



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

Workshop 6

The Future of Population and Migration in the Gulf

**(Sponsored by the Gulf Labour Markets, Migration
and Population (GLMM) Programme)**

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Abstract

An era of exceptionally fast population growth and migration in the Arab Gulf States may well be ending. Extremely fast population growth in the Gulf has been generated by two factors: rapid natural increase of national populations and unmatched rates of net migration in response to tens of millions of jobs. Sustained low oil prices now prompt States to downscale gigantic infrastructure schemes relying on mostly low-skilled migrant workforce and to manage a shift from labour-intensive to capital-intensive projects. High rates of unemployment and shrinking resources heighten the negative perceptions of foreign workers resulting in increased restrictions on their hiring as well as the imposition of taxes in several different forms. These changes pose several important questions for the future which the workshop will address.

Description and Rationale

An era of exceptionally fast population growth and migration in the Arab Gulf States may well be ending.

For the last five decades or more, migration and demographic trends in the Arab Gulf States (Table 1) have been driven by oil and gas wealth. Between 1950 and 2015 these states have had the world's highest rates of overall demographic growth: their total population multiplied by a factor ranging from 10 (Oman and Saudi Arabia) to 100 or more (Bahrain and UAE), compared with a less than threefold increase of the world's population.

Extremely fast population growth in the Gulf is generated by two factors. First, rapid natural increase of national populations, resulting from high (though declining) levels of fertility and low death rates. The above demographic transition has been enabled by states generously subsidizing their citizens' families and health. The second factor consists of unmatched rates of net migration in response to tens of millions of job opportunities created by firms (e.g. construction) and households (domestic services). Specific patterns of migration characterized by the predominance of mostly unaccompanied men and specific legislations not granting migrants access to citizenship explain uniquely high sex ratios and proportions of foreign citizens. Such a pattern is not indefinitely reproducible, however.

Table 1: Selected demographic indicators in Arab Gulf States

Country	Demographic multiplier 1950-2015 (1)	Sex ratio In 2015 (M/F) (2)	Foreign nationals in 2015 (%) (3)	Rate of population growth in 2010-2015 (%)	
				Nationals (4)	Foreigners (5)
Bahrain	11,9	177,6	53%	4,2%	11,8%
Kuwait	25,6	179,1	70%	3,0%	3,7%
Oman	9,8	217,1	46%	2,6%	9,5%
Qatar	89,4	378,3	91%	2,6%	8,9%
Saudi Arabia	10,1	138,3	37%	1,4%	5,9%
UAE	131,6	357,4	89%	2,8%	16,0%
<i>World average</i>	2.9	101,8	< 3%	1,2%	

Sources: (1), (2) UNDESA, Population Prospects 2015; (3), (4), (5) GLMM Demographic-Economic Database.

On the other side, oil and gas economies are reaching a key turning point. Sustained low oil prices now prompt States to downscale gigantic infrastructure schemes relying on mostly low-skilled migrant workforce and to manage a shift from labour-intensive to capital-intensive projects. The availability of rising numbers of young, educated nationals is seen as an asset for building knowledge-based post-oil economies. However, currently high level of unemployment among nationals of some Gulf countries risks challenging the social order. High rates of unemployment and shrinking resources heighten the negative perceptions of foreign workers resulting in increased restrictions on their hiring as well as the imposition of taxes in several different forms. There is a growing vision among the rulers and government that the old social contract based on oil income's redistribution (through generous state subsidies, the lack of direct taxation, employment by a plethoric public sector, etc.) must now give way to a new social contract that will be based on the active participation of citizens in public affairs, including the production of national wealth. But this is not popular with the nationals many of whom believe that government subsidies are their right by virtue of citizenship.

The above changes pose several important questions for the future: For example, how rapidly will fertility decline occur resulting in the slackening of the rate of natural increase? How will behaviours of nationals change in terms of work preferences and adjustment of lifestyles? How will attitudes towards migrant workers impact the future demand for such workers? Will this affect the demand for Asian vs. Arab workers? What will the social, economic and political impacts of return migration on home countries be? How will the declining economic situation of Gulf countries affect the economic and social situation of migrants in the Gulf?

Anticipated Participants

The workshop will gather scholars from a variety of disciplines (demography, economics, sociology and others). Selected papers will address one or more of the three following aspects:

- 1) determinants of change in migration and population patterns;
- 2) scenarios and projection of future migration and population trends;
- 3) possible consequences of these trends, for the Gulf as well as the major sending countries.

They will combine country case studies in the Gulf with regional analyses at Gulf level and papers focusing on broader migratory systems, notably the two systems linking

South-Asia and Arab states to the Gulf. Case studies on countries of origin will also be included.

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, USA. She is the Scientific Co-Director of the Gulf Labor Market and Migration Program (<http://gulfmigration.eu/>) with Philippe Fargues. Labor migration, especially from Asian to oil-rich Gulf countries, has been a consistent theme in her multi-faceted research interests. Her numerous migration-related publications focus on: socioeconomic profiles and economic progress of migrant workers, domestic worker migration, violence against women migrants, increasingly restrictive policies of host countries, the role of social networks in migration, second generation non-nationals in the Gulf, and irregular migration. Her recent publications on migration include: *Skillful Survivals. Irregular Migration to the Gulf* (with Philippe Fargues, GRC, Cambridge, forthcoming 2016). Her other books include *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 the founding Director of the Migration Policy Centre at the European University Institute, in Florence, Italy, and an Affiliate at Harvard Kennedy School. He has held senior positions at the National Institute for Demographic Studies in Paris and the American University in Cairo and taught at Harvard and various universities in France, the Middle East, and Africa. His research interests include migration, population and politics, demography and development. His recent publications include: *Skillful Survivals. Irregular Migration to the Gulf* (with Nasra Shah, GRC, Cambridge, forthcoming 2016); *Migration from North Africa and the Middle East: Skilled Migrants, Development and Globalisation* (IB Tauris, 2015), *Is What We Hear about Migration Really True? Questioning Eight Migration Stereotypes* (EUI, 2014); *International Migration and the Nation State in Arab Countries* (Middle East Law and Governance, 2013); *Demography, Migration and Revolt in the South of the Mediterranean* (Brookings, 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

Baldwin-Edwards, Martin, 2011, "Labour Immigration and Labour Markets in the GCC countries: National Patterns and Trends." London School of Economics - Kuwait Programme Paper, March 2011, No. 15 - https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/55239/1/Baldwin-Edwards_2011.pdf

Clemens, Michael 2013, "Seizing the Spotlight: A Case for Gulf Cooperation Council Engagement in Research on the Effects of Labor Migration," Essay, July 2013 - <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/seize-spotlight-labor-migration.pdf>.

Fargues Philippe & Françoise de Bel-Air, 2015, "Migration to the Gulf States: The Political Economy of Exceptionalism," in Acosta Arcarazo D. & and Wiesbrock A., *Global Migration: Old Assumptions, New Dynamics*, Praeger, pp. 139-166.

Forstenlechner, Ingo and Emilie Jane Rutledge 2012, "The GCC's "Demographic Imbalance": Perceptions, Realities and Policy Options, Middle East Policy Council, Vol. XVIII, Winter, No. 4, <http://www.mepc.org/journal/gccs-demographic-imbalance-perceptions-realities-and-policy-options?print>"

GLMM, Demographic and Economic Database - <http://gulfmigration.eu/glmm-database/demographic-and-economic-module/>.

Shah, Nasra M., 2012, "Socio-demographic transitions among nationals of GCC countries: Implications for migration and labour force trends," *Migration and Development*, Vol1, No. 11, pp. 138-148.

Shah, Nasra M. and Constance A. Nathanson, 2004, "Parental perceptions of costs and benefits of children as correlates of fertility in Kuwait," *Journal of Biosocial Science*. Vol. 36, No. 6, pp. 663-682.

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *The 2017 Revision of World Population Prospects* - <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/>

Key Data Source

The workshop directors strongly encourage the use of the GLMM demographic and economic database: <http://gulfmigration.eu/glmm-database/demographic-and-economic-module/>.

Strategic Plans of the GCC countries

The following are all current strategic plans of the Arab Gulf countries. The directors encourage the use of them in the papers.

Bahrain. From Regional Pioneer to Global Contender: The Economic Vision 2030 for Bahrain.

Document: <http://www.bahrain.bh/wps/wcm/connect/38f53f2f-9ad6-423d-9c96-2dbf17810c94/Vision%2B2030%2BEnglish%2B%28low%2Bresolution%29.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>

Presentation: http://www.bahrain.bh/wps/portal/!ut/p/a1/jdBND4IwDAbg3-KBK61MAb1NowKBaEAUdzGYzKIBZiaKP1_UE373tuZ503bAIAGWp-etSIutzNPs9mbm0hmj2TRsw8NpPEQ6jlqOP3AIhIYFFjVAyKACpjWxZh3DtPG_PBpBv-m2KhAEiNTuhf502EcckT_zH4r-nB_xHObAntjrFXfwbc0H-LyHB0xkcX_0wXNV8QWwBRfc8WVfIJVe1MUh2NXQw3LstSFICLj-lpp-C6xkccCkhqEwz6Ok4u7a2dnn9JG4wowbBwv/dl5/d5/L2dBISEvZ0FBIS9nQSEh/

Kuwait. New Kuwait 2035.

Document (overview) : https://s3.amazonaws.com/assets.newkuwait.gov.kw/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/KNDP_Inforgraphics_ProjectOverview_ENG.pdf

Website: <http://www.newkuwait.gov.kw/en/>

More description of plan's objectives:

https://www.fairobserver.com/region/middle_east_north_africa/kuwait-economy-reform-gulf-news-analysis-01377/; <http://www.thearabweekly.com/Economy/7766/Kuwait-launches-ambitious-development-plan>

Oman. Oman Vision 2020

Document: not available.

Website: <https://www.scp.gov.om/en/Page.aspx?I=14>

Qatar. Qatar National Vision 2030

Document: https://www.mdps.gov.qa/en/qnv/Documents/QNV2030_English_v2.pdf

Website: <https://www.mdps.gov.qa/en/qnv1/Pages/default.aspx>

Saudi Arabia. Saudi Vision 2030

Document: http://www.vision2030.gov.sa/sites/default/files/report/Saudi_Vision2030_EN_2017.pdf

Website: <http://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en>

United Arab Emirates.

UAE Vision 2021: United in Ambition and Determination

Document: <https://www.vision2021.ae/sites/default/files/uae-vision2021-brochure-english.pdf>

Website: <https://www.vision2021.ae/en/our-vision>

UAE Centennial Plan 2071

Website: <https://government.ae/en/about-the-uae/uae-future>

Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030

Document: <http://www.tdic.ae/TDICWSAssets/En/pdf/Abu-Dhabi-Economic-Vision-2030.pdf>

Dubai Plan 2021

Document : <https://www.dubaiplan2021.ae/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/DP2021Booklet-%D9%83%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%AF%D8%A8%D9%8A-2021.pdf>

Website: <https://www.dubaiplan2021.ae/dubai-plan-2021/>