

National and Foreign Populations in GCC Countries

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Françoise De Bel-Air, Senior Fellow, GLMM

According to recent estimates from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the GCC region is the third migration destination worldwide, after North America and Europe. The six Gulf states hosted 10.1 percent of all migrants worldwide in 2024, up from 5 percent in 1990. Saudi Arabia alone concentrated 4.5 percent of all migrants worldwide (down from 5 percent in 2015), while 2.7 percent were recorded in the UAE.

Table 1. Total population and percentage of nationals and non-nationals in GCC countries (2022)

Country	Total population	Nationals	Foreign nationals	% nationals	% foreign nationals
Bahrain	1,524,693	714,011	810,682	46.8	53.2
Kuwait	4,589,643	1,502,896	3,086,747	32.7	67.3
Oman	4,730,648	2,835,864	1,894,784	59.9	40.1
Qatar	2,878,202	348,839*	2,529,362*	12.1**	87.9**
Saudi Arabia	32,175,224	18,792,262	13,382,962	58.4	41.6
UAE	10,288,946	1,331,683*	8,957,263*	12.9**	87.1**
Total	56,187,356	25,525,555*	30,661,800*	45.4**	54.6**

Source: National institutes of statistics and GLMM's estimates based on data published by national statistical institutes

* GLMM's estimate, based on data published by national statistical institutes (see link).

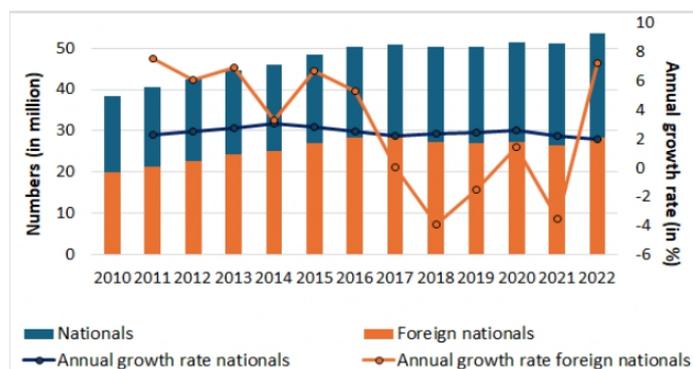
** The percentage is calculated on the basis of population estimates (see <https://gulfmigration.grc.net/gcc-total-population-and-percentage-of-nationals-and-non-nationals-in-gcc-countries-national-statistics-mid-2022/>)

The numbers of citizens and foreign nationals are readily available in Gulf states' publications, except in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. GLMM estimates of foreign and national populations in the two countries were calculated on the basis of official data published by local statistical institutes. Estimates thus indicate that around 31 million foreign nationals were residing in the Gulf region in 2022, making up almost 55 percent of a total population of 56 million (Table 1). Oman and Saudi Arabia were the only two countries with a majority of nationals in their population (60 and 58 percent, respectively, while the UAE hosted 87 percent foreign citizens and Qatar 88 percent, according to GLMM estimates).

Saudi Arabia, home to over half (57 percent) of the total GCC population, gathered 44 percent of all immigrants in the region (Table 1).

Since 2010, national populations have expanded at a regular pace of 2-3 percent annually (Figure 1). Foreign residents, on the other hand, decreased in numbers in the late 2010s (-4 percent between 2017 and 2018) due to deportation campaigns and increases in work and residency fees in several Gulf states, and again during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21. Since then, the number of immigrants has surged (+7 percent in 2021-2022, last year available).

Figure 1. GCC total population* by nationality (nationals/non-nationals) and annual growth rate (2010-2022)



*Qatar is not included (no estimates available for the total period)

Sources: see <https://gulfmigration.grc.net/glmm-database/demographic-and-economic-module/>.