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A Note on Syrian Refugees in the Gulf: Attempting to Assess Data and Policies

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EXPLANATORY NOTE

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A Note on Syrian Refugees in the Gulf: Attempting to Assess Data and Policies

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Abstract: As the migrant crisis escalates at Europe's borders, the Gulf States have been blamed for having offered "zero resettlement" to Syrian refugees. In response to these statements, some Gulf States claim that they have actually relaxed their entry and residency laws to accommodate sizeable numbers of Syrian nationals since the start of the conflict. The paper assesses these claims using statistics available from these countries, as well as declarations from official bodies released in the local press. It appears that, besides being major aid donors to Arab countries sheltering Syrian refugees, most Gulf States have passed various measures destined to facilitate the entry and stay of Syrians since 2011.

Keywords: Syria; Bahrain; Kuwait; Oman; Qatar; Saudi Arabia; United Arab Emirates; Politics; Laws & Regulations; Refugees; Deportation; Family Reunification.

As the migrant crisis escalates at Europe's borders, the Gulf States have been blamed for having offered "zero resettlement" to Syrian refugees escaping from the conflict.¹ In response, the Saudi Foreign Ministry claimed that "Saudi Arabia has hosted around 2.5 million Syrians since the beginning of the crisis in that country in 2011" and that "a total of 100,000 Syrian students are registered in public schools."² The UAE government said "it has provided residency permits to more than 100,000 Syrians who have entered the country since 2011 and that more than 242,000 Syrian nationals currently live in the country."³ Kuwait also claimed that it had granted long-term residency permits to Syrian nationals.⁴

The GCC states are not signatories to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and, thus, do not recognise "refugees" as a legal category. Moreover, expatriates in the region are considered "guests" on short-duration visit visas, or temporary contract workers (of whom only a fraction have a right to family reunion). Therefore, GCC governments' claims raise the following questions:

- Can these statements be sustained by available demographic data?
- Are there figures indicating that the GCC countries relaxed their entry and residency rules from 2011 to allow more Syrians into their territory than the average flow of workers and dependents?
- Did these countries enforce measures to support Syrian nationals fleeing the conflict?

The paper attempts to answer these questions, using statistics available from the Gulf countries as well as declarations from official bodies released in the local press. It has to be said that data broken down by single nationality are not readily available in most Gulf States: this kind of information may be perceived as sensitive politically. First, foreign nationals make up between a 33 and 88 per cent of Gulf States' resident populations,⁵ and outnumber nationals in all but two of the countries. Second, some foreign nationalities may also outnumber other national groups (e.g. Indians in the UAE, Nepalis in Qatar). Most Gulf States do not provide the nationality breakdown of their migrant populations or only release partial figures (workers only, selected nationalities, for instance). Finding alternative sources of reliable information is also difficult. Sending countries cannot keep exact records of their departing citizens by destination and cannot follow up on their return, remigration, and other movements under general circumstances, let alone in a civil war. On the receiving end, foreign embassies are usually not accurately informed of the exact numbers of their nationals residing in a given country: these may not wish to be recorded, neglect or avoid signalling their departure. Embassies, in general, have to resort to the authorities of the receiving country to evaluate the numbers and characteristics of their nationals. In the Gulf States, moreover, Syrian ambassadors were expelled following the decision of the six GCC member countries to close their embassies in Damascus in February 2012.⁶ Syrian representation in Qatar was later handed over to the Syrian National Coalition (SNC), a group opposed to the Assad regime.⁷ The embassy was supposed to first deal with the administrative needs of Syrians in Qatar before extending its mandate to Syrian expatriates in other Gulf countries mid-2015.⁸

Against this backdrop, it nevertheless appears that, besides being major aid donors to Arab countries sheltering Syrian refugees,⁹ most Gulf States have passed various measures destined to facilitate the entry and stay of Syrians since 2011. However, the paucity of data available on single nationalities in Gulf States' published statistics (in the present case, on Syrian nationals) affects available evidence of the exact impact of such measures on the actual flows and stocks of Syrians received in the Gulf region as refugees from the Syrian conflict.

Saudi Arabia

1.1. Stock Data

Data on resident foreign nationals in Saudi Arabia are not broken down by country of citizenship in any publication, either from the Central Department for Statistics and Information (CDSI) in population Censuses, Labour Force Surveys, Demographic Surveys, or in the statistics available from the Ministries of Labour, Education, Interior, etc.

Press sources have published estimates of Syrian nationals residing in the country ranging from 500,000,^{10,11} to 700,000¹² and even one million.¹³ However, such figures are not supported by any available official data, nor are the sources given by those who publish the data.

Using the figure of 100,000 Syrian students¹⁴ whom Saudi authorities claim they enrolled in the country's public schools, and under the reasonable assumption that their families accompanied Syrian schoolchildren, an estimate can be drawn of the Syrian nationals composing these families. The Syrian Population Census of 2010 provides a distribution of the population residing in Syria at the time of the census, broken down by five-year age groups.¹⁵ The categories aged 5 to 15 made up 24 per cent of the total population and 23.3 per cent of the urban population. Considering for the sake of comparison, that the 100,000 Syrian schoolchildren are within the 5 to 15 years age bracket, the total number of Syrian nationals in these families can be estimated at around 420,000 persons.¹⁶ However, this remains a minimal estimate, as 1) some Syrians may be enrolled in private education for which no data by citizenship is available and 2) some Syrians in Saudi Arabia may be without school-age children. On the other hand, a share of these nationals from Syria may be Syrian spouses of Saudi citizens.

1.2. Flow Data

Statistics available on flows of foreign nationals to and from Saudi Arabia are not broken down by citizenship. This is the case for residency and labour visas or permits statistics, Hajj statistics pertaining to pilgrims from outside Saudi Arabia, or, for that matter, newly enrolled school and university students, for instance. For example, the annual flows of Syrian workers to Saudi Arabia are impossible to estimate. The Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which provided statements defending the Saudi role in receiving refugees, only publishes aggregate statistics on visas delivered. It should be noted, moreover, that the Saudi embassy in Damascus is closed. Syrians willing to travel to Saudi Arabia have to apply for visas from the Saudi embassies in Beirut, Amman, or Ankara, which do not publish any records of visas delivered.

The exception to this rule is the yearly Saudi records of entries and exits, which count all movements at the country's borders for any kind of purpose and duration: entry for/exit after long-term residency as worker or family dependent, short-term visit, pilgrimage, etc. Entries and exit statistics, unfortunately, ceased being published by country of citizenship after 2013.

Table 1: Records of entries and exits of Syrian nationals at Saudi borders (2010-2013)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	Cumulative flows 2011-2013
Entries	1,596,094	1,333,538	1,047,241	766,571	3,147,350
Exits	1,586,058	1,299,071	965,288	744,351	3,008,710
Net migration	10,036	34,467	81,953	22,220	138,640

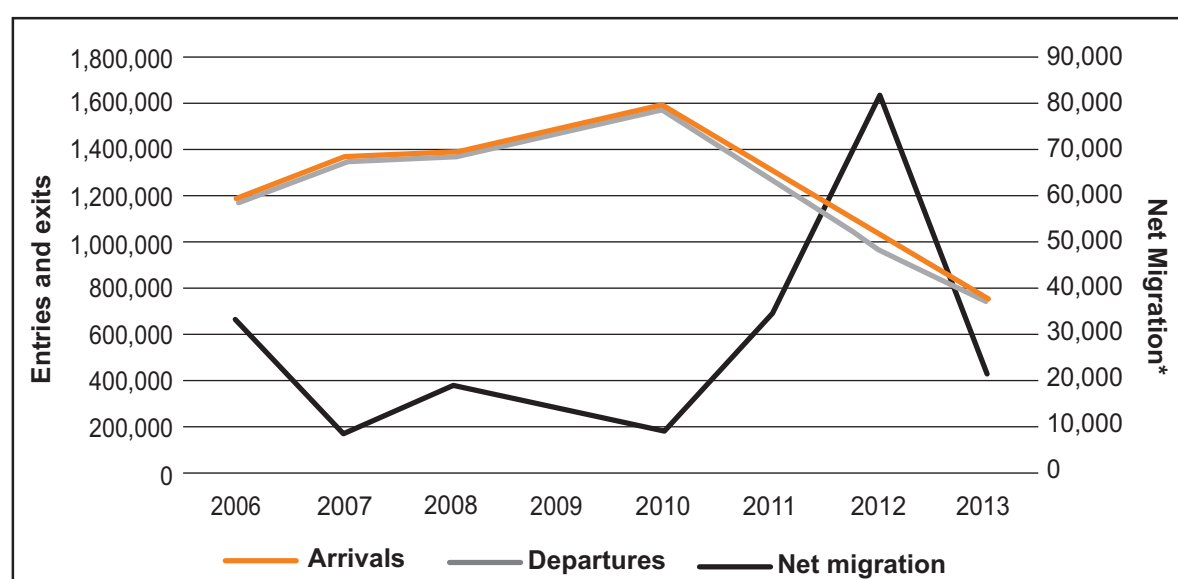
Source: CDSI Statistical Yearbooks, 2011 to 2014. Date of reference: December 31, given years.

According to the entry and exit figures, Saudi Arabia received 3,147,350 Syrian nationals between 2011 and 2013. However, the numbers of exits are relatively similar and the net migration figure for the period (entries - exits) amounts to no more than 138,640 persons. A significant surplus of arrivals over departures is especially noticeable in 2012 (82,000 persons). Witness accounts confirmed that Saudi Arabia's relatively leniency in allowing Syrians into the country, had changed in the first months of 2013:

authorities were said to have “stopped family visas, and at times opening it for certain jobs like medicine and only if the Syrian is going to a certain city like Riyadh.”¹⁷

Moreover, the parallel evolution of entries and exits (Fig. 1) suggests a dominant pattern of regular, short-term stays until 2011, most likely for visits as well as pilgrimage purposes. Yet, figures drop after 2010: this may mean that the entry of Syrians to Saudi Arabia has become, all in all, more difficult since 2011. Since 2012, indeed, Syrians are said to have been denied Hajj visas, for instance.¹⁸

Figure 1: Entries, exits and net migration of Syrian nationals to Saudi Arabia (2006-2013)

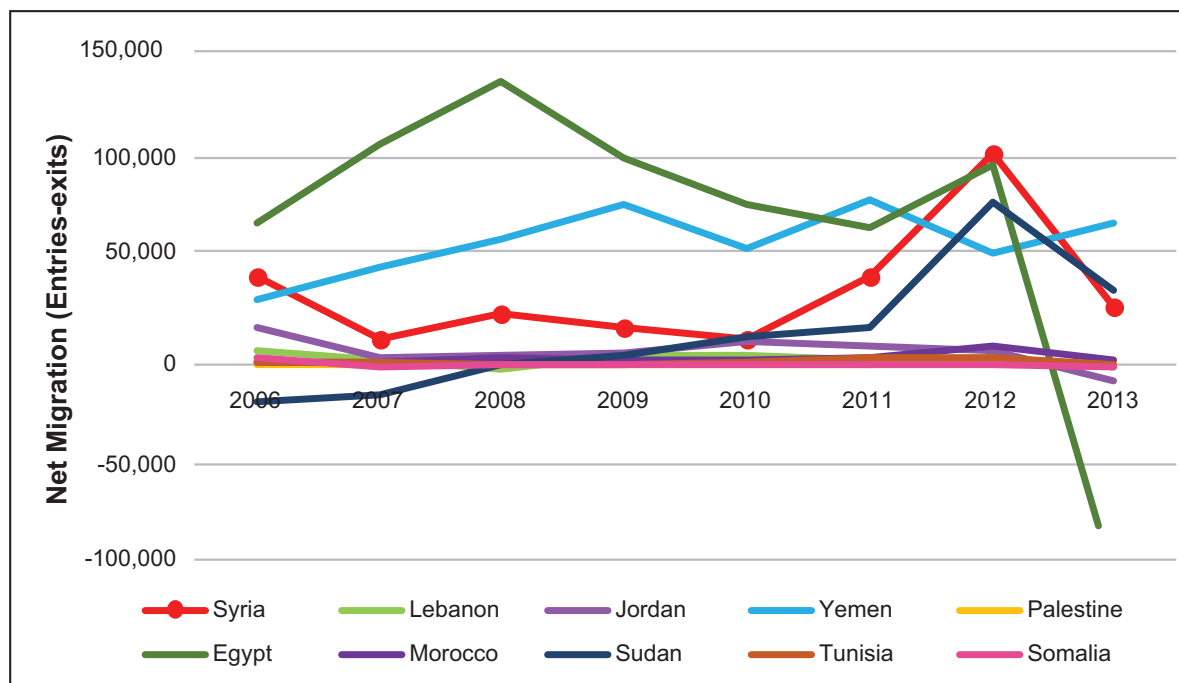


Source: CDSI, Statistical Yearbooks, 2007-2014.

* Net migration is the difference between the figures of entries and exits.

In general, figures of entries and exits of Syrian nationals to and from Saudi Arabia suggest that entries have become more difficult since the start of the war, but movements have not stopped. Moreover, some Syrians who entered have stayed in the country since 2011.

A comparison between the cross-border movements of Syrian nationals and other Arab nationalities (Fig. 2) may also imply that nationals from countries at war were affected differently by the mass deportation campaign that took place in November 2013. The announcement of the departure of 300,000 Egyptians during the regularisation and deportation campaign is validated in the vast surplus of Egyptian exits over entries in 2013. Yet, this is not the case for Sudanese and Yemenis,¹⁹ whose net migration rates remain positive like those of Syrians. This could provide support to the Saudi authorities' claims that they implemented some measures protecting refugees, among them Syrians.

Figure 2: Net migration to Saudi Arabia (selected Arab countries, 2006-2013)

Source: CDSI Statistical Yearbooks, 2007-2014.

1.3. Measures Taken in Favour of Syrians Forcibly Displaced to Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has received waves of “refugees” in the past, some claiming to stay on the basis of religious solidarity such as the Uzbeks and Uighurs fleeing communism, from the 1930s to the 1950s. In the 1990s, the KSA hosted about 35,000 Iraqi refugees in the Rafha camp and even signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with UNHCR to deal with these refugees.²⁰ The Kingdom also hosts vast communities of Palestinians, Somalis, Burmese (Rohingyas), Sudanese, etc. These populations fleeing conflicts generally used the employment channels, or overstayed pilgrimage, visit to relatives, or tourist visas. When foreign residents in irregular situation were targeted by crackdown campaigns, ongoing since 2013, exceptions were made. Burmese (Rohingyas), Palestinian and Syrian²¹ residents were formally exempted from deportation if found contravening labour and residency regulations.

Other protective measures aimed at Syrians have been announced in Saudi Arabia since 2012: a royal order issued in 2012, for instance, allows Syrian children to study in Saudi schools. All Syrians in the Kingdom are said to receive free medical treatment.²² They are also allowed to work in the private sector like other expatriates.²³

The “Programme of the Custodian of the Two Holy Shrines for the Syrian Students” was announced in 2012. It orders universities to incorporate up to 3,000 Syrian university students per year free of charge in Saudi public universities, under a quota system.²⁴ The programme clearly stated it would be conditional to the continuation of the conflict and, therefore, re-examined every year. It also restricted

applications to Syrian students having valid entry visas and of certain age categories only. However, it seems that the programme was continued under the new Saudi King's rule.²⁵

In December 2014, another decision was announced,²⁶ allowing Syrians to stay in the country without *iqamas* (residency permits) as long as their visit, Hajj, or Umrah visas are valid. They would have, however, to correct their status later. The measure is limited to Syrian visitors holding a valid entry visa.²⁷

To sum up, it can be said that available data are not detailed enough to support the claim by Saudi Arabia that it received 2.5 million Syrians forcibly displaced by the conflict. Flow data would even support statements suggesting that Saudi Arabia has not encouraged entry of Syrians since 2011, even though it exempted stranded Syrians from deportation. However, the several measures announced in the press do support statements by Saudi officials that they did receive a number of refugees from Syria. An estimate of Syrian nationals who have arrived in Saudi Arabia since 2011 stands perhaps around 420,000. This is a minimal estimate, for it fails to incorporate Syrian refugees who came with no school-age children.

Saudi Arabia is also a major donor of aid to the Syrian refugees. "The country has contributed \$117.6m to the UNHCR budget since 2011: in 2013, it was the 19th largest contributor globally. The private sector added another \$2.1m, with billionaire investor Prince Alwaleed bin Talal al-Saud's foundation a major donor."²⁸

Kuwait

Kuwait publishes only some data by country of citizenship of residents. Among these are the records of entries and exits. As in the case of Saudi Arabia, this source indicates that cumulative flows of Syrian nationals to Kuwait since the start of the war are positive, at 18,114 persons. Kuwait thus did receive Syrian nationals, and the net flows actually peaked in 2012.

Table 2: Records of entries and exits of Syrian nationals at Kuwaiti borders (2010-2013)

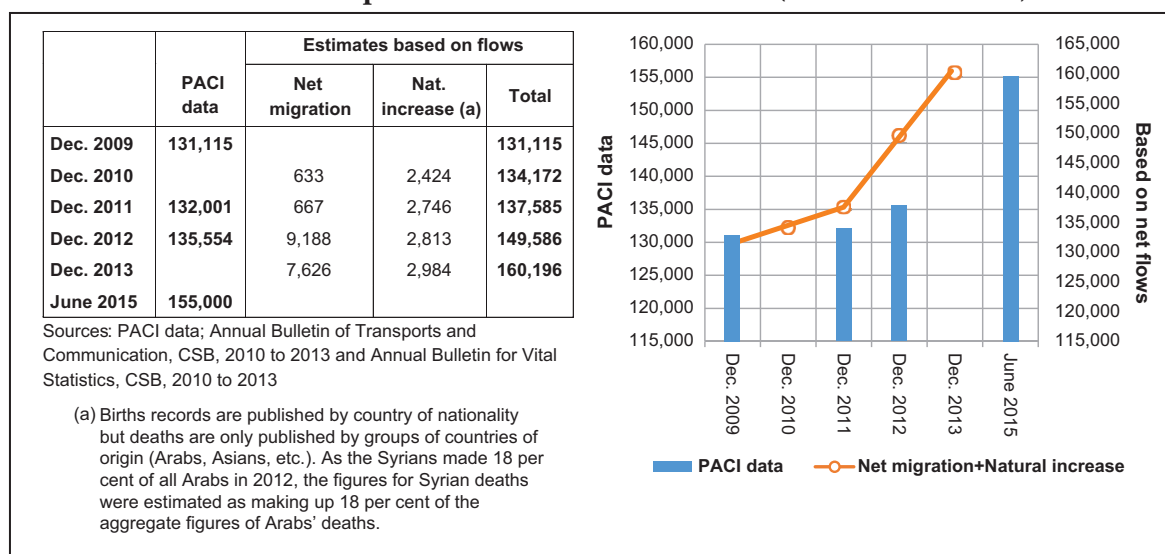
	2010	2011	2012	2013	Cumulative flows 2011-2013
Entries	307,949	269,013	227,429	199,456	1,003,847
Exits	307,316	268,346	218,241	191,830	985,733
Net migration	633	667	9,188	7,626	18,114

Source: Annual Bulletin of Transports and Communication, CSB, 2010 to 2013

As for the stocks of resident population, records of foreign residents maintained by the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) are considered more accurate than census-based figures released by the Central Statistical Office of the Ministry of Planning (Shah, 2010: 15). PACI is an independent governmental body in charge of maintaining a population register based upon which it issues civil identification cards to all residents. PACI data provide estimates of the Syrian population on December 31, for the years 2009, 2011 and 2012,²⁹ and on June 30, 2015 (Table 3).

As presented in Table 3 and Fig. 3, the stocks of Syrian residents in Kuwait can, therefore, be estimated using two sets of sources: PACI data on resident Syrian nationals, on the one hand; and the records of entries and exits (net migration), completed by births and deaths records (natural increase), on the other.

**Table 3 and Figure 3: Evaluations of the stocks of Syrian residents in Kuwait:
PACI data compared to flows-based estimates (2010 to mid-2015)**



According to PACI, 131,115 Syrian nationals resided in Kuwait as of December 31, 2009 before the war broke out. It appears, on the basis of these numbers, that PACI data (employing residencies delivered to foreign residents), probably underestimate the total stocks of Syrians who have arrived in Kuwait since then. The discrepancy between the two sources is especially marked for 2012 (14,032 Syrian nationals). The other figures (based on entries and exits' flows) are higher because they include Syrian nationals who entered, and later remained, on short duration tourist or visit visas, and did not apply for residency.

As of April 2012, more stringent security screenings started being applied to Syrian nationals. The Kuwaiti government continued allowing Syrian nationals already residing in Kuwait to sponsor their Syrian children for entry visas and residence permits, but this accommodation became limited to girls under the age of 15 and boys under the age of 10.³⁰ However, the hike in net migration figures and hence of stocks based on these data for 2012 shows that family reunion schemes were widely used. The inward movements continued during 2013, but at a slower pace.

In September 2015, a representative of the General Directorate for Residency Affairs in Kuwait's Interior Ministry announced that Syrian nationals would be granted extensions of residency so that they were not deported because of administrative problems. Cases include those whose contracts had ended and those who cannot renew residency permits because they could not renew their expired passports or because they could not present required documents. Syrian nationals who entered Kuwait on visit visas, but were not able to leave in due time, were granted long-term visas.³¹

As of June 30, 2015, PACI estimated that there were almost 155,000 Syrian residents. Figures based on flows, available until December 31, 2013, were consistently higher than the PACI ones at similar dates. The total of Syrian nationals in Kuwait may thus be slightly higher than 155,000 and include persons residing without residency documents. Therefore, the statements of Kuwaiti authorities that they do not take in new Syrian refugees but refrain from deporting expired residency and visit visa overstayers³² seem plausible, in the light of available data.³³ Moreover, granting residencies to holders of short-term visas or overstayers is a very important decision, as it should allow many children in irregular situation to enrol legally in Kuwait's school system.

United Arab Emirates

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), no data on foreign nationals' stocks and flows has been made available by country of citizenship since the end of the 2000s. However, the Emirati Ministry of Labour published some figures of registered workers by nationality until 2007: Syrian nationals employed in the private sector numbered 59,650 that year.³⁴ In order to draw an estimate of all Syrian nationals (including inactive family members), and in the absence of any indication of the ratio of worker to family dependent in the UAE, we use data available for Kuwait in 2009.³⁵ These provide a breakdown of all resident populations, by migration status (worker, family member, student, etc.) and country of citizenship. In Kuwait, in 2009, Syrians numbered 131,115, of whom 57,535 were classified as workers. The multiplier between workers and total figures is therefore: 2.28. Assuming that family reunion policies and behaviours are identical for Syrians in Kuwait and the UAE, which is not certain, an estimate of the total Syrian population in the UAE in 2007 would be: $59,650 \times 2.28 = 136,002$. This estimate is unverifiable, however, and concerns only workers in the private sector and their dependents.

However, if we assume that the numbers of Syrian nationals did not change with the financial crisis of 2008, this figure of 136,000 Syrians in the late 2000s becomes credible: it matches the declaration by UAE officials that prior to the conflict, the country was hosting 140,000 Syrians. Responding to an article in *The New York Times* that accused the Gulf nations of "tepid response" to the migration crisis, the UAE Ambassador to the US stated that 100,000 new entrants had been received since the start of the conflict, joining 140,000 of their compatriots already residing in the UAE since before 2011.³⁶ Provided the estimates supplied by the UAE authorities are valid, an increase of 100,000 persons over the course of four years (mid-2011 to mid-2013), from 142,000 to 242,000 Syrians, constitutes a 13 percent rate of increase annually. This rate is high enough to support the claim that some avenues were opened to accommodate Syrians in priority.

That said, in the absence of data on UAE residents by country of citizenship for recent years, the Emirati government's claim that it granted residency permits to about 100,000 new Syrian residents cannot be verified. Moreover, it is impossible to determine if these 100,000 Syrians entered as labourers with or without family dependents, or if the UAE's residency policy has been relaxed to permit them entry into the country. Indeed, recent witness accounts indicate that it is now "very difficult" for families of Syrian residents in the UAE to visit GCC countries.³⁷ Employers there also confirm that hiring a Syrian is also "almost impossible."³⁸ Other witnesses stated that UAE authorities favoured certain professions and profiles ("white collar") over others (those in "blue collar" categories).³⁹ This has serious implications:

persons residing without a valid long-term residence and work permit for instance, cannot enrol their children in local schools, besides being themselves unable to work and earn a living wage.

Nevertheless, the UAE claim to be the biggest donor to the cause of the Syrian refugees. According to the *Financial Times*, as of September 2015, “the UAE government gave \$10.7m to the UNHCR with the private sector adding another \$17.1m. A UAE official says in total it has donated \$38m through bilateral aid since 2011”.⁴⁰ Since the onset of the crisis, the UAE also provided over Dh4 billion (around \$1.1 billion) in support of the Syrian people, of which a total of \$581.5 million went to humanitarian assistance. Among the projects funded are the Mrjeb Al Fhood refugee camp in Jordan, home to around 6,500 Syrian refugees and the UAE-Jordanian field hospital in Al Mafrq which provided nearly a half-million treatments. \$72 million more was allocated to support refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey.⁴¹

Qatar

In January 2013, Qatar received the first batch of 42 Syrian refugees from Lebanon. The refugees included widows and families and were received as special guests of the Emir. They were already being assisted by Qatar while in Lebanon and would be fully provided for once they arrived in the country.⁴²

Qatar is one of the most vocal critics of President Bashar Al-Assad. The country donated millions of dollars in humanitarian aid for refugees and is reportedly arming rebel forces in Syria.⁴³ Therefore, some Syrian families found a shelter in Doha. However, due to security concerns, Qatar limited business, work and visitor visas for Syrians during the war. Moreover, no support programmes are available to assist the “refugees”. According to an article in the *Doha News*,

“Qatar has[...] allowed Syrians who were already sponsored and working here to bring in their relatives. However, these applications are approved on a case-by-case basis and can take months to process, as embassy and government officials investigate whether the applicant poses a security risk, among other factors. Once in Qatar, the Syrians are granted a visitor visa that can be renewed inside the country for QR200, exempting them from leaving Qatar and coming back, as many other long-term “visitors” must do, embassy officials said. This appears to be a change from 2013, when many visitors reported having to go off the grid once their visitor visas expired. [...] However, the inability to work on a visitor visa means many Syrians in Qatar face financial hardships, due to the high cost of living. Last year, representatives of the Syrian embassy in Qatar,[said] there are more than 40,000 Syrian expats living here with residency permits. The number of Syrians on visitor visas is more than 20,000, including men, women and children.”⁴⁴

The claim is unverifiable due to lack of relevant and reliable statistics.

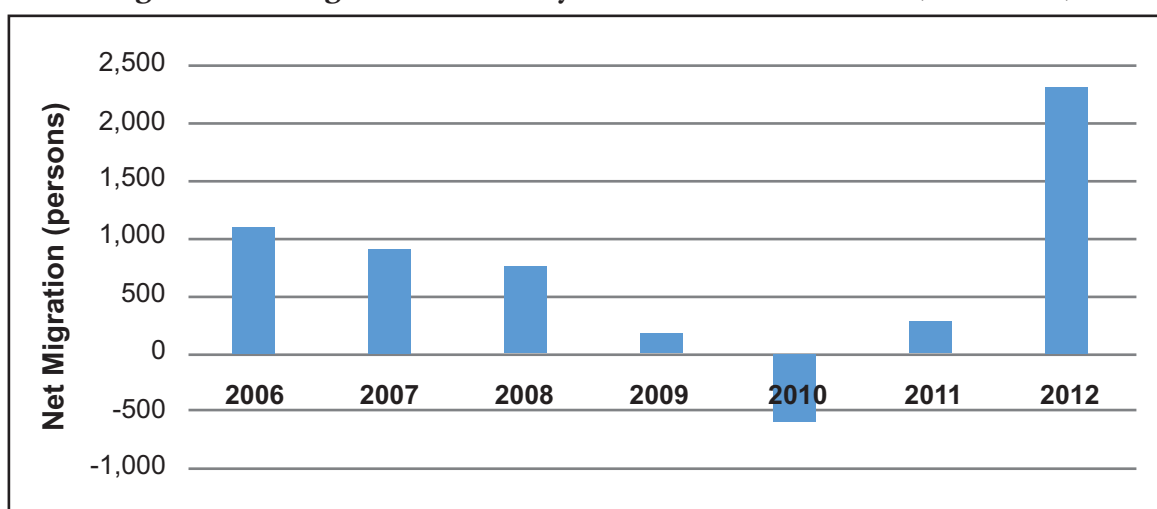
In any case, their parents’ situation also has unfortunate consequences for Syrian children. As Qatar’s Supreme Education Council (Ministry of Education) forbids students without residency permits from attending schools in Qatar, Syrian children on temporary visas cannot enrol there; the Syrian School in Doha is more lenient as regards residency situation but cannot accommodate all applications.⁴⁵

In spite of this situation inside Qatar, the country provides generously for refugee education abroad. Charity organisations such as Qatar Charity are also active in supporting displaced Syrians inside Syria,

Iraq, Lebanon, and Turkey, for example.⁴⁶ Qatar donated \$26.6m, and another \$20.9m has come from the private sector.⁴⁷

Bahrain

Figure 4: Net migration flows of Syrian nationals to Bahrain (2006-2012)

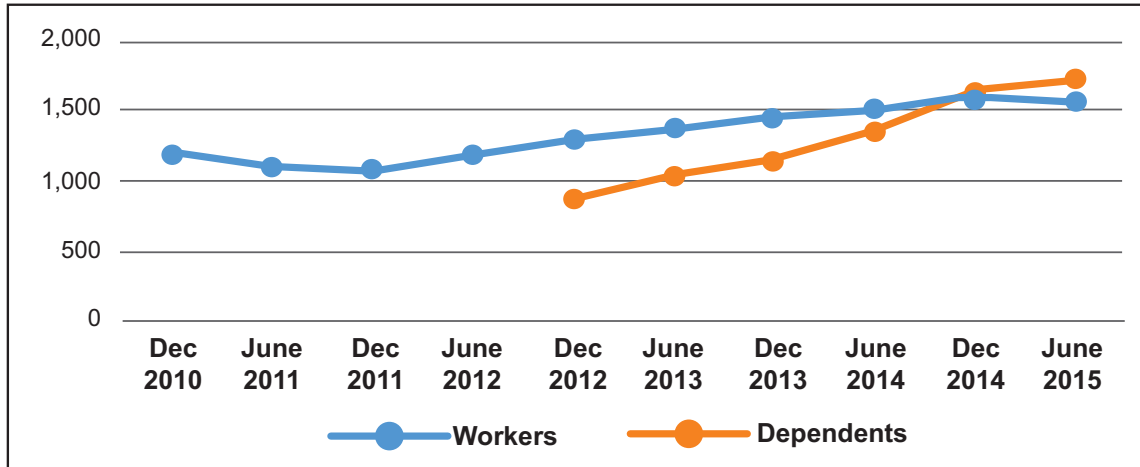


Source: Ministry of Interior

As regards Bahrain, data indicate that Syrians were received in every increasing numbers into the country from the period the conflict started. The year 2012 (the last year for which statistics are available) witnesses a highly positive net migration flow.

Bi-yearly data records of workers and their dependents published by Bahrain's Expat Management System also clearly indicate that the flow of Syrian workers to the Kingdom fluctuated at the beginning of the conflict and has stalled since 2014. Yet dependents have been joining the resident workers in growing numbers since 2013.⁴⁸ Although no mention of such a policy could be found in the press or elsewhere, Bahrain did probably facilitate the entry of Syrian dependents as a way to grant them protection from the conflict.

**Figure 5: Numbers of Syrian workers and dependents residing in Bahrain
(Dec. 2012–June 2015)**



Source: LMRA and EMS

In mid-2012, as Bahrain was conducting support activities in a Syrian refugee camp in Jordan, the Bahraini opposition claimed that Bahrain was actually attempting to naturalise thousands of Sunni Syrian refugees, in a bid to alter the Kingdom's demographic balance in favour of the Sunnis. Bahrain's government vigorously denied the statements made by the opposition.⁴⁹ Such political sensitivities specific to Bahrain may explain the lack of publicisation of the opening of borders to Syrian refugees from the conflict. Apart from state assistance targeted at Syrian refugees abroad, charity operations are also organised in the country to collect funds and in-kind donations to help the Syrians.

Oman

Oman did not declare that it had received Syrians as refugees from the conflict. In general, the Sultanate has only hosted small numbers of Syrian expatriate workers over the years.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, vast charity operations in favour of the victims of the conflict have been organised since the war broke out, under private as well as governmental initiatives.⁵¹ The Sultanate's government is also a major aid donor to victims of the conflict in other Middle Eastern states hosting Syrian refugees, coordinated by the Ministry of Social Development Affairs. Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO) helped raise as much as \$13 million in one single campaign called "Donation for Syria" in 2013. Oman Charitable Organisation was also a prominent contributor to the setting up and equipment of Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan and it has been "determined to continue with the humanitarian assistance programme till the end of the crisis."⁵²

Conclusion

This paper is a work in progress. As of today, a response to the first question explored in the paper ("Can these statements be sustained by available demographic data?"), would be negative. The scarce data available on Syrian nationals in each Gulf country are not detailed enough to allow us to accurately measure the size and structure of flows of Syrian nationals pushed into the GCC as a direct effect of the conflict. The statement by Saudi Arabia is, especially, impossible to verify due to lack of data.

For the same reason, it is difficult to provide evidence in answer to question 2: “Are there figures indicating that the GCC countries relaxed their entry and residency rules from 2011 to allow more Syrians into their territory than the average flow of workers and dependents?” We do not know for certain (except in the case of Bahrain) how many, and who are the Syrians who entered Gulf countries since the start of the conflict, in terms of age, sex, profession and migration status. As for question 3 (“Did these countries enforce measures to support Syrian nationals fleeing the conflict?”), a broad answer could be that some support measures were tailored for the Syrians, such as protection from deportation, exemption from residency renewal, and some access to free education and health. In view of the grave consequences of being irregular for families (impossibility to work and to provide for livelihoods, as well as the impossibility of enrolling children at school), any operation of regularisation is welcome.

From the evidence available, our conclusion has thus to remain limited in scope. Besides being major donors to Syrian refugees in Syria and in neighbouring countries, Gulf States 1) have continued attracting Syrian workers, and may have facilitated family reunions; 2) have enforced social protection and residency facilitation measures for Syrian residents, those who entered before 2011 and could not return, and those who entered since 2011, because of the conflict.

A detailed discussion of the reasons behind the silence surrounding Gulf States’ action towards Syrians inside the region (until September 2015) is beyond the scope of this paper. Many concerns may well be at interplay, among with them the demographic imbalance (nationals being a minority inside their country) as well as keeping a “national preference” for Gulf nationals on the labour market at times of politico-economic tensions due to dropping oil prices.⁵³ However, as some Gulf States are frontline actors in the Syrian conflict, security is certainly a massive concern. The risk of infiltration of activists undertaking terrorist attacks or sedition is taken very seriously. The political affiliation of Syrian “guest” nationals is, therefore, the object of stringent and lengthy control measures. These are hard to reconcile with official statements claiming Gulf States and societies’ solidarity with the Syrian people.

Endnotes

1. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/09/syrias-refugee-crisis-in-numbers/>
2. <http://www.arabnews.com/featured/news/805236>.
3. <http://www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/government/uae-home-to-242000-syrians>.
4. <http://gulfnews.com/news/mena/syria/kuwait-extends-residency-permits-for-syrians-1.1577117>.
5. <http://gulfmigration.eu/gcc-total-population-and-percentage-of-nationals-and-non-nationals-in-gcc-countries-national-statistics-2010-2015-with-numbers/>.
6. <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/03/16/200997.html>. However, some of the Syrian diplomatic representations functioned for a while longer. The *Middle East Monitor* explains that “Most of the countries that are hostile to the Syrian government want to close their embassies, but were confronted with the status quo whereby the Syrian state retains its international legitimacy and makes it impossible for them to do so, being the only body authorised to issue passports and official documents for its nationals.” Indeed, the Syrian embassies in Riyadh and Kuwait, for instance, only ceased activities in March 2014. <https://www.middleeast-monitor.com/news/middle-east/10287-syria-closes-its-embassies-in-riyadh-kuwait-and-washington>.
7. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/03/201332801947829802.html>; <http://dohanews.co/syrian-opposition-opens-new-embassy-in-qatar/>.
8. <http://www.thenational.ae/uae/expatriate-syrians-will-soon-be-able-to-get-passports-in-qatar>. Yet, as of mid-2015, SNC’s concerns for security still hampered the new embassy from issuing and renewing passports, the most pressing need of Syrian expatriates. <http://www.thenational.ae/uae/syrian-embassy-in-doha-ceases-passport-extensions>.
9. On GCC states’ contribution to UNHCR, see for instance K. Young, *Refugee Crisis and Economic Migration: Regional Economic Interdependence and the Arab Gulf States* Washington: The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW), 2015, p. 6. See also L. Al-Khatteeb, “The Gulf States Should Do More for Syrian Refugees,” Markaz, Brookings, September 30, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2015/09/30-gulf-states-syrian-refugees-alkhateeb>.
10. <http://www.arabnews.com/columns/news/804116>.
11. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-09-04/syria-s-refugees-feel-more-welcome-in-europe-than-in-the-gulf>.
12. Adeeb Chichakli, Ambassador of the Syrian National Coalition in the Gulf States <http://aawsat.com/home/article/449411>.
13. <http://www.arabnews.com/news/470216>.
14. This figure is difficult to assess, given the fact that the Saudi statistics on education are neither disaggregated by nationality, nor by country of citizenship and the aggregated figures of enrolment in public education for the years prior to 2011 (2007–2010) do not display a regular upward pattern. However, a very broad estimation of the “surplus” of school students in 2014 due to the enrolment of Syrian pupils can be obtained the following way: 1) calculate the 2007–2010 average rate of growth of school population; 2) apply it to the enrolment figures for the years 2011 to 2014; and 3) subtract the figure obtained (6,682,730) from the actual enrolment figure for 2014 (6,798,442). The figure of the “surplus” obtained is 115,712 students. Not-

withstanding the reservations noted previously regarding the consistency of data, this method may support the claim by Saudi authorities of an incorporation of about 100,000 extra students into the country's public education system (primary, intermediate and secondary) (Source: Chapter "Education Statistics," Statistical Yearbooks 2007 to 2014, CDSI).

15. <http://www.cbssyr.sy/yearbook/2011/Data-Chapter2/TAB-11-2-2011.htm>. The data concern all residents, Syrians and foreign nationals.
16. The family structure of refugees in Jordan and Turkey, for instance, comprises slightly smaller numbers of individuals in the age group 60 and above (around 3 per cent) than in Syria in 2010 (6.4 percent). However, the age composition of Syrian refugees in Jordan and Turkey is similar to that of residents in Syria before the war.
17. <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/15788>.
18. According to *Al-Akhbar* newspaper in an article dated May 2013 <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/15788>. Yet, the Saudi authorities denied the statements http://www.saudinf.com/display_news.php?id=7876.
19. Yemenis were among the most affected by deportations from Saudi Arabia: above 200,000 in 2013, and the deportations have continued throughout 2014, according to the General Directorate of Passports <http://www.gdp.gov.sa/sites/pgd/ar-SA/MediaCenter/News/Pages/default.aspx>. However, a parallel movement of entries or re-entries seems to have taken place. As of late September 2015, Saudi Arabia has stopped deporting Yemenis and the country engaged in a campaign to grant undocumented Yemenis who had been in Saudi Arabia before April 9 a six-month renewable visa enabling them to work and live legally in Saudi Arabia. As of late September 2015, 460,000 Yemenis have been "regularised," which accounts for the high number of re-entries by Yemenis.
20. <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5135c0902.pdf>.
21. <http://www.arabnews.com/news/470216>.
22. <http://www.spa.gov.sa/English/details.php?id=1397412>.
23. <http://www.arabnews.com/featured/news/805236>.
24. <http://www.alhayat.com/Articles/3237964/وزير-التعليم-العالى-يوجه-بقبول-3000-طالب-سوري-في-الجامعات>
25. http://admissions.kau.edu.sa/SYR_1435/.
26. <http://www.albawaba.com/news/saudis-allow-syrians-pilgrimage-visas-stay-country-639230>.
27. <http://arabic.arabianbusiness.com/politics-economics/2014/dec/30/378211/#.VhJ3DXrtmko>.
28. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/55f828a8-5216-11e5-8642-453585f2cfcd.html#axzz3q3Di84bO>.
29. <http://gulfmigration.eu/non-kuwaiti-population-by-migration-status-and-country-of-citizenship-of-holder-2009-some-nationalities/>; <http://gulfmigration.eu/non-kuwaiti-population-by-migration-status-and-country-of-citizenship-of-holder-2011-some-nationalities/> and <http://gulfmigration.eu/non-kuwaiti-population-by-sex-migration-status-and-country-of-citizenship-of-holder-2012/>.
30. According to the Immigration and nationality firm Fragomen: http://www.martindale.com/immigration-law/article_Fragomen-Del-Rey-Bernsen-Loewy-LLP_1498758.htm.
31. <http://gulfnnews.com/news/mena/syria/kuwait-extends-residency-permits-for-syrians-1.1577117>.

32. Kuwait held an amnesty for migrants in irregular situations from March 1 to June 30, 2011 (N. Shah, "Recent Amnesty Programmes for Irregular Migrants in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia: Some Successes and Failures," *Explanatory Note No. 9/2014, GLMM*, 2014): in this time they could fix their status. Crackdowns on remaining migrants in irregular situation were conducted after the expiry of the grace period. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour stated mid-2013 that over 67,000 migrants (from all nationalities) had been stripped of their residencies in 2012, due to overstays and deportations. From April to July 2013, an additional 2,000 migrants had been deported from Kuwait due to traffic violations. Some Syrians may have been among the migrants who left at that time.
33. Yet, some Syrian nationals are under threat of deportation under the charge of "disruptions of public order" (street fights) <http://gulfnews.com/news/mena/syria/kuwait-extends-residency-permits-for-syrians-1.1577117>.
34. <http://gulfmigration.eu/uae-arab-foreign-labourers-employed-in-the-private-sector-and-registered-with-the-ministry-of-labour-by-country-of-citizenship-and-sex-2005-2007/>.
35. <http://gulfmigration.eu/uae-arab-foreign-labourers-employed-in-the-private-sector-and-registered-with-the-ministry-of-labour-by-country-of-citizenship-and-sex-2005-2007/>.
36. <http://www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/government/uae-aid-to-syrian-refugees-is-the-highest>.
37. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/55f828a8-5216-11e5-8642-453585f2cfcd.html#axzz3prAiEo38>. Already in 2012-early 2013, parents, children, spouses were allowed in the UAE; Brothers and sisters were allowed with some difficulties. In the case of extended family members, it was simply not easy. <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/15788>.
38. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/55f828a8-5216-11e5-8642-453585f2cfcd.html#axzz3prAiEo38>.
39. <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/15788>.
40. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/55f828a8-5216-11e5-8642-453585f2cfcd.html#axzz3prAiEo38>.
41. <http://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/uae-supports-syrian-people-over-aed-4b-2011-extends-residency-permits>.
42. <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/qatar/220421/first-batch-of-syria-refugees-lands-in-doha>.
43. <http://dohanews.co/syrian-refugees-search-for-support-in-qatar/>.
44. <http://dohanews.co/qatar-other-gcc-nations-urged-to-host-syrian-refugees-as-crisis-worsens/>.
45. <http://dohanews.co/syrian-refugees-search-for-support-in-qatar/>.
46. <http://dohanews.co/syrian-refugees-search-for-support-in-qatar>.
47. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/55f828a8-5216-11e5-8642-453585f2cfcd.html#axzz3prAiEo38>.
48. Syrian dependents do not appear in published records that only display the most numerous nationalities. Syrians' emergence in the ranking actually signals an increase in their numbers.
49. <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-denies-bid-to-naturalise-syrians-1.1080480>.
50. They do not appear in official statistics, which only account for the most numerous national communities.
51. <http://timesofoman.com/article/67091/Oman/Donate-for-refugees-in-Syria-plead-Omani-and-Syrian-residents>.
52. <http://omanobserver.om/omans-helping-hand-to-syrian-refugees/>.

53. Another, more general argument would be “the fundamental incompatibility of the Gulf political-economic model with the category of refugee”(https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2015-10-05/no-gulf-country-syrian-refugees.) This refers to the socio-political challenge of reconciling the reception of large numbers of “refugees”, i.e., under State supervision, with the *kafala* “sponsorship” system, which precisely delegates to citizens the management of foreign populations. As such, the institution of sponsorship is the backbone of the social contract in the Gulf States (on *kafala* and demographics, see for instance pp. 154-157 in Fargues and De Bel-Air, “Migration to the Gulf States: the Political Economy of Exceptionalism”, in: D. Acosta Arcarao and A. Wiesbrock, *A Global Migration: Old Assumptions, New Dynamics* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO), Vol. 3, 139-166.

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