



**Gulf Research Centre Cambridge**  
Knowledge for All

Workshop 10

## **Determinants of Future Migration in the Gulf**

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### **Abstract**

During the last four decades, the percentage of non-nationals has steadily increased in the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Currently, almost half (48.1 percent) of the combined GCC population consists of non-nationals. The rise in proportion of expatriates is contrary to the desires and plans of the host countries. The objective of this workshop is to identify and discuss the factors that are likely to be central in determining the future trends in the volume, pace, and shape of future migrant inflows to the GCC countries. Factors determining the future migration to the Gulf will continue to originate in the sending countries as well as the GCC countries, as in the past. In the sending countries, the slow pace of social and economic development combined with relatively high population growth rates continues to result in high rates of unemployment and underemployment, leading to overseas migration. This is perceived by the sending country governments as a “safety valve” and has become an attractive alternative for migrants looking for better economic opportunities in life.

In the Gulf countries, the extensive plans for infrastructure and socioeconomic development continue to necessitate the inflow of foreign workers not available

indigenously. The supply of indigenous workers remains low as a result of the relatively small population base in most of the GCC countries, low rates of female work participation, and the concentration of nationals in public sector jobs that make up a relatively smaller part of the economy. Efforts to nationalise the labour force have been marginally successful. In addition, a tendency towards maximising the length of stay in the Gulf is found among migrants, resulting in the growth of a second and third generation that considers the Gulf as home. The long-term stay of foreign workers is accompanied by the growth of extensive networks of friends and relatives that aid the migrants' ability to prolong their stay in the Gulf. Finally, the recent wave of political unrest in the Arab region may be an important factor that may heighten migration to the Gulf in future.

## Workshop Description and Rationale

Contrary to the plans and desires of the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the proportion of non-citizens in the Gulf has steadily increased during the last four decades. Country-based data reveal that the percentage of non-nationals comprised 48.1 percent of the total population of 48.1 million GCC residents (Table 1). A very significant difference exists in the proportion of non-nationals in the various GCC countries, ranging from 32.0 percent in Saudi Arabia to 88.5 percent in the United Arab Emirates.

*Table 1: Total population, and percentage of nationals and non-nationals, latest year*

Country	Total population	% Nationals	% Non-nationals
Bahrain (2010) <sup>a</sup>	1,234,571	46.0	54.0
Kuwait (mid-2013) <sup>b</sup>	3,891,943	31.5	68.5
Oman (mid-2013) <sup>c</sup>	3,855,206	56.3	43.7
Qatar (2010) <sup>d</sup>	1,699,435	14.3	85.7
Saudi Arabia (2012) <sup>e</sup>	29,195,895	67.9	32.1
United Arab Emirates (2010) <sup>f</sup>	8,264,070	11.5	88.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>48,141,120</b>	<b>51.9</b>	<b>48.1</b>

(a) CIO, Census 2010; (b) PACI, Oct. 2013; (c) NCSI, *Bulletin of Population Statistics* n°3, 2013; (d) QSA, Census 2010; (e) CDSI, <http://www.cdsi.gov.sa/english/index.php>; (f) [www.uaestatistics.gov.ae](http://www.uaestatistics.gov.ae)

GCC countries share many of the policies that they have instituted during the last two decades for limiting the number of non-nationals in their populations and the labour force. Such policies include ones related to maximising the number of nationals through high fertility and participation of women in the labour force. At the same time, active efforts are being made to restrict the inflow of foreign workers. Despite the heightened efforts aimed at restricting the percentage of non-nationals, the outflows from the major sending countries in Asia show an upward trend (Shah 2012), as do the inflows to the six GCC countries (Fargues and Brouwer 2012).

Two of the main reasons for the increasing percentages of non-nationals are the continued need of the labour force for foreign workers and the exacerbating stock of foreign workers in the GCC countries. While data on the duration of stay of non-nationals are not available for any of the countries in a systematic manner, observation suggests that migration to the Gulf is not a “temporary” phenomenon as conceived and planned by the governments. Once in the Gulf, migrants are able to prolong their stay for several years. Those who are allowed to bring their families with them are able to produce a second generation of migrants in the host countries. A recent study from Kuwait shows that about 18 percent of all non-nationals were born in the country. Among high school students who were born in the country, about one-third of the parents were also born in Kuwait, implying that the students were in fact third generation (Shah 2013).

Factors that affect the volume and pace of migration originate in the sending countries as well as in the Gulf. In the sending countries, the relatively low rate of socioeconomic development combined with a high rate of population growth in many of the South and Southeast Asian countries ensures a continued supply of inexpensive labour that is willing and able to move to the Gulf countries to benefit from higher wages paid there, relative to those in their home countries. Labour migration continues to be encouraged by the sending countries as a means of reducing unemployment and enhancing foreign exchange earnings. Effective regulatory mechanisms have been developed by several Asian countries to maximise outflows and simultaneously increase the protection and welfare of their emigrating workers. In addition, vast social networks of foreign workers and their families have been established within the Gulf countries that support chain migration and the enlargement of the stock of workers.

In the Gulf countries, extensive plans for infrastructure and socioeconomic development continue to necessitate the import of foreign workers in view of the small number of indigenous workers. In addition, foreign workers are needed to fill many jobs in the private sector that the citizens are reluctant to take up e.g., construction and factory related jobs. Citizens prefer to work in public sector jobs that are less arduous and less competitive. The supply of indigenous workers is also curtailed by the limited participation of women in the labour force. Gulf governments have made concerted efforts to increase the education and skill level of women and their participation in the workforce has been rising. However, most employed women are concentrated in the public sector and in a limited number of occupations (e.g., teaching and clerical work).

With the rising personal income of Gulf citizens, a new dimension has been added to the lifestyle in the form of the rapid rise in demand for domestic workers. Large numbers of domestic workers from the Philippines, Indonesia, India, and Sri Lanka have arrived during the last 3-4 decades to work in the Gulf. Most are sponsored by individual families and work for them. Some are sponsored by families (for a fee) but engage in freelance work which is considered illegal. The experience of Kuwait highlights the enormity of this phenomenon. In a population of 2.2 million legal foreign residents, the country had 607,667 persons (26.4 percent) on a domestic service visa in 2012 (Ministry of Interior data available in the GLMM Database).

The wave of protest and political unrest that spread over the Arab region in recent years might have an impact on migration to the Gulf States. Unrest in Bahrain may have produced some outflows from the country, while revolts in Egypt, Syria, and Yemen must be expected to affect flows of migration to the GCC. One cannot predict the long-term impact of the Arab Spring on migration, which will be anything from return migration, if revolts end up bringing freedom, democracy and well-being, to increased emigration if they fail to do so. In the short term, however, it is increased emigration pressure which is observed. How much of that pressure is exerted on the GCC countries and how do GCC governments receive migrants from countries where there is political unrest are questions still to be answered.

Finally, the attitudes and perception of the nationals towards foreigners is likely to be an important factor in how “welcome” or “unwelcome” the foreigners feel. The general treatment accorded to foreigners by nationals may influence a migrant’s decision to continue staying in a Gulf country or to return home, or move to another country. A two way association probably exists between the citizens’ perceptions of foreigners and government policies relating to foreigners. Both may impact future decisions about whether to bring in foreign workers.

## **Anticipated Papers**

The main goal of this workshop is to identify and discuss the factors that seem most likely to determine the pace, volume and shape of future migrant inflows to the Gulf countries. Such factors might include social, political, economic, legal and others. The workshop plans to specifically highlight the following themes in relation to their impact on future migration:

- Socioeconomic development in South and Southeast Asia
- Reliance on Gulf migration as a “safety valve” for sending countries
- Economic health of the GCC countries
- Pace of infrastructure and socioeconomic development in the GCC countries
- Political and social unrest in the GCC countries and in the sending countries
- Labour force nationalization policies in the Gulf
- Women’s participation in the labour force in the GCC countries
- “Semi-permanence” of migrants to the GCC countries
- Policies of the GCC countries regarding future migration to the Gulf
- Attitudes and perceptions of Gulf citizens towards migrants and their families.

Those who will submit a paper proposal are strongly encouraged to take note of, and possibly use, the data made available at the Gulf Labour Markets and Migration programme’s website.

## Workshop Director Profiles

**Nasra M. Shah** is Professor of Demography at the Department of Community Medicine and Behavioral Sciences at the Faculty of Medicine, Kuwait University. She received her doctoral degree in Population Dynamics from the Johns Hopkins University, School of Public Health, Baltimore, USA. Before joining Kuwait University, she worked in Hawaii, USA and Pakistan. Her research has focused on various themes including the role of social factors in infant and child mortality; predictors of fertility and contraceptive use; women's role and status; utilization of health services; and psychosocial and physical health of older persons. Labor migration, especially from Asia to oil-rich Gulf countries, has been a consistent theme in her research. During the 1990s, she participated in the IOM/UNFPA global project on emigration dynamics, chairing the South Asia region. Her migration related research includes analyses of socioeconomic profiles and economic progress of migrant workers, domestic worker migration, violence against women migrants, increasingly restrictive policies of host countries, irregular migration, and the role of social networks in migration. She was a member of the International Advisory Board of the 2010 World Migration Report by IOM. She serves as a member of the Editorial Boards of Asian and Pacific Migration Journal; Migration and Development; and International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health. Her many publications include the books "Asian Labor Migration: Pipeline to the Middle East"; "Pakistani Women: Basic Needs, Women and Development"; and "Population of Kuwait: Structure and Dynamics."

**Philippe Fargues** is a sociologist and demographer. He is currently the Director of the Migration Policy Centre at the European University Institute, the founding Director of the Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration (CARIM) and Director of the Migration Summer School. He has been Director of the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies at the American University in Cairo, a senior researcher at the French National Institute for Demographic Studies in Paris, a visiting professor at Harvard, and the Director of the Centre for Economic Legal and Social Studies (CEDEJ) in Cairo. His research interests include migration and refugee movements, population and politics in Muslim countries, family building, and demography and development. He has extensively published on these topics and lectured in a number of universities in Europe, America, Africa and the Middle East. Fargues' most recent publications include: "International Migration and the Nation State in Arab Countries" (Middle East Law and Governance, Toronto, 2013); "Demography, Migration and Revolt in the South of the Mediterranean" (in Arab Society in Revolt, Brookings, Washington, 2012); "Immigration without Inclusion: Non-Nationals in Nation-Building in the Gulf States" (Asian and Pacific Migration Journal 2011); "International Migration and the Demographic Transition: a Two-Way Interaction" (International Migration Review, 2011).

## Selected Readings

Fargues P. and I. Brouwer. "GCC Demography and Immigration: Challenges and Policies." In *National Employment, Migration and Education in the GCC*, ed. S. Hertog (Cambridge: Gerlach Press, 2012), 241-73.

GLMM - Gulf Labor Market and Migration database: [gulfmigration.eu](http://gulfmigration.eu).

Shah, N.M. "Socio-demographic Transitions among nationals of GCC Countries: Implications for migration and Labour force Trends." In *Migration and Development* 1:1, (2012): 138-148.

Shah, N.M. "Second Generation Non-nationals in Kuwait: Achievements, Aspirations and Plans." Research Paper, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalization in Gulf States. London School of Economics and Political Science, 2013