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# Demography, Migration, and the Labour Market in the UAE

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# Demography, Migration, and the Labour Market in the UAE

**Françoise De Bel-Air**

**Abstract:** The objective of the paper is to draw a sketch of UAE's population and migration dynamics, using the scarce data available from the federal and emirate-level statistical bureaus. In 2010, expatriates in the UAE were estimated to number 7,316,073 persons, twenty times the 1975's figure of 356,343. Foreign nationals thus made up 88.5 per cent of the country's total population; most were believed to come from Asia and especially from India. In the employed population, foreign nationals accounted for an even larger share (96 per cent of the Dubai's employed population in 2011). Non-Emiratis comprised 40 per cent of the UAE's public sector's workforce in 2013, but as much as 99.5 per cent of those employed in the private sector. Unlike in other GCC states, a quarter of working expatriates were in managerial posts, employed across all activities' spectrum. Expatriates' demographic expansion mounted during the 2000s, a period of spectacular economic growth fuelled by soaring oil prices. Since 2008's financial downturn, however, the economy recovered and the hiring of foreign workers has resumed, stimulated by large-scale projects such as Dubai's Expo 2020. Nonetheless, reforms in immigration policies are now undertaken, fuelled by security concerns and pressures from human rights' protection bodies. The reality of some expatriates' settlement is also witnessed in numbers (expatriate children aged 0-14 outnumbered Emirati children already in 2005), while mixed marriages are acknowledged in policies: some naturalisations of children of Emirati mothers have been performed since 2011.

**Keywords:** United Arab Emirates; Foreign Population; National Population; National and Foreign Labour; Migration Policy; Statistics; Human Rights; Family Reunification; Second Generation.

**B**efore oil was first discovered in the late 1950s in Abu Dhabi, and in 1966 in Dubai, the then Trucial States under British rule had attracted various flows of migrants: merchants from the Indian subcontinent, Baluchi families, and seasonal workers and traders from neighbouring Persia, among whom were the Ajamis, a class of merchants mostly settled in Dubai since the mid-nineteenth century. Abu Dhabi was the first of the emirates to begin exporting oil in 1962. That same year, expatriates were

estimated to half of its population.<sup>1</sup> After the 1973 oil boom, large streams of foreign workers continued entering the newly formed United Arab Emirates (UAE), a federation of seven emirates created in 1971 under the leadership of Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

In these two emirates, as well as in Sharjah, the population soared dramatically between the late 1960s and 1980: from 44,000 to 420,000 in Abu Dhabi and from 59,000 to 279,000 in Dubai. Expatriates, who made up 72 per cent of the total population that year, comprised mainly European and Arab workers, as well as Asians due to the historical ties between the territory and the subcontinent. However, like elsewhere in the Middle East, the fear of “revolutionary” ideologies supposedly held by Arabs (Nasserism, Baathism) and of labour-led claims led to their progressive replacement by Asian workers, who were also deemed cheaper to employ. These new labourers from the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, for instance, swelled the ranks of formerly established communities from Pakistan and India, of whom Keralites (people from the Indian state of Kerala) made up the bulk. The Iranian revolution in 1979, and the First Gulf War of 1990-1991 that forced Yemenis, Jordanians, and Palestinians out of the country, put a halt to the recruitment of an Arab workforce.

Soaring oil prices during the 2000s gave a new impetus to the hiring of large numbers of foreign workers from everywhere in the world, including the Arab states. Two-digit rates of economic and demographic growth during the decade propelled this new phase of development, characterised by attempts to reduce the country’s dependency on oil exports and diversify the economy. Every emirate designed a master plan to monitor its development process, which pointed to the huge manpower needed to perform such labour-intensive activities as construction and infrastructure development. Yet, development of the business, tourism, financial, and education sectors is also high on the agenda, and these sectors mostly attract highly skilled professionals in a wide range of specialisations. For instance,<sup>2</sup> the Vision 2020 Plan outlined in 2003 by the Emirate of Sharjah focussed on improving urban and community developments, as well as boosting tourism, developing academic institutions, and promoting trade and investment. Dubai embarked on early diversification of its economy toward developing the ports, trade, services, and finance sectors. The emirate’s Strategic Plan 2015, unveiled in 2007, touched on urban planning, energy, roads and transportation, and the environment. Owing to the credit boom that built up after 2000, Dubai also turned itself into the financial gateway and cosmopolitan hub of the Middle East. Between 1995 and 2005, Dubai city’s size quadrupled and its population doubled. The 2030 roadmap for the Emirate of Abu Dhabi was announced in April 2009. The vision laid out for the development of Al Ain, the second biggest city in the emirate, focused on the provision of better transportation and housing for UAE nationals, as well as on environmental protection. Abu Dhabi’s development plan included new industries, cultural attractions, hotels, schools, and hospitals. Yet, maintaining a balance between managing population growth (it is forecasted that the population of the capital could treble in the coming two decades) on the one hand, and fostering tourism and trade while preserving the city’s cultural heritage and natural environment on the other, was deemed a priority.

This development phase enhanced the distinct characteristics of each of the seven Emirates, and especially, the different development paths chosen by Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The UAE’s oil reserves are the fourth largest in the world; however, 95 per cent of these resources as well as 92 per cent of the gas reserves accrue to Abu Dhabi. It funds much of the federal budget from the huge revenues generated

by its hydrocarbons as well as by the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA), believed to be one of the largest sovereign wealth funds worldwide. By contrast, Dubai's dependency on foreign direct investments (FDI), particularly in "mega real estate projects," explains why the emirate was hard hit by 2008's financial crisis. The global rate of growth of GDP fell from 5.2 per cent in 2007 to -2.2 per cent in 2009.<sup>3</sup> Projects were put on hold, companies went bankrupt, and many expatriates (exact numbers unknown) left Dubai, some of them relocating to Abu Dhabi and others leaving the UAE. Abu Dhabi's financial assistance to Dubai during the crisis solidified the economic and socio-political power of the capital city. Abu Dhabi's more "conservative" visions of social structure and migrants' incorporation, especially, can be witnessed in the recent responses given to burning issues such as long-term migrants' naturalisation. The enduring pre-eminence of blood descent (*nasab*, genealogy)<sup>4</sup> in granting citizenship over *jus solis* and services rendered is a marked feature of the UAE naturalisation process under the rule of the Al-Nahyan, which runs against the more inclusive perception of former Dubai ruler Shaikh Rashid bin Saeed Al-Maktoum.<sup>5</sup>

From the early 2010s, the UAE significantly reformed its migration policies for a number of reasons. First is the emergence of nationals' unemployment (9.2 per cent in the total population, 17.2 per cent for the 15-29 age group)<sup>6</sup> a politically sensitive issue<sup>7</sup> which called for improving the monitoring of labour migration to the UAE. Security concerns also led to tightened control over migrants suspected of political activities. Several waves of Lebanese expatriates have been expelled since 2009, some under the accusation of sympathy with Hezbollah;<sup>8</sup> Syrian and Palestinian families were also asked to leave the country.<sup>9</sup> Since 2011, hiring workers from Tunisia, Egypt, and other countries affected by the Arab uprisings has become more difficult too.<sup>10</sup> Irregular migrants were also targeted by rounding up operations and amnesty campaigns. Several of the latter took place in 2012-2013 and the two-month amnesty ending February 4, 2013 led to the exit of 62,000 irregulars.<sup>11</sup> More recently, a six-month amnesty starting on January 4 and due to run until June 2015 was granted to firms to adjust their employees' labour cards with reduced fines.<sup>12</sup> The Foreigners and Illegals Sector of the General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs (GDRFA) in Dubai conducted a total number of 224,548 transactions. The number of sponsor complaints the GDRFA received in 2014 about matters such as employees leaving work decreased by six per cent when compared with 2013.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, the creation of the Emirates Identity Authority (EIDA) tasked with identifying and cataloguing all residents (they are now required to obtain personal identification cards [Emirates ID], and be incorporated in the population registry) significantly enhanced the monitoring of expatriate populations.<sup>14</sup> By the end of 2013 (last data available at the time of writing), EIDA stated that 95.22 per cent of Emiratis and 95.33 per cent of foreign residents were enrolled in the population register.<sup>15</sup>

Lastly, the call by various international human rights organizations as well as sending countries for the protection of migrants' rights, especially after several demonstrations by Asian workers claiming appalling work and salary conditions on construction sites in the mid-2000s, has led to the introduction of a number of new measures. A specific action plan to raise awareness on human rights-related labour issues was outlined by the Labour Ministry at the beginning of 2009, coordinated by 17 government departments and including the private sector. A newly-established facility at Dubai Police which monitors human trafficking also has the mandate to address workers' complaints. A Wage Protection System was

established by the Ministry of Labour, besides a Decent Work Programme in coordination with the ILO. Labour inspections and settlement of labour disputes were significantly enhanced. Since 2009, a pilot project to survey and document best practices in the management of the temporary contractual employment cycle is run within the realm of the Abu Dhabi Declaration group, which includes Middle East receiving and Asian manpower sending countries.<sup>16</sup> The UAE also reformed its sponsorship system by abolishing the no-objection certificates (NOC) (that prevented workers from moving jobs without their employer's consent), for employees who have been in a job for two years.<sup>17</sup> Lastly, permitting some categories of expatriate professionals to work in Dubai without the need for a sponsor was under discussion as of early 2015.<sup>18</sup> Regarding domestic workers, the UAE Federal National Council in 2012 approved legislation to address the protection of their rights. In 2013, the UAE government amended a federal law to better safeguard victims of human trafficking and launched an awareness-raising campaign targeting those who may be in a position to combat trafficking, such as airport security personnel.<sup>19</sup>

The UAE has now entered a new phase of post-crisis booming development, for instance with the successful bid for Expo 2020 won by Dubai. In spite of the extraordinary rates of population growth and demographic imbalance characterising the country today, the enhancement of political control and management of resources, natural and human, seems to be the most striking trend in the new migration policies in the UAE, characterising the post-financial crisis era.

## Inward Migration

### Stocks

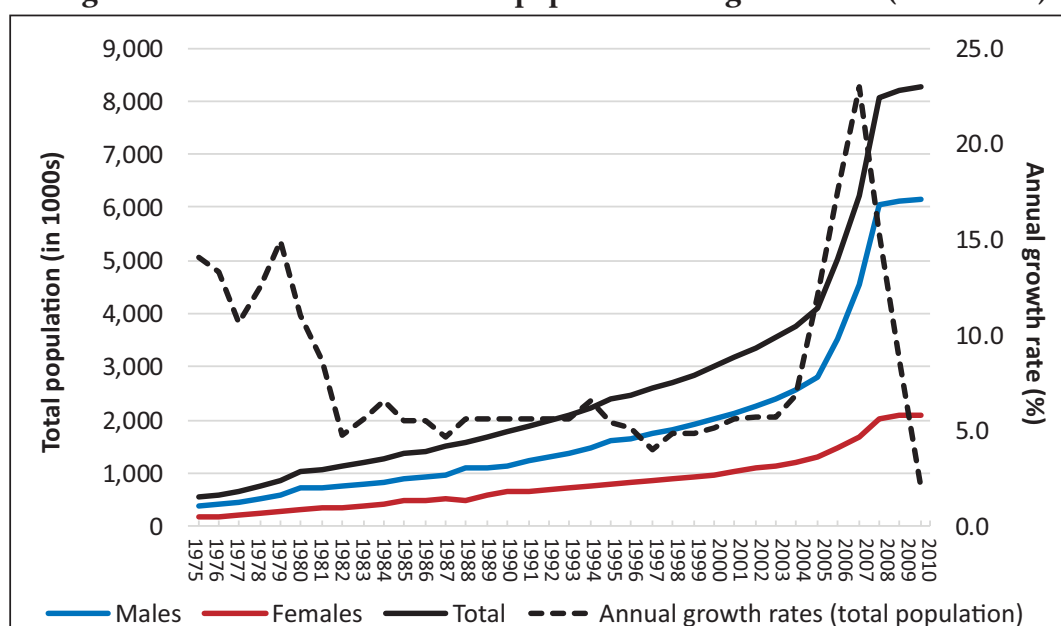
#### *Data Issues*

In contrast to other GCC countries which have set up a population registry like Kuwait and Oman, in the UAE population figures and demographic characteristics of the resident population (Emiratis and foreigners) are not yet disclosed to the public in real time. Since 1971, five censuses have been conducted at the federal level: in 1975; 1980; 1985; 1995; and 2005. As of April 2015, the last comprehensive population census available was that of 2005. The federal census originally due to be carried out in April 2010 under the supervision of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, the federal entity in charge of statistical research) was eventually cancelled.<sup>20</sup> Only Abu Dhabi and Fujairah conducted an emirate-level census in 2011.<sup>21</sup> Sharjah officially announced it would organise its population census by the end of 2015 and Ajman in 2016.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, intercensal population data as well as post-2005 figures are estimates, underlining the fragility of UAE's population statistics as also pointed out by some international agencies.<sup>23</sup> Population projections and estimates in the UAE have to be taken with caution, for two sets of reasons. First, the scale of irregular sojourn and labour cannot be overlooked, given the speed of population growth in the country, and especially in Dubai, partly due to the dependency of UAE's economy on labour-intensive sectors such as the construction sector. Second, the methodology used to project population figures since 2010 was recently questioned, as it led to the release of extraordinary rates of demographic growth, for example in Ras Al-Khaimah where the population was said to have jumped from 267,000 inhabitants in

2009 to 413,000 in 2010.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, the population figures for the UAE at every geographic level have to be considered with caution.

**Figure 1: Evolution of UAE's total population and growth rate (1975-2010)**



Source: NBS.

**Table 1: Evolution of population and demographic growth rates in Abu Dhabi and Dubai (selected years, 1968-2013)**

	Abu Dhabi		Dubai	
	Total population	Av. annual growth rate per period (%)	Total population	Av. annual growth rate per period (%)
<b>1968</b>	44,552		59,000	
<b>1975</b>	196,539	<b>21</b>	183,187	<b>16</b>
<b>1980</b>	420,455	<b>15</b>	276,301	<b>8</b>
<b>1985</b>	553,668	<b>6</b>	370,788	<b>6</b>
<b>1995</b>	920,271	<b>5</b>	689,420	<b>6</b>
<b>2000</b>	1,112,716	<b>4</b>	862,387	<b>4</b>
<b>2005</b>	1,374,169	<b>4</b>	1,321,453	<b>9</b>
<b>2006</b>	1,461,478	<b>6</b>	1,421,812	<b>7</b>
<b>2007</b>	1,574,281	<b>7</b>	1,529,792	<b>7</b>
<b>2008</b>	1,695,788	<b>7</b>	1,645,973	<b>7</b>
<b>2009</b>	1,826,674	<b>7</b>	1,770,978	<b>7</b>
<b>2010</b>	1,967,659	<b>7</b>	1,905,476	<b>7</b>
<b>2011</b>	2,161,619	<b>9</b>	2,003,170	<b>5</b>
<b>2012</b>	2,334,570	<b>8</b>	2,105,875	<b>5</b>
<b>2013</b>	2,453,100	<b>5</b>	2,213,845	<b>5</b>

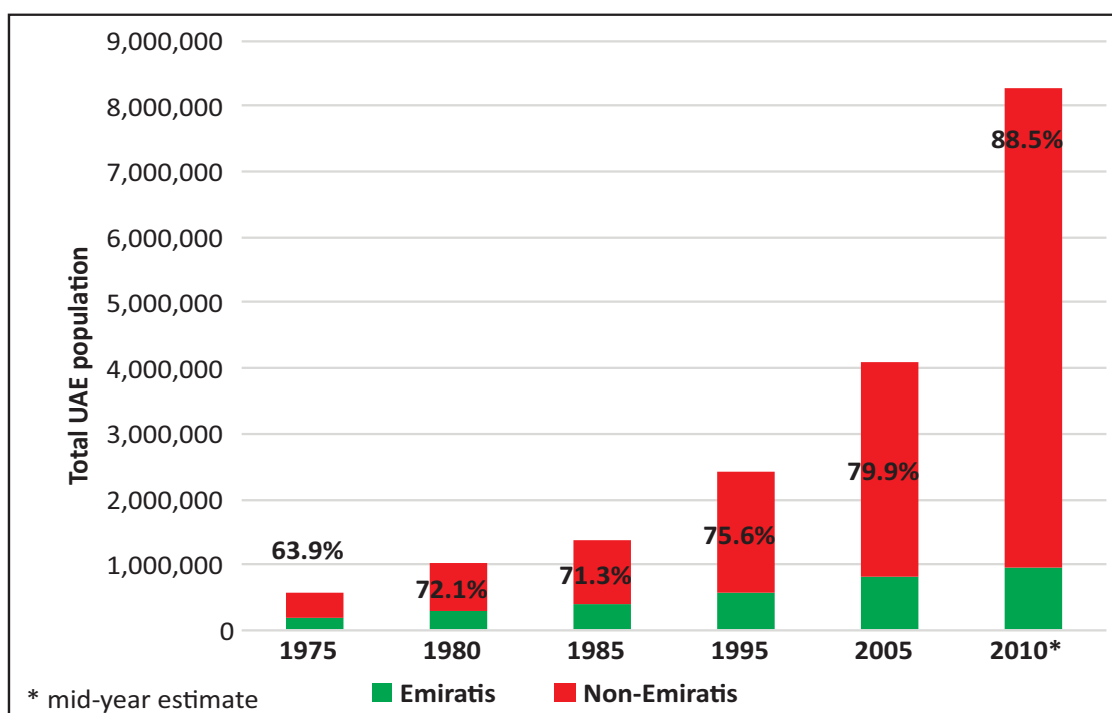
Source: SCAD, Abu Dhabi and DSC, Dubai.

*Population and Immigration*

At the end of the year 2010 (last available data), estimates of UAE total population stood at 8,064,270 persons.<sup>25</sup> This would signify that UAE’s resident population has multiplied by 28 since 1971, the year the country was established, at a stunning average growth rate of 8.4 per cent annually. The hike in population numbers was particularly pronounced from 2000 until 2008, the onset of the world financial crisis. Annual demographic growth rates peaked at more than 20 per cent in this period,<sup>26</sup> before collapsing below 2 per cent per annum in 2009-2010 (Fig. 1). More recent time-series, only available for the emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi (Tab. 1), confirm the relative slowdown in annual demographic growth rates: 4.5 per cent in Dubai as of mid-2013, 5 per cent in Abu Dhabi (5.2 per cent for the non-Emirati residents of Abu Dhabi alone). Yet, the figures show that the two economic heavyweights were affected differently by the crisis: Abu Dhabi’s rising rates of demographic growth in 2010-2012 suggest that some of the population moved from Dubai to Abu Dhabi.<sup>27</sup>

High levels of immigration explain the UAE’s high demographic growth rates. Non-Emiratis were 356,343 in 1975 after the first oil boom, thus accounting for 64 per cent of the resident population. Thirty-five years later, in 2010, according to NBS’s estimate, their number had multiplied by twenty to an estimated 7,316,073 persons, or 88.5 per cent of the resident population as a whole. As noticed earlier, demographic expansion was particularly high during the 2000s: Between 2005 and 2010, nationals grew by 2.8 per cent annually on average, while foreign residents’ rates of growth reached 16 per cent, which is a very high figure.<sup>28</sup>

**Figure 2: UAE’s total population and estimates of the proportion of non-nationals in census years (1975; 1980; 1985; 1995; 2005 and 2010)**

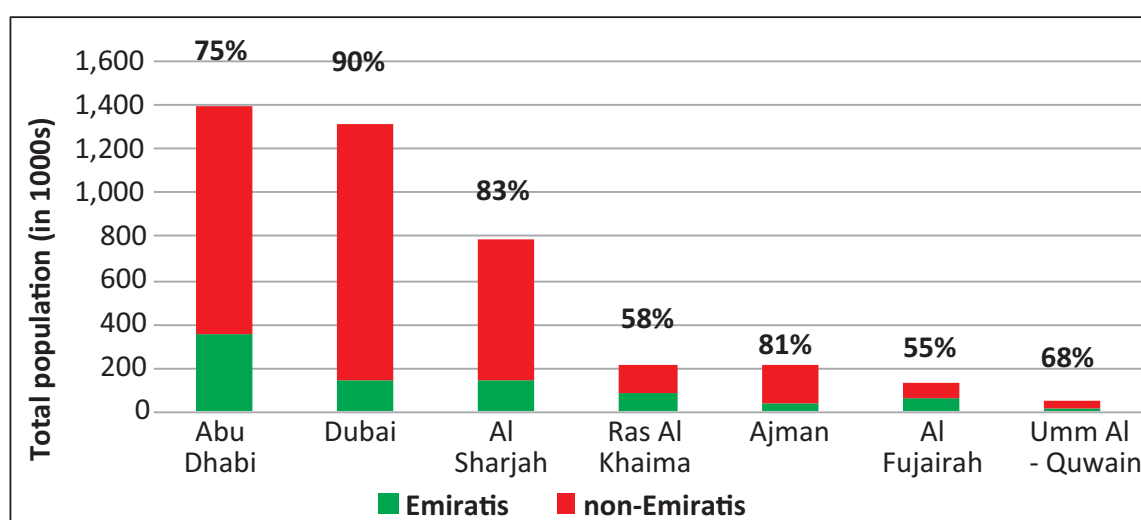


Source: NBS.



Each of the seven emirates of the Federation displays a different demographic situation, partly due to the diversity of economic paths chosen by each of them, as was described in the introductory section. The most populated regions, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, hosted two-thirds of the total as well as foreign populations in the UAE in 2005. However, the share of non-nationals ranged from 55 per cent in the small Emirate of Ajman to 90 per cent of all residents in Dubai that same year. As of 2011, census results for Fujairah showed 61 per cent expatriates in the emirate's population.<sup>29</sup> A 2013 estimate for Abu Dhabi was 495,368 Emiratis and 1,957,728 expatriates, or a proportion of 79.8 per cent expatriates.<sup>30</sup> In Dubai, the results of the 2011 Labour Force Survey revealed a proportion of 92.6 per cent expatriates in the emirate's population (aged 15 and above).

**Figure 3: UAE population by nationality and proportion of non-Emiratis, by Emirate (2005)**



Source: Census 2005.

### *Population Structure*

The UAE resident foreign population is imbalanced demographically like in all other GCC states. Men outnumbered women by 1 to 3.5 in 2010 in the total population aged 15 and above. Within the foreign population alone, there were four men for every woman.<sup>31</sup> In Dubai, the sex ratio is 308 men for 100 women and in Abu Dhabi, 380 men for 100 women, in the non-national population.<sup>32</sup> Those in working age groups made up as much as 85 per cent of foreign residents in 2005 (88 per cent in Abu Dhabi in 2013). Concerning education, 55.8 per cent of non-Emiratis held below-secondary education in 2005 (a level similar to that of Emiratis). However, the share of tertiary educated (holding university degrees) was higher among foreign nationals (15 per cent), than among Emiratis that year (11.8 per cent).

Indeed, the spectacular levels of economic growth experienced by the UAE over the 2000s gave an impetus to the settlement of a very diverse foreign population. No recent demographic data on non-national residents disaggregated by nationality is available in the UAE. Estimates published in the media, retrieved from embassy sources, suggest that the top-ranking nationalities in the UAE were Indians, by far the largest national community with 2.6 million; Pakistanis (1.2 million); and Bangladeshis

(700,000). Emiratis would thus be ranking third in numbers with 1.085 million nationals.<sup>33</sup> The expatriates-to-nationals' demographic gap is even larger among the working population. In 2011, in the emirate of Dubai, non-nationals made up 96 per cent of the estimated 1,325,949 employed residents.<sup>34</sup> Their distribution by nationality group emphasises the clear numeric domination of Asians in the emirate:

**Table 2: Dubai: Employed population by nationality group (2011)**

	Number	%
<b>UAE</b>	<b>52,783</b>	<b>4.0</b>
GCC countries	314	0.0
Other Arab countries	75,280	5.7
Asia	1,152,366	86.9
Africa	23,125	1.7
Europe	16,951	1.3
North America	3,524	0.3
Caribbean & Central America	381	0.0
South America	379	0.0
Oceania (Australia, New Zealand, etc.)	846	0.1
<b>Total non-Emiratis</b>	<b>1,273,166</b>	<b>96.0</b>
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>1,325,949</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Labour Force Survey 2011, DSC.

These results even suggest the reinforcement of Asian nationalities' numeric pre-eminence. According to data from the 2005 census,<sup>35</sup> expatriates from Asians countries made around 85 per cent of all expats at that time in Dubai. Arabs constituted around 8 per cent and Americans and Europeans together around 4 per cent.<sup>36</sup>

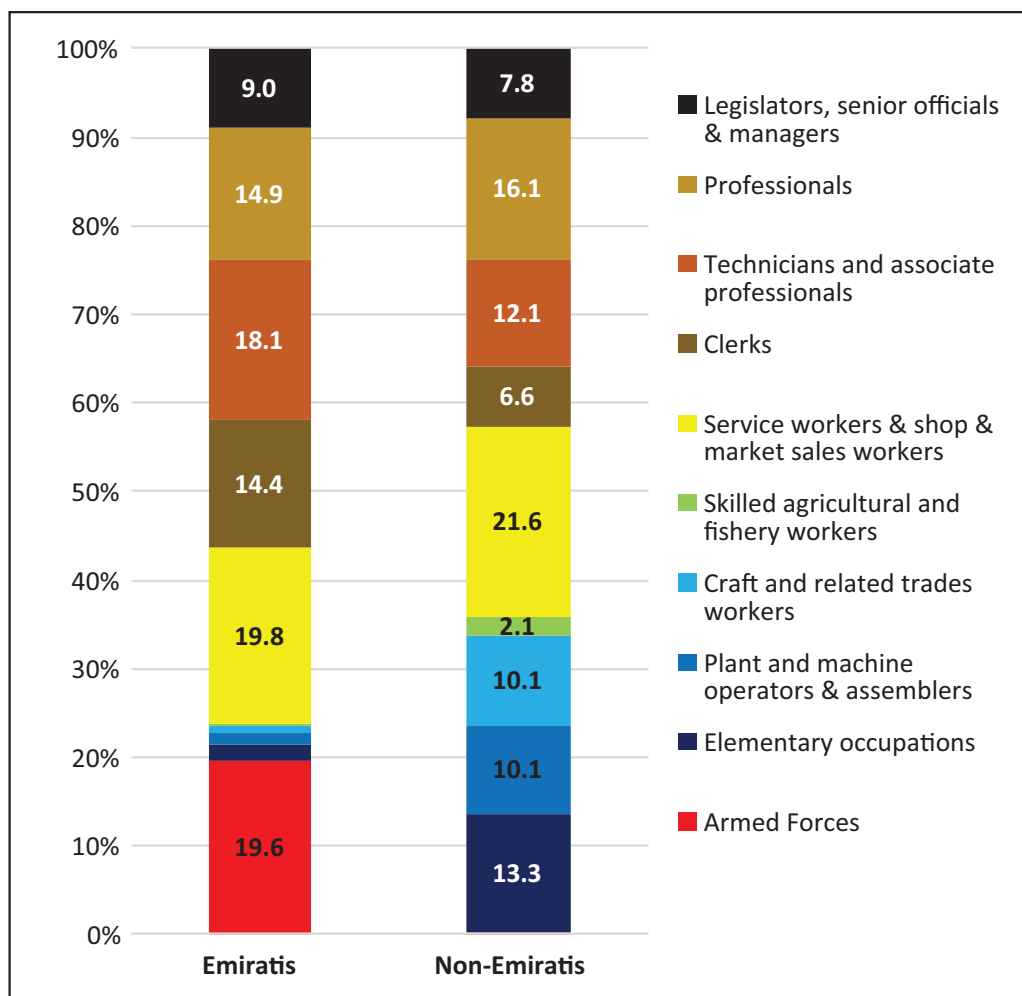
### *Foreign Workers in UAE's Economy*

In 2009, the public sector (federal and local) employed 90 per cent of the working nationals and 15 per cent of the foreign employees. Another 15 per cent of the foreign workers worked in the domestic sector but most of them (65 per cent) were in the private sector.<sup>37</sup> Emiratis comprised 60 per cent of the total workforce in the public sector in 2013, but only 0.5 per cent of the private sector's workforce, a matter of great policy concern in the country.<sup>38</sup>

Due to the "demographic imbalance" characterising the country, and especially its workforce, foreign workers indeed dominate numerically at every occupational level. A 2008 survey of establishments indicated that foreign employees made up 89 per cent of all managers and 99 per cent of those in unskilled positions.<sup>39</sup> In the UAE, unlike in other GCC states where they are massively clustered in

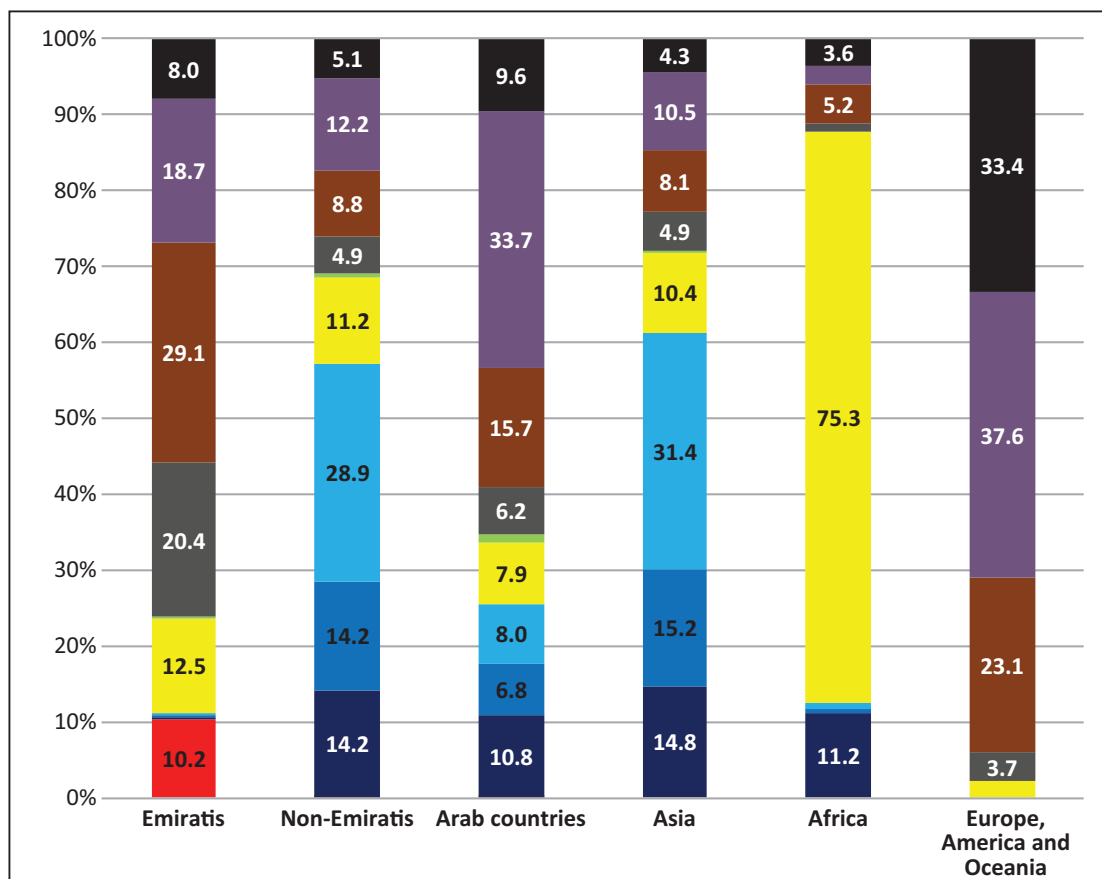
semi- and low-skilled occupations, foreign workers display a relatively diverse profile: the “blue-collar” categories (from “craft and related trade workers” to “elementary occupations”, in blue colours in Fig. 4) employed a third of them (72 per cent in Qatar by comparison) and another 22 per cent were in “trade and services” occupations (Fig. 4).<sup>40</sup> On average, 24 per cent of foreign workers are in managerial and professional positions. These figures also cover up for important variations between nationality groups. As emphasised in the example of Dubai (Fig. 5), “Western” nationalities are overwhelmingly in the upper echelons of occupations. By contrast, 61 per cent of Asians are “blue collar,” even though around 15 per cent of them also perform managerial and professional occupations. Arab workers, like elsewhere in the Gulf, are more evenly distributed across the occupation scale.

**Figure 4: Employed population by nationality (Emirati/non-Emirati) and occupation category (2009)**



Source: LFS 2009, NBS.

**Figure 5: Employed population by nationality group and occupation category (Dubai, 2011)**



Source: LFS 2011, DSC.

As of 2009, Emirati nationals were also mostly concentrated in the “Public Administration, Defence and Social Security” sector of activity (61 per cent of them, males and females together), and in Education to a much lesser extent (9 per cent). As for non-Emiratis, their activity sectors were rather diverse (there again, unlike other GCC states like Qatar). They were found in retail trade (17 per cent), in construction (14 per cent), in the domestic services sector (15 per cent) and in manufacturing as well as transport sectors (9 per cent each). The “real estate and business” as well as the “public administration” sectors each also employed 7 per cent of foreign labourers. This further highlights the scale of expatriates’ participation in the UAE economy in the private and public sectors, as well as the diversity of the non-national population, in terms of skills and areas of specialisation.

Most recent data from 2014 on the labour force’s stocks in the private sector show that the UAE economy has progressively overcome the effects of the 2008 financial crisis. Decreasing in size until 2011 to reach a low of 3,886,165 active persons, in 2014 the overall size of the labour force reached 4.417 million, a 10 per cent growth from 2013 and “the strongest growth rate in 44 years,” according to the Ministry of Labour. In the private sector, “[t]he construction industry topped the list of the three major employers, where the number of workers reached over 1.50 million or 34 percent of the total workforce;

the services sector followed it with 1.050 million workers or 24 percent of the total workforce; and the industries sector with 500,000 workers or 12 percent, accounting for about 70 percent of total jobs in the country.”<sup>41</sup>

### *Resident Family Dependents*

Beside workers, the UAE also hosts a sizeable population of family dependents. The Indian Embassy in Abu Dhabi estimated, for instance, that 10 per cent of Indian nationals residing in the UAE in 2015 were dependent family members.<sup>42</sup> Among the non-Emirati residents of Dubai, 16 per cent were out of the labour force in 2012.<sup>43</sup> By comparison, this is double the proportion of the non-economically actives in Qatar during the same period.<sup>44</sup> Sixty-six per cent of these non-economically active residents of Dubai were homemakers and 24 per cent were students. Interestingly, foreign housewives displayed a very highly-educated profile: more than half of them (52 per cent) were tertiary-educated. The rule governing family reunion in the UAE, Article 31(D) of Ministerial Decision No. 360/1997, may be part of the explanation. It states that “family reunification may be granted to the wife of a sponsored foreigner if his monthly salary is Dh3,000 or more and accommodation is provided by the employer, or if his monthly salary is Dh4,000 (excluding accommodation).”<sup>45</sup> Even though the scale of monthly wages by nationality group ranges between Dh3,000 and 43,000 in Dubai,<sup>46</sup> this law de facto excludes more than half of Dubai’s workers from bringing their family over to the emirate. Indeed, 55 per cent of all labourers there earned less than Dh3,000 per month in 2012.<sup>47</sup> For the high salaries, on the contrary, it is also possible for the wife to sponsor her husband, providing she is employed as a doctor, engineer or teacher, and that she earns a minimum salary of Dh3,000 (inclusive of accommodation) or Dh4,000 (excluding accommodation).<sup>48</sup>

Nonetheless, the 2005 census showed that expatriates stay in the UAE for a long time. The weighted average of stay for all expatriates in the country was around 8.7 years<sup>49</sup> and almost one-third (31 per cent) of the foreign population aged 10 and above had been residing in the country for ten years and more.<sup>50</sup> By comparison, only 14 per cent of the foreign residents in Qatar surveyed during the 2010 census were recorded as having stayed as long in the country.<sup>51</sup> The sizeable proportion of young age groups (aged 0-14) among non-national residents, 15 per cent, also suggests some degree of family reunion. Everywhere else in the GCC (except in Saudi Arabia), the figure is lower: from 5 per cent in Oman to 14 per cent in Kuwait (around 2010).<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, in 2005 the non-nationals were already the majority (61 percent), among the 0-14 year-olds.<sup>53</sup>

Apart from workers and families, the UAE also attracts growing numbers of foreign university students. Latest higher education statistics for the academic year 2013-2014 indicate that 50,882 foreign students were enrolled in Higher Education Establishments (HEI) in the UAE that year, a 10 per cent (and growing) increase from the previous academic year. Of these students, 47,202 were in private education, which comprise the 25 to 30 branches of Western HEI opened in the country over the last decade, and local private universities applying foreign curricula (such as American University of Sharjah; American University of Dubai; INSEAD- Abu Dhabi; Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi; University of Strathclyde Business School; and Dubai Harvard Foundation for Medical Research, for instance).

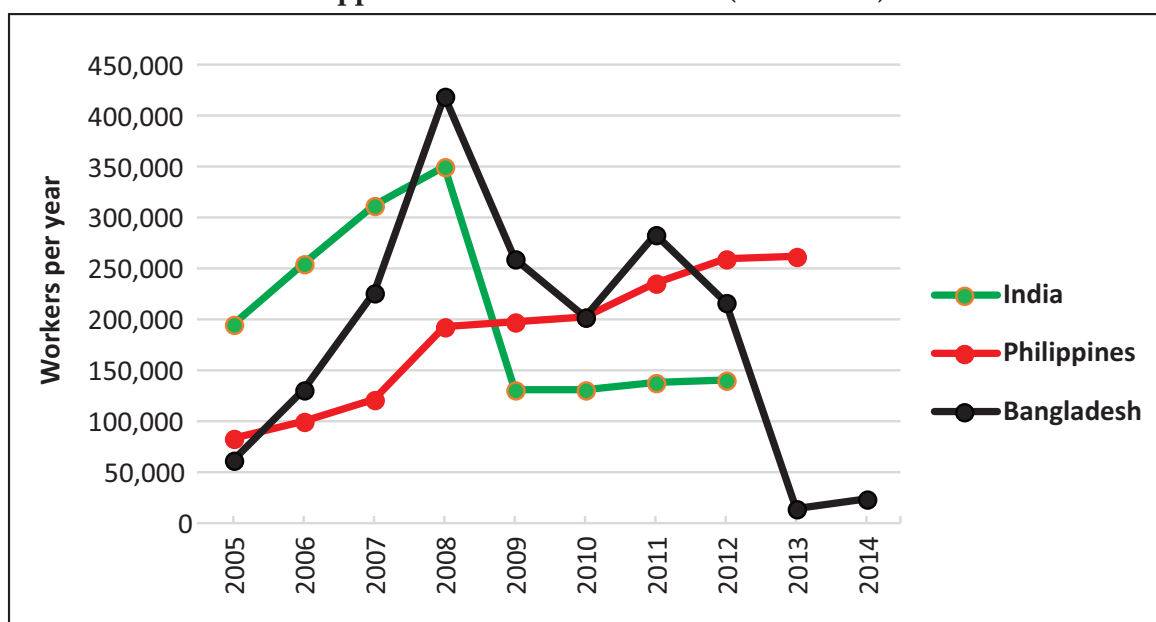
## Inward Migration

### Flows

#### *Resumption of Sustained Inflows*

Since 2008, data on labour permits are not systematically published in the UAE. Nevertheless, statements from the Labour Minister in the press confirmed the return of growth to the country and the resumption of large-scale hiring from abroad: the ministry announced in April 2015 that 1.2 million new labour permits had been issued in 2014. In 2012, this figure amounted to 945,460 and topped up a further 658,422 renewed permits. As a point of comparison, the last available figure of first permits-delivery for 2008, before the financial crisis, was 1.51 million.<sup>54</sup> The figures of workers deployed to the UAE, released by Bangladeshi, Filipino, and Indian sources<sup>55</sup> clearly illustrate the effect of the global economic downturn on the UAE economy and, consequently, on foreign workers' hiring policies. Filipinos seem relatively less affected, probably because a large share of females among them often work in the domestic and health sectors, which are less sensitive to economic fluctuations. As for Indians and Bangladeshi labourers, a vast proportion among them is employed in the construction sector, which was hit hard by the crisis. The fall in Bangladeshis' deployment figures stems from the UAE government's decision to suspend the issuance of new visas to these workers in 2012.<sup>56</sup>

**Figure 6: Deployed overseas workers from Bangladesh, Philippines and India to the UAE (2005-2014)**

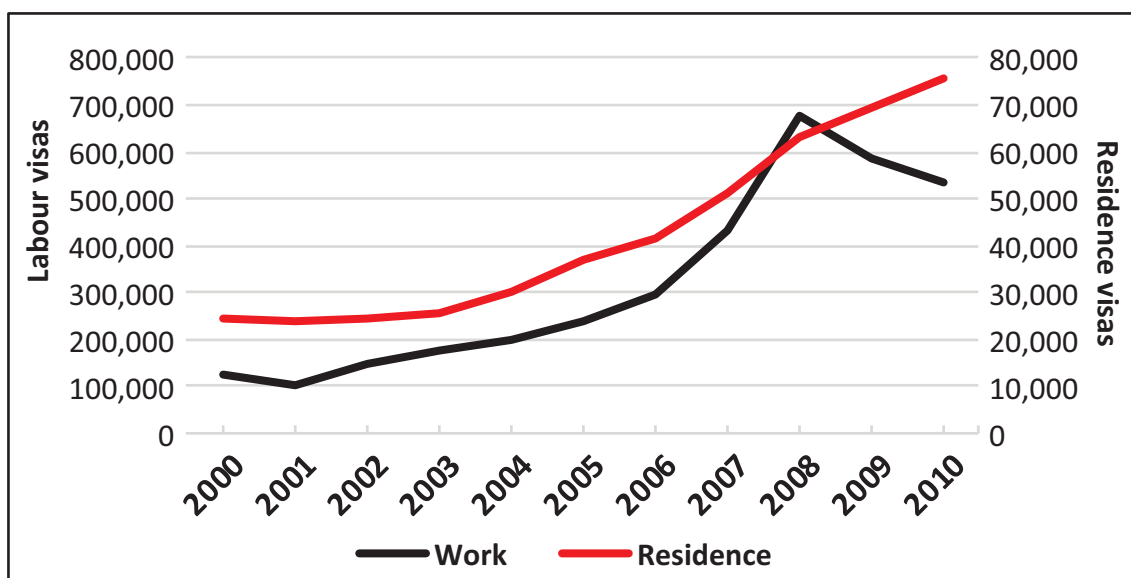


Source: Sending countries' overseas employment agencies.

As regards movements for the purpose of residency, which pertain to workers and to family dependents, time-series data available for Abu Dhabi suggest that they have not been affected by the economic downturn, in contrary to workers' movements. The number of entry visas for the purpose of

residency increased steadily over the decade.<sup>57</sup> This confirms the hypothesis of a trend, noticed earlier, towards the settlement or long-term stay of certain foreign families in the Gulf state.

**Figure 7: Entry visas issued by purpose of entry (Abu Dhabi, 2000 - 2010)**



Source: SCAD.

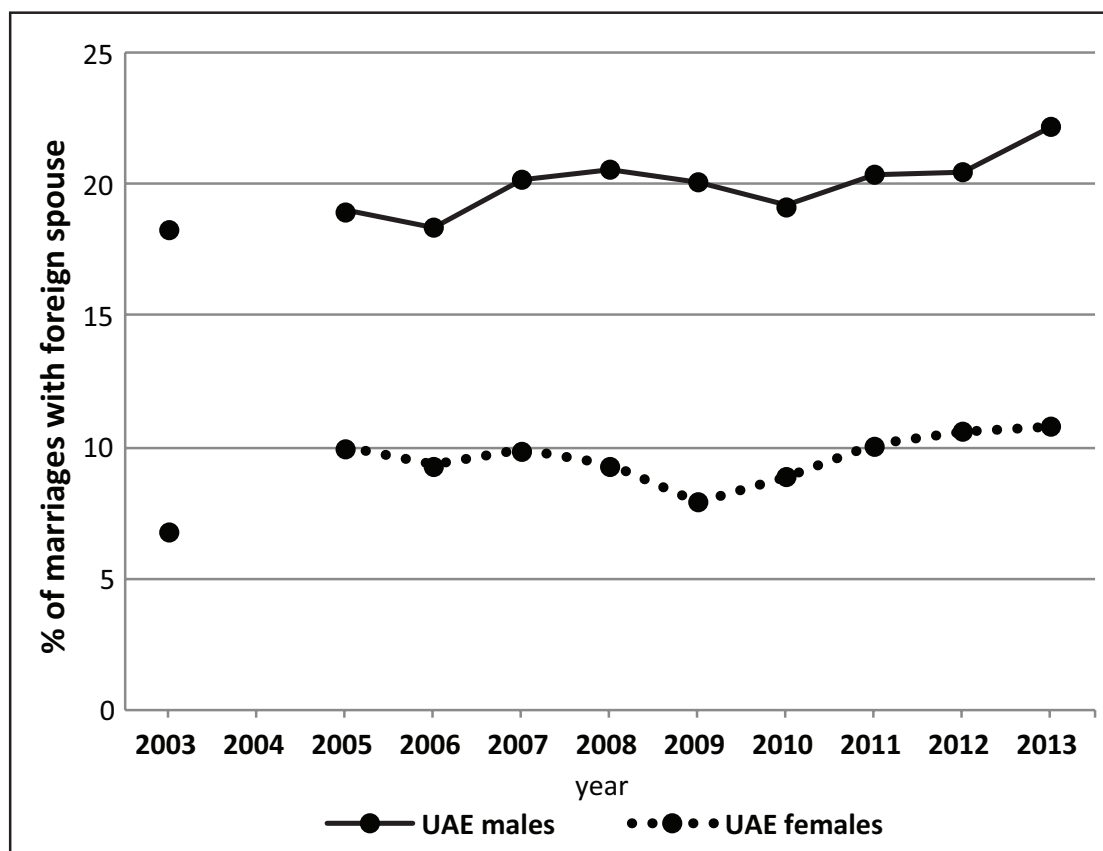
More recently, the Director of the Ministry of Interior's General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs (GDRFA) in Dubai stated in the press that the first half of 2014 had seen a 30 percent increase in the number of residency visas issued compared with the same period in 2013. There were 570,917 new residency visas issued in the first half of 2014 as opposed to 436,993 in 2013.<sup>58</sup>

### *Policy Changes*

Foreign migrants indeed sustain UAE's demographic and economic growth rates, and some families may settle for years, and even for generations. An (unknown) share of non-nationals are born in the UAE as second or even third-generation descendants of migrants, yet with no right so far to naturalisation and no protection against expulsion by authorities. The three-year horizon of the labour contract compels the residents to a transient and insecure life. The complex mosaic of origins, lifestyles, skills and income levels, create a multiplicity of different situations among expatriates in the UAE, of perceptions of one's agency and resources, of transnational connections, and sense of permanency in the UAE.<sup>59</sup> This is further complicated by the "tiering of citizenship and residency and hierarchisation of migrant communities" performed by Emirati authorities, especially since 2004 and the start of the process of ID cards' delivery.<sup>60</sup>

Such policies did not, however, isolate expatriates from locals. As shown in figure 8, the proportion of Emiratis, males and females, marrying a non-national has increased throughout the decade 2003-2013. One out of five Emirati males marries a foreign bride; Emirati women are less prone to such unions but these increased by 5 percent over the decade. No data is available regarding the citizenship or nationality group of the foreign spouses.

Figure 8: Marriages with a foreign spouse by sex (2003; 2005-2013)



Source: NBS.

A Presidential decree was passed in 2011, which grants children of Emirati women married to non-nationals the right to apply for citizenship after reaching the age of 18. In 2012, 1,117 children of Emirati mothers were subsequently naturalised,<sup>61</sup> and 500 more were granted citizenship in 2013.<sup>62</sup> In late 2013, a decree by the Ruler of Sharjah, Dr Shaikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al-Qasimi, granted children of Emirati mothers and foreign fathers equal pay and benefits in government jobs in the emirate. They were also given access to other benefits such as allocated land and housing, scholarships, medical care, and child support for the mothers.<sup>63</sup> These measures privilege the rule of the pre-eminence of blood descent (*nasab*) over that of patriarchal lineage. This seems to reflect the “Abu Dhabi view” on nationality. It is also a political move that enhances the feeling of citizenship and sense of belonging of Emirati females. Yet, beyond such concerns, this move is also a way to cope with the expansion of the country’s resident population in line with Abu Dhabi 2030 and similar development targets. Yet, this very slow and selective way of expanding the citizenry is an indication of the enduring domestic socio-political tensions incurred by the extraordinary population growth patterns of the UAE.



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## Endnotes

1. In general, however, British authorities did not record population movements in and out of the territory.
2. This section draws partly on the *UAE Yearbook 2010*, <http://www.uaeyearbook.com/Yearbooks/2010/ENG/data/UAE-Yearbook-2010-English.pdf>.
3. National Bureau of Statistics, *Analytical Report on Economic and Social Dimensions in the United Arab Emirates 2009* (Abu Dhabi: NBS, April 2010), 6.
4. Paul Dresch. "Debates on Marriage and Nationality in the United Arab Emirates," in *Monarchies and Nations. Globalization and Identity in the Arab States of the Gulf*, eds. Paul Dresch and John Esposito. London, New York: IB Tauris, 2005.
5. The Shaikh is supposed to have said, in support of incorporating expatriates into citizenry, that: "those who were with us when we were poor should be with us now that we are rich" (Dresch 2006: 141).
6. Ingo Forstenlechner and Emilie Rutledge, "Unemployment in the Gulf: Time to Update the 'Social Contract'," *Middle East Policy* XVII, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 50.
7. Nationals choosing unemployment instead of taking on jobs available in the public sector reveals the mismatch between education and employment, and the low quality of jobs proposed in the private sector as an alternative to fading public employment. This raises the urgency to "update the social contract" (Forstenlechner and Rutledge 2010) in every GCC country, where well paid and secure governmental jobs assorted with generous welfare systems have been for decades an element of the redistribution of the oil wealth. The system created "a sense of entitlement among the local youth, pushing them to delay employment until a better, more suitable, job offer comes along" (Naufal 2014: 1635). By contrast, since the onset of oil exploitation, *laissez-faire* policies have been ruling over the management of the private sector, where wages are too low to attract local job-seekers, hence creating what the latter see as an "unfair competition" between nationals and non-nationals on the labour market.
8. [http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/04/lebanon-nationals-deportation-uae-decision.html?utm\\_source=Al-Monitor+Newsletter+\[English\]&utm\\_campaign=f26d558241-April\\_08\\_2015&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_28264b27a0-f26d558241-100372433#](http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/04/lebanon-nationals-deportation-uae-decision.html?utm_source=Al-Monitor+Newsletter+[English]&utm_campaign=f26d558241-April_08_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_28264b27a0-f26d558241-100372433#).
9. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/d9a58dc0-648b-11e1-9aa1-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3Zw8oldGq> <http://www.hrw.org/news/2010/07/19/letter-minister-interior-uae-regarding-arbitrary-deportations-lebanese-and-palesti>.
10. <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/firms-see-obstacles-in-hiring-from-arab-spring-nations>.
11. [http://www.gulfinthemedia.com/index.php?m=politics&id=633539&lim=240&lang=en&tblpost=2013\\_02](http://www.gulfinthemedia.com/index.php?m=politics&id=633539&lim=240&lang=en&tblpost=2013_02).
12. <http://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/amnesty-of-more-than-dh2-billion-in-unpaid-labour-fines-for-uae-workers>.
13. [http://www.uaeinteract.com/docs/Dubai\\_issued\\_more\\_than\\_12m\\_visas\\_in\\_2014/66417.htm](http://www.uaeinteract.com/docs/Dubai_issued_more_than_12m_visas_in_2014/66417.htm).
14. "Emirates ID is responsible for the issuance of electronic identity cards for the whole population in the country, nationals and residents, in order to verify and confirm the identity of each individual through the unique identification numbers and smart cards that are linked with their biographical and biometric details. (..) Emirates ID is also responsible for the establishment of a modern population register in order to facilitate

the obtainment of government services as well as to provide the required information for supporting decision making, strategic planning and the allocation of resources in all vital sectors in the UAE.” EIDA, Strategic Plan 2014–2016, p. 22, <http://www.id.gov.ae/assets/ql375iED.pdf.aspx>. See also Lori 2011.

15. EIDA, *Annual Report 2013*, 40, <http://www.id.gov.ae/assets/p6MrFjXs.PDF.aspx>. To date, no data is available to the public from the population register.
16. *UAE Yearbook, 2010*, Chapter “Labour.”
17. The NOC will be replaced by a visa stamp from the Ministry of Labour. The reforms also give employees the right to leave their companies if their employers do not respect contractual arrangements or other employment standards. The reform allows expatriates who have work permits to act as sponsors of their dependents, a role traditionally reserved for companies. <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/uae-leads-on-path-to-worker-sponsorship-reform>.
18. [http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.aspx?xfile=data/editorial/2015/April/editorial\\_April30.xml&section=editorial](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.aspx?xfile=data/editorial/2015/April/editorial_April30.xml&section=editorial).
19. Froilan T. Jr., Malit, Ali Al Youha. “Labor Migration in the United Arab Emirates: Challenges and Responses,” *Migration Information Source*, September 18, 2013, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/labor-migration-united-arab-emirates-challenges-and-responses>.
20. <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/door-to-door-census-in-uae-is-scraped>.
21. Respectively by the Statistics Center–Abu Dhabi (SCAD) and the Fujairah Statistics Center. No results have been published from Abu Dhabi’s census and population estimates released by SCAD are still based on the 2005 census. Only one table was published on Fujairah’s population composition.
22. As announced by the Emirate’s Department of Statistics and Community Development (<http://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/census-planned-for-sharjah-population>). Ajman announced its own for 2016 (<http://gulfnnews.com/news/uae/government/ajman-to-hold-census-1.1457641>).
23. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2014/cr14187.pdf>, 15.
24. <http://www.thenational.ae/business/industry-insights/economics/standard-poors-warns-on-rak-rating-as-it-questions-population-data>. The methodology used by UAE statistical apparatuses until 2010 was the component method, which projects the various components of population growth (fertility, mortality, migration) separately by sex, age group, etc. The UN estimated that the UAE civil registration system ensures a good coverage of events (90 per cent) (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/vitalstatkb/Attachment206.aspx>). However, administrative records pertaining to migration movements and to events, affecting migrants may not be as accurate for reasons stated above. In a second phase, after 2010, the methodology for calculating population figures switched to an exponential growth model, whereby population is assumed to grow at a constant, geometric rate. Given the speed of demographic changes in the UAE, the assumption of a constant rate of growth is hard to confirm; moreover, the small size of each of the emirates’ population may amplify the errors, if any.
25. Estimate of resident population (nationals and non-nationals) based on administrative records, using the component method: addition of natural increase and net migration since the last census year (2005). <http://www.uaestatistics.gov.ae/ReportPDF/Population%20Estimates%202006%20-%202010.pdf>.
26. 21.6 and 26.1 in 2007 and 2008, respectively (unsmoothed data). If data are smoothed, the annual rate of increase is 23 and 15.3; these may be closer to reality, since intercensal estimates of population figures are obviously too low.

27. Intercensal data are estimates. For details available from SCAD and from DSC on the source of the data for each year, please see: <http://gulfmigration.eu/uae-abu-dhabi-mid-year-population-estimates-by-nationality-emiratinon-emirati-and-sex-1960-2010/> and <http://gulfmigration.eu/uae-dubai-estimates-of-total-population-by-sex-1953-1968-census-dates-2006-2013>.
28. See note 21 for NBS's methodology of estimating 2010 figure of non-nationals.
29. <http://www.fscfuj.gov.ae/reports/census2011.pdf>.
30. <http://www.scad.ae/SCADDocuments/SYB%202014%20-%20Population%20-%20En.pdf>. The figures are said to be estimates based on the 2005 census results, and not on the 2011 census.
31. The sex ratio of total population aged 15 and more is 357 males for 100 females. For the non-nationals alone: 420 males for 100 females. See: <http://gulfmigration.eu/national-and-non-national-populations-aged-15-and-above-by-sex-and-sex-ratios-in-gcc-countries-national-statistics-latest-year-or-period-available>.
32. Population aged 15 years and more, respectively in 2011 and 2013.
33. <http://www.bqdoha.com/2015/04/uae-population-by-nationality>. *BQ* is a business newspaper based in Doha, Qatar. Data presented in the article were the most recent estimates supplied to the writers by origin countries' embassies. In general, sending countries' estimates cannot be as accurate as receiving countries'. Moreover, embassies alone do not have the means to record comprehensively the presence and characteristics of their resident nationals, which relies on expatriates' will or need to frequent consular services, declare their presence and departure, etc. Comprehensive account of national communities thus has to rely on the receiving country's records of residents (from Interior Ministries or population registers). In the UAE, EIDA is in the process of completing the recording of all residents, nationals and non-nationals, in the country in order to deliver ID documents to all.
34. It should be kept in mind that the following data are taken from Labour Force Surveys, which are sample surveys. The sampling base of these surveys is Family Budget Surveys, which in turn depend on the 2005 census with minor modifications. Therefore, the Labour Force Surveys' results should be taken with caution, even though they are the only available source for describing the Emirate's population. I thank one of the reviewers of this paper for informing me on the LFS's sampling procedure.
35. These data have not been published (i.e., disclosed to the public).
36. Al Awad, Mouawiya. "The Population of Dubai", WP: 16-08, Dubai: Dubai Economic Council, 2008 Al Awad 2008: 8.
37. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). *Labor Force Survey 2009*, Abu Dhabi: NBS, 2011. The remaining 5 per cent is employed in "joint" and other sectors.
38. <http://www.thenational.ae/uae/new-rules-for-emiratis-in-private-sector-jobs>.
39. <http://gulfmigration.eu/uae-employed-population-by-nationality-group-and-major-occupation-group-2008>.
40. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). *Labor Force Survey 2009*, Abu Dhabi: NBS, 2011.
41. Unpublished data disclosed in media statements. [http://www.gulfinthemedias.com/index.php?m=economics&id=746838&lim=420&lang=en&tblpost=2015\\_04](http://www.gulfinthemedias.com/index.php?m=economics&id=746838&lim=420&lang=en&tblpost=2015_04).
42. <http://indembassyuae.org/en/community-affairs/indian-community-in-the-uae>.
43. Dubai Statistics Centre (DSC). *Bulletin of Labor Force Survey Results 2012*, Dubai: Population Statistics Section (DSC), November 2013.

44. <http://gulfmigration.eu/qatar-population-aged-15-and-above-by-nationality-qatari-non-qatari-sex-and-relation-to-labor-force-2013>.
45. Article 31(D), Ministerial Decision No. 360/1997. See M. Zahra, [http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/35397/GLMM\\_ExpNote\\_05\\_2015.pdf?sequence=1](http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/35397/GLMM_ExpNote_05_2015.pdf?sequence=1), 7. See also: <http://dnrd.ae/en/Services/ServicesGuide/Pages/AudianceService.aspx?ServiceId=233&AudianceId=3>. The amounts are equivalent to \$817 and 1,100, respectively, as of April 15, 2015. In May 2014, a hike in the salary threshold for family reunion was announced (at a minimum salary of AED 10,000 was announced and later denied (<http://www.emirates247.com/news/dubai-says-no-hike-in-minimum-salary-for-uae-family-visa-2014-05-04-1.547896>)). This AED 4,000 level of income allowing for family reunification is similar to that of Kuwait where the minimum salary allowing for family reunification is KD250 (F. De Bel-Air, “The Demographic and Economic Framework of Migration in Kuwait,” EN 1/2013, GLMM, <http://gulfmigration.eu/>).
46. <http://gulfmigration.eu/uae-dubai-employed-population-aged-15-and-above-by-nationality-group-and-monthly-and-annual-income-2011>.
47. [http://www.dsc.gov.ae/Report/DSC\\_LFS\\_2012\\_02\\_18.pdf](http://www.dsc.gov.ae/Report/DSC_LFS_2012_02_18.pdf).
48. <http://www.guide2dubai.com/info/work-with-husbands-visa.asp>.
49. However, with differences according to nationality. For example, 30 per cent of Arab expats stayed in the UAE for more than 10 years, as opposed to 21 per cent of Asians and 15 per cent of Europeans and Americans. See Al Awad, Mouawiya. “The Population of Dubai”, WP: 16-08, Dubai: Dubai Economic Council, 2008: 8.
50. <http://gulfmigration.eu/uae-non-emirati-population-by-sex-age-group-and-duration-of-stay-in-the-uae-five-year-periods-2005>.
51. <http://gulfmigration.eu/percent-distribution-of-non-qatari-population-by-duration-of-stay-in-qatar-for-each-municipality-2010>.
52. <http://gulfmigration.eu/national-and-non-national-populations-by-aggregated-age-groups-in-gcc-countries-national-statistics-latest-year-or-period-available>.
53. <http://gulfmigration.eu/national-and-non-national-populations-by-aggregated-age-groups-in-gcc-countries-national-statistics-latest-year-or-period-available>.
54. UAE Yearbook 2010.
55. Philippines Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), compendium of OFW statistics 2010 and 2013, [http://www.poea.gov.ph/stats/2010\\_Stats.pdf](http://www.poea.gov.ph/stats/2010_Stats.pdf); [http://www.poea.gov.ph/stats/2013\\_stats.pdf](http://www.poea.gov.ph/stats/2013_stats.pdf); Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) of Bangladesh <http://www.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/statisticalDataAction>; Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, Annual Report 2012-2013, [http://moia.gov.in/writerereaddata/pdf/Annual\\_Report\\_2012-2013.pdf](http://moia.gov.in/writerereaddata/pdf/Annual_Report_2012-2013.pdf).
56. Malit and Youha “Labor Migration in the United Arab Emirates”.
57. These figures concern visas, not permits. The visas delivered are more than the permits.
58. <http://gulfnnews.com/news/uae/general/uae-residency-visas-issued-up-30-this-year-1.1357431>.
59. Among many field works available on migrants in the UAE, N. Vora’s book on second- and third- generation middle-class Indians in Dubai emphasises the feeling of belonging through “consumer citizenship” (Neha Vora, *Impossible Citizens: Dubai’s Indian Diaspora*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2013). See also Syed Ali,

- “Going and Coming and Going Again: Second-Generation Migrants in Dubai,” *Mobilities* 6, 4 (2011): 553-568, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2011.603947>.
60. Manal A. Jamal “The “Tiering” of Citizenship and Residency and the ‘Hierarchization’ of Migrant Communities: The United Arab Emirates in Historical Context,” *International Migration Review*, Fall 2015, doi: 10.1111/imre.12132.
  61. Law <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/1-117-foreign-children-granted-uae-citizenship-446111.html>.
  62. <http://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/sheikh-khalifa-grants-uae-citizenship-to-500-children-of-emirati-mothers>.
  63. Law <http://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/sharjah-ruler-issues-citizenship-decree>.

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