

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**

**LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.2268
TO BE ANSWERED ON 29.07.2022**

CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN GCC COUNTRIES

2268. SHRI M.K. RAGHAVAN:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government has taken note of the lack/less connectivity between Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Kozhikode, if so, the details regarding the interventions by the Government to increase connectivity to GCC countries;
- (b) whether the Government has any data regarding the number of persons who have lost their jobs in GCC countries due to COVID-19 pandemic, if so, the details regarding the same;
- (c) whether any interventions are being made by the Government to provide financial support to returnees from GCC countries who have lost their jobs as a result of layoffs in various countries, if so, the details thereof; and
- (d) whether the Government has noticed an increase in human trafficking to GCC countries, if so, the details of steps being taken to ensure that Indian migrants to GCC countries are protected?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

[SHRI V. MURALEEDHARAN]

(a) Kozhikode is well-connected with each of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The total number of flights between Kozhikode (Calicut) airport and Gulf countries per week for Summer 2022 are as follows:

UAE (Abu Dhabi)	UAE (Dubai)	UAE (Sharjah)	UAE (Ras al Khaimah)	Saudi Arabia	Qatar	Kuwait	Oman	Bahrain
18	37	21	2	49	22	5	14	13

(b) & (c) As per Government's estimates, about 7,16,662 workers returned from the six Gulf countries under the Vande Bharat Mission. Their country-wise breakup is given below:

S.No.	Name of ECR Countries	Estimated No. of Indian workers
1.	United Arab Emirates	3,30,058
2.	Saudi Arabia	1,37,900
3.	Kuwait	97,802
4.	Oman	72,259

5.	Qatar	51,190
6.	Bahrain	27,453
	TOTAL	7,16,662

During the Covid-19 pandemic, our Missions and Posts facilitated the return of Indian workers stranded abroad on the Vande Bharat Mission. They also proactively extended support to Indians both directly using the Indian Community Welfare Fund and by coordinating with community associations. This included expenses on a needs basis pertaining to boarding and lodging, air passages, emergency medical care, etc.

It was the Government's priority to ensure during the pandemic that its impact on Indian workers in terms of loss of employment was mitigated. To that end, the Ministry and all our Missions in the Gulf were continuously engaged at highest political level with the Governments of the Gulf nations to maintain the workers, ensure their welfare and facilitate financial payments due to them. All countries in the Gulf have responded favourably to these efforts by the Government as a result of which, there has been a steady flow of returnees back to the Gulf countries.

Indian Missions/Posts are also continuing to pursue with the Governments in the Gulf countries the return of Indian workers, the realization of payments due to them, new recruitment in the light of economic recovery, and other welfare measures as appropriate.

The Government of India launched the Skilled Workers Arrival Database for Employment Support (SWADES) portal as a joint initiative of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE), the Ministry of Civil Aviation, and the MEA, aimed to create a database of returning citizens based on their skill sets and experience, who lost their jobs and were stuck overseas and have returned back to India through the VBM.

As per information received from the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), all the stakeholders have been given access to the SWADES candidate database with uploading of details on the Aatmanirbhar Skilled Employee Employer Mapping (ASEEM) portal for employer connect under different sectors. 34118 candidates have registered for SWADES skill card (as on June 2022).

As the pandemic has receded in recent months, this focus has shifted to pressing for return of workers and families on an expeditious basis. While a large number of Indian workers particularly in the Gulf returned to India due to COVID-19, the economic recovery in that region and their increasing openness to travel from India has now seen a return by many of them. As per the eMigrate portal total 4,16,024 Emigration Clearance(EC) were issued for ECR countries during the period 1 January 2020 to 30 June 2022.

(d) The MEA receives complaints against illegal recruitment agents from time to time through established mechanism. Such complaints are forwarded to relevant law enforcement agencies of State Governments concerned to take necessary actions as per the provision of Emigration

Act. To prevent trafficking and illegal migration, the Labour and Manpower Cooperation MOUs/Agreements are in place with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates) and Jordan that provide the overarching framework for cooperation on labour and manpower related issues. Further, to safeguard the specific interest of domestic workers in GCC Countries, who are often the most vulnerable category; Ministry has signed separate MOUs/Agreements on domestic workers with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.
