have not been able to create sustainable livelihoods abroad. Policy recommendations are aimed at addressing the issues that were highlighted in the result section of this brief