

## Indian Migrants in UAE

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### ABSTRACT

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is home to many Indian expatriates. As a result of the oil boom and the diversification into various sectors of the oil economy, the UAE hired a large non-national workforce for the success of development projects and projects. The majority of migrant workers come from South and Southeast Asia, particularly India, which is one of the largest migrant communities in the UAE. They come to the UAE for a variety of reasons, including job possibilities, greater income, and better living conditions. The purpose of this study is to provide an overview of Indian immigrants, including migration trends and patterns, employment, community and culture, social assistance, and the contribution of migrants in the UAE. According to the conclusions of this report, India is the largest manpower supply country to the UAE. Economic and demographic factors force Indians to migrate to the UAE and support various economic activities such as construction, manufacturing, retail, health care, and so on in the host country; as a result, expatriates receive large remittances, which influence the emigrants', their families', and India's, standard of living.

**Key Words :** Indian Migrants, UAE-India Relations, Contribution, Social Support

### INTRODUCTION

The United Arab Emirates' strategic location has facilitated international trade and commercial activities, particularly in oil. The discovery of oil in 1958 and subsequent price hikes in 1973, along with economic diversification policies, have accelerated industrialization and social changes in the UAE<sup>1</sup>. This procedure demanded the services of a huge workforce, primarily from foreign countries. According to the International Trade Administration Report, the UAE is now the sixth biggest oil reserve country in the world. At the same time, it ranks

seventh in terms of proven natural gas reserves<sup>2</sup>.

Initially, workforces were provided by nearby Asian and African countries; then, Europeans began to offer workers as well. The greatest number of migrants are from South and Southeast Asia, particularly India. The Indian Subcontinent and its neighbouring countries are major manpower providers to the Gulf region. In this aspect, India takes the lead as a source of manpower for the region. According to recent research, the number of Indian expatriates worldwide has reached around 22-25 million at present<sup>3</sup>. And more than half of all Indian expatriates live in the GCC nations, which have the

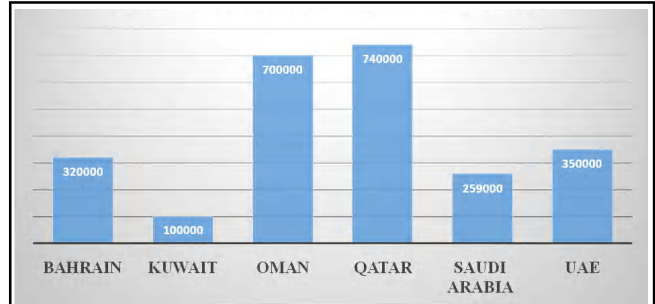
1. Md. Faiyaz Afzal, "United Arab Emirates: A Study of Indian Emigrants," in *Social and Economic Development- Issues and Challenges in India*, ed. SeydNaushad Ahmad, Ateeque A, and Nizamuddin Khan (Delhi: A.K. Publication 2019), Accessed November 23, 2023, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329786260\\_United\\_Arab\\_Emirates\\_A\\_Study\\_of\\_Indian\\_Emigrants](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329786260_United_Arab_Emirates_A_Study_of_Indian_Emigrants).
2. "United Arab Emirates - Oil and Gas," International Trade Administration, accessed December 8, 2023, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/united-arab-emirates-oil-and-gas>.
3. Imad Abu Al-Futouh, "Millions of workers and thousands of businessmen," *Aljazeera*, June 29, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.net>.

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highest number of Indians outside of India<sup>4</sup>. The Indian expatriate community is the biggest ethnic community in the UAE, accounting for nearly 30% of the country's population. According to UAE data, the number of resident Indian Nationals is expected to reach 3.5 million in 2021. Indian migrants significantly contribute to UAE's economy through work and remittances, fostering economic and cultural ties. They have influenced and acclimatized to the Gulf region's culture and customs, playing a crucial role in both countries' development.

### Trends and Patterns of Indian Migrants in the UAE:

According to data from the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the number of Indians in the UAE has surpassed the 3.5 million mark, although the entire population has yet to hit the 10 million mark<sup>5</sup>. There are over 2.5 million Indians in Saudi Arabia, more than a million in the State of Kuwait, approximately 780,000 in the Sultanate of Oman, and 760,000 in the State of Qatar, with approximately 332,000 Indians in Bahrain<sup>6</sup>. In the UAE, the number of Indian residents (3.5 million) outnumbers the total number of citizens (2.7 million), accounting for 30% of the overall population. The number



**Source:** Sanjay Kumar, "With 9m in Gulf countries, GCC makes top destination for Indian expats," Arab News, July 30, 2023, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2346486/world>

**Fig. 1 : Population of Indian Migrants in the GCC states**

of Indian residents in Qatar is 760,000, which is more than double the number of Qatari nationals (320,000). In Kuwait, the number of Indian experts is about equal to the Kuwaiti population by nearly one million persons, while the number of Indians resident in Bahrain is roughly equivalent to half the Bahraini population. While the overall number of Indians in Oman is close to one-third of the Omani population<sup>7</sup>.

### Community and Employment:

Indian scholar Neha Kohli's research identifies three main groups of Indian labor in Gulf States: unskilled, semiskilled, and skilled. The unskilled group includes workers in construction, municipalities, cleaning, and farms, while the semiskilled group includes professionals in public and private sectors. The skilled group includes businessmen, investors, and capital owners who own and contribute to investments in Gulf countries<sup>8</sup>.

According to research statistics, the first and second categories represent the majority of the Indian community in the Gulf countries, where the numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled workers reach approximately 70% of total Indians in the region, with a clear increase for the semi-skilled workers compared to previous decades<sup>9</sup>.

Years	Indian Migrants (%)	Total population of UAE
2000	55,099 (1.85%)	3275333
2005	194412 (4.37%)	4280993
2010	130910 (1.58%)	8481771
2015	285220 (3.12%)	8916899
2020 <sup>1</sup>	3,471,000 (3.5million) (35.0% of the UAE's population)	92,87,289
2021	3.5 million (30%)	9365145
2022	3,425,144(3.419 million)	9441129
2023	3.5 million	9516871

Sources: Ruchi Singh, "Origin of World's Largest Migrant Population, India Seeks to Leverage Immigration," *MPI*, March 9, 2022, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/india-migration-country-profile>. <https://www.macro-trends.net/countries/ARE/uae/population>.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. HudhaifaEbrahim, "Indian Businesses Invest Billions inGcc," the Medialine, November 5, 2023, <https://themedialine.org/life-lines/indian-businesses-invest-billions-in-gcc/>.

7. Imad Abu Al-Futouh, "Millions of workers and thousands of businessmen."

8. Imad Abu Al-Futouh, "Millions of workers and thousands of businessmen."









9. Ibid.

According to a recent research, the migration of blue-collar workers from India to the Gulf States increased by 50% in the first seven months of 2023<sup>10</sup>. Among the Indian states, Kerala had the highest representation followed by Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh in terms of labour in 2021. However, Indians from the northern states, combined with other states, also form a significant portion of the Indian population of the UAE<sup>11</sup>. According to a

recent study, there has been a significant shift in migration trends over the last decade, with Kerala witnessing a heavy decline in workers travelling to Middle Eastern countries<sup>12</sup>. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have begun to replace Kerala, which was a major supplier of blue-collar workers from India in the GCC region<sup>13</sup>.

A 2022 UAE report shows that Indians in the UAE work in various sectors, with 65% in blue-collar jobs,

**Table 2 : Some Richest Indian Businessmen in the Gulf**

			
<p><b>M.A. Yusuff Ali</b> \$8.4 billion (revenue), Chairman &amp; Managing Director of LuLu Group with various hypermarkets and malls</p>	<p><b>B.R. Shetty</b> \$ 4 Billion net worth Health Care and Medicine service</p>	<p><b>Ravi Pillai</b> Net Worth: \$3.2B Company: RP Group of Companies Sector: Real estate and construction</p>	<p><b>Micky Jagtiani</b> Net Worth: \$5.2B Company: Landmark Group Sector: retail stores</p>
			
<p><b>Sunny Varkey</b> Net Worth: \$3B Company: GEMS Education Sector: Education</p>	<p><b>Shamsheer Vayalil</b> Net Worth: \$3.8B Company: VPS Healthcare Sector: Healthcare</p>	<p><b>J.R. Gangaramani</b> Company: Al Fara'a Group Sector: construction, ready mix, electro-mechanical services and interiors</p>	<p><b>Azad Moopen</b> Net Worth:\$1.1B Sector: Healthcare</p>

**Source:**Forbes. "Top Indian Business Leaders in the Middle East." *Forbes*. Accessed November 22, 2023. <https://www.forbesmiddleeast.com/ar/lists/top-indian-business-leaders-in-the-middle-east/k-p-basheer/>.

10. Sudeep Lavania, "UP, Bihar replace Kerala as top supplier of blue-collar workforce to Gulf nations," *India Today*, November 17, 2023, <https://www.indiatoday.in/business/story/up-bihar-kerala-blue-collar-jobs-in-gulf-nationa-gcc-2464358-2023-11-17>.
11. Embassy of India, "Indian Community in UAE." Embassy of India. Last Modified November 2022. <https://www.indembassyuae.gov.in/indian-com-in-uae.php>.
12. "50% jump in blue-collar worker migration from India to Gulf nations; UP tops list," *Money Control News*, November 17, 2023, <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/50-jump-in-blue-collar-migration-from-india-to-gulf-countries-up-tops-among-states-11760731.html>
13. SudeepLavania, "UP, Bihar replace Kerala."

20% in white-collar non-professionals, and 15% in professionals and businessmen, primarily in low-skilled or labour-intensive jobs<sup>14</sup>.

**Prominent Indians in the Gulf:**

The Gulf nations, particularly the United Arab Emirates, are home to a number of notable Indian financial and corporate tycoons who created and controlled multibillion-dollar commercial enterprises. According to Forbes’ annual study in 2018, the combined fortune of the 100 most influential Indian business people in the Gulf was around \$26.5 billion<sup>15</sup>. Retail, real estate, information technology, healthcare, cuisine, hospitality, tourism, and other areas associated to Indian businesses are expanding in this state.

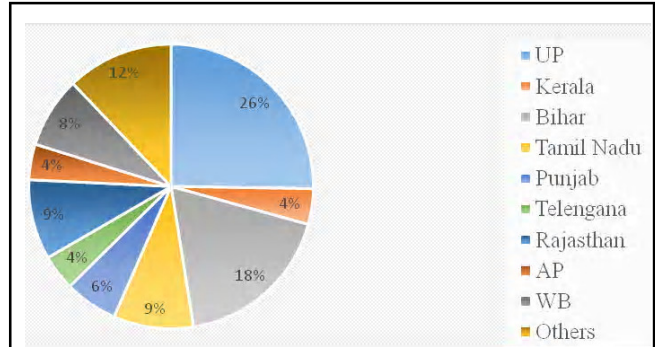
The Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award has been awarded to several prominent Indians and an Indian Community Association from the UAE, including Yussuff Ali M.A., Syed M Salahuddin, B.R. Shetty, Krishnamurthy Kumar, Dr. J.R. Gangaramani, Azad Moopen, Mohan Jashanmal, P. Bava Haji, Shamsheer Vayalil Parambath, Bharat Kumar Jayanti Lal Shah, Ashraf Palara Kunnummal, Vasu Sharaff, Girish Pant, Surender Singh Kandhari, Dr. Zulekha Daud, and ISC Abu Dhabi<sup>16</sup>.

In 2008, the President of India awarded Mr. Yussuf Ali the Padma Shri, followed by Dr. B.R. Shetty and Mr. Sunny Varkey in the following years. Dr. J.R Ganagaramani, Shri Azad Moopen, and Shri Sundar Menon received the award in 2010, 2011, and 2016<sup>17</sup>.

The UAE has designated free zones for foreign businesses, attracting Indian businessmen for tax benefits and other advantages. They often collaborate with local and international partners, participate in cultural events, and diversify investments in various sectors<sup>18</sup>.

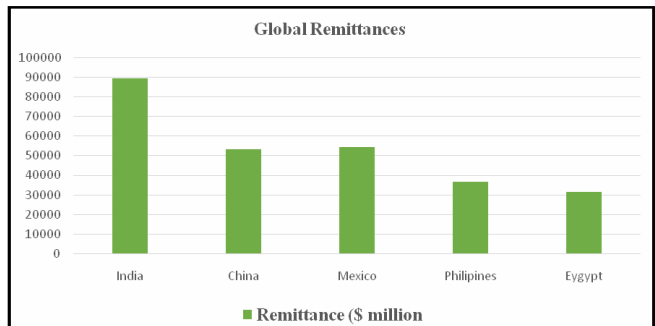
**Contributions:**

Through their employment and remittances, Indian migrants contribute considerably to the UAE’s economy. They also play an important role in both nations’ growth



Source: John Calabrese. “India-Gulf Migration: A Testing Time.” *MEI*. April 14, 2020. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/india-gulf-migration-testing-time>

**Fig. 2 : Distribution of Indian Workers by Sending State, 2018**



Source: Sreedev Krishnakumar, “Just 4 countries account for 54% of remittances to India, which will hit a record this year, shows data,” *Money Control News*, December 2, 2022, <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/economy/just-4-countries-account-for-54-of-remittances-to-india-which-will-hit-a-record-this-year-shows-data-9637001.html>.

**Fig. 3 : Top Remittance Recipients in 2021**

by developing economic and cultural relations<sup>19</sup>. They have contributed to the UAE’s different social and economic sectors through a variety of ways, including workforce, skilled professionals, remittances, cultural

14. Embassy of India, “Indian Community in UAE.”

15. Imad Abu Al-Futouh, “Millions of workers and thousands of businessmen.”

16. Aditi Singh, “INDIAN EXPATS IN UAE,” *LinkedIn*, July 29, 2023, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/indian-expats-uae-aditi-singh/>.

17. Embassy of India, “Indian Community in UAE.”

18. *Ibid.*

19. For more information visit <https://www.indembassyuae.gov.in/indian-com-in-uae.php>.

**Table 3. Some Registered Indian Associations in the UAE**

Sr. No.	Name	Contact Information
1.	India Social & Cultural Center, Abu Dhabi	info@iscabudhabi.com
2.	Indian Social Center, Al Ain	iscalain@gmail.com
3.	Indian Islamic Center, Abu Dhabi	iic@emirates.net.ae
4.	Kerala Social Center, Abu Dhabi	ksemails@gmail.com
5.	Abu Dhabi Malayalee Samajam	msamajam@gmail.com
6.	Indian Ladies Association, Abu Dhabi	ila762010@gmail.com

Source: Embassy of India, "Indian Community in UAE." Embassy of India. Last Modified November 2022. <https://www.indembassyuae.gov.in/indian-com-in-uae.php>.

activities, entrepreneurship, healthcare, education, technology, infrastructure development, social work, and so on.

Indian workers in the Gulf generate annual financial transfers of \$89 billion to their families in India, accounting for 65% of the total transfers of Indian expatriates worldwide. This makes India the first global destination for workers' remittances, ahead of China and Mexico<sup>20</sup>.

The Indian community is the UAE's backbone. India receives a large amount of foreign exchange from Gulf countries. Indians from all across the world sent \$83 billion to India in 2020. A big portion of this was due to Indians working in Gulf nations. The majority of the funds are sent by Indians living in America. India leads in remittances from working abroad, accounting for 23.4%, followed by the UAE at 18%. In 2018, Indians sent \$79 billion back home, with UAE workers contributing \$13.8 billion. Other countries contributing include Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman<sup>21</sup>.

### **Cultural Activities and Religious Practice:**

In keeping with India's distinct language and cultural character, different linguistic/regional associations for social and cultural activities exist. All segments of the Indian population participate in cultural activities. Schools, cultural centres, and religious institutions have been built by Indian communities to help maintain Indian traditions and values. The UAE has a mechanism for registering social organisations of the expatriate population, and such organisations can operate freely within the parameters established by the UAE Government. The following Indian

Associations in UAE have been working actively in various ways<sup>22</sup>.

1. India Social and Cultural Center, Abu Dhabi
2. Abu Dhabi Malayalee Samajam
3. Kerala Social Center
4. Indian Islamic Center
5. Indian Social Center, Al Ain
6. Indian Ladies Association

There are other associations can also be found in the Emirate that play a vital role in fostering cultural ties, providing support, and organizing various events. These associations serve as a platform for networking, community engagement, and addressing the needs of the Indian diaspora in the UAE. The Indian community, in this country, organizes various types of cultural programs such as Diwali, 'Eid, Bollywood Nights, Art and literary events etc.

The UAE is recognized for its tolerance and multiculturalism, which allows people of many religious origins to practice their beliefs. Some Hindu temples and other Indian religious centres may also be found in the UAE, particularly in places such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Temples are used for religious services, community meetings, and cultural events<sup>23</sup>.

### **Social Support:**

Indian migrants in the UAE often form social support networks to help navigate the challenges of living and working in a foreign country. These networks provide emotional support, practical assistance, and a sense of community. Here are some aspects of social support

20. Ibid.

21. For more information one can visit <https://www.bbc.com/urdu/articles/c1e0zx89gp8o>.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

networks among Indian migrants in the UAE Such as Community and Cultural associations, Social circles, and Social Media Platforms in the forms of Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp etc. Other social support systems such as community and help centres, and Youth groups are also emerging as vital players in the Country. Notably, various Indian organizations play a key role in the support system.

### **Emerging Facilities:**

Now Indians can also use UPI in UAE: Indian travellers can now make seamless payments in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) using apps based on the Unified Payments Interface (UPI). The UAE has a large Indian expatriate population and having UPI as one of the payment methods will make it much easier for Indian travellers to make payments in the country<sup>24</sup>.

India signs agreement with UAE to trade in rupees: According to a report in the Dawn newspaper, India has inked a deal with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to settle transactions in rupees rather than dollars, lowering transaction costs by eliminating the exchange of currencies. Indian efforts will be bolstered<sup>25</sup>.

Golden visa: The “golden visa” provided to Indians by the UAE was crucial in encouraging commercial engagement between the two nations. According to Sanjay Sudhir, India’s envoy to the UAE, “We have about 3.5 million Indian citizens in this country, which is the largest number anywhere”<sup>26</sup>.

### **Conclusion:**

The situation of Muslims in India, comprising around 200 million people, significantly impacts Indian-Arab relations, with the largest Muslim minority and third largest concentration experiencing increasing sectarian attacks. India’s response to this crisis is aimed at preventing Gulf anger and preventing damage to the complex bilateral relations, which are already strained due to Indonesia and Pakistan. It can be concluded that India-UAE ties have improved significantly in recent years. The migration of Indian people to the UAE will further strengthen the bilateral relation and positively impact the financial and other living conditions of the people of the both sides.

India’s strategic rapprochement with the Gulf States, particularly UAE, is crucial to counter China’s growing influence in the region, as India is seen as the primary alternative and strategic partner to the West in the face of this growing influence.<sup>27</sup> Social support networks significantly benefit Indian migrants in the UAE by providing a sense of belonging, shared identity, and assistance in navigating life’s complexities, while government and non-governmental organizations may also offer resources and support services.

However, the Indian migrant community in the UAE is a vital part of the country’s social and economic fabric, contributing significantly to its development. However, they face challenges that require attention from both sending and receiving countries. Continuous policy-making, social integration, and labor rights protection are essential for their well-being and prosperity.

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24. For further details visit <https://urdu.news18.com/news/international/indians-can-now-make-payments-using-upi-in-uae-rah-mgb-410716.html>.

25. Arpan Chaturvedi, India ties up with UAE to settle trade in rupees,” *Reuters*, July 15, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com>.

26. For more information visit <https://thenewkhalij.news/article/29>.

27. *Ibid*.