

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

**SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT BULLETIN  
ON MIGRATION AND YOUTH**

**Youth Migration, Employment and Education in the Arab Region**

International migration from, between and to the countries of the Arab region is highly intense. In 2013, the 22 countries of the Arab region hosted 30,308,131 international migrants, more than twice the 14,848,583 migrants in the region in 1990. They made up 8.4 per cent of the total population of the Arab region, compared to 6.7 per cent in 1990. The largest growth in the number of migrants was registered in the six countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC),<sup>1</sup> whose share of the migrants hosted by the Arab region grew from 59.6 per cent in 1990 to 73.8 per cent in 2013.<sup>2</sup> The growth in international migration to the GCC has been such that more than two thirds of the total growth of migrant stock in Asia during the period 2000-2013 occurred in Western Asia.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the number of recorded emigrants from the Arab region stood at more than 22 million in 2013, an increase of almost 10 million compared to 1990. While more than half of these emigrants are found in other Arab countries, significant numbers also reside in Europe (more than 6 million, of whom more than 4.7 million are from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia), Sub-Saharan Africa (more than 1.9 million, most of whom are from Somalia and the Sudan) and Northern America (1.4 million, of whom more than 1 million reside in the United States).<sup>4</sup>

As overall migration has grown dramatically in the Arab region, the number of migrants in the youth group (defined here as people aged 15-24) has grown in line with this overall trend, almost doubling from 2,343,724 youth migrants in 1990 to 4,415,890 in 2013, representing 14.6 per cent of the total migrant population. In 2013, more than 63 per cent of these young migrants (almost 2.8 million) were men, while only 37 per cent (more than 1.6 million) were women. This compares to the global youth migrant population that is around 53.5 per cent male and 46.5 per cent female.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, data to assess the overall importance of the emigration of youth from Arab countries are not available. However, detailed data on a subset of Arab migrants is available from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Database on Immigrants in OECD Countries. According to these figures, young people (aged 15 and above) made up 10.8 per cent of all adult migrants in OECD countries around 2005, with over 48.2

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<sup>1</sup> Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

<sup>2</sup> Calculations by author based on United Nations Population Division. Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2013 Revision, Tables 1 and 4: International migrant stock at mid-year by age and sex and by major area, region, country or area, 1990 and 2013. Available from <http://esa.un.org/unmigration/TIMSA2013/migrantstocks2013.htm>?. Accessed 2013.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations (2013). *International migration and development: Report of the Secretary-General, A/68/190* (25 July), p. 6. New York.

<sup>4</sup> Calculations by author based on United Nations Population Division. Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Destination and Origin, Table 10: Total migrant stock at mid-year by origin and by major area, region, country or area of destination, 2013. Available from <http://esa.un.org/unmigration/TIMSO2013/migrantstocks2013.htm?msdo>. Accessed 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Calculations by author based on United Nations Population Division. Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Age and Sex, Table 4: International migrant stock at mid-year by age and sex and by major area, region, country or area. 2013. Available from <http://esa.un.org/unmigration/TIMSA2013/migrantstocks2013.htm>?. Accessed 2013.

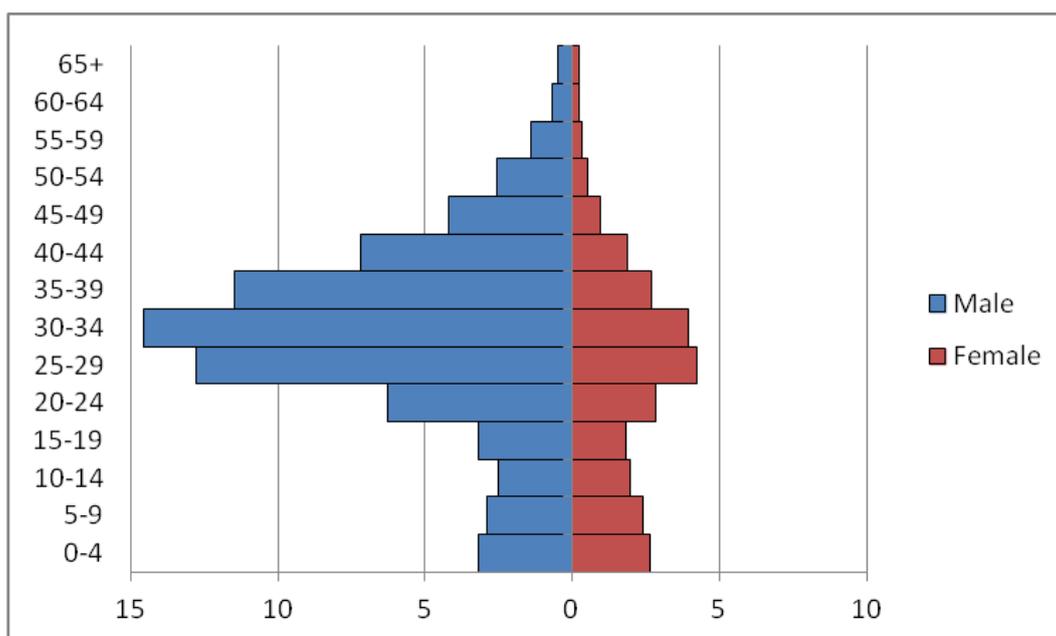
per cent of these migrants being female, pointing to the importance of the emigration of young people from Arab countries.<sup>6</sup>

These migration flows have important impacts on the development of Arab countries in terms of both opportunities and challenges. This bulletin will consider some of the most important trends in relation to youth and migration, particularly migration for employment, forced migration, family migration, and migration for education, and their policy implications.

### Youth and labour migration

The largest single migration flow within and to the region is labour migration. For all age groups, including young people, labour migration mostly concerns men, as can be seen from the youth migrant populations in the GCC countries, where migration is overwhelmingly labour-related and young women are highly underrepresented. This is especially true for the 20-24 age bracket, during which migrants are more likely to be in the country of destination for work reasons (see figure I and table 1).<sup>7</sup> For instance, in Qatar, in 2010, there were 75,000 male migrants in the 20-24 age bracket, compared to only 29,977 female migrants. In other such countries of destination as Saudi Arabia, the difference is less dramatic but still clear: in 2010, there were 453,069 20-24-year-old male migrants compared to only 262,558 20-24-year-old female migrants.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure I. Age structure of migrants in the GCC countries, 2013**



*Source:* Calculations by author based on United Nations Population Division. Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Age and Sex, Table 4: International migrant stock at mid-year by age and sex and by major area, region, country or area, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Calculations by author based on OECD Database on Immigrants in OECD Countries, 2005/2006.

<sup>7</sup> Migrants in the 15-19 age bracket may be resident in GCC countries under their parents' residency visas; however, at age 21, male children of migrant parents lose this coverage. Therefore, most male migrants in the 20-24 age group are likely to be labour migrants. Female children of migrant parents are covered by their parents until they are married or their parents' visas expire.

<sup>8</sup> Calculations by author based on United Nations Population Division. Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Age and Sex, 2010. Available from <http://esa.un.org/MigAge/>. Accessed 14 June 2012.

TABLE 1. YOUTH MIGRANT POPULATION IN THE GCC COUNTRIES

Country	Total youth migrant population			Male youth migrant population			Female youth migrant population		
	15-19	20-24	Youth (15-24)	15-19	20-24	Youth (15-24)	15-19	20-24	Youth (15-24)
Bahrain	29007	60147	89154	17787	40923	58710	11220	19224	30444
Kuwait	138672	164608	303280	87665	111262	198927	51007	53346	104353
Oman	19965	121208	141173	12427	93249	105676	7538	27959	35497
Qatar	38542	104977	143519	22301	75000	97301	16241	29977	46218
Saudi Arabia	504250	715627	1219877	288161	453069	741230	216089	262558	478647
United Arab Emirates	386262	866506	1252768	280851	630036	910887	105411	236470	341881

Source: Calculations by author based on United Nations Population Division. Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Age and Sex, Table 4: International migrant stock at mid-year by age and sex and by major area, region, country or area, 2013.

The above data may reflect the gendered nature of the sectors in which young migrants work, such as construction, which is heavily masculinized. Moreover, migration of young women to this region is sometimes restricted by their countries of origin, which often set lower age limits for work in the domestic sector, which is a heavily feminized sector. For example, Indonesian women migrating to work as domestic workers must be at least 21 years of age, whereas in other sectors, the lower age limit is 18.<sup>9</sup> However, these rules are not always obeyed. A study on former migrant domestic workers who had returned from GCC countries to West Java Province in Indonesia found that more than 50 per cent of them had been under 21 the first time they had migrated.<sup>10</sup> These young women are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse as the legal regimes governing domestic worker migration require them to be physically isolated in private homes and make them dependent on their employers for their residence visas under the *kafala* (sponsorship) system. Moreover, their work generally falls outside the scope of the labour law, depriving them of its protections.<sup>11</sup>

Considering the youth employment crisis in the Arab region, it is understandable that many young people from Arab countries emigrate for employment. Finding a decent first job is very difficult for young people in the Arab region. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the youth unemployment rate in the Middle East was 29.1 per cent in 2013, while, in North Africa, it was 23.7 per cent, compared to a global youth unemployment rate of 12.6 per cent. In both cases, the unemployment rate for women was far higher, namely, 43.5 per cent in the Middle East and 36.7 per cent in North Africa.<sup>12</sup> Those youth who do find work are mostly forced to take up jobs in the informal sector with “low wages, precarious work conditions and [a] lack of social protection”.<sup>13</sup>

This difficulty in finding work of decent quality reflects the economic structure of countries in the region, in which private sector activities focus on areas which imply either low demands for labour,

<sup>9</sup> Raharto, Aswatini (2011). The Migratory Experience of Ex-Migrant Domestic Workers: The Example of Indonesia. *Inter-Regional Report on Labour Migration and Social Protection* (2013), p.77. New York: ESCWA-ESCAP.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Esim, Simel and Carole Kerbage (2013). The Situation of Migrant Domestic Workers in Arab States: A Legislative Overview. *Inter-Regional Report on Labour Migration and Social Protection* (2013), pp. 49-50. New York: ESCWA-ESCAP.

<sup>12</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO) (2013). *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2013: A Generation at Risk*, p. 80. Geneva. According to the ILO, the Middle East includes the Arab countries located in Asia and the Islamic Republic of Iran, while North Africa is made up of Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, the Sudan, and Tunisia.

<sup>13</sup> ESCWA (2012). *Integrated Social Policy Report IV: Labour Markets and Labour Market Policy in the ESCWA Region* (E/ESCWA/SDD/2011/3), p. 23. New York and Geneva: United Nations.

including resource extraction industries or real estate, or low added-value activities which translate into poor quality jobs with few prospects for improvement. Meanwhile, public sector employment, the first choice of most educated young people, is decreasing.<sup>14</sup> The structure of immigration rules, particularly in the GCC countries, contributes to this difficulty: as foreign employees are not able to change jobs and are dependent on their employers for their continued residence in the country, they have little bargaining power. They are cheaper to hire even at higher levels of experience, and can have their contracts terminated more easily, all of which makes young nationals less attractive to hire.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, educational systems in Arab countries do not prepare students well for the labour market: although the achievements in primary education achieved by Arab countries are impressive, literacy remains low compared to other developing regions, and relatively few children go on to secondary and tertiary education. The courses of study pursued by students tend to be in the humanities and social sciences rather than in technical disciplines, while the methodologies used to teach them are traditional, failing to make use of best practices in terms of inquiry-based and student-centred learning and failing to develop problem-solving and communication skills.<sup>16</sup> Even if employment services are able to provide remedial training, it is “beset by limitations related to the content of programmes and skills [...], the inequitable distribution of services and weak coordination with and regulation of private providers”.<sup>17</sup> Although some reform has taken place, public employment services rarely provide integrated services, lack capacity and only reach a small segment of the population in need.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, given the lack of opportunities to access decent work in Arab countries, it is not surprising that a survey by Silatech/Gallup in 2010 found that 30 per cent of respondents aged 15-29 (37 per cent of male and 24 per cent of female respondents) in Arab countries wanted to emigrate permanently and that the main factor which could convince respondents to stay was to “get a job/get a better job”. Although intentions to migrate do not always transform into reality, they nonetheless show that, for many young people, both male and female, migration is seen as a means to improve their employment situation.<sup>19</sup>

Considering the above and the culture of migration which has consequently evolved in such countries as Morocco, where migration is seen as a main route to social betterment, young people want to move abroad to work, which many of them also do. This phenomenon does not just affect the unemployed: indeed, the Silatech/Gallup survey suggests that it is the higher-skilled and already-employed who are most likely to migrate.<sup>20</sup>

However, young people might be constrained from migrating by the lack of the different forms of capital required to migrate, namely:

- Human capital, including qualifications or work experience required for a job;
- Financial capital, to pay recruitment fees or travel costs;
- Social capital, including access to networks of migrants in the country of destination, who can help them with finding work and with their travel and housing arrangements.

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<sup>14</sup> ESCWA (2012). Rethinking policies toward youth unemployment: What have we learned? Background Note for the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Annual Ministerial Review Regional Preparatory Meeting, pp. 6-8.

<sup>15</sup> Hertog, Steffen (2012). A Comparative Assessment of Labor Market Nationalization Policies in the GCC. In *National Employment, Migration and Education in the GCC*, pp. 100-101. Berlin: Gerlach Press.

<sup>16</sup> World Bank (2008). *The Road Not Traveled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa*, p.20. Washington D.C.

<sup>17</sup> ESCWA (2012). *Active Labour Market Policies in Arab Countries* (26 March), p. 28. New York.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-20.

<sup>19</sup> Silatech/Gallup (2010). *The Silatech Index: Voices of Young Arabs* (November), p.55.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 55-56.

## Forced migration of youth

The second most important migration flow in the region is that related to forced migration, with forced migrants coming from within the region and neighbouring countries, particularly the Horn of Africa. Young women and men are more highly-represented in this group. In Jordan, for instance, the number of young female migrants, most of whom were refugees from Iraq, Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic, increased from 147,956 in 2000 to 202,188 in 2013, representing 48.9 per cent of the total youth migrant population. In other countries where refugees make up the majority of the migrant population, as is the case in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, the small difference between the genders in a refugee-dominated migrant population seem to bear this trend out.<sup>21</sup> The situation for many youth forced migrants is rather precarious: there are often restrictions preventing refugees from being able to work in Arab countries, leaving young forced migrants in a situation of socioeconomic vulnerability at risk of exploitation in irregular labour markets.

## Family migration

Another form of migration for young people in the region, and young women in particular, is migration for family reunion or formation. This is particularly important for the female children of migrants in GCC countries: whereas male children of migrants lose their residency rights after the age of 21, unmarried female children of migrant parents are able to remain in countries of destination as long as their parents' residency is valid.<sup>22</sup> However, opportunities for male and female children of migrants to participate in family reunion tend to be limited to highly-skilled and highly-paid workers, depriving many young people of the possibility of being with their parents.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, migration for marriage is an important phenomenon for young women in the region: for instance, a survey in Palestine found that younger women who migrated predominantly did so for marriage.<sup>24</sup>

## Migration for higher education

In 2010, 219,389 internationally mobile students were studying in the Arab region.<sup>25</sup> Students from other Arab countries make up the largest group of internationally mobile students in the Arab region, accounting for almost 20.5 per cent of this population. This number might be even higher considering that it is possible that many students from Arab countries are among the 151,131 internationally mobile students whose region of origin is "unknown".<sup>26</sup> The main countries of destination in the region for internationally mobile students in 2010 are shown in figure II, while figure III lists the countries which had the most important foreign student populations in relative terms in 2004.

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<sup>21</sup> Calculations by author based on UN-DESA, Trends in international migrant stock: the 2013 Revision. Available from <http://esa.un.org/unmigration/wallchart2013.htm>. Accessed 14 June 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Ghoneim, Ahmed and Hanan Natheer (2013). Migration Policies in ESCWA Countries. *International Migration and Development in the ESCWA Region: Challenges and Opportunities*, p. 27.

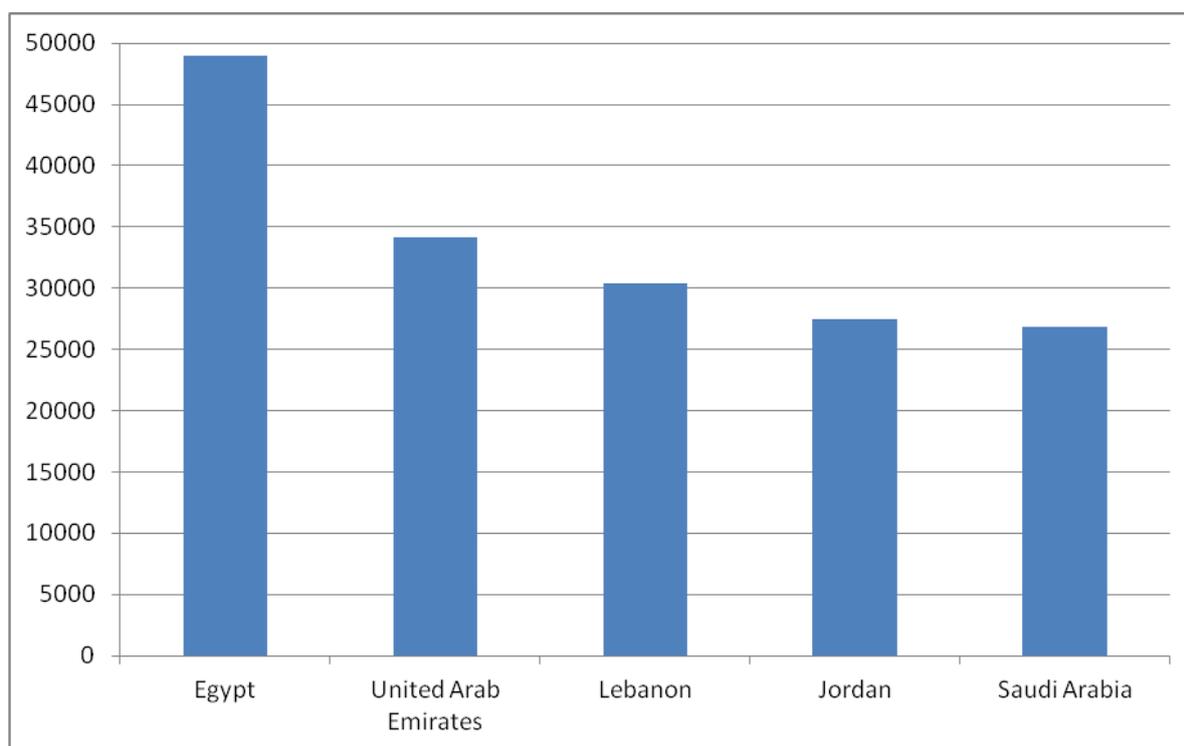
<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Blangiardo, Gian Carlo (2012). *Gender and Migration in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan African Countries*, pp. 30-32. CARIM Research Report 2012/1. Italy: European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2012). *Global Education Digest 2012. Opportunities Lost: The Impact of Grade Repetition and Early School Leaving*, p. 133. Montreal, Canada. The UNESCO definition of the Arab region does not include the Comoros and Somalia.

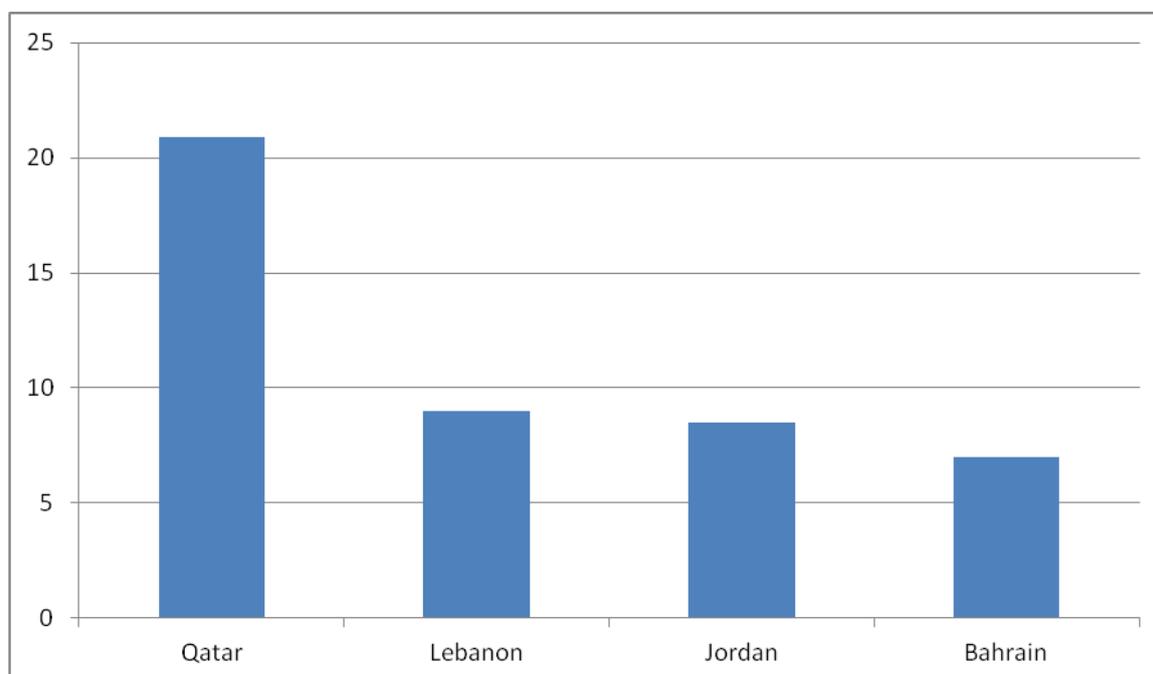
<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

**Figure II. Number of inbound internationally mobile students in selected Arab countries, 2010**



Source: UNESCO (2012). *Global Education Digest 2012. Opportunities Lost: The Impact of Grade Repetition and Early School Leaving*, Table 9, pp. 130-133.

**Figure III. Internationally mobile students as a proportion of the total student body, 2004**



Source: International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2008). *World Migration Report 2008: Managing Labour Mobility in the Evolving Global Economy*, p. 107. Geneva.

In such countries as Lebanon, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, female internationally mobile students outnumber their male counterparts.

Although relatively low by comparison to the number of migrants in the region, the number of internationally mobile students is likely to increase as the range of tertiary education institutions across the region continues to grow. Egypt has traditionally been the main country of destination for internationally mobile students, with the American University in Cairo and the Al-Azhar University, also in Cairo, being major poles of attraction.<sup>27</sup> However, in recent years, the higher education systems in the countries of the GCC have undergone a major reform. Such countries as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are expanding their tertiary education facilities, both through the foundation and expansion of such home-grown universities as the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia (founded in 2009), and the collaboration with universities from Asia, Europe, North America and Oceania through such initiatives as Education City in Qatar and the Dubai International Academic City.

There is, therefore, an important migration angle to these new university hubs in the region as they are likely to have a major impact on intraregional student mobility flows. Most notably, they open new opportunities for students from the region to study at highly prestigious tertiary educational institutions without having to travel outside the region. At the same time, countries of destination are increasingly recognizing that student migration is important in the global search for talent. In many countries of the Global North, a large proportion of students stay in their countries of study to take up jobs.<sup>28</sup> This approach could serve as a model for such countries as Qatar which aim to upgrade the skills of their migrant workforces,<sup>29</sup> as graduates from universities within the country are more likely to have the relevant skills and knowledge needed in the country.<sup>30</sup> However, in the absence of appropriate regional cooperation, this approach risks exacerbating trends towards the brain drain of students and staff from poorer countries of the region.<sup>31</sup> The dearth of research and understanding about the effects of student mobility in general,<sup>32</sup> and student mobility within the Arab region in particular, makes it presently difficult to draw conclusions on this form of mobility and its effects.

In 2010, 249,277 students from Arab countries studied abroad, making up almost 7 per cent of the total internationally mobile student population.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, no global data is available to compare the number of young men and women studying abroad. However, data on individual cases suggests that men are more likely to study abroad than women: according to figures from the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, only 23.2 per cent of scholarship students in 2011 were female,<sup>34</sup> while figures from the

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<sup>27</sup> Becker, Rosa and Renze Kolster (2012). *International Student Recruitment: Policies and Developments in Selected Countries*, p. 81. Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education.

<sup>28</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2008). *World Migration Report 2008: Managing Labour Mobility in the Evolving Global Economy*, p. 115. Geneva. Gribble, Cate (2008). Policy Options for Managing International Student Migration: the Sending Country Perspective. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, vol. 30, No. 1, p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> General Secretariat for Development Planning. *Qatar: National Vision 2030*.

<sup>30</sup> Kuptsch, Christiane (2006). Students and talent flow – the case of Europe: From castle to harbour? In *Competing for Global Talent* (2006). Kuptsch, Christiane and Eng Fong Pang (eds.), pp. 39-40. Geneva: International Labour Office and International Institute for Labour Studies.

<sup>31</sup> Romani, Vincent (2008). The Politics of Higher Education in the Middle East: Problems and Prospects. *Middle East Brief*, No. 36 (May 2009), p. 2. Brandeis University, Crown Centre for Middle East Studies.

<sup>32</sup> Findlay, Allan (2011). An Assessment of Supply and Demand-Side Theorizations of International Student Mobility. In *International Migration*, vol. 49, No. 2, p. 165. Georgetown University; see also King, Russell and Parvati Raghuram (2012). *International Student Migration: Mapping the Field and New Research Agendas*, p. 127. Published online 13 November 2012. Available from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/psp.1746/pdf>.

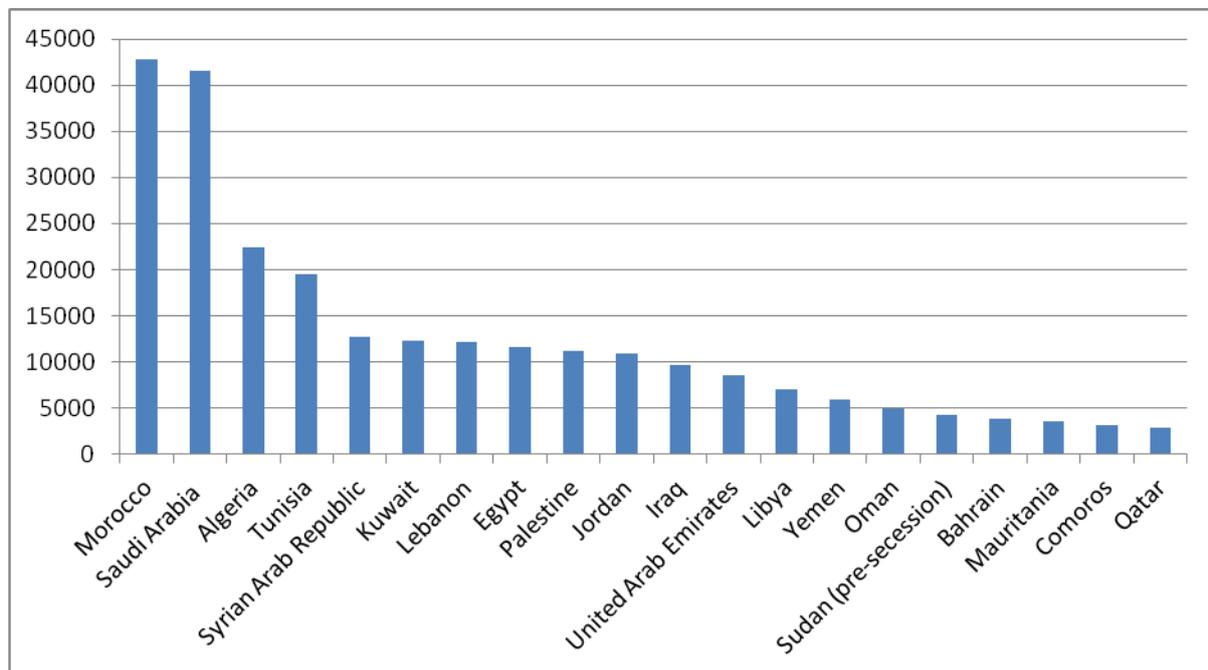
<sup>33</sup> UNESCO, 2012, p. 137.

<sup>34</sup> Arab News (2013). *US most preferred destination for Saudi students : Ministry*. Jeddah (5 March). Available from <http://www.arabnews.com/saudi-arabia/us-most-preferred-destination-saudi-students-ministry>.

Conférence des Grandes Écoles in France showed that, in 2009-2010, only 34.2 per cent of students from Maghreb countries attending these elite institutions were female.<sup>35</sup>

As figure IV shows, the former French colonies of the Maghreb, namely, Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia, in addition to Saudi Arabia, make up the largest groups of outbound internationally mobile students in numbers; the outbound mobility ratio, however, is highest in Comoros and Djibouti, with 60.9 per cent and 51.6 per cent, respectively. This reflects, on the one hand, the small size of their populations and the lack of local opportunities in tertiary education, and, on the other hand, the similarities between the educational systems in place in these countries and in France, the main country of destination for these students also contribute to this high ratio. Special programmes run by France aim at facilitating the recruitment of students from these countries.

**Figure IV. Number of outbound internationally mobile students from Arab countries, 2010**



Source: UNESCO, 2012. Table 10, pp. 134-137.

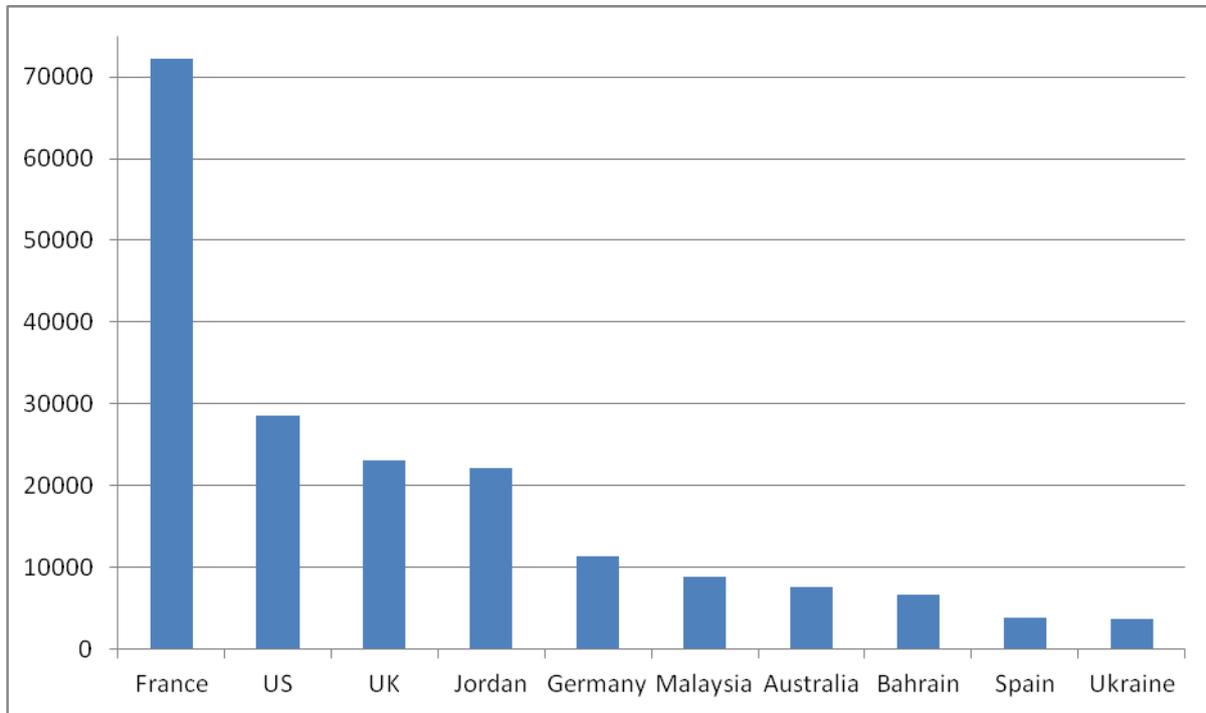
Despite the importance of intraregional migration in accounting for internationally mobile students in Arab countries, available data shows that most internationally mobile students from Arab countries study outside the region (see figure V). As to the connection between the countries of origin and the countries of destination, it is worth noting that the high number of students travelling to study in France is made up predominantly of students from the former French colonies, namely, Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Syrian Arab Republic, and Tunisia, whereas more than 72 per cent of the Arab students in the United States are from GCC countries, with more than 50 per cent from Saudi Arabia alone. These trends are influenced by different factors, including linguistic affinities and geographical proximity in the case of the Maghreb countries; bilateral agreements and structures facilitating student mobility between specific countries, for instance between Jordan and the Ukraine;<sup>36</sup> and financial support for studying abroad

<sup>35</sup> Poree, Brigitte (2011). *Les Grandes Écoles sur la scène internationale. Enquête mobilité 2011*. Conférence des Grandes Écoles, p. 40. Paris.

<sup>36</sup> Embassy of Ukraine in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (2012). Cultural and humanitarian cooperation. Available from <http://jordan.mfa.gov.ua/en/ukraine-jo/culture>.

in the case of the GCC countries, for instance, through the King Abdullah Scholarship in Saudi Arabia, the largest scholarship programme in the world.<sup>37</sup>

**Figure V. Top ten countries of destination for students from Arab countries, 2010**



Source: UNESCO, 2012. Table 10, pp. 134-137.<sup>38</sup>

While global figures relating to the fields of study of these students are unavailable, the aggregation of trends presented in different reports suggests that students from Arab countries tend to study in such fields as science, technology and engineering. In 2008, 49.2 per cent of Saudi students receiving scholarships from the King Abdullah Foundation chose these fields,<sup>39</sup> as did 37 per cent of students from the Maghreb countries studying in France.<sup>40</sup> Economics are also popular, with 23 per cent of students from the Maghreb countries and 42 per cent of Egyptian students in France studying this subject.<sup>41</sup> Medicine is particularly popular among students from the Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon and Algeria studying in France, with 42 per cent of Syrian students and 20 per cent of Lebanese and Algerian students each enrolled in medical courses.<sup>42</sup> These preferences can be, in part, explained by the existence of agreements in specific fields, but also reflect the individual “pragmatic choices” made by students who aim to use their studies to access jobs either in the countries of destination or back in their countries of origin.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Lamine, Bechir (2010). *Towards an Arab Higher Education Space: International Challenges and Societal Responsibilities*. Proceedings of the Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education, Cairo, 31 May, 1-2 June 2009, p. 719. Beirut: UNESCO.

<sup>38</sup> This accounts for only 81.2 per cent of the internationally mobile students from Arab countries.

<sup>39</sup> Arab News, 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Campus France (2011). *La mobilité des étudiants du Maghreb, de l’Egypte et du Levant* (Mai), p. 3. Available from [http://ressources.campusfrance.org/publi\\_institu/agence\\_cf/notes/fr/note\\_02\\_hs\\_fr.pdf](http://ressources.campusfrance.org/publi_institu/agence_cf/notes/fr/note_02_hs_fr.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Campus France, 2011, pp. 3-6.

<sup>42</sup> Campus France, 2011, pp. 5, 7 and 8.

<sup>43</sup> Balac, Ronan (2010). Les mobilités internationales des étudiants marocains. In *Espaces, Populations, Sociétés*, vol. 2-3, pp. 395-411 Available from <http://eps.revues.org/4264#tocto1n3>.

Outward student mobility has always been used by developing countries as a tool for development. It enables countries of origin to upgrade the skills of their workforce by allowing students to access learning opportunities which are not available locally, with the hope that they will be able to use these skills in their home countries. Saudi Arabia, for instance, has supported students to study abroad since the 1920s.<sup>44</sup> Many students, however, prefer to stay in their countries of destination after graduation. Thus, in order to ensure that this potential is not lost, countries of origin need to provide incentives attracting young people to return to their countries of origin to use their newly-acquired skills. At the same time, they need to reach out to those students who choose to remain abroad to encourage and support their involvement in such transnational development activities as sending remittances, establishing trading links, advocating their countries of origin abroad, and engaging in short-term returns.<sup>45</sup>

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

Young men and women migrate to, within and from the Arab region as dependents and independent migrants, both voluntarily and involuntarily. Migration can carry risks for young women and men, in particular in relation to forced labour and trafficking in persons: young women can be vulnerable to forced labour in countries of destination in begging, domestic work and prostitution, either as refugees or as deceived migrant workers. Young male migrants are also vulnerable to forced labour.<sup>46</sup>

However, as with older adults, voluntary migration is primarily an opportunity for migrants in this age group. Not only does migration for employment increase young people's opportunities to increase their earnings, but it can also be a major opportunity to improve their education and careers, for their own benefit as well as the benefit of both their countries of origin and destination.

There is a clear relationship between youth migration from the Arab region and young people's search for better employment opportunities. To address this nexus, Arab countries are recommended to consider the following:

- Directing State investment towards, and providing tax incentives for companies to invest in, research and development and training for staff in the private sector to improve the quality of jobs and provide incentives for young people to stay in their countries of origin;
- Engaging in outreach activities towards young migrants living abroad to encourage them to invest their financial and human capital in decent employment-generating activities in their countries of origin;
- Loosening the restrictions on the mobility of foreign employees in Arab countries, in order to reduce the attractiveness of expatriate workers for employers;
- Developing national action plans on youth employment which incorporate a migration perspective, to promote coordinated and comprehensive policies aimed at improving youth employability, with particular focus on skill-upgrading and labour-matching services for national, regional and international labour markets;
- Implementing such existing agreements as Arab Labour Organization (ALO) Agreements 1 and 4 on the Movement of Arab Manpower and ALO Agreement 14 on the Arab Worker's Right to Social Insurance when Moving for Employment in an Arab Country, to enable young people to move within the region to fill skill and labour force gaps;

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<sup>44</sup> Lamine, 2010, p. 718.

<sup>45</sup> IOM, 2008, pp. 121-122.

<sup>46</sup> United States of America Department of State (2012). *Trafficking in Persons Report* (June).

- Protecting the rights of young migrant workers through the ratification and enforcement of all relevant ILO conventions in the areas of child labour, particularly in relation to hazardous work, migrant labour and domestic work. In addition, countries of the region which have not already done so should ratify the United Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families;
- Increasing the engagement between countries of origin and countries of destination to ensure the protection of youth migrants;
- Incorporating domestic work into the scope of national labour law given its importance in employing young female migrants;
- Expanding the possibility for family reunification beyond the categories to which it is currently restricted in recognition of the right to family unity. In particular, countries of destination for temporary migrant workers should ensure that any restrictions are valid under the Convention on the Rights of the Child dealing with “applications by a child or his or her parents to enter or leave a State Party for the purpose of family reunification [...] in a positive, humane and expeditious manner”.<sup>47</sup>

In relation to forced youth migrants, the following is recommended:

- Arab countries which have not already done so should ratify the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol;
- Countries of destination for refugees should ensure that their refugee policies are gender- and age-sensitive, with particular attention to the situation of young women and their protection from forced labour.

In relation to student migrants, the following is recommended:

- Student mobility should be facilitated by the harmonization of educational standards with international standards throughout the region, in order to broaden the base of students able to make use of these opportunities;
- Countries of destination for student migrants within the region could create specific visas for students with relevant skills for the economy to enable them to remain in the country at their own expense and for a limited period of time after they finalized their studies to look for work;
- Countries of origin should recognize the importance of their young people who are studying abroad, or who have studied abroad and have returned, and carry out research on their situations and intentions to understand whether student migration represents a brain drain or a brain gain;
- Countries of origin should make specific efforts to reach out to students in the countries of destination to inform them about and promote their engagement as partners in development activities, for instance through sponsoring cultural events and clubs at universities;
- Universities with high concentrations of students from particular countries of origin should consider enabling such students to involve themselves in development activities benefitting their countries of origin by granting academic credits for such activities, as well as providing capacity-building support and twinning with counterpart institutions in countries of origin as part of their corporate social responsibility policies.

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<sup>47</sup> United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Article 10.1, p.3. Available from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>.