FIFTH GULF RESEARCH MEETING 2014

Workshop

Determinants of Future Migration in the Gulf

Nasra M. Shah - Professor - Department of Community Medicine and Behavioral Sciences - Faculty of Medicine - Kuwait University - Email: nasra@hsc.edu.kw

Philippe Fargues - Director - Migration Policy Centre (MPC) - Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS) - European University Institute (EUI) - Email: philippe.fargues@eui.eu

Under the auspices of the Gulf Labour Market and Migration (GLMM) program - a joint program of the MPC and the GRC

Updated: 08 November 2013

Please Note: Applications for the workshop should be submitted through the GRM website (grm.grc.net) once the Call for Applications has been published (expected end of November 2013)

Introduction and Background
Contrary to the plans and desires of the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the proportion of non-citizens in the Gulf has steadily increased during the last four decades. Country-based data reveal that the percentage of non-nationals comprised 48.1 % of the total population of 48.1 million GCC residents (Table 1). A very significant difference exists in the proportion of non-nationals in the various GCC countries, ranging from 32.0 % in Saudi Arabia to 88.5 % in the United Arab Emirates.
Table 1: Total population, and percentage of nationals and non-nationals, latest year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>% Nationals</th>
<th>% Non-nationals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain (2010)^a</td>
<td>1,234,571</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait (mid-2013)^b</td>
<td>3,891,943</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman (mid-2013)^c</td>
<td>3,855,206</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar (2010)^d</td>
<td>1,699,435</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>85.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia (2012)^e</td>
<td>29,195,895</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Arab Emirates (2010)^f</td>
<td>8,264,070</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>88.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>48,141,120</strong></td>
<td><strong>51.9</strong></td>
<td><strong>48.1</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


GCC countries share many of the policies that they have instituted during the last two decades for limiting the number of non-nationals in their populations and the labor force. Such policies include ones related to maximizing the number of nationals through high fertility, and participation of women in the labor force. At the same time, active efforts are being made to restrict the inflow of foreign workers. Despite the heightened efforts aimed at restricting the percentage of non-nationals, the outflows from the major sending countries in Asia show an upward trend (Shah, 2012), as do the inflows to the six GCC countries (Fargues and Brouwer, 2012).

Two of the main reasons for the increasing percentages of non-nationals consist of the continued needs of the labor force for foreign workers, and the exacerbating stock of foreign workers in the GCC countries. While data on the duration of stay of non-nationals are not available for any of the countries in a systematic manner, observation suggests that migration to the Gulf is not a “temporary” phenomenon as conceived and planned by the governments. Once in the Gulf, migrants are able to prolong their stay for several years. Those who are allowed to bring their families with them are able to produce a second generation of migrants in the host countries. A recent study from Kuwait shows that about 18 % of all non-nationals were born in the country. Among high school students who were born in the country, about one-third of the parents were also born in Kuwait, implying that the students were in fact third generation (Shah, 2013).

Factors that affect the volume and pace of migration originate in the sending countries as well as in the Gulf. In the sending countries, the relatively low rate of socioeconomic development combined with a high rate of population growth in many of the South and Southeast Asian countries ensures a continued supply of inexpensive labor force that is willing and able to move to Gulf countries to benefit from higher wages paid there, relative to those in their home countries. Labor migration continues to be encouraged by the sending countries as a means of reducing unemployment and enhancing foreign exchange earnings. Effective regulatory mechanisms have been developed by several Asian countries to maximize outflows and simultaneously increase the protection and welfare of their emigrating workers. In addition, vast social networks of foreign workers and their families have been established within the Gulf countries that support chain migration and the enlargement of the stock of workers.

In the Gulf countries, extensive plans for infrastructure and socioeconomic development continue to necessitate the import of foreign workers in view of the small number of indigenous workers. In addition, foreign workers are needed to fill many jobs in the private sector that the natives are reluctant
to take up e.g., construction and factory related jobs. Native workers prefer to work in public sector jobs that are less arduous and less competitive. The supply of indigenous workers is also curtailed by the limited participation of women in the labor force. Gulf governments have made concerted efforts to increase the education and skill level of women and their participation in the workforce has been rising. However, most employed women are concentrated in the public sector, and in a limited number of occupations (e.g., teaching and clerical work).

With the rising personal income of Gulf citizens, a new dimension has been added to the lifestyle in the form of the rapid rise in demand for domestic workers. Large numbers of domestic workers from the Philippines, Indonesia, India, and Sri Lanka have arrived during the last 3-4 decades to work in the Gulf. Most are sponsored by individual families and work for them. Some are sponsored by families (for a fee) but engage in freelance work which is considered illegal. The experience of Kuwait highlights the enormity of this phenomenon. In a population 2.2 million legal foreign residents, the country had 607,667 persons (26.4%) on a domestic service visa in 2012 (Ministry of Interior data available on the GLMM Database).

The wave of protest and political unrest that spread over the Arab region in recent years might have an impact on migration to the Gulf States. Unrest in Bahrain may have produced some outflows from the country, while revolts in Egypt, Syria and Yemen must be expected to affect flows of migration to the GCC. One cannot predict the long-term impact of the Arab Spring on migration, which will be anything from return migration, if revolts end up bringing freedom, democracy and well-being, to increased emigration if they fail to do so. In the short term, however, it is increased emigration pressure which is observed. How much of that pressure is exerted on GCC countries and how do GCC governments receive migrants from countries where there is political unrest are questions still to be answered.

Finally, the attitudes and perception of the natives towards foreigners is likely to be an important factor in how “welcome” or “unwelcome” the foreigners feel. The general treatment accorded to foreigners by natives may influence a migrant’s decision to continue staying in a Gulf country or to return home, or move to another country. A two way association probably exists between the citizen’s perceptions of foreigners and government policies relating to foreigners. Both may impact future decisions about whether to bring in foreign workers.

**Goals of the workshop**

The main goal of this workshop is to identify and discuss the factors that seem most likely to determine the pace, volume and shape of future migrant inflows to the Gulf countries. Such factors might include social, political, economic, legal and others. The workshop plans to specifically highlight the following themes in relation to their impact on future migration:

- Socioeconomic development in South and Southeast Asia;
- Reliance on Gulf migration as a “safety valve” for sending countries;
- Economic health of GCC countries;
- Pace of infrastructure and socioeconomic development in GCC countries;
- Political and social unrest in GCC countries and in the sending countries;
- Labor force nationalization policies in the Gulf;
- Women’s participation in the labor force in GCC countries;
- “Semi-permanence” of migrants to the GCC countries;
- Policies of GCC countries regarding future migration to the Gulf;
- Attitudes and perceptions of Gulf citizens towards migrants and their families.
Those who will submit a paper proposal are strongly encouraged to take note of and possibly use the data made available at the Gulf Labor Markets and Migration program’s website: gulfmigration.eu.

References
GLMM - Gulf Labor Market and Migration database: gulfmigration.eu.