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Emigration from the Arab and Sub-Saharan Regions: a Socio-Political Inquiry into Push Factors, Policies and Diasporas Contributions to Development

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EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE
ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES
MIGRATION POLICY CENTRE (MPC)

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a Socio-Political Inquiry into Push Factors,
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The Migration Policy Centre (MPC)

Mission statement

The Migration Policy Centre at the European University Institute, Florence, conducts advanced research on global migration to serve migration governance needs at European level, from developing, implementing and monitoring migration-related policies to assessing their impact on the wider economy and society.

Rationale

Migration represents both an opportunity and a challenge. While well-managed migration may foster progress and welfare in origin- as well as destination countries, its mismanagement may put social cohesion, security and national sovereignty at risk. Sound policy-making on migration and related matters must be based on knowledge, but the construction of knowledge must in turn address policy priorities. Because migration is rapidly evolving, knowledge thereof needs to be constantly updated. Given that migration links each individual country with the rest of the world, its study requires innovative cooperation between scholars around the world.

The MPC conducts field as well as archival research, both of which are scientifically robust and policy-relevant, not only at European level, but also globally, targeting policy-makers as well as politicians. This research provides tools for addressing migration challenges, by: 1) producing policy-oriented research on aspects of migration, asylum and mobility in Europe and in countries located along migration routes to Europe, that are regarded as priorities; 2) bridging research with action by providing policy-makers and other stakeholders with results required by evidence-based policy-making, as well as necessary methodologies that address migration governance needs; 3) pooling scholars, experts, policy makers, and influential thinkers in order to identify problems, research their causes and consequences, and devise policy solutions.

The MPC's research includes a core programme and several projects, most of them co-financed by the European Union.

Results of the above activities are made available for public consultation through the website of the project: www.migrationpolicycentre.eu

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The nexus between skilled emigration and development

Skilled emigration¹ has spurred a large literature covering both associated benefits and drawbacks. Academic and policy discourses have generally focused on the nexus between diasporas, economic development and human capital.²

While literature streams on skilled out migration usually attract attention to the detrimental effects and negative externalities arising from the drainage of homeland resources (Bhagwati, 1976, 1979; Faini 2006), paradigmatic shifts have occurred in the last decades.

Indeed, according to more positive readings of talented migration, which have proliferated in recent times,³ the pernicious effects of out-migration may be compensated or at least mitigated by Diasporas' positive externalities (Beine et al 2001; Brinkerhoff 2008; Nyberg-Sorenson 2005; Stark et al 1997). These beneficial externalities lie in financial remittances, human-capital accumulation, increased investment in education, and skills transfer.

Another shift lies in reconceptualising North-South dichotomies through new perceptions of migration. A growing body of research on immigrant transnationalism (Basch et al 1994; Levitt 2004) has looked at ways that migration can diffuse benefits and bridge developmental gaps through mobility. Less emphasis is placed on dependency and asymmetric development, and explorative research has tested the potentialities of co-development through transnational practices. Diaspora contributions and cross-border involvement can hence bridge the development gap between origin and destination countries (Haas 2010; Faist 2008; Nyberg-Sorenson 2004).

Further, unlike the 1960s, when the role of financial remittances was magnified, the last two decades have seen an upsurge in research on non-financial or social social remittances (Levitt 1998). Skilled migrants are thought not only to contribute to homeland development through donations and investments, but also through the ideas and values they reinvest in their home settings. These ideas cover knowledge, technological, and know-how transfers as well as socio-political, civic, intellectual ideas and cultural values that have been acquired in the host land. (Brinkerhoff 2008; Nyberg-Sorenson, 2004)

In academic and policy-orientated research,⁴ skilled migration in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEM) as well as Sub-Saharan African (SSA) regions has lately awakened interest particularly with regard to two fields: assigning tangible effects to brain drain; and pondering how to better steer the beneficial effects of talented migration.

This interest is justified on the basis of increased migration in highly-skilled nationals in and throughout these regions. Hence, for countries such as Mali, Sudan, Jordan, Libya and Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Egypt and Lebanon, we note a particularly significant increase in skilled migration over unskilled migration.⁵

¹ The piece of analysis borrows from Vertovec's definition of a skilled migrant as 'most broadly defined as those in possession of a tertiary degree or extensive specialized work experience'. See Vertovec, 2002: 2. Skilled emigration in this piece of analysis is used interchangeably with other expressions such as talented or qualified emigration.

² For various accounts on the link between migration and economic and human development, see Faini 2006; Kapur 2005; Kindleberger 1967; Lowell and Findlay 2002; Özden and Schiff 2005.

³ For a summary on the state of the debate between migration and development as well as on the brain gain-brain/ gain literature, see Brinkerhoff 2008 and Özkan 2011.

⁴ See Arab Human Development Report 2003; Easterly and Nyarko, 2008; Fargues 2010 a; Fargues 2010 b; Özden 2006; World Bank 2008.

⁵ See CARIM concept note on highly skilled migration, <http://www.carim.org/index.php?callContent=544>.

This interest is further grounded in destination countries' focus on skilled migration from developing countries as a strategy to alleviate labour and demographic shortages. Of particular interest to our study are the policy debates and frameworks that have gained ground in the Euro-Arab Mediterranean and Euro-Sub-Saharan contexts. Hence, in conjunction with the Lisbon agenda and recently the 2009 Stockholm Programme, the EU's Global Approach to Migration (GAM),⁶ has focused, through several initiatives, on the link between economic competitiveness, employment at EU level, and cooperation with Mediterranean and African countries in the field of immigration. EC commissions related to the GAM have flagged up how migration could fill in the labour market shortages in Europe, and concomitantly pave the way for development.⁷ Adopted in May 2009, the EU Blue Card Directive promotes attention to the necessity of galvanizing highly-skilled immigration from third countries to the European Union, while taking into account brain-drain risks.⁸

Yet, beyond the EU's recent policy emphasis on skilled migration and international competition for talents, what do we know about skilled emigration dynamics from the perspective of the SEM and SSE governments?

The truth is that little is known about the socio-political environment and the intrinsic policy arenas affecting talented emigration from these countries. Not enough light is shed on how sending governments weigh the costs and benefits of skilled emigration, and the extent to which underlying realities and governmental imperatives help determine when, whether and in what cases skilled emigration can be labeled as brain gain or brain drain. Further, while most migration debates concentrate on immigration countries, there is a paucity of knowledge when it comes to framing the role of the state in the South in a sending context (Brand 2006).

Based on original research carried out by CARIM in the SEM and SSA regions, the present chapter aims to contribute to the literature on skilled migration and its controversial linkages with development by casting light on two controversial facets: the sending state's perception of highly-skilled emigration in the South and the complexity of conditions determining whether the departure of highly-skilled professionals amounts to loss or gain for the country of origin.

While understanding that drives for talented emigration should be subject to an in-depth and contextually-bounded perspective – something that is unfortunately beyond the scope of this study, the present chapter reviews common determinants spurring skilled emigration in these regions. It, afterwards, tackles the policy environment and prominent political debates shaping skilled emigration dynamics in these countries. Further, this chapter seeks to inspire some theoretical and empirical reflections on the nexus between talented emigration and sociopolitical development. Echoing literature streams that have been investigating diasporas “as one of the least recognized yet significant potential contributors” to development (Brinkerhoff, 2008, vii), the present article – while attracting attention to various dilemmas stemming from skilled out-migration – flags up positive contributions transmitted by highly-skilled emigrants.

⁶ See for instance European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. The Global Approach to Migration One Year On: Towards a Comprehensive European Migration Policy*, COM (2006) 735; European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. Applying the Global Approach to Migration to the Eastern and South-Eastern Regions Neighbouring the European Union*, COM (2007) 247.

⁷ See European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. The European interest: Succeeding in the age of globalization*. COM(2007) 581 final, 3.10.2007 ; European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - A common immigration policy for Europe: Principles, actions and tools* COM(2008) 359 final, 17.6.2008.

⁸ See *Council Directive 2009/50/EC of 25 May 2009 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of highly qualified employment*.

On a more cautious note, the present chapter suggests that if un-harnessed and un-institutionalized, these contributions will remain too disparate and diffuse to significantly contribute to national development in a sustainable fashion. The concluding section suggests some thoughts for maximizing the contribution of SEM and SSA skilled migrants' to national development.

The present piece of analysis does not attempt to exhaustively cover determinants prompting talented migration, and does not claim, in any way, to formulate generalizations concerning the link between highly-skilled migration and development. Instead, it seeks to extrapolate recurring sociopolitical and policy tendencies in these regions that can help contextualize and better evaluate the potentialities and setbacks of talented emigration.

Factors motivating skilled emigration

Before framing determinants spurring talented out-migration, it is worth mentioning the scarcity of statistical data available in sending countries and the data that researchers have in order to analyze skilled migration in these regions. Many aspects of skilled emigration, such as the identification of categories, their distribution, and the migrants' level of education, are not fully known. Numbers coming from different sources in the sending context are scattered and incomplete. Those published in the media are thought to be unreliable or instrumentalized for political ends.⁹ In their analyses, researchers have, instead, focused on data gathered by and in destination countries (Docquier and Marfouk 2006, Venturini and Nerazani 2010).

In the absence of reliable data originating from sending contexts, our knowledge of how to approach and evaluate skilled emigration remains partial. More importantly, as a result of the paucity of quantitative knowledge for these trends, state policies in these countries are, by definition, inadequate for dealing with highly-skilled emigration dynamics and for harnessing their positive effects.

At a general level, a complex mix of economic, political and social factors motivates highly-skilled migration dynamics in these countries, affecting the state's migration policies in this context, and determining the extent to which the departure of skilled professionals is brain drain or not. While each country though has its own intrinsic dynamics spurring skilled migration and conditioning its impact (Tabar 2010), some common factors stand out.

In most of these countries, a discrepancy between higher-educational attainments and limited matching spaces in the labour markets is notable. The presence of an excess supply of educated labour force, which is not paralleled by adequate job creation, clearly pushes skilled emigration (Venturini and Nerazani 2010). The lack of national planning in education leads to a mismatch between the supply of skilled workers and the capacity of national labour markets to absorb job seekers. In Sudan, an overproduction of qualified workers is reported (Assal 2010). In Tunisia, a significant increase in students' stocks – and thus graduates – spells greater difficulties for their insertion into professional life (Zekri 2010). In Morocco, PhD holders have expressed on several occasions general dissatisfaction as to their employability (Perrin 2010). In Algeria and Syria, unemployment is also aggravated by a sense of the marginalization among the highly-skilled (Labdelaoui 2010; Marzouk 2010). In Egypt, low return rates on highly-skilled education have been noted (Sika 2010). Yet increasing unemployment among the highly educated is not always an incentive for emigration. In Egypt, for example, tertiary migrants have not always been unemployed in their homeland. And highly-educated nationals, especially women, prefer to take up jobs in the public sector (Venturini and Nerazani 2010). In most of these countries, there is a paucity of empirical research to evaluate when

⁹ In Algeria, it is said that numbers provided by the media are not reliable especially in a context characterized by the opaqueness of governmental institutions, and that these contradictory sources are often instrumentalized for political ends (Labdelaoui 2010).

and under what circumstances, and in which professional sectors there was brain drain or brain waste because of deskilling or unemployment.

Additional factors that stand out as major motives explaining skilled emigration in the SEM and SSA countries are open conflict, instability and deficient political governance. These countries have either conflict-ridden societies or have internal indicators of instability, various socio-economic hurdles or have rather closed political regimes that finally, in one way or another, affect the decision to emigrate. In the cases of Palestine, Sudan, and Lebanon, open conflict and a lack of political stability have acted as an important stimulus prompting skilled professionals to seek other horizons. In Palestine, though findings show that there might be job opportunities in the job market especially in education, public finance, 5,000 to 6,000 skilled migrants still leave the country *per* year (Shalabi 2010). In Mauritania, critical junctures, such as the Senegalese-Mauritanian conflict in 1989,¹⁰ have led to the departure of professionals in the economic or administrative domains to Senegal and even their emigration to Europe or to the US (Ahmed Salem 2010:9).

Also the opacity of many political systems in the region and the restrictions on political and civil liberties encourage the emigration of qualified professionals. Historically, some of these regimes – e.g. Mauritania, Syria, Tunisia or Algeria – have not opposed the emigration of the highly skilled, for involving them would have posed a threat to the political system itself. In Syria (Marfouk 2010) and Algeria (Khelfaoui 2006; Labdelaoui 2010), it is reported that skilled professionals find difficulties in evolving in a restrictive setting. In Jordan, skilled emigration is thought to strengthen ‘control over potential political opposition and, particularly, the reproduction of the elites’ (De Bel Air 2010). Restrictive conditions have also hampered the return of the highly skilled in countries, as, for example, the Sudanese case hints (Assal 2010).

Further, the SEM and SSA countries’ economies themselves and lagging socio-economic reforms act moreover as catalysts or push factors for highly-skilled emigration. In Senegal, the departure of professionals is spurred on in large part by successive economic crises and by the breakdown of social services that resulted from national adjustment programs (Tall and Tandian 2010). In Palestine, increase in poverty is said to motivate highly-skilled emigration. In Libya and Syria, an over regulated economy has acted as a demotivating factor for professionals. Furthermore, in the specific case of Jordan, encouraging skilled migration has been a reaction to arising societal challenges such as relieving unemployment and spurring private revenues through emigrants’ financial transfers. The economic liberalization and deregulation phase that was undertaken as well as the efforts to adjust to free trade have led to lower salaries, tempting Jordanian professionals to leave these countries (De Bel Air 2010).

Another push factor for qualified emigration is the desire for professional development. Skilled professionals, be it in Jordan, Mali, Senegal, are lured by better economic and wage conditions or brighter opportunities for qualifications abroad. Yet, wage differentials are not a specific push factor for the highly skilled but rather for migrants in general.

At the policy level, an important factor contributing to skilled emigration is the lack of well-articulated policies or legislative measures to restrict or to contain skilled migration in origin countries. This lack of governmental planning is juxtaposed with attractiveness factors and demand in OECD countries and across the Mediterranean or by better work opportunities in the Gulf.

Whereas SEM and SSA countries have not articulated coherent policies regarding the departure of highly-skilled nationals, incentives in destination countries encourage qualified emigration. These incentives range from open immigration policies to bilateral scholarships with universities, and inter-

¹⁰ In the wake of Mauritanian-Senegalese border tensions, ethno-political upheavals resulted in the expulsion of Senegalese and Black Mauritians from the country. The government has, since 2008, coordinated the return of these refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa (Senegal and Mali).

state agreements. Nonetheless, the extent of attractiveness that OECD countries exert on highly-skilled migrants from the SEM and SSA regions varies greatly.¹¹

These factors notwithstanding, attractiveness factors and demand in destination countries and economic hardships in sending countries are not enough to grasp the dynamics of skilled emigration from these countries. The primary focus is rather on political instability and a lack of individual liberties, a failing that encourages highly-skilled professionals to emigrate (Tabar 2010).

The 2011 Arab uprisings that led to the fall of longstanding and apparently resilient dictatorships (Bellin 2004) are expected to inaugurate an unprecedented era of reform in many Arab countries. Still, it is important at this stage to hold back from hasty evaluations, let alone predictions as to the outcomes of the revolts. Certainly their implications, and their future impact on migration, skilled emigration and immigration trends, are not yet apparent.

Perhaps for the moment it will suffice to say that revolutionary change in countries such as Libya, Egypt and Tunisia, has shot down misconceptions over the Arab world's resistance to democratisation. Yet, it has also conjured up the spectre of uncertainty, and it is expected to pose various migratory challenges in the region and in the Mediterranean more generally.

On the one hand, intra-Arab skilled migration flows will undoubtedly experience significant shifts as Arab countries in turmoil attract fewer professionals and investments. In Libya, for instance, the government's crackdown on the uprising generated a severe migration crisis as foreign and Arab professionals returned to their origin countries (Abdelfattah 2011).

Also, the challenges that post-dictatorial scenarios pose at societal, institutional and economic levels in countries in a state of transition such as Egypt and Libya will prompt potential migrants to seek better opportunities abroad.¹² Important factors expected to encourage the departure of skilled professionals in the next years range from the lack of security, political instability, to deteriorating economic conditions in light of the transition.

Moreover, the Arab uprisings brought major flaws in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership to light. On the one hand, migration crises generated by the fall of dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya were met with extreme vigilance on the European side of the Mediterranean.¹³ EU member states were not only criticised for their lack of responsiveness, but also for their apparent inability to develop cohesive policies in response to the crisis (Perrin, 2011).

Notwithstanding these setbacks, the unfolding Arab revolutions offer a unique opportunity for Southern and Northern Mediterranean countries to revamp their migration and skilled migration policies. In the SEM context, the necessity of post-dictatorial state-building offers countries in a state of transition a chance to democratize their migratory regimes – both as sending and receiving contexts, and to re-attract their skilled Diasporas by involving the latter in the democratization process.

With regard to the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, the uprisings offer an unprecedented opportunity to revamp the pillars of the EU's Global Approach to Migration.¹⁴

¹¹ For an in-depth reading on the destination of highly skilled immigrants from these regions, see Docquier et al 2005; Docquier and Marfouk 2006, and Venturini and Nerazani 2010.

¹² For an analysis of the Egyptian case and how the revolution in Egypt is expected to spur migration, see Abdelfattah (2011).

¹³ While the Italian government portrayed the asylum seeker and migrant influx to Lampedusa as an impending disaster, the Danish government imposed strict border management controls. For an account of European countries' reactions to the migration crises, see Nicholson (2011: 2).

¹⁴ See The European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee of the Regions, Communication on Migration*, Brussels, COM (2011) 248 final, 4.5.2011.

However, as revolutionary outcomes remain uncertain, and as political crafting scenarios are still being negotiated, shifts in the policy discourse with regard to immigration and emigration, in the SEM context, remain unpredictable.

Additionally, the EU's approach thus far to the influx of refugees and migrants from the Southern Mediterranean has revealed a preference for security with 'symmetrical burden-sharing', portrayed rather as a utopia. It still remains to be seen whether and how the EU, which has so far privileged extraterritorial methods to control migration,¹⁵ will consolidate a comprehensive migration approach based on cooperation and dialogue with its southern neighbours.

Monitoring, nevertheless, at this stage how the Arab uprisings will shape and reverberate on skilled emigration and immigration flows – both at intra-Arab and Euro-Arab Mediterranean levels – remains an academic and policy priority.

The policy environment: policy debates and frames

As stated before, in order to grasp any linkages between skilled migration and homeland development, it is of paramount importance to deepen our understanding of their sending countries' positions *vis-à-vis* out-migration. This section will address the predominant policy environment and policy debates as well as the policies created to manage skilled migration in these countries.

Although skilled emigration has not the same salience and policy priority in all these countries, as some are more affected than others by the phenomenon, a number of cross-cutting features are there to be seen.

Prevailing governmental strategies revolve around courting the diasporas (particularly in electoral periods), encouraging financial remittances and investments, as well as calling for the maintenance of cultural ties with their communities abroad. Still, upon analyzing how the issue of talented migration is articulated in policy frames, it is important to differentiate political discourse from policy practice. In fact, all SEM and SSA governments display involvement at the level of political discourse. Yet even if governments are aware that they are experiencing serious loss, the policy environment is rather relaxed, and encourages emigration. In general, policy action oscillates between disengagement and partial engagement.

In countries in which skilled emigration is not a crucial issue such as Mauritania and Chad, governments are not particularly concerned. Mauritanian newspaper articles frequently deplore brain drain, and non-state actors in Chad call for the issue to be integrated in the policy agenda. Still, policy debates on skilled emigration remain infrequent and little knowledge is available as to their profile and destinations in policy arenas (Ahmed Salem 2010: 7-8; D'nalbaye 2009).

In some countries which witness more important waves of brain drain, conspicuously enough, the theme is not pro-actively tackled in policy frames and this is especially true in the Eastern Mediterranean countries. For instance, Lebanon has not actively tried to control highly-skilled mobility, making sure that a *laissez faire laissez passer* policy prevails (Hourani, 2007). The Jordanian government has also had an open door policy, and has at times set up incentives for highly-skilled personnel to emigrate. There is growing controversy on whether the bilateral labour agreements that Jordan has signed with Gulf countries benefit the origin country¹⁶ or are rather to be read as a strategy to alleviate unemployment or increase investments in the country (Tabar 2010). Syria has no legal restrictions hindering emigration. Before the fall of the Mubarak regime, Egypt equally encouraged

¹⁵ For more details on methods of extraterritorial control of immigration, See Nicholson (2011) .

¹⁶ In 2009, for example, Jordan signed an agreement with Bahrain to provide the country with skilled doctors despite the degradation in the quality of medical care (De Bel Air 2010).

the emigration of the highly skilled through various migration policies. Given successive conflicts and its indebted national economy, Palestine has not been able to contain the phenomenon either.

In Sub-Saharan countries such as Mali and Senegal, policy discourses express concern over brain and human-resources drainage, yet existing mechanisms are not coherent enough to effectively tackle talented emigration and to counter the drainage of human resources. In Senegal, scholarly research calls for the revision of political instruments that are set to deal with brain drainage (Tall and Tandian, 2010: 10). In other countries of the Sub-Saharan region, a more conspicuous lack of migration governance is noted. In Sudan, for instance, although various institutions deal with out-migration, migration strategies remain too disparate and slack to get to grips with skilled emigration (Munzoul 2010, 9). Skilled migration in Chad remains an under-explored theme in the policy agenda. (D'nalbaye 2009)

It is important to note that the discrepancy between policy discourse and practice varies from country to country in the SEM and SSA regions. A flagrant gap between discourse and practice is noted in some countries. This is especially true of Syria, where governmental discourses recurrently refer to the importance of the Syrian diaspora communities and Syrian intellectuals residing abroad, yet these discourses do not mature into policy. In Sudan, the main act regulating the emigration of the highly skilled mainly 'ensures expatriates' financial contributions' (Assal 2010). Other governments' interest in their highly-skilled diasporas remains sporadic and this interest is typically instrumentalized for political ends. Lebanon is a case in point here (Hourani 2007). Before elections, political factions seek to mobilize expatriates.¹⁷

Whereas Eastern Mediterranean countries have generally shown less commitment in tapping their diaspora's skills, other governments in the Southern Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Africa, have dedicated more effort to harnessing their highly-skilled Diasporas economic, social and human capital. Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, have been active in the last decades devising multilateral and bilateral frameworks that seek to improve migration governance including the governance of skilled migration. In Egypt, the Ministry of Manpower and Emigration (MME) under the Mubarak regime has initiated and consolidated cooperation frameworks with international organizations and Arab as well as EU countries thus organizing emigration flows and strengthening the linkage between diaspora communities and national development. In Morocco, the Delegated Ministry in Charge of Moroccans Residing Abroad (MRE) and the Council of the Moroccan Community Residing Abroad (CCME) have, in the last years, intensified their efforts in consolidating ties between the diaspora and the homeland. Tunisia has advocated a concerted approach to migration governance with a view to embedding migration in a development perspective focused more on migrants' capital than on promoting a merely security-based migration regime. This concerted approach which also lays the ground for increasing cooperation with immigration countries,¹⁸ foresees mechanisms for improving Tunisian expatriates' integration in destination countries so as to tap their skills in higher education and advanced research.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, proactively working on incorporating migration in a co-development perspective, the Senegalese¹⁹ and Malian governments²⁰ endorsed various bilateral and multilateral initiatives, thus ensuring more efficient migration governance and strengthening their diaspora's role in national development.

¹⁷ See for instance, "Lebanon: Hariri's Party Accused of 'Buying' Expat Votes", AKI, June 4, 2009, <http://www.adnkronos.com/AKI/English/Politics/?id=3.0.3393117148>

¹⁸ See "les accords de gestion concertée" signed between France and Tunisia

¹⁹ See "les accords de gestion concertée" signed between France and Senegal. The Senegalese government has also been active in implementing the UN-sponsored initiative TOKTEN so as to tap Senegalese expatriates' skills and knowledge.

²⁰ The declaration on Migration and Development signed in Bamako in 2007 has paved the way for a Migration Information and Management Center (CIGEM) whose objective is to study and enhance circular migration. The Malian government enthusiastically endorses UN-sponsored initiatives such as TOKTEN and TALMALI seeking to involve Malian expatriates' in reforming higher education there and reinvesting in the homeland competences acquired abroad.

These endeavours notwithstanding, institutionalized policies that seek to gear expatriate professionals' financial and human capital either lack sustainability or are instrumentalized for political ends. In Egypt for example, the agreements that served to better regulate skilled migration flows did not address structural problems such as 'the mismatch between the education supply and the skills demand in OECD countries' (Galal 2002 cited in Sika 2010). In the case of Morocco, various political setbacks undermine linkages between the diaspora and the Moroccan government.

Morocco still entertains, in part, a politicized relationship with its diaspora. In addition to controversial stances regarding the political participation of Moroccan expatriates in their homeland, some governmental programs tapping the diaspora's skills are reported to be fraught with setbacks. For instance, FINCOME,²¹ a governmental programme, designed to implicate the skilled migrant in the development process has been accused of lacking rigour and a follow up structure (Belguendouz 2010).

In spite of Tunisia's so-called concerted approach to migration and its pivotal role in Euro-Mediterranean migration governance, its diaspora policies were, to a great extent, utilitarian. Under the Ben Ali regime, the Tunisian state kept the Tunisian diaspora communities in check. For instance, Tunisian emigrants' political participation was limited to voting in presidential elections and referendums.

As a result of various policy setbacks and failings in these countries, non-state and associational initiatives have flourished. These initiatives can be classified as either diasporic, homeland-based or sponsored by international organisations.

By building complex transnational networks, skilled migrants have strengthened communication channels among themselves, with their home and their host lands. Student and professional networks or epistemic communities serve to diffuse knowledge transfers, provide a platform for discussing technological and cultural innovations and even for the discussion of political reforms.

In the homeland, local and civil society initiatives attempt to harness the potential of highly skilled migrants, and reinforce their commitment to their homelands.

Moreover, international programmes managed by the United Nations such as TOKTEN, TALMALI, or 'live Lebanon', are worth mentioning.

Despite their symbolic importance, these international initiatives have in general a limited impact as highly-skilled professionals are not convinced that investing their skills can alter the situation. Sudan is a case in point here because of the strong divisions that lingered before the referendum that led to secession in January 2011 of the South. In Chad, TOKTEN did not take off as highly-skilled emigrants did not express much enthusiasm about its eventual prospects. In Palestine, in spite of the successful collaboration between the UNDP and Palestinian beneficiary institutions over TOKTEN, increasing polarization between pro-Fatah and pro-Hamas factions is thought to have played a role in limiting the diaspora's plans to return and contribute to national development. In Lebanon, recurrent instability since former premier Hariri's slaying in February 2005 acts as a disincentive for diasporic returns and contributions (Fakhoury, forthcoming).

At a more complex level, with the hope of better grasping the political dynamics governing skilled emigration, it is important to take into account the fact that these sending countries have historically had little ability to and, indeed, little interest in limiting skilled emigration and finding long-lasting solutions to brain drain

Skilled emigration has had some kind of *functional utility* for certain Arab governments in that it has acted as a relief valve for political and economical purposes. It has allowed the pairing away of discontent in authoritarian regimes such as Jordan, Syria and Mauritania and it has relieved overpopulation as in Egypt or pressure in the job market as in Sudan and Mali.

²¹ International Forum of Moroccan Competences abroad.

In many of these countries, political institutions have had a keen interest in limiting the diaspora's implication in the homeland. Reasons are reluctance to grant the diaspora more rights, such as external voting rights in order not to upset the homeland's political equilibrium. This is the case, for example with Lebanese.²² Or there is an attempt to curb a diaspora's implication in the political process as in the Ben Ali political era in Tunisia.

Findings reveal that the functional utility that some authoritarian governments have derived from leaving the door ajar to highly-skilled emigration is short sighted (Tabar 2010). Using highly-skilled emigration to dilute tensions and to curb opposition has contributed to delaying political and economic reform in the homeland (Marzouk (2010). It has, on the other hand, deepened the lack of trust in expatriate professionals in their states, and strengthened their reluctance to invest. This schism between the expatriates and their homelands fuels much discontent in countries such as Algeria and Syria.

Interestingly enough, whereas governments have used skilled emigration to control opposition, skilled emigration ends up reinforcing opposition through translocal and transnational politics. Skilled nationals from Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Mauritania have found greater opportunities to express discontent and to become politically active in their host states (Tabar 2010). Although it is too early to evaluate the outcomes of the unfolding revolutions in the Arab world, transnational and diasporic linkages in countries such as Egypt and Tunisia have played a role in galvanizing – through 'virtual' politics, international political lobbying, social media and technology channels – mass mobilization. In transitioning countries such as Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, anecdotal evidence shows that skilled professionals living abroad came back, for short or longer periods, so as to assist civil society or to be involved in the state-building process.

The controversial link between skilled emigration and local development: brain drain combined with positive externalities

Homeland development spurred by diasporas has been theorized as the result of the 'flows of ideas, money and political support to the migrant's home' (Robinson 2002: 123, quoted in Orozco 211). Yet, various prerequisites impacting these flows hinge on the existence of organizational mechanisms that help convey financial and knowledge transfers, and on the disposition of diasporas to maintain homeland links (Esman, 1986). This disposition is clearly contingent, among other factors, on a homeland's openness and readiness to involve its diaspora.

In order to evaluate SEM and SSA skilled expatriates' contribution to development, an intersection of interdependent factors comes into play: the flow of financial and non financial contributions that diasporas send are contingent on the institutions and links that homeland structures put at their disposal. This in turn has an affect, clearly, on diasporas' willingness and determination to invest further in their homelands.

As discussed above, migration regimes in these countries generally lag behind when it comes to providing institutional vectors capable of steering diasporas' positive externalities. Some governments such as Lebanon have even counted on the altruistic willingness of their diaspora to invest without deploying much effort in setting up incentives (Hourani 2007).

Of paramount importance is the lack of trust or confidence that diasporas have in prevailing governance in their homelands. This diffidence often undermines the involvement of qualified professionals (Tabar 2010).

These remarks notwithstanding, are there benefits to be derived from skilled emigration in these countries? The classical argument is that qualified emigration from the South is brain drain or loss of

²² This situation is expected however to change as the 2008 electoral law will allow Lebanese to vote overseas in the 2013 elections.

skills for the North. Certainly, findings regarding the severity of brain drain in poor African countries (Docquier and Marfouk 2005) as well as the loss of professionals in SEM countries to the North (for example professors in Algeria, engineers in Morocco etc.) cannot be ignored (Fargues 2010 a and b).

The departure of skilled professionals has not only resulted in the squandering of local capacities, but also in the atrophy of local public and intellectual debates. In countries, such as Syria, Mauritania, Algeria, the emigration of intellectuals and highly-skilled professionals has led to the impoverishment of the domestic public sphere in which internal discourses on reform are negotiated.

Still, the correlation between highly-skilled emigration in each country and in development more generally cannot be easily summed up. The literature warns against generalizations given the great variation and diversity among these countries.²³ Yet specific trends particular to the SEM and SSA help at least to contextualize the debate on brain drain/brain gain.

As many of these countries cannot accommodate the surplus of highly-skilled personnel or suffer from insufficient governance and instability, then the departure of the latter is in some cases not brain drain but brain waste or even a more adequate solution both for the migrant and for the homeland.

In many of these countries, skilled out-migration is thought to alleviate labour markets. In Sudan, it is suggested that the highly-skilled Sudanese who leave the country do not constitute a brain drain as their skills are ‘not needed by the ‘Sudanese labor market’’ (Tabar, 201). In Egypt and in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, it is reported that without outward qualified migration, there would be too much pressure on the domestic labour market (Sika 2010; Venturini 2010). The overproduction of highly-qualified students in Lebanon, against the backdrop of a highly volatile economy and political setting, entails necessary emigration. In Syria, skilled professionals experience deskilling, over occupation, unemployment or general alienation from the system, and their emigration may, in certain cases, be a lesser evil.

As mentioned before, research in Senegal calls attention to the fact that it is more the institutional apparatus set up to deal with migration rather than skilled out-migration that is problematic.

Generally speaking, SEM and SSA skilled migrants’ contributions to national development lie in financial and non-financial remittances.

Although remittances in general have spurred positive and negative readings,²⁴ the remittances have helped reduce poverty, finance education and development projects in countries such as Mali, Senegal, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Egypt,²⁵ and Lebanon.

Perhaps equally important to development are non-quantifiable benefits stemming from talented migration. Departing from recent literature streams that have promoted a more flexible and holistic human capital approach (Williams and Balaz 2005 cited in Brinkerhoff 2008: 10), there is reason to believe that skilled professionals in these countries may find more adequate opportunities abroad so as to serve -- through resource and knowledge exchange -- their homeland’s interests. In all of the SEM and SSA countries, talented migration is perceived as an important contributor to ‘brain circulation’ and transfer of skills. In the case of Egypt, skilled emigration is said to increase ‘the entrepreneurial skills of a large number of Egyptian migrants’ (Sika 2010). Under the TOKTEN initiative skilled Palestinian, Lebanese, Malian, and Sudanese professionals have engaged in various training, capacity-building and educational programs (Fakhoury forthcoming).

²³ In the MENA region, for instance, it is noted that “there are large variations among different these countries, and “it is difficult and dangerous to draw conclusions without detailed analysis.” (Özden 2006, 17)

²⁴ Although some interpret remittances as a positive contribution to economic and family lives in the sending contexts (Kapur 2005), many studies warn against detrimental effects of remittances either because the latter foster a subsidized economy (Chami and Jahjah 2005) or because they tend to be used for consumption purposes in these countries (Tabar 2010: 15).

²⁵ For example, Egyptian Professionals’ emigration to the OECD and to the Gulf is thought to contribute positively to development in Egypt through remittances which amount to 4 percent of the country’s GDP (Saki 2010).

Positive contributions – and ones that are often overlooked – hinge on the skilled migrants' ability to infiltrate, from the transnational level, their homeland's restrictive settings or to provide for political change. Through diaspora networks, skilled migrants have helped develop transnationalised and delocalized civil-society arenas, in which new political subjectivities are discussed. In countries, such as Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Mali, Senegal, Lebanon, or Palestine, highly-skilled emigrants have instigated reflections on national reform from abroad, albeit to differing degrees.

Evidence proves that skilled diasporas could also be a source for political change in the home country, for instance so as to recruit new political elites. Lebanon is a case in point here. In Tunisia, the toppling of Ben Ali's regime in January 2011 provided an opportunity for skilled emigrants, who did not sympathise with the former autocratic regime, to return and participate in the political reform process.²⁶

Further, highly-skilled diasporas have, in all these countries, acted as interlocutors or mediators that the international community usually capitalizes upon so as to foster cultural and scientific exchange or to promote conflict regulation.

In Mauritania, in the wake of the 1989 refugee crisis, qualified refugees have acted as mediators with UNHCR paving the way for the return and reintegration of Mauritanian refugees from Senegal and Mali (Fresia 2006 quoted in Ahmed-Salem 2010: 9). In Sudan, Palestine and Lebanon, highly-skilled migrants have been active at international levels in conflict regulation and post-conflict restructuring.

How to strengthen the nexus between the homeland and its skilled Diaspora? some preliminary suggestions

This study has shown the complexity of determinants stimulating skilled emigration in these countries. It has also brought into focus the importance of studying sending governments' imperatives and the policy environment characterising each country so as to acquire a more comprehensive picture of the circumstances that frame talented migration as brain drain or brain gain.

Contrary to general assumptions, this chapter will argue that skilled emigration is not always absolute brain drain, but may bring about multileveled benefits; yet the lack of migration policies and organizational mechanisms for maximizing the potential of diasporas has so far amplified the costs of highly-skilled migration. In fact, one major impediment is the lack of a propitious climate beneficially exploiting migrants' transfers, in most of these origin countries.

Looking at the larger picture we see that talented migration can evolve into a phenomenon incurring mutual benefits in sending and receiving contexts as much as it may alleviate unemployment in certain sectors in origin countries and match supply with demand in destination countries. Moreover, skilled emigration may provide the opportunity needed to enhance the migrant's skills and may even act as a remedy to feelings of dissatisfaction in restrictive homeland settings.

Still, there is so far no adequate empirical research, and certainly no concerted policy action,²⁷ showing how this matching can take place without causing brain drain in certain national sectors. Paucity of knowledge is also evident when it comes to evaluating which best practices can help channel knowledge transfers acquired by the migrants in their host lands.

²⁶ We note for instance the return of the political and human-rights activist Mouncef Marzouki, who left France after the toppling of the Ben Ali regime, announcing that he would run for presidency. Marzouki was elected Tunisia's president in December 2011.

²⁷ For example, the EU Blue card intends to take into account brain-drain considerations while recruiting highly-skilled immigrants. Still, there is lack of research on how this can be implemented and on how brain drain occurs. See Martin 2010: 92.

Areas of concern in most of these countries lie, first, in the investment of financial remittances beyond consumption and, second, in the lack of knowledge on how to create sustainable programs at governmental or associative levels so as to tap diaspora skills.

SEM and SSA countries can, however, contribute to tapping a diaspora's potential first and foremost by overcoming *a two-fold reluctance*: the state's reluctance to collect data about their highly-skilled nationals, and the state's reluctance to engage their diaspora in a comprehensive development strategy which extends to political arenas.

Significant steps lie in stimulating the production of more research and statistical data on the extent and effects of highly-skilled emigration so as to convert these research findings into policy-making. Governments can also play a role in boosting domestic and international research initiatives that seek to locate the countries' 'highly-skilled' distribution, education and skills.

Moreover, governments can support research and consulting initiatives that show how educational strategies can be improved while taking local and international labour market needs into consideration. These initiatives usually seek to revisit the formation/employment match so as to provide for more compatibility between educational degrees and job openings. Reforming tertiary education, as in the Malian or Tunisian cases, without creating jobs, spurs out-migration.

More importantly, a crucial step incumbent on sending governments is to spur both the return and the circularity of skilled migrants by providing an auspicious recipient context. Yet in this context, many questions arise. If origin countries have economic and political hurdles to jump, can they attract back their skilled diasporas? The critical situation of highly-skilled nationals in most countries of origin (high unemployment rates, low wages, lack of democracy and freedom, etc) constituted in the last decades the main incentive for departure (Perrin 2010).

There is hence an urgent need to contextualize highly-skilled diasporas in a favourable economic and political context in the SEM and SSA countries so as to benefit from their positive externalities. Even though, Lebanese, Malian, Sudanese, Palestinian diaspora networks are powerful agents for development, diaspora communities are not self organising and need institutions to mobilise their competences (Kuznetsov 2006).

As to re-attracting these professionals by improving political and institutional governance in these countries, this continues to be a daunting policy challenge. Governments can at least work on generating minimal conditions for hosting and organising diaspora networks.

A notable breakthrough lies in improving the comprehensiveness of the policy debate and the policy exchange on skilled emigration. More effort could hence be dedicated to shifting the focus *from state-controlled migration governance to a transnationalised migration management*, which includes civil society actors, migrant associations and regional institutions. Inter-regional and inter-state consultative processes can help share best practices on how to improve the governance of highly-skilled migration and how to incentivise diasporas in conflict-ridden or unstable settings.

In policy arenas, more difficult tasks whose implementation does not only depend on governments' sheer willingness lie in creating institutionalised modes of political participation through which diasporas can transmit their allegiances and bond with their homeland. Through external voting, recognition of dual citizenships, social measures guaranteeing the portability of benefits, highly-skilled Diasporas can regain their trust and identify again with their homeland.

While governments in the SEM and SSA countries should first and foremost overcome their limited knowledge and their averseness towards knowing more about their diasporas and tapping their skills, academic research in countries in the South can play an equally vital role in spreading more knowledge on ways to juxtapose diasporic linkages with the homeland.

Suggestions for future research avenues in academia might include investigating how skilled migrants and qualified refugees position themselves *vis-à-vis* state-building and development

narratives in their countries, and which prerequisites, according to them, could galvanise their involvement in their countries' political and social processes. In fact, little is known of the perceptions of highly skilled migrants from SEM and SSA countries and their discourses when it comes to framing their willingness and their propensity to engage into homeland development.

While an upsurge in transnational studies on social remittances in Latin America and the Caribbean has proven that these remittances can affect socio-cultural and political development (Levitt 1998; Flores 2009; Guarnizo 2003; Smith 2005), less is known about this dimension in the MENA and Sub-Saharan countries. More thorough country-case analyses may thematise how skilled migrants from these countries have participated through transnational spheres in renegotiating public spheres through acquired intellectual, social and political practices in their host lands.

Additionally, policy-orientated research can be empowered by local and international stakeholders so as to study how skilled emigrants might best contribute to local development, not necessarily through physical return but through virtual return in medical, health, scientific and higher-education sectors.²⁸

In a nutshell, these propositions draw attention to the need for a virtuous circle of exchange between SEM and SSA homeland settings and their highly-skilled expatriates: filling in the quasi-vacuity in policy arenas in SEM and SSA migration regimes – by creating diaspora organisational resources – reflects the homeland's increasing interest in its skilled expatriates, and incentivises in turn the latter to connect with their homelands and invest their skills in their societies of origin. In the absence of reinforcing linkages that concretise a policy nexus between the homeland and its diasporas, skilled emigration will remain a controversial topic with ungraspable benefits and manifold detriments.

²⁸ On this dimension see for instance the concept of digital Diasporas advanced by Brinkerhoff (2007). TOKTEN Lebanon has also been experimenting with implementing new research in the health sector mainly by tapping virtually medical doctors' expertise (Fakhoury forthcoming).

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