



# Calculated Risks, Agonies, and Hopes: A Comparative Case Study of the Undocumented Yemeni and Filipino Migrant Communities in Jeddah

**Fahad Alsharif**

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edited by Philippe Fargues and Nasra M. Shah

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**Gulf Research Center**  
Knowledge for All

E-mail: [info@grc.net](mailto:info@grc.net)

Website: [www.grc.net](http://www.grc.net)



## Gulf Labour Markets and Migration Programme

E-mail: [info.glmm@grc.net](mailto:info.glmm@grc.net)

Website: [gulfmigration.eu](http://gulfmigration.eu)

# Gulf Research Center

E-mail: [info@grc.net](mailto:info@grc.net)

Website: [www.grc.net](http://www.grc.net)

## Jeddah

Gulf Research Center  
19 Rayat Al-Itehad St.  
P.O. Box 2134  
Jeddah 21451  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

## Geneva

Gulf Research Center  
Foundation  
WMO Building - 2nd Floor  
Avenue de la Paix, 7bis  
CH-1211 Geneva  
Switzerland

## Cambridge

Gulf Research Centre  
Cambridge  
Centre of Islamic Studies  
University of Cambridge  
Sidgwick Avenue  
Cambridge CB3 9DA, UK



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## IX

# Calculated Risks, Agonies, and Hopes: A Comparative Case Study of the Undocumented Yemeni and Filipino Migrant Communities in Jeddah

*Fahad Alsharif\**

**Abstract:** In the last few decades, Saudi Arabia, and Jeddah in particular, has experienced a massive flow of undocumented migrants. This is particularly interesting because it involves migrants from different continents and countries offering the opportunity for a cross-sectional analysis of their communities. This chapter focuses on Jeddah as a case study for the whole country. For the first time, using both quantitative and qualitative analysis, a researcher has been able to access some of the undocumented migrant communities in the city in their own environment and through face-to-face interviews gather accounts of their lives as part of the undocumented. In particular, this chapter analyses two Yemenis and a Filipino. These two communities make for an interesting comparative study because of their differences and similarities. Despite sharing the common experience of living as undocumented migrants in Saudi Arabia, their relationship with the members of their communities,

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\* Fahad Alsharif, a Saudi anthropologist, is affiliated with the King Saud University in Riyadh.

other communities, and with the Saudi society are as different as their backgrounds. This chapter also discusses the immigration policies adopted by Saudi Arabia and their failure in tackling the problems of the undocumented migrants in the country.

## **Push and Pull Factors**

Prior to analysing the data collected from the interviews, it is important to discuss the push factors which lie behind the migrants coming from Yemen and the Philippines and the pull factors in Jeddah.

Yemen, with one of the highest rates of population growth in the world (3.45%) is a demographic time bomb. Nearly 50% of its population of 24 million is under the age of 16 and the country has the highest unemployment rate (35%) in the Arab region. The individual average Gross National Income (GNI) is under \$1,000. More than half of the Yemenis are illiterate. Yemen is politically unstable, with shaky regimes. Besides, in addition, to generating many migrants, Yemen is also a transit country for undocumented migrants from various parts of Africa making their way to Saudi Arabia (Thiollet 2007).

The Philippines shares some of Yemen's economic characteristics. The country has a large population of 96.5 million (UN 2012) and GNI per capita of \$2,210 (World Bank 2011), which is higher than that of Yemen but still among the world's lowest. Unemployment is nearly 20%. At least 40% of those employed work in the informal sector and poverty afflicts about a quarter of the population.<sup>1</sup> The Philippines differs from Yemen in having a much better education system and a literacy rate of 95%. The vast majority of Yemenis are Muslims, while the Filipinos are predominantly Catholic with a Muslim minority.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of the differences in some demographic variables, the previously mentioned issues provide strong push factors for migration from both communities, some of which is undocumented.

Jeddah began shifting from an economy centered on the Haj and Umrah to one with a more diversified base after oil was discovered in Saudi Arabia in the 1930s. The sudden increase in oil prices in the 1970s brought huge revenues for Saudi Arabia and allowed it to embark on ambitious infrastructure and other economic development plans. Many of these government projects were carried out by the private sector that started to make huge profits, which eventually trickled down to the ordinary Saudi household. All these factors increased the demand for

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1. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rp.html>.

2. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-15578948>, accessed July 1, 2013.



skilled and semi-skilled foreign labour to meet the requirements of the economy's growing sectors.

## **Saudi Migration Policies**

The Saudi *kafala* (sponsorship) system has expanded to meet the increasing demand for workers in both the public and the private sectors. It includes all types of foreign professional expatriates, including engineers for construction projects, and doctors and nurses for private hospitals and clinics, not to mention, of course, a vast number of semi-skilled and low-skilled workers.

When unemployment rose among Saudi citizens, policy makers adopted "Saudization" as a national policy to employ Saudis in the private sector with the aim of reducing the number of foreign migrants in the country. This government policy achieved its goals only to a small degree, resulting in yet another policy, the Nitaqat system, as an effective tool to enforce Saudization. The word *nitaqat* means "areas" or "zones" in Arabic. This programme was introduced by the Ministry of Labour in June 2011.

The Ministry of Labour teamed up with the Ministry of Interior, employing 1,000 inspectors to enforce the new laws. The government established jail terms and fines for Saudi citizens who do not comply with the laws and it promised to deport any foreign guest worker who violated the new policy. As a consequence of the deportation policy, many undocumented migrants were pressured to go into hiding in order to avoid being deported. From 2012 to 2014, more than one million expatriates were deported under the two new laws. Parallel to the deportation policy, amnesty policies were adopted to address international human rights concerns about migrant conditions in Saudi Arabia.

The standard procedure for the amnesty initiative is to provide the migrants with a grace period in which to rectify their legal status or face a fine or jail, and deportation. Very often, after the deadline, the Saudi authorities would launch a crackdown and round up thousands of undocumented workers: this crackdown could last from a few weeks to a few months. Different government agencies carry out raids on all types of local markets, restaurants, mini-grocery stores, shopping centres, and residential areas.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Reuters, March 27, 2013.

## Methodology

The researcher used qualitative methods, particularly a face-to-face semi-structured anonymous interview questionnaire with closed and open-ended probing questions.<sup>4</sup> Migrants were interviewed while they were free (i.e., not under arrest, or under threat of arrest), living and working in the city. They were, thus, able to respond freely, without fear, to questions about their real experience in the city.<sup>5</sup> Using the snowball sampling technique, the researcher interviewed 55 undocumented females and males from the Yemeni and Filipino communities<sup>6</sup> based on one or more of the following four criteria:

- Entered the country without obtaining an official visa, for example, smuggled into the country by land or by sea;
- Entered the country legally with Umrah or Haj visas but overstayed;
- Entered legally with a work permit visa, but left the Saudi employers without consent;
- Born in the city to undocumented parents.

Twenty nine undocumented Yemeni migrants and 26 undocumented Filipinos were chosen. The interviewees agreed to talk in detail about their plight and experiences with regard to their legal status.<sup>7</sup>

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4. The confidentiality of the interviewees was protected and care was also taken not to flout standard norms and rules of professional ethics in fieldwork research.
  5. See, for example, the work of al-U'thman (2002), Ba Eshin (2002), Sultan (1984), Assaf (1987), Al-Azim (1992). It should be noted that a recent exception to this approach is Ahsan Ullah (in this volume). The author conducted face-to-face interviews with members of the Bangladeshi community in the city.
  6. It should be noted that we use the word “communities” in this chapter to differentiate the two groups of migrant labour under study. In other words, we used the snowball sampling technique to study these hidden populations of undocumented migrants. They were not a representative sample.
  7. The author managed to interview all the Filipino men and women himself; however, many of the female Yemeni women were interviewed by a female research assistant, who had been trained to do these interviews. This was done to maintain sensitivity to Yemeni traditions.

## Data Analysis of Undocumented Yemeni and Filipino Migrants in Jeddah

The demographic data collected from interviewing the two communities in Table 9.1 reflects an average age of 29 for the Yemenis and 26 for the Filipinos. The average Yemeni migrant had four children, twice the average number of children in the Filipino community. All the 29 interviewees from Yemen were Muslims. Twenty four interviewees from the Filipino community were Catholics and two were Muslims. The education level in the Yemeni community ranged from no formal education to a university degree. The average years of education for the Yemeni interviewees was 5.6, which equals the years of school between grade five and grade six. The average education level for Filipinos was twice as high, corresponding to grade 11.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 9.1: General overview of the demographic characteristics**

Nationality	Yemeni		Filipino		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Gender						
Female	14	48	16	61.5	30	54.5
Male	15	52	10	38.5	25	45.5
Total	29	100	26	100	55	100%
Average age	28		32		30	
Level of education	5.5		11		8.1	
Marital status						
Married	13	45	10	38	23	42
Single	15	52	16	62	31	56
Divorced	0	0	0	0	0	0
Widows	1	3	0	0	1	2
Total	29	100	26	100	55	100
Average number of children	4	100	2	100	3.05	100
Religion						
Muslims	29	100	2	8	31	56
Christians	0	0	24	92	24	44
Total	29	100	26	100	55	100

8. We used the American high school system where grade 1 stands for the first year of school and grade 12 is the final year prior to entering university.

## The Migration Process

As noted previously, we identified four types of undocumented migrants in Jeddah. This section will discuss these four types with emphasis on Yemeni migrants.

**Table 9.2: Issues related to illegal migration to Saudi Arabia**

Way of becoming undocumented	Nationality					
	Yemeni		Filipino		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Smuggled	13	44.80	0	0.00	13	23.63
Overstay	11	37.90	2	7.70	13	23.63
Run away from Sponsor	0	0.00	24	92.30	24	43.64
Born in the city with no documents	5	17.20	0	0.00	5	9.10
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Reasons of migration	f	%	f	%	f	%
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Economic	20	69.00	26	100.00	46	83.60
Social to join family or friends	4	14.00	0	0.00	4	7.30
Religious	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Born in the city with no documents	5	17.00	0	0.00	5	9.10
War & Famine	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Worthiness of migration	f	%	f	%	f	%
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Yes	24	82.75	26	100.00	50	90.90
No	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Born	5	17.25	0	0.00	5	9.10
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Issues related to migration	Yemeni		Filipino		Average	
	Yemeni		Filipino		Average	
Cost of migration in \$	560		0		N/A	
Average age at arrival	20		25		22.36	
Average years as an undocumented	3		4		3.47	
Average number of deportations	0.79		0.076		0.45	

### ***Undocumented Entry, Smuggling***

It is important to note that Yemen shares a border with Saudi Arabia making it is easy for Yemenis to enter clandestinely. Regardless of the technologically advanced surveillance equipment that the Saudi authorities use, the border cannot be fully watched or protected. Of all the arrests that were made at the Saudi borders at various times from 1978 to 2008, an overwhelming majority was that of Yemeni nationals: 3,419,207 out of 3,464,492 (or 98.7%). No Filipinos were arrested clandestinely entering the country.

In our study, all the undocumented Filipino migrants are persons who entered the country with a work contract but who, then, overstayed their visa. The Philippines does not share a border with Saudi Arabia, which makes the clandestine entry of Filipinos practically impossible. However, the long Saudi-Yemeni border is porous, and Yemenis can enter illegally without a visa. Thirteen of the 29 undocumented Yemeni migrants were smuggled into Jeddah using different routes from Yemen: simply crossing the 1,100 mile long Yemeni-Saudi border on foot, or getting a lift from a Yemeni or Saudi driver, or paying a smuggler to guide them across the border.

The cost of smuggling declared by Yemeni interviewees was on average \$560. Most interviewees noted that both Saudi and Yemeni nationals are involved in the smuggling of undocumented migrants of many different nationalities into Saudi Arabia. The average cost of this trip for the smuggled interviewees varied over the years but, most recently, it stood at between \$507 and \$614. A typical example was provided by interviewee number 11: "I paid a Saudi or a Yemeni national approximately \$26 from Taiz to Harad (also known as Hardh, Wadi Suleiman) and from Harad we were smuggled to Jeddah for around \$500."<sup>9</sup>

### ***Overstaying Umrah and Haj Visas***

Table 9.2 indicates that eleven of the 29 Yemeni migrants used Umrah visas to get to Jeddah and, then, overstayed their visa. From the interviews, it is evident that most of those who arrived in Jeddah using an Umrah visa were female relatives of a documented Yemeni migrant who already worked in the city. In this case, they obtained Umrah visas to enter the country by using their husband's proper

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9. Many Yemenis noted that a large number of individuals, who could not afford the cost of being smuggled to Jeddah, smuggle themselves all the way to Jeddah on foot and many of them were subject to arrest once they crossed the border or while in the desert on their way to Jeddah.

*iqama* (residency permit) and then overstayed their visa period in violation of Saudi migration laws.

Interviewee number 3 was an undocumented Yemeni wife who had overstayed her Umrah visa by eight months. Her husband, interviewee number 4, was 34 years old and had a *kafeel* (sponsor). The undocumented wife has one daughter from her present husband, and at the time of the interview she was pregnant. She had formerly been married and was now divorced. She has two girls from her previous marriage who live in Yemen with their grandparents. She was brought to Jeddah by her husband, who noted:

I had to bring my wife here to Jeddah even if I have to smuggle her across the border...I was born in Jeddah and I feel I am more a Saudi than a Yemeni. Why can't I get an *iqama* for my wife? I am afraid to drive around Jeddah or even take her to Makkah for Umrah because if I was stopped by the police for a minor traffic violation or at a road block, they might ask for my wife's *iqama*. Then both of us will be subject to arrest and deportation.

He also wonders if he remains in Jeddah – and he plans to stay – how his children will receive an education without proper documents. He is trying to save money to buy visas for his wife and children.

### ***Breaking Work Contract***

These are the migrants who entered the country legally on a work visa, but who left their Saudi employers without their employers' consent: i.e., they ran away from their sponsors. Twenty-four (92.3%) Filipino migrants in our sample found themselves in this category while none of the Yemenis were "runaways."

### ***Born in the City with no Proper Documents***

Another important group constituted of those undocumented migrants born in the city. Five of the interviewed Yemeni migrants (17%) were born in Jeddah to undocumented parents, who either entered the country with proper documents to work for a *kafeel* or were smuggled across the border. For example, two of the females, aged 14 and 17, were born in Jeddah to an undocumented father and a mother from, respectively, Yemen and Myanmar. In this regard, the older female, interviewee number 27, noted:

We were born in Jeddah with no proper documents which made our lives a disaster. I don't understand why my parents married in this country without being documented migrants first. This kind of marriage has made it difficult

for my sister and me to live a normal life like other children and have an opportunity for proper education. How we are going to get married? Should we get smuggled back to Yemen? We do not even know the address of our father or his family in Yemen. Or should we marry another undocumented migrant? We have lived in secrecy all of our lives and we do not know what to do. Our parents got divorced ten years ago when we were little children....we live with our mother and work as beggars...

Individuals who were born in Jeddah but who do not have proper residency or Saudi nationality cannot enrol their children in public school or university. This particular group are the victims of their parents' circumstances. There are possibly thousands of them across the Makkah region especially in its three major cities: Makkah, Madinah, and Jeddah.

**Table 9.3: Issues related to working conditions**

Issues related to work	Nationality					
	Yemeni		Filipino		Total Average	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Average number of jobs per year	3	100	3.3	100	3.1	100
Is it easy to find a job?						
Yes	23	79.31	23	88.46	46	83.6
No	6	20.69	3	11.54	9	16.4
Total	29	100	26	100	55	100
Average # of working hours per day	11		9		10	
Average income per month in \$	328		750		527	
Average rent per month in \$	62		100		80	
Standard of living since coming to Jeddah						
Improved	24	82.75	24	92.3	48	87.3
Same	5	17.25	2	7.7	7	12.7
Declined	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	29	100	26	100	55	100

The average income of all the interviewees from Yemen is \$328 a month in exchange for twelve hour-long working days and they change jobs more frequently than Filipinos. Filipinos change job less frequently, and their average working hours are less than the Yemenis at nine hours. The average Filipino monthly income in our sample is more than double that of the Yemenis and stands at around \$750. It should be noted that, unlike most other communities, the undocumented Filipino migrants in Jeddah never have problems getting a job in the city. There is both an ever increasing demand for their services, and they have a reputation for being outstanding housemaids, nurses, etc. Like other undocumented migrants in Jeddah, Filipino migrants receive their salaries in cash. More specifically, the monthly income of a Filipina housemaid is around \$500. Those who work in healthcare make on average \$1,000; a hairdresser would make \$1,300. Males from both communities who work as private taxi drivers for other undocumented or documented migrants from their communities earn up to \$2,000 per month. In Jeddah, both Yemenis and Filipinos make more money than other undocumented migrant communities, e.g., Ethiopians and Nigerians (Alsharif 2015).

The rate of job change is related, for both communities, to the number of years spent in Jeddah. Migrants change jobs for many reasons, the vast majority of our interviewees indicated that they did so for better pay.

Even though the majority of interviewees from the Yemeni community did not have a *kafeel*, and their opinions are based on what they have heard from others, they have their own views and attitudes towards the *kafala* system. In this case, 22 (76%), of the interviewees from Yemen believe that the *kafala* system is unfair and should be abolished because it resembles a modern form of slavery. Furthermore, many of them noted that they do not need a *kafeel*, even if they were provided with one. They strongly believe that they can make more money working in an undocumented fashion because they do not have to deal with the Saudi *kafeel* who will control their life and pay them less money.

Interviewee number 25 said:

I think it is not fair. The *kafeel* always takes advantage of you. When my father was alive, he was always complaining. And yes, it is like modern slavery. Many Saudis get so many visas and sell it to anyone who pays more. And always ask for more money when it is time to renew the *iqama*.

Interviewee number 26 noted: "Some *kafeels* ask for monthly payments if they allow you to work for yourself." In general, the interviewees noted that they do not need a *kafeel* to enter Saudi Arabia, for the simple reason that they have come into



the country illegally. As such they do not have to renew their *iqama* or pay a Saudi *kafeel* part of their earnings.

As interviewee number 15 revealed:

I am freer to work or not.... The *kafeel* controls your life and very often pays me little money compared to what I earn from my job now. The problem that most of us face without a *kafeel* is the threat of the Baladiyyah (a local police authority)... Also, without legal documents, we are subject to raids by the Jawazat authority (Office of Passports and Naturalisation) here in Al-Hindawiya.

This shows that most of the temporary migrants consider this system to be a social problem that should be abolished. The Filipino reaction to the question was almost the same.

When the researcher asked the interviewees about whether they will take advantage of the most recent amnesty initiative by the Saudi government, 25 (86%) of the 29 Yemeni interviewees said they will not take advantage of the amnesty. The majority of the men noted that they do not need it to go back to Yemen, as they can smuggle themselves easily between the two countries. None of the 26 Filipino migrants intended to sign up for the amnesty.

There was also a probing question about whether living standards had improved, stayed the same, or not improved since they came to Jeddah. Forty-eight (87.3%) interviewees from both undocumented communities noted that their standard of living had improved. Only two (7.7%) Filipino interviewees claimed that it had stayed the same, while five (17.3%) Yemeni migrants who were born in the city with no documents stated that it stayed the same. In this connection, they could not compare it to a different place due to their special circumstances.

## **Employment and Income**

It is difficult to list all the types of work that undocumented migrants from the Yemeni and Filipino communities undertake while living in Jeddah. In general, Yemeni migrants work in minimum wage jobs, but quite a few worked in more complex construction-related jobs. They also work in interior decoration, car repair, car bodywork (known as panel beating in the UK) and painting, and tailoring. Many also worked selling near-expired goods, as house painters, cooks in restaurants, and porters. Some, meanwhile, are forced to beg. Filipino males worked in different jobs as tailors, private taxi drivers, waiters or cooks in oriental restaurants, medical technicians, electricians, painting cars (detailing), and mechanics.

Fourteen of the female Filipino interviewees worked as housemaids or nannies for Saudi or non-Saudi families. The remaining two females were unemployed at the time of the interview, but explained that they were receiving training in women's cosmetics and hairstyling from an undocumented Filipino hairdresser in the city.

The income of the undocumented migrants in the city seems to depend on supply and demand conditions. For example, in the case of housemaids or cooks, the supply of female maids from the Philippines as well as of other females from other nationalities goes down in Ramadan. This pushes up the average wages for their services. Filipino housemaids are also subject to wage fluctuations because of negotiations with their own government and the Saudi Ministry of Labour regarding their contract details, i.e., salary and living conditions. During these extended periods of labour negotiations, the salary of undocumented Filipina maids rises due to their scarcity.

## **Legal Issues Facing Undocumented Labourers in Saudi Arabia**

It was important to ask about the interviewees' concerns regarding their legal status because each community has a different way of relating to the Saudi authorities or to their own representatives in the country. For most Yemenis, in contrast with the undocumented migrants of other communities, the fear of deportation is mitigated by the fact that most of them know they can easily re-enter the country.

### ***Years as an Undocumented Migrant***

In this study, the time spent in Jeddah as an undocumented migrant varied for our Yemeni and Filipino sample between one year (only one migrant) and twenty years (three migrants). The average time spent in Jeddah without documents for the Yemeni migrants was approximately three years, while for the Filipinos it was four years. It should be noted at this juncture that we did not include five interviewees from Yemen, who were born in Jeddah, in the calculation of the average time spent in Jeddah with no documents. The mode (i.e., the most repeated numbers of years) was twelve years, as reported by five Yemeni migrants.

The number of times an individual was deported from the two communities varied from no deportation to being deported four times. In total, the 29 Yemeni interviewees experienced 23 deportations: i.e., each Yemeni had been deported an average of 0.7 times. In the case of Filipino migrants, only two males had experienced deportation, and only once. The average number of deportations of an undocumented Filipino was significantly lower, then, just 0.08 as set out in table 9.2.

## **Some Aspects of Undocumented Migrant Life**

### ***Communication***

Modern technology, for example, the mobile phone, seems to play a big part in the interviewees' lives in terms of communicating with their family members and friends inside and outside Jeddah. Most of the interviewees socialise mainly with their own community members, with a few exceptions. This socialisation pattern with their own communities also runs across all communities in the city. When asked about the number of times they call their families while living and working in Jeddah, the frequency varied between twice a week and once a month for the Yemeni migrants. The average number of contacts per month for the 29 Yemeni migrants is four. Many interviewees actually sneak back to Yemen to visit their family. For instance, seven of the male subjects interviewed were married and all noted that they, like many other married Yemenis, migrate across the borders from Saudi Arabia to Yemen to visit their wives and children and come back: all this without documentation. For the Filipino migrants, the number of contacts with family ranged between 30 and 60 contacts per month with an average of 50 per month. The number of contacts with family members by the undocumented Filipinos in the sample is very high compared to the Yemeni and other communities of undocumented migrants in the city. The Filipinos use, in addition to mobile phones, more free communication media such as Skype, Lines, Tango, etc. perhaps because of their higher education level, higher salaries and better English.

### ***Social Life***

Most of the Yemenis socialised largely within their own community. Many of them noted that they are open to socialising with other communities, but they admitted that the bulk of their social gatherings or "hanging out" is with Yemeni friends and relatives. In this regard, twenty interviewees (68.9%) said they only participate in social life with their own Yemeni community. Nine (31%) of the interviewees indicated that they participate socially with all other communities. The great majority of Filipinos also socialise mainly with their own community. It should be noted that the average number of friends and relatives reported by the Yemeni undocumented migrants is more than double that of the Filipino migrants. For example, table 9.5 indicates that the average number of relatives for the 29 Yemenis interviewed for this study was twelve, while those for the 26 Filipinos was only six. In addition, the average number of friends for the Yemeni interviewees was 31 versus 17 for the Filipinos. Overall, these 55 interviewees have a total of 1,845 relatives and friends, documented and undocumented labour migrants, who live and work in the city of Jeddah.

**Table 9.4: Social ties**

Family and Social Ties	Nationality					
	Yemeni		Filipino		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Do you remit?						
Yes	23	79.31	23	88.46	46	83.6
No	6	20.69	3	11.54	9	16.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>
Percentage of remittance	40.0%		50.0%		46.14%	
Average # of people in the same residence	8		4.5		6.34	
Average # of contact with family per month	4		50		25.74	
Average # of relatives in Jeddah	12		6		9.16	
Average # of friends in Jeddah	31		17		24.38	

### *Remitting*

Fourteen (48%) of the interviewees noted that they were the only breadwinner for their families. Fifteen (52%) indicated that they were not the only breadwinner for their family. Only two females (7%) indicated that they were the only breadwinner for their families.

Twenty three of the Yemeni interviewees (79%) noted that they regularly (usually on a monthly basis) remit part of their income to relatives in their native countries. Six interviewees do not remit money. The ratio of remittances to income varied from 0% to 70%. As far as remittance from females is concerned, on average 16% of their income was remitted, while the males' average was 52%.

The average percentage of remittances for both female and male interviewees stands at 40%. Most of their remittances are for paying a previous debt or to assist families. The vast majority of the Yemeni migrants, like other undocumented

migrants, remit funds by giving it to someone of their own nationality who has connections with the communities of origin.

In the Filipino case, the ratio of remittances to income varied between 0% and 55% of their monthly income. Ten (38.4%) of the interviewees noted that they are the only breadwinners for their families, sixteen (61.5%) indicated that they were not the only breadwinners for their families. Twenty three interviewees (88%) from the Filipino community noted that they regularly (usually on a monthly basis) remit part of their income to relatives in their native country. Only three interviewees said that they did not remit money. Overall, Filipino males remit more than their female counterparts, respectively, about 55% and 50%. The average monthly remittances rate for both female and males is 50%.

### ***Medical Needs***

In the case of undocumented Yemeni migrants, all the interviewees (100%) noted that, in case of a medical emergency, they have no access to public hospitals in Jeddah and that their only possible option, if they can afford it, is to go to a private hospital or clinic. However, Yemeni interviewees often receive medical care in the various districts in which they live. For example, in the Al-Hindawiyia district where some of them reside, there is a small clinic that functions in the early morning where minor illness and injuries are treated.<sup>10</sup> The cost is around eight dollars. In addition, if there is no access to medical care, the vast majority noted that they would seek consultation with the nearest pharmacist, or see one of the local Attar (traditional medical/herbal practitioners) for medical advice. In the case of pharmacies, pharmacists provide all types of medical advice and can sell any type of medication, except those that are usually prescribed by psychiatrists. In emergencies, according to the interviewees, private hospitals are accessible because they do not ask for identification cards.

Medical access is, on the basis of our sample, rather different for Filipino migrants. Eighteen (69.2%) of the Filipino interviewees noted that in case of a medical emergency, they have access to private hospitals and medical clinics in Jeddah. In this regard, interviewee number 32, a 28-year-old female Filipino hairdresser said:

I have many female and male Filipino friends who work in private hospitals or clinics who help me receive medical treatment without asking me to provide *iqama* ... sometimes free of charge.

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10. All the doctors and nurses are foreign professionals from India and Pakistan.

Eight (30.85%) of the interviewees said they do not have access to hospitals and that they would seek the advice of a pharmacist.

## Hopes and Plans for the Future

This section deals with the hopes and plans of these two undocumented migrant groups in Jeddah based on a few questions listed below.

**Table 9.5: Hopes and plans for the future**

Future plans	Nationality					
	Yemeni		Filipino		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
<b>Are you satisfied with living in Jeddah?</b>						
Yes	26	89.70	15	57.70	41	74.5
No	3	10.30	11	42.30	14	25.5
Total	29	100	26	100	55	100
<b>Does living in Jeddah with no documents bother you?</b>						
Yes	10	34.48	26	100	36	65.5
No	19	65.52	0	0	19	34.5
Total	29	100	26	100	55	100
<b>Are you going to use the amnesty issued by the Saudi government?</b>						
Yes	3	10.30	3	11.54	6	10.9
No	26	89.70	23	88.46	49	89.1
Total	29	100	26	100	55	100

*Are you satisfied with how you live and work in Jeddah?*

Regardless of the difficult lives of these undocumented migrants in the city of Jeddah, the vast majority of Yemeni migrants, almost 26 (90%) are content with their lives in the city and only three (10%) are not happy. Fifteen (57.6%) of the Filipino interviewees (eight males and seven females) said they were satisfied. Eleven (42.4%) of the interviewees (two males and nine females) said they were not satisfied.

*Does living in Jeddah with no documents bother you? Please give details.*

Only ten Yemeni interviewees (34%) admitted that it bothers them to be in the city undocumented; seventeen (59%) interviewees noted that having no documents did

not bother them; and two (7%) did not answer. Most agreed that the city provided them with the opportunity to make a living, while sending money to loved ones back home, but that happiness is not a permanent condition. The majority admitted that the harsh labour conditions, the long hours they spend every day at work, and the continuous threat of deportation does not favour a normal life. Many of the Muslim interviewees noted that living close to the two holy cities of Makkah and Madinah, with the possibility of performing Haj and Umrah, gives them a sense of spiritual satisfaction. This assists many of them in easing their difficulties. On the other hand, all (100%) of the Filipino migrants, men and women, noted that it bothered them not to have proper documents.

*What are your long-range goals and objectives in terms of work and or living in Jeddah? How do you plan to achieve your expected goals?*

Ninety per cent said that their objective is to stay in Jeddah to save as much money as possible in case they are deported. In particular, the youngest ones hope that they can regularise their status. The major concern for Filipino migrants is to save enough money to allow them to go back and get married, if they are single, or to buy a home or a small business, if married. Many of the females want to go back with enough money to go to a nursing school or get a university degree. Many of the males will attempt to stay as long as possible in Jeddah in order to save money so that they can open small businesses in various industries such as, for instance, garages.

*If you were pressured to leave Saudi Arabia for any reason, would you attempt to re-enter the country with a permit or without?*

In response to this question, many Yemeni interviewees' answers were similar to these words:

I was deported three times from Jeddah and came back twice in the same week I was deported and, on the third occasion, I stayed with my family for a whole month. I was caught by the Jawazat (police) at the work site twice and at the place where I lived once. I was deported because I have no permit to work in Saudi Arabia.

Of the Yemenis, 25 (86%) said that if pressured to leave Jeddah they would definitely try to come back. Four of them (14%), three women, said they would not come back. One can safely assume that the undocumented Yemeni migrants in Jeddah have calculated all the risks involved in being smuggled to Saudi Arabia,

taking into account variables such as the possibility of being arrested and deported. They have, then, balanced this against the benefits that they can gain if they live and work in Jeddah. The undocumented Filipino migrants' response differs. Twenty four of them (92.3%) noted they would not attempt to re-enter Saudi Arabia. In this case, they said that the new fingerprinting system would stop them from entering the country. Only one Muslim female (7.7%) said she would try to re-enter using a Haj or Umrah visa, if she could.

## **Conclusion**

It is important to note that the Yemenis outnumber all other communities in Saudi Arabia. One of the main reasons for this is the geographical and cultural proximity to the country. Most of the undocumented Yemenis have relatives or friends already living in the Kingdom and, due to the lack of any language barrier, they can circulate more easily in the country. This allows them to enjoy relative freedom in comparison with members of other communities, such as Filipinos. Yemeni migration to Jeddah is circular. For many undocumented migrants, it is a continuous circular round trip from Yemen to Jeddah. Yemeni migration goes back in history, when compared to the Filipinos who began arriving after the 1970s.

Both Yemen and the Philippines face domestic and external problems. Over the years, many migrants from Yemen<sup>11</sup> have fled to Jeddah to seek better incomes that allow them to save money to invest in a better future once they return to their country. In addition, due to the historical links between the two countries, Jeddah in Saudi Arabia has always been the primary destination for Yemeni migrants not least because of the many Saudi nationals there who are of Yemeni origin.

Most undocumented Yemeni migrants are young with an average age of 28. They are physically fit and able to smuggle themselves into Saudi Arabia regardless of the harsh conditions of the journey. Despite the fact that the way they became undocumented resembles other communities' experiences, it is important to note that most of them are aware of the fact that they can come and go from the country at will without being caught. This is an important point that distinguishes them from the Filipinos and other undocumented communities in Jeddah.

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11. During 2014, we witnessed major political developments in Yemen, as the Houthis Movement – also referred to as Ansar Allah – solidified control over the capital, Sanaa and the central government collapsed. This will, likely, result in more migrants seeking safety and economic stability in Saudi Arabia.



All this suggests that, for our sample, many variables contribute to the presence in Jeddah of these two communities. As can be gauged from the interviews the main reason is economic, but in the case of Yemeni migrants, the presence of family and friends in the city contributes greatly to their migration in addition to the ease of arrival through a long and porous border.

Filipinos' personal narratives sound less dramatic than those of Yemeni migrants. This is due to the fact that the Filipinos enter Saudi Arabia with a work visa and, at least at the beginning of their lives in Jeddah, they enjoy a legal status. However, their working contracts sometimes subject them to a long working day and, for many of them, the option of clandestine work is attractive because of the higher wages they can earn.

Accusations of rape and mistreatment have been put forward by housemaids as a reason for breaking a work contract before the three months granted by the authorities. However, our interviews with undocumented Filipino migrants did not pick up any such problem. It is sometimes claimed that the real reason for the accusations is so that the worker can enter an underground economy, which enables the women in question to earn more money than in a household. In addition, they can move more freely in the country and change jobs more frequently.

In addition, the Filipino migrants arrive in Saudi Arabia better prepared to work in more skilful jobs. Compared with Yemeni migrants, they are more educated, and most of those in our sample work in the health services mainly as nurses. This gives them the possibility of living in more organised and integrated communities even if they share, with the other groups of migrants, the status of being undocumented. Their internal organisation is also evident from the way they teach each other the skills they need for their jobs, for example, hairdressing.

Obviously, this situation which is almost privileged has an impact on the way the members of the Filipino community live and imagine the future. For example, most of them are aware that in case of a forced deportation they cannot return easily, due to the distance of Saudi Arabia from their country. This is why their hope is to save a sufficient amount of money in order to open a business back home. Living as undocumented migrants in this way makes them more flexible and less vulnerable to the many challenges documentation poses. It is evident from the interviews and fieldwork that the Filipinos have a better relationship with the city and, together with the Yemenis, manage to construct a better life for themselves and their families back home. This can be deduced from the high remittances that they send to their home countries.

There is no magic or quick-fix remedy that will totally eliminate the phenomena of the undocumented migrant community in Saudi Arabia, either now or in the future. This chapter contends that if the issue of undocumented migrants is not resolved creatively, especially for those born in the city who have no access to Saudi documentation, then the country, in general, and the city of Jeddah, more specifically, is sitting on a ticking time bomb which is set to explode.

The undocumented who have no access to good education and healthcare will continue to live in an underground, unregulated economy, which can only lead to future problems. The following are some recommendations that could guide those Saudi government bodies concerned with the issue of undocumented migrants and help them determine reasonable steps to solve this serious problem:

1. Expose those who are involved in illegal, underground activities such as selling work visas to poor foreign workers
2. Impose fines on recruitment agencies and Haj and Umrah travel agencies for each individual who violates the requirement of departure after the pilgrimage season or overstays his/her residency permit.
3. Establish Economic Free Zones straddling the Saudi-Yemeni border and encourage Saudi companies to construct factories that will employ both Saudis and Yemenis and provide them with the appropriate training. This will serve two purposes: it will reduce the flow of Yemeni migration to Saudi Arabia while limiting rural-urban migration within Saudi Arabia. Constructing infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and vocational training facilities within these zones will benefit both the Yemeni and Saudi communities. Once the current conflict between Yemen and Saudi Arabia ends, the GCC should draw up a long-term plan to have Yemen join the regional bloc.

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## SKILFUL SURVIVALS: IRREGULAR MIGRATION TO THE GULF

The Gulf States are among the most sought-after destinations by global migrants. Part of this migration is irregular, due to five main causes: entering without a proper visa; overstaying after a visa or residence permit has expired; being employed by someone who is not the sponsor; absconding from a sponsor; and being born in the Gulf to parents with an irregular status. The treatment reserved for migrants in an irregular situation marks out the Gulf States. Arrest and detention are widespread practices in spite of constitutional guarantees against arbitrary imprisonment. Staying without a proper visa or absconding from a sponsor is regarded as a criminal act, and foreign nationals who commit such acts are detained in the same prisons as common law criminals with no clear right of recourse. Domestic workers, most of whom are women employed by private households and, therefore, not protected by labour laws which in the Gulf apply only to businesses, are particularly subject to arbitrary sanctions and jail.

Lived experiences suggest that migrants may not see their irregular status as being disastrous. Many, in fact, are willing to perpetuate this situation, despite their awareness about possible arrest, jail term, and deportation. A theme that emerges repeatedly in interviews indicates the lack of options open to migrants elsewhere, including their country of origin. Migrants in an irregular situation learn to negotiate the formal and informal spaces and systems they encounter. Most irregular migrants seem to share one characteristic: resilience. As their stay in the Gulf lengthens, they gather enough capacity to exercise their agency to achieve a skilful survival in the face of adversity. A wide-ranging system of mutual benefits constituting win-win situations for varied actors enables and perpetuates irregular migration.

