

Forum: Arab League

Issue: Addressing challenges associated with high levels of immigration

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Introduction

Across the world, there has been an increase in migration, leading to mass immigration presenting complex and stressful challenges for nations, including the members of the Arab League (AL). The Arab League has regions with diverse economic, social and political structures; each with different immigration patterns and hence different forms of it such as but not limited to: labourers, illegal migrants, residents, and refugees. In 2020 alone, Arab countries that were part of the AL accounted for hosting nearly 15% (41.4 million) of migrants and refugees worldwide. Furthermore, the region(s) of the Arab World (MENA Region) are some of the main destinations for migrant workers (labour migrants) searching for opportunities to support their families. These migrants often get jobs with low pay requiring low-skill such as construction, hospitality, and other forms of domestic work. In the example of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the nation has a large expat population with most being unskilled labourers hired in construction, hospitality and service industries.

Whilst migration and hence immigration have their benefits, such as reaping economic benefits for the nations, increasing certain industries, and addressing job shortages, among others, it also poses unique challenges, such as integrating society, safety and security concerns, strain on public services, and managing challenging situations in the region. There are many economic concerns regarding this as while there is the possibility of growth of the financial sectors, the countries could also increase poverty by taking jobs up leaving few for the individuals of that country, further aggravated by the fact that there are times when the immigrants also come from low-income backgrounds. The social implications are also huge, as while there is the chance of diversification, citizens may be against it as it diversifies the community causing an increase in racism and unfair treatment; it could also pose harm to the community belief which can affect international ties.

Immigration issues in the MENA region have stemmed from the complex interactions between the historical, cultural, economic and political factors in the area, contributing to the

migration patterns in the nations affected too. It also has strategic geographical locations, considerable access to resources, and a rich and long cultural heritage making it a prime epicentre for migration. Immigration to the region started during the oil boom of the 1970s when sizeable oil reserves were found in the Arabian Peninsula; leading many individuals from South Asia, North Africa, and other regions of the world to take up jobs in GCC countries due to the abundance of natural resources. Within this era, the number of foreigners in the GCC had doubled reaching 30% of the total population. However, this period came with its disadvantages such as the unethical human rights of exploitation, hazardous work environment, and poor labour rights. For example, in Saudi Arabia (KSA) there were no proper guidelines that employers needed to follow which allowed nearly anything to happen, however, with the development of the Kafala system, it is now regulated.

At present, many nations in the MENA region have been recorded to face forced displacement, where individuals have had to claim refuge by relocating to safer states. Some of these large-scale refugee movements have been caused by the Syrian civil war, the ongoing war in Yemen, and instability in certain states for example Iran and Libya, often as a consequence of opposing cultural views and a lack of control. These have strained the already stressed healthcare and education funds placed to improve the situation. With refugees fleeing conflict-ridden countries, they undertake perilous journeys often plagued with scams, human trafficking/abuse, and manipulation; frequently facing barriers to employment, education, and social services leading to unjust treatment and xenophobia. There also is the chance that when humanitarian aid comes into play, it could breach sovereignty guidelines and laws in the name of humanity which could anger the government and public leading to bad diplomatic and international ties affecting global communication of issues leading to further conflict.

The increase of immigrants also has been produced due to the lack of cohesive and attainable immigration policies, and varying (commonly conflicting) approaches to refugee management and labour migration. This has led to severe consequences for the displaced persons regarding their treatment across international borders, requiring the aid of international organisations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to address the humanitarian issues whilst creating constructive cooperation in these sensitive circumstances. Examples of this are during the Syrian Civil War and the Libyan conflicts where many

UN-based organisations, NGOs, and NPOs had to enter the battlefield to tend to those who were compromised.

Furthermore, in the future, it is important to focus on how sustainability can affect the current migration and immigration dynamic of the Arab World, and how sustainability can be implemented in challenges regarding water scarcity, rising global temperatures, and desertification. This could boost a more positive tone regarding immigration and migration in the region creating a more balanced economic, social and safe environment while fostering regional cooperation and collaboration, and promoting abiding international norms. It is also important to diversify the playing field for both genders in different fields by offering the same opportunities to both males and females combatting gender disparity. This can also provide positive press and forward-facing economies and nations which can help the community and economy in the long run.

To ensure safety and peace within the Arab League (AL) nations, it is imminent that addressing immigration more efficiently becomes of key importance. This includes taking note of the impacts of immigration while maintaining economic growth, social equilibrium, and the protection of human rights.

Definition of Key Terms

Arab World/MENA Region

The Arab World, commonly known as the MENA Region, refers to the Middle East and North Africa. These nations make up the Arab League. The countries in the MENA Region are in the appendix at the bottom of this document.

Brain Drain

When educated professionals and skilled individuals leave a place to move to another with better pay or living conditions.

Citizenship

Legal status between a person and a state brings legal rights and duties.

Civil Wars

A war between two or more organised groups in a nation.

Deportation

The act of forcing someone to leave a nation, especially when they do not have a legal right or have broken a law.

Diaspora

A large group of individuals who share the same nationality or origin, but for a set of reasons are staying outside of the region.

Entertainment Worker

Entertainment workers are part of the entertainment sector often mixing with the hospitality and service sectors. Though being part of the service and hospitality work (waiting tables, serving, clearing and cleaning) is not considered entertainment work unless there is an aspect of amusement. Often singing, massaging, or dancing; it is a female-dominated industry in the MENA Region.

Forced Displacement

Forced displacement is when an individual is compelled to leave a certain region to evacuate a dangerous situation due to generalised violence, conflicts, natural disasters, global warming/climate change, social injustices, and human rights violence. An example of Forced Displacement in the MENA Region is the Syrian War, where millions of Syrian citizens were forced to migrate out of their nation in search of a safer nation to stay in.

Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC)

The GCC countries are a union regarding regional, intergovernmental, political, and economic cooperation, the nations part of the GCC are: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Immigration

Immigration is the process by which individuals become residents or permanent citizens of another country. Historically, the process has been relatively positive, with an increase in

social, economic, and cultural benefits in the nations. Immigration is also a way for individuals to support their families by sourcing job opportunities abroad.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDP)

IDPs are individuals or groups who have been forcefully displaced from their homes or places of residence, to evade the effects of armed conflicts. *Often also called forced immigrants (refugees).*

Kafala/Kafeel

The Kafala/Kafeel system was created to regulate the relationship dynamic between employers and migrant workers in many countries in West Asia (mainly the GCC). In the GCC it entails that all migrant workers must have a work entry visa and a residential permit to have a profession.

Labour Market

The labour market is the availability to be employed with the application of supply and demand. An example of the labour market would be

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

The MOU which oversees labour migration, state the terms and conditions governing migration between two nations. These are non-binding agreements.

Migrant/Labour Workers

Migrant/Labour workers are foreign workers who have left their nation to do practical work with their hands and can be skilled/unskilled labourers. Often the employment of these workers happens when there is a need to fill a temporary shortage of workers. Within the MENA Region, these workers are employed for low-paying jobs requiring low-skill but usually have high danger rates. These often are construction worker

Migration

Migration is the movement of an individual from one nation, locality, residence, etc., to settle in another. Migration is a trait of the human species and is a normal human activity; given that, humans have always moved from one area to settle in another.

Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZ)

The QIZ was an initiative by the United States (US) Congress to establish peace in the Middle East. The QIZ allowed Egypt and Jordan to export products to the US duty-free as long as they had input from Israel.

Refugees

Refugees are individuals who have been forced to flee a conflict-ridden or unjust area and have crossed international borders to seek safety. They are no longer able to return to their nation without risking their freedom and life. Refugee(s) is a legal term that carries a certain set of legal consequences like protection, that refugees are entitled to.

Visa Trading

In the MENA Region visa trading is a semi-often practice which is illegal in the Arab States, where employers apply/obtain more work visas than jobs available. They ‘warehouse’ employees in accommodations until the visas can be traded and the workers get a job. In this ‘warehouse’ period the workers are not working hence they do not get paid. By participating in the practice, the employees could face severe hurdles such as confusing migration situations. They can end up working for different employers than the one listed on their visa.

Youth Unemployment

This is a straightforward term, regarding the unemployment of individuals aged 15 to 24, there has been a rise in this with the MENA Region at 25% exceeding that of any other region in the world; with Tunisia having a rate of 30%.

Key Issues

High Unemployment Rates

To date, the MENA region has grappled with the challenge of high unemployment rates, especially with the newer generation. The issue started from several related factors. The area is heavily dominated by oil and gas industries, limiting job opportunities in the MENA region.

These nations are also buffeted by a lack of education preparing students for the job positions available, failing to equip the students with the necessary skills demanded by the modern job market, creating conflict between employers and candidates.

These nations are further troubled with their regard to their public and private sectors, with most of the public sectors shrinking and facing slow growth while the private sectors have worsened the unemployment problems. The consequences of the contrasting sectors have led to social unrest, high unemployment rates, a slow yet visible rise in poverty, and a larger number of professionals moving away in search of better prospects.

The difference between the public and private sectors in the economies of the MENA region further aggravates these challenges. Public sectors, once seen as stable, have slowed; while the private sector has not had enough growth to foster the needs of a growing workforce. This difference has led to social unrest, a small yet steady increase in poverty, and the migration of skilled professionals to other nations in search of better opportunities.

Labour Market Conditions

The MENA nations have wrestled with rapidly changing labour markets, often plagued with high unemployment rates and limited job opportunities. The labour markets are further troubled with roadblocks such as the black market and gender inequality, even in nations with significant economic growth.

Gender inequality further deepens the problems in the labour markets of the MENA Region. Women, despite having numerous educational accomplishments in many MENA Region Countries, have been underrepresented in the workforce due to cultural and legal barriers.

Conflicts in the Region

Conflicts in the Middle East, particularly in the nations of Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Libya, have been causes of widespread migration and devastation. Although active acts of violence have decreased in some areas, the effects of war still are felt in those areas, stuck with shelled-out homes, infrastructure, and social services. The Syrian civil war is a major example of a conflict that has displaced millions of individuals across the world. With the risk of violence, bankruptcy, and poverty; individuals in conflict-stricken areas are forced to seek safety and opportunity-filled regions.

Environmental Challenges

The MENA countries are affected also by environmental degradation, which encompasses desertification and pollution. These problems are not only endangering the existences of many people- especially the those who depend on agriculture but are also fuelling migration as people have to move from places that are no longer supportable for sustainable living. The absence of well-coordinated regional approaches towards coping with environmental issues makes this region ill-equipped to handle the increasing pressures on natural resources, threatening the prospects for development in the long term.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

While the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is a nation that has been open to immigrants and has provided job opportunities for countless individuals, it has started a program which has been called Saudisation. Saudisation aims to increase the number of jobs for Saudis by mandating a company employ a certain number or percentage of Saudis. On the other hand, the nation still wants foreign nationals and experts with high skills to take up jobs, leaving the future of immigration in the KSA uncertain as of right now. It also aims to diversify its economy by 2030, to introduce more industries rather than just oil-based industries.

The United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a relatively wealthy country facilitating a large immigrant population. Unlike most AL countries, the UAE has a pro-immigration policy that has astronomically helped the UAE's economy. Immigrants make up a huge portion of the nation's private workforce, with citizens making up most of the government jobs. To attract foreign individuals the UAE offers long-term residency visas. While immigrants face challenges as there might be anywhere else, such as job limitations and discrimination. While immigrants face challenges, such as job limitations and discrimination—common in many countries—the countless opportunities available in the UAE often outweigh the negatives.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Jordan was responsible for managing the Syrian refugee crisis, from the Syrian Civil War, and supporting the refugees. It has an open border policy allowing refugees and immigrants to enter the nation to claim safety and security. Jordan also works with NGOs to provide safety and security measures. While Jordan was not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the nation kept its belief of not returning refugees. Although there is no clear definition for local government involvement in the management of refugees, they are most likely the ones to implement the national policies to cooperate with NGOs on border security and refugee management. Jordan also hosts numerous refugees.

The Republic of Tunisia

Tunisia’s measures to counter immigration policies drew anger during the year 2024. These policies are inclusive of the ‘desert dumping’ approach as well as mass arrests which result in the forcible ejection of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. These measures have extended to the arrest of journalists and human rights activists which have led to international criticism. Claims have been raised in which President Kais Saied has been accused of shifting the blame on specific individuals to cover up to the economic turmoil the country is facing and to preserve his status. The result of this is a severe restriction on the political narrative, and freedom of speech has appeared to be a complex issue particularly for the months leading up to the presidential elections in October the following year.

Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
<i>Circa. 19th Century</i>	European Colonialism	<i>Circa. 19th Century, European colonialism had intensified in the MENA region, resulting in a change to new administrative and economic systems, which had affected the population growth and patterns of migration and immigration.</i>

<i>Circa. Late 19th Century</i>	Opening of the Suez Canal	<i>Circa. Late 19th Century</i> , due to the opening of the Suez Canal there was a method of migration due to the increase in trade between Europe and the MENA region. The creation of the Canal was one of the earliest methods of migration to the region, with a total of over 1.5 million workers being employed in the lifetime of the project creation from multiple nations. During the construction, at any given point there were 30,000 workers on site.
1948	The Arab-Israeli War	Due to the Arab-Israeli War millions of Palestinians were displaced.
1950s-60s	Discovery of Oil	Because of the discovery of oil in the MENA region, there was a greater involvement of foreign individuals searching for new prospects in the region, this also led to the creation of new industries creating the vast oil industries in the region.
1967	The Six-Day War	The war between the individuals of the Gaza Strip against the nation to the north of them had left numerous individuals displaced forcing them to migrate. The war had led to the death of more than

		15,000 Arabs, while the Israelis had fewer than 1,000.
1970's-80's	The Iranian Revolution and Gulf Wars	Due to the severe conflicts in Iran and the Gulf, people were migrating within and out of the regions due to safety concerns and issues.
1990's	The Gulf War (and its effects)	The war had left multiple Iraqi Kurds and Shiites scattered.
2011	The Arab Spring	Due to the restlessness of the Arab Spring, and their acts of violence leading to severe political instability, citizens of Syria and nations surrounding the areas affected were forced into fleeing to save themselves leading to forced migration.
2015	The Syrian War	2015 was a tough time within the MENA region due to the start of the Syrian War displacing millions, and causing mass evacuations of the nations leading to political instability and haphazard safety orders especially regarding the treatment of refugees and how to handle them. Over half of Syria's population has been displaced, with 16.7 million requiring emergency aid in 2024. Furthermore, approximately 6.5

		million Syrians have been recognised as either refugees or asylum seekers. 7.2 million have been displaced within Syria.
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Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Labour Migration Policies

Previously, the nations had tried to develop labour migration policies enforced in the region. This had come in a reformation of the Kafala system in several GCC nations to help change jobs to different employers without severe consequences and improve labour reform by promoting workers' rights. Some countries have also implemented bilateral agreements with other nations ex. India, Philippines and Egypt to accomplish goals, further promoting positive immigration.

Refugee Response

Formerly, the nations of the MENA region also utilised the help of international organisations such as the UNHCR, IOM, and WFP to respond to the influx of refugees and conflict-stricken areas. The use of these UN organisations was instrumental in aiding the individuals affected with healthcare, education, and shelter. Some nations also implement guidelines within their state to ease the refugees into the foreign community. Most nations have not reacted well to the humanitarian crises in the region; with 16.4 million individuals being displaced in the MENA Region, 12.6 being IDP, 2.4 refugees, more than 250,000 claiming as asylum seekers and more than 370,000 stateless persons.

Border Security

The MENA region nations have also cracked down on border security by strengthening forces on international borders, especially in areas with high international traffic flow and beside conflict-ridden states. Due to the rise in humanitarian crises, the funding for border security has not meant the amount needed, currently reaching 35% of the amount needed in the MENA Region.

Possible Solutions

Increase Employment Rates

To address the issue of high unemployment rates there should be varied yet similar approaches to the solution. This could include economic diversification, improve education and training in the MENA region, and create a more facilitative environment for both the public and private sectors. The area should also construct a more sustainable and equitable future for the next generation.

There are, however, ways this disparity can be reduced, at least in women, and that is through increasing employment rates. This could include economic diversification, as well as educational and training improvement within the MENA region, and assistance with the facilitative environment for the public and private sectors. Moreover, creating a more balanced and more sustainable future for the upcoming generations would help in ensuring stabilization and growth to the region.

Implementation of Technology

By increasing the technology sectors, the nations in the MENA region can increase job opportunities while creating new professions. For example, the addition of certain technologies means that individuals will need to be hired for servicing, regular checks, operation etc. The use of new technology also can grow the tech industry which can attract multinational corporations enabling globalisation.

Further, increasing investments in the technological sector will allow regional nations from MENA to create employment opportunities and drive innovation. The introduction of certain technologies means that certain tasks will need to be assigned such as servicing, engineering, conducting regular checks or operating them, which indicates people will need to be hired. Moreover, this progress could also promote the growth of the technological industry and attract multinational enterprises, leading to greater global integration. Eventually, sustained investments in technology can provide good prospects for economic diversification.

Improve Labour Market Conditions

To improve the labour market conditions, a proposed solution is to support young generations to start their businesses to improve and deal with the issues. By giving new opportunities there is a way to create new jobs and upstart economic growth, this could enhance governance while reducing corruption creating a fostering environment for businesses and investments. Likewise, an addition is to invest in the education and training sectors to equip students and workers with the necessary skills to enter into the international job market.

Encouraging self-employment to the younger generation has been touted as a way to deal with, for example, poor working conditions and to assist in the provision of entrepreneurship opportunities in the region. Allowing for entrepreneurship opportunities would

Diversifying the Economy

One of the ways to improve the labour market conditions is to diversify the economy. By diversifying the economy, the nation can foster new sectors increasing globalisation while boosting the economy. For heavily oil-dependent economies, the addition of technology sectors or hospitality and service industries could grow the economy's strength.

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Appendix

Approximated Numbers (Top 5):

Within the AL the top five destination countries in the region hosting refugees and migrants were: Saudi Arabia (13.5 million), the United Arab Emirates (8.7 million), Jordan (3.5 million), Kuwait (3.1 million) and Oman (2.4 million).

Nations Part of the MENA Region and Arab League:

In order they are: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen