

Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) - Annual Meeting 2013

New Orleans: 10 - 13 October 2013

Panel

Arab Gulf Migration: Practices, Data and Policies

Organized under the auspices of the **GCC Labor Markets and Migration Program** – a joint program of the Gulf Research Center (GRC-Jeddah, Geneva, Cambridge) & the European University Institute (EUI- Florence)

Participants

Paper presenters

- Zahra Babar, Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS), Georgetown University, Doha
- Ganesh Seshan, School of Foreign Service (SFS), Georgetown University, Doha
- Abdelkader Latreche, Permanent Population Committee (PPC), Doha
- Georges Naufal, American University of Sharjah (AUS)

Discussant

- Ala Al-Hamarneh, Center for Research on the Arab World, Institute of Geography, University of Mainz

Chair and organizer

- Imco Brouwer, Gulf Labor Markets and Migration Program, Gulf Research Center, Geneva

Panel Outline

The six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) –Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates– share as a common feature a high dependency on a foreign workforce and a persistently high and, in most cases, growing proportion of non-nationals in the resident population. The GCC's uniqueness, however, does not lie in the high level of immigration as much as in the persistence over time of a high proportion of non-citizens. Insisting on GCC uniqueness may lead to the wrong notion that the migration it receives is entirely different from migration to other countries in the world with regard to its causes and consequences. As in many countries with a guest-workers system, in the GCC the number of non-working foreign nationals has continuously grown as a result of family reunification leading to immigration of: non-national spouses and children; children born in the GCC from non-nationals; and foreign nationals retiring in the GCC countries where they spent their active life. In other words, the GCC countries are experiencing that many guest-workers turn out to be immigrants, but governments do not (yet) formally acknowledge this fact. Far from being unique, the GCC countries are subject to similar demographic, economic, social, and political challenges as other countries that experience significant immigration. In this panel is argued that in explaining population and migration specificities of the GCC states one should look at policies –policies that were adopted or were consciously not adopted– and at their intended and unintended consequences. The panel looks at a number of migration-related policies of the countries of origin and of destination, including: reducing dependency on foreign workers; regulating access and control of foreign workers; formally preferring Arab over Asian workers, but de facto preferring Asians over Arabs. Another key focus of the panel is data. Without sufficient data, choices of individual migrants and of governments of the countries of origin and destination are ill-informed. All papers rely on the increasing amount of data that GCC countries make publically available. One paper in particular shows what can and must be done with demographic and administrative data. Papers make an effort to focus on various angles of specific policy domains (demographic, economic, social, and political). In doing so, the panel aims at contributing to the understanding of migration dynamics of the GCC countries and to determine what is unique / specific to the GCC countries and what is not.

Zahra Babar

Negotiating the Alien Arab: Labor Mobility in the State of Qatar

Although much recent scholarship has focused attention on the conditions of non-Arab migrants to the Persian Gulf, the study of Arab migrants to the region has been neglected for several decades. This paper addresses an important gap in the literature on labor migration by focusing on migrant Arab workers in the State of Qatar. Existing ethnographic research, detailing mostly the lives of workers from South and South East Asia, has underlined how nationality, language, and ethnicity have a significant impact on individual migrants' experiences of living and working in the GCC. In addition, inter-disciplinary research has focused on the system of regional migration governance and processes of labor recruitment and how these shape the migration experience. However, this body of work has not provided insight on the specific experiences of Arab migrants. Given the current levels of political instability in some parts of the Arab world, which may be propelling new streams of Arab workers to seek opportunities in the Gulf States, it is important to re-focus scholarly attention on regional Arab labor mobility.

The paper examines Arab-origin migration to Qatar, reviewing how the state has negotiated the entry and control of 'Alien' Arabs. The paper examines the evolution and transformation of migration patterns to the country, assesses policies adopted by the state to control the flow of foreigners, and argues that these policies have been an integral part of more general processes of political and economic change in the country. Particular attention is given to scrutinizing how and why Qatar has become more selective and politicized in negotiating labor migration, and how this has impacted on Arab migration. Articles within the Labour Law of Qatar privilege Arab workers, yet the drive for lower-skill workers who are willing to accept lower wages has led to an increasing reliance on migrants from less developed countries further afield. The forces and factors driving regional migration have become more complex over time, and traditional explanations for the motivation, attraction, and selection of migrants are no longer sufficient in the study of migration to the Persian Gulf. Qatar, which in the last decade has emerged as one of the Middle East's fastest-growing economies, provides a sound case-study for analysis.

George Naufal

The Flow of Information in the Story of a Typical Expatriate Worker in the Gulf

People are motivated to move by home country factors and/or destination country factors. A rational economic agent would follow a cost-benefit analysis when deciding to migrate. Both Neoclassical and the new economics of migration (NEM) agree that, to a large extent, the expected wage differential between the destination and home countries play a decisive role in the decision to move residence. Unexpected shocks in the destination country introduce risk factors that distort the expected wage and therefore could ultimately guide the migrant's decision whether to stay or even to migrate in the first place. Shocks include macro-shocks, exogenous to the migrant, and micro-shocks which are endogenous and are directly linked to the migrant (for instance committing a crime). In the case of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, unexpected shocks to migrants are even more costly because they do not only include loss of income (loss of job) but also could potentially lead to their early return to their home countries.

This paper examines potential income shocks to a typical migrant living in the Gulf region. In particular, we look at the story of a domestic worker from the Philippines who was forced to return back home. We focus our attention to the role of information asymmetry that, to a certain extent, played a main role in the early departure of the migrant. We examine the flow of information between four main players: host government, sponsor, embassy and migrant. The paper therefore offers direction for future areas of research, specifically in terms of data collection in the Gulf. In that sense, the paper is a methodological study. Further, the paper offers clear policy implications for labor exporting and importing countries. By default, policies of domestic workers and sponsorship directly control the number of foreign workers by regulating the access to domestic help. Further, with more uncertainty (unexpected shocks), expatriates (of whom domestic workers) are inclined to remit more and fast. Building on the policy implications of the paper, we argue that the host government (Gulf country) must effectively control the flow of information to the other parties. While introducing new regulations to adapt to the fast growing economies is important, disseminating those laws to a dynamic and very diverse population is quite challenging but also crucial.

Abdelkader Latreche

Transformation of International Migrants in the UAE

The migrant community in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is diverse from demographic, economic, social and administrative perspectives. Migrants have different administrative and legal status (temporarily vs. temporary-permanent, regular vs. irregular); they cover the entire spectrum from lowly skilled to highly skilled labor; many of the foreign nationals have no partners/dependents but an increasing number are living with their families, including children born abroad or, increasingly, born in the country. There is an increasing number of foreign pupils and students (either born abroad or in the UAE). Furthermore, there is also a growing number of foreign graduate students enrolled in UAE universities and international universities located in the country. Foreign investors form another expanding group of individuals and also refugees in the country. As a result the community of non-nationals in the UAE have become extremely diversified and complex. The UAE has de facto become a country of immigration, moving away from the idea of importing temporary foreign labor.

In order to make the appropriate policy decisions, one needs to understand reality, the recent trends and the expected developments in the near future. This paper will analyze the structure of migrants and expatriates' present in the UAE, the nature of the growth and changes of each category, through the use of a number of sources that cover various aspects of expatriates' presence such as the statistics of expatriates' movement (arrival and departure) in the state, the natural growth of expatriates and their families by nationality, the presence of expatriates' children at all levels of education by nationality, the distribution of migrants in labor market activities such as health, education, administration, financial remittances, and asylum, etc. and linking them up with the regulations. This study uses a multi-dimensional demographic analysis of the presence of expatriates and migrants in the UAE avoiding the classical problems prevailing in international migration studies on the GCC which rely entirely on analysis of the labor market, labor rights and the competition between Arab and Asian workers.

Ganesh Seshan

A Survey of Migration Policies and Programs in Sending and GCC Host Countries

Recognizing that migration is substantial force that shapes economic outcomes of migrant households and host country natives, different policies in both origin and host countries are called for in order to maximize potential benefits and reduce costs. This paper surveys innovative programs and policies that currently exist in sending and host countries in the GCC and outlines high-potential areas for further experimentation and research. The focus is on policies and programs that could help raise the development impact of migration and remittances. We classify these with respect to type and stage of migration during which they are applied – before, during and after migration. While of course these are not mutually exclusive, programs offer training, financial education, financial services, or reintegration while policies aim at regulation, home country investment, or political involvement. Unsurprisingly, much more work needs to be done on policies and programs targeting migrant households, whether in the origin or host country. Despite a growing number of migration-targeted programs and policies undertaken by governments and non-governmental organizations, we know very little about their effectiveness or limitations. At the pre-departure stage, we require a better understanding of what constraints potential migrants face in learning about and pursuing job opportunities abroad. For migrants to the GCC where permanent settlement in the host country is an option for only a minority, preparing for reintegration back home is critical component of the migration lifecycle. Interventions that help generate new income sources back home, such as small business using capital raised from remittances, that migrants could then manage upon returning permanently is an area that merits further work.