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The Effect of Migrant Worker Remittances on Economic Growth in Low- and Middle-Income Developing Countries: a Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT:

A country's economic growth is greatly influenced by various factors, including remittances by migrant workers. This study aims to analyze the influence of remittances of migrant workers on economic growth. The method used is a literature study with a systematic literature review (SLR) approach. This study identified 250 publications from the Emerald Publisher, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar databases (2012–2024 period), then filtered until 22 relevant studies were obtained. The results of the study indicated that as many as 68.2% of remittances contributed positively and significantly to economic growth, while the remaining 31.8% did not show a positive and significant influence. This suggests that there are other factors that also affect economic growth and deserve further exploration. This study also found that there is a difference in the influence of remittances in developing countries with low income and middle income categories. In middle-income countries, remittances tend to have a positive and significant influence as a support for long-term investment and development when compared to low income. Human capital and an effective financial system are key factors that encourage remittances to have an impact on economic growth in developing countries. Developing countries with low income have poor financial systems which cause the positive impact of remittances on economic growth to be insignificant. These findings demonstrate the importance of official remittance channels and the use of remittance funds for productive investment to drive sustainable economic growth. In addition, the level of human capital greatly affects the effectiveness of remittances in supporting economic growth in developing countries.

Keywords: remittances, economic growth, developing countries, low income, middle income, systematic literature review

INTRODUCTION

The economic stability of a country is the main factor that underlies its economic growth. The term economic growth refers to a gradual increase in the growth rate of a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (Afridi et al., 2024). In the perspective of classical economic

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theory, the economic growth rate of a country is seen as the main indicator to assess its economic performance. If a country experiences high economic growth, it reflects that the country has a strong and efficient economic performance. On the other hand, if economic growth is at a low level, this condition is considered a reflection of the weak economic performance of the country concerned (Handoyo et al., 2020). As a developing country, *Indonesia* is always striving to achieve and maintain sustainable long-term economic growth. In the midst of these efforts, various external factors have emerged that are increasingly prominent, one of which is the intensification of *globalization*. Although *globalization* offers opportunities, on the other hand it also triggers the emergence of anti-globalization sentiment. The context of these external factors still leaves a lot of room for further study, especially regarding their impact on Indonesia's economic growth. Some of the relevant variables to be analyzed include the level of imports, income from remittances, foreign direct investment (*FDI*), world oil prices, and other external variables (Handoyo et al., 2020). Suryadi (2017) also mentioned that remittances, inflation, interest rates, bank credit distribution, and economic growth are the main factors in advancing the nation's economy.

Remittances are one of the variables that need to be taken into account when we discuss economic growth (Sobiech, 2019). According to Ukhtiyani & Indartono (2020), remittances are the process of transferring money by migrant workers to their families in their countries of origin and making a significant contribution to the economy of developing countries through various channels (Mohamed Aslam & Alibuhtto, 2024). Data from the World Bank (2014) states that global remittances amounted to \$430 billion in 2011 and remittances equaled 0.31% of global GDP in 2009 (Meyer & Shera, 2017). Based on the same source, in developing countries, it was found that remittances can reach 27% of total GDP. Remittances recorded are greater than or almost two-thirds of *FDI*. The high rate of remittances is caused by two factors, namely international migration that is increasing every year between developing and developed countries and the decrease in transaction costs since the development of technology that makes economic activity faster with cheaper costs for international transfers and payments.

A lot of research has been done to find out the positive and negative impacts of remittances. According to Mohamed Aslam & Alibuhtto (2024), some researchers argue remittances by workers or remittances to be used by their families in their home countries play an important role in development. Remittances are expected to stimulate the development of the financial sector in the recipient country (Eftimoski & Josheski, 2020). This is because remittances will be used for consumption and investment purposes for the families of the remittance recipients in the country of origin. In addition, remittances also play a role in the development of Human Resources (*HR*) through the fields of education, health, and gender equality (Azam, 2015). Therefore, reducing poverty levels is one of the positive impacts of the use of remittances. Some argue that the direct impact of remittances on growth depends on the use of funds received (Javid, 2012). If the recipient of the remittance cannot make good use of it, then the remittance cannot have a positive impact on economic growth. Awad & Sirag noted that if remittances are used for excessive consumption, it can cause inflationary pressures or hinder the supply of labor (Awad & Sirag, 2018).

This research will conduct a study by summarizing previous studies on how remittances from migrant workers relate to the economic growth of a country, especially in developing

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countries with middle income and low income. A *systematic literature review (SLR)* was used by researchers to answer questions related to how migrant worker remittances affect economic growth. Therefore, this study aims to provide a review of the empirical literature on the relationship between remittances of migrant workers and economic growth in developing countries with middle-income and low-income categories based on the results of previous research. The researchers hope to further identify the linkages between remittances and economic growth to build on and enrich the pre-existing literature.

Hypothesis

Based on the theory of economic growth according to Robert Solow in Baafi & Kwame Asiedu (2025), it is explained that one of the factors that affect the level of economic growth is labor growth. However, if the number of the labor force that continues to increase is not balanced with the availability of jobs, it can result in the number of job seekers continuing to increase while the demands of life are getting bigger (Nola, 2016). Therefore, the phenomenon of *Migrant Workers* has emerged, where workers from a country choose to migrate internationally in order to get a job. The high number of migrant workers globally will certainly result in a high rate of remittances. Quoting research by Meyer & Shera (2017), data from the World Bank (2014) states that global remittances reached \$430billion in 2011 and remittances amounted to 0.31% of global GDP in 2009. In developing countries alone, remittances can reach 27% of total GDP. Based on this statement, this study will further analyze the relationship between migrant worker remittances and economic growth using four hypothesis alternatives, namely:

- H0: Remittances of migrant workers in low-income developing countries have no effect on economic growth
- H1: Remittances of migrant workers in low-income developing countries affect economic growth
- H0: Remittances of migrant workers in middle-income developing countries have no effect on economic growth
- H2: Remittances of migrant workers in developing middle-income countries affect economic growth

RESEARCH METHODS

This researcher used the *Systematic Literature Review (SLR)* to explain the relationship between two variables, namely remittances of migrant workers and economic growth. A *systematic literature review* is a method that aims to identify and evaluate research results, specifically through the processes of planning, implementing, and reporting literature reviews (Sekar Setyaningtyas et al., 2022). In addition, a *systematic literature review* is described as an experimental investigation that outlines areas to identify issues that have been thoroughly studied and those that require further examination (Fernandes & Samputra, 2022).

In the process of selecting previous research, *keywords* or *kata kunci* are crucial in the screening process to ensure that selected research aligns with the research objectives. Furthermore, this study utilizes the *PICO (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome)* method (Eriksen & Frandsen, 2018). The stages used consist of *Search, Filtering, Coding, and Analysis* (Santoso & Samputra, 2023).

Step 1: Search

Previous research searches were conducted using the predetermined keywords on Emerald Publisher, *ScienceDirect*, and *Google Scholar* within the publication period of 2012 to 2024. In this step, 260 suitable studies were found.

Step 2: Screening

This step was carried out by checking and excluding duplications in publications (Santoso & Samputra, 2023). During this screening stage, fifty-five (55) previous research studies were selected according to the specified keywords. The keywords used in this study are "the effect of remittances on economic growth" and "the effect of remittances on economic growth in developing countries".

Step 3: Coding, Analyzing, and Synthesizing

This phase involves labeling previous research based on the type and topic of discussion. At this stage, the researcher selected previous studies that provided the most appropriate results and discussions relevant to the research objectives. From this selection process, twenty-two (22) studies were ultimately chosen.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After conducting the stages of searching, filtering, coding, analyzing, and synthesizing previous studies that discussed remittances and economic growth in accordance with predetermined keywords or keywords, 22 (twenty-two) previous studies were selected that were in accordance with the criteria and provided empirical evidence related to the influence of remittances on economic growth. The research obtained is the result of publication in the 2012-2024 time period. Of the 22 previous studies, quantitative methods were used by all studies with a wide range of time spans and scopes globally.

Table 1. Tabulation of Systematic Literature Review Results from selected research

No	Reference	Country Level	Status	Era	Research Methods
1	Ahamed Lebbe Mohamed Aslam, mohamed Cassim Alibuhtto (2022)	Sri Lanka	Middle Income	1975-2021	Quantitative
2	Muhammad Asim Afridi, Ismail Khan, Haseeb Ur Rahman, Mustafa Rehman Khan (2024)	82 Developing Countries	Middle Income	2000-2022	Quantitative
3	Muhammad Azam (2015)	4 Developing countries in Asia (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka)	Middle Income	1976-2012	Quantitative
4	Imran Khan (2024)	India	Middle Income	1976-2021	Quantitative
5	Sae Woon Park, Sunhae Lee, and Surya Nepal (2020)	16 Developing countries in Asia	Middle Income	2002-2016	Quantitative

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6	Seyed Soroosh Azizi, Abed Aftabi, Mohsen Azizkhani, Kiana Yektansani (2023)	113 Developing countries	Low Income: 30 Countries; Middle Income: 83 Countries	1990-2015	Quantitative
7	Amna Zardoub, Faouzi Sboui (2020)	41 Developing countries	Low Income: 8 Countries; Middle Income: 33 Countries	1990-2016	Quantitative
8	Nur Siti Annazah, Ivan Lilin Suryono (2021)	Indonesia	Middle Income	1988-2018	Quantitative
9	Joseph Antwi Baafi, Michael Kwame Asiedu (2024)	23 Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa	Middle Income	1974-2020	Quantitative
10	Rossanto Dwi Handoyo, Angga Erlando, Ilham Septiyanto (2020)	Indonesia	Middle Income	1980-2017	Quantitative
11	Suryadi (2017)	Indonesia	Middle Income	2006-2016	Quantitative
12	Khairah Ukhtiyani, Setyabudi Indartono (2020)	Indonesia	Middle Income	1998-2018	Quantitative
13	Siti Imroatul Khuriyah, Agus Purnomo (2023)	Indonesia	Middle Income	-	Descriptive Quantitative
14	Noah Cheruiyot Mutai, Lawrence Ibeh, Manh Cuong Nguyen, Joyce Wangui Kiarie, Cynthia Ikamari (2024)	Kenya	Middle Income	1973-2021	Quantitative
15	Vincent Fromentin (2017)	102 Developing Countries	Low Income: 17 Countries; Middle Income: 85 Countries	1974-2014	Quantitative
16	Dietmar Meyer, Adela Shera (2016)	Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, give Bosnia and Herzegovina	Low Income: 1 Countries; Middle Income: 6 Countries	2000-2014	Quantitative
17	Dimitar Eftimoski, Dushko Josheski (2021)	CESEE Countries	Middle Income	2000-2014	Quantitative
18	Muhammad Javid, Umaima Arif, Abdul Qayyum (2012)	Pakistan	Middle Income	1973-2010	Quantitative
19	Hajer Kratou, Kaouthar Gazdar (2016)	MENA Countries	Low Income: 1 Countries; Middle Income: 8 Countries	1984-2011	Quantitative
20	Rasha Qutb (2022)	Egypt	Middle Income	1980-2017	Quantitative
21	Atif Awad, Abdala Sirag (2018)	Sudan	Low Income	1977-2015	Quantitative
22	Soma Rani Sutradhar (2020)	Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka	Middle Income	1977-2016	Quantitative

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The scope of the previous research chosen varied greatly. The countries included in the scope are developing countries from various regions in Asia, Europe, Africa, and South America, with various classifications or status of countries, such as low-income developing countries and middle-income countries. Some of the selected research only uses middle income or low income countries as the subject of the research. However, there is also a study that uses a combination of middle-income and low-income countries.

From Table 2, it can be seen that the 22 selected studies have one thing in common, namely the dependent variable or indicator used to measure the level of economic growth is Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Economic growth means a gradual increase in the growth rate of per capita income measured through a country's Gross Domestic Product (Afridi et al., 2024). Therefore, GDP or GDP is chosen as a benchmark to assess economic growth. In addition, 2 studies also used other variables to measure economic growth. They use GDP and credit as well as GDP and poverty as benchmarks for economic growth.

Table 2. Empirical Results of the Selected Research

No	Variable Dependency	Variable Independent	Empirical Results
1	GDP	Remittance	+
2	GDP	Remittance	+
3	GDP	Remittance	+
4	GDP	Remittance	+
5	GDP	Remittance	+
6	GDP	Remittance	-
7	GDP	Remittance	+
8	GDP	Remittance	+
9	GDP	Remittance	+
10	GDP	Remittance	-
11	GDP and Credit	Remittance	-
12	GDP	Remittance	-
13	-	Remittance	+
14	GDP	Remittance	+
15	GDP	Remittance	+
16	GDP	Remittance	+
17	GDP	Remittance	-
18	GDP and Poverty	Remittance	+
19	GDP	Remittance	+
20	GDP	Remittance	-
21	GDP	Remittance	-
22	GDP	Remittance	+

Because the researcher focuses on researching the influence of remittances on economic growth, the previous research that was chosen certainly used remittances as an independent variable. In addition to remittances, other variables are also used as other independent variables such as the number of migrant workers, consumption, exports, imports, free trade, Foreign Direct

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Investment (FDI), investment, savings, development assistance (ODA), deposits, interest rates, deposit rates, credit, money supply, liquid liability, broad money, exchange rates, inflation, world oil prices, government expenditure, government consumption, government debt, current account balance, GDP per capita growth, real GDP per capita, and Income per capita. In addition, several previous studies that were selected also used variables related to Human Resources, such as human capital, population, Human Development Index (HDI), labor force, percentage of working-age population, population growth annual, school/education enrollment ratio, and life expectancy. One of the studies by Khuriyah & Purnomo (2023), uses a descriptive quantitative method by collecting data through the dissemination of questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documentation. The method is used to find out how the pattern of remittance is used to improve the welfare of families in the country of origin.

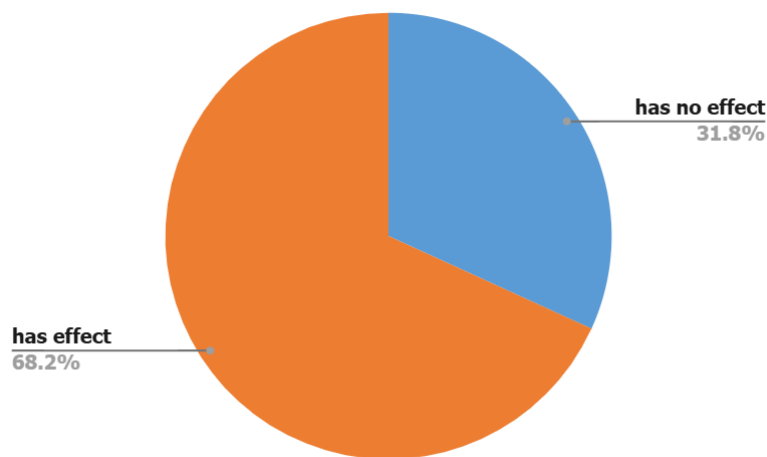


Figure 1. The percentage of the effect of remittances on economic growth from previous research

Furthermore, 15 studies out of 22 selected studies showed empirical results that remittances have a positive and significant influence on economic growth in the countries or scopes chosen by the researcher or equivalent to 68.2%. Meanwhile, 7 studies out of 22 selected studies or equivalent to 31.8% showed that remittances did not have a significant influence on economic growth in the countries or the scope of the research.

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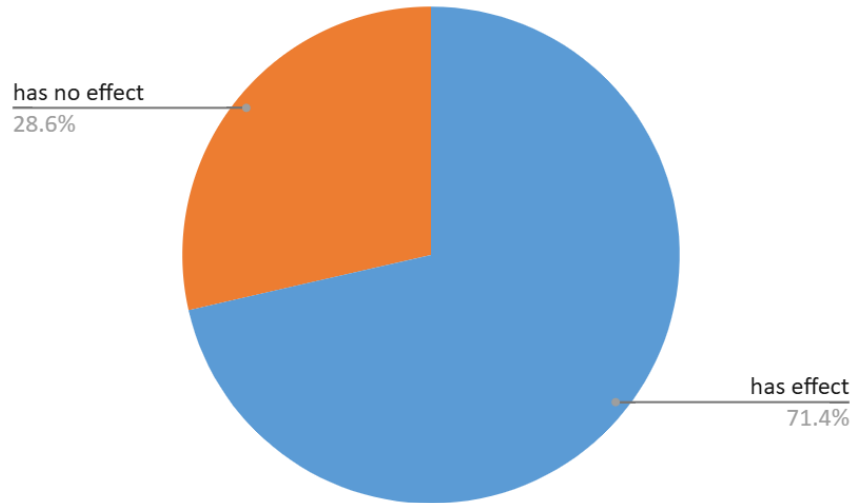


Figure 2. The percentage of the effect of remittances on economic growth from previous research at the level of Middle Income Countries

A total of 21 studies used developing countries with middle income status as the study subjects. Of these, 15 studies or 71.4% showed that remittances had an influence on economic growth, while the other 6 studies or 28.6% did not show an influence on economic growth.

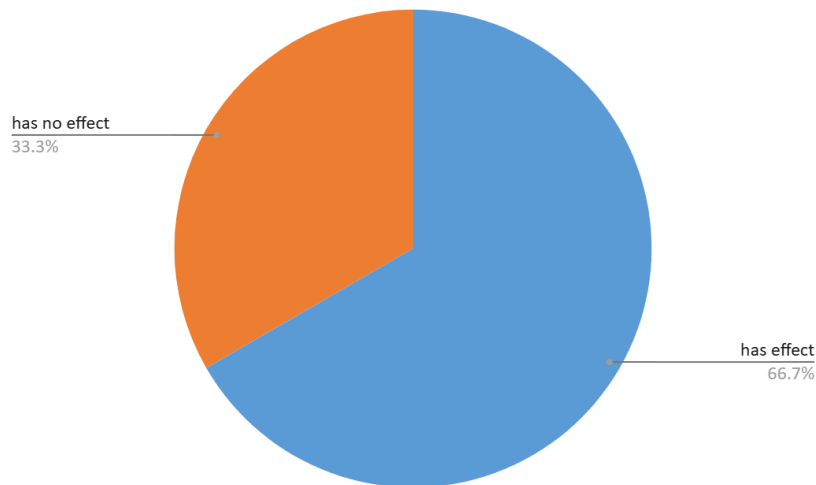


Figure 3. The percentage of the effect of remittances on economic growth from previous research at the level of Low Income Countries

Meanwhile, as many as 6 studies made developing countries with low income status as the subject of the study. From these studies, 4 studies or 66.7% showed that remittances have an influence on economic growth, while the other 2 studies or 33.3% concluded that remittances have no influence on economic growth.

Remittances of Migrant Workers in Middle Income Developing Countries

A total of 15 studies analyzed stated that remittances affect economic growth. Some studies have also shown that remittances can have an impact, both in the long term and in the short term. Research by Khan, 2024 & Mutai et al. (2024) states that remittances have an effect on economic growth in the short and long term. Meanwhile, according to Fromentin (2017); Kratou & Gazdar (2016); Mohamed Aslam & Alibuhtto (2024); Annazah & Suryono (2021), remittances only affect economic growth in the long term. The short-term impact of remittances on economic growth is conditional or depends on certain conditions. The impact is influenced by the level of financial development and institutional quality in a country (Kratou & Gazdar, 2016). Financial development and remittances are complementary. In fact, remittances can drive economic growth only in countries with good financial systems.

In addition, research conducted by Fromentin (2017) shows that remittances do not have an impact on short-term economic growth in developing countries with low income levels, but have an influence in the long term. Meanwhile, in developing countries with middle income, both lower middle income and upper middle income, remittances contribute to the country's economic conditions, both in the short and long term. The findings refer to the fact that the high number of remittances entering a country will increase the level of credit to banks so that it will move the financial sector of a country. Zardoub & Sboui (2023) also mentioned that remittances only affect economic growth if a country has an upper middle income. If a country has a lower middle income, then remittances are not significant to the level of economic growth.

In upper-middle-income countries, a more efficient and accessible financial system allows remittances and the development of the financial sector to complement each other in driving economic growth. In these countries, remittances are generally channeled through formal financial institutions and utilized for productive investments, thus contributing to improved household welfare and long-term economic development. On the other hand, remittances through informal channels—such as entrusting money to friends or relatives who are traveling—due to high transfer fees, tend to reduce the effectiveness of remittances in supporting economic growth (Zardoub & Sboui, 2023).

According to Azizi et al. (2024), in general, remittances do not have a significant impact on economic growth in developing countries. But when combined with human capital, the relationship becomes significant and positive. This shows that the effectiveness of remittances in driving economic growth is highly dependent on the level of human capital of a country; The higher the quality of human resources, the greater the influence of remittances on economic growth. These findings are in line with the neoclassical growth model put forward by Mankiw which emphasizes that economic growth is determined by the accumulation of physical capital and human capital (Annazah & Suryono, 2021). So the influence of remittances depends on the level of human capital of a country. If a developing country has a higher level of human capital,

then remittances are more influential than countries with low levels of human capital. Middle income countries that have relatively higher levels of human capital can drive higher labor productivity and wages. So that remittances sent by migrant workers to their families in their home countries can be maximized. It can also motivate households in the home country to stay employed and invest the remittances they receive for their family's investment and education. While remittances may not have a significant impact on economic growth in low-income countries, remittances can boost economic growth in middle-income countries.

Remittance of Migrant Workers in Low Income Developing Countries

Discussions related to the influence of remittances on economic growth in low-income developing countries have been described in several studies. According to Afridi et al. (2024); Zardoub & Sboui (2023) stated that remittances have no effect on economic growth in low-income countries. According to Afridi et al. (2024), remittances cannot contribute significantly to economic growth in a country that has a less developed financial system. In addition, sending remittances to the country of origin through informal channels, such as entrusting them to friends or relatives who travel abroad on the grounds of high transfer fees, makes remittances not have a significant impact on economic growth (Zardoub & Sboui, 2023).

Research by Awad & Sirag (2018); Azizi et al. (2024); Eftimoski & Josheski (2020); Handoyo et al. (2020); Suryadi (2017); Qutb (2022); Ukhtiyani & Indartono (2020) revealed that remittances have no effect on a country's economic growth. The findings are due to the fact that migrant workers from the origin who have sent remittances, carry out remittance transfers without using official channels (Awad & Sirag, 2018). In addition, the majority of studies reveal that remittances have no effect due to high household consumption expenditures. Excessive consumption from the household sector causes remittances to not have a significant impact on economic growth. This happens because the funds received are not used for investment or opening a business, so a sustainable economy is not achieved.

According to Azizi et al., 2024, the influence of remittances also depends on the level of human capital of a country. If a developing country has a higher level of human capital, then remittances are more influential than countries with low levels of human capital. Countries with lower levels of human capital in low-income countries result in relatively lower labor productivity and wages for households. As a result, lower wages can encourage households to stop working and use remittances for consumption rather than investment. In contrast, middle-income countries have relatively higher levels of human capital, resulting in higher labor productivity and wages. This can motivate households to keep working and invest the remittances they receive. As a result, while remittances may not have a significant impact on economic growth in low-income countries, remittances can boost economic growth in middle-income countries.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that migrant workers' remittances have a significant effect on economic growth in developing countries, although the effect is not uniform. Of the 22 studies analyzed through a *systematic literature review*, 68.2% showed that remittances contribute positively and significantly to economic growth, while the remaining 31.8% found no significant effect. The effect of remittances on economic growth is highly dependent on a country's income level and financial system. Several studies have shown that remittances can contribute to economic growth in the long and short term, but the impact depends on the financial system and the level of human capital. Developing countries with middle income are better able to optimize the benefits of remittances than countries with low income. This is due to supporting factors such as a more effective financial system and a better level of human capital. In contrast, low-income countries tend not to be able to maximize the potential of remittances due to weak financial infrastructure and low quality of human resources. Remittances have varying effects depending on the channel through which they are sent and how the funds are used. In countries with middle or higher incomes, remittances are often channeled through formal channels and used for productive investments in education, health, and production sectors that support economic growth. In contrast, in low-income countries, the use of informal channels for remittances and high household consumption make the impact of remittances on the economy insignificant. Finally, the human capital factor plays an important role in maximizing the positive impact of remittances on economic growth. Countries with higher levels of human capital have higher labor productivity and wages, which encourage households to focus more on investment rather than consumption. In contrast, countries with lower human capital often face difficulties in utilizing remittances productively, resulting in remittances being used more for consumption than for activities that can support long-term economic growth. Excessive consumption reduces the potential of remittances to encourage investments or business openings that can lead to a sustainable economy.

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