Social Policy Brief on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region

1. Background

Migration plays a key role in sustainable development across the globe. If well-managed, human mobility can lead to considerable gains for migrants and can generate significant development for communities of origin and destination. If migration is poorly managed, however, it can impede sustainable development and place migrants in vulnerable situations. The United Nations estimates that 244 million people (4 per cent of the world’s population) are international migrants, but the development effects of human mobility are much greater than this number suggests, since many more people are affected economically, socially and politically by the effects of in-migration, out-migration, transit migration and displacement.

The current situation in the Arab region requires actors and policymakers at the local, national, regional and global levels to adopt policies and strategies that respond to the realities of these migration dynamics. The present publication builds on the first edition of the Situation Report on International Migration, published in 2015, and provides an updated overview of contemporary migration trends, patterns and policy developments in the Arab region. In addition, it examines the contributions of international migration to the region’s economic and social development, especially in the context of recent and ongoing global processes, such as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. About the report

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 analyses demographic, migration and displacement data and examines migration within the Arab region. It begins with an overview of migration and displacement dynamics and trends in the region as a whole, followed by an analysis of the four major sub-regions and an overview of remittance flows to and from the Arab region. Key trends and issues shaping recent migration and displacement patterns and flows in the region are highlighted below.

Key findings:

- The Arab region hosts roughly 14 per cent of global international migrant stocks, with numbers growing by 150 per cent, from under 15 million migrants in 1990 to nearly 35 million by 2015.
- The number of female migrants in the Arab region has doubled from 5.6 million in 1990 to 11.6 million in 2015. However, the proportion of females in the total stock of migrants decreased from 39 per cent to 33 per cent over the same time period. The data also show large differences in the proportion of female migrants between sub-regions, and by country of origin.
• The GCC region, in particular, is a major hub for labour expatriates, with migrant workers comprising an estimated 67 per cent of all workers in the sub-region. While the Maghreb countries have long been exporters of labour, primarily to Europe, the sub-region also attracts labour from other Maghreb countries and Sub-Saharan Africa, and remains a common transit area for mixed migration flows from Sub-Saharan Africa en route to Europe. Within the Mashreq, circulation of labour has been a long-standing trend, along with persistent forced displacement within and across borders. The Arab region’s least developed countries (LDCs) hosted migrants mostly from other Arab countries. Migrants from the Arab LDCs move mainly to the GCC region and Sub-Saharan Africa.

• The Arab region received a total of $50.8 billion in remittances in 2015, which have been increasing in the region. However, the numbers for 2015 show remittance growth slowing and even declining in some Arab countries. The GCC countries are the main sending countries, sending 93 per cent of all remittances from the region, while the Mashreq countries remain the main receiving countries, receiving 70 per cent of remittances to the Arab region in 2015.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 covers national policy developments in international migration in the Arab region between April 2015 and March 2017, including in the areas of nationality, statelessness, labour migration, irregular migration, human trafficking and migrant smuggling, forced migration and refugees. It also considers international efforts in migration governance in which Arab countries took part or which directly or indirectly affect migration in the Arab region, including interregional, regional and sub-regional processes and bilateral cooperation.

Key findings:

• Given the importance of labour migration in the region and its influence on development, Arab countries have particularly focused on governance in this area of migration. Pragmatic steps have been taken to reform the kafala system that still governs labour migration in many countries; however, the system still exists in all Arab countries.

• Even with high levels of protracted displacement across the region, which increase challenges and strain resources, many Arab countries have welcomed refugees and other displaced populations with solidarity. Nonetheless, solutions for refugees and other displaced populations remain uncertain in view of generous but insufficient international support and limited progress in addressing the root causes of displacement and refugee movements.

• Arab States have engaged in international processes on migration at the inter-regional, regional, sub-regional and bilateral levels. While bilateral initiatives have mainly focused on labour cooperation, regional processes have touched upon forced migration, refugee movements, irregular migration, human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 considers human mobility in the Arab region within the context of current global processes and frameworks on migration governance and sustainable development. It examines the link between international migration in the region and the 2030 Agenda, which recognizes that migration is a
multidimensional reality of major relevance to the development of countries of origin, transit and destination, thus requiring coherent and comprehensive responses. It also focuses on labour migration targets under the SDGs involving labour migrants’ recruitment, their rights and remittances. The chapter sets out policy and programming options, and methods for collecting meaningful data to monitor progress of the migration-related SDGs.

Key findings:

- SDG target 10.7 of the 2030 Agenda urges all governments and stakeholders to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.
- Sustainable development and human mobility are interlinked in four ways:
  o the level of development influences out-migration, in-migration and displacement dynamics;
  o migration, especially migration based on rights and migrants’ skills, leads to immediate development gains for migrants;
  o migrants, including in-migrants, out-migrants and refugees, are contributors to sustainable development in their host, transit and origin communities; and
  o migrants, refugees and displaced persons are often vulnerable populations whose specific needs have to be considered to ‘leave no one behind’.
- There are four key migration-related SDG indicators, which relate to labour migrants’ recruitment practices, rights and remittances.
- It proposes concrete indicators, policy and programming options, and meaningful data collection to measure SDG indicators on migrants’ occupational injuries, migrant workers’ labour rights, the recruitment costs borne by migrants, and remittance transfer costs.
- It is possible to increase the quality and scale of migration’s positive impact on the development of migrants, and of communities of origin, transit and destination. Holistic migration governance can help achieve the SDGs if policies are inclusive and well-managed. Governments should ensure that policies empower migrant women and men, protect their rights, ensure decent working conditions, and provide choices and liberties. Policies should also focus on saving lives by search and rescue and ensuring the existence of protection-sensitive entry systems.

Highlighted box:

This Report was prepared under the aegis of the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region, co-chaired by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA) and International Organization for Migration (IOM) and comprising a further 13 United Nations agencies.

Graphs that can be included in the document:

Migrant stocks in top 10 countries of destination in the Arab region (millions), 2015
Source: DESA, 2015.

Note: Arrows indicate whether the migrant stock has increased or decreased since 2010.

Main countries of origin for migrants in the Arab region, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Stock (millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrian Arab Republic</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Arab countries</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of the world</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DESA, 2015.