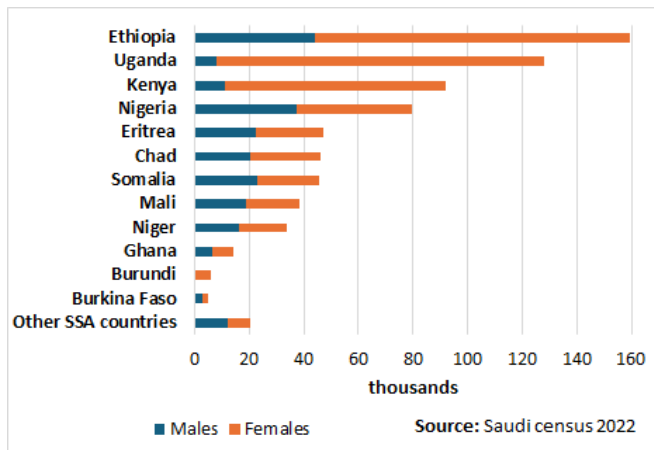


Sub-Saharan African Migrants in the Gulf States

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Little is known about migrants from Sub-Saharan African countries in the GCC. Far behind the large numbers of migrants from Asian countries, the 715,000 nationals from Sub-Saharan African countries made up 5.3 percent of foreign populations recorded in the Saudi census of 2022, for instance. In Kuwait, they only constituted 1.2 percent of all residency permit holders in 2023. Nonetheless, the scarce data available on these migrants depict a population of relatively diverse socio-demographic and employment profiles.

Figure 1. Saudi Arabia: Sub-Saharan African populations by country of citizenship and sex (2022)



Qatar and the UAE offer no population data disaggregated by nationality of migrants. While Oman recorded many workers from Tanzania and Uganda in 2022 (11,500 and 11,000 respectively), nationals from Ethiopia dominate numerically in Saudi Arabia (Figure 1), Kuwait, and Bahrain, followed by Kenyans, Ugandans, and Nigerians. However, Figure 1 indicates the diversification of African residents, which now migrate from French-speaking nations (among which are Mali, Niger, Burundi, and Burkina-Faso).

Unlike other nationality groups from Arab and Asian countries, Sub-Saharan African migrants in the GCC are mostly women. Yet, the gender imbalance differs by nationality. Women make up the bulk of nationals

from Uganda and Ethiopia, for instance (38 Ethiopian men for 100 women in Saudi Arabia, and only 10 in Kuwait), but Figure 1 points out that other nationalities show a more balanced gender structure (e.g., Nigeria, Somalia). Differentials also exist by country of destination: Kenyan nationals are mostly women in Saudi Arabia (13 men per 100 women), while the gender gap is less acute in Kuwait and in Bahrain (58 Kenyan men for 100 women).

In comparison to other nationalities (Figure 2), African workers are often employed in the domestic sector, by far the largest employment sector of female migrants in the Gulf region. There again, slight differences exist by nationality. In Bahrain, almost all female Ethiopian workers were in domestic services (94 percent), but one third of female workers from Kenya were employed in the governmental and private sectors in 2022. The vast majority of Sub-Saharan African men work in the private sector throughout the region.

However, the existing data does not allow comparisons by origin and destination countries, nor a better analysis of the sociodemographic, employment, residency, or other characteristics of these migrants. Though present in the Gulf states in increasing numbers, African migrants remain too little known, and more publicly available data disaggregated by citizenship is needed.

Figure 2. Kuwait: Sub-Saharan African workers vs. total migrant workers. A comparison of their distribution by sector of employment (Q4 2022)

