
Session 3: Family Policies in the Gulf



William Guéraiche

Title: Family policies in the UAE: what is at stake?

Abstract:

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has paid a great deal of attention to families since the beginning of the century. Three factors may explain the rationale behind the public policies in this domain. First, like in the other GCC states, the demographic transition has transformed the “nationals” into minorities in their own country. To stabilize the local population, families have been thought of a strong leverage to maintain a high birth rate. Second, families are, with the tribal heritage, the main pillar of the “tradition”. The social contract between the ruling families and their citizens in the emirates is the cornerstone of social and political stability. Third, with the promotion of women at all stages of the Emirati society, their role has been discussed. Indeed, they are perceived as the bearers of tradition but the massive entry of women into the workforce (46% in the UAE and 66% in the government sector as of 2014) has affected their roles in the family, leading to trends such as late marriage and divorce. The federation and the local governments have tried to address the main issues related to families. For instance, in Dubai, because family business represents 75% of the business in the region, Dubai International Financial Centre Authority, announced in 2006 the launch of a Family Office. In 2018, the federal government drafted the National Family Policy whose objective has been to find a balance between tradition and modernity. Six main areas were identified: marriage, family relations, balances of roles, child protection, family protection and “re-engineering the provision of family services to achieve family happiness”. The ministry of Community Development is supposed to coordinate the federal and local actions.

Bio:

Dr. William Guéraiche is an associate professor at the University of Wollongong Dubai (UOWD) where he is also the director of the Master of International Relations. He has more than 70 publications. In his last edited volume on traditional and non-traditional issues, Facets of Security in the United Arab Emirates, Routledge, 2022, he explores different topics such as Demographics and Community security.
