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Knowledge for All

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Social Remittances and Social Change: Links between Home and Host Communities in the Gulf

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Abstract

The main purpose of this workshop is to expand the knowledge on the transfer and exchange of social remittances by migrants and their families when they move from one country to another, temporarily or permanently. Values, beliefs, norms, behavioral preferences, and skills may be transmitted between countries and communities to which migrants move, or from which they originate. Research from the USA and Europe shows that various forms of social remittances are generated by the interaction of migrants between their home and host countries. The Gulf countries are host to some of the largest migrant communities in the world, a majority of whom are temporary labor migrants. Despite their large volume, hardly any research exists on this topic in the Gulf region. Our specific objectives are to enhance the understanding of the types, nature, and frequency of social remittance diffusion between communities in the home

country and major countries (and communities) of destination, especially in the Gulf. Also, we aim to gauge the major social changes and outcomes that may have resulted from the diffusion of social remittances, and to assess the development impacts that the above may have generated, in order to suggest some policy guidelines that may aid such development in future.

When a person moves, temporarily or permanently, from one community to another he/she brings along many ideas, values, beliefs, and behaviors he acquired in the native culture. Upon arrival in the host country, the migrant is exposed to a whole new range of cultural prescripts. Successful integration and performance in the new environment require a certain degree of re-socialization that may in fact challenge or negate the values and beliefs formerly held. The migrant must then negotiate and adjust with many new realities. In time, the ideas of the host country may be adopted, to varying degrees, depending on the particular circumstances of the migrant, and may be transmitted back to the home country.

Continued interaction and engagement with the home country is typical of many migrants, especially in the earlier phases of the migration trajectory. Such interaction results in cultural diffusion, described by Levitt (1998) as social remittances in the form of “ideas, behaviors, identities and social capital that flow from receiving to sending countries”. Thus, a person’s definition of appropriate and suitable norms may get re-formulated as a result of exposure to the destination country norms, and may span social, psychological, philosophical, political and religious ideas and beliefs.

In many cases, migration is not spread equally across all geographical locations within a country. Specific areas and communities demonstrate a higher propensity to migrate than others, partially as a result of social networks that enable and promote the migration of friends and relatives in the home country. At the same time, specific geographical areas within the host countries become home to migrants owing to land and rental costs, government policies about locating migrants, preferences of migrants, and other factors. This historical spatial growth and settlement of migrants results in the development of home and host communities that may be paired together to study the two-way flow of social remittances.

The Gulf region has been home to foreign workers and their families for several decades. The long-term (though ‘temporary’) presence of non-nationals has had many impacts in terms of the residential patterns, institutional development, and indigenous lifestyles. The host country is now home to second and third generation migrants from Asian and Arab countries. Even though the Gulf region does not have policies to integrate foreign workers, social and cultural influences on the receiving countries are inevitable. At the same time, in addition to massive financial remittances from the Gulf to a large number of countries, social and ideational remittances are impacting the sending countries in a variety of ways.

Contrary to the attention that the flow of financial remittances has received worldwide, the transfers of social remittances remain a largely under-researched area, especially in the Gulf and Middle East. Beyond the work by USA researchers such as Levitt and colleagues, the topic has been addressed recently by scholars in Europe, looking at social remittances between European host and home countries (Grabowska et al., 2017), and between European and other countries (Norwicka and Serbedzida, 2016). The

partial convergence of Egyptian non-migrants' birth rates with those of Gulf populations through a mechanism of "ideational remittances" (non-migrants in Egypt are exposed through their migrants to models prevailing in the Gulf) was also pointed out by Fargues (2011). Yet, similar research on the Gulf region is almost non-existent.

Description and Rationale

Objectives and Scope

The overall goal of this workshop is thus to advance the body of knowledge about the types, modes, and channels through which social remittances are transmitted and the impacts such remittances exert on social change in the home and/or host countries. Our geographical focus is essentially the Gulf. With almost half of its population composed of foreign nationals, the Gulf is home to temporary labor migrants from a wide range of countries, predominantly in South and Southeast Asia. Thus, papers relating to corridors linking Asia or Middle East and the Gulf would be given a priority. However, research focusing on other parts of the world will also be considered. Papers focusing on social remittances by returnees from the Gulf will also be welcome.

The specific objectives of the international conference are to:

1. Enhance our understanding of the types, nature, and frequency of social remittance diffusion between communities in the home country and major countries (and communities) of destination, especially in the Gulf.
2. To gauge the major social changes and outcomes that may have resulted from the diffusion of social remittances, focusing on the home country as well as the host countries (and communities).
3. To assess the development impacts that the above may have generated, in order to suggest any policy guidelines that may aid such development in future.

Anticipated Participants

Papers may focus on any of the aspects outlined above. They may analyze the social ties of migrants in the host country with their home country and the diffusion of ideas, political orientations, values, behaviors and "material dimensions of transnational circulation" (Lacroix, Levitt and Vari-Lavoisier, 2016) that impact their home communities. If possible, they may look at pairs of home and host communities, assessing social remittance exchanges and their impacts. Papers may also focus on social changes in home country households and communities generated by social remittances and their consequent impacts on beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. Papers focusing on the Gulf will be given priority, although ones on other parts of the world will also be considered.

Workshop Director Profiles

Nasra M. Shah is a Professor at the Lahore School of Economics since September 2018. Until then, she was professor of Demography at the Department of Community Medicine and Behavioral Sciences at the Faculty of Medicine, Kuwait University. She received her doctoral degree in Population Dynamics from the Johns Hopkins University, School of Public Health, Baltimore, USA. Professor Shah's research has focused on several different demographic issues in the context of health and societal development. She has conducted extensive research on the Asian region, especially Pakistan and the major South Asian countries. Kuwait is another major country on which her work has focused for almost 30 years. She has addressed questions related to the role that social factors play in the reduction of infant and child mortality, and on the predictors of fertility and contraceptive use. She has also analyzed changes in the social, economic and health status of women in several Asian and Pacific countries and edited a major volume on the socioeconomic and demographic profile of Pakistani Women. One of her latest research interests includes the study of psychosocial factors in aging and the role that networks play in the aging process. Labor migration, especially from Asian countries to the oil-rich Gulf countries, has been one of the consistent themes in Dr. Shah's research for more than 35 years. She has published two books and numerous articles on various migration topics. Her research has focused on the perspective of sending as well as receiving countries. It has addressed topics such as socioeconomic profiles of migrant workers, economic progress of migrant workers, domestic worker migration, violence against women migrants, increasingly restrictive policies of receiving countries, irregular migration, the role of social networks in the migration process, and aspirations and plans of 2nd generation non-nationals. Her many publications include books on *Asian Labor Migration: Pipeline to the Middle East*; *Pakistani Women; Basic Needs, Women and Development*; *Population of Kuwait: Structure and Dynamics* and *Skilful Survivals: Irregular Migration to the Gulf*.

Françoise De Bel-Air (PhD) 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. She has been a research 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, EUI. Her research focusses on political demography, as well as on the demographic and socio-political dynamics in the region: youth, intergenerational and gender relationships, family structures, labour and forced migration, migration and population policies. She published an edited volume on *Migration and Politics in the Middle East* (2006) and over forty book chapters, scientific articles and research papers on population issues in the Arab region. Her recent publications include a special issue of *Arabian Humanities* on "Marriage and Family in the Gulf Today" (with B. Destremau and J. Safar); Chapter 7 "Exclusion, Mobility and Migration" in the *Arab Human Development Report 2016 on Youth*; "Asian Migration to the Gulf States in the 21st Century", in Chowdhury, M. and Rajan, I. (eds). *South Asian Migration to the Gulf: Causes and Consequences*", Palgrave, 2018 and "'Blocked Youth': The Politics of Migration from the SEM Countries before and after the Arab Uprisings." *The International Spectator* (53): 2018. <https://grc.academia.edu/FrancoiseDeBelAir>; https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Francoise_De_Bel-Air.

Philippe Fargues is a French demographer. He is a part-time Professor at the Robert Schuman Centre of the European University Institute and an Affiliate at the Middle East Initiative of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard Kennedy School. He was the founding Director of EUI's Migration Policy Centre and held senior positions at the National Institute for Demographic Studies in Paris and the American University in Cairo and taught at Harvard and various universities in France, the Middle East and Africa. His research interests include population, international migration and politics. His recent publications include: *Skilful Survivals. Irregular Migration to the Gulf* (with Nasra Shah, GRC-Cambridge, 2017); *Mass migration and uprisings in the Arab countries: An analytical framework* (International Development Policy, 2017); *Migration from North Africa and the Middle East: Skilled Migrants, Development and Globalisation* (IB Tauris, 2015), *Is What We Hear About Migration Really True? Questioning Eight Migration Stereotypes* (EUI, 2014); *International Migration and the Nation State in Arab Countries* (Middle East Law and Governance, 2013); *Demography, Migration and Revolt in the South of the Mediterranean* (Brookings, 2012); *International Migration and the Demographic Transition: a Two-Way Interaction* (International Migration Review, 2011).

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