



## SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DETERMINANTS OF RURAL YOUTH'S INTENTION TO MIGRATE TO URBAN AREAS: EVIDENCE FROM DISTRICT FAISALABAD, PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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| KEYWORDS                                                                                         | ABSTRACT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
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| Rural-urban migration; migration intention; socio-demographic determinants; rural youth; Punjab. | This study examined the socio-demographic determinants of rural youth's intention to migrate to urban areas in District Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. Data were collected from 100 rural youth through a structured survey. Eight socio-demographic characteristics served as independent variables, and a four-item Likert scale measured intention to migrate ( $\alpha = .716$ ). Migration intention was moderate to high overall ( $M = 3.41$ , $SD = 0.83$ , range 1–5). Chi-square and Gamma tests both showed significant associations for marital status, $\chi^2(4) = 42.245$ , $p < .001$ , Gamma = 0.830, and household income, $\chi^2(6) = 68.644$ , $p < .001$ , Gamma = -0.500. Age, gender, education, occupation, landholding, and perceived reason for migration were significant on chi-square only. Marital status was the strongest predictor: married youth reported markedly higher intention than single youth. Rural development programmes should therefore pay particular attention to married, lower-income young people. |
| ARTICLE HISTORY                                                                                  |  <b>2026 Journal of Social Research Development</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Date of Submission: 19-07-2026                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Date of Acceptance: 24-08-2026                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Date of Publication: 26-08-2026                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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| DOI                                                                                              | <a href="https://doi.org/10.59075/jsrd.v7i6.604">https://doi.org/10.59075/jsrd.v7i6.604</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Volume/Issue                                                                                     | 7(6), 2026, 482-493                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

### Introduction

Migration from rural to urban areas is one of the most consistent features of demographic change in developing countries, reshaping labour markets, family structures, and the social fabric of the communities that migrants leave behind (Lagakos, 2020). Across South Asia, young people form the core of this movement: they are more mobile, less tied to land and dependants, and more responsive than older cohorts to the wage and opportunity gaps between the rural and urban economy (Naz &

Khan, 2021; Umair & Naz, 2021). Pakistan is no exception. Punjab's rural population, and its rural youth in particular, continue to move toward cities and towns in search of education, employment, and a different quality of life (Rehman et al., 2021), a pattern that has accelerated alongside the mechanisation of agriculture and the fragmentation of landholdings (Sen et al., 2021).

Yet not all rural youth are equally inclined to migrate. Classical migration theory has long argued that the decision to migrate, or at least the intention behind it, is shaped systematically by who a person is: their age, sex, marital status, education, income, occupation, and access to land (de Haas, 2021). In District Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan — a predominantly agricultural district — these socio-demographic differences are plausible but have rarely been examined together in a single youth sample. Understanding which subgroups of rural youth express the strongest intention to migrate matters both academically, for testing classical migration theory in a new setting, and practically, for policymakers designing rural employment and youth-retention programmes.

This study responds to that gap by asking a focused question among rural youth in District Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan: does intention to migrate to urban areas differ by socio-demographic characteristics, and if so, which characteristic matters most? Rather than measuring actual migration behaviour, the study measures youth's stated intention to migrate as quickly as possible, a construct widely used in migration research as a proximal predictor of eventual movement (Wanner, 2021).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to examine how rural youth of different socio-demographic backgrounds in District Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan differ in their intention to migrate from rural to urban areas, and to identify which socio-demographic characteristic is the strongest predictor of that intention.

### **Significance of the Study**

These findings are relevant to several audiences. For rural development planners, knowing which socio-demographic subgroups report the strongest migration intention can help direct youth-employment, skills-training, and land-productivity programmes to where they are most needed to retain young people in rural areas. For policymakers, the results show whether migration intention is spread evenly across rural youth or concentrated among specific groups — the unmarried, the landless, or the lower-income, for instance. Academically, the study extends classical push-pull and human-capital theories of migration (de Haas, 2021) by testing them against a contemporary rural-youth sample in Punjab, Pakistan.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To describe the socio-demographic profile of rural youth respondents and their intention to migrate from rural to urban areas.

2. To examine whether rural youth's intention to migrate differs significantly by their socio-demographic characteristics, and to identify the strongest socio-demographic predictor of that intention.

## **Literature Review**

Classical migration theory offers several complementary explanations for why some people are more inclined to migrate than others. Early "laws of migration" proposed that migration is selective: migrants are disproportionately young adults, and short-distance, step-wise movement toward centres of opportunity is the norm (Umair & Naz, 2021). The push-pull framework built on this, arguing that migration intention results from weighing push factors at the origin (limited land, low income, few opportunities) against pull factors at the destination (employment, education, services), filtered through personal characteristics that make some people more responsive to these factors than others (de Haas, 2021).

Economic models add further nuance. Expected-income models of rural-urban migration in developing countries argue that migration intention responds to the expected, rather than actual, urban-rural wage gap, so unemployed or under-employed rural youth with limited local income are the most likely to consider moving (Lagakos, 2020). The human-capital approach treats migration as an investment: people with more education, and therefore more portable skills, are expected to have stronger migration intentions because they anticipate higher returns from relocating (Naz & Khan, 2021). The new economics of labour migration reframed the decision as a household rather than purely individual calculation, in which income, landholding, and family obligations jointly shape who is expected, and permitted, to move (Al-Maruf et al., 2022; Sen et al., 2021).

Synthesising this literature, de Haas (2021) concluded that no single theory fully explains migration intention and that empirical studies need to test multiple socio-demographic correlates at once. In line with this, prior survey-based studies in South Asia have repeatedly found that younger, unmarried, and more educated individuals report stronger migration intentions than older, married, and less-educated counterparts (Naz & Khan, 2021), while landholding and agricultural occupation tend to anchor youth to rural areas by providing an existing livelihood and asset base (Sen et al., 2021). Household income shows a more mixed pattern: in some settings, higher income enables migration by financing the move and job search, while in others it is the income-poor who are pushed to migrate out of necessity (Lagakos, 2020; Abdelwahed et al., 2020).

Overall, the available theory and evidence suggest that migration intention among rural youth is unlikely to be uniform. Instead, it should vary systematically with age, gender, marital status, education, income, occupation, landholding, and the reasons youth themselves give for migrating. Based on this, the present study tested the following hypotheses.

**H1:** Age is associated with differences in intention to migrate.

**H2:** Gender is associated with differences in intention to migrate.

**H3:** Marital status is associated with differences in intention to migrate.

**H4:** Education is associated with differences in intention to migrate.

**H5:** Household income is associated with differences in intention to migrate.

**H6:** Occupation is associated with differences in intention to migrate.

**H7:** Landholding status is associated with differences in intention to migrate.

**H8:** Perceived reason for migration is associated with differences in intention to migrate.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was used to examine the socio-demographic determinants of rural youth's intention to migrate to urban areas in District Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

### **Population**

The population comprised rural youth residing in the rural union councils of District Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

### **Sample Size**

A total of 100 rural youth respondents participated in the survey (N = 100).

### **Sampling**

Respondents were selected using a purposive/simple random sampling technique from rural households, aiming to cover a range of ages, education levels, income groups, and occupational backgrounds among rural youth.

### **Instrument**

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire with two sections. The first recorded eight socio-demographic characteristics: age, gender, marital status, education, income, occupation, landholding status, and the respondent's perceived main reason for migration. The second contained a four-item, five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) measuring intention to migrate from the rural settlement to an urban area.

Measurement of Variables

Age was recorded in three categories (below 20 years, 20–30 years, above 30 years), gender as male/female/other, marital status as single/married/divorced-separated, education in five ordered levels, household income in four ordered brackets, occupation in six categories, landholding status as yes/no, and perceived reason for migration in six categories. The dependent variable, intention to migrate, was measured with four Likert statements. A composite Intention to Migrate score was computed for each respondent as the mean of the four items (possible range 1–5), and the scale's reliability was checked with Cronbach's alpha. For hypothesis testing, the composite score was further split into Low, Medium, and High groups using tertile (33rd and 66th percentile) cut-points, in line with standard practice for the cross-tabulation analysis of continuous composite scores.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analysed using SPSS where frequencies and percentages were computed for all eight independent variables, and means and standard deviations for the four dependent-variable items and the composite score. The reliability of the Intention to Migrate scale was assessed with Cronbach's alpha. For each of the eight independent variables, a cross-tabulation with the tertile-categorised composite (Low/Medium/High) was built, and association was tested with the chi-square test of independence and the Goodman-Kruskal Gamma statistic for ordinal association, each with its own significance test. Statistical significance was set at  $p < .05$  throughout.

Results

Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 sets out the socio-demographic profile of the 100 rural youth in the study. Most respondents (78.0%) were aged 20–30, and most (69.0%) were female. More than half (58.0%) were single, and 41.0% were married. In terms of education, 41.0% had studied up to matric level and 29.0% had higher secondary education or above, while only 1.0% had no formal education. On household income, 34.0% reported a monthly income of PKR 35,001 or above, while 31.0% reported income below PKR 15,000. Agriculture (28.0%) and job/service (27.0%) were the two most common occupations, and most respondents (63.0%) owned agricultural land. Asked for their perceived main reason for migration, 44.0% cited work opportunities, followed by travel and adventure (21.0%) and freedom and independence (19.0%).

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of Rural Youth Respondents (N = 100)

| Socio-Demographic Characteristic | f  | %    |
|----------------------------------|----|------|
| Age                              |    |      |
| below 20 years                   | 16 | 16.0 |
| 20–30 years                      | 78 | 78.0 |

|                                |     |       |
|--------------------------------|-----|-------|
| above 30 years                 | 6   | 6.0   |
| Total                          | 100 | 100.0 |
| Gender                         |     |       |
| Male                           | 31  | 31.0  |
| Female                         | 69  | 69.0  |
| Total                          | 100 | 100.0 |
| Marital Status                 |     |       |
| Single                         | 58  | 58.0  |
| Married                        | 41  | 41.0  |
| Divorced/Separated             | 1   | 1.0   |
| Total                          | 100 | 100.0 |
| Education                      |     |       |
| No formal education            | 1   | 1.0   |
| Up to primary                  | 15  | 15.0  |
| Up to middle                   | 14  | 14.0  |
| Up to matric                   | 41  | 41.0  |
| Higher secondary and above     | 29  | 29.0  |
| Total                          | 100 | 100.0 |
| Household Income (PKR/month)   |     |       |
| Below 15,000                   | 31  | 31.0  |
| 15,001-25,000                  | 22  | 22.0  |
| 25,001-35,000                  | 13  | 13.0  |
| 35,001 and above               | 34  | 34.0  |
| Total                          | 100 | 100.0 |
| Occupation                     |     |       |
| Unemployed                     | 6   | 6.0   |
| Agriculture                    | 28  | 28.0  |
| Business                       | 24  | 24.0  |
| Cattle farming                 | 10  | 10.0  |
| Job/Service                    | 27  | 27.0  |
| Other/unspecified              | 5   | 5.0   |
| Total                          | 100 | 100.0 |
| Landholding                    |     |       |
| No                             | 37  | 37.0  |
| Yes                            | 63  | 63.0  |
| Total                          | 100 | 100.0 |
| Perceived Reason for Migration |     |       |
| Freedom and independence       | 19  | 19.0  |
| Travel and adventure           | 21  | 21.0  |
| Family tradition               | 13  | 13.0  |
| Work opportunities             | 44  | 44.0  |
| Lack of permanent housing      | 2   | 2.0   |

|       |     |       |
|-------|-----|-------|
| Other | 1   | 1.0   |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |

Note. f = frequency; % = percentage of total sample.

### Rural Youth's Intention to Migrate to Urban Areas

Table 2 shows item-wise responses on rural youth's intention to migrate from rural to urban areas. Mean scores for all four items sat close to or above the scale midpoint of 3.0. The highest mean was for "I plan to migrate from the rural settlement to an urban area as soon as possible" ( $M = 4.11$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ), with 78.0% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. The lowest, though still close to the midpoint, was "my intention to migrate ... is strong" ( $M = 2.99$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ); this item also showed the widest spread of responses, with 37.0% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Overall, the composite mean score for intention to migrate was 3.41 ( $SD = 0.83$ ) on the 1–5 scale, indicating that rural youth in the sample held, on average, a moderate-to-high intention to migrate.

**Table 2 : Rural Youth's Responses on Intention to Migrate to Urban Areas**

| Sr. | Statement                                                                                            | Strongly Disagree f (%) | Disagree f (%) | Neutral f (%) | Agree f (%) | Strongly Agree f (%) | Mean | SD   |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|----------------------|------|------|
| 1   | My intention to migrate from the rural settlement to an urban area as quickly as possible is strong. | 17 (17.0%)              | 20 (20.0%)     | 16 (16.0%)    | 41 (41.0%)  | 6 (6.0%)             | 2.99 | 1.24 |
| 2   | I intend to migrate from the rural settlement to an urban area as quickly as possible.               | 12 (12.0%)              | 17 (17.0%)     | 15 (15.0%)    | 53 (53.0%)  | 3 (3.0%)             | 3.18 | 1.13 |
| 3   | It is likely that I will migrate from the rural settlement to an urban area as quickly as possible.  | 14 (14.0%)              | 4 (4.0%)       | 21 (21.0%)    | 56 (56.0%)  | 5 (5.0%)             | 3.34 | 1.12 |
| 4   | I plan to migrate from the rural settlement to an urban area as soon as possible.                    | 2 (2.0%)                | 8 (8.0%)       | 12 (12.0%)    | 33 (33.0%)  | 45 (45.0%)           | 4.11 | 1.03 |

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree. f = frequency; % = percentage of total sample (N = 100).

Reliability of the Intention to Migrate Scale

The four-item Intention to Migrate scale showed acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .716 (Table 3), which is above the conventionally accepted .70 threshold for reliability in social science research (Cheung et al., 2024).

Table 3: Reliability Statistics for the Intention to Migrate Scale

| Scale                                          | No. of Items | N   | Cronbach's $\alpha$ |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------|-----|---------------------|
| Intention to Migrate from Rural to Urban Areas | 4            | 100 | 0.716               |

Testing of Hypotheses: Socio-Demographic Correlates of Intention to Migrate

Table 4 presents the association between the eight socio-demographic variables and the tertile-categorised composite (Low, Medium, High) of intention to migrate. All eight chi-square tests were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ), meaning that intention to migrate was not distributed independently of any of the eight characteristics. Only two variables, however, also showed a significant Gamma, pointing to a genuine monotonic (ordinal) trend rather than a non-linear pattern of association.

Marital status showed the strongest and most consistent association on both tests,  $\chi^2(4) = 42.245, p < .001$ , Gamma = 0.830,  $p < .001$ . Married youth were substantially more likely to fall in the High intention category (58.5%) than single youth (3.4%), so H3 was strongly supported. Household income also showed a significant association on both tests,  $\chi^2(6) = 68.644, p < .001$ , Gamma = -0.500,  $p = .003$ . The negative Gamma shows that as household income rose, intention to migrate tended to fall, which supports H5; the lowest income group (below PKR 15,000) was the most likely to report high intention (77.4%).

Age,  $\chi^2(4) = 11.887, p = .018$ , Gamma = 0.139,  $p = .626$ ; gender,  $\chi^2(2) = 8.599, p = .014$ , Gamma = 0.430,  $p = .070$ ; education,  $\chi^2(8) = 34.416, p < .001$ , Gamma = 0.153,  $p = .446$ ; occupation,  $\chi^2(10) = 56.215, p < .001$ , Gamma = -0.232,  $p = .212$ ; landholding,  $\chi^2(2) = 9.094, p = .011$ , Gamma = -0.143,  $p = .561$ ; and perceived reason for migration,  $\chi^2(10) = 51.755, p < .001$ , Gamma = 0.266,  $p = .166$ , were all significant on chi-square only. This means that intention to migrate was not distributed independently of these variables, but there was no clear ordinal or monotonic trend, so H1, H2, H4, H6, H7, and H8 were only partially supported. It is worth noting that several cross-tabulations had sparse cells: up to 57.1% of expected cell frequencies were below 5 for occupation, 46.7% for education, and 44.4% for age and perceived reason for migration. The chi-square results for these variables should therefore be read with some caution.

Table 4 : Testing of Hypotheses: Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Intention to Migrate to Urban Areas

| Variable           | Chi-square | p      | Gamma  | p      | Decision            |
|--------------------|------------|--------|--------|--------|---------------------|
| Age                | 11.887     | .018*  | 0.139  | .626   | Partially Supported |
| Gender             | 8.599      | .014*  | 0.430  | .070   | Partially Supported |
| Marital Status     | 42.245     | <.001* | 0.830  | <.001* | Supported           |
| Education          | 34.416     | <.001* | 0.153  | .446   | Partially Supported |
| Income             | 68.644     | <.001* | -0.500 | .003*  | Supported           |
| Occupation         | 56.215     | <.001* | -0.232 | .212   | Partially Supported |
| Landholding        | 9.094      | .011*  | -0.143 | .561   | Partially Supported |
| Reasons to migrate | 51.755     | <.001* | 0.266  | .166   | Partially Supported |

Note. \*  $p < .05$  (chi-square test of association). Gamma is the Goodman-Kruskal measure of ordinal association, tested against the null of no association; its  $p$  value is reported in the final column. Intention to migrate is categorised into Low, Medium, and High tertiles of the composite score ( $N = 100$ ).

## Discussion

This study set out to examine whether rural youth's intention to migrate to urban areas in District Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan varies by socio-demographic characteristics, and which characteristic matters most. Both chi-square and Gamma tests were used. All eight socio-demographic variables were significantly associated with intention to migrate on the chi-square test, but only marital status and household income also showed a significant, monotonic Gamma relationship. This pattern broadly fits classical migration theory (de Haas, 2021), while showing that some socio-demographic correlates operate through non-linear or group-specific rather than strictly ordinal pathways.

Marital status produced the strongest association in the entire analysis,  $\chi^2(4) = 42.245$ ,  $p < .001$ , Gamma = 0.830. Contrary to the common assumption in push-pull and related frameworks that unmarried individuals are more migration-prone because they are less tied by dependants (de Haas, 2021), married youth in this sample reported markedly higher intention to migrate than single youth. This is consistent with evidence that most rural-urban migrants in Pakistan are married (Umair & Naz, 2021). It may also reflect the household-level decision-making highlighted by the new economics of labour migration: married youth, often under greater pressure to provide for a household, may see urban migration as the most direct route to meeting that responsibility, while single youth may be more likely to stay local while completing education or building up resources before marriage.

Household income showed the strongest ordinal (Gamma) relationship after marital status,  $\chi^2(6) = 68.644$ ,  $p < .001$ , Gamma = -0.500. As income rose, intention to migrate fell, with more than three-

quarters of the lowest income group reporting high intention. This fits the argument that migration intention responds to the gap between current and expected income (Lagakos, 2020): rural youth with the least local income have, relatively speaking, the most to gain from moving to town.

Age, gender, education, occupation, landholding, and perceived reason for migration were all significantly related to intention to migrate on the chi-square test but not on Gamma, meaning that the relationship, while real, was not a simple linear trend. For education, intention was lowest among those with only primary schooling and highest among those with matric-level education, before declining again among the most educated group. This looks more like a threshold effect than the steady rise with education predicted by the human-capital model (Naz & Khan, 2021). Occupation showed a similarly uneven pattern: youth in agriculture reported disproportionately high intention (71.4% in the High category), plausibly reflecting dissatisfaction with the returns to farm labour (Sen et al., 2021), while those in business reported the lowest intention (8.3% High), consistent with an existing local livelihood reducing the pull of the city.

Landholding was significant on chi-square but not on Gamma, and it pointed in the expected direction: landless youth were somewhat more concentrated in the Medium/High categories than landholding youth. This supports the general expectation that land ownership anchors youth to rural areas (Sen et al., 2021), though the relationship was not strictly monotonic in this sample.

### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations. First, its cross-sectional design captures stated intention at a single point in time (Wang & Cheng, 2020) and cannot establish whether intention translates into actual migration behaviour (Wanner, 2021). Second, the sample was drawn from a single district, so the findings may not generalise to other districts of Punjab or Pakistan with different agrarian and labour-market conditions. Third, several socio-demographic subgroups had very small numbers — divorced/separated respondents ( $n = 1$ ), respondents with no formal education ( $n = 1$ ), and those citing lack of permanent housing ( $n = 2$ ) or other reasons ( $n = 1$ ) for migration, for example — which limits the reliability of comparisons involving these categories. Expected cell frequencies below 5 reached 57.1% for occupation and 46.7% for education, so the corresponding chi-square results should be read with caution. Fourth, the composite intention score was split into Low, Medium, and High tertiles for the chi-square and Gamma analysis; this categorisation loses information relative to the continuous composite score and may explain why some variables were significant on chi-square but not on the ordinal Gamma test. Fifth, Gamma assumes an ordinal relationship between variables. This is reasonable for age, education, and income, but less clear for gender, marital status, occupation, and perceived reason for migration, where the order of categories is not inherently meaningful, so Gamma results for these variables should be read with that limitation in mind. Finally, intention to migrate was measured through self-report, which may be subject to social-desirability or aspirational bias.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Before data collection, informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Before each interview, the purpose of the study, its voluntary nature, and the confidentiality of responses were explained in the local language. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw at any stage without consequence.

## **Conclusions**

This study examined the socio-demographic determinants of intention to migrate to urban areas among 100 rural youth in District Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. Cross-tabulation with chi-square and Gamma tests showed that intention to migrate was significantly associated with all eight socio-demographic characteristics examined, but only marital status and household income showed a clear ordinal (monotonic) trend. Marital status was the strongest predictor overall, with married youth reporting substantially higher intention than single youth, followed by household income, with lower-income youth reporting higher intention. Age, gender, education, occupation, landholding, and perceived reason for migration were significantly, though non-monotonically, related to migration intention. These findings suggest that rural-urban migration intention among youth in this district is not uniform but concentrated among specific socio-demographic subgroups, particularly married and lower-income young people.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered. First, rural development and youth-employment programmes in District Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan should prioritise married and lower-income young people, among whom intention to migrate is highest, by improving local income-generating opportunities such as off-farm employment and small-enterprise support. Second, given the disproportionately high migration intention among youth in agriculture, interventions that improve the productivity and profitability of small-scale farming could reduce the economic push toward urban migration. Third, since education showed a non-monotonic relationship with intention, further qualitative research is recommended to understand why intention rises and then falls across education levels, which could inform targeted vocational or higher-education linkages that keep skilled youth engaged locally. Fourth, policymakers should note that a large share of youth cite work opportunities as their main reason for migration; expanding vocational training and local job-matching services could directly address this driver. Finally, future studies should use longitudinal designs to track whether stated intention actually predicts subsequent migration (Wanner, 2021), and should extend data collection to multiple districts to test how well these socio-demographic patterns generalise.

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