Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

2017 Situation Report on International Migration: Migration in the Arab Region and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Executive Summary

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1. BACKGROUND

While the story of migration in the Arab region may vary from country to country, it is always a story of people and their movements. Whether voluntary or involuntary, regular or irregular, migrants are part of the social, economic, environmental, cultural and political narratives of society. The story of migration in the Arab region is therefore also a story of regional development.

The 2017 Situation Report on International Migration provides new insight into the critical nexus between migration and sustainable development. It explains how migration plays a key role in sustainable development across the globe and in the Arab region specifically, situating migration trends squarely within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It showcases migrants' potential to contribute to the development of their countries of origin and destination, and offers evidence and indicators that link migration to positive development outcomes.

Recognizing the increasing numbers of migrants and refugees and the growing importance of human mobility in shaping the social and economic fabric of communities, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development stresses the important role human mobility plays in global development.

An estimated 244 million people, or 4 per cent of the world's population, are international migrants. Migration is a prominent feature in the Arab region where of number of international migrants has more than doubled to 38 million in 2017 from around 15 million migrants in 1990, or about 14 per cent of international migrants worldwide.

The 2017 Situation Report provides an updated overview of contemporary migration trends, patterns and policy developments in the Arab region. It also examines the contributions of international migration to the region's economic and social development, especially in the context of recent and ongoing global frameworks, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the forthcoming Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration which aims to serve as a roadmap for States to realize the potential of the nexus of migration and development. Opportunities for policymakers at the local, national, regional and global levels to build and improve policies and strategies that respond to the realities of migration dynamics in the region are highlighted in this second edition of the regional report on migration.

2. ABOUT THE REPORT

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 analyses demographic, migration and displacement data in the Arab region and at the level of each of the four major subregions – the Maghreb, the Mashreq, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and the least developed countries (LDCs). The chapter also documents remittance flows to and from the Arab region.
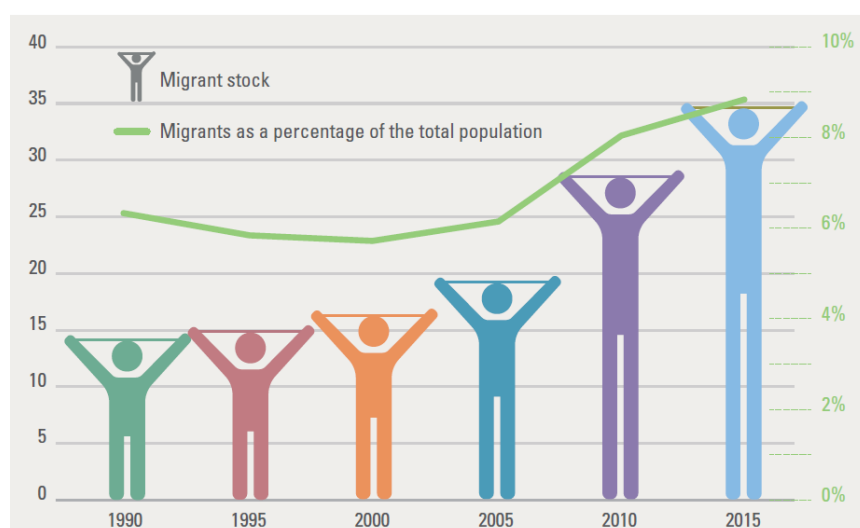
Key findings:

- In addition to high levels of labour migration, protracted conflicts in numerous Arab countries have led to high levels of displacement in the region. Around 41 per cent of all people internally displaced globally due to conflict and generalized violence were living in the Arab region at the end of 2016.

- The number of female migrants in the Arab region has doubled over the past 25 years to 11.6 million in 2015 from 5.6 million in 1990, explained in part by the fact that displacement often impacts more women than typically male-dominated labour migration flows.

- The GCC countries are a major hub for labour migrants, with a greater concentration of migrants than anywhere else in the world. The Maghreb continues to send and receive labour migrants and serve as a

transit area for mixed migration flows. Within the Mashreq, labour migration has been a long-standing trend, along with persistent forced displacement within and across borders.
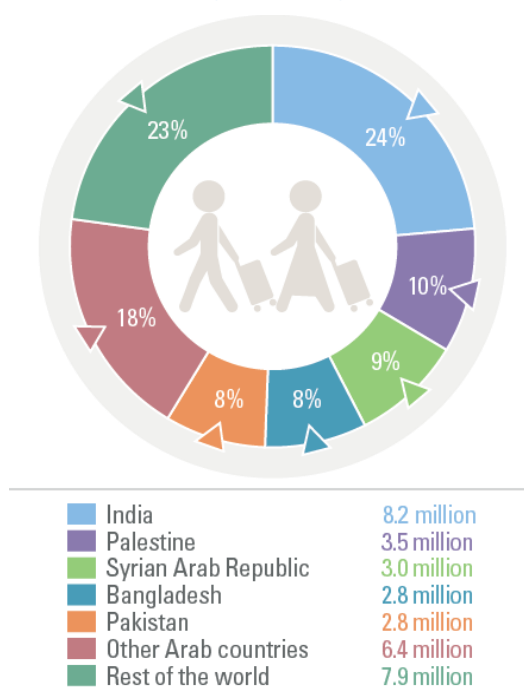
- The Arab region received nearly $51 billion in remittances in 2015, an increase for all countries over the 2000-2015 period. However, estimates for 2016 showed slowed growth and even decline in remittances to some Arab countries. The GCC countries were the source of 93 per cent of all remittance outflows from the region in 2015. Mashreq countries were the main receiving countries, receiving 70 per cent of all remittance inflows to the Arab region in 2015.

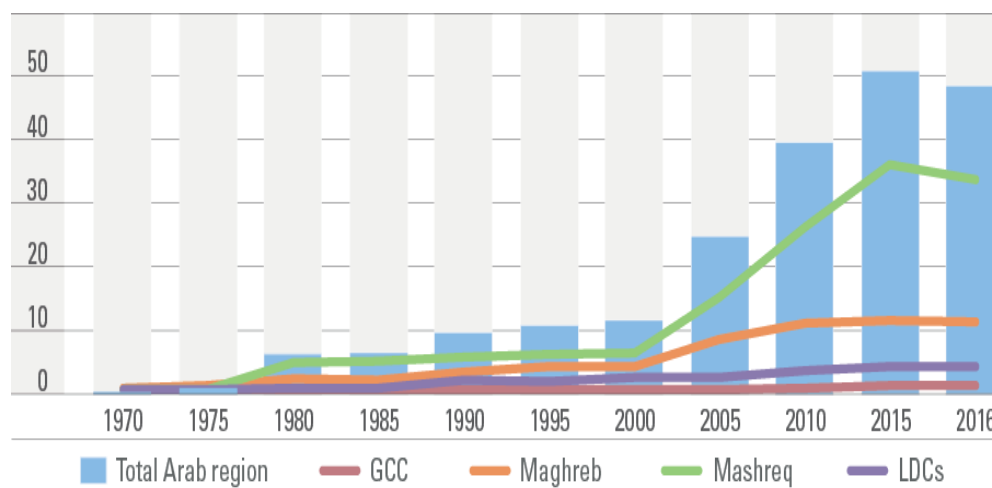Figure 1. **Migrant stocks in Arab countries (millions), 1990-2015**

Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), "Trends in international migrant stock 2015", International migration database. Available from www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates15.shtml (accessed 25 October 2016)..

Figure 2. **Main countries of origin for migrants in the Arab region, 2015**

India	8.2 million
Palestine	3.5 million
Syrian Arab Republic	3.0 million
Bangladesh	2.8 million
Pakistan	2.8 million
Other Arab countries	6.4 million
Rest of the world	7.9 million

Source: United Nations, DESA, "Trends in international migrant stock 2015" (see figure 1).

Figure 3. **Remittance inflows to the Arab region by subregion, 1970-2016**
(*Billions of dollars*)

Note: Data for 2016 are estimates.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 documents Arab national policy developments in the areas of nationality, statelessness, labour migration, irregular migration, human trafficking and migrant smuggling, forced migration and refugee flows between 2015 and 2017. Given the growing numbers of international migrants, especially refugees and other displaced populations, and increasing awareness of the need to deal with irregular migration flows, Arab countries are focusing greater attention on governing international migration. In addition to national efforts, Arab countries have undertaken reforms and actions at the international level, engaging in interregional, regional and subregional processes and bilateral cooperation to govern migration and support the fight against migrant trafficking and smuggling.
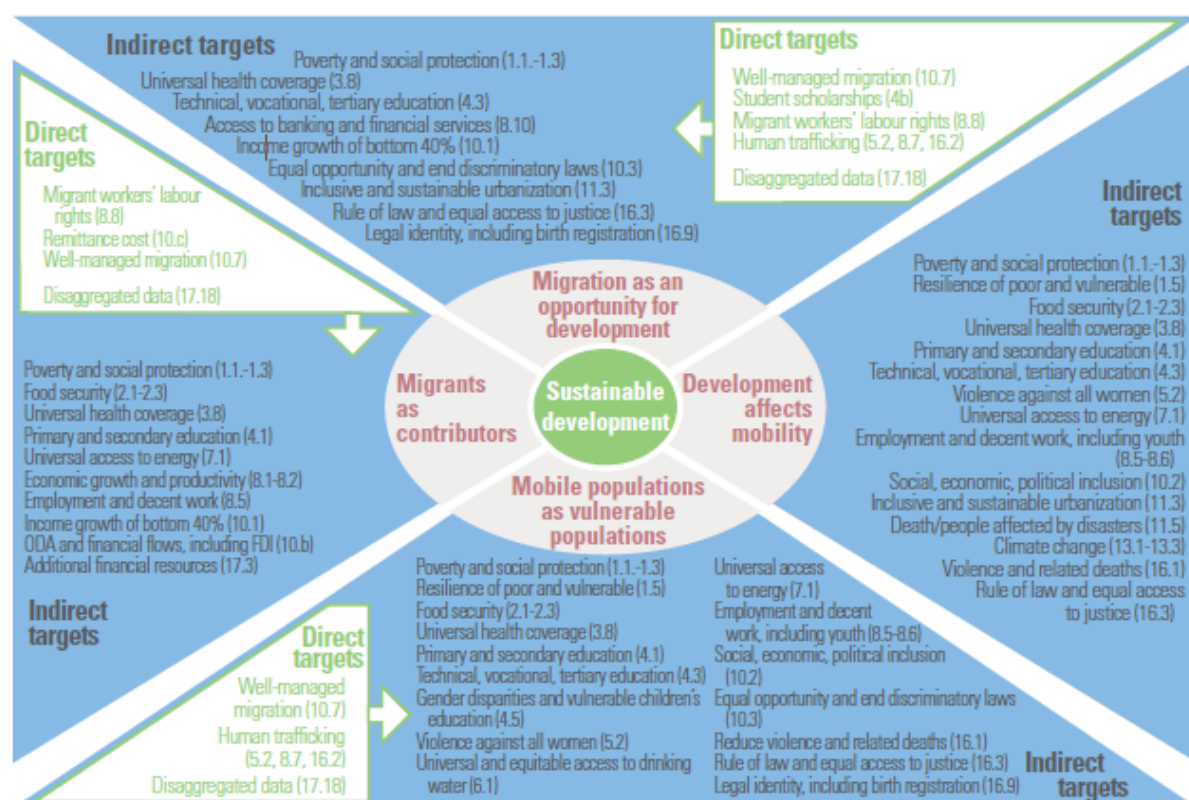
Key findings:

- Access to nationality in the Arab region remains greatly restricted and gender-based. While these policies contribute to statelessness and are still a major issue for countries in the region, there have been some improvements.

- Bilateral initiatives have improved migration policies on the recruitment, reception and return of migrants while at the same time facilitating migration and protecting migrants' rights. Pragmatic steps have been taken to reform the sponsorship (*kafala*) system in many countries. Even so, many workers are still vulnerable under this system and most Arab countries have not ratified longstanding ILO frameworks for migrants' rights.

- Only limited progress has been made in the Arab region on the governance of irregular migration.

- Many Arab countries have adopted national action plans to fight human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Several countries are now offering protection, access to legal assistance, shelters and medical centres and broadened channels to report abuse for trafficked and smuggled individuals.

- While some Arab States have engaged in regional and international planning on migration, especially forced migration, no new ratifications of the Refugee Convention took place during the period. Many States continued to offer protection to refugees, with some offering extended residence permits, reduced or eliminated fees and the ability to work. However, some States increased restrictive admission policies.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 considers human mobility in the Arab region in the context of the current global processes and frameworks on migration governance and sustainable development. Recognizing that migration is a multidimensional reality of major relevance for the development of countries of origin, transit and destination, it proposes coherent and comprehensive responses. It examines the link between international migration in the region and the 2030 Agenda, focusing on the SDG targets related to labour migrants' recruitment, rights and remittances. The chapter sets out policy and programming options and methods for collecting meaningful data to monitor progress toward achieving the migration-related SDGs and targets.

Figure 4. SDG targets directly and indirectly related to human mobility

Source: Compiled by ESCWA and IOM.

Key findings:

- Human mobility intersects with sustainable development in four key areas, as follows:
    - The level of development of an area or community can be a driver or mobility;
    - Migration can be an opportunity for development;
    - Migrants can be contributors to development in their countries of origin and destination;
    - Mobile populations are also vulnerable populations, whose specific needs must be considered for governments to 'leave no one behind' in development.
- Related public policies can promote positive sustainable development outcomes.
- In SDG target 10.7 of the 2030 Agenda, all governments and stakeholders committed to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.

- Other SDG targets that are directly relevant to migration include the protecting of migrant workers' labour rights and the promotion of safe and secure working environments, especially for women (target 8.8); reducing the transaction costs of remittances (target 10.c); scholarships that can affect student mobility (target 4.b); and trafficking in persons, especially women and children, and forced labour and exploitation (targets 5.2, 8.7, 16.2). Achieving these migration-related SDGs will require improvements in meaningful data collection (17.18).

- Several frameworks have been established to help Governments build, assess and evaluate laws, policies and programmes on international human mobility, including:

    o Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration;

    o Migration Governance Framework;

    o Migration Governance Index;

    o Dashboard of indicators for measuring policy and institutional coherence for migration and development.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Global action is required to ensure that all human beings can achieve dignity and equality, and enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives in a healthy and sustainable environment. It is possible to increase the quality and scale of migration's positive impact on the development in 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. Ultimately, human mobility can lead to considerable gains for States and migrants alike, contributing to development in both countries and communities of origin and destination.

The report was prepared under the aegis of the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region, with preparation and production led by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and International Organization for Migration (IOM).