

Engaging Diasporas in Information Campaigns on Migration

Diaspora Mapping Report

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List of acronyms

APV	Associazione Pakistani Varesini
BEOE	Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment
CWA	Community Welfare Attaché
EMN	European Migration Network
EU	European Union
EUDiF	European Union Global Diaspora Facility
FIA	Federal Investigation Agency
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IBMS	Integrated Border Management System
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MOPHRD	Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development
NADRA	National Database and Regulatory Authority
NICOP	National Identity Card for Overseas Pakistanis
OEC	Overseas Employment Corporation
OEP	Overseas Employment Promoters
OPF	Overseas Pakistanis Foundation
OPAC	Overseas Pakistanis Advisory Council
POC	Pakistan Origin Card
PARIM	Awareness raising and information campaigns on the risks of irregular migration in Pakistan (PARIM)
TOKTEN	Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USD	United States Dollar



Executive summary

Under the PARIM project, this report examines the potential for engaging diaspora members as Ambassadors of Change in information and awareness-raising campaigns related to irregular migration. The PARIM project aims to offer balanced information about the dangers and consequences of irregular migration, the realities of life in Europe for irregular migrants, and opportunities for legal migration to potential migrants in districts with high irregular migration rates. One outreach approach planned under the PARIM awareness campaign is engaging with Pakistani diaspora members in Europe as “credible messengers” to share balanced information with potential migrants in Pakistan. Acknowledging the important role of social networks in migration decision-making, this study builds on available knowledge on the effectiveness of engaging diaspora members in awareness campaigns. Taking Pakistan as a case of inquiry, the study reviews the existing institutional mechanisms for diaspora engagement, and presents an overview of the Pakistani diaspora community in Europe, particularly in the four PARIM countries of research: Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, and Italy, through a detailed mapping of Pakistani migrant associations in these countries.

This report triangulates information from the PARIM Background Report, which critically reviews the available literature on the effectiveness of information campaigns, with insight drawn from in-depth interviews with migrant associations and representatives of Pakistani Embassies in the four countries, and available literature on the topic. The purpose is to understand the main activities and projects of identified migrant associations, their involvement with the community in the country of residence and in Pakistan, and identify the key channels of communication which can guide the engagement mechanism for members of the diaspora in the PARIM information campaign. Following are the key conclusions drawn from this research:

- Existing research confirms that potential migrants rely greatly on information and support from friends and family in the diaspora as trusted sources. However, the same level of credibility and trustworthiness may not be given to diaspora members and associations that are not personally known to potential migrants. Hence, the effectiveness of such messaging may be limited in terms of impact on potential migrants’ decision to migrate.
- Potential migrants may be more receptive to positive messaging about migration, sharing avenues of legal and safe migration, compared to an information campaign designed to discourage irregular migration through scare tactics. Potential migrants often discard such messages as “biased propaganda”, especially if it is shared through an institutional approach.
- Among the four PARIM countries, Italy has the largest Pakistani community, followed by Greece, Austria, and Bulgaria. This is important as the number and formality of migrant associations in a country depend on the size of the community. Associations vary in terms of their mandate, area of interest, and membership base. All associations have more than one focus area as part of their activities.
- Associations are more engaged with the local host country authorities than they are with communities and authorities in Pakistan. Generally, all associations had a productive relationship with the Pakistani Embassy in their country.
- The focus of the majority of the migrant associations interviewed is on the communities in their countries of residence, while only a couple of associations had dedicated programmes aimed at informing potential migrants in Pakistan about legal migration pathways to Europe.
- Among digital channels of communication, mainly social media (Facebook) and web-based telephone apps such as WhatsApp were most common. The mode of communication depended on the purpose:

for communication related to outreach, public forums were preferred, while community members reached out to these associations largely through private messages on social media.

- The outreach and influence of social media “stars” (YouTubers and TikTokers) is quite strong for sharing information on the journeys and lives of irregular migrants in Europe, particularly those interested in settling in or transiting through Greece and Italy.

Based on these findings, the report offers the following suggestions for the PARIM awareness campaign, and for other campaigns that may aim to engage Pakistani migrants abroad:

- Based on the different types of migrant associations, this report recommends devising a strategic plan of engagement differentiated by types of migrant associations.
- Associations prefer long-term collaborations and partnerships rather than one-off events and, therefore, campaign designers should adopt a forward-looking approach to relationship building with these associations, embedding other avenues of collaboration in the future as per institutional priorities.
- A differentiated approach should be adopted for migrant associations based on the content of the message. For positive messaging, engagement-seeking associations with pre-existing interest and outreach on topics of migration should be engaged. On the other hand, for negative messaging, potential migrants are more likely to trust personal accounts of individual diaspora members (e.g. YouTubers) rather than those institutionally connected. Ideally, effort should be made to involve diaspora

members that are personally known to targeted potential irregular migrants.

- While recognising the prevalence of social media and digital technologies for communication, the campaign must be cognisant of the digital divide between the migrant associations in the four countries and the potential migrants in Pakistan. Findings from the PARIM survey with potential migrants shall inform the communication campaign about average internet usage.
- The profile of selected diaspora members must resonate with the potential migrants in Pakistan. Preference shall be given to first-generation migrant workers who are familiar with the irregular migration path and the implications of choosing irregular migration. The age group of the diaspora members, their socioeconomic background, district of origin, mode of arrival to Europe, etc. may be selected to match the general profile of potential irregular migrants in Pakistan.
- Based on specific diaspora members’ experience and knowledge of migration to Europe, the information campaign can benefit from involving them as content creators, in addition to being key influencers.
- The information campaign must consider overlaps between economic and educational motivations of migration when designing the content. This is relevant as awareness campaigns may focus on one or the other aspects of migration motivations, without considering the interlinkages between them.
- The evaluation framework must consider that diaspora members are just one of the many sources of information for potential migrants, with evidence suggesting higher influence of friends and family abroad, rather than strangers in the diaspora.



1 Introduction

Pakistan has the sixth-largest diaspora in the world, with estimates suggesting a population of 9.1 million¹ people of Pakistani origin living abroad, which roughly translates to 5% of the total population. While a vast majority of Overseas Pakistanis² are in the Gulf and the Middle East for work, the Pakistani diaspora is widely spread with significant populations in the UK and other European countries, North America, and smaller groups in Africa, Asia, and Australia.³ These destinations are representative of a long history of emigration, some of them starting as early as the time of the creation of Pakistan in 1947.⁴

Considering the significant population size living outside of Pakistan, and the potential for capitalising on their contributions to the national development through remittances and other inflows, official efforts of engaging with the Pakistani diaspora started in the 1970s with the development of dedicated institutions responsible for promoting labour emigration, protecting the rights of emigrants and deriving nationally-oriented benefits from the diaspora.⁵ As Pakistan has a pro-emigration policy stance, the majority of emigration from Pakistan takes place through regular, legal routes to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Middle East. However, due to the lack of adequate legal opportunities to migrate to Europe amid high labour demand, in the last three decades, irregular pathways have been adopted by many Pakistanis migrating to Europe, where Pakistanis are regularly amongst the largest groups of smuggled persons detected.⁶ The rise in this trend has also been facilitated by a large transnational network of smugglers, with the presence of agents down to the local village level in Pakistan who recruit and smuggle people towards Europe.⁷ Exploitation at the hands of these agents is common as some pretend to be official recruiters, while others openly overcharge based on the clandestine nature of the journey and put migrants in vulnerable situations along the journey.⁸

Responding to irregular arrivals in Europe, the European Commission and the EU Member States have dedicated significant efforts to reduce the flow of irregular migrants towards the continent. In addition to adopting a stricter border policy and focusing on the return of irregular migrants present in Europe, a new set of policies focus on reducing flows from the source. One of the areas within this policy priority is funding information campaigns to inform potential irregular migrants about the dangers of the journey, exploitation by the agents, and the difficulties of life in Europe for those without proper documentation. While the efficacy of these information campaigns in reducing the flow of irregular

¹ Rashid Amjad, "Introduction: An Age of Migration," in *The Pakistani Diaspora: Corridors of Opportunity and Uncertainty*, ed. Rashid Amjad (Lahore: Lahore School of Economics, 2017), 1–22.

² Overseas Pakistanis is the official term used for people of Pakistani origins abroad. It is used both for both temporary and permanent migrants.

³ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). "International Migrant Stock," 2019.

⁴ Fareeha Zafar, "The Pakistan-Europe Corridor," in *The Pakistani Diaspora: Corridors of Opportunity and Uncertainty*, ed. Rashid Amjad (Lahore: Lahore School of Economics, 2017), 75–90.

⁵ Ayesha A Qaisrani, "Reaching out, Inviting in: Pakistan's Approach to Diaspora Engagement," *Migration and Development*, August 12, 2020, 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21632324.2020.1797457>.

⁶ FRONTEX. "Risk Analysis for 2016." Warsaw, 2016.

FRONTEX. "Risk analysis for 2020." Warsaw, 2020.

⁷ Aksel Damla B, Angeliki Dimitriadi Magean Hendow Ahmet İcduygu Aysem B Karacay Michaela Marouf, and Jenny Andersson-Pucher. "Study on Smuggling of Migrants: Characteristics, Responses and Cooperation with Third Countries: Case Study 3: Pakistan – Turkey – Greece," 2016.

⁸ Katharina Hahn-Schaur, *Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration from Pakistan: Background Report* (Vienna: ICMPD, 2021).



emigrants is contested, there is evidence that intending irregular migrants from Pakistan are not fully aware of the complexities of irregular migration.⁹

It is in this context that the project “Awareness raising and information campaigns on the risks of irregular migration in Pakistan (PARIM)” seeks to provide information and raise awareness among potential migrants in Pakistan through a series of campaigns communicating balanced information about the dangers and consequences of irregular migration, options for legal migration, and the legal, social and economic realities of life in Europe. The campaigns will focus on potential and intending migrants (as well as their ‘key influencers’) in (irregular) migration-prone areas in Pakistan through a mix of methods, including community awareness raising, media (including social media) campaigns, capacity building with civil society organisations (CSOs) and journalists, and by working with members of the diaspora. The design and implementation of the campaign will be informed by rigorous research that identifies the actual information gaps of the intending migrants, their migration intentions, motivations and decision-making processes, their key influencers, and channels likely to reach them.

Under PARIM project, ICMPD has conducted in-depth background research to understand the key concepts and assumptions behind information campaigns and their effectiveness in Pakistan. The background report¹⁰ concludes that migration information campaigns can be meaningful and impactful interventions, within the scope of certain important caveats and provided they are built on a sound understanding of macro, meso, and micro drivers of migration decision-making in the country context, as well as lessons learned from previous campaigns regarding trusted messengers, relevance of content, messaging (framing) and target group segmentation. A survey is also being conducted in six districts of central Punjab in Pakistan from where trends of irregular migration are high.

The background report finds that one of the key assumptions of the effectiveness of information campaigns is that the information is trusted. The important role of social networks in migration decision-making has been highlighted in various case studies.¹¹ In Pakistan as well, family and friends in destination countries are trusted as key sources of information for migration.¹² Recognizing that social connections, usually with co-nationals abroad, are trusted sources of information, many international campaigns have now increasingly begun to engage diaspora members and returnees as proxies for “key influencers” and “messengers” for their content.¹³ The effectiveness of such engagement is not well-documented yet.

Based on the same logic, the PARIM project aims to engage targeted diaspora groups (and irregular migrants) as Ambassadors of Change in the four PARIM partner countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, and Italy to share their personal accounts of the struggles and difficulties of the irregular journey to Europe, and the complexities at arrival. The purpose is to engage them as proxies for social connections of potential irregular migrants abroad. The intention is that these diaspora members represented by Pakistani migrant associations will serve as ‘credible messengers’ for the content of the information campaign, and advocate for safe and legal migration in community outreach activities in Pakistan.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Felipe Alexander Dunsch, Jasper Tjaden, and William Quiviger, “Migrants as Messengers: The Impact of Peer-to-Peer Communication on Potential Migrants in Senegal,” 2019.

¹² International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Pakistan: Survey on Drivers of Migration - Regional Evidence for Migration Policy and Analysis. IOM, 2020.

¹³ The Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons, and Related Transnational Crime. Addressing Irregular Migration through Effective Information Campaigns. The Bali Process, 2015.



In this context, the PARIM research component undertook an in-depth inquiry into the potential engagement of Pakistani diaspora in the project campaign for effective reception of the information shared. This involved: a) identifying and mapping the various prominent Pakistani migrant associations (aka diaspora organisations) in the four countries, and b) conducting interviews with the most active migrant associations in the four countries to understand their past and existing activities, projects, and perceptions about irregular migration from Pakistan to Europe. Interviews were also conducted with representatives of Pakistani Embassies in the four countries to understand the demography of Pakistani communities in these countries, and identification of key migrant associations.

Against this background, this report firstly aims to examine the existing literature on the role of diaspora as agents of change in countries of origin. Specifically, the report looks at how the Pakistani diaspora has traditionally been engaged by the Pakistani state institutionally as well as by potential migrants for migration related purposes. Secondly, the report analyses the primary data collected through diaspora mapping, focusing on key findings from Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, and Italy.

The report is structured as follows: chapter 2 presents the working definitions of diaspora, diaspora engagement, and migrant associations in the context of information campaigns and reviews the existing literature on the topic, highlighting key pieces of evidence on the effectiveness of such campaigns. Chapter 3 gives an overview of the institutional framework in Pakistan related to diaspora engagement. This chapter also presents the key findings from the discussions with representatives of Pakistani Embassies in Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, and Italy. Chapter 4 discusses the cartography of the Pakistani diaspora with an emphasis on the profile of the community in the four PARIM countries. Chapter 5 presents the key findings from diaspora mapping, particularly based on the information drawn from in-depth interviews with migrant associations. Finally, chapter 6 draws conclusions based on the main findings and suggests practical recommendations for diaspora engagement for the design of the information campaign. In the annex, we provide additional information on methodological approach for this report.



2 Diaspora engagement in the context of migration information campaigns

2.1. Defining diaspora and conceptualising diaspora engagement

An inquiry into the conceptual underpinnings of diaspora engagement warrants an explanation of what constitutes a “diaspora” and how it is defined. While the scholarly debate continues on the conditions that define membership in the diaspora,¹⁴ for policy relevance, a loosely bound concept of diaspora is often employed which includes all emigrants and their descendants that are transnationally active and have linkages with the homeland.¹⁵ The EMN Glossary defines diaspora as “*individuals and members of networks, associations, and communities, who have left their country of origin, but maintain links with their homelands.*” The glossary further notes that it is a wide concept encompassing long-term as well as short-term (labour) migrants and even second or third generations. Similarly, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) defines diaspora as “*Individuals who are migrants or descendants of migrants, and whose identity and sense of belonging, either real or symbolic, have been shaped by their migration experience and background.*”¹⁶

Adopting a broader definition allows a more thorough understanding of how states then theorise the “diaspora” for their needs. For instance, for the case of Pakistan, all migrants, regardless of their status in the receiving country, including temporary labour migrants, as well as permanent migrants naturalised in other countries, are identified as “Overseas Pakistanis” in the official policy discourse.¹⁷ However, besides this official label, the policy narrative often refers to them as “Pakistani Diaspora”, “Pakistani migrants”, “expats”, or as most recently termed “Non-Resident Pakistanis”. These terminologies are used often interchangeably in the media as well as official discourse.¹⁸ However, within the official term of “Overseas Pakistanis”, the state often uses rhetoric such as the “diaspora” and “expats” for invigorating investments and development contributions, while offering ‘migrant workers’ or ‘labour migrants’ welfare services to protect their rights. Based on the multiplicity of terms used to refer to Pakistanis abroad, this report uses the terms “diaspora”, “migrants” and “Overseas Pakistanis” interchangeably.

¹⁴ William Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 83–99.

Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

Rogers Brubaker, “The ‘diaspora’ Diaspora,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28 (2005): 1–19.

Martin Sokefeld, “Mobilizing in Transnational Space: A Social Movement Approach to the Formation of Diaspora,” *Global Networks* 6, no. 3 (2006): 265–84.

¹⁵ Alan Gamlen, Michael E Cummings, and Paul M Vaaler, “Explaining the Rise of Diaspora Institutions,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 4 (2019): 492–516.

Dovelyn R Agunias and Kathleen Newland, *Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development: A Handbook for Policymakers and Practitioners in Home and Host Countries* (Washington D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, 2012).

¹⁶ International Organisation for Migration. IOM’s Strategy to Enable, Engage and Empower Diaspora, n.d. <https://diaspora.iom.int/ioms-strategy-enable-engage-and-empower-diaspora>, n.d.

¹⁷ Overseas Pakistanis Foundation. “Vision and Mission.” n.d. <https://opf.org.pk/about-us/vision-mission/>.

¹⁸ Ayesha A Qaisrani, “Reaching out, Inviting in: Pakistan’s Approach to Diaspora Engagement,” *Migration and Development*, August 2020.



Box 1: Operational definitions of diaspora, diaspora institutions, diaspora engagement strategies, and migrant associations for this study

Diaspora

“Diasporas are emigrants and their descendants who live outside the country of their birth or ancestry, either on a temporary or permanent basis, yet still maintain affective and material ties to their countries of origin” – Agunias and Newland (2012)¹⁹

Diaspora institutions

Diaspora institutions are *“formal state offices in executive or legislative branches of government dedicated to the affairs of emigrants and their descendants” - Gamlen (2019)²⁰*

Diaspora engagement strategies

“An explicit and systematic policy initiative or series of policy initiatives aimed at developing and managing relationships with a diaspora” – Ancien et al. (2009)²¹

Migrant Associations

“Diasporas organise in associations to provide them with a structure through which to share their cultural identity, show solidarity between each other, and make claims for their rights in the public sphere” – Pescinski (2018)²²

We use the term ‘migrant association’ instead of the more commonly used ‘diaspora organisation’ to stay consistent with the self-identification of the majority of the associations contacted.

In the last few decades, there has been a considerable increase in diaspora engagement strategies initiated by the sending countries, including targeted policies and legislation, shifts in official rhetoric to include the overseas citizens in the national comity, and dedicated institutional infrastructure.²³ Ancien et al. (2009) define diaspora engagement strategy as the dedicated set of policy initiatives aimed at fostering and managing diaspora relations. Diaspora engagement strategies collectively refer to any state-led initiative aimed at engaging with the Pakistanis abroad, including institutions, policies, legislation, and initiatives. This increased focus on state-led diaspora engagement initiatives is situated in the migration-development nexus debate where states attempt to capitalise on their diaspora for nationally-oriented development and political goals, tapping into the diaspora’s social, financial, and

¹⁹ Agunias and Newland, *Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development: A Handbook for Policymakers and Practitioners in Home and Host Countries*.

²⁰ Alan Gamlen, Michael E Cummings, and Paul M Vaaler, “Explaining the Rise of Diaspora Institutions,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 4 (2019): 492–516.

²¹ Delphine Ancien, Ancien Delphine and Rob Kitchin, *Exploring Diaspora Strategies: An International Comparison* (Maynooth: NUI Maynooth, 2009).

²² Janina Pescinski, “The Place of Diaspora Associations in Cities,” United Nations University, 2018.

²³ Hercog Metka and Melissa Siegel, “Diaspora Engagement in India: From Non-Required Indians to Angels of Development,” in *Emigration Nations. Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship Series*, ed. M Collyer (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

Dovelyn R Agunias and Kathleen Newland, *Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development: A Handbook for Policymakers and Practitioners in Home and Host Countries* (Washington D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, 2012).



human capital.²⁴ Thus, diaspora members are made participants in the national development process through transnational practices and politics.²⁵

While diaspora strategies may differ based on the purpose for the diaspora's engagement, who the state seeks to engage within the diaspora is based on their positionality²⁶ and location, and how the state may channel its strategy.²⁷ Generally, these strategies can be categorised into three main themes as per Gamlen's (2008) theorisation: i) capacity building; ii) extending rights; and iii) extracting benefits. Capacity building often relates to strengthening the governmental institutions and introducing dedicated strategies to foster ties with the diaspora. In doing so, the state also "recognises" or "creates" a diaspora as its transnational subject through mapping, counting, and categorising the diaspora members. Once identified and recognised, the state then extends certain rights to the diaspora members to bring them into the polity of the home country. With rights offered, the diaspora members are then approached and often obligated to contribute to the home country's development goals by framing them as agents of change and strategic resources.²⁸ Depending on the preference of the state and the affiliations of the diaspora members, some are also regarded as "development or political threats".²⁹

In addition to home state initiatives to engage the diaspora, host countries are also leveraging on different diaspora groups for achieving their objectives of integration of migrants in the communities, promoting return and reintegration of migrants, transnational cooperation, specifically related to sending-country-oriented development plans and strategies.³⁰ The host countries also primarily recognise diaspora members as 'agents of change' with linkages in sending countries that can be used for advancing their development plans and externalising migration policy. Against that background, there is an emerging interest by host countries to invest in the capacity building of diaspora groups.³¹

2.2. Diaspora members as agents of change: State-led diaspora engagement

Within the migration-development nexus debate, state-led diaspora engagement is situated in the "development as an outcome" perspective. The increased focus of sending countries on migrants as "redistributors" of wealth through remittances, investment, and philanthropy has led to migrants being lauded as "agents of development".³² Within the development arena, diaspora members' contributions to finance regular household expenses, recovering from crises, their entrepreneurial investments, as well as their significant role in fostering trade and cultural diplomacy between host country and country of origin is increasingly being recognised globally in light of the sustainable development goals.³³ Sending countries, including China, India, and the Philippines are observed to

²⁴ Giulia Sinatti and Cindy Horst, "Migrants as Agents of Development: Diaspora Engagement Discourse and Practice in Europe," *Ethnicities* (Ethnicities) 15, no. 1 (2015): 134–52.

²⁵ Fiona B Adamson and Madeleine Demetriou, "Remapping the Boundaries of 'state' and 'national Identity': Incorporating Diasporas into IR Theorizing," *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 4 (2007): 489–526.

²⁶ Maria Koinova, "Sending States and Diaspora Positionality in International Relations," *International Political Sociology* 12 (2018): 190–210.

²⁷ Qaisrani, "Reaching out, Inviting in: Pakistan's Approach to Diaspora Engagement," August 2020.

²⁸ Malin Frankenhaeuser and Marion Noack, *Promoting Diaspora Engagement: What Have We Learnt* (Vienna: ICMPD, 2015).

²⁹ Fiona Adamson, "Mechanisms of Diaspora Mobilization and the Transnationalization of Civil War," in *Transnational Dynamics of Civil War*, by J Checkel, ed. Jeffrey T Checkel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 63–88.

³⁰ Dina Ionescu, "Engaging Diasporas as Development Partners for Home and Destination Countries: Challenges for Policymakers. 26," 2006.

³¹ European Union Global Diaspora Facility (EUDiF). "Future Forum." Vienna, Austria, 2021.

³² Parvati Raghuram, "Which Migration, What Development? Unsettling the Edifice of Migration and Development," *Population, Space and Place* 15 (2009): 103–17.

³³ Rabat Process, *A Collection of Diaspora Engagement Practices* (Vienna: ICMPD, 2020).



be recalibrating their relationships with their diaspora members, shifting gears from labelling them as “lost” citizens, to hailing them as strategic partners.³⁴ Increasingly, diaspora members are seen as a source of “soft power” for the sending country and a tool for promoting the ‘nation-brand’ abroad.³⁵ Thus, the increased interest in engaging with the migrants by home and host states, development organisations, and civil society organisations for development pursuits is largely based on the economic potential that the migrants have, including through remittances, knowledge exchange, or brain drain/gain, and diaspora initiatives. Countries, including India and the Philippines, allow special tax exemptions to their diaspora members to invest in the “homeland” and even buy property, otherwise not allowed to foreigners.³⁶

Remittances, philanthropic donations and charity by diaspora members are perceived to play an integral role in rehabilitation, reconstruction, and development of states experiencing conflict and natural or humanitarian emergencies.³⁷ Indeed, diaspora members are often hailed as partners in the state-building and reconstruction processes.³⁸ From sending country perspective, diaspora members are seen as bearers of better knowledge and scientific exposure, which gives them a unique position to reverse-transfer advanced knowledge and skills from their host country to the home country.³⁹ For instance, the role of Indian diaspora is widely recognised for expanding and outsourcing technology related work to India from the United States.⁴⁰

Based on such an understanding, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched the “Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN)” programmes in the 1970s aimed at enhancing capacity building in migrant-origin countries. The TOKTEN programme has been implemented in several countries, the majority of which have been conflict-affected, such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Syria, Nigeria, Algeria, Sudan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and even India and China. These TOKTEN programmes are intended to enhance social and human capital in the countries of origin through the contributions of the diaspora members. TOKTEN and other similar knowledge exchange programmes support temporary return of skilled diaspora members to promote capacity building in under-developed and post-conflict scenarios to bridge the skill and knowledge gap. For instance, Afghanistan actively promoted temporary return of its nationals since 2001 through UNDP’s TOKTEN programme, World Bank’s Afghanistan Expatriate Programme, IOM’s Temporary Return of Qualified Afghan Nationals Project, etc.⁴¹ Diaspora members from Afghanistan are also deemed to play an active role in the reconciliation process, capacity building in health and education sectors in the country, and investment in telecommunication, banking, and real estate sector.⁴²

³⁴ Kingsley Aikens and Nicola White, *Global Diaspora Strategies Toolkit* (Diaspora Matters, 2011).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Agunias and Newland, *Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development: A Handbook for Policymakers and Practitioners in Home and Host Countries*.

³⁷ Ninna Nyberg-Sørensen, Nicholas Van Hear, and Paul Engberg-Pedersen, *The Migration–Development Nexus: Evidence and Policy Options* (IOM, 2002).

³⁸ Fatima Kouser, “The Afghan Diaspora and Post-Conflict State Building in Afghanistan,” *E-International Relations*, August 2014, 2021, <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/08/21/the-afghan-diaspora-and-post-conflict-state-building-in-afghanistan/>.

³⁹ Agunias and Newland, *Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development: A Handbook for Policymakers and Practitioners in Home and Host Countries*.

⁴⁰ Aikens and White, *Global Diaspora Strategies Toolkit*.

⁴¹ Katie Kuschminder, Julia de Bresser, and Melissa Siegel, *Irregular Migration Routes to Europe and Factors Influencing Migrants’ Destination Choices* (Maastricht: Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, 2015).

⁴² Fatima Kouser, “The Afghan Diaspora and Post-Conflict State Building in Afghanistan,” *E-International Relations*, August 2014, 2021, <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/08/21/the-afghan-diaspora-and-post-conflict-state-building-in-afghanistan/>.



The success and effectiveness of such programmes, however, remains contested. Mueller⁴³ argues that the success of such knowledge-transfer programmes is based on a number of factors, including the capacity of the diaspora members themselves to transfer the knowledge, as well as the capacities of the host organisations that serve as the platform for these interventions. Moreover, such knowledge transfer programmes are often short-lived, with limited capacity to sustain themselves over time. Country level evaluations of TOKTEN programmes⁴⁴ also indicate that success of such knowledge transfer programmes is not straightforward, and requires more time investment and better management infrastructure to show meaningful impact in sending countries. Moreover, if knowledge being transferred is more tacit in nature, lack of any standardised metrics of measurement also restricts the evaluation of impact.⁴⁵

Another form of diaspora engagement involves diaspora initiatives in the form of hometown associations or collective development projects, which are often focused on civic activities. These contributions may involve community development and business investment. Hometown associations are generally labelled as diaspora or migrant associations in the policy narrative, and are perceived to play a dual role – culturally connecting diaspora members through ‘homeland’-oriented initiatives, and mobilising resources for contributions towards the homeland.⁴⁶ Although such initiatives have existed for long, it is only in the last two decades that aid agencies, non-government organisations, and even government authorities have started leveraging this momentum created to direct investment opportunities for the development of places of origin.⁴⁷ For instance, in Mexico, the government runs the ‘three for one’ programmes in which municipal, state, and federal levels of government match the amount of investment by hometown associations, leading to hybrid models of co-development.⁴⁸

Technology is also one of the key facilitators of fostering an enhanced relationship between governments and their diasporas.⁴⁹ Better communication and travel facilities have catalysed the flow of information and re-connected lost linkages, making it easier for the governments to tap into their diaspora and connect with them on a mass scale. Several countries, including Pakistan, are creating online portals to map, register, and profile their diaspora members. It also eases diaspora’s engagement in both host and home countries. Technology has helped in removing distance for interpersonal exchanges, especially through the use of social media, which helps in sustaining connections with the home country and the diaspora. The M-Pesa initiative in Kenya, which allows for remittance transfer over phone, is hailed as one of the best technological solutions to online payment with the least transaction costs.⁵⁰

Despite these theorisations of diaspora members as instruments of development, a number of arguments challenge the actual impact of diaspora-led development. Critics argue that the agenda of

⁴³ Charlotte Mueller, “Research on Diaspora Knowledge Transfer within a Temporary Return Program,” accessed August 8, 2021, <https://migrantknowledge.org/2019/10/16/research-on-diaspora-knowledge-transfer-within-a-temporary-return-program/>.

⁴⁴ Abdullah Mansaray, “Mid-Term Review of Tokten Project,” 2009.

⁴⁵ Katie Kuschminder, *The Role of the Diaspora in Knowledge Transfer and Capacity Building in Post-Conflict Settings: The Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals to Afghanistan* (Maastricht: Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, 2011).

⁴⁶ Manuel Orozco and Rebecca Rouse, *Migrant Hometown Associations and Opportunities for Development: A Global Perspective* (Migration Information Source, 2007).

⁴⁷ Sudeep Basu, “Diasporas Transforming Homelands: Nuancing ‘Collective Remittance’ Practices in a Western Indian Village,” 2013.

⁴⁸ Heather Williams, “Both Sides Now: Migrant Philanthropy, State Power and the Struggle for Accountability,” in *Politics from Afar: Transnational Diasporas and Networks*, by P Mandaville and T Lyons, ed. P Mandaville and T Lyons (New York: Hurst, 2012), 45–68.

⁴⁹ Aikens and White, *Global Diaspora Strategies Toolkit*.

⁵⁰ World Remit. M-pesa. n.d. <https://www.worldremit.com/en/kenya/mobile-money/m-pesa>.



diaspora engagement strategies often neglects the core concern of the differentiated impact of diaspora-led development. For instance, Boyle and Kitchin (2014)⁵¹ contend that diaspora strategies, in general, tend to benefit the elite in sending states as compared to lower-income households, and thus may exacerbate inequalities. They also find that benefits are disproportionately distributed across geographical contexts, as diaspora members prefer to invest in their communities of origin rather than on need-basis. Similarly, Agarwal et al.'s (2010)⁵² study finds that for the case of India, the benefits of knowledge transfer do not match the harmful effects of brain drain through the emigration of high-skilled labour. More recently, Gevorkyan (2021)⁵³ problematises the limited evaluation of the scale of development benefits accrued to diaspora. He compares the impact of diaspora-led development on individual wellbeing and macro-level development for the case of Armenia and argues that benefits of diaspora-led development are often ad-hoc, experienced more on an individual level and are inadequate to meet the actual scale of growth and development needed for the country.

Moreover, diaspora groups are neither homogenous, nor static, and their priorities and roles in national development may change over time and space. Where diaspora members are often hailed as “agents of development”, there are also instances where diaspora members are declared as “national threats”. In Afghanistan, for instance, domestic political elites reportedly felt threatened by the contestation of power they experienced with the returned diaspora members who took on high-profile positions in the government.⁵⁴ Depending on their political affiliations, lobbying influence, and the political power they may be able to exert, diaspora members can simultaneously act as peace-makers and peace-breakers,⁵⁵ depending on what terms peace is perceived in.

Indeed, the perception by the state of a diaspora group can also lead to their framing as “threats” to the state. For example, Tamil diaspora groups are often referred to as ‘enemy of the state’ in Sri Lanka, Kurds are labelled as conflict-makers in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, and Irish diaspora is stated to be troublemakers in Ireland in terms of potential support of the Irish Republican Army.⁵⁶ In this context, diaspora members can be considered to have contributed to ‘conflict’ through their material contributions (remittances that fund conflict, weapons, money laundering etc.), or by lobbying with power groups to exert pressure on the state. Sometimes, even sharing new ideas, knowledge, and skills is considered to be anti-state.⁵⁷

However, since estimates and actual amounts of diaspora’s contributions and support for peace or conflict are not quantified, the extent of their influence (whether positive or negative) cannot be gauged in home country politics and development. The transfer of remittances is mostly family-to-family, with little to no aggregate data on how those remittances are used. Moreover, the fact that majority of remittance transfer takes place through informal channels makes it very difficult to claim

⁵¹ Rob Kitchin and Mark Boyle, “Diaspora-Centred Development: Current Practice, Critical Commentaries, and Research Priorities,” in *Global Diasporas and Development* (Springer India, 2014), 17–37.

⁵² Rajshree Agarwal, David Audretsch, and MB Sarkar, “Knowledge Spillovers And Strategic Entrepreneurship,” *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal* 4 (2010): 271–83.

⁵³ Aleksandr V. Gevorkyan, “Diaspora and Economic Development: A Systemic View,” *European Journal of Development Research*, no. 0123456789 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-021-00432-x>.

⁵⁴ Paivi Pirkkalainen and Mahdi Abdil, “The Diaspora Conflict-Peace Nexus – A Literature Review,” 2009.

⁵⁵ Hazel Smith and Paul Stares, *Diasporas in Conflict: Peace-Makers or Peace-Wreckers?* (Tokyo: UNU Press, 2007).

⁵⁶ Paivi Pirkkalainen and Mahdi Abdil, “The Diaspora Conflict-Peace Nexus – A Literature Review,” 2009.

Eva Ostergaard-Nielson, “International Migration and Sending Countries: Key Issues and Themes,” in *International Migration and Sending Countries: Perceptions, Policies and Transnational Relations*, ed. Eva Ostergaard-Nielson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 3–30.

⁵⁷ Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford: Stanford university Press, 2001).

Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” 2004.



what the net role of diaspora members is in homeland development and politics.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the role of diaspora as agents of change is increasingly being recognised globally, as more and more sending states endeavour to bring the diaspora into their sphere of influence and extract nationally oriented benefits from them.⁵⁹

A round-up of recent literature and evidence from sending country perspective shows that for effective diaspora engagement, governments need to take account of a few considerations:

Table 1 Recommendations for effective diaspora engagement

Purpose of engagement	An organised attempt at state-led diaspora engagement must be founded on solid reasoning, with clear objectives in mind of what is expected from the process. Lessons from EuDiF’s Future Forum webinar on diaspora engagement ⁶⁰ show that governments need to be clear on the expected outcomes from engagement strategies and policies. There has been an increased reliance on adopting ready-made strategies that other countries have introduced, and while taking into account best practices and lessons learned is desirable, governments must realise that diaspora engagement strategies are not a one-size-fits-all approach.
Know your diaspora	It is now generally accepted that a country’s diaspora is not a homogenous group. ⁶¹ Diaspora members vary in terms of their socioeconomic background, political interests, professional backgrounds, ethnic and linguistic identities, and affiliation with the home country. There may be conflict within and among the diaspora based on these characteristics and it then becomes integral for the sending government to take into account their conflicting interests to have effective diaspora engagement. ⁶² Sending countries mostly prefer to engage with the diaspora that has “influence and affluence”, ⁶³ which may leave out other groups. But to identify them and build trust, countries need to actively consult with different diaspora groups, build on unifying elements among different diaspora groups, and devise targeted policies. ⁶⁴ Seefar suggests involving and supporting migrant associations that represent multiple diaspora groups for effective diaspora engagement and overcoming the issue of diaspora fragmentation. ⁶⁵
Evaluate and revise policies	Diaspora engagement strategies and policies should have clear evaluation mechanisms to assess what is working and what is not. Lessons from Guyana and Zimbabwe show that in line with the changing needs of the diaspora and the governments, the two countries decided to update their diaspora engagement policies. In Zimbabwe, this need was recognised as the diaspora became better organised and thus had more

⁵⁸ Sarah Collinson, *Power, Livelihoods and Conflict: Case Studies in Political Economy Analysis for Humanitarian Action – Introduction* (London: Humanitarian Policy Group, London: Overseas Development Institute, 2003).

⁵⁹ Qaisrani, “Reaching out, Inviting in: Pakistan’s Approach to Diaspora Engagement,” August 2020.

⁶⁰ European Union Global Diaspora Facility (EuDiF), “Future Forum: Homeland Diaspora Policies: Measuring and Scaling Impact” (Vienna, Austria, 2021).

⁶¹ Aikens and White, *Global Diaspora Strategies Toolkit*.

Aguias and Newland, *Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development: A Handbook for Policymakers and Practitioners in Home and Host Countries*.

⁶² Fanny Tittel-Mosser, *Diaspora Engagement* (Vienna: Regional Global Series, Vienna: EuDiF, 2021).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Rosalinda Rasul, “Homeland Diaspora Policies: Measuring and Scaling Impact,” June 2021.

Rabat Process, *A Collection of Diaspora Engagement Practices* (Vienna: ICMPD, 2020).

⁶⁵ Seefar, “Diaspora Engagement and Development: The Role of Refugees,” Seefar.Org, n.d., <https://seefar.org/news/research/diaspora-engagement-in-development-the-role-of-refugees/>.



advanced demands.⁶⁶ In Guyana, the identification of differences within the diaspora groups created the need for a revised policy.⁶⁷ Sending states must, therefore, be constantly on the lookout for adapting their strategies in alignment with the changing scenario and the desired outcomes from diaspora engagement, but in a harmonised and coherent manner with previous strategies.

2.3. Diaspora and irregular migration: How potential irregular migrants engage with diaspora members

As mentioned earlier, diaspora or migrant associations and networks have existed long before government organisations started incorporating them as strategic development partners,⁶⁸ and they continue to engage with communities in places of origin even in the absence of organised institutional efforts. This strand of diaspora studies can also be explored through the lens of social network theory in the field of migration according to which diaspora members and migrants engage with communities at home, including potential migrants and non-migrant groups in their social circles.⁶⁹ This creates feedback loops through which information and resources are exchanged between migrants, potential migrants, and non-migrant members of the community in places of origin, sometimes leading to a self-perpetuating process of migration at the community level.⁷⁰ In other words, information received from friends and family living abroad helps potential migrants make their migration decisions and increases reliance of potential irregular migrants on interpersonal connections in the diaspora as a source of credible information.

In the case of Pakistan, a culture of migration is observed in certain districts, especially in Central Punjab (of which six districts are study sites for PARIM project), from where people initially moved to Europe in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The fact that in Pakistan irregular migration trends are high from these same districts points to the strong historical linkage and network between people who migrated earlier and those migrating now or in the process of planning their migration. This relates to Ahmad's (2008) assertion that trends of irregular migration often originate from places of high former legal migration flows⁷¹ and feedback loops created through diaspora and home community interactions are influential in creating these trends. For instance, his research finds that migrant smuggling from Pakistan to the UK started in the 1960s and 1970s when Pakistanis who had moved to the UK visited Pakistan in their rented vans through land routes and brought back foreign goods and information. On the way back, some would take family members along a different route back to the UK. In fact, an MPI study shows that for long-term settlement processes, social network in a destination country and historical ties to a country play a more important role than asylum and admission policies of countries.⁷²

⁶⁶ Paul Matsvai, "Homeland Diaspora Policies: Measuring and Scaling Impact," June 2021.

⁶⁷ Rosalinda Rasul, "Homeland Diaspora Policies: Measuring and Scaling Impact," June 2021.

⁶⁸ Dina Ionescu, "Engaging Diasporas as Development Partners for Home and Destination Countries: Challenges for Policymakers. 26," 2006.

⁶⁹ Douglas Massey et al., "Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal," *Population and Development Review* 19, no. 3 (1993): 431–66.

⁷⁰ Hein de Haas, "The Internal Dynamics of Migration Processes: A Theoretical Inquiry," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36 (2010): 1587–1617.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Jacob Townsend and Chrystal Ooman, *Before the Boat: Understanding the Migrant Journey - EU Asylum towards 2020* (Migration Policy Institute, 2015).



There are multiple stages at which social connections in the diaspora influence the decision of potential irregular migrants. At the pre-decision stage, friends and family in the diaspora often propel new migration journeys through their narratives, the impressions they create when they visit or through their social media activities, and the materials they send back home from host countries often depicting financial and material success. A study on Ethiopian migrants in South Africa shows that personal visits, remittances and materials sent back home create a disparity with the economic conditions within rural Ethiopia, encouraging youth to consider migration.⁷³ Diaspora members may also influence future migration plans among youth by their visits to home communities, where they give an impression of having a higher standard of living, sometimes in contrast to their actual living conditions, and are given more respect owing to their elevated status as a migrant.⁷⁴ Often their interactions with friends and family in the home communities paint a rosy picture of their lives after migrating, increasing expectations of youth about life after migration, sometimes even creating social pressure for youth to seek migration.⁷⁵ Such impressions are also created when friends and family in the diaspora share social media updates, putting up a better image of their life online than their actual situation, leading to information asymmetry. In some cases, social media algorithms then show such potential irregular migrants more videos and information similar to the content of irregular migration they have been watching through their accounts, which may actually increase the potential of irregular migration.⁷⁶

Indeed, in a study analysing the drivers of migration from Pakistan, IOM⁷⁷ finds that social networks are one of the key sources for information about destination countries. In a survey carried out with 761 potential migrants across 19 districts of Pakistan in all four provinces, 36% of the respondents collected information about the destination area through their family and friends abroad through social media. About 15% of the sample received information about the destination through their family and friends who had returned from abroad. In the overall sample, 70% of the respondents reported having a family or friend in the intended destination, and 89% of those were already receiving some sort of support from their friends and family (or both) related to documentation, finances, employment, and accommodation, reflecting the role of social networks in facilitating migration flows and bolstering particular migration corridors.

Another important factor to consider is that when the decision to migrate irregularly has been made and during the journey, reliance on social networks abroad (friends, family and acquaintances) increases. Potential migrants tend to trust information from people they know, who have taken similar journeys, have the relevant information and experience or are in their desired places of destination. Their connection is often shaped by the degree of restrictions and sometimes the skill level of potential irregular migrants. Zell and Skop (2011) find that less skilled and irregular migrants tend to rely more on social networks than highly skilled migrants.⁷⁸ Similarly, Garip and Asad (2015) find that when the risk factor is high, such as the intention of travelling across borders without proper documents, potential migrants tend to rely more on strong social ties such as family members and close friends,

⁷³ Yordanos Seifu Estifanos, *Social Networks, Dreams and Risks: Ethiopian Irregular Migrants into South Africa* (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and Social Development Policy Division, 2017).

⁷⁴ Ali Nabil Ahmad, *The Romantic Appeal of Illegal Migration: Gender, Masculinity and Human Smuggling from Pakistan*, ed. Leo Lucassen Marlou Schrover Joanne van der Leun and Chris Quispel, Migration (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008).

⁷⁵ *Ibid* p. 137

⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

⁷⁷ IOM Pakistan: Survey on drivers of migration. Regional Evidence for Migration Policy and Analysis. 2020.

⁷⁸ Sarah Zell and Emily Skop, "Social Networks and Selectivity in Brazilian Migration to Japan and the United States," *Population, Space and Place* 17, no. 5 (2011): 469–88.



as compared to acquaintances or other community members.⁷⁹ This validates de Haas's (2010) assertion that restrictive migration policies create more irregularity and increased reliance on family networks.⁸⁰ Even during transit, recent migrants, specifically those known to the new irregular migrants, are trusted with more credible information on the cost of border crossings, contacts for smugglers, availability of boats, life in the destination country, etc. Dekker et al. (2018) show that Syrian refugees in the Netherlands used information from both personal contacts and social networks to triangulate and validate various rumours or misinformation when making migration-related decisions.⁸¹ This further validates the assertion that for migration planning, credibility of source is important, and that potential irregular migrants are more likely to trust information coming through trusted people.

During the pre-departure and transit stage, technology also plays an important role. On the one hand, the advent of internet and social media has given new momentum to such networks as distances shrink and information becomes more readily available and transmissible. On the other hand, some studies argue that technology enables potential migrants to gather information from other sources, making them less reliant on migrant networks.⁸² However, evidence depicts that potential migrants tend to trust kin and community members abroad for the provision of credible information, even through social media.⁸³ Optimity Advisors and Seefar (2017) find that "*diaspora plays an important role in conveying messages and information about Europe and migration, and Facebook is an important channel of communications for these*".⁸⁴ They further conclude that social media is the most common medium of communication with friends and family in the diaspora for migration-related information, rather than being a source of information for potential migrants. A study on irregular flows of Iranians to Australia also concludes that while mass media messaging and online channels may provide the "atmospherics", the most effective communication modes are through interpersonal connections, especially through the diaspora.⁸⁵ Thus, empirical evidence shows that the internet and social media may help to expand and sustain existing migrant networks, rather than decrease reliance on them.⁸⁶

At the post-arrival stage, transnational social networks existing between places of origin and destination have been associated with lower financial, social, and emotional costs for newly arrived migrants.⁸⁷ In such cases, migrants' social circle in the diaspora has been observed to provide relevant information and assistance concerning housing, employment, and integration in the new community to newcomers. In a study by Hagen-Zanker et al. (2014) in Nepal and North-Western Pakistan, migrants shared that their food costs are covered by relatives already in the host country until they find

⁷⁹ Filiz Garip and L Asad, "Migrant Networks," in *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences: An Interdisciplinary, Searchable, and Linkable Resource*, ed. Robert A Scott Stephen Kosslyn ([Hoboken, N.J.] John Wiley & Sons 2015, 2015).

⁸⁰ Hein de Haas and Aleida van Rooij, "Migration as Emancipation? The Impact of Internal and International Migration on the Position of Women Left behind in Rural Morocco," *Oxford Development Studies* 38, no. 1 (2010): 43–62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600810903551603>.

⁸¹ Rianne Dekker et al., "Smart Refugees: How Syrian Asylum Migrants Use Social Media Information in Migration Decision-Making," *Social Media + Society*, 2018, 1–11.

⁸² Rianne Dekker and Godfried Engbersen, "How Social Media Transform Migrant Networks and Facilitate Migration," *Global Networks* 14, no. 4 (2014): 401–18.

⁸³ Masja van Meeteren and Sonia Pereira, "Beyond the 'Migrant Network'? Exploring Assistance Received in the Migration of Brazilians to Portugal and the Netherlands," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 19 (2018): 925–44.

⁸⁴ Optimity Advisors and Seefar, *How West African Migrants Engage with Migration Information En-Route to Europe*, 2017.p.10

⁸⁵ Farsight, "Iranian Refugees: An Exploration of Irregular Migration to Australia," 2015.

⁸⁶ Masja van Meeteren and Sonia Pereira, "Beyond the 'Migrant Network'? Exploring Assistance Received in the Migration of Brazilians to Portugal and the Netherlands," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 19 (2018): 925–44.

Rianne Dekker and Godfried Engbersen, "How Social Media Transform Migrant Networks and Facilitate Migration," *Global Networks* 14, no. 4 (2014): 401–18.

⁸⁷ Kara Somerville, *Strategic Migrant Network Building and Information Sharing: Understanding Migrant Pioneers in Canada* (IOM, 2011)



employment.⁸⁸ Against this backdrop, it is not surprising to find that in a survey conducted among 393 Pakistani returnees from Europe in 2016, 79% had a relative in Europe before departure, of which 62% had relatives in Greece, 20% had a relative or family in the UK, and 4% had relatives in Italy.⁸⁹ In the same study, about 21% of the returnees had received financial assistance from their relatives in Europe for the migration journey, 9% received information about the job market and 8% of returnees had received information about the quality of life in Europe before embarking on the journey.

In the above illustration of the social network theory related to how potential irregular migrants engage with friends and family in the destination countries at different stages, an underlying assumption is that migrants and diaspora members are actively facilitating migration. However, for such social networks to facilitate migration, certain conditions need to be fulfilled:⁹⁰ i) migrants have the capacity (resources and capital) to enable further migration; and ii) they are willing to help out of moral obligations, altruism, self-interest, or the combination of these factors. Sanchez et al. (2018) found that although friends and family abroad initially offer to financially help and facilitate a potential migrant through their journey, it does not always materialise as diaspora members often lack the resources or have outdated information. Evidence also indicates that while migrants may support and facilitate migration based on kinship and community ties, they may also act as “gatekeepers” of information when they feel that more inflow of co-ethnic migrants may lead to competition (in the labour market) for themselves.⁹¹ Some friends and family of potential migrants who live abroad and who crossed borders irregularly may also provide inaccurate or misleading information to migrants.⁹² Besides factors such as job and wage competition, some migrants may not be willing to share their own difficult conditions of arrival and living due to fears of shame and humiliation for not being successful. They may even portray themselves as having “made it”, which may inadvertently send a message to potential migrants of the success of irregular migration. Estifanos (2017) also finds that migrants, smugglers, and even return migrants in Ethiopia hide the risks involved in the migration process. On the other hand, it is also possible that migrants may not have the most accurate or most updated information, which may mislead potential migrants or those in transit unintentionally.⁹³ This leads to information asymmetries as migrants conceal their negative experiences to portray their success, leading to deceptive expectations for future migrants and often putting them in precarious and high-risk situations. Moreover, Collyer (2005)⁹⁴ finds that when irregular migration journeys take place in highly restrictive environments, friends and family are hesitant to offer facilitation, and in such cases, potential irregular migrants may rely more on weaker social ties, such as strangers in the diaspora. This highlights that other people in the diaspora, not known to potential migrants personally, are only approached when the option of contacting friends and relatives abroad is bleak.

Thus, the role of migrants and diaspora members as “credible messengers” or “resources” may vary – where some may be a source of genuine and authentic information for the journey and life in the destination country, others may foster unrealistic or misleading expectations. Depending on the

⁸⁸Jessica Haagen-Zanker et al., “Migration from the Margins: Mobility, Vulnerability and Inevitability in Mid-Western Nepal and North-Western Pakistan,” 2014.. p. 23

⁸⁹ International Organisation for Migration. Comprehensive Profile of Pakistani Returnees. IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2016.

⁹⁰ Hein de Haas, “The Internal Dynamics of Migration Processes: A Theoretical Inquiry,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36 (2010): 1587–1617.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Gabriella Sanchez et al., A Study of the Communication Channels Used by Migrants and Asylum Seekers in Italy, with a Particular Focus on Online and Social Media (European Commission, 2018).

⁹³ Optimity Advisors and Seefar, *How West African Migrants Engage with Migration Information En-Route to Europe*, 2017.

⁹⁴ Michael Collyer, “When Do Social Networks Fail to Explain Migration? Accounting for the Movement of Algerian Asylum-Seekers to the UK,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, no. 4 (2005): 699–718.



context, and the nature of the message transmitted, diaspora members may encourage or deter further (irregular) migration. Despite the risk of being misled and the varying degrees of legitimacy, potential migrants rely on friends and family in the diaspora for information, resources, and connections, and consider them as the most reliable advisor for their migration plans. If that option does not exist for them, only then do they refer to other co-nationals in the diaspora or migrant associations for information on (irregular) migration.

2.4. Diaspora engagement for migration information campaigns

The above discussion illustrates the degree of engagement between potential irregular migrants and their social connections abroad, specifically friends and family in the destination countries, at different stages of migration. Leveraging this role of friends and family in the diaspora as credible messengers, information campaign projects, often funded by host countries, are now increasingly considering engaging with diaspora members to share testimonials of their “real” experience in host countries in an attempt to deter further irregular migration. States, donors and implementing agencies are engaging diaspora members, and often returnees, as “key influencers” and “messengers” in projects on information campaigns related to irregular migration.⁹⁵ Engaging diaspora members and returnees is based on the assumption that as co-nationals they are generally seen by campaign donors and implementers as trusted actors in the game. In that sense, such projects use diaspora members as proxies for friends and family abroad. Diaspora members are often engaged to share their stories about the difficulties of the journey, the risk of fraud, the physical and psychological dangers experienced on the way, and difficulties faced in the host country to dispel “rumours” created by smugglers.

However, as PARIM background report⁹⁶ and the above sections highlight, there are certain difficulties in engaging diaspora members as proxies for trusted messengers in an information campaign aimed at deterring migration. Firstly, previously cited evidence suggests that migration-related information is shared mostly through interpersonal networks and informal communication channels between potential irregular migrants and their social connections in the diaspora. Migrants mostly engage with people they already know in the diaspora (friends, family or acquaintances), which does not mean that any diaspora member giving information on migration would be trusted.⁹⁷

Moreover, potential migrants use trusted means of communication with their connections in the diaspora. Information campaigns, on the other hand, often engage with the diaspora for one-off project activities, for example, recording a video testimonial or participation in an event, which may be quite different from the actual trusted channels of communication between potential migrants and their social connections in the diaspora. In particular, research has shown that when the information received is understood as trying to prevent migration, migrants may disregard it.⁹⁸ Thus, if diaspora members with whom migrants do not have a personal connection are considered to be “co-opted” in this way, their involvement may not be effective. Such a campaign may have different, if any, impacts

⁹⁵ The Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime.

⁹⁶ Hahn-Schaur, Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration from Pakistan: Background Report.

⁹⁷ European Commission, “Study on Best Practices in Irregular Migration Awareness Campaign: Interim Report Phase II,” 2021.

⁹⁸ Hahn-Schaur, Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration from Pakistan: Background Report. Hernández-Carretero, María, and Jørgen Carling. “Beyond ‘Kamikaze Migrants’: Risk Taking in West African Boat Migration to Europe.” *Human Organization* 71, no. 4 (2012): 407–16.



on potential irregular migrants, depending on migrants' level of knowledge, planning and timeframe of migration. Negative messaging, particularly through information campaigns is often perceived as "biased propaganda".⁹⁹ Potential migrants who fantasise about being abroad may consider it selfish on the diaspora members' part to discourage others while they themselves are already abroad. A recent evaluation conducted by the European Commission notes that, "*they (potential migrants) were primarily looking for information from returnees and diaspora on how to successfully migrate. They were distrustful of any messages from these groups that would deter them from migrating*".¹⁰⁰

Secondly, information campaigns are designed based on the assumption that diaspora members also want to discourage (irregular) migration and want to share their (negative) experiences. This is often difficult to predict as in most studies on migrant networks, diaspora members personally known to potential migrants are one of the key sources of information that enable migration.¹⁰¹ Diaspora members and social networks deterring migration is often the exception rather than the norm.¹⁰² Even in cases where diaspora members have had negative experiences in their journeys or in host countries, they may not be willing to share them due to fear of shame and being perceived as a failure.¹⁰³ Thus, finding diaspora members who agree with the campaign's objectives and convincing them to share the negative experiences or risks of migration may be challenging and cost-intensive.

Research is yet to prove that bad experiences of deportees and returnees has had any negative or discouraging impact on future journeys. While return migrants often experience stigma and shame of failure on return, they are still considered reliable sources of information about migration in their communities and social networks. A Seefar study conducted on irregular journeys of Afghans to the EU shows that the information received from word of mouth from Afghan friends and family in the diaspora and returnees who have either been deported from the Balkan states or returned from Iran and Pakistan had great significance in the future irregular attempts to migration by Afghans.¹⁰⁴

Evaluation of the "Migrants as Messengers"¹⁰⁵ campaign by IOM found that peer-to-peer messaging through returnees is effective during information campaigns as people trust social ties with them and their emotional experiences may influence the risk perception of prospective migrants.¹⁰⁶ The evaluation found limited impact in the knowledge of potential migrants based on the information shared in the campaign, yet it found that the treatment group has higher risk perceptions and was 20% less likely to report the intention to migrate irregularly – indicating that "information" in itself may not be effective in changing intention or behaviour, rather change in intention may be linked to emotional factors, as found by Tjaden (2020).¹⁰⁷ While these findings feed into the larger debate on the effectiveness of information campaigns on irregular migration, the core element relevant for this

⁹⁹ Felipe Alexander Dunsch, Jasper Tjaden, and William Quiviger, "Migrants as Messengers: The Impact of Peer-to-Peer Communication on Potential Migrants in Senegal," 2019.

¹⁰⁰ European Commission, "Study on Best Practices in Irregular Migration Awareness Campaign: Interim Report Phase II," 2021. p. 43

¹⁰¹ Mixed Migration Centre, "The Decision to Migrate among Afghans: Access to Information and Key Influencers," 2020.

¹⁰² Katie Kuschminder, Julia de Bresser, and Melissa Siegel, Irregular Migration Routes to Europe and Factors Influencing Migrants' Destination Choices (Maastricht: Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, 2015).

¹⁰³¹⁰³ Gabriella Sanchez et al., A Study of the Communication Channels Used by Migrants and Asylum Seekers in Italy, with a Particular Focus on Online and Social Media (European Commission, 2018).

¹⁰⁴ Seefar, "Reluctant Journeys: Why Afghans Migrate Irregularly to Europe," Seefar.Org, 2019, <https://seefar.org/news/research/reluctant-journeys-why-afghans-migrate-irregularly-to-europe/>.

¹⁰⁵ International Organisation for Migration (IOM), "What Is 'Migrants as Messengers,'" n.d., https://www.migrantsasmessengers.org/sites/default/files/documents/MaM_OnePager_EN_031120.pdf.

¹⁰⁶ Felipe Alexander Dunsch, Jasper Tjaden, and William Quiviger, "Migrants as Messengers: The Impact of Peer-to-Peer Communication on Potential Migrants in Senegal," 2019.

¹⁰⁷ Jasper Tjaden, "Assessing the Impact of Awareness- Raising Campaigns on Potential Migrants – What We Have Learned so Far," Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean, no. December (2020): 426–34.



study is the role of diaspora members or returnees as “influential” messengers. This indicates that the “credibility” of returnees (and perhaps diaspora members) may factor from the emotional elements more than the “factual correctness” of the message they share,¹⁰⁸ highlighting the relevance of competing factors that may influence behaviour besides information.¹⁰⁹ Even then, the decline in migration intention (20%) is not considered adequately strong compared to the customisation of the content as per the needs of the participants and the choice of a “trusted messenger”.¹¹⁰

Finally, as highlighted in the background report,¹¹¹ the diaspora abroad is not a homogenous group, and neither are the potential migrants. If there is a mismatch in the profiles of the diaspora members engaged and potential migrant community, the effort to engage with diaspora for information campaigns will further fall short of its purpose. For instance, in 2021, a young potential migrant from Sialkot district may dismiss the message if the messenger is an older diaspora member originally from another part of Pakistan who moved to Europe in the 1970s through a different route. Moreover, a diaspora member who has been legalised in the host country may himself be a symbol of success, and his challenges may be received by the target population as merely temporary. On the other hand, migrants who still do not have legal status in the host country may shy away from participating in such information campaigns. So, careful consideration needs to be placed when engaging with a particular diaspora member concerning who the target audience is and what message is to be transmitted.

Against such evidence, some studies find limited impact, if any, for engaging diaspora members as partners in information campaigns.¹¹² An evaluation of 10 irregular migration information campaigns commissioned by the European Commission sends caution on the level of effectiveness of diaspora members (and returnees) in information campaigns based on a lack of empirical evidence that suggests their impact.¹¹³ The evaluation concludes that involving diaspora members and returnees is only effective if they are personally known to the potential irregular migrants. Effectiveness is negligible in projects that involve diaspora members unknown to the potential migrants.

2.5. Summary of key points

While evidence related to the effectiveness of engaging diaspora members as “credible messengers” in an information campaign stands inconclusive as of yet, the following takeaways can be drawn from the above discussion.

1. **Understanding the scope of diaspora engagement at different stages of migration:** At different stages of migration, from pre-departure to post-arrival, potential irregular migrants engage with their social contacts in the diaspora differently. From passive consumption of information about friends’ and family’s lifestyles abroad, to actively seeking information, financial and in-kind support after the decision has been made, potential migrants’ level and

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel Schans and Caitin Optekamp, *Raising Awareness, Changing Behaviour? Combatting Irregular Migration through Information Campaigns* (The Netherlands: Ministry of Justice and Security, 2016).

¹¹⁰ Helen Dempster and Jasper Tjaden, “Are Public Information Campaigns for Migrants Effective? Lessons for the Biden Administration,” Centre for Global Development, April 2021, <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/are-public-information-campaigns-migrants-effective-lessons-biden-administration>.

¹¹¹ Hahn-Schaur, *Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration from Pakistan: Background Report*.

¹¹² Seefar, “3E Impact. Ethical, Engaged & Effective. Running Communications on Irregular Migration from Kos to Kandahar,” *Seefar.Org*, 2018, <https://3e-impact.org/>.

¹¹³ European Commission, “Study on Best Practices in Irregular Migration Awareness Campaign: Interim Report Phase II,” 2021.



mode of engagement with them may differ. This is important to recognise when designing an information campaign, specifically with regard to how the content is framed, keeping in mind the migration stage of the targeted potential irregular migrant group,

2. **Diaspora members are imperfect proxies for credible messengers in information campaigns:** When designing an information campaign involving diaspora members, implementing agencies should be mindful of the fact that diaspora members may be “imperfect” proxies for “credible messengers”. As the discussion above demonstrates, potential irregular migrants seek information from people they trust, who also have the relevant experience and information – i.e. friends and family who live in destination countries.¹¹⁴ The mere fact that a co-national from abroad is sharing the message does not automatically garner trust from the potential irregular migrant. Therefore, evaluation mechanism of the information campaign must be designed taking into account that the impact may not be as strong if strangers in the diaspora are engaged for information sharing for a targeted potential migrant group. Engaging with diaspora members personally known to potential migrants would be a time and cost-intensive process, with little guarantee that those diaspora members would be willing to participate in the campaign.
3. **Identify and build trust with relevant diaspora members:** Not all people in the diaspora would be relevant, and not all relevant diaspora members would be willing to participate or share the campaign’s message. Starting with this understanding, careful consideration is needed to identify which diaspora members would be most effective for engagement and a good rapport should be built with specific diaspora members who could be engaged. This requires a devoted engagement exercise prior to the implementation of the campaign which involves understanding diaspora members’ own views and level of influence in the community of origin. Involving migrant associations may be helpful and easier in reaching out to the diaspora community, but evidence suggests that potential irregular migrants may not trust information coming from institutions.¹¹⁵
4. **Focus on the message:** It is very tricky to involve diaspora members as messengers for deterring irregular migration as, in principle, diaspora members themselves are symbols of success for potential irregular migrants.¹¹⁶ In that sense, care is needed when drafting the message that the campaign wants to deliver through the diaspora members, considering that the diaspora members engaged are not the only source of information for the potential irregular migrants. Potential irregular migrants engaged in an information campaign may be exposed to conflicting information from different diaspora members, including their own networks, where some may be informing them about the risks (such as in information campaigns), while others may be offering them with information on how to overcome those risks (e.g. through personal networks).

In that sense, focusing information campaigns on legal alternatives and positive narratives is found to be more effective than deterrence.¹¹⁷ For instance, a Seefar study recommends that

¹¹⁴ Mixed Migration Centre, “The Decision to Migrate among Afghans: Access to Information and Key Influencers,” 2020.

¹¹⁵ Optimity Advisors and Seefar, *How West African Migrants Engage with Migration Information En-Route to Europe*, 2017.

¹¹⁶ Seefar, “3E Impact. Ethical, Engaged & Effective. Running Communications on Irregular Migration from Kos to Kandahar,” Seefar.Org, 2018, <https://3e-impact.org/>.

¹¹⁷ European Migration Network (EMN), *Migration and Communication: Information and Awareness-Raising Campaigns in Countries of Origin and Transit* (Vienna: Diplomatic Academy of Austria, 2019).



focusing on chances of success at the destination country, on how the new and restrictive policies of destination country would impact their regularisation and legalisation process, and ways of differentiating between accurate and inaccurate information would be more effective than just detailing about the risks of the journey and life in Europe.¹¹⁸ Other studies also argue that messages inducing “fear” without providing an alternative are not effective.¹¹⁹

5. **Use personalised channels of communication:** As mentioned earlier, potential irregular migrants use their own trusted channels of communication to engage with diaspora members. Social media is an important channel of personal communication with the friends and relatives in the diaspora, rather than for accessing mainstream content available on various platforms. In this sense, mainstream social media forums could be used to signpost towards people that could offer more customised information based on the potential migrants’ information needs.¹²⁰ For example live sessions with active participant engagement, rather than publishing generic testimonial-type videos on public forums, may be more effective.

¹¹⁸ Seefar, “3E Impact. Ethical, Engaged & Effective. Running Communications on Irregular Migration from Kos to Kandahar,” Seefar.Org, 2018, <https://3e-impact.org/>.

¹¹⁹ Caitlin Optekamp, *Migration Information Campaigns* (Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2016).

¹²⁰ Optimity Advisors and Seefar, *How West African Migrants Engage with Migration Information En-Route to Europe*, 2017.



3 Institutional Framework

This section presents an overview of the institutional landscape that relates to international migration from Pakistan, reflecting particularly on Pakistan’s approach to diaspora engagement. It draws linkages between the institutional infrastructure developed over the last five decades and the state’s evolving priorities for engaging with Overseas Pakistanis echoed through policy-related initiatives. This is followed by a brief discussion on the mechanisms in place for dealing with and managing irregular migration from Pakistan, particularly in relation to the return and repatriation of irregular migrants already in destination countries. The chapter also briefly presents an overview of the activities and challenges of the Pakistani Embassies in the four PARIM research countries.

3.1. Institutional landscape

Pakistan’s evolving institutional landscape related to diaspora engagement follows the two broad categories of diaspora engagement politics conceptualised by Gamlen (2008):¹²¹ i) recognising or creating a diaspora through identity formulation; and ii) offering certain national rights to the diaspora members and drawing nationally-oriented benefits from them. This overview depicts how these two strands of diaspora engagement are exercised in the context of Pakistan.

The foundations of Pakistan’s institutional framework related to international migration were laid in the 1970s with the establishment of the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE) in 1971, the inception of the National Talent Pool in 1976, and the creation of the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF) in 1979. Each of these institutions targeted a separate policy focus:

- i) BEOE was founded to regulate and promote labour emigration from Pakistan,¹²² together with its subsidiary organisations such as Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC) and the Protectorate of Emigrants, which oversees the private recruiters - Overseas Employment Promoters (OEPs)
- ii) the National Talent Pool was originally designed as a database for highly qualified workers within Pakistan, however, its mandate was extended to include Overseas Pakistanis in 1978 to “revert” the brain drain of well-qualified Pakistani professionals abroad;¹²³
- iii) Overseas Pakistanis Foundation was created with the primary objective of offering security and welfare services to the Overseas Pakistanis and their families in Pakistan.¹²⁴ These institutions are governed by the Emigration Ordinance 1979 and the Emigration Rules 1979.

Over the years, several organisational restructuring efforts have taken place. In 2004, a new division was established within the then Ministry of Labour to deal with matters related to Overseas Pakistanis.¹²⁵ In 2008, a separate Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis was created, which in 2013 was merged with the Ministry of Human Resource Development to create the Ministry of Overseas

¹²¹ Alan Gamlen, “The Emigration State and the Modern Geopolitical Imagination,” *Political Geography* 27 (2008): 17–35.

¹²² Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE), “Director General’s Message,” 2021, <https://beoe.gov.pk/director-general-message>.

¹²³ National Talent Pool (NTP). National talent pool: Home. n.d. <http://talentpool.gov.pk/>.

¹²⁴ Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF), “Vision and Mission,” *Opf.Org.Pk*, n.d., <https://opf.org.pk/about-us/vision-mission/>.

¹²⁵ Archived website of Ministry of Labour, Manpower and Overseas Pakistanis Division, n.d.



Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (MOPHRD). To date, the MOPHRD serves as the focal government institution with the mandate of policymaking related to Overseas Pakistanis and engagement with intending and existing emigrants through its subsidiary departments and organisations. As a result of this organisational restructuring, BEOE along with its affiliated departments (OEC, OEPs, and the Protectorate of Emigrants), and OPF came under the jurisdiction of MOPHRD, while National Talent Pool was authorised to the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training.

3.2. Policy priorities

With these institutional mechanisms in place, the Pakistani state aligned its vision for achieving the following objectives about Overseas Pakistanis:¹²⁶

- promote the emigration of Pakistani labour to lessen the burden of domestic unemployment
- offer welfare and social services to Overseas Pakistanis and their families and protect the rights of workers
- capitalise on the flow of remittances by encouraging transfers through regularised and formal channels
- incentivise Overseas Pakistanis to invest in Pakistan for development gains

Since the late 2000s, several efforts have been made to strategise these objectives in the form of an official state policy on Overseas Pakistanis, however, the two efforts made in 2009 and 2013 for a National Emigration Policy and the Pakistani Diaspora Policy respectively could not materialise due to bureaucratic lags. The most recent effort initiated in 2018, with technical support from ICMPD, followed a wider consultative process, and the resulting National Emigration and Welfare Policy for Overseas Pakistanis is awaiting formal approval from the Cabinet.¹²⁷

Despite the lack of a formally accepted policy document on emigration and diaspora engagement, several initiatives have been applied over the course of the last two decades, reflecting the state priorities. The first set of initiatives relate to determining a formal identity of the Pakistani diaspora for state-led purposes. Existing literature classifies such initiatives into “embracing” the diaspora.¹²⁸ For cultivating diaspora relations, the Pakistani state in 2002 launched two identity documents offering certain rights to Overseas Pakistanis such as the right of visa-free travel, opening a bank account, buying property, staying indefinitely etc. These include the National Identity Card for Overseas Pakistanis (NICOP) for dual citizenship holders and labour emigrants and the Pakistan Origin Card (POC) for foreigners of Pakistani origin.

Related to the concept of ‘embracing’ the diaspora by giving them rights and to further the objective of offering welfare to Overseas Pakistanis, the state appointed Community Welfare Attachés (CWAs)

¹²⁶ Ayesha A Qaisrani, “Reaching out, Inviting in: Pakistan’s Approach to Diaspora Engagement,” *Migration and Development*, August 12, 2020, 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21632324.2020.1797457>.

¹²⁷ Silk Routes Facility, “National Emigration and Welfare Policy for Overseas Pakistanis: Processes, Challenges, and Responses for Action,” 2020.

¹²⁸ Alan Gamlen, “The New Migration-and Development Pessimism,” *Progress in Human Geography* 38, no. 4 (2014): 587–91. Simon Turner and Nauja Kleist, “Introduction: Agents of Change? Staging and Governing Diasporas and the African State,” *African Studies*, 2013, 192–206.



in some Pakistani missions abroad. The Emigration Rules of 1979 include the appointment of Labour Attachés, entrusted with the roles and responsibilities that have been delegated to the CWAs. Their main purpose is to safeguard the interests of Overseas Pakistanis, provide counselling and protection services, offer dispute settlement mechanisms, and promote employment opportunities for Pakistani labour.¹²⁹ The need for specialised appointments of CWAs primarily arose as a result of limited legal and counsellor support available for Pakistanis in destination countries. Considered especially vulnerable are the approximately 11,000 Overseas Pakistanis imprisoned in foreign jails, particularly in the Middle East.¹³⁰ Initially, 19 CWAs were to be appointed in 16 Pakistani missions abroad,¹³¹ particularly in those countries with higher population concentration of Pakistanis. The number has now been increased to 24 CWAs¹³².

These CWAs serve as the focal points for any welfare and protection-related matters concerning Overseas Pakistanis and deal directly with the migrants. It is envisaged that CWAs will be appointed not only in countries where the Pakistani population is already high but also in countries where Pakistan seeks to foster further diplomatic and trade relations. Focus will also be placed on their capacity building by offering them specialised training on topics such as counselling, case management, gender sensitivity, and return and reintegration.¹³³

In the same vein of embracing the diaspora, other mechanisms for complaint redressal were also improved. The incumbent government introduced an initiative called Call Sarzameen in 2019 which is a complaint portal for Overseas Pakistanis, and can be accessed through an App or web.¹³⁴ This portal is integrated with the Pakistan Citizens' Portal, which is designed to overcome bureaucratic lags and communicate the issues of people directly to the relevant ministry for quick action. This portal allows the complainant to track the progress on their complaint through the App.

The second set of initiatives relates to what is categorised as “tapping” the diaspora for material and political gains in the national context.¹³⁵ To regularise the flow of remittances, the Pakistan Remittance Initiative was launched in 2008 in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and the State Bank of Pakistan.¹³⁶ As a brain gain strategy, the government launched initiatives such as Naya Pakistan Calling in 2018 to encourage engagement of highly-qualified overseas Pakistanis in professional and technical capacities in Pakistan's development policymaking,¹³⁷ Pakistan Banao Certificates in 2019 as investment bonds, and more recently the Roshan Digital Account in 2020 for offering digital banking opportunities to overseas Pakistanis, and attracting investment. Investment-related initiatives have garnered some momentum, specifically with Pakistan Banao Certificates

¹²⁹Migrant Resource Centre (MRC). Community Welfare Attaches. n.d. <https://www.mrc.org.pk/en/migration-network/community-welfare-attaches>.

¹³⁰ Ikram Junaidi, “11,000 Suffering in Foreign Jails: JPP Study,” *Dawn*, April 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1478050>.

¹³¹ Six CWAs are appointed in Saudi Arabia, which hosts the largest Overseas Pakistani population, three in UAE, two in Qatar, one each in Bahrain, Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, UK, South Korea, Italy, Spain, Greece, Iraq, USA, South Africa, and Japan.

¹³² Thirteen of these positions are vacant at the time of writing this report.

¹³³ Silk Routes Facility, “National Emigration and Welfare Policy for Overseas Pakistanis: Processes, Challenges, and Responses for Action,” 2020.

¹³⁴ The Nation, “Overseas Ministry Launches ‘Call SarZameen App’ to Instantly Resolve Expats’ Grievances,” *The Nation*, April 2019, <https://nation.com.pk/29-Apr-2019/overseas-ministry-launches-call-sarzameen-app-to-instantly-resolve-expats-grievances>.

¹³⁵ Jennifer M Brinkerhoff, “Diasporas and Conflict Societies: Conflict Entrepreneurs, Competing Interests or Contributors to Stability and Development,” *Conflict, Security and Development* 11, no. 2 (2011): 115–43.

¹³⁶ Pakistan Remittance Initiative (PRI). Home. n.d. <https://www.pri.gov.pk/>

¹³⁷ As part of this scheme, highly qualified diaspora members are invited to share their CVs to create a databank. The idea is that based on their relevance and qualifications, they will be engaged in different professional and technical capacities in Pakistan's development planning.



accumulating investment worth USD 30 million up till September 2019¹³⁸ since its launch in January the same year, and Roshan Digital Accounts leveraged USD 1 billion in the first seven months.¹³⁹ More recently, IOM Pakistan partnered with the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination to introduce the project titled Engaging Diaspora in Strengthening the Health Sector in Pakistan, which is another registration platform for diaspora members who are engaged in health and medical services overseas. Latest figures show that 2000 medical service-providers of Pakistani origins have registered on the platform.¹⁴⁰ These initiatives are well-aligned with the goals of strengthened diaspora engagement articulated in the latest draft of the National Emigration and Welfare Policy for Overseas Pakistanis.

3.3. Return and repatriation mechanisms for irregular Pakistani migrants

The policy interest on returnees has been growing in recent years, particularly by the EU and its Member States in terms of irregular migrant returnees. The increase in irregular migration from Pakistan and the high rejection rate of asylum applicants from Pakistan in the EU also necessitated the need for institutional setups dealing with the repatriation of Pakistani returnees and deportees. An intricate institutional mechanism is being developed for dealing with returnees who migrated irregularly with regard to return and repatriation involving the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through its agreements with the EU and the Member States, MOPHRD through the delegation of CWAs, and the Ministry of Interior through the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). These national organisations work in collaboration with the EU Member States, the Australian Government, and international organisations, such as IOM and UNODC, to strengthen Pakistan's management of returnees and deportees. More recently, IOM Pakistan collaborated with the Government of Pakistan to constitute Returnee Reintegration Coordination Committee which comprises of partners such as FIA and National Vocational and Technical Training Commission, working towards improving the Readmission Case Management System.¹⁴¹

In 2010, Pakistan and the EU entered into the EU Readmission Agreement, which serves as the framework for the return of Pakistanis residing in the EU countries without authorised documentation.¹⁴² Initially, Pakistan agreed to readmit third-country nationals who had transited through Pakistan to the EU under certain conditions. This agreement also allowed for readmission of third-country nationals who had transited through Pakistan to the EU under certain conditions. In 2016, however, based on issues of lack of verification of nationalities of deportees, the agreement was suspended shortly, after which a new pact was signed between the EU and Pakistan.¹⁴³

Currently, under the readmission agreement's capacity building facility between the EU and Pakistan, a digital Readmission Case Management System is being developed to streamline the

¹³⁸ Mehtab Haider, "Govt Collects 30m from Pak Expats under Pakistan Banao Certificate," *The News*, September 2019, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/521122-govt-collects-30m-from-pak-expats-under-pakistan-banao-certificate>.

¹³⁹ Dawn. "Remittances Exceed \$2bn for 12th Straight Month with Highest Inflows from Saudi Arabia, UAE." Accessed July 6, 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1628615>.

¹⁴⁰ IOM Pakistan. IOM Newsletter January – March 2021.

¹⁴¹ IOM Pakistan. Newsletter January – March 2021.

¹⁴² EUR-LEX. "Agreement with Pakistan on Readmission," 2010.

¹⁴³ Amir Wasim, "Understanding on Deportation Issue Reached with the EU," *Dawn*, February 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1238076>.



process and to “manage returns and cooperate on readmissions” with the EU.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, the EU through IOM in partnership with the Government of Pakistan is investing in strengthening the capacities of reception facilities for the returnees. The GIZ-funded Facilitation and Reintegration Centres, mentioned above, also serve as Pakistan’s first reintegration centre for returnees. Pakistan also signed a bilateral agreement with Norway in 2017 for the readmission of Pakistani nationals, however, it does not have a bilateral agreement with any of the four PARIM research countries on return and/or migration.

In the same vein, IOM in Pakistan has been implementing the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme for more than a decade. The programme is designed to facilitate migrants’ decision to return, offers assistance on return, and provides reintegration support to returnees.¹⁴⁵ In 2020, Pakistan was among the top five countries of origin that received return assistance from IOM for 1,402 people.¹⁴⁶

In recent years, the issue of reintegration of return migrants has also attracted policy focus, which has led to the development of more streamlined mechanisms of reintegration of returnees. Supported by GIZ (German development agency), two Facilitation and Reintegration Centres have been established within OPF in Islamabad and Lahore recently, aimed at guiding returnees for social and economic integration on their return to Pakistan.¹⁴⁷ Some of the initiatives under this Centre include a database of returnees, dissemination of job-related information, micro-loan schemes for incentivising entrepreneurial activities for the returnees, etc. However, as the registration for the returnee database is voluntary, many returnees remain unaware of these facilitations offered. There is also not a rigorous process for job placements and the impact of the job information campaigns cannot be gauged accurately yet. While the upcoming National Emigration and Welfare Policy for Overseas Pakistanis has a section on return and reintegration, there are considerations of developing a standalone return and reintegration policy for the Overseas Pakistanis. Indeed, this topic has only grown in importance recently, considering that the pace of return of labour migrants at the end of their contracts, especially from the GCC countries, was aggravated suddenly as a result of huge job losses and global economic slowdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This institutional machinery in place for the management of returnees and deportees is coupled with a strengthened and tougher border control regime, supported through the financial and technical expertise of the EU. In 2018, two new laws were put forth to deal with the irregular flow of people from Pakistani borders – the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act 2018, and the Prevention of Smuggling of Migrants Act 2018.¹⁴⁸ An Inter-Agency Task Force has been set-up to implement the “Integrated Border Management System (IBMS)” to control human trafficking and smuggling from Pakistan.

This overview of the institutional framework reflects that while the mechanisms for the promotion of labour migration and channelling remittances and investments from the overseas Pakistanis are

¹⁴⁴ International Organisation for Migration (IOM). European Readmission Capacity Building Facility. n.d. <https://eea.iom.int/european-readmission-capacity-building-facility-eurcap>.

¹⁴⁵ IOM Pakistan. Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration. <https://pakistan.iom.int/assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration-avrr>

¹⁴⁶ International Organisation for Migration (IOM). Return and reintegration highlights 2020. Geneva: IOM.

¹⁴⁷ Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF), “Pilot Project: Establishment of Facilitation and Reintegration Centre for Pakistani Migrant Workers,” 2019, <https://www.opf.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/combinefr-1.pdf>.

¹⁴⁸ Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). Anti Human Trafficking Unit. n.d.. https://www.fia.gov.pk/immigration_w.



well-established, the focus on welfare and protection of migrants in the destination countries and a streamlined process for the reintegration of returnees and deportees is only picking up pace more recently.

3.4. Institutional engagement with migrant associations

Recognising the importance of migrant associations as key stakeholders in the diaspora engagement process, the government of Pakistan actively pursues opportunities to strengthen the relationship with migrant associations and key members of the diaspora in destination countries. The Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF) is the prime institutional body responsible for engaging with the Pakistani diaspora, including the migrant associations created and run by Overseas Pakistanis. Aligned with the state's objectives of establishing a strong network of well-positioned Overseas Pakistanis, OPF is set to revitalise the Overseas Pakistanis Advisory Council (OPAC). OPAC would serve as a platform for engaging and mobilising renowned diaspora members of Pakistani origins who have notable contributions in their host countries for Overseas Pakistanis and the "cause" of Pakistan.¹⁴⁹ Members of OPAC are mandated with the responsibility to represent the concerns and issues of Overseas Pakistanis to relevant state bodies in Pakistan, and the Council is expected to suggest corrective measures needed to address those issues. The members, which are envisioned to be 50 in total, would be nominated by the Pakistani mission in the respective regions and countries. The OPAC members would serve as a liaison between the Pakistani communities abroad and the Pakistani government by creating awareness of different schemes launched by the government for Overseas Pakistanis.

Similarly, in pursuit of creating sustained linkages with Overseas Pakistanis over generations, OPF has also initiated the Overseas Pakistanis Youth Council that offers a platform to younger Pakistanis abroad (children of migrants) for cultural visits to Pakistan to familiarise them with their Pakistani heritage.¹⁵⁰ The vision is to keep them engaged as "ambassadors" of Pakistan in their host countries, while also encouraging some brain gain. This initiative reflects the state's objective of creating long-term ties with the next generations of Pakistani migrants with hopes of keeping them engaged for fulfilling national development goals.

Besides these state-initiated platforms for diaspora engagement, OPF's website includes a list of active migrant associations with which the state collaborates. These associations often work in close collaboration with the state departments to facilitate the Pakistani diaspora population living abroad and often bridge communication between the government authorities and diaspora members. In return, the state also often mobilises Overseas Pakistanis through these associations to achieve national objectives such as driving investment and remittances towards Pakistan, supporting local development initiatives, encouraging knowledge and skill transfer, furthering cultural diplomacy, etc.

As mentioned earlier, for welfare services and addressing the general issues of diaspora members and migrants in destination countries, Community Welfare Attaches (CWAs) serve as the focal

¹⁴⁹ Migrant Resource Centre (MRC). Pakistani Diaspora. n.d. <https://www.mrc.org.pk/en/migration-network/pakistani-diaspora>

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.



points. They have direct interaction with the overseas Pakistanis population in their respective appointed countries and serve as the link between the government and the overseas population.

3.4.1. Institutional engagement with migrant associations in PARIM project countries

For understanding how the institutional engagement is extended in countries of destination, particularly the four PARIM project countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, and Italy), interviews were conducted with representatives of Pakistani Embassies in these four countries. The main purpose of this exercise was to elucidate the level of engagement of Pakistani migrant associations with state authorities of the home country, the services offered by the Pakistani state to the diaspora in these countries, the channels of communication between the embassy and migrants and migrant associations, and to know about the challenges that embassies face in engaging with the diaspora in these particular countries. CWAs were appointed in Greece and Italy (although the appointee in Italy was yet to join the position), while Austria and Bulgaria did not have dedicated CWAs.

The analysis shows that embassies of Pakistan in these four countries offer four types of services, in line with the usual services provided by foreign missions abroad:

- i. **Consular service:** Addressing the needs of the Pakistani community in these four countries, the main activity carried out by the embassies of Pakistan is consular service. Assistance with regard to identity documents, registration, verifications and attestations, visa applications, renewal of passport, etc. are the prime responsibilities of the Embassies of Pakistan in the respective host countries.

It was highlighted that with increased digitisation of visa and documentation procedures, the frequent direct interaction between diaspora members and embassies has somewhat decreased. Engagement on consular services is also less frequent for people who have been in the country for a long term, including with those who have naturalised in the country of residence.

- ii. **Engaging with host country authorities:** The embassies also act as a bridge and a liaison between the Pakistani community and state authorities of the host countries and assist the community in case they need help in engaging with the host country authorities for approvals, registration, verifications, applications, tax-related procedures, interaction with law enforcement agencies regarding imprisonment/detention, etc. This often also relates to decisions regarding asylum and regularisation, as well as family reunification. For instance, under Italy's amnesty scheme of regularising undocumented migrants amid COVID-19,¹⁵¹ the Pakistani Embassy in Italy assisted in providing verification documents for 18,000 irregular Pakistani migrants in Italy.¹⁵² Similarly, the Embassies are also the main point of contact for managing issues of repatriation and deportation through identity verification.
- iii. **Redressal of grievances of the Pakistani community:** For creating a direct link between the Ambassador of Pakistan and the Pakistani community, regular consultative events, called *E-Katcheri* are held where community members have the opportunity to voice their concerns, issues, ideas, and suggestions. These events are organised at a monthly

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch, "Italy: Flawed Migrant Regularisation Program: Opportunity to Learn Lessons for Future," 2018.

¹⁵² Interview with Representative of Pakistani Embassy in Italy. 2021, June 23.



or bi-monthly interval, during which community members can directly lodge their complaints and concerns relating to issues experienced in the country of residence or those experienced in dealing with Pakistani authorities. These consultations are held directly with the Ambassador of the respective countries. Due to COVID-19, these consultative events now take place online.

The embassies are also responsible for making arrangements in crises situations such as accidents, or death. For instance, embassies assist in the transportation of dead bodies back to Pakistan in case of the death of an individual residing in that country. Moreover, during COVID-19, the Embassies also arranged food drives and provided food and basic items of use to community members during the initial days of lockdown. At the request of migrants, legal aid is sometimes arranged through the Pakistani embassy. Migrants often also seek help regarding employment opportunities. The representative of the Pakistani Embassy in Italy shared that they offer guidance to legal residents about job opportunities through migrant associations. This reflects the existence of a strong network with the local migrant associations. Embassies in all four countries have also initiated registration platforms for mapping migrant associations and Pakistani professionals working in these countries, perhaps due to an institutional decision by the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs to identify the Pakistani diaspora in other countries

- iv.** Cultural promotion, diplomacy, and nation-building activities: the Embassies of Pakistan in the four countries organise cultural promotional activities and events such as the celebration of national and religious holidays (Eid, Pakistan Day, Independence Day, etc.), sports events, and cultural diplomacy events. The Embassies also reach out to diaspora members to inform and advocate about development initiatives taken by the Pakistani government that may concern diaspora members. For instance, initiatives such as Roshan Digital Account (aimed at facilitating banking services for Overseas Pakistanis), Pakistan Banao Certificates (government-initiated investment bonds), and services offered by the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation are communicated to diaspora members through events and other communication channels in all four PARIM countries. Facilitation with the process of fostering trade between Pakistan and the host countries is also offered on demand.

A few country-specific challenges emerged from the research that the Pakistani Embassies experience in relation to the community:

- In both Italy and Greece, where the Pakistani community is largest among the PARIM countries, including a large number of irregular migrants, the Pakistani Embassies are serving as a liaison between the Pakistani government and Greek and Italian authorities to create pathways for legal migration. One of the legal options for entering Italy for seasonal work called *Decreto-Flussi* was suspended for Pakistani migrants in 2018 due to high irregular entries from Pakistan in Italy. However, the Embassy of Pakistan in Italy convinced the Italian government to allow legal entry through the seasonal work programme again in 2020. The Pakistani Embassy in Greece is also striving to carve out legal migration pathways for Pakistani communities. Programmes of legal migration pathways are generally based on bilateral cooperation (although no bilateral agreements exist respectively between Pakistan and the four PARIM countries on legal migration) and are often based on performance on cooperation on return and deportation, including under the EU Readmission Agreement.

Previously there have been contestations on the deportation of irregular migrants as a limited verification process was undertaken before sending irregular migrants to their “home” country. For instance, in 2015, Pakistan rejected a plane carrying 30 deportees from Greece on the grounds that it contained “unverified deportees”.¹⁵³

- Representatives of both Greece and Italy mentioned that due to high rates of irregularity among Pakistani migrants, it is extremely difficult for them to intervene for favourable working conditions for those workers. Due to their irregular status, the labour market often exploits migrant workers who are forced to work at below minimum wage rate and are not provided with any accident or workplace hazard insurance.
- In Bulgaria, the share of irregular Pakistani migrants has decreased significantly over the last few years. Indeed, Bulgaria has experienced almost a 90% decline in irregular flows between 2015 and 2017.¹⁵⁴ Several factors could explain this decline, such as stricter border control, lack of employment prospects for irregular migrants, and Bulgaria’s non-Schengen status inhibiting further mobility in Europe. Nonetheless, authorities still consider Pakistan as one of the main source countries and put pressure on Pakistan to reduce this flow towards Bulgaria.
- Due to the small size of the Pakistani community in Bulgaria, there are some limitations in the consular services provided by the Pakistani Embassy there. For instance, the Pakistani Embassy in Bulgaria does not offer the latest NICOP¹⁵⁵ cards with smart chips. As per the Embassy’s estimates, the Pakistani community (besides students) is less than 100 in number, and very few in detention centres. According to Bulgarian government estimates, between January 1, 1993, and November 30, 2018, 3,168 people of Pakistani origin were given refugee status in Bulgaria.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, recognition rates of Pakistanis in Bulgaria are low: estimates from 2020 show that there were 85 asylum applications from Pakistani migrants, including 10 from unaccompanied children, out of which only 1 was given refugee status, while 55 were rejected.¹⁵⁷ At the same time, for those who obtain refugee status in Bulgaria, many move on once their status is regularised. Recent information shows that out of 73,238 people (from a variety of countries of origin) given refugee status in the same period (1993-2018), only 1,000-2,000 people currently reside in Bulgaria.¹⁵⁸ This indicates that a large number of people who have been granted refugee status, including Pakistanis, have moved from Bulgaria, perhaps to other European countries.
- As a legal migration pathway, the government of Austria and the Pakistani Embassy are exploring the potential of educational opportunities for Pakistani students in Austria.¹⁵⁹ However, the student visa application requirements are time and cost-intensive, often making it difficult for the students to apply for scholarships or join their courses in time.

In terms of communication between the Embassy and the community, in most cases, community members approach the embassy through telephone or social media. All four embassies have official Facebook pages, which serves as the primary two-way communication medium between the Embassies and community members. In countries, such as Bulgaria, with a smaller community,

¹⁵³ Jon Boone, “Pakistan Sends Deported Migrants Back to Greece,” *The Guardian*, December 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/03/pakistan-sends-deported-migrants-back-to-greece-eu>.

¹⁵⁴ Global Detention Project, “Immigration Detention in Bulgaria: Fewer Migrants and Refugees, More Fences,” 2019..

¹⁵⁵ National Identity Cards for Overseas Pakistanis

¹⁵⁶ Caritas Bulgaria, “The Bulgarian Migration Paradox: Migration and Development in Bulgaria,” 2019.

¹⁵⁷ Asylum Information Database. “Country Report Bulgaria.” 2020

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Bol News. “Pakistani Mission Lauds Austria’s Efforts against Covid-19.” Bol News. June 26 2021. <https://www.bolnews.com/latest/2021/06/pakistani-mission-lauds-austrias-efforts-against-covid-19/>.



WhatsApp groups are also a regular mode of communication. In Italy, the Embassy circulates information through the network of migrant associations as well as community elders to reach community members, in addition to the regular modes of telephone, e-mail, and social media. In Austria, the Embassy has a mailing list through which it shares information and news. In Italy, the Pakistani Embassy also offers mobile consular services by visiting different cities outside the capital, in which the Pakistani community is concentrated. In Greece, the Pakistani Embassy has partnered with a mobile network used by the majority of the Pakistani community in Greece, which is used to send alerts and updates as text messages.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Punjab Euro TV. Interview with the Pakistani ambassador in Greece. YouTube. Athens, September 13.



4 Pakistani Communities Abroad

Pakistan's emigrant population is among the ten largest in the world, with estimates varying between 6.3 million¹⁶¹ and 11.1 million¹⁶². Remittances flowing into Pakistan continue to rise reaching \$26.7 billion in the July-May period of 2020-2021,¹⁶³ defying predictions of decline amid COVID-19. Currently, Pakistan ranks sixth on the list of countries with the most workers' remittances.¹⁶⁴ Data on the top destination countries differs between different sources: whereas the UN and the World Bank list the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), India, United Arab Emirates (UAE), the United Kingdom, and the United States as the top five destinations; the Pakistani Government (Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment – BEOE) only mentions the Gulf countries (KSA, UAE, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain),¹⁶⁵ where labour migrants mostly move.

This discrepancy in the numbers of migrants should be seen in light of the fact that the BEOE documents migrant data from 1971 onwards and only focuses on registered labour migration flows.¹⁶⁶ Other estimates may reflect the stock of Pakistani migrants who moved abroad either without registration through BEOE, moved for studies and did not return, moved irregularly and were later regularised in their destination countries, moved for family reunification, and/or include children and generations of migrants who moved before the 1970s.

Estimates about the distribution of the stock of Overseas Pakistanis show that as of 2017, the largest Overseas Pakistani population resides in Saudi Arabia (22%), India (18%), UAE (16%), and Europe (15%).¹⁶⁷ Destination choices of Overseas Pakistanis reflect historic patterns. During the Partition of India in 1947, a mass migration took place between the two newly established countries, with the majority of Hindus migrating towards India and Muslims from India migrating towards Pakistan. It is estimated that about 14.5 million people were displaced and moved between the two countries.¹⁶⁸ Due to colonial links, initial migration trends developed towards the United Kingdom. Currently, there are about 1.5 million people of Pakistani origin in the UK,¹⁶⁹ comprising primarily of those who initially moved there to fill the labour gap in the UK's industrial sector and their descendants. They comprise 2% of the total population of the UK as per the 2011 census.¹⁷⁰

In the 1970s, with the oil prices peaking in the Gulf region, another flow of Pakistani migrants started towards the Middle East through a highly regularised system of contract-based employment in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Since 1971 to date, about 10.9 million people have migrated to the GCC countries, with 0.1 million in other Middle Eastern countries.¹⁷¹ As per 2017 estimates,

¹⁶¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), "International Migrant Stock," 2019.

¹⁶² Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE), "Labour Migration Report," 2020.

¹⁶³ Dawn. "Remittances Exceed \$2bn for 12th Straight Month with Highest Inflows from Saudi Arabia, UAE." Accessed July 6, 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1628615>.

¹⁶⁴ Dawn. "Record Remittances." Accessed July 6, 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1624824>.

¹⁶⁵ EUDiF. *Diaspora Engagement Mapping: Pakistan Country Factsheet*. 2019.

¹⁶⁶ Personal communication with a BEOE senior representative

¹⁶⁷ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), "International Migrant Stock," 2019.

¹⁶⁸ Bharadwaj, Khwaja, and Mian, *The Big March: Migratory Flows after the Partition of India*.

¹⁶⁹ Fareeha Zafar, "The Pakistan-Europe Corridor," in *The Pakistani Diaspora: Corridors of Opportunity and Uncertainty*, ed. Rashid Amjad (Lahore: Lahore School of Economics, 2017), 75–90.

¹⁷⁰ UK Government. *Population of England and Wales by Ethnicity*. Census 2017.

¹⁷¹ Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE). 2020. *Labour Migration Report*. Islamabad: Government of Pakistan.



about 3.7 million Pakistanis currently reside in the Gulf region.¹⁷² This estimate needs to be updated as many Overseas Pakistanis residing in the GCC countries returned to Pakistan over the course of 2020, primarily due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the same era of migration to the Gulf, more mobile Pakistanis also started moving towards the United States and Canada owing to their relatively relaxed immigration policies at that time. As of 2017, the US hosts about 900,000 people of Pakistani origin.¹⁷³ Initial migration from Pakistan towards European countries (other than the UK) also started in the decades of 1960s and 1970s, when a small number of economic migrants moved to Europe, mostly from central Punjab areas. Over the years the population grew, and currently, many European countries host second and third generations of Pakistani migrants.¹⁷⁴

According to the Pakistan Migration Report 2020¹⁷⁵ published by the Lahore School of Economics, there are approximately 2.2 million Pakistanis in Europe, with the largest communities in the United Kingdom, Italy, Greece, France, Spain, Germany, and Denmark. In terms of their socio-economic profile, Pakistanis in Europe (particularly the first generation) are predominantly poorly educated, semi or non-skilled individuals from the rural areas (mostly from Punjab).¹⁷⁶ The first generation of migrants was mostly involved in casual labour and small trade, and some people expanded their businesses to import raw materials from Pakistan. The second and third generation, on the other hand, is highly educated and employed in information technology, and health, among other skilled professions. The shift in the skill-set and the socioeconomic status of the diaspora members have significant implications for diaspora engagement for information campaigns. For instance, as mentioned in the background report¹⁷⁷ a mismatch in the profile of diaspora members involved in an awareness-raising campaign with that of potential migrants may not create the desired outcome of change in migration intention, as the potential migrant may not relate to the messenger.

The initial migration flows towards Europe, followed by family reunification movements, was met with stricter border control measures and insufficient regular migration opportunities to Europe in recent decades. The confluence of these factors, along with high domestic unemployment rates and security issues within Pakistan, gave rise to another trend: the establishment of an irregular migration corridor towards Europe from certain “migration prone” districts of Pakistan.¹⁷⁸ These are the same districts, in central Punjab, from which initial regular flows took place. For instance, the flows towards Greece can be traced back to the 1970s when Greece and Pakistan entered into an agreement to employ Pakistani workers in Greece’s shipping industry.¹⁷⁹ Today, Pakistan is among the top 10 countries of irregular migration detections on the EU borders for a number of years. According to the estimates of

¹⁷² Nasra Shah, “The Pakistani Diaspora in the Gulf,” in *The Pakistani Diaspora: Corridors of Opportunity and Uncertainty*, ed. Rashid Amjad (Lahore: Lahore School of Economics, 2017), 111–36.

¹⁷³ Michael Kugelman, “The Pakistani Diaspora in the United States,” in *The Pakistani Diaspora: Corridors of Opportunity and Uncertainty*, ed. Rashid Amjad (Lahore: Lahore School of Economics, 2017), 47–74.

¹⁷⁴ Nadia Mushtaq Abbasi, “The Pakistani Diaspora in Europe and Its Impact on Democracy Building in Pakistan” (Islamabad, 2010).

¹⁷⁵ Centre on International Migration, Remittances and Diaspora. Pakistan Migration Report. Lahore: Lahore School of Economics, 2020.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Hahn-Schaur, *Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration from Pakistan: Background Report*.

¹⁷⁸ Kleopetra Yousef, “The Vicious Circle of Irregular Migration from Pakistan to Greece and Back to Pakistan,” 2013.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.



2020, there were 15,955 first-time asylum applications from Pakistani migrants in the EU, with Italy, France, Greece, Germany, and Spain receiving the most applications.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ EUROSTAT. "First Time Asylum Applicants," 2020.



4.1. Pakistani Community in PARIM countries

Population

PARIM focuses on Pakistani communities in four European countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, and Italy. Of these four countries, Italy hosts, by far, the largest number of Pakistani migrants, with ca. 113,000 compared to 8.5 thousand in Greece, 5.5 thousand in Austria, and only about 340 in Bulgaria.¹⁸¹ However, the overall share of migrants in the general population is much higher in Austria and Greece (ca. 12 per 1000 inhabitants) than it is in Italy and Bulgaria (ca. 5.5 per 1000 inhabitants).

Estimates obtained through representatives of Pakistani Embassies in the four countries show that the Pakistani community in Greece is 60,000 – 65,000 as of 2019, against previous census estimates of 17,000 in 2011. In Austria, the Pakistan community is about 6000-7000 strong, in Bulgaria, the community is under 100 individuals, excluding about 200 students of Pakistani origins, and in Italy, there are about 131,000 legal residents of Pakistani origins. Including undocumented migrants, the total would rise to about 145,000 – 200,000 Pakistanis in Italy (see table below)

Table 2 Latest population estimates in PARIM countries

Country	Population estimate
Austria	6000-7000
Bulgaria	65-85
Greece	60,000 – 65,000
Italy	131,000 – 200,000

Source: Pakistani Embassies in PARIM countries

Moreover, estimates from BEOE show that since 1971, about 33,885 Pakistani workers have migrated to Europe, of which 28,562 people migrated to Italy as registered workers, and 556 to Greece since 1971, while there are no estimates provided for Austria and Bulgaria. According to the UN DESA statistics, the number of Pakistani migrants significantly increased in the past 5 years in all four countries under study.

Irregular migration is notoriously difficult to measure accurately, therefore for irregular migration flows from Pakistan there is a limited amount of accurate data available. However there are some sources, which demonstrate the importance of irregular migration routes from Pakistan via the Eastern Mediterranean route to Europe (via Greece), although other routes (including air routes) are also used. According to the latest Risk Analysis Report by FRONTEX, 2,603 irregular Pakistani migrants were detected on the external borders of Europe in 2020, which is a 31% decline from 2019 when 3,799 Pakistanis were detected.¹⁸² Of the 2,603 Pakistanis detected in 2020, about 1,071 were detected on land borders, about 771 of which were detected on the Eastern Mediterranean Route.¹⁸³ FRONTEX also reports that in 2020, about 14,277 Pakistanis were illegally staying in EU countries.

¹⁸¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), “International Migrant Stock,” 2019..

¹⁸² FRONTEX. Risk Analysis for 2021.

¹⁸³ EUROSTAT. “Third Country Nationals Found to be Illegally Present – Annual Data (Rounded)”, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_EIPRE__custom_1251130/default/table?lang=enm



As per Eurostat data, the number of Pakistanis found to be illegally staying in the EU was at its peak in 2015 with over 2 million people (2,085,465), which has decreased down to 557,455 by 2020, with the highest number residing in Germany (117,930) and France (103,915) as of 2020.

Additionally, applying for asylum is a tactic used by some irregular migrants. In May 2021, about 1,347 Pakistanis had applied for the first time for asylum in European countries, along with 353 repeated applications, with a 9% recognition rate, and 16,818 pending cases¹⁸⁴. During 2020, Italy received 5,455 asylum applications from Pakistani migrants, Greece received 4,145, Austria received 180, and Bulgaria received 85 asylum applications from Pakistani citizenship holders¹⁸⁵. Figure 1 offers a five-year comparison of asylum applications from Pakistan.

Deportation data (assisted and forced returns) is also an important indicator: In 2020, about 19,100 Pakistanis were issued an order to leave the EU, with 235 cases from Austria, 35 cases from Bulgaria, 740 from Italy, and 7,010 from Greece.¹⁸⁶ Data from 2020 also shows that following an order to leave, about 4,610 people returned from Austria, 230 from Bulgaria, 2,815 from Italy, and 6,950 from Greece.¹⁸⁷ As per the data of 2019, between 2014 and 2019, Greece sent back 17,534 people, Italy deported 945, Austria deported 270, and Bulgaria deported 175 Pakistanis.¹⁸⁸ These deportations reflect a stricter border control regime, along with declining recognition rate for Pakistani asylum seekers. Pakistan has generally been categorised by European countries as a “safe country”, and thus asylum applications from Pakistan are not prioritised. In 2020, the recognition rate for Pakistani asylum seekers in Bulgaria was 0%, in Greece, it was 2%, in Italy the recognition rate was 18%, and in Austria, the recognition rate was 14%.¹⁸⁹ Overall in the EU, the recognition rate for Pakistani asylum seekers was 9% in May 2021 as compared to 10% in May 2020.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ European Asylum Support Office. 2020. Asylum trends – 2020 overview. <https://www.easo.europa.eu/asylum-trends-easo-asylum-report-2021>

¹⁸⁵ European Asylum Support Office. Asylum Trends 2020 Overview.

¹⁸⁶ EUROSTAT. “Third Country Nationals Ordered to Leave- Annual Data (Rounded)”, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_EIORD_custom_1208897/default/table?lang=en

¹⁸⁷ EUROSTAT. “Third Country Nationals Returned Following an Order to Leave – Annual (rounded)”, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_EIRTN_custom_1208931/default/table?lang=en

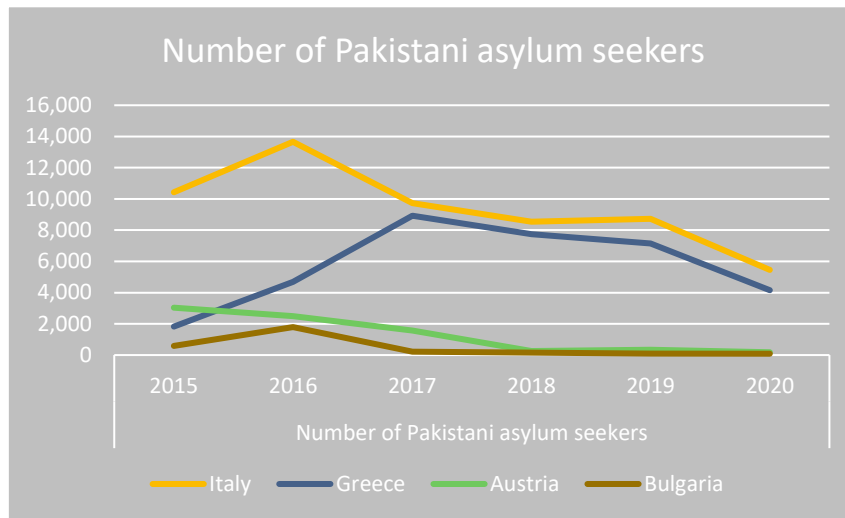
¹⁸⁸ Waqas Ahmed, “Illegal Travels: Over Half a Million Pakistanis Sent Home in Five Years,” *Express Tribune*, October 2019, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2083017/1-illegal-travels-half-million-pakistanis-sent-home-five-years>.

¹⁸⁹ European Asylum Support Office. Latest Asylum Trends – 2020 Overview. <https://www.easo.europa.eu/asylum-trends-easo-asylum-report-2021>

¹⁹⁰ European Asylum Support Office. Latest Asylum Trends – May 2021. <https://www.easo.europa.eu/latest-asylum-trends>



Figure 1 Number of Pakistani Asylum Seekers



Source: EUROSTAT 2020

An informant in Greece shared that in the late 1990s and early 2000s, many Pakistani irregular migrants benefitted from three drives of regularisation carried out in 1998, 2001, and 2005 in the country. In their view, this created a stream of irregular migrants, mostly guided by migrant smugglers, who gave the impression that this trend of regularisation would continue.¹⁹¹ More recently, stricter border control, less tendency to regularise irregular migrants, and a high rejection rate for Pakistanis offer little chance for new arrivals to settle. Yet, there is still a steady inflow of Pakistanis who reside irregularly, particularly in Greece and Italy.

Of course, the estimates of asylum applications and irregular entries do not represent the whole of the Pakistani community in these PARIM project countries. There is also the second and third generation of initial migrants to these countries, as well as those who arrived through legal channels for work, education, or family reunification. Additionally, cases of overstayer migrants are also reported where people enter the countries on legal tourist or student visas and then overstay the stipulated time.¹⁹²

Socioeconomic background and occupations

Information obtained from in-depth interviews with the Pakistani Embassy representatives and migrant associations shows that a significant majority of the first-generation migrants who come to the PARIM countries are young (average 28 years), male, and not too highly skilled or educated. Women as primary migrants are rare, and very few male migrants reunite with their families in these countries until they acquire legal status. Some migrants also marry European women and more recently, there are now a rising number of cases of families arriving in Greece together, including minors and elderly people.¹⁹³ As per the official statistics, Italy received 120 asylum applications from

¹⁹¹ As per the information shared by an informant in Greece.

¹⁹² Kleopatra Yousef, "The Vicious Circle of Irregular Migration from Pakistan to Greece and Back to Pakistan" 3 (2013): 1–28, <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/index.cfm?action=media.download&uuid=FC305670-E7D5-7091-03A35583FE4D6771>.

¹⁹³ Interview with a migrant association in Greece and Italy.



unaccompanied minors from Pakistan in 2020, Greece received 740, Austria received 25, and Bulgaria received 10 applications from unaccompanied minors.¹⁹⁴

In all four countries, the Pakistani community is largely engaged in small trade, or low-paying jobs involving manual labour and in the service sector. Some of the more educated ones with professional degrees are engaged in the IT and health sector. During and following the COVID-19 pandemic, many Pakistani migrants in Italy and Greece also found employment in the delivery business. Most of the initial migrants to Greece in the 1970s were involved in the shipping industry, or small businesses, particularly restaurants, mini-marts, and barbershops. Pakistanis are rarely involved in white-collar jobs in Greece.¹⁹⁵ The textile industrial units in Brescia and Prato in Italy are one of the main employers of Pakistani migrants, while many are also involved in the agriculture sector, especially those who come via the seasonal work permit (*Decreto-Flussi*). Pakistanis in Italy are also employed in the services sector, particularly restaurants, advertising and publicity, and courier work.¹⁹⁶

In the four PARIM countries, Pakistanis generally originate from central Punjab (including districts such as Mandi Bahauddin, Jhelum Gujrat, and Gujranwala) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. This reiterates the existing patterns of high rates of irregular migration from these districts.¹⁹⁷ Migrants from Sindh and Balochistan are fewer in number, and there are also reportedly a few Baloch migrants in Greece who are not well-connected with the larger Pakistani community there. In Austria, Bulgaria and Greece, the majority of the Pakistani community is settled in the respective capital cities (Vienna, Sofia, Athens), while in Italy, which has the largest Pakistani community in the EU, they are concentrated in Rome, Milan, Brescia, and Prato.

The language barrier was cited as the main factor that inhibits social and economic integration initially, although lack of legal documentation is also an important factor.¹⁹⁸ As many irregular migrants do not consider Bulgaria, Greece, and Italy as their permanent abode, with hopes of further migrating to Western European states such as Germany, France, and the UK, they often do not invest time and resources in learning the language.¹⁹⁹ In terms of documentation, strict rule of law and requirements of documentation for access to everyday and essential services does not create a favourable situation for irregular migrants to stay in Austria, unless they obtain legal status.²⁰⁰ In Greece, irregular migrants also tend to stay in rural areas as surviving in the cities without proper documents is extremely difficult.²⁰¹

Moreover, a general rise in xenophobia and Islamophobia has also contributed towards a hostile attitude of locals towards some Pakistanis. Anecdotal evidence suggests that certain restaurants and cafes in Greece refuse to allow dine-in service to Pakistani customers, and only allow takeaway

¹⁹⁴ EUROSTAT. "Asylum Applications Considered to be Unaccompanied Minors - Annual Data (Rounded)", 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYUNAA_custom_1209171/default/table?lang=en

¹⁹⁵ Interview with a migrant association in Greece.

¹⁹⁶ Punjab Euro TV. Pakistani Community in Italy: Interview with President. YouTube, June 18, 2021.

¹⁹⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Persons: A Situational Analysis of Pakistan (UNODC, 2011).

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Daud Khan, Ahmed Raza, and Mahnoor Malik, "Pakistanis in Italy: A Talk with Ejaz Ahmad," *The Friday Times*, March 2021, <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/pakistanis-in-italy-a-talk-with-ejaz-ahmad/>.

²⁰⁰ Interview with a migrant association in Austria.

²⁰¹ Punjab Euro TV. Pakistani Agriculture Workers in Greece: Wages, Working and Housing Conditions. YouTube, July 25 2020.



food/coffee for them as their presence is “unpleasant” for their other customers.²⁰² This element of hostility towards Pakistani migrants was also expressed to be more in Greece than in other PARIM study countries during the interviews. The Fundamental Rights Agency conducted a survey in 2019 based on which 33% respondents shared that they would feel “uncomfortable” having an asylum seeker or refugee as their neighbour, and 32% would feel “uncomfortable” for having a Muslim neighbour²⁰³. Perocco finds that Islamophobia is the “*acute and most widely spread form of racism*” in Europe.²⁰⁴ This directly affects the Pakistanis in Europe as most are Muslims and many entered Europe through irregular means, often claiming for asylum. Besides specific incidents such as this, generally respondents from the study shared that Pakistani migrants are well-respected in their communities and appreciate their interaction with the local community.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). Fundamental Rights Report 2021. Luxembourg: 2021.

²⁰⁴ Fabio Perocco, “Brasília, v. 26, n. 53, Ago,” *REMHU, Rev. Interdiscip. Mobil. Hum.*, 2018, 25–40.



5 Pakistani Migrant Associations in Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, and Italy

As part of the PARIM project, a mapping exercise was conducted to identify Pakistani Migrant Associations operating in the four PARIM countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, and Italy. This information was collected through a web search, data available on Overseas Pakistanis Foundation's website, social media search, and information provided by Pakistani Embassies in the respective countries (see Annex 1 for methodology). The primary purpose of this mapping exercise is to explore the potential of involving Pakistani diaspora members as "Ambassadors of Change" in the PARIM information campaign. The idea is to create a network of diaspora groups (represented by migrant associations) which would then be mobilised for the awareness campaign for effective messaging. The project expects that the testimonials and messages delivered by the Pakistani community already in Europe (specifically in the four project countries) about the hardships of their journeys, their struggles on arrival, and the difficulties of life in Europe would be better received and trusted by potential migrants to get a realistic picture of life in Europe. As discussed earlier, numerous studies have found that potential migrants often consider their friends and family abroad as the most reliable source of information. Based on this notion, PARIM project aspires to mobilise some diaspora members as proxies for trusted sources from abroad and aims to involve them as "messengers" for the information campaign to be carried out in the second year of the project.

Based on the mapping exercise, a few prominent migrant associations were reached out to for in-depth interviews. The main objective of the interviews was to get an overview of the Pakistani community in the project countries, types of Pakistanis organisations and associations operating within those countries, the degree of their engagement with the community members, their channels of communication, their views and activities related to the flow of irregular migrants, their level of engagement and cooperation with the Pakistani Embassy, and their level of interaction with Pakistanis in Pakistan. This exercise was based on the premise that organised migrant groups can offer collective insight on the community's views on irregular migration, and provide information about the communication channels used for engaging with Pakistanis in host countries and in Pakistan. The aim was to draw a broad picture of the role that these migrant associations (and other diaspora members) could play in the information campaign and to get a sense of their "willingness" to be part of an information campaign on irregular migration. This section elaborates the key findings from those interviews and also benefits from the information obtained from interviews with the representatives of Pakistani Embassies in Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, and Italy.

5.1. Types of migrant associations

The mapping exercise led to the identification of 54 migrant associations run and managed by the Pakistani community in the four PARIM countries. These associations were identified from their online presence through a web search using keywords such as "Pakistan", "Association", "Pakistani Community" etc. with names of the four countries, and the main cities of the respective countries. References were also drawn from interviews with the Pakistani Embassies to identify the most active associations.

A total of thirteen migrant associations were contacted to be interviewed, however, only nine responded/agreed to be engaged. Among these nine, two were in Austria, three in Greece, three in



Italy, and one in Bulgaria. Semi-structured interviews were held with the representatives of these associations. While the initial mapping allowed to get a broad picture of the type of migrant associations existing in these countries, the interviews offered a deeper insight into their projects and activities, their modes of engagement with the community, socioeconomic information about the Pakistani community in the respective countries, the level of engagement with community and authorities in Pakistan, and the level of engagement with the Pakistani embassy.

Results of the mapping shall be interpreted with a few caveats: the sample obtained through the mapping does not represent the whole population, as the sample universe is largely unknown.²⁰⁵ Moreover, since not all mapped associations were contacted, knowing which of the mapped associations are still active was not possible in this exercise. Another consideration, as noted by Taylor et al. (2014) is that a diaspora mapping conducted for diaspora engagement activity may only give results for those associations that are seeking engagement with external partners themselves. For the PARIM information campaign on irregular migration, the implication may be that associations that have the most influence among community members may not be approached.²⁰⁶ However, those same associations may have less interest in engaging in such an activity if they do not look for external partners. Despite these limitations, the research offers important lessons for involving diaspora members as messengers in an information campaign.

Broadly categorising, the mapping exercise revealed the following five types of associations through which Pakistanis express their identity and belonging to Pakistan:

- i. **Community associations:** These associations are focused on community development and social activities, and are organised around the national or ethnic identity of “being Pakistani” or “from Pakistan”. They are generally more inclusive and are engaged in a wide range of activities revolving around community welfare, cultural promotion, expression of solidarity on issues of importance to Pakistan (such as Kashmir), business promotion, sports, integration skills such as language courses, etc. Some of these associations are highly organised and structured with elected members forming the executive committee and specific departments for different activities. Others are less structured, often run by the founder of the association and a few active members, while still others are registered as associations but are largely inactive. Most of the other categories of migrant associations can also be considered as subsets of community associations with a narrower focus (e.g. religious associations, sports associations, professional associations, etc.). Community associations generally also tend to be more representative, are likely to be more involved with home and host country authorities, and often play an active role in diplomacy (e.g. through trade and cultural exchange exhibitions, tourism expo etc.).
- ii. **Religious associations:** These associations are created around common religious identities and values. While some religious associations may be global in scope, there are also some based on country of origin. Some of the religious associations may also be “franchises” or “chapters” of certain religious movements and organisations in the country of origin,²⁰⁷ creating a sense of

²⁰⁵ Jirka Taylor et al., *Mapping Diasporas in the European Union and United States Comparative Analysis and Recommendations for Engagement* (California: RAND Corporation, 2014).

²⁰⁶ For instance, a well-known association in Greece was headed by an influential migrant who is involved in illicit activities, including human trafficking and has arrest warrants against him. The research team was advised not to contact his association, even though he is known to have a very strong social network in Greece and Pakistan.

²⁰⁷ Peggy Levitt, “You Know, Abraham Was Really the First Immigrant: Religion and Transnational Migration,” *International Migration Review* 37, no. 3 (2003): 847–73.



“long-distance” religious transnationalism.²⁰⁸ For the case of Pakistan, some religious organisations such as Minhaj ul Quran²⁰⁹ are international with extensions of organisations operating in Pakistan, while others are standalone associations working for the promotion of religion in the specific country or locality. Almost all of them are Islamic in nature as a heavy majority (96.4%) of the country is Muslim. However, in Greece, a Pakistani Christian Community was also identified. These associations are not only involved in the promotion of religion and religious activities but are also engaged in community welfare such as food drives, donations etc.

- iii. Political associations: There are two kinds of diaspora-led political associations: i) those that are focused on increasing the diaspora’s representation in the host country; and ii) those that are extensions of home country political parties in the transnational space and are home-country oriented.²¹⁰ Like some religious associations, certain political parties from Pakistan, such as the Pakistan Tehreek I Insaaf (the ruling government in Pakistan currently) also have their “overseas chapters” in countries with large Pakistani communities.
- iv. Student and youth associations: As we know from the desk research,²¹¹ educational opportunities are one of the most important goals of migration of Pakistani youth. Student associations are based in universities and educational institutes where a group of Pakistani students organise themselves for cultural and religious activities, and celebration of national occasions. For instance, the Pakistani Student Association in Italy is very well-organised and connected across different universities in different cities across Italy and they are engaged with not only the Pakistani Embassy in Italy, but also universities in Pakistan. Such associations are generally aimed at promoting students’ interests in the country of residence, but also involve cultural promotion and social cohesion through the celebration of national and religious holidays (e.g. Eid, Pakistan’s Independence Day), literary and poetry sessions, movie screenings and board games etc.
- v. Professional associations: These associations are created on shared professional interests among the members of the diaspora. These invoke common cultural heritage and shared identity, linked with professional linkages such as art, sports, music, literature, media, etc. as “critical aspects of diaspora formation”²¹². Of these, sports associations (e.g. cricket), and journalism-focused associations, were most common among Pakistani diaspora members in the four PARIM countries.

While these categorisations offer important insight into the scope of work carried out by migrant associations, the demarcations are not rigid. The boundaries are often porous as activities organised by these associations span over various categories. For instance, religious associations may also actively be engaged in community development activities, and community associations may also have separate student wings for youth. A common element found across categories was the focus on social work for the Pakistani community living in these countries e.g. services offered for integration such as language programmes, organising food drives and donations for the needy community members, job referrals etc.

²⁰⁸ Sean Mcloughlin, “Religion, Religions, and Diaspora,” in *A Comparison of Diasporas and Transnationalism*, ed. A Quayson and G Daswani (Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2013), 125–38.

²⁰⁹ <https://www.minhaj.org/>

²¹⁰ Ekatarina Rashkova and Sam van der Staak, “The Party Abroad and Its Role for National Party Politics,” 2019.

²¹¹ Hahn-Schaur, Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration from Pakistan: Background Report.

²¹² Ramon Spaaij and Jora Broerse, “Diaspora as Aesthetic Formation: Community Sports Events and the Making of a Somali Diaspora,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 5 (2019): 752–69.



Moreover, the degree of backward linkages, i.e. engagement with community (including potential migrants) and authorities in Pakistan, also varied. Some of the associations focused more actively on establishing backward linkages with the community and institutions in Pakistan, while others concentrated their work on the issues of integration of community in the host country.²¹³ For the sake of categorisation, the degree of backward linkages has been scaled as low, medium, and high, based on the associations' self-reported level of engagement with organisations and communities in Pakistan. Based on the above-mentioned types, the migrant associations engaged in the PARIM research can be categorised as:

Table 3 Categories and Activities of Migrant Associations Interviewed

Country	Association	Category	Key projects/activities ²¹⁴	Engagement channels used	Backward linkages
Austria	Austria Pakistan Association	Community Association (diplomacy, business, culture)	Immigration counselling and advice, language courses, promotion of cultural and educational ties between Austria and Pakistan, trade forums, promotion of tourism in Austria and Pakistan (Annual Tourism Conference), business marketing facility. Upcoming projects: skill-matching app for Pakistanis in Austria and Pakistan, awareness raising on irregular migration through a TV series	With external institutions: telephone, email, personal meetings. With individuals: social media (Facebook), seminars, free counselling sessions	High
Austria	Pakistan Community Forum Austria	Community Association	Diplomacy projects to promote the soft image of Pakistan, career counselling and job placement, counselling on legal ways of entering Austria, language course and translation services, accommodation support to newcomers, tuition for students, the celebration of cultural and national days, development of a community centre	Social media (Facebook), WhatsApp, e-mail, telephone	Medium
Bulgaria	Pakistan Society in Sofia Medical University	Student Association	Celebration of religious events (Eid, Iftaar), events for student engagement (sports, board games)	Social media (Instagram, Facebook)	Low
Greece	Association of Pakistani Muslims Working in Greece (aka	Community Association	Social work e.g. food drives, support in finding accommodation, religious events etc.	Social media (Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, e-mail, community events)	Medium

²¹³ The scale was determined by asking the respondents if their association actively worked with any Pakistani organisations or community in Pakistan

²¹⁴ As reported by associations during interviews



	<i>Gulzaar Zainab)</i>				
Greece	Pakistan Journalists Club Greece	Professional Association	Publishing Urdu newspaper, sharing news related to Pakistani community in Greece, coverage of events, celebration of Independence day	Facebook, print media	Low
Greece	Greek Pakistan Association	Community Association	Sports tournaments, blood donation drive, language courses, local community seminars and events, transfer of dead bodies to Pakistan	Flyers and posters, WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, SMS	medium
Italy	Pakistan Student Association Italy ²¹⁵	Student Association	Career development counselling, accommodation, guidance on documentation and visa process for student visa, pro-Pakistan diplomacy activities with the PK embassy in Italy, sports, the celebration of national days, collaboration with Pakistani universities for seminars	WhatsApp, Social media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube), individual counselling, seminars	High

²¹⁵The relevance of student associations is based on a reported trend that many migrants from Pakistan reach Europe legally on student visas, but on arrival, they apply for asylum or overstay the stipulated time on their visas. To understand those dynamics, student associations were also included in the mapping.



Italy	<i>Giovani Pakistani</i> (Youth of Pakistan)	Youth Association	Integration of second-generation Pakistani youth, health issues (HIV, Hepatitis C), women empowerment, inter-generational dialogue	Instagram, Facebook, Telephone and WhatsApp, WordPress blog, webinars	Low
Italy	<i>Associazione Provinciale Pakistani Varesini</i> (Pakistani Association of Varese Province)	Community Association	Integration, intercultural harmony, women empowerment, inter-generational dialogue	Social media (Facebook), events, and in-person meetings (prior to COVID-19)	High

Source: PARIM fieldwork by authors (2021)

5.2. Structure, projects, and activities of mapped migrant associations

For analysing the relevance of these associations for PARIM’s information and communication campaign, getting a sense of their activities, projects, and past and future events was essential. While the number of associations reached out through PARIM research are not representative of the total number of Pakistani associations in these countries, a broad sense of the structure and type of activities of these associations could be gauged. Migrant associations are largely concentrated in the capital cities of the countries where the community concentration is also high, except for Italy where the Pakistani community is also large in other cities (Milan, Bologna, and Varese). Except for one, the interviewed associations were all registered bodies in their respective countries. All the associations were headed by a President (all male), and most had an elected executive committee depicting a high level of organisation within the association.

The range of activities and projects, as reported during the interviews, varied, depending on the scope of their mandate and the size of the association, reinforcing the idea that diaspora groups are heterogeneous and complex.²¹⁶ While all²¹⁷ were concerned about the “social issues” of the Pakistani community in the country (such as lack of integration because of language and cultural differences), “Pakistani image” and “cultural promotion”, the frequency, scale, and formality of these activities and projects varied. The extent of activity for some associations concentrated heavily on community engagement, intercultural events to promote integration, and celebration of Eid, Pakistan Independence Day, and other national celebrations, while others were more concerned with fostering partnerships with external institutions (home and host country), information dissemination, creating scholarship opportunities, boosting trade between home and host country, offering dedicated integration services such as language courses, job search, social welfare work such as offering accommodation or food to Pakistani migrants in need, providing legal advice, helping community members with institutional bureaucratic processes, promoting intergenerational

²¹⁶ Jirka Taylor et al., Mapping Diasporas in the European Union and United States Comparative Analysis and Recommendations for Engagement (California: RAND Corporation, 2014).

²¹⁷ With the exception of the Pakistan Society in Sofia Medical University – which focused primarily on student-focused events and celebrated some religious events such as Ramadan (Iftaar) and Eid.



integration, etc. Overall, all associations were involved in a diverse range of activities (an overview is given in table 3, as reported by the associations themselves).

The level of engagement of these associations with the Pakistani embassy, and authorities of Pakistan and the host country, varied. While most reported a positive professional relationship between the association and the Pakistani Embassy, one of the respondents shared his reservations that the Embassy preferred engaging with the community members who were economically better off and well-settled rather than “working class” associations. This highlighted the class dynamics that may shape the nature and degree of relationship between the associations and authorities. The inequality of social status between the officers of Foreign Service and some less skilled migrants working in the informal sector may also be a factor. Some associations also mentioned that the degree of engagement with the Pakistani Embassy also depends on the policies and willingness of the Ambassador. Generally, however, the associations found the engagement with the host country authorities, international NGOs, Pakistani Embassy, and the Pakistani institutions to be productive for the advancement of mutual interests. Intra-association collaboration within a country was generally observed to be weak in Austria and Greece (Bulgaria has no other associations identified), while it was quite strong in Italy. A certain degree of contestation could also be sensed in the three countries with multiple Pakistani associations as doubts were expressed about the legitimacy, performance, and impact of other Pakistani associations working in the country.

Relevant for the PARIM project is their perceptions, messaging, activities, and projects about irregular migration. All respondents were aware of the trend of irregular migration from Pakistan towards Europe. A common experience among them all was that irregular migrants often reached out to these organisations for help regarding verification and provision of identity documents, as well as processes that require local language skills such as registration in local government authorities. In that regard, some associations referred them towards relevant government authorities, obtained information on their behalf from the embassy and other Pakistani authorities (such as NADRA) and host country authorities, informed them about changes in immigration rules and laws on their public forums (such as Facebook pages and websites), and some even provided reference letters for those who were trying to attain legal status in the country (on a case by case basis).

Some of the associations, particularly student associations or those with a youth chapter in their organigram, have sought active engagement with universities in Pakistan to promote student mobility towards Europe. Those associations explicitly framed these initiatives as a way of promoting legal migration towards Europe and discouraging irregular movements by Pakistani youth. One of the associations is also creating a TV series highlighting the dangers and challenges of an irregular migrant in Europe and aims to launch it on a national level television channel in Pakistan.

In terms of assisting aspiring migrants, a number of associations shared that diaspora associations primarily act as mediators and provide guidance to potential migrants, rather than any financial or material assistance. More concrete assistance may be provided if a potential migrant is personally known to a diaspora member. In Italy and Greece, associations reported that as the community is largely working class in these countries, therefore hardly able to financially support potential migrants. Pre-departure guidance provided included advice on legal pathways of migration,



application procedures, implications of changes in immigration laws and rules, advice on life in Europe, and jobs in the country. Post-arrival guidance to new migrants comprised of assistance with accommodation, job placement, guidance about arranging documents, translation and interpretation services, guidance about access to host country services etc. While no specific information was shared about interaction with migrants in transit, one association reported being contacted by families of transit migrants who lost contact with them during their journey.

Moreover, while all respondents generally talked about the perils and complications of being undocumented in their respective countries of residence, they shared that within the Pakistani diaspora community, some do feel that they benefitted from migrant smuggling services, and recommended potential migrants to use such irregular routes through agents and smugglers. This is due to the fact that these migrants were able to find work in host countries and send money back to support their families. Their earnings, even if below minimum wage levels, are still higher than what they earned in Pakistan.

On the other hand, exploitation of irregular Pakistani migrants is a particular challenge within the community. Of particular relevance are agriculture contractors in Italy, many of them Pakistani themselves, who exploit irregular Pakistani migrants by paying them below minimum wage rates and extorting them for long hours at work. Some of the respondents also blamed (migrant smuggling) agents who deceived potential migrants by spreading rumours (mostly through social media) about future legalisation initiatives in Greece and Italy.

While most respondents appreciated the objectives of engaging the diaspora for information campaigns regarding irregular migration, some were doubtful about the potential impact. In their opinion, potential migrants are not receptive to negative messaging coming from diaspora members and often argue that if the diaspora member conveying the message can survive in Europe, they would also manage. Diaspora members often also experience social pressure to bring their male family members and relatives to Europe if they have successfully reached the continent.

5.3. Profile of members

All the migrant associations interviewed for this report were headed by males, and membership of the executive committees of the more structured associations was also predominantly male. This is not surprising as the majority of labour migrants and irregular migrants from Pakistan are men. Student and youth associations, however, had a higher participation rate by women as compared to other categories of associations. Some of the associations had a membership fee, however, their community events could also be attended by non-members.

The number of members varied, depending not only on the size of the Pakistani diaspora in the location but also the scope of their work. For instance, *Giovani Pakistani* has 20 members in various cities of Italy comprising of educated second-generation young people of Pakistani origin. Pakistan Journalists Club Greece has 50 members who are professionals in the media industry, including journalists, video editors, news composers, vloggers, publishers, etc. On the other hand, the Association of Pakistani Muslims Working in Greece have 467 members, a quarter of which are pensioners, and *Associazione Pakistani Varesini* (APV), Italy at one point had more than 1,000



members. The Pakistan Student Association in Rome has 156 members in 2021, from a total of 300 students. The associations interviewed for this research generally had a younger membership base, mostly ranging from 22-40 years, although the associations were headed by older individuals,²¹⁸ with the exception of youth and student-led associations, which were headed by students. Some of the associations are now being operated by second-generation Pakistani immigrants. All members work for the associations voluntarily.

An important observation made by respondents in Greece and Italy, which holds true for Bulgaria as well, was that these countries are considered as entry points to Europe. According to them, the current Pakistani community in these countries comprises of those who failed to migrate further to Western European countries, or those who are still in the process of trying to leave amid stricter border controls and reduced opportunities of being regularised. However, the community back in Pakistan still does not consider these migrants as “failures” per se. It may also be that such migrants do not express their sense of “failure” to their relatives and friends back in Pakistan. For potential irregular migrants in Pakistan, having been able to get to Greece or Italy is in itself an indicator of success.

5.4. Outreach and engagement channels

Understanding the channels of communication of these associations was a key element explored through the interviews to guide the PARIM communication campaign. All associations had an online social media presence, largely through Facebook, but also through Instagram and Twitter to a smaller degree, while only two of the associations interviewed had dedicated websites. Facebook following ranged from 80 likes to 14,000 likes for the more organised and structured associations.

The relevance of a specific communication channel depended on the audience and nature of the message. For communication and outreach activities of the associations, the most common platforms used were Facebook updates on the associations’ official Facebook page and WhatsApp messages in Pakistani diaspora groups. Instagram was also used, but mainly by youth-led associations. Some of the associations advertised their events and activities through flyers posted in public areas frequented by Pakistanis, and even announcing in local Urdu newspapers initiated by some diaspora members. Word of mouth was mentioned as a common mode of sharing news within the diaspora, and their events such as seminars and counselling sessions also served as their outreach platforms. Since the nature of communication was advocacy and announcements, public forums with the likelihood of wide outreach were preferred by migrant associations.

On the other hand, community members preferred to get in touch with these associations largely on WhatsApp, private messages on the Facebook pages of these associations, through email, and regular telephone calls. Community members in Pakistan, especially aspiring migrants, are more likely to share their issues to receive guidance through personal interaction, rather than on public forums. The choice of the channel also varies if the community member (or aspiring migrant) personally knows someone at the association, in which case communication takes place more informally through personal contacts (mostly through WhatsApp, direct phone calls, and personal

²¹⁸ Age of the respondent was not asked directly.



visits when possible). If the community members do not know someone at the association, then they reach out through Facebook or website, however, through a personal message most often, instead of posting the query on the public forum (e.g. Facebook Timeline). Specifically, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the prime mode of communication in recent months has largely been digital – including social media, and web-based communication apps such as WhatsApp.

This finding has interesting implications for the information campaign. Since the same platforms of communication (Facebook and WhatsApp) can be used for different types of interactions (with a group vs. individually), the nature of the message and the relationship between the messenger and target group must determine the mode used. Triangulating this information with the previous literature base shows that potential migrants trust information and guidance from *family and friends* in the diaspora more than strangers. Moreover, while the previous evidence shows that information obtained from public sources on the internet may contribute to decision-making regarding migration, the actual decision is shaped more by the assistance provided by someone personally known to the potential migrant through private conversations, rather than through an institution (or association).²¹⁹

Finally, the degree of engagement of migrant associations with other associations, government departments, and civil society organisations varied. All of the associations had interacted with the Pakistani Embassy in the country, while some had a closer collaborative working relationship with the Embassy. It was more common for the associations to have a formal engagement with host country authorities for community related projects and activities than with Pakistani authorities. For example, one association undertook a project with the Ministry of Interior of Italy, another association was conducting a health awareness project related to HIV and hepatitis with local government etc. Members of some associations were also working as translators and counsellors for the national asylum office of their host country. This reflects the focus of those associations on the betterment of the Pakistani community within the host country, as compared to a focus on the home community in Pakistan. Only two associations out of the ones interviewed (one in Austria and one in Italy) had strong institutional ties with Pakistani government bodies (MOPHRD) or international organisations (e.g. ILO, ICMPD). At least three associations had organisational links with educational institutions and other private bodies in Pakistan. Respondents preferred long-term engagement with international organisations and government entities rather than one-off event-based involvement.

²¹⁹ Optekamp, Caitlin. Migration Information Campaigns. Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2016.



Box 2: The role of Vloggers for information campaigns

Between the organised structure of an association and an individual in the diaspora, there is a rising trend of “social media vloggers”, who have wide outreach through applications such as YouTube and Tik Tok and are deemed to be quite influential within the migrants and potential migrants circle. This observation was voiced by at least three respondents, and the research identified at least two such vloggers whose YouTube channels have more than 100,000 subscribers, with viewership exceeding on million for certain videos related to migration. They cover a variety of topics on their vlogs uploaded on YouTube, specifically focusing on the lives of Pakistani migrants, including irregular migrants in Europe.

One such channel is called the Punjab Euro TV,²²⁰ hosted by a Pakistani migrant living in Greece who interviews the Pakistani community in Greece and Italy about their stories and experiences as undocumented migrants in Europe, their living and work conditions, and asks his interviewees about their advice to potential migrants in Pakistan. The channel has about 109,000 subscribers at the time of writing this report and each video on a migrant’s life in Europe has more than 50,000 views. The Vlogger’s objective through these videos is to discourage the flow of Pakistani irregular migrants and share information about potential legal pathways of entry into Europe. As the Vlogger is directly posting the testimonials by migrants in Greece and Italy, without any institutional affiliation, and sharing news about the difficulties, accidents, and interjections faced by migrants, some respondents opined that potential migrants may trust the information more than information from an institutional source. Moreover, by making the videos largely in Punjabi language, and a limited few in Urdu, the YouTube channel is offering customised information to the targeted potential migrant group in Punjab Pakistan, from where a major proportion of irregular migrants originate. For the PARIM communication campaign, collaboration with such “messengers” can be sought for specific content and for signposting potential migrants to the MRCs.

Another popular YouTuber is Ali Virk²²¹ with more than 270,000 subscribers to his channel. The “About Me” section on his channel states that the purpose of his videos is to share information on Turkey (where he currently lives) and other countries. His YouTube playlists show vlogs of his journey from Pakistan to Turkey, and he also travels from Turkey to Greece and documented it along the way. He travelled to Turkey through a legal procedure and offers advice to his viewers regarding the process and recommends not taking the irregular route. The language of communication used is Urdu.

5.5. Summary of findings

To summarise, the following conclusions can be drawn from this chapter.

1. An obvious conclusion drawn from the study is that the number and formality of migrant associations in a country depends on the size of the community. There is a large number of Pakistani migrant associations in Austria, Greece, and Italy, while there is only one

²²⁰ Punjab Euro TV. n.d. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PuzqhGB694g&list=PLKyC3wW1ssL6MqRXuuZ4gy3DLp3FE8T6J&index=19>.

²²¹ Ali Virk. n.d. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1k_P--WlJQoljMPe0oBqAw



(recognised) association in Bulgaria. **The associations vary in terms of size, formality, organisational structure, goals, and vision.** The diversity in migrant associations reinforces the notion that the diaspora is not a homogenous group with similar preferences and priorities.

2. Not many associations have backward linkages i.e. projects or activities involving communities, organisations, and institutions in Pakistan. Most of the associations are **focused on addressing issues of interest and relevance for the Pakistani community in their country of residence.**
3. Associations are **more engaged with the local host country authorities** than they are with communities and authorities in Pakistan. Generally, all associations had a productive relationship with the Pakistani Embassy in their country.
4. The role of diaspora members as information providers was highlighted during the interviews, with the caveat that **potential migrants generally contact their personal connections in the diaspora** for information based on trust, rather than strangers.
5. While most associations provided guidance and information to irregular migrants already in their countries of residence, some also had initiatives aimed at potential migrants. **Most migrant associations provided guidance and information** to irregular migrants in their host countries about the rules and procedures, offered translation and interpretation services, guided them about document collection, offered help in filling forms, etc. These services were not part of their mandate but were provided out of goodwill, if requested. About three associations were actively addressing irregular migration from Pakistan – by making a TV series on the perils of irregular routes and by providing guidance on legal pathways to entry.
6. The dominant channel of engagement between the associations and community was **digital and social media, mainly Facebook and WhatsApp.** Only two associations had a dedicated website, while all the associations had Facebook pages. The mode of communication depended on the purpose: for communication-related to outreach, public forums were preferred, and communication by community members with the associations was largely through private messages.
7. Respondents highlighted the wide outreach and **influence of social media “influencers” and “vloggers”** on YouTube and Tik Tok on topics of irregular migration from Pakistan to Europe.



6 Conclusions and recommendations

As the European governments and related agencies increasingly externalise migration management, focusing on mechanisms to stop migration from the source, information campaigns have gained much popularity in the last two decades for their perceived ability to influence the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours of potential migrants.²²² By informing potential migrants about the perils of the irregular journey, the difficulty of life in Europe, and the challenges of attaining legal status in Europe, state and EU-funded communication campaigns are largely focused on migration deterrence by informing migrants why they should not migrate to Europe.

With the increased relevance of information and awareness campaigns in migration strategies of the EU, a heightened interest is observed in deeper specifications of the content, target groups, messenger, and channels of communication for most effective outcomes.²²³ One of the assumptions on which information campaigns are based²²⁴ is that information received during a campaign is trusted. While the authenticity of the content is important, the choice of the messenger is a key factor.²²⁵ As the messenger is the source of information for the potential migrant, the reception of the message, and hence the effectiveness of the campaign depends on how the messenger is perceived by the target population.²²⁶ Information coming from a trusted source is considered to be more credible, and hence has a higher likelihood of affecting knowledge, attitude, and behaviour.

The important role of friends and family in the migration decision has been extensively highlighted in past literature from Pakistan and across the globe. Of particular relevance is the role of the social networks abroad in the provision of information to potential migrants. Owing to this key role that diaspora members often play in migration-decision making, state-led policies from host countries are now increasingly seeking diaspora engagement in information campaigns to influence the decision of potential migrants. Despite the proliferation of diaspora engagement campaigns, specifically for information campaigns and generally for other engagement objectives, the effectiveness of diaspora engagement is difficult to determine owing to the lack of comprehensive evaluation strategies of such initiatives.

Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, potential irregular migrants from Pakistan rely heavily on support from friends and family abroad, particularly in the destination country, for acquiring migration-related information²²⁷. It is in this context that this report explores the role of diaspora members as messengers (Ambassadors of Change) in an information campaign.

This section synthesises the findings from the fieldwork to draw and summarise lessons for the information campaign in terms of the scope of migrant associations as “messengers”. The recommendations are primarily aimed at informing the PARIM information campaign, with wider implications for involving diaspora in migration-related information campaigns in general. In the

²²² Kira Kosnick, “Mediating Migration: New Roles for (Mass) Media,” *The French Journal of Media Studies* 5 (October 2014).

²²³ European Migration Network (EMN), *Migration and Communication: Information and Awareness-Raising Campaigns in Countries of Origin and Transit* (Vienna: Diplomatic Academy of Austria, 2019).

²²⁴ Discussed in depth in Hahn-Schaur, *Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration from Pakistan: Background Report*.

²²⁵ James Dennison, “How to Perform Impact Assessments: Key Steps for Assessing Communication Interventions,” 2020.

²²⁶ Hahn-Schaur, *Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration from Pakistan: Background Report*.

²²⁷ International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Pakistan: *Survey on Drivers of Migration - Regional Evidence for Migration Policy and Analysis*. IOM, 2020.



absence of many evaluation studies on diaspora engagement for an information campaign, this study recommends with caution the following perspectives:

- ❖ The main point of departure from this analysis is that engaging diaspora members for information campaigns aimed primarily at deterring further irregular migration may not be the most effective method to achieve the desired outcome. As emphasised throughout the report, information campaigns recruit diaspora members as proxies for trusted sources of information based on the evidence that social networks of potential irregular migrants play a pivotal role in their migration decision and journey. As often with proxies, there is a limit to the effectiveness of such an intervention. **When such campaigns engage with any diaspora member to share their experiences, they must design the campaign with the acknowledgement that trust levels for these “messengers” may not be as strong as those that exist between personal social networks of potential irregular migrants.** Potential irregular migrants only refer to co-nationals abroad when they do not have access to trusted information coming from friends, family and acquaintances abroad. Understanding the limitations of such campaign designs from the start is useful to manage expectations about impact that should be incorporated in key performance indicators for evaluation later.
- ❖ Another important conclusion drawn is that potential irregular migrants generally dismiss any sort of “negative messaging” shared by organisations and people not personally known to them. This is specifically the case when they have their own personal trusted sources of information in the destination countries or other places abroad through which they not only triangulate their information but also seek guidance about overcoming such obstacles. **Learning from this behaviour, the content of information campaigns must not focus solely on discouraging attributes, but rather should highlight prospects of safe and legal migration with dignity.**
- ❖ It is also important to consider that the reliance of potential irregular migrants on their social networks abroad varies at different stages of migration planning and the journey. Often, the influence of their international friends and family is more tacit in the pre-decision phase. This is when potential migrants are generating an impression of life abroad based on the lifestyle and resources they see of their relatives and friends who migrated earlier. When the decision to migrate has been taken by a potential irregular migrant, reliance on social networks increases for accessing information about the process, journey, and life abroad. It is at this stage that they rely more on trusted sources rather than organisations and strangers in the diaspora. **Drawing from this assertion, it may be useful to consider that diaspora engagement for information campaigns may be more effective for people who do not have a firm plan of migrating yet. Once the plan is finalised and some efforts have been made for the process, potential migrants have often already tapped into their personal networks abroad, experiences of strangers in the diaspora and campaigns by migrant associations may not be much meaningful to them.**
- ❖ Because associations have varying levels of formality, thematic areas of focus, organisational affiliations with specific actors, political parties and institutions, and degree of structure within the association, a strategised plan of engagement must be developed for different kinds of migrant associations. A one-size-fits-all strategy will not be effective, and a nuanced and customised engagement plan must be made for collaborating with these migrant

associations.²²⁸ **Not all migrant associations will be appropriate for engagement in information campaigns and careful identification of those who would be best suited to achieve the outcomes of the project would be needed.**²²⁹ Migrant associations may have different ideas and perceptions about the intended purpose of engagement. Their mandate and goals may differ, based on which the profile of their members is determined. Some may be more inclusive than others, while some may only appeal to diaspora members of a specific socioeconomic or professional background, and/or region of origin in Pakistan.

- ❖ **Associations prefer long-term collaborations and partnerships rather than one-off events and, therefore, a strategy that adopts a forward-looking approach to relationship building with these associations must be sought,**²³⁰ **embedding other avenues of collaboration in the future as per institutional priorities.** In that sense, the interviews conducted for this report can be considered an initial step towards building rapport with these associations, and regular engagement with them for the information campaign may prove fruitful. All associations interviewed were open to being contacted again for the information campaign, however not all were found closely relevant for the campaign based on their degree of backward linkages. Some associations were interested to explore an institutional partnership to advance their own projects and ideas for supporting the Pakistani community in the diaspora. Pakistani embassies in the four partner countries were also interested to explore the scope of collaborative work with ICMPD.
- ❖ For positive messaging, for instance, sharing legal pathways of migration to Europe and skill requirements matching the demands in Europe, the communication plan must **consider engaging with associations that are institutionally well-connected and already actively providing counselling and guidance to potential migrants in Pakistan, especially those that are partnering with universities to target youth.** Building on their ongoing networks, activities, and campaigns of the migrant associations will be more effective for outreach.

Messages and content that focus on **negative elements** to discourage irregular migration, for instance, through testimonials and experience sharing, must focus on **individual diaspora members, ideally those personally known to potential irregular migrants rather than associations for the audience to be more receptive to the content.** The intended target group may not be inclined to consider advice coming from an “institutionalised” perspective.²³¹ In case identifying diaspora members in the personal social network of potential irregular migrants is difficult, collaboration could be sought with independent activists such as the **social media influencers** with a large following (including Vloggers and Tik Tok users).

Moreover, since potential irregular migrants trust individual sources more than wider information platforms, information campaigns could use wider platforms and channels to signpost towards relevant individuals to guide them. For instance, social media pages of organisations such as MRCs and migrant associations could share more personalised and interactive sources of information such as “live” discussions on Facebook, YouTube, and

²²⁸ Jirka Taylor et al., *Mapping Diasporas in the European Union and United States Comparative Analysis and Recommendations for Engagement* (California: RAND Corporation, 2014).

²²⁹ Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie and Thakrar Balan, *A Framework for DfID-Diaspora Engagement* (London: Global Forum on Migration and Development, 2005).

²³⁰ Jirka Taylor et al., *Mapping Diasporas in the European Union and United States Comparative Analysis and Recommendations for Engagement* (California: RAND Corporation, 2014).

²³¹ Caitlin Optekamp, *Migration Information Campaigns* (Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2016).

Instagram by relevant individuals to allow potential migrants to engage with them in a real-time.

The point of emphasis here is that diaspora members in general are not automatically trusted sources of information, unless potential migrants know them personally. However, as a substitute for personalised connections, **engagement should be sought with both migrant associations and diaspora individuals for more effectiveness and for tailoring the content of the message with the appropriate messenger.** Taylor et al. (2014)²³² also argue for a nuanced approach to diaspora engagement based on the target of engagement and the breadth of engagement. For information campaigns, they recommend engaging with individual members of the diaspora, however, acknowledging that the boundaries between members in the diaspora groups and migrant associations may be blurred.

- ❖ Related to the above theme, the information campaign could also build on existing initiatives of some of these migrant associations who are already working on relevant subjects to dissuade irregular migration and promote regular migration (e.g. TV series, vloggers mentioned above). Donors can piggyback on these efforts and help in customising and increasing the outreach of such initiatives through capacity building and sponsorship.
- ❖ While the engagement and outreach channels and strategies of migrant associations are largely based on social media (primarily Facebook), and web-based calling apps (such as WhatsApp), **there may be a likelihood of a wide digital divide between the migrant associations (and diaspora in general) and the target population of potential migrants.** While the six PARIM districts in Pakistan are in Central Punjab with relatively good internet connectivity, the inclination of those target populations towards social media, the accessibility to the internet and smart devices, and digital literacy among other factors determine the usage and thereby the effectiveness of using social media as a channel for the information campaign.²³³ In that sense, communication channels must be carefully determined based on the access and availability for the target groups. An assessment of which communication channel would be most effective to convey messages from the diaspora must be determined.²³⁴ In this regard, the PARIM survey findings on social media usage will be important to explore the scope of using this channel for the information campaign. For the PARIM information campaign, **ensuring that the profile of selected diaspora members to be engaged resonates with the potential migrants is important,** as emphasised in the Background Report. It is likely to be more fruitful to engage a first-generation migrant who has experienced and is fully aware of the irregular migration procedure to share with potential migrants. The age group of the diaspora members, their socioeconomic background, district of origin, mode of arrival to Europe, etc. may be selected to match the general profile of potential irregular migrants.
- ❖ Relating to the fact that diaspora members or recent (irregular) migrants may be more aware of the motivators and de-motivators of adopting a certain migration path, **there is value in engaging diaspora members or associations not just for conveying the “message” but also in “designing” the message and shaping the content.** With more direct access to

²³² Jirka Taylor et al., Mapping Diasporas in the European Union and United States Comparative Analysis and Recommendations for Engagement (California: RAND Corporation, 2014).

²³³ Rianne Dekker et al., “Smart Refugees: How Syrian Asylum Migrants Use Social Media Information in Migration Decision-Making,” *Social Media + Society*, 2018, 1–11.

²³⁴ Jasper Tjaden, “Assessing the Impact of Awareness- Raising Campaigns on Potential Migrants – What We Have Learned so Far,” Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean, no. December (2020): 426–34.



those who have chosen the irregular migration route, migrant associations and individual diaspora members may be in a position to contribute valuably to the messaging and design of the content.

- ❖ Recent (irregular) migrants could also be asked to identify influential community members in the sending district (among the six PARIM districts) who could also be engaged in the awareness campaign.
- ❖ The background report recommends that the campaign should **differentiate between potential migrants with economic motivations and those with educational motivations**, in terms of target group segmentation for the campaign and relevant messaging. Discussions with student associations show that these motivations may be overlapping, with many young people in Pakistan pursuing educational opportunities in Europe with the long-term plan to find employment in Europe, or apply for asylum. For some, the educational route is the only way to get to Europe legally. The awareness campaign must consider this aspect if designing separate content for those with educational motivations and those with economic or other motivations.
- ❖ Finally, an information campaign engaging diaspora members and associations as proxies for trusted messengers must keep in mind that **information from the diaspora is just one of the sources among the multiple others that potential irregular migrants may base their decision-making on**. Indeed, it may not even be the most trusted, especially if coming from a stranger in an activity organised by an institution, and potentially perceived as having an objective of discouraging migration. Hence evaluating the effectiveness of involving diaspora members as messengers may be challenging in the absence of specific performance indicators. Existing evidence on the effectiveness of such programmes is limited, and while the literature emphasises the important role played by friends and family as “credible messengers”, the same level of trust cannot be implicitly judged for general diaspora members.



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8 Annex 1

Methodology

This report is based on a comprehensive review of secondary sources, mapping of Pakistani migrant associations, and in-depth interviews with Pakistani Embassies and a small subset of migrant associations operative in the four PARIM research countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, and Italy). For literature review, the report draws on academic sources published in journals, as well as reports by international organisations and NGOs, official websites of Pakistani government authorities such as MOPHRD, OPF and BEOE, and media content analysis of news reports published in accredited national dailies. The report particularly benefited from the PARIM Background Report published in April 2021.

Mapping of the migrant associations was done through web and social media (mainly Facebook) search with keywords such as 'Pakistan', 'Association', 'Pakistani Community' etc. with names of the four countries, and the main cities of the respective countries. The official website of Overseas Pakistanis Foundation was also consulted to include the migrant associations mentioned in their list. This led to the identification of 54 associations across the four countries, varying in size, focus, and formality. Information was gathered about their mandate, their contact details and focal persons. For conducting in-depth interviews with a subset of these associations, references were drawn from the Pakistani Embassies to identify the most active associations. References were also drawn from in-depth interviews with migrant associations through snowball sampling.

A total of thirteen migrant associations were contacted to be interviewed, however, only nine responded/agreed to be engaged. Among these nine, two were in Austria, three in Greece, three in Italy, and one in Bulgaria. Semi-structured interviews were held with the representatives of these associations. The medium of communication were both Urdu and English, depending on the preference of the interviewee. All of the interviews were organised virtually using platforms such as Zoom (and WhatsApp in one case).