

CALL FOR PAPERS

Highly Skilled Migration to the Gulf States Project Terms of Reference for Authors (Countries of Destination)

Abstract

The Gulf Labour Markets, Migration, and Population (GLMM) programme / Gulf Research Center (GRC) in cooperation with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's (KAS) Regional Programme Gulf States are publishing a call for papers for the project "Highly Skilled Migration to the Gulf States". The project aims to provide an in-depth analysis of highly skilled migration trends and dynamics in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. It examines policies, migration dynamics, and outcomes related to the attraction, recruitment and retention of highly skilled talent from Arab, Asian and African countries of origin to three GCC states: **Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates**.

1. Background

The six countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE) are the third largest recipients of migrants¹ worldwide: they hosted 11 percent of the world's total migrant stock in 2019 according to the United Nations' figures (last available data), making the region a global migration hub. The GCC-Asia migration corridor is the largest South-South corridor worldwide, and the six Gulf countries are the main destination for Asian migrant workers, from Bangladesh and Pakistan for instance. The six GCC countries also attract the bulk of the migration from most Arab states in the Mashreq, especially Egyptians and Jordanians, as well as growing numbers of workers from North African and Sub-Saharan African countries.

For decades, most migrants were clustered in low-skilled occupations like private and domestic service sectors. However, faced with the need to diversify and decarbonize their economies, the Gulf states' governments set ambitious socio-economic transformation goals. The process of transition from labour-intensive to internationally competitive, knowledge-based, and innovative economies fostering high value-added industries, includes prioritising attracting more skilled and highly skilled workers.

To that effect, recent measures were passed, such as the Labour Market Initiative and the Premium Residency Card (PRC) scheme in Saudi Arabia, the opening of "Golden Visas" and the amendments to the 1972 citizenship law in the UAE, which in theory opens pathways to better social protection and career prospects, long-term stays, and even naturalisation. These measures are intended to boost the attractiveness of Gulf labour markets for foreign workers, especially those who are highly skilled, and to "attract relevant foreign talents for the econom[ies]"² of the region, while still retaining existing skilled workers in the GCC countries.

In doing so, Gulf states are now increasingly competitive with EU countries in attracting global talent. In only a decade, the countries of the region, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have indeed become major stakeholders in the global economy. Their political and diplomatic influence is also growing rapidly within the Arab region and beyond.

Understanding Gulf states' labour market dynamics, their interaction with other major labour hubs seeking to attract global talents (such as the EU/single European countries), assessing the reasons behind the GCC region's attractiveness for these professionals, mapping global talents' mobility trends, and grasping their characteristics and motivations are of great importance for policymakers inside and outside the Gulf region, to assess challenges posed to their

¹ The term "migrant" here refers to foreign nationals.

² <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/v2030/overview/>.

attractivity for global talents and consequently, to their own economic development processes and international diplomatic and political influence.

The project thus focuses on highly skilled migrants, especially those originating **from six countries of origin (India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Jordan, Egypt and Tunisia) to three Gulf states (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates)**. Highly skilled professions are defined as the 3 upper categories of professions in ILO ISCO-08 classification, or other definition(s) used by destination countries, which should be specified. The project aims to provide an in-depth analysis of highly skilled migration trends and dynamics to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. It investigates the impact and outcomes of the labour and migration policies in place since 2010, as well as challenges related to the attraction, recruitment and retention of highly skilled professionals to the three Gulf states.

2. Deliverables/ Tasks

1. Write an Abstract of 250-500 words - to be submitted at the beginning of the agreement
2. Write a Report of 6,500-7,500 words - deadline first draft 15 September - deadline final version 25 October
3. 25 October
4. Write a Policy Brief (drawn/extracted from the report) of 1,500-2,000 words - deadline first draft 25 October - deadline final version 15 November
5. 25 October - deadline final version 15 November
6. Participate in a virtual workshop with all ten authors (end September / early October)
7. Participate in a webinar for selected stakeholders (November)
8. Participate in a public webinar (November)

3. Methodology

The methodology will include a review of relevant policy documents, published (and if available, unpublished) migration statistics, and legal frameworks governing key professions. Interviews will also be conducted with countries of origin's government officials establishing and implementing skilled migration policies and bilateral relations with Gulf states, with recruiters, professional associations, and other relevant stakeholders.

To the extent the information is available to the researcher, the numbers and characteristics of highly skilled migrants to Gulf states (especially, the three destination countries selected for the project) or policy provisions directed at professionals to these countries, may be detailed. Sources of data used, and their limitations should be specified.

4. Focus of the papers on countries of destination (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar)

- Policies towards the highly skilled workers in the 3 countries' reform processes: a comprehensive view (attraction/retention of which specific skills/skilled workers: social protection, working conditions, overall livability especially for the workforce with family, socioeconomic integration...)
- Technological and other changes (development of AI, "knowledge-based economies"; decarbonization and greening of economies). and future labour needs: new skill profiles, professions, and activity sectors
- Outcomes of economic reforms and general policies of attraction/retention of highly skilled workers and global talents on the foreign workers' populations: recent changes in the characteristics of foreign workers' populations; indicators of attraction/retention of highly skilled workers
- Politics and diplomacy: towards a shift in foreign workers' countries of origin? Patterns of competition with other GCC states and world regions to attract foreign talent workers.

5. Examples of research questions possibly addressed in the papers:

- What are the numbers and characteristics of highly skilled migrants to/in the Gulf states?
- Is the transition from large numbers of low-skilled, low-pay, and low-rights workers to smaller numbers of better-skilled, better-paid, and better-protected migrants effective?
- If so, which categories of skilled and highly skilled migrants have increased most in recent years?
- How do Gulf states attract skilled and highly skilled workers?
- What do Gulf states do to retain them?
- To what extent are specific sectors or highly skilled professions targeted by policies of nationalisation (Saudisation, Emiratisation, etc.) of the workforce?
- Which countries/regions of origin are targeted, and which diplomatic, political, and economic strategies do the Gulf states employ to open new multilateral and bilateral channels with relevant labour-sending countries and regions?
- Beyond economic needs, what is the impact of diplomatic and international relations on the origin, size, and characteristics of highly skilled migration inflows to GCC states?
- Do specific highly skilled professions escape the nationality-based wage differentials in Gulf host states?
- To what extent is there competition among the Gulf states, and intra-Gulf mobility among highly skilled migrants?

6. Paper guidelines

Authors will receive detailed paper guidelines for the reports and the policy briefs.

7. Contracts

Remuneration: 2,300 EUR

- Authors will sign a contract with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's (KAS) Regional Programme Gulf States

8. Application

To submit an application to this call for papers, please send the following to gulf@kas.de :

- Title of the proposed policy report and a general overview of what the policy report will cover. (Please note that the policy report should cover **one** of the countries of destination).
- An updated CV

The deadline for receiving applications is **31st July 2024**.