



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge

Knowledge for All

Workshop 4

Socio-economic Impacts of GCC Migration

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Introduction and Background

The six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are the largest recipients of temporary migrants in the world constituting almost 43 percent of their population (Table 1). In some countries such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, more than 80 percent of the population consists of non-nationals. Despite this extreme imbalance, policies that exclude non-nationals from the possibility of becoming citizens of the GCC countries continue to persist. A majority of all migrants to the region are contract workers, who in some cases are accompanied by their families.

Table 1: National and foreign populations in the GCC countries from 1975 to 2010

Year	Absolute numbers			Percentage		Annual rate of growth	
	Total	National	Foreign	National	Foreign	National	Foreign
1975	9,731,259	8,790,223	941,036	90.3%	9.7%	3.2%	14.5%
1990	22,522,620	14,281,239	8,241,381	63.4%	36.6%	3.3%	5.0%
2010	41,093,624	23,536,409	17,557,215	57.3%	42.7%		

Source: National Offices of Statistics (Fargues, 2011)

While discrepancies regarding the absolute number of migrants in various countries sometimes exist between sources, migration scholars generally agree on the following dimensions that typify the trends, patterns and characteristics of migration to the region.

- (1) An upward trend in the proportion of foreigners has persisted during the last two decades despite concerted policies and efforts to reduce the number of non-nationals in the population and labor force through indigenization of the workforce.
- (2) A consistent shift from Arab to Asian workers has taken place over time with the result that a majority of all foreign workers in most GCC countries are now Asian.
- (3) About two-thirds of all migrant workers are men while the rest are women.
- (4) Among men, more than half are engaged in low-skilled occupations in the production and labor occupational category, or in the service sector.
- (5) A large majority (more than three-fourth) of all Asian women migrants are concentrated in a single occupation, domestic service.
- (6) Reliance on domestic workers has been increasing in all GCC countries and such workers comprise about 10 percent of the total population in some countries such as Kuwait.
- (7) A negligible proportion of low-skilled men and women are accompanied in the Gulf by their spouses and children, even though a majority (70-80 percent) are married.
- (8) The six major sending Asian countries are India, Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. However, an increased diversification of sending Asian countries, such as Nepal and Viet Nam, has also occurred.
- (9) Reliance on foreign workers is a result of many factors including small indigenous populations insufficient to fulfill the ambitious development plans, preference among nationals for public sector jobs, and relatively low labor force participation of indigenous women.
- (10) Finally, migration to the GCC countries is “temporary” more in name than in practice. Many workers live in the Gulf for many years and the pool of 2nd and 3rd generation migrants is expanding.

Impacts on Social and Economic Life

The above summarization of migration to the Gulf highlights two key points. First, the process of GCC migration is likely to have wide ranging impacts not only on the receiving countries but also on the sending countries. Second, these impacts are likely to occur at the societal, community, family and individual levels.

Systematic and objective research based on empirical data on the social and economic impacts of GCC migration is scarce. A few observations and research findings for the receiving countries may be summarized as follows. General perceptions of nationals within the receiving countries, expressed in the popular press, usually bemoan the negative impacts on the upbringing of children and on culture in general. Government policies to reduce the proportion of non-nationals are supported by public perceptions. Also, it is generally believed that if the number of nationals is increased (through high birth rates) this would naturally result in the decline of foreigners. We are not aware of any systematic surveys among nationals that measure the native population's attitudes and beliefs about the socioeconomic implications of foreigners' presence. Some studies

indicating the impact of domestic workers on living arrangements and care of elderly persons have been published. It has been reported, for example, that the probability of nucleation of families is aided by the presence of domestic workers in Kuwait. Also, the lack of co-resident children increases the probability of care by domestic workers in the country (Shah et al. 2010 and Shah et al. 2011).

In the case of sending countries, some findings on the socioeconomic impacts of GCC migration are available. These are usually based on small scale surveys. Results from studies on the impacts on families left behind present a mixed picture. Some point to the negative impacts on children in the absence of mothers (and fathers), such as loneliness and poor performance at school. Others point to the gain in status by wives whose husband is a bread earner in the Gulf. Studies on the use of remittances by households with a migrant worker in the Gulf often indicate that remittances are frequently used for 'non-productive' expenditures such as marriages, and building or renovation of homes. Several studies report that the cost of migration is often high and funds for the move are raised by the sale of wife's jewelry or land, and may result in a high degree of indebtedness.

Goals of the Workshop – Anticipated Papers

The goals of this workshop are to share research findings on the socioeconomic impacts of GCC migration on sending as well as receiving countries, based on scientific, empirical studies on the following themes:

- 1) Impacts of GCC migration on:
 - Spouses and children situated in sending countries
 - Change in gender roles and gender relations in sending countries
 - Remittance behaviors and use of remittances in sending countries
 - Structure of families and living arrangements in GCC countries
 - Lifestyle and normative changes in GCC countries

- 2) The role of domestic workers in:
 - Care of the children and elderly in GCC countries
 - Facilitating labor force participation of indigenous women

- 3) Relatively unexplored research areas such as:
 - Plans and aspirations of 2nd generation expatriates in the Gulf
 - Social interaction between nationals and non-nationals in the Gulf
 - Perceptions of identity and identity threat among Gulf nationals
 - Social networks among non-nationals in the Gulf
 - Psychological and physical health of migrant workers

Workshop Director Profiles

Prof. Philippe Fargues is a sociologist and demographer. He is currently Migration Programme Director at the European University Institute, the founding Director of the Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration (CARIM) and co-Director of the Florence School on Euro-Mediterranean Migration and Development. He has been founding Director of the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies Program at the American University in Cairo, a senior researcher and head of the unit 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, demographic methodologies and their application to developing countries. He has numerous publications and has lectured in various universities in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. His most recent publications include *Mediterranean Migration Report 2008/2009*; *Work, Refuge, Transit: An Emerging Pattern of Irregular Immigration South and East of the Mediterranean* (*International Migration Review*, 2009, 43/3); *Emerging Demographic Patterns across the Mediterranean and their Implications for Migration through 2030* (Migration Policy Institute, 2009); *The Demographic Benefit of International Migration: Hypothesis and Application to Middle Eastern and North African Contexts* (*International Migration, Economic Development and Policy*, The World Bank and Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); and his books include: *Generations Arabs, Christians and Jews Under Islam*, *The Economy of the Middle East in a Prospect of Peace*, *The Atlas of the Arab World – Geopolitics and Society*.

Prof. Nasra Shah, a Demographer/Sociologist, received her doctoral degree in Population Dynamics from the Johns Hopkins University, School of Public Health, Baltimore, USA. Before joining the Faculty of Medicine at Kuwait University in 1988, she worked in Hawaii, USA and Pakistan. Her research has focused on labor migration from Asia to the Gulf, 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 the importance of social networks in psychosocial health of older persons. Her many publications include books on Pakistani Women, Asian Labour Migration, Basic Needs, Women and Development, and Population of Kuwait: Structure and Dynamics.

Suggested Readings

Fargues, Philippe. Immigration without Inclusion: Non-nationals in Gulf State Nation Building. Presented at the 2011 Gulf Research Meeting (Workshop 12, Migration in the Gulf) July 6-9, 2011, University of Cambridge.

Hugo, Graeme J. Migration as a Survival Strategy: The Family Dimension of Migration. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division Population Distribution and Migration, Proceedings of the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Population Distribution and Migration, Santa Cruz, Bolivia, 18-22 January, 1998.

Louer, Laurence. The Political Impact of Labor Migration in Bahrain. *City and Society* 20, no. 1 (2008):32-53.

Shah, Nasra M., E. Hanan Badr, and Makhdoom A. Shah. Foreign Live-in Domestic Workers as Caretakers of Older Kuwaiti Men and Women: Socioeconomic and Health Correlates. *Ageing and Society*, Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Shah, Nasra M., E. Hanan Badr, Kathryn Yount, and A. Makhdoom Shah. Decline in Co-residence of Parents and Children among Older Kuwaiti Men and Women: What Are the Significant Correlates? *Journal of Cross Cultural Gerontology* 26 (2011):157-174