

Panel 31: **Migration in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries**

Friday 18, 11.15-13.15, Aula A9

Convenors: **Gennaro Errichiello** (Loughborough University, UK), **Neema Noori** (University of West Georgia, USA)

In the last few years, the topic of migration to the GCC countries has attracted growing scholarly interest. Outside of academic circles, the establishment of prestigious academic and cultural institutions imported from Europe and North America such as the Guggenheim, NYU, and the Sorbonne has gained the attention of human and labour rights advocacy organizations concerned about the plight of migrant workers in the Gulf. Human Rights Watch, among other organizations, has been highly critical of the injury and death rates for construction workers building stadiums for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. At the same time, due to the region's economic success, some policy makers and scholars in the West have publically debated the virtues and pitfalls of adopting aspects of the region's migrant labour policies. Because of historical, political, and socio-economic reasons, migration to the GCC countries is not comparable to migration in the West. Migration to the GCC area is strictly regulated and controlled by the kafāla system, a state administered labour sponsorship regime. These differences have led scholars from a variety of disciplines to reassess longstanding assumptions and theories on international migration. The overriding aim of the panel is to illuminate the patterns, complexities and ambiguities of international migration in the GCC. In light of this aim, the panel welcomes contributions from a wide range of methodological and disciplinary approaches to the subject of migrant labour and migration in the GCC.

Paper givers:

- 1) **Gennaro Errichiello** (Loughborough University), *Migration in the Arab Gulf countries. Pakistanis in Dubai*

After the oil boom of the 1970s, the Arab Gulf States, which are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) organization, launched numerous projects for the construction of infrastructures. Due to the lack of skills and abilities among locals, and the small size of the local populations they were forced to recruit workforce from India, Pakistan and other Asian countries in order to implement their development projects. To date the burgeoning unemployment among national youth, for whom finding a job has become difficult, has led the GCC authorities to question about the presence of many migrant workers on their own territories. This situation is a result of the saturated public sector that is not able to satisfy the growing demand for work that these countries have been facing since the 1990s. This is the reason why the GCC countries have opted for nationalization policies, which means the implementation of measures to reduce and restrict the presence of foreigners in the local labour market. Based on my ethnographic research, this paper explores the dynamics of migration in the GCC countries. It is focused on Pakistani migration to the UAE, and in detail on Pakistani professionals in order to unfold constraints, limitations and complexities.

- 2) **Mohammad Alhussien** (Independent researcher), *The Migration to the GCC*

The migration to the GCC is unique and different from the migration to the Western countries in various aspects. The entrance and presence of migrants in the GCC is regulated and controlled by a rigid sponsorship system. This system tends to undermine the rights, status and freedom of the foreign migrants in various aspects. On the other hand, the opportunities to the naturalization of these migrants are rare. Moreover, the termination of jobs is common among foreign labors. On the other hand, the relevant information or data relating to foreign labors or migrants in general is classified. Such information is classified and considered among the top information of the state. Accordingly, such information and data needed for researches is generally restricted or inaccessible. Due to aforementioned conditions, the researches intended for exploring the status or problems of the foreign labor or migrants is challenged by such governmental tightened control over such information. However, such researches and surveys need special tailoring whether in methodology, data collection, ethical consideration, and publication of results of such researches and surveys.

3) **James M. Dorsey** (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore), *Gulf labour reform puts the heat on labour exporting countries*

Widespread criticism of discriminatory and repressive labour regimes in the Gulf in the wake of the awarding of the 2022 World Cup to Qatar is likely to spark labour reform not only in labour importing but also in Asian and African labour exporting countries. The primary focus has so far been on reform, if not abolition of the kafala or sponsorship system that puts employees at the mercy of their employers. Policies in labour exporting nations that not only accept their nationals being subjected to sub-standard living and working conditions in the Gulf but frequently fail to stand up for their rights are however increasingly also being put in the spotlight.

4) **Neema Noori** (University of West Georgia), *The political economy of international higher education and academic labour in the Persian Gulf*

The Persian Gulf city states of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Qatar, fueled by windfall oil profits, heralded their meteoric rise and newfound status within the global imaginary with a frenzy of commercial building which included the construction of the tallest building in the world, ski resorts in the desert, under-water hotels, and artificial islands in the sea. As stunning as their arrival in the world's popular consciousness, was their ability to attract elite Western educational and cultural institutions such as the Sorbonne, the Guggenheim, the Louvre, NYU, Cornell, and Georgetown University. Lured by generous cash offerings as well as a desire to be near what was perceived to be a dynamic new hub for global commerce, these institutions claimed their presence would facilitate meaningful dialogue in ways that advanced liberal political reform in an otherwise authoritarian political landscape. This paper examines the political and economic relationships between Western universities, their host countries, and the academic personnel imported to staff these new institutions. The paper argues that the kafala regime, a repressive system designed to facilitate and control the flow of migrant labor to the region, has had a corrosive effect on academic freedom within these campuses and as such has stymied their ability to engage in the forms of public

dialogue that they earlier envisioned. The academic workers brought in to staff these universities soon find that the labor regulations designed to ensure a low cost and docile work force exerts a similarly repressive force on them and that they are now under many of the same constraints as the workers brought in to build the campuses that they now staff.

5) **Sabrin Bakcha, (FOCSIV) *Migration toward the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries: between Arab regionalism and sub-regional concerns***

The literature on migration to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries has largely focused on the presence of Asian expatriates. However, the current migrant crisis has raised the attention on the Gulf governments reluctance to host Arab refugees and the lack of a regional strategy to deal with this issue. An historical perspective can help to understand the reasons behind the GCC countries' attitude toward migration by 'other' Arabs. By exploring the mutual conditioning of migration patterns and the main events in the region from 1948 till 1991, this article aims to investigate how Arab migration to the Gulf has affected political relations between receiving and sending countries and, consequently, the Arab regionalism. Although migration is generally considered a driving factor of regionalization, evidence suggests that migration has not helped to reach 'Arab unity'. The Kuwait's case study shows how migration outcomes allowed government to spurn the rules of pan-Arabism by supporting the establishment of a sub-regional organization – namely the GCC – centred on an exclusive Arab-khalijy identity.