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**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)**

**INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
IN THE ARAB STATES**

United Nations  
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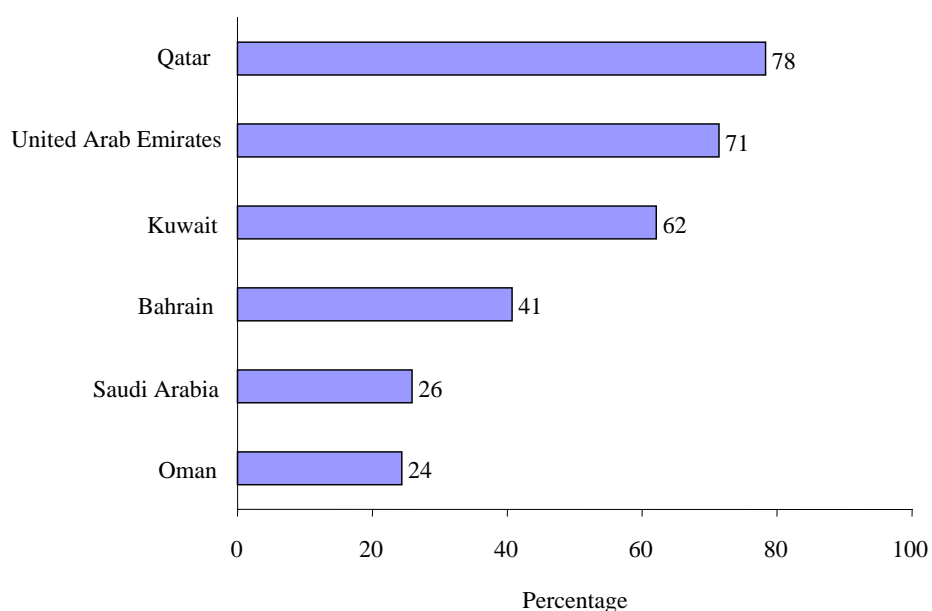
## FACTS AND FIGURES<sup>1</sup>

### International migration: trends and prospects

In 2005, there were 19.8 million migrants living in the Arab region, as compared with 13.1 million in 1990. One million were in the Arab Maghreb, 5.7 million in the Arab Mashreq and 12.8 million in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States. If the number of migrants in the GCC States continues to grow at the present rate, there will be 18 million within a decade.

Migrants currently outnumber the native population in some GCC States, a unique and unprecedented situation with political, social and economic implications that necessitate strategic planning and precautionary measures. In 2005, there were an estimated 12.8 million migrants in the GCC States. The proportion of Arab migrants in the workforce fell from 74 per cent in 1975 to 28 per cent in 2005. Social and economic policies in the wake of the first Gulf War were a significant factor in reduced demand for Arab labour.

### Immigrants as a proportion of total population in the GCC States 2005



The GCC States are unique in having a high proportion of expatriate labour that amounts in some cases to 70 per cent, accompanied by rising unemployment of nationals, which currently stands at between 15 and 20 per cent. In 2004, 13 per cent of Saudi nationals were unemployed, the highest rate, 35 per cent of which being among young people.

In 2005, there were 8.3 million migrants from the Arab region, of whom 3.7 million were from the Arab Maghreb, a similar number from the Arab Mashreq and some 316,000 from the GCC States. A breakdown of migrants by gender shows that 49.6 per cent of migrants are women and 50.4 per cent men.

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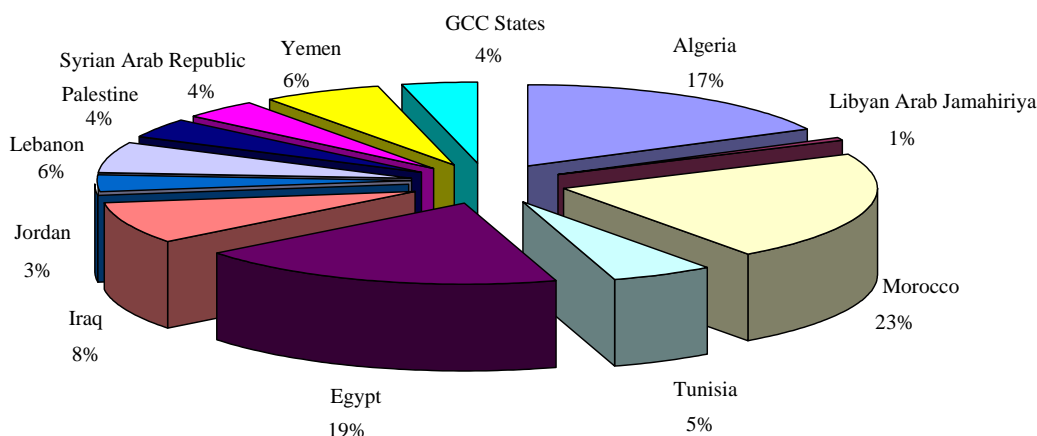
<sup>1</sup> This brochure is based on the statistics and information contained in the background documents of the Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region: Challenges and Opportunities, which was held at United Nations House in Beirut from 15 to 17 May 2006.

The volume of emigration from the Arab Maghreb is 6.6 million or 9 per cent of the population of the region. That figure includes emigrants to Europe, America and Canada, migrants within the Maghreb and to the Arab States, particularly the Gulf, and naturalized migrants. A high proportion are in the European Union countries, where, at 41 per cent of the total, they are the second largest immigrant group after the Turks, who account for 50 per cent. Twenty-two per cent of the group are Moroccan, 13 per cent Algerian and 5.8 per cent Tunisian.

A breakdown of migrants by receiving country shows that migrants from the Arab Maghreb are concentrated in certain countries: the largest groups are in France, Belgium, Italy and Spain, followed by Germany and the Netherlands, where they rank second after the Turks. The distribution of migrants differs according to country of origin: for example, 93 per cent of Algerian migrants, 74 per cent of Tunisian migrants and 40 per cent of Moroccan migrants are in France. That massive migration alleviates the pressure caused by the increase in the working population on the labour market in the Arab Maghreb.

Reports indicate that, in 2000, 4.9 million people born in the Arab Maghreb were living in Europe and Canada and accounted for 11.8 per cent of immigrants in those countries. The proportion was higher in France, however, where it was 40 per cent, followed by Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium and Italy. Seventy per cent of Lebanese emigrants go to a country of permanent migration.

**Distribution of Arab migrants in the OECD countries<sup>2</sup>  
by country of birth**



Fifty per cent of all migrants in the world are women. In 2005, the proportion of women migrants was 46 per cent in the developed countries and 36 per cent of total migrants in the Arab region. Migration of women to the GCC States remained low, at only 27.8 per cent. The proportion of migrant women in the labour force is some 34 per cent in Oman, 19 per cent in Bahrain and 22 per cent in Kuwait, while the proportion is lower in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, at 15 per cent.

The countries of South-East Asia are the major source of women migrants to the GCC States, Jordan and Lebanon, while Indonesia and Sri Lanka are the major source of women migrants to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, women accounting for 90 per cent of all migrants from Indonesia. Most women

<sup>2</sup> The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has 30 Member States, including Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and most European countries.

migrants are in low-skilled jobs and 54 per cent of them have not received primary education. Most of them work in the health, domestic and other services.

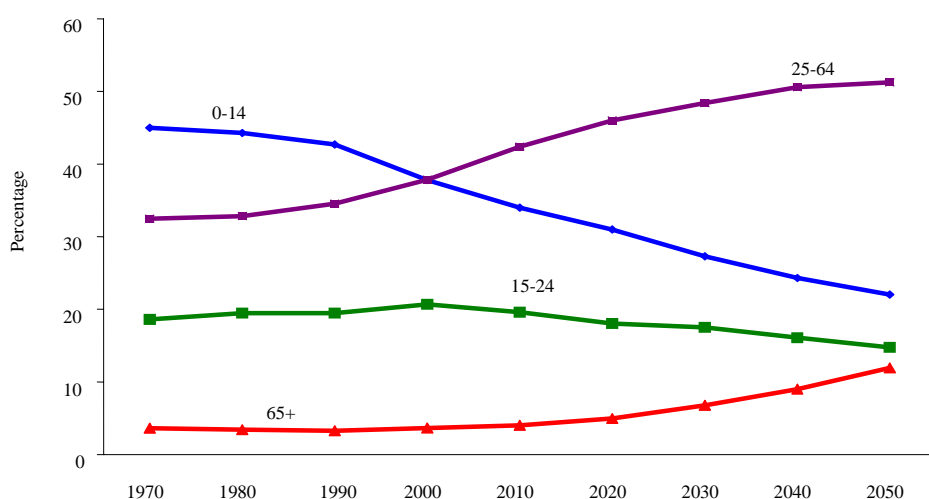
There are sharp differences between countries with regard to Arab women migrants: Europe is the preferred destination of women from the Arab Maghreb, while the preferred destination of women from the Arab Mashreq is the Gulf States. Jordanian and Egyptian women to the Gulf as temporary migrants, while migration to other countries in the world is permanent. The age structure of women migrants also differs: women migrants from the Gulf States are younger and those from the Arab Maghreb and Egypt are generally older.

### International migration and development

The Arab region has witnessed significant demographic change characterized by falls in fertility and mortality rates, a declining dependency ratio and increased participation in the workforce. It is forecast that by 2030 the proportion of the population of working age, namely, between 15 and 65, will have risen from 54 per cent in 1990 to 66 per cent, the highest the region has ever witnessed. ESCWA studies suggest that the forecasted fall in fertility, combined with a gradual fall in the dependency ratio, will probably result in a growth of per capita income for up to 25 years. As that process will be coupled with the slow growth of the ageing population, it will offer a number of countries in the region a demographic window of opportunity at different points in time, but only for a limited period.<sup>3</sup>

If the change in the age structure of the population is accompanied by appropriate policies, it will create a favourable opportunity for economic growth in the short and medium terms. That opportunity can have positive effects on development if accompanied by sound, effective economic and social policies aimed at developing human resources and creating job opportunities for those of working age. It will have negative effects on development if decision-makers are unable to plan for it and create favourable conditions and an appropriate political environment. Possible negative results include an increase in unemployment and a significant rise in demand for international migration.

**Changes in the age structure of the population in the Arab region**



<sup>3</sup> The demographic window of opportunity is the period of time during which societies undergo demographic change and significant changes in the age structure of the population whereby the proportion of the population of working age outweighs other age groups. It can be defined as the period in which the proportion of the population in the 0 to 15 age group falls below 30 per cent and the proportion aged 65 years and over is below 15 per cent.

Given that global ability to absorb the increased demand for international migration is limited and that more stringent selection criteria are being employed, and because unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, is rising, it is forecast that social and economic instability will increase and tend to have a negative effect on political stability. Studies show that current employment policies have proved disappointing in terms of job creation, raising skills levels and curbing demand for international migration. The rate of youth unemployment in some Arab countries is rising fast: in Jordan in 2004, for example, it affected 76 per cent of all young people.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN SELECTED ARAB COUNTRIES  
(15-24 AGE GROUP)<sup>4</sup>

Country	Youth unemployment (percentage) (15-24)	Year
Bahrain	46.6	2000
Jordan	76.0	2004
Kuwait	66.2	1995
West Bank and Gaza	35.1	2001
Yemen	46.9	1999
Egypt	60.3	2001
Morocco	39.1	2001

### Foreign remittances and development

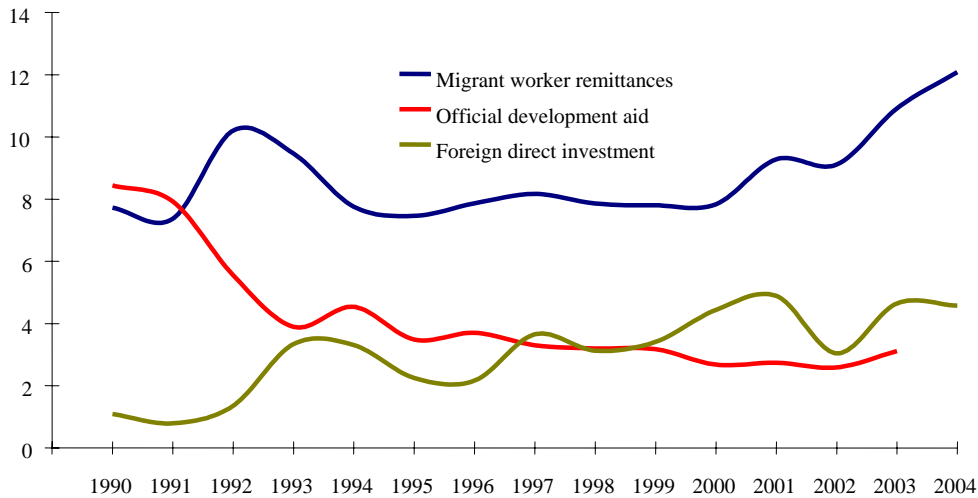
In 2004, the Arab region received a total of US\$ 21.6 billion in international remittances from migrants. Lebanon ranked first, with the volume of remittances to the country amounting to US\$ 5.2 billion, while Morocco was in second place with US\$ 4.2 billion. The volume of remittances to Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia was US\$ 3.3 billion, US\$ 2.1 billion and US\$ 1.4 billion respectively. Total remittances to those countries amounted to US\$ 16.2 billion in 2004, representing 10 per cent of all remittances to developing countries. The volume of remittances was seven times greater than the aid given by the European Investment Bank in the form of grants and facilitated loans.

Official remittances from countries in the ESCWA region and GCC States are put at exactly US\$ 26 billion a year. The highest volume is from Saudi Arabia, where the sums involved were between US\$ 13.5 and US\$ 15.8 billion a year between 1996 and 2004, putting it in second place after the United States. The volume of remittances would be much higher if money transferred through unofficial channels were added. According to World Bank estimates, unofficial remittances constitute 50 per cent of total remittances to developing countries.

The volume of migrant remittances to the Arab region greatly exceeds foreign direct investment (FDI) and development aid and, unlike other inflows, is increasing steadily. Migrant remittances to Egypt in 2000-2002 were 223 per cent of the volume of development aid. The figures for Jordan, Morocco and Yemen are 355, 527 and 296 per cent respectively. In recent years, remittances have been three times the volume of FDI in Egypt and Tunisia, four times the volume in Morocco, five times the volume in Jordan and 23 times the volume in Yemen.

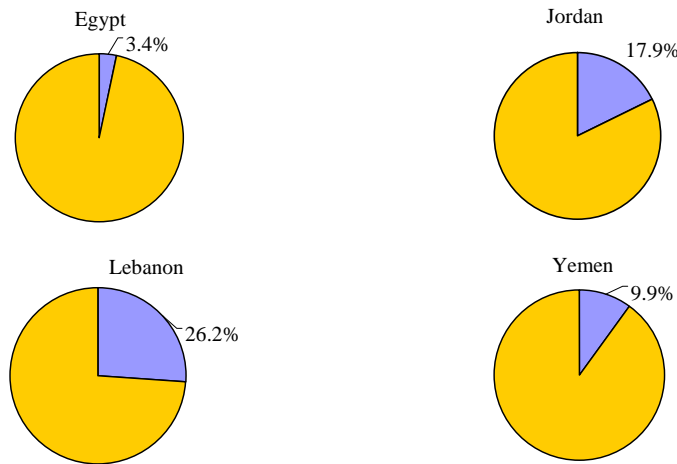
<sup>4</sup> ESCWA, "The Demographic Window: an Opportunity for Development in the Arab Countries" E/ESCWA/SDD/2005/5, p. 70.

**Migrant remittances compared with foreign direct investment and official development aid in five Arab countries  
(US\$ billion)**



Foreign remittances have a clear impact in the Arab Mashreq countries through their contribution to GDP, which amounts to 3.4 per cent in Egypt, 9.9 per cent in Yemen, 17.9 per cent in Jordan and 26 per cent in Lebanon.

**Remittances as a percentage of GDP**



At the overall economic level of the Arab Maghreb countries, foreign remittances help to absorb the trade deficit with receiving countries: three quarters of the trade deficit with France and over two thirds of that with Germany. Absorption of the balance of payments trade deficit with some countries is even higher: 419 per cent with the United Arab Emirates, 352 per cent with Italy and 351 per cent with Spain.

A not inconsiderable proportion of remittances is used for productive investment, which led to the creation of 17,000 jobs in Tunisia between 1987 and 2004. In Morocco, 84 per cent of such investment is in the construction sector, 7.5 per cent in agriculture and 5 per cent in commerce. Nevertheless, 30 per cent of migrant investments go to the receiving countries.

Studies conducted in 2000 indicated that there was a relationship between migrant financial remittances and poverty. In some countries in the Middle East, South Asia and Eastern Europe, remittances amounting to 10 per cent of GDP led to a 1.9 per cent reduction in the number of people living on US\$ 1 per day. Between 1984 and 1999, remittances to Morocco helped to prevent 4 per cent of the population, some 1.2 million people, slipping under the poverty line and to reduce the percentage of poor persons from 23 to 19 per cent. Some 10 per cent of the population of the Egyptian countryside has risen above the poverty line thanks to migration.

### **Highly-skilled migration and development**

The Lebanese experience is one of the most significant in the Arab region, and perhaps, the world in terms of benefiting from emigrant skills to transfer and develop know-how and support development projects. Its distinguishing features are the diversity of the research and intellectual activities in which highly-skilled emigrants are involved and their contribution to the development of local scientific experience and the fulfilment of development projects and programmes. Emigrants have invested their savings by setting up successful construction companies. Some have gone into the banking sector, investing in 42 of Lebanon's 86 banks. Expatriates have contributed to education and healthcare, establishing a number of schools and hospitals that remain in existence. They have also contributed to the availability of clean drinking water and established many charitable organizations and public foundations.

Know-how has been transferred to Lebanon through its expatriate community and the involvement of many of its associations and individual members in scientific and research programmes. A number of expatriates and returning migrants have been active in political life and established political parties with seats in parliament. The number of parliamentary seats held by former migrants has ranged from 8 in 1992 to 19 in 2005.

In 2000, a total of 970,000 university-educated Arabs were living in countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), where they accounted for 2.5 per cent of highly-skilled workers born outside those countries. In absolute terms, the largest groups of migrants with a higher education were from Morocco and Algeria, each with 200,000. Egypt was in third place with 148,000 university-educated migrants. That category accounted for 22.2 per cent of Algerian migrants, 21.4 per cent of Moroccan migrants and 15.2 per cent of Egyptian migrants. The volume of highly-skilled Arab migrants varies in different receiving countries: France has received 40 per cent, the United States 23 per cent and Canada only 10 per cent.

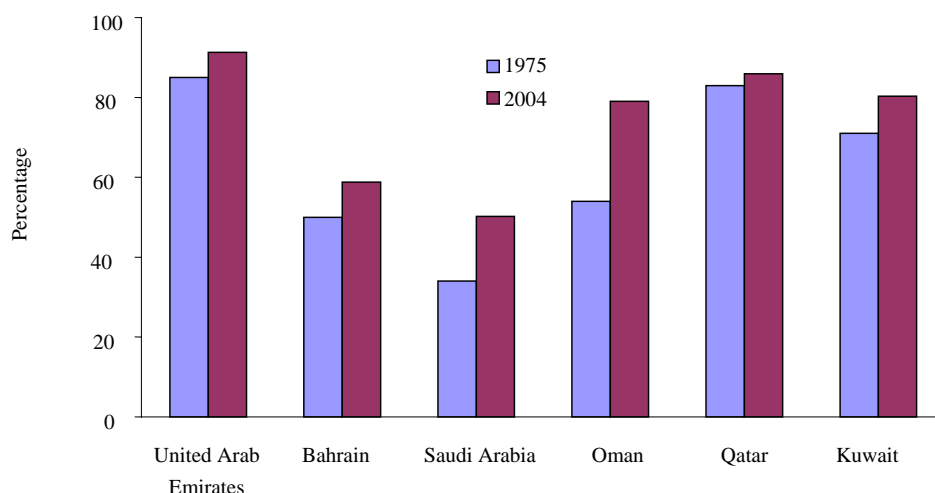
There are 135,000 Arab students studying in European countries, 40 per cent of whom are from Morocco. Fifty per cent of those students are in France. The emigration of highly-skilled workers from the Maghreb includes 7,000 doctors, who account for 70 per cent of all foreign doctors in France.

Highly-skilled migrants are predominantly men: the proportion of university-educated women migrating from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Libyan Arab Jamahiriya is 10 percentage points lower than that of men, while the migration of educated women from Qatar and the Emirates was higher than that of men.

### **International migration and migration policies**

In the last two decades, policies aimed at attracting Asian labour facilitated the emergence of the trade in migrant labour. Importing labour became a profession in itself, as is clear from the proliferation of employment agencies and the importation of labour. Despite calls to control migration and migration flows, migrants continued to flood in, especially from Asia, at the rate of more than 1 million per annum, thus pushing up the average circulation of migration. Statistics show that the proportion of migrants in the labour force increased in all GCC States between 1975 and 2001.

### Proportion of migrants in the labour force of the GCC States



Currently, migration policies tend to restrict international migration. Policies vary greatly as regards their severity. Immigration is rising in all the GCC States except Bahrain and all those States are intent on introducing policies to restrict it in the future. Conversely, other Arab countries, including Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen, have been applying policies to encourage emigration as part of the national development strategy.

### Changes in immigration and immigration policies in the GCC States

Year Country	1976		2005	
	Position on immigration	Public policy	Position on Immigration	Public policy
United Arab Emirates	Satisfactory	Maintain current levels of migration	Too high	Lower levels of migration
Bahrain	Satisfactory	Maintain current levels of migration	Satisfactory	Maintain current levels of migration
Oman	Satisfactory	Maintain current levels of migration	Too high	Lower levels of migration
Qatar	Satisfactory	Maintain current levels of migration	Too high	Lower levels of migration
Kuwait	Satisfactory	Maintain current levels of migration	Rising	Lower levels of migration
Saudi Arabia	Too low	Raise levels	Too high	Lower levels of migration