



Population Policies and Migration Department
League of Arab States

Regional Report on Arab Labour Migration 2006

Executive Summary

SERIES ON POPULATION & DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB REGION

This report is issued once every two years and addresses the Arab migration within and outside the Arab countries as apart of “Observatory of the Arab International Migration» project, which is being implement by Population Policies and Migration Department/ League of Arab States (LAS) supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

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First: Objectives and Methodology

-This report aims to establish a scientific research tradition on international migration within the Arab region. We hope it will be published periodically to follow up the latest change in the field of migration at the regional level. This publication is justified by several facts, including the following:

- **Migration has become a societal phenomenon** that characterizes countries of the Arab Region, both as labour-sending or labour-receiving countries, or both. Such reality draws the attention to analyzing dimensions and monitoring development prospects of this phenomenon. Moreover, significant changes have occurred to the phenomenon of Arab labour migration, due to impacts of globalization and economic liberalization and structural adjustment. Such changes need to be monitored and analyzed in order to identify risks and challenges imposed by migration and its associated opportunities on national development and regional integration;
- **Lack of data**, information and scientific analyses necessary for evaluating migration policies and their development. Also, the lack of interest in research and survey on the phenomenon of the Arab labour migration, particularly since the 1990's, compared to earlier decades;
- **Absence of a mechanism for activating and maintaining** a dialogue between those concerned with migration issue, including decision-makers, planners, experts, policy and programme executives and researchers at both regional and national levels. In spite of the recent release of several international reports, such as the annual reports of OECD, IOM, UN Population Department and most recently CARIM report, these reports have not largely touched on the particularities and specificities of migration process and immigration characteristics and emigration in the Arab Region, in such a way as to draw an overall regional picture about Arab migration as a whole;

- In this context, and in light of background papers and workshops, it was possible to determine the Report's objectives as follows:

- **Diagnose** the most important changes that have occurred in Arab labour migration within a context where implications of globalization have reacted with structural changes taking place within the Arab Region;
 - **Analyze and monitor opportunities**, risks and challenges imposed by developments on Arab labour migration over the last decade of the 20th Century to date;
 - **Utilize the report to stimulate a profound dialogue** on dimensions, issues, trends and patterns of Arab labour migration and raise awareness on its challenges and opportunities, while enhancing its contribution to achieving development and regional integration;
 - Propose suggestions and orientations for developing migrants policies in the region and propose alternative policies that contribute to activating roles of such movement in national development and Arab regional integration and sub-regional integration: Mashreq, Maghreb and Gulf;
- The report's main objective is to serve as a mechanism for enhancing dialogue between partners, in general, and between officials and those concerned with the migration sector in Arab countries. Also, it aims to develop a joint regional vision while gaining the endorsement and support of decision-makers for policies that activate developmental roles of Arab labour migration. Thus, the report was drafted within an orientation to diagnose the most prominent phenomena, in order to develop more effective policies for utilizing migration in favour of Arab regional development, integration

and international cooperation. The report considers, for analysis purposes, each Arab sub-region – Maghreb; Mashreq; Gulf – as a case with its own relative particularity, in spite of common features with other Arab cases. Gulf countries are labour-receiving countries, yet Mashreq countries, such as Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt, are both labour-receiving and labour-sending, as for Maghreb countries – with the exception of Libya – they seem to be basically labour-sending. However, due to recent developments, these countries have become a hub for increased numbers of clandestine immigrants coming from African countries.

Furthermore, each of the above-mentioned sub-regions has its historical, economic and political circumstances, as well as specific patterns of neighbourhood relations that have influenced waves of immigrants and emigrants, for instance: Asian migration to the Gulf, Maghreb migration to Europe, Mashreq migration to the Gulf and beyond the Arab Region.

- In an attempt to achieve the scientific and developmental objectives of the Report, and in the light of the initial poll over the phenomenon of Arab labour Migration, and in the light of the background papers and workshops, the following main scientific questions have been developed:

First: What are the most important changes that have occurred on the Arab labour migration, since the last decade of the 20th Century, with special focus on changes in volume of migration, migration streams and characteristics of migrants?

Second: What are the most important opportunities and challenges imposed by changes in the phenomenon, on national development and regional integration?

Third: What are the main orientations of developing policies for Arab labour migration, in order to further activate their roles in national development and regional integration?

Within this context, it is important to emphasize that topics and contents of the Report were in line with its own objectives. Thus, the Report's content was confined to the limits that materialized these objectives, without indulging in unnecessary details.

Second: A synthetic vision of the Report:

The Report reviews the most prominent features of the Arab labour migration among Arab countries and outside the region, as well as the most important changes in its characteristics and trends patterns over the last decade. Hereunder we provide an overall vision of the Report's content:

- **Lack of data** on migration and difficulties of identifying its trends and characteristics are some of the most significant challenges that face all researchers, planners and those concerned with the migration sector alike. This scarcity is attributed to several factors, among others, the difficulty to handle a phenomenon that involves several countries at the same time in addition to the lack of interest in research and surveys on migration. To determine the number of immigrants, it is necessary to know their accurate numbers in all countries of the world. National surveys and public censuses usually identify only residents, and in some cases, their relatives. Difficulties are also attributed to the weak exchange of information at the international level, concerning the size and characteristics of migrants. This, together with administrative and political reasons, as well as undocumented and illegal migration;

- The **estimation of emigrants from countries of origin lies between 15 - 20 million**, out of which 5 million are Palestinians, 2.7 million are Egyptians, 3 million are Moroccans, 1 million are Algerians, 800,000 are Tunisians, more than 600,000 are Lebanese, nearly 1 million are Yemenis and 600,000 are Sudanese. These are just estimated figures. For instance, other sources estimate Syrians and Lebanese residing or naturalized in South America to be several millions. Some authorities estimate Sudanese immigrants to be also several millions. Estimates vary altogether from one source to another, especially between labour-sending and labour-receiving countries;

- Compared to migration from other regions and continents of the world, **Arab migration is highly diverse in forms and patterns**, including emigration, whether to other Arab countries or to foreign countries, migration from other Arab or foreign countries, i.e. transit migration, usually from sub-

Sahara African countries heading for European countries, and forced migration, due to the Israeli Occupation, or wars and conflicts in several Arab countries. Arab countries range from basically labour-sending countries, such as Maghreb countries, except for Libya, to basically labour-receiving countries, such as Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states & Libya .

- A recent development over the past years in labour migration streams, as an overall orientation especially towards Arab Gulf states, has been **the decrease of opportunities for Arab labour migration**. Arab immigrants in Gulf Cooperation Council states have dropped from 72 % of the total immigrants in 1975 to 31 % in 1990, down to barely 25 - 29 % in 2002. At the same time, Asian labour has risen up to two thirds of the incoming labour to the Gulf. Estimates indicate that Indians alone in the Gulf make up almost the total number of all Egyptian, Yemeni, Syrian and Jordanian immigrants.
- In spite of the declining chances of the Arab labour force in GCC states, and in spite of enhancing and consolidating the policy of controlling borders and prohibiting migration to European countries, still, it is evident that flows of migration of Arab labour continue in significant sizes from Arab Countries and sometimes in growing sizes, as in the case of Moroccan migration that has doubled within the period of 1993 – 2004, with an annual increase of about 6.3 percent, equivalent to five fold the population growth in Morocco.
- **Arab labour migration is nearly equally divided between GCC states and migrants to industrial Western countries**: Europe – mainly France & Germany, and recently Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, USA & Canada. Arab migration to USA & Canada is characterized by the high educational profile of migrants, in comparison to Arab migration to other countries.
- The Arab migration over the last decade is, also, characterized by the **high percentage of educated migrants**. For example, migrants from Morocco, holders of the secondary education certificate, rose from 20.2 % between 1970-1984 to 44.1 % during the 1990's.
- **Also, migration of Arabs with high academic degrees has increased**, both within and outside the Arab Region, e.g. data on immigrant Jordanian labour show a rise in specialized “white-collar” migrants from 31 % in 1975 to 57.9 % in 1995. Data and examples also indicate a rise of migration of Moroccan competencies to Europe, in particular, e.g. Moroccan researchers working at the Centre Nationale des Etudes Scientifiques amount to 1,600. The percentage of professors of the Mathematics Institute at the University of Algeria, who have emigrated over the past few years, amounts to 70 percent. Graduates of the National Postal & Telecommunication Institute and Mohammedeya Engineering School in Morocco, who emigrate every year range between 50 and 70 percent.
- As for indicators at the Arab level on the whole, more than one million Arab emigrants to OECD countries are holders of high academic degrees (OECD 2005 data base). This is by far less than the actual figures. Physician doctors who migrate annually to European countries are estimated to be 5000. Out of a total of 300,000 students who graduate annually from Arab universities the number of migrants holders of academic degrees is approximately 70,000 (Zahlan, 2005).
- **Migration of females** within and outside the Arab Region **has risen** tangibly. According to the Lebanese Population & Housing Survey 2000, Sri Lankan emigrant females amounted to 11,500, representing 95 per cent of the total Sri Lankan population residing in Lebanon. In 1998, those arriving to Kuwait amounted to 32.9 percent, in Qatar 29.5 percent, to UAE 27.9 % and to Bahrain 33.6 percent. This type of migration is to meet the needs of housekeeping services, where 88 % of Sri Lankan females residing in Lebanon are engaged in housekeeping work. Also, the percentage of female emigrants from North African countries to Europe has risen within the framework of the Family Reunification Law.
- In spite of the fall in Arab labour migration, in general, yet **the volume of remittances and its positive impact on the Arab labour-sending countries has continued and even expanded**. Remittances to countries of origin represent an important input in improving shortage in foreign currency and balance of payment deficits. Such remittances have contributed to funding some

development projects in labour-sending countries and raising the chances of setting up small projects. Annual remittances by migrants from Middle East and North African countries amounted to nearly \$ 14 billion, equivalent to 2.3 % of the GDP of these countries and 3.8 times of the ODA received by all countries of the Region (IOM, News, Sept. 2004). These remittances are considered main economic resource for labour-sending countries. For example, they represent 31.8 % of the trade balance deficit in Tunisia and 84.0 % in Morocco, surpassing the tourism resource in the latter. Savings and remittances of emigrants have contributed to curbing poverty, by reducing for example poverty rates in Morocco by nearly 20 percent. In general, remittances have contributed to improving health conditions of emigrants' families and the educational status of their children. Also, they helped creating productive and active citizens in several sectors at the local level, especially in economic activities related to building and construction.

- On the other hand, **the Arab Region witnessed a wide movement of forced migration**, primarily due to the Israeli- Palestinian settlement, as well as wars and armed conflicts, as never witnessed by any other region in the South, with an intensive and incomplicant manner with all conventions and international laws and treaties. Displacement of Palestinians has been escalating ever since 1948, where Palestinian emigrants are estimated to exceed 5 million. Also, the Lebanese civil war has led to the evolution of a surge of forced migration to neighbour countries, as well as to Europe, USA, Latin American and African countries. According to the UNHCR report, their numbers have reached 900,000 in some estimates. As for forced emigration from Iraq, it has been rising during the 1980s and 1990s, with diverse currents, especially outside the Arab Region. According to some estimates, it reached 1.635 million in 1992 (UNHCR, 2002). This, in addition to the outcomes of civil wars in Somalia and Sudan that led to forced migration to neighbouring countries and to Europe, USA & Canada. In Sudan alone, there were 451,400 migrants to neighbouring African countries in 2001 (Ibid), and in Somalia, a bit less than 500,000 (Ibid).

- **Irregular or illegal migration rose as a reaction to closing the door** in front of legal labour migration. This migration includes those heading for Arab countries and those heading for European countries. The number of Arab illegal migrants present in European countries is estimated to be half a million. In spite of the increasingly strict security measures on all Mediterranean borders, still migration streams have not ceased, with all the death boats that carry migrants, with those arrested or killed, and with the few who manage to legalize their status, after a short illegal stay, in receiving countries. The number of transit Africans and sub-Saharan, who drowned in the Mediterranean between 1989 and 2002, is estimated to be 8000-10,000 victims.

- As for Arab Gulf States, it is possible to find out about some estimates of the number of illegal immigrants, through the calls to illegal migration to depart Arab Gulf States announced occasionally in official newspapers. These migrants are estimated to be tens of thousands. Some studies indicate that illegal immigrants in Jordan were nearly 127,000 in 2001. The lowest estimates for illegal Egyptians residing in Kuwait lie between 10,000 – 50,000 (Farrag, 1999).

- It is worth mentioning that South Mediterranean countries, especially the Maghreb countries, play a **role of transit for irregular migration**, particularly from sub-Saharan countries. These are estimated to be 65,000 – 80,000 migrant per year.

- In spite of these negative aspects, **Arab labour migration is distinguished by its multi-dimensional positive impacts**, whether on emigrants and their families, or on local communities, in relation to improving incomes, promoting economic sectors, and at the Macro economic level. It also has considerable positive impacts on the economies of receiving countries. Migration represents a great potential for enhancing integration among Arab countries and sub-regions.

- Labour **Migration has contributed to raising the GDP** in both Arab & non Arab receiving countries, where:

- It has provided the receiving countries with trained labour force without investing in their training or health, etc.

- It has reduced the cost of labor force in receiving countries, regarding wages, etc., given that the cost of immigrant labour is less than that of nationals.
- It has contributed to the growth of local markets in receiving countries, since immigrants labourers and their families constitute an additional purchasing power and enhance certain activities, such as travel agencies, airline companies and finance houses involved in savings and transfers of immigrant labour.
- It has also contributed to raising inter-trade practices and opportunities in certain commodities between receiving countries and sending countries, in response to consumer traditions and habits of immigrant labour.

- **At the overall Arab level, migration has played a major role in development efforts** and in building up the modern state, especially at the beginning of launching infrastructure projects and modernizing state institutions, such as education, health services, and public administration, as was the case in the Gulf Cooperation Council states and Libya, for example. Also, Arab labour has played a major role in maintaining the level of performance and activity of state institutions, when it replaced the Iraqi labour during the Iraqi/Iranian War. The experience of Egyptian peasants emigrating to Iraq presents significant lessons in settling Arab labour within the Arab Region. Egyptian labour in Jordan has contributed to raising Jordanian remittances and increasing rates of economic growth. Arab labour has contributed to the reconstruction of Lebanon, following the civil war. Also, the migration of qualified Arab cadres has contributed to guaranteeing basic services in many Arab countries.

- **Migration has contributed to improving the conditions of emigrants and their families**, where it has curbed problems of unemployment, housing, marriage, children's education, health care and nutrition for children. Migration has also contributed to creating job opportunities especially at the local level, whether in the building sector or in many other related sectors. It has also provided funds for many NGO's that have set up productive and service projects for local communities, many of which are cited in this Report. Savings of emigrants are an important source for curbing poverty, directly, by allowing a proportion of the poor families to have access to their basic needs and by preventing average-income families from falling under the line of poverty.

- **Arab labour migration in its present types and forms carries several challenges.** This is attributed to several factors related to the countries in question, primarily shortcomings in general and sectoral development policies of Arab countries, like policies of preparing and using human capital in the achievement of sustainable and renewable development. It is also attributed to cognitive and technical progress at the international level, as well as repercussions of globalization on Arab and global labour markets. Among the most important challenges are:

- Emergence of an important and critical challenge, represented in **weak Arab labour competitiveness**, both in Arab and non-Arab labour markets. This competitiveness is not limited to expertise and skill alone, but it includes the way of thinking, ability to self-educate oneself and to absorb new trends, and of being aware of the needs for further productivity and creativity. Except for the attraction of certain distinguished qualified Arab calibers abroad, who are faced with weak local conditions and circumstances, local unemployment is on the rise, due to complex factors, indeed. As a consequence of such competitiveness, there has been an escalating replacement with non Arab labour in Gulf States and other Arab countries. Labour emigrating outside the Arab Region – except for distinguished and rare qualified cadres – is being more threatened to be disposed of and put aside, in addition to security and administrative imposed restrictions in Europe and USA.

- Furthermore, the challenge of **emigration of qualified Arab cadres is one of the most important challenges** related to migration in the era of globalization. While demand for them is rising outside the Arab Region, with estimates up to one million, their qualifications are not employed in national and regional development.

Also, qualified cadres that have emigrated did not find serious national policies that benefit from their scientific and cognitive expertise in transferring and producing knowledge and utilizing it, nationally

and regionally, vis-à-vis challenges and prerequisites in the fields of production.

Emigration of qualified Arab cadres leads to complex losses. Expenses invested on their education and health are lost, as well as chances to benefit from them in national and regional development. On the other hand, qualified foreign cadres engaged to replace them in development projects are quite expensive.

Arab countries did not only fail to provide the necessary conditions and circumstances to curb the emigration of brains, but also stop those insisting to remain from pursuing their scientific research and liberal thinking .

Halim Barakat: Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi-Autumn 2001: 87

Losses for the Arab Region, due to migration of qualified cadres, is estimated to be up to \$ 1.57 billion per year.

Al-Bayan Newspaper, UAE-April 10,2002.

- **The challenge of continuous illegal/irregular migration** with all its repercussions, particularly across the Mediterranean, has led over the past decade to:
 - Loss of thousands of youth by drowning or going astray in the Mediterranean. At least 1,000 victims fall annually from several Arabs and African
 - Growth and expansion of the activities of criminal networks and migrants' trafficking become responsible for most of the illegal transit operations. Such networks were estimated to be responsible for 70–80 % of migrants across the Mediterranean during 2000 – 2001, turning it into a very rich industry worth \$ 3 – 4 billion (Widgren, 2004);
 - One of the most critical implications of this phenomenon is the growing security policies that monitor all Mediterranean borders and southern borders of North African countries, as well as a growing security approach to handle migration across the Mediterranean.
 - In turn, these implications were reflected on the image of the immigrant in the European public opinion, where negative aspects become magnified, and where sometimes migration stands parallel to crime and extremism. This only feeds antagonism against immigrants and increases racism.
 - Parallel with emphasizing the necessity of holding a dialogue at all levels, in order to find solutions for this phenomenon, it is worth mentioning that the reasons for this phenomenon are complex and not only attributed to poverty and great disparity in development between the North and South of the Mediterranean, but also to the need of some sectors of the European economy for this kind of labour, as evident from several studies.
- In its turn, **lack of data** and information about migration **is an important** challenge that hinders the development of its policies, its sound management and the utilization of its profits. Data and information are prerequisites for the evaluation and development of migration policies, in order to further activate the roles of migration in regional development and integration. For these data to succeed in producing the necessary information and in helping to take the relevant decisions, they should be comprehensive and properly updated. They should also be accurate and of a high quality, allowing comparisons over time and places, and emergent changes at the national, regional and international levels .
- The lack of data is attributed to the difficulty of following up and determining the size of migration and diagnosing its characteristics and repercussions, as well as lack of interest in setting up comprehensive, updated databases and lack of funds for specialized research institutions .