

**TWELFTH COORDINATION MEETING ON  
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

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**FOLLOW-UP TO THE HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION  
AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAB REGION<sup>1</sup>**

*United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia*

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in the paper do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations Secretariat.

## A. INTRODUCTION

The Arab region continues to be one of the most migration-intense regions in the world. Despite only accounting for 5 per cent of the world's population, 13.1 per cent of the total global migrant stock (over 30 million migrants) lives in the 22 countries of the Arab region.<sup>i</sup> While migrants made up 3.2 per cent of the population of the world in 2013, the proportion of migrants in the Arab regions stood at 8.4 per cent. In the sub-region formed by the six countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC),<sup>ii</sup> this proportion reached 45.9 per cent. Intra-regional migration is important, with migrants from other Arab countries accounting for around 11.5 million of the migrants in the Arab region. However, most migrants to the region come from outside the region, particularly from countries in South and South-East Asia. Indeed, five Asian countries (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and the Philippines) accounted for over 50 per cent of migrants in the Arab region in 2013. Meanwhile, over 22 million people from Arab countries were living abroad in 2013; while around half of this population lived in other Arab countries, important concentrations of migrants from Arab countries live in Europe and Northern America.<sup>iii</sup>

These trends have seen significant increases since 1990, with a particular acceleration since the turn of the millennium. Most immigration to the countries of the Arab region comes in the form of labour migration, particularly to the countries of the GCC. This is a longstanding trend, building on historic patterns of contact between Arab countries and countries of the Indian sub-continent and linked to the discovery and exploitation of hydrocarbon resources in the GCC countries, and the implementation of ambitious development plans in these countries. In the decade since the beginning of the new millennium this labour immigration has increased in intensity, to the extent that the overall Western Asia region was responsible for over two-thirds of the total growth of migrant stock in Asia between 2000-2013.<sup>iv</sup> Most of this migration involves single men of working age and of low-to-medium skill levels, involved in industries such as services and construction. However, smaller flows of female migrants deserve particular attention, given the specific challenges women migrants face, especially those employed in the domestic work sector.<sup>v</sup> Overall, migrants make up the majority of workforces in GCC countries thus making them essential to the development of these countries.

Meanwhile, better job opportunities in richer Arab countries or European countries are also the main driver of emigration from Arab countries. This emigration generates, inter alia, large remittance flows, with countries such as Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon in particular receiving large amount of remittances: Egypt received over US\$20 billion in remittances in 2013, while remittances to Lebanon and Jordan represented 17 and 11.4 per cent of the GDPs of these countries.<sup>vi</sup>

The second main driver of migration to the Arab region is political instability and conflict in the region. The large historical populations of refugees under the care of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (now registered at over 5 million persons)<sup>vii</sup> have been joined in recent years by Iraqi and Syrian refugees fleeing the conflicts in their countries. Most of these refugees have moved to neighbouring countries, with Jordan and Lebanon alone hosting over half of the total number of refugees in the Arab region in mid-2013.<sup>viii</sup> The ongoing crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic is likely to see these numbers – and the pressure on infrastructure and services in Lebanon and Jordan – continue to grow.

Thus international migration remains a phenomenon of central importance for the social and economic development of the countries of the Arab region. As such, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the regional commission which covers 17 of the Arab countries,<sup>ix</sup> is following up on the work it has carried out in preparation for the second High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development to assist its member countries to implement the

recommendations of this important global event, and to ensure that migration find its place in the post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda.

## B. ESCWA ACTIVITIES

ESCWA's follow-up activities to the outcomes of the second High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development aim to enhance migration partnerships and cooperation to improve policy coherence and coordinated responses to international migration challenges. ESCWA is supporting enhanced partnership and cooperation between countries of the region through supporting the creation of a regional consultative process covering the Arab region under the aegis of the League of Arab States (LAS) and in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The project for a regional consultative process on migration stems from the Regional Consultative Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region which was co-convened ESCWA, IOM and LAS in June 2013 in preparation for the second High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. In the final declaration of this meeting, participants representing 15 Arab countries emphasized "the importance of establishing a Regional Consultative Process on Migration in the Arab region within the framework of the League of Arab States." <sup>x</sup> On this basis, LAS, ESCWA and IOM aim to support the efforts of Arab countries to put this regional consultative process into action.

ESCWA is also working to enhance cooperation and coordination between international organizations through the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region, which it co-chairs with LAS and IOM. The goal of this Working Group is to coordinate the complementary efforts of actors in the Arab States region and promote joint research and interventions on international migration, with a particular focus on examining the links between migration and development; ensuring systematic production and access to quality (sex disaggregated) migration data; supporting the development and implementation of Government policies and programmes that maximize the benefits and minimize the adverse impacts of migration in a more coherent way; and promoting dialogue between countries of the region to find mutually-beneficial solutions to migration challenges. The working group focuses in particular on gender perspectives, cultural diversity, human rights and the rule of law. In support of better-understanding complementary roles of the different agencies working on international migration in the region as well as the areas of strength and gaps in their responses and identifying areas of potentially-fruitful coordination and collaboration, ESCWA is currently finalizing a mapping report of international migration initiatives of the 16 member agencies of the Working Group.

As an outcome of the mapping report, which identifies a weakness in the area of research and data-gathering, the working group is embarking on an ambitious initiative involving the preparation of a regional situation report addressing international migration issues in the Arab region, due to be released in spring 2015. This report will aim to make use of the different perspectives and mandates of the wide range of international organizations working on international migration to strengthen the evidence base on international migration in the Arab region.

The Working Group is also planning to focus on building member countries' capacities to mainstream migration into their development strategies. In this regard, ESCWA has translated *Integrating International Migration into Development Strategies: A Handbook for Policymakers and Practitioners* into Arabic in order to increase its accessibility to policymakers and practitioners in the Arab region. It is currently finalizing its work plan with its partners at LAS and IOM with the aim of carrying out a series of capacity-building workshops using tools based on this and other sources for selected member countries in the first half of 2014.

In response to its increasing interest and work in strengthening the migration evidence base, ESCWA has recently been approached by the European University Institute and the Organization for Economic

Cooperation and Development to partner with a project to develop an Observatory for International Migration in the Arab Region. This project will aim to build the capacities of national statistical offices to measure, estimate and analyze migration, and to use these analyses to improve policy-making processes on international migration.

ESCWA hopes that these new forums for cooperation and coordination will provide a platform for improved policy coherence and responses to international migration challenges and opportunities in the Arab region.

### C. INTEGRATING MIGRATION INTO THE IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK OF THE POST-2015 UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

ESCWA is keen to ensure that migration finds its appropriate place in the post-2015 United Nations development agenda so that its potential to act as an enabler for development is recognized and maximized. ESCWA echoes the expert consensus emerging from the debate on the place of migration in the post-2015 development agenda, namely that the most effective way to include migration would be through:

- a reference to migration as an enabler of development in any foundational statement for the post-2015 development agenda;
- specific targets related to the new global partnership for development which see migrants as agents and subjects of development and thus which seeks to facilitate voluntary mobility and engage migrants as partners for development, while respecting their human rights;
- indicators targeted at migrants under other goals combined with a systematic disaggregation of data to show how migrants fare compared to non-migrants.<sup>xi</sup>

ESCWA feels that this approach would give migration the prominence it deserves while not overloading the resulting development agenda. By addressing the issue of the global governance of migration, the post-2015 development agenda can focus on policy actions – such as lowering remittance and recruitment costs, protecting the rights of migrants and promoting cooperation on labour mobility – which can help migration and migrants fulfil their potential for development. Meanwhile, considering migrants as a specific group for the purposes of measurement of progress would enable the particular needs of migrants as subjects of development policy to be highlighted, ensuring that migrants benefit as much as other groups from the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda.

Looking forward, ESCWA aims to use its strong relationships with its member countries and partner organizations to increase dialogue and cooperation at a regional and inter-regional level in the context of the new development agenda to maximize the development impacts of migration for all concerned.

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<sup>i</sup> The 22 Arab countries are: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

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

<sup>iii</sup> All calculations based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2013). Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2013 revision (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2013).

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

<sup>v</sup> For more information, see ESCWA-ESCAP, 2013, *Inter-Regional Report on Labour Migration*, Geneva and New York: United Nations. Available from:

[http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E\\_ESCWA\\_SDD\\_2013\\_Technicalpaper2\\_E.pdf](http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E_ESCWA_SDD_2013_Technicalpaper2_E.pdf)

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<sup>vi</sup> World Bank staff calculation based on data from IMF Balance of Payments Statistics database and data releases from central banks, national statistical agencies, and World Bank country desks, October 2013.

<sup>vii</sup> UNRWA, 2013, *UNRWA in Figures*, Available from:

<http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2013042435340.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> UNHCR, 2013, *UNHCR Mid-Term Trends in 2013*, Annex table 1

<sup>ix</sup> The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia covers 17 the following countries: Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, , the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen

<sup>x</sup>“Final Declaration of the Regional Consultative Meeting on International Migration and Development in the Arab Region in preparation for the second High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development”, available from: <http://css.escwa.org.lb/sdd/3173/3-1.pdf>

<sup>xi</sup> See ESCWA, forthcoming, *Migration and the Post-2015 Development Agenda*