

TOWARDS A NEW RENTIER STATE MIGRATION MODEL? INSIGHTS FROM CENTRAL ASIA AND THE GULF ARAB STATES

FARKHAD ALIMUKHAMEDOV

farkhad.alimukhamedov@univ-toulouse.fr

Post-doctoral fellow at LaSSP (Laboratoire des Sciences Sociales du Politique, France) and Lecturer at Institute of Political Sciences of Toulouse. His research area includes Central Asian studies, international migration and internationalization of higher education

HISHAM BIN HASHIM

hbh24@georgetown.edu

Research Assistant for the Qatar Humanitarian Innovation Lab (Q-HIL) research initiative at Qatar University (Qatar). His research interests primarily explore user-centered approaches to humanitarian innovation in a wide range of fields, including education, health, and water. He co-authored, with Laurent A. Lambert, a book chapter entitled 'MOOCs and International Capacity Building in a UN Framework: Potential and Challenges'. In Leal Filho W., Mifsud M. (eds) Handbook of Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Development. World Sustainability Series. Springer.

Abstract

In 2015, the so-called "migrant crisis" became a major international issue that has since affected the immigration policies and national asylum systems of dozens of countries all over the world. Against the background of a global economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and renewed mass migration movements in Central America and across the Mediterranean Sea, better understanding the impact of the 2015-2016 mass migration movements on various countries' migration policies and legislation might prove useful to better anticipate policy and legislative changes in the near future. First, this paper uses global descriptive statistics and trends in legal reform and deportation policies towards asylum seekers and refugees to highlight a specific pattern that has been observed among energy exporting rentier states: between 2015-2017, most hydrocarbons-exporting rentier states, while remaining open to economically vital inflows of temporary migrant workers, adapted their legislation to make it particularly restrictive towards asylum seekers. More precisely, we found a perfect correlation (100%) between being a high-income hydrocarbon-exporting rentier state and having restrictive legislation and/or strong deportation policies towards asylum seekers and undocumented migrants as of late 2017. This observation cannot satisfactorily be correlated with all countries that have high standards of living. Only a minority (30%) of high-income but non-rentier states classified as having similarly restrictive legislative regimes for asylum seekers and refugees. The rentier states in the Arabian Gulf and Central Asian regions, which confirmed these global observations, were more deeply analyzed and showed that, in rupture with their past tradition of hosting significant refugee populations, a form of new - and more restrictive - rentier state migration model has been emerging following the dramatic increase in refugee flows since 2015.

Keywords

Asylum Seekers, Central Asia, GCC, Europe, Refugee Flows, Migration Policy, Oil Prices, Rentier States

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Introduction

In recent years, few Afghans leaving their country at war found shelter in the gas-exporting and richer neighboring countries to the north (in e.g., Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) or within the rest of Central Asia, as in the emerging economy of Kazakhstan. By contrast, it was Pakistan, despite its lack of precious natural resources and widespread poverty, that has been hosting several hundred thousand Afghan refugees. Similarly, in the Middle East, only a limited number of Syrians have found refuge in the oil rich monarchies of the Arabian Gulf, while millions are hosted in oil-deprived and significantly poorer countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The objective of this paper is to investigate and make sense of the influence a country being an energy exporting rentier state has on adopting restrictive policy and legislative provisions during a period of mass refugee flows, by analyzing the response of Arabian Gulf and Central Asian rentier states during the so-called "migrant crisis" of 2015-2017.

This paper begins by providing a global statistical overview of national policies towards refugees, with particular attention paid to highlighting aspects where rentier states generally differ from other United Nations (UN) member states. Our analysis shows that, following the rapid increase of refugee flows in 2015, rentier states all over the world adopted closed-door policies and regulations toward refugees and asylum seekers, with only a few (non-high-income) exceptions, such as Iran and Indonesia. In Section 2, the paper takes Central Asian and Gulf Arab rentier states as case studies to offer a more in-depth analysis of national and regional migration policies. On a theoretical level, we investigate why hydrocarbon-exporting rentier states are so open to, and sometimes largely dependent upon, certain types of inward migration while simultaneously being particularly closed to asylum seekers and undocumented migrants. Finally, this paper argues in section 3 that both the specific political economy of rentier states and their acute economic concerns in times of depressed hydrocarbons prices (2015-2016) seem to have made the idea of hosting a large number of asylum seekers a non-starter.



1. Global Statistical Trends in Refugee Policy

1.1. Concepts and methodology

Rentier states are generally defined as states that receive most of their revenues from abroad, on a regular basis, for the exploitation of a national resource. Since the 1970s, social scientists analysing the political economy of oil-exporting Middle Eastern countries have focused on a key structural factor, the rentier nature of their political and economic systems. In the post-independence context of the 1950s and 1960s, several countries of the Middle East and North Africa region benefitted from increasingly large revenues from oil concessions and their young national oil companies (Mabro, 1969; Mahdavy 1970). Mahdavy particularly, considered the 1950s as a period of paradigmatic change in the economic history of the region. Building on the case of fast-paced modernization through state expansion in Iran (an oil exporting country located at the junction of the Middle East and Central Asia), Mahdavy (1970) generalized this political pattern of "*fortuitus Etatism*" fuelled by oil revenues to the whole Middle Eastern region. Later, Beblawi (1990) proposed four criteria to better define the key features of an archetypal rentier state. Beblawi's (1990: 87-88) criteria are as follows:

- Rent revenues from natural resources clearly dominate the economy;
- The origin of the rent revenues is foreign;
- Only few of the active population is involved in the generation of this rent, while most work in the distribution or utilization of it;
- The state is the main recipient of the external rent.

Although oil revenues have financed impressive development achievements in most Arabian Gulf countries, such as universal water connection and electricity supply or modern education and healthcare systems, the notion of rentierism in the Arabian Gulf also connotes poor economic efficiency and authoritarian political governance. In the context of the rich petromonarchies of the Arabian Gulf, Lambert (2014) describes a "rentier ruling bargain", where the people would obediently support "*the regime's hegemony over both domestic and international politics in exchange of a comprehensive and generous welfare state*" (2014: 12).

Also, according to the literature on rentier state theory, the rentier state is considered protected from any democratic aspirations of its society, at least as long as it is able to finance a generous welfare state, because economic redistribution policies tend to depoliticize the citizenry. Yet this theoretical assumption was criticized following the 2010-2011 Arab Spring revolutions and the particularly strong political mobilization seen in Bahrain, Libya and Kuwait, wherein the (rentier) state was contested despite significant redistributive policies while international issues (such as sustained low oil prices or major diplomatic tensions) could also affect the redistributive policies (Gengler and Lambert, 2016).

In this paper, we take into consideration a broader concept of rent that includes not only hydrocarbons export revenues but also other rents. Malik (2017) argued that oil revenues



in the MENA region are complemented with other unearned income streams from aid, remittances and government regulation, which together constitute a broader challenge of 'rentierism'. The concept of rentier state has also been used in recent decades in other places besides the Middle East.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, several scholars applied rentier state theory to determine the political and economic model of the newly independent countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus. The oil and gas exporting countries like Turkmenistan (Kuru, 1999) as well as Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan (Franke, Gawrich, Alakbarov, 2009; Kendall-Taylor, 2012) were defined as rentier states. Pal Istvan Gyene (2015) considered Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan as the ideal type of "rentier state", while qualifying Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as rentier economies (due to their dependence on outside resources such as external aid and remittances) and Uzbekistan as running under a rentier logic. Despite low share of natural resources, the role of migrant remittances is extremely important among of semi-rentier states according to Ostrowski (Ostrowski, 2014) for whom Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (32% and 38% of GDP in 2018) are defined as semi-rentier ones. He also defines Uzbekistan as a rentier state due to its deepened post-soviet dependency on natural resources (cotton, gold, etc.), and increased role of migrant remittances. Applying rentierism and the rentier policy logic to the academic field of migration policy holds the potential to provide new insights and perspectives for research on developing countries' and emerging economies' migration policies and their political economy.

Discussions related to political regimes and migration policies do not always account for the economic structure of hosting countries. Resource rich countries generally feature relatively large immigration flows and play an important role in international migrations. Comparative studies dealing with the resource-rich countries' immigration policies also showed they have all had a substantial need for foreign labour, which is expected to result in some similarities in their labour-migration policies (Valenta *et al.*, 2017; Lambert *et al.* 2015). We argue in this article that they tend to follow a rentier logic and use alternative policies to what could be seen as international best practices regarding asylum seekers.

Rentier states' migration policies are based on the monopoly of power and the latter aims to control the legitimate means of movement and migration. Consequently, rentier states systematically produce vulnerable migrants with limited rights (Bel Air, 2018). This rentier state migration framework cannot be disassociated from power dimensions in international relations where periphery countries (Wallerstein) are dependent on core countries and reinforce the unequal power relations. They develop unequal power dimensions with weaker states because expanding economies of resource-rich countries are eager to import a relatively cheap labour force (Valenta *et al.*, 2017).

Rentier logic in migration may comprise different forms and fields of migration. For example, semi-rentier states or low-income rentier states can also find in the hosting of refugees an important rent, leading in some case to what Tsourapas (2018) called a 'refugee rentier state': some countries (such as Jordan or Lebanon in the Near East) arguably host large numbers of refugees over many years with the purpose of benefitting from a rent being paid by the international community. By contrast, hydrocarbon



exporting rentier states with high incomes may seem to have less to benefit from being particularly open to asylum seekers.

Non-state actors can be implicated in reinforcing a rentier logic in migrations. For example, labour recruitment agencies operating in the Arabian Gulf and countries of origin are visible signs of a "rentier migration system" with increasing migrant recruitment costs since the 1980s (Rahman, 2015). Although migration discourse usually comprise remittances, they fail to underline the role of debt contracted by migrants in the migration process. The vast majority of current economic migrants from South East Asian countries cannot afford moving to GCC countries with their own savings, often leading them to incur debts that take several months or years to repay. (Rahman, 2015). This situation strenghtened the exploitative framework over time and rendered migrants more vulnerable vis-a-vis the host society. We demonstrate in this paper that most rentier states have restrictive laws (or other barriers, such as difficult entry conditions) towards refugees and asylum-seekers not because they lack resources to help them, but their economic structures are based on the importation of mainly low-skilled, low-cost labour on a temporary basis. Paradoxically, a sizeable portion of the economic migrants in the GCC are from war-torn countries (Valenta and Jacobsen, 2017).

Our study indicates that there is a strong correlation between having a hydrocarbon rentier economy and having restrictive regulations and policies towards asylum seekers and/or refugees. Rentier states also do not adhere to international or regional legal frameworks due to the securitization of migration. Their migration policies show that they are *severely restrictive* with regards to refugee and asylum-seekers and *less restrictive* in other fields of migration (entry/exit rules, visa regulations, etc.). Other studies also show that resource-rich countries have different levels of restrictivity based on skill-related differentiations (Valenta *et al*, 2017). Despite comparatively restrictive migration regimes, rentier states, especially Arabian Gulf states, remain important actors in international migration flows due to the growing number of migrants they receive.

In our analysis, we compiled a list of all UN member states, coupled them with World Bank classifications for country income group, and added our own categorical data regarding which of these countries are:

- a) Net hydrocarbon exporters;
- b) Hydrocarbon rentier states (i.e. countries for whom hydrocarbons represent the largest source of government revenues);
- c) States with restrictive asylum systems and immigration policies for refugees.

We classify a country as being restrictive towards refugees based on the following set of criteria:

- Not being a signatory to and/or ratifying the 1951 Refugee Convention;
- Not being a signatory to and/or ratifying the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- New laws and regulations that diverge significantly from international *non-refoulement* norms and standards, such as the application of a 'safe third country' principle for



refugees fleeing states that are not recognized as safe third countries, like Afghanistan and Iraq for example)¹;

- Based on the approach used by DEMIG policy data², we identify restrictiveness of migration related legislation over time.

1.2. Distribution of the global refugee population

In 2015, the world witnessed the beginning of the largest international mass migration since the end of World War 2. This mass migration movement brought the attention of the international media towards the conditions of asylum seekers populations fleeing civil conflict and war, especially from Afghanistan and the Middle East, eventually leading to important legislative and policy reforms in a number of countries. When investigating the patterns of migrations and asylum during that period, some surprising patterns emerged.

According to the UNHCR (2016), following the increased migration flows in 2015, a majority (59%) of refugees became concentrated in the top 10 refugee host countries, and only one of them, Iran (ranking number 4), is an oil-rich country. As Table 1 illustrates, the resource 'burden' of hosting refugees is essentially borne out by relatively poorer countries. For instance, small Middle Eastern countries like Lebanon and Jordan host more refugees than the world's largest economies, including China, Germany, Japan and the United States of America.

We could also observe that only four hydrocarbon rentier states, namely Iran, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen, are part of the top 20 refugee host countries. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that none of these four rentier states are high-income countries. Yemen and South Sudan in particular suffer from high intensity conflicts which significantly undermine state sovereignty and the rule of law. As for Sudan, although it is home to a sizeable refugee population, it has also begun arresting and deporting migrants. All in all, the question we have been led to ask is: to what extent is there a correlation between being a high-income rentier state and having restrictive policies towards refugees?

Table 1 – Top Twenty Refugee Host Nations in 2016

No.	Country	Total Refugees	Total Population	Refugees as a Percentage of Total Population	
1.	Turkey	2,869,421	80,745,020	3.55%	The top 10 refugee host nations account for 59.38% of the global refugee population
2.	Pakistan	1,352,560	197,015,955	0.69%	
3.	Lebanon	1,012,969	6,082,357	16.65%	
4.	Iran	979,435	81,162,788	1.21%	
5.	Uganda	940,835	42,862,958	2.19%	
6.	Ethiopia	791,631	104,957,438	0.75%	
7.	Jordan	685,197	9,702,353	7.06%	
8.	Germany	669,482	82,114,224	0.82%	
9.	DRC	451,956	81,339,988	0.56%	
10.	Kenya	451,099	49,699,862	0.91%	
11.	Sudan	421,466	40,533,330	1.04%	

¹ For the European definition and legal implications of the Safe Third Country concept, see: <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/united-kingdom/asylum-procedure/safe-country-concepts/safe-third-country>

² <https://www.migrationinstitute.org/data/demig-data>.



12.	Chad	391,251	14,899,994	2.63%	The top 20 refugee host nations account for 77.83% of the global refugee population
13.	Cameroon	375,415	24,053,727	1.56%	
14.	China	317,255	1,410,000,000	0.02%	
15.	France	304,546	64,979,548	0.47%	
16.	Tanzania	281,498	57,310,019	0.49%	
17.	Bangladesh	276,207	164,669,751	0.17%	
18.	U.S.A	272,959	324,459,463	0.08%	
19.	Yemen	269,783	28,250,420	0.95%	
20.	South Sudan	262,560	12,575,714	2.09%	
	Top 20 Total	13,377,525	2,877,414,909	0.46%	
	World Total	17,187,488	7,466,964,280	0.23%	

Source: UNHCR, Global Report 2016.

1.3. Effects of Hydrocarbons Rentierism and National Income on the National Asylum System

A statistical analysis of all UN member states with the above-mentioned criteria shows rapidly a strong correlation between having a hydrocarbon rentier economy and having a restrictive regulation and policy system towards asylum seekers and/or illegal migrants by proving our first hypothesis. As a whole, over 64.3% of hydrocarbons-exporting rentier states have either very restrictive legislation or implement mass deportation policies towards asylum seekers or illegal migrants, compared with only 15.2% for non-rentier states among UN member states (see Table in annex 1). This correlation however, becomes even stronger if we distinguish between, on the one hand, low and middle income rentier states (e.g. Azerbaijan, Chad, Uzbekistan), and on the other hand the richer high-income rentier states (e.g. Brunei, Norway and Kuwait). Exactly 100% of high-income rentier states have restrictive legislation that actively hinder refugee protection or are known to be moving in this direction. If we bundle high-income rentier states with upper-middle income rentier states, the share of countries with restrictive immigration regulations and/or policies still remain relatively high at 79%. A wrong conclusion could be that simply all high-income countries overall – i.e. rentier states or not - have more very restrictive legislation and/or a mass deportation policy towards asylum seekers and undocumented migrants than poorer ones. But this assumption does not stand a statistical examination.

Among UN member states as a whole, the proportion of high-income but non-rentier states featuring restrictive immigration legislation and/or recent mass deportation policies is only 30%, compared to 100% for high income hydrocarbons rentier states, as previously mentioned. If we consider all high and upper-middle income non-rentier states, this figure further decreases to 22.3%, vs. 79% for their rentier counterparts. Given the strength of this correlation, it seems pertinent to explore further in-depth, and in a more qualitative manner, the impact of being a hydrocarbons rentier state on a country's asylum and immigration policies.

This report reflects the international situation of national asylum systems and migration policies as of mid-November 2017. On a related note, even with a potential miscategorization of up to five countries, due for instance to rapidly changing situations and poorly documented cases, the margin of error behind this analysis does not exceed



2.6%.

2. Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Central Asia and the Arabian Gulf

2.1. International Migration and Refugee Regimes in the GCC and Central Asian "Models"

In international relations, we speak of the "international regime" "since the late 1970s, following the "Regime Theory" (Keohane, 1982). According to International Relations' standard definition of a regime: "implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations" (Krasner, 1983).

However, several authors argue that there is no global migration regime (Betts, 2010; Hollifield, 1992; Koslowski, 2011). Betts even states that "[t]here is no UN Migration Organization and no international migration regime (2010: 1).

Countries must cooperate because it is difficult to overcome difficulties such as clandestine immigration or smuggling without international cooperation (Koslowski, 2011). Ronen Shamir therefore argues about "the emergence of a global mobility system, oriented towards closure and blockade" (2005: 199). Nowadays, no matter from a global perspective or from a multi-level and multi-dimensional perspective, the governance of forced immigration cannot be regarded as truly "global" (Benz and Hasenclever, 2010: 376).

There are approaches from International Relations perspective to explain current situation related to global refugee regime. The one is the Prisoners Dilemma proposed by Suhrke (1998) where

"Collectively, states recognize the value of refugee protection (both for security and humanitarian reasons); individually, states' optimum strategy is to 'free ride' on other states 'contributions' while "Suasion Game"(perspective) – leads to a situation in which the weaker actor either 'takes what is on offer', or hurts itself more by not cooperating at all" (Hasenclever et al. 1997; Martin 1993).

For Betts who employs Suasion Game perspective "The refugee regime can be characterized as a North-South impasse situation" where "They (Southern states) are left in a position in which they have few options other than either to take 'what is on offer' in terms of limited earmarked contributions of the North or to disengage from negotiations entirely" (2010: 134). However, other scholars argue that the lack of a formal organization for migration and treaties cannot be only an issue of concern, but also an opportunity to discover implicit principles of how to manage migration on multiple levels (Punter, van der Veen, Wingerden, Vingswaran, 2019).

Multi-decade patterns of international migration flows indicate that migration trends tend to be relatively analogous among countries of, or within, the same region (as in e.g. Central America, Southern Africa, the Maghreb), with few exceptions (e.g. Southeast Asia and East America). In the former regions, neighboring countries tend to adopt a relatively similar legislative framework related to migration, reinforcing thereby common migration



trajectories. From that perspective, this paper tries to review and redefine the broad lines of the so-called “Gulf Model” and “Central Asian Model”, and to propose explanations to some recent policy changes regarding refugees and asylum-seekers, and particularly from neighboring countries. We owe the term ‘model’ to Thiollet’s (2016) work on how Gulf countries’ migration policies developed over time. It articulates some peculiarities, underlined below, that distinguish them from other migrant-receiving countries.

In the literature, most papers focusing on immigration and integration policies originate from migrant receiving countries, mainly in the EU and North America, and to a lesser extent, emerging East Asian economies (see e.g. Arslan *et al.*, 2015; Castles and Vezzoli, 2009). During the last decade many studies across these countries were developed in order to illustrate the comparative approach. Therefore, measurement indices were provided by scholars and research institutes such as MIPEX³, EUDO GlobalCIT⁴, DEMIG⁵, IMPIC⁶, IMPALA⁷. Contemporary research over migration issues offers arguably more refined measures and methods related to migration flows and takes into account the global picture (Ortega and Peri 2009; 2014, Mayda and Patel, 2004; Bjerre *et al.*, 2014), as does the OECD on a regular basis. Several studies have been conducted across countries with quantitative methods (Klugman and Pereira, 2009, Ruhs, 2011, Czaika and de Haas, 2013).

Although the above measures can be useful and straightforward in analyzing migration and refugee politics, it is important to underline that, with few exceptions (Ruhs, 2011) many measurement models exclude Central Asian Republics (CAR) and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. In fact, the Arabian Gulf countries are among the top recipient of economic migrants in the world. Gulf countries are, in per capita terms, the top recipients of global migrants (Fargues, 2015). Despite their smaller overall population sizes, Saudi Arabia and UAE are among the top 10 immigrant receiving countries in absolute terms, ahead of countries such as the UK, France, Canada or Australia (KNOMAD, 2016). Qatar, the UAE and Kuwait, more particularly, rank in the global top three countries in terms of the ratio of immigrants relative to their native citizens. As a whole, the GCC region has a uniquely high proportion of immigrants among its population, as shown in the table below.

Table 2 - Total population and percentage of nationals and non-nationals in GCC countries

Country	Date/ Period	Total population	Date/ Period	Nationals	Non-nationals	% in total population	
						Nationals	Non-nationals
Bahrain (1)	mid-2016	1,423,726	mid-2016	664,707	759,019	46.7	53.3
Kuwait (2)	31 December 2016	4,411,124	31 December 2016	1,337,693	3,073,431	30.3	69.7
Oman (3)	7 April 2017	4,599,051	7 April 2017	2,488,755	2,110,296	54.1	45.9
Qatar (4)	February 2017	2,673,022	April 2010	243,073	1,456,362	14.3	85.7

³ <http://www.mipex.eu/>

⁴ <http://globalcit.eu/>

⁵ <https://www.migrationinstitute.org/data/demig-data>

⁶ <http://www.impic-project.eu/>

⁷ <http://www.impaladatabase.org/>



Saudi Arabia (5)	May 2016	31,742,308	May 2016	20,064,970	11,677,338	63.2	36.8
United Arab Emirates (6)	mid-2010	8,264,070	mid-2010	947,997	7,316,073	11.5	88.5
Total*		53,113,301		25,747,195	26,392,519	49.4	50.6

Sources: GLLM, based on the GCC countries' respective ministry or authority of statistics⁸

However, despite high numbers of migrants, Gulf countries migration policies are highly criticized. Diop, Johnson, Trung Le (2018: 43) stress political regime to explain the current migration challenges. They argue that

"Selectorate theory (de Mesquita et al., 2004) suggests that in monarchical regimes like those of the GCC, rulers must keep a subset of their populations happy to prevent challengers from emerging and replacing the incumbent regime. While defining this subset can often be difficult in practice, in the case of the GCC states, this vital group clearly derives from the small citizen population" (2018: 43).

GCC governments systematically interfere to "restrict more" despite the they have very little impact on the ground (Thiollet, 2015: 9). Thiollet underlines two main features of the so-called Gulf model: temporary labour import and anti-integration policies. Temporality is imposed by the Gulf states to limit the stay of migrants. For example, in 2006 UAE imposed a maximum 6-year stay for migrants, and in 2015, Saudi Arabia imposed a maximum 8-year stay for migrants. At the same time governments willingly reinforce political fiction of "temporary migration" by refusing publicize data on foreign populations (Thiollet, 2015).

Anti-integration policies can even be observed in relation to ethnic arabs. For example, the systematic replacement of Arab migrants with Asian migrants started since 1979 (Bel Air, 2015). Fargues notes that "[t]heir oil wealth has grown much faster than their native population, and they have called in massive numbers of foreign workers. At the same time, they have always adamantly kept a strict separation between nationals and non-nationals". (Fargues, 2015).

Despite the high numbers of migrants, it is noteworthy that there is also a high turnover with significant rates of "irregular migrants": "Not only do non-citizens have fewer rights than citizens, but their very presence must be negotiated — and can be questioned — at any moment. Many are constantly at risk of falling into an irregular situation" (Fargues, 2015). In fact, the purpose of "temporality" with "anti-integration" policies are directed to increase the turnover of migrants (Bel Air, 2015). Besides that, Gulf nationalization policies (e.g., the Nitaqat policy in Saudi Arabia) constituting attempts to reduce dependency on foreign labor may also result in pushing migrants towards irregularity. Last, but not least, the *Kafala* system provides "double control" (state and citizen participate) unlike in other countries and remains among the major channels of "reproducing irregular migrants". Rentiersism is considered as an explanation for such a

⁸ See: <http://gulfmigration.eu/gcc-total-population-percentage-nationals-non-nationals-gcc-countries-national-statistics-2010-2017-numbers/> Last accessed 19/11/2017.



migration model according to several researchers. Diop, Johnson, Trung Le (2018) argue based on their study related to challenges in reforming kafala that

“For some groups, resistance to kafala reform derives from their basic political economic interest in the status quo. These interests make the prevailing system so profitable that nearly any change would result in losses” (44). Fargues (2018) thinks that “Novelties such as nationals’ full employment, including in the private sector, income taxation or amendment of the kafala would all mean that a shift in political culture, from a rentier to a productive model”.

Studies stressed Central Asian context as a « subregional migration system » (Sadovskaya, 2007: 168) and also introduced the term “regional migration subsystem in Central Asia” (Sadovskaya, 2013: 31). Unlike the Gulf countries however, Central Asia does not have a single, almost completely homogenous regional model. Freedom of movements and labor migration developed under a regional basis, during the Soviet era, but now feature some meaningful differences from one country to another (Ormonbekova, 2011). The Central Asian region as a whole was predominantly a migrant-sending one before the disintegration of the USSR and that broad tendency is still ongoing nowadays. With the notable exception of Kazakhstan and, to a lesser extent, of Turkmenistan, all other countries are still partly or fully economically dependent on the remittances sent by their citizens working abroad, predominantly from Russia and the post-Soviet space. Tajikistan for instance, is the country most heavily dependent on its migrant citizens’ remittances in the world.

The laws adopted in Central Asian countries since their independence (1991) indicate that there is an increasing openness towards international cooperation in several migration areas such as entry/exit rules, relations with diaspora, international cooperation in human trafficking and in lesser extend in citizenship rules. However, there have been increasingly restrictive laws and regulations in other areas dealing with refugee/asylum-seekers, and also regulations related to the labor migration. Migration policies across Central Asian states show that governments tried to establish a strict control over foreign labor, but also on export of labor abroad. Therefore, the real and official data related to labor migrants were significantly different because the vast majority of migrants still work beyond the frameworks established between the governments. In case of migrant sending countries, there have been no effective policies to organize labor emigration.

Consequently, Central Asian governments faced many challenges in categorical substitution (category jumping), formal recognitions of the status of migrants and “implementation gaps” of their migration policies. Thus, some studies used the term “strategy of survival” (Sadovskaya 2006, Zayonchovskaya, 2003) to highlight legal challenges of migrants within Central Asian region. Other studies show that beyond formal decisions, informal practices are highly visible in migration management in a larger Eurasian migration system (Polese, Urinboyev, 2016).

Similarly, to the Arabian Gulf states, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are rich in natural resources and their respective states are dependent on their oil and gas revenues. However only Kazakhstan and Russia in post-Soviet have evolved as net migrant-



receiving countries. Both export oil and gas, and like many Gulf countries, host large numbers of economic migrants (Marat, 2009). Therefore, it is difficult to identify one Central Asian migration model due to the fact that—unlike many other regions—it features considerable internal diversity. Some scholars have shown that although migrant-sending countries do not always have similar policies, migrant-receiving countries, such as Russia and Kazakhstan, have developed similar immigrant policies and approaches; they both have a changing and complex legislative procedure which sometimes negatively affects the migration flow (Ni, 2015). Therefore, a classification can be made under legislative grounds which show common characteristics of a Central Asian migration model which has much in common with the Gulf model.

Table 3 - Features of GCC and CAR Migration “Models”

Differences	Common features	Impacts of global migration regime
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employer driven open migration regime in Gulf countries and tight state control in Central Asian countries - Liberal granting of working visas in Gulf and complex work permit procedures in Central Asia - Very limited access to citizenship in GCC and possible access for citizenship for economic migrants in Central Asian countries <p>Important role of private actors in Gulf migration while government agencies had exclusive control over t labor migration in Central Asia. Currently, there is an increasing role of private actors in Central Asia in export of labor migrant “Labor import” based on bilateral agreements GCC and migrant sending countries; very tiny share of labor migration organized based on bilateral or multilateral agreements in Eurasian migration system</p> <p>Residential segregation in GCC and no such policies across Central Asian countries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Important share of immigrants/emigrants - Precarious or short-term contracts, - High turnover of migrants - Temporality - Lack of integration policies - Difficulties for family reunification (for semi-skilled and unskilled workers) - Occupational segregation - Hierarchization” of migrants in GCC (Jamal, 2015) and Central Asia (priority given to ethnic migrants) - Limited socio-economic rights - Deportation programs - Exploitative framework (Kafala system in Gulf countries and complex work permit procedures in Central Asia) - Renationalization of migration during crisis (Nitaqat in Gulf, and attention to internal migrants in Kazakhstan) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Securitization of migration - Gaps between laws and practices - “Legal gap” in compliance with international norms - “Exit revolution” - Facilitation of entry/exit rules - Increased bilateral agreements in the management of migration flows

Prepared by authors, based on Thiollet (2016), Jamal (2015) and GLMM (2014).

It has been argued that not every regime open to migrants necessarily welcome refugees (Breunig, Cao, Luedtke, 2012). Both Gulf countries and migrant-receiving countries of (essentially Northern) Central Asia (i.e. Kazakhstan) host high ratios of migrants among their population and feature in the top 30 largest receiving countries for migrant labor. In some countries such as Qatar and UAE, migrants constitute up to 90% of the population, as shown in Table 3. Such a description could also apply to Kazakhstan, Russia and, to a lesser extent, Turkmenistan. Another element that seems to mirror the



hydrocarbons exporting countries of the Gulf and of Northern Central Asia, is their relative closeness to asylum seekers.

Both CAR and GCC migration models develop high turnover of economic migrants without joining all required international instruments related to their protection.

Table 4 - National/Non-National Ratio and number of ILO Instruments signed by CAR and GCC

Countries	(Net) sending or hosting country	Official Ratio (approximate) National/Non Nationals ^{9, 10}	Signed ILO instruments focused on migrant workers ¹¹ (3 in total ¹²)	Good practices database of the ILO ¹³
Bahrain	Hosting	52% (immigrants)	0	2
Kazakhstan	Hosting	12% (immigrants)	0	3
Kuwait	Hosting	69% (immigrants)	0	1
Kyrgyzstan	Sending	13- 28% (emigrants)	1	2
Oman	Hosting	44% (immigrants)	3	0
Qatar	Hosting	85% (immigrants)	0	0
Saudi Arabia	Hosting	32% (immigrants)	0	0
Tajikistan	Sending	25-46% (emigrants)	2	0
Turkmenistan	Neither sending, nor receiving	-	0	0
UAE	Hosting	88% (immigrants)	0	1
Uzbekistan	Sending	9-11% (emigrants)	0	0

Prepared by authors by using ILO and GLMM data

Another critical element is the limited data available for rentier states. Although the available data shows relatively low rates of migrants in Eurasian countries based on work permits attributed to economic migrants, a more nuanced approach suggest that the reality could be rather different. The complex administrative requirements related to hiring foreign labour in Eurasian countries leads to the use and abuse of foreign labour through illegal means. Thus, the role of undocumented migrants in the economies of Kazakhstan and Russia is important to consider.

According to the *Gulf Labour Markets, Migration and Population* center (GLMM) website:

*"Despite questions concerning international human rights standards and the situation of foreign nationals in GCC countries, the influx of (temporary) immigrants continues and the absolute numbers and relative percentages of foreign-nationals vis-à-vis nationals in all GCC countries remain at least stable and, in most cases, actually continue to grow. This happens notwithstanding the declared policies to reduce the share of foreign workers and to increase the participation of nationals in the workforce"*¹⁴.

⁹ <http://gulfmigration.eu/total-population-and-percentage-of-nationals-and-non-nationals-in-gcc-countries-latest-national-statistics-2010-2015/>

¹⁰ <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/valday/Labour-Migration-from-Central-Asia-to-Russia-in-the-Context-of-the-Economic-Crisis-18334>

¹¹ These instruments include the following conventions and recommendations : C097, C143, and C021

¹² http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12030:0::NO:::#Migrant_workers

¹³ <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/migpractice/migmain.home>; For benchmarking purposes, it is worth mentioning that the USA signed the most agreements, i.e. 12 "good practices".

¹⁴ <https://gulfmigration.org/about/context/>



That resulted significant level of closeness of migration regimes in GCC comparing to other regions. As Ruhs showed in his paper, GCC countries' immigration programmes are most restrictive especially in terms of residence, family and social rights among 46 high- and middle-income countries (Ruhs, 2011).

2.2. International Treaties, Conventions and their Application and rentierism

Betts argues that as a typical example of Eurocentrism, Geneva convention was applied permanently on a global scale in 1967 without modification. Therefore, countries in the Middle East and Asia, have not signed the agreement, which they believe is inconsistent with the asylum conditions in their areas. (Betts, 2018, 16). They consider that the Convention does not conform to the reality of displacement in their region, and in any case, their own culture and legal practices provide shelter (Betts, 2018; 50).

Another salient feature of rentier state is non application and non-engagement with international or regional norms related to refugee and asylum-seeker protection. Table 5 shows comparative hosting capacities and how various countries absorb the global refugee population.

Table 5 - Selected indicators measuring capacity and contributions of host countries

Countries / Indicators	Ranking in total refugee population	Refugees to 1000 inhabitants rank	Ranking in Asylum applications submitted	National population size (Mln)	Gross Domestic Product (billion)	National surface area (sq. km)	Overall donorship Ranking (private and state in 2018)	Overall donorship ranking (private and state in 2019)
Bahrain	138	107	152	1,5	32,179	771	-	-
Oman	134	130	149	4,8	66,293	309500	66	71
Qatar	141	126	135	2,6	152,452	11600	20	9
Saudi Arabia	143	164	71	33,5	646,438	2149690	28	21
UAE	111	122	128	9,5	348,743	83600	31	40
Kuwait	118	111	62	4	110,876	17820	34	37
Kazakhstan	122	143	111	18	137,278	2724902	80	-
Uzbekistan	156	172	63	32	67,22	447400	-	-
Turkmenistan	155	166	125	5,8	36,18	488100	-	-
Kyrgyzstan	132	135	139	6	6,551	199949	95	-
Tajikistan	91	101	100	9	6,952	141376	-	-

Data: UNHCR 2018

As the above table shows, despite being closed towards refugees, the rentier states of the GCC are placed among the important donors of the UNHCR. In Qatar for example, private donors contributed more than 39 million USD (in addition to more than 9 million USD from the government of Qatar as of 30 April 2019)¹⁵, ranking the country among the top donors of the UNHCR. Bel Air (2015) showed that despite Arabian Gulf countries not being officially bound to the 1951 Geneva Convention, they do provide asylum to

¹⁵ <https://www.unhcr.org/partners/donors/5baa00b24/2019-unhcr-donor-ranking.html>



some Syrian asylum seekers. Rentier states also revealed their approach in adapting to the influx of refugees. For example, Uzbekistan offered humanitarian aid for refugees from Kyrgyzstan during the conflicts of 2005 and opened her borders. The GCC paid significant attention to the plight of Palestinian refugees and implemented swift measures to protect their interests in the 1950s. Despite this history of assisting refugees, as seen in the Casablanca protocol of 1955, the current response to Syrian refugees demonstrate shifting attitudes among rentier states with regards to showing ethnic or religious solidarity (Alimukhamedov, Lambert, Bin Hashim, 2018).

Bel Air (2015) also writes that it remains impossible to verify the exactness of these countries' positions on asylum seekers due to a general lack of data. The problem with data related to refugees is best described by UNHCR (2012) on their Periodic Review of the UAE, showing the complexity of the issue due to a legislative framework which stresses that "(d)despite the absence of a national framework regulating issues related to asylum, the UAE Government continues to respect international refugee protection standards, including the essential principle of non-refoulement" (UNHCR, 2012: 1). GCC countries do not send back all asylum-seekers to the countries of origin due to national laws, even though they are not bound by the 1951 Geneva Convention. However, national immigration laws in GCC countries do not recognize refugees, with the exception of *political* asylum-seekers as shown in the table above.

Non-recognition of refugee status by GCC applies also to regional practices proposed by the League of Arab States. In 1994, the League of Arab States proposed the Arab Charter on Human Rights, where article 28 states that:

"Everyone has the right to seek political asylum in another country in order to escape persecution. This right may not be invoked by persons facing prosecution for an offense under ordinary law. Political refugees may not be extradited".

This charter does not change the position of GCC countries related to asylum and was signed by all Gulf states, with the exception of Oman, which is less endowed in oil and gas. In 1994, the Arab League passed the "Arab Convention on Regulating the Status of Refugees in Arab Countries", which is largely similar to the Geneva Convention (1951). However, it simply has no signatories. The process of non-recognition of refugees creates in practice other categories, such as "Arab brothers and sisters in distress" (KNOMAD, 2018) without providing necessary legal and administrative protection.

Table 6 – UNHCR Data on Refugees in the Arabian Gulf, Central Asia & Russia

Country/Territory of asylum	Refugees	Asylum-seekers	Persons under UNHCR Statelessness Mandate	Total population of concern
Bahrain (2016)	247	113	None	360
Kazakhstan (2015)	708	97	7 909	8 714
Kuwait (2016)	741	900	93 000	94 641
Kyrgyzstan (2014)	354	158	9 118	9 630



Oman (2016)	245	190	No data	435
Qatar (2016)	120	118	1 200	1 438
Saudi Arabia (2016)	118	Over 30	70 000	Over 70 148
Tajikistan (2016)	1969	288	19469	21 779
Turkmenistan (2014)	26	No data	7125	7151
UAE (2016)	882	600	30 000 – 100 000	31 482 – 101 482
Uzbekistan (2016)	27	0	86 524	86810

Prepared by authors, based on multiple UNHCR reports

With the exception of Uzbekistan¹⁶, the CAR are all signatories of to the 1951 Geneva Convention. Compared to GCC countries, they are also better engaged with relevant international legal instruments as shown in Table 7. Additionally, CAR also had alternative mechanisms such as the CIS agreement on aid for refugees and forcibly displaced people signed in 1993 by CAR, following the collapse of the USSR. In 1995, a support structure for refugees and forcibly displaced people was created.

Table 7 - Treaty Parties of Relevant Legal Instruments

Country or territory	Refugee Convention and	CAT	ICCPR
Kazakhstan	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kyrgyz Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tajikistan	Yes	Yes	Yes
Turkmenistan	Yes	Yes	Yes
Uzbekistan	No	Yes	Yes
Iran	Yes	No	Yes
Saudi Arabia	No	Yes	No
Bahrain	No	Yes	Yes
Kuwait	No	Yes	Yes
Qatar	No	Yes	No
Oman	No	No	No
UAE	No	Yes	No

Source: Refugee Legal Aid Information for Lawyers Representing Refugees Globally

¹⁶ Since 2016, the new Uzbek government implemented numerous positive policies in the field of migration. Uzbekistan became the member of OIM in 2018 and adopted series of decisions focused on protection of the rights of migrant workers, organization of export of labor force (Russia, Poland, South Korea, etc), entry/exit rules , etc. Presidential decree on granting asylum in Uzbekistan was signed in 29.05.2017.



However, as we mentioned above, states have significant gaps in the application of international norms due to incompatible national laws that do not always stay in line with the 1951 Geneva Convention. The so-called “legislative gap” between the 1951 Geneva Convention and national legislations in Central Asian countries are an issue for dealing with refugees. This may include: the lack of a binding, written set of Refugee Status Determination (RSD) operating procedures or referral mechanisms; the absence of a temporary accommodation center for newly-arrived asylum seekers; insufficient legal advice and representation that refugees and asylum seekers may require; and the failure to use appropriate country of origin information in the RSD process.

According to Cynthia Orchard “Central Asian governments and regional organizations generally prioritize concentration of power and security over human rights. While there are legitimate security concerns in the region, they are often exaggerated, and all governments in the region are responsible for serious violations of IRL and international human rights law” (Orchard, 2016). In fact, it is important to consider not only the 1951 Convention, but all series of Human Rights Laws in order to see the accurate diagnosis of refugee, asylum-seeker policies of the hosting countries. Ratification of Human Rights Instruments play a key role in measuring moral commitments of the states combined with other key international agreements regarding refugees, migrants and stateless people. According to the status of the ratification of Human Rights Instruments, CAR and GCC states are among 2nd (between 10-14 instruments signed out of 18) and 3rd (between 5 and 9 instruments signed out of 18) groups respectively¹⁷. In fact, important barriers in development of refugee and asylum-seeker conditions in CAR is very much linked to compliance with Human Rights Instruments.

While applying basic measurement with coding¹⁸ related to changes in national legislations over time, we found out that rentier states are less likely to adopt full compliance with international norms with regards to refugee protection. For example, since signing the 1951 Geneva Convention, CAR passed restrictive application procedures in their regulation of refugee and asylum-seeker policies. Not only did legal practices become more restrictive compared to the early years of independence, but they continually evolved to be more restrictive over time.

Despite signing the 1951 Geneva Convention and Protocol of 1967 in 1999, Republic of Kazakhstan (RK) still applies strict division between the concepts of “refugee” and “political asylum”. Kazakh authorities are the promoters of the 10-Point Plan of Action initiative in Central Asia¹⁹, but the question of full compliance with Geneva convention in Kazakh national law is not achieved. For example, the primary issue concerns the annual stay permit attributed to refugees. In fact, “Granting refugee status for one year and its subsequent annual extension is in conflict with provisions of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Law of RK on Refugees, on Legal Status of foreigners, and on Citizenship of the Republic of Kazakhstan” (De Berry & Petrini, 2011). Although the 1951 Convention provides the right to work and be employed in the host countries, in reality refugees do not have access to the labor market. According to the Labor Code of RK, the following documents are required: a copy of the social individual code (SIC),

¹⁷ For further detailed information see <http://indicators.ohchr.org/>.

¹⁸ (+) for positive change for refugees and (-) for restrictive steps taken by authorities

¹⁹ The Action stresses refugee problem and tries to mobilize all neighboring partners (countries) that are affected by the Afghan refugees.



a copy of the taxpayer's registration number (TRN), beginning from 1 January 2013 – a copy of the individual identification number (IIN), and a copy of the registration document" (Abishev and Sultanov, 2012:120). The list of complex obstacles facing refugees also include the National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan's Resolution No. 266 which does not let individuals temporarily residing in Kazakhstan have a bank account or make transactions, limit access to social benefits such as free healthcare, deny private ownership of housing, and make it difficult to acquire Kazakh nationality for children of refugees born in Kazakhstan (Abishev and Sultanov, 2012). The latter is very complex which can be given only by the President of the country while the status of refugee is redefined annually by the decree 273 of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of 20-11-2007. Even the new law of 2010 (amended 2017) did not introduce major changes to Kazakhstan's restrictive policies.

In the case of neighboring Kyrgyzstan, it adheres to both the 1951 Geneva Convention and its Protocol in 1996. The March 25 2002 "Law on Refugees" was adopted, which generally complies with such standards. Theoretically, refugees after having stayed for three years can apply for citizenship. However, this decision was amended in 2006 in relation to the legal entry of refugees and asylum-seekers, excluding mainly ethnic Uyghurs and Uzbeks from applying for refugee status due to political concerns. Article 2 of the law was modified and applied only to those applicants staying in the territory on lawful grounds, which is a violation of the 1951 Geneva Convention. Kyrgyzstan also became more active in relocating refugees to third countries (1900 refugees). Besides legal restrictions, Kyrgyz Republic holds a very low rate of recognition of refugee status (0 in 2012, 13% in 2013).

Tajikistan adheres both to the 1951 Geneva and its Protocol in 1993. The new asylum law adopted in 2002 (first in Central Asia) and national resolutions implemented policies in contradiction to convention. For example, resolution 325 (2000) and resolution 328 (2004) prohibit asylum-seekers and refugees from residing in designated urban areas, such as capital Dushanbe or Khujand. Resolution 325 (article 499(3) of administrative code) allows deportation and even refoulement of refugees which is in contradiction with article 14(1) of the law on refugees. Several countries are designated as safe third countries for asylum seekers by the resolution 323 (2000) such as Afghanistan, Belarus, China, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The resolution also prohibits the granting the refugee status for applicants who temporarily resided in these countries without defining the length of stay (Rozumek, 2012). The continuous restrictions of the refugee regime in Tajikistan has been reinforced in later years. Law 1124 adopted by the parliament in 26-07-2014 removed the possibility of becoming citizen of the country (refugees had the possibility to apply for citizenship after 2, 5 stay in the country). The implementation gap is reinforced in pre-screening procedures before an asylum claim is registered. Moreover, access to asylum currently depends also on various preliminary requirements (visa, travel document, or evidence of residence).

Besides adhering to the Geneva Convention and the Protocol in 1998, Turkmenistan is the only one among CAR having signed 1954 convention related to statelessness and 1961 convention on the reduction of the statelessness in 2012. However, Turkmenistan granted refugee status mainly to ethnic Turkmens coming from neighboring countries. In 2005, it granted 10,158 refugees citizenship, and after 2011 Turkmenistan granted



nationality to more than 6,400 stateless persons and refugees. As a rentier state, Turkmenistan uses the ethnic card in SDP and RSD. Turkmen authorities also apply separate procedures for refugees and asylum-seekers in contradiction with the 1951 convention. Since 2005, Turkmenistan accepted no asylum-seeker (2nd category) applications in the country, since RSD responsibility is transferred to State Migration Service.

As shown above, despite legal adherence, there is no country in Central Asia which fully complies with UNHCR 1951 Convention. In contrast, the experience of CAR shows how the legal gap increased in relation to international norms over time.

As we stated earlier, migration regimes of rentier states are formed in relation to their regime security. Therefore, legal steps and consequent implementation in rentier states occur in relation to regime security. Recently, important changes in relation to general migration policies occurred in Qatar. The country adopted refugee asylum law (first in GCC) and new labour laws in 2018. These positive changes cannot be fully disassociated from regime security (Qatar's recent political isolation in GCC and upcoming World Cup 2022²⁰) These positive approaches also aim to protect regimes via international cooperation and recognition. However, regime security in rentier states may also have opposite reactions in relation to their political and economic situation. For example, after the assassination attempt of Niyazov in 2002, migration policies were tightened and many restrictive measures were introduced (establishment of exit visa for citizens, no visa-free agreement making it impossible for foreigners of any country to visit Turkmenistan without visa, prohibition of double citizenship and others) in Turkmenistan.

Some scholars argue that regimes of CAR benefited from integration to global markets despite many critics related to the domestic political situation (Rustemova Tutumlu, 2011, 2012). Efficient management of migration may also create opportunities for them to reinforce their capacities by diversification of resources.

3. Growing Importance of the Economic Rationale in Shaping Migration Regimes

3.1. An economic rationale to the converging trends towards a 'rentier state migration model'?

Lambert *et al.* (2015) and Shin (2016) consider that the main determinants of a country's immigration policies and regulations are the political nature of the state involved and its political economy. Shin (2016) particularly emphasized the distinction between democratic and autocratic regimes, considering that the latter's immigration policy is in essence a consequence of an autocrat's decision making over natural resource revenues and his redistributive policy. The more an autocratic country can redistribute to its citizens, the less necessary it is for the citizenry to work in low-paid jobs, leading to more reliance on imported labour. Shin articulates his idea as follows:

²⁰ <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/is-the-reform-of-the-right-of-asylum-in-qatar-for-real,3154>



"the immigration policy of an authoritarian regime is a consequence of elites' redistributive policy and their concern about the labor market. Even though elites generally prefer immigrant labor, immigration policy depends on the extent to which autocrats are able to redistribute to native citizens who would be underemployed in the presence of substantial low-skill immigration. When governments rely solely on elites' tax revenues, they lack capacity to redistribute. Without redistribution, autocrats provide wages in exchange for native workers' labor. Revenue-seeking governments encourage labor-market participation of domestic workers while restricting immigration. However, governments with independent sources of income distribute rents to their citizens while supplying migrant workers to elites who support the regime." (Shin, 2016: 16)

However, Lambert *et al.* (2014) empirically explored the many similarities in the hiring of Asian domestic workers in the hydrocarbons-exporting countries of the Arabian Gulf states and of (democratic) Scandinavia. Norway and Qatar specifically, and more generally oil and gas exporting countries of both regions, tend to create special legal niches (as *'au pair'* in Scandinavia or as *'domestic workers'* in the GCC) to import low-cost labour from South and Southeast Asia (especially female workers from the Philippines) and bypass the more demanding national labour code in the GCC or the unions' sector agreements in Scandinavia. In both regions, the Asian domestic workers end up performing domestic jobs seen as unappealing to citizens, while being paid several times less than the minimum salary citizens are legally entitled to. This similar migration phenomenon is observable in both democratic and non-democratic settings and thus tends to relativize the relevance of the autocratic/democratic dichotomy proposed by Shin (2016), while supporting nevertheless both Lambert *et al.* (2015) and Shin's (2016) common argument that the political economy and redistribution of hydrocarbons revenues are major elements in the making of immigration policies.

3.2. How economic trends can explain the convergence towards a rentier state migration model?

High income rentier states such as Brunei, Kuwait, Qatar and Norway, *inter alia*, have a sophisticated redistributive welfare state and a different political economy, compared to non-rentier, "productive states" (see Luciani, 1990). In the case of the latter however, economies are not dependent on natural commodity exportations and refugees are not necessarily perceived as a burden, but, from a supply-side economics perspective, as an avenue to add more economically contributing members to society. In Europe, this can be partly explained by the demographic problems that a number of EU states face, due to aging populations and some quasi-deserted rural areas. The opened position of EU countries such as Germany, Sweden, and Finland can be explained by their economic and social models which seek to expand their economies and maintain some sectors for exportation purposes, including agriculture and industries that requires young, productive and cost-effective working populations. From this perspective, the refugees can be seen as an economic investment. They can either help the local economies by



substituting natives in so-called '3D jobs' (i.e. Dirty, Dangerous and Difficult), thereby allowing the latter to occupy generally more skilled, better paying positions.

The recent and gradual convergence towards a 'rentier state migration model', especially among high-income hydrocarbons-exporting countries, tends to sharply depart from this perspective. Rentier countries may keep on having a high ratio of temporary economic immigrants (both unskilled and white-collar ones), but at the same time they do not want to carry a share of the 'burden' of hosting refugees, as they have done in the past decades. A refugee becomes a 'burden' within a political economy where wealth is not as much produced (e.g. from agriculture, industrial production and services) as it is redistributed from hydrocarbons revenues. When a large share of the national income is largely stemming from a finite resource, like oil rents, refugees might not be seen as potential contributors, but rather as foreign and thus arguably illegitimate beneficiaries of a (free) slice of the pie. As coal, oil and gas resources are finite, rent redistribution and rent capture happen to be zero-sum games, wherein adding people implies taking away some resources from others.

The 2014 fall in oil and gas prices (e.g. crude oil prices fell from USD 114 (for barrel) in 2014 to USD 30 in 2015) has negatively affected the GCC and CAR rentier states during the last three years. Many suffered from the devaluation of the Kazakh currency (Schenkkan, 2015), as more than a million migrants were deported from Saudi Arabia from 2014 to 2016 (GLMM, 2016), and Russia tightened migration legislation (Denisenko, 2017). In addition to mass deportation of immigrants, various policies conducted by the regimes such as "Saudization" or "Emiratization" are often considered as ways to create better economic opportunities for the natives, although they generate negative effects for immigrants, particularly among white collar expatriates in terms of job security. The redistributive rentier state model provides some forms of cooperation and power sharing between the state and the nationals in controlling immigration during economic slowdowns, as CAR and GCC countries are currently experiencing. The rentier state establishes a "hierarchization" between natives and immigrants—the latter's job flexibility providing a good leverage for increased job security among the former in times of lower economic growth. This model eventually allows some reduction in the citizens' pressure over the government. During periods of economic hardship, the pressure is shouldered by immigrants and not equally shared with national citizens and the government. Immigrants can be rapidly and efficiently exploited within this system (e.g. through decreases in salary, deportation before the end of contract, replacements), depending on the state's evolving interests. Limited social and economic rights, coupled with spatial separation of communities, nourish and strengthen this status quo. Therefore, the rentier state model cannot simply be reduced to economic advantages, but rather, it also provides political assets for the ruling elite, which can easily play the temporary migrant 'card' to various ends, and particularly as an adjustment variable. It is worth mentioning, other hydrocarbons exporting countries, beyond the CAR and Arabian Gulf states, have also reduced the inflows of migrants and have begun to massively deport unskilled economic immigrants over the past year, while depressed oil revenues deteriorated their economic situation. This involves significantly different rentier states, such as Algeria, Equatorial Guinea, Norway and Venezuela, inter alia.

The current COVID crisis immediately hit migrants making their situation extremely difficult. Official data suggest that in Kuwait, the UAE and Bahrain nearly all cases of



COVID are found among migrants, many of whom live in labour camps (the Guardian, 2020). In Kazakhstan, undocumented migrants were “left behind all possible parachutes and safety opportunities” without access to state medical assistance (Cabar, 2020). Moreover, the Kuwait National Assembly approved a draft bill which seeks to reduce the number of foreign workers from 70% to 30%. As a result, Indians should not exceed 15% of the population, even though they currently constitute the majority of migrants in the country (BBC, 2020). Although, there is scepticism about the implementation of the draft, governments “take advantage” of this situation not to renew residency of migrants without any criteria (Gulfnews, 2020). Another GCC country, the UAE, has made it legal for employers to unilaterally change labour contracts to “restructure the contractual relationship”, often allowing private organizations to cut salaries or force employees to take unpaid leave (Business-humanrights.org, 2020).

The notion of crisis is usually associated with present difficulty and future uncertainty. At the same time, it also offers the possibility to question existing migration frameworks. This may provide further opportunities to think about better systems and update current migration regimes. However, rentier states’ policies during any crisis period seem to give them more opportunities to make remaining migrants vulnerable and increase their fears and anxieties.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to investigate, and make sense of, the influence of energy rentierism over a country’s policy and legal provisions towards asylum seekers and refugees, such as during the so-called “migrant crisis” between 2015-2016.

This article highlighted that some hydrocarbons-exporting states of the Arabian Gulf and Central Asia, which have long been relatively generous with granting asylum to populations from their respective regions, have now made their borders much less open. Based on global descriptive statistics, we have shown that there is indeed a strong correlation between being a hydrocarbon-exporting rentier state and having restrictive legislation and/or mass deportation policies towards asylum seekers. This is for instance the case with the energy rich states of Saudi Arabia and Kazakhstan, while the vast majority of the world’s refugees are hosted by countries with limited valuable natural endowments and economic resources per capita.

Through case studies this paper analyzed the policies of hydrocarbon-rich states toward asylum seekers and potential refugees. Comparing the current migration models of rentier states in the Gulf Cooperation Council and Central Asia, the paper highlighted that most Central Asian states have long ratified a significantly larger number of international conventions than their Gulf counterparts. Regionally though, very few Afghans have found shelter in Central Asian countries - especially in the oil and gas rich states of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan - and only very limited numbers of Syrians and Yemenis have found protection in oil-rich Gulf monarchies after 2015. This trend stands in contrast to the history of Gulf states hosting communities of asylum seekers from the region, such as Palestinians, Iranian minorities, and Yemenis during previous conflicts. This paper thus concludes that dynamics of convergence among the rentier states of both regions towards a more restrictive and arguably new rentier state migration model can be



observed. However, this paper cannot yet affirm that increased refugee flows was the main driver of policy and legislative change in these two regions.

The authors acknowledge that the acceleration of the more restrictive laws and regulations on mass deportation policies towards asylum seekers and 'undocumented migrants' in these rentier states correlates also with an important external driver of change: i.e., lower international oil and gas prices since the second half of 2014. As correlation does not necessarily imply causation, further investigation is needed to determine which factor has been the main driving force towards the similar evolutionary trajectories of national asylum systems and deportation policies towards immigrants among rentier states. This further investigation is necessary, not only at the regional scale but also at the national and international scales, as the above-mentioned dynamics have been observed well beyond the Arabian Gulf region and the CAR, in many other hydrocarbons-exporting rentier states such as Algeria, Equatorial Guinea, and Norway.

Annex 1. List of UN Member States by classifications on income group, net hydrocarbons exporter, rentier state, and very restrictive immigration policies

Country	Income group	Net Hydrocarbons Exporter	Hydrocarbons Exporting Rentier State	Very Restrictive Refugee Policies
Afghanistan	Low income	No	No	No
Albania	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Algeria	Upper middle income	Yes	Yes	Yes
Andorra	High income	No	No	No
Angola	Lower middle income	Yes	Yes	Yes
Antigua and Barbuda	High income	No	No	No
Argentina	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Armenia	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Australia	High income	Yes	No	Yes
Austria	High income	No	No	Yes
Azerbaijan	Upper middle income	Yes	Yes	No
Bahamas, The	High income	No	No	Yes
Bahrain	High income	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bangladesh	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Barbados	High income	No	No	No
Belarus	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Belgium	High income	No	No	No
Belize	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Benin	Low income	No	No	No
Bermuda	High income	No	No	No
Bhutan	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Bolivia	Lower middle income	Yes	Yes	No
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Botswana	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Brazil	Upper middle income	Yes	No	Yes
Brunei Darussalam	High income	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bulgaria	Upper middle income	No	No	Yes
Burkina Faso	Low income	No	No	No
Burundi	Low income	No	No	No
Cabo Verde	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Cambodia	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Cameroon	Lower middle income	No	No	Yes
Canada	High income	Yes	No	Yes
Central African Republic	Low income	No	No	No
Chad	Low income	Yes	Yes	No
Chile	High income	No	No	No
China	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Colombia	Upper middle income	Yes	No	No



Comoros	Low income	No	No	No
Congo, Dem. Rep.	Low income	No	No	No
Congo, Rep.	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Costa Rica	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Côte d'Ivoire	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Croatia	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Cuba	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Curaçao	High income	Yes	No	No
Cyprus	High income	No	No	No
Czech Republic	High income	No	No	No
Denmark	High income	Yes	No	Yes
Djibouti	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Dominica	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Dominican Republic	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Ecuador	Upper middle income	No	No	Yes
Egypt, Arab Rep.	Lower middle income	Yes	No	No
El Salvador	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Equatorial Guinea	Upper middle income	Yes	Yes	Yes
Eritrea	Low income	No	No	No
Estonia	High income	No	No	No
Ethiopia	Low income	No	No	No
Fiji	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Finland	High income	No	No	No
France	High income	No	No	No
Gabon	Upper middle income	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gambia, The	Low income	No	No	No
Georgia	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Germany	High income	No	No	No
Ghana	Lower middle income	Yes	No	No
Greece	High income	No	No	Yes
Grenada	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Guatemala	Lower middle income	Yes	No	No
Guinea	Low income	No	No	No
Guinea-Bissau	Low income	No	No	No
Guyana	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Haiti	Low income	No	No	No
Honduras	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Hungary	High income	No	No	Yes
Iceland	High income	No	No	No
India	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Indonesia	Lower middle income	Yes	Yes	No
Iran, Islamic Rep.	Upper middle income	Yes	Yes	No
Iraq	Upper middle income	Yes	Yes	No
Ireland	High income	No	No	No
Israel	High income	No	No	Yes
Italy	High income	No	No	Yes
Jamaica	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Japan	High income	No	No	Yes
Jordan	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Kazakhstan	Upper middle income	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kenya	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Kiribati	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Korea, Dem. People's Rep.	Low income	No	No	No
Korea, Rep.	High income	No	No	Yes
Kuwait	High income	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kyrgyz Republic	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Lao PDR	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Latvia	High income	No	No	No
Lebanon	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Lesotho	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Liberia	Low income	No	No	No
Libya	Upper middle income	Yes	Yes	Yes
Liechtenstein	High income	No	No	No



Lithuania	High income	No	No	No
Luxembourg	High income	No	No	No
Macedonia, FYR	Upper middle income	No	No	Yes
Madagascar	Low income	No	No	No
Malawi	Low income	No	No	No
Malaysia	Upper middle income	Yes	No	Yes
Maldives	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Mali	Low income	No	No	No
Malta	High income	No	No	No
Marshall Islands	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Mauritania	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Mauritius	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Mexico	Upper middle income	No	No	Yes
Micronesia, Fed. Sts.	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Moldova	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Monaco	High income	No	No	No
Mongolia	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Montenegro	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Morocco	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Mozambique	Low income	Yes	Yes	No
Myanmar	Lower middle income	Yes	Yes	Yes
Namibia	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Nauru	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Nepal	Low income	No	No	No
Netherlands	High income	Yes	No	No
New Zealand	High income	No	No	Yes
Nicaragua	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Niger	Low income	No	No	No
Nigeria	Lower middle income	Yes	Yes	No
Norway	High income	Yes	Yes	Yes
Oman	High income	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pakistan	Lower middle income	No	No	Yes
Palau	High income	No	No	No
Panama	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Papua New Guinea	Lower middle income	Yes	Yes	No
Paraguay	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Peru	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Philippines	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Poland	High income	No	No	Yes
Portugal	High income	No	No	No
Qatar	High income	Yes	Yes	Yes
Romania	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Russian Federation	Upper middle income	Yes	Yes	No
Rwanda	Low income	No	No	No
Samoa	Upper middle income	No	No	No
San Marino	High income	No	No	No
São Tomé and Príncipe	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Saudi Arabia	High income	Yes	Yes	Yes
Senegal	Low income	No	No	No
Serbia	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Seychelles	High income	No	No	No
Sierra Leone	Low income	No	No	No
Singapore	High income	No	No	Yes
Slovak Republic	High income	No	No	No
Slovenia	High income	No	No	No
Solomon Islands	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Somalia	Low income	No	No	No
South Africa	Upper middle income	No	No	No
South Sudan	Low income	Country at War		
Spain	High income	No	No	No
Sri Lanka	Lower middle income	No	No	No
St. Kitts and Nevis	High income	No	No	No
St. Lucia	Upper middle income	No	No	No



St. Vincent and the Grenadines	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Sudan	Lower middle income	Yes	Yes	No
Suriname	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Swaziland	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Sweden	High income	No	No	No
Switzerland	High income	No	No	No
Syrian Arab Republic	Lower middle income	Country at War		
Tajikistan	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Tanzania	Low income	No	No	No
Thailand	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Timor-Leste	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Togo	Low income	No	No	No
Tonga	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Trinidad and Tobago	High income	No	No	No
Tunisia	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Turkey	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Turkmenistan	Upper middle income	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tuvalu	Upper middle income	No	No	No
Uganda	Low income	No	No	No
Ukraine	Lower middle income	No	No	No
United Arab Emirates	High income	Yes	Yes	Yes
United Kingdom	High income	Yes	No	No
United States	High income	Yes	No	Yes
Uruguay	High income	No	No	No
Uzbekistan	Lower middle income	Yes	No	Yes
Vanuatu	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Venezuela, RB	Upper middle income	Yes	Yes	Yes
Vietnam	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Yemen, Rep.	Lower middle income	Country at War		
Zambia	Lower middle income	No	No	No
Zimbabwe	Low income	No	No	No



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