

“A Portrait of Low Income Migrants in Qatar: New Data from a Large-Scale Survey.”

On January 15, 2013, the Center for Gulf Studies hosted a public lecture by Dr. Andrew Gardner entitled “A Portrait of Low Income Migrants in Qatar: New Data from a Large-Scale Survey.” In his talk, Dr. Gardner outlined the details of his comprehensive study on migrant, low-income laborers (classified as workers earning 2000 Qatari Riyals or less per month), the purpose of the study, and its initial findings. The study, funded by the Qatar National Research Fund as part of the National Priorities Research Program, was done using a sample of 1,189 low-income migrants who were surveyed about a range of questions concerning their national and cultural backgrounds, their employment, their housing, and their treatment. Dr. Gardner explained that much consideration was given on maintaining the accuracy of the survey in representing the overall low-income migrant population in Qatar by ensuring the sample was representative of the overall population. He did concede, however, that the sample was more weighted towards the male population due to the difficulties of obtaining interviews with female migrant workers.

Among the more salient findings of the survey was that 90% of migrant workers had their passports confiscated by their sponsors upon their arrival to Qatar. The low-income laborers all had to pay for their work visas to be able to work in Qatar, with an average cost of the visa amounting to \$1031 USD. Other key findings were that 21% of those surveyed claimed they received their salaries on time either sometimes, rarely, or never; and that small but significant percentages of the population reported having insufficient water supply (5%), irregular electricity supply (2%), and a lack of air conditioning (2%). One key purpose of the study was to analyze trends between the nationalities and religions of the low-income migrants and their overall treatment under employment in Qatar. The findings showed ‘Arab’ low-income migrants earned slightly higher wages, worked less hours, and shared their living spaces with fewer people than their ‘South Asian’ counterparts. Dr. Gardner explained that this correlation could possibly be attributed to similarities in culture and language.

The study reveals an inconsistent process of applying for visas outside of Qatar, allowing for exploitation and misinformation to occur. The study also reveals areas where there is room for improvement, specifically in the treatment of the migrant workers, and the respect of their basic human rights, as is the case with the confiscation of their passports.

The Center for Gulf Studies (CGS) at the American University of Kuwait aims to promote greater cultural understanding of and increased intellectual interest in the Gulf, by facilitating free and open academic discourse on a range of issues that both shape and challenge this critical region of the world. The goal of CGS is to enable scholars as well as political and civil society actors both within and outside the region to contribute and add value to the burgeoning field of Gulf Studies, while at the same time informing and engaging the general public. To this end, the CGS encourages, supports, and cultivates interesting and original research on the Gulf, while regularly organizing a variety of public academic events such as lectures, roundtable discussions, and conferences.