

Second and Third Generation Foreign Residents Born in Kuwait

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Migration to the six GCC countries is mostly linked to employment and, until recently, foreigners' sojourn in Gulf states was not meant to exceed the duration of their labour contract. However, long-term migrants do exist. Some have even established themselves over multiple generations. Data available for Kuwait offers a glimpse on these populations.

Table: Non-Kuwaiti population born in Kuwait by nationality and age group (2021)

	Arab countries	Non-Arab Asian countries	Non-Arab African countries	Other countries	Total	% females
0-15 years	199,619	71,382	1,261	4,298	276,560	49
15-29	110,893	21,672	333	1,830	134,728	49
30-64	122,772	14,477	361	3,032	140,642	43
65+	2,896	161	5	89	3,151	22
Total born in Kuwait	436,180	107,692	1,960	9,249	555,081	47
Total foreign nationals	1,210,255	1,612,232	39,015	35,499	2,897,001	33

Source: Kuwait census 2021, Central Statistics Bureau (CSB)/The Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI)
“Other countries” refers to countries of Europe; North and South America; and Oceania.

Down from a high of 43% during the mid-2010s, non-Kuwaiti births made up 33% of all births in Kuwait in 2021, and of all foreign residents recorded during Kuwait's census 2021 (66% of the total population), 22% were born in the country. Most of these Kuwait-born, foreign residents were citizens of other Arab states (79%), while non-Arab Asian countries' nationals made up 19% of them. An illustration of Kuwait's long-standing “Arabist” stance, more than one-third (36%) of all Arab foreign residents were actually born in Kuwait, as opposed to only 7% of the many nationals from other Asian countries (Table).

While the total migrant population's gender structure is strongly skewed towards males (only 33% of the non-Kuwaitis are females), the Kuwait-born foreign population is more balanced (47% females). The table above suggests an explanation for this slight deficit of females: the relative equilibrium between sexes observed at young ages (until age 30) progressively skews and males eventually outnumber females (22% females only in age group 65 and above). In the absence of mortality or international mobility differentials between sexes, this may suggest that many Kuwait-born foreign women tend to marry outside Kuwait, perhaps in their family's origin country.

Half of the Kuwait-born foreign population was below 15 years old in 2021. Kuwait-born foreign residents also made-up over a quarter (26%) of all the foreign “youth” (population aged 15-29 years). Though second and third generation offspring of migrants are not, so far, able to gain the right for citizenship in Gulf states and are subjected to the sponsorship rule, all field studies conducted on these populations emphasize their strong sense of belonging to the country they were born and raised in. Their transnational upbringing also grants them specific competencies (languages spoken, cultural adaptability, and familiarity with Gulf countries' social norms, etc.). A deeper knowledge about these populations would thus highlight their value as assets for Gulf states' ambitious development projects.