



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge  
Knowledge for All

## **14<sup>th</sup> Gulf Research Meeting**

**Cambridge, 9-11 July 2024**

### **Workshop No. 10**

## **Migration to the Gulf: Possible Scenarios for the Future**

### **A View from the GCC and from Countries of Origin**

#### **1. Directors**

**Nasra M. Shah**

Scientific Director, Gulf Labour Markets, Migration, and Population (GLMM) Programme

**Françoise De Bel-Air**

Senior Fellow, Gulf Labour Markets, Migration, and Population (GLMM) Programme

#### **2. Abstract**

Against the backdrop of the current transformations of GCC demographics and economies, as well as the socio-political and economic contexts of origin countries, the purpose of the workshop is to assess and forecast future trends and patterns of migration to the Gulf states.

Taking stock of the multiplicity of migration determinants, from individual agency to meso-level and structural factors, the workshop seeks to:

- Highlight the determinants (from proximate to remote) of labour and migration dynamics and policies in the Gulf states.
- Evaluate the outcomes of migration-related policies and measures in the Gulf states on future flows, in terms of number, structure, characteristics, and dynamics, and critically assess existing estimates.
- Analyse the perceptions of Gulf states' institutional context and migratory environments by the origin countries and the way these impact emigration policies, processes, and decision-making in those countries.
- Assess the outcomes of socio-political and economic changes in origin countries on future migration to the Gulf.
- Measure the strength of different types of informal and formal networks and changes in them.

The workshop covers the period from 2010 until the present, with a focus primarily on the post-COVID-19 pandemic period. The workshop welcomes contributions from all disciplines of the social sciences, theoretically grounded and supported by imperatively based evidence (field surveys, statistical datasets, policy, and other documents, etc.).

### 3. Context

Migration is a complex phenomenon, and its determinants are many. Structural, macro-level factors combine with meso and micro-level factors to inform, orient and facilitate the final individual decision to migrate. These range from the “individualistic calculus of benefits and costs among would-be migrants,”<sup>1</sup> rationally based on the latter’s knowledge of wage levels, employment opportunities, and other potential “pull” factors like the quality of social protection in destination regions, to factors “pushing” migrants out of their home countries, such as deteriorating economic conditions, political unrest, or other factors of a structural nature, for instance, inequalities in the access to resources.

Similarly, a multi-level combination of factors drives the design of official migration policies and the actual handling of the phenomenon in origin and receiving countries. Some may be intended, such as addressing demographic change and nationals’ unemployment or applying quotas for specific nationalities. Others may be rooted in the political economy of the concerned country: policies may seek to favour specific stakeholders’ interests at the national level, as well as through “migration diplomacy” at the bilateral and international levels (Adamson and Tsourapas, 2019). A country’s historical context may also attribute challenges to migration, which are specific to that context and will entail specific policy responses by national governments (Demeny and McNicoll, 2006). The “symbolic role” played by immigration and emigration, “which goes beyond a rational assessment of their real impact on host [and origin] countries” (Boswell, 2007: 79) also drives the conception and implementation patterns of migration policies.

The six GCC countries are among the largest recipients of migrants worldwide: they hosted 11 percent of the world’s total migrant stock in 2019 according to United Nations figures (last available data). The GCC-Asia migration corridor, especially, is the largest South-South corridor, and the Gulf region is the main destination for Asian migrant workers. For instance, above 95 percent of Pakistani worker and 77 percent of Bangladeshi worker outflows were directed to the Gulf countries as of 2022 according to their respective government estimates. The GCC also attracts the bulk of the migrants from Egypt and Jordan, as well as growing numbers of workers from North African and Sub-Saharan African countries. Therefore, assessing possible future trends of migration to the Gulf states is essential, for the major GCC destination countries themselves, and for migrants’ countries of origin.

However, accurately assessing workers’ motivations to migrate (or not) to GCC countries, apprehending the many factors underpinning current and future migration policies and their implementation patterns in the GCC and in countries of origin, begs for a theoretically comprehensive review of the issue of Gulf migration dynamics and policies, as summed up in the first paragraph of this section. Political economy, neo-institutionalist approaches to migration, and labour policies, for instance, may clarify the structural context of policies, and thus help reassess their scope, stakes, and possible limitations. Gaps also remain in the knowledge of the remote and direct determinants of migration dynamics and policies, beyond better-documented direct economic factors. Lastly, data pertaining to migration dynamics and the measurement of the policies’ outcomes are rare and/or too often inconsistent.

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<sup>1</sup> Portes, A. “Migration and Social Change: Some Conceptual Reflections,” *CMD Working Paper* n°08-04, August 2008, p. 14.

#### 4. Focus/objectives

Against the backdrop of the current transformations of GCC demographics and economies, as well as the changing socio-political and economic contexts of origin countries, the purpose of the workshop is to address the above-mentioned gaps, to **assess and forecast future trends and patterns of migration to the Gulf states.**

The workshop will tackle the following themes:

- a. **Determinants of future labour and migration dynamics and policies.** Besides proximate, well-documented determinants of migration (search for better wages, unemployment in the origin country, megaprojects and capital investments; fluctuations in the price of hydrocarbons in GCC countries, etc.), the workshop seeks to highlight indirect background factors likely to influence the future of migration (such as Gulf nationals' demographic dynamics, residents' educational patterns, etc.), as well as remote, structural factors underpinning migration dynamics, migration policies, and popular perceptions and debates pertaining to the issue (see section 8).
- b. **An assessment of migration-related policies and measures in the Gulf states and their outcomes on future flows.** Such measures may be workforce localization policies (Saudization, Omanisation, etc.), skills verification policies, measures aiming to attract skilled workers, etc. Other policies of interest are those aiming to shift the relative migration composition from origin countries, and those aiming to modify the structure of the resident population, for example, policies designed to correct the perceived "demographic imbalance" in Kuwait, or policies designed to retain, attract, and settle wealthy investors and special talents. The outcomes of these policies on the future of migration in the region will be evaluated critically, in terms of number, structure, characteristics, and dynamics.
- c. **The perceptions of Gulf states' institutional context and the migratory environment by the origin countries** and the way these impact emigration policies, processes, and decision-making in those countries. These perceptions could vary across various stakeholders in the countries of origin including governments, private placement agencies, potential migrants and their households, migrants' networks, etc. The social, economic, and political interests and processes underpinning the negotiations, drafting, and implementation of bilateral labour agreements would also be of particular interest.
- d. **The outcomes of socio-political and economic changes in origin countries on future migration to the Gulf.** Economic recession or conflict, improvements in education level, or the matching of workers' skills with specific demands in GCC states may intensify migration to the Gulf. On the contrary, an erosion of wage differentials between the origin and potential Gulf destination countries may reduce the attractiveness of Gulf migration. Changes in bilateral relations may also impact the volume and characteristics of migration, positively or negatively (in Pakistan, see for example Shah *et.al*, 2020; 2022).
- e. **The strength of different types of informal and formal networks and changes in them.** Social networks have proved to be integral at various steps of a migrant's Gulf journey in terms of providing knowledge, financial assistance, logistical support, and arranging the Gulf country employment. The role of formally appointed recruitment agents as well as friends and relatives in mobilizing migration will continue to play an important role in the future. This will continue to be a significant element as long as the migrant must have a *kafeel* who can sell him/her a work visa. Furthermore, the strength of such networks continues to be vital for irregular migrants

present in Gulf countries; many survive largely because of such connections (Shah and Alkazi, 2022).

## **5. Papers focus/topics**

1. Determinants of migration to the Gulf states, from individual to structural. For example, how and why do existing historical relations between each GCC state and specific origin countries influence the setting up and implementation patterns of migration policies? How can researchers interpret popular debates surrounding the migration issue in Gulf countries?
2. How are second and third-generation Gulf-born descendants of migrants perceived by Gulf societies and policymakers? Are host country policies likely to encourage their long-term stay/settlement? If so, how could they fulfil, or contribute to fulfilling, the labour force needs of the Gulf countries, and be actors in the Gulf states' development process?
3. Expected short to middle-term outcomes of migration policies in the GCC in terms of number (less or more migrants, etc.), structure (by origin countries, skill level, sector, gender, etc.), characteristics and dynamics (more irregular migration due to restrictions in legal avenues to migrate; more families due to openings for settlements and social protection advancements, etc.).
4. Critical analysis of the outcomes of policies and lessons for the future: did nationals enter the labour market in significant numbers? Which categories of nationals benefitted most from labour reforms? How can researchers accurately measure the "ghost nationalization" of jobs? How many "exceptional talents" were granted long-term residencies and what are their economic and other inputs on GCC host states?
5. What motivates migration specifically to the Gulf states, in traditional and new sending countries (Sub-Saharan African countries, for example)?
6. Analysis of how the demographic and labour force characteristics are changing in origin countries and how these changes, and/or other factors, might affect the supply of potential migrants to the Gulf states in the future?
7. How do social networks continue to facilitate migration from the origin countries? Are migration experiences more successful if organized through networks?

Papers should focus on one of the five themes indicated in section 4 above, also keeping in mind the indications in sections 5 and 6. Furthermore, papers should focus on one country of origin or one destination country.

## **6. Paper structure, referencing, and format**

Please make sure that the submitted paper is clearly structured and is as close to being ready for publication as possible.

Authors should also adhere as to the [GRM Paper Guidelines](#).

Participants who do not submit a paper by the 31 May deadline or whose submitted paper does not meet the requirements will be disinvited by GRCC.

## 7. Publication plans

The directors aim at publishing an edited volume, ideally including all the submitted and accepted papers of the workshop.

Papers that may not be publishable in the edited volume will still be reviewed by the directors and considered for individual publication in either a peer-reviewed journal or as a GLMM explanatory note. Directors will make reasonable efforts to ensure that all accepted papers are published in one of these three forms.

## 8. References

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De Bel-Air, F. "New Profiles of Demand in the Gulf Cooperation Council and Possible Impact on Labor Migration from Asia," in: Asian Development Bank Institute, International Labour Organization, and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Eds.). *Labor Migration in Asia: Changing Profiles and Processes*, Tokyo/ Bangkok/ Paris: ADBI/ ILO/ OECD, June 2023, pp. 27-56, <https://www.adb.org/publications/labor-migration-in-asia-changing-profiles-and-processes>.

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Tayah, M.-J., and H. Assaf. 2018. The Future of Domestic Work in the Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Abu Dhabi Dialogue, 2018. <http://abudhabidialogue.org.ae/sites/default/files/document-library/2018%20ADD%20SOM%20-%20Future%20of%20Domestic%20Work%20Report%20-min.pdf>.

## 9. Directors' bio notes

**Nasra M. Shah** is a Professor of Migration and Development at the Lahore School of Economics, Pakistan. She is the scientific director of GLMM. Prior to returning to her homeland, she was Professor of Demography at the Department of Community Medicine and Behavioral Sciences at the Faculty of Medicine, Kuwait University for about 30 years. Prof. Shah received her doctoral degree in Population Dynamics from the Johns Hopkins University, School of Public Health, Baltimore, USA, in 1974. Before joining Kuwait University, she worked in Hawaii, USA at the East-West Population Institute and at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad. Besides international migration, 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 Asian to oil-rich Gulf countries, has been a consistent and very prominent theme in her research throughout her professional career. 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, the role of social networks in migration, and migration policies of host and home countries. She has served 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 books on *Asian Labor Migration: Pipeline to the Middle East*; *Pakistani Women; Basic Needs, Women and Development*; *Population of Kuwait: Structure and Dynamics*; *Skillful Survivals: Irregular Migration to the Gulf*; *Migration to the Gulf: Policies in Sending and Receiving Countries*; and *Covid-19 Crisis and Asian Migration*.

**Françoise De Bel-Air** (Ph.D.) is a researcher and consultant based in Paris, France. A socio-demographer by training, she specializes in the demography of Arab countries, especially in the Middle East and the Gulf region. Currently a Senior Fellow with the Gulf Labour Markets, Migration and Population programme (GLMM) of the Gulf Research Center Foundation since 2013, she was a Senior Fellow at the French Institute for the Near East (IFPO) in Amman, Jordan for several years and a part-time Professor at the Migration Policy Centre, European University Institute, Florence, Italy. Her research focusses on political demography, as well as on the demographic and socio-political dynamics in the region: youth, family structures, labour and forced migration, migration, and population policies. She has published two edited volumes and over fifty book chapters, scientific articles, and research papers on population issues in the Arab region.

Her publications on migration issues and Gulf states include Chapter 7 "Exclusion, Mobility and Migration" in: *Arab Human Development Report 2016 on Youth*; "Asian Migration to the Gulf States in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," in: Chowdhury, M. and Rajan, I. (eds). *South Asian Migration to the Gulf: Causes and Consequences*, Palgrave, 2018 and "'Blocked Youth': The Politics of Migration from the SEM Countries before and after the Arab Uprisings." *The International Spectator* (53): 2018; *The Socio-Economic Impact of Covid-19 and Low Oil Prices on Migrants and Remittances in the Arab Region* (with B. Nilsson), UNDP-RBAS Research Papers, 2021; "Youth Unemployment and Alienation in the Middle East: A Critical View" in: *Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of the Middle East*, A. Salvatore et al. (Eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022; "New Profiles of Demand in the Gulf Cooperation Council and Possible Impact on Labor Migration from Asia," in: ADBI/ILO/OECD (Eds.). *Labor Migration in Asia: Changing Profiles and Processes*, Tokyo/ Bangkok/ Paris: ADBI/ILO/ OECD, June 2023, pp. 27-56, and "The Politics of Migration in the Gulf States" in: *Introduction to Gulf Politics*, Kh. Almezaini and K. Alexander (Eds). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (forth).