

GLMM Policy Brief - No. 1/2019

Empowering Women and Fostering Fertility: Two Conflicting Policy Goals in Qatar?¹

Philippe Fargues

Executive Summary

Non-nationals comprise 91 per cent of Qatar's population. In response to the challenge to nationhood it faces, Qatar applies an unwavering pro-birth policy to nationals. But Qatar is also a resolutely modernising country whose government is keen to promote women's full access to all levels of education and employment. Could it be that these two strategies—advocating women's high fertility and supporting their enrolment at university and participation in the labour market—collide?

The most recent statistical data show a spectacular progress in women's education in a few generations, from a very low 1.9 years of schooling and a negligible proportion (0 per cent) of women with a university education in the generations born before 1942 (aged 65 and over in the 2016 labour force survey), to a very high 11.4 years at school and an unmatched 46.6 per cent women with a university education in the generations born in 1987-1991 (aged 25-29 in 2016).

The progress of women's economic participation has been slower. Yet the proportion of economically active women—36.9 per cent in 2016—though it remains low by global standards, is fairly high compared with other Arab countries.

Regarding fertility, the reprocessing of the most recent population census (2010) provides the following findings:

- Total fertility has declined, but it remains high in relative terms (ca. 3 children per women)
- Education is not a significant factor of fertility differentials
- Women's economic participation is a key determinant of fertility decline
- Employing migrant domestic workers allows maintaining large families

1. This Policy Brief is written in the framework of a project funded by the Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF) under its National Priority Research Program (NPRP) – Project NPRP 9-190-5-022 – and is implemented by the GLMM (European University Institute and the Gulf Research Center Foundation) and the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) at Qatar University.

On the basis of these findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Women's universal access to all levels of education must be furthered, and curricula as well as individual students' choices must adapt to rapidly evolving labour needs
- Putting efforts in developing women's economic participation should be a logical consequence of families' and the state's considerable investment on female education
- Encouraging firms to open jobs for women and shaping male mentalities so that a head of household welcomes his wife's commitment outside home are priorities
- In order for women's employment outside home not to prevent them from building a family of the size they want, the state must continue its support to working mothers
- For migrant domestic workers who provide economically active women with help at home to be fully protected, the state must put in place monitoring mechanisms to make sure that Domestic Workers Law of 2017 is effectively implemented
- Finally, the state must acknowledge that fertility alone cannot compensate for demographic imbalances. No significant increase in the share of nationals in the resident population of Qatar should be expected unless a resolute naturalisation policy granting citizenship to selected foreign nationals is put in place

The population challenge

Qatar, together with the UAE, holds the record for the world's fastest demographic growth since 1950 in relative terms. Between 1950 and 2019, Qatar's total population increased from 25,000 to 2.7 million: it multiplied by more than 100 while in the same period, the world's population multiplied by 3. An overwhelming aspect of Qatar's demographic growth has been a rate of immigration that is among the world's highest. As a result, 91 per cent of Qatar's resident population at present comprises non-nationals. As a way to mitigate a continuously growing imbalance between nationals and foreign nationals, the government of Qatar applies an unwavering pro-birth policy for nationals. At the same time, Qatar is a modernising country with regard to the status of women, shifting away from a tradition of gender inequality in access to education and employment.² The problem is that women's education and economic activity are known as favouring birth control and the reduction of fertility. To what extent does this quasi-universal rule apply to Qatari nationals? Could the two strategies followed by the Qatari state—on the one hand, supporting women's high fertility and, on the other hand, promoting their education and economic participation—collide?

Pro-family and pro-women policies

Qatar's pro-family policy is enshrined in its Permanent Constitution, which stresses that "the family is the basis of the society [and] the law shall regulate adequate means to protect the family, support its structure, strengthen its ties, and protect maternity, childhood, and old age."³ The country's pro-natalist

2. For a detailed overview of Qatar's demographic and economic developments: Françoise De Bel-Air, "Demography, Migration, and the Labour Market in Qatar," https://gulfmigration.org/media/pubs/exno/GLMM_EN_2017_03.pdf.

3. <http://www.almeezan.qa/LawView.aspx?opt&LawID=2284&language=en>.

policy has been emphasised by the Permanent Population Committee’s programme—the Population Policy of the State of Qatar 2017-2022—aiming to “master population growth rates during the period 2017-2022, in order to reform the demographic imbalances.”⁴ Goal number one is to “increase the number of citizens.” For this, the state will “issue legislation to endorse the Marriage Fund; introduce dowry and wedding cost reduction; increase the number of low-cost wedding halls in major cities in the State.” An additional goal is to “provide supporting programs to reduce the decline of fertility and childbearing rates among Qatari women.”⁵

On the other side, the development plan launched in 2008, Qatar National Vision 2030, aims to “enhance women’s capacities and empower them to participate fully in the political and economic spheres, especially in decision-making roles.”⁶ Actually, Qatar’s strong commitment to empower women has translated into spectacular changes in recent decades. As shown by Table 1, women’s average level of education rose from a very low 1.9 years of schooling and a negligible proportion (0 per cent) of women with a university education in the generations born before 1942 (aged 65 and over in the 2016 labour force survey) to a very high 11.4 years at school and an unmatched 46.6 per cent women with a university education in the generations born in 1987-1991 (aged 25-29 in 2016). The proportion of women who attended university peaked at 60.3 per cent among the generations born in 1972-76 (aged 40-44 in 2016).

Table 1: Educational level of Qatari women by generation

Generations	Average number of years at school	Proportion with university education
Before 1942	1.9	0.0%
1942 – 1946	2.1	1.0%
1947 – 1951	4.3	10.3%
1952 – 1956	5.0	20.8%
1957 – 1961	6.3	43.4%
1962 – 1966	7.0	53.0%
1967 – 1971	8.1	57.2%
1972 – 1976	9.5	60.3%
1977 – 1981	10.1	59.6%
1982 – 1986	11.1	58.7%
1987 – 1991	11.4	46.6%

Source: Author’s calculation from Labour Force Survey 2016,

<https://www.mdps.gov.qa/en/statistics1/pages/topicslisting.aspx?parent=Social&child=LaborForce>.

For lack of long time series, the progress of women’s economic participation is more difficult to assess. Table 2 shows that 36.9 per cent of women aged 15 and over were economically active at the time of the 2016 labour force survey. This level is low by global standards but fairly high compared with other Arab

4. https://www.mdps.gov.qa/en/statistics/Statistical%20Releases/Population/Population/2017/population_policy_2017_EN.pdf.

5. Idem.

6. <https://www.mdps.gov.qa/en/qnv1/Pages/default.aspx>.

countries, which are characterised by a deficit of female economic participation. Moreover, the 2016 labour survey shows a steady increase in female rates of economic participation in recent years, from 31.5 per cent in 2011 to 36.9 per cent in 2016. From that point of view, the goal set by the Population Policy to “increase the fields of women’s participation, particularly labour force participation” seems in the process of being attained.

Table 2: Participation rates of Qatari women aged 15 years and above by calendar year

Year	Percentage active
2011	31.5
2012	34.6
2013	34.7
2014	35.0
2015	36.1
2016	36.9

Source: Labour Force Survey 2016.

How did Qatari women’s fertility respond to their increasing education and economic activity? Has the objective of “providing an environment that contributes to balancing women’s work and family responsibilities”⁷ fully worked? Did the different channels through which the Qatari state supports family building among nationals—from various loans for marriage and housing, generous child allowances on top of free education and health, and lengthy fully paid maternity leave to religious TV programmes on the duty of marriage and procreation⁸—produce the expected outcomes? A closer look at fertility levels, trends, and differentials brings a mitigated answer.

Fertility outcomes

For the purpose of this policy brief, the level of fertility of Qatari women is measured by their Total Fertility Rate (TFR).⁹ Comparing TFRs of all Qatari women at different points in time makes it possible to assess fertility trends (Table 3), and comparing TFRs of different sub-groups of Qatari women at a given point in time allows the assessment of fertility differentials (Table 4). TFRs have not been computed the classical way (using vital statistics by calendar year combined with mid-year estimates of the female population) for the reason that vital statistics in Qatar are not available by socioeconomic characteristics of the women and therefore do not allow the study of differentials. TFRs are obtained by applying the ‘Own Children Method’ (OCM) to individual household records of Qatar’s two most recent population censuses (2004 and 2010).¹⁰

7. Population Policy of the State of Qatar 2017-2022.

8. See Onn Winckler, “How Many Qatari Nationals Are There?” *Middle East Quarterly* (Spring 2015), <https://dev.meforum.org/5081/how-many-qataris>.

9. TFR is the sum of age-specific fertility rates by year of age from 15 to 50 during a given period of time. It measures the final number of children a woman exposed to fertility rates of that period would have over a lifetime.

10. Lee-Jay Cho, “The Own-Children Approach to Fertility Estimation: an Elaboration,” *International Population Conference - Liège 1973*, International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, Liège, 1973, vol. 2, pp. 263-280.

– Outcome 1: Fertility has declined, but it remains high in relative terms

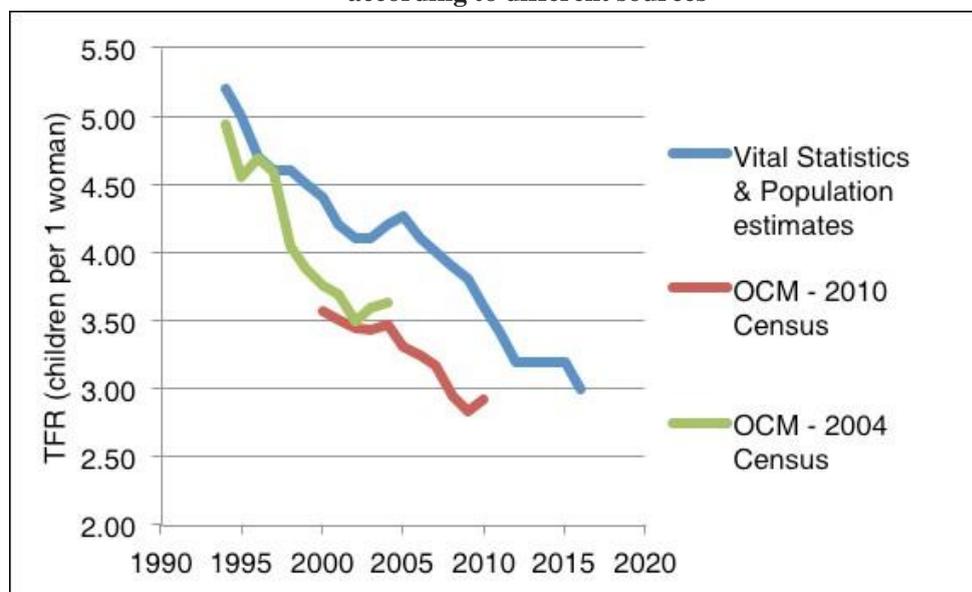
In the first half of the 2010s, Qatari nationals had a TFR of around 3 children per woman (Figure 1 and Table 3). This is a high level by global standards—to be compared with 2.5 for the whole world, 1.7 in the more developed regions and 2.7 in the less developed regions in 2010-2015—but an average level if Qatari nationals are compared with other Arab countries whose TFR ranges from a low 1.7 in Lebanon to a very high 4.4 in Yemen.¹¹ While the fertility of Qatari nationals is still high, it has steadily declined over the last two decades. As shown in Figure 1, their TFRs decreased by 0.1 child every year from the mid 1990s when it reached approximately 5 children per woman to the mid 2010s when it dropped to approximately 3 children per woman.

Table 3: Total fertility rates of Qatari women by five-year period 1995-2015, according to different sources

Period	Vital Statistics & Population Estimates	OCM - 2010 Census	OCM - 2004 Census
1995 -99	4.68		4.35
2000 -04	4.20	3.49	3.64
2005 -09	4.01	3.10	
2010 -14	3.26	2.92	

Source: Fargues & Abdulhadi Al-Rakeb, *Fertility of Nationals in Qatar- Its Levels, Trends and Differentials in the Early 21st Century - A Study Based on Qatar's Population Censuses of 2004 and 2010*, forthcoming.

Figure 1: Total fertility rate of Qatari women by year from 1994 to 2016, according to different sources



Source: Fargues & Abdulhadi Al-Rakeb, forthcoming.

For the application to Qatar, please refer to Philippe Fargues and Noof Abdulhadi Al-Rakeb, *Fertility of Nationals in Qatar - Its Levels, Trends and Differentials in the Early 21st Century - A Study Based on Qatar's Population Censuses of 2004 and 2010* (forthcoming).

11. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2018), World Population 2017, www.unpopulation.org.

We could establish elsewhere that the pronounced decrease of the fertility of Qatari nationals has entirely taken place below 35 years of age while fertility rates after 35 years of age have remained unchanged, and the women's mean age at childbearing has increased from 30.3 years in 2000 to 31.5 years in 2010.¹² Such a decline in early fertility is to be related to the elevation of women's age at first marriage in young generations. Marriage statistics show that women's average age at first marriage has risen from 19 years in 1986 to 25 years in 2004. How do these trends relate to two major changes in the Qatari society: the spectacular development of secondary and tertiary education among Qatari women and their increased participation in economic activities?

Table 4: Total fertility rates of Qatari women by socioeconomic characteristics in 2000-04 and 2005-09

Period		2000 - 2004	2005 - 2009
All Qatari women		3.47	3.13
Women's education	Primary or less	3.64	3.02
	Preparatory & Vocational	3.08	2.50
	Secondary	3.43	3.07
	Tertiary	3.38	3.05
Women's economic participation	Inactive	3.99	3.59
	Active	3.08	2.74
Migrant domestic workers	Zero MDW*	0.39	0.37
	One MDW	4.02	3.19
	Two or more MDW	4.18	3.82

* Migrant Domestic Worker

Source: Fargues & Abdulhadi Al-Rakeb, forthcoming.

– *Outcome 2: Education is not a factor of fertility differentials*

The development of female education has been almost universally recognised as a critical determining factor of the transition of fertility from high to low levels. Indeed, education can foster women's aspiration and ability to be active participants in economic and other activities that are not compatible in terms of time use with bearing and rearing numerous children. Moreover, it generates the parents' desire to have fewer but better educated children, triggering a quantity-for-quality trade-off in fertility choices. Contrary to expectations, however, the fertility of Qatari women does not vary with their level of education. Table 4 shows no significant variation of the TFR according to women's level of education (the lower fertility of women with preparatory or vocational education is not significant, due to their small number). In Qatar, the education received by a woman is an indicator of her social status and population categories with a social status keep valuating relatively large families.

12. Fargues and Abdulhadi Al-Rakeb, forthcoming.

– *Outcome 3: Women's economic participation is a key determinant of fertility decline*

The negative relationship between fertility and economic activity works in both directions: on the one hand, heavy parental responsibilities leave mothers little time to engage in economic activity outside home; on the other hand, having an economic activity outside home and desire to keep it is a reason for women to limit their fertility and subsequent involvement in domestic affairs. This quasi-universal relationship applies to Qatar as well. Table 4 shows a difference of – 0.9 children between the TFR of active women and that of inactive women.

– *Outcome 4: Employing Migrant Domestic Workers allows maintaining large families*

Domestic workers free their female employer from a number of daily tasks linked to taking care of their children. Table 4 shows that the larger the number of Migrant Domestic Workers (MDW) in the household, the higher the fertility of the head of the household's wife. The relationship is so strong that households with no MDW have an almost zero level of fertility, a fact which means that as soon as a child is born the family must hire a MDW. Having children but no MDW would be a sign of a low social status that is hardly found in Qatari society. Table 4 also shows that the fertility gap between households with only 1 MDW and those with 2 or more MDWs has widened from one period to the next, indicating that employing more MDWs was a factor of family enlargement.

Recommendations

Qatar is heading towards a society whose members, particularly women, enjoy universal access to all levels of education. Such an outstanding achievement must be furthered. However, for education to create the best ground on which to build a creative knowledge-based economy, not only the quantity but also the quality of education must be sought for: curricula as well as individual students' choices must adapt to rapidly evolving labour needs.

To fully harvest the benefits of education at individual as well as country level highly educated women should be able to find employment matching the skills they have acquired. Putting efforts in developing women's economic participation, which at present remains relatively low, should be a logical consequence of families' and the state's considerable investment on female education. The state has a role to play, from encouraging firms to open up jobs for women to shaping male mentalities so that a head of household welcomes his wife's commitment outside home.

In order for women's employment outside home not becoming a stumbling block to building a family of the desired size, the state must continue its support to working mothers. Legislation must be further developed to accommodate maternal duties in a working life.

Providing economically active women with help at home is instrumental for allowing them to have the number of children they want. So far, those delivering house care in Qatar are migrant domestic workers. In this regard, Qatar's Domestic Workers Law of 2017 defining a legal framework for the employment and protection of MDWs must be hailed as decisive progress. The state must now put in place monitoring mechanisms to make sure that the law is effectively implemented.

Finally, the state must acknowledge that fertility alone cannot compensate for demographic imbalances. No significant increase in the share of nationals in the resident population of Qatar should be expected unless a resolute naturalisation policy granting citizenship to selected foreign nationals is put in place.

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About the Authors: Please refer to: <http://gulfmigration.eu/about/people/> for information about the authors. Contact author: Françoise De Bel-Air: f_dba@hotmail.com.

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