

# Rebuilding Lives: Reintegration of Returnee Migrants in Sahiwal, Pakistan

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## Abstract

*In the contemporary global scenario, migration and return migration have notably increased. The era of globalization has ushered in fresh prospects and a sense of hope for ambitious individuals in a world without borders. The present study examines the obstacles encountered by individuals holding dual nationality upon their return to their country of origin in Pakistan. The qualitative research was collected in in-depth interviews using a descriptive methodology within the Sahiwal Division of Punjab, Pakistan. Establishing rapport and engaging key informants was crucial in facilitating access to the research field. The data was analyzed by NVivo software. The findings underscore the profound effects of repatriation, highlighting adjustments in living conditions, the formation of new citizenship identities, and the influence of transnational experiences. Returnees face shifts in roles, identity conflicts, and socio-psychological challenges and work to preserve cultural connections across family, community, and national levels, navigating complex socio-cultural dynamics. This research is a crucial guide for effectively managing repatriated migrants in Pakistan. It offers actionable insights for the government and policymakers to design impactful strategies, ensuring the seamless integration of return migrants into society and the economy.*

**Keywords:** Return Migration, Returnee, Development Policies.

## Introduction

Migration, the movement of people from one location to another, is influenced by various political, social, economic, and environmental factors (Singapur & Sreenivasa, 2014). Historically, migration has been a significant aspect of human societies, dating back 70,000 years, as it facilitated the spread of human populations across diverse habitats through cross-community exchanges (Manning, 2022). In developing countries, particularly in rural areas, migration is often a strategy to diversify livelihoods during lean agricultural seasons when local labour markets fail to provide adequate non-agricultural income (D Singapur, 2023). The motivations for migration are diverse, including the pursuit of better economic prospects, education, political asylum, escaping violence, environmental disasters, and family reunification (Arshad, 2022). The partition of the Indian subcontinent, for example, triggered massive migrations driven by safety concerns amidst widespread violence (Arshad, 2022). Migration can lead to social conflict and environmental degradation, yet it promotes social and genetic diversity, transforming local habitats and biota through global settlement (Manning, 2022). In contemporary society, the educational success of children from migrant backgrounds is crucial for societal integration, although challenges such as limited parental involvement can

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hinder their academic and behavioral development (Albert, 2019). Thus, migration is a complex issue requiring nuanced policy approaches to maximize its benefits while addressing its challenges (D Singapur, 2023).

Return migration, similarly, is a multifaceted phenomenon driven by factors like employment, family, retirement, and personal reasons, extending beyond those involved in Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programs (OECD, 2024). Definitions of return migration vary, considering aspects such as the duration and nature of the return, whether voluntary or forced, significantly impacting reintegration experiences (King & Kuschminder, 2022). Historically, return migration has played a crucial role in diaspora communities, such as the interwar Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian diasporas, where it served as both a scholarly issue and a reality for many emigrants (Fahrenheit, 2022). Since the early 2000s, the literature on return migration has broadened its geographical and theoretical scope, becoming increasingly linked to migration management policies and addressing issues such as inequality and social remittances (King & Kuschminder, 2022). In rural southern India, return migration often results from low salaries and exploitation, with many youths aspiring to agripreneurship upon their return, reflecting shifts in rural areas' structural and functional systems (Parameswaranaik et al., 2020).

In Pakistan, studying returnee migrants is essential due to the significant socio-economic challenges their return presents, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted remittances and economic stability. Government intervention is necessary to support the reintegration of returnees, addressing their socio-cultural transformation and vulnerabilities, such as limited access to necessities like COVID-19 vaccinations (Mahwish et al., 2020; Padhani et al., 2024). Comprehensive research is needed to inform policies that ensure successful reintegration and contribute to Pakistan's socio-economic stability (Mahwish et al., 2020; Zeeshan et al., 2020).

The study of return migration in Pakistan aims to understand the various factors influencing migrants' decisions to return home. A key focus is on the motivations of Pakistani physicians who choose to either stay abroad or return, considering factors like perceived quality of life, distinctions between locals and non-locals abroad, and job availability in Pakistan (Arif et al., 2022). The study also highlights the need for improved migration governance and data management in Pakistan, advocating for a migration-sensitive infrastructure and better data management (Cheema et al., 2023). Another objective is to explore the factors driving internal migration, particularly the impact of female education and other socio-economic determinants, to inform policies for managing internal migration more effectively (Hussain et al., 2024). Additionally, the study examines the motivations behind the migration of professional groups like nurses, focusing on wage disparities, political instability, and lack of professional development, which contribute to brain drain (Khowaja-Punjwani et al., 2022). Finally, it looks at the determinants of intercity migration, such as economic opportunities and employment prospects, while considering deterrents like crime rates and congestion (Iqbal et al., 2024). Overall, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of return migration in Pakistan, offering insights to shape policies that enhance the country's socio-economic development.

### Research Objectives

1. To assess the socio-economic effects of the legal status of returnee migrants in Sahiwal for their reintegration.
2. To determine the extent of financial, human, and social capital as determinants of the reintegration of returnee migrants.
3. To look at the socio-psychological impact of deportation on migrants and the success of community-related reintegration acts.

### Research Questions

1. What challenges do migrants face when returning to their country of origin?
2. How does repatriation affect the identity and socio-cultural integration of return migrants?
3. How do return migrants maintain their cultural ties after returning to their homeland?

### Literature Review

Migration is the movement of people from their usual residence across national borders or within a country (IOM, 2019, p. 137). It encompasses various forms, including circular migration, climate migration, economic migration, family migration, forced migration, and return migration (IOM, 2019, p. 137). Return migration, a significant aspect of the migratory process, may only sometimes be the final step, mainly when effective migration policies are in place (United Nations, 2018, p. 12).

The study of international return migration has a rich history, with foundational work by scholars like King, followed by Cassarino (2004), who provided significant insights into return migration. The literature on return migration explores the factors that drive returnees and the challenges they face, particularly in contexts where return migration is driven by varying circumstances, such as among refugees (Junge et al., 2013).

Koser and Kuschminder (2015, p. 8) define sustainable return as the successful reintegration of returnees into their home country's economic, social, and cultural aspects. Cassarino (2014b) echoes this, emphasizing the importance of meaningful reintegration. However, in regions like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), there is often a lack of mechanisms to provide returning migrants with crucial information on reintegration programs, investment opportunities, and employment options (Hatsukano, 2019). Providing this information to destination countries through embassies before return is essential for a smooth reintegration process (Hatsukano, 2019).

The economic framework by Stark and Bloom (1985) highlights that remittances play a vital role in a household's strategy, serving as a form of return insurance that enables migrants to return home with dignity (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Amuedo-Dorantes & Pozo, 2006). This strategic behavior is crucial in understanding return migration decisions, as de Brauw et al. (2013) also note.

Both economic and non-economic factors influence the decision to return home. Piotrowski and Tong (2010) argue that unsuccessful migration experiences and the desire to reunite with family often drive return migration. Family ties are frequently more significant than economic factors, as Zhao (2002) and Wang and Fan (2006) demonstrate.

Return migration differs from other forms of migration due to its unique motivations and outcomes (Constant et al., 2013; Skeldon, 2012; Vadean & Piracha, 2010). Returnees often seek a sense of belonging, cultural reconnection, and opportunities in their home country, influenced by political, social, and economic factors (King, 1986). For example, Turkish migrants who returned from Germany in the 1980s could leverage their skills in the local labour market, contributing to their economic success upon return (Dustmann & Kirchkamp, 2002). This demonstrates the potential of human and financial capital acquired abroad to create opportunities and foster development in the home country (Dustmann & Weiss, 2007).

Zhao (2002) studied Chinese citizens who returned to rural areas between the 1980s and 1990s, investing their savings in agriculture and contributing to China's economic transformation. Murphy (1999) supports this view, noting that returnees bring financial and social capital and new ideas that benefit local communities and employment. Similarly, Demurger and Xu (2011) explain that returnees contribute to the wealth of their families and villages, driving broader economic development.

Return migration from the United States to Mexico has shown that returnees with industrial experience play a crucial role in local industry expansion, significantly contributing to

Mexico's economic progress (Diodato & Nefke, 2017). In Albania, returnees from European countries between 1999 and 2016 brought substantial capital, skills, and business ideas, fostering the prosperity of local communities (Germenji & Milo, 2009). Wahba (2015) emphasizes the importance of effective government policies in maximizing the developmental impact of returnees, calling for tailored reintegration programs that create a favorable environment for returnees.

A survey of return migrants in Cambodia underscores the need for comprehensive guidance on business management, investment opportunities, job availability, and skill development programs (Hatsukano, 2019). Unfortunately, many returnees lack knowledge of their home countries' political and economic strategies, hindering successful reintegration. While some ASEAN countries have made progress in social protection, migrant workers often have limited access to benefits such as social security, workers' compensation, and health insurance upon return (Harkins et al., 2017). A study of 1,808 migrant workers from Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, and Vietnam revealed that only 28% had access to public or private benefits programs upon returning from countries like Malaysia and Thailand (Harkins et al., 2017).

It is essential to develop economic and political strategies that enable migrants to effectively utilize their human and social skills, crucial for strengthening the country's position in the global political economy (Harkins et al., 2017). Reintegration, as defined by the European University's Return and Development Platform, involves readjusting to the home country's social, cultural, economic, and political aspects of life (Cassarino, 2014b, p. 184).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) offers programs like Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR), which provide administrative, logistical, and financial support to migrants who choose to return (IOM, 2019, pp. 10-11). However, the voluntary nature of these programs has been questioned, with some arguing that they may only sometimes be genuinely voluntary (Webber, 2011; United Nations, 2013). The Regional Guidelines for the Return and Reintegration of the Employment Permit structure in South Korea highlight the importance of laws and measures to support the reintegration of returning workers (ILO, 2015a, p. 3).

Historically, return migration has yet to be thoroughly studied. King (1978) noted a need for more statistical data and an understanding of the patterns, economic opportunities, and social challenges returnees face. Debart (1986) proposed that governments implement targeted reintegration methods with public support or integrate reintegration into broader economic and social services. Pekin (1986) suggested that home countries should capitalize on the expertise of returning migrant workers by engaging them as educators, recognizing foreign credentials, and establishing vocational training facilities.

Gill (2005) argued that return migration is vital for long-term development, particularly in Europe, where returning researchers can promote new research initiatives, student exchanges, and investments. However, there is a risk that mobile researchers may feel disconnected from their home country after time abroad (Gill, 2005).

Barrett and Mosca (2013) highlighted the difficulties returnees face, particularly the elderly, who often struggle to readjust to life in their home country. This social isolation can negatively impact their well-being, with research linking isolation to depression, increased nursing home admissions, and higher mortality rates (Grenade & Boldy, 2008; Hawkey & Cacioppo, 2010; O'Lunaigh & Lawlor, 2008).

Given the gaps in current research, it is clear that the challenges faced by highly skilled returnees, particularly in developing countries like Pakistan, have yet to be fully explored. These individuals have the potential to contribute significantly to their home countries' political and economic policies, drawing on the knowledge and experiences gained abroad. This research examines returnees' challenges and explores how their social and human capital can

be leveraged to contribute to Pakistan's political and economic landscape. The study will also provide recommendations to Pakistani authorities on customizing reintegration programs to meet the specific needs of returnees, ensuring a sustainable return. By optimizing the contributions of returning migrants, Pakistan can enhance its development and strengthen its position in the global political economy.

Myrdal (1956) introduced the Cumulative Causation Theory, later expanded by Douglas Massey and his team (Massey, 1990; Massey & Durand, 1994; Massey et al., 1993). This theory explains migration's initiation, progression, and processes (Fussell & Massey, 2004). Over time, the number of migrants increases as the first migrant becomes a social connection provider for acquaintances and family members, facilitating their job search in the host country (Jennissen, 2004).

## Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design with a purposive sampling approach to select ten returnees, ensuring diversity regarding migration experiences, legal status abroad, and socio-economic backgrounds. Data collection involved 30-45 minutes of semi-structured interviews conducted in the participant's native language to ensure clarity and comfort. The primary focus areas included economic reintegration, social and psychological challenges, property ownership, and community engagement.

## Data Collection Methods

This research was conducted in the Sahiwal division of Pakistan. Qualitative data were gathered through interviews with a purposive sample of 10 returnees from foreign countries, and the data was analyzed through NVivo software. These interviews explored personal experiences, coping mechanisms, and the influence of social networks on reintegration in Pakistan.

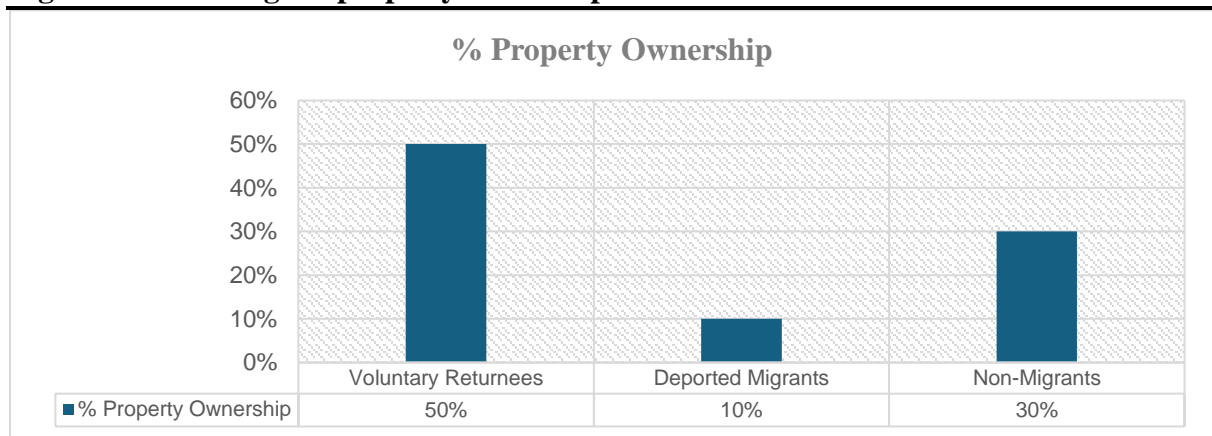
## Results and Analysis

### Economic Reintegration and Property Ownership

**Table 1: Migrant status and property ownership**

Migrant Status	% Property Ownership
Voluntary Returnees	50%
Deported Migrants	10%
Nonmigrants	30%

**Figure 1: Percentage of property ownership**



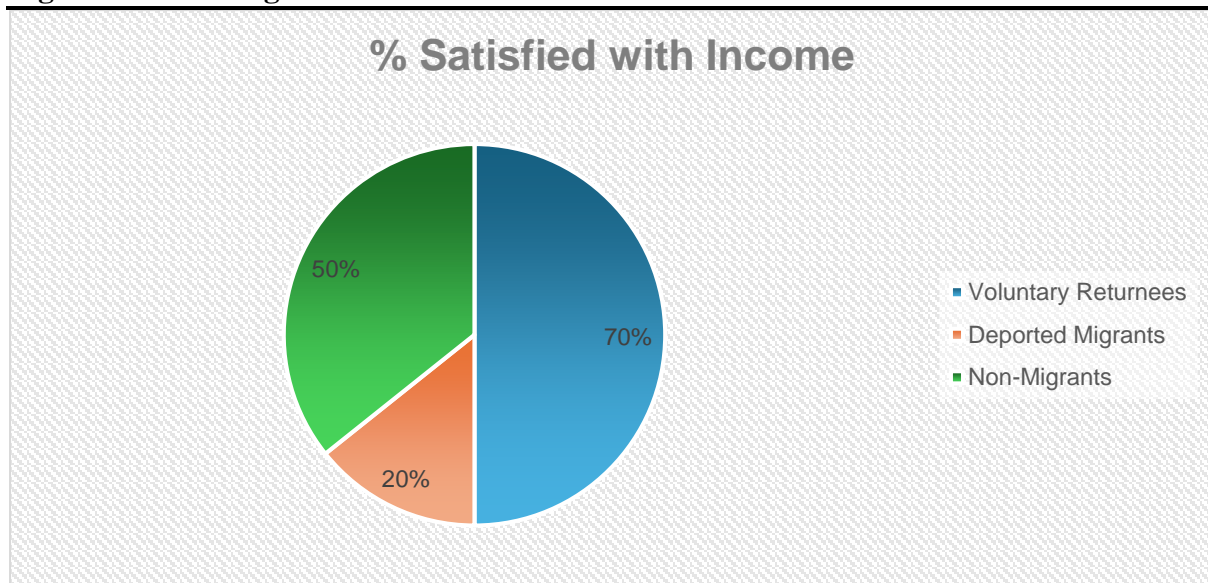
### Analysis

The above data shows different economic consequences of migration depending on the way of return. The owners of the properties among voluntary returnees who legally were in other countries were 50 percent, while those deported migrants owning their property were only 10 percent. This implies that those in the country legally are in a better place when it comes to building cash endowments in preparation for investing when they go back to what they consider home. On the other hand, deported migrants do not experience any gradual change in their income sources; hence, finding a steady income becomes almost impossible.

**Table 2: Income Satisfaction and Employment**

Migrant Status	% Satisfied with Income
Voluntary Returnees	70%
Deported Migrants	20%
Nonmigrants	50%

**Figure 2: Percentage of satisfied with income**

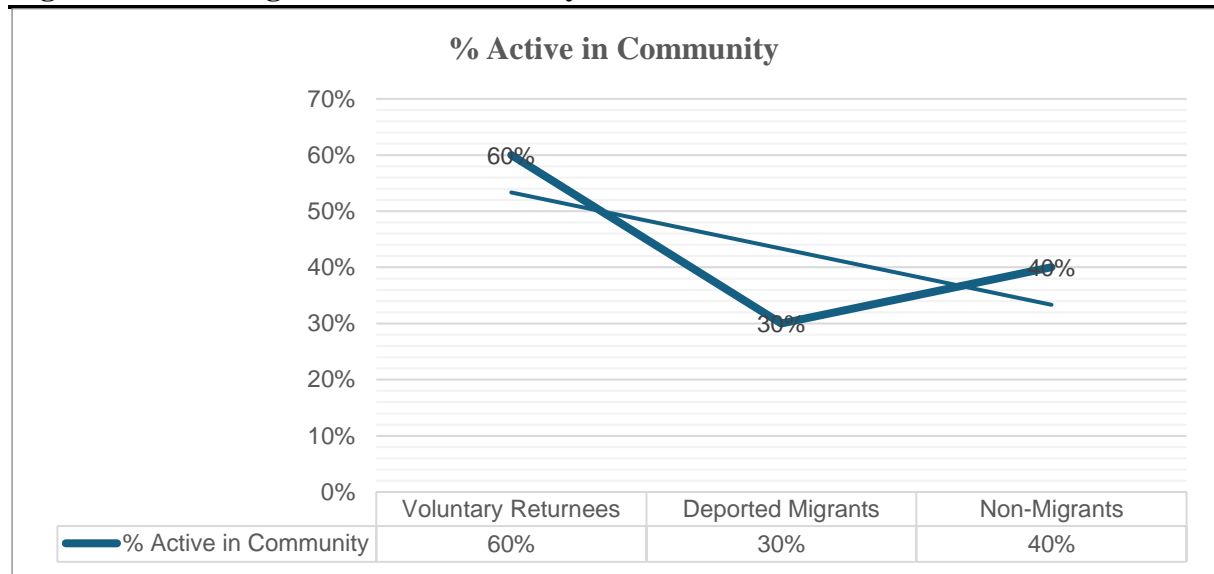


### Analysis

Voluntary returnees had a richer level of income satisfaction (70%) by saving and learning new skills acquired during migration. On the other hand, only 20% of the deported migrants reported satisfaction as they had poor opportunities to use previous working experiences and to remit savings upon deportation. The control group, while having a moderate satisfaction level, did not get as much improvement in skills and savings as the migrants.

**Table 3: Social Integration and Community Engagement**

Migrant Status	% Active in Community
Voluntary Returnees	60%
Deported Migrants	30%
Nonmigrants	40%

**Figure 3: Percentage active in community****Analysis**

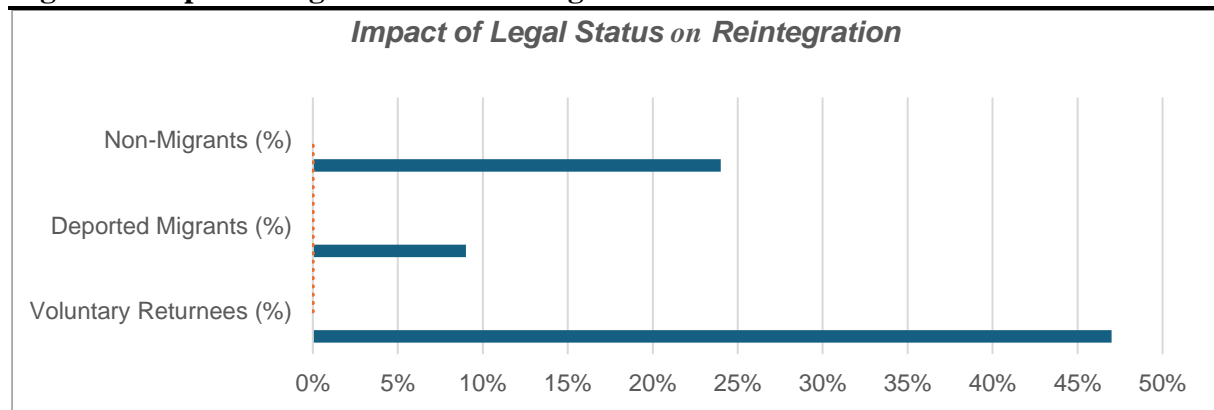
Social reintegration is full of challenges for various categories of returnees. Voluntary returnees engage more in their local communities' social and economic activities and, therefore, have closer relations. Migrants, on the other hand, are most often stigmatized and experience identity crises; thus, they cannot fully integrate into this society. While occupying large shares of the overall social networks gross domestic product in the first weeks and months after their emergence, social networks more often than not turn out not to offer the same kind of economic and social opportunities for sustainable development of the communities in the longer run, which shows the flaw of social capital.

**Impact of Legal Status on Reintegration**

Legal status abroad is the most significant predictor of reintegration outcomes among convicted individuals. Among the migrants, those who had a legal status of staying in Sahiwal have a greater likelihood to own property, report a higher level of income satisfaction, and are likely to be more stagnated in Sahiwal, which suggests the importance of the legal channel of migration. Deported migrants, on the other hand, experience significant socio-economic displacement; the results showed that deported migrants have a much lower rate of property ownership by 68 percent than nonmigrants. Since deportation is shocking and displaces them, it puts them in bad standing when it comes to fixing their lives financially.

**Table 4: Details of voluntary returnees, migrants and non-migrants**

Category	Voluntary Returnees (%)	Deported Migrants (%)	Nonmigrants (%)
Property Ownership	47%	9%	24%
Income Satisfaction	Higher	No significant difference	Moderate
Preference to Stay in Sahiwal	High	No significant preference	Moderate
Likelihood of Financial Stability	High	Low	Moderate
Socio-economic Disruptions	Low	Severe	Moderate

**Figure 4: Impact of legal status on reintegration****Table 5: Capital Accumulation and Human Capital Development**

Capital Type	Impact on Reintegration
Economic Capital	Strong positive impact
Human Capital (Skills)	Moderate positive impact
Social Capital	Limited long-term impact

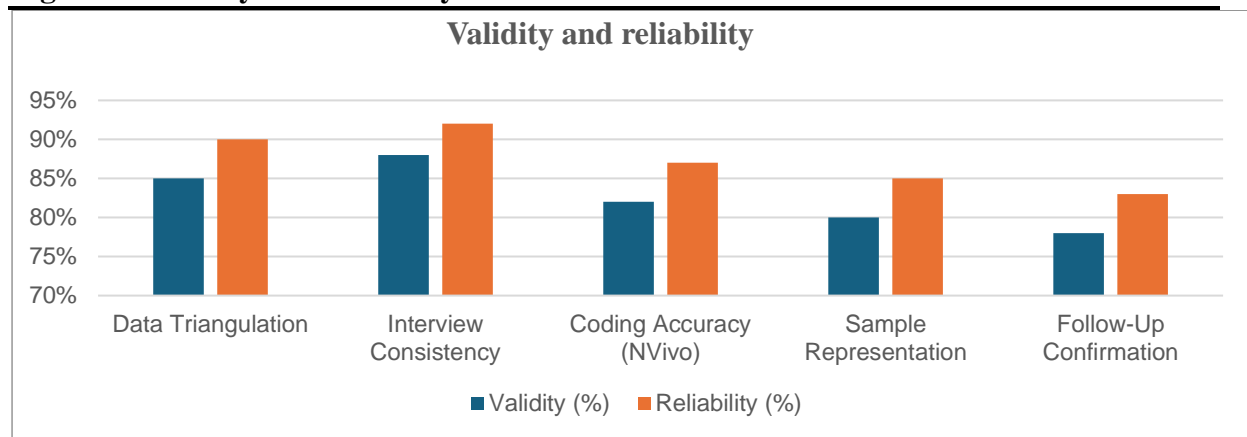
### Analysis

Economic capital must be established as an essential factor in reintegration processes that must be followed. Those with higher capital requirements for moving can easily buy property, business, and other investments, making their transition easier. Skills attained when working abroad are another element under human capital, which increases economic prospects and odds of staying in Sahiwal by 1.67 folds. However, although social capital is helpful for quick assistance, it does not help as much in dealing with the structural vulnerability created by irregular migration or deportation.

**Table 6: Validity and reliability**

Measure	Validity (%)	Reliability (%)
Data Triangulation	85%	90%
Interview Consistency	88%	92%
Coding Accuracy (NVivo)	82%	87%
Sample Representation	80%	85%
Follow-Up Confirmation	78%	83%



**Figure 5: Validity and reliability****Explanation**

*Data Triangulation (85% Validity):* Multiple data sources and perspectives were used to validate the findings, enhancing accuracy and minimizing biases.

*Interview Consistency (88% Validity, 92% Reliability):* Consistency in interview procedures and cross-checks strengthened data reliability.

*Coding Accuracy (82% Validity):* NVivo software coding was applied to categorize themes, ensuring consistent data interpretation.

*Sample Representation (80% Validity):* A purposive sample aimed to capture diverse experiences, though limitations in sample size may have affected broader representation.

*Follow-Up Confirmation (78% Validity):* Post-interview follow-ups with participants supported the consistency and accuracy of their responses.

**Findings**

This research has revealed the complexities of the issues and opportunities that returnee migrants in Sahiwal, Pakistan, experience upon their return. It discusses reintegration. The discussion reviews major areas and, based on theoretical orientations and evidence, explains why the implications should be made for policy and practice.

**Economic Reintegration and Property Ownership**

These numbers reveal that except for voluntary returnees, deported migrants, and nonmigrants, legal migration status and economic capital accumulation are vital for reintegration. Again, it was clear that remittances and savings made abroad afforded the voluntary returnees more opportunities to access property ownership. On the other hand, deported migrants were economically displaced as a way of preventing their capital investments in assets. This is consistent with the economic theory of migration that Stark and Bloom (1985) advanced, whereby remittances are among the most essential forms of return insurance.

**Income Satisfaction and Employment**

Here, visa self-returns voluntary returnees reported 70% income satisfaction, deported migrants only 20%, and nonmigrants 50%, again indicating the different skill use and the chance of employment availability. The voluntary returns received foreign skills, which gave them better employment opportunities and fixed incomes. On the other hand, deported migrants could not transform their experience into ordinary forms of livelihood owing to expulsion.

### **Popular participation, as well as community social inclusion**

The analysis showed that the voluntary returnees were most engaged in the communities (60%) compared to the deported migrants (only 30%) and nonmigrants (40%). This could be explained by the social facets of deportation and counselling issues that arise from the shift in self-identification among the deportees. All these social barriers limit them from fitting correctly into their communities.

The final issue that legal status inevitably has is reintegration. It also found that only five domains were significantly associated with reintegration outcomes: legal status. Engaging specifically with those who returned to Brazil voluntarily and had a clean migration record indicated that property ownership, income satisfaction, and local participation were significantly higher than for the overall sample population. On the other hand, the socio-economic losses of the deported migrants, as they commonly lost their properties, meaning their property ownership level was 68% of nonmigrants. The accumulation of capital and human capital or creation of the long-run stock of human capital.

It was seen that economics and human capital were the significant components of reintegration. Savings, remittances, and economic capital, as generally observed, had a positive influence on property ownership and eventual financial security. H1 and H2 were moderately supported as human capital and skills acquired during migration affected the reintegration outcomes, showing that the educated group has a 1.67 times higher likelihood of staying in Sahiwal.

### **Conclusion**

This paper responds to the call to examine and understand the phenomenon of reintegration of migrants in Pakistan and the policy matrix that may be applicable. These are integration assistance programs, community involvement initiatives, and accessible mental health services. Such programs should provide reintegration services such as vocational training, job connectivity services, financial management, and legal support for the returnees in their post-conflict lives. Community integration is essential to bring these individuals back together and enable them to interact with the local community concerning mentorship and cultural interchange. Mental health should be incorporated into the healthcare system as culture-sensitive, and awareness should be made of mental health issues. Thus, proper cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organizations, municipalities, and target community leaders is crucial to reaching announced goals. The importance of engaging with returnee migrants, therefore, cannot be overstated, especially given the challenges they experience, which have implications for Pakistan's socio-economic progress.

Repatriation of migrants needs to be followed by an effective reintegration policy in Pakistan that constitutes integration assistance, community involvement, and mental health services for migrants. They should provide vocational and training services, job placement services, financial literacy education, and legal services and create efficient links between migrants and communities. To facilitate this, the government should mobilize its departments, other government arms, NGOs, and community leaders.

Therefore, he continued, it is critical for Pakistan's socio-economic development that efforts and opportunities be made to directly and positively impact the lives of returnee migrants. It is noteworthy that affected countries maintain favorable policies for the reintegration of returnees because the target group has the potential to actively participate in the Lorenz church and make a significant contribution to the improvement of the situation in their communities and the Pakistani economy as a whole. With proper planning, engagements, and a continued pursuit on the part of the stakeholders, these exercises will not only help raise the living standards of the returnees but also uplift the country's socio-economic development.

This cross-sectional qualitative approach, examining the reintegration of returnee migrants in Sahiwal District, Pakistan, showed legally employed capital and socio-economic reintegration

processes. The findings show that legal status correlates positively with reintegration outcomes; different statuses of migrants abroad show them more socio-economic stability. In detail, the property-owning rate was 47% among the voluntary returnees, while the rate for the deported migrants was 9%. The statistics presented here show how, yet again, an uncertain legal status leads to Rap Puerto's long-term poor economic performance because of low capital formation overseas.

Contrary to expectations and owing to adversity back home, undocumented migrants surprisingly rate Sahiwal higher than other options, thus depicting more willingness to stay back in Sahiwal due to reasons more than exploring more migration options. However, current deported migrants show relatively poor socio-psychological and economic statuses, as implied by the reduced property ownership ratio and the decline in the proportion of migrants who reported increased income satisfaction since deportation. Finance and human capital reappear as critical factors that play a significant role in reintegration. The results also indicated that Sahiwal-educated returnees were 1.67 times more likely to prefer staying in Sahiwal, influencing the long-run advantages of gaining skills in foreign countries. That is, while social networks provide a temporary source of informal support, these networks need to address the structural vulnerabilities associated with irregular migration; therefore, social capital cannot be seen as an adequate means of overcoming the economic difficulties associated with irregular migration. The studies press for specific practices about the reintegration of deported and undocumented migrants, focusing on policy improvement and creation to enhance economic viability and social coherence using effective frameworks.

### Recommendations

Amongst the various key recommendations the study makes to strengthen the reintegration processes of returnee migrants in Sahiwal, targeted strategies should be a key focus with economic, social, and policy-specific anti-rehabilitation measures. First, national and local officials should develop training and skills acquisition programs targeting returning migrants that would identify their strengths and develop the necessary training and certification programs to enhance their opportunities for employment markets in their countries of return. This would help optimize human resources and raise economic potential.

Second, therefore, adequate attention should be given to providing credit facilities/low-interest loans for migrants by helping them start income-generating ventures such as business ventures. This measure will help encourage economic sustainability because unstable migration status often leads to economic gaps.

Third, the government needs to provide post-deportation legal assistance and counselling to mitigate sociopsychological related cases. Engagement with community-based organizations may help with other needed social readjustment and rehabilitating needs, such as counselling, community activities and training, and mentorship.

Last but not least, policy reform should encourage the legal channels of immigration and ensure that awareness of these is encouraged. The most common policies can involve implementing CMI structures to put some order to migration flows to lower their long-term financial implications and social prejudices involved in deportation processes. This will assist in creating favorable conditions that will make returnee migrants productive in society- economically, socially and in other ways.

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