

Remittance of Indian Immigrants: Catalytic for Socio-economic Development

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Abstract: Immigrants have become an integral component of socio-economic development, and play a diverse set of roles, preserving a range of influences on the economy of their origin. International migration, usually network-driven is a natural consequence of capitalist market formation in the developing world penetrating peripheral regions.

Every year 2.5 million (25 lakh) Indians migrate overseas, which is the highest annual number of migrants in the world. Indians represent the second largest U.S. immigrant group, after Mexicans and ahead of Chinese and Filipinos. The 2.7 million Indian immigrants residing in the United States as of 2021 made up 6 per cent of the total foreign-born population, and their numbers continue to expand. USA ranks second on the list with so many growth opportunities accessible for Indians in the spheres of technology and biological sciences.

Based on secondary sources of data, the present research assesses the trend, major flow of immigrants and their contribution to the development of Indian economy, which concludes that with the help of remittances, immigration can contribute positively to the developmental activity of a country, including employment, economic growth, poverty reduction, social empowerment, and technological progress.

Keywords: Migration, Diaspora, Remittance, Economic development.

INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of human civilisation, migration has been motivated predominantly by economic considerations. Migration has been embedded in modern world as an integral part of the society because thousands of men and women migrate every year from their native locations to urban centres in search of employment or for a better urban living. Factors that determine why a person migrates are related to the place of residence from

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where migration starts, also known as the origin, and the place of new settlement, or where migration ends either completely or temporarily, also known as the destination. The favourable attributes of a location are pull factors, which attract a person. The unfavourable attributes operating at a location are the push factors, which force or compel a person to move away i.e., push factors. Both pull and push factors can apply simultaneously at the place of origin as well as at the destination (*Migration and Its Impact on Cities*, 2017).

According to the United Nations Population Division, an international migrant is someone who has been living for one year or longer in a country other than the one in which he or she was born. This means that many foreign workers and international students are counted as migrants. The tourists, foreign-aid workers, temporary workers employed abroad for less than year and overseas military personnel typically are not counted as migrants.

In case of 'internal migration' we have rural-urban migrants within the country whereas in 'international migration', "migrants" are foreign-born residents of a recipient country. The identified push factors for this migration include poverty, unemployment, indebtedness, low-income potential, limited opportunity for work, etc., whereas the pull factors are desire to earn more, desire for urban lifestyle, migrant agent's allurements about brighter prospects of income, benefits, and remittances, etc.

Over the last two decades, the world has witnessed a steady migration of people from developing nations to developed nations in search of well-paying jobs, higher education, and a better standard of living. The count of people living outside their birth country has grown from 153 million in 1990 to 272 million in 2019 which has further increased to 281 million in 2022 which constitutes 3.6 per cent of the world's population (World Migration Report, 2022).

SCANNING THE LITERATURE

Studies focusing on various aspects of international migration are comprehensively available mostly in the studies conducted under the aegis of World Bank, ILO, UNO, IMF, World Migration Report 2022, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, etc. In recent decades, scholars have put huge emphasis on the relationship between remittances and the level of economic growth; some such studies have been unfolded below.

In a study of the effects of temporary labour migration from five African countries to South Africa's mines, on agricultural production in the countries of origin, Lucas (1987: 313) concluded that migration diminishes domestic

crop production in the short run but enhances crop productivity and cattle accumulation through invested remittances and increased domestic plantation wages in the long run.

The remittances trigger increased consumption levels that may by easing capital and risk constraints on local production- in turn facilitate local investments by migrants and non-migrants alike (Stark, 1980; Stark and Bloom, 1985). In this way, expenditure on housing and consumption may have significant multiplier effects in the wider economy. Various empirical studies have reported that construction activities can generate considerable employment and income for non-migrants (Taylor *et al.*, 1996). This also applies to many other expenses such as feasts and funerals (Mazzucato *et al.*, 2006). In this way, the benefits of remittances might accrue to households other than the ones that directly receive them (Taylor, 1999).

Ratha, (2006) observes that there are strong and unambiguous evidences that support the argument that remittances alleviate poverty in developing countries. According to World Bank sources, household surveys confirm the poverty alleviating impact of remittances: a 10 per cent increase in per capita remittances leads to a 3.5 per cent decline in the share of poor people in the population.

Lindley (2006) equally found that migrants in Hargeisa, Somalia, tend to send more remittances from abroad when the family experiences a decline in fortunes and, therefore, concluded that people receiving regular remittances are better protected from exchange-rate fluctuations and have an improved ability to assist relatives in rural areas in times of crisis.

Singh & Hari (2011) observe that hard work and sacrifice of the immigrants who support their family members and communities of origin through remittances, which leverage as an essential source of external finance, serves as an engine of economic growth.

Ratha (2013) suggests there are positive spill over effects associated with some of the expenditures and investments made by remittance-receiving households accruing to entire communities. He argues that remittances increase household income and are therefore a powerful anti-poverty force in developing countries. Furthermore, migrant remittances raise domestic savings and improve financial intermediation, which in return can improve growth prospects for the entire country.

In their study, Meyer, and Shera (2017) use panel data regression analysis to investigate the impact of worker remittances on the economic growth of Albania and five regional countries for the period 1999-2013. Their findings from fixed effects model suggest that worker remittances have positive significant impact on the economic growth of the chosen countries. The authors argue that the productive use of these remittances,

such as investing this money into consumption and investments can improve economic growth further.

Eggoh *et al.* (2019) find strong evidence that remittances may foster economic growth. Using the PSTR framework and difference and system GMM models for a dynamic panel of 49 developing countries over the period 2001-2013, they find three channels through which remittances may have indirect growth effects: investment, consumption, and financial development. The authors argue that the nonlinear relationship between remittances and growth mainly depends on financial development and investment, and less on remittance level and consumption.

A perusal of the above-mentioned studies validates that there is no paucity of research studies on the problems and prospects associated with immigration by researchers, who throw light on numerous aspects of immigrants and the consequent benefits of remittances. However, the present study unfolding the use of current data, identifies the development prospects immigrants apparently make an endeavour to contribute to the existing literature.

OBJECTIVES & METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

In the light of the above backdrop, the objectives of the study are:

- i) To delve deep into the theoretical perspectives of migration, key global migration data, trend of migration to destination countries and flow of remittances at the macrolevel.
- ii) To investigate the reasons for the phenomenon migration / large inflows of labourers from India to the UAE.
- iii) To focus on the remittances realised in terms of growth, investment, human capital formation, and poverty reduction, etc.

This study is based on secondary sources of data accumulated through published reports or retrieved from World Bank, ILO, World Migration Report 2022, and research papers, etc.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF MIGRATION

There is no single, coherent theory of international migration, but relatively a fragmented set of theories, occasionally segmented by disciplinary boundaries. Neoclassical economics focuses on differentials in wages and employment conditions between countries, and on migration costs. It generally conceives movement as an individual decision for income maximisation (Lewis, 1952; Todaro, 1969), migration as a household strategy to minimise family income risks or to overcome capital constraints on family production activities (Stark, 1991). The sum and substance of the human

capital theory of migration is its assumption of productive capacities as dependent on the level of education, skills, and physical capabilities of migrants. The human capital theory of migration (Sjaastad, 1962) regards migration as investment that involves cost now with the anticipation of benefits in the future.

Dual labour market theory, world systems theory and the world society approach focus on forces operating at an aggregated macro-level, and portray migration as a natural consequence of economic globalisation and market penetration across national boundaries (Wallerstein, 1974). The dual labour market theory, also known as the segmented labour market theory postulates migration, predominantly propelled due to pull factors driving forces behind international migration, links immigration to the structural requirements of modern industrial economies (Piore, 1979). Migration is a natural consequence of the disruptions and dislocations that happen while capitalist development and expansion in peripheral countries is propelled with the onslaught of globalisation, diffusion of consumption habits triggered by demonstration effect of consumption (Duesenberry, 1949), and break down of local systems of production. Theories illuminating the perpetuation of migration emphasise the social network theory which unfolds the significance of kin and friendship networks in determining and sustaining both internal and international migration in the country of origin and destination, supporting circular migration and lowering migration risks. This is accompanied by the theory of cumulative causation, which states that migration sustains itself by creating more migration (Massey, 1990). Movement of people towards unknown locations seems unbelievable as some sort of information about the destination is a pre-requisite to allure migration. The choice of destination is frequently determined by the existence of networks of family and friends that have earlier migrated to that specific location.

Numerous internal/domestic as well as international migratory movements, ancient and modern, provides the testimony to the argument that "the majority of movers move along well-trodden paths which, even if they have not travelled them before themselves, have been traversed earlier by family members and friends" (Hugo, 1994, p.11). The various network approaches and theory of cumulative causation all recommend that migration flows acquire a measure of stability and structure over space and time. "Migrants are rational beings who flee towards favourable regions, where their needs for a secure or better life can be met" (Harris & Todaro, 1970).

In the light of the above statement, it is apparent that while international migration is a complex phenomenon encompassing a multiplicity of economic, social and security aspects all around the world, poverty or

economic dissatisfaction, political uncertainty, and inequality and human rights problems, a range of other compelling reasons have been witnessed as contributing factors that enhance the propensity to move abroad. Diaspora contacts and social remittances have a strong potential for positive and normative information exchange that fosters positive development: better human rights and political conditions, as well as new economic and business opportunities that may happen next.

REMITTANCE FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Migration, indeed, has the potential to serve as an engine of growth and development for the origin and destination countries apart from the migrants themselves. In the place of destination, migration rejuvenates workforces, renders economically viable services, promotes entrepreneurship, supports social security and welfare schemes, and meets the demand for skills for emerging high-tech industries. In the place of origin, positive contributions of migration are reflected in capital inflows through remittances and investments, transfer of technology and critical skills through return and circular migration. In brief, migrants sustain development and partnership through the monetary, human, and social capital they supply, their involvement in social networks and their contributions to exchanges between cultures.

Remittances frequently go towards social sector development of the recipient households in improved housing, nutrition, schooling, and health care. Remittances therefore create human capital by financing education of children, and health expenses while improving food security for poor households. Regular remittances to families in developing markets not only reduce the level of poverty, but also help them avoid falling back into the poverty trap. They provide a buffer to help deal with emergencies – such as someone falling sick. Whatever the quantum of remittances, it has the potential to raise the standard of living of the people from the migrants sending poorest regions by having an impact on their income, consumption, and savings. In Kerala, for instance, the foremost end use of remittances is household consumption, education, debt, construction and repair of buildings and bank deposits for 86 per cent, 36 per cent, 27 per cent, 11 per cent, and 8 percent households respectively (Zachariah *et al.*, 2002). “Remittances put large sums of money into circulation in countries in Latin America for the purchase of goods and services that boost the economy”. In this way, remittance flows have a positive impact on economic development (Rhyne, 2007).

Immigrants are also inclined to boost output, create new opportunities for native workers, provide skills needed for growth, generate new ideas,

stimulate international trade, and contribute positively to long-term fiscal balances. Mexico, Nepal, and Indonesia are examples of some nations that have demonstrated a significant reduction in poverty on account of remittance inflow. Higher remittance inflow implies higher disposable income in the hands of the remittance receiving family, which in turn results in enhanced consumption demand. Expenditure on goods and services propels economic growth, through a stimulus to businesses and economic activities. Regular remittances to families in developing markets not only reduce the level of poverty, but also help them avoid relapsing into the poverty trap, by providing a buffer to help deal with emergencies.

The consistent flow of global remittances has a positive effect on macroeconomic growth. The inflow of foreign exchange facilitates to increase forex reserves, strengthen the currency, improve a country's balance of payments, and enhance its credit rating, increase investor confidence, and lower borrowing costs for the government as well as local businesses and households.

KEY FACTS AND FIGURES FROM WORLD MIGRATION REPORTS 2000 AND 2022

While some aspects have remained persistent- the proportion of female international migrants, as well as the overall proportion of the world's population who were migrants – other aspects have altered considerably. International remittances, for instance, have increased from an estimated USD 128 billion to USD 702 billion, emphasising the international migration as a driver of development (Table 1).

Table 1: Key facts and figures from World Migration Reports 2000 and 2022

<i>Particulars</i>	2020	2022
Estimated number of international migrants	173 million	281 million
Estimated proportion of world population who are migrants	2.8%	3.6%
Estimated proportion of female international migrants	49.4%	48.0%
Estimated proportion of international migrants who are children	16.0%	14.6%
Region with the highest proportion of international migrants	Oceania	Oceania
Country with the highest proportion of international migrants	UAE	UAE
Number of migrant workers	—	169 million
Global international remittances (USD)	128 billion	702 billion
Number of refugees	14 million	26.4 million
Number of internally displaced persons	21 million	55 million

Source: World migration Report, 2022, P.10

The estimated number of international migrants has grown over the past 50 years. In 2020, almost 281 million people lived in a country other

than their country of birth, or about 128 million more than 30 years earlier, in 1990 (153 million), and over three times the estimated number in 1970 (84 million). The percentage of international migrants as a share of the total global population has also enlarged, but only incrementally (Table 2).

Table 2: Decadal variation of international migrants, 1970–2020

<i>Year</i>	<i>Migrants as a % of the world's population</i>
1970	2.3
1980	2.3
1990	2.9
2000	2.8
2010	3.2
2020	3.6

Source: World migration Report, 2022, P.24

INDIAN DIASPORA SPEARHEADED THE WORLD WHEN IT HAPPENS TO BE SETTLING ABROAD

Though India is the single largest source of international migrants, its 17.9 million migrants in 2020 accounted for only 1.3 per cent of all people born in India by that year. By comparison, the United Kingdom's 4.7 million international migrants accounted for 7.6 per cent of those born in the UK by 2020. Mexico's 11.2 million international migrants accounted for 8.2 per cent of those born in Mexico (Natarajan *et al.*, 2022).

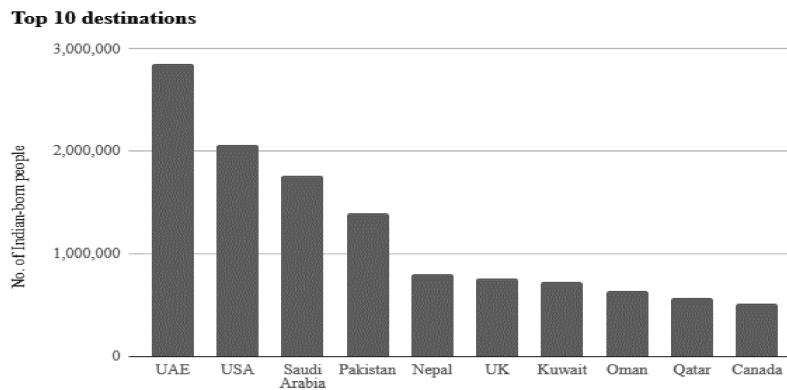
India's migrants are dispersed around the world, but the countries with the largest Indian migrant populations are the United Arab Emirates (3.5 million), the United States (2.7 million) and Saudi Arabia (2.5 million). From 17.9 million migrants in 2020, increased to 18 million distributed across the world, India is the largest source of international migrants, the biggest Diaspora by a huge margin. Second placed, Mexico has only 11.2 million, followed by Russia and China, both having more than 10 million immigrants each living outside (Table 3).

Table 3: Top Five Countries of Origin of International Migration (in millions)

<i>Name of origin country</i>	<i>International Migration</i>
India	17.9
Mexico	11.2
Russia	10.8
China	10.5
Syria	8.5

Source: Pew Research Centre, United Nations Economic and Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020

Unlike Mexican emigrants, most of whom live in the United States, Indians have spread far and wide, right from blue-collar workers in Arab countries to students in the industrialised world (The Times of India, Jan 6, 2023). India's migrants are dispersed around the world, but the countries with the largest Indian migrant populations are the United Arab Emirates (3.5 million), the U.S. (2.7 million) and Saudi Arabia (2.5 million).



INDIAN FLOW OF MIGRANTS TO THE UAE IN THE 2000S

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is situated in the Middle East bordering the Gulf of Oman and Saudi Arabia. In December 1971, the UAE became a federation of six emirates- Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al-Quwain, and Fujairah, while the seventh emirate, Ras Al Khaimah, joined the federation in 1972. During the period of 1970s & early 1980s, the increase in oil price led to economic boom in various Emirates of UAE which subsequently triggered phenomenal rise in remittances resulting from labour migration, attributable entirely to the economic boom in the oil-exporting countries and the associated inflow of remittances from Indian workers. Several Indians leave the country in pursuit of education or avenues of employment to gulf countries (Habibullah, 2021). Numerous labourers who migrated during this period were skilled and semi-skilled workers in manual or clerical occupations and their migration in these areas was temporary in nature (Nayyar, 1994).

As of 2015, nearly 3.5 million Indians lived in the UAE, the world's second-largest migration corridor. Unlike the Mexico-U.S. corridor, most have migrated for economic opportunities in these oil-rich countries. The UAE is the top destination globally for Indian migrants, the number of Indians living in the UAE and other Persian Gulf countries consist of the oil-producing countries bordering on or located near the Persian Gulf: Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United

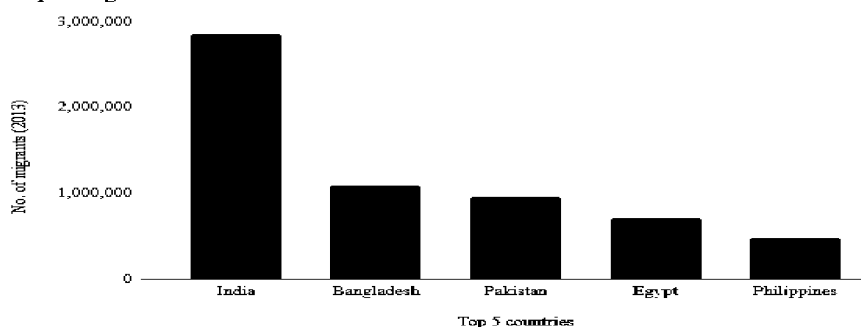
Arab Emirates; has increased substantially during the past decade, from 2 million in 1990 to more than 8 million in 2015 (Connor, 2016). According to the Ministry of External Affairs 2020 data, almost 13.6 million Indians live outside of India. The largest portion of this number, 3,41,000 resides in the United Arab Emirates. UAE is followed by Saudi Arabia with 2594957 Indians followed by the US with 12,80,000 Indians. Kuwait hosts 10,29,861 Indians, Oman 7,79,351, Qatar 7,56,062 (Table 4).

Table 4: Population of Overseas Indians in the Gulf States, 2020

Country	Non-Resident Indians (NRIs)	Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs)	Overseas Indian
Bahrain	323292	3366	326658 (3.66)
Iran	4000	337	4337 (0.05)
Iraq	18000	7	18007 (0.20)
Kuwait	1028274	1587	1029861 (11.54)
Oman	779351	1790	781141 (8.75)
Qatar	745775	775	746550 (8.36)
Saudi Arabia	2592166	2781	2594947 (29.06)
United Arab Emirates (UAE)	3419875	5269	3425144 (38.37)
Total	8,619,833	15,912	8,926,645 (100.00)

Source: Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, NRIs-and-PIOs_1.pdf (mea.gov.in)

Top 5 migrants to the UAE



As data regarding Indian migrants from Kerala have demonstrated, many migrant workers in the Gulf have 'climbed the social ladder,' garnering higher wages that have enabled them to remit larger sums (Rajan & Zachariah, 2018).

INDIA, THE LARGEST RECEIVER OF REMITTANCES IN THE WORLD

The chief source of international remittances is exclusively from the high-income countries. The United States has consistently been the top

remittance-sending country in the world, with a total outflow of USD 68 billion in 2020, followed by the United Arab Emirates (USD 43.24 billion), Saudi Arabia (USD 34.60 billion) and Switzerland (USD 27.96 billion). The fifth highest remittance-sending country was Germany with total outflows of 22.02 billion USD. As a top recipient, China (classified as an upper-middle-income country by the World Bank) has also been a significant source of international remittances, with USD 18.12 billion reported in 2020.

Table 5: Top ten countries sending remittances 2010-2020 (current USD billion)

2010	Percent	2015	Percent	2020	Percent
United States	50.53	United States	60.72	United States	68.00
Saudi Arabia	27.07	UAE	40.70	UAE	43.24
Russian Federation	21.45	Saudi Arabia	38.79	Saudi Arabia	34.60
Switzerland	18.51	Switzerland	26.03	Switzerland	27.96
Germany	14.68	Russian Federation	19.69	Germany	22.02
Italy	12.88	Germany	18.25	China	18.12
France	12.03	Kuwait	15.20	Russian Federation	16.89
Kuwait	11.86	France	12.79	France	15.04
Luxembourg	10.66	Qatar	12.19	Luxembourg	15.20
UAE	10.57	Luxembourg	11.19	Netherlands	13.92

Source: World Migration Report, 2022, P.41

India consistently remains the largest receiver of remittances in the world. In 2020, India received over 83 billion dollars in remittances while this number was at 83 billion dollars in 2019. Remittances constituted about 3.1 per cent of Indian GDP in 2020. The six topmost remittance receiving countries in 2021 were India, Mexico, China, Philippines, France, and Egypt. India has been the world's top receiver of remittances since 2010. Remittances to India grew from \$53 billion in 2010 to \$89 billion in 2021 (Table 6).

Table 6: International Remittance to top six receiving countries (Remittance inflows in billions of nominal US dollars)

Name of origin country	2010	2021
India	53	89
Mexico	22	54
China	52	53
Philippines	22	37
France	20	32
Egypt	12	31

Source: World Bank and Pew Research Center

CONCLUSION

In recent years, the Government of India has taken several steps to strengthen the institutional framework for protecting migrants' welfare, through developing a suite of pre-departure, protection-during-work-abroad, and rehabilitation-upon-return migration safety awareness programs, establishing an Indian Workers' Resource Center in Sharjah (UAE), assisting those who may be at risk of exploitation and Community Welfare Funds, which levy small fees from consular services to support Indian nationals caught in crisis or emergency. However, these efforts are piecemeal responses, equally the reforms adopted by Gulf governments to address allegations of worker abuse are apparently incomplete and inadequate necessitating bilateral policy formulations (Pethiyagoda, 2017).

THE WAY FORWARD

The movement of people across international boundaries has enormous implications for growth and poverty alleviation in both origin and destination countries. Circular and return migration fosters the country of origin's development when they involve the return and utilisation of skills and/or capital. However, there is one crucial prerequisite for return and circularity to happen: that is there must be options for employment and entrepreneurial initiative in the home country. If the country of destination is to encourage the return of migrants, it may need to explicitly and extensively incorporate measures to improve economic prospects and employment in home countries. Countries of destination may also need to explore possible obstacles to voluntary return and circular migration in their national policies and practices.

The role of immigration in intensifying global human capital flows, supporting local livelihoods, and boosting national development is evident in Kerala. The new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations highlights the need to "protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment" (United Nations, 2015). It emphasises the need to study how migration and remittances can be leveraged for improved development financing through reducing remittance costs and mobilising Diaspora savings and collective remittances.

The World Bank (2006) has aptly remarked that "sound macroeconomic policies, political stability, and improvements in the investment climate in destination countries are prerequisites for making the best use of remittances. Formalisation of money transfers by channelling through the formal banking system is also believed to be central to enhancing their long-term development impact". The Roundtable on remittances and other

Diaspora options in the Global Forum on Migration and Development (2007) approved that that improving the formalisation of transfers offered opportunities to leverage the development impact of remittances by providing options for individual savings, and investments or support to local development projects.

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