



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

The 2011 Gulf Research Meeting

July 6 – 9, 2011
University of Cambridge

Workshop 12

Migration in the Gulf

Workshop Directors

Prof. Philippe Fargues
Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced
Studies
European University Institute

Prof. Nasra Shah
Faculty of Medicine
Kuwait University

Abstract

The Gulf States have the highest proportion of migrant workers in the world. Conversely, global migrants see the Gulf States as a major magnet, the third largest in the world after the European Union and North America. By contrast with its overwhelming importance for economies and societies, migration to the Gulf States is under-documented and under-researched and the Gulf does not have the place it would deserve in migration studies. The main goal of this workshop will be to gather international expertise on migration to the Gulf with the aim of addressing the impact of migration on Gulf development and stability. Another aim will be to start building the Gulf migration studies community. A by-product of the workshop may be an edited volume. The workshop will be multidisciplinary and open to all the disciplines that are relevant to migration studies, such as political science, economics, demography, law, contemporary history, sociology.

Workshop Description and Rationale

Migration and the international mobility of labor have made the Gulf States a unique part of the world. Nowhere as in GCC countries are local indigenous populations a minority of inhabitants; nowhere else do majorities consist of migrants with temporary residency, no access to citizenship, and limited membership in society. Nowhere else are labor markets so highly dependent upon the international recruitment of the workforce. There has been until now three successive stages of migration to the Gulf, and a fourth stage may well be opened in the wake of the economic crisis started in 2008.

From World War II to the October 1973 War: Founding the Welfare State

From World War II to the October 1973 War, the Gulf States went through a process of wealth accumulation. Rising demand for oil in the world economy matched by rising supply from the Gulf translated into rising oil 'rent'.¹ High income was transformed into material welfare for natives through the recruitment of foreign workers who would produce national wealth while allowing nationals to largely stand out of the labor market.

The demand for manpower was then commensurate with the potential supply from the Arab Middle East, which became typically divided between two sorts of countries: those with human capital and population surpluses and those with oil and financial capital surpluses. Labor migration from population-rich to capital-rich Arab countries was regarded by Pan-Arabism as the best way to cross-fertilize the two disconnected assets of the Arab world, i.e. population and capital. Migration was viewed as a strategy to build the Arab nation.

Table 1: Migrants in GCC countries, 1990-2005

Country	Population mid-2005	Migrants mid-2005		Change 1990-2005	
		Absolute numbers (thousands)	In % of Population	Absolute numbers	Relative change %
Bahrain	727	295,5	40,6	122,3	70,6
Kuwait	2.687	1.669,0	62,1	117,7	7,6
Oman	2.567	627,6	24,4	175,4	38,8
Qatar	813	636,8	78,3	266,9	72,2
Saudi Arabia	24.573	6.360,7	25,9	1.617,7	34,1
U. A. Emirates	4.496	3.211,7	71,4	1.881,4	141,4
Total	35.863	12.801,3	35,7	4.181,4	48,5

Source: UN Population Division, <http://esa.un.org/unpp/>

From the War of October 1973 to the First Gulf War: Building the Post-oil Economy

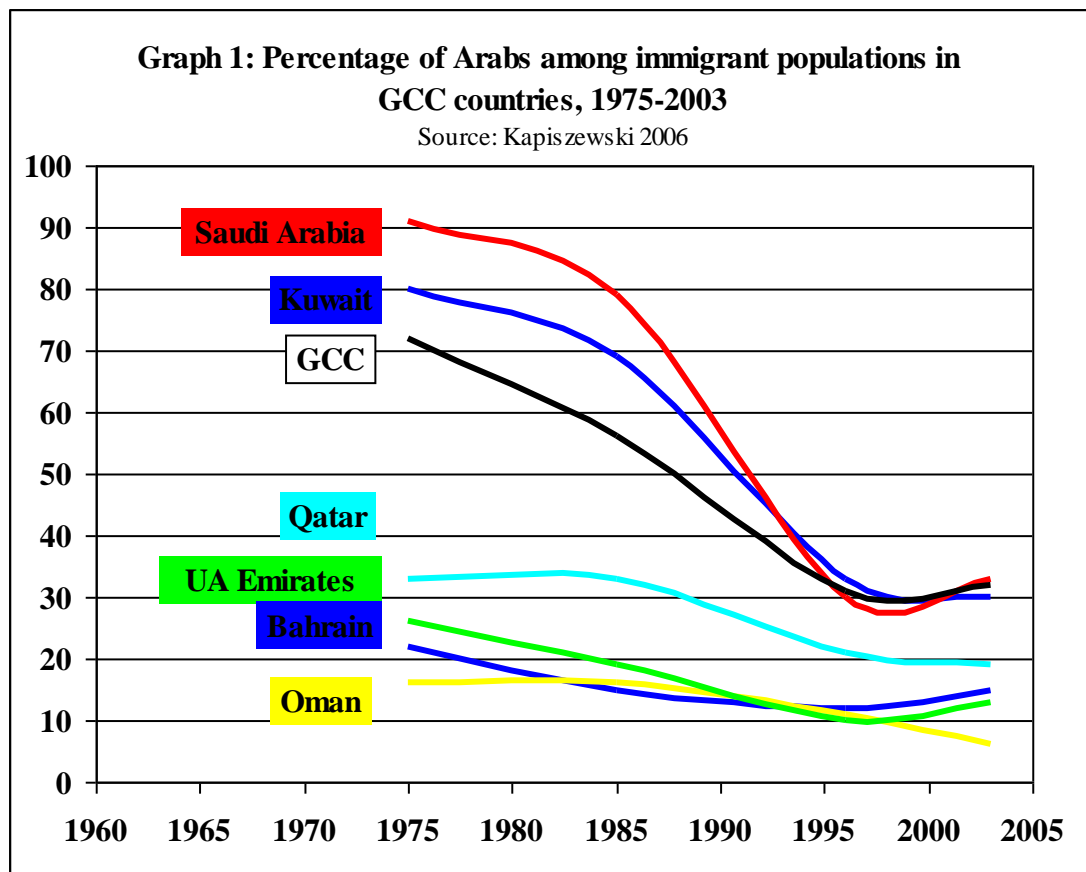
The war of October 1973 opened a second stage of migration to the Gulf. With oil prices soaring, Gulf rulers could launch ambitious programs of economic

¹ A 'rent' is an income brought by a special location, in this case oil-rich soil, as opposed to an income earned from capital or from work.

construction. A new economic culture emerged and governments understood that oil wealth is transient and must be used to build a strong post-oil economy. They started to construct large-scale modern infrastructures and plants. Because the ultimate goal was to adapt to the local reality – a weak demography combined with a strong wish to preserve identity – mobilizing capital was the objective, not creating permanent employment. Capital-intensive rather than labor-intensive industries were chosen.

The construction of infrastructures and plants, however, created large numbers of short-term jobs. Gulf governments opted for turnkey plants ordered to foreign societies that would hire their workers abroad. Asians started to outnumber Arab workers. According to some scholars, substituting Asians to Arabs was also a means to address political concerns: because Arab migrants share a language and a culture with the local society, they are more susceptible than Asians to voice and defend their workers’ interests. This would have clashed with Gulf rulers’ strategy of importing labor while avoiding the formation of a working class.

Dual societies were gradually born, in which nationals and foreigners were separated de facto (e.g. world’s lowest levels of economic activity among nationals vs. world’s highest among non-nationals) as well as de jure (e.g. the obligation for every foreigner to have a local sponsor). During this second stage, migration became the most popular topic among Arab social scientists. The debate was then revolving around issues of regional integration and whether migration reduces or accentuates economic inequalities between countries, as well as around issues of identity and whether Asian migration would make Arabs a minority in the richest part of their nation and therefore challenge the ideal of that nation.



From the First Gulf War to the Present Day: Constructing the Social Link

A third stage started with the 1990-1991 Gulf War and is characterized by the will to construct society, beyond economy. It was triggered by Kuwait being invaded from outside, poorly defended from inside, and eventually rescued by an external coalition. The war had an immediate impact on migration as it resulted in three million legal immigrants forced to leave their host countries. Several Arab communities were particularly targeted: Palestinians in Kuwait, Egyptians in Iraq and Yemenis in Saudi Arabia, for the reason that they bore the wrong nationality and found themselves residing in what had become overnight the opposite camp.

Political lessons were also drawn. The war was an occasion for major oil countries to reassess their vision of labor and to adopt policies of ‘Gulfization’ of the workforce. The context was the economic crisis that followed the Gulf War. Not only did it not produce any escalation in oil prices comparable to that of October 1973, but the reconstruction bill was astronomical and to be paid with cheap oil. For the first time, young nationals in the Gulf found themselves confronted with a drop in purchasing power and the emergence of unemployment. Immigrants started to be viewed as competitors and indigenising employment became a stake. One after the other, the Gulf States adopted Gulfization policies along two lines: on the one side, reducing the supply of migrant workforce by reinforcing barriers at entry and stay, and on the other limiting the demand for migrant workers by expanding the list of jobs kept for nationals and taxing employers who hire non-nationals. Gulfization policies have had mitigated results and labor markets’ dependency on migrant workers is still at its peak.

More importantly, the whole conception of labor was altered by the crisis of 1990-1991. At the time of the first oil boom in the 1970s, labor was intended at transforming oil income into welfare and wealth for nationals; work itself was left to non-nationals and its benefits transferred to nationals through welfare packages and the sponsorship system. With the 1990-1991 crisis, the vulnerability of societies dependent upon labor imports became patent and a process of political reappraisal of labor started. Labor should now be national and oil revenues be transformed into job creation and wages for nationals in order to serve the social contract and the political link.

Will the Global Economic Crisis Engender A Downswing In Migration To The Gulf?

It is too early to know whether the financial and economic crisis started in 2008 will have opened a fourth stage of migration to the Gulf, likely to be characterized by migration flows on the ebb. Indeed, GCC countries are doubly hit: as oil exporters by the fall in oil prices and as investors on global money markets by the fall in finance and banking. The economic crisis may exacerbate unemployment – among migrants as well as among nationals – and put into question the sustainability of a migration-driven pattern of growth, a situation to which governments could respond by tightening measures for keeping employment for nationals.

Table 2: Percentage of non-nationals in the population and labor force of GCC countries, 2000

Country	Population	Labour force
Bahrain	40.0	61.9
Kuwait	64.9	81.3
Oman	22.7	64.3
Qatar	73.7	81.6
Saudi Arabia	25.4	55.8
UAE	75.7	89.8
GCC	34.9	70.0

Source: Shah 2006

However, one has to consider that the current global financial crisis arrives in the Gulf States after several years of unprecedented financial accumulation. Not only did oil prices soar from 2006 to mid-2008, but post 9/11 Gulf investments were partly redirected to the Arab region in reaction to the United States blocking many Arab assets in American banks as a measure to counter global terrorism. On the one side, the crisis may rapidly translate into a reduction of migrant workers' employment but, on the other side, it comes after two years of spectacular boom during which long-term projects employing migrant workers were launched, and after more than a decade of failing policies to indigenise the workforce.

Other developments are susceptible to produce other changes in migration to the Gulf. A rising demand for highly skilled people that local supply may not match – for lack of the adequate skills or because of insufficient numbers of highly skilled nationals – will increasingly expose the Gulf to what has become a global competition for talents. Contrary to low-skilled workers who will still be needed (even though in smaller numbers) in the construction sector or in domestic services and whose potential supply can be considered unlimited, high-level professionals needed for ambitious programs, such as the creation of world-class universities, remain a scarce resource worldwide. Their recruitment may put to the test Gulf labor markets' competitiveness in attracting the best and brightest. In addition, the rise of global advocacy for migrants' rights may have an increasing bearing on migrants' choice of a destination.

Finally, local, social developments may play a role and curb decades-old patterns of migration to the Gulf. A rising competition (whether real or imagined) between nationals and migrants, or mounting movements of protest by migrant workers claiming their rights, may foster anti-immigration reactions and eventually affect stability.

Topics for the Workshop

The workshop will address past and current trends and policies as well as scenarios for future changes. It will envisage migration from the following points of view:

Describing migration:

- Levels and trends
- Patterns: countries of origin, type of migration (work, family, study, asylum...), modes of recruitment, duration of stay, legal status, trafficking...
- Migrants' profiles: demographic, education and skills, employment...

Appraising the consequences of migration:

- Benefits and costs for host countries in the Gulf
- Development of origin countries
- Migrants' condition.

Assessing the governance of migration:

- Sustainability of migration patterns
- Policies of Gulfization of the workforce
- The sponsorship system

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 he 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 Arabes, 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 M. Shah, a Demographer/Sociologist, received her doctoral degree in Population Dynamics from the Johns Hopkins University, School of Public Health,

Baltimore, USA. Before joining 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.