

# **Mixed Migrations to the Gulf: An Empirical Analysis of Migrations from Unstable and Refugee-producing Countries to the GCC, 1960–2015**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The wealthy, oil-rich Gulf Cooperation Council countries (the GCC) are among the largest destinations for temporary labour migrants in the world. However, these states have not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention, and an asylum system is virtually non-existent in the GCC. Yet, it is relevant to ask whether certain segments of the migrant stock in the GCC are the result of mixed migrations. Numerous studies indicate that the variety of migrant flows is often not captured by legal categories prescribed by authorities. Drawing from previous research, this article assesses the mixed migrations to the GCC. The empirical analysis herein relies on dyadic-migration estimates from the World Bank and the UN's Population Division. Merging these two data sources, we contribute to the field by providing new insights and estimates of possible mixed migrations to the region. Our findings confirm the initial impression that the GCC has primarily been a receiver of labour migrants. However, it is maintained that the region also hosts fairly large numbers of migrants from refugee-producing and politically unstable countries, and it is evident that migrations from refugee-producing countries to the GCC have grown in the last decades.

**KEYWORDS:** Gulf countries, mixed migrations, migration trends, refugee-producing countries

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A growing number of studies on migrations and refugees acknowledge that a large proportion of migrants have mixed motivations for migration.<sup>1</sup> It is also maintained that motivations for migration can fluctuate and change *after* migration. People who moved as labour migrants, primarily with an aim to improve their economic conditions, may decide to prolong their stay as the political situation in their home country deteriorates. Furthermore, many countries do not accept refugees; thus, the legal constraints may force genuine refugees to migrate through other migration channels and legitimise their temporary or permanent residence as labour migrants, students or family migrants.<sup>2</sup>

In this article, we focus on mixed migrations to the oil-rich countries in the Middle East. The six wealthy Gulf States of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)<sup>3</sup> have fairly small native populations, but they are among the largest receivers of migrants in the world. There are, according to data from the United Nations (UN), about 25 million migrants in the GCC, and in some of the countries in the region the migrant population constitutes more than 80 per cent of the total population.<sup>4</sup> The vast majority of migrants in the GCC have migrated to the region via temporary labour-migration regimes. On the one hand, the GCC countries have for years had highly liberal labour-migration policies that have allowed an influx of millions of temporary labour migrants. On the other hand, the countries in the region have been very restrictive with regard to refugees. None of the GCC countries have signed the 1951 Refugee

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<sup>1</sup> See D. Boehm, "US-Mexico Mixed Migration in an Age of Deportation: An Inquiry into the Transnational Circulation of Violence", *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 30 (1), 2011, 1-21; J. Klaauw, "Refugee Rights in Times of Mixed Migration: Evolving Status and Protection Issues", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28(4), 2010, 59-86; T. Linde, "Mixed Migration – A Humanitarian Counterpoint", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 30 (1), 2011, 89-99; N. Van Hear, *Mixed Migration: Policy Challenges*. Oxford. COMPAS. University of Oxford, 2011; See also: <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/policy-primers/mixed-migration-policy-challenges> [accessed last time 24 May 2016].

<sup>2</sup> Klaauw, "Refugee Rights in Times of Mixed Migration."

<sup>3</sup> The GCC countries are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Qatar and Bahrain.

<sup>4</sup> G. Naufal & I. Genc, *Labor Migration in the GCC Countries: Past, Present and Future*, Singapore, Middle East Institute, 2014; M. Valenta & J. Jakobsen, "Moving to the Gulf: an empirical analysis of the patterns and drivers of migration to the GCC countries, 1960–2013", *Labor History* 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0023656X.2016.1239885>

Convention,<sup>5</sup> and they have often been criticised for denying entrance and protection to refugees, even to those from neighbouring war-torn countries, such as Syria.<sup>6</sup>

The GCC countries are primarily perceived as countries with highly exploitative labour-migration regimes and with a lack of interest in providing protection to refugees.<sup>7</sup> According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), in 2015 there were less than two thousand registered refugees in the GCC.<sup>8</sup> Yet, it is indicated that a sizable proportion of the labour migrants in the GCC are from war-torn countries.<sup>9</sup> Hence, it is plausible to expect that a certain part of migrant stocks in the GCC countries are people who may be categorised, in one way or another, as mixed migrants.<sup>10</sup> However, few studies focus on mixed migrations to the GCC. This study attempts to fill a gap in the migration field by exploring these interconnected questions: Which countries are major potential producers of mixed migrants to the GCC? What is the scale of the mixed migrations to the Gulf region and how did such migrations develop over time? Which factors seem to contribute to the identified trends and the dynamics of mixed migrations to the GCC?

There is a general absence of reliable data about migrations to the Gulf, and we thus have to rely on available estimates. In this article we use dyadic-migration estimates from the World Bank and the UN's Population Division. These two data sources are seldom fully utilised in comprehensive longitudinal and cross-sectional explorations of mixed migrations

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<sup>5</sup> Lack of interest of Gulf States to receive refugees: not signing the 1951 Convention on refugees was a political stance at the time, pertaining to the Palestinian question and the preservation of their right of return to their homeland.

<sup>6</sup> See for example [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chaker-khazaal/no-arab-gulf-countries-ar\\_b\\_8280448.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chaker-khazaal/no-arab-gulf-countries-ar_b_8280448.html) [accessed last time 24 May 2016]; See also <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/9/4/gulf-countries-pressure-syrian-refugees.html> [accessed last time 24 May 2016].

<sup>7</sup> Gulf States, like many other Arab states, have not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention; See H. Thiollet, "Migration as Diplomacy: Labour Migrants, Refugees, and Arab Regional Politics in the Oil-Rich Countries," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No 79, 2011, 103-121; See also Valenta & Jakobsen, "Moving to the Gulf".

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e45ade6.html> [accessed last time 24 May 2016].

<sup>9</sup> F. De Bel-Air, *A Note on Syrian Refugees in the Gulf: Attempting to Assess Data and Policies*. Florence, Italy: European University Institute, 2015; UNHCR, *Yemen situation. Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan 2016*, Geneva, UNHCR, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> De Bel-Air, "A Note on Syrian Refugees in the Gulf"; D. Sriskandarajah, "The Migration-Development Nexus: Sri Lanka Case Study". *International Migration*, 40(5), 2002, 283-307; Thiollet, "Migration as Diplomacy"; UNHCR, "Yemen situation".

and migrations in the Persian Gulf. Yet, merged together, these panel data provide several relevant indices of mixed-migration developments in the region from 1960 to 2015. In what follows, we intend to outline a set of longitudinal and cross-sectional observations of possible mixed-migration trends to the GCC. Here, the major ambition is to provide a comprehensive and transparent overview of long-term developments, and to make a general assessment of the size and composition of possible mixed-migrant populations in the Gulf.

The article has several interrelated parts. First, we present relevant research and perspectives, and we describe the panel data from the World Bank and the UN. Second, we outline general migration trends to the Gulf region. Third, we explore the mixed migrations to the GCC. Here, we start with cross-sectional investigations. Thereafter, we focus on longitudinal data and outline possible mixed-migration trends since 1960. The analysis demonstrates that a better understanding of mixed migrations to the Gulf requires both longitudinal and cross-sectional explorations as well as a combination of different available indices of mixed migration.

## **2. PANEL DATA FROM THE WORLD BANK AND UN**

We use migration data covering a period of five-and-a-half-decades, starting in 1960 and ending in 2015. Data are extracted from two different sources and combined into a single, comprehensive dataset. Firstly, we use recently-updated estimates of migration stocks from the United Nations' Department of Economic Affairs, Population Division.<sup>11</sup> These data comprise calculations of bilateral migration flows, divided into five-year intervals and spanning the period 1990–2015. Secondly, data covering the preceding period – that is, 1960 to 1985 – are from the World Bank's Global Bilateral Migration Database 1960–2000.<sup>12</sup> Since

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/index.shtml> [accessed last time 24 May 2016].

<sup>12</sup> See <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/global-bilateral-migration-database> [accessed last time 24 May 2016].

the World Bank uses ten-year intervals for their data, and in order to obtain consistent intervals for the entire period under study, we use linear interpolation to estimate missing mid-decade data (i.e., data for 1965, 1975 and 1985).<sup>13</sup> Both the UN and the World Bank equate migrants with foreign-born people, with population censuses forming the main information base for their data.<sup>14</sup> However, the Gulf states' statistics, when categorising resident populations, separate between nationals and foreigners. The criterion for defining migrants in the GCC is thus the *nationality*, not the place of birth. Moreover, naturalisation is very rare in the Gulf states. This means that a certain proportion of foreign nationals who are born in the Gulf are (unduly) counted as migrants. It is therefore important to stress that the migration data we use in this article are best-estimates only. In addition, missing data for some countries do pose a few challenges. One such challenge is that time-series, while generally complete for high-sending states, are sometimes incomplete for countries with a low-to-medium number of migrants to the Gulf. Missing values are generally set to 0 by us, which should lead to a slight total underreporting of the total number of migrants in the GCC. This is particularly the case with migrations to Oman, which is the GCC country with the highest number of missing values. However, in some instances concerning data on migration to Saudi Arabia (and, in one instance, Oman) from 1990 and subsequent years, we were able to extract numbers from an older version of the UN's dataset.<sup>15</sup> In these instances, which involve nine sending countries in total,<sup>16</sup> data for 1995 and 2005 were linearly interpolated, and 2013 values were used for the year 2015.

Secondly, the bulk of the empirical analysis proceeds at the bilateral level, combining data from different sources. In some such cases, and for some variables, we do not have data

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<sup>13</sup> While estimations for 1965 and 1975 are made using only World Bank data, data for 1985 are the sum of World Bank estimates for 1980 plus the UN's estimates for 1990, divided by 2.

<sup>14</sup> D. Ratha, & W. Shaw, *South-South Migration and Remittances*, Washington D.C., World Bank Working Paper No. 102, 2007; UN, *International migrant stock: By destination and origin*. UN, New York, Population Division, 2013

<sup>15</sup> See also Valenta & Jakobsen, "Moving to the Gulf."

<sup>16</sup> This concerns estimates of migrant stocks in Saudi Arabia coming from Eritrea, Morocco, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Chad, Thailand, Tunisia and Turkey, and migrants in Oman from South Sudan.

for certain years. This mostly concerns 2015. For example, data on refugee populations are only available for 2014; data from that year are therefore combined with migrant-stock data for 2015 in some of the analyses. Further, in some instances it is appropriate to conceive of migrant stocks in per-capita terms. As we do not have population data for 2015, there, as well, we employ data for last available year (i.e., 2014).

These concerns, taken as a whole, make it less advisable to employ any rigorous quantitative techniques. We therefore instead use a combination of descriptive presentation and bivariate analysis of the data. Our study is, by necessity, limited to the 27 (non-western) sending countries for which we have data (these 27, it should be emphasised, clearly include the most notable source countries of migrations to the GCC).<sup>17</sup> In some parts of the analysis, for reasons of clarity, we exclude a handful of these 27 – specifically, those countries that are not among the major migrant senders. Furthermore, India, which is by some distance the largest source of migrants to the GCC, is also excluded from some of the figures, again for reasons of presentation (the massive number of Indian migrants tend to ‘cram’ the figures that present absolute – as opposed to per-capita – numbers of migrants).

A further methodological challenge involves the suspected underreporting of migrant stocks, which obtains, among other reasons, because of lags in censuses and the near-inescapable lack of data on irregular migrants.<sup>18</sup> Concerning the latter, there are some discrepancies between the UN and the World Bank data, although these discrepancies are relatively minor and should therefore largely be inconsequential. In any case, longitudinal analysis of the data, and the conclusions arising therefrom, should and must be made with due caution. This is so even if correlations between the two datasets are generally very high (0.88 for 1990 and 0.90 for the year 2000).

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<sup>17</sup> In alphabetical order, these countries are: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, West Bank and Gaza (Palestine) and Yemen.

<sup>18</sup> Ratha, & Shaw, “*South-South Migration and Remittances*.”

The graphs presented herein collapse numbers for all GCC countries. This is done partly because it eases interpretations of patterns of migration and partly because such patterns do not vary greatly among GCC states. Correlations between migrant stocks for individual GCC countries are indeed very high: For 2015, the lowest migrant-stock correlation between a Gulf state and the GCC total was 0.92 (Oman).

### 3. RELEVANT PREVIOUS RESEARCH

A growing number of studies stress that protracted economic and political instability and armed conflicts in the sending countries are producing heterogeneous migration flows that often are not captured by legal categories prescribed by the migration policies of receiving countries.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, several case studies, such as Boehm's study on US–Mexico mixed migrations,<sup>20</sup> Williams' study on mixed migrations in Nepal<sup>21</sup> and Crush, Chikanda and Tawodzera's study on mixed migrations from Zimbabwe to South Africa illustrate that the migrants may have mixed motives for migration and that they often migrate via mixed migratory channels.<sup>22</sup> The concept of mixed migrations recognises the fact that people may be affected by wars both directly and indirectly. In some cases they have to flee to save their lives, while in others they are forced to leave because they have lost their livelihood on account of the war.<sup>23</sup> As Monsutti, who studied the emigration of Afghans, points out:

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<sup>19</sup> J. Crush, A. Chikanda & G. Tawodzera, "The Third Wave: Mixed Migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 49(2), 2015, 363-82; Klaauw, "Refugee Rights in Times of Mixed Migration"; Linde, "Mixed Migration – A Humanitarian Counterpoint," Van Hear, *Mixed Migration: Policy Challenges*.

<sup>20</sup> See Boehm, "US-Mexico Mixed Migration".

<sup>21</sup> N. Williams, "Mixed and Complex Mixed Migration during Armed Conflict: Multidimensional Empirical Evidence from Nepal", *International Journal of Sociology*, 45(1), 2015, 44-63

<sup>22</sup> See Crush, Chikanda & Tawodzera, "The Third Wave"; See also Van Hear, *Mixed Migration: Policy Challenges*.

<sup>23</sup> A. Monsutti, "Afghan Migratory Strategies and the Three Solutions to the Refugee Problem", *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 27(1), 2008, 58-73.

Although, generally speaking, Afghans have fled from war, their reasons for migration and the actual dynamics of the movement are much more nuanced. The physical effects of the war may be differentiated from the disruption of traditional livelihoods, the political and ethnic repercussion of the war and the economic fallout caused by the war.<sup>24</sup>

Studies on forced migration indicate that refugees usually stay close to their country of origin. This is so either due to a lack of opportunities and resources to migrate abroad, or in order to be able to return rapidly, or to commute in order to take care of family members, livestock, land and property back home.<sup>25</sup> For others, moving to a neighbouring country becomes just a single stage in their ‘fragmented migration’ via several countries.<sup>26</sup> Many of the above-mentioned studies also discuss the concept of mixed migrations and the challenges such migrations pose for migration policies.<sup>27</sup> The studies also identify and distinguish between various sub-categories of refugee flows. For instance, there is a distinction between anticipatory refugees and acute refugee movements.<sup>28</sup> The traditional image of the refugee is usually associated with acute refugee movements, but people may also move in anticipation of a worsening situation *prior to* the escalation of the conflict.<sup>29</sup> It is also maintained that people who already have refugee status in one country may continue their ‘fragmented journey’<sup>30</sup> and migrate to another country via other migration channels, as labour migrants, irregular workers or on student visas or family reunion or visitor visas. This they do because

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<sup>24</sup> Monsutti, “Afghan Migratory Strategies”, 63.

<sup>25</sup> For example, most refugees from Afghanistan are in Pakistan and Iran; most Syrian refugees are in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon; while a majority of Sudanese refugees are in Chad, Uganda, Kenya or Ethiopia. See UNHCR, *Global trends, forced displacement in 2015*, Geneva, UNHCR, 2016; IOM, *Migrations in Sudan. A country profile*, Sudan, Khartoum, Interantional Organisation for Migration, 2013; See also Monsutti, “Afghan Migratory Strategies”, see also N. Öner & D. Genc, “Vulnerability leading to mobility: Syrians’ exodus from Turkey”, *Migration Letters*, 12(3), 2015, 251-262, see also UNHCR, *Yemen situation*.

<sup>26</sup> See M. Collyer, “Stranded Migrants and the Fragmented Journey”, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 23(3), 2010, 273-293.

<sup>27</sup> See R. Jureidini, *Mixed migration flows. Somali and Ethiopian migration to Yemen and Turkey*. Cairo, Center for Migration and Refugee Studies American University in Cairo, 2010; See also Klaauw, “Refugee Rights in Times of Mixed Migration”; See also Van Hear, *Mixed Migration: Policy Challenges*.

<sup>28</sup> Monsutti, “Afghan Migratory Strategies”.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Collyer, “Stranded Migrants and the Fragmented Journey”.



the refugee status did not include proper rights to work, access to education or other rights and opportunities needed by refugees in protracted refugee situations.<sup>31</sup>

Another category of mixed migrations includes people who originally were economic migrants but who became mixed migrants as they refrained from initial return plans or usual circular migratory practice due to increased political instability and violence in their home country.<sup>32</sup> There are also categories composed of migrants who are forced into different migrant statuses due to the lack of better alternatives to migration and legal status. Several studies illustrate how migration policies impose restrictions on certain kinds of migrations while they are open for others.<sup>33</sup> For example, Crush et al. show that large numbers of migrants from Zimbabwe, who primarily were economic migrants, registered themselves in South Africa as asylum seekers because this, at that time, was the only alternative to irregular status in the country.<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, we also find refugees bearing the status of labour migrants as there are few possibilities to apply for asylum or to get satisfactory refugee protection in the destination countries.<sup>35</sup> This may be applicable to the situation in the GCC countries as they have not signed the refugee convention yet still host migrants from war-torn countries.<sup>36</sup> Thiollet indicates that the GCC authorities do not offer refugee status to people in need of protection, but they have in periods used the *kafala* system and temporary labour-migration politics as ‘an asylum policy by proxy’ or ‘quasi-asylum policy’.<sup>37</sup> Thiollet points out, for example, that Saudi authorities have for years allowed immigration and residence of Eritreans

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<sup>31</sup> E. Collett, P. Clewett & S. Fratzke, *No Way Out? Making Additional Migration Channels Work for Refugees*. Brussels, Migration Policy Institute, 2016.

A. Papadopoulou, “Smuggling into Europe: Transit Migrants in Greece,” *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 17(2), 2004, 167-184

<sup>32</sup> See Boehm, “US-Mexico Mixed Migration”; See also Crush, Chikanda & Tawodzera, “The Third Wave”.

<sup>33</sup> Crush, Chikanda & Tawodzera, “The Third Wave”; Klaauw, “Refugee Rights in Times of Mixed Migration”; Thiollet, “Migration as Diplomacy”.

<sup>34</sup> Crush, Chikanda & Tawodzera, “The Third Wave”.

<sup>35</sup> Klaauw, “Refugee Rights in Times of Mixed Migration”;

<sup>36</sup> De Bel-Air, *A Note on Syrian Refugees in the Gulf*; Thiollet, “Migration as Diplomacy”; UNHCR, *Yemen situation*.

<sup>37</sup> Thiollet, “Migration as Diplomacy”, 113,116.

through significant liberalisations of their sponsorship/*kafala* regime, which in practice served, as she pointed out, ‘as an asylum policy by proxy for Eritrean exiles’.<sup>38</sup> Similar practices towards other groups are indicated by De Bel-Air. In the words of the author:

The kingdom [Saudi Arabia] also hosts vast communities of Palestinians, Somalis, Burmese (Rohingyas), Sudanese, etc. These populations fleeing conflicts generally used the employment channels, or overstayed pilgrimage, visit to relatives, or tourist visas. When foreign residents in irregular situation were targeted by crackdown campaigns, ongoing since 2013, exceptions were made. Burmese (Rohingyas), Palestinian and Syrian residents were formally exempted from deportation if found contravening labour and residency regulations.<sup>39</sup>

The above-mentioned studies indicate that there are categories of migrants in the GCC which may be associated with mixed migrations. However, we know little about the scale of these migrations. Several scholars have pointed out that research on migrations in the GCC suffers from a general lack of statistics;<sup>40</sup> the field is therefore hampered by a lack of accuracy as available statistics, which is disaggregated by citizenship, does not distinguish between migrants (foreign born) and their descendants. The field is thus dominated, with few exceptions,<sup>41</sup> by policy discussions and qualitative studies of specific migrant groups. The lack of data and literature on the subject of mixed migrations in the GCC is obvious. The migration outlook and empirical analysis that follows acknowledges the deficiencies in available data sets. Yet, we attempt to contribute to filling a gap in the field using available

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<sup>38</sup> Thiollet, “Migration as Diplomacy”, 114.

<sup>39</sup> De Bel-Air, *A Note on Syrian Refugees in the Gulf*, 7.

<sup>40</sup> K. Ahmed, K. “Diasporas in the GCC states: fertile grounds for research,” *Diaspora Studies*, 8(2), 2015, 132-144; De Bel-Air, *A Note on Syrian Refugees in the Gulf*; A. Kapiszewski, *Arab versus Asian Migrant Workers in the GCC Countries*. Beirut. UN/POP/EGM, 2006.

<sup>41</sup> See for example G. Naufal & I. Genc, *Expats and the Labour Force: The Story of the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries*. New York. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

quantitative estimates to assess the mixed migrations to the GCC. Drawing on the above-mentioned research on mixed migrations, in the next sections we analyse the available statistics from the World Bank and the UN, which we assume will give us a better understanding of the mixed migrations to the GCC countries. We start with total migration flows and trends. Thereafter, we introduce and discuss available indicators of possible mixed migrations to the region, assess the size, origin and proportion of mixed migrations to the region, and discuss possible connections between armed conflicts in selected countries and the dynamics of migration from these countries to the GCC.

#### 4. MIGRATIONS TO THE GCC

The affluent countries in the Persian (Arab) Gulf are among the largest receivers of migrants in the world and *the* largest per-capita receiving region. In 1960, there were only a few hundred thousand non-nationals in the GCC, and they constituted around 16 percent of the population.<sup>42</sup> However, the number of migrants in the GCC has since increased remarkably; the rise was four-fold between 1960 and 1970, and again from 1970 to 1980. Especially in the last three decades, the massive growth in labour migrations – from around 4 million in 1980 to around 25 million in the present decade – has contributed to a rapid overall increase of the GCC population.

Migrations to the Persian Gulf have for decades been characterised by substantial migratory flows from the large countries of South Asia and comparably smaller migration flows from Arab countries. According to several studies, Arab migrants have been outcompeted by a cheaper foreign labour force from Asia. Arab migrants were in periods also perceived as possibly subversive. The migrants being met with considerable suspicion, authorities were concerned that they might bring with them undesirable political influence and

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<sup>42</sup> Naufal & Genc, *Expats and the Labour Force*, 34.

ideologies that had already produced instability in other Arab countries.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the dynamic of migration flows and the Gulf authorities' stance on different migrant communities should be seen in light of their bilateral relations and foreign policy interests. Migration policy and diplomacy are interconnected in the GCC, and it is not unusual that authorities in Gulf countries allow the immigration of migrants from certain countries or start mass deportation of certain groups as part of their foreign policy. The best-known example is the mass expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian and Yemeni migrants from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in the early 1990s due to their countries' support of Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War.<sup>44</sup>

In the last three decades, the share of Asians in the Gulf increased with the number of migrants. For several large emigration states in South Asia and the Middle East, the GCC countries constitute a major migrant destination.<sup>45</sup> Almost half of the total emigrant stock from India, which is by some distance the largest migrant-sending country in South Asia, is hosted by the GCC. Figure 1 shows the rapid growth of the total migrant population, which was primarily the result of an extreme increase in migrations from India and other countries in South and South-East Asia.

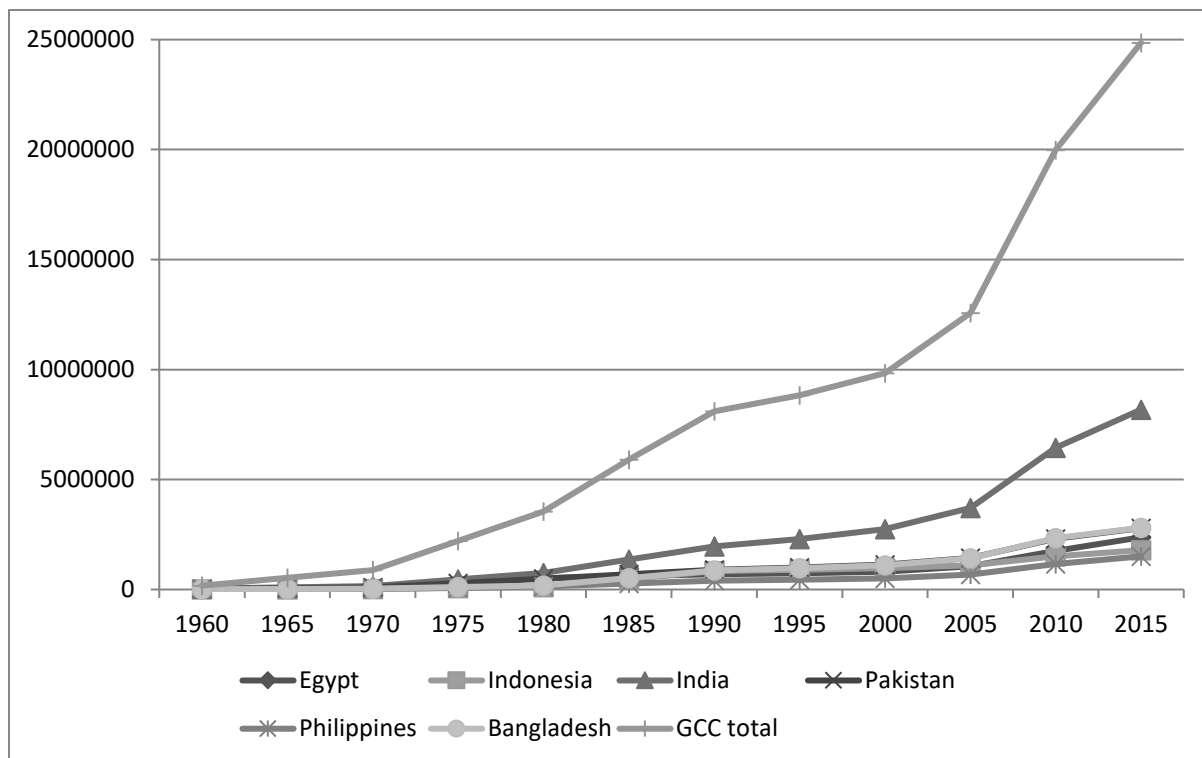
**Figure 1. Migrant stock in GCC countries, 1960–2015, for the six largest senders in 2015**

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<sup>43</sup> Kapiszewski, *Arab versus Asian Migrant Workers*; Naufal & Genc, *Expats and the Labour Force*.

<sup>44</sup> Kapiszewski, *Arab versus Asian Migrant Workers*; Thiollot, "Migration as Diplomacy".

<sup>45</sup> N. Shah, "Labour Migration from Asian to GCC Countries: Trends, Patterns and Policies", *Middle East Law and Governance*, 5 2013, 36–70



Notes: Data from 1960–1980 are estimates extracted from the World Bank’s Global Bilateral Migration Database 1960–2000; data from 1990–2015 are estimates by the UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division; data for 1965, 1975 and 1985 are obtained from linear interpolation; ‘GCC total’ include numbers from all 27 non-Western sending countries under study; comparisons between the World Bank and the UN data should be made with caution as estimation techniques differ.

According to several studies, there are clear links between developments in oil prices and the dynamic of migrations to the Gulf.<sup>46</sup> The oil embargo in 1973, for example, resulted in a steep increase in oil prices. The oil revenues, in turn, generated economic growth in the GCC, which lead to a substantial increase in the demand for foreign labour. Furthermore, the tremendous growth in the gross domestic products (GDP) in the GCC – a post-1990 phenomenon – went together with an extreme increase in migrant stocks, with the most pronounced surge in GDP and migrations taking place in the period after the year 2000. Between 2000 and 2010, migrant stocks in the GCC region as a whole increased by 94 per cent (see figure 1). In the same period, the combined gross domestic product (GDP) for GCC

<sup>46</sup> Naufal & Genc, *Expats and the Labour Force*; See also Valenta & Jakobsen, “Moving to the Gulf”.

countries rose by 67 per cent when measured in constant, inflation-adjusted US dollars. The corresponding number when we measure in current U.S. dollars was a whopping 203 per cent.<sup>47</sup>

In 2015, around 50 million people lived in the GCC, and approximately half of them were foreign nationals. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have received the largest numbers of migrants. In 2015, there were 10.2 million migrants in Saudi Arabia and 7.8 million in the UAE. Other GCC countries host a considerably smaller migrant population: 2.7 million migrants are in Kuwait, 1.7 in Oman, 1.6 million in Qatar and 680 000 in Bahrain. In per-capita terms, Saudi Arabia's migrant stock makes up around 35 per cent of the country's population,<sup>48</sup> whereas migrants account for over 82 per cent of the population of the Emirates. Migrants also constitute the majority of the population in Qatar (70 per cent), Kuwait (77 per cent) and Bahrain (50 per cent), whereas the migrants' share of Oman's population is, comparatively speaking, a more modest 43 per cent.

As figure 1 indicates, migrants from India and other countries in South Asia have for decades dominated migration flows to the GCC, constituting more than half of the total migrant population in the region. UN estimates suggest that there were more than 13 million migrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in the GCC in 2015. Real numbers might even be higher, due to suspected under-reporting and irregular migrations. It is estimated that ten per cent of the population in the GCC are irregular migrants, with overstays representing the most common form of irregular stay. The frequency and magnitude of amnesties, which transforms migrants' status from irregular to temporary-worker status, are important aspects of the migration policies in the region.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> In these calculations, population numbers for 2014 are used, which might, though only slightly, overstate the percentage of migrants.

<sup>49</sup> P. Fargues, F. De Bel-Air, & N. Shah, *Addressing Irregular Migration in the Gulf States*. Jedah, Geneva, Cambridge, Tokyo, Labour Market and Migrations, Gulf Research Center, 2015

The exceptionally large numbers of migrants in the GCC are primarily a result of the wage differentials and labour-force expansion requirements in the region. The GCC countries have small native populations, and the tremendous economic growth they experienced due to their oil and gas resources required the import of a foreign labour force. These needs have for years been fulfilled by a temporary labour-migration regime that has enabled the migration of millions of foreign workers.<sup>50</sup> All countries in the region have variants of sponsorships (the *kafala* system), which enable employers in the GCC, who function as sponsors (*kafel*), to import a temporary labour force of all skills. The contracts usually last for two years, but they may be renewed, and large numbers of temporary labour migrants have been in the GCC for years. GCC countries are known for their temporary labour-migration system. At the same time, they are not signatories of the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the official numbers of refugees in the GCC are extremely low. According to the UNHCR, in 2015 there were a scant 1,760 registered refugees in the whole GCC area, with Kuwait hosting the highest number of refugees in the region in 2015 – a mere 593 in total.<sup>51</sup>

As the GCC countries receive millions of labour migrants, and as asylum and refugee-protection space is virtually non-existent in the GCC, it becomes relevant to focus on a possible mixed-migrant population that arrived via the temporary labour-migrations system. The figures presented in this section, however, confirm the impression that a vast majority of migrants in the GCC are from large Asian countries, such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and other countries that for decades have not been major refugee-producing countries. On the next pages we intend to go beyond these initial impressions and analyse in more depth the mixed migrations to the GCC.

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N. Shah, *Recent Amnesty Programmes for Irregular Migrants in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia: Some Successes and Failures*, Jedah, Geneva, Cambridge, Tokyo, Labour Market and Migrations, Gulf Research Center, 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Kapiszewski, *Arab versus Asian Migrant Workers*.

<sup>51</sup> Data are from the UNHCR, see <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e45ade6.html> [accessed last time 24 May 2016].

## 5. ASSESING MIXED MIGRATIONS TO THE GCC

Assessments of the migrant and refugee population in one country often focus on nominal values, relating the refugee population to the total size of the migrant population in the receiving country, or comparing the refugee population with the size of the native population in the country.<sup>52</sup> In some cases, particularly given substantial differences in size of the sending countries, it may be pertinent to take into consideration the population size of sending countries when discussing the national composition of the migrant population in receiving nations.<sup>53</sup> We have used several of the above-mentioned references in our attempts to assess the mixed-migrant population in the GCC. However, first it should be useful to look beyond the largest nationalities in the GCC. Can we find evidence of mixed migration if we expand our scope and focus as well on other sending countries than only the top six? Figure 2 shows the migrant stocks in GCC controlled for the size of populations in 15 sending countries. (We exclude from the presentation 12 countries for which we do have data. India, which is by far the largest sender of migrants to the GCC – the country's stock in 2015 counted 8.18 million in absolute numbers and 6.46/1,000 people in per-capita terms – is excluded to ease presentation and interpretation. Also excluded for reasons of clarity are countries that belong in the bottom nine of senders in absolute and/or per-capita terms.<sup>54</sup>)

### **Figure 2. Migrant stocks in the GCC and migrant stocks per capita for 15 sending countries, 2015**

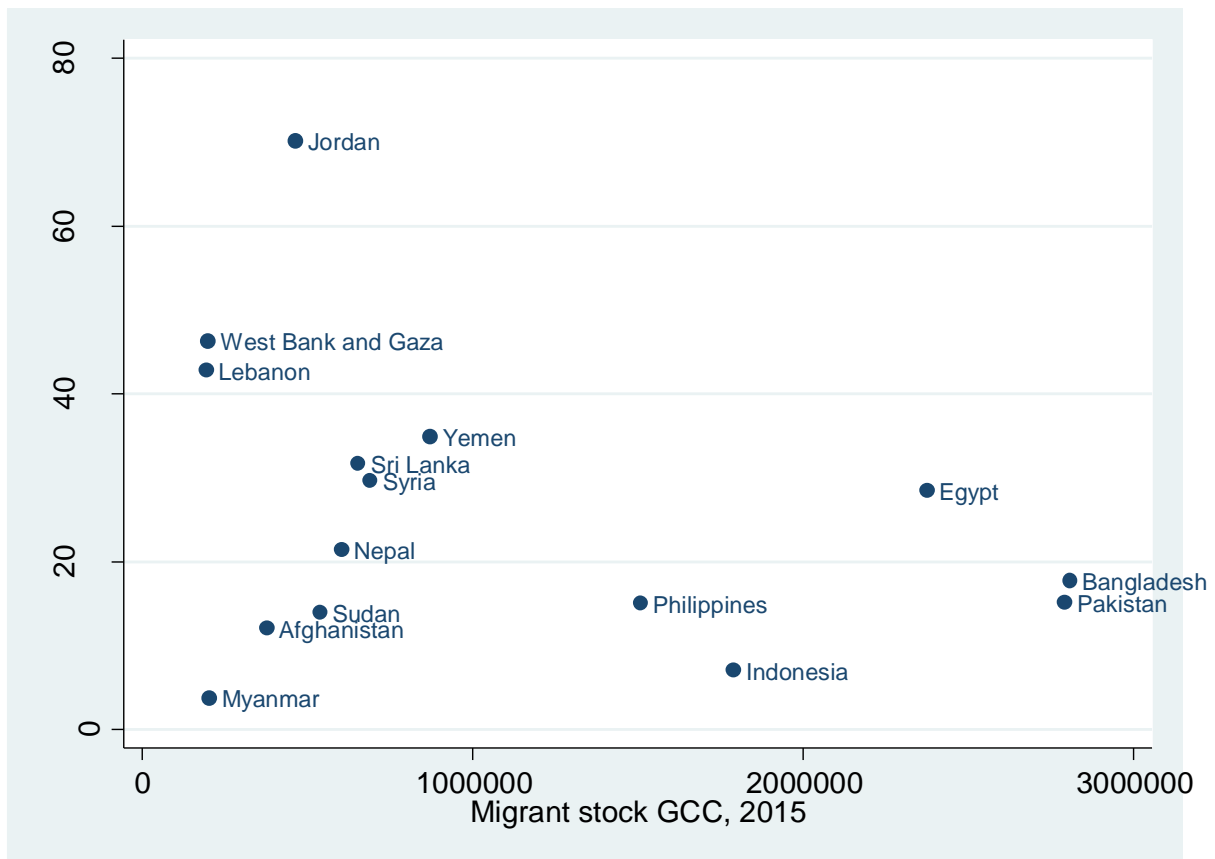
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<sup>52</sup> See S. Castles, S., H. De Haas & M. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave and Guilford, 2014; M. Kamrava & Z. Babar, *Migrant Labor in the Persian Gulf*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012; Kapiszewski, *Arab versus Asian Migrant Workers*.

<sup>53</sup> See also <http://unhcr.org/556725e69.html> [accessed last time 24 May 2016].

<sup>54</sup> This is the case for the following 11 countries (absolute and per-capita numbers of migrants to the GCC are in parentheses): Iraq (14,153/0.41); Chad (18,221/1.38); Morocco (32,546/0.97); Somalia (37,638/3.48); Nigeria (47,714/0.27); Thailand (43,677/0.65); South Sudan (44,350/3.78); Eritrea (65,879/10.08); Turkey (145,912/1.92); Tunisia (20,809/1.89); and Ethiopia (138,123/1.43).





*Notes:* Data on migrant stock are estimates by the UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division; data on per-capita migrant stock are based on 2014 population data from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators; numbers include 15 non-Western sending countries; India, the largest sending country, is excluded to ease presentation and interpretation; 11 additional sending countries for which we have data are also excluded for reasons of clarity (a country is excluded if it is among the bottom nine senders – out of the 27 – of migrants to the GCC in absolute and/or per-capita terms).

Figure 2 concurs with Figure 1 above as it indicates – on the  $x$ -axis – that the largest migrant groups in the GCC in 2015 originate from India (which is excluded from the figure, please see above), Bangladesh, Pakistan, Egypt, Indonesia and the Philippines. These are countries that we generally do not associate with large-scale wars. Still, two points are worth making in that regard. Firstly, according to data from the Armed Conflict Dataset, assembled by the Peace

Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and University of Uppsala,<sup>55</sup> between 1960 and 2014 (the last year for which we have such data), these six countries did indeed experience *major* intra- or interstate war in 41 out of a total 318 country-years (that is, 12.9 per cent).<sup>56</sup> Given the paucity of major war in general – where such wars are defined to include armed conflict resulting in over 1,000 battle deaths within a year – this is not an insignificant amount. When *minor* wars are also included in the assessment, numbers become conspicuously high. For the six largest senders of migrants to the GCC, wars with more than 25 battle-related deaths have been the rule rather than the exception in the period under study; 191 out of 318 – or 60.1 per cent of – country-years witnessed such armed conflicts. The Philippines, for example, have experienced continuous insurgencies from 1969 until the present, which means that 45 out of 55 relevant years have been ‘war years’ for that country.<sup>57</sup> Of course, neither high- nor low-intensity war automatically renders a country’s overall security situation forbiddingly precarious, and it does not necessarily spur massive refugee crises. It does, however, give grounds for raising the issue about possible mixed motives for at least a portion of migrants coming from such countries.

Secondly, when we extend the scope and look beyond these six largest groups we can note that within the 27 sending countries are also sizable numbers of Syrians, Afghans, Sudanese, Yemenites and other migrants hailing from especially war-torn countries. And when we control for the size of population in the sending countries (y-axis in figure 2), then Yemen and Syria, countries currently affected by severe armed conflicts, emerge as important

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<sup>55</sup> See [http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp\\_prio\\_armed\\_conflict\\_dataset/](http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_prio_armed_conflict_dataset/) [accessed last time 24 May 2016].

<sup>56</sup> Egypt experienced major warfare with at least 1,000 battle-related deaths in 1967 and 1973; Indonesia in 1961, 1975–1978 and 1981; India in 1962, 1965, 1971, 1988, 1990–1992, 2000 and 2002–2005; Pakistan in 1965, 1971, 1974 and 2008–2014; and the Philippines in 1978, 1981–1987, 1990–1991 and 2000. Bangladesh has not seen any major war after the extremely bloody 1971 war of independence, which in the PRIO/Uppsala data is coded as a Pakistani war (Bangladesh was known as East Pakistan before 1972).

<sup>57</sup> Bangladesh suffered warfare with at least 25 battle-related deaths in the following periods and years: 1975–1991, 2005–2006; Egypt in 1967, 1969–1970, 1973, 1993–1998, 2014; Indonesia in 1960–1969, 1975–1988, 1990–1992, 1997–2005; India in 1961–1971, 1979–2014; Pakistan in 1964–1965, 1971, 1974–1977, 1984, 1987, 1989–1992, 1994–2004, 2006–2014; the Philippines in 1969–2014.

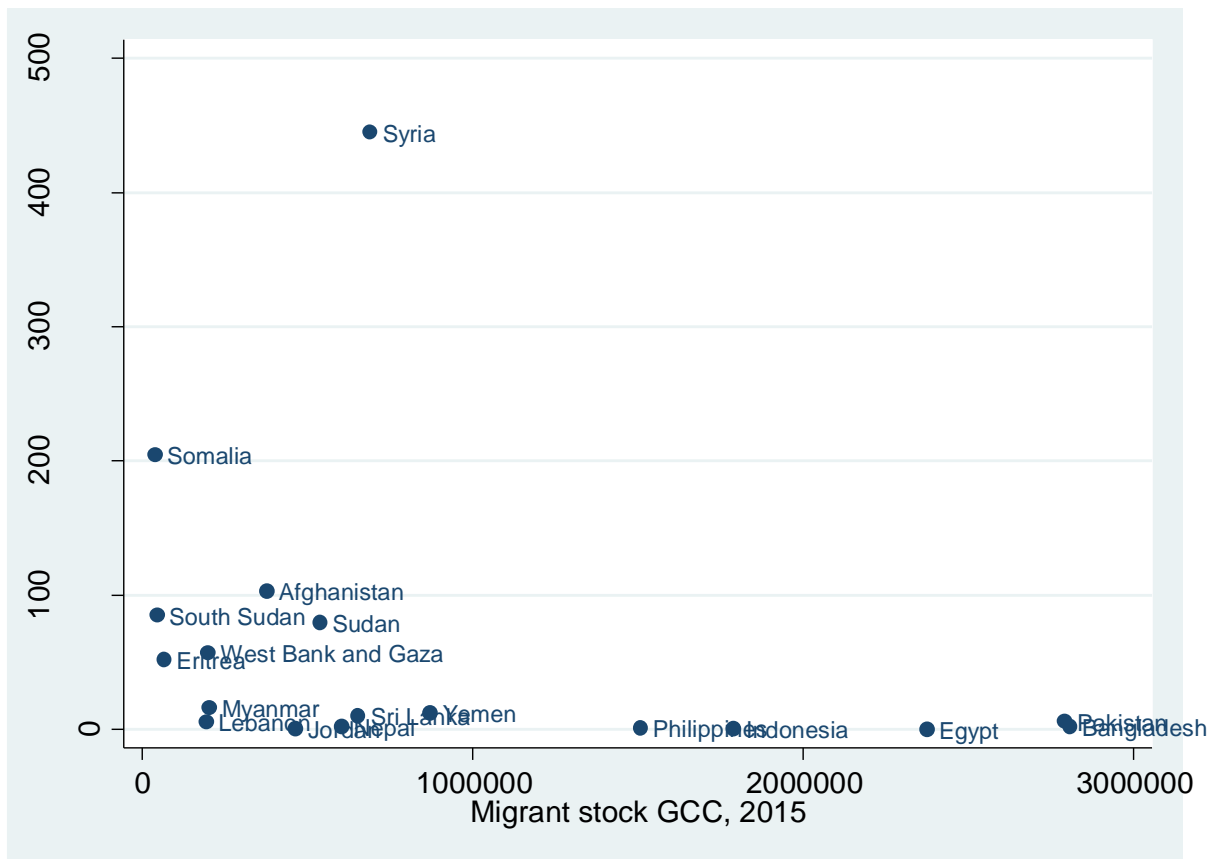
*per-capita senders* of migrants to the GCC. It is, however, important to recall here the discussion of different categories of mixed migrants that we presented earlier in the article, which centered on mixed migrants who migrate either prior to, during or after armed conflicts in their home countries. As we will soon see, most migrants from Syria and Yemen in the GCC countries arrived *before* the onset of war in their home countries.

When we merge the UN's and the World Bank's estimates we get several relevant indices of possible mixed migrations to the GCC, which work to confirm these initial impressions. The first indicator of the mixed migrations we choose to explore is refugee production of the sending countries. If the country from which a migrant originally comes has a considerable population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and a notable refugee population abroad, it is then possible that the migrant, although s/he is not registered as a refugee, has other than pure economic reasons for migrating to the GCC. Figure 3 shows migrant stocks in the GCC (total) for 18 source countries, and a combined measure of source-country per-capita IDPs and refugee population abroad. (We exclude from the presentation nine countries for which we do have data, among them, again, India (which in 2013–2014 had 0.42 refugees/IDPs per 1,000 people). Also excluded are countries that belong in the bottom eight of migrant senders in per-capita terms.<sup>58</sup>)

**Figure 3. Refugees and internally displaced persons per 1,000 people, and migrant stock in GCC for 18 sending countries, 2015**

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<sup>58</sup> These are (with number of refugees and IDPs per 1,000 people in parentheses): Iraq (72.05); Nigeria (18.79); Thailand (0.52); Morocco (0.05); Chad (7.94); Ethiopia (4.17); Tunisia (0.14); and Turkey (13.42).



*Notes:* Data on migrant stock are estimates by the UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division; data on the y-axis combine 2013 data on IDPs and 2014 data on refugee population by country of origin (both sets of data are from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators). Data on per-capita migrant stock are based on 2014 population data from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators; numbers include 18 non-Western sending countries; India, the largest sending country, is excluded to ease presentation and interpretation; 8 additional sending countries for which we have data are also excluded for reasons of clarity (a country is excluded if it is among the bottom eight senders – out of the 27 – of migrants to the GCC in per-capita terms).

The values on the y-axis in the figure are based on slightly older estimates of refugee and IDP populations, as the latest available estimates from the World Bank, which we use in this article, are from 2014 and 2013, respectively. Since then, the wars in Syria and Yemen have escalated. Yemen is therefore scarcely visible in the figure, but, according to UNHCR, there

were over 2.3 million IDPs in Yemen in 2015.<sup>59</sup> According to the UN's estimates there were approximately 870 000 Yemenites, 690 000 Syrians, 540 000 Sudanese and 380 000 Afghans in the GCC in 2015.<sup>60</sup> It should nonetheless be mentioned that the GCC receives only a small share of the total emigrants from Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq and other such countries that are among the major refugee-producing countries in the world. The general trend is that the refugees settle in proximity of their home countries. Still, there are certain exceptions from the general trend as approximately one third of the Sudanese and Sri Lankan diasporas is in the GCC, and for most Yemenites the Gulf region is the major migrant destination. In 2015, almost 90 per cent of the Yemenite diaspora was in the GCC.

Figure 4 shows the largest nationality groups in the GCC in 2015 from large refugee-producing countries (defined by us as countries with more than 5 refugees per 1,000 people). The figure also shows these countries' total size of migrant stock and total refugee stock.<sup>61</sup>

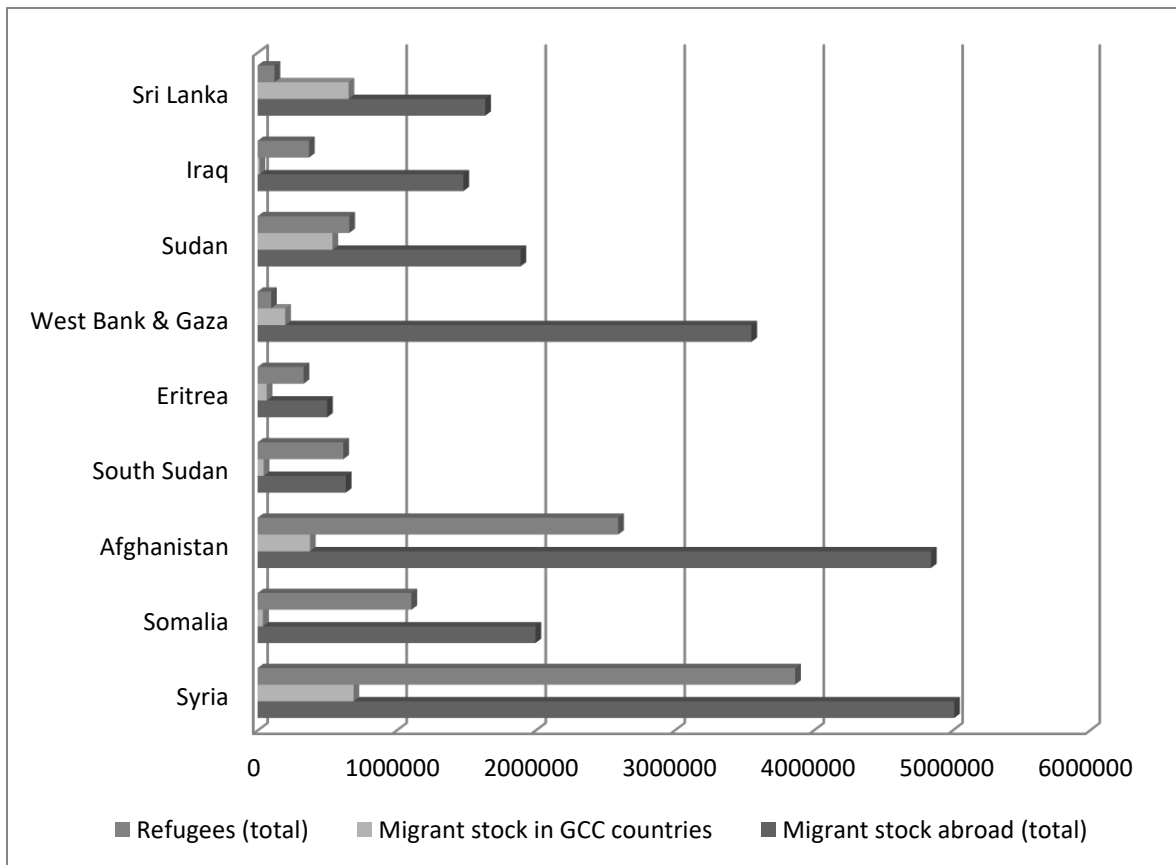
#### **Figure 4. Migrant and refugee stock from selected countries: total and in the GCC, 2015**

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<sup>59</sup> See [http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendocPDFViewer.html?docid=57066a626&query=refugee asylum 2016](http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendocPDFViewer.html?docid=57066a626&query=refugee%20asylum%202016) [accessed last time 24. May 2016].

<sup>60</sup> Estimates on the numbers of Syrians in the GCC diverge a lot, even those from the UN and the World Bank. According to the dataset from the UN's Population Division there were 690 000 Syrians in GCC in 2013, while the World Bank estimates that 1.4 million Syrians were in the GCC in that year. See, for instance, <http://europe.newsweek.com/gulf-states-are-taking-syrian-refugees-401131?rm=eu>. In this article, we have chosen to rely on the UN's estimates for the years 1990–2015 given both the temporal consistency of these data – which include five-year intervals up to and including the year 2015 – and the fact that the UN is generally regarded as the most authoritative source of such data. For other data see: <http://gulfmigration.eu/>. The World Bank has included this database as the main source for its estimates of Gulf States' populations.

<sup>61</sup> It is important to note that available data on refugees should be treated with caution as some of them may be misleading. For example, most Palestinians recorded in statistics as being 'abroad' are in fact second, third or fourth-generation of people of Palestinian origin who are Jordanian citizens born in Jordan; hence, they are not migrants, despite that the UN categorises them as such. Numbers are also cumulative (and they include some refugees born in the host country), and some of the 'migrants' could be refugees but are not registered by the UNHCR. And, as already noted, in some cases, the majority of migrants from large refugee-producing countries, such as Syria and Yemen, arrived in the GCC prior to the conflict in their home countries.



Notes: Data on migrant stock are estimates by the UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division; data on refugee population by country of origin are from 2014 and are extracted from the World Bank's World Development Indicators.

On the one hand, it is clear that the GCC countries are not a major destination for migrants from the largest refugee-producing countries. It is also clear that the largest communities from refugee-producing countries in the GCC are fairly small compared with the millions of temporary labour migrations from relatively poor but non-refugee-producing countries in (South) Asia. This is true even if we measure refugee population relative to source-country population size (with a partial exception for the West Bank and Gaza). On the other hand, these numbers are far from negligible. There were 2.6 million migrants from large refugee-producing countries in the GCC in 2015; this makes up approximately 10 per cent of the total

migrant stock in the region.<sup>62</sup> Migrants from these countries are categorised as labour migrants, students, family members and visitors, but they may still have mixed motivations for moving to the GCC. And their motivations and reasons to migrate or stay in the GCC are surely diverse: Some, such as recent refugees from current conflicts, were ‘pushed’ to the Gulf. Others, though, became refugees only *after* having migrated, because conflict in their home country deters them from returning. We will discuss this distinction in more detail later in the article.

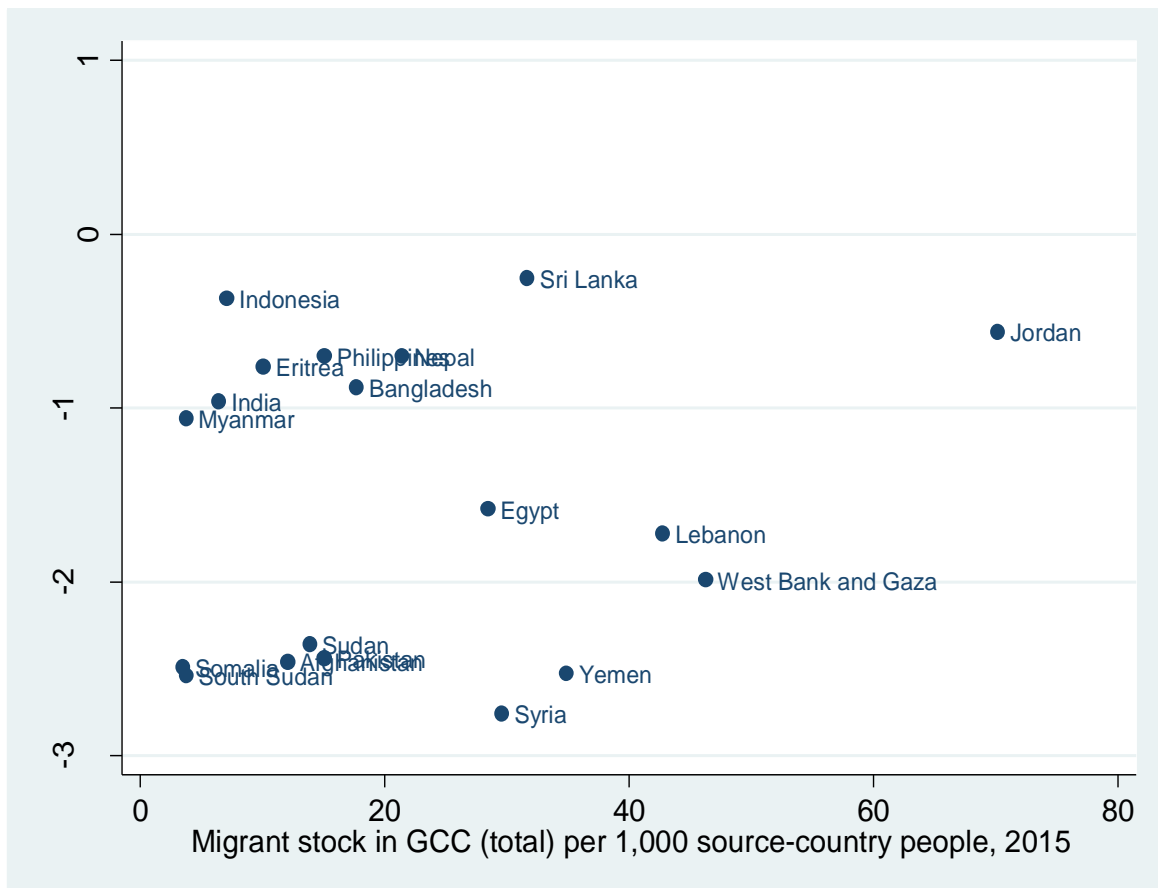
The second available indicator of possible mixed migrations to the Gulf region is related to political conditions in the sending countries. People may have mixed motives for migrating, due to political instability and a high level of violence in the country, even if they are from countries which do not produce large numbers of registered refugees and which are not involved in any large-scale armed conflict. Figure 5 provides an overview of the share of migrant stock in the GCC from countries shaken by political instability and a high level of violence for the 19 largest per-capita source countries. (We exclude from the presentation countries that belong in the bottom eight of migrant senders in per-capita terms).<sup>63</sup>

**Figure 5. Migrant stocks in GCC per 1,000 source-country people for 19 major source countries, and political stability and absence of violence in source country, 2015**

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<sup>62</sup> Refugee-producing countries are here defined as the countries that according the World Bank’s database have more than 5 refugees per 1000 people. Yemen’s numbers are below this threshold because the country only recently became a large producer of refugees and IDPs. If we had proceeded to include migrants from Yemen, then the GCC would be hosting almost 3.5 million migrants from refugee-producing countries.

<sup>63</sup> These are (scores on the Political Stability index are in parentheses): Iraq (-2.47); Nigeria (-2.11); Thailand (-0.91); Morocco (-0.39); Chad (-1.53); Tunisia (-0.93); Ethiopia (-1.24); and Turkey (-1.06).



Notes: Data on migrant stock are estimates by the UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division; data on political stability are from 2014 and are extracted from the World Bank’s World Governance Indicators (see <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home>); numbers include 19 non-Western sending countries; 8 sending countries for which we have data are excluded to ease presentation and interpretation (a country is excluded if it is among the bottom eight senders – out of the 27 – of migrants to the GCC in absolute terms)

The data on political stability, which are from the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators, ‘measures the perceptions of the likelihood that the government will be destabilised or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means’.<sup>64</sup> For 2014, the last year for which we have data, the most stable country (or, in this case, territory) was Greenland, with a score of 1.94, while the least stable country was Syria, scoring -2.76. The global mean is 0, and as we can see from the figure, all of the 19 migrant-sending countries presented (and,

<sup>64</sup> See <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#doc>. [accessed last time 24 May 2016].



indeed, all of the 27 sending countries for which we have relevant migration data) scored below the global average, and several large sending countries are politically unstable countries with fairly high levels of violence. Among this group of migrant-sending countries, however, no clear pattern can be discerned; all these states are relatively unstable, but *within* the group of 27, no correlation exists between instability and per-capita migrant stock in the GCC. This general trend does not change in any noteworthy way when we use absolute migrant-stock numbers of the sending countries (not shown). Neither do other measures of security or institutional quality seem to matter; the bivariate relationship between migrant stocks and a measure of state fragility is insignificant,<sup>65</sup> and level of democracy is uncorrelated with migrant stocks to the GCC.<sup>66</sup> This is the case irrespective of whether we use absolute or population-weighted measures of migrant stocks.

## 6. PATTERNS OF MIXED MIGRATIONS IN THE GCC, 1960-2015

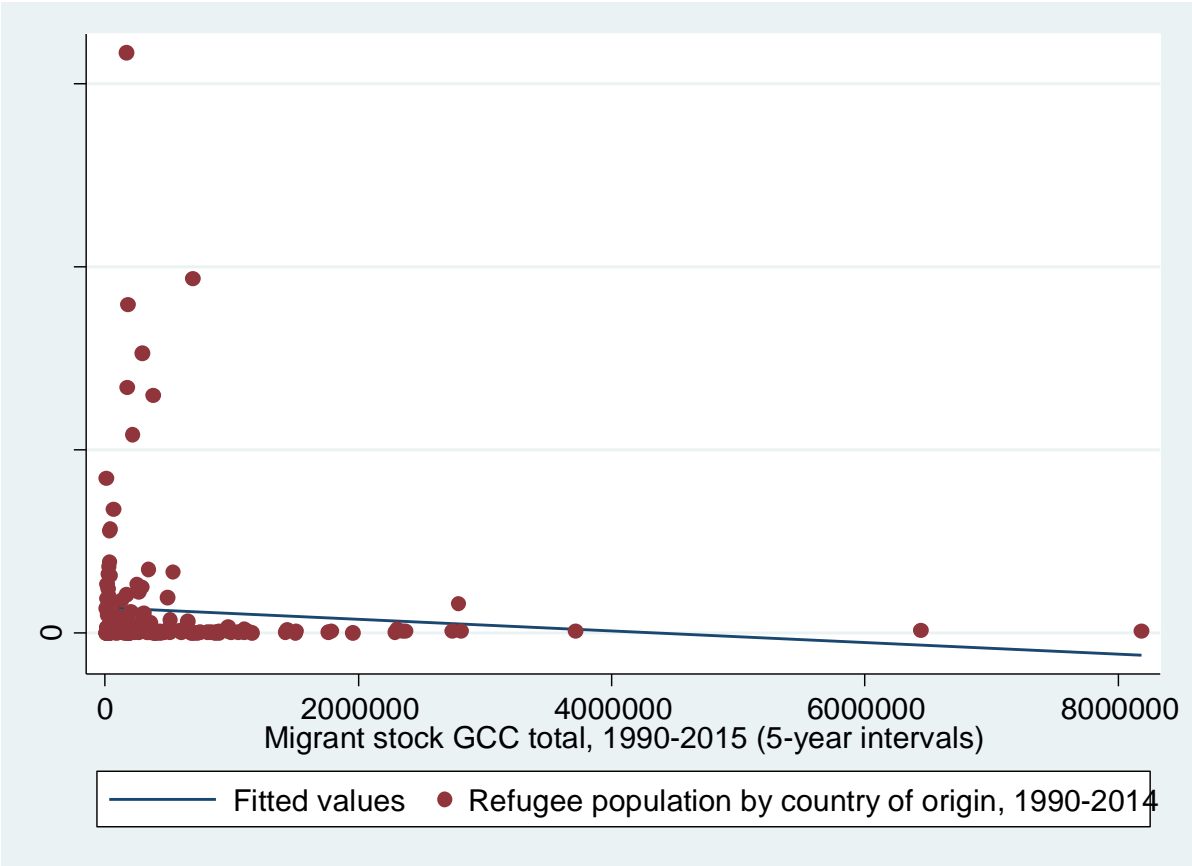
We have so far focused primarily on cross-section data, which we believe might give us leads in our assessments of mixed migrations to the GCC. In the next pages, we discuss longitudinal correlations between, on the one hand, total migrant stock in the GCC and, on the other hand, migrant stocks from refugee-producing countries and countries suffering under high levels of violence and political instability. Figure 6 indicates correlations between refugee production (*y*-axis) and total migrant stock (*x*-axis) in GCC countries for the period 1990–2015.

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<sup>65</sup> To check this, we used data on state fragility from Center for Systemic Peace at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html> [accessed last time 24 May 2016]. They measure state fragility by the SFI Index, which ranges from 25 (highly fragile) to 0 (highly stable). Exemplifying this lack of association between the SFI and migrant stock for our sample of 24 states (West Bank & Gaza does not have an SFI score), the three largest migrant-sending countries rank as no. 11 (India), 12 (Bangladesh) and 16 (Pakistan) on the SFI – that is, close to the sample middle.

<sup>66</sup> For this bivariate test, we used data on democracy level from The Center for Systemic Peace at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html>. The democracy level is measured by the Polity Index, which ranges from +10 (fully democratic) to -10 (fully autocratic).

**Figure 6. Refugees by country of origin, and migrant stock to GCC for 27 major sending countries, 1990–2015 (5-year intervals)**



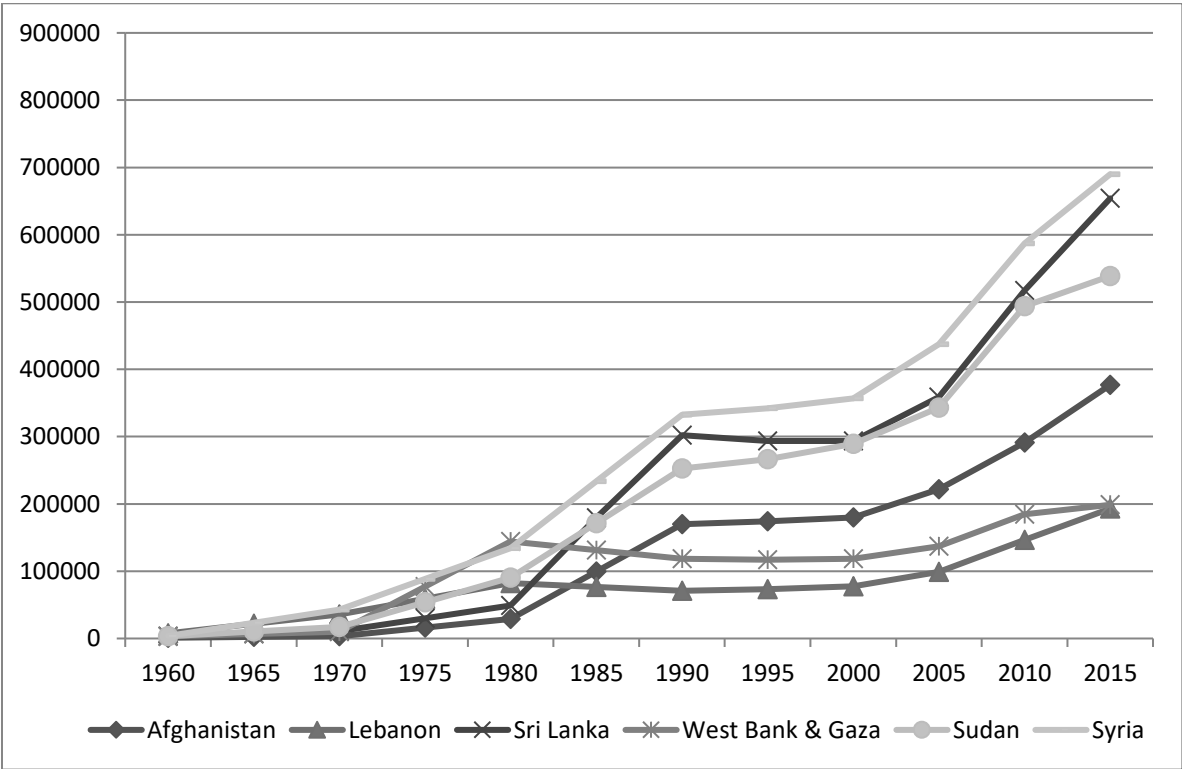
*Notes:* Migrant-stock data from 1990–2015 are estimates by the UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division; data on refugee population by country of origin are extracted from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators; refugee-population data for 2014, the latest available year, are used in conjunction with migrant-stock data for 2015.

Figure 6 displays correlations between variables in 5-year intervals, and it is in line with initial findings from the cross-sectional analysis for 2015 (see figure 3). Indeed, migrations to the GCC were for decades largely dominated by migrations from non-refugee-producing countries. Migrations from refugee-producing countries have in comparison been small. However, they were not negligible as several of the large refugee-producing countries have contributed with hundreds of thousands of migrants to the GCC. This is, for example, the case with Afghanistan, which has been a significant refugee producer ever since the 1979 Soviet

invasion, after which Afghan migrations to the GCC have steadily increased. Countries such as Sri Lanka, Sudan and West Bank and Gaza (Palestine) have also seen the concomitant generation of a substantial number of refugees *and* a huge outflow of migrants – in particular relative to population size – to the GCC region in the last few decades.

The scatter diagram gives us relevant indications of possible correlations between the above-mentioned variables, but it reveals few clues about the dynamic of growth in migrant stocks from refugee-producing countries. Figure 7 shows how the migrations from the major refugee-producing countries have developed in the period 1960–2015.

**Figure 7. Developments in migrant stocks from large refugee-producing countries, six largest nationalities in the GCC, 1960-2015**



Notes: Data from 1960–1980 are estimates extracted from the World Bank’s Global Bilateral Migration Database 1960–2000; data from 1990–2015 are estimates by the UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division; data for 1965, 1975 and 1985 are obtained from linear interpolation; comparisons between the World Bank and the UN data should be made with caution as estimation techniques differ.

Migrants from the countries in the figure represent only a small proportion of the total migrant population in the GCC (for total numbers, please recall figure 1). However, more than 90 per cent of the entire migrant stock from refugee-producing countries in the GCC originates from the countries displayed in the figure. Notably, migrant stocks from these countries have grown substantially in the last decades. The largest contributors among this group have for years been Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Lebanon, West Bank and Gaza and the Sudan, with Yemen (not included in the figure) and Syria constituting the most recent senders. The figure shows that a major increase in the migrant stock happened in the 1980s. This was followed by a stagnation in the growth in the 1990s, before the migrant stock again started to grow strongly after 2005. The above-mentioned countries have been marked by several relevant events that may be related to the indicated migration trends. Regarding push factors, the most obvious suspects would be escalations in armed conflicts.<sup>67</sup> As Sriskandarajah, who studied links between war in Sri Lanka and migrations, points out:

...the conflict has had high direct and indirect costs island-wide in terms of lives, livelihoods, and slower economic growth. Not surprisingly, the largest increases in both migration flows have occurred since 1983... While the majority of political migrants have been Tamils directly affected by the conflict in the north-east, the conflict has also indirectly fueled the increased flows of predominately Sinhalese labour migration from the south-west...More than three-quarters of migrant workers reside in the Gulf region.<sup>68</sup>

Indeed, the first surge in numbers of migrants from Afghanistan, Sudan and Sri Lanka coincides with escalations of armed conflicts in these countries, while the 1991 Gulf War deterred migrants in the early nineties. The economic downturn and the political instability

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<sup>67</sup> For other relevant factors, such as dynamics of economic growth and the developments in purchasing power parity in the GCC, see, for example, Valenta & Jakobsen, "Moving to the Gulf".

<sup>68</sup> Sriskandarajah, "The Migration–Development Nexus", 289, 293.

that followed curbed migrations to the area. And in the aftermath of that war, large groups of migrants were expelled, such as Palestinians from Kuwait and Yemenites from Saudi Arabia. In addition, a total of one million foreign workers fled Kuwait.<sup>69</sup> The second period of rapid growth in the numbers of immigrants, which has been taking place after 2005, should be seen in light of pull forces. Specifically, impressive economic growth rates propelled by increased oil prices have for over a decade attracted migrants to the region, both from refugee-producing and non-refugee-producing countries. Yet, the growth after 2005 indicated in the figure also coincides either with the escalation of old conflicts or with new ones, in Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza and Sri Lanka. These conflicts have resulted in large-scale displacements of people and emigrations, including migrations to the GCC, both during the conflict escalation and in the post-conflict phase.<sup>70</sup> It should be mentioned, however, that while in some cases escalations of the conflicts coincide with intensified migrations to the GCC, in others we cannot see such interconnections. The war in Syria has, for example, resulted in an increase of Syrians in the GCC, but the growth in the Syrian migrant stock was not more rapid than the growth *prior* to the conflict, even though the push factors have obviously increased since 2011 (see Figure 7). According to the UN's estimates, there were 590 000 Syrians in the GCC prior to the war (in 2010). Five years later, the migrant stock from Syria has grown to 690 000. In other words, most Syrians in GCC seem to be labour migrants who migrated prior to the war in Syria.

Indeed, longitudinal data help nuance the cross-section overviews presented earlier in the article. We have scrutinised longitudinal data from figure 7 in light of historical data and timelines of the conflicts in the respective countries represented in the figure. And it surely is

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<sup>69</sup> See Naufal & Genc, *Expats and the Labour Force*,

<sup>70</sup> Lebanon experienced conflict with Israel in 2006; the West Bank & Gaza in 2008 and 2014 and Sri Lanka in 2006–2009. In these years and periods, migrations from these countries to the GCC again intensified.

possible to identify sub-categories of mixed migrants.<sup>71</sup> Here, we may distinguish between migrants who migrated to the Gulf prior to, during and after the armed conflicts in their countries of origin. Migrants from Bangladesh are among the largest migrant groups in the GCC, and during the Bangladeshi ‘Liberation War’ in 1971, ten million East Bengalis fled the country. However, at that time migrations from Bangladesh to the GCC were negligibly small compared to the large-scale migrations that followed later. A second category is composed of ‘stranded migrants’.<sup>72</sup> Most migrants from Syria and Yemen are usefully associated with this category as most Syrians and Yemenites in the GCC are labour migrants who arrived prior to the conflicts in their countries, which started in 2011 and 2015, respectively. Migrants from Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Sudan, for their part, may be associated with a third category of mixed migrants – those fleeing *during* conflict. The armed conflicts in these three countries started in the late 1970s and early 1980s and lasted, with variable intensity, for decades. Migrations to the Gulf from Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Sudan were substantial during most of these prolonged conflict periods. In sum, therefore, the general impression is that there are possible links between armed conflict in sending countries, the pull-factors and the dynamic of migration to the Gulf.<sup>73</sup>

## **7. POLITICAL STABILITY AND TERRORISM IN SENDING COUNTRIES AS PUSH FACTORS**

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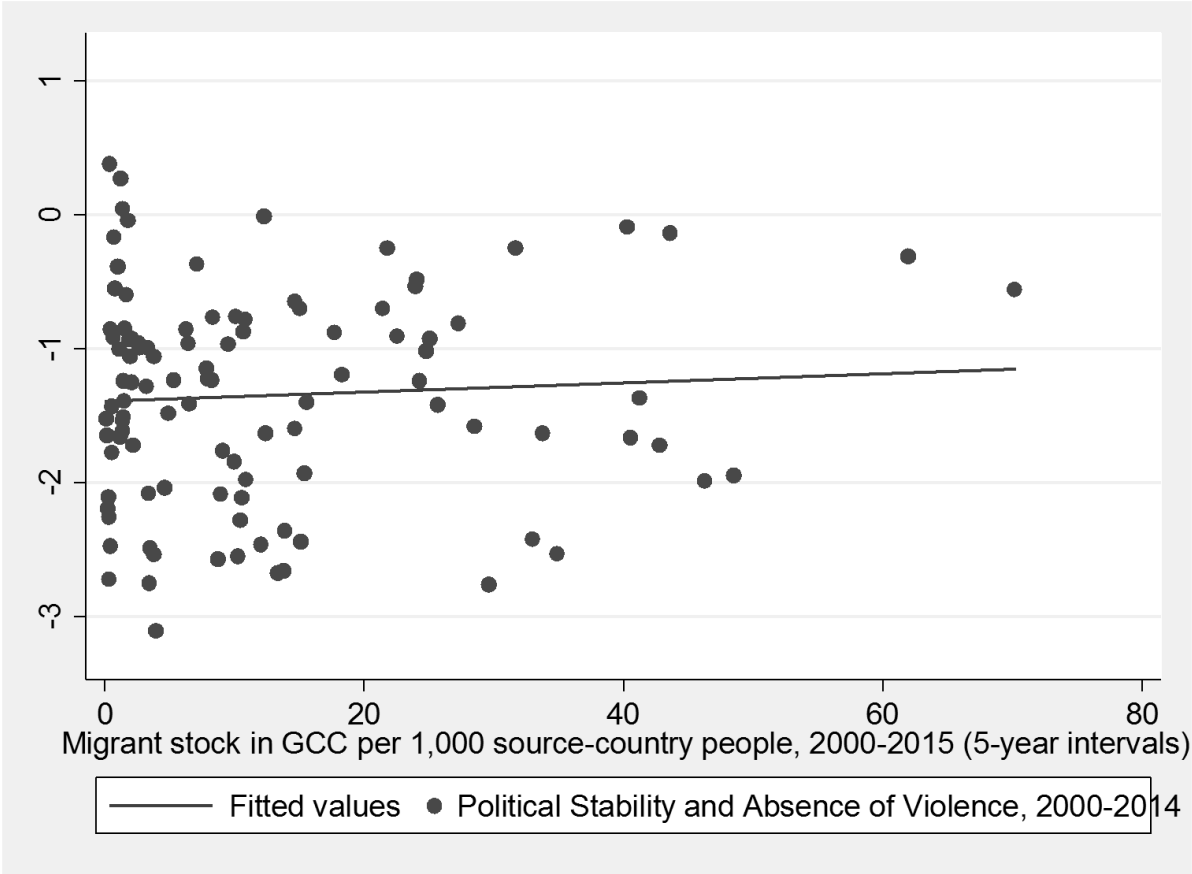
<sup>71</sup> The armed conflict in Sri Lanka lasted between 1983 and 2009. War between northern and southern parts of Sudan started in 1983 and lasted until 2005, while the war in South Sudan, between Nuer and Dinka, started in 2013. Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviet Union in 1979, which sparked a decade-long insurgency. The pull-back of Soviet forces was immediately followed by civil war, which has continued more or less unabatedly ever since, though different specific stages of the war(s) can surely be identified (phases of the war(s) are not least separated by the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban in 1996, and by the 2001–2002 U.S. and NATO military intervention). In sum: Each of these countries has been affected by devastating armed conflict for decades, which obviously represents a strong push force.

<sup>72</sup> Collyer, “Stranded Migrants and the Fragmented Journey.”

<sup>73</sup> However, a better understanding of the aforementioned exceptions would require a more detailed analysis of conflicts in the sending countries, migration obstacles and migration alternatives, as well as an investigation of the GCC countries’ treatment of different migrant groups.

Full-scale armed conflicts are obvious push forces. However, there are also less extreme factors that go beyond pure economic motivations for migration. As already noted, the level of political instability and violence in the country may also be used as indices of possible mixed migrations. Longitudinal data on political stability in sending countries confirm the findings from cross-sectional figures (see figure 5) as a majority of migrants to the GCC in the period after 2000 are from countries shaken by political instability, state fragility and high levels of violence. Figure 8 shows migrant stock per capita in the GCC and political stability in the period 2000–2015. (The World Bank only has data on political stability and violence from 1996, which makes 2000 the first year for which we can mesh such data with data on migration.)

**Figure 8 Migrant stock per capita (per 1,000 people) in GCC countries, and political stability for 27 sending countries, 2000-2015 (5-year intervals)**



*Notes:* Data on migrant stock are estimates by the UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division; data on political stability are extracted from the World Bank's World Governance Indicators (see <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home>); political stability data for 2014, the latest available year, are used in conjunction with migrant-stock data for 2015

These data indicate that relatively few migrants in the GCC are from the most unstable countries. However, figure 8 also indicates that the vast majority of migrants in the GCC in the period 2000–2015 were from countries that scored below the global average (represented in the figure by 0) regarding violence and political instability.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, only three of our sample's country-years scored above the global average in this period, namely Tunisia (2000 and 2005) and Thailand (2000).

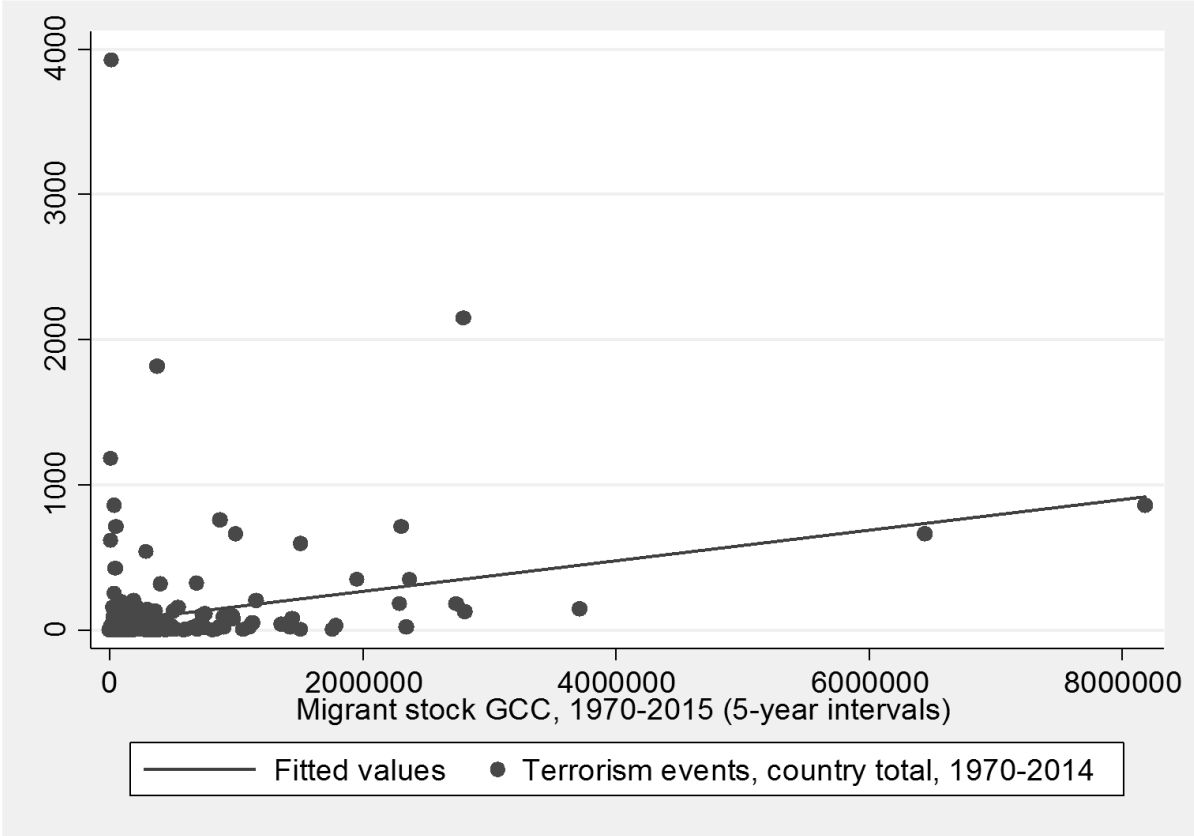
There also exist other relevant variables indicating instability in the sending countries, and there are other push factors that might contribute to mixed migrations. Frequent terrorist attacks may represent push forces as they, in addition to being strongly correlated with civil war, produce anxieties and fear. We have thus also investigated correlations between the yearly number of terrorist events in the largest migrant sending countries and migrations to the GCC. As figure 9 indicates, some of the largest senders to the GCC score relatively high on terrorist events. However, most of the sending countries do not have very frequent terrorist events, and those that are most affected by terrorism do not send large numbers of migrants to the GCC.

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<sup>74</sup> For the patterns of growth in these migrations, see figure 1.



**Figure 9. Migrant stock GCC, and terrorist events for 27 sending countries, 1970–2015 (5-year intervals)**



*Notes:* Data on migrant stock are estimates by the UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division; data on per-capita migrant stock are based on population data from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators; data on terrorism events are from the START Global Terrorism Database (see <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>); terrorism data for 2014, the latest available year, are used in conjunction with migrant-stock data for 2015.

To sum up: It is evident that migrations to the GCC have not been dominated by migrations from the most politically unstable countries, those characterised by the highest levels of violence or from countries with the most detrimental terrorist-attack record. Nevertheless, it is also indicated that the majority of migrants to the GCC have come from relatively unstable states, and many are from countries with quite high levels of violence and terrorism. Therefore, we cannot exclude the possibility that a fairly large number of migrants from such countries may have other than pure economic reasons for migration to the GCC.

It should also be mentioned that political instability, violence and terrorist attacks may yield an *indirect* push effect, as they may have a devastating effect on the economies of sending countries, especially those that depend on tourism, such as Turkey and Egypt. Egypt, for instance, is highly dependent on tourist revenues. According to the UN's statistics, Egypt is among the major sending countries to the GCC; thus, developments in the country are of high relevance for discussion on *future* mixed migrations to the Gulf. In recent years, the political situation in Egypt has deteriorated, and the country experiences oppression, social unrest and more frequent terrorist attacks, which have had a devastating effect on its tourist industry. These developments may contribute to an increase in an already large emigration from Egypt to the Gulf.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, it should be mentioned that Libya has traditionally been among the major destinations for Egyptian migrants. However, the economic and security situation in Libya has deteriorated significantly since the Arab Spring, which deters migrants. It is thus expected that migrant flows from Egypt will be deflected to other major destinations in the region, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Generally, in addition to armed-conflicts and the worsening political and economic situation in the sending countries, it would be relevant to take into consideration developments in other receiving countries, as well as fragmented and secondary migrations from countries that have already received large numbers of refugees. There are large refugee communities – such as Syrians and Palestinians in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, and Afghans in Pakistan and Iran – who live in difficult, refugee-protracted situations, with many trying to improve their situation via migrations to third countries. It is difficult to estimate the scale of these fragmented migrations, but the GCC countries are certainly also included in their migration trajectories and survival strategies.

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<sup>75</sup> Since the Arab Spring, Egypt's migrant stock in the GCC has increased by more than half a million. For more on Egyptian emigrations see <http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/?s=egypt> [accessed last time 9. January 2017].

## 8. CONCLUSION

The Gulf Cooperation Council countries are among the largest destinations for temporary labour migrants in the world, but their liberal labour-migrant regimes seem to contrast starkly with their restrictive refugee policies. As an asylum system is virtually non-existent in the GCC, the narrow legal categories prescribed by the local migration policies cannot capture the variety of migrant flows. Drawing on the growing body of literature that focuses on the limitations of ‘voluntary-forced migration’ dichotomy and the narrow legal categories used to govern migration flows, we explored the mixed migrations to the GCC. We based our analysis on several general indices, and it is important to stress that the available statistics may only assess the *potential* mixed migrations to the Gulf. It is acknowledged that the flows from refugee-producing countries and politically unstable countries to the GCC are not homogenous; rather, they include a variety of migrants with a variety of motivations for migration. However, it is clear that the region is a destination for millions of migrants from countries that are not affected by wars. Among the migrants are, however, also people from states where political instability, violence and protracted armed conflict have resulted in devastated economies, tragic losses of lives and a substantial displacement of people.

The recent surge in the numbers of asylum seekers in Europe – from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries – indicates that the permanent protection in the West appears as a best option for most migrants from conflict areas. There are also alternative, for many less appealing but often cheaper exit options, such as migration to neighbouring states or to the Gulf as a temporary labour migrant. Few regions in the world have legal, well-established channels for large-scale labour migrations of people from the unstable developing countries – but the GCC does. Yet, this does not mean that the Gulf countries are a free haven for mixed migrants. Migration to the Gulf is not an optimal solution for the migrants. This is, *inter alia*, because the migration regimes in the GCC are based on the ‘high numbers-low

rights' principle, and cases of harsh treatment of migrants and large-scale deportations from the Gulf are well-documented. Numerous studies also indicate that many temporary labour migrants in the GCC live in difficult conditions and experience severe exploitation. Nevertheless, due to strong push factors in sending countries and possibilities to send remittances to families back home, the migrant stocks from refugee-producing countries have grown significantly in the GCC in the last decades.

It is maintained herein that mixed migrations to the Gulf are happening within highly constrained structural frames characterised by the lack of other, better migration opportunities for people from unstable developing countries. Permanent refugee status in the West clearly provides greater social rights and opportunities than temporary labour-migrant visas in the GCC. Yet, there are few legal migration channels to the West. And it is very difficult for people from unstable countries who suffer from social and economic fallouts of the conflicts in their countries, but who are not directly affected by armed conflicts, to be granted protection there. In this context, migration to the GCC as a temporary labour migrant will continue to appear as an alternative survival strategy and an important source of remittances to families back home.