

# New Migration Trends in the Mashreq Region

**Riad al Khouri**  
Director  
Middle East Business Associates  
(MEBA wll), Jordan

The Mashreq in 2004 remained both a recipient and exporter of migrants. The largest groups of migrants in the region are from Sudan, Egypt, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Yemen. In terms of origin, the majority are from Sub-Saharan Africa, and South and Southeast Asia. Apart from the Sudanese living in Egypt, Indians, Pakistanis and Filipinos form the largest group of third country nationals in the region. Egyptians and Jordanians mostly move to Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, while Iraqis move mainly to Jordan and Syria.

The gender dimensions of migrants are increasingly important in the Mashreq, with the feminization of migration creating new economic and social realities. The last few decades have witnessed a growth in female migration to the region, as Mashreq countries have undergone economic expansion and restructuring and the majority of female migrants work in Jordan and Lebanon. The demand for female migrants in the Mashreq has increased, particularly in the service industries, through the creation of low and unskilled jobs that migrant women are willing to take while the local population is reluctant to do so. These jobs are filled by women from the developing countries of Asia, principally Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. The majority of them tend to work in private households as domestic workers and also in the hotel and entertainment industries.

Irregular migration occurs throughout the Mashreq, with all countries involved as origin, transit and destination points. Furthermore there is evidence that both smuggling and trafficking of people occurs regularly and on a large scale. Comprehensive research is needed to fully grasp the magnitude of these phenomena, but the table below shows the region's key smuggling routes, as derived by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) from cases of apprehensions documented by governments and the media.

Migration within the region is also important. For example, many Egyptian migrant workers – as well as those of other Mashreq nationalities – are also working in Jordan illegally and this is an issue that the Jordanian Ministry of Labour has been trying to address. The Ministry, which has been getting tougher on foreign labour in the past few years, tightened procedures further in 2004, when it started inspecting the country's private sector establishments more rigorously to check on their compliance with the labour laws and regulations. Nearly 100 inspectors were assigned to the campaign, which covers more than 55,000 companies and factories in the country. Meanwhile, for many Egyptians at home, the unemployment problem continues. It has been estimated that Egypt needs

to achieve a sustained real GDP growth rate of at least 6% annually for joblessness to decline to manageable levels, but such expansion has not been regularly forthcoming. For the time being, however, remittances by expatriates are among Egypt's largest foreign-revenue earners, with nearby Jordan remaining a destination favoured by Egyptian migrants. At the same time, Jordanians working abroad have played a key role in the Jordanian economy. Jordan ranks in the top ten largest recipients of remittances among developing economies, after such countries as Lebanon, Turkey, and Egypt. Remittances sent home by Jordanian expatriates are the equivalent of between a fifth and a quarter of GDP. This percentage is the highest in the Mashreq region, followed by Lebanon with a seventh. Mashreq governments' efforts at Diaspora management and the degree to which remittances are actually or potentially contributing to unemployment mitigation are considerable and increasing. Egypt has an active Diaspora management strategy, as does Lebanon and more recently, Syria.

As Gulf economies have been growing at high rates in the past two years and are forecast to do well in 2005, demand for Mashreq labour in the Gulf is therefore likely to rise for the rest of the decade. However, this will only happen if

TABLE 25 Primary Smuggling Routes from and through the Mashreq		
Origin	Areas of Transit	Destinations
Iraq	Turkey	Europe, Indonesia, Australia
Palestine	Lebanon, Turkey	Southern Europe
China, Eastern Europe	Egypt	Israel
Turkey	Jordan	Israel
Syria/Turkey/Iran/Iraq	Lebanon	Europe (especially Cyprus, Greece, Italy)
Nigeria, Senegal	Egypt	Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Western Europe

**WORLD CONGRESS HMI.  
HUMAN MOVEMENTS AND IMMIGRATION: A CHALLENGE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY  
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From the 2nd to the 5th of September the Universal Forum of the Cultures Barcelona 2004 housed the World Congress of Human Movements and Immigration, organised by the European Institute of the Mediterranean and Forum 2004. With the aim of contributing to identifying the challenges and perspectives implied by the existence of nearly 200 million migrants throughout the world, the Congress brought together experts, civil society actors and the relevant politicians from all over the world.

Starting with the shared idea that human mobility can be a true vehicle for the complete development of human potential and in order to achieve a fairer world, nearly 1,900 participants and 269 speakers from 64 different countries shared ideas, opinions and experiences through a wide range of activities (plenary sessions, debates, regional sessions, experiences, "I was an immigrant too" sessions, cinema workshops and exhibitions). The central subject matters of the Congress, globalisation, cultural diversity and justice, provided a framework to address specific themes and debate proposals in each of the sessions, whose results can be consulted on the congress web page: [www.mhicongress.org](http://www.mhicongress.org).

The final conclusions document of the MHI Congress covers 10 points that include the principle aspects analysed and debated during the congress, while at the same time summarising the challenges faced by the international community; among them we emphasise:

**Migration as a growing phenomenon:** the processes of globalisation that contribute to the intensification of migratory movements.

**Demographic complementarities:** areas where the population is decreasing and ageing can benefit from others with a much younger population.

**Complex causes:** while some movements are caused by the difference in economic opportunities, others are in response to injustice, persecution and the violation of human rights, whether through violent conflicts or the deterioration of the environment.

**Avoid undesired effects:** which makes us question whether our current way of managing migration helps us create the societies we want.

**Rethinking concepts:** this means that, if we want migration to contribute to economic progress, social cohesion, justice and peace in the 21st century, there is a need to re-examine the way we think about migration.

**Negotiation-based policies:** States must find the right tools and strategies for promoting the forms of migration that best serve their interests, and for protecting the basic rights of the migrants and contributing to the development of their countries of origin.

**International co-operation:** the need is considered to build a coalition of interests, not only within each country, but also between different countries, to establish more orderly forms of migration, and to generate the political will to share the responsibility of its management.

On a **Mediterranean** level, the session dedicated to the EuroMed space stands out, in which it was agreed that immigration must be considered as a **factor of change** in the Mediterranean, because organised immigration can contribute to the stability of the region. On the other hand, migrations must be understood to be a **partial response** to the excess of workforce in the countries of origin and to the decrease of active population in European countries. But migration can only perform this key role if Europe is capable of attracting immigrants with the necessary training and if they have easy **access to the labour market**, in a regulated, official way.

regional stability is maintained. Otherwise, the delicate balance of the segmented labour markets, which brings prosperity to the Mashreq and the Gulf countries alike, through specialization and maximizing comparative advantages, will go into reverse and lead to serious economic disruption in the Arab region and beyond.

With these complex migration patterns in such a volatile region, a policy framework to manage regional labour mobility becomes necessary. Mashreq countries have experienced increasing

cooperation with international agencies, in order to achieve this kind of migration management, but it is still mostly on a case-by-case basis, dealing with crises or responding to disasters outside a regionally coordinated strategic framework. Whatever happens to the labour markets in the Mashreq and the Gulf over the next few years, a deeper, cross-border, strategic approach to migration is needed, preferably involving international organizations, as well as regional bodies such as the League of Arab States.

At about 15%, the Mashreq has a high unemployment rate, about three times the global average. Job creation, although rapid in some Mashreq countries from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, has not matched the growth in the work force. Population growth is adding millions of labour-force entrants every year and this flow is proportionately greater than in any other region in the world. Since the unemployment rate is also one of the highest among all regions, the task of job creation is probably more formidable than in any other.