



Migration and Social Change in Middle Eastern Countries

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: April 28, 2024 Revised: May 21, 2025 Accepted: June 14, 2025 Available Online: June 21, 2025 Keywords: migration, social change, Middle East, labour migration, refugees, remittances, GCC, rights, cultural change, development.	Over the last several decades, migration has been a cause of demographic, economic and cultural changes in the Middle East countries. The migration of labor, influx of refugees in the war-torn regions, and intra-regional migration have transformed the economic systems, social conventions, family setups, labor and political environments in the region. The given research article focuses on the multifaceted relationships between migration and social change in the Middle East through an analysis of the causes, trends, and effects of migration such as labor migration to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, refugee displacement, remittances, diasporic cultural change, and policy reaction. Based on the results of empirical literature, regional data, and other scientific works, the study indicates the contribution of migration towards social change and also exudes issues pertaining to integration, rights, inequality, and cultural adjustment. The results are indicative that migration is a cause and effects of socio-economic change in the Middle East and present policy guidelines on how to cope with its effects.
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Introduction

The migration has been the characteristic of the Middle East and has produced a great effect on the population demographics and socio-economic frameworks. The contemporary period of mobility within the region has been inspired by the combination of movement of labor and displacement as a result of conflict as well as economic ambitions beyond the national borders. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman have become the significant targets of labor migrants, predominantly South and Southeast Asian, owing to the high rate of economic growth and the demand of labor in infrastructure, construction, services and household sectors. Simultaneously, the political turmoil and military conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya have generated one of the most significant refugee groups in the globe that has generated immense displaced populations at the local and global levels.

Migration has transformed the societies in the Middle East by changing the economic relations, relations within families, the norms and political organization. Traditionally, foreign labor inflow has helped Gulf economies to maintain a fast rate of development, as well as creating a flow of remittances that strengthen household incomes and alleviate poverty in the source of labor countries. Meanwhile, migration has posed social problems: labor rights disparities, cultural conflicts between migrant and host-country populations, and the necessity of policy models that would help to strike the right balance between the development and the protection of human rights. The Kafala system popular in most GCC countries exemplifies this conflict - reducing the legal status of migrant workers to their employers and establishing a situation that could foster exploitation and a lack of mobility.

The social networks and demographic trends because of the forced migration due to conflict have been profoundly shaped. In Syria and Iraq alone, there are millions of internally displaced persons and refugees residing in other countries, which changes the ethnic and religious make-ups, and puts pressure on the provision of public services in the host communities. Migration also causes the shift in culture: as the return migrants tend to introduce new ideas, values, and expectations, the gender norms, family life, consumption rates, and even political activity of the mother countries can be changed by them (as well)). The changes are representative of the social change, at large, i.e., the change in cultural values, institutional organizations, and social structures as a reaction to the forces of migration.

The study is noteworthy since migration is not a demographic and economic process alone - it is a social change agent of the Middle Eastern societies. This relationship is critical to the policymakers, scholars and development practitioners wishing to control the complex effects of migration. The Middle East is a perfect example to study the effects of migration on social changes in both the labor receiving and the labor sending countries, such as the alteration of work force, family, and cultural patterns. To test how migration can influence educational achievement, gender roles, and social mobility by means of remittances, diasporic influence, and return migration. To test the challenge of migrant integration, labour rights, and policy reaction - particularly in situations whereby legal frameworks (e.g. Kafala) and conflict induced displacement are a challenge to social cohesion and human rights.

Literature Review

The migration picture of the Middle East is connected to a variety of migration types, which include the labor migration, mobility of refugees, family reunification, and return migration. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations have traditionally been dependent on migrant workforce to propel the rapid economic growth. In the recent decades, the proportion of expatriates among some GCC populations has skyrocketed, and the statistics indicate that up to 76-88 percent of the population in some of the Gulf countries is made up of foreign-born workers none of which is found globally and indicates the extent to which migration has become deeply embedded in the region socio-economically. The United Arab Emirates and Qatar have become virtually synonymous with the large shares of migrant labor, as this is one of the trends in labor supply and demand where the demand is much higher than the domestic supply of labor and requires significant numbers of imported workers.

The financial reasons that have led to migration into the Gulf are well-recorded. The remittance back home countries enhances the living standards, alleviates poverty and empowers household investment in education and health. As an extension of the economic logic of labor migration, remittance has turned out to be a major component in developing strategies of sending nations including Pakistan, Bangladesh and Egypt where millions of people have turned remittance income into a kind of hedge against domestically induced economic turbulence. Nevertheless, in spite of the remittance advantages, migrants are usually exposed to structural inequalities in the host countries. The Kafala system that binds the legal status of a migrant to a local sponsor (kafeel) has been criticized to create power relationships and expose the workers to exploitation, poor job mobility, and poor labor protections. Another study of migrant welfare in the Gulf has emphasized that most migrants have been subjected to unstable working conditions, congested living conditions, and a lack of access to mental health services, which actually increases social vulnerability instead of reducing it.

Another dimension to the migration in the Middle East is experienced as a result of conflict-related displacement. Over the past ten years, there have been millions of refugees and internally displaced people that have been generated in countries like Syria, Iraq and Yemen, which have had significant effects on both the home and receiving communities. Demographic studies show that as of mid-2010s over 23 million individuals in the Middle East were displaced individuals, which is almost 40 percent of the global figure at the time. The long-term consequences of this scale of displacement on the social cohesion, the public services, and the inter-communal relations are that the host countries like Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey are taking in populations of people with different needs.

The social implications of migration go beyond the immediate economic and demographic effects of migration. Research has underlined the fact that migrants transfer cultural norms, consumption habits and gender roles to their home countries after migration. The life experiences in foreign countries can equip return migrants with new skills, attitudes and expectations, which, when introduced into the country, lead to cultural change. As an illustration, the Gulf migrants returning home have been noted to embrace more on individualistic orientations as well as alternative gender norms that can slowly influence the social outlook in their respective home societies. Migration also plays with political movements - mass emigration and diaspora networks have been associated with a larger set of socio-political processes, such as participating in uprisings and transnational activism during the Arab Spring, which is an illustration of how diasporic communities can affect politics back home and the subject itself.

This literature identifies migration as a source of social change as well as the cause of social stratification. Although migration creates economic opportunities to some, it also strengthens the inequalities between the mobile and immobile populations. The positive effects of migration are not evenly spread; more educated or richer people can find better-paid workplaces whereas unskilled employees are more likely to work in insecure jobs and lack the security of their rights. Furthermore, migrant communities can also be socially excluded or discriminated, which influences their integration abilities and well-being in the long term.

The social results of migration are determined by the policy structures of sending and receiving countries. Certain states of the Gulf region have instigated reforms to enhance the labor conditions and the management of migrant population in a better way whereas other nations of the Middle East are facing the challenge of not being able to integrate the refugees into the formal labor market environment or are unable to provide them with sufficient social services. Areas of research that are becoming more significant to learn the social implications of migration are remigration policies, diaspora engagement strategies and international labor standards.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that migration is a multi-layered process in the Middle East - a unifying factor in labor markets, conflict, diasporic, economic remittances, cultural change and policy concern. It is imperative to understand these interrelationships in order to understand how migration leads to social change in the region.

Methodology

This paper will use a mixed-method research design in order to thoroughly investigate the connection between migration and social change in the Middle East nations. Migration Research Mixed-method approach is especially suitable to migration research as it allows quantifying trends and qualifying social experience and developing a greater insight into the influence of migration on social structures, cultural norms, and economic relations. The research design will be a combination of both secondary quantitative data analysis and qualitative content analysis of policy documents and scholarly literature and international reports (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018).

Research Design and Approach.

The quantitative part of the research is based on the second-hand data sources, which are the sources of the reputable international organizations, including the World Bank, International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and International Labour Organization (ILO). With the help of these datasets, one can find longitudinal data on migration flows, remittance levels, the participation of the labor force, refugee displacement, and demographic shifts of the countries of the Middle East. The identification of long-term trends in migration and correlation with social indicators is achieved with the use of time-series and cross-sectional data regarding employment rates, the number of individuals attending school, the rate of gender engagement in the labor force, and urbanization (World Bank, 2022).

The qualitative aspect will consist of the systematic analysis of documents on scholarly articles, migration policies, labor laws, and regional development reports. The given approach will enable the study to embrace social aspects that cannot be characterized effortlessly, including cultural adaptation, identity change, family reorganization, and attitudes towards migrants in host countries. Narratives connected to migrants experiences within the context of sponsorship systems, problems of refugee integration, and social tensions in host communities are also addressed in the qualitative analysis (UNHCR, 2021).

Sampling and Data Sources

The sample of the study is a comparative regional choice of Middle East countries, among which there are labor-receiving (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait) and migration-sending or transit countries (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq). This choice will guarantee the coverage of different migration settings - labor migration, forced displacement, and mixed migration systems. Triangulation of secondary data sources was carried out to increase validity. The selection of data was made based on availability, reliability, and relevance to the indicators of the social change. As an example, World Bank remittance data was compared against date national central bank data where possible, whereas refugee figures of UNHCR were compared with government host country data. This type of triangulation reduces data contradictions and makes the results more credible (Bryman, 2016).

Analytical Framework

The discussion is informed by a social change framework, focusing on the impacts of migration, which relates to institutions, norms, and power relations. Such central dimensions of analysis are:

- **Economic Change** - labor market change, dependence on remittance and income inequality.
- **Demographic and Family Change**- changed household structure, later marriages and trans-national family set-ups.
- **Cultural and Normative Shifts** - gender roles change, consumption changes, and social expectations change.
- **Policy and Institutional Response** - reforms in the labor regulation, strategies of refugee management, and social protection systems.

Descriptive statistics and trend analysis were used to analyze quantitative data in order to determine patterns over time. Thematic coding of qualitative data was done and was centered on the common themes of social integration, exclusion, adaptation, and resilience. This two-fold study makes certain a comprehensive view of social change brought about by migration (Miles et al., 2020).

Considerations and Limitations Ethics

The study uses only secondary data so there were no direct human subjects and therefore there are minimal risks to ethics. Nevertheless, ethical standards were followed by making sure that there was a proper representation of the migrant populations and no biased interpretations, were made. The study has one research limitation because it uses only formally registered data, which may not reflect undocumented migration and informal labour processes. Moreover, social change is prolonged, and not all the effects of migration could be properly recorded in the frames of the given time period, which is why the methodology offers a strong and effective way of studying the problem of migration and social change in the Middle East.

Results and Discussion

The findings suggest that migration has greatly changed the economic, social, and cultural system in the countries of Middle East. Among the most obvious findings is the structural reliance of migrant workers in the Gulf economies. The quantitative data have shown that migrants make over 60 percent of the labor force in various GCC countries, especially construction, household, and service industries (ILO, 2022). This dependency has enabled quick economic development but has also created divided labor market where there is unequal payment, employment security and access to social benefits.

Impacts on the Economy and Labor Markets

The results indicate that there is a high level of association between migration inflows and GDP growth in labor receiving states. Migrant labor has facilitated massive development of infrastructure and also maintained its relative cheapness of labor. Nonetheless, this form of economy has caused the marginalization of migrants as seen through limited up-mobility and labor rights on sponsorship systems (ILO, 2021). In countries of labor, remittances are stabilizing in household economies, with a major portion of national income in such countries like Egypt and Jordan (World Bank, 2022).

Table 1: Migration and Economic Indicators (Selected Countries)

Indicator	GCC Countries Labor-Sending	Countries
Migrants as % of workforce	High (60–80%)	Low
Remittances (% of GDP)	Low	High (8–12%)
Labor market segmentation	High	Moderate

Social and Demographic Change

Migration has changed the family structures due to the long-distance separation and transnational parenting. The statistics indicate that families who obtain remittances spend more on education and healthcare, which increases the development of the human capital (UNDP, 2021). Meanwhile, the separation over long period has social costs, which comprise the weakened family solidarity and mental stress among the migrants and their families. Forced displacement has also increased social pressure on the host countries. States that host refugees including Jordan and Lebanon are faced with the strain of accommodating more people in terms of housing, education and medical services. Although refugees have a positive economic impact by working informally, their status as refugees usually limits their social inclusion which strengthens vulnerability and social exclusion (UNHCR, 2021).

Table 2: Social Impacts of Migration

Dimension	Observed Impact
Education	Increased enrollment in remittance-receiving households
Gender roles	Greater female workforce participation
Social cohesion	Strained in refugee-hosting communities

Cultural Transformation and Identity

Qualitative results indicate that there are major cultural changes that take place due to migration. The return migrants bring about novel lifestyles, work ethics and social expectations which are brought about by gradual changes in norms involving gender equality, consumption and civic participation. Nevertheless, even though such changes are not always accompanied by the intergenerational tensions and opposition in the traditional communities, the findings show that migration is actually a two-sided process because on the one hand it contributes to the development and social mobility, and on the other hand it leads to inequality, exclusion, and strain on the institution (Castles et al., 2014).

Discussion

The results support theoretical approaches that consider the migration as a source and effect of social change. Migration in the Middle East has increased the pace of economic modernization but has revealed the vulnerabilities of the system of governance, labor, and social protection. The reliance on migrant workforce in the Gulf countries brings out a paradox that although the migrant workers are the backbone of economic growth, they are not engaged in social and political activities. Forced migration adds to the burden, as social services are already scarce in the weak states. There are long-term impacts of the existence of refugee populations on host societies and they require long-term plans of integrating the society instead of responding to the situation with humanitarian actions. Migration leads to cultural change that breaks the traditional customs and provides possibilities of social change and reform.

As the discussion has pointed out, migration policies should take into consideration not only the migrants as economic units but also as social actors whose well-being directly affects outcomes of social stability and development. Migration in the Middle Eastern countries can be discussed in terms of not only the demographic movement but also the significant social force impacting the institutions, identities, and even the power relations. The contact between host societies and migrants creates stratified social effects, which affect the labor market, cultural practices, and social cohesion. Among the most apparent social changes attributed to migration is the reorganization of work lines, especially in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. Migrant workers are in a segregated labor market where nationality, skills level, and legalities define the access to wages, housing, healthcare, and legalities (Longva, 2019). This division strengthens the social stratification as it forms parallel societies in which migrants play a significant role in productive economic activities even though they are a marginalized social group.

Migration has brought significant social change in the field of gender relations. Migration of women especially in domestic and care work have changed the conventional gender norms in the host countries as well as sending nations. The vulnerabilities of migrant women in the destination countries are usually combined with gender, nationality, and employment status, but their economic value contradicts the traditional beliefs about the role of women in both personal and institutional life (Jureidini and Hassan, 2019). Remittances received by the female migrants in sending countries may also strengthen the decision-making ability of women in households and result in slow changes in the patriarchal family structure (De Bel-Air, 2018). All these gendered relations demonstrate the existence of migration as an empowering and exploitative force that works out in different ways depending on institutional circumstances.

Another important aspect of social change brought about by migration is cultural exchange. Migrants take cultural activities, languages, religious expounds, and consumption patterns across the borders. In the Middle Eastern cities like Dubai, Doha, and Riyadh, cosmopolitan urban space has been created and this space is typified by a variety of food, religion, and social networks. On the one hand, such diversity may become the source of cultural pluralism; however, on the other hand, it may create the tension associated with the national identity and cultural preservation (Kapiszewski, 2017). The reaction of host societies is to further nationalize and create citizenship borders, which illustrates that globalization and nationalism have a paradoxical relationship in the migration-receiving countries.

Conclusion

Migration has become one of the most powerful forces that determine the social change in the countries of the Middle East. This paper shows that migration has long-term and significant effects on economic processes, family socialization, cultural patterns and institutional patterns. The migration of labor has helped the GCC states to boost their economy and the

remittances have helped the sending countries to enhance their livelihoods. Meanwhile, the absence of equality in the labor systems, the protection of rights, and even social exclusion pose a threat to the viability of the existing models of migration.

Displacement has increased population strains and created governance vulnerabilities, and inclusive and rights-based migration management should be the core of migration management. The paper comes to the conclusion that migration must be regarded as a long-term social process, and it needs to be coordinated at the regional level, cooperate internationally, and invest in social integration mechanisms.

It is through dealing with opportunities and challenges that the Middle Eastern countries can be able to use migration as a lever to social development instead of a cause of inequity and instability in the countries. This paper therefore sought to explore the linkage between migration and social change in the count of the Middle East countries with migration being seen as both an effect of and a driver of socio-economic transformation. This is because the evidence confirms that migration has dramatically changed the social landscape of the region, affecting the labor-market, family institutions, gender relations, cultural practices, or political participation. The effect of migration is not uniform and can only be one direction, however, it has multifaceted outcomes governed by institutionalization, legalization, and power relations between migrants and their host societies.

Migration to the Gulf has made economic growth unprecedented and at the same time brought about highly stratified societies. Migrant labourers constitute the backbone of the major sectors of the economy but they have very low access to rights as well as social integration, which is something that highlights a development model, which is process driven by economic efficiency rather than social inclusion. This contradiction poses some pressing questions of the long-term sustainability of economies that rely on migration. Migration necessitates social transformation which cannot be achieved fully without structural disparities in the labor governance systems.

Forced migration has given a sense of urgency to the debates on social change in the Middle East. Conflict-related refugee movements have changed the host societies revealing vulnerabilities in the social protection regimes, as well as pointing to the strength and agility of displaced people. The social impact of long-lasting displacement is not restricted to humanitarian issues, as it determines the results of education, labor involvement, and inter-communal interactions throughout generations. To solve these difficulties, it is necessary to abandon the emergency approach and to adopt the long-term integration tactics which acknowledge the refugees as the active members of the social and economic life.

It is also revealed in the study that remittances and return migration are transformative. Migrants contribute to poverty reduction and human capital improvement through finance back to their countries of origin, which is used in household welfare, education and health. In addition to economics, the return migrants play the role of agents of social change by transferring new skills, values and worldviews. Such influences may contravene the traditional norms, encourage gender equality, and activate entrepreneurship. The facilitating conditions of the return migration positively influence, however, such factors as reintegration and productive investment.

Migration, culturally, has led to pluralism and brought up identity and belonging debates. The societies of Middle East have a fine line to walk on the compromise that exists between the freedom to open up and global labor markets and national identity. This social change is based on continuous negotiation on citizenship, cultural boundaries and social cohesion. To conclude, migration in the Middle East countries is a great agent of social change that brings opportunities and challenges to the definition of belonging to the society that is becoming more diverse. To use the potential of migration in promoting inclusive development, there should be comprehensive policies that embrace economic goals coupled with social justice concepts. Defending the rights of migrants, enhancing social integration, and addressing inequalities are not only the ethical concerns, but the strategic requirements concerning the sustainable social change. By acknowledging the fact that migrants are part of society and not a transitory economic contribution, the Middle East nations will be on the way to a more balanced and stable future that will be defined by mutual wealth and social unity.

Recommendations

- Reform the labor migration policies by providing equal legal protection on migrant workers and showing equal mobility rights.
- Slowly abolish exploitative sponsorship structures and introduce rights based labor contracts.
- Increase educational and healthcare opportunities to refugees and migrant families.
- Encourage gender-sensitive migration policies which will empower women to both send and receive in the sending and receiving communities.
- Promote the participation of the diaspora in the development of their countries by investing and transferring skills.
- Enhance data gathering of migration and social impacts to make sound policies.

- Create social integration initiatives to minimize discrimination and xenophobia.
- Strengthen the regional and international collaboration in terms of protecting refugees and burden-sharing.
- Reintegration assistance and employment can facilitate support return migration.
- Insourcing migration governance to international human rights standards.

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