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Implementation of Labour Policies for Migrant Industrial Workers in Faisalabad's Textile Sector

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Abstract
This research discussed on industrial labour migration why people move from rural areas to Urban. The city is considered one of the major industrial hubs of Faisalabad. The textile industry which creates many employment opportunities for workers coming from rural regions. Using Everett S. Lee's (1966) push-pull framework to analyze the drivers and consequences of rural-to-urban mobility. Migrants originating from Jhang, Toba Tek Singh, Chiniot, Sargodha, Okara, Layyah, and Samundri are shown to be propelled by mounting rural pressures fragmented agricultural landholdings, volatile seasonal earnings, chronic underemployment, and inadequate healthcare and education infrastructure. Correspondingly, Faisalabad expanding industrial base exerts a strong pull, offering the prospect of stable factory employment, regular wages, and upward socioeconomic mobility. Moving beyond a descriptive account of migration patterns, the study critically interrogates the practical enforcement of statutory labour protections, particularly the welfare provisions administered by the Employees' Old-Age Benefits Institution (EOBI) and the Punjab Employees Social Security Institution (PESSI), to assess whether these mechanisms genuinely safeguard the migrant workforce. The findings reveal a markedly ambivalent reality that complicates optimistic narratives of urban migration. Although formal textile enterprises follow minimum wage standards, overtime regulations, and statutory benefit registration, the lived security of migrant workers is still weaker than expected. Long after resettlement, most migrants continue to contend with depressed real wages, precarious and substandard housing, and persistent employment insecurity. The study concludes that while economic necessity and urban opportunity effectively drive rural-to-urban migration, the institutional labour protections designed to safeguard these workers are still inadequately enforced, perpetuating a durable cycle of precarity among Faisalabad industrial migrant labour force.

Keywords: Rural-Urban Migration; Industrial Labour; Labour Policy Implementation; Social Security; Textile Sector; Faisalabad; Pakistan.

1. Introduction

Rural-to-urban migration into industrial hubs is one of the defining features of Pakistan's labour market, and Faisalabad the country's principal textile and power-loom centre is among its largest

destinations. Workers arrive from surrounding agricultural districts in search of higher and more regular income, and for many households' migration functions as a deliberate livelihood strategy rather than a last resort (Sohail, 2025; Mukhtar et al., 2018). Once in the city, however, migrant workers encounter a labour-protection system that is considerably more developed on paper than in practice. The Government of Punjab has built a formal architecture of protection for industrial workers. Registered employees and their dependents are entitled to medical care through PESSI hospitals and dispensaries; the Workers' Welfare Fund finances housing, education, and welfare grants; and the Punjab Labour Department is responsible for enforcing statutory minimum wages, occupational safety standards, and working-hour limits. Factories are, in turn, expected to comply with the Factories Act, the Minimum Wages Ordinance, the Payment of Wages Act, and provincial social-security legislation. In practice, compliance is uneven. Many industrial employers meet baseline wage and safety requirements and voluntarily extend additional benefits — subsidised meals, dormitory housing, transport, and long-service allowances while other, typically smaller, enterprises rely on informal daily-wage arrangements that place workers outside the reach of the statutory system altogether.

Labour governance in Pakistan has been deficient in its approach to domestic industries, with the sole emphasis on promoting labour migration to foreign countries and maximizing the inflows of remittances. The post-COVID recovery in migration has further confirmed this trend, by signaling a rise in the volume of labour movements, but not necessarily the structural inadequacies of migration and labour governance (Ashraf, 2022a). Concurrently, policy concerns have focused mainly on brain drain and skilled migration and comparatively less attention has been accorded to the working conditions and rights of low-skilled and semi-skilled workers, who constitute the bulk of Pakistan's industrial labour force (Ashraf, 2022b). The gender gaps that limit women's labour mobility and highlight broader inadequacies in women's inclusiveness within the labour policy framework of Pakistan are also a major issue in the governance framework (Ashraf, 2022c). The findings of these studies indicate that the labour policies have focused on labour mobility rather than effective labour protection, with major gaps in implementation, especially in labour-intensive industries such as the textile industry in Faisalabad, where migrant workers still struggle to secure safe working conditions, legal rights and social security benefits in the face of existing laws and regulations.

This mismatch between the design of labour policy and its implementation has material consequences. Workers in informal arrangements lack written contracts, face precarious job security, and are frequently excluded from social-insurance registration; wage disparities by gender persist even where nominal minimum-wage compliance is achieved; and occupational safety enforcement remains inconsistent, particularly in smaller power-loom units. At the same time, Pakistan's constitutional and international commitments including obligations arising from the International Labour Organization's core conventions and Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees just and favourable conditions of work and the right to organise establish a normative baseline against which current practice can be measured (Ahmad, 2009; International Labour Organization, 2019).

This article therefore has two aims. First, it documents how existing labour and social-security policy is implemented for migrant industrial workers in Faisalabad, drawing on original field interviews to describe employment conditions, welfare provision, and the gap between statutory entitlement and lived experience. Second, it develops a rights-based policy framework grounded in the country's own legal obligations rather than in aspirational or externally imposed standards that assigns concrete responsibilities to government, industry associations, factory owners, and labour unions for closing that gap.

1.1. Problem Statement

The established statutory framework migrant industrial workers in Faisalabad continue to experience informality, wage insecurity and uneven access to social protection. This study investigates the factors that drive rural-to-urban labour migration into Faisalabad, the conditions migrant workers meet in the city industrial labour market, and the extent to which existing labour policy is implemented at the factory level. The findings are intended to inform policymakers and labour authorities seeking to improve the working and living conditions of migrant industrial workers.

1.2. Significance of the Study

Faisalabad is one of Pakistan's largest industrial and textile cities, and thousands of rural workers migrate there annually in search of employment. Understanding how migration reshapes the industrial workforce and how labour policy does or does not respond to that reshaping is directly relevant to provincial labour planning, to industry compliance practice, and to the wellbeing of a workforce that is central to Pakistan's textile export economy.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in Everett S. Lee's push–pull theory of migration, which explains population movement as the joint product of negative conditions at the origin and positive conditions at the destination, mediated by intervening obstacles and personal factors. In the Faisalabad context, push factors include limited agricultural income, seasonal unemployment, and inadequate rural educational and social infrastructure, while pull factors include the city continuous industrial labour demand, comparatively higher and steadier wages, and better urban infrastructure. Migration decisions are frequently made at the household level, with remittances used to raise living standards and diversify economic risk (Todaro & Smith, 2020; Castles et al., 2019). The theory is still a useful organizing lens for Faisalabad because it captures both the structural drivers of migration and its economic rationale, while leaving room for the welfare costs inadequate housing, job insecurity, and limited rights protection that migrants absorb once they move.

2.1. Labour Policy, Social Security, and Implementation Gaps

A separate strand of literature examined the implementation of Pakistan's labour-protection architecture. Studies of the Punjab Employees Social Security Institution point to persistent gaps between the services PESSI is mandated to provide and workers' actual experience of coverage and service quality (Abbas et al., 2026). Occupational-health research on female textile workers in Lahore and Faisalabad documents how precarious, informal work arrangements translate directly into elevated health risk (Khan et al., 2025), while wage-compensation studies of Punjab's industrial sector show that environmental and safety risks are inconsistently reflected in worker pay (Afzal et al., 2023). Documented cases including the prolonged non-payment of wages following the collapse of an international buyer relationship at a Faisalabad garment factory (Baloch, 2022) and the 2012 Ali Enterprises fire in Karachi, in which 255 workers died due to blocked exits and the absence of basic fire-safety measures illustrate the human cost of weak enforcement, even though such events are not unique to Faisalabad. Comparative literature on labour migration governance in other manufacturing economies, including China's Hukou-linked restrictions on migrant workers access to urban services (Cooke, 2011; Fang et al., 2009) and Japan's more comprehensively regulated migrant labour regime (Bartram, 2004), provides useful external benchmarks for evaluating the relative depth of Faisalabad's protection gaps. Taken together, this literature suggests that Faisalabad central labour-policy challenge is less a matter of statutory design than of enforcement capacity, registration coverage, and employer compliance a gap this study investigates directly through original field data.

3. Research Methodology

This study used descriptive qualitative methods in which the method attempts to find the data in both reality and literal sense. Data collection in the research was obtained by way of primary and secondary data collection using various sources on the title of the research. These interviews helped gather detailed information about their reasons for migration, employment conditions, wages, and the challenges they face in urban industrial life. The methods of data collection that were suggested by us as the writer include interview and literature study which involves tracing data gathered in books, journals, documents, and data analyze and survey.

4. Findings

4.1. Drivers of Migration

Consistent with the push–pull framework, respondents most attributed their move to Faisalabad to the search for stable employment, higher and more predictable income, and access to services unavailable in their home districts. Migrants originating from Jhang, Toba Tek Singh, Chiniot, Sargodha, Okara, Layyah, and Samundri cited limited agricultural income, seasonal unemployment, and inadequate rural educational and healthcare infrastructure as the principal reasons for leaving, while Faisalabad's continuous industrial labour demand, established textile sector, and comparatively better infrastructure served as the main draw. For most respondents, the decision to migrate was described as a household strategy rather than an individual choice, made with the expectation that remittances and improved income would raise the families overall standard of living.

4.2. Employment Conditions and Wage Security

Employment security varied sharply with the formality of the workplace. A substantial share of respondents in smaller units worked without written contracts, on a daily-wage basis, with correspondingly reduced job security, no paid leave entitlement, and exposure to abrupt dismissal. Even among permanent employees, wages frequently clustered near the statutory minimum, which was raised to PKR 40,000 per month for unskilled labour in Punjab in 2025 an increase labour organization argue remains insufficient relative to the urban cost of living. Piece-rate arrangements, common in textile production, allowed some workers to earn above the fixed wage floor but were also associated with longer working hours. Overtime, though nominally compensated at a premium rate under the Factories Act was often unpaid or under-paid in practice, and respondents generally lacked the means or knowledge to formally claim owed overtime. Female respondents consistently reported earning less than male counterparts for comparable work a disparity that persisted despite the constitutional and statutory principle of equal pay for equal work.

4.3. Occupational Safety and Health

Workplace safety conditions were reported as inconsistent across factory types. Respondents in textile and power-loom units described exposure to cotton dust and chemical residues, overcrowded and poorly ventilated production floors, and inconsistent provision of protective equipment such as masks and gloves. Larger factories more frequently maintained onsite medical dispensaries staffed for a few hours daily and had arrangements with local hospitals for emergency referral, while smaller units offered minimal onsite medical capacity. Periodic health screening including vision, hearing, and tuberculosis checks was reported in some larger establishments but was not universal.

4.4. Social Security and Welfare Provision

Access to statutory social-insurance schemes was closely tied to registration status. Where employers registered workers with PESSI, respondents reported access to free or subsidized treatment at PESSI hospitals and dispensaries, though several noted long wait times and the need

to pay out of pocket for specialized care. Contributions toward EOBI were reported as providing modest old-age pensions, generally described by respondents as insufficient for subsistence. A meaningful share of respondents, particularly those in smaller or informally organized workplaces, reported no registration with either scheme, leaving them without access to the associated healthcare and retirement protections.

Employer-provided welfare benefits beyond the statutory minimum were common among larger factories but discretionary rather than mandated. These included free or subsidized dormitory housing for single male workers, housing allowances after extended tenure (commonly cited at around ten years of service), subsidized canteen meals, drinking water and rest facilities, shuttle transport to workers' home districts, and, in some traditional firms, informal compassionate practices such as offering employment to a family member following a worker's death. None of these practices are legally mandated, and their availability varied considerably by firm size and ownership structure. A 2025 Workers' Welfare Housing Scheme, targeting subsidized flats for registered industrial workers was cited by respondents as a positive but still limited-reach development.

4.5. Family, Housing, and Community Conditions

Migrant workers without accompanying families commonly lived in factory-provided or informally rented shared housing, typically located near industrial areas and offering low-cost but often crowded and infrastructural weak accommodation. Workers with families in the city identified childcare and access to schooling as ongoing concerns. The rapid concentration of migrant workers around industrial zones was also reported to place strain on local transport, sanitation, and health infrastructure.

4.6. Worker Voice and Formalization

Formal grievance mechanisms were limited. Where present, they typically consisted of a designated human-resources function with authority over recruitment, payroll, and dispute mediation, rather than an independent worker body. Factory-level worker committees existed nominally in some units but were reported to hold little practical influence, and union membership was described as minimal across the sample, reflecting broader patterns of weak unionization in Faisalabad's small and medium industrial units.

5. Discussion

The findings indicate that Faisalabad's labour-policy problem is primarily one of implementation rather than statutory design. Pakistan's legal framework the Factories Act, the Minimum Wages Ordinance, the Payment of Wages Act, and provincial social-security legislation already establishes baseline protections consistent with the push–pull framework's assumption that urban pull factors include not only wages but institutional protection. In practice, however, the depth of protection a migrant worker receives depends heavily on factory size, ownership structure and registration status, producing a two-tier labour market: a more formalized segment in larger, often export-oriented firms, where statutory and discretionary benefits are more consistently delivered, and a substantially less protected segment in smaller and power-loom units, where informality, unregistered employment, and inconsistent safety practice are common.

This pattern is broadly consistent with prior research on urban informality in Punjab (Imran, 2016; Chaudhry, 2014) and with occupational-health evidence on female textile workers in Faisalabad and Lahore, which links informal work arrangements directly to elevated health risk (Khan et al., 2025). It also aligns with assessments of PESSI's service delivery, which point to a gap between the institution's mandate and workers' experienced coverage (Abbas et al., 2026). Compared with more heavily regulated migrant-labour regimes such as Japan's, and with China's

Hukou-linked restrictions on migrant workers' access to urban services (Cooke, 2011; Bartram, 2004), Faisalabad's core deficiency is not the absence of a protective statute but the weakness of registration coverage and inspection capacity that would make those statutes operative for the full industrial workforce.

Gender appears as a persistent cross-cutting gap: wage disparities and underrepresentation in supervisory roles were clear despite formal equal-pay principles, echoing broader documentation of gender-based disparities in Pakistan's textile sector. The near absence of effective worker voice weak unionization and largely symbolic worker committees limits the capacity of workers themselves to press for better enforcement, reinforcing dependence on employer discretion and government inspection capacity that is, by the study evidence, currently insufficient.

These findings support a general theoretical proposition: in labour markets with a large informal or semi-formal segment, wage-focused explanations of migration decisions (as in classical push–pull and human-capital models) need to be read alongside institutional analysis of which workers can access the protections nominally available to them. The value migrants place on urban employment cannot be fully understood without accounting for the substantial share who migrate into positions that fall outside the reach of the very social-security and safety systems intended to protect industrial labour.

6. Conclusion

Migration to Faisalabad continues to function as a viable livelihood strategy for rural households, delivering higher and more stable income than migrants' areas of origin can typically offer. At the same time, this study's field evidence shows that the benefits of migration are unevenly distributed and are tempered by persistent informality, wage insecurity, uneven occupational safety practice, and inconsistent access to statutory social protection. Government-administered welfare institutions PESSI, EOBI, and the Workers' Welfare Fund provide a meaningful, if incomplete, layer of protection, but registration gaps mean that a large proportion of migrant workers, particularly those in smaller and informally organized factories, remain outside their reach. The central conclusion of this study is that Faisalabad's labour-policy challenge lies predominantly in implementation and enforcement rather than in the absence of an adequate statutory framework. Closing this gap requires treating migrant industrial workers not merely as inputs to industrial production but as rights-bearing individuals entitled to the protections Pakistan's own constitutional and international commitments already promise.

7. Policy Recommendations

Drawing on the study's findings, the following measures are proposed for a rights-based, human-centred labour policy for Faisalabad's industrial sector. Implementation responsibility is distributed across the Punjab government, industry associations and factory owners, and labour unions, consistent with the collaborative model already emerging around initiatives such as the Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce's industrial safety training and the Women Workers Alliance's anti-harassment committees.

7.1. Wages and income security

Review the minimum wage annually, indexed to inflation and local cost of living, with electronic or otherwise documented wage payment to ensure transparency. Enforce meaningful penalties, including criminal liability for repeat offences, against employers who violate minimum-wage or timely-payment requirements under the Payment of Wages Act. Conduct transparent wage audits to enforce the constitutional and statutory principle of equal pay for equal work.

7.2. Occupational safety and working hours

Expand independent safety inspection capacity within the Punjab Labour Department, combining scheduled and surprise audits with transparent public reporting. Mandate functioning fire and emergency systems, including clear evacuation routes and regular drills, with meaningful fines or closure for non-compliance. Enforce statutory limits on overtime and mandated rest breaks, supported where feasible by electronic attendance monitoring.

7.3. Social protection and formalization

Require automatic PESSI and EOBI registration at the point of hiring for all formal-sector workers, with audits targeting under-registration. Mandate written contracts specifying wages, hours, and benefits for all workers, including those in smaller and power-loom units, and simplify registration pathways for currently informal workers. Strengthen enforcement against debt-bondage and other exploitative arrangements, paired with accessible legal aid for affected workers.

7.4. Gender equity

Require anti-harassment committees with confidential complaint mechanisms in all medium and large factories. Support targeted measures to increase women's representation in supervisory roles, alongside secure transport and childcare provision to enable women's labour force participation.

7.5. Worker voice

Protect and streamline union registration and collective bargaining processes, with government mediation available for disputes. Support training for worker representatives in negotiation and labour law, and institutionalize regular dialogue among government, employers, and workers.

7.6. Implementation architecture

Position the Punjab government as the lead enforcement actor, with strengthened Labour Department capacity and transparent inspection and dispute-resolution processes. Encourage industry associations and factory owners to move beyond minimum compliance toward voluntary welfare provision already practiced by leading firms housing, transport, canteen services while treating these as complements to, not substitutes for, statutory protection. Pair urban labour-market reform with rural investment in education, agricultural modernization, and local employment generation, so that migration to Faisalabad increasingly reflects opportunity rather than necessity.

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