



# Migration and development dynamics in Chot Dheeran, Pakistan

Transnational ties are strong in Chot Dheeran, where international out-migration shapes local development. Yet the impacts of migration often reflect socio-economic disparity and perceptions are mixed.

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International out-migration – largely to Europe – shapes ideas about the future, livelihoods, standards of wealth, ambition, and life satisfaction.

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Very few legal pathways to Europe mean that most migrate irregularly. Nearly one in five young adults (18%) have experienced a failed migration attempt.

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Some 38% of young men do not think that they will be living in Chot Dheeran in five years – and almost all of these men (94%) do not expect to be in Pakistan.



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Photo: Arsalan Ahmad for MIGNEX.

Chot Dheeran is a village in the Punjab province of Pakistan with a population of around 8,000 people. It is located 50 km from Mandi Bahauddin, the rapidly expanding district centre. Chot Dheeran is one of many agrarian villages in Mandi Bahauddin, located between two rivers: the Jhelum and Chenab.

In Chot Dheeran, the Biradari system – which is loosely termed ‘caste’ among Muslims in South Asia – continues to hold profound weight as a social order, even if this is changing.

Over one-third (39%) of surveyed young adults have no formal education, while nearly half (49%) consider it difficult to earn a living and feed a family. Although education is free, the poorest families need their children to work, so they are not sent to school.

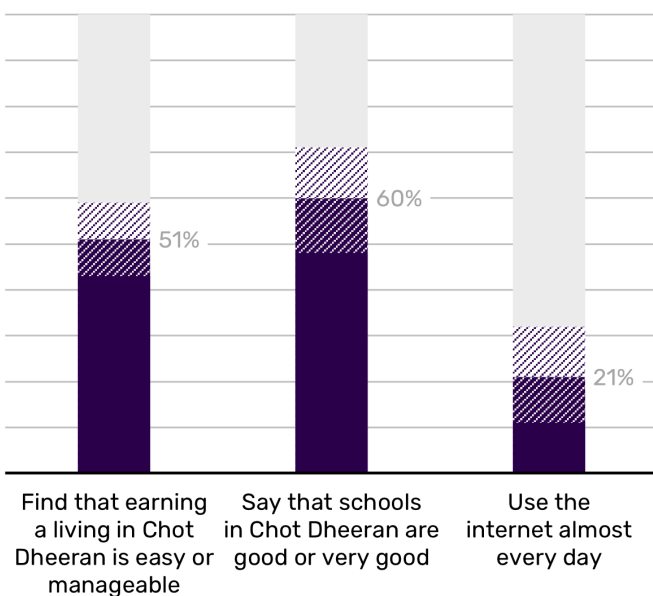
The impacts of international out-migration are widespread. Remittances, family ties, and return- and circular migration support local development and livelihoods. The building of many migrant-funded houses provides work for the construction sector and for the local resident-owned brick kilns. However, there is concern that little redistribution of profits has reinforced socio-economic inequality in the area.

This case study brief is based on fieldwork and survey data. The MIGNEX team also conducted research in Keti Bandar and Youhanabad and carried out a review of migration-relevant policies in Pakistan.<sup>1</sup>

**Migration from Chot Dheeran**

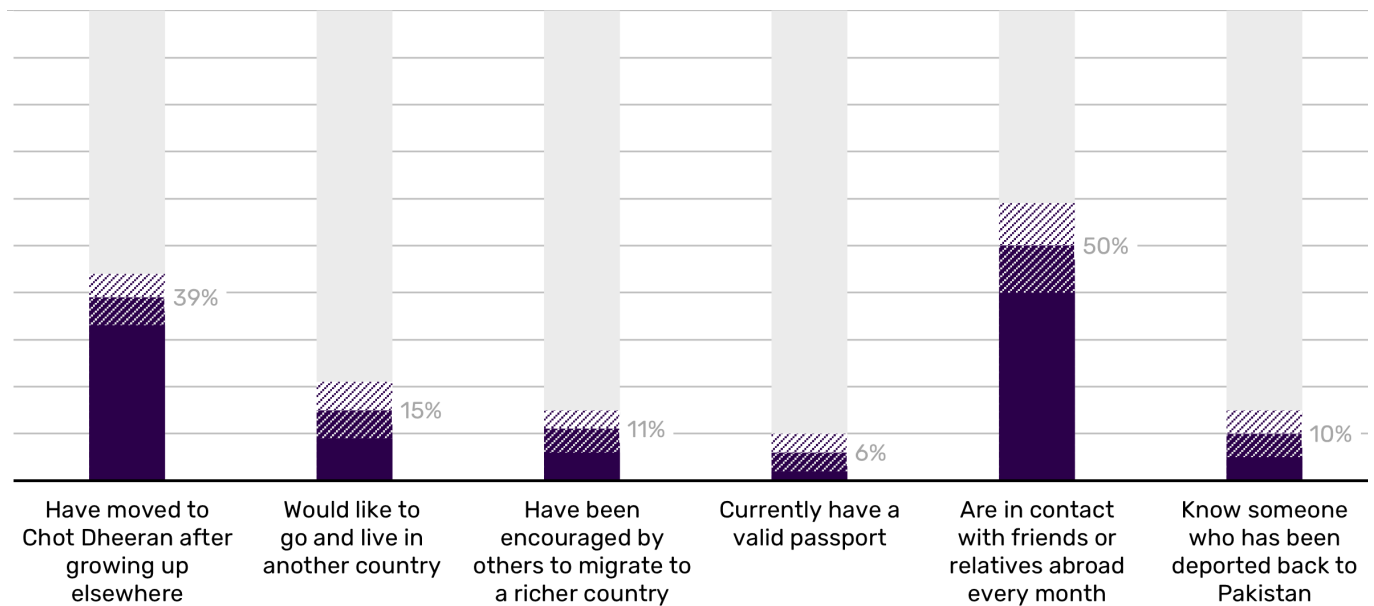
International out-migration is a prominent characteristic of Chot Dheeran. Although moving to a city or bigger town in Pakistan for work or education is possible, migration is largely imagined as going ‘to Europe’.

This shapes ideas about the future, livelihoods, standards of wealth, ambition, and life satisfaction. International out-migration is



**Figure 1. Indicators of development**

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.



**Figure 2. Indicators of migration dynamics**

Source: MIGNEX survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

also often perceived as necessary to improve livelihoods and send remittances home.

Grand palace-like ‘migrant houses’ on the outskirts of the village, migrant-owned businesses, land investments, and businesses set up using remittances from abroad are evidence of Chot Dheeran’s ties with international migration. This widespread impact is significant considering 36% of surveyed young adults have family, friends and relatives living abroad, mostly in France (51%), Belgium (27%) and Italy (23%).

Despite few legal pathways to Europe, migration is perceived to be relatively feasible for most, even for those from poorer or lower caste backgrounds. The majority leaving for Europe cross borders irregularly and pay smugglers to facilitate the journey, which are often called ‘dankey routes’.<sup>3</sup>

Those who can afford it – and who have the necessary connections – travel by air, though this is uncommon. Nearly one in five (18%) of 18–39-year-olds have experienced a failed migration attempt.

The majority of international out-migrants are men and boys. Over the next five years, considerably fewer young men (62%) expect to stay in Chot Dheeran, compared to 82% of young women. Among those who expect to leave Chot Dheeran in the

next five years, most young men (94%) expect to leave.

### Migration aspirations

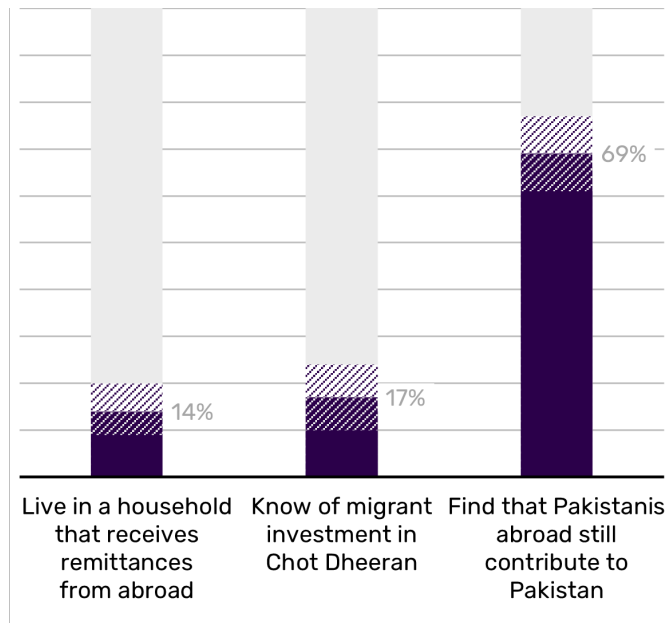
Attitudes towards international out-migration, and the money it brings to the community, are mixed. Around half (46%) of surveyed young adults think their family would approve if they migrated to a richer country.

Many perceive it as an opportunity for improved livelihoods, education, and a way to support those who stay in Chot Dheeran. Yet there is concern that migration is depopulating the area and having a negative impact. Some noted that diaspora-funded migrant homes disrupt the natural landscape and reinforce socio-economic disparity in the community. Others feel a disconnection with those who had left.

Perceptions are also shaped by access to remittances. Those who remain in the village are often women whose husbands are abroad

*All of us have someone abroad who used dankey routes, and all of us are upset with the situation. None of us wanted this.*

Focus group participant



**Figure 3. Migration–development interactions**

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

for years at a time. Migration leaves some women more restricted within the joint family system, while those left in charge of household finances have more freedom and power.

Overall, the dilemma in how to view international out-migration is very real. Despite the potential benefits, many spoke of the risks of migration, including vulnerabilities on the journey and insecurity of gaining regular status in a European country. The costs of migration – for those left behind and for the area overall – have led many to perceive the risks as greater than the potential benefits.

### In-migration

Some 39% of young adults reported that they grew up elsewhere in Pakistan, while the rest (61%) grew up in Chot Dheeran. Many in-migrants are women who move for marriage: almost half (48%) of young women in Chot

Dheeran grew up elsewhere in Pakistan, compared to 8% of young men.

However, overall, the local community does not consider Chot Dheeran an area of in-migration. Some move to Chot Dheeran for work at the brick kilns; however, this is perceived as more transitory. Although these in-migrants often remain in Chot Dheeran for long periods of time they would move on if possible – either to new kilns, or if they are able to break the debt cycle which necessitates work in the kilns. There are also camps with travellers - or ‘mobile populations’ - who would also move on if possible.

### Links between migration and development

Given the salience of international out-migration, transnational ties are strong. Over one-third of young adults have a family member, relative or friend abroad (36%), some 44% of whom had lived in their household before. Most (87%) have monthly contact with migrant family or friends.

Over one-third (39%) received remittances in the past year. Remittances were the most important source of income for 7% of young adult households. Nearly one fifth (17%) know of migrant investment in Chot Dheeran, including the remodelling of the local graveyard, an ambulance and vocational training for the construction of houses.

### Notes

1. Fieldwork consisting of key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observations was carried out by Marta Bivand Erdal, Furrukh Khan, Arsalan Ahmad and Safia Mahmood in March 2020. A face-to-face survey of 500 randomly selected residents (aged 18–39 years) was conducted by Gallup Pakistan in November–December 2021.
2. Based on Punjabi idiom meaning to ‘hop from place to place’ – here understood as irregular migration to European Union member states, facilitated by networks of agents.

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MIGNEX – Aligning Migration Management and the Migration–Development Nexus – is a five-year research project (2018–2023) with the core ambition of creating new knowledge on migration, development and policy. It is carried out by a consortium of nine partners: The Peace Research Institute Oslo (coordinator), Danube University Krems, the University of Ghana, Koç University, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Maastricht University, ODI, the University of Oxford and Samuel Hall.

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