

The Challenges of Migration: Egypt

In 2002 Egypt ranked as one of the top labor-exporting countries.

Egypt is engaged in three types of migration in the MENA region. The first takes place between some MENA countries not located in the Gulf area, such as Libya. Libya has been a magnet for Egyptian labor in the South-South context, where migrants were employed in nearly all sectors of the economy (notably construction), as oil revenues fuelled a massive growth in government revenues and related investments in development projects. The second type is where Egypt is both a sending and hosting country of migrant labor, that is, "replacement migration" as in the case of Jordan. The third type is traditional migration, which takes place between the non-Gulf labor-exporting countries to the Gulf labor-importing countries. At least until 1990, the predominant direction of Egyptian migration within the MENA region was to the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for employment opportunities associated with increased government and private spending fuelled by the high oil prices in the 1970s. This has been greatly reduced in the past years.

On the other hand, socio-economic conditions at the national level reveal a tendency towards a rise in migration motives due to limited employment opportunities. Job creation in the private and government sectors is insufficient to absorb new job seekers (600, 000 – 700, 000 new entrants to the labor market). The demographic factor is also a major determinant for the younger age groups entering the labor market and which are known to have the highest propensity for migration (often at great risks for their lives). Egypt is a densely populated country (75 million) with a population growth estimated at 2%. The population structure is characterized by a young age structure (almost one third of Egyptians are under 15 years of age). It is expected that the age category 15 - 64 will increase in Egypt from 61% in 2000 to 68% in 2025 implying significant pressure on the labor market.

It is important to highlight the importance of migration in Egypt, as remittances to Egypt have been among the highest in the world peaking at \$ 6.1 billion in the early 1990s (Egypt ranks third after India and Mexico among the countries receiving the highest remittances from migrants abroad, although it has now dramatically deteriorated, redirecting the waves of migration towards Europe, mainly Italy).

Security at border controls should be rethought. These measures clearly do not stem the constant flow of migration but instead they lead migrants to take even greater risks. The answer to the challenge of migration lies in its very problem: the urgent need to redefine development and cooperation policies between North and South. Moreover, the system of GSP (General System of Preferences) should be better addressed to meet the needs of developing countries, if trade could be regarded as a substitute for migration.