



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

Workshop 9

Migration Policies in the Gulf: Continuity and Change

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Abstract

Host countries in the Gulf and a majority of origin countries differ in their views and policies on migration, consistent with an apparently universal rule. While the former regard immigrants as a threat the latter view their emigrants as benefactors. At the sending end, there is the belief that emigrants will improve the lives of the families and communities left behind. At the receiving end, there is the fear that immigrants will bring to their hosts some of the problems that pushed them to move and may disrupt the traditional social order. Such fears are likely to have been exacerbated by the rising levels of unemployment among Gulf nationals, even though nationals and migrants do not compete for the same jobs.

The objective of this workshop is to take stock of major policies of host as well as origin countries in order to arrive at a better understanding of the continuity and change in such policies and the factors motivating such changes. In the case of host countries, the workshop focuses especially on policies relating to efforts aimed at restricting future migration, reducing dependence on foreign workers, ensuring protection and decent work

for migrants, increasing women's participation in the workforce, curb irregular migration, enhance collaboration and cooperation with sending countries etc. In the case of origin countries, the workshop focuses especially on policies designed to enhance and maintain labor migration, regulate and oversee the work of intermediaries that facilitate migration, ensure protection and worker welfare in host countries, foster money transfers, curb irregular migration, and cooperation with host countries to attain orderly and legal migration. Monitoring systems to evaluate the success of various policies are often missing. Thus the workshop will attempt to assess the implementation and impact of migration-related policies of various countries.

Description and Rationale

In responding to the United Nations queries about their views and policies on immigration, almost all Gulf countries regard the level to be too high and state that they have policies to reduce it. In contrast, a majority of the countries from which migrants to the Gulf originate state that they are either satisfied with the level of emigration from their countries or regard it as too low and would like to raise it or at least maintain the level (Table 1).

Source and host states in the region conform to an apparently universal rule, with the former viewing their emigrants as benefactors and the latter regarding immigrants as a threat. At the sending end, there is the belief that emigrants will improve the lives of the families and communities left behind. While, at the receiving end, there is the fear that immigrants will bring to their hosts some of the problems that pushed them to move, and may disrupt the traditional social order. Such fears are likely to have been exacerbated by the rising levels of unemployment among Gulf nationals, even though nationals and migrants do not compete for the same jobs.

The respective contradictory goals have resulted in a multitude of rules, regulations, and laws that have provided policy guidelines for managing migration from the origin to host countries. Several of these policies go back to the advent of large scale labor migration to the Gulf countries starting in 1970s and 1980s, as does the divergence of policies between the host and origin countries. Many of the policies have become more refined and specific over time. During the last two decades, some have been implemented more vigorously than before. Moreover, while policies on immigration (regulating entry, stay, work, rights, etc.) are as old as nations themselves, emigration and diaspora policies are in most cases recent, a fact which makes migration a matter for international relations, such as the Colombo and Abu Dhabi processes in Asia.

The objective of this workshop is to take stock of major policies of host as well as origin countries in order to arrive at a better understanding of the continuity and change in such policies and the factors motivating such changes. In the case of host countries, we will focus especially on policies relating to efforts aimed at restricting future migration, reducing dependence on foreign workers, ensuring protection and decent work for migrants, increasing women's participation in the workforce, curbing irregular migration, enhancing collaboration and cooperation with sending countries etc. In the case of origin countries, we will focus on policies designed to enhance and maintain labor migration, regulate and oversee the work of intermediaries that facilitate migration, ensure protection and worker welfare in host countries, foster money transfers, curb irregular migration, and cooperation with host countries to attain orderly and legal migration.

While it is important to document the continuity and change in major policies regulating migration to Gulf countries, it is equally important to assess the degree to which such policies achieve their intended goals. Though firm conclusions about the effectiveness of different policies are difficult to make in the absence of well-designed monitoring systems, an attempt will be made to assess the implementation and impact of source and host states' migration-related policies, to the extent possible.

Table 1: Mismatch between views and policies of host (GCC) countries on immigration, and views and policies on emigration of major origin countries, 2013

GCC Host Country	View of immigration	Policy on immigration
Bahrain	Too High	Lower
Kuwait	Too High	Lower
Oman	Satisfactory	Maintain
Qatar	Too High	Lower
Saudi Arabia	Too High	Lower
UAE	Too High	Maintain

Major Origin Country (Asian)	View of emigration	Policy on emigration
Bangladesh	Too Low	Raise
India	Satisfactory	Maintain
Indonesia	Too Low	Raise
Nepal	Satisfactory	Raise
Pakistan	Satisfactory	Raise
Philippines	Satisfactory	Maintain

Sri Lanka	Satisfactory	Maintain
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Major Origin Country (Arab)	View of emigration	Policy on emigration
Egypt	Too Low	Maintain
Ethiopia	Satisfactory	No Intervention
Jordan	Too Low	Raise

Source: UN, *Population Policies 2013*, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/policy/WPP2013/wp2013.pdf>

Anticipated Participants

The workshop will give preference to papers that focus on policies relating to the following topics:

- Wage protection initiatives in the Gulf
- Measuring and assessing working and living conditions of migrant workers in the Gulf
- Success of programs aimed at enhancing female work participation in the Gulf
- Protection of the most vulnerable groups, e.g., domestic workers
- Programs to enhance skill levels to increase competitiveness in a tightening labor market among migrants from origin countries
- Controlling fraudulent practices surrounding migration in origin and host countries
- Managing and reducing recruitment costs in migration
- Vision and planning for return migration

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

De Bel-Air, Françoise (2015), "[The Socio-political Background and Stakes of 'Saudizing' the Workforce in Saudi Arabia: The Nitaqat Policy](#)", Explanatory Note - GLMM - EN - No. 03/2015.

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

Fargues, Philippe (2013), "International Migration and the Nation State in Arab Countries" *Journal of Middle East Law and Governance*, University of Toronto, Brill, pp. 5-35.

Hertog Steffen (2014), “Arab Gulf States: An Assessment of Nationalisation Policies”, GLMM Research Paper No. 2014/1.

Jureidini, Ray (2016), “Ways Forward in Recruitment of 'Low-skilled' Migrant Workers in the Asia-Arab States Corridor: ILO White Paper”, International Labour Organization, ILO Regional Office for the Arab States - Beirut: ILO.

Khalaf, Abdulhadi, Omar AlShehabi and Adam Hanieh (eds.) (2014), *Transit States: Labour, Migration and Citizenship in the Gulf*, [Pluto Press](#), 272 pp.

Ruhs, Martin and Philip Martin (2008), “Numbers vs. Rights: Trade-Offs and Guest-Worker Programs”, *International Migration Review*, 42.

Shah, Nasra M. (2015-16). “Outlook on Migration in the Gulf in 2016”, *Migration Policy Practice*, IOM, Vol. V, Number 5, December 2015-January 2016.

Shah, Nasra M. (2006). “Restrictive Labor Immigration Policies in the Oil-Rich Gulf: Effectiveness and Implications for Sending Countries”, published in Proceedings of United Nations Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region: Challenges and Opportunities. Beirut, May 15-17, 2006 (UN/POP/EGM/2006/3).

In addition, participants are invited to critically use the legal documents (<http://gulfmigration.eu/glmm-database/legal-module/>) and demographic and economic data (<http://gulfmigration.eu/glmm-database/demographic-and-economic-module/>) available on the GLMM website.