



International
Labour
Organization

► **Labour market
demand in the **Middle East:**
Prioritized destinations for
Sri Lankan migrant workers**

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in the Middle East:
Prioritized destinations for
Sri Lankan migrant workers**

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Printed in Sri Lanka

► 1. Introduction

The International Labour Organization (ILO) in Sri Lanka is “promoting decent work through good governance, protection and empowerment of migrant workers: contributing towards the effective implementation of the Sri Lanka National Labour Migration Policy” under the Safe Labour Migration Project. The project’s fourth phase is structured around three objectives, the third of which is: “policymakers, public officials and other stakeholders are provided with an evidence base for their informed participation in policy, dialogue and action on labour migration”.

Foreign employment demand and supply studies provide the government with valuable insights to make informed decisions about foreign employment labour market policies, economic development strategies, and overall national planning. This helps create a balanced and sustainable migrant workforce, fostering economic growth and social stability. The Safe Labour Migration Programme of the International Labour Organization Country Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives initiated this research study to bridge the knowledge gaps for better decisions in the foreign employment landscape, responding to the Government of Sri Lanka. This study was carried out by Nielsen IQ Lanka (Pvt) Ltd in close collaboration with the Ministry of Labour & Foreign Employment, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), Licensed Foreign Employment Agencies and workers’ associations.

This analysis supports the Government to pinpoint regions or countries where Sri Lankans can potentially secure higher salaries or access more promising job prospects. Moreover, it helps individuals identify regions and countries with specific skill shortages or surpluses, enabling them to align their career choices with market demand. Equally important, this analysis assists Governments in establishing focused skills development mechanisms to align with migration trends. It has further become increasingly necessary to conduct additional labour market analyses and skills mapping for foreign job placements, given constantly evolving circumstances and the role of

labour migration supporting Sri Lanka’s continued and renewed economic development.

In line with the findings of the desk research conducted under the third objective, a research study on labour market supply and demand for Sri Lankan migrant workers was commissioned. This document presents those findings.

Study objectives

The researchers were asked to look in depth at the following issues and to map out the supply and demand for skills and labour and highlight the gaps and opportunities that would allow them to make recommendations for improving the foreign employment options for women and men seeking to migrate out of Sri Lanka.

1. The current mid-term and long-term labour demand in countries of the Middle East, Europe and North America and the Asia-Pacific for women and men migrant workers.
2. The similarities and overlap in labour demand across the different migration corridors.
3. The current labour supply in Sri Lanka, including profiles of aspiring women and men migrant workers, their skills and qualifications and the available skills training and qualifications facilities in Sri Lanka.

These objectives were further broken down into the following research questions.

Labor market demand

- What are the immediate, medium-term and long-term labour market demands in the Middle East, Europe and South and South-East Asia for women and men migrant workers from Sri Lanka?
- What are the labour and employment sectors that are most in demand and for most countries and regions in the immediate, medium and long term, disaggregated according to gender, skill category and earning potential?

- What are the employment and recruitment pathways (processes) for the in-demand labour sectors?
- What are the labour and employment sectors in countries and regions of destination that best align with the national economic and development strategies in Sri Lanka (with a view to the sustainable reintegration of migrant workers)?
- Do the existing qualifications and certification opportunities available in Sri Lanka sufficiently cater to the requirements of the in-demand foreign employment sectors? What are the gaps and how could they be addressed?
- Are the existing qualifications and certification opportunities in Sri Lanka adequately recognized in the targeted countries and regions of destination by potential employers and do they result in sufficient wage increases?

Labour market supply

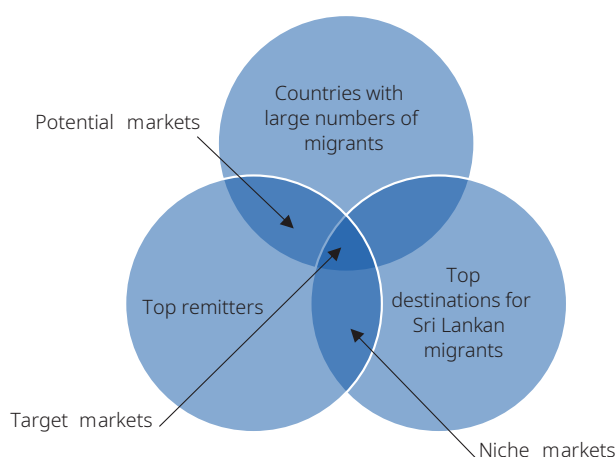
- What is the profile of aspiring migrant workers from Sri Lanka, disaggregated by age, gender and skill category?
- What are the existing expertise and skills within this population of aspiring women and men migrant workers?
- What are the qualification and certification opportunities available to aspiring women and men migrant workers, including the time and cost implications of completing additional certifications?
- What are the areas that the Government of Sri Lanka should focus on for investment, particularly regarding skills training and certifications that would result in improved employment opportunities for migrant workers?

Skills mapping

- Are the existing populations of aspiring women and men migrant workers sufficiently qualified or certified to meet the requirements of the in-demand foreign employment labour sectors? If not, how could they be improved?

The overarching objective of the research study was to identify and map the demand for migrant workers in destination countries and the supply from Sri Lanka. After further discussions with the Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment, it was decided that the research would give more emphasis to identifying demand and then mapping the current supply against it, as opposed to more emphasis on supply. This was with the expectation that the Ministry would use the findings of this research to develop and implement the short-term and long-term policies and actions to equip Sri Lankan migrant workers to meet the demand of global migrant worker market and take the necessary steps to facilitate labour migration that would be conducive to the country's further development. It was also emphasized that exploration of migration corridors that are not in the current radar for Sri Lanka is also needed.

Figure 1. Criteria for selecting countries with high potential for Sri Lankan migrants



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Kuwait

► Background

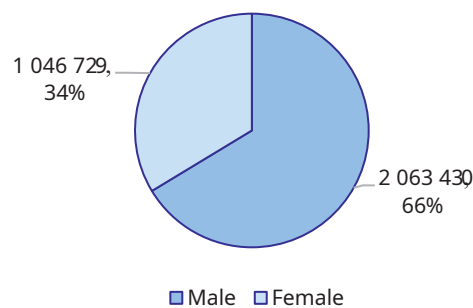
1. Kuwait

a. Migrant population in Kuwait

According to the World Migration Report 2022, Kuwait was the twentieth-largest destination country for international migrants. In 2020, as the report noted, 2.98 million migrants lived in Kuwait, or 69.8 per cent of the total population. That means two thirds of Kuwait's population were migrant workers.

Data from the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) on the international migrant population put the number at slightly more, at 3,110,159 migrants in Kuwait. Of them, 2,063,430 were men and around half, or 1,046,729, were women (figure 18).

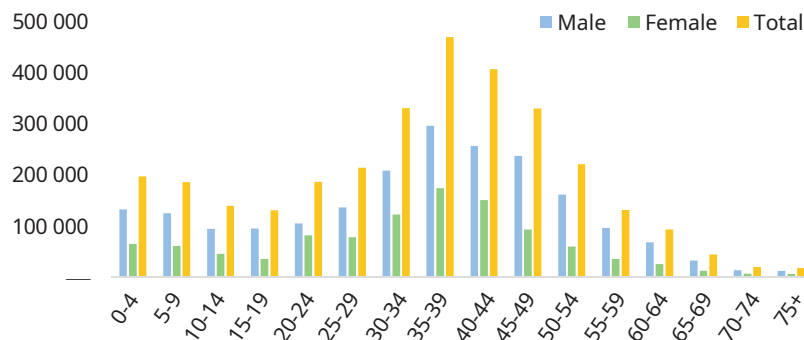
Figure 1.1. International migrants in Kuwait, by gender, 2020



Source: UN DESA, Population Division, "International Migration Stock 2020".

Most of those migrants were aged 35–39 (figure 19).

Figure 1.2. International migrants in Kuwait, by gender and age, 2020



Source: UN DESA, Population Division, "International Migration Stock 2020".

Net migration to Kuwait increased between 1995 and 2019, at 17 per cent, before steadily declining from 2020 to 2023 (table 12).

Table 1.1. Net migration rate in Kuwait, 2020–23

Year	Net migration rate	Decline, compared with previous year (%)
2020	7.125 per 1 000 inhabitants	15.56
2021	5.812 per 1 000 population	18.43
2022	4.499 per 1 000 population	22.59
2023	3.186 per 1 000 population	29.18

Source: See MacroTrends, “Kuwait Net Migration Rate 1950–2023”.

The vast number of migrant workers in Kuwait in 2020 hailed mostly from South Asia and Arab countries (table 13). Labour migrants from these regions are predominately employed in the construction sector

and services industry. Among the many immigrant communities in Kuwait in 2020, 32 per cent were Indians and 21 per cent were Egyptians.¹

Table 1.2. Share of international in Kuwait, by origin region, 2020

Region	Share (%)
Arab region	27.9
South Asia	37.8
Africa	1.9
Other countries	1.1

Source: IOM, *Kuwait-Country-Strategy 2020–2024*, 2020.

Among the Asian countries represented in Kuwait in 2020, Filipinos had the largest grouping, at 11,000 migrants, followed by Nepalese (9,000 migrants), Indians (8,000 migrants) and Sri Lankans (also 8,000 migrants).²

The share of all foreign workers in the total population in 2020 was 61.7 per cent, while the proportion of foreign workers in the total workforce was 86 per cent. Of the nearly 70 per cent of non-Kuwaitis in the population, an estimated 144,000 persons were irregular migrants. The documented

migrants numbered 3,344,362, with 69 per cent of them men and 31 per cent of them women.³

The Government does not grant citizenship to foreigners unless it is an exceptional case, which leads to temporary labour mobility being the most predominant form of migration into the country, especially from countries in South Asia.

The majority (83 per cent) of Kuwaitis are employed in the public sector due to the higher pay, job stability, short hours and other psychosocial factors.

¹ IOM, *Kuwait-Country-Strategy 2020–2024*, 2020.

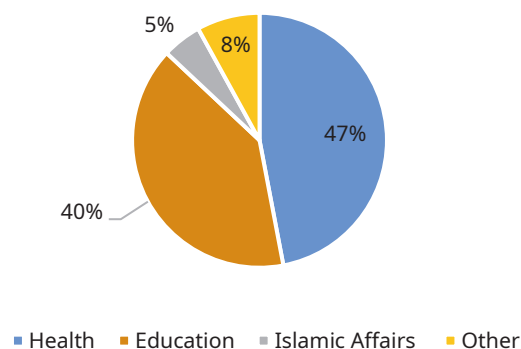
² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Only 8.7 per cent of public sector employees are non-Kuwaitis; 88.3 per cent of non-Kuwaitis are employed in the private sector. According to the *Towards a National Jobs Strategy in Kuwait report*, non-Kuwaiti jobs in the public sector in 2020 were concentrated in health (47 per cent) and education (40 per cent), and migrants were paid less than what

nationals were paid for the same work (figure 20). The facilities, wages and benefits for the migrant workers in the private sector are well below the public sector standards. This is one reason behind Kuwaitis' low interest in working in the private sector and the failure of the Government's Kuwaitization efforts.⁴

Figure 1.3. Proportions of non-Kuwaiti jobs in the public sector, 2019

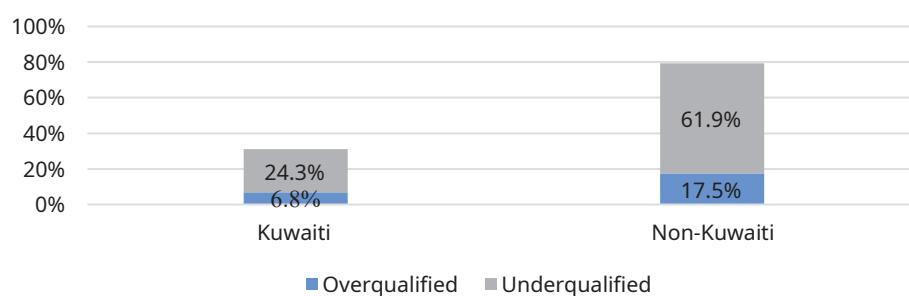


Source: World Bank Group, *Towards a National Jobs Strategy in Kuwait*, 2020.

There is a significant mismatch, estimated at 77 per cent, between workers' skills and the skills demanded by the market. The skills gap was larger for non-Kuwaitis than Kuwaitis in 2019. For Kuwaiti

nationals, 6.8 per cent were overqualified for their job while it was 17.5 per cent for non-Kuwaitis (figure 21).

Figure 1.4. Qualification mismatch in Kuwait, by nationality and type, 2020



Source: World Bank Group, *Towards a National Jobs Strategy in Kuwait*, 2020

⁴ World Bank Group, *Towards a National Jobs Strategy in Kuwait*, 2020.

According to data from Kuwait's Public Authority for Civil Information, foreign workers in general, and among them Asians, are more often employed in services and blue-collar occupations than in highly skilled professions. Asian labourers are also mostly employed in the private and domestic labour sectors, while 71 per cent of Asian females alone work in the domestic sector.⁵

b. Migration policy in Kuwait

The Ministry of Interior largely manages the country's migration policy. The Domestic Workers Department within the Ministry is responsible for policies regarding domestic labour. Kuwait's migration policy is derived from its "Kuwaitization" policy, aiming to create a 100 per cent Kuwaiti workforce in the public sector and reducing the number of expatriates in the private sector.⁶ The Kuwait Public Policy Centre is mandated to provide suggestions to the Government on the formulation of migration policy. Considering the Kuwaitization, the country's frequent changes in rules and regulations governing migration have become less transparent. For transparency, the Public Authority of Manpower has created the Tazeez social media account, but it is only in Arabic.

Kuwait is the first and only Gulf Cooperation Council country to set a minimum wage (in 2016) for domestic workers, at 60 Kuwaiti dinar (US\$200) in 2016. Additionally, the Parliament passed a law in June 2015 that, for the first time, gave migrant domestic workers labour rights, including one day of rest per week, a 12-hour working day with rest and annual paid leave.

Kuwait issued a new standard contract for migrant workers, and a 2016 administrative decision allowed some foreign workers to transfer their sponsorship to a new employer after three years of work without their employer's consent. These reforms, however, do not extend to migrant domestic workers.

The education system does not supply the skills needed in the private sector. Most Kuwaiti students are enrolled in humanities and art subjects, with only about 30 per cent majoring in science, technology, engineering or mathematics. Students aim for public sector employment due to the higher wages and social status.

c. Labour demand and trends in Kuwait

Several features of the 2010 Labour Law have potential impact on nationals as well as the expatriate labour force in Kuwait. If implemented effectively, the law could enhance the welfare of all workers, including non-nationals. The elimination of the kafala system and regulation of foreign worker inflow by an independent authority could reduce visa trading and lower the migration costs for foreign workers. Transferring from one employer to another would also become easier.

Kuwait looks to develop and modernize its infrastructure to improve the quality of life for its citizens and residents. The New Kuwait: Vision 2035 guides investments into the construction sector.

Like other Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Kuwait has embarked on long-term infrastructure mega projects with heavy investment. For example, the value of construction projects in Kuwait is expected to more than double in 2023. Five ongoing projects to build housing units are costing a total of 3.22 billion dinar (US\$10.5 billion), the last of which is to be completed in 2029. Other infrastructure projects include a railway, a new airport, five planned cities and a metro service for Kuwait City. For each of those projects, Kuwait is in the process of importing labourers. Labour demand for migrant workers will remain high because their perceived work ethic is preferred to local workers, in addition to the lower wages and benefits that foreign workers are willing to accept. With the development of infrastructure, new jobs are expected to emerge in the hospitality (hotels) and retail sectors.

⁵ Gulf Labour Markets and Migration, *The Demographic and Economic Framework of Migration in Kuwait*, 2013.

⁶ Khitam Al Amir, "One-third of Expats Want to Leave Kuwait", *Gulf News*, 20 May 2021.

d. Migration to Kuwait from Sri Lanka

According to the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, 12,816 Sri Lankans registered as migrant workers in Kuwait in 2021. It was a dramatic decrease from the 46,914 in 2018 and the 43,073 in 2019, but an increase from the 8,015 migrants in

2020. Kuwait was among the top-five destinations for Sri Lankans for all four years. Among the total registered migrants in 2021, more than 30 per cent were men and 70 per cent were women. Table 14 reflects the number of registered migrants in 2021 by their skill category.

Table 1.3. Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment-registered migrants in Kuwait, by skill category, 2021

Skill category	No. of registered migrant workers
Professional	98
Skilled	3 055
Middle level	72
Semi-skilled	7 769
Clerical & Related	148
Low-skilled	1 674
Total	12 816

Source: Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment statistics, 2021.

As previously noted, the Middle East was the top region in terms of the origin of remittances to Sri Lanka from 2016 to 2021. According to KNOMAD's bilateral remittance matrix, the most remittances from Sri Lanka migrants in any one country came from Kuwait, at US\$115 million in 2021.⁷

Kuwait has made around 334 occupation types and 370,435 jobs available to Sri Lankan migrants. According to the latest available Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment data, 342,260 of those vacancies remain available.⁸

⁷ KNOMAD, "Bilateral Remittance Matrix 2021", n.d.

⁸ Bureau of Foreign Employment, "Foreign Job Vacancies", n.d.

Kuwaiti labour market demand

Recruitment pathways	Challenges and barriers	Skill gaps to be bridged	Visa process
<p>Professionals and skilled persons typically seek opportunities through personal contacts and direct job orders through Sri Lanka agents.</p> <p>A visit visa (tourist) is used to enter the country and search for a job .</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indians and Filipinos dominate the labour market with language proficiency and presentable personality Indian investors offer jobs to their own-country people Employment granted through foreign employment agents without connecting with the Kuwait Embassy (non-legitimate channels) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language skills (mainly a good command of English and the native language) Presentable personality and appearance Interview technique Knowledge of climatic conditions in summer Awareness of technology used in the country Culture and food 	<p>The employer provides a work visa for a contract period of 2–3 years for domestic workers, professionals and semi-skilled persons.</p>

Immediate and mid-term opportunities, 1–2 years		
Job category	Required qualifications (acceptance for local qualifications)	Work experience
<p>Low-skilled</p> <p>Domestic worker (female only)</p>	<p>Sri Lankan academic qualifications and professional qualifications are recognized. Applicants must have the Higher National Diploma for technicians from German Tech or technical colleges or related vocational training qualifications (NVQ levels 4–7).</p>	<p>Sri Lankan academic qualifications and professional qualifications are recognized. Applicants must have the Higher National Diploma for technicians from German Tech or technical colleges or related vocational training qualifications (NVQ levels 4–7).</p>
<p>Professional</p> <p>Accountant, engineer, architect, ICT professional, doctor, teacher, hospitality sector assistants , pharmacist, X-ray technician</p>	<p>And applicants must have English language proficiency. Work experience and skills assessment test-based evaluations are done by employers depending on the profession.</p>	<p>And applicants must have English language proficiency. Work experience and skills assessment test-based evaluations are done by employers depending on the profession.</p>
<p>Skilled and semi-skilled</p> <p>Electrician, automobile engineer, AC repair and maintenance, boat repairing, heavy vehicle driver, cleaner</p>		

Long-term opportunities, 3–5 years
<p>Health sector, tourism-related, hospitality, ICT sector, education sector, construction sector</p> <p>Technical-related: electrician, automobile engineer, air-conditioning specialist, boat repairer</p>

Kuwaiti labour market demand

Sector	Skill category	Occupation category	Education and Skill requirements	Time period	Comments	Salary benefits
Construction	Low-skilled	Low-skilled labour	Applicants must have a minimum education level of tenth grade and 1 year of experience. English proficiency (beginner) is expected.	In the Shortage Occupation List in 2023, and demand for these jobs are expected in the next few years too.	High demand in short and medium term	Low-skilled workers earn 75–170 Kuwaiti dinar per month. Skilled workers earn 400 dinar per month. Professional workers earn 2,000–4,000 dinar per month.
Construction	Skilled, professional	Erection engineer Construction engineer Project manager Civil design engineer Building management system engineer	Applicants must have 6–10 years of experience in a similar capacity. Work experience in oil and gas or petrochemical industries is a plus. The education requirements vary depending on the job. For example, erection engineers must have a Bachelor of Technology or Engineering (Electrical); construction engineers must have a bachelor's degree in engineering or Higher National Diploma or a diploma in engineering; project managers can have any level of graduation; civil design engineers need a Bachelor of Technology or Engineering (Civil); BMS engineers need a diploma (electronics, mechanical) or a Bachelor of Technology or Engineering (Electrical, Mechanical) or a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, or a related field. Applicants should be men only. BMS engineer applicants can be any Arab national, Indian, Pakistani or Sri Lankan.			The average monthly salary of a Kuwaiti man in the public sector is 1,929 dinar (US\$6,277). This is 43 per cent more than the average wage of 1,350 dinar (US\$4,393) paid to Kuwaiti women in the public sector.
Construction	Skilled, professional	Protection maintenance engineer Construction specialist Plumber and electrician	Applicants must have a minimum of 5 years of experience. Protection maintenance engineers must have a Bachelor of Engineering or Bachelor of Technology degree in electrical engineering from a National Board of Accreditation-approved institution eligible for Kuwait Society of Engineers membership registration. Construction specialists must have a Bachelor of Technology or Engineering, while plumbers and electricians can have any level of graduation. There are no preferred nationalities generally, but Indians are preferred for plumbers and electricians.			German Tech and related vocational qualifications (NVQ levels 4–7) are recognized and highly paid. Salaries are high, at a minimum of 500,000 Sri Lankan rupees per month for technicians.

Kuwaiti labour market demand

Sector	Skill category	Occupation category	Education and Skill requirements	Time period	Comments	Salary benefits
Domestic worker	Low-skilled	House maid House nurse Babysitter	Applicants must have previous experience working as a maid or in a related field. They must have fluency in a certain language (such as English or Arabic). And they should have the physical ability to lift and stand for long periods of time. They must follow instructions and work efficiently.	In the	Shortage Occupation List in 2023, and demand for these jobs are expected in the next few years too.	
Information technology	Skilled, professional	Web designer and developer	Applicants must have 3–6 years of experience and a diploma. There is no nationality preference.			
Health	Skilled, professional	BSC nurse	Applicants must have 3–7 years of experience and a Bachelor of Science (Nursing).			
Hospitality management	Semi-skilled, skilled	Waiter Waitress Hostess Bartender and cashier	Applicants must have 2 years of work experience in hotel operations and a relevant degree or diploma in hospitality or tourism management.			
Accounting, finance and administration	Semi-skilled, skilled	Accountant Office administration (female) Sales executive	Applicants must have prior experience. Accountant applicants must have a Bachelor of Commerce, Bachelor of Business Administration (Management), Bachelor of Arts (Economics) or a Chartered Accountant. For office administration, any graduation diploma is needed. Sales executives must have a Bachelor of Science; and business development managers must have a Bachelor of Technology or Engineering.			

Kuwaiti labour market demand

Recommendations for Kuwait

Key messages

- There is stiff competition from Indian and Philippine migrant workers for jobs. Fluency in English and Arabic languages are strong positive factors.
- In addition to construction, ICT and hospitality are two important sectors for Sri Lanka to promote migration to Kuwait.

Recommendations

- Immediate vacancies for 2023, such as in the ICT, hospitality, health and construction sectors, should be targeted.
- Strategies are needed to exploit the market potential for the next 3–5 years for jobs in ICT, hospitality and health care (nurses).
- Mutually beneficial migration should be continued through bilateral labour agreements.
- Demand-side information should be made available through country-specific job portals.
- Categories of professionals who can be sent to Kuwait should be determined and then send them through the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (currently, the job categories that are catered to are in the skilled and semi-skilled sectors).
- Public-private partnerships should be initiated to provide short-duration Arabic language courses for persons heading to Kuwait. Along with specific languages, there should be a course on the rules and regulations, culture and other values of the country that would be important for migrant workers to keep in mind when they are working in Kuwait. Knowledge about the visa process, laws and day-to-day living in the country must be provided.
- The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment training programmes should be structured to include awareness of language for all semi-skilled and low-skilled workers.
- At the final year of academic and tertiary school education, students should be given career guidance to identify foreign employment opportunities, language fluency in English as well as other leading language skills (German, French, Chinese, Italian and Arabic).



Oman

► Background

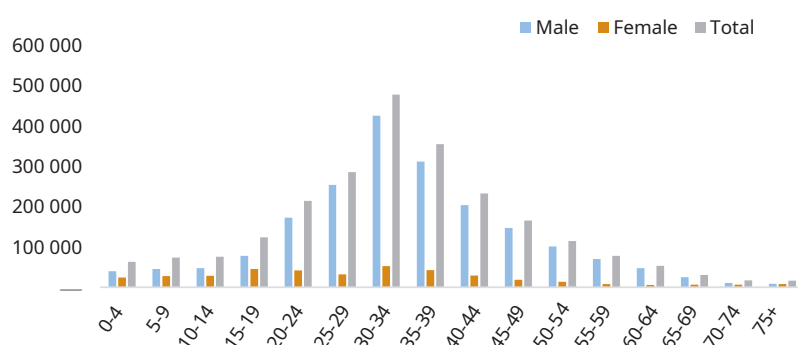
2. Oman

a. Migrant population in Oman

Oman is popular as a labour-importing country. In the scoring system adopted for this study, Oman placed fifteenth among the remittance origin countries and sixth among destination countries for Sri Lankan migrants. Overall, Oman ranked sixth in terms of its potential for skilled and professional migrants from Sri Lanka.

According to Oman's National Centre for Statistics and Information, the total population in 2021 of 4,507,468 persons included 2,757,983 Omanis (61.2 per cent) and 1,749,485 expatriates (38.8 per cent). But according to UN DESA statistics, 2,372,836 migrants lived in Oman in 2020; of them, 1,984,025 were men and 388,811 were women (figure 24).

Figure 2.1. International migrants in Oman, by age and gender, 2020



Source: UN DESA, Population Division, "International Migration Stock 2020".

According to Oman's National Centre for Statistics and Information's March 2021 statistics, Bangladesh nationals continue to be the largest migrant community in the country, with a total 546,615 workers and their dependants, followed by Indians,

at 491,427 persons, and Pakistanis, at 182,885 persons.⁹

The top-five sending countries in 2018 were Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Philippines and Egypt (table 17).

Table 2.1. International migrants in Oman, by country of citizenship, 2018

Country	Migrant population
India	748 461
Bangladesh	690 407
Pakistan	257 105
Egypt	50 431
Philippines	49 243
Uganda	31 986
Sri Lanka	23 063
Nepal	17 748

Source: Gulf Labour Markets, Migration and Population, "Oman: Population (selected nationalities and sex)", 2018.

The net migration rate for Oman in 2023 is 4.120 per 1,000 population, which is a 41.4 per cent decline from 2022, when the rate was 7.025 per 1,000 population, which was a 29.3 per cent decline from 2021, when the rate was 9.931 per 1,000 population. And that rate represented a 22.6 per cent decline from 2020, at 12.836 per 1,000 population.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information's Monthly Statistical Bulletin for January 2022, there were 1.131 million expatriates employed in the country's private sector in December. However, there was a 10 per cent decline in the number of expatriates working in the government sector, dropping from 38,073 public sector employees in November 2021 to 37,996 in December 2021. In total, there were some 1.38 million expatriates employed in Oman (Omans expat numbers on the rise since October 2022).

b. Migration policy in Oman

There is a strong downward trend in the number of foreigners in Oman. It is mostly due to several labour-related policies designed to prioritize Omanis for employment over expatriates, a trend called "Omanization". Some jobs in the private sector will be nationalized, and foreign workers in the country's public service will also be replaced by Omani nationals as part of a wider strategy called Vision Oman 2040 that seeks to diversify the economy away from oil and make it more beneficial to the local population.

In line with the Omanization policy, the Government enforced restrictions on non-Oman citizens in 207 job categories. By 2018, the Ministry of Labour had extended the ban to foreign workers in 87 jobs spanning ten sectors.¹⁰ According to Oman Vision 2040, the Government is looking to have Omanis fill a 40 per cent share in private sector employment.¹¹

c. Labour demand and trends in Oman

Oman citizens dominate the public sector while foreign workers are more numerous in the private

sector. Data from 2020 indicate that nearly 90 per cent of the public sector employees were Omani nationals.¹² However, the Omanization policies have brought more Oman citizens into the private sector than the public sector, which has had tough impact on the foreign labour market.

Due to the Omanization policy, there are only limited sectors and jobs open to foreign workers. Under the policy, the following occupations are reserved for citizens:¹³

- specialists: lawyer, civil engineer, accountant, legal adviser, department manager;
- technicians: primary school teacher, nurse, architectural draftsman, TV cameraperson;
- occupational workers: accounts clerk, general car mechanic, general salesperson, general leather worker;
- skilled workers: leather worker, welder, typist, electrician; and
- limited-skilled workers: newspaper vendor, machine operator, car repair or fitter.

The future demand for foreign workers will depend on many factors: the number of young nationals entering the labour market and the effect of the localization of labour markets; the ability of Omanis to create new jobs; the development of locals based on vocational training and skills-based courses; and the reduction of the gap between the needed and available skills of locals.

As with other Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Oman is invested heavily in infrastructure projects. Oman's Ras Al Khar Eco-Resort Su is among the mega projects, which include oil, gas and green fuel mega projects as well as projects in the health and education sectors. The infrastructure projects are generating jobs in the construction sector and the logistics and manufacturing sectors.

10 Mona Farag, "Oman's Latest Employment Rules for Foreigners Explained", in *NGulf*, 3 September 2022.

11 Government of Oman, *Oman Vision 2040*, 2021.

12 Author, "Skills Needs in the Oman Labour Market: An Employer Survey 2022", 2022.

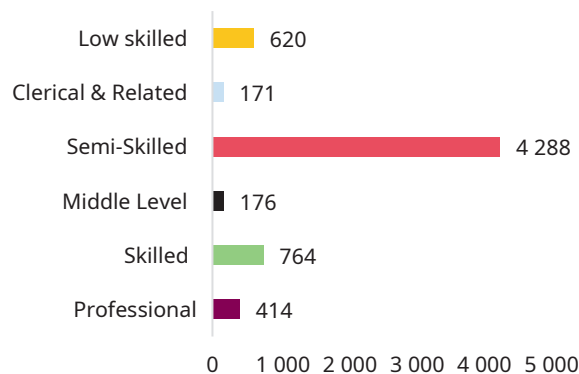
13 K.C. Das, and Nilambari Gokhale, "Omanization Policy and International Migration in Oman", Middle East Institute, 2010.

In the Oman Vision 2040, five sectors have been singled out as potential drivers of future employment and economic growth: Manufacturing was expected to be the major driver. For example, Liwa Plastic Industries Complex has created 13,000 jobs (1,000 direct and 12,000 indirect). Transportation and logistics, tourism, mining and fisheries are the other four drivers.¹⁴

d. Migration to Oman from Sri Lanka

According to the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, 6,433 Sri Lankans registered as migrant workers in Oman in 2021 (figure 25). This was a decline from the 8,329 migrants in 2018 and the 9,016 in 2019 but an increase from the 2,719 migrants in 2021. Among the total registered migrants in 2021, more than 75 per cent were men, with only 25 per cent women.

Figure 2.2. Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment-registered migrants in Oman, by skill category, 2021



Source: Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment statistics, 2021.

Again as previously noted, the Middle East was the top region for remittances going to Sri Lanka from 2016 to 2021. According to the KNOMAD's bilateral remittance matrix, all Sri Lankans in Oman remitted US\$78 million in 2021.¹⁵

Oman has made 39,251 jobs in 128 occupation types available to Sri Lankans. According to the latest available data with the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, Sri Lankans have filled 4,384 of the vacancies, with 34,867 still available.¹⁶

¹⁴ See Government of Oman, Oman Vision 2040, 2021.

¹⁵ KNOMAD, "Bilateral Remittance Matrix 2021", n.d.

¹⁶ SLBFE, Foreign Job Vacancies", n.d.

Oman labour market demand

Recruitment pathways	Challenges and barriers	Skill gaps to be bridged	Visa process
Job opportunities are found through employment agencies, Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment website and personal contacts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of English fluency to converse Finding reliable employment agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language proficiency in (English) Soft skills 	Work visa is acquired through the employer.

Immediate and mid-term opportunities, 1-2 years		
Job category	Required qualifications (acceptance for local qualifications)	Work experience
Professional and skilled Software engineer (Java, .net) Health sector: nurse, lab technician, radiologist, pharmacist	Sri Lankan academic qualifications and professional qualifications are recognized. Nursing applicants must have a degree or diploma in nursing and a Sri Lanka nursing registration. Caregivers for adults must have a certificate course in caregiving. For semi-skilled workers, German Tech, technical college or related vocational training qualifications (NVQ levels 4-7) are recognized. All applicants must have high IELTS score and English language proficiency.	Minimum work experience of 5-8 years is required for professional categories.
Semi-skilled Domestic worker (female)		Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment websites and personal contacts.

Long-term opportunities, 3-5 years
Software engineer, developer in the IT sector Domestic worker

Oman labour market demand

Sector	Skill category	Occupation category	Education and Skill requirements	Time period	Salary benefits
Transportation	Low-skilled	Transport in charge, driver	Applicants must have 3–5 years of experience and a secondary school education (academic or general).	In the Shortage Occupation List in 2023, and demand for these jobs are expected in the next few years too.	<p>The official minimum wage in the country is 325 rials per month, equivalent to US\$845.</p> <p>The average salary in Oman in 2023 is about US\$1,500 to US\$2,000 . Skilled foreign workers are paid several times as much, and in management positions, salaries often pay US\$9,000–US\$1,000,000 per month.</p>
Manufacturing	Skilled, professional	Sales manager, sales executive Production planning engineer Quality assurance engineer Product sales engineer	Applicants must have a diploma or graduate certificate in mechanical engineering. Courses in NDT techniques, such as MP/UT/DP, and familiarity with international NDT codes is expected. Sales manager or executive applicants must have a Bachelor of Business Administration (Management) or 5–10 years of experience in a similar capacity.		
Construction	Skilled, professional	Construction engineer Quantity surveyor Construction manager or supervisor	Applicants must have 12–15 years of experience and a Bachelor of Technology or Engineering degree. Multidiscipline activity knowledge in mechanical, civil, electrical and instrumentation in the oil and gas construction field is an added advantage. Applicants for construction manager and supervisor must have proven work experience in a relevant role, along with a bachelor of science in construction management, architecture, engineering or related field.		

Oman labour market demand

Sector	Skill category	Occupation category	Education and Skill requirements	Time period	Salary benefits
Construction	Low-skilled labour	Welder and construction worker	Applicants must have proven experience in a relevant field and experience in operating equipment, such as trench rammers, drills and pneumatic hammers (construction workers). Welders must have knowledge on welding equipment and procedures (TIG, MMA, etc.).		
Mining	Skilled, professional	Health and safety manager Mine geologist	Health and safety manager applicants must have a Bachelor of Technology or Engineering manager. Any graduate degree is accepted for mine geologist applicants. All applicants are expected to have 5–10 years of experience.		
Hotel and hospitality management	Skilled	Guest relation supervisor Guest relations officer Restaurant manager	Applicants must have proven experience in a similar capacity and familiarity with hospitality industry standards. They also must have proficiency in English, with knowledge of additional languages a plus. They must be computer literate and have a customer-oriented and professional attitude, an outgoing personality and outstanding communication abilities, along with excellent organizational and time-management skills. A diploma or a bachelor's degree in hospitality management is preferred.		
Hotel and hospitality management	Semi-skilled, skilled	Waiter or waitress Pastry chef Room attendant	Applicants must have similar experience with luxury hotels, a good personality with excellent communication and strong service-minded skills, along with a good command of spoken and written English.		

Recommendations for Japan

Key messages

- ICT and health are two important sectors for Sri Lanka to promote migration to Oman.
- Fluency in English and Arabic languages are strong positive factors.
- Most opportunities are for blue-collar, skilled and semi-skilled jobs, like software engineers and developers, nurses, lab technicians, radiologists and pharmacists.
- Most of the current emphasis is on domestic workers and the health sector, but opportunities are available in the IT sector as well.

Recommendations

- The formal pathway through Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment should be enhanced for aspiring migrants to access jobs in Oman.
- A page in prominent Sinhala and English newspapers should be developed by the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment to highlight job opportunities in Oman for interested parties.
- Public-private partnerships should be initiated to provide language courses for aspiring migrants to attend before departing for Oman. Along with language training, there should be a course on the rules and regulations and culture of the country and other values that would be important for migrant workers.
- German Tech students and other technical college students must participate in language course in their study programmes.
- Knowledge in handling technology equipment in the workplace (video demos) should be nurtured.



Qatar

► Background

3. Qatar

a. Migrant population in Qatar

Qatar ranked third in the scoring system used for this study, emphasizing its importance as a labour market that Sri Lanka could gain by using novel and customized approaches for orderly migration. According to the three scoring criteria, Qatar is in the top-five countries for remittances to Sri Lanka

and has received the most Sri Lankan migrants over the past few years.

The total migrant population in Qatar in 2020 numbered 2,226,192 persons (figures 12 and 13).

Figure 3.1. International migrants in Qatar, by gender, 2020

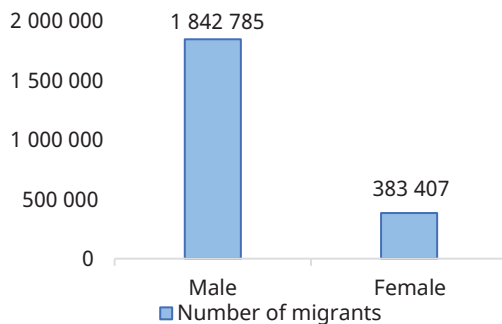
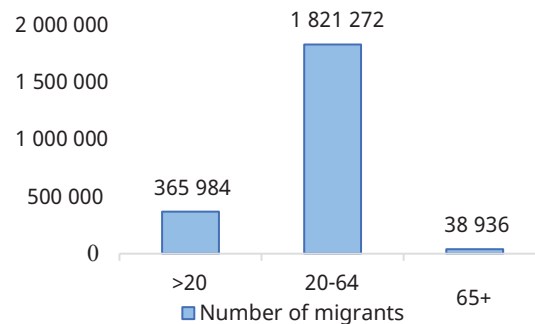


Figure 3.2. International migrants in Qatar, by age category, 2020



Source: UN DESA, Population Division, “International Migration Stock 2020”.

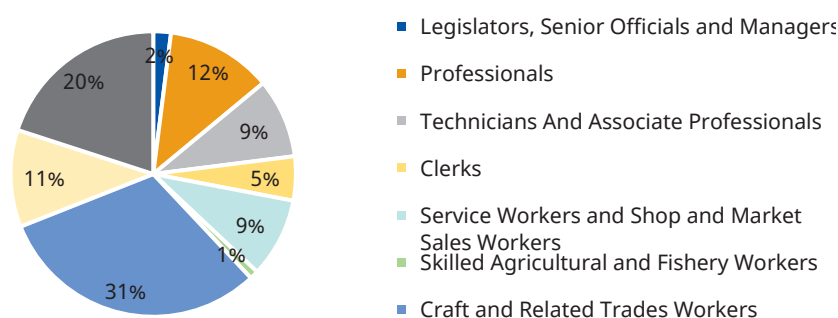
According to data from the International Organization for Migration, the top-five migrant-sending countries to Qatar in 2020 (latest available data) were India (by far), Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Egypt (table 10).

Table 3.1. Top-five migrant-sending countries to Qatar, 2020

Country	Migrant population
India	702 013
Bangladesh	261 672
Nepal	253 940
Pakistan	235 505
Egypt	183 544

Source: IOM, *World Migration Report 2022*, 2022.

As illustrated in Qatar’s 2020 census data (figure 14), the largest portion of non-Qatari citizens were employed as craft and related trades workers. Among them, a large portion had a secondary or post-secondary education attainment.

Figure 3.3. Percentage of non-Qatari nationals, by occupation

Source: Planning and Statistics Authority-State of Qatar, “General Population, Housing and Establishment Census 2020.

The non-Qatari workers with a university level of education were largely employed as professionals, technicians and associate professionals and craft and related trades workers (General population, Housing and establishment Census 2020 2020). Additionally, non-Qatari workers accounted for 99 per cent of the labour market in the private sector in 2012.¹⁷

b. Migration policy in Qatar¹⁸

Generally, issuance of temporary work permits and work visas or job recruitment are guided by the kafala system. Each foreign employee who enters the country must have a sponsorship from an employer. This sponsor can be an individual or a company. In this system, every employee is tied to their sponsor (called kafeel) for a specific contract period, and the employees are not allowed to change their job or change the destination country without the consent of their sponsor (employer). Some studies in Qatar have revealed that some sponsors exert excess control of their employees in an illegal way by keeping their personal documents, such as passport and other travel papers. Mostly low-skilled workers have been affected by this situation, and they experience labour exploitation and abuse at the

hand of their employer. Higher-skilled workers are less affected by this system because they cannot be replaced easily.

The kafala system has been heavily criticized internationally. It has demotivated migrant labourers to seek out Gulf Cooperation Council countries, especially low-skilled workers from Asia. Reforms have been encouraged.

A new employment law ushered in reforms in 2020 in terms of employment contracts, the minimum wage and the kafala system. The reforms also required that the termination of probationary workers be given a minimum of one month notice (from the previous minimum of three days’ notice); and the termination notice for outside of probation must be given one month for workers in their first two years of employment and two months for workers with longer employment. Violations require employers to pay compensation equivalent to the worker’s basic wage for the notice period or the remaining part of the notice period.

In case of redundancy, employers must submit a detailed statement with reasons for the termination, the number of workers and categories and the period when the termination will take effect. This

¹⁷ GIZ and ILO, *Labour Market Trends Analysis and Labour Migration from South Asia to Gulf Cooperation Council Countries, India and Malaysia*, 2015.

¹⁸ Source of information for this section: see Qatar Labour Law and Immigration: Recent Reforms, 18 January 2021; GIZ and ILO, *Labour Market Trends Analysis and Labor Migration from South Asia to Gulf Cooperation Council Countries, India and Malaysia*, 2015.

must be submitted to the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs at least 15 days prior to the termination.

As per the new national minimum wage law, the basic salary was revised to 1,000 Qatari riyal per month, as of March 2021.

The kafala system reform allows foreign workers to move between employers without consent of the previous employer. This means they are not required to obtain a no-objection certificate to move to a new employer. And they no longer need an exit permit to take up a new job in another country. Most importantly, the reform imposes a penalty for employers who violate the new labour law.

The Government has signed labour-related MOUs with several South Asian countries – Bangladesh (1988, 2008), Nepal (2005, 2009), Pakistan (1978, 2008) and India (1985, 2007) – that focus on the protection of migrant workers during recruitment, prior to departure, the content of contracts and salaries or wages.

c. Labour demand and trends in Qatar

The current trend in most Gulf Cooperation Council countries is to reduce dependency on oil and gas and diversify their economies in such “novel” (new or non-traditional) sectors as construction, agriculture, hospitality and manufacturing. Qatar is on a path to diversify its economy and create more job opportunities.

Qatar’s successful bid to host the 2022 World Cup was supported by its plans for developing large-scale infrastructure projects, such as a metro system, a light rail system, a new port, roads, stadiums and related sporting infrastructure. The Government recognizes that these large-scale infrastructure projects have led to increased job opportunities in the medium term and, in the long term, they may lead to an indirect creation of job opportunities in tourism, hospitality, cleaning, security services and other sectors. As highlighted in the literature, these infrastructure development projects may require low- and medium-skilled labour until around 2025 (table 12).

Table 3.2. Projected occupational categories of low-skilled or semi-skilled workers for medium-term demand, up to 2025

Construction and maintenance of buildings	Sales and services	Domestic work	Education and health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction supervisor or foreperson • Construction worker • Welder • Plumber • Electrician • Air-conditioning technician • Tiler • Mason • Carpenter • Crane operator • Maintenance engineer • Civil engineer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driver • Cook • Waiter • Other hotel service staff • Cleaner • Private service • Security guard • Gardner • Foreperson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic worker • Housekeeper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurse • Paramedic • Teacher

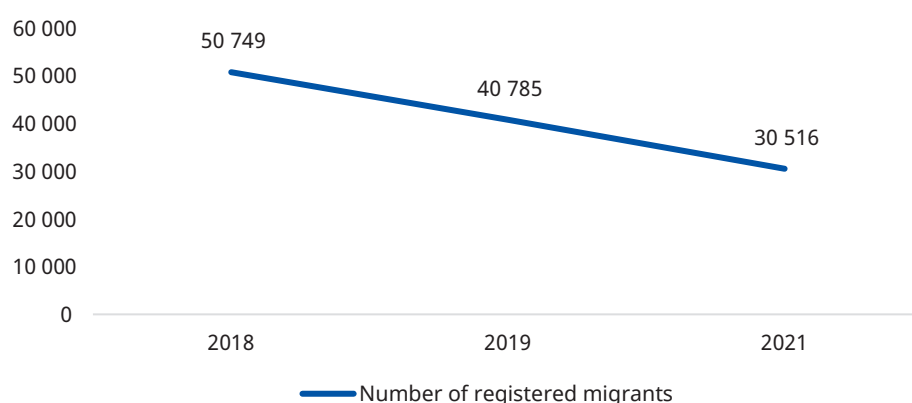
Source: GIZ and ILO, *Labour Market Trends Analysis and Labor Migration from South Asia to Gulf Cooperation Council Countries, India and Malaysia*, 2015.

The female migrant worker share is considerably small in all sectors except households with employed persons. However, the future trend forecast sees more demand for women workers for the country's economic expansion, with high demand for women with low- and middle-skill levels. When more Qatari women seek employment, there will be demand for domestic workers from foreign countries.

d. Migration to Qatar from Sri Lanka

According to Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment data, 30,516 Sri Lankans registered as migrant workers in Qatar in 2021, which was the largest number among all countries. But it also represented a decline: In 2018, there were 50,749 registered migrants and 40,785 in 2019 in Qatar, even though the country was in the top-three destinations for Sri Lankan migrants in those three years (figure 15).

Figure 3.4. Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment-registered migrants in Qatar, 2021

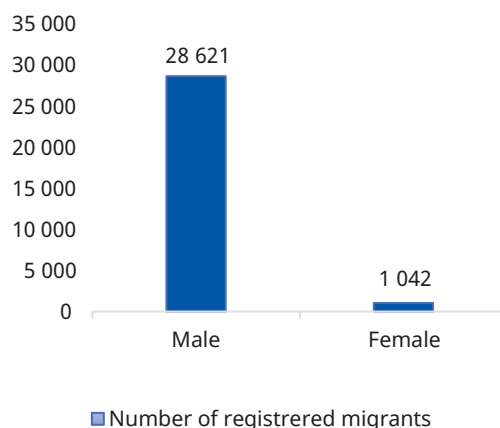


Note: 2020 is excluded due to the COVID-19 pandemic affecting migration.

Source: Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment statistics, 2021.

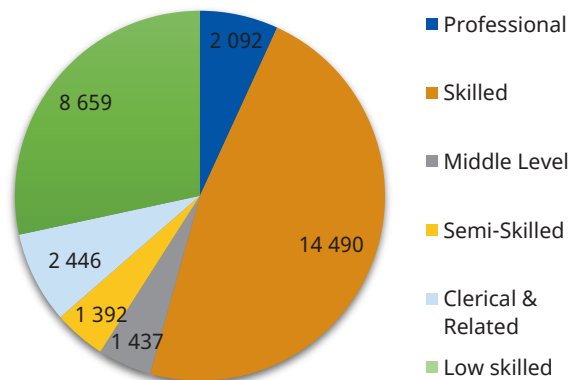
Among the total registered migrants in 2021, 28,621 were men and 1,042 were women (figure 16). The largest portion of Sri Lankans in Qatar were in jobs in the skilled categories (figure 17).

Figure 3.5. Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment-registered migrants in Qatar, by gender, 2021



Source: Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment statistics, 2021.

Figure 3.6. Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment-registered migrants in Qatar, by skill category, 2021



Source: Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment statistics, 2021.

According to KNOMAD's bilateral remittance matrix, Qatar was the second-highest source of remittances to Sri Lanka in 2021, at US\$487 million.¹⁹

The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment vacancies page as of June 2023 cited 702 job categories for men and women, with 74,430 positions (of an initial 100,081 vacancies) still available.²⁰

¹⁹ KNOMAD, "Bilateral Remittance Matrix 2021", n.d.

²⁰ SLBFE, "Foreign Job Vacancies", n.d.

Qatar labour market demand

Recruitment pathways	Challenges and barriers	Skill gaps to be bridged	Visa process
Job opportunities are found in the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of English fluency to converse Indian investors offer jobs to their own country people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English language proficiency Soft skills and mannerisms 	The work visa is acquired through the employer for a 2-year contract period.

Immediate and mid-term opportunities, 1-2 years		
Job category	Required qualifications (acceptance for local qualifications)	Work experience
Professional and skilled Nurse and caregiver Construction: civil engineering, mechanical engineering, maintenance, electrical engineering, civil engineering, AC repairing, ship and boatbuilding Hair dressing and salon staff Hospitality: waiter, steward and chef	Sri Lankan academic qualifications and professional qualifications are recognized. Nursing applicants must have a degree or a diploma in nursing and the Sri Lanka nursing registration. Construction sector applicants must have technical college or related vocational training qualifications (NVQ levels 4-7). And hospitality sector applicants must have taken hotel school management courses. English proficiency is essential for all applicants.	Minimum work experience of 3-5 years is required for all professional and skilled categories.
Low-skilled Domestic worker		

Long-term opportunities, 3-5 years
Construction sector Hospitality sector

Qatar labour market demand

Sector	Skill category	Occupation category	Education and Skill requirements	Time period	Comments	Salary benefits
Human services	Skilled, semi-skilled	Cook Waiter Other hotel service staff Security guard Gardner Foreperson	Applicants must have a degree or equivalent qualification in relevant subjects or a high school diploma or equivalent. They must have previous experience in a similar role and knowledge on security positions. Security guard applicants must be physically fit.	Forecasted until 2025	Concentrate on hospitality sector	The basic salary is 5,000 Qatari riyal per month.
	Low-skilled	Driver Cleaner	Applicants must be qualified with a secondary school diploma, have a valid driver's license (for drivers) and prior experience in a similar role. They are also expected to have verbal and written communication skills.		Supply side is very positive for this segment of migrant workers.	
Construction	Semi-skilled, low-skilled	Construction supervisor, foreperson Construction worker Welder Plumber Electrician Air-conditioning technician Tiler Mason Carpenter Crane operator	Applicants must have a preferred degree, high school or vocational education or an apprenticeship or valid certifications related to the subject. They also must have industry experience (especially Gulf country experience).	Forecasted until 2025	Should continue with this segment	
	Skilled, professional	Maintenance, civil engineer	Applicants must have a bachelor's degree or diploma in a relevant field and 6 or more years of experience in a relevant field. They also must have language proficiency and computer and soft skills. Having a Qatar driver's license is an added advantage.		Should fully concentrate on this segment	

Qatar labour market demand

Sector	Skill category	Occupation category	Education and Skill requirements	Time period	Comments	Salary benefits
Health	Skilled, professional	Nurse Paramedic	Applicants must have a bachelor's degree in medicine or a relevant diploma or degree as well as other relevant certification or valid professional license (Qatar Council for Healthcare Practitioners license or valid Qatar identification and National Occupational Classification) related to the role is preferred. In some cases, a master's degree will be preferred. Industry experience, proficiency in English and computer skills and skills in communication are expected.	Forecasted until 2025	Should fully concentrate on this segment	
Education	Skilled, professional	Teacher	Applicants must have a bachelor's degree at the least in a relevant field and a valid teaching license from a reputed organization or country. They must have at least 2 years of experience and excellent classroom management skills.	Forecasted until 2025	This is an important area to promote.	

Recommendations for Qatar

Key messages

- **In addition to construction, ICT, health and hospitality are two important sectors for Sri Lanka to promote migration to Qatar.**
- **Fluency in English and Arabic languages are strong positive factors.**

Recommendations

- Strategies should be crafted to explore the market potential for the next 3–5 years in the hospitality and construction sectors.
- Mutually beneficial migration should continue through bilateral labour agreements.
- Promoting skilled and semi-skilled migration to Qatar should be targeted.
- Demand-side information should be provided through country-specific job portals. Currently, job opportunities are found through the job agents, foreign employment agencies and personal contacts.
- Coaching should be available for semi-skilled aspiring migrants on etiquette, work ethics and laws of the country. Short-duration coaching in the English and Arabic languages for aspiring migrant workers should be made available through public-private partnerships.
- The most common migrants to Qatar are in the labour, semi-skilled and skilled categories in the industrial sector, although opportunities exist in the health sector for nurses and caregivers as well as in the hospitality sector, therefore they should be targeted.



Saudi Arabia

► Background

4. Saudi Arabia

a. Migrant population in Saudi Arabia

In the scoring system adopted for this study, Saudi Arabia placed in the top-five countries in all three criteria: global migrant population, remittances to Sri Lanka and popular destination country for migrants from Sri Lanka. Overall, Saudi Arabia led the top-15 countries.

Of the global migrant population in 2020 (figures 2 and 3), 38.4 per cent, or 13,454,842 migrants, were in Saudi Arabia (9,235,130 men and 4,219,712 women).

Figure 4.1. Saudi Arabia migrant population, by gender, 2020

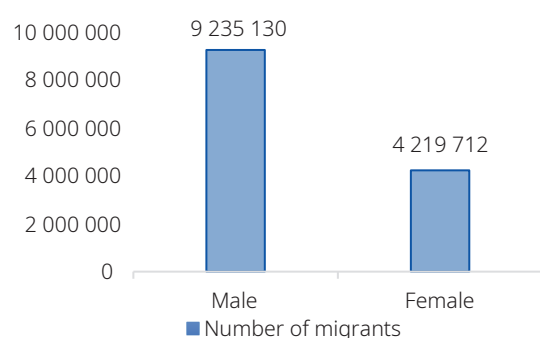
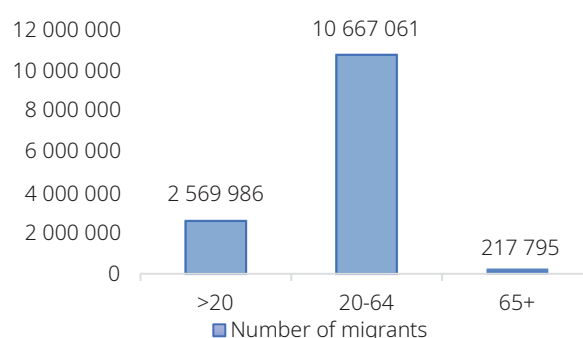


Figure 4.2. Saudi Arabia migrant population, by age category, 2020

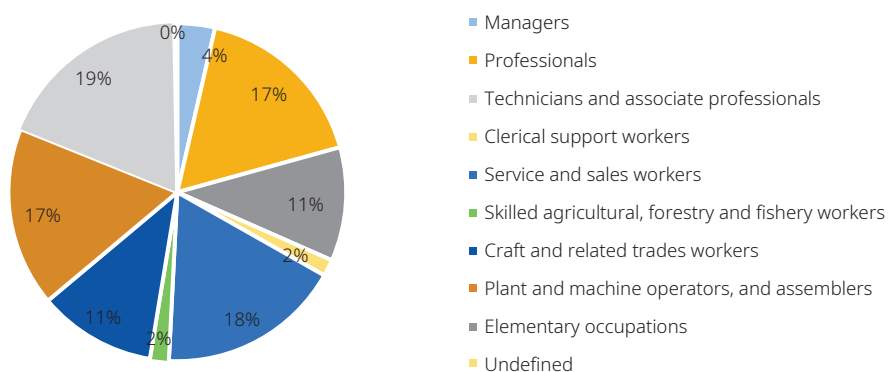


Source: UN DESA, Population Division, “International Migration Stock 2020”.

According to the 2022 labour market survey statistics for Saudi Arabia, 74.5 per cent of non-Saudi nationals were in the labour force. Among the employed non-Saudi nationals, nearly 50 per cent had a bachelor’s degree or equivalent qualification

or had qualified with an upper-secondary education. The main groups of occupation were service and sales workers. Employed professionals accounted for the second-largest portion (figure 4).

Figure 4.3. Share of non-Saudi nationals, by occupation

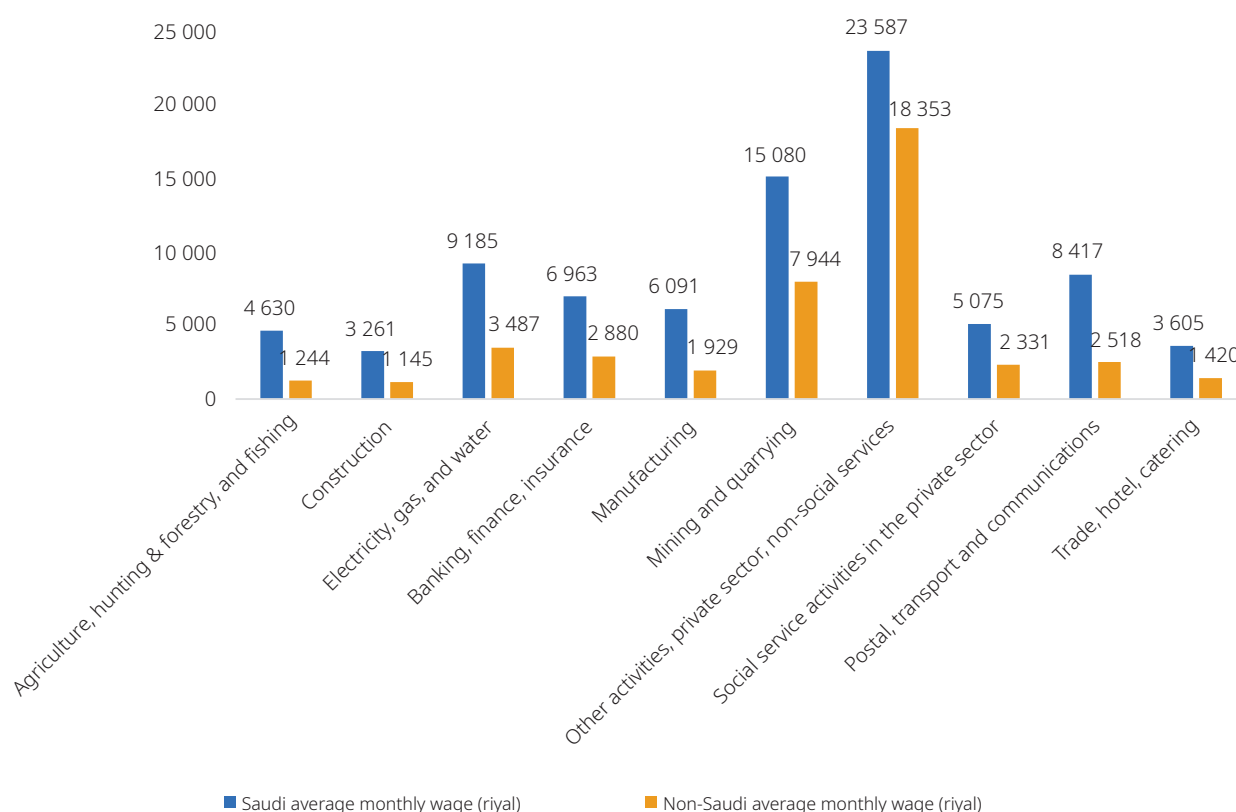


Source: Labour market statistics of Saudi Arabia, 2022 fourth quarter, General Authority for Statistics.

Wage levels between Saudi nationals and non-Saudi nationals vary considerably (figure 5). The data, albeit more than a decade old, suggest that nationalization of the labour market may rely on high labour costs. Thus, in the long term, it may

lead to a diminishing number of migrant workers in productive labour, while it may lead to a high demand for foreign workers with low skills in the short to medium term.

Figure 4.4. Average Saudi and non-Saudi wages, by sector, 2011



Source: ILO, Labour Market Trends Analysis and Labor Migration from South Asia to Gulf Cooperation Council Countries, India and Malaysia, 2015.

The literature points out that non-Saudi nationals make up a majority of the workforce in the private sector and predicts this trend to continue. According to the Central Department for Statistics and Information, foreign labour in 2011 (latest available data) accounted for 89.1 per cent of the private sector workforce.²¹

According to the *World Migration Report 2022*, Saudi Arabia was the third-largest destination country for international migrants. In 2020, the top-five countries of migrant origin (in Saudi Arabia) were India (by far, at more than 2.5 million persons), Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Egypt (table 4).

21 GIZ and ILO, *Labour Market Trends Analysis and Labour Migration from South Asia to Gulf Cooperation Council Countries, India and Malaysia*, 2015.

Table 4.1. Top-five migrant-sending countries to Saudi Arabia, 2020

Country	Migrant population
India	2 502 337
Indonesia	1 709 318
Pakistan	1 483 737
Bangladesh	1 277 624
Egypt	962 432

Source: IOM, World Migration Report 2022, 2022.

b. Migration policy in Saudi Arabia²²

In general, Saudi Arabia facilitates migrant recruitment through South and South-East Asia and Africa.

The controversial *kafala* system is the main method for sponsoring migrant workers in Saudi Arabia.²³ It provides the legal framework for relationships between employees and employers in most of the Gulf corridor countries, including Saudi Arabia. The literature is full of documentation on how this system creates labour exploitation, poor working conditions and discrimination by targeting cheap labour from other countries to support the emerging economies of the Gulf region.

The *kafala* system has been subjected to several reforms. With effect as of June 2021, it was reformed to allow migrant employees the freedom to change their job without their previous employer's permission and it gives foreign workers the right to leave the country without their employer's permission. The reforms aimed to improve Saudi Arabia's labour market attractiveness, especially after heightened media and activists' attention on human rights abuses among the migrant population. For instance, when recruiting domestic workers and low-skilled labour in small numbers,

recruiting agencies now act as sponsors. For the mega recruitment agencies that hire low- or semi-skilled workers in large numbers for manufacturing plants or construction companies, it is difficult to act as the sponsor. The *kafala* system remains important and practised.

The literature also stresses that these reforms have been significant steps to improve the migrant labour conditions and enhance labour market attractiveness, but they have not abolished the traditional system or unfair and inhuman treatment of migrants.

The Government of Saudi Arabia signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with India in 2014 regarding domestic workers that specifies their protection during the recruitment process, prior to departure, in the content of contracts with employers and through the provision of salaries.

Another main policy implication is the Nitaqat Law, which the Ministry of Labour introduced in 2011 to specify a system of categorization of firms by their main economic activity and size and sets targets based on the ratio of national and foreign workers. This practice, however, has led to the "Saudization" of the workforce, whereby nationals receive more opportunities. Although introduced

22 Source of information for this section: see Council on Foreign Relations, "Al Jazeera, "Saudi Arabia announces changes to Kafala system, 14 March 2021; and GIZ and ILO, *Labour Market Trends Analysis and Labour Migration from South Asia to Gulf Cooperation Council Countries, India and Malaysia*, 2015.

23 Each foreign employee who enters the country must have a sponsorship from an employer. This sponsor can be an individual or a company. In this system, every employee is tied to their sponsor (called *kafeel*) for a specific contract period, and the employees are not allowed to change their job or change the destination country without the consent of their sponsor (employer).

as a long-term plan, the literature reveals that in the foreseeable future, Saudi Arabia will continue to depend on foreign labour, especially in the labour-intensive sectors. Rapidly changing labour policies, revenue from oil and the expansion or merging of recruitment and migration institutions in origin and destination countries are creating many migrant-related uncertainties.

c. Current and upcoming labour demand trend in Saudi Arabia

As with other Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Saudi Arabia has been targeting economic diversification. Instead of depending on oil and gas revenues, the Government is looking to expand the economy in terms of trading, hospitality, human services and construction to create more employment opportunities for both nationals and foreigners.

In line with the Gulf Cooperation Council objective to create a knowledge-based economy, Saudi Arabia seeks more skilled and productive labour

than low-skilled labour, which should reduce the recruitment costs. Skilled and vocationally qualified labourers are preferred in the emerging sectors, such as automobile manufacturing and the green construction and production process. However, as stressed in the literature, the foreseeable migrant labour demand response will be led by the demand for low-skilled labour.

The manufacturing and wholesale and retail trade sectors are also considered as growing sectors that may create more opportunities for low- and semi-skilled workers. The automobile manufacturing and green construction (advanced water treatment systems and solar panel projects) sectors may require high-skilled or specific technical and vocationally skilled labourers.

Saudi Arabia has an initiative to shift from individual sponsorships to large-scale recruitment agencies. Table 5 depicts the projected occupational categories for low- and semi-skilled workers in the medium-term demand in Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

Table 4.2. Projected occupational categories of low-skilled or semi-skilled workers in the medium-term demand, up to 2025

Construction and maintenance of buildings	Sales and services	Domestic work	Education and health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction supervisor or foreperson • Construction worker • Welder • Plumber • Electrician • Air-conditioning technician • Tiler • Mason • Carpenter • Crane operator • Maintenance engineer • Civil engineer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driver • Cook • Waiter • Other hotel service staff • Cleaning labour • Private service • Security guard • Gardner • Foreperson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic worker • Housekeeper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurse • Paramedic • Teacher

Source: GIZ and ILO, *Labour Market Trends Analysis and Labor Migration from South Asia to Gulf Cooperation Council Countries, India and Malaysia*, 2015.

The share of migrant workers who are women is considerably small in all sectors in Saudi Arabia except households (domestic workers). But trend forecasts indicate that increasingly female labour will be required within the country's economic expansion, and there will be high demand for women with low-skill or semi-skill levels. And when more national women take up employment, there will be increased demand for domestic workers from foreign countries as well as other Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

Saudi Arabia's ambitious construction endeavors in the planned NEOM region, encompassing projects like THE LINE, Trojena, Sindalah, Oxagon, and more, are aligned with their 2030 vision. They have expressed a need for Sri Lankan workers in engineering categories, quantity surveyors, and

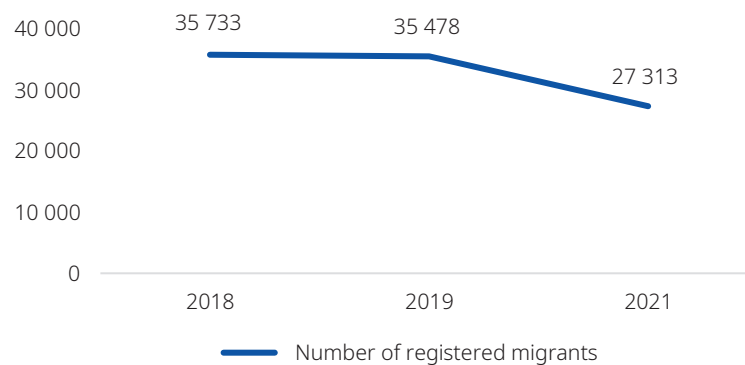
architects to contribute to these projects. This presents promising opportunities for Sri Lankans.

d. Migration to Saudi Arabia from Sri Lanka

According to the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, 27,313 Sri Lankans registered as migrant workers in Saudi Arabia in 2021, with the largest portion in semi-skill jobs. This was a decrease from the 35,733 migrants in 2018 and 35,478 migrants in 2019, although Saudi Arabia was among the top-three labour destinations for Sri Lankans for all three years (figures 6 and 8).

Among the total registered migrants in 2021, more than 60 per cent were men, with only 1 per cent women (figure 7). The other portion (nearly 30 per cent) did not define their gender in the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment statistics.

Figure 4.5. Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment-registered migrants in Saudi Arabia, 2018, 2019 and 2021



Source: Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment statistics, 2021.

Figure 4.6. Sri Lanka Bureau of foreign Employment-registered migrants in Saudi Arabia, by gender, 2021

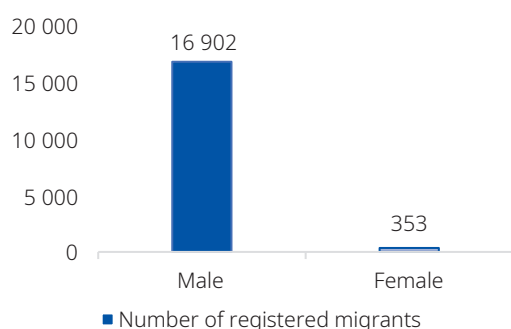
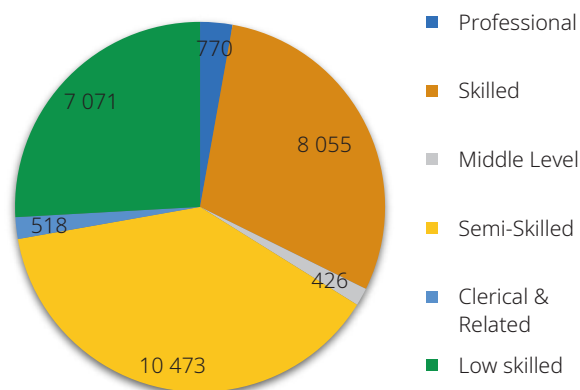


Figure 4.7. Sri Lanka Bureau of foreign Employment-registered migrants in Saudi Arabia, by skill category, 2021



Source: Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment statistics, 2021.

The Middle East was the top region for remittances to Sri Lanka from 2016 to 2021.²⁴ According to the bilateral remittance matrix, Saudi Arabia reported the largest volume of remittances in 2021 (latest available data) among all other countries, at US\$1,476 million.²⁵

Saudi Arabia has invited Sri Lankans to apply for 207,883 vacancies in 482 occupation types. According to the latest Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment data, 168,383 vacancies remain available.²⁶

²⁴ SLBFE, "Annual Statistics of Foreign Employment 2021", 2021.

²⁵ KNOMAD, "Bilateral Remittance Matrix 2021", n.d.

²⁶ SLBFE, "Foreign Job Vacancies", n.d.

Saudi Arabia labour market demand

Recruitment pathways	Challenges and barriers	Skill gaps to be bridged	Visa process
Job opportunities are found through individual job agents, foreign employment agencies, LinkedIn and personal contacts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many Indians dominate the job market due to biases from Indian investors in the finance, hospitality and construction sectors Lack of fluency in Arabic and English Know-how on using technology available in Saudi Arabia Only NVQ levels 5–7 recognized Work experience of 3–5 years in a similar field or capacity required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language skills in English Basic knowledge in Arabic language Knowledge about technology Work experience 	<p>There are different types of visas, including a tourist visa, but an employment visa is required to work in Saudi Arabia. A job offer is required beforehand because a work visa is not possible to obtain without a sponsor (employer), who must apply for the visa on behalf of the applicant. A signed employment contract must be received by the applicant prior to arrival.</p> <p>The work visa requires a letter from the employer or visa sponsor that has been certified by the Chamber of Commerce as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Interviews are conducted by the local agents as well as by the Saudi employers (online). Skills and work experience are given more weight during the selection process.</p> <p>A single-entry tourist visa allows a stay of up to one month (30 days), while a multiple-entry visa permits a stay of up to three months (90 days) in Saudi Arabia. The multiple-entry visa remains valid for a maximum of three months, irrespective of exits and re-entries during that period. Tourists cannot extend their visas and must depart from the country before their visa expires.</p> <p>A tourist visa can be converted to a work visa. It is possible to change a visit visa to a work visa, but it requires certain conditions to be met. The individual must first secure a job offer from a Saudi employer who is willing to sponsor their work visa. The employer will then apply for the work visa on behalf of the employee, and once approved, the individual can change their status from a visitor to a resident and begin working legally in the country. A temporary work visit visa is also a visit visa and is valid for a stay of up to 90 days. The visa is issued electronically without any documents and can be extended for another three months. Application is online through the website of the General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs and assistance for a visa can be obtained from the Department of Foreign Affairs in Saudi Arabia.</p> <p>See www.dfa.ie/travel/travel-advice/a-z-list-of-countries/saudi-arabia/</p>

Saudi Arabia labour market demand

Immediate and mid-term opportunities, 1–2 years		
Job category	Required qualifications (acceptance for local qualifications)	Work experience
<p>Professional and skilled</p> <p>Sales, technology, sustainability and human resources (most in demand jobs)</p>	<p>Sri Lankan academic qualifications and professional qualifications in the relevant field are recognized. Applicants must have a master's or postgraduate degree or a diploma in a related field. Accountant applicants must have a Bachelor of Science in Accountancy, with 2 years of experience. Applicants for work</p> <p>in beauty salons must have NVQ certification and experience in a salon for 1–2 years. English language fluency is required.</p>	<p>Professional segments require 2–3 years and 4–5 years of experience in a relevant field.</p> <p>Semi-skilled jobs require 1–2-year experience.</p>
<p>Immediate vacancies for 2023</p> <p>Contract manager Safety adviser Community director Housing adviser Facility manager Foreman engineer (civil) Foreman engineer (NEU) Foreman engineer (HVAC/Mech) IT or communication engineer Utility plant manager</p> <p>Landscaping engineer Safety officer Quality assurance officer Recreation adviser General supervisor Fire captain Food safety or quality officer Laundry supervisor Housekeeping supervisor Food and beverage manager Executive chef</p> <p>Recreation organizer Landscape supervisor Event or recreation organizer Gym instructor Housekeeping manager Laundry manager Weather station system group leader (instrumentation supervisor) Airfield lighting and navigation aids group leader (airfield lighting supervisor) Maintenance planner Electrician – industrial Fire alarm technician Heavy vehicle driver</p>	<p>Vocational training certificate and NVQ level 4 or more are recognized at a negotiable level.</p>	
Long-term opportunities, 3–5 years		
<p>Accountant, accounting technician Financial analyst Sales clerk and shopkeeper System administrator, system analyst Beauty salon staff: nail technician, hairdresser, receptionist Construction, oil and gas and retail industries: skilled and semi-skilled technician, project manager, quantity surveying Marketing, finance, banking, legal officer, supply chain, procurement, sales, business development, logistics, manager Hospitality and tourism: chef, cook, assistant chef, food and beverage manager, maintenance engineer Semi-skilled: heavy vehicle driver, domestic helper</p>		

Saudi Arabia labour market demand

Sector	Skill category	Occupation category	Education and Skill requirements	Time period	Comments	Salary benefits
Information technology	Skilled, professional	AI and machine learning specialist	Applicants must have 5–10 years of experience, a bachelor's degree in computer science, mathematics or a related field and strong knowledge of machine learning techniques and applications.	Long term	High market potential	Head of private banking earns 140,000–177,000 Saudi riyal per month. Legal partner (5+ years) earns 104,000–229,000 riyal per month.
Trading	Skilled, semi-skilled, low-skilled	Occupations in the small and medium-sized enterprise sector		Forecasted in Vision 2030 of Saudia Arabia	No specified qualifications or skills	Secretariat general in public sector earns 208,000+ riyal per month.
Hospitality					Plan to create 1 million jobs by 2030, mainly for Saudi nationals	
Sales and services	Skilled, professional	Project managers Client information and customer service workers	Applicants must have a bachelor's degree or equivalent, at least 3–5 years of industry experience, skills in problem-solving, project management software and methodologies, language proficiency (Arabic) and proficiency in cost management, finance, analytics and communication, as well as MS office packages.	Forecasted until 2025	High market potential	Chief strategy officer earns 135,000–180,000 riyal per month.
	Skilled, semi-skilled	Cook Waiter Gardner Foreperson Other hotel service staff Security guard	Applicants must have a degree or equivalent qualification in relevant subjects or high school diploma or equivalent and/or apprenticeship (such as horticulture) or previous experience in similar role. Technical skills expected for gardeners include mowing, trimming, weeding, planting, cultivating, fertilizing, watering, etc. Knowledge on security positions and physical fitness is expected of security guard applicants.		Required number of years in experience may vary from industry, sector, employer For security guards in some cases, opportunities limited to Saudi nationals	A group chief financial officer earns 104,000–150,000 riyal per month. Sales and marketing general manager can earn 59,000–68,000 riyal per month, while the head of corporate communications earns 51,000–56,000 riyal a month.

Saudi Arabia labour market demand

Sector	Skill category	Occupation category	Education and Skill requirements	Time period	Comments	Salary benefits
	Low-skilled	Driver Cleaner	Applicants must have qualified in secondary school. Drivers must have a valid Saudi driver's license, prior experience in similar role and verbal and written communication skills.		High market potential and one of the most preferred jobs among semi-skilled migrant workers in Sri Lanka. Fluency in English and Arabic languages is a strong positive factor.	A manufacturing: managing director earns 99,000–135,000 riyal per month. A human resources chief or a shared services officer can earn 104,000–156,000 riyal per months.
Construction	Semi-skilled, low-skilled	Construction supervisor, foreperson Construction worker Welder Plumber Electrician Air-conditioning technician Tiler Mason Carpenter Crane operator	Applicants must have a preferred high school or vocational education, apprenticeship or valid certifications related to the subject, industry experience with skills related to the industry (like masonry techniques, working with blueprints or plans). A bachelor's degree or equivalent in relevant civil engineering or related subject for construction supervisor or foreperson is required. All applicants must have language proficiency in Arabic.	Forecasted until 2025	Required number of years in experience may vary from industry, sector, and employer. Salary may vary based on the years of experience	
	Skilled, professional	Civil or maintenance engineer	Applicants must have a bachelor's degree in relevant field, at least 5 years of experience in engineering, maintenance and planning, language proficiency and computer skills		High market potential subject to fluency in English and Arabic languages	
Health	Skilled, professional	Nurse Paramedic General doctor Dentist X-ray specialist Deputy general manager Obstetrician Operations surgeon Technical performance monitor	Applicants must have a bachelor's degree in medicine or relevant diploma or degree, other relevant certification related to the role (preferred). A master's degree is preferred in some cases. A valid professional license, industry experience in clinical practice, proficiency in English and computer skills, skills in communication, leadership, time management, finance practices, etc. are expected for managers.	Forecasted until 2025 and forecasted in Vision 2030 of Saudia Arabia	High market potential subject to fluency in English and Arabic languages	

Saudi Arabia labour market demand

Sector	Skill category	Occupation category	Education and Skill requirements	Time period	Comments	Salary benefits
Education	Skilled, professional	Teacher	Applicants must have a bachelor's degree at the least in a relevant field and at least 2 years of experience.	Forecasted until 2025	High market potential subject to fluency in English and Arabic languages	
Automobile manufacturing	Skilled, semi-skilled		Applicants must have higher education or vocational qualifications.		Focusing on high-skilled or specific technical and vocationally skilled people	

Recommendations for Saudi Arabia

Key messages

- Demand for migrant workers is very high, and the trend is predicted to continue up to 2030.
- ICT and hospitality are two important sectors for Sri Lanka to promote migration in Saudi Arabia.
- Fluency in English and Arabic languages is a strong positive factor.

Recommendations

- Immediate vacancies for 2023 should be targeted.
- Strategies should be developed to exploit the market potential for the next 3–5 years, such as in the ICT, hospitality, accounting and business management, construction and beauty salon sectors.
- Mutually beneficial migration should continue through bilateral labour agreements.
- Promoting skilled and semi-skilled migration in Saudi Arabia should be a concentrated focus.
- Skills development programmes, such as English and Arabic, should be facilitated through public–private partnerships to provide short duration courses for migrants before they leave the country. Along with the specific languages, there should be a course on the rules and regulations, culture of the country and other values that would be important for the migrant workers to keep in mind when they are working in Saudi Arabia.
- Demand-side information should be provided through a country-specific job portal. Currently, job opportunities are found through the job agents, foreign employment agencies, LinkedIn and personal contacts and job sites. Because there are more opportunities in the skilled and blue-collar job categories, they should be advertised in prominent newspapers to create awareness. As well, explore the professional job market and link with available resources in the country to send migrants to Saudi Arabia.



United Arab Emirates

► Background

5. United Arab Emirates

a. Migrant population in the United Arab Emirates

According to the *World Migration Report 2022*, the United Arab Emirates is the sixth-largest destination country for international migrants.

In the scoring system for this study, the United Arab Emirates placed seventh among the top remitters to Sri Lanka and third among destination countries for Sri Lankan migrant workers. After evaluation of the study's criteria, the United Arab Emirates ranked second of countries with potential for Sri Lankan semi-skilled and professional migrant workers.

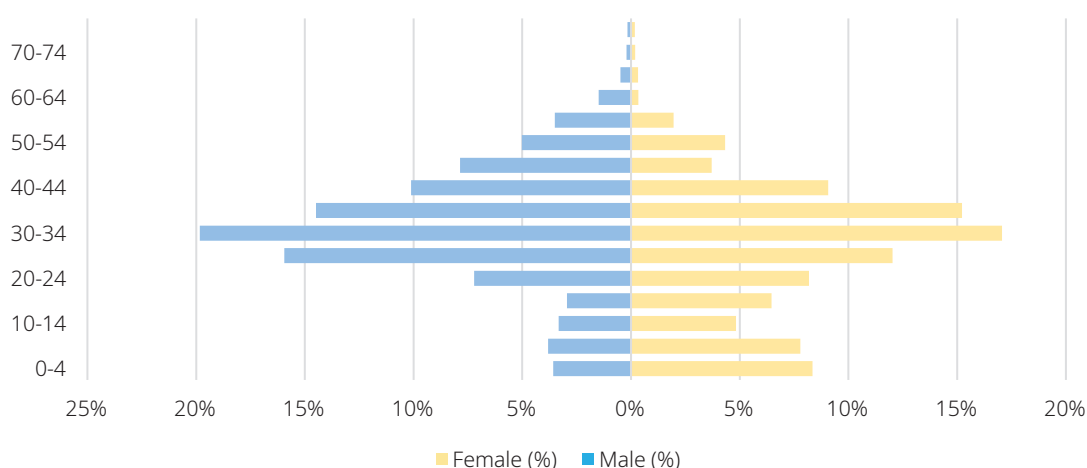
As of July 2020, there were 8,716,332 international migrants in the country, accounting for 88 per cent of the total resident population – nationals numbered 570,957, making them a minority in their own country (table 6). The United Arab Emirates thus has the largest number of migrants in relation to population. Of the foreign migrants in the country in 2020, 6,419,792 (73.7 per cent) were men and 2,296,540 (26.4 per cent) were women, at a ratio of almost 3:1 (figure 9).

Table 5.1. International migrants in the United Arab Emirates, 2010, 2015 and 2020

Year	Total migrants	Migrants (male)	Migrants (female)	Migrants (male) %	Migrants (female) %	Total United Arab Emirates population	Migrant %
2010	7 316 697	5 463 446	1 853 251	74.67	25.33	8 549 998	85.58
2015	7 995 125	5 890 170	2 104 956	73.67	26.33	9 262 896	86.31
2020	8 716 332	6 419 792	2 296 540	73.65	26.35	9 890 400	88.13

Source: Dubai Online, UAE Population 2022 – Total, Nationality, Migrants, Gender.

Figure 5.1. International migrants in the United Arab Emirates, by age and sex, 2020



Source: UN DESA, Population Division, "International Migration Stock 2020".

The net migration rate for the United Arab Emirates in 2023 is 0.433 per 1,000 population, which is a 63.4 per cent decline from 2022, when it was 1.182 per 1,000 population. And that year was a 38.8 per cent decline from 2021, when it was 1.931 per 1,000 population, which was a 27.9 per cent decline from 2020.²⁷ (Uae Net Migration Rate 1950-2023 n.d.)

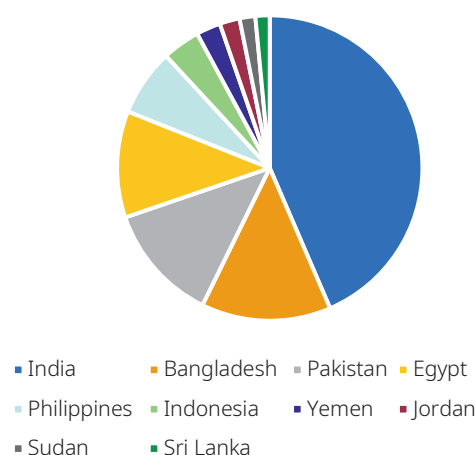
The biggest expatriate group in the United Arab Emirates is Indian (table 7 and figure 10), at nearly

40 per cent. Other large groups in the expatriate population are Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Egyptians, Filipinos, Indonesians, Yemenis, Jordanians, Sudanese and Sri Lankans (with Kuwaitis, Palestinians, Syrians, Lebanese and Nepalis represented in smaller numbers). Egyptians are the largest group from Africa. British nationals are the largest group from Europe. According to the data, Sri Lankans rank tenth.

Table 5.2. No. of international migrants in the United Arab Emirates, 2020

Country	No. of migrants	%
India	3 471 300	39.83
Bangladesh	1 095 231	12.57
Pakistan	996 288	11.43
Egypt	899 612	10.32
Philippines	564 769	6.48
Indonesia	318 809	3.66
Yemen	205 618	2.36
Jordan	168 968	1.94
Sudan	133 226	1.53
Sri Lanka	120 491	1.38

Figure 5.2. Top-ten migrant origin countries to the United Arab Emirates, 2020



Source: "UAE Population 2022 – Total, Nationality, Migrants, Gender".

Table 8 illustrates the percentage distribution of employed non-United Arab Emirati nationals by main groups of occupations.

27 Macro Trends, UAE Net Migration Rate 1950-2023, n.d.

Table 5.3. Percentage distribution of employed non-United Arab Emirati nationals, by main groups of occupations, 2019

Occupation	Non-United Arab Emirates		
	Male	Female	Total
Managers	9.8	8.3	9.4
Professionals	13.8	20.2	15.3
Technicians and associate professionals	11.2	8.6	10.6
Clerical support workers	3.7	6.5	4.4
Service and sales workers	14.9	13.9	14.7
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	1.2	...	0.9
Craft and related trades workers	19.2	0.2	14.7
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	12.2	0.3	9.4
Elementary occupations	13.8	41.7	20.4
Not stated	0.1	0.2	0.1
Total	100	100	100

Source: See uaestat.fcsc.gov.ae, 2019 data.

b. Migration policy in the United Arab Emirates

The five-year Green visa enables foreigners to sponsor themselves without assistance from United Arab Emirates citizens or employers under the country's new immigration policies. This visa is open to independent contractors, skilled employees and investors. Persons with a Green visa can sponsor their own family members. A Green visa holder has up to six months to renew their work permit when it expires.

The Golden visa offers a ten-year extended residency option. Golden visas are available to investors, business owners and people with "remarkable talent", such as professionals, sports stars, students and humanitarian pioneers.²⁸ Holders of a golden visa may also sponsor their children and relatives. If the holder of a golden visa dies, their family members may continue to reside in the United Arab Emirates as long as the visa is still in effect. The benefits of having a 100 per cent ownership of a business is also provided to holders of Golden visas under the new immigration regulations.

c. Migration trends in the United Arab Emirates

The labour demand for migrant workers in the construction sector is expected to increase in 2023 and in the coming years due to several mega infrastructure projects ongoing (33 currently) and planned. These projects require low- and semi-skilled labourers (table 9). Due to the country's infrastructure development, the tourism and care sectors have developed and are expected to generate job opportunities.

According to the 2015 ILO report Labour Market Trends Analysis and Labour Migration from South Asia to Gulf Cooperation Council Countries, India and Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates is expected to engage in sustained large-scale construction activities over the next 15 years, during which time the population of the urban centres will double. Sectors at the centre of this strategy are construction, real estate, tourism and hospitality, manufacturing, logistics, education and health care, with significant expected demand for workers at all levels.

28 "Everything You Need to Know About the Golden Visa UAE", n.d.

Table 5.4. Occupation categories for low-skilled and semi-skilled workers, up to 2025

Construction and maintenance of buildings	Sales and services	Domestic work	Education and health
Construction supervisor or foreperson	Driver	Domestic worker	Nurse
Construction worker	Cook	Housekeeper	Paramedic
Welder	Waiter		Teacher
Plumber	Other hotel service staff		
Electrician	Cleaner		
Air-conditioning technician	Private service		
Tiler	Security guard		
Mason	Gardner		
Carpenter	Foreperson		
Crane operator			
Maintenance engineer			
Civil engineer			

Source: ILO, *Labour Market Trends Analysis and Labor Migration from South Asia to Gulf Cooperation Council Countries, India and Malaysia*, 2015.

The United Arab Emirates has initiated reform of the controversial kafala system that gives employers inordinate control over migrant workers and severely limits workers' human and labour rights. Under the 2020 reforms, the Government defined minimum labour standards, introduced paid holidays, limited working hours and prohibited child labour. The changes have eased some of the contractual limitations for migrants, including domestic workers.

Recruiting agencies have an increasingly important role in recruitment, training and workforce management. By leveraging online job boards, social media and other digital tools, these agencies are reaching a wider pool of candidates and streamlining the recruitment process. There is a growing trend of mega-sized agencies.

The Government announced a long-term plan for the transformation of the Emirate's economy, focusing on knowledge-based industries. Entitled

Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030, the plan identifies the following immediate economic priorities:²⁹

1. Building an open, efficient, effective and globally integrated business environment.
2. Adopting a disciplined fiscal policy that is responsive to economic cycles.
3. Establishing a resilient monetary and financial market environment with manageable levels of inflation.
4. Driving significant improvement in the efficiency of the labour market.
5. Developing a sufficient and resilient infrastructure capable of supporting the anticipated economic growth.
6. Developing a highly skilled, highly productive workforce.

²⁹ See The Abu Dhabi, Economic Vision 2030, 2008.

7. Enabling financial markets to become the financiers of the economic sectors and projects.

The strategy contains three sectors and five pillars.

Three sectors:

- construction;
- medical products; and
- consumer products.

Five pillars:

- infrastructure;
- legislative structure;
- funding;
- talent; and
- market demand.

The country made history when women were hired as public bus drivers.³⁰ Demand for qualified women migrant workers typically spans job categories of sales rep, yoga instructor, nurse, special education

teacher, paralegal, media agent, administration assistant, waitress, receptionist and call centre agent.

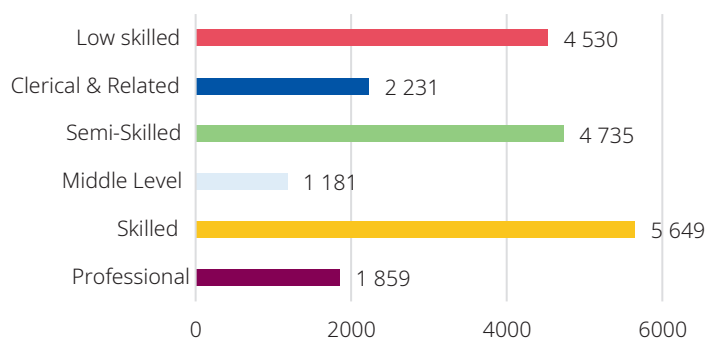
The majority of Emiratis who work do so in public sector jobs. Foreign low-skilled workers are sought for private sector jobs that offer low wages.

d. Migration to the United Arab Emirates from Sri Lanka

According to the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, 20,185 Sri Lankans registered as migrant workers in the United Arab Emirates in 2021. This was a decline from the 32,821 migrants in 2018 and the 32,860 migrants in 2019. The United Arab Emirates was among the top-five destinations for Sri Lankans for all three years.³¹

Among the total registered Sri Lankan migrants in 2021, more than 59 per cent were men, leaving women to account for 41 per cent (figure 11).

Figure 5.3. Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment-registered migrants in United Arab Emirates, by skill category, 2021



Source: Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment statistics, 2021.

As previously noted, the Middle East was the top region for generating remittances to Sri Lanka from 2016 to 2021. According to KNOMAD's bilateral remittance matrix, the United Arab Emirates reported \$356 million in remittances to Sri Lanka in 2021.³²

The United Arab Emirates has offered 76,080 vacancies in 386 occupation types to Sri Lankan workers. According to the latest available data with the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, only 4,921 vacancies have been filled.³³

³⁰ *Filipino Times*, "Dubai Hires First Women Bus Drivers in Middle East", 15 July 2020.

³¹ Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment statistics, 2021.

³² KNOMAD, "Bilateral Remittance Matrix 2021", n.d.

³³ SLBFE, "Foreign Job Vacancies", n.d.

United Arab Emirates labour market demand

Recruitment pathways	Challenges and barriers	Skill gaps to be bridged	Visa process
<p>Job opportunities are found through the individual job agents, foreign employment agencies, LinkedIn and personal contacts.</p> <p>Migrants can enter the country with a visit visa and look for work and then convert this visa to a work visa.</p> <p>To make things easier for expats who want to work remotely in the country, a remote work visa is valid for 1 year. It allows holders to relocate to Dubai and legally work for their current company or organization remotely.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Threat of Indians in the labour market who are dominating in United Arab Emirates because they get plenty of opportunities through the Indian investor counterparts in the finance sector, hospitality sector and construction. Language skills in Arabic and English is required. Lack of knowledge about use of technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language skills in English Knowledge in native language is an advantage. Soft skills and knowledge about the culture to work collaboratively with multicultural society. Knowledge about technology 	<p>An offer letter from the employer or contract is required to apply for job visa. An employer-sponsored resident permit requires Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization approval and an employment contract. The visa process takes about 2 months.</p> <p>An employment entry visa, known as a pink visa, is required. To begin the process of obtaining this permit, the employer must apply for visa quota approval on behalf of the employee. This approval will be obtained through the Ministry of Labour.</p> <p>Visit visa permits a stay of up to 30 days and is valid for 58 days from the date of issuance. Invitation letter, passport copy and valid residence visa copy of the host is necessary to apply, along with an onward and return confirmed ticket.</p>

Immediate and mid-term opportunities, 1–2 years

Job category	Required qualifications (acceptance for local qualifications)	Work experience
Sales, technology, sustainability and human resources (most in demand)	Applicants must prove good health (free of HIV or tuberculosis) and no criminal record. They also must be at a professional level, at skill levels 1–5 (explained below) and they must have a certificate higher than a secondary certificate or an equivalent certificate.	Professional segments require 2–3 years and 4–8 years of experience in the relevant field or similar capacity.
Several industries in the energy sector require science, technology and engineering specialist	The certificate must be attested by the responsible authority. The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization has defined nine levels of employment:	Semi-skilled jobs require 1–2-years of experience with work certificates.
Construction, oil and gas and retail industries: skilled and semi-skilled technician, project manager, quantity surveying	Level 1: legislator, manager, business executive	
Marketing, finance, banking, legal officers, supply chain, procurement, sales, business development, logistics, managerial positions	Level 2: professional in scientific, technical and human fields	
Hospitality and tourism: chef, food and beverage manger, maintenance engineers	Level 3: technician in scientific, technical and humanitarian fields	
Semi-skilled: heavy vehicle driver, domestic helper, cleaner	Level 4: writing professional	
	Level 5: service and sales occupation	
	Level 6: skilled worker in agriculture, fishery and animal husbandry	
	Level 7: craftsperson in construction, mining, other crafts	
	Level 8: operator and assembler of machinery and equipment	
	Level 9: simple profession, including cleaner and domestic worker	

Long-term opportunities, 3–5 years

Engineering specialist, IT and data engineers, telecom, engineering, quantity surveying, auto technician
 Hospitality and tourism: chef, food and beverage manager, maintenance engineer
 Education sector: primary and early childhood teacher
 Semi-skilled: heavy-vehicle driver, housekeeping assistant, domestic cleaner

United Arab Emirates labour market demand (Dubai*)

Recruitment pathways	Challenges and barriers	Skill gaps to be bridged	Visa process
<p>There is a trend where migrant workers visit on tourist visa and search for jobs.</p> <p>Job opportunities are searched via LinkedIn, websites, employment agents and personal contacts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of English fluency to converse Indians dominate the labour market with their language proficiency and personal contacts with the business community in Dubai Indian investors offer jobs to their own country people Medical qualification from a medical school listed in the International Medical Education Directory of the Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English language proficiency 	<p>Work visa through the employer for 2-year contract period.</p> <p>Minimum fee of 1,200 diram for domestic workers (men and women)</p>

Immediate and mid-term opportunities, 1-2 years		
Job category	Required qualifications (acceptance for local qualifications)	Work experience
<p>Professional and skilled</p> <p>Nurse, caregiver, doctor, lab technician</p> <p>Banking, insurance and finance officer</p> <p>IT sector: software development</p> <p>Lawyer</p> <p>Teacher, tutor</p> <p>Distribution, supply chain, logistics</p> <p>Facilities, property management</p> <p>Business consultancy services</p> <p>Automotive repair, spare parts, support services</p>	<p>Sri Lankan academic qualifications and professional qualifications are recognized.</p> <p>Medical doctor applicants must hold a medical qualification listed from a medical school listed in the International Medical Education Directory of the Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research.</p> <p>The United Arab Emirates accepts American training inclusive of medical school, residency and fellowship.</p> <p>Required to be a graduate of an allopathic medical school listed in the Avicenna Directory of Medical Schools published by the WHO, or the International Medical Education Directory.</p> <p>Nurse applicants must have a degree or diploma in nursing and the Sri Lankan nursing registration. A certificate course in caregiving for the adult caregivers.</p> <p>German Tech, technical colleges and related vocational training qualifications (NVQ levels 4-7) are recognized.</p> <p>All applicants must have English language fluency.</p>	<p>Minimum work experience of 3-5 years is required for professional and skilled categories.</p>

Long-term opportunities, 3-5 years
<p>Health sector: Nursing, lab technicians</p> <p>Finance and insurance sector</p> <p>Construction sector – engineers and semi-skilled labour</p> <p>IT sector – software engineering</p> <p>BPOs and hybrid operations</p>

United Arab Emirates labour market demand

Sector	Skill category	Occupation category	Education and Skill requirements	Time period	Salary benefits
Construction and maintenance of buildings	Skilled, low-skilled	Construction worker, welder, plumber, electrician, air-conditioning technician, tiler, mason, carpenter, crane operator	Applicants must have higher secondary, secondary school, vocational course or professional degree. At least 2–5 years of experience working in a similar role is expected.	Project occupational categories of low-skilled or semi-skilled workers in demand, up to 2025	Expats in the United Arab Emirates are not required to pay any personal or corporate income tax, which provides a unique opportunity to receive a 100 per cent tax-free salary or wage in Dubai and other Emirates.
Construction and maintenance of buildings	Skilled, professional	Construction supervisor, foreperson, maintenance engineer, civil engineer	Applicants must have a degree in civil engineering or equivalent from a recognized university. Excellent command of English, both written and spoken, and at least 2–5 years of experience working in a similar role is also required.		The gross salary range is typically from 4,607 dirham (minimum salary) to 23,955 dirham (highest average, actual maximum salary is higher). For a human resource job, the average is 14,489 dirham per month. A job in medicine or social care earns an average of 11,420.80 dirham per month. A job in production earns an average of 11,640 dirham per month. While in telecommunications, the average salary is 15,342 dirham per month.
Sales and services	Skilled	Data entry clerk, administrative assistant, customer service representative	Applicants must have a degree from a recognized institution and proven experience as a data entry administrator or similar role.		
Hotel and hospitality	Low-skilled	Cook, waiter, other hotel service staff	Applicants must have passion for hospitality, with a minimum 2 years of experience in a similar role.		
Hotel and hospitality Construction	Low-skilled	Driver, cleaner, security guard, gardener	Applicants must have a minimum 2 years of experience in a similar role.		
Education and health	Skilled, professional	Nurse, paramedic, teacher	Applicants must have a bachelor's degree in the field and at least 2–5 years of experience working in a similar role.		
Domestic work	Low-skilled	Domestic worker, housekeeper, gardener, security guard	Applicants must have at least 3 years of experience in the same role.		

Recommendations for United Arab Emirates

Key messages

- ICT, science, technology and engineering and hospitality sectors have high demand for skilled and semi-skilled workers.
- Fluency in English and Arabic are strong positive factors.
- Skilled and semi-skilled jobs require work experience.

Recommendations

- The formal pathway should be enhanced through Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment for aspiring migrants to access jobs in the United Arab Emirates.
- Knowledge in handling technology and equipment in the workplace (video demos) and multitasker skills should be provided.
- Remote working opportunities for the professional categories should be identified and promoted.
- Public-private partnerships should be initiated to provide short duration Arabic language courses to be learned before leaving the country. Along with the specific languages, there should be a course on the rules and regulations, culture of the country and other values that would be important for the migrant workers to keep in mind when they are working in the country.
- Because there are more opportunities in the skilled and blue-collar job categories, they should be advertised in prominent newspapers to create awareness. Also, the professional job market should be explored to link with available resources in the country to send migrants to the United Arab Emirates.



Israel

Israel labour market demand

Sector	Skill category	Occupation category	Education and skills requirements	Time period
High tech	Skilled, professional	Developer AI specialist Python programmer Algorithm developer Cybersecurity analyst, specialist, researcher DevOps engineer	Applicants must have a bachelor's or master's degree in computer science or related discipline and deep knowledge of computer architecture and computer languages. They also are expected to have industry experience plus communication, independent working and team-playing skills and proficiency in English.	Current
Health and nursing care industry	Skilled, professional	Doctor Nursing Caregiving	Applicants must have a degree in medicine or relevant professional qualification, the required industry license and experience. They also must have strong verbal and written communication, interpersonal, teamwork and organizational skills and proficiency in English.	
Social welfare	Low-skilled	Social worker (nanny or child protective services, foster care)	Applicants should have previous experience with a similar role and personal skills, such as patience and understanding.	
Construction	Semi-skilled	Building and construction related	Applicants should have a high school or relevant industrial qualification plus experience in the construction sector.	
Other	Skilled, professional	Project manager	Applicants must have strong management and communication skills, with 2–4 years of industry experience, skills in leading a project or team and strong technical understating. And they should be a self-learner.	

Recommendations for Israel

Key messages

- High tech, nursing care and construction industries require foreign labour mainly for skilled and semi-skilled occupations.
- Fluency in English and Hebrew are strong positive factors.

Recommendations

- Public-private partnerships should be initiated to provide English and Hebrew language courses before migrants depart for jobs in Israel.
- More information on labour market demands for migrant workers in Israel must be made available.
- Knowledge in handling technology and equipment in the workplace (video demos) and multitasker skills must be provided through training courses.
- The presence of migrant workers in Israel is not as prevalent as in other countries. Opportunities are opening up in the health sector, especially for caregivers. The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment should create awareness of these opportunities on their website or through mainline media.

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