



Gulf Research Center Foundation
Knowledge for All

Second Gulf Research Meeting 2011

Workshop Socio-Economic Impacts of GCC Migration

Directors

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Summary

While we know that Gulf migration has wide-ranging socioeconomic impacts on the sending and receiving countries, systematic and objective research based on empirical data is scarce in the region. The goals of this workshop were therefore to bring together those scholars assessing the above impacts at the individual, community or societal level in either sending countries or the GCC countries. Some of the themes on which papers were invited included the impacts of GCC migration on spouses and children left behind, changes in gender roles, gender relations, remittance behaviors, living arrangements, psychological and physical health of migrant workers, and care of children and elderly in the GCC countries.

The workshop received about 30 proposals from which 14 were selected. A total of 13 papers were received and uploaded on the GRM website. In addition, a paper was presented by Nasra Shah, and a special presentation to introduce participants to an existing online database on migration (CARIM database on international migration) was made by Philippe Fargues. Together with regular participants, the workshop benefitted from the presence of three listening participants and several persons who attended specific presentations. Four participants who had submitted papers were unable to attend the workshop due to health problems or unforeseen emergencies.

Participants included economists, demographers, sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists resulting in a highly interdisciplinary debate and discussion. The papers covered a wide array of topics ranging from broad theoretical overviews to specific case studies. Almost all the six Gulf countries and some sending countries were covered; almost half the papers focused on the UAE and none on Oman.

The workshop began with a presentation by Nasra Shah outlining the socio-demographic transitions occurring among nationals of the GCC countries and their implications. She reported that fertility of nationals has declined to less than four births per woman in all GCC countries while infant mortality has declined to less than 10 per 1,000 live births in most countries. Despite these declines, the growth rates

among GCC nationals are high and will pose serious challenges for the growing national labor force. At the same time, the reliance on foreign nationals is still on the rise.

A paper by Valentine Moghadam and Massoud Karshenas presented a broad overview of the social policies regarding labor force recruitment and management in the Gulf. While taking stock of the existing policies and the lack of GCC country ratification of migration initiatives by United Nations bodies, the authors examined the possibility of introducing policies that can be democratic, inclusive, and developmental. A general theoretical paper, using the example of the UAE, by Victor Huang attempted to develop a theoretical framework for analyzing the role of social network diversity in the development of trust among people of different cultures to enable effective knowledge sharing and collaboration. A paper by Ibrahim Awad (not presented) outlined the role of the Kafala system for GCC labor markets and proposed some alternatives. Six papers focused on specific migrant groups, migrant workers, and other aspects of migration in the UAE. Amin Moghadam and Maryam Khazaeli described the experience and lived realities of the Iranian Achami migrants in Dubai. They illustrated how this subgroup has created a new social and spatial dynamic whereby they are connected in Iran and Dubai and have benefitted Gulf Research Meeting – July 2012 59

The 2012 Gulf Research Meeting from a “dual belonging” status. Musa Shallal described the situation and living arrangements of Sudanese immigrant families in the UAE, some of whom moved to the country 40 years ago. He described the situation of some families faced with difficulties resulting from family separation since the husband had to leave the wife and children in Sudan. Another paper on the UAE, by Sanuja Ali, provided a general discussion of several different aspects of foreigners’ lives in Dubai, which she describes as a city of “guests”, with a layering of national groups. A paper by Josiah Rector (not presented) described Dubai as a global city which, he argues, is similar to the labor market dynamics that occur in other global cities of the world. A paper by Abideen Adewale discussed the relatively new phenomenon of foreign students in the UAE who could possibly be trained and then retained there to contribute to the labor force to make up for the shortage of indigenous workers.

Finally, a paper by Daniel Falk (not presented) discussed the role of Arabic language in the landscape of Abu Dhabi. It focused on how perceived identity threat, caused by mass immigration, informed language policy in the UAE.

Three papers focused on Indian migration to the Gulf. Using an unconventional methodology, Ganesh Seshan compared the reports of Indian workers in Qatar and their wives back in India about the husband’s earnings in Qatar. He found that wives underreported their husband’s earnings, which was associated with the amount of remittances sent to India. In a paper focusing on Syrian Christians from Kerala living in Kuwait, Ginu Zacharia examined the transnational religious dynamics to learn whether religion plays a role in reorienting a migrant’s life in the host 60 country and in creating a sense of belonging. In a paper on impacts of migration from North Indian villages to the Gulf, Anisur Rahman provided some observations on such impacts. Finally, a paper (not presented) on the social networks of Sudanese and Egyptian migrants in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, analyzed the structure and functions of these networks, the challenges and opportunities before them, and their future vision about social and economic remittances.

Papers

- “Social Policy and Labor in GCC” by Valentine M. Moghadam, Northeastern University, Massachusetts, United States
- “Migration and Language Policy - the Role of Arabic in the Linguistic Landscape of Abu Dhabi” by Daniel Falk, University of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany
- “Blurring the Boundaries of Belief: The Transnational Religious Dynamics of the Syrian Christians of Kerala in Kuwait” by Ginu Zacharia Oommen, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India
- “Iranian Migration in Dubai: the Case of Achami Migrants” by Amin Moghadam, Lyon II University, Lyon, France
- “Dubai, City of Guests” by Sanuja Karayil Mohammad Ali, University of California, Berkeley, United States
- “Labor in a Global City South Asian Guest Workers in Dubai, 1960-2011” by Josiah Rector, Wayne State University, Michigan, United States
- “Social Network among Migrants in Saudia Arabia: Opportunities and Implications” by Amira Yousif Babiker Badri, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
- “What do Migrants and Their Spouses Back Home Talk About? An Empirical Study of Migrants in Qatar from Southern India” by Ganesh Seshan, Georgetown University, School of Foreign Service in Qatar, Doha, Qatar
- “Trust and Knowledge Transfer in a Multicultural Environment - The Role of Social Network Diversity” by Victor Huang, Zayed University, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates