

ARAB MEDITERRANEAN YOUTH MIGRATION. WHO WANTS TO LEAVE, AND WHY?

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Introduction

Migration has become one of the main priorities on the European Union's (EU) agenda in the 21st century. The common European migration policy has been strengthened in order to optimize the regulation of migrant flows (2005 Global Approach to Migration and Mobility; 2015 Global Agenda on Migration). Regular means of entry have been strongly regulated and standardized, as the Common European Asylum System exemplifies. Also, major efforts have been made towards bringing a halt to irregular migration, especially on (but not restricted to) the Mediterranean routes.

The EU migration regime, which focuses on attracting highly skilled migrants and fighting irregular migration, has, to a certain extent, affected potential migrants' perspectives and decisions to emigrate. Nevertheless, immigrants and refugees continue to arrive in Europe in high numbers. Numerous and complex factors are still pushing them to move to the EU. This is the case of young people from the five Arab Mediterranean Countries (AMCs) under study in this article, namely, Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia, who still have the desire to migrate "for a better life."

In this framework, the purpose of this policy paper is to identify and explain the push factors behind the phenomenon of Arab Mediterranean youth immigration to the EU. The analysis of these young potential immigrants' intentions and motivations is addressed in order to make a relevant contribution to the concern over immigrant arrivals.

In order to offer a complete picture, the analysis explores patterns of divergence and convergence in young people's desires to emigrate in relation to education profiles and employment situations within and across countries. The analysis tackles questions such as: Do the poorly educated wish to emigrate more than the highly educated? Do unemployed

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young people want to emigrate more than those who are employed? Do students fit into the growing trend of people wanting to emigrate and, if so, are their motivations any different from less educated youth?

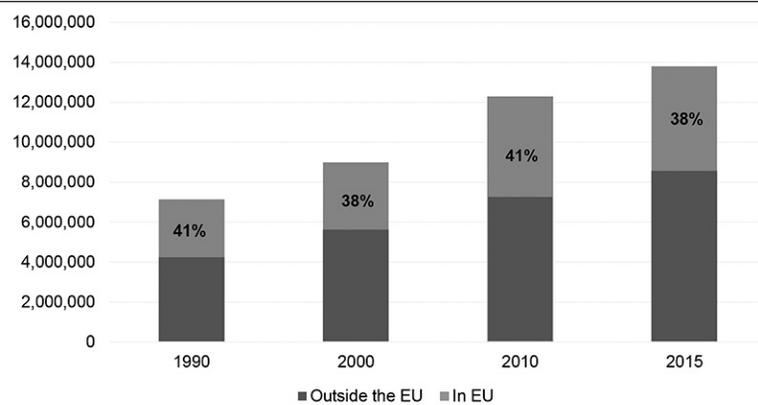
This article is based on the findings of the SAHWA Project,¹ a large comparative analysis on Algerian, Egyptian, Lebanese, Moroccan and Tunisian youth ranging from 15 to 29 years old. The project combines in-depth interviews with an extensive and unique representative survey of 10,000 young people; 2,000 per country.² The sample is representative of rural and urban settings and gender variations, as well as employment sectors and educational backgrounds.

The present article focusses on the absolute importance of push factors of an economic nature. This leads us to discuss some policy options in the areas of the labour market and education that may well enhance the socioeconomic opportunities of these young people in their countries of origin. Lastly, once the possibilities for action have been considered, some policy recommendations will be presented.

Migration from AMCs to the EU: Main Trends and Concerns

The EU has been receiving immigrants from the region since the mid-20th century, but the Arab uprisings in 2011 made the issue of migration from this region a key concern for the whole Union.

Figure 1. AMC immigrants in the world (% of the total in EU-28)



Source: UN DESA (2015). Elaborated by the author.

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² In quotations from the qualitative data, the codes used are: DZ = Algeria, TN = Tunisia, MA = Morocco, EG = Egypt, LB = Lebanon; FG = Focus Group summaries, FE = Focused Ethnographies, LS = Life Story summaries and NI = Narrative Interviews summaries.

Figure 1 clearly illustrates that immigrants from the AMCs (mainly Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia and Western Sahara) around the world are mostly concentrated in the EU, of which France (with 2,828,623) has the greatest share, followed by Spain and Italy. As a matter of fact, according to the UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015), immigrants from these countries represent close to 10% of the total foreign-born EU population.

In the context of these large migration flows to the EU, the five AMCs analysed in this document have played a key role as “exporting” countries, and most of them also as transit countries, hindering irregular migration flows through the Mediterranean (Boucherf, 2017). In quantitative terms, Lebanese, Egyptian and Tunisian emigration is far less numerous than that of Algerians (90% of the Algerians residing in other countries live in an EU country according to UN data for 2015) and Moroccans (87.5% of Moroccan emigrants live in the EU). Algerians have traditionally settled in France, where they constitute the biggest immigrant community nowadays (90% of the 1,585,624 Algerians in the EU live in France). Moroccans are the most numerous community of emigrants from the AMCs (over 2.8 million in 2015, of whom 2.5 million live in an EU country) and are the community most widely spread across other countries (in France, above all, but many Moroccans live in Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and Germany). They have also been comparatively more mobile in recent years. Moroccans were one of the biggest migrant groups arriving in Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries during the 2004–2014 period, with an average of 126,000 new arrivals every year (as compared with 41,000 Algerians or 30,000 Egyptians per year in the same period) (OECD, 2016).

Tunisian emigrants have also mostly headed to Europe (87.8% of Tunisian migrants live in the EU), although they constitute a smaller community in countries such as France and Italy. With regard to Lebanese and Egyptian emigrants, they have traditionally preferred certain Gulf states (especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) as well as some English-speaking countries (the USA, Canada and Australia) to Europe (only 8.5% of Egyptian and 26% of Lebanese immigrants reside in an EU country). For instance, in 2015 50% of Egyptian emigrants chose the three English-speaking countries mentioned above. Before the beginning of the Syrian war, Lebanon had the highest emigration rate in the region (12.5%), which was mostly directed to the USA, Canada and Australia, and, to a lesser extent, to Germany (OECD, 2015).

The impact of the Arab Spring on emigration (and youth emigration in particular) is complex and is still being evaluated, as is its impact on youth migration aspirations (Bardak, 2015). On the one hand, migratory movements have taken place within the region: Egypt and Tunisia have received flows of immigrants and refugees from Libya,

and Lebanon currently hosts over 1.1 million Syrian refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2016), meaning that there is a rate of one refugee for every four Lebanese citizens. On the other hand, it is less clear what the quantitative impact of immigration from these countries for Europe was. A study shows that the uprisings in countries like Tunisia and Egypt fuelled irregular emigration to the EU, especially in spring 2011, when a noticeable increase of irregular immigration to Italy was recorded (42,807 immigrants, most of them Tunisians, according to Fargues and Fandrich, 2012). Some European countries recorded an increase in Tunisian, Egyptian and Moroccan immigrants in the 2010-2013 period, noticeably Italy. For example, there was a sharp increase in the number of Moroccan immigrants in this country from 2012 to 2013, where a peak of 525,000 residents was registered, and an increase in Egyptian immigrants from 90,000 in 2010 to 135,000 in 2013 (OECD, 2015).

Regular arrivals have used the available means, such as family reunification procedures, the EU blue card or other national visa regimes for the highly qualified or, to a lesser extent, circular migration schemes, amongst others. Irregular arrivals, however, through (but not restricted to) the Mediterranean routes have been the object of particular concern for the EU. The irregular arrivals to European shores via maritime routes that started in the early 2000s reached a peak in 2005-07 on the Spanish and Italian coasts. After the early FRONTEX operations in Spanish and Italian territories, new irregular routes to Greek islands were opened. However, the old maritime routes to Italy are still used despite the high mortality rates (UNHCR, 2016). With the start of the Syrian war in 2011, the contingent of “boat refugees” has increased exponentially amongst African and Middle Eastern labour immigrants.

Part of EU policy towards managing immigration with the MENA region has been to foster cooperation on migratory issues. The Communication “A dialogue for migration, mobility and security with the southern Mediterranean countries” adopted by the European Commission in May 2011 was the first reaction to the Arab uprisings. The document seeks to address the challenges in the area of migration and mobility through the establishment of a dialogue on migration, mobility and security issues between the EU and the southern Mediterranean countries. The November 2011 review and update of the EU’s “Global Approach to Migration and Mobility” (GAMM) which reframes the strengthening of the securitization of migration issues and the externalization of border control was adopted in the same framework (de Bel-Air, 2011).

Furthermore, the EU has promoted initiatives such as regional dialogues (like the Rabat Process in 2006 and the Khartoum Process in 2014), bilateral dialogues on migration, mobility and security (with Morocco and Tunisia in 2011, and more recently with

Lebanon in 2014) and important bilateral agreements, such as the two Mobility Partnerships signed with Morocco in 2011 and with Tunisia in 2014 (García Andrade, Martín, & Mananashvili, 2015). These partnerships include clauses on negotiating the never-concluded readmission agreements with Morocco and Tunisia. In the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was reactivated in 2008, within which youth and youth migration constitute one of the main areas of concern and dialogue. Major summits on migration have also been held, such as the 2014 summit between the EU and the African Union, or the more recent 2015 Valletta summit, which launched an Emergency Trust Fund for Africa providing development assistance of €1.8 billion, plus €20 billion.

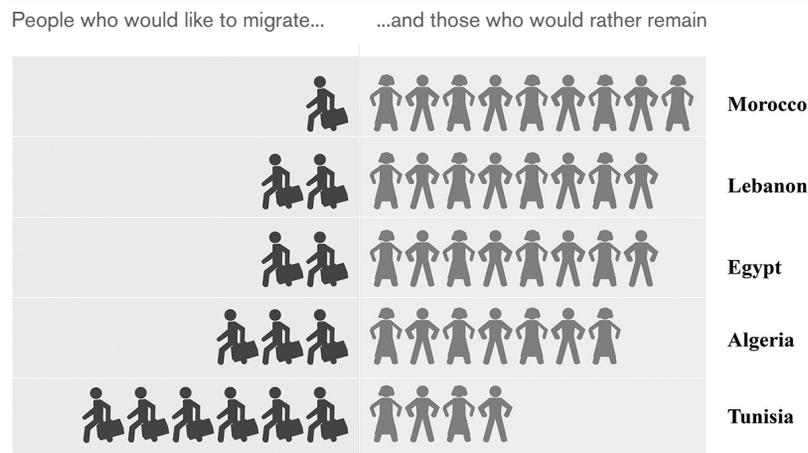
These initiatives are important steps taken by the EU in order to engage more closely with some of the North African transit and origin countries with the final objective of better managing immigration. Despite these enormous economic and diplomatic efforts, though, the EU is still far from reaching a satisfactory solution to these issues. In this framework, this article shows young potential immigrants' intentions and motivations for emigration in order to help design more effective policies to manage migration flows from the AMCs.

Young Potential Immigrants' Intentions and Motivations for Emigration

As the SAHWA Youth Survey 2016 (2017) data shows, while a very small minority of young people from the AMCs have been abroad at least once (from 1% to 5% in all countries), a fairly significant share wish to emigrate from their countries. Across the region they make up 21% of those interviewed, but the figure is quite different if we analyze country data: 8% in Morocco, 16% in Lebanon, 17% in Egypt, 26% in Algeria, and up to 53% of young people in Tunisia (Figure 2). Amongst those wanting to emigrate, more than half of young people (57%) in the region regard it as fairly or highly possible that this emigration will take place within the next five years.

The most attractive EU countries are France (the first option for about 40% of all Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians), Germany, Italy, Austria and the UK. As a young Moroccan woman points out, "young people want to go to Europe because they think they will get a better chance there" (MA_FG_1). While Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian young people wish to settle in European countries, often reproducing former colonial ties, Egyptian and Lebanese youth consider more distant English-speaking countries, namely the USA, Canada and Australia. Although the presence of family members and the knowledge of the language are important to them, the main reason for choosing these "preferred destinations" matches the imagined labour opportunities in these countries. In other words, they believe that in France, Germany or the USA they will have easy access to jobs.

Figure 2. Proportion of young people wanting to emigrate from their countries



Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016 (2017). Elaborated by the author.

Who Are Those Wishing to Emigrate?

Of those who wish to emigrate or are undecided about it, relatively few admit that they would emigrate irregularly. In fact, only 19% of young people confirmed that if they had the opportunity to emigrate without legal permission that they would do so. The most inclined to emigrate irregularly, or to at least recognize it as a possibility, are Algerians (27%) and Moroccans (34%), which means that, in these two countries, one in every three young people who wishes to emigrate or is undecided would undertake an irregular journey. Although we should bear in mind that this inclination is likely to be underrepresented, it is still thought by many to be justified, as can be ascertained from the following quote from a young man in Tunisia:

“Youth who choose *harqa* (irregular emigration) are right! They are disgusted! What do you want them to do? There is no more work! That’s why they try *al harqa*, you see madam!” (TN_FG_2).

In general terms for the whole region, it is young people with middle (37%) and primary (19%) levels of education who express their desire to leave their country. In contrast, youth with higher levels of education are less willing to emigrate; in fact only 16% with secondary and 9% with higher levels of education wish to emigrate. If these data are analyzed on a country-by-country basis many differences can be found. As shown in Figure 3, it is not the poorly educated that wish to emigrate most (with the exception of young Lebanese), but young people at all education levels (in Algeria and Morocco) or even those with secondary and higher education at slightly higher rates (in Egypt and Tunisia). In Tunisia, where the desire to emigrate is the highest of the five countries under

analysis, 38% of youth with primary education wish to emigrate, compared to 59% of youth with higher education (i.e. undergraduate level at least). As a young man from this country mentioned:

“The Tunisians’ problem is jobs, I tried everything to work! No results! My parents spent a lot of money on my studies so that I could work. But I can’t” (TN_FG_2).

Figure 3. Share of educated young people that wish to emigrate (% of same education level)

	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher
Morocco	5	11	8	5
Lebanon	33	14	14	17
Egypt	15	9	19	21
Algeria	28	25	27	27
Tunisia	37	30	56	59

Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016 (2017). Elaborated by the author.

Considering the labour profiles – students, employed, unemployed, housewives and others – dealt with in more detail below, housewives are invariably the most unwilling to emigrate in the region as a whole, as well as in four of these five countries (Morocco is an exception). The regional data shows that most people who are willing to emigrate are unemployed: 35% of the unemployed express their interest in migrating. In contrast, only 16% of employed people would be prepared to emigrate. But, as previously said, country specificity is also relevant with regard to the situation of being employed and unemployed. On the one hand, the unemployed are the largest group seeking to emigrate from Algeria and Tunisia (39% in both cases), and the Moroccan unemployed and other inactive youth also show a greater desire to leave than the employed. On the other hand, in Lebanon and Egypt, those wishing to emigrate are mostly employed (47% of those who wish to emigrate in both cases), which can be explained by the precariousness of their working conditions and widespread discontent among the youth (SAHWA National Case Study Egypt, 2016; Dibeh, Fakh, & Marrouch, 2017).

Push Factors: Why Emigrate?

Analyzing the push factors for emigration in detail, economic reasons are always amongst the strongest, in somewhat different orders of importance (see Figure 4). According to the SAHWA Youth Survey 2016 (2017), “economic reasons” are the lack of professional opportunities, poor living conditions, low income in the country relative to abroad and the desire to help the family. Young people from the AMCs mention these four economic and

work-related reasons as the main causes for leaving their country: 48.2% of all respondents mentioned the lack of professional opportunities as a reason to emigrate ahead of the other three causes mentioned above.

Although there are some differences by country, in general terms, all the countries share similar patterns, and the sum of the four reasons for leaving is mentioned as an important factor by 90% of Egypt's youth, 75% of Tunisia's, 70% of Morocco's, 61% of Algeria's and 49% of Lebanon's. These results corroborate the earlier research findings that explain migration through the lack of economic growth (Bakewell, 2008; Taylor, 1999), including those which focus on the analysis of the AMCs in particular (Bardak, 2015; Flahaux & De Haas, 2016). In fact, many young people from the five AMCs pointed to these economic factors as the main reasons to emigrate during the interviews:

“Here there is no work, while there are jobs there. It’s a project for work and for a better future” (DZ_FG_8).

“The lack of job opportunities, poverty, prices are getting higher everyday ... All that pushes people to migrate” (EG_FG_1).

Figure 4. Main push factors for emigration (by country, share of total)

	Tunisia	Morocco	Lebanon	Egypt	Algeria
Lack of professional opportunities	34	20	0	48	13
Poor living conditions	21	18	19	11	21
Inadequate opportunities for study and training	12	9	9	5	11
Income lower than abroad	12	16	26	26	10
Lack of opportunities to gain experience	5	9	0	2	22
Help the family	5	16	4	5	17
Escape family pressure and problems	4	9	27	1	6
Political and security circumstances	3	3	0	0	0
Other	4	0	15	2	0

Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016 (2017). Elaborated by the author.

*Note: In Egypt this questions was asked as a single answer question. For the rest of the countries multiple answers were permitted.

Economic factors are not the only drivers of emigration (Figure 4). The second most cited factor relates to education, particularly the mismatch between education and the labour market. In this regard, 6% of all respondents mentioned the inadequate conditions for study and training or the lack of opportunities to gain experience. This concern is especially sensitive in the Algerian case, where 33% of young people pointed to it as a main factor in their desire to emigrate.

As the literature shows, political factors are also important drivers of migration (Lundquist & Massey, 2005; Etling, Backeberg, & Tholen, 2017). However, SAHWA data show that political motivations are the least important reasons for youth from the AMCs to emigrate, stated as a factor by only 0.5% of young people. At country level, political and security circumstances were indicated by only 3% of Tunisians and 3% of Moroccans. Finally, it is worth mentioning how, in the Lebanese case, escaping family pressure and problems was also cited as an important reason to migrate (27%), to a much larger extent than in the other four countries.

The reasons pushing young people of different education levels to migrate vary considerably from country to country, but some general lines can be drawn. To begin with, it should not be assumed that the highly educated are unaffected by economic drivers, as such issues affect young people regardless of their education levels. Nevertheless, the highly educated are comparatively more affected by the lack of opportunities to gain experience. 52% of young people with higher education identify this factor as the main reason to emigrate. It seems especially important in Algeria, where it is the number one reason, as well as in Morocco and Tunisia. Along the same lines, the inadequate opportunities for study and training are identified as one of the most important issues among those with higher education (the second most significant reason in Algeria and Tunisia, and also important in Morocco and Egypt).

The need to help their families, which is considered here an economic push factor, is mentioned by only 5% of young people. But there are some differences from country to country, and in Morocco and Algeria the need to help the family was the third most important reason. In fact, this motivation is more common among highly educated Moroccans, in contrast to Algeria, where the less educated the young person, the more important this factor is. Compared with the more educated youth, the least educated are affected most by the following factors: low income levels (in Egypt, Lebanon), poor living conditions (in Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and, to an extent, Egypt) and lack of professional opportunities (in Algeria, but also Tunisia if taking into account those at middle educational levels). Lastly comes emigration due to family pressure and problems, which, along with political participation, was the least important factor across the region as a whole, with less than 2% citing it, but which was the most significant reason in Lebanon (27%), and invariably affected the less skilled youth more than the more educated in all five countries. In the Lebanese case, it has an impact on 21% of the highly educated, 34% of those with middle education and up to 54% of youth with primary education.

Young people's reasons also vary according to their labour status and situation. Students, for example, who are a highly representative group amongst the surveyed youth, are not indifferent to the aforementioned economic concerns. In fact, students with higher education point to the lack of professional opportunities in the country as the main reason

to emigrate. In any case, this group is pushed to emigrate in greater proportion than the other groups for two other reasons, namely, the lack of opportunities to gain experience and, more importantly, the inadequate opportunities for study and training. This latter reason is amongst the top three reasons for students in four of the five countries analyzed. Specifically, it is students' second reason in Tunisia and Algeria (pushing 24% and 21% of students, respectively) and the third most important reason for students in Egypt and Lebanon (12% in both cases).

As far as the employed and unemployed groups are concerned in the AMCs, they revealed quite similar reasons. Both employed and unemployed youth clearly point to the economic and labour aspects mentioned, namely the lack of professional opportunities, as the main issues which push them to emigrate. It is worth mentioning that while the unemployed state poor living conditions as the second factor, the employed mention the great differences between their countries and abroad in terms of income. These three reasons together account for 75% of the employed and 76% of the unemployed seeking to emigrate from Tunisia, 93% of the employed and 100% of the unemployed in Egypt, 81% of the employed and 75.86% of the unemployed in Morocco, and 54% of the employed and 46% of the unemployed in Lebanon. For the case of Algeria, although this percentage is lower (56% of the employed and 49% of the unemployed) the importance of the economic factor is notably higher when the need to help their families is added to this category, reaching levels of 72% among the employed and 70% among the unemployed. For the Algerian unemployed, helping their families is the most important reason for emigrating (21%), behind only poor living conditions (27%), differing here from the priorities of the employed. In the Lebanese case, the unemployed feel more pushed by escaping family pressure and problems (37%) than the employed (28%).

Final Remarks and Recommendations

After understanding the complex situation of youth in the five Arab Mediterranean Countries and the absolute importance of push factors of an economic nature, policy recommendations tackling the areas of labour market and education need to be made. It is especially important to remark, firstly, how the education level or being employed or unemployed are not, in most of the analyzed countries, important factors that impact on the desire to migrate. Secondly, in general terms, young people across the AMCs have similar motivations to emigrate: economic drivers. If the right labour and education policies are well implemented and coordinated, they hold the potential to truly enhance young people's socioeconomic opportunities in their countries of origin, and, as a result, spare the youth from the often "compulsory choice" of emigration. Furthermore, although some patterns can be found with a regional perspective, there are many differences between countries. Therefore, a country-specific angle should be maintained when political decisions are taken.

The main challenges or constraints in the labour structure relate to the education system and its incapacity to prepare young people for further professional activities, resulting in a great skills mismatch in terms of supply/demand (Göksel, Şenyuva & Güngen, 2016):

- In order to cope with the short-term effects of this mismatch, training opportunities for the employable youth ought to be promoted, either in situ or abroad. Incentives for private companies and institutions hosting trainees ought to be considered and further developed. In the same vein, informal education, adapted to labour market necessities, should be encouraged through both public and private supply.

- In order to cope with the medium and long-term effects, investment in an in-depth evaluation of the education system is necessary, so that resources are better allocated and optimized. Evaluating the system's strengths and weaknesses is the only way forward for structural improvements in the long run.

The EU, which is one of the most important external influences in the region, should play an important role in terms of support through its programmes (bilateral or regional) to address the continuous mismatch between education and the labour market, mainly by supporting informal education or training programmes. On the other hand, it is essential to simplify the means of access to the EU of a foreign labour force, particularly in certain labour niches (e.g. highly skilled professions). Those who fulfil the requirements need to be provided with safe and easy access to the continent. This issue should especially be addressed to young migrants with a tertiary education, as the United Nations Development Programme, (UNDP) (2016) remarks, through the mutual recognition of diplomas and visa facilitation. In this regard, both origin and reception countries benefit from temporary labour schemes, which provide employment opportunities for migrants as well as alleviate labour shortages in the EU. These schemes need to be extended and simplified in order to reach the potential beneficiaries.

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