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## Demography, Migration, and the Labour Market in Qatar

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# Demography, Migration, and Labour Market in Qatar\*

Françoise De Bel-Air

**Abstract:** In 2016, Qatar ranked first worldwide in terms of per capita GDP. This is due to its huge hydrocarbon reserves and to the small size of its resident population (2.5 million in June 2017). Exploiting the hydrocarbon resources and channelling them into ambitious development policies required massive imports of foreign labour. The country's total population has grown seven-fold since the mid-1980s; moreover, foreign nationals made up an estimated 91 per cent of all residents (aged 15 and above) and up to 95 per cent of all employed population in 2015. The awarding of the 2022 FIFA World Cup to Qatar in December 2010 turned the spotlight on the country's dilemma regarding the "number vs. rights trade-off" issue: Qatar has one of the most constraining kafala systems in the region, which underwent only minor changes in a reform enacted in December 2016. Paradoxically, demographic data also indicate that a growing share of foreigners live with their families and give birth in the country. Among these may be Syrian nationals who have come to the country since 2011. As of 2017, foreign population growth rates have started decelerating, as past infrastructural projects achieved completion, new migration policies that privilege skills over number are initiated, and political uncertainty looms.

**Keywords:** Qatar; Foreign Population; National Population; Nationals and Foreign Labour; Migration Policy; Statistics; Labour Camp; Human Rights, Sponsorship; Family Reunification; Second Generation.

In 2016, Qatar ranked first worldwide in terms of per capita GDP, with \$129,726 per resident.<sup>1</sup> This is due, first, to its huge hydrocarbon resources: the country has the third largest natural gas reserves worldwide as well as sizable oil reserves; it is also the top producer and exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in the world. Second, reaching such a level of individual wealth is made possible by the modest size of the country's total population: 2.5 million in June 2017.

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\* This is a fully revised version of the paper (updated till June 2017) that was published by the same author with the same title as GLMM - EN - No. 8/2014.

When the exploitation of Qatar's oilfields started in 1949, the country had hardly 16,000 inhabitants, down from about 27,000 as recorded half a century earlier in 1908.<sup>2</sup> The collapse of the traditional economy based on pearl trade in the 1920s, and economic and political tensions with Bahrain in the 1930s had dispersed Qatar's elusive and mobile population – local semi-nomad and nomad Bedouin groups, fishermen, merchant families with slaves, and a few thousand Persian origin people, some of them Shiites and the others Sunni Arabs (the hawla). Qatar's ruling family and the British Protectorate authorities who set up the oil sector resorted to importing workers from the Indian subcontinent and from the Arab Middle East, due to the local manpower's low level of literacy and industrial skills. In 1970, shortly before Qatar gained independence (in 1971), the first census was conducted. It estimated the total population at 111,113, of which 45,039 were Qataris and 66,094 foreigners. This was the first and last time that population estimates for nationals and non-nationals would be disclosed in the country.

Indeed, the small size of the national population, even if it has been expanded to include some naturalised families from Iran and the Arab Middle East, is considered a great challenge in Qatar. It can be argued that the oil rent guaranteed each of the few Qatari citizens a high standard of living, protection and security such as free health care, housing grants, subsidised utilities and education to university level. Expenditure per student in education, for example, was one of the highest in the world in the 2010s<sup>3</sup> and Qatar stands high in the Human Development Index rankings (0.856, the top one in the Arab region, ranking 33rd worldwide in 2015).<sup>4</sup> However, fulfilling the rulers' ambitions to modernise the country's institutions and infrastructure to a world-class level, and more generally, investing the huge hydrocarbon revenues, requires equally huge numbers of foreign manpower, too large to ever be fully replaced by the small numbers of Qataris. Therefore, in the view of many Qatari citizens, the high population imbalance is not so much a blessing (many foreign workers cater for the needs of the few nationals) as a curse (Qatari identity, constructed after independence, is under considerable strain).<sup>5</sup>

This dilemma has deepened since 2003. The increase in hydrocarbon prices spurred a hike in production and attracted growing amounts of FDI into the country until the 2008 financial crisis. Qatar's economic growth rate shot up to 15 per cent yearly during the period,<sup>6</sup> as infrastructure investments boomed, in real estate, tourism, and in education. Qatar Foundation's Education City for example, hosts branches of several prominent US universities.<sup>7</sup> Yet, the tremendous rise in immigration rates since the 2000s is mostly due to the massive inflow of low-skilled, Asian construction workers. The awarding of the 2022 FIFA World Cup to Qatar in December 2010 and the debates surrounding this event which pointed to abuses of unskilled foreign labourers<sup>8</sup> on the country's building sites actually underlined Qatar's dilemma. Qatar has one of the most constraining kafala systems in the region and no category of expatriates is exempted from Qatari sponsorship.<sup>9</sup> And yet, a survey conducted in 2010 showed that citizens felt sponsorship laws needed to be even stricter.<sup>10</sup> The "number vs. rights trade-off"<sup>11</sup> is indeed at work in Qatar, whereby the bigger the expatriate population, and especially "blue collars" among them, the less rights they are likely to be granted.

Qatar was thus faced with two choices. The first was to limit the numbers while increasing foreign workers' rights; the second was to sustain high levels of immigration while at the same time loosening

the demographic imbalance between nationals and foreigners, through blurring the distinctions of status and identity separating the two parties.

Until mid-May 2014, the first option seemed to be the favoured policy target. In Qatar's National Vision 2030, the master plan for Qatar's development planning launched in 2008, two of the five main challenges to address were: "Modernisation and the preservation of tradition" and "the size and quality of the expatriate labour force and the selected path of development." The Qatar Population Policy passed in 2009 tackled both, first, by promoting higher fertility rates among Qataris and second, through advocating for "improving recruitment policies in line with a knowledge-based economy" (i.e., limit the recruitment of unskilled labourers and substitute technology to number).<sup>12</sup> This seemed in line with official announcements made for several months, which promised substantial reforms to the country's labour and migration policies. It was expected that the sponsorship rule, which conditions exit from the territory and change of employer to the sponsor's consent, would undergo substantial revisions or even be cancelled altogether. However, Law No. 21 of 2015, enacted in December 2016 and partly amended by Law No. 1 of 2017,<sup>13</sup> only brought minor changes to the rule (Zahra 2015).<sup>14</sup> The kafala and the exit permits were not abolished as was hoped.

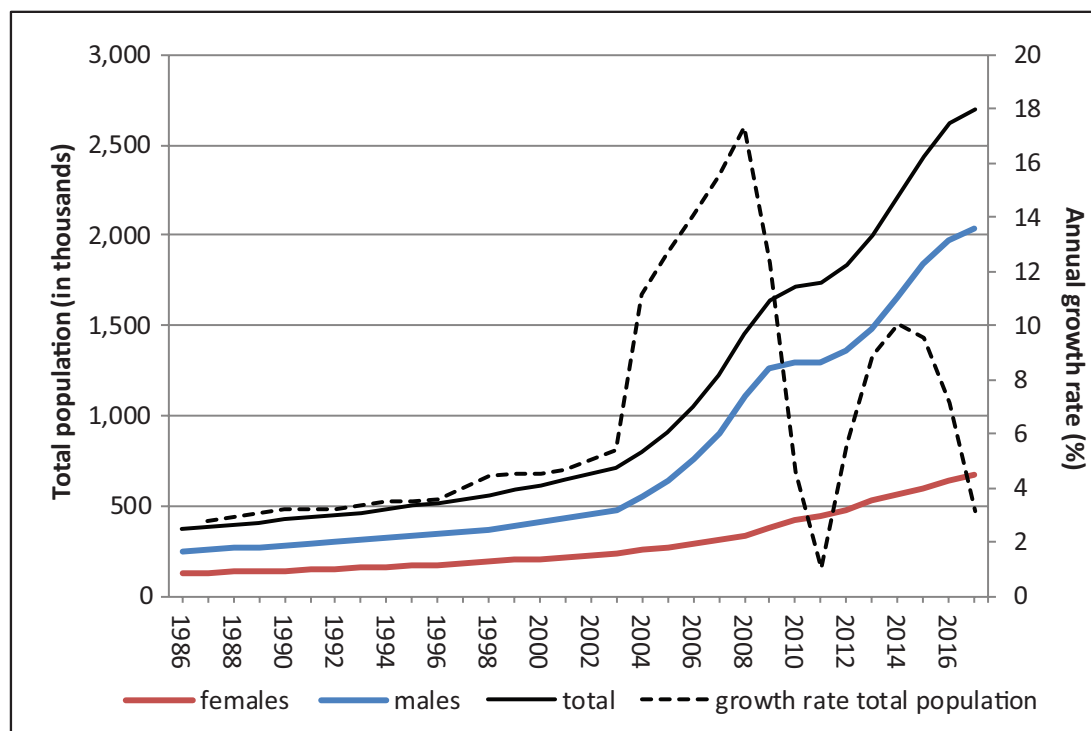
To date, the new Population Policy 2017-2022 announced late 2016 by the Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics (MDPS) and the Permanent Population Committee aim to strengthen previous policy orientations: increasing the number of nationals, supporting orientation towards a knowledge economy and controlling the recruitment of expatriate workers.<sup>15</sup> The resident population was indeed expected to start decreasing by mid-2017, due, first, to the near-completion of major infrastructure projects and second, to the layoffs following an economic slump. Reduced revenues from oil and gas, in a country highly dependent on these resources,<sup>16</sup> resulted in budget cuts. These had an impact on the state's population, which stood at 2,545,820 in June 2017, down from 2,700,539 one month before. A number of layoffs and staff reductions have taken place across the private and public sectors since 2015-2016: in companies and energy firms, as well as in public bodies (universities, research centers and cultural institutions, hospitals, etc.),<sup>17</sup> and more recently in the Qatar Foundation, a state-owned non-profit body.<sup>18</sup> Regional political tensions, additionally, may have a further impact on migrants in Qatar. Since three Gulf States and Egypt cut ties with Qatar and imposed a land, sea, and air blockade on June 5, 2017, many expatriates, including Egyptians, fear for their future in the country.<sup>19</sup>

## INWARD MIGRATION

### *Stocks*

In June 2017, Qatar's total population stood at 2,545,820, up from an estimated 373,392 in 1986.<sup>20</sup> The country's population thus grew sevenfold in a thirty-year span, at an average rate of 6.4 per cent yearly.<sup>21</sup>

Figure 1: Evolution of Qatar’s population and growth rate (1986-2017)



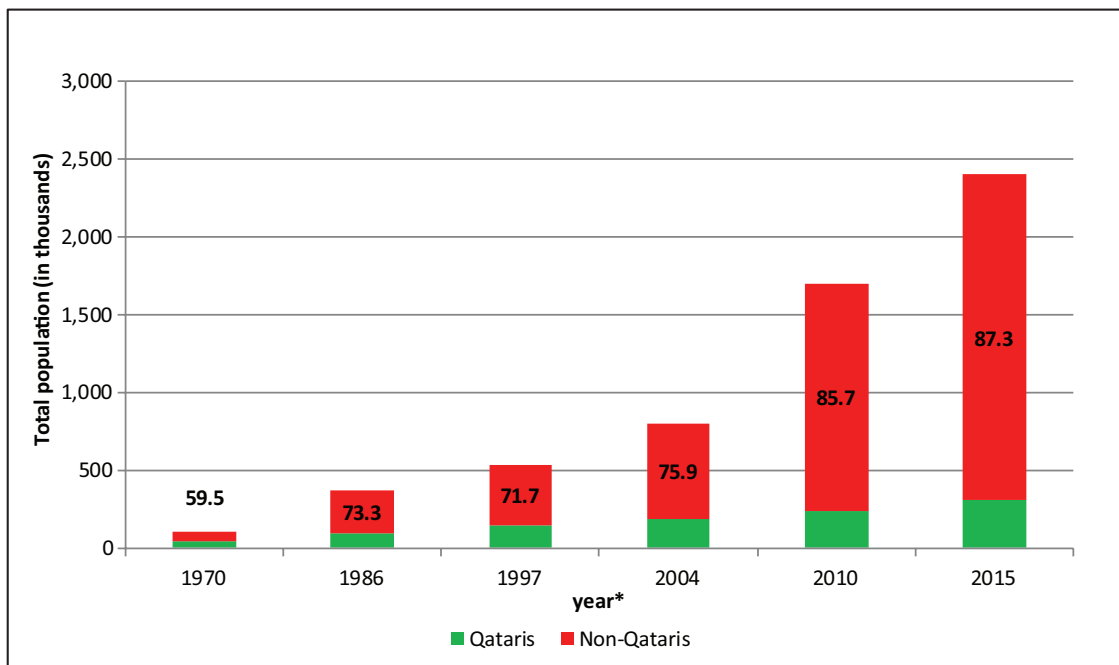
Source: QSA (Statistical Yearbook, 2016 and monthly figures on total population, June 2017).

Growth rates rose after 2003 to peak at an amazing 17.3 per cent in 2008, before sinking as an effect of the financial crisis. Numbers picked up again in 2012-2015, due to the start of the massive rise in workers’ recruitment to fuel the country’s infrastructure development projects, in line with the Qatar 2030 master plan and, especially, following the awarding of the 2022 Football World Cup bid to Qatar. Between the two censuses of 2010 and 2015, the country’s total population increased by 35 per cent, from 1,699,435 to 2,404,774. In particular, the stocks of males in the country, mostly foreign labourers, resumed their spectacular increase already observed over the period 2003-2008. Since 2016, however, the growth in Qatar’s population has been at a much slower pace, for the reasons stated earlier. First, declining oil and gas revenues led to budget cuts and layoffs; second, the near-completion of major construction projects slowed down the inflows of new workers. The Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics indeed forecasted that population numbers would peak at the beginning of 2017 and start declining in the first half of the year.<sup>22</sup>

As mentioned previously, Qatari authorities only publish aggregate figures of the resident population (Qataris and non-Qataris together), and conceal data for total national and non-national populations. Figures disaggregated by nationality (Qataris/non-Qataris) are available for the population aged 15 and above only.<sup>23</sup> However, other sources allow indirect estimates of the unpublished numbers of Qataris and / or non-Qataris below that age.<sup>24</sup> In 2010, non-Qataris numbered 1,456,362 or 85.7 per cent of

the total resident population of 1,699,435, a significant increase from previous decades (Figure 2).<sup>25</sup> Between 2004 and 2010, the Qatari population thus grew at a rate of 3.9 per cent annually, while non-Qataris' rate of growth reached 14.6 per cent on average over the period, a very high figure. During the period 2010-2015, it can be estimated that the foreign population grew by 7.3 per cent annually on average. Foreign residents reached an estimated number of 2,096,587, while Qataris numbered around 306,187 at the time of the last census in April 2015. Foreign residents thus made up 87.3 per cent of the total population, up from 85.7 per cent five years earlier.<sup>26</sup>

**Figure 2: Qatar's total population and estimates of the proportion of non-nationals in census years (1970-2015)**



\* 1986; 1997; 2004: mid-year population estimate. GLMM calculations using QSDA/MDPS data.

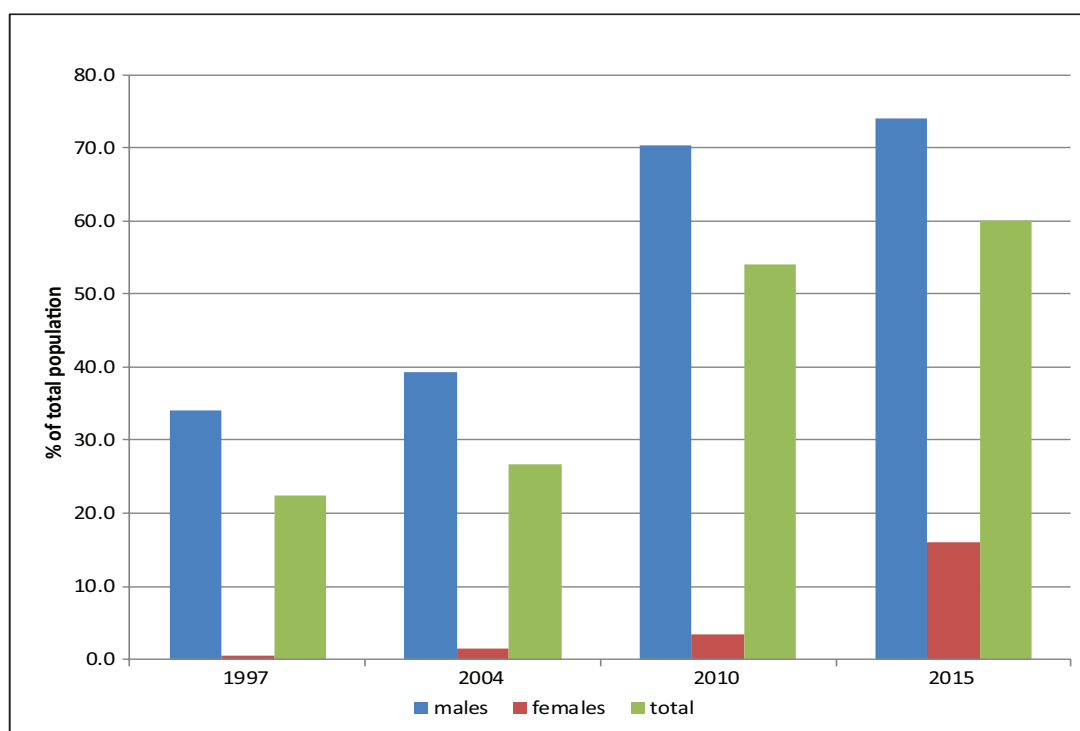
Qatar's foreign population is heavily distorted demographically. Men outnumber women by almost 1 to 5 (sex ratio for the population aged 15 and above reached 483 males for 100 women in early 2017) and those in working age groups (15 to 64 years) made up 74.4 and 92.3 per cent of foreign women and men, respectively, in 2015.<sup>27</sup> On average, this population is relatively less educated (62 per cent have below secondary level education) if compared to the Qatari nationals (33 per cent only at similar education levels). Still, 16 per cent of non-nationals held a university degree (as compared to 33 per cent of Qataris) in 2015.<sup>28</sup>

At first sight, Qatar also displays an amazing pattern of spatial segregation of its expatriate population: the share of those living in labour camps,<sup>29</sup> presumably non-nationals, went markedly up starting 2004 (Figure 3). In 2015, the clear majority of Qatar's population (60 per cent or 1,442,882 persons) actually dwelt in this type of housing.<sup>30</sup> This segregation is particularly acute for men: 74 per



cent of them lived in labour camps that year. Between 2010 and 2015, the population of camps gained 443,288 more males. It also gained 81,444 females, a 6.7-fold increase from 2010. The share of women living in camps reached 16.3 per cent of all resident females in 2015, perhaps a sign of the expansion of the retail and services sectors, whereas most males are probably construction workers.<sup>31</sup> As of 2010, census results indicated that labour camps hosted a relatively young (average age: 34 years) and less educated population than the non-nationals as a whole: 73.5 per cent had a primary school education level or less while 5 per cent held a university degree.<sup>32</sup>

**Figure 3: Proportion of Qatar’s total population living in labour camps, by sex (1997; 2004; 2010 and 2015)**



Source: 1997; 2004; 2010 and 2015 censuses, QSA/MDPS.

This emphasises the spectacular levels of economic growth experienced in Qatar over the 2000s and 2010s, which gave an impetus to the import of foreign labourers. In the first quarter of 2017, out of a 2,108,881 strong labour force, 2,006,605 were non-nationals. Of those, 2,004,114 were employed, or 95.1 per cent of the total employed population, which is higher than in any other GCC state.<sup>33</sup> Within the foreign employed population, men outnumber women by 1 to 7.

Public wealth allows for a large public sector<sup>34</sup> in the country, which employed 80 per cent of the economically active Qataris in 2015. By contrast, 81 per cent of all economically active non-nationals were involved in the private sector that year. Non-Qataris made up 99 per cent and 64 per cent, respectively, of the private and public sectors’ manpower, due to their overwhelming share in the country’s total workforce.<sup>35</sup>



Non-nationals, in effect, numerically dominate every occupation level (from 83 per cent of the highly-skilled to 99 per cent of those in unskilled positions).<sup>36</sup> Yet, the bulk of the foreign labourers (71 per cent, and 73 per cent of males alone) remained clustered in the lowest occupation categories. Among Qataris, by contrast, 80 per cent were in “white collar” positions, from managers to clerks (92 per cent of females and 73 per cent of males) as of 2015. Another 7 per cent held trade- and services-related professions.<sup>37</sup>

As regards activity sectors, 51 per cent of Qataris (61 per cent of males and 34 per cent of females), worked in “public administration and defence” in 2015; besides, many of the female citizens were employed in education (28 per cent). For expatriates, the construction sector stood out by far as the main employer. In 2006, 125,000 workers were recorded in that sector, a quarter of all employed foreign nationals. Three years later, in 2009, recruitment in this activity had more than quadrupled and was peaking at 558,000 workers, or 47 per cent of the total foreign workforce. In 2015, the sector still employed 42.2 per cent of all foreign labourers and, as shown in Figure 4, had reached another high, a six-fold increase in nine years. This is probably a sign of the construction fever ahead of the 2022 World Cup. The number of workers in domestic services and manufacturing doubled during the years 2006–2015. The numbers of foreigners employed in education and in retail trade more than trebled, which confirms the recent orientation of Qatar’s economy towards higher value-added and commercial activities.<sup>38</sup>

**Figure 4: Foreign labourers by activity (Qatar, 2006–2015, selected activities)**



Source: Labour Force Surveys, 2006 to 2015 and Population Census 2010.

It is worth mentioning that female expatriates display a more contrasted employment pattern than males. Most of them (46 per cent) were recorded in the domestic sector in 2015, but 31 per cent of them were in “white collar” occupations, from clerks to managers (men: 16 per cent). Twenty-four per cent were highly skilled (men: 13 per cent). Besides domestic services, indeed, as of 2015 women expatriates were mostly employed in retail trade, as well as in education (11 per cent each).

Most recent estimates of expatriates by country of citizenship<sup>39</sup> (Table 1) indicate that Asians, and Indians among them, largely outnumber other expatriate communities in Qatar, like in the other GCC states. As of 2015–2016, Indians were the largest group of foreign citizens in the country with an estimated 650,000 residents, 25 per cent of the resident population as a whole,<sup>40</sup> and around 31 per cent of the total estimated foreign population.<sup>41</sup> The four largest national groups (India, Nepal, Bangladesh and the Philippines), together constituted almost three quarters of all foreigners in Qatar. The Egyptians are the largest Arab national group; yet, estimated at around 200,000, they made up less than 10 per cent of all foreigners and 8.6 per cent of the total population. Syrians are estimated to number around 54,000, which includes newly arrived Syrian refugees.<sup>42</sup> The other Arab nationalities (Sudanese, Lebanese, Jordanians, Tunisians, and Palestinians) make up between 20,000 and 50,000 persons. It is also interesting to note that nationals from African countries started migrating to the GCC in increasing numbers, for employment in the domestic sector (female Ethiopians, as well as Ugandans and Tanzanians, for instance), and in the construction and in the services sector (Kenynes, Ghanians, Eritreans). The growing turn to African countries to supplement Asian domestics or construction labourers, for instance, points to the policies of workforce diversification practiced in Qatar and in the rest of the region, which aim to attract cheaper manpower and deflect origin countries or human rights defenders’ actions to enforce migrants’ rights.<sup>43</sup>

**Table 1: Some estimates of foreign residents in Qatar by country of citizenship (selected countries), c. 2015–2016**

Country/region of citizenship	Estimates (total population)	% of total population
India	6,50,000	25.0
Nepal	3,50,000	13.5
Bangladesh	2,80,000	10.8
Philippines	2,60,000	10.0
Egypt	2,00,000	8.6
Sri Lanka	1,45,256	5.6
Pakistan	1,25,000	4.8
Syria	54,000	2.2
Sudan	50,000	2.1

Table 1 continued

<b>Indonesia</b>	43,000	1.8
<b>Jordan</b>	40,000	1.7
<b>Iran</b>	30,000	1.5
<b>Lebanon</b>	24,000	0.9
<b>Ethiopia</b>	22,000	0.9
<b>Tunisia</b>	20,000	0.8
<b>Palestine</b>	20,000	0.8
<b>Kenya</b>	14,000	0.5
<b>Eritrea</b>	10,000	0.4

% of total includes the Qatari population's estimates.

Source: SNOJ, J. Population of Qatar by nationality - 2017 report, Priya DSouza Consultancy, February 2017. <http://priyadsouza.com/population-of-qatar-by-nationality-in-2017/>

Indians, Nepalese, Filipinos, and Bangladeshis alone made up about 78 per cent of the foreign labourers, with 1,088,556 workers as of September 30, 2013 (Table 2).<sup>44</sup> Indians made the bulk of all expatriate labourers – 31.2 per cent of all employed non-nationals – with the Nepalese close behind. Arab workers<sup>45</sup> accounted for no more than 10 per cent of the total. Among them, Egyptians alone accounted for a half but made up 5 per cent only of all foreign labourers.

Yet, does this national, occupational, and spatial clustering of most foreign residents in labour camps mean that Qatar is only a place for temporary, labour-bound sojourn? In 2010, indeed, half of the non-Qataris surveyed in the census had been residing in the country for only two years and less. Another third had spent five years and more in Qatar, and 8.4 per cent of non-nationals had been residents for 15 years and more.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the proportion of inactive (i.e., family dependents) among non-Qataris decreased over the years: from 16 per cent of all foreign residents in 2004 down to 8 per cent in 2009, at the peak of economic growth and recruitment in the construction sector. Since then, the share of dependents among foreign residents has remained below 10 per cent of the total, hitting a low of 7.9 per cent in 2015.

Nonetheless, the numbers of dependents have been rising steadily until today (2015, last available data), and reached 159,874 persons that year (36,518 men and 123,356 women), aged 15 and above, up from 68,285 inactive foreigners in 2006.

**Table 2: Estimates of non-nationals in Qatar by migration status and country/region of citizenship (selected nationalities), 2013**

Migration status Country/ region	Workers		Family dependents	
	numbers	%	numbers	%
<b>India</b>	452,578	<b>83</b>	92,224	<b>17</b>
<b>Nepal</b>	339,901	<b>100</b>	778	<b>0</b>
<b>Philippines</b>	165,447	<b>90</b>	19,201	<b>10</b>
<b>Bangladesh</b>	130,630	<b>95</b>	6,615	<b>5</b>
<b>Arab countries</b>	<b>146,498</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>135,230</b>	<b>48</b>
<i>Egypt*</i>	71,784	<b>59</b>	49,359	<b>41</b>
<i>Palestine*</i>	4,395	<b>31</b>	9,691	<b>69</b>
<i>Lebanon*</i>	10,255	<b>61</b>	6,649	<b>39</b>
<i>Sudan*</i>	14,650	<b>47</b>	16,340	<b>53</b>
<i>Syria*</i>	17,580	<b>57</b>	13,410	<b>43</b>
<i>Jordan*</i>	8,790	<b>n.a.</b>	<i>n.a.</i>	<b>n.a.</b>
<i>Other Arab countries*</i>	19,045	<b>29</b>	45,753	<b>71</b>

\*: estimates, author's calculations.

Sources: Asian countries: Qatar National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) estimates as of September 30, 2013, published in Al-Raya newspaper, October 1, 2013 (<http://gulfmigration.eu/estimates-of-non-nationals-by-country-of-citizenship-and-migration-status-selected-nationalities-qatar-26-30092013/>).

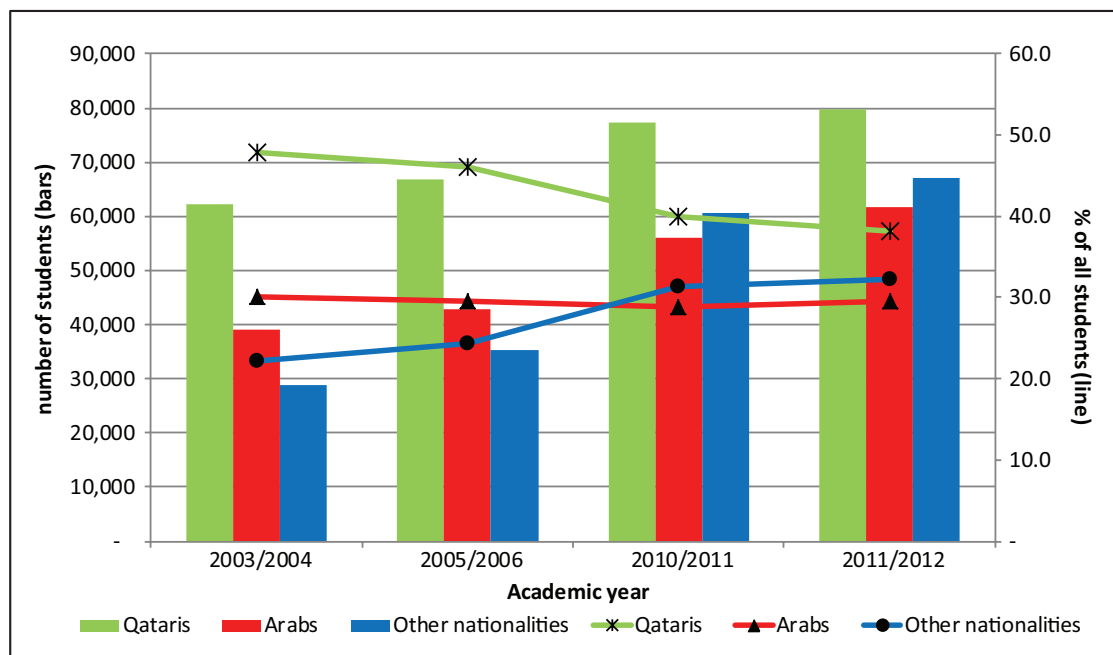
Arab countries: Qatar Ministry of Labour data for August 2013, author's calculations on the basis of the percentage and total figures of Arab labour force and population obtained from Qatar's Ministry of Labour by Zahra Babar and published in: Zahra Babar, "Working for the Neighbours: Arab Migrants in Qatar," in Arab Migrant Communities in the GCC ed. By Zahra Babar (Doha: CIRS, Georgetown University and London: Hurst and Co, 2017), pp. 19-38.

As it appears, the nationality or regional origin factor plays an essential role in defining the conditions of stay in Qatar. As highlighted in Table 2, Nepalese and Bangladeshis are quasi-exclusively workers, thus clustered to the lowest tier of the occupation and income ladder (and presumably housed mostly in labour compounds). On the opposite end,<sup>47</sup> half of resident Arab nationals are family dependents. In Qatar, a minimum salary of QR10,000 and a certified rent contract in the worker's name condition the possibility for a worker to sponsor his family members as dependents.<sup>48</sup> The large share of dependents among Arab residents, including Egyptians, thus suggest that most of them perform skilled and highly-skilled, well-paid activities. This was actually confirmed by Z. Babar in her processing of unpublished data from Qatar's Ministry of Labour: "Arabs comprise only 12 percent of the foreign Qatari labour force, yet make up more than 20 percent of jobs in the educational sector, more than 95 percent of finance and insurance jobs and over 89 percent of jobs in the professional, scientific and technical fields."<sup>49</sup> Up to 92,220 Indian expatriates (17 per cent of this national group), are also classified as dependents, which means that this very large community has a diversity of skill levels and occupation profiles.

Moreover, the likelihood of some non-nationals in the highly-skilled and upper-income brackets settling, at least for some time, with their family in Qatar is first confirmed by the proportional increase in female expatriates classified as “house makers,” a category of the inactive foreign population. Indeed, this can be taken as a proxy to assess the relative share of foreign households within all families (Qatari and non-Qatari) residing in the country, hence roughly indicating the scale of family reunification.<sup>50</sup> For twenty years,<sup>51</sup> indeed, foreign housewives accounted steadily for half of the total; yet their share increased throughout the 2000s to finally reach 76 per cent of all housewives in 2015. Among these, most were Arabs (58 per cent).<sup>52</sup>

The increase in the number of non-Qatari school students since 2003 also confirms this growing trend towards family reunification. As compared to Qatari pupils’ population, the “other nationalities” (Asians as well as Westerners) gained in number and in relative share, while the Arab students also increased in number but remained steady at 30 per cent of the total during the decade (Figure 5).<sup>53</sup> It is interesting to note that as early as 2003–2004, before the hike in recruitment of foreign labourers, all foreign school students were already outnumbering Qatari students: the latter made up 48 per cent of the total.<sup>54</sup> In 2015–2016, Qataris’ share among school students had fallen to a third.<sup>55</sup>

**Figure 5: Schoolchildren in Qatar by nationality group, in numbers and in proportion of total (2003–2012, available years)**



Source: Annual Statistical Abstracts, Ministry of Education/ Supreme Education Council (2003–2012).

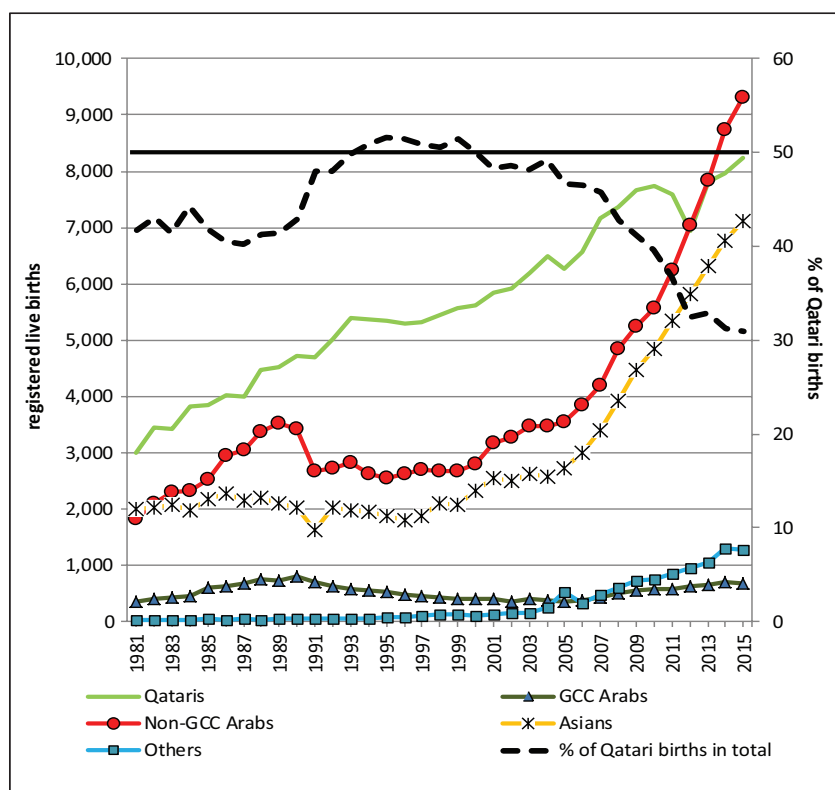
The evidence of family reunion, usually limited to foreigners in the upper-income bracket as we have argued, thus confirms that Qatar did enact a policy of upgrading its workforce by attracting highly-skilled manpower, some of them Arab nationals, in line with the objectives defined for Qatar National Vision. This developed in tandem with the massive hiring of low-skilled workers for turnkey construction projects.

## Flows

In Qatar, the Ministry of Interior’s data on residency permits are not made available to the public in yearly statistical publications, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs does not disclose records of labour permits granted by occupation level. It is, therefore, impossible to assess precisely the socio-economic characteristics of new entrants to Qatar.

The distribution of students in schools by nationality group pointed out the extent of the “demographic imbalance” affecting the Qatari population, even in non-active age groups. The distribution of births by nationality group of child<sup>56</sup> highlights yet another facet of Qatar’s unique demographic setup: two-thirds of newborns in the country are now foreign nationals. The numbers of Qatar-born Arab and Asian babies, after nosediving during the 1990s in the aftermath of the First Gulf War, rose steadily from the beginning of the 2000s alongside the growing stocks of foreign residents. As of 2015 (last year available),<sup>57</sup> Qataris only made up 31 per cent of all newborns in the country (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Registered live births by nationality group of child (Qatar, 1981-2015)**



Source: Bulletin of Vital Statistics, QSA/ MDPS.

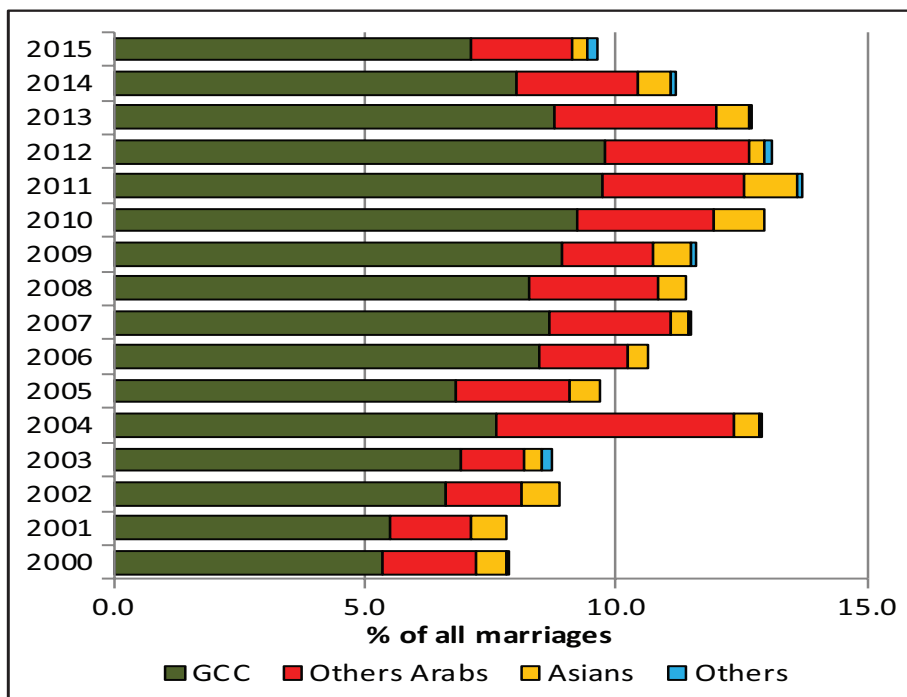
Figure 6 may also suggest another development in the population of Qatar, that of an inflow of refugees from the Syrian conflict. Asian nationals' births in Qatar have risen markedly since the early 2000s, yet, by comparison, the numbers of Arab births seem to have shot up since 2011. Qatar and the other GCC states are not signatories to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and, thus, do not recognise "refugees" as a legal category. Therefore, de facto refugees in the region can only enter and reside in GCC countries under the conditions made to other expatriates, i.e., as "guests" on short-duration visit visas, as temporary contract workers, or as a sponsored labourer's family dependent. Nonetheless, various sources in Qatar reported on the presence of Syrian nationals in the country, some having to stay clandestinely. Representatives of the Syrian Embassy stated that, as of mid-2014, Syrian nationals with residency numbered around 40,000, while another 20,000 were holding short-term, visit documents.<sup>58</sup> The figure of 54,000 Syrians in November 2015 (Table 1) is thus consistent with a regular increase in the numbers of these nationals in legal situation in the country (hence, in a position to declare their child's birth in Qatar's civil status), either having been granted iqamas instead of their short-term visit documents, or having come from Syria using the usual immigration channels. Meanwhile, the number of Syrian university students recorded by the Ministry of Higher Education also witnessed an increase: from 171 in 2011, Syrian nationals studying in Qatar's public universities and colleges went up to 475 in 2015-2016, a near four-fold increase. The figures of university students from other, non-GCC Arab countries, by comparison, only doubled over the same period.

This raises the more general question of whether or not Qatar is becoming a multicultural society. As a matter of fact, foreign births include infants born to wealthy, highly-skilled expatriates financially able to sponsor their inactive family members, but also a share of children born to any legally-residing couple.<sup>59</sup> Births on Qatari territory or migration of infants thus should contribute to diversifying non-Qatari resident population in terms of occupation level (workers of every skill level may still be living with their spouse, if the latter came as a labourer, thus sponsored individually), and also ethnically, as we have seen that most Asian women, in contrary to Arabs, are active. However, the absence of *jus solis* (birth-right citizenship) in Gulf States, does not endow these children with any socio-economic, and let alone, political, claim on the country.

Another factor questions the reality of a demographic diversification of the Qatari population: despite administrative obstacles,<sup>60</sup> mixed marriages (i.e., between a Qatari and a foreign spouse) occurred over the years, making up 7 to 13.5 per cent of all marriages between 2000 and 2015 (Figures 7 and 8).<sup>61</sup>

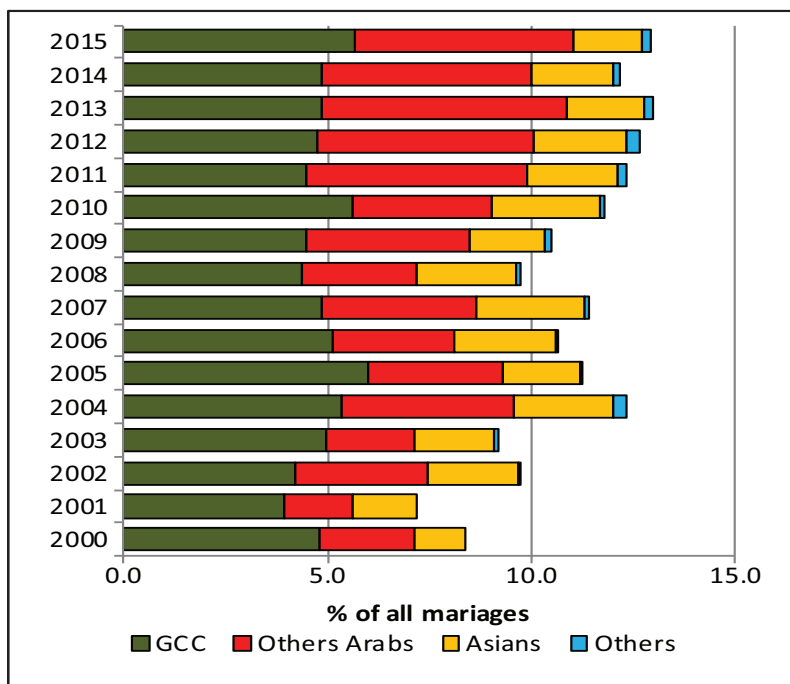


Figure 7: Marriages of Qatari men with foreign women (2000-2015)



Source: Marriage and Divorce statistics, QSA/MDPS, given years.

Figure 8: Marriages of Qatari women with foreign men (2000-2015)



Source: Marriage and Divorce statistics, QSA/MDPS, given years.

The shares of Qatari males and females marrying foreign nationals have been relatively similar;<sup>62</sup> however, women most often choose citizens from other GCC states (up to 10 per cent of all female unions in 2012). These are sometimes blood relatives, stemming from transnational tribal groups settled across the whole Gulf region. Moreover, women's unions with non-nationals have been decreasing since 2011. It may have to do with the regional tensions following the Arab uprisings, which spurred dissent between Qatar and its neighbours. It may be, also, that Qatari women changed their marriage patterns, towards a more “nationalistic” approach.<sup>63</sup> Male Qataris, by contrast, started turning to non-GCC Arabs and even Asians, in modest, yet slightly growing proportions.<sup>64</sup>

Obtaining naturalisation in Qatar is a constraining process for non-nationals: it requires 25 years of continuous presence in the country. However, the foreign spouse of a Qatari male can obtain citizenship after five years of marriage; similarly, children of a Qatari mother, as well as individuals with exceptional skills useful to the country, are all granted a priority status in qualifying for naturalisation.<sup>65</sup> Rising numbers of highly-skilled residents with family members born on Qatari territory and of mixed marriages, therefore, could lay the ground for future ethnic diversification and demographic expansion of the national Qatari population, yet, very slowly and selectively. Migration policies are promoting the recruitment of more highly-skilled expatriates. The effect of these measures on Qatari society's openness to non-Gulf populations is yet to be seen.

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## Endnotes

1. At Purchasing Power Parity (in international \$), and \$60,732 in current US\$ (<http://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/qatar>).
2. Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf. Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990): 117.
3. Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2012, *Qatar Country Report* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012). The total number of students being awarded overseas scholarships increased by 61.5 per cent during 2009 and 2010.
4. UNDP, *Human Development Report 2016* (New York: UNDP), 2016, tab. 1, p. 212.
5. On internal differentiation among the Qatari citizenry, see Sharon Nagy, “Making Room for Migrants, Making Sense of Difference: Spatial and Ideological Expressions of Social Diversity in Urban Qatar,” *Urban Studies* 43, 1 (January 2006): 119-137.
6. L’investissement direct étranger au Qatar en 2012, <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/File/395138>.
7. <https://www.qf.org.qa/content/qf-schools/academic-bridge-program>.
8. Amnesty International, *The Dark Side of Migration: Spotlight on Qatar’s Construction Sector Ahead of the World Cup* (London: Amnesty International, 2013).
9. In contrast to Bahrain, which (at least on paper) scrapped it altogether, or Saudi Arabia, where foreign investors do not require Saudi sponsorship since 2000, for example. The UAE also reformed its rule of conditioning sponsorship change to the obtaining of a non-objection certificate from the worker’s sponsor.
10. <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/qatar/qatari-citizens-want-sponsorship-rules-tightened-further-survey-1.742530>.
11. Martin Ruhs and Philip Martin, “Numbers vs. Rights: Trade-Offs and Guest-Worker Programs,” *International Migration Review* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 249-265.
12. Permanent Population Committee, *Qatar Population Status 2012, Three Years after Launching the Population Policy* (Doha: PPP, Oct. 2012): 11-13, [http://www.gsdp.gov.qa/portal/page/portal/ppc/PPC\\_home/ppc\\_news/ppc\\_files\\_upload/populations\\_status\\_2012\\_en.pdf](http://www.gsdp.gov.qa/portal/page/portal/ppc/PPC_home/ppc_news/ppc_files_upload/populations_status_2012_en.pdf).
13. <http://gulfmigration.eu/qatar-law-no-1-2017-amending-provisions-law-no-21-2015-regulating-entry-exit-expatriates-residence/>.
14. In Maysa Zahra’s analysis, “[the new law] did little more than change the terms used for “sponsor” and “sponsorship,” replacing them with “recruiter” and “responsibility,” respectively. Under this law, the employer can still exercise control over the exit of the foreign employee from the country. The foreign employee may submit a petition to the exit petitions committee to contest the decision of the employer or the competent authority prohibiting him from exiting the country. The transfer of employment is still subject to the approval of both the employer and the Ministry of Labour.” (See M. Zahra, “Qatar’s Legal Framework of Migration,” Explanatory Note No. 2/2016, GLMM, <http://gulfmigration.eu>).
15. <https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/01/11/2016/Population-policy-goals-need-to-be-re-evaluated-Minister>.

16. On average over the past two decades, oil and gas accounted for around 80 per cent of exports of goods and services, and revenues from the hydrocarbon sector represented almost 90 per cent of total fiscal revenue (IMF, Qatar, IMF Country Report No. 17/88, April 2017).
17. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36023390>.
18. <http://gulfbusiness.com/qatar-foundation-cut-800-staff-report/>.
19. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-06-15/qatari-crisis-migrant-workers-caught-middle>; <https://business-humanrights.org/en/current-rift-in-qatar-puts-business-rights-of-migrant-workers-at-risk#c158928>; <https://dailynewsegypt.com/2017/06/05/egyptian-residents-situation-qatar-remains-unclear-following-diplomatic-turmoil/>.
20. Mid-year population estimates, Qatar Statistics Authority (QSA), then the Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics (MDPS), *Annual Statistical Abstracts*.
21. The validity of data is hard to assess, as all data emanate from the same source (MDPS) since 2015 and from QSA before that date. The UN Statistics Division stated in 2008 that civil registration of births and deaths in Qatar had reached a coverage rate of 97 per cent in the 1990s: <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CCUQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Ffunstats.un.org%2Funsd%2Fvitalstatkb%2Fattachment80.aspx&ei=6PymU5YdyaQ787yBsAY&usg=AFQjCNHOyW3issTrFW9qYFnAMUfHXHJ9w>.  

However, other issues can be raised about the quality of population statistics in the country: population and housing census 2004, for instance, was conducted on the total Qatari population, but only on a sample of the non-Qatari resident population. Census 2010, however, covered the whole of the resident population. Census 2015 is said to have included “all individuals (nationals and foreigners) within the regional boundaries of the State as of 20/04/2015, the census’ date of reference, “whether in households, labor sites, institutions, hotels, ports or border crossings. Data [is] also collected on buildings, households, and establishments” (<http://www.mdps.gov.qa/en/statistics/census/Census2015/Pages/default.aspx>).
22. <https://dohanews.co/ministry-qatars-population-increased-by-40-percent-since-2010/>.
23. In Labour Force Surveys, conducted quarterly since 2006, and based on censuses’ results.
24. See for instance O. Winckler, “How Many Qatari Nationals Are there?” *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2015, <http://www.meforum.org/meq/pdfs/5081.pdf>. The author used vital statistics (Qatari births and infant and child deaths) to estimate missing figures of the Qatari population aged below 10 years old, not published in 2010’s census, and estimated past trends of naturalisation. Another source is the *Women and Men Statistical Profiles*, published every two years since 2004 by the MDPS. These publications provide the percentage distribution of population by broad age groups, including the 0-14 age group, by sex and nationality (Qatari-non-Qatari). See <http://www.mdps.gov.qa/en/statistics1/pages/topicslisting.aspx?parent=Social&child=GeneralSocialStatistics>. As Labour Force Surveys (see previous endnote) publish data disaggregated by nationality for those aged 15 and above, a simple calculation using the two sources, thus allows an estimate of total populations by nationality. Finally, some data disaggregated by nationality and nationality groups are also published by the Ministry of Education and MDPS on school students, which may be used to estimate the size of the population aged below 15, yet more roughly than the previous source since the school enrolment rate stands below 100 per cent in Qatar.
25. GLMM estimates based on QSA data. See <http://gulfmigration.eu/population-by-nationality-qatari-non-qatari-census-1970-2010/>.

26. The method used to estimate the Qatari and non-Qatari populations for the period closest to census 2015 (held in April) is the following: 1. *Woman and Man in the State of Qatar-A Statistical Profile* (2016) gave the percentage distribution of population by broad age groups for mid-2015, by sex and nationality. The percentage of those aged below 15 is (x) and the percentage of those aged 15 and above is (y); 2. The Labour Force Survey for the first quarter of 2015 gave the numbers of Qataris and foreigners by sex, aged 15 and above for March 2015 (z). The number of Qatari and non-Qatari males and females aged below 15 thus equals  $(x)*(z)/(y)$ . Total figures for Qataris and non-Qataris are then obtained by adding these results to the numbers of Qataris and non-Qataris aged 15 and above, taken from the Labour Force Survey Q1 2015 (z). The total population figure obtained is 2,402,774 (306,187 Qataris + 2,096,587 non-Qataris), which is very close to census 2015's total population figure: 2,404,775. The difference comes from the rounded-up percentages used for the calculation. Calculations for later periods, using percentage age group distribution for 2015 and recently published Labour Force Surveys (Q1, 2017), retrieve numbers significantly higher than the total figures published in monthly statistics. This indicates that the age balance has changed within the two years, and that the percentage of residents aged below 15 has decreased.
27. Respectively, *Labour Force Survey, Q1 2017* and MDPS. See *Woman and Man in the State of Qatar-A Statistical Profile, 2016*.
28. Population aged 15 and above, Labour Force Survey 2015, <http://gulfmigration.eu/qatar-population-aged-15-nationality-qatari-non-qatari-sex-education-level-2015/>.
29. Labour camp or labour gathering population is defined as follows by QSA: A group of persons of the same gender usually staying in housing units. They live as a group (collectively) but there is no relationship between them and they do not form a living household. They are two to six (small cluster) or seven or more persons (big clusters) who usually belong to one organisation (company, establishment, etc.).
30. <http://gulfmigration.eu/qatar-total-population-place-residence-household-labour-camps-etc-gender-census-night-april-2015/>.
31. Al Khor area, for example, where as many as 87.4 per cent of all residents are recorded living in labour camps in 2010 (48 per cent in 1997) is home to many employees of the oil industry [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al\\_Khor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Khor). In 2014, labour camp dwellers were also construction workers involved in the many building sites related to the 2022 World Cup. As regards women, most of them were located in Doha in 2015. This suggests that many female employees from the expanding retail and services sectors are housed in such dwellings.
32. <http://gulfmigration.eu/qatar-large-and-small-labor-camp-population-15-years-and-above-by-10-years-age-group-sex-and-educational-level-qatar-2010/>.
33. <http://gulfmigration.eu/percentage-of-nationals-and-non-nationals-in-employed-population-in-gcc-countries-national-statistics-latest-year-or-period-available/>.
34. Government department, government company, or corporation.
35. <http://gulfmigration.eu/qatar-economically-active-population-aged-15-nationality-qatari-non-qatari-sex-activity-sector-2015/>.
36. According to the ISCO 08 classification, the three upper categories of occupations are “managers,” “professionals” and “technicians and associate professionals” and the three lowest “craft and related trades workers,” “plant and machine operators and assemblers,” and “elementary occupations”, respectively.
37. 2015 data (<http://gulfmigration.eu/qatar-economically-active-population-aged-15-nationality-qatari-non-qatari-sex-occupation-2015/>).



38. Labour Force Surveys, 2006 to 2015, and Census 2010. The figures of workers include domestic workers. 2015 data (latest available data as of May 2017): <http://gulfmigration.eu/qatar-economically-active-population-aged-15-nationality-qatari-non-qatari-sex-activity-sector-2015/>.
39. The nationality breakdown of Qatar's population (Qataris/non-Qataris), and the breakdown of the foreign population by country of citizenship is concealed by the MDPS, in charge of gathering and disseminating statistical data on the country. However, since 2013-2014, Doha-based journalist and consultant Jure Snoj has been collecting and compiling figures of foreign residents in Qatar from various sources, starting with 55 nationalities. The first publication of these data in BQ magazine (<http://www.bq-magazine.com/economy/2013/12/population-qatar-nationality>) was consistent with a 2013 publication of governmental figures on selected nationalities (English: <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/qatar-s-population-exceeds-2m-521314.html>; Arabic: Al-Raya newspaper <http://www.raya.com/news/locals>, October 1, 2013, p. 20).

Latest release of data (2017 Report), under the umbrella of Priya D'Souza Consultancy firm displays figures for 87 nationalities. The author states the origin of data as follows in the report: "The majority of figures shown in the table below have been sourced from foreign embassies in Qatar. While they are mostly estimates, in many cases the embassies have been clear the data was given to them by Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, meaning that data was exact at the day of issuing the report. In several additional cases the Government of Qatar has made data for specific nationalities publicly available. These occasions happened when a high-ranking official was interviewed by the media, as well as a few instances of the figures appearing on official Qatari Governmental websites" (<http://priyadsouza.com/population-of-qatar-by-nationality-in-2017/>).

40. Including Qatari nationals.
41. Of 2,096,587, estimate of the foreign population in Qatar as of census 2015. These ratios are only indicative, since figures' dates of reference differ by a few months, hence are subjected to change.
42. F. De Bel-Air, "A Note on Syrian Refugees in the Gulf: Attempting to Assess Data and Policies," Explanatory Note No. 11/2015, Gulf Labour Market and Migration (GLMM) programme of the Migration Policy Center (MPC) and the Gulf Research Center (GRC), <http://gulfmigration.eu>.
43. See F. Malit and A. Al-Youha, "Kenyan Migration to the Gulf Countries: Balancing Economic Interests and Worker Protection," Migration Information Source, May 18, 2016.
44. Total foreign employed labourers: 1,394,405 (Labour Force Survey 2013, Q3).
45. Non-Qatari GCC nationals may not be accounted for in MoL's figures, which are drawn from labour permit data. In the GCC countries, the Unified Economic Agreement between the Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (chapter 2, art. 8), guarantees no distinction between nationals and other GCC countries' citizens as regards freedom of movement, work and residence, ownership, and exercise of economic activity in every GCC state. See Zahra Babar, *Free Mobility within the Gulf Cooperation Council* (Doha: CIRS, Georgetown University, 2011), 3. Therefore, they may be working in Qatar without holding a permit. Female dependents of sponsored expatriates, who are allowed to work while remaining under their spouse's sponsorship, may also escape registration and counting as stated by Babar (2017: 30, footnote 42).
46. <http://gulfmigration.eu/percent-distribution-of-non-qatari-population-by-duration-of-stay-in-qatar-for-each-municipality-2010/>. No data is available on the profile of residents in each category of length of stay.
47. Data for Western expatriates are not available.



48. \$2,747 (May 2017). Obtaining a rent contract and bills in their name is also difficult for most resident workers, who often have to sub-rent their flat for the real estate prices are very high in Qatar. <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/news/qatar/219493/getting-family-visas-tough-for-some-expats>.
49. Babar, 2017: 35.
50. The indicator is imperfect, because a) some females may be also part of a household, while working in Qatar (sponsored as an individual worker, by a Qatari national or establishment); b) No man is registered as housemaker, although women can sponsor their partner, and c) it assumes that Qatari family formation process has not changed significantly over the years (increase in age at marriage or in divorce rates, for instance). However, this remains the only way to estimate the number of foreign households, which is not published in Qatari statistics.
51. Between 1986 and 2004 censuses.
52. 50,550 family dependents were recorded as housewives in 2013 (Babar, 2017: 50, Table 2.1). However, Arabs might be overrepresented among foreign households, due to their generally low activity rates.
53. Some MoE-SEC's yearbooks in the decade did not display detailed information on students' nationality groups. The data stopped being disaggregated by nationality group of students after 2011-2012.
54. 67,893, as compared to 62,329 Qatari pupils enrolled (from Kindergarten to secondary level, all establishments).
55. 192,519, as compared to 96,115 Qatari pupils enrolled (from Kindergarten to secondary level, all establishments). Education Statistics 2016, <http://www.mdps.gov.qa/en/statistics1/pages/topicslisting.aspx?parent=Social&child=Education>.
56. Unsmoothed curve. Late registered births are not counted in the year of birth, but the year of declaration.
57. Quarterly data for 2016 are available as of June 2017 (<http://www.mdps.gov.qa/en/statistics1/pages/topicslisting.aspx?parent=Social&child=GenrealSocialStatistics>). However, these quarterly figures may not include the late registered births, declared in 2016, but which occurred earlier.
58. <https://dohanews.co/syrians-qatar-continue-struggle-despite-help-government/>.
59. Article 17 of Law No. 9 of 2004 which regulates expatriates' entry, departure, residence, and sponsorship matters, states that "A residence permit may be applied for within sixty days of the date of birth or the date of entering the country in respect of a child born to an expatriate whose family has obtained residence permits. If the child was born outside the country and one or both parents have a valid residence permit, the child shall be permitted to enter the country within two (2) years of its birth." Refer <http://gulfmigration.eu/law-no-4-of-2009-regulating-the-entry-exit-residence-and-sponsorship-of-expatriates-2/>.
60. Law No. 21 of 1989 regulates the marriage of Qataris to foreigners. According to the law, a committee of officials from different government institutions, including the Ministry of Awqaf, examines applications for such marriages (from male and female citizens) and gives its recommendation to the Ministry of Interior, which has the final decision. The law makes an exception for those wanting to marry someone from another GCC country, their cousin, or the son/daughter of a Qatari mother. <http://gulfmigration.eu/law-no-21-of-1989-regulating-marriage-to-foreigners-2/>.
61. Source: Annual Bulletin of Vital Statistics (Marriages and Divorces), QSA/MDPS, given years.
62. This is worth noting, as anywhere else in the GCC, males marry away more than females.

63. The issue of men marrying foreigners is a matter of great debate in Gulf States, as women and social activists link it to marriage delay and to growing levels of female celibacy, as well as to an array of social ills besides the first two, the other cannot be counted as social ills, right? (family instability, child delinquency, dilution of the purity of descent, weakening of ethnic identity and Gulf social values, etc.).
64. This is due, in part, to rising bride prices in the Gulf, which has spurred the creation of many online marriage agencies for Muslims. The development of international tourism and communications also opened new matrimonial “markets,” for example, South-East Asia.
65. Law No. 38 of 2005 on the Acquisition of Qatari Nationality, <http://gulfmigration.eu/qatar-law-no-38-of-2005-on-the-acquisition-of-qatari-nationality/>. Besides, O. Winckler in his reconstruction of the Qatari population up to 2010, concluded on the evidence that a number of naturalisations occurred throughout the Emirate’s history, including that of Qatari men’s foreign wives (Winckler 2015).

### About the Author



**Françoise De Bel-Air** (Ph.D.) is a researcher and consultant based in Paris, France. A socio-demographer by training, she specialises in the political demography of Arab countries, with an emphasis on the Middle Eastern and Gulf States. She has been a research fellow and programme manager in the French Institute for the Near East (IFPO) in Amman, Jordan. She is currently involved in several European and international projects focusing on recent changes in family structures in the Arab world, highly-skilled and female migration, as well as GCC countries' demographic dynamics and policies. She has published over thirty-five book chapters, scientific articles and research papers, and an edited volume on Migration and Politics in the Middle East (2006). She is currently working on a book on Jordan and the refugee issue. Contact: [f\\_dba@hotmail.com](mailto:f_dba@hotmail.com)

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**Short Reference:** F. De Bel-Air, “Demography, Migration, and Labour Market in Qatar,” Explanatory Note No. 3/2017, GLMM, <http://gulfmigration.eu>.

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