# Situation Report on International Migration 2019

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Context of the Arab Region

## Executive Summary

UNITED NATIONS
ESCWA

Shared Prosperity **Dignified Life**

IOM
UN MIGRATION

**VISION**

ESCWA, an innovative catalyst for a stable, just and flourishing Arab region

**MISSION**

Committed to the 2030 Agenda, ESCWA's passionate team produces innovative knowledge, fosters regional consensus and delivers transformational policy advice. Together, we work for a sustainable future for all.

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IOM
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UNECA

International Labour Organization

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

World Health Organization

UNAIDS
JOINT UNITED NATIONS PROGRAMME ON HIV/AIDS

UNDP

UNEP

UNFPA

UN@HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS

unicef
for every child

UNODC
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

UN WOMEN

WFP
World Food Programme
wfp.org

# Summary

In its third edition, the Situation Report on International Migration in the Arab Region broadens and deepens knowledge on migration by regionalizing migration data and analysing migration trends, patterns, and drivers at the regional and subregional levels. It also highlights Arab countries' efforts to develop migration related policies. In its thematic chapter, the Situation Report delves into the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), a visionary document that provides a comprehensive global framework of common values, principles and approaches to international migration governance. Its 23 objectives comprise an aspirational, integrated and fit-for-purpose set of measures, offering a holistic approach to achieving safe, orderly and regular migration. The Situation Report provides a timely analysis of GCM policy implications for migration governance in the region. It addresses three priority areas of migration governance in the Arab countries, showcases policies and programmes adopted across the region, and presents recommendations for integrated and comprehensive migration governance in the selected priority areas.

# Background

The Arab region is witnessing an unprecedented level of international migration. In 2017, the region hosted over 38 million migrants and refugees, representing almost 15 per cent of the total 258 million international migrants worldwide. A significant proportion are labour migrants, especially in Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Over 9 million refugees have sought protection in the region, including 3.7 million refugees under the UNHCR mandate and 5.4 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA. Conflicts and environmental pressures in the region have also led to internal displacement of around 15 million people, mainly in Iraq, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

Migration from the Arab region has also been on the rise, reaching an estimated 29 million people in 2017, almost half of whom migrated within the region. According to mid-2018 data, the Arab region was the origin of over 8.7 million refugees under the UNHCR mandate out of a total of 20.2 million. The Arab region was also a major recipient of remittances amounting to $54.1 billion in 2017, almost double the amount the region received in official development assistance and almost double the amount received in net foreign direct investments in the same year.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted in December 2018, comes at a critical moment and offers a roadmap for how countries can effectively manage migration, with the overall objective of making migration beneficial for all, and ensuring that migration occurs in safe conditions and out of choice rather than out of desperation.

The nexus between migration and development has become well established in recent years and was underlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Migrants' potential to contribute to the sustainable development of their countries of origin and destination is often showcased in a multitude of stories and research linking migration directly to positive development outcomes. To capitalize on the development potential of migration, migrants' protection and empowerment are clear prerequisites. GCM operationalises the links between meeting migrants' needs and fulfilling their rights, on the one hand, and increasing prosperity, innovation and sustainable development, on the other. It is based on a 360-degree vision of international migration and makes the case for aligning all sectoral and cross-cutting policies with migration-related objectives. It recognises scattered policy responses focusing solely on migration management are not sufficient to transform migration into a source of positive development outcomes.

## About the Situation Report

**Chapter 1** provides an overview of the latest migration and displacement trends and figures in the Arab region and subregions, in line with the first GCM objective on migration data as a basis for evidence-based policies. The chapter also includes information on remittances to and from the region, and analysis of the main drivers of migration and displacement in the Arab region.

**Figure 1.** Number of migrants and refugees in the Arab region (millions), 1990-2017
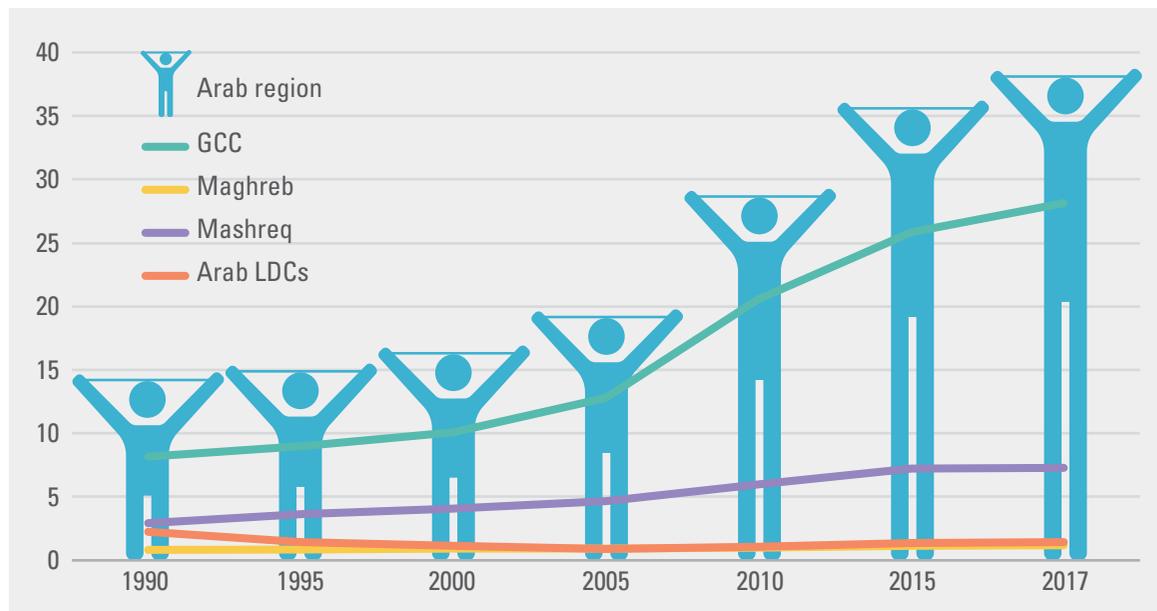


**Source:** ESCWA calculations based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (DESA), 2017; DESA, "Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2017 Revisions", International Migration database. Available at https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2017/estimates17.asp (accessed on 7 August 2018).

**Figure 2.** Distribution of migrants and refugees in the Arab region by sex and age group, 2017



| Older males: 1% | Working-age males: 49% | Male youth: 7% |
| Male children: 10% | Older females: 1% | Working-age females: 19% |
| Female youth: 5% | Female children: 9% | |
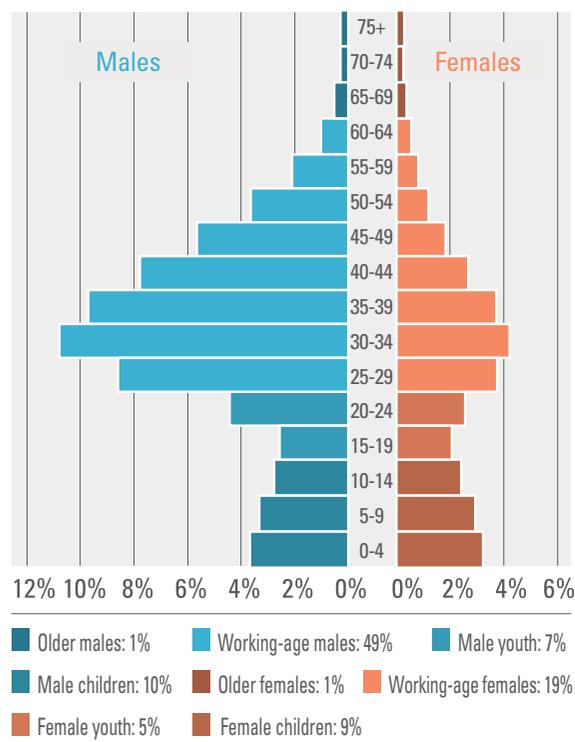
**Source:** ESCWA calculations based on DESA, 2017 (see figure 1).

**Figure 3.** Main countries of origin of migrants and refugees in the Arab region, 2017



| India | 8.9 million |
| State of Palestine | 3.7 million |
| Syrian Arab Republic | 3.2 million |
| Bangladesh | 3.1 million |
| Pakistan | 3.1 million |
| Rest of the Arab region | 7.1 million |
| Rest of the world | 9.0 million |
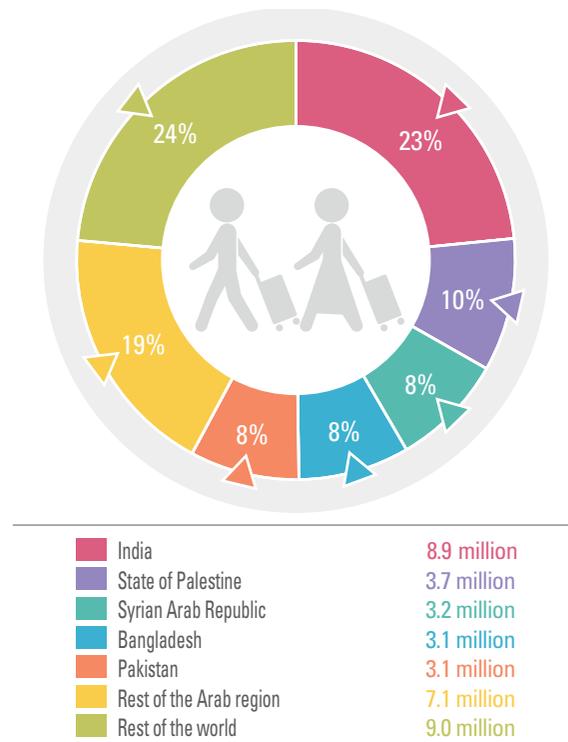
**Source:** ESCWA calculations based on DESA, 2017 (see figure 1).

**Figure 4.** Number of migrants and refugees originating from the Arab region (millions), 1990-2017
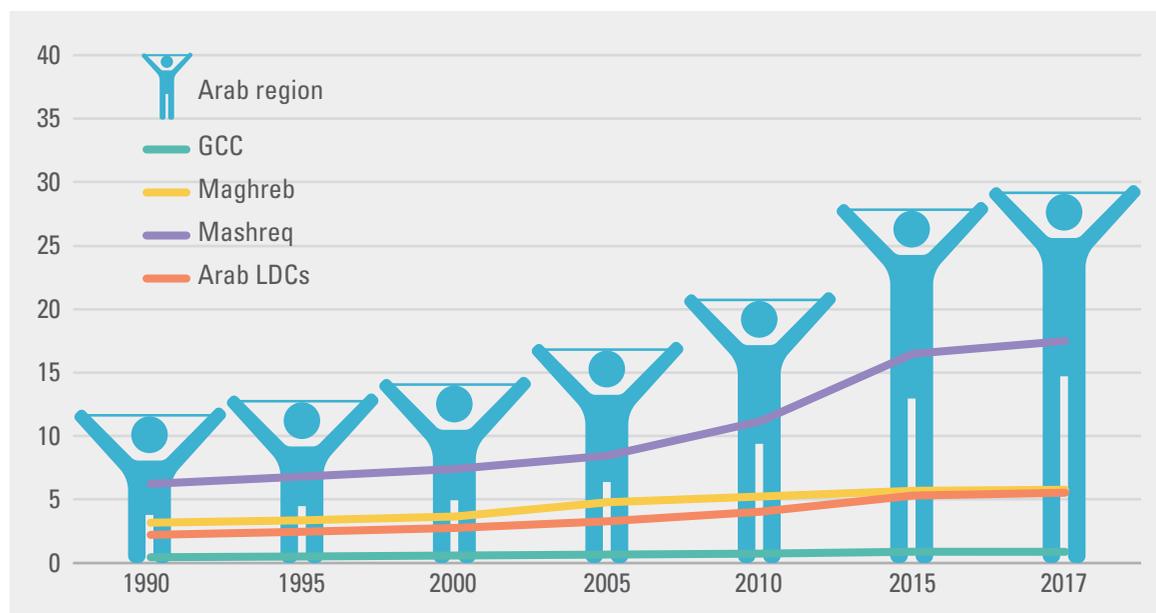


**Source:** ESCWA calculations based on DESA, 2017 (see figure 1).

**Figure 5.** Main countries of destination for Arab migrants and refugees, 2017
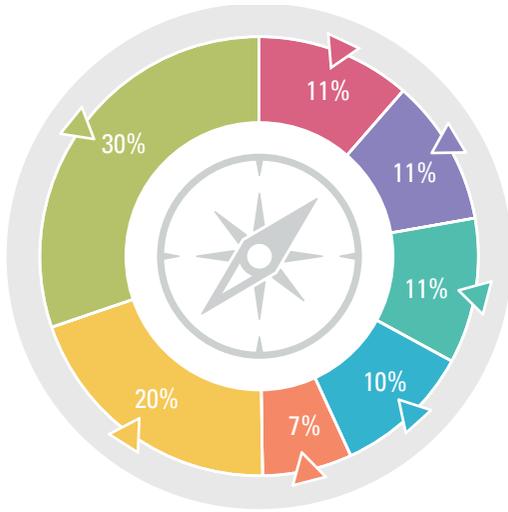
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ■ | Turkey | 3.3 million |
| ■ | Jordan | 3.1 million |
| ■ | Saudi Arabia | 3.1 million |
| ■ | France | 3.0 million |
| ■ | Lebanon | 1.9 million |
| ■ | Rest of the Arab region | 5.8 million |
| ■ | Rest of the world | 8.8 million |

Chart values: 30%, 11%, 11%, 11%, 10%, 7%, 20%

**Source:** ESCWA calculations based on DESA, 2017 (see figure 1).

## 2/5 OF WORKERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST[1] WERE MIGRANTS IN 2017

THE GCC SUBREGION CONTINUES TO BE A LABOUR MIGRATION HUB. IT HAD THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF MIGRANT WORKERS AS A PROPORTION OF THE TOTAL WORKFORCE WORLDWIDE IN 2017.

1. Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, State of Palestine, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates (according to ILO)..

**Figure 6.** Remittance inflows to the Arab region by subregion (billions of dollars), 1990-2017

Legend:
- Arab region
- GCC
- Maghreb
- Mashreq
- Arab LDCs

X-axis: 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2017
Y-axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60
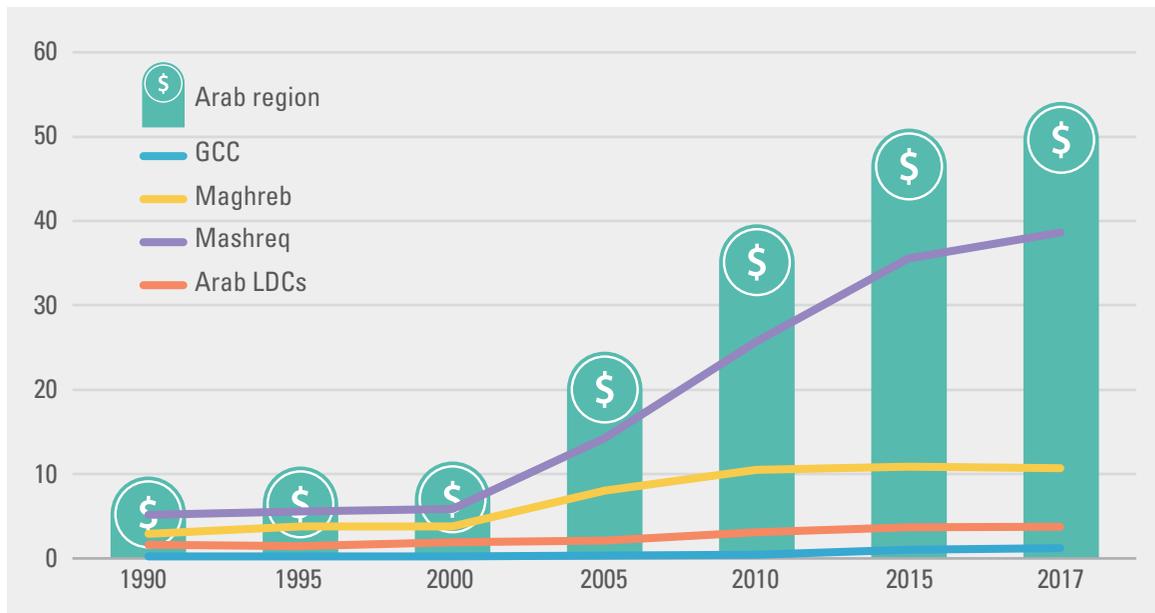
**Source:** World Bank, Migration and Remittances Data. Available from https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data.

**33%** OF THE **MIGRANT** AND **REFUGEE** POPULATION IN THE **ARAB REGION** WERE **WOMEN** IN **2017**

IN 2017, WOMEN REPRESENTED NEARLY 1/2 OF THE **MIGRANT POPULATION** IN THE MASHREQ SUBREGION AND THE ARAB LDCS, BUT ONLY 35% IN THE MAGHREB AND 28% IN GCC COUNTRIES.

**2/5** OF **REFUGEES** IN THE WORLD CAME **FROM** THE **ARAB REGION** IN **2018**

ARAB REGION | REST OF THE WORLD

IN 2018, THE ARAB REGION WAS THE ORIGIN OF OVER 8.7 MILLION REFUGEES, 29% OF WHOM REMAINED IN THE REGION.

IN 2017, THE **MASHREQ** SUBREGION WAS THE MAIN RECIPIENT OF **REMITTANCES**. OVER **2/3** OF ALL **REMITTANCES** SENT TO THE REGION WERE RECEIVED BY **EGYPT, JORDAN AND LEBANON**
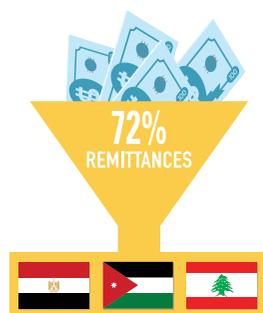
72% REMITTANCES

THE ARAB REGION RECEIVED $54.1 BILLION IN REMITTANCES IN 2017, REPRESENTING 8.7% OF GLOBAL REMITTANCE INFLOWS.

AROUND **27%** OF ALL **GLOBAL REMITTANCE OUTFLOWS** CAME FROM **GCC COUNTRIES** IN **2017**

GCC COUNTRIES | REST OF THE WORLD

TOTAL REMITTANCES SENT FROM THE ARAB REGION REACHED $120.6 BILLION IN 2017, WITH ALMOST ALL SENT FROM GCC COUNTRIES.

**Chapter 2** presents an update of policy developments and international efforts on migration governance involving Arab countries between April 2017 and March 2019. The main policy areas addressed include nationality and statelessness, labour migration, irregular migration, human trafficking and migrant smuggling, forced migration and refugee protection, and admission and residency procedures. The chapter also describes developments in subregional, regional and global cooperation relating to migration involving Arab countries.

**Table 1.** Policy developments by country and thematic area, April 2017-March 2019

| Country | Nationality and statelessness | Labour migration | Irregular migration | Human trafficking and migrant smuggling | Forced displacement and refugee protection | Admissions, visas and residency permits | Other laws and policies |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Algeria | | | | | | | X |
| Bahrain | | X | X | X | | X | X |
| Comoros | | | | | | | |
| Djibouti | | X | | | X | | |
| Egypt | X | | | X | | | X |
| Iraq | | | | X | X | X | |
| Jordan | X | X | | X | X | | |
| Kuwait | | X | X | X | | X | X |
| Lebanon | | | | | X | | |
| Libya | | | | | | | |
| Mauritania | | | | | | | |
| Morocco | | | X | X | | | |
| Oman | | X | | | | X | X |
| Qatar | | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Saudi Arabia | | X | X | X | | X | X |
| Somalia | X | | | X | X | | |
| State of Palestine | | | | | | | |
| Sudan | X | | | X | X | | |
| Syrian Arab Republic | | X | | | X | | X |
| Tunisia | | | X | X | | | X |
| United Arab Emirates | X | X | X | | X | X | |
| Yemen | | | | | | | |

**Source:** Compiled by ESCWA, 2019.

## Key findings:

- GCC countries were involved in diverse new developments in migration governance at the national level, while other subregions, most notably the Arab LDCs, introduced limited laws and policies;
- Trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling received the most attention, while labour migration, forced displacement and refugee protection were also high on the policy agenda;
- In the area of labour migration, GCC countries made efforts to enhance the protection of migrant workers' rights by creating tighter regulations for recruitment agencies, establishing standardized contracts, setting up mechanisms to support the resolution of labour disputes, and enacting new regulations for issuance and renewal of work permits. Nonetheless, the *kafala* system still puts migrant workers in particularly vulnerable situations, potentially impeding their access to rights and services;

- Regularization campaigns have been launched, allowing some migrants in irregular situations to leave the country without paying a penalty. However, the focus on integrating these migrants by regularizing their status or opening up regular migration channels has been limited;
- Trafficking in persons has been the subject of numerous policy responses, while fewer policies have been adopted to address migrant smuggling;
- Some Arab countries have passed new laws updating procedures for granting asylum, refugee status or protection to forcibly displaced persons and expanding the services available for them. However, the high numbers of refugees and the protracted nature of displacement in the region is putting significant pressure on host countries and communities, sometimes triggering policy responses that restrict the rights of refugees and the services they are entitled to, thus exacerbating their already vulnerable circumstances.

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**Chapter 3** introduces GCM and unpacks its objectives, and examines regional migration governance priorities in the light of GCM. It also provides a policy map for each selected priority area showcasing policies and programmes adopted across the region, identifies gaps and makes recommendations for policy interventions. Moreover, the chapter analyses existing national frameworks and policies for migration governance in the selected priority areas, namely full inclusion and access of migrants to basic services (with a focus on health services), vulnerabilities in migration, and human trafficking and migrants smuggling.

## Key findings:

- Restrictive nationality laws and legislation on migrants' naturalization in most Arab countries are not conducive to

the full inclusion of migrants and their descendants in the citizenry, leading to the emergence of subpopulations of non-citizens with limited or no access to fundamental rights and basic services.
- Migrants' access to basic services is a prerequisite for ensuring their rights and empowering them. An assessment of migrants' access to health, as a core dimension of human development, shows that the State is responsible for providing health care in a couple of countries only. In the majority of GCC countries, employers are responsible for providing health insurance, while in several countries, regulation on who bears the cost of health services is ambiguous, leaving migrants at risk of being excluded or left behind.

- Migrant domestic workers belong to the category of migrants facing increased vulnerabilities and high risks of abuse. In the largest migrant destination countries of the Arab region, namely the GCC subregion, Jordan and Lebanon, foreigners' employment and residency are governed by the kafala system, which entails risks for migrant domestic workers because of their exclusion from labour laws. Some countries have recently taken measures to alleviate these limitations, by introducing compulsory wage protection systems to ensure that migrants' wages are payed in full and on time.

- While the majority of Arab States are parties to the Palermo protocols on trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, insufficient implementation facilitates a variety of unlawful practices that worsen migrants' situation in the region. Several countries have taken measures to prevent trafficking in persons; however, these do not extend to migrant smuggling, and human and administrative resources are insufficient to combat associated criminal networks.

## Conclusion

The analysis presented in the 2019 Situation Report on International Migration in the Arab Region demonstrates that migration is a reality that affects the lives of millions of people migrating to, from and through the region. The Arab region has its own set of challenges, including the scale of migration flows, and complex migration patterns and trends. In several countries, notwithstanding, a number of good practices are emerging with regards to migration governance.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration adopts a people-centred approach, aimed at making migration work for all: migrants and communities in origin and destination countries. However, for the shift in the governance of international migration to materialize, the challenge today is to ensure swift implementation of GCM. Arab countries would benefit from exploring means to implement GCM and accelerate progress towards achieving its goals.