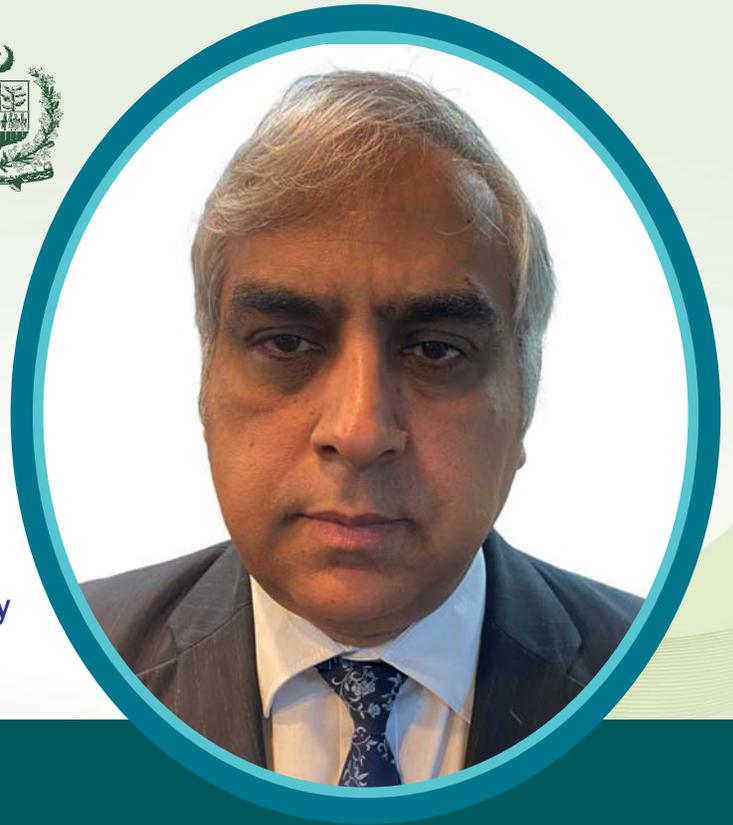


# Exclusive Interview



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## Mr. Akram Ali Khowaja Director General Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment

**ICMA: How does the Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment collect and manage information about Pakistanis who are going abroad?**

**Akram Khowaja:** The Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BE&OE) registers intending emigrants who are proceeding abroad for overseas employment, specifically on work visas. It is mandatory for every emigrant who plans to work abroad to appear at one of the nine Protector of Emigrant Offices for the registration of their Foreign Service Agreement before departure. The Management Information System (MIS) of BE&OE is linked with NADRA, where data on each emigrant, including job details, destination country, and other relevant information, is maintained. There are two modes of obtaining foreign employment in Pakistan: through Overseas Employment Promoters (OEP) or through Direct Employment.

**ICMA: To what extent does overseas employment play a role in Pakistan's brain drain situation?**

**Akram Khowaja:** Due to fluctuating economic conditions, Pakistani youth are either obtaining low-paid jobs or facing unemployment. The local market can create opportunities for these educated youth. Therefore, the issue of brain drain is not as significant here. Additionally, more than 50% of Pakistan's labor force consists of unskilled/semi-skilled workers. Moreover, the financial inflows sent back by overseas workers in the form of remittances to support their families and invest in their home country have become

a significant source of foreign exchange and an essential component of Pakistan's balance of payments.

**ICMA: What are the primary sectors that Pakistani workers tend to seek employment in when they go abroad?**

**Akram Khowaja:** As more than 96% of Pakistanis are heading to Gulf countries, the top categories for these countries, according to the last five years of data maintained by BE&OE, include drivers, labourers, masons, managers, electricians, salesmen, technicians, foremen, carpenters, and more. Conversely, European Union (EU) countries have shown a contrasting pattern by attracting a more diverse range of professional expertise, including doctors, engineers, managers, computer programmers, auditors, cooks, and others.

**ICMA: Can you share the top destinations where Pakistani workers often migrate for employment purposes?**

**Akram Khowaja:** During the last five years, the top destination countries for Pakistani workers are Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Malaysia, UK, Iraq, Romania, Cyprus, Greece, Canada, United States, Australia etc.

**ICMA: How do private sector Overseas Employment Promoters assist in facilitating jobs abroad, and how does the government oversee their activities to ensure they follow the right procedures and guidelines?**

**Akram Khowaja:** Overseas Employment Promoters (OEPs) play a crucial role in facilitating jobs abroad.

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OEPs acquire job demand from the destination countries and, upon approval by the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BE&OE), they advertise the job vacancies in newspapers and conduct the selection process in accordance with the criteria and requirements specified by foreign employers. Additionally, job information is uploaded to the official BE&OE website.

To oversee the activities of OEPs, BE&OE has established a proper complaint mechanism. In case of any complaints against an OEP, BE&OE takes action, which may include suspending or canceling their license, imposing penalties, and, where applicable, fully or partially forfeiting the security deposit. These actions are carried out in accordance with the Emigration Ordinance of 1979 and the Emigration Rules of 1979.

**ICMA: What impact does the departure of skilled individuals for overseas jobs have on Pakistan's local economy?**

**Akram Khowaja:** The departure of skilled individuals for overseas jobs can have a significant impact on the local economy. It can lead to a shortage of skilled professionals in key sectors, affecting productivity and economic growth. However, Pakistan faces a challenge with a large number of unemployed youth struggling to secure gainful employment due to the limited potential of the industrial sector to absorb them. Additionally, remittances sent back by Pakistani expatriates working abroad are a significant source of foreign exchange that supports the Pakistani economy.

**ICMA: What trends have you observed in the emigration of finance professionals and accountants from Pakistan for overseas employment in recent years?**

**Akram Khowaja:** Over the last five years, 16,945 accountants, 2,643 auditors, 1,778 financial advisors, and 1,294 financial analysts have pursued opportunities abroad, primarily in European countries. This demonstrates a significant opportunity for Pakistani finance professionals and accountants, particularly within the EU countries.

**ICMA: What type of support and guidance does your Bureau offer to professionals, such as accountants, who are looking for job opportunities abroad?**

**Akram Khowaja:** The Bureau has developed an extensive platform on their website to facilitate foreign job seekers. Any Pakistani foreign job seeker can visit the website and

search for desired jobs by entering a query based on their interests, preferred country, or foreign employer. Additionally, BE&OE provides pre-departure briefings to intending emigrants in regional offices regarding the general social traditions and labor laws of the destination country.

**ICMA: Are there any government initiatives in place to encourage the return of skilled Pakistani expatriates to contribute to the country's progress?**

**Akram Khowaja:** Pakistan has one of the world's largest labor forces, and providing employment opportunities for this workforce is a pressing concern for our government. In fact, Pakistan has a surplus labor force, and our local job market lacks the capacity to adequately absorb such a vast labor force. Thus, the role of overseas employment is vital in addressing this challenge.

Currently, there is no mechanism in place at the BE&OE level to encourage the return of skilled Pakistani expatriates. Recently, the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (OP&HRD), in collaboration with ICMPD (the International Centre for

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Migration Policy Development) and GIZ (German Agency for International Development), initiated a project to encourage the return of skilled Pakistani expatriates to contribute to the country's progress. Furthermore, the National Emigration & Welfare Policy for Overseas Pakistanis has been developed and is in an advanced stage of approval. This policy places a strong emphasis on the social and economic integration of returning migrants.

**ICMA: In the coming years, what do you expect regarding the future patterns of brain drain and overseas employment for Pakistan?**

**Akram Khowaja:** While there is currently no significant brain drain from Pakistan, the future patterns of brain drain and overseas employment for Pakistan will depend on various factors, including global demand for skilled labor, government policies, economic conditions, and political stability.

*The Editorial Board thanks Mr. Akram Ali Khowaja, Director General, Bureau of Emigration & Overseas Employment for sparing from his precious time to give exclusive interview for Chartered Management Accountant Journal.*