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Labour market activity, occupational change and length of stay in the Gulf

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- analyse migration as part of broader global change
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Abstract

This paper analyses the relationship between migration duration and occupational changes, using the case of Indian expatriates in the Gulf States. *De jure*, permanent migration to a Gulf state is almost impossible, leaving a (renewable) temporary work visa the only option available for Indian migrants. De facto, however, 'temporary' stay can last for years or even decades, and thus, questions about the factors influencing the timing of return become relevant. This analysis, based on two rounds of the Kerala Migration Survey (KMS 2008 and 2009), aims to deepen our understanding about the relationship between return migration, labour market activity and occupational change among Indian expatriates returning from the Gulf region. In particular, we investigate whether the length of stay in the Gulf depends on migrants' occupational trajectories before, during, and after the migration experience. We find some significant effects of transitions in labour market activity on the length of stay abroad. In particular, the prospect of acquiring an occupation which entails upward social mobility (mainly in the public sector or self-employment) seems to be associated with a shorter stay in the Gulf states, whereas the prospect of post-return labour market drop-out significantly increases migration duration.

Keywords: Migration duration, occupational change, Gulf countries, Indian migration

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1 Introduction

Migrants and their families are normally the main beneficiaries of labour migration. Better opportunities and higher wages enable them to live better lives in the present and to save more for the future. Staying abroad and earning higher salaries for as long as possible seems therefore to be a reasonable strategy in theory. In fact, most migrants in many different contexts do not stay permanently in their host country, either because they do not want to or because they are not allowed to. For most migrants in the Gulf countries, permanent immigration is not an option for various political and legal reasons, so temporary migration is the dominant form of migration in the region. The term 'temporary', though, is very elastic when it comes to (renewable) work visas for Gulf migrants, and many (Indian and other) 'expatriates' are staying for many years or sometimes decades in the region.

The central question we are asking in this study is: how long do temporary migrants stay in the Gulf region, and what determines the timing of return? To answer this question we focus on the occupations migrants were involved in before migration, while in the Gulf and after returning home. Besides many factors (economic, social, political) that obviously all play some role in influencing migration duration, we are particularly interested in the question of whether labour market participation and/or changes in occupation have a significant effect on the length of stay in a Gulf country. In particular, we investigate whether the length of stay in the Gulf depends on participation in the labour market (employed, unemployed or inactive) or the type of occupation (sector/category) the migrants had before, during, and after returning from the Gulf.

The focus of this research is on the relationship between various parameters related to labour market activity, such as whether to participate in the labour force, finding a job, and type of employment; and parameters related to the migration decision such as whether and where to migrate, how long to stay abroad and when to return. We hypothesise that long-staying migrants are negatively selected among those migrants who were in a relatively poor situation before migration (unemployed or low-status occupation) or who have negative prospects post-return, whereas 'short-stayers' are positively selected among all migrants because of a relatively superior situation before migrating or their relatively good post-return prospects.

Our results show that migrants stay longer abroad if they were unemployed before migrating or have poor prospects of finding employment after return. However, becoming unemployed while abroad significantly reduces the length of stay abroad. Beyond this, migrants who were self-employed or employed in the public sector before going abroad return earlier than those outside these sectors. Migrants with the intention of starting or continuing their own business return earlier. Returnees who can find employment in the public sector return on average about 32 months earlier than returnees employed outside the public sector. Thus, curtailment of migration duration is a viable option for those migrants with eminently respectable jobs in the public sector before migration, or prospects of such jobs after returning home. Procrastination of return is particularly prevalent among groups of migrants with rather low prospects for socio-economic improvements at home, or among those migrants who are consciously planning their post-return retirement.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The next section provides the theoretical frame for this research by reviewing relevant literature on the drivers of return

migration, considering in particular the role of labour market activities along individual migration trajectories. Section 3 gives an overview of the research context and a description of the evolution and recent situation of the India–Gulf migration corridor. Section 4 outlines the empirical strategy, and Section 5 discusses the results of various empirical analyses. Section 6 summarises and concludes.

2 Migration duration and choices of labour market activity: some hypotheses

Return migration has been a relatively neglected area in the research of international migration. Since the early 1960s return migration has been studied mainly as a sub-process of international migration, and as the presumed final stage of migratory trajectories (Durand 2004). The analysis of Rhoades (1979) sheds some light on the main reasons for this lack of attention. Mainly, the observation of massive urbanisation processes led to (simplistic) views of migration as a one-directional movement from rural to urban areas. The difficulty of comprehensively measuring and quantifying return migration also contributed to this neglect in theorising on return migration (Rhoades 1979). Most research on return migration has focused on impacts, such as financial and human capital flows into the origin countries (Taylor et al. 1996), while the drivers of return migration have hardly received any attention (de Haas and Fokkema, 2010).

Return migration can be defined as a migratory movement when people return to their place of origin after spending a significant period of time in another country (King 2000). Although this definition involves clearly delimited spatial and temporary boundaries, the conceptualisation of return migration seems to be more complex, where return migration can also be attributed to different phenomena, also termed as counter-stream and retro-migration (King 2000). Return migration movements can also be embedded in broader processes of circular migration, and it is rather difficult to define analytically when return migration starts and ends. Theoretical debates have so far come up with some broader explanations for return migration processes, which may emphasise the role of policies (Gmelch 1980), economic factors (Bastia 2011), socio-cultural and life-cycle factors (King 1986), or changes in the labour market status and activities (Rhoades 1979).

We briefly review these broader categories of return drivers. The impact of policies on return migration is an under-researched topic, and the focus of some existing studies is mostly on the effectiveness of specific return-migration programmes (IOM 2002, 2010). When host countries face rising unemployment or perceive problems with social cohesion, states often try to control and restrict entry and the eligibility of their foreign population to stay permanently, and they often target particular emigrant groups and encourage their return. However, evidence about the effectiveness of these policies is rather ambiguous. For instance, policies developed in post-1973 Europe to encourage the return migration of ‘guest workers’ largely failed because of lack of knowledge of the drivers of return migration (Castles 2004). These policies supporting voluntary return included various incentives such as financial support, vocational and entrepreneurial training, micro-credits for businesses, and so on. Although significant numbers of migrants did return, this was largely unrelated to those policies, which are therefore generally considered as failures (Dustmann 1996). Generic emigration and immigration policies seem to play a more prominent role in affecting return migration than targeted return-migration policies. By encouraging

circularity and re-emigration through granting easier access to their territories and labour markets, states tend to promote return migration.

Economic factors such as rising unemployment in the host country, improving wage and job opportunities back home, or the desire to invest savings are important determinants in explaining return-migration movements. Economic stagnation or recession in host countries have been explored as important factors for initiating and accelerating return-migration flows (Bastia 2011). Neoclassical economics conceptualises return migration as the consequence of a miscalculation of the costs and benefits of movement (Todaro 1969; Borjas 1989). A negative wage differential would compel the migrant to consider return for the purpose of maximising returns on investment in physical, human and social capital (Vanderkamp 1971; Ghosh 2000). However, this argument does not seem to apply to those migrants who were successful in the host country but return to their homeland nonetheless (Cassarino 2004). This phenomenon can be explained by the implications of the 'new economics of labour migration' (NELM) (e.g. Stark 1996), which postulates that savings and skills acquired in the receiving country improves the prospect of a successful re-integration and contributes to upward social mobility in the home country. This perspective implies that achieving the expected accumulation of various types of capital through adequate integration in the labour market of the host country becomes a necessary condition for a later return to the home country. In this respect, Dustmann and Kirchkamp (2002) explore wage differentials as an important driver for return migration. Their study shows that higher wages in the host country lead to shorter stays and earlier return. The income effect of higher than expected or increasing wages in the host country allows a larger accumulation of income and wealth per time unit and dominates the substitution effect, which facilitates an earlier than planned return and a successful end of the migratory project. Similarly, migrants prolong their stay abroad if wage differentials are lower than expected or declining.

Nevertheless, *non-economic factors* such as socio-cultural factors also shape return migration. Migration scholars have linked return migration with the 'myth of return' (Massey et al. 1990), where the 'homeland' is constructed as the final stage of the migratory and life cycle, and where love for the home country will be the driving force, whether or not return is finally achieved. This cultural and emotional driver for return does not necessarily lead to return migration but does rather reinforce linkages with the home country, and may function as a reactive mechanism against lack of integration or discrimination in receiving countries (King 2000). Although there is not always a direct relation between the set of beliefs around the 'myth of return' and movement itself, other studies have proved the strength of this driver – studies looking, for instance, at second-generation Italian migrants from Switzerland to Italy who return to the roots of their ancestors (Wessendorf 2007), or at second- and third-generation Galician-Spanish migrants who return from Latin America (Oso et al. 2008).

Among other factors on the micro level, the *intersection of the life cycle, migratory cycle and family cycle* seems to play an important role in the decision to return home. Factors such as the age, gender and main migration motives may largely explain return migration movements. King (2000) includes in the classification of causes for return the 'family cycle', which suggests that return migration is largely explained by significant life events such as retirement from work (King 1986). Family responsibilities for children and elderly parents also seem to affect return-migration strategies. The return movements of

Southern European migrants since the 1980s also shows how the age of the children left behind intersects with the migratory cycle. For example, the migratory cycle can turn towards settlement or going back home when children are entering secondary education (Babiano and Asperilla 2002; Oso and Villares, 2007). Martinez (2011) explores the intersection between care strategies and return migration in the region of Cochabamba (Bolivia) for women heads of households, showing that the failure of some of the care strategies set for the children explains an earlier return to the country of origin.

On the macro level, return migration also seems to be driven by changes in the labour market or the *occupational structure* in the countries of origin. For instance, the economic development of the countries of origin, and the maximisation of the financial and human capital accumulated throughout the migration experience, might lead to better chances to be employed in the country of origin in sectors with better status, even if they do not provide as high salaries as in the destination country. Occupational change as a return-migration driver has been analysed in some previous studies (Constant and Douglas 2002; Dustmann and Kirchamp 2002; Ghosh 2000; Ilahi 1999; Zhao 2002). The occupational transition has been explored through the re-integration of return migrants, where a comparison between pre-migration and post-return employment behaviour reveals that there is a substantial change in the occupational position of migrants (Ilahi 1999; Zhao 2002; Jensen and Pedersen, 2007). Return migrants seem to gain higher positions in the labour market than those they had before migration or those in the destination country (Ilahi 1999). Thus, return migration appears to be a viable option for gaining a better position in origin-country labour markets.

Human capital theory can explain how the gains achieved through migration such as skill-upgrading, education, ideas, professional training, and so on, affect the position a returnee can acquire in the labour structure of origin countries. Dustmann and Kirchkamp (2002) explore the relation between migration duration and activity choice for the case of Turkish returnees from Germany. Their study shows that Turkish returnees chose self-employment or non-employment, mostly linked to retirement from active life; and they uncover a strong negative relation between the level of education and the duration of the stay abroad. In their model, higher education is linked to better wages abroad, which will lead to an earlier return to the home country. This hypothesis also fits with the NELM theories to explain return migration. Education is also linked to the type of economic activities undertaken back in Turkey, where higher educational attainment is positively associated with the likelihood of being employed – and particularly self-employed (Dustmann and Kirchkamp 2002).

In this paper we explore this hypothesis further by looking at how *changes in occupation and labour-market status* might be a driver for return migration. The return migration of successfully employed workers from a country where wages and incomes are significantly higher than in the origin country questions migration as a rational calculation of economic costs and benefits, challenging the neoclassical model to explain migration drivers. However, this can be explained if we consider the better position that returnees might occupy in terms of occupational and social hierarchies in their home country than they did in the host country. Experiencing or having well-founded prospects of upward mobility in the labour market in the origin country might fulfil social mobility aspirations.

According to the preceding overview, while return migration can be attributed to various drivers, only a few studies analyse the role of occupational mobility in return

migration. For the case of Indians returning from the Gulf, Zachariah et al. (2001) point out that post-return incorporation into the labour market is largely successful and that unemployment rates among returnees are very low. Occupations pursued by returnees mainly concern self-employment activities or casual work in the private sector. This points to the complexities of the intersection between return migration and occupational mobility: they show that most occupational mobility is within, and not between sectors. This means that many migrants who were occupied in agriculture before emigration return to the same sector but engage in a different type of occupation – for instance, they transfer from a salaried worker to a manager.

Thus, opportunities for employment in other, possibly 'higher' positions in the labour-market structure seem to explain why people move back to the home country, even when aggregate or individual wage differentials may not be in favour of the return option. Return migration generates additional benefits that go beyond wage differentials: returning home allows migrants to improve (instantaneously) their *relative* social status, and to maximise the human and financial capital transferred from the host country. Hereby, human capital added to the financial capital accumulated after years of saving in the country of destination shapes the decision to return to the country of origin: the chance to mobilise the savings, skills, and ideas might mean an entrepreneurial project or a better occupation in the labour market and social structure of the home country. This will help return migrants to gain social mobility and status in the home country.

3 Background and data

India is the major country of origin of non-Arab migrants in the entire Gulf region. In 2006, the stock of Indian migrants in the Gulf region was estimated at about 3.5 million (Khadria 2008). This makes India the largest sending country of semi-, low- and unskilled labour migrants to the Gulf States. Recruitment of this cheap labour force enabled not only the unprecedented economic growth of the Gulf region, but at the same time, remittances of the Indian Gulf diaspora contributed to the accumulation of significant foreign-exchange reserves and facilitated at least partially investment, growth and development in some major migrant-sending regions in India. While the India–Gulf migration systems seem mutually beneficial on an aggregate level, the situation for the migrants and returnees themselves is more ambiguous: while for some migrants it is a success story, many others return back to India disillusioned, deprived and sometimes highly indebted (Rajan et al. 2010).

India's history as a sending country of migrants can be divided into two clearly differentiated periods: pre- and post-independence. Before independence India fixed the shortage of a cheap and flexible labour force for the British Empire, supplying 30 million workers during the pre-independence period. In the aftermath of post-independence in 1947 and the accompanying industrialisation processes, Indians started to migrate increasingly towards Western countries, in particular to the UK and the USA (Rajan and Kumar 2010). As a consequence of the oil-price shocks in the 1970s, the economic boom in the resource-rich countries of the Middle East led to a tremendous increase in the demand for unskilled and skilled labour. Labour-force shortages among citizens caused an upsurge in the demand for workers from within and increasingly also outside the traditional Arab supplier countries – Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, or Palestine. This excess demand for labour

combined with rather open entry policies led to a continuously increasing number of Indian expatriates in the Gulf region. This trend reached its peak in the early 1980s (Khadria 2008). In the following years, however, the inflow of migrants (including Indians) slowed down due to political and economic reasons. Due to public concerns about the rapidly growing foreign population and declining oil revenues and economic stagnation, which diminished the demand for foreign labour, Gulf countries began to impose more restrictive immigration regulations. During the Gulf crisis in 1990/91, about 160,000 Indian expatriates were compelled to return home from the conflict-affected countries. It was only after 1992 that migration from India to the Gulf States picked up again (Rajan and Kumar 2010).

As a partial consequence of the rather restrictive immigration policies in the Gulf countries for the settlement of migrants, return migration has gained momentum since the mid 1990s. Zachariah et al. (2001) state that during the 1990s about 800,000 Gulf migrants returned to Kerala; most returnees were men in their thirties with a primary or incomplete secondary education. This selection of returnees may have been the consequence of some policy shifts towards more restrictive and selective immigration policies over last two decades (Shah 2008). But the structure of labour markets in the Gulf and a change in the demand for different (higher) skills may also partly explain the changing composition of returnees.

The nature of immigration policies in the Gulf countries might explain why most Indian migrants return. The Gulf states are known for their rather liberal entry policy but restrictive access to long-term settlement rights, factors which may speed up return and shorten the duration of the stay (Ruhs 2011). This is particularly the case for policies affecting *family reunification*. Family reunification is highly restricted for migrant workers in the Gulf. This policy interrupts the development of a spatially integrated family life, which might accelerate return or redirect migration flows to other destinations. Other barriers to settlement and reasons for return include the fact that migrants are not allowed to possess any real-estate property such as a house, or to run their own business in the Gulf (Shah 2006). However, these policies are not homogeneous for all Gulf migrants. Most Gulf states have implemented very selective integration policies by means of which the high-skilled migrants have greater access to rights than unskilled migrants. For instance, high-skilled migrants are often allowed to bring family members and have other concessions concerning settlement and 'integration', such as private property, that the large group of low-skilled migrants does not have (Shah 2008).

Table 1: Destination choice of Kerala emigrants

Destination (all emigrants)	Mean	SD
UAE	0.399	0.490
Saudi Arabia	0.276	0.447
Oman	0.094	0.292
Qatar	0.053	0.223
Kuwait	0.055	0.229
Bahrain	0.048	0.213
Other international destination	0.146	0.353

Source: Own calculations based on KMS (2008) and RMS (2009)

The skill composition of Indian migrants has notably changed over recent decades (Khadria 2008). While most migrants in the 1970s and 1980s were unskilled or semi-skilled, labour-market needs shifted towards more skilled labour later on. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, demand for semi-skilled and unskilled workers in the construction sector declined, and instead shifted towards the maintenance, services, and transport sectors (Rajan and Kumar 2010). For the past two decades, the labour markets of the Gulf countries have tended to increasingly to select higher skilled migrants (Shah 2008).

India is the top sending country of temporary migrants in the Gulf region. Within India, the federal state of Kerala operates as the major 'migration hub', or the central node of the India–Gulf migration corridor (Czaika 2012). About 85 per cent of all Keralite emigrants temporarily move to one of the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia being the main countries of destination hosting about two-thirds of all international migrants from Kerala (see Table 1). For a more detailed description of the composition of the Indian diaspora in the Gulf we use two recent rounds of the Kerala Migration Survey[1] conducted between 2008 and 2009 (KMS 2008, RMS 2009). Based on these sources, we know that about 30 per cent of all Keralite households have at least one international migrant, and about 15 per cent contained one or more return migrants (see also Zachariah and Rajan 2010).

Table 2: Characteristics of Indian migrants in the Gulf region

Characteristics (Gulf migrants)	Mean	SD
Gender (male ratio)	0.702	0.457
Age at emigration (in years)	27.836	6.775
Emigration expenses (in Rs.)	61'241	40'069
Education		
None	0.012	0.109
Primary	0.571	0.495
Secondary or higher	0.365	0.482
Religion		
Muslim/Sunni	0.452	0.498
Hindu	0.338	0.473
Christian	0.187	0.390

Source: Own calculations based on KMS (2008) and RMS (2009)

Table 2 reports that migration to the Gulf from India is dominated by male migrants (70 per cent) and migrants with a Muslim (Sunni) background (45 per cent). In some respects, such as the average age at emigration of about 28 years, migrants from Kerala to the Gulf are not very different from Keralite migrants migrating to other international destinations, whereas

[1] The Kerala Migration Survey (KMS) was conducted between August and December 2008 and there was a follow-up Return Migration Survey (RMS) in 2009 where all households of the 2008 survey were revisited. The 2008 survey collected representative information from about 15,000 households across all districts in Kerala. The questionnaire compiled questions on characteristics of entire migrant and non-migrant households as well as individual information on economic and non-economic characteristics of household members. Characteristics on other former household members were included whether they were at that time internal migrants, international migrants, or returnees.

in terms of religion, gender, employment status, economic activity, and also educational attainments, differences are more significant. For instance, compared with migrants to other international destinations, migrants to the Gulf tend not to come from the upper (secondary or higher degree) and lower ends (non-formal education) of the educational distribution – this is reflected by the relatively high share of Gulf migrants with only primary education. That is, Gulf migrants are on average better educated than the average population in Kerala, but less well-educated than other international migrants. This might be the consequence of the specific demand for low-skilled labour in the Gulf, but it is also due to more restrictive and selective entry policies in alternative (Western) destinations. Another reason for the alleged 'positive' selection of emigrants is the relatively high cost of emigration, in which a visa costs about 50 per cent of the total migration costs (Zachariah and Rajan 2011). However, high emigration costs are not only a reason why many people cannot afford emigration at all, but also why some migrants may stay longer abroad than desired – because of the need to save enough money to cover the funds they borrowed before emigration. In 2008, total emigration costs were on average about 60'000 Rupees, which was on average about seven months' income in the Gulf (which was about 100'000 Rupees per annum), or about three times the average annual income in Kerala (22'000 Rupees).

Table 3: Labour-force status and occupational choice before, during and after stay in the Gulf

Description	**Before migration**		**Stay in the Gulf**		**After return**	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Labour-force status						
Employed	0.799	0.401	0.928	0.259	0.760	0.427
Unemployed	0.121	0.327	0.010	0.100	0.029	0.167
Outside labour force	0.079	0.271	0.054	0.227	0.203	0.402
*Occupational sector if employed**						
Public sector	0.017	0.131	0.017	0.128	0.019	0.135
Private sector	0.164	0.371	0.822	0.383	0.178	0.383
Self-employment	0.160	0.367	0.017	0.128	0.241	0.428
Agriculture	0.038	0.190	0.068	0.251	0.239	0.427
Other characteristics						
Average annual income (in Rupees)	22'328	36'849	101'576	87'162		
Age at return (in years)					38.030	10.096
Migration duration (in months)			107.010	96.658		

Note: These statistics are based on Gulf returnees only. Data on labour-force status and occupational sector before migration of current emigrants show a similar pattern, which suggests that these distribution parameters are representative for all (i.e. current and past) Gulf migrants. Data on current emigrants are available from the authors on request. (*)Residual categories are unpaid family work and employment in the informal non-agricultural sector.

Table 3 shows that about 12 per cent of the Gulf migrants were unemployed before migrating, while only 3 per cent experienced post-return unemployment. This seems to suggest that migrating to the Gulf leads to skill-upgrading and improved employability after return. However, a more important consequence seems to be the sharp increase in labour-

force drop-outs after return: while before migration only about 8 per cent of migrants were outside the labour force, after return more than 20 per cent did not participate in the labour market. Whether this is due to life-cycle effects such as (early) retirements or is rather the consequence of a reduction in intra-household labour supply cannot be answered, although the fact that Gulf migrants return on average at the age of 38 (with a standard deviation of about 10 years) implies that retirement is unlikely to be the main reason for labour-market drop-out.

The distribution of the employed labour force across sectors shifts towards more self-employment and in particular, more employment in the agricultural sector. These sectors often involve significant investments in establishing a business or in starting one's own agricultural production. Employment shares in the public or formal private sector do not significantly change between before and after migration. Beyond these trends of sectoral shifts in labour-market activities along migration trajectories, we seek to explore in the remainder of this paper whether labour-market participation in general and occupational choices in particular are significantly related to the timing of return, and thus, to the duration of the Gulf migration episode.

4 Empirical strategy and variables

The following empirical analysis explores some of the main characteristics of Indian migration to the Gulf in relation to occupational change at three different stages: before emigration, while in the Gulf, and after returning home. Hereby, we differentiate the relative importance of the various determinants affecting the emigration decision from India to the Gulf and the decision to return to India. *Individual labour transitions* from occupational categories in India before migration, during the Gulf stay, and after returning to India are analysed in relation to their impact on the length of stay in the Gulf. We will test the following hypothesis: a change in the labour-market status and type of occupation[2] in the course of the migration trajectory has a significant effect on emigration and return decisions, and thus, the length of stay abroad. In particular, if the emigration step is linked to an improvement of the occupational category, migration duration is likely to be prolonged. Similarly, if return migration is likely to improve the occupational category, migration duration is significantly reduced, and vice versa.

Our empirical strategy reflects the major steps of a migration trajectory; that is, the respective decisions about where to go, when to return, and, thus, how long to stay abroad. The empirical analysis, therefore, is designed to explore the relative importance of our set of determinants at different stages along the emigrate-stay-return trajectory.

[2] The operationalisation of the categories related to labour-market status and occupational categories is driven by the conceptualisation of the labour-market incorporation compiled in the survey. In order to measure the labour-market status, we created the categories of 'employed', 'unemployed' and 'outside labour force'. In order to operationalise categories of occupation, the survey questionnaire did not offer a consistent identification of sector of employment and professional category. Therefore we have used: 'employed in the public sector', 'self-employed', 'employed in private sector', 'employed in agriculture' and 'other employment' as a residual category. This category includes mainly 'unpaid family work', 'labourer in non-agricultural sector' and other residual categories. We assume that those occupations with a higher prestige or status in the labour incorporation (both in the Gulf region and India) are employment in the public sector and self-employed.

At the first stage, and by using individual data on international migrants and returnees, we run a multinomial logit (MNL) model on the destination choice. The MNL model estimates the relative probability of migrating to one of the six Gulf states compared with another international destination. Thus, the probability of individual m_j migrating to Gulf state $d \in D = \{1,6\}$ is estimated according to

$$Prob\left(m_j = d\right) = \frac{\exp\left(Z_{dj}\right)}{1 + \sum_{d=1}^{D} \exp\left(Z_{dj}\right)}$$

with $Z_{dj} = (\beta X' + \varepsilon)$ and $d = 7$ as the reference category for 'other international destination'.

We control for migrant-specific characteristics of gender, educational attainment, religion, age at emigration, year of emigration, and emigration expenses to capture their effects on the pattern of Gulf destination choice. Our main variables of interest, however, are those related to the type of economic activity and labour-force status before emigration. We try to explore the existence of 'occupational corridors', which means that we try to identify some occupation-related linkages between India (Kerala) and the six Gulf destination countries.

After this, and based on information on returnees only, we apply a similar set of drivers in estimating the length of stay in the Gulf. For this stage, however, we use additional information from the follow-up survey in 2009, which allows the inclusion of a larger set of explanatory variables than before, including individual income gaps calculated as the difference between the a migrant's annual income in India before emigration and his or her (average) annual income while in the Gulf. Additionally, we control for reasons for return such as compulsory expulsion, poor working conditions, health problems, and problems at home. According to our analytical focus, we test separately for the influence of the labour-force status before emigration, while in the Gulf and after returning home to India, and focus on the role of changes in labour-force participation and status along the Gulf migration trajectory.

Finally, we analyse various 'occupational transition regimes' and their effect on the length of stay the Gulf. Hereby, we estimate migration duration by focusing on the effect of various labour-market trajectories, i.e. changes in labour-market status and activities, along individual migration trajectories, i.e. before and after migration as well as during the stay in the Gulf.

5 Results

5.1 Determinants of destination choice

Since about 85 per cent of emigrants from Kerala decide to move to a Gulf state, we run a multinomial logit model to estimate the odds of choosing one of the six Gulf states as a migrant's destination relative to the odds of choosing another international destination outside the Gulf region (Table 4). We apply a set of variables on individual-specific characteristics such as gender, age at time of emigration, year of emigration, and finally, individual expenses to assess their effect on the emigration decision. In terms of gender composition, only Qatar has a significantly higher inflow of female migrants than other international destinations, while Saudi Arabia as a destination is, relative to other destinations, rather male-dominated (although not significantly). This might reflect different

labour-market demands within the Gulf region, but also more regulatory openness in Qatar towards family migration. Religious affiliations have a strong effect on destination choice, indicating the overwhelming preference of Muslims for Gulf destinations and of Christians for non-Gulf countries (except for Kuwait).

Table 4: Determinants of Gulf destination choice (multinomial logit)

Gulf destination	UAE	Saudi Arabia	Oman	Qatar	Kuwait	Bahrain
Gender (male)	-0.021	0.157	-0.202	-0.354**	-0.050	0.004
	(0.17)	(1.19)	(1.34)	(2.02)	(0.30)	(0.02)
Age (at emigration)	-0.014	0.014	0.010	0.001	0.015	-0.017
	(1.58)	(1.60)	(0.96)	(0.06)	(1.37)	(1.29)
Year (at emigration)	0.024**	0.004	0.009	0.012	0.017**	0.007
	(4.10)	(0.74)	(1.30)	(1.36)	(2.09)	(0.86)
Emigration expenses	-0.029*	0.023	-0.063**	-0.020	0.025	-0.033
	(1.90)	(1.46)	(3.13)	(0.93)	(1.15)	(0.30)
Education						
None	-0.126	-0.384	-0.699	-0.216	-1.376	0.132
	(0.20)	(0.59)	(0.92)	(0.27)	(1.17)	(0.33)
Secondary or higher	-0.226*	-0.461**	-0.479**	-0.220	-0.070	-0.294*
	(1.92)	(3.68)	(3.27)	(1.29)	(0.43)	(1.71)
Labour-force status						
Unemployed	-0.682**	-1.118**	-1.236**	-1.057**	-0.761**	-1.100**
	(3.52)	(5.50)	(5.41)	(4.17)	(2.94)	(4.08)
Outside labour force	-1.582**	-1.997**	-1.774**	-1.509**	-1.051**	-1.455**
	(7.50)	(8.57)	(6.87)	(5.16)	(3.74)	(4.77)
Labour-force activity						
Public sector	-2.448**	-2.080**	-3.255**	-2.344**	-1.856**	-3.339**
	(8.79)	(7.27)	(6.94)	(4.91)	(4.47)	(4.46)
Private sector	-1.290**	-1.290**	-1.725**	-1.675**	-0.800**	0.956**
	(7.28)	(7.02)	(8.19)	(6.66)	(3.50)	(4.10)
Self-employed	-0.348	0.026	-0.326	-0.211	-0.173	0.234
	(1.26)	(0.09)	(1.08)	(0.65)	(0.50)	(0.68)
Agriculture	-0.074	0.496	0.335	-0.417	-0.866	0.247
	(0.12)	(0.80)	(0.52)	(0.53)	(0.93)	(0.34)
Religion						
Christian	-0.481**	-0.154	-0.636**	-0.381*	0.296*	-0.495**
	(3.84)	(1.12)	(3.95)	(1.83)	(1.69)	(2.60)
Muslim (Sunni)	1.434**	2.040**	0.646**	1.838**	1.335**	0.610**
	(7.72)	(10.71)	(3.06)	(8.10)	(5.68)	(2.54)
No. of obs.			5509			
Pseudo R2			0.059			

Note: **(*) significant at 5% (10%) level. *z-scores* in parentheses. Reference categories: (i) for destination is 'other international destination', (ii) for education is 'primary education', (iii) for labour-force status is 'employed', (iv) for labour-force activity is 'other activity', (v) for religion is 'other religion'.

Despite the fact that emigration costs (and in particular visa costs) are significantly higher for Gulf destinations than for other international destinations, migrants from Kerala seem to value benefits from migration higher than its pecuniary costs. However, migrants seem to discriminate against some destinations (UAE, Oman) due to emigration costs. This seems to reflect the relative unattractiveness of these two countries due to fewer opportunities to compensate for emigration costs.

Concerning educational attainments, Gulf migrants are on average less qualified than emigrants going to other international destinations. Among Gulf destinations, better educated migrants primarily avoid Saudi Arabia and Oman, whereas migrants in Qatar and Kuwait are not significantly differently educated compared with migrants in other non-Gulf destinations.

The labour-force status prior to emigration is significantly associated with the destination choice: unemployed people and people outside the labour force prefer non-Gulf destinations, indicating that employment is a pre-requisite for accumulating necessary resources for financing emigration costs. Beyond resource effects, being employed before emigration is an important signal to labour-recruitment agencies which may increase the probability of being recruited in a Gulf state. For people employed in the public sector and the private sector (except Bahrain), migration to the Gulf is not a preferred option if other international migration alternatives are available. Self-employed people and people economically active in the agricultural sector do not have a significant preference for any particular destination country.

5.2 Migration duration and labour-market status

Table 5 presents the regression results on the determinants for migration duration, i.e. the length of stay in a Gulf country for all returnees above age 16 at the time of emigration. We run pooled regression but include country dummies to control for cross-country heterogeneity such as country-specific policies in the six Gulf states to regulate the length of the temporary status of Indian (and other) expatriates. For this analysis we merge the KMS 2008 dataset with information on (re-visited) returnees from the Kerala Return Migration Survey taken in 2009 (Zachariah and Rajan 2011). Due to this follow-up survey which generates a panel structure we can include two additional control variables that are expected to play an important role in the decision on migration duration: first, we can include information on individual income differentials of average income prior to emigration and the average annual income received in the Gulf, and second, reasons for return indicating to what extent return motivations are driven by (i) legal issues related to host-country regulations (such as compulsory expulsion), (ii) poor work conditions including harsh behaviour of the employer, (iii) personal reasons such as health problems, or (iv) factors related to the situation at home (such as problems at home). The estimates display that migration duration increases with higher income gaps. Based on an average income gap of about 80’000 Rs (approx. 20’000 Rs in Kerala before migration and about 100’000 Rs in the Gulf), we estimate that an increase of the income gap by about 10’000 Rs delays return from the Gulf on average by about one month. Interestingly enough, this estimate is very close to the effect of emigration expenses on migration duration: an increase in total emigration costs by 10’000 Rs increases the length of stay in the Gulf also by about a month.

However, the two effects require slightly different explanations: a widening income gap increases the opportunity costs for early return, so that additional time with higher salaried employment in the host country compensates for the social and psychological costs of being absent from the home country. Another interpretation is that contracts for higher paid jobs filled by higher-skilled migrants are generally longer termed, so that there are fewer restrictions on the length of work permits for higher salaried positions. Repayment of emigration expenses are another reason for an extension of the migration duration. Based on our dataset, Gulf migrants spend on average 60'000 Rs on their migration project, the equivalent of about three years of their average annual income in Kerala. Earning enough to cover the high emigration costs and repayment of debts are important reasons why migrants tend to stay longer abroad. Thus, emigration expenses turn out to be a significant factor for both emigration and return. The findings also show the significance of the age of emigrants regarding the length of stay in the Gulf. The average migration duration in the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states is about 107 months (i.e. about 9 years): the younger migrants are when they emigrate, the longer they tend to stay in the Gulf. One standard deviation below the average emigration age of about 27 years, i.e. emigrants of about 21 years, spend about 15 months more in the Gulf than those one standard deviation above the mean, i.e. emigrants of about 35 years. This age effect may be explained by demand-side factors such as the fact that employers have to invest more in skills and training for younger migrants, which makes longer contract periods at least likely. Older migrants may also suffer from stagnating productivity or increasing health problems, particularly in physically demanding jobs such as those in the construction sector, making them less attractive to employers. On the other hand, older migrants may earn higher salaries which allow earlier return because the hoped for or necessary amount of savings has been accumulated more quickly (Dustmann and Kirchkamp 2002).

The results also show a strong linkage between the Muslim (Sunni) community and the Gulf destinations, reflected by the significant extra time of about 15 months spent in the Gulf compared with the length of non-Muslims' stay. It is not clear, however, whether this effect is due to the sheer preference of Muslim expatriates to stay longer in a familiar religious environment or the positive discrimination of Gulf employers for Muslims in terms of longer contracts or renewal of contracts. Interestingly, neither gender nor marital status at emigration has a significant impact on the duration of stay abroad. This means, despite the fact that Gulf migration is masculinised, that female migrants stay equally long. This suggests that female migrants are neither affected by more restrictive migration regulations nor by shorter contracts in the labour-market niches they occupy.

For our analysis of the effects of labour-market status and occupations on the migration duration we run separate models estimating the influence of labour-market-related factors before emigration, during the Gulf stay, and after returning home to India. In Table 5, Model 1 is the reference model excluding the labour-force-related variables, whereas Models 2 and 3 (a-d) test for the influence of different labour-force states on the length of stay in the Gulf. We can show that being unemployed before emigration, or prospects of being unemployed after returning from the Gulf, significantly extend migration duration.

Table 5: Migration duration and labour-market status before, during and after migration

	Migration duration						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(3a)	(3b)	(3c)	(3d)
Income (gap in '0000)	1.05**	0. 95**	0.92**	1.04**	1.05**	1.10**	1.06**
	(5.78)	(5.12)	(4.96)	(5.69)	(5.72)	(6.02)	(5.77)
Gender (male)	8.12	8.65	7.78	7.39	8.14	10.77*	8.11
	(1.43)	(1.52)	(1.05)	(1.30)	(1.36)	(1.87)	(1.41)
Age (at emigration)	-1.07**	-1.01**	-1.15**	-1.08**	-1.03**	-1.05**	-1.08**
	(4.58)	(4.29)	(4.79)	(4.61)	(4.39)	(4.50)	(4.58)
Expenses (in '0000 Rs)	1.09**	1.09**	1.01*	1.08**	1.12**	1.06*	1.11**
	(1.99)	(1.99)	(1.82)	(1.97)	(2.03)	(1.93)	(2.01)
Marital status (married)	-5.87	-4.64	-3.79	-5.66	-5.82	-5.26	-6.04
	(1.58)	(1.24)	(1.01)	(1.53)	(1.56)	(1.42)	(1.63)
Labour-force status							
Unemployed (before)		10.47**					
		(2.07)					
Unemployed (Gulf)		-32.10*					
		(1.93)					
Unemployed (after)		16.47*					
		(1.76)					
Employed (before)			-10.33**	-26.02**	-2.77	-10.00**	2.86
			(2.19)	(2.03)	(0.61)	(2.17)	(0.34)
Employed (Gulf)			25.53**	19.30	1.51	-1.65	8.12
			(3.12)	(1.61)	(0.34)	(0.13)	(1.29)
Employed (after)			-8.86*	-23.39*	7.90*	-5.01	-1.84
			(1.93)	(1.86)	(1.81)	(1.27)	(0.47)
Reason for return							
Compulsory	-15.61**	-14.76**	-15.26**	-17.17**	-15.33**	-15.65**	-15.88**
	(2.07)	(1.96)	(2.03)	(2.28)	(2.04)	(2.08)	(2.10)
Health	11.16**	10.23**	9.81**	10.29**	11.20**	10.34**	10.70**
	(2.33)	(2.14)	(2.05)	(2.15)	(2.34)	(2.16)	(2.23)
Problems at home	-2.34	-2.54	-2.49	-1.92	-2.26	-1.73	-2.24
	(0.44)	(0.48)	(0.47)	(0.36)	(0.42)	(0.33)	(0.42)
Work conditions	-9.23*	-9.36*	-9.67*	-10.07**	-9.47*	-9.79*	-9.36*
	(1.80)	(1.82)	(1.88)	(1.96)	(1.84)	(1.91)	(1.82)
Religion							
Christian	-4.24	-4.74	-4.78	-4.05	3.78	-4.46	-4.05
	(0.96)	(1.08)	(1.09)	(0.92)	(0.85)	(1.01)	(0.92)
Muslim/Sunni	15.56**	16.19**	15.55**	15.09**	15.86**	16.53**	15.70**
	(4.24)	(4.42)	(4.24)	(4.12)	(4.30)	(4.50)	(4.27)
Country dummies				Yes			
Year (at emigration)				Yes			
Constant				Yes			
No. observation				1844			
R2 (adjusted)	0.518	0.520	0.521	0.521	0.518	0.519	0.518

Note: Employment definition in model: (3) Any employment, (3a) Public sector, (3b) Private sector, (3c) Self-employment, (3d) Agriculture. **(*) significant at 5% (10%) level. t-statistics is parentheses.

Those who were employed before emigrating to the Gulf stay about 10 months less than those not in any employment. A similar negative association on migration duration is detected for those who find employment after return, whereas those with expectations of becoming unemployed or who are planning to leave the labour force after return spend more time abroad. Disaggregation of the occupations into various categories of employment shows that migrants who were employed in the public sector before emigration or after return stay about two years less in the Gulf than those who were employed outside the public sector. Only those who were self-employed prior to emigration also stay a shorter period of time in the Gulf (see also Ilahi 1999). Employment in the private sector after return is associated with a longer stay in the Gulf, possibly implying that a successful transfer of those skills which are acquired in the Gulf and are necessary for a job in the formal private sector may require an extended time abroad.

5.3 Migration duration and transitions in labour-market status and occupations

Finally, we refine our analysis by focusing on changes in the labour-market status and occupational categories between two different stages of an individual migration trajectory, and their effects on the length of stay in the Gulf. We hypothesise that relative improvements in the labour-market status and occupation have a direct effect on the return decision. Table 6 reports separate estimates for three different transitions in labour-market status and activity during a migration trajectory: first, the transition from labour-market status before emigration to that while in the Gulf; second, the transition from labour-market status and activity during the Gulf stay to that after returning home, and third, the changes in labour-market status between the time before emigration and the time after return. All estimates are based on separate regressions based on Model (1) in Table 5. We find that individual transitions into employment in the Gulf either from outside the labour force or out of unemployment have a positive effect on the migration duration, though only significant on a 5 per cent level if a migrant was unemployed before emigration (which was the case for 11.5 per cent of all returnees). If the migrant was employed before emigration and in the Gulf, changes in the sector of employment are primarily relevant when moving into or out of the public sector.

Migrants leaving public-sector employment in India for a position outside the public sector in the Gulf stay – on average – more than two years less in the Gulf than those migrants without this particular occupational trajectory; migrants who were able to find employment in the public sector of a Gulf state although they were not employed in the public sector in India stay about two years and three months longer than other migrants. These results provide evidence for the importance of higher status occupations and superior working conditions in the public sector both in India and in the Gulf. Public-sector employment is by and large a very attractive occupation since it comes along with various amenities including higher job security, better payment, health insurance and some fringe benefits. For other changes in the type of occupation held at emigration, we find a negative effect on migration duration for migrants who leave their self-employment for a dependent position in the Gulf. This effect of a transition out of self-employment seems to be perceived as a step backwards; although the position is often higher paid, it comes with less personal freedom and independence in the work-related part of life.

Table 6: Migration duration and transitions in labour-market status or occupational category

Before migration	Gulf	After return	Coeff	t-stat.	Freq [%]
Unemployed	Unemployed		-20.03	0.72	0.36
Unemployed	Employed		12.33**	2.37	11.53
Employed	Unemployed		-29.84	1.39	0.60
Employed	Outside labour force		9.99	0.29	0.24
Outside labour force	Employed		15.49	1.56	2.63
Employed	Employed		-6.35	1.43	78.61
Public sector	≠Public sector		-26.99**	2.10	1.61
≠Public sector	Public sector		26.44*	1.85	1.42
Private sector	≠Private sector		17.62	0.74	0.52
≠ Private sector	Private sector		-5.21	1.53	67.86
Self-employment	≠ Self-employment		-12.03**	2.69	16.42
≠Self-employment	Self-employment		7.54	0.39	0.90
Agriculture	≠Agriculture		-0.81	0.09	3.74
≠Agriculture	Agriculture		-0.89	0.13	6.65
	Unemployed	Unemployed	-21.98	0.57	0.18
	Unemployed	Employed	-27.38	1.45	0.78
	Employed	Unemployed	19.50**	2.01	2.63
	Employed	Outside labour force	10.09**	1.99	15.11
	Outside labour force	Employed	25.67	0.85	0.24
	Employed	Employed	-5.77	1.33	75.03
	Public sector	≠Public sector	18.02	1.15	1.26
	≠Public sector	Public sector	-32.55**	2.66	1.93
	Private sector	≠Private sector	-10.00**	3.03	65.75
	≠ Private sector	Private sector	9.43	0.44	0.64
	Self-employment	≠ Self-employment	-8.05	0.32	0.55
	≠Self-employment	Self-employment	-7.24*	1.90	24.60
	Agriculture	≠Agriculture	-0.80	0.07	2.12
	≠Agriculture	Agriculture	-3.51	0.86	21.44
Unemployed		Unemployed	8.29	0.55	0.96
Unemployed		Employed	1.19	0.21	8.60
Employed		Unemployed	22.42*	1.80	1.67
Employed		Outside labour force	-3.46	0.63	11.83
Outside labour force		Employed	3.25	0.25	1.50
Employed		Employed	-5.94	1.56	65.95
Public sector		≠Public sector	-5.83	0.26	0.71
≠Public sector		Public sector	-27.69	1.42	0.90
Private sector		≠Private sector	-10.71*	1.69	8.96
≠ Private sector		Private sector	4.71	0.81	10.24
Self-employment		≠ Self-employment	-9.34	1.27	6.44
≠Self-employment		Self-employment	-2.60	0.53	14.24
Agriculture		≠Agriculture	-1.55	0.15	3.14
≠Agriculture		Agriculture	-2.13	0.53	26.68

Note: These estimates are based on separate regression on basis of Model 1 in Table 5.
** (*) significant at 5 per cent (10 per cent) level.

This interpretation is confirmed by the negative association on migration duration for those who become self-employed or find a public-sector occupation after returning home. These results show that upward occupational mobility after return migration is negatively associated to the duration of stay in the Gulf. Working in the public sector and self-employment activities improve working conditions and allow the returnees to enjoy a higher occupational and social status in the home country. Therefore, occupational changes at different stages of a migration trajectory prove to be an important factor in return migration decision-making.

Obviously, not all occupational changes affect the length of stay in a Gulf country. Only public-sector work and self-employment seem to be the rather attractive employment options which, if available before or after migration, have a significant negative effect on the length of stay in the Gulf. Beyond this, we find that migrants from Kerala to the Gulf with the prospect of becoming unemployed after return, or who intend to leave the labour force (e.g. for retirement), stay significantly longer in the Gulf. In particular, the transition into unemployment prolongs the Gulf stay by more than one and a half years. We find an even stronger effect in the same direction if a migrant was employed before emigration but falls into unemployment afterwards, extending the stay in the Gulf by almost two years.

6 Summary and conclusion

This study on the drivers of Gulf migration has focused on the relevance of changing occupational categories at different stages along migration trajectories for the length of stay abroad and the decision to return. We have analysed the explanatory capacity of occupational mobility as the key factor influencing the length of stay in the Gulf and the consequent return movement.

These findings contribute to the theoretical developments of the new economics of labour migration by positioning occupational change as a driver for return migration. For those migrants who have good prospects to gain 'better' labour-market positions after return than they had before emigration or in the destination country, earlier return seems as a viable option even if income after return may be significantly lower than abroad.

Our analysis has shown that this is the case for Indian migrants returning from the Gulf states. Return migration is linked to changes in occupations along migration trajectories between India and the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and their specific effects on the migration duration. Our findings indicate that occupational change is not a predictor of return migration decision and the length of stay abroad in the Gulf *per se*. But our results show that the prospect of acquiring an occupation which entails upward social mobility seems to induce earlier return migration. Hereby, public-sector work and self-employment seem to be the most attractive employment options which, if available, seem to influence not only the decision to emigrate at all but also the (relatively short) duration of stay in the Gulf and the subsequent decision to return.

This interpretation is confirmed by the negative association between becoming self-employed or finding a public-sector job after returning and migration duration. These results suggest that the prospect of an upwards occupational mobility after return migration reduces the length of stay in the Gulf. Working in the public sector and self-employment improve working conditions and allow the returnees to enjoy a higher social and employment status in India (often including better salaries). Thus, experiencing a change in

occupational status resulting in better positions in the labour-market structure in the country of origin might fulfil the goals of social mobility throughout the Gulf migration experience of Indian expatriates.

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