

# INDIAN MIGRANTS TO GULF COUNTRIES

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## ABSTRACT

*Indian migrants are a significant source of labour in Gulf countries; these workers are mostly skilled or unskilled. Indian workers are migrants due to the pull factor of employment opportunity. All types of workers are needed in Gulf countries, regardless of their technical or non-technical skills. Indian migrant workers also contribute to the Indian economy's growth and development. However, in the context of Indian workers, the Gulf States do not provide adequate health and crisis services. During the crisis, the Indian government assists Indian migrants in returning home safely and with care. Following that, the Kerala High Court directed the central government to respond to a public interest litigation seeking the return of Indian expatriates stranded in Gulf countries due to flight restrictions to India. Indians live in other countries. Whereas some professionals live in many developed countries, the vast majority of Indian workers are employed in Gulf countries, where they are both skilled and unskilled. As a result, the vast majority of Indian expats in the United States are Overseas Indians, also known as NRIs or OCIs. In the case of Indian workers, the largest numbers are migrants to UAE after the Saudi Arabia. In the Gulf, migrant workers have limited access to and awareness of health and welfare services. Migrant groups also avoid health care because they are afraid of deportation, discrimination, and other linguistic, economic, and cultural barriers. During COVID-19, this paper investigates the status of Indian migrants as well as the effects of health and the Indian economy. Hence, the paper is based on secondary data obtained from national and international organization publications, and existing literature was used for the purpose of the current study.*

**Keywords:** *Migration, Migrants, Indian, workers, Gulf, Countries*

## INTRODUCTION

A major flow of Indian workers into the Gulf began in 1973 following a rise in oil prices, followed by large-scale development activities. As a result, the supply of unskilled labour from India and Pakistan has increased. The Gulf was up by close to 200% between 1970 and 1975. A few decades later, the first Gulf War saw another surge in Indian workers to replace workers expelled from Arab countries, who did not fully support the effort to push Iraqi forces back from Kuwait. There arose a need to care about

the rights of migrants, employment exploitation, fraud, etc. in different countries (Khadaria, et al., 2009). Thus, migration from India to the Middle East, Africa, and Europe has been on the rise in recent decades due to the growing demand for skilled labour.

The Act 1983 is related to emigration, it a legal instrument in India that deals with emigration matters and the welfare of migrants. Due to its shortcomings, the government tabled an updated draft Migration Bill in 2019 for debate and consideration. Thus, a stringent set of legal

conditions and the Indian migrants to the Gulf region adhere to procedures. This has three phases. In pre stage- Individual needs to a passport for require jobs, purchasing insurance and booking travel , excess to need emigration clearance from the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. A registered recruiting agent provides these processes. The second stage is covered to the employment period during which the designated Indian expatriate works for an employer in a Gulf country (including workers sponsored by a Gulf country citizen).Third stage is final stage of the migration process entails the return of the migrant to India, it is also known as the capacity-building stage. Thus, migrant workers use the resources and skills acquired to sustain their lives at home (CIRS 2011). But, lack of comprehensive migration framework, policy program in India during crisis ,it is focused on mobility at the crisis time duration. Thus, migration is related issues and challenges are focused on cooperation agreements such as the MoU between India and the host country.

The UAE is the top destination for Indian workers abroad, ahead of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the US, and Oman. According to the Ministry of External Affairs, the majority of NRIs, about 7.6 million, live in the Middle East. Nearly 189,000 emigration clearances were issued for the Gulf from January to July this year alone, indicating a new wave of emigration following the crippling COVID-19 pandemic. In the 2020 data put out by the Ministry of External Affairs, around 13.6 million Indians live outside India. The largest portion of this number, 341,000, lives in the UAE. Emigration clearance is required from the Government of India for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers as well as certain professionals such as nurses notified from time to time, for taking up employment in 18 countries including GCC states. In 2018, the number of Indian workers moving to the Gulf region declined by 21%, with around 300,000 Indian expatriates cleared by the Department of Emigration of India's Ministry of External Affairs to Gulf countries.

As of 2018, there were 8.5 million non-resident Indians (NRIs) working in the Gulf countries

(Ministry of External Affairs 2018). The Indian expatriate community in the Gulf includes domestic workers and unskilled workers employed in construction companies, municipalities, and agricultural farms. This labour accounts for 70% of the Diaspora. Skilled and semi-skilled workers—doctors, engineers, and accountants employed in the government and private sectors, and businessmen—make up between 20% and 30% of the migrant workforce, and domestic workers make up about 5% of the migrant population (Khadaria 2007).

The majority of the Indian community in the GCC is from the southern states of Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. The rest are from Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Punjab, Bihar, and Rajasthan. As seen during the ongoing pandemic, these macroeconomic ties increase the risk of higher infection rates, and the global economy was also adversely affected by falling oil prices, border closures, and restrictions on international travel.

Gulf countries rely heavily on the free movement of migrant workers, and the vulnerability of migrants to the virus is a threat to the region. The Gulf countries are making arrangements to insulate themselves from the impact of the crisis. The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have called for stricter oversight of labour camps. Thus, it moved many migrant workers to less crowded establishments. Similarly, areas with expatriate populations are also being seen as a potential threat in the UAE and Bahrain, where security forces have been deployed to restrict the movement of these workers and conduct random testing. This has led to debate about the Gulf countries' reliance on migrant workers in the region and the need to redefine the responsibility of businesses during the pandemic. Governments have also included facilities to track migrant workers, hence their housing, while holding sponsors responsible for the deteriorating conditions of migrant workers.

## WHAT MAKES GULF MIGRANTS VULNERABLE?

Low-income migrant workers in the Gulf are largely denied social security and health insurance coverage. A number of health risks, such as poor living conditions, work in hazardous industries such as construction and oil and gas, and the exploitation that goes with it, exacerbate existing health risks. Many migrants also work in service industries, such as hospitality, which necessitates frequent exposure to or proximity to others. Lower-income migrants also have lower levels of education and language skills, limited access to information on health rights and benefits, and cultural sensitivities, all of which impair their ability to address their health conditions during the normal migratory process, exacerbating their situation during cross-society pandemics. In the Gulf, migrant workers have limited access to and awareness of health and welfare services. Migrant

groups also avoid health care because they are afraid of deportation, discrimination, and other linguistic, economic, and cultural barriers. Due to pre-existing health conditions and a lack of healthcare facilities, many migrant workers died from the corona virus.

## OVERSEAS INDIAN STATUS IN THE GULF STATES

The most Overseas Indians live in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The UAE is the first destination for Indian migrants, followed by Saudi Arabia. Table 1 shows the status of Indians living abroad, non-residents, and people of Indian origin. Observation revealed that the UAE and Saudi Arabia have the highest population.

**Table - 1: Population of Overseas Indians in the Gulf States, 2018**

Country	Non-Resident Indians (NRIs)	Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs)	Overseas Indians
Bahrain	312,918	3,257	316,175
Kuwait	928,421	1,482	929,903
Oman	688,226	919	689,145
Qatar	691,539	500	692,039
Saudi Arabia	2,812,408	2,160	2,814,568
UAE	3,100,000	4,586	3,104,586
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,533,512</b>	<b>12,904</b>	<b>8,546,416</b>

*Source: Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 2018*

## THE SITUATION OF INDIAN WORKER MIGRANTS IN GULF COUNTRIES

Workers from India are migrating to Gulf countries due to the pull factor and better employment opportunities. These migrants are from the working or skilled classes. It could not be more qualified. Their goal is to make money, so they have migrated

from India to the Gulf countries. According to Table 2, the total number of migrant workers increased in 2015. Following that, the total number of workers decreased steadily from 2016 to 2018, but increased again in 2019. According to observations, the majority of Indian workers migrate to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. As a result, Indian workers migrate to Gulf countries in search of employment opportunities.

**Table-2: Number of Indian Workers Migrated in 2019**

Country	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	5-Year Total
Saudi Arabia	306,000	162,000	73,000	66,000	143,000	750,000
UAE	225,000	159,000	141,000	103,000	42,000	670,000
Kuwait	67,000	70,000	51,000	52,000	72,000	245,000
Oman	85,000	61,000	4,900	32,000	26,000	209,000
Qatar	59,000	29,000	22,000	32,000	28,000	168,000
Bahrain	16,000	12,000	10,000	9,000	9,000	28,000
Malaysia	21,000	10,000	13,000	16,000	10,000	70,000
Others	85,000	15,000	2,000	2,000	4,000	108,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>781,000</b>	<b>506,000</b>	<b>361,000</b>	<b>312,000</b>	<b>334,000</b>	<b>2,294,00</b>

Source: Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 2019

## GOVERNMENT OF INDIA EFFORTS AT REPATRIATION

The government of Kerala, which has the largest expatriate population, requested that thousands of Indian workers in the Gulf be repatriated immediately, citing inadequate healthcare and the nature of labour camps, and also assumed full responsibility for workers returning to the state. Following that, the Kerala High Court directed the central government to respond to a public interest litigation seeking the return of Indian expatriates stranded in Gulf countries due to flight restrictions to India (Gulf News 2020a). The Kerala government began online registrations of migrant workers from Kerala who wanted to return to India for various reasons in April 2020. Migrants on a visit visa who had lost their jobs, senior citizens, pregnant women, students, and those released from prisons were among them. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has threatened to restructure or suspend its Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on labour with countries unwilling to accept back expatriates from the Gulf. This included prohibiting the hiring of workers from these countries and instituting a quota system in hiring operations (Nasrallah 2020). Given the high number of cases of infection in the community (UN-2020), Kuwait has directed the

Indian government to evacuate the expatriates. Vande Bharat Mission is the world's largest occupational evacuation scheme for Indian expatriates. India also dispatched medical teams comprised of doctors, health professionals, and nurses to medical assistance from the both Kuwait and United Arab Emirates (Chaudhary 2020; Saseendran 2020).

## CHALLENGES FOR INDIAN MIGRANTS IN COVID-19

The Vande Bharat mission, on the other hand, is a selective process aimed at repatriating those in vulnerable categories, such as the sick, elderly, those with family emergencies, pregnant women, and tourists. With the focus on nationalization of the workforce in the Gulf countries, a number of expatriates have been laid off in the private and public sectors. While a number of employees have been able to return on Vande Bharat flights, they must do so on their own dime. Indian expatriate and business organizations have been assisting by paying for airfare for those who have lost their jobs and wish to return to India. These organizations registered with Indian embassies in the Gulf have been providing basic necessities such as food and lodging to those who have been unable to return

(Gulf News 2020b). However, given the current situation, new job opportunities for these migrants appear limited.

## ECONOMIC IMPACT ON INDIA

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The pandemic has exacerbated the Gulf economy's already precarious state as a result of falling oil prices. As a result, employers may choose to cancel or postpone employee recruitment. The pandemic's aftermath may also have a negative impact on Indian workers who have work visas but are unable to enter the Gulf countries due to the lockdown. This could exacerbate the already low rate of recruitment of migrant workers in the Gulf, as well as lead to stigmatization of migrants returning from the Gulf. According to reports, due to financial constraints and the outbreak of infection in labour camps, a large number of migrant workers in the Gulf have been living on handouts and charitable donations (Dar 2020). The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has threatened to restructure or suspend its Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on labour with countries unwilling to accept back expatriates from the Gulf. This included prohibiting the hiring of workers from these countries and instituting a quota system in hiring operations (Nasrallah2020).

## EFFECT ON INDIAN HEALTHCARE

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The socioeconomic status and circumstances of Gulf expatriates limit their ability to take precautionary measures against the pandemic. Undocumented or irregular migrants, as well as free visa workers, face increased social stigma. The Gulf countries are currently experiencing financial difficulties, which may limit their ability to assist foreign workers. The Gulf countries have not done enough to incorporate labour health needs into national health policy frameworks, and India has not requested migrant inclusive health policies under the Memorandum of Understanding on Labor. The Gulf countries are currently experiencing financial difficulties, which may limit their ability to assist foreign workers. Except for Kerala, most Indian states have

inadequate health-care infrastructure (New Indian Express 2018). Returnees, when combined with low testing rates, staff shortages, a lack of protective equipment, and a faulty disease surveillance system, could strain India's already fragile healthcare sector (Bansal 2020).

As a result of COVID-induced "reverse migration," more Indian workers are migrating to the Gulf. According to new data, the UAE was the most popular overseas destination for Indian workers in the first seven months of 2022, ahead of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United States, and Oman. The UAE's ambitious digital push and expanding startup incubation, combined with opportunities for investors and workers, are fueling the country's talent flow.

## CONCLUSION

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Migration from India to the Middle East, Africa, and Europe has been on the rise in recent decades. The Gulf was up by close to 200% between 1970 and 1975. A few decades later, the first Gulf War saw another surge in Indian workers to replace workers expelled from Arab countries. The Act of 1983 is related to emigration; it is a legal instrument in India that deals with emigration matters and the welfare of migrants. Migration from India to the Middle East, Africa, and Europe has been on the rise in recent decades due to the growing demand for skilled labour. Indian migrants travel to the Gulf countries for procedures in three phases. Individuals require a passport in the pre-travel stage to apply for jobs, purchase insurance, and book travel. The second stage is covered by the employment period, during which the designated Indian expatriate works for an employer in a Gulf country. The third and final stage of the migration process entails the return of the migrant to India. It is also known as the capacity-building stage. Mostly The migrants workers rest are from Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Punjab, Bihar, and Rajasthan. As seen during the ongoing pandemic, these macroeconomic ties increase the risk of higher infection rates, and the global economy was adversely affected by falling oil

prices, border closures, and restrictions on international travel. The majority of NRIs, about 7.6 million, live in the Middle East. In 2018, the number of Indian workers moving to the Gulf region declined by 21%. The majority of the Indian community in the GCC is from the southern states of Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. Migration from India to the Middle East, Africa, and Europe has been on the rise in recent decades. In 2020, around 13.6 million Indians will live outside of India. Emigration clearance is required from the Government of India for skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers, as well as certain professionals.

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