



League of Arab States
General Secretariat
Social Sector
Migration and Arab Expatriates
Department

Arab Regional Working Group on International Migration

Concept Note

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Executive Summary

This concept note outlines the situation related to migration in the Arab region and the current consensus on the need for coordination between the United Nations system, League of Arab states, IOM and other actors in the field. It then suggests that the current response of actors in the RCM framework is limited and suggests the creation of an Arab regional working group on international migration as a means of filling gaps and strengthening the response of international actors to this issue.

Background and Justification

Migration is a central issue for socio-economic development in the Arab region. Migration from Arab countries to non-Arab countries, from non-Arab countries to Arab countries, and between Arab countries has a long history. However, contemporary migration flows are notable for their intensity, their impact, and the context in which they take place.

In 2010, the Arab region hosted almost 25.85 million migrants, over 10 million more than it hosted in 1990.¹ Available data suggest that the majority of these migrants come from Asian countries, with nationals from countries such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and the Philippines being particularly highly-represented.² Meanwhile, emigration from Arab countries is also high: the United Nations Population Division counted over 13.7 million migrants from Arab countries in 2010, with Palestine, Egypt, Morocco, Iraq and the Sudan being the main countries of origin. Almost half of these migrants move to other Arab countries, with Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa hosting also being major regions of destination.³ Given data limitations, these figures are only estimates which are likely to underestimate the real scale of migration from, to and between Arab countries.

Moreover, this major movement of people has major impacts on development in the countries concerned, whether they are countries of origin, destination, or transit, bringing both challenges and opportunities:

- *Countries of origin* are often faced with a loss of labour force; this is particularly acute where this loss of labour force is skilled, such as is the case in Lebanon.⁴ However, while abroad,

¹United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2011). *Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Age and Sex* (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2011).

² Calculation based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2012). *Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin* (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2012).

³ With 3.1 million and 1.6 million migrants respectively from Arab countries. Calculation based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2012). *Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin* (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2012).

⁴ ESCWA, 2010, *A Conceptual Framework for Integrating Migration into Development Planning in the ESCWA Region*, E/ESCWA/SDD/2010/Technical Paper.4

these migrants can also have positive impacts on development in their countries of origin. For example, migrants send remittances to their families and communities in their countries of origin. The Arab countries are estimated to have received more than US\$ 47.3 billion in remittances in 2012, up from US\$ 43.7 in 2011. Arab countries, particularly Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon figure amongst the world's most important recipients of remittances in terms of absolute value and in terms of the share of GDP represented by remittances.⁵ These remittances assist in reducing poverty and covering household expenses; they can help lead to increased household expenditure on education and health, though they can also sharpen pre-existing inequalities. On the macro level, they also help to offset balance of payments deficits and provide valuable sources of foreign currency for their countries of origin, but can also fuel inflation. Large expatriate populations who maintain their links with their homelands can also be important sources of human and social capital, assisting countries of origin to link into trade and information networks.⁶

- Meanwhile, *countries of destination* for migrants also feel the socio-economic impacts of migration very strongly. The socio-economic development of the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, for example, has long been reliant on large-scale immigration of workers to fill skills and labour gaps in order to exploit the natural resource base of these countries.⁷

Finally, the development impacts of migration cannot be separated from the human rights implications of migration in countries of origin, destination and transit: migrants and members of their families can face risks of exploitation, abuse and social isolation as a result of migration.

Recognizing the complexity of the implications of contemporary migration, States in the Arab region and around the world have begun to develop a consensus that "international migration could be a positive force for development in both countries of origin and countries of destination, provided that it was supported by the right set of policies."⁸ As a result of these regional and global consensuses, processes for dialogue and coordination have emerged, at regional and global levels, and between States and international organizations.

Within the United Nations system, there is recognition that the impacts of migration are spread across a wide range of areas, and that no single agency has the sole mandate to coordinate work on international migration. Recognizing this, since 2006 the Global Migration Group has brought together a growing number of UN and non-UN member agencies whose mandates touch on migration issues to coordinate their work to ensure a coherent approach to migration across the United Nations system.⁹ Meanwhile, at a regional level, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific has established a Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration

⁵ World Bank, 2012, *Migration and Development Brief 19: Remittances to developing countries will surpass \$400 billion in 2012*, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1288990760745/MigrationDevelopmentBrief19.pdf>

⁶ ESCWA, 2010, *op cit*

⁷ ESCWA, 2010, *op cit*.

⁸ United Nations General Assembly, 2006, *Summary of the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development*. See also the 2006 "Arab Declaration on International Migration", which notes the potential positive impacts of migration on development for Arab countries, and "[c]all[s] on Member-States and specialized bodies in Arab labor-exporting and labor-receiving States to strengthen policies geared to maximize benefits from migration in the interest of development, to promote welfare and curb poverty, to improve family conditions, to enhance Arab regional cooperation and integration and to curb negative implications of migration, all within a framework of continuing dialogue and effective partnership."

⁹ Global Migration Group, *Terms of Reference*, http://www.globalmigrationgroup.org/uploads/what-is-gmg/Final%20GMG%20Terms%20of%20Reference_prioritized.pdf

including Human Trafficking to coordinate joint work at a regional level to “maximize the benefits and minimize the adverse effects of migration consistent with broader social and economic development goals.”¹⁰

Therefore, not only is migration in the Arab region intense, but it also has major impacts on the countries of the region. These impacts are complex and multi-sectoral, negative and positive, and can change over time, making them difficult for Governments to manage alone. It is also clear that there is a context of recognition of the need for coordination within the United Nations system to maximize the benefits of international migration, and minimize the negative impacts.

Statement of the problem to be addressed

However, despite the recognition of the scale of international migration in the Arab region, its importance, and the need for coordination of work on it, thus far inter-agency coordination has been lacking in the Arab region. Individual agencies or groups of agencies cooperating on an ad hoc basis have implemented a number of important initiatives; however, there is currently no mechanism to communicate regularly on the work carried out by international organizations in the region; to promote coordinated normative and technical work on international migration; prevent duplication of efforts; and ensure a consistent, system-wide message and strategy for migration. This limits the potential multiplier impact of initiatives and lobbying undertaken by the organizations involved, while increasing the difficulty of organizing inter-agency activities at a regional level.

This problem is particularly pressing in the context of the second High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, due to take place from 3-4 October 2013 on the theme of “Identifying concrete measures to strengthen coherence and cooperation at all levels, with a view to enhancing the benefits of international migration for migrants and countries alike and its important links to development, while reducing its negative implications”. In the absence of a mechanism to ensure coherence and cooperation between agencies, it will be more difficult to prepare for the High-Level Dialogue and follow up on its likely recommendations.

Proposed Solution

Therefore, to facilitate follow-up of the outcomes of the Second High-Level Dialogue and to coordinate future work on International migration it is suggested that a Regional Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region be created through the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) process. This working group could be co-chaired by ESCWA, IOM and LAS and involve all interested member agencies of the Global Migration Group at the global level, as well as other RCM members, including the Arab Labour Organization. The working group would aim to strengthen the impacts of work carried out on International migration by the member agencies by creating a forum for systematic information-sharing on activities, knowledge products and best practice; coordination of activities to ensure maximum impact; and collaboration on the implementation of normative and technical meetings, projects and publications. It would also enable the United Nations system and the League of Arab States to strengthen its advocacy role in the region on the importance of integrating migration into development planning and provide comprehensive and practical solutions based on a wide range of expertise and experience.

¹⁰ Thematic Working Group on International Migration including Human Trafficking, 2012, “Foreword” in Thematic Working Group on International Migration including Human Trafficking, *Situation Report on International Migration in South and South-West Asia*

Following the experience of ESCAP, its specific tasks could include the following:

(a) Information sharing:

Contributing to a better understanding and developing a common approach of migration phenomena in the Region with comparable data by strengthening coordination and information sharing mechanisms between concerned UN agencies and inter-governmental organizations on migration-related programmes, projects, activities and ideas linked to international migration and development in the Region.

(b) Establishing priority areas for cooperation and potential joint programme responses:

(i) Enhancing cooperation among members of the Working Group in order to promote synergies and minimize duplication in migration-related programmes and projects in the Region; and

(ii) Identifying priority areas of governments for the development of joint programmes and projects where UN and international agencies have a comparative advantage.

(c) Dissemination of innovative/good practices and lessons:

Identifying best practices in areas of concern to the members of the Working Group and to governments in the Region in relation to international migration and promoting the dissemination, sustainability, and creative replication of such innovative practices where appropriate and possible.

(d) Others:

(i) Encouraging broad participation and commitment of participating sectors and other stakeholders, including migrants; and

(ii) Promoting research and information management among migration policy makers in the Region.¹¹

¹¹ Adapted from UN-ESCAP, 2006, "Regional Thematic Working Group on International Migration including Human Trafficking Terms of Reference"