



Migration and development dynamics in Youhanabad, Pakistan

Youhanabad – the largest Christian-majority area in Pakistan – is an urban neighbourhood of Lahore undergoing major educational and infrastructural expansion.

Youhanabad has been, and continues to be, shaped by internal in-migration of Christians of different denominations.

International mobility and development interventions are often tied to different church-based networks in the area.

Overall, out-migration is low: most young adults (78%) expect to stay in Youhanabad in the next five years. Migration aspirations are also low, with most (88%) preferring to stay.



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Photo: Arslan Tarar for MIGNEX.

Youhanabad is an urban area of Lahore, the capital of the Pakistani province of Punjab. While Christians are a minority in Pakistan – constituting around 1.6% of the population – Youhanabad is a Christian-majority area.¹

In 1965, a Catholic priest bought the land which today houses Youhanabad. Small land plots and funds to build basic housing were provided to Christian families. Youhanabad is now home to a variety of Christian denominations. There is a strong presence of the Roman Catholic church, the Church of

Pakistan (Anglican), as well as other established churches such as the Methodists and the Presbyterians. There is also a high number of other small, non-institutionalised churches. Socio-economic diversity in the area reflects the fact that Youhanabad is unique in Pakistan, in being a majority-Christian urban area.

This case study brief is based on fieldwork and survey data. The MIGNEX team also conducted research in Chot Dheeran and Keti Bandar, and carried out a review of migration-relevant policies in Pakistan.²

Migration from Youhanabad

As a Christian-majority area, with transnational ties in church-based networks, international out-migration is something that everybody knows about in Youhanabad. For instance, out-migration – including circular and return migration – is visible in the Catholic church. Many monks, nuns and priests in Youhanabad have studied and worked around the world, mainly across Asia, as well as other locations in Pakistan.

Other documented migrants – including nurses, students and beauticians – move abroad for work in the Middle East (in the Gulf states, often Dubai) or elsewhere in Asia and beyond.

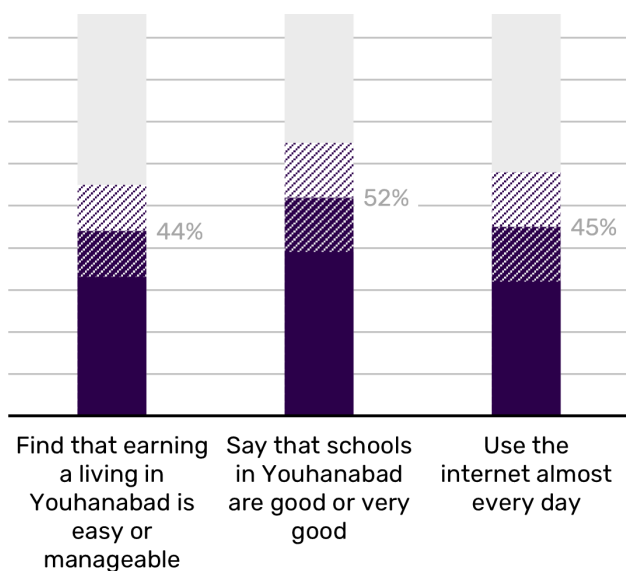


Figure 1. Indicators of development

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

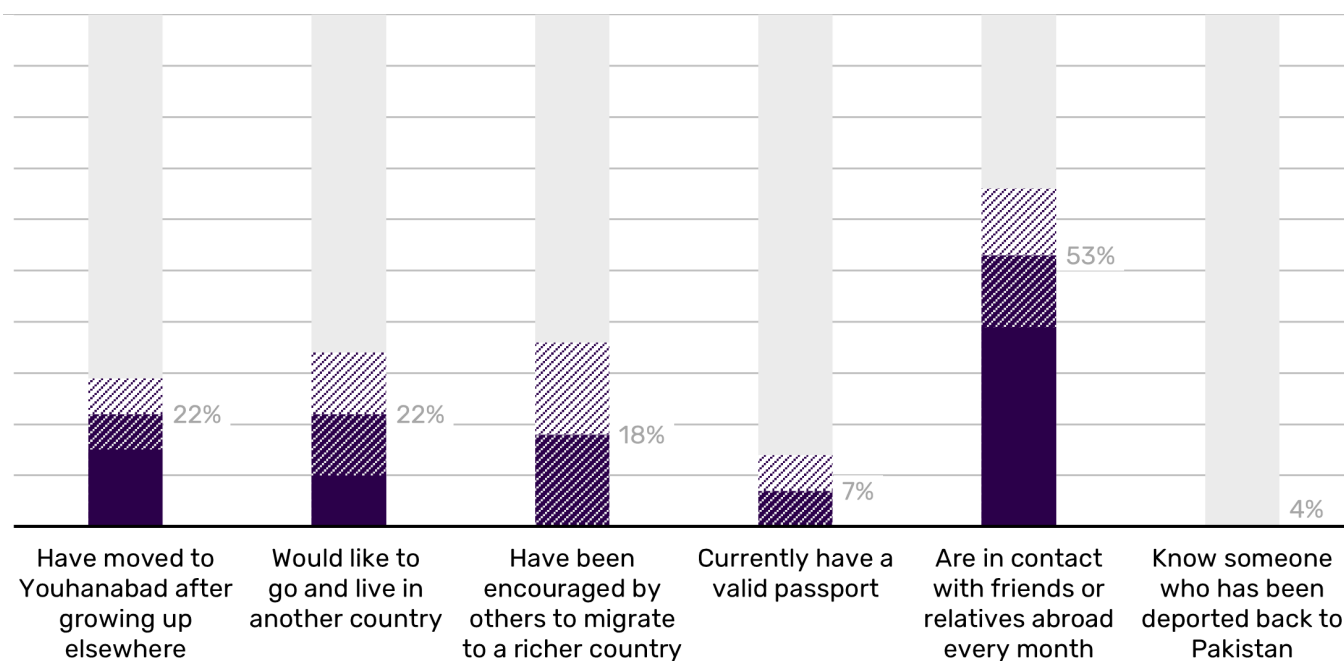


Figure 2. Indicators of migration dynamics

Source: MIGNEX survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

Nearly a quarter (23%) of surveyed young adults have family and friends living abroad – predominantly in Canada (30%), Kuwait (24%), Malaysia (22%), the United Arab Emirates (21%), the United States (15%) and Germany (13%).

However, international migration is not common. Indeed, it is perceived by many as almost impossible, largely due to the intricacies of migration control and bureaucracy, such as visa fees and the timings involved. Most young adults (78%) expect to stay in Youhanabad in the next five years.

For some, migration is feasible, or could be if desired. Among those who do not expect to stay in Youhanabad, almost two-thirds (63%) expect to leave Pakistan in the next five years. Nearly a fifth (16%) of young adults have seriously considered migrating internationally in the past year.

Migration aspirations

The general atmosphere in Youhanabad is one of optimism, confidence and dynamism – often stemming from major improvements in infrastructure. For example, recent initiatives for beyond-primary education are supporting new opportunities for young adults.

However, reflecting the socio-economic diversity of the area, experiences and

perceptions vary. While increased educational opportunities offer new possibilities for some, others struggle with cycles of debt, rented housing and inadequate income levels.

Across the diverse perceptions of the area, migration aspirations are relatively low. Under one-quarter (22%) of young adults would prefer to leave Youhanabad in the next five years; and even if given the necessary papers, around two-thirds (65%) would not migrate to a richer country.

In-migration

In-migration is a defining feature of Youhanabad, when taking a 50-year view since its establishment. Most households have several layers of in-migration stories across generations – often of Christians moving from villages or smaller towns around Punjab where they are a small minority.

A good thing about this country is that they let you observe your practices with freedom – this is freedom. We celebrate because we have that freedom. It's a good thing that we are celebrating happily.

Focus group participant

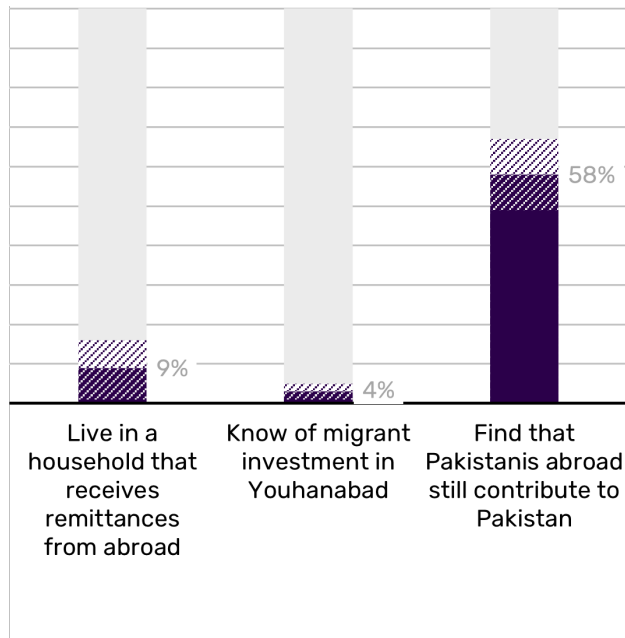


Figure 3. Migration–development interactions

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

There is also a notable international presence in Youhanabad, most often related to church-related mobilities.

In-migration continues to shape the area. Amid urban expansion and increasing ambitions among Christians elsewhere in Pakistan to move to Youhanabad (often for work or educational opportunities), the population has been growing steadily. Almost one-quarter (22%) of young adults living in Youhanabad are internal migrants who grew up elsewhere in Pakistan.

Migration inflows are at times transitory, often due to church-related circular and return mobilities. This is particularly true for nuns, monks and priests responding to roles within the Catholic church, which is the case for foreigners and Pakistanis alike.

Christians continue to be the majority in Youhanabad, yet there is also a degree of

mixing with other faiths. While some Muslim families live in the area, many more Muslims commute to work in Youhanabad and live elsewhere. Many actively do not want to live in a majority-Christian area. However, there is evidence of inter-faith co-existence that ranges from toleration to active support, rather than being defined by hostility.

Links between migration and development

Of those young adults with migrant family or friends abroad (23%), nearly two-thirds (64%) reported that they have been in contact in the past year. Over one-third (39%) of these young adults reported that their households had received remittances in the past year, yet very few (0.1%) stated that remittances were the most important source of household income.

Overall, few young adults (3%) know of migrant investment in Youhanabad. The international presence is most often church-related. Significant educational expansion over the past ten years is tied to the range of international church-related networks in the area. For instance, the Roman Catholic church runs a number of educational as well social welfare institutions. The church-built schools – especially the newly built college run by a Catholic order of priests and funded with money from abroad – is a major international development intervention.

Notes

1. Data draws on Pakistan Population Census, 2017.
2. Fieldwork consisting of key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observations was carried out by Marta Bivand Erdal, Furrakh Khan, Wardah Noor, Jovairiah Batool, Muhammad Aneeb Ul Hassan Qureshi, Behroz Karim, Arslan Tarar in November 2021. A face-to-face survey of 500 randomly selected residents (aged 18–39 years) was conducted by Gallup Pakistan; January–February 2022.

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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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