



Migration Profile

OMAN

A. Executive Summary

Located in the south-eastern end of the Arabian Peninsula, the Sultanate of Oman has a population of approximately four and a half million people. Amongst its inhabitants is a rapidly decreasing proportion of foreign workers, presently around 30% of the population, who are being displaced by the nationalisation of the workforce. A country of immigration, Oman has no substantial diaspora abroad and is not the origin of noticeable migration flows. Although a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Oman is a neutral and non-interventionist State in the context of the war in Yemen, keeping communication channels open for different actors in the wider Middle East region. Home to a few hundred refugees from Iraq, Syria and Pakistan, Oman has adopted a helpful stance by letting Yemeni citizens find temporary care in Omani hospitals and by sending humanitarian help in cash and in kind to Yemen. An ancient civilisation and state apparatus dating back to antiquity, of predominantly Arab and Muslim background, Oman is nowadays trying to diversify its economy away from oil as outlined in the Vision 2040 project.

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Oman is located south of the Arabian Peninsula, bordering the Arabian sea, the Gulf of Oman, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. It spans over 309,500 km² and has a population of 4,496,000 (84.5% urban, 15.5% rural). Oman's ethnic breakdown can be roughly described as follows, although these figures are not recent: Omani Arab (48.1%), Baluchi (15%), South Asian (9.8%), other Arab (7.2%), Bengali (4.4%), Persian (2.8%), Tamil (2.5%), Zanzibari (2.5%), and other (7.5%). The population's religious affiliations according to 2010 figures are Muslim (85.9%), Christian (6.5%), Hindu (5.5%), Buddhist (0.8%), and other/unaffiliated (1.3%).

Mainly covered by dry desert, the country's climate is hot and humid along the coast and dry in the interior, with strong southwest summer monsoons (May to September) in the far south.

Oman is a Sultanate that is headed and governed by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq from Muscat, the capital. His Majesty is the successor of his cousin, Sultan Qaboos, who died in 2020. A neutral and non-interventionist country, Oman has not taken part in the eight-nation coalition of Arab states led by Saudi Arabia in Yemen. Although a member of

the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Oman opted to support Yemen through humanitarian aid and taking in Yemeni refugees.

II. International and Internal Migrants

Figures from February 2021 show that 29% of Oman's population, roughly 1,440,000 of 4,960,000, are foreigners. This number includes 140,000 domestic workers who are subject to the *kafala* sponsorship system. The five biggest source countries are Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Egypt.

Overall, however, the number of expatriates leaving the country has caused Oman's population to drop dramatically in recent months according to data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), thus prompting journalists to evoke *an exodus of expats*. It is now hardly possible to obtain clear expat community figures as all are experiencing continuous and significant decreases. As an example, the number of Indians dropped by 21% to reach 492,276 at the end of 2019 while the Bangladeshi community has lost 100,000 of their countrymen over the last 10 months.

The strong downward trend in the number of foreigners in Oman is mostly due to several labour-related policies designed to prioritize Omanis for employment over expatriates, a trend called "Omanization." Some jobs in the private sector will be nationalised and foreign workers in the country's public service will also be replaced by Omani nationals as part of a wider strategy called Vision Oman 2040 that seeks to diversify the economy away from oil and make it more beneficial to the local population. Oman has been strongly hit by the conjunction of the Covid-19-related economic crisis and the drop in oil prices. According to the International Monetary Fund, Oman's economy shrank by 6.4% in 2020.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

It does not appear that Oman is impacted by noteworthy emigration waves.

IV. Forced Migration (internally displaced, asylum seekers, and refugees)

The number of Yemeni refugees living in Oman is not publicly available; however, 2,500 are believed to be in the country according to some government officials. Figures from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) offer a different picture, with 309 refugees under UNHCR mandate (296 from Iraq, 8 from Syria, and 5 from Pakistan), 254 asylum seekers (all from Iraq), and 0 internally displaced people of concern to the UNHCR. Refugees and asylum-seekers live mainly in urban areas, and almost all of them possess valid residence permits, meaning they have secured sponsorship through work, investment, or a family connection. Oman forbids refugees from working in the country, but many manage to work illegally to send money back home to families who desperately need it. The government did provide temporary medical care and protection to Yemeni citizens displaced due to the war. These citizens demonstrated that they could not receive adequate care in their home countries and were thus offered temporary stay for themselves and an accompanying family member in Oman during the treatment period.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Trafficked men and women, mostly from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Indonesia, transit or end up in Oman, where they are subjected to forced labour, and prostitution to a lesser degree. As is often the case, many of these people travel willingly and legally to Oman in the hope of finding work in domestic service, construction, agriculture, or the service sector. Some end up with their passports or wages withheld and get lured into forced labour. Unscrupulous agencies with sub-agents abroad lure workers with false job offers. Domestic workers are engaged through the *kafala* system, the visa-sponsorship employment system common in Oman and other Islamic legal systems; it gives a lot of power to employers, which can lead to the above-mentioned abuses. Although forced labour is forbidden under the labour law, domestic workers are excluded from the law's protections. In 2019 courts convicted seven individuals for human trafficking crimes. For the first time, the government convicted two Omani nationals of trafficking.

VI. National Legal Framework

Oman is not a state party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Nor is it a party to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons or the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Although Oman is not party to these Conventions and does not have a national framework regulating issues related to asylum, it is noteworthy that the Constitution's Article 36 forbids refoulement. Thus, the authorities generally refrain from deporting people in need of international protection to territories where their safety or health would be at risk. According to the US Department of State's 2020 Trafficking in Persons Report on Oman, uneven law enforcement in Oman focuses more on sex trafficking than on labour trafficking crimes. However, the 2008 anti-trafficking law criminalized sex trafficking and labour trafficking and prescribed punishments of three to seven years' imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 to 100,000 Omani rial (\$12,990-\$259,740) for offenses involving adult victims and seven to fifteen years' imprisonment and a minimum fine of 10,000 Omani rial (\$25,970) for offenses involving child victims. Furthermore, the circular from the Ministry of Manpower No.2/2006 forbids employers from withholding migrant workers' passports, though it does not specify penalties for noncompliance.

In an effort to address passport retention, the MoM reported investigating 95 passport retention cases in 2019 and 120 in 2018. High-ranking officials from Oman also attended Bahrain's inaugural intergovernmental forum on combating trafficking in the Middle East where they committed to region-specific reforms, including that of the prominent *kafala* sponsorship system. The government also collaborated with an international organization to develop and conduct training for government entities and civil society representatives. The Royal Oman Police Training Academy continued to educate all incoming cadets on the legal framework for trafficking-related crimes, victim identification, and the mechanisms for transferring potential cases to court, graduating 500 new Omani officials during the year.

VII. Main Actors

The State

Oman keeps its border open to thousands of Yemenis, providing medical treatment, food, and financial support to those in need. It also supplies power generators and gas cylinders, builds houses and water wells, and constructs much-needed infrastructure and medical centres in the war-torn country. Martin Griffiths, special envoy of the UN secretary-general to Yemen, declared in 2018 that Oman is playing a pivotal role in helping Yemenis. Moreover, the Omani government allows international organizations to operate from within its territory. In 2019, 136 trucks of aid were sent to Yemen according to the mission head in Oman for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The ICRC operates under the guidance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and does not export anything unless approved and validated by local authorities. Since 2017, 200 Omani surgeons and health professionals have been trained by the ICRC in war surgery, treating patients injured by war. The state-funded Oman Charitable Organization is behind most public and private initiatives dedicated to easing the suffering of Yemenis. The Oman Charitable Organization is a key partner in supporting a logistics hub run by the ICRC in Salalah, where a free guest house for Yemeni patients was opened in 2019 by Omani White Hands aid workers.

The State keeps a record of all charitable associations, which can be found on the dedicated official website for the official Oman eGovernment Services Portal.

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church in Oman caters to approximately 55,000 Catholics, about 2% of the total local population, mostly migrant workers and expatriates. As explained above, their number is decreasing, most likely due to the increase in the Omanization trend in various work sectors.

The Church in Oman is part of the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia (AVOSA), which includes the Churches of Yemen and the United Arab Emirates; its centre is in the city of Abu Dhabi. The head is Bishop Paul Hinder OFM, a member of the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for promoting Integral Human Development. Since 13 May 2020, Mons. Hinder has also been the Apostolic Administrator of the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia (AVONA), covering Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. At present there are four parishes in Oman: the Church of St. Anthony of Padua in Sohar, the Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul in Ruwi, the Church of the Holy Spirit in Ghala, and the Church of St. Francis Xavier in Salalah.

Although there are no official relations between the Holy See and the Sultanate of Oman, Mons. Hinder affirms that relations are cordial, assuring that the country maintains a position of openness towards all; this allows Oman to be seen as a good negotiator in case of conflict. Oman played a major role in the liberation of Father Thomas Uzhunnalil, an Indian Salesian missionary abducted in Yemen in 2016.

April 2021

C. References

Institutional Websites and NGOs

Institutional Centre for Statistics & Information, (2021), *Total Population*,
<https://www.ncsi.gov.om/Pages/IndicatorDetails.aspx?ItemID=m3J5yY5QxUbEvHhsfc8KuO%3d%3d>

CIA, (2021), *Oman country profile*
<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/oman/>

Britannica, (2021), *Oman, plant and animal life*
<https://www.britannica.com/place/Oman/Plant-and-animal-life#ref257070>

Human Rights Watch, (2021), *Oman*
<https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/oman>

US Department of State, (2021), *2020 Trafficking in Persons Report, Oman*
<https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/oman/>

UNHCR, (2021), *Refugee Statistics*
<https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/?url=CvGr8G>

UNHCR, (2021) *Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees For the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Compilation Report*
https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/oman/session_23_-_november_2015/unhcr_upr23_omn_e_main.pdf

Borgen Project, (2021), *Yemeni refugees in Oman*,
<https://borgenproject.org/yemeni-refugees-in-oman/>

AVOSA, (2021) <https://avosa.org>

The Official eGovernment Services Portal, (2021), *Charitable Organisations*,
https://omanportal.gov.om/wps/portal/index/gov/NGOs/charitableOrganizations!/ut/p/a1/hc_JDoIwEAbgp-EoM20VlxuGIOLSGFygFwOmFhKkBIHi24vGi8Zl bv_k-5MZEBCKQJLpuIq00Wc37Owt nxBLQJxnPD5iqDt4XLBhy6lLmlA1AD8Mjb-629A_CRd8gOMR4i8P561gzVB6rtOpxd06Yhb72CynNII2dr1-1OLOU77CX4c6YNOuU4eD0d2kbCeAlHKvSxlaZ7LZp1W1fE0MNDAuq5NpbXKpbnTBwM_VVJ9qiB8lRDIAo6HELNxSyRXVt8A9oASgw!!/d15/d5/L0IKOSEvUUt3TS80RUkhL2Vu/

Online newspapers and periodicals

Business Live Me, (2020), *A breakdown of the 5 largest expat communities in Oman in 2020*
<https://www.businessliveme.com/oman/a-breakdown-of-the-5-largest-expat-communities-in-oman-in-2020/>

International Live Investment, (2020), *50 000 leave Oman in expat exodus*,

<https://www.internationalinvestment.net/news/4020513/leave-oman-expat-exodus>

Al Arabiya English, (2021), *Oman makes recruitment of expat workers more costly promotes nationalization*

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2021/01/28/Oman-makes-recruitment-of-expat-workers-more-costly-promotes-nationalization>

PWC, (2021), *Oman incentives announced by the Government as part of Oman Vision 2040*

<https://www.pwc.com/m1/en/services/tax/me-tax-legal-news/2021/oman-incentives-announced-by-the-government-as-part-of-oman-vision-2040.html>

The National News, (2021), *Oman provides sanctuary for Yemenis fleeing conflict*

<https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/oman-provides-sanctuary-for-yemenis-fleeing-conflict-1.30420>