

**Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS) at  
Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q)**  
*and*  
**Gulf Labour Markets, Migration, and Population (GLMM) Programme  
Gulf Research Center (GRC)**

**Joint Webinar**

**Emerging Trends in Sub-Saharan African Migration to the GCC**

**12 June 2024**

**1:00pm-2:30pm AST / 12:00-1:30pm CET**

*This version: 2 June 2024*

**Registration**

[https://grc-net.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_3dt1SU83T8SYrAtE-f2JJw](https://grc-net.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_3dt1SU83T8SYrAtE-f2JJw)

**Subtopics**

Trends; Driving Forces; Impact of Global Events; Skilled Labor; Opportunities and Challenges; Future Trends

**Speakers**

- Dr Kristian Alexander - Senior Fellow at the Rabdan Security & Defense Institute (RSDI), Abu Dhabi
- Mrs Aida Awel - Chief Technical Adviser, Labour Migration at International Labour Organisation (ILO), Addis Ababa
- Dr Françoise De Bel-Air - Senior Fellow, GLMM
- Mr Lawrence Egulu - Commissioner for Employment Services, Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development of the Republic of Uganda
- Mr Paul Odhiambo - Independent policy analyst, Nairobi
- Prof Lahra Smith - Associate Professor and Director, African Studies Program, Georgetown University

**Welcome by CIRS**

- Mrs Misba Bhatti, Research Analyst, Center for International and Regional Studies Georgetown University in Qatar

**Moderator**

- Mr Imco Brouwer - Managing Director, GLMM

## Questions

- Emerging Trends: What new patterns are we seeing in migration from Africa to the GCC, and what specific characteristics define these trends?
- Driving Forces: What factors are motivating movements from Sub-Saharan African countries to the GCC?
- Impact of Global Events: How have recent global events, such as the pandemic, influenced migration trends from Sub-Saharan Africa to the GCC?
- Skilled Labor Dynamics: What are the primary drivers behind the increase in skilled labor migration from Sub-Saharan Africa to the GCC?
- Opportunities and Challenges: What are the key opportunities and challenges facing Sub-Saharan African migration to the GCC, and what might the future trajectories look like?
- Future Trends: What other potential trends could emerge in Sub-Saharan African migration to the GCC? What is the socio-demographic and educational profile of Gulf-born, second and third generation foreign residents?

## Abstract

Migration from Africa has been a significant topic of scholarly interest for many decades, encompassing both intra-continental movements and migration to other parts of the world. Recent trends have demonstrated notable shifts in migration patterns, particularly the growing migration from Sub-Saharan Africa to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. The GCC region appeals to many individuals seeking economic and personal advancement, as well as enhanced living standards. In this webinar, experts will explore several important questions concerning migration trends between Sub-Saharan Africa and the GCC region.

## Description

Migration from Africa has been a significant topic of scholarly interest for many decades, encompassing both intra-continental movements and migration to other parts of the world. Recent trends have demonstrated notable shifts in migration patterns, particularly the growing migration from Sub-Saharan Africa to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. The GCC region appeals to many individuals seeking economic and personal advancement, as well as enhanced living standards.

Contemporary migration trends from Africa to global migration hubs such as the GCC are influenced by various factors, including evolving economic conditions in sending and receiving states, political instability and conflict, demographic pressures, and the impact of climate change. The GCC offers economic opportunities in a variety of sectors and different skill levels. Currently increasing demands in construction, hospitality, and domestic work sectors are drawing migrants from countries like Ethiopia, but there are also skilled and high-skilled job opportunities across the region. Bilateral agreements between African governments and Middle Eastern migrant-receiving countries have also facilitated increased migration flows to the GCC.

The increase in migration from West and East African countries such as Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Cameroon, and Ghana to the GCC, particularly to the UAE, is attributed to specific contextual factors. Poor governance in these countries has resulted in sociopolitical conflict, corruption, favoritism, and high unemployment. Additionally, stricter immigration policies in

Western countries have redirected many African migrants toward the GCC, where visas are easier to obtain.

Climate-induced migration is also contributing to movements within Africa and beyond. Droughts, floods, and desertification are displacing populations in countries like Somalia, Chad, and Niger, prompting movements within and beyond the continent. The GCC countries, known for their higher standards of living and stable economies, attract migrants from these affected areas. The GCC region provides a unique perspective on the global dimensions of climate-driven migration, connecting the world's wealthiest and poorest nations.

Youth migration represents another critical trend in African migration, as the continent's young population increasingly seeks opportunities abroad due to high unemployment and limited prospects at home. Many university graduates struggle to find employment in their home countries, prompting them to seek opportunities overseas. However, data also suggests that an increasing number of Africans are migrating to the GCC not only for work and family reasons but also to pursue higher education at universities based in the region. Obtaining a degree at these internationally accredited universities is becoming an increasingly attractive option for many African students, as the GCC countries are generally viewed as hospitable and accommodating to a multicultural student population.

Shifting gender dynamics in African migration is also evident, with an increasing number of women migrating independently for work, education, and personal empowerment. This trend is particularly pronounced in the healthcare and domestic work sectors. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Eastern Migration Route from Ethiopia, Somalia, and Djibouti through Yemen has seen a 64% increase in the number of women and children migrating alone in recent years, seeking improved livelihoods.

The impact of migration on both Sub-Saharan Africa and the GCC is multifaceted. While Africa experiences the loss of human capital and economic strain, the GCC benefits from an influx of labor but faces challenges related to social integration and worker rights. This webinar aims to examine emerging trends in migration from Africa to the GCC, analyzing the driving forces behind this movement, its opportunities and challenges, and potential future trajectories. By convening academic scholars, experts, policymakers, and stakeholders, the panel will offer insights and perspectives on addressing the complex issues surrounding migration from Africa to the GCC.

In this conversation, experts will explore several important questions concerning migration trends between Sub-Saharan Africa and the GCC region.

#### Speakers' Biographical Notes

**Dr. Kristian Alexander** is a Senior Fellow at the Rabdan Security & Defense Institute (RSDI) in Abu Dhabi, UAE. He previously worked as a Senior Fellow at Trends Research & Advisory, Abu Dhabi, UAE, and before that as an Assistant Professor at the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

**Mrs. Aida Awel** is a Chief Technical Advisor of the Better Regional Migration Management Program in the ILO Country Office for Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, based in Addis Ababa Ethiopia, but covering seven countries in East and Horn of Africa. She has more than twenty years' broad-based experience in development at both national and international levels with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the ILO, covering areas of work such as gender, employment creation, youth, governance, migration, development policy as well as project development, management and monitoring and evaluation. She has worked in various positions within the ILO over the last twenty-one years. Her work assignments encompass wide range of activities, including capacity building, policy-oriented research, governance, policy development, employment creation and project management. For the last 11 years, she has managed different project and programmes for the ILO on labour migration and reintegration in East and Horn of Africa. She also coordinates the ILO and African Union joint activities for the Africa Region, which gave her a broader perspective in mainstreaming the Decent Work agenda at the continental level. Before joining the ILO in 2003, she has worked as a Solicitor Assistant in a law firm in London, United Kingdom. She is a candidate for a PhD in Management (Leadership and Organizational Change) with Walden University, Minnesota, USA. She also holds an MPhil degree from Walden University, USA, an MBA in International Business from University of Greenwich, UK and a Bachelor of Laws from London Guild Hall University, UK.

**Dr. Françoise De Bel-Air** is a researcher and consultant based in Paris, France. A socio-demographer by training, she specializes in the demography of Arab countries, especially in the Middle East and the Gulf region. Currently a Senior Fellow at the Gulf Labour Markets, Migration, and Population (GLMM) programme of the Gulf Research Center Foundation (GRCF, Geneva) since 2013, she was a Senior Fellow at the French Institute for the Near East (IFPO) in Amman, Jordan for several years, and a part-time Professor at the Migration Policy Centre (MPC), European University Institute (EUI), Florence, Italy. Her research focusses on political demography, as well as on the demographic and socio-political dynamics in the region: youth, family structures, labour and forced migration, migration, and population policies. She published two edited volumes and over fifty book chapters, scientific articles, and research papers on population issues in the Arab region. Her recent publications on migration and Gulf states include "Asian Migrants in the Gulf", in Shah. N. (Ed). Covid-19 Crisis and Asian Migration, Lahore: Lahore School of Economics, 2021; The Socio-Economic Impact of Covid-19 and Low Oil Prices on Migrants and Remittances in the Arab Region (with B. Nilsson), UNDP-RBAS Research Papers, 2021; "Youth Unemployment and Alienation in the Middle East: A Critical View", in: Salvatore, A.; Hanafi, S. and Obuse, K. (Eds). The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of the Middle East, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022; and "The Politics of Migration in the Gulf States", in: AlMezaini, Kh. and Alexander; K. (Eds). Introduction to Gulf Politics, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (forthcoming).

**Mr. Lawrence Egulu** is currently Commissioner for Employment Services in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development of the Republic of Uganda, Mr. Egulu is a Development/policy economist by training, with over 25 years' experience in economic and social policy and operations in the public and private sectors. He has previously worked in various capacities at the International Labour Organization, as well as the World Bank and trade unions where he has provided policy advise, designed and implemented a number of

programmes and projects on, inter alia, social protection, youth employment and entrepreneurship, migration, poverty reduction, climate change, economic literacy, etc. Mr. Egulu holds a BA in Economics from Makerere University (Uganda), an MA in Development Economics from Williams College (USA) and currently a PhD Candidate at Nova Southeastern University (USA). He also has several certifications from, among other institutions, the Harvard Kennedy School, London School of Economics, International Training Center of the ILO, and the World Bank Institute.

**Mr. Paul Odhiambo** is currently an independent policy analyst. Mr. Odhiambo was a foreign policy analyst at, Trade and Foreign Policy Department, Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA, Nairobi, Kenya) from February 2011 to February 2024. Mr Odhiambo has MA International Relations and Diplomatic Studies (Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda); and BA Philosophy (Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, Italy), Diploma in Philosophy and Religious Studies (Christ the King Major Seminary, Nyeri, Kenya). Core research areas include Foreign Policy Analysis; International Political Economy, Geopolitics and Security; Emerging economies (e.g. BRICS); Regional interests; East Africa, Horn of Africa and Red Sea, Indian Ocean Rim and Indo-Pacific space, Africa's Great Lakes Region, and Nile River Basin. Published work includes research papers, book chapters, journal articles, blogs, teaching modules, and media articles, including interregional mechanisms for protection of African migrants in the Gulf Region - <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/531/53173395011/53173395011.pdf>. He has presented papers on areas of interests at conferences/workshops both locally and internationally. He is a member of International Relations Society of Kenya. Previous work experience includes a lecturer and a coordinator of Distance-Learning Programme at Uganda Martyrs University (Nkozi, Uganda; January 2007 – June 2009); part-time lecturer at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (Nairobi campus, September 2014 – June 2016, Kenya); programme officer at John Paul II Centre for Justice and Peace (Kampala, Uganda; June 2006 – May 2007) and programme officer at Jesuit Hakimani Centre (Nairobi, Kenya; April 2004 – June 2006 and January 2010 – January 2011).

**Prof. Lahra Smith** is an Associate Professor in the Walsh School of Foreign Service and the Department of Government at Georgetown University and the Director of the African Studies Program. She is a Political Scientist with a particular interest in citizenship, migration and political development in Africa. She is the author of *Making Citizens in Africa: Ethnicity, Gender and National Identity in Ethiopia* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), Her ongoing research interests include mixed migration and informal migration in the Horn of Africa, as well as citizenship and the role of teachers in history and social studies education in Africa. Her most recent book is titled *African Perspectives on South-South Migration*, co-edited with Dr. Meron Zeleke (Routledge, 2024).