GLMM / KAS

Webinar

20 January 2026

5:00-6:30 pm KSA – 3:00-4:30 pm CET

From Transit to Settlement? Mapping Secondary Mobility from Gulf States to Europe and North America and Its Policy Implications

Updated: 13 January 2026

Background

Highly skilled professionals in the Gulf increasingly view the region not as a final destination but as a strategic springboard toward longer-term opportunities in North America, Europe, and other advanced economies. This emerging pattern of *stepwise migration*—where migrants accumulate experience, credentials, and savings in the Gulf before moving onward—has profound implications for labour markets, migration governance, and talent retention strategies across the GCC.

The GLMM-GRC 2025 project "Highly skilled workers' onward migration from the Gulf to the EU and North America" (supported by the Regional Programme Gulf States of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation) examined the drivers of skilled workers' move from the Gulf to the EU and North America. At a December 9, 2025 webinar, GLMM-KAS discussed how wage gaps, temporary residency, strict visa requirements, and limited career progression contribute to these onward migrations among nurses, engineers, and tech workers. Despite efforts to attract talent, Gulf states' labour market structures often push skilled professionals abroad.

The current webinar will focus on the powerful pull of Western destinations, where clearer pathways to permanent residency, family reunification, and professional recognition offer long-term security unavailable in the Gulf. The webinar will also analyse migrants' desire to return to the Gulf *after* securing Western citizenship, creating new forms of circularity that challenge traditional assumptions about migration trajectories.

Complementing these insights, the webinar will present a comparative overview of highly skilled immigration trends in Canada, France, Germany, the UK, and the US and analyse post-2021 reforms of highly skilled immigration legislations in the five countries. These countries are simultaneously tightening and expanding their highly skilled migration pathways, creating a shifting landscape that Gulf-based professionals must navigate. Understanding how these regimes interact with Gulf labour systems is essential for designing policies that support retention, mobility management, and long-term workforce planning.

By mapping these interconnected dynamics, the webinar offers researchers, policymakers, and practitioners a nuanced understanding of how the Gulf's role as a global migration hub is evolving—and what this means for the future of talent mobility.

Key questions addressed

- What structural factors in Gulf labour markets drive highly skilled migrants to pursue onward migration, despite competitive salaries and strong demand for their skills?
- How do Western migration regimes—points-based systems, salary thresholds, and permanent residency pathways— and their recent uncertainties shape the aspirations and behaviours of Gulf-based professionals?
- What forms of circularity are emerging, and how does the rise of "return migration with Western passports" reshape the Gulf's talent landscape?
- What policy options exist for Gulf states seeking to retain skilled workers while maintaining demographic and labour-market objectives?

Speakers

- **Mr. Froilan Malit, Jr.** is a Ph.D. Politics and International Studies candidate at SOAS University of London and a visiting fellow at the American University in Dubai and research associate at GLMM. He specializes in the linkages between foreign policy and migration in the Asia-Gulf Corridor. With over a decade of experience, Malit has worked as a migration policy consultant on Middle East migrant issues for organizations such as the ILO, IOM, the World Bank, and GLMM. His work has been published in Third World Quarterly, British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, Middle East Critique, and a diverse range of journals on labor, migration, and international studies.

- **Dr. Asma Atique** is a Research Fellow at Global Migration Institute, Toronto Metropolitan University, where she is researching international student mobility, recruitment, and labour market integration. She holds a PhD in Law from Osgoode Hall Law School, York University, where she studied environmental justice and Pakistani migrant workers in the United Arab Emirates. She holds an LLM in Environmental Law from Newcastle Law School. Before joining CERC Migration, Asma worked at the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants and was a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at York University.

- **Dr. Françoise De Bel-Air** is a population studies researcher and consultant with expertise in Arab countries. Her background in socio-demography has led her to focus on population data, policies, and dynamics in the Middle East and Gulf regions. Currently a Senior Fellow at the Gulf Labour Markets, Migration and Population programme (GLMM) of the Gulf Research Centre Foundation, she was a Senior Fellow at the French Institute for the Near East (IFPO) in Amman, Jordan, and a part-time Professor at the Migration Policy Centre, European University Institute in Florence, Italy. Besides migration, her work also covers topics such as youth, family structures, and broader population and socio-political dynamics.

- **Dr. Michael Ewers** is an Associate Professor of Geography in the Department of Earth, Environmental and Geographical Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. As a human geographer he focuses on three areas: migration and globalization; worker welfare and inequality; and human capital and sustainable

economic development. His goal is to understand who moves where and why in a global context; how individuals and groups experience and navigate migration and work differently across space; and how places create human capital for sustainable urban-economic development. He was an Assistant Professor of Geography at Texas A&M University and a Research Associate Professor and Senior Policy Analyst at Qatar University's Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI).

Moderator

- **Dr. Richa Shivakoti** is the Research Lead on Migration Governance at the Canada Excellence Research Chair in Migration & Integration and a Researcher with the Bridging Divides program at Toronto Metropolitan University. Her research focuses on labour migration, migration governance and the politics of immigration and emigration. She is currently leading three research projects on multinational migration, on gendered migration policies in Ghana and on emigration from Canada. She is an Associate Editor for Comparative Migration Studies and on the advisory board for the Public Administration and Development journal. Richa has a PhD in Public Policy from the National University of Singapore and a dual Masters in Public Affairs and Political Science from Indiana University, Bloomington.