Overview of Inter Arab Migration of the Work Force

Heba Nassar
Director
Centre for Economic and Financial Research and Studies
University of Cairo

Despite the fact that the idea of an economically integrated Arab world has been a part of the region's political discourse for decades, this region is in many ways one of the least integrated regions in the world. However Arab labour movement – though unplanned – was the single manifestation of Arab integration and is till now the most active economic activity taking place in this region (Nassar, 1994).

In regard to of the intra-regional Arab labour movement, the complementary supply and demand of migrant Arab labourers within the region has to some extent been perceived as a mutually beneficial mechanism. Intra-regional migration is what is referred to as South-South Context of Migration, which can be further classified into three trends: The first encompasses the migration that takes place between Arab countries and other countries that are not located in the Gulf area such as Libya. The second trend is rather a phenomenon, where the same sending country is the hosting country of migrant labour as the case of Jordan (replacement migration). The third category is the traditional type of migration, which takes place between the non-Gulf labour exporting countries and the Gulf labour importing countries (Nassar, et al 2002).

On the other hand, the region also witnesses extensive extra-regional migration, known as the South-North trend in migration, and which consists of emigration from the Maghreb countries to the European OECD countries. According to analysts, demographic reasons are considered the main contributing factors to the increase in potential emigration from the south that has taken place over many decades, while the capacity of integration for immigrants in the north is limited by political factors (Glystos, 1999).

However, a revision of major aspects that are of particular significance in migration trends, carried out over the year 2002 to 2003, shows the prevalence of the following factors.

At a National Level

The first point is that Arab labour sending countries reveal a tendency toward a rise in migration motives due to the difficult economic situation, the poor conditions of the labour market, and successive economic crises. With only a few exceptions Arab countries have achieved slow growth over recent years. GDP increased by an average of less than two percent in the period 2002 and 2003, and GDP per capita rose by only 0.2 percent, in comparison to 3.7 percent in low-income countries. The region in general has advanced at a slower rate than any other region in the world, which has resulted in social consequences such as the rates of unemployment in the region – excluding the Gulf countries – currently averaging close to twenty-five percent (ERF, 2002).

Secondly, a major challenge facing the migration of labour is the internal employment situation, as the capacity of job creation is at an insufficient level to absorb new job seekers. As is currently the case, to a greater or lesser degree, in all Mashreq sending countries, the high number of unemployed among Jordanians, Egyptian and Yemenis is a serious economic challenge. Official estimates of unemployment levels range between eight percent in Egypt, seventeen percent in Yemen and fifteen percent in Jordan (Arab Fund, 2002).

However, the subject of debate is the real unemployment levels. It is currently estimated that Egypt needs to achieve a sustained real GDP annual growth rate of at least seven percent, in order for unemployment to be reduced to manageable levels and to absorb the estimated 600,000 new entrants to the labour market in 2002. But such expansion has not been achieved over the past few years due to poor export performance and low direct foreign investment. Moreover, with an already low rate of immigration to the west, the high population growth, the decrease in economic indicators, the low investment level and the lack of the required development infrastructure, the chances are poor for increased regular migration of labour forces out of Yemen. This suggests that Yemen might be forced to resort to clandestine migration activity and aid from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states.

With an average annual population growth rate of 2.5 percent in the period between 2000 and 2002, Syria's labour force should continue to grow strongly over the next two decades, which will result in the intensification of migration of the labour force to Jordan, the Lebanon and the GCC states. Additional Jordann labour market surveys in 2002 confirm the plight of young people in their search for employment,

TABLE 19	Citizens of Arab countries of the Mediterranean and Turkey resident in Europe, by country of nationality and of residence in 2000											
Country of residence	Year	Country of nationality									Sub-Total Med Countries	Total of Immi-grants
		Algeria	Egypt	Jordan	Lebanon	Morocco	Palestine	Syria	Tunisia	Turkey		
Germany	2000	17,186	13,811	11,190	54,063	81,450		24,421	24,260	2,053,564	2,279,945	7,343,591
Austria	2001									134,243		761,427
Belgium	1999	8,452	613	215	1,098	125,082		699	4,243	70,701	211,103	891,980
Denmark	2001	408	594	785	2,538	3,293		588	470	35,232	43,908	258,629
Spain	2001	13,847	952	625	912	199,782		1,046	643	491	218,928	895,720
Finland	2001	216	200	113	84	537		93	164	1,784	3,191	91,074
France (1)	1999	685,558	15,974	933	33,278	725,782	869	10,826	260,622	258,817	1,992,659	5,618,476
Greece	1998	216	6,599	1,381	2,465	444		2,587	336	3,210	17,238	165,444
Ireland	2000											126,500
Italy	2000	11,435	33,652	2,936	3,729	170,905		2,370	55,213	5,810	286,050	1,270,553
Luxembourg	2001											164,700
Netherlands	2000	917	2,771	229	338	119,726		543	1,312	100,688	226,524	651,532
Portugal	2000	91	57	78	191	330	10	75	27	89	948	190,896
United Kingdom	2000	15,000	9,000		4,000	8,000			1,000	43,000	80,000	2,450,000
Sweden	2001	500	592	509	3,369	1,234		6,035	797	15,846	28,882	477,312

(1) Includes naturalised French citizens
Source: Philippe Fargues: «L'émigration en Europe vue d'Afrique du Nord et du Moyen-Orient» *Revue Esprit* (December 2003) based on data from the Council of Europe, except France: INSEE.

as sixty-three percent of respondents in the age group of fifteen to nineteen answered that they believed that there is no work available to them, in a country where about fifty thousand citizens annually join the labour force as a consequence of its continued rapid population growth. At the same time, Jordan is also host to a high level of replacement migration. In 2002, the number of foreign workers with permits (mainly Egyptians) reached 127,000 with possibly as many as a further 275,000 working illegally in jobs that most Jordanians refuse to occupy (Khouri, 2003).
The third point is the demographic factor, which is an essential aspect in determining migration and rapid growth of work force, especially in the young age groups that are known to have the highest migration propensities. According to observations the percentage of the population in MENA countries aged up to fourteen years is expected to decrease from forty-three percent to thirty-two percent by the year 2025, with the total population increasing from 244 million to 552 million over the same period. This will mean greater pressure on the labour markets to create jobs (Dhonte et al, 2001). Given that the numbers of the active population are also expected to rise, as a result of the gradual change in the population structure and greater numbers of women seeking work, the domestic labour markets will be incapable of absorbing such an increase in job seekers.

At a Regional Level

Firstly, the Iraqi war in 2003 has deeply affected migration trends in the region in several ways. The motives of emigration from Iraq saw a huge increase, in addition to a rise in caution on the part of Arab and Muslim nationals and endorsement of more restrictions on their movement, particularly regarding the US and several western countries. However, the illegal migration of Kurds through Turkey and Iran has declined.
Secondly, the Israeli-Palestine conflict reached a climax in 2002 and 2003, which also affects intra-Arab migration, and in particular the movement of the work force from Palestine to the Gulf.
Thirdly, the trend in the GCC states of replacing Arab workers (mainly from the Mashreq) with either nationals or workers from eastern and southern Asia is still escalating. The percentage of Arab nationalities among the total numbers of immigrants has descended from seventy-five percent in 1975 to approximately thirty percent in 2002, leaving a larger gap for Asian migration. As a result, Mashreq countries can anticipate less remittance income, an influx of returning workers, and perhaps increasing unemployment rates (Khouri, 2003).
Fourthly, the Arab work force now benefits from fewer opportunities of migration to the Gulf states, not only due to diminishing economic capabilities, the completion of the infrastructure stage and its replacement by the national labour force, but also because of the increasing orientation toward the new economies in the fields of communication and information, which reduces the need for unskilled labour and increases the need for specific skills that are usually not provided for among nationals or the populations of neighbouring countries (Fares, 2003).
Moreover the region faces the increase over recent years of new forms of migration, including migration that consists of companies employing local labour in a work environment similar to that in foreign countries, through the use of communication networks.
Fifthly, with the approval of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership being extended to many Arab countries, the skills of migrants have changed, and

greater importance needs to be given to the migration of skilled labour.

At a Global Level

Firstly: In 2002/2003 cross-border flows of people between the Mashreq and the west have been hampered by the consequences of 11th September, which has led to a significant increase in illegal migration since 2001 and 2002.

Secondly: from another perspective, the role of multinational companies has become more important in shaping migration flows. This type of work force movement follows a different set of regulations, in which the workers are gradually separated from their societies.

Thirdly: with the publication of the Arab Human Development Report in 2002, there is a growing pressure on Arab countries of immigration to adopt international standards of labour and their application to migrants, such as those relating to wages, social security, and the conditions of integration, employment and return to the country of origin affecting the established sponsorship system in the Gulf States. It is important to note that aside from clandestine migration, a large proportion of labour migration among countries in the Mashreq further encompasses illegal aspects. «While entry into Mashreq countries from other countries in the region may proceed legally, prolonged residence and work are often undertaken illegally» (Fares, 2003).

Fourthly: despite the fact that Cancun 2003 did not entail new issues regarding the migration of the labour, with several Arab countries becoming members of the World Trade Organisation, new forms of migration have emerged from the service trades, outside the framework of migration laws and systems, and within the regulation of the World Trade System under GATS Mode 4. It is possible that in the near future, the largest migrant categories will be made up of technicians and specialists of international companies and firms that are closely related to the service industry. This trend would bring a new notion to Inter-Arab migration, as the new category falls outside the authority of local migration laws and the governments and regimes of the importing countries. Such a situation is therefore likely to bring changes to the future of trends, volume and environment of migration.

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