



Gallup Pakistan Analysis of Internal Migration in Pakistan (Census 2023)



PRESS RELEASE

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Punjab–Sindh Corridor Dominates Pakistan’s Migration Landscape — Nearly One in Twenty Pakistanis Has Changed Province in Search of Work and Opportunity

Islamabad, November 26th, 2025

Gallup Pakistan, as part of its *Big Data Analysis* initiative, presents a comprehensive review of internal migration patterns drawn from Pakistan’s first-ever Digital Population and Housing Census 2023. The findings portray a nation on the move — though unevenly — with migration increasingly shaped by economic corridors, urban concentration, and demographic transitions. The data reveal that while the Karachi–Lahore–Islamabad triangle continues to attract most internal migrants, rural and peripheral regions remain largely immobile. Islamabad emerges as Pakistan’s most dynamic destination, where almost half the population consists of in-migrants from other provinces, reflecting its pull as the country’s administrative and educational hub.

What is the Big Data Analysis Series by Gallup?

Gallup Pakistan’s Big Data series was started by Bilal I Gilani, Executive Director of Gallup Pakistan. Bilal explains the rationale of the series: *“Pakistan does not suffer from a lack of data,” notes Bilal Gilani, “but from limited accessibility and weak translation of numbers into understanding. Gallup Pakistan bridges this gap by analyzing large, often under-used datasets — from PSLM and Labour Force Surveys to Economic Surveys, Election Commission data, and now the National Census 2023 — so that these statistics can inform development priorities and public discourse.”*

What data points this current edition covers:

This edition explores the scale and structure of internal migration in Pakistan as captured by the 2023 Census. It examines inter-provincial flows, migration rates by province, age and gender dimensions, and the emergence of urban economic corridors that are reshaping the country’s population distribution. The analysis also highlights the social dynamics behind migration — including family movement, marriage-related relocation, and education-driven mobility among young adults.

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High Mobility in Islamabad:

Nearly **47.4%** of Islamabad's residents were born outside the capital — the highest share nationally.



Gender and Purpose:

Men migrate mainly for work or business (**37%**), while women move largely for marriage (**37%**) or family reunification (**43%**).



Punjab as Source and Destination:

With 127 million residents, Punjab remains both the largest sender and receiver of migrants.



Age Profile:

Mobility peaks among those aged **25–40 years (31%)**, followed by youth **15–24 years (19%)**.



Urban vs Rural:

Urban migration rate **9%** vs Rural **3.2%** — showing urban pull and rural stagnation.



Sindh Pull Effect:

Over **50%** of Punjab's out-migrants move to **Sindh**, primarily to Karachi — the country's top economic magnet.



Provincial Rates:

Punjab **5.75%**, Sindh **5.44%**, KP **3.01%**, Balochistan **2.96%**, ICT **47.4%**.



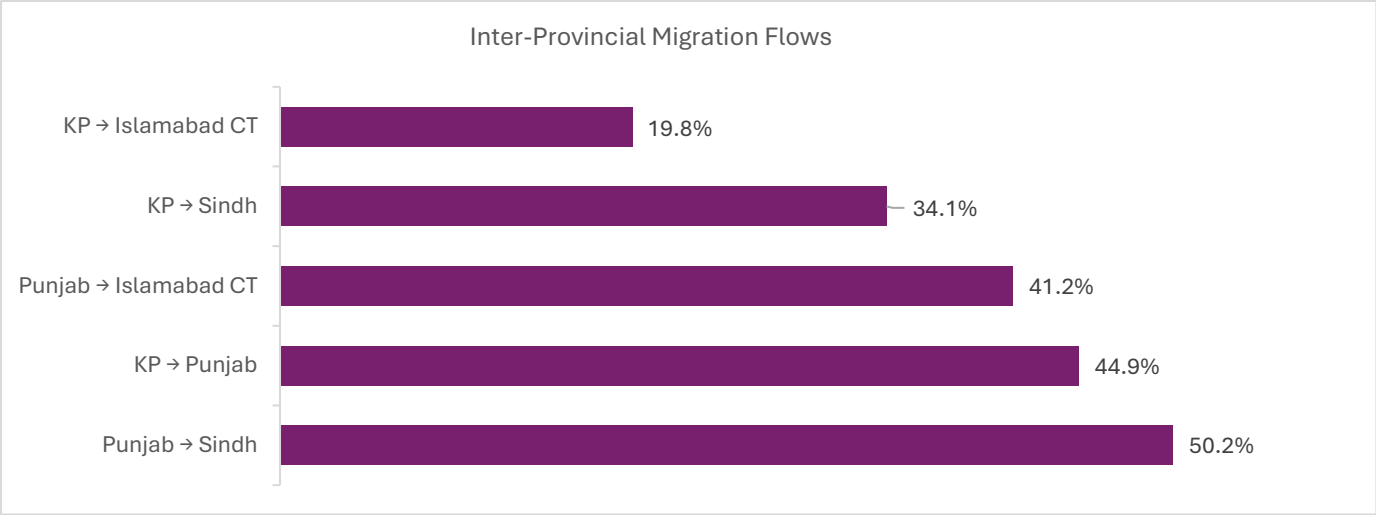
Key Findings:

1. High Mobility in Islamabad: Nearly 47.4 % of Islamabad's residents were born outside the capital — the highest share nationally.
2. Punjab as Source and Destination: With 127 million residents, Punjab remains both the largest sender and receiver of migrants.
3. Sindh Pull Effect: Over 50 % of Punjab's out-migrants move to Sindh, primarily to Karachi — the country's top economic magnet.
4. Gender and Purpose: Men migrate mainly for work or business (37 %), while women move largely for marriage (37 %) or family reunification (43 %).
5. Age Profile: Mobility peaks among those aged 25–40 years (31 %), followed by youth 15–24 years (19 %).
6. Urban vs Rural: Urban migration rate 9 % vs Rural 3.2 % — showing urban pull and rural stagnation.
7. Provincial Rates: Punjab 5.75 %, Sindh 5.44 %, KP 3.01 %, Balochistan 2.96 %, ICT 47.4 %.

1. National Overview: A Country of Uneven Mobility

Across Pakistan, 5.44 percent of the population has migrated from one district or province to another — roughly one in twenty citizens. Yet mobility is far from evenly distributed. Islamabad Capital Territory stands out with a migration rate of 47.4 percent, illustrating its transformation into a magnet for civil-service employment, higher education, and middle-class settlement. By contrast, Punjab (5.75 %), Sindh (5.44 %), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (3.01 %), and Balochistan (2.96 %) register much lower rates, constrained by economic structure and infrastructure disparities.

These differences reveal that Pakistan’s population redistribution is primarily urban-driven rather than national in scope. The movement is concentrated along key economic corridors — particularly between Punjab and Sindh — while provinces with lower urbanization, such as Balochistan, remain relatively static.

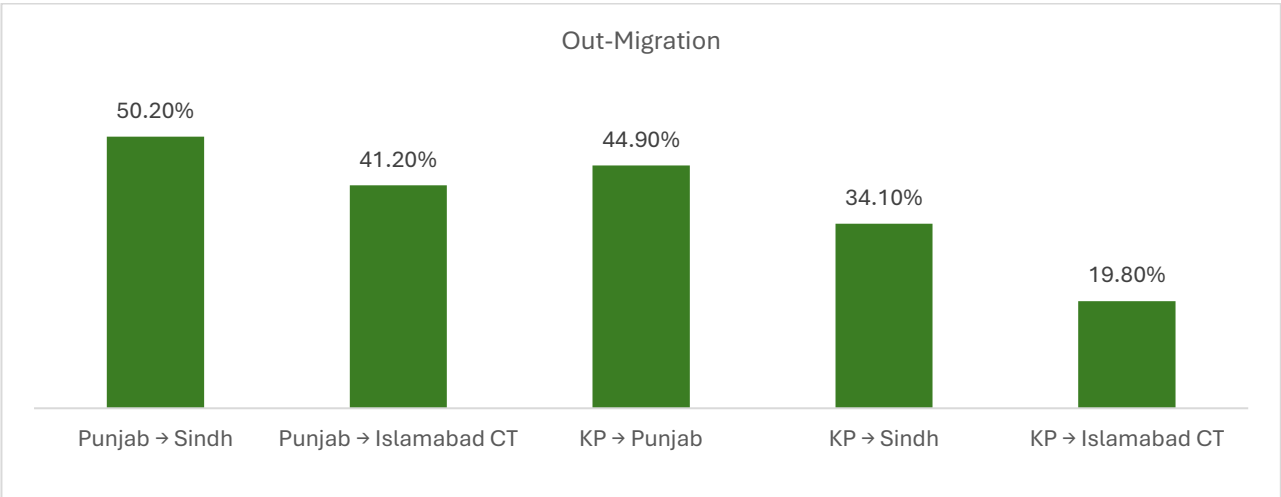


Source: PBS, National Census Report 2023 (Digital Census).

2. Inter-Provincial Flows: The Punjab–Sindh Corridor

The Census shows that Punjab is simultaneously the largest sender and receiver of migrants. About half of Punjab’s out-migration (50.2 %) heads toward Sindh, mainly Karachi, the country’s industrial and financial hub. Another 41.2 percent relocates to Islamabad Capital Territory, driven by public-sector employment and suburban housing developments along the Islamabad–Rawalpindi axis. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa sends 44.9 percent of its migrants to Punjab and 34.1 percent to Sindh, underscoring its traditional role as a labour-exporting province. Meanwhile, Balochistan’s migration exchange remains minimal due to limited connectivity and urban absorption capacity.

Together, these patterns define Pakistan’s core mobility corridor — Karachi–Lahore–Islamabad — a north-south urban spine that channels economic opportunity, labour flow, and family migration. Peripheral areas remain on the sidelines of this national circulation, amplifying regional inequalities and dependence on a few dominant urban centres.

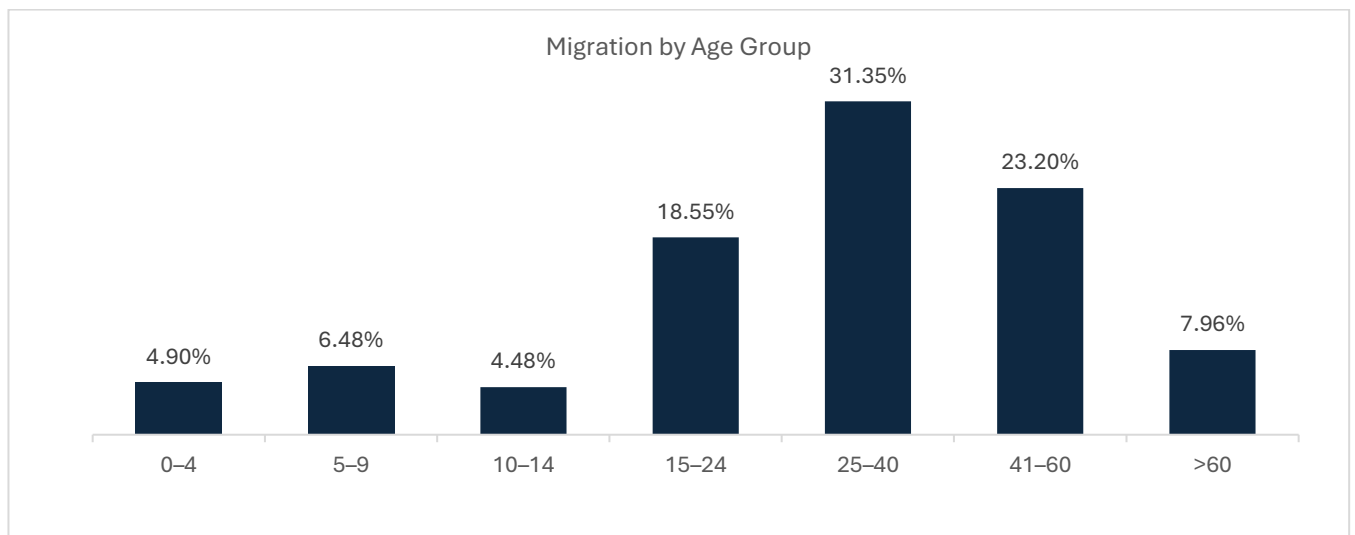


Source: PBS, National Census Report 2023 (Digital Census).

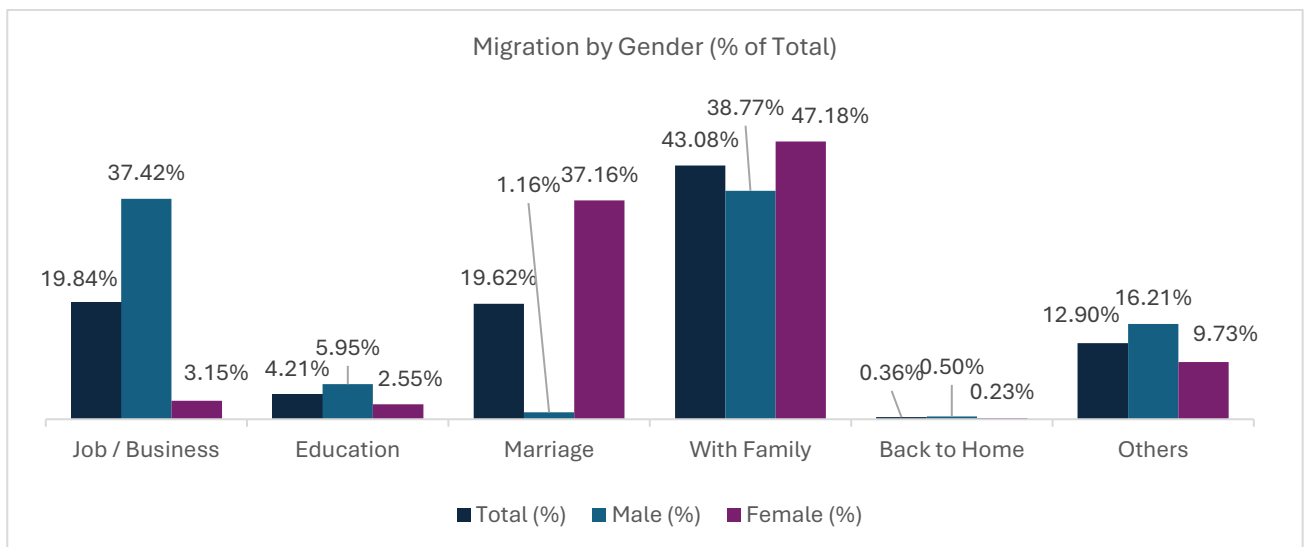
3. Demographic Profile of Migrants

Migration in Pakistan is primarily a young-adult phenomenon. The 25-to-40-year age group constitutes the largest share (31.3 percent) of migrants, reflecting the search for employment, marriage, and family consolidation during working years. Another 18.6 percent are aged 15–24, pointing to growing mobility linked to university education and early-career transitions.

Gender differences are pronounced in purpose: men migrate mainly for work and business (37 percent), whereas women move largely for marriage (19.6 %) or to join family (43 percent). This dual character of migration — economic for men, social for women — mirrors broader gender roles within Pakistan’s labour and household structures.



Source: PBS, National Census Report 2023 (Digital Census).



Source: PBS, National Census Report 2023 (Digital Census).

4. Urban Corridors and Economic Hubs

The Census confirms that Pakistan’s urban growth is now heavily concentrated around a few metropolitan anchors. Karachi absorbs more than half of Punjab’s out-migrants, solidifying its role as the national labour and business hub. Lahore and Rawalpindi–Islamabad attract educated youth and service-sector professionals, while Faisalabad, Hyderabad, and Peshawar operate as secondary migration poles within their provinces.

High-density indicators — such as Karachi South’s 158,000 people per square kilometre and Lahore City’s population exceeding 2 million per tehsil — illustrate the gravitational pull of these metropolitan cores. The clustering of people, capital, and opportunity along this axis points to a continuing urban concentration trend, with major implications for housing, transport, and labour markets.

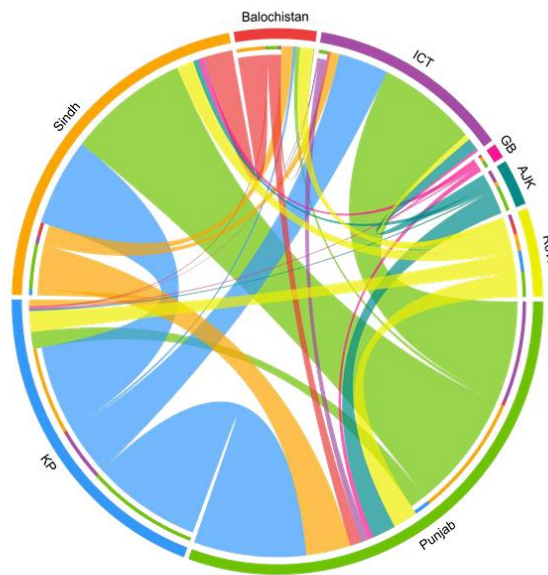


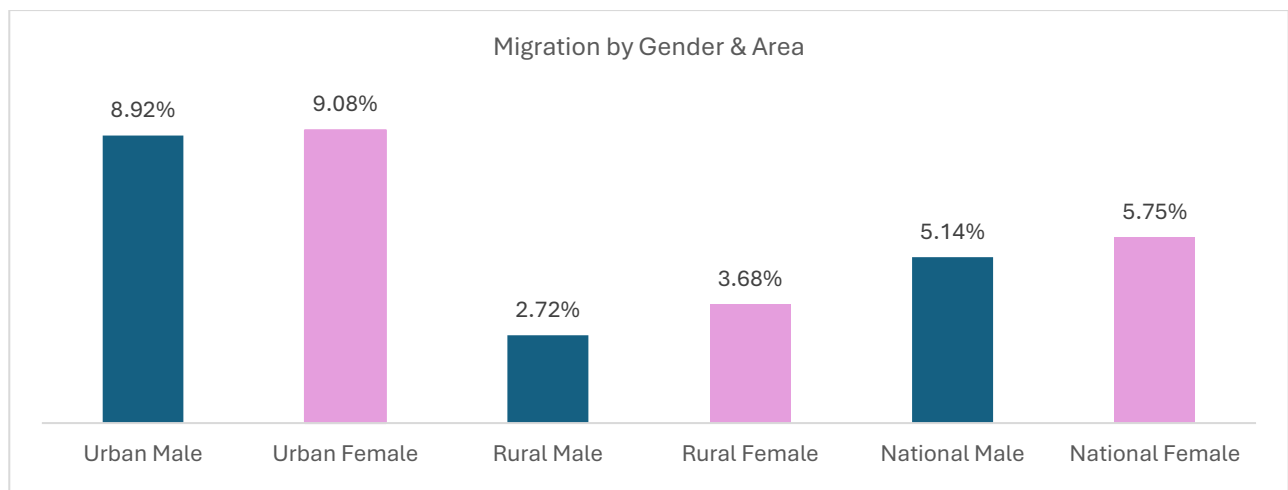
Figure 3.14: Inter-regional Migration Trends

Source: PBS, National Census Report 2023 (Digital Census).

5. Regional and Social Dimensions

Migration is also deeply shaped by geography and social structure. Urban migration rates (9 %) are nearly three times higher than rural (3.2 %), indicating stronger economic incentives and mobility networks in cities. Men constitute 5.1 percent of migrants and women 5.7 percent, yet the nature of movement differs — male migration remains economically driven, while female mobility reflects cultural and familial transitions.

Provincial patterns reinforce these divides: Punjab and Sindh host the majority of in-migrants due to diversified economies, while KP and Balochistan exhibit low inflows, constrained by limited industrialization and service-sector development. These findings suggest that internal migration is as much a story of economic opportunity as of regional inequality — where the same forces that propel growth also deepen disparities in access and living standards.



Source: PBS, National Census Report 2023 (Digital Census).

6. Policy Implications

The migration trends emerging from the 2023 Census carry significant implications for national planning.

First, the Karachi–Lahore–Islamabad corridor requires coordinated infrastructure investment to manage population pressure and housing demand. Second, rural development must become a policy priority to reduce the “push” factors of migration — unemployment, limited schooling, and low-income agriculture. Third, formalized labour-mobility frameworks could turn migration into a driver of productivity by matching provincial labour surpluses with demand in industrial hubs. Fourth, migration policies must adopt a gender-sensitive lens, acknowledging that millions of women move through family-based mobility and therefore need social protection, access to services, and documentation support. Finally, continued data continuity is vital: migration should remain a standard census module so that policymakers can track evolving mobility patterns with accuracy.

About the National Census (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics)

The 7th Population and Housing Census 2023, conducted by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) under the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, marked a historic milestone as the first-ever digital census in Pakistan. Guided by the decisions of the Council of Common Interests (CCI), the Digital Census was carried out nationwide from March to May 2023, employing cutting-edge technology to ensure transparency, accuracy, and efficiency in data collection.

For the first time, the census adopted a digital data collection model, supported by over 120,000 tablets, a secure software solution, and a real-time monitoring framework. Technical collaboration with NADRA, NTC, and SUPARCO enabled high-resolution mapping, data transmission, and centralized synchronization, while a dedicated Census Support and Call Center ensured timely troubleshooting and field coordination.

The report presents a comprehensive picture of Pakistan's demographic, social, and housing characteristics — covering indicators such as population growth, density, literacy, migration, education, housing materials, utilities, and digital access. It forms the foundation for national planning, resource allocation, electoral delimitation, and policy formulation at all levels of governance.

PBS expresses gratitude to all partners, provincial governments, enumerators, and citizens for their cooperation in making Pakistan's first digital census a success. The National Census Report 2023 stands as a landmark achievement, embodying innovation, transparency, and data-driven policymaking for the country's sustainable future.

Editor's Note

This edition draws on Pakistan's first-ever Digital Population and Housing Census to uncover how internal migration is reshaping the country's demographic and economic landscape. The data reveal a clear pattern: movement is highly concentrated along the Karachi–Lahore–Islamabad corridor, which now functions as Pakistan's central migration spine. Islamabad stands out in particular, with nearly half its population born elsewhere, reflecting its growing appeal for employment, education, and middle-class settlement.

Yet the findings also highlight uneven mobility. Punjab and Sindh exchange the bulk of migrants, while provinces like KP and Balochistan remain comparatively static due to structural and economic constraints. Gender differences add another layer: men migrate largely for work, whereas women relocate mainly for marriage or family.

By translating these patterns into an accessible narrative, this edition of the Big Data Analysis Series aims to inform policy conversations on how Pakistan can better manage mobility, reduce regional disparities, and support the social and economic needs of a population increasingly on the move.

— **Aisha Aamir**

Research Executive, Gallup Pakistan



Wish to Contribute to Gallup Big Data Analysis?

Gallup Pakistan is looking for collaboration with researchers to expand the Big Data Analysis project. If you have any ideas, please write to Bilal I Gilani, Project Director, Big Data Analysis at Gallup Pakistan.

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