

REGION ON THE MOVE



Regional Mobility Report for the Middle East and North Africa
January – June 2021



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Newly arrived migrants walk along the coast near Ras Al'Ara after landing at Yemen's shores earlier that morning. They are bound for Aden, a city 50 kilometres away. © IOM 2021/Rami Ibrahim

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ACRONYMS

AVVR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
CMR	Central Mediterranean Route
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
EMR	Eastern Mediterranean Route
FM	Flow Monitoring
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GCM	Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
IDP	Internally displaced persons
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MMP	Missing Migrants Project
MiMOSA	Migrant Management Operational System Application
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PoE	Points of entry
UN	United Nations
USD	United States dollar
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
VBM	Vande Bharat Mission
WMR	Western Mediterranean Route
WAAR	Western Africa Atlantic Route

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the first half of 2021, migration of nationals from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and of nationals from other regions to the MENA region were shaped by economic and conflict-related factors, as well as consequences stemming from the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

Displacement in the MENA region is largely driven by conflict and violence rather than natural disasters. Over the course of 2020 and the first half of 2021, changing dynamics in conflict-affected and post-conflict countries in the MENA region have influenced the rate of new displacements, with some contexts leading to more displacement than compared to previous years and to other contexts. In 2020, Syrian, Yemeni and Sudanese nationals made up the largest portion of newly internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the region. The number of IDPs in Iraq, Libya and Sudan declined in 2020 due to ceasefire agreements and peacebuilding initiatives, although the situations in these countries remain fragile. Iraq has witnessed a decline in the number of IDPs since October 2017 and a concomitant increase in returnees. In contrast, Yemen experienced more than 172,000 new displacements in 2020 alone, resulting from the opening of new frontlines and escalation of hostilities in the country. Following the ceasefire signed in October 2020 in Libya, the number of previously displaced families returning to their place of origin has continually increased, coinciding with a decline in the number of new displacements. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the number of new IDPs has decreased since January 2021, although a spike in internal displacement can be identified in June 2021, reflecting the escalation of conflict in areas such as Idlib province. Overall, most displacement in the MENA region in 2020 occurred within the country of origin, as the number of IDPs in conflict-affected countries tends to far outweigh the number of refugees and asylum seekers from those countries, with the Syrian Arab Republic as a notable exception.

With respect to migratory flows along sea routes, the outbreak of the pandemic caused an immediate decrease in arrivals, even if such a reduction was limited to the period between mid-March and May 2020. These figures have since increased to varying extents. For example, after a decline in arrivals along the Central Mediterranean Route during the first half of 2020, arrivals increased in the second half of the year, and further increases took place in the first and second quarters of 2021. Similarly, arrivals along the Western Mediterranean Route fell with mobility restrictions in March 2020 but increased starting July 2020. Arrivals along the Eastern Mediterranean Route over the course of 2020–2021 were more variable, with arrivals rising from July 2020, decreasing from September 2020 to February 2021 and rising once more beginning in March 2021. Regarding arrivals from the Horn of Africa to Yemen, movement restrictions

continued to curb flows in the second quarter of 2021. Between sub-Saharan Africa and Northern Africa, flows sharply declined in March 2020, followed by a stabilization in arrivals. Finally, flows from Ethiopia to Sudan sharply declined in March 2020 but rapid rises in arrivals were recorded in June and September 2020. Thus, a gradual rebound in flows towards Europe is indicated following steep drops in March 2020, while arrivals towards North Africa have generally not experienced the same rise in flows in 2020 or 2021.

Along with the increase of flows, a surge in the deaths of migrants in transit was observed, rising 155 per cent compared to the same period last year. Along the Central Mediterranean Route, Western African Atlantic Route and Eastern Route from Horn of Africa to Yemen, the number of deaths increased relative to both 2019 and 2020, with the Central Mediterranean Route constituting the deadliest maritime route for migrants on record. In contrast, the number of deaths along the Western Mediterranean Route increased compared to 2020 but decreased compared to 2019. While a rise in deaths does not necessarily correspond with an increase in arrivals, it indicates the need to consider both attempted and successful arrivals when analysing migration patterns. Notably, rises in deaths relative to the same period in 2019 are not observed along land routes in the region, although slight increases are observed compared to 2020. The largest number of deaths along land routes occurred while crossing the Sahara Desert. The Sahara crossing has been arguably one of the most dangerous migration routes in the world, but evidence to support this claim is scarce. Deaths in the desert often occur in remote areas where there is a lack of access or reporting; therefore, the number of recorded deaths is probably underreported, as well as in other routes.

Looking at reverse flows of returnees to their countries of origin, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) assisted 4,224 migrants in MENA countries – 949 were through the IOM Libya VHR program – and 1,201 migrants originating from MENA countries to voluntarily return home. Most returns occurred from North Africa towards sub-Saharan African countries, with Mali, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea as the top three countries of origin of returning migrants. For Ethiopians returning from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, returns resumed in September 2020 and sharply increased from June 2021, with a rise in the number of registered Amhara and Tigray returnees. Additionally, countries such as India have facilitated the return of over six million nationals from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries as of 30 April 2021.

While the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic has unfolded differently across the various regions of the world, the operational

status of air, land and sea points of entry in the MENA region has not changed dramatically since December 2020. Points of entry (PoE) continued to reopen in the first half of 2021, albeit at a slower pace relative to other periods and in a localized rather than regional manner. For example, in Algeria, Morocco and Yemen, many points of entry continue to be fully closed or partially operational. However, GCC countries began to reopen their land and sea points of entry in the first half of 2021. Additionally, international airports in Iraq, Libya, Morocco and Saudi Arabia fully reopened between March and June 2021 even though with some limitations that remained valid.

The pandemic has led to mobility restrictions, as well as to negative socioeconomic effects for migrants both inside and outside the MENA region. At the macroeconomic level, the sectors most impacted by the pandemic were those relying primarily on a migrant workforce. Because of these adverse effects, an increasing proportion of MENA nationals express a desire to migrate for economic reasons, particularly among young, educated and low-income men as reported by the *Arab barometer*. However, barriers and costs to migration may prevent them from fulfilling these intentions.

With respect to remittances, which constitute an important source of income in many MENA countries, the amount of money sent back home generally increased during the reporting period of January to June 2021. In 2020, remittance flows to Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia increased, while remittances to Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon showed a double-digit decline, suggesting a varied effect. However, looking at individual country examples of Egypt, Lebanon and Kuwait, remittances tended to decrease in the

first half of 2020 but increased later in the year. These findings indicate the resilience of MENA migrants abroad, as well as the countercyclical nature of remittances more generally.

Although limited data are available for 2021, evidence suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened labour conditions and access to health care, education and basic services for migrants in the MENA region. Migrant workers, particularly those in irregular status and engaged in informal employment, have experienced abrupt contract terminations and nonpayment of wages. Informality and status as a migrant also often restrict access to national social protection programs that could mitigate the economic impact of job loss. For migrants who seek daily work, mobility restrictions have significantly impeded their ability to identify new work opportunities. Women, youth, irregular migrants, recently arrived migrants, migrants in transit and returnees have also faced disparate economic consequences because of the pandemic.

The economic effects of the pandemic and exclusion from national health care systems appear to have limited migrants' access to health care, despite the heightened risks of transmission they may experience related to their sectors of employment, living conditions and access to information. Furthermore, disruptions to education during the pandemic may exacerbate learning gaps along economic lines, with those who have internet access, computers and a suitable study space best able to cope with these new challenges. Finally, the pandemic has also restricted access to basic services for migrants due to supply chain disruptions, mobility restrictions and reduced humanitarian funding and programming.



Migrants rest in the shade of a tree near the Yemeni coastline. © IOM 2020/Majed Mohammed

INTRODUCTION

This report looks at the different dimensions of migration and mobility in the MENA countries during the first half of 2021. Given the timeframe of the report, this edition of Region on the Move also examines the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on different dimensions of migration, including the situation of migrants and mobile populations in the region.

Migration has always defined – and continues to define – our globalized and interconnected world, with the number of international migrants growing significantly over the past few decades. Migration has been recognized as a key accelerator for development in both countries of origin and destination. While migration can open economic and social opportunities for migrants, it also introduces challenges relating to the integration of migrants, lack of job opportunities and substandard working conditions for migrants in destination countries. The total number of international migrants coming from MENA countries and living abroad has increased from 15.5 million to 26.4 million from 2010 to 2020, indicating an increase of 70 per cent in the last decade. This figure indicates that international migration is seen as a viable solution or as coping strategy for improving the economic and physical security of sending households and communities and a tool for development for receiving countries and communities.

A holistic approach to migration governance and analysis is crucial to optimize migration's benefits, offset the risks and challenges it may pose and make migration work for all individuals and communities in countries of origin, transit and destination. Such an approach will provide a broader and more informed understanding of the different topics related to mobility and mobile populations in the region, including demographic, socioeconomic and political aspects.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a significant turning point in migration trends as it has affected several dimensions of migration in many countries. The spread of the pandemic has impacted migration patterns, strategies, and directions, while also affecting the socioeconomic conditions of both immigrants to and emigrants from the MENA region.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of migration trends, policy developments and priority issues in the region to inform policymakers, researchers and practitioners. It builds on other reports on international migration in the MENA region and thus provides a thorough and up-to-date picture of migration in the region over time. In addition, the report examines regional migration governance in the light of the objectives set forth by the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), which emphasizes the full inclusion and protection of migrants by ensuring their access to basic services, reducing their vulnerabilities and combatting smuggling and trafficking in persons.

The report presents a timeline of main events relating to migration over the course of the considered period (January–June 2021); it then analyses data relating to the presence of migrants in the MENA region and MENA migrants outside the region, as reflected in migrant stocks. Given the scale and significance of forced migration in the MENA region, the report takes a closer look at displacement within and across international borders in the following subsection. After analysing migrant stocks, the report explores flows of migrants to and from the MENA region, as well as prominent migratory routes. The risks of migration along these routes, including deaths and disappearances, are then considered. This first section concludes with a look at reverse migratory flows in the form of assisted returns, as well as obstacles to return that leave migrants stranded in their countries of destination.

The second section focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mobility, as reflected in data on socioeconomic well-being, international migrant stocks, intentions to migrate, remittances and changes in the job market affecting migrants. Additionally, two focus themes provide a deep dive into trends and themes relevant to the region and timeframe. The first focus considers progress relating to the implementation of the GCM in the region, as the first GCM Regional Review Conference for Arab States took place during the reporting period in February 2021. The report ends with a focus on the role of female migrants in GCC countries and potential gender-related vulnerabilities they may encounter during their migration process.

HIGHLIGHTS

18 JAN 2021	Direct flights between Egypt and Qatar resume for the first time since 2017. A reported 300,000 Egyptians live in Qatar.
21 FEB 2021	In Sudan, the Central Bank devalues the Sudanese currency, creating significant economic problems due to high inflation rates.
09 MAR 2021	At least 39 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa drown when their boat capsizes off the Tunisian coast; 165 survive.
10 MAR 2021	A Government of National Unity (GNU) is formed to unify the warring Western-based Government of National Accord and the Eastern-based authorities supported by Libyan Arab Armed Forces. The GNU is a provisional body meant to lead the country to the long-delayed elections in December 2021.
18 MAR 2021	After departing from Libya, 66 migrants die crossing the Mediterranean Sea.
28 MAR 2021	In Sudan, the Government and Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) reach an agreement, paving the way for peace negotiations between the two sides.
23 April 2021	An additional 130 migrants die attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea and are discovered on the shore of Libya.
17 MAY 2021	The European Council and European Parliament reach a provisional agreement on a draft directive regarding the European Union (EU) Blue Card, which establishes the entry and residence conditions for highly qualified non-EU nationals coming to live and work in the EU.
17–19 MAY 2021	An estimated 9,000 arrivals to Spain's Ceuta enclave are recorded, the largest number measured at any one time.
19 JUN 2021	A boat that embarked from Mbour, Senegal on 13 May 2021 capsizes off Dakhla, in front, off the southern coast of Morocco, causing the death of 71 migrants.
29 JUN 2021	The European Council presidency and European Parliament reach a provisional agreement regarding an EU asylum agency regulation. The proposed regulation aims to improve the application of asylum policy within the EU, by turning the current European Asylum Support Office (EASO) into a full-fledged agency.

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION WITHIN AND FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICAN REGION

This section discusses data on the stock of migrants in the MENA region, as well as data on flows of MENA migrants to other countries within and outside the region. Around 9 per cent of the total population of MENA nationals live in another country either within or outside the region, that is, a total of 26.4 million international migrants in 2020.¹ Many MENA nationals migrated within the region for economic reasons. Some of the main drivers of migration to these destination countries include economic growth in some sectors and consequent demand for migrant workers, demographic characteristics of the MENA countries' populations such as the high share of working age population, economic stagnation, lack of job opportunities and service provision, unemployment and underemployment affecting young people, the high prevalence of an informal economy and lack of job security and the concentration of job opportunities in low-skill, labour-intensive sectors. Moreover, the conflicts in Iraq, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, and the long-standing conflict and tension in Israel and the Palestinian territories has greatly contributed to migration and displacement in the region.

The main receiving countries for migrants are the GCC countries, such as Saudi Arabia (13.5 million), the United Arab Emirates (8.7 million), Kuwait (3.1 million) and others, which largely host migrant workers. Additionally, other MENA countries hosting significant numbers of migrants include Jordan (3.4 million), which serves as a migration hub both for migrant workers and forced migrants fleeing Syria after 2011; Lebanon (1.7 million), where the largest part of migrant population are forced migrants, including Syrians and Palestinians – under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) mandate respectively; and Sudan (1.4 million), where the largest part of the migrant population are forcefully displaced migrants coming from South Sudan and countries in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel.

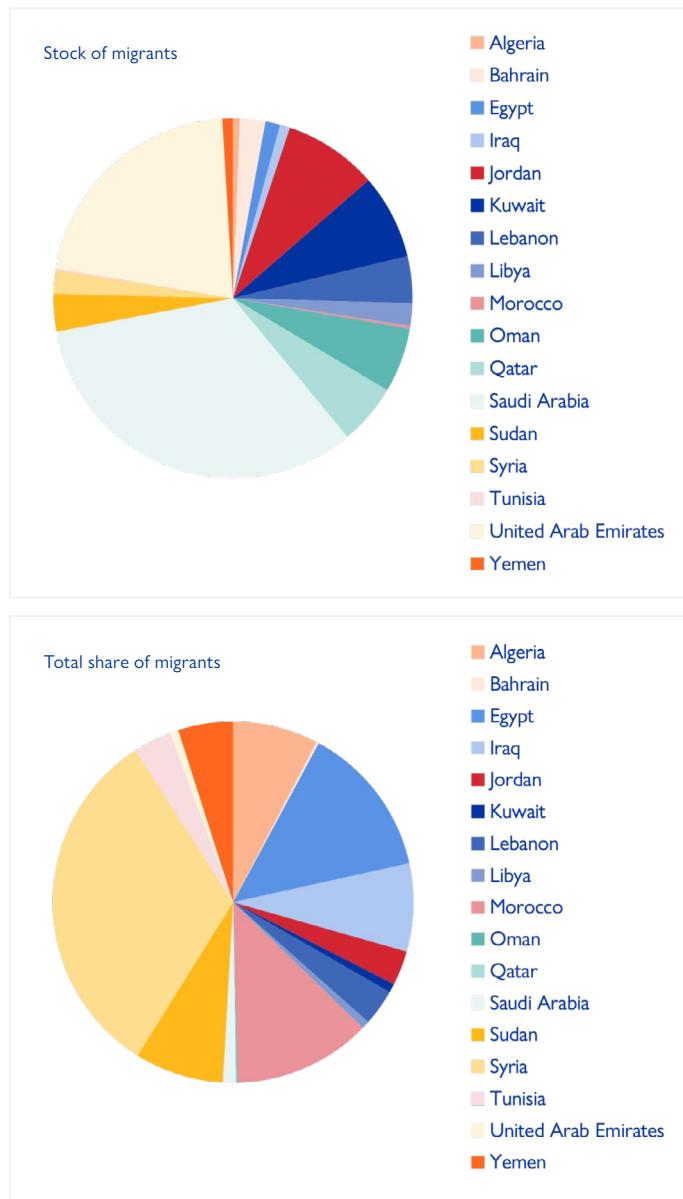
Data from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) show that in 2020, the number of migrants – including migrant workers and refugees under UNCHR's mandate – originating from MENA countries increased, with the largest share coming from Syria and accounting for almost half of migrants originating from MENA countries. The second and third largest countries of origin for migrants in the region are Egypt and Morocco, whose nationals migrated mostly towards the GCC countries, Northern Africa and Europe.

Source: UN DESA 2020

Other significant migrant populations originated from Sudan, Iraq and Yemen, whose nationals migrated largely to escape from conflicts. Algerian migrants represent another significant migrant community that is mostly located in Europe; they are a classic example of economic migration of MENA migrants towards Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and European countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic does not appear to have significantly impacted the stock of international migrants. However, a slight increase in migrant stocks can be observed, especially for nationals of countries characterized by higher migration. The economic consequences of the pandemic may have encouraged higher numbers of migrants to move abroad. At the same time, COVID-19 related mobility restrictions may have hindered the wider use of migration as a coping strategy.

Figure 1 & 2: Stock of migrants living in MENA countries & migrants from MENA region



1 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2020). *International Migrant Stock*. UN DESA, New York.

FORCED MIGRATION TRENDS IN THE REGION: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

Given the significance of forced migration from MENA countries, this subsection takes a closer look at displacement within and across international borders in the region. First, it examines regional-level trends in internal and external displacement. Next, it discusses the evolutions of specific conflicts in the region such as those in Yemen, Syria and others.

- **Regional-level analysis and country comparisons**

The MENA region is home to several protracted conflicts and to a sizable proportion of the global refugee population. Over nine million refugees have sought protection in the region, including 3.5 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate and 5.7 million Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA.

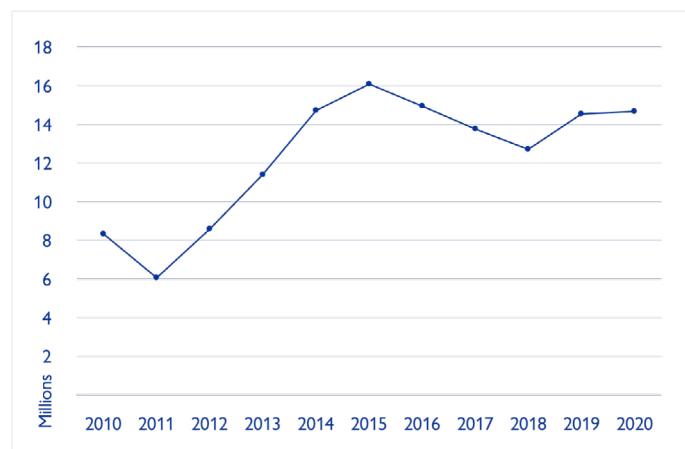
Conflicts and environmental pressures in the region have also led to the internal displacement of around 15 million people.² Migration and displacement in the region have had a strong influence on political, economic and social developments, not only in MENA countries, where almost half of the region's migrants reside, but also in neighbouring and more distant regions. Due to COVID-19- and conflict-related mobility restrictions, data on forced migration during the current reporting period are limited.

Compared to the global average, conflicts and violence triggered over three times more displacements than disasters in the region.³ The MENA region, together with sub-Saharan Africa, recorded most of the new displacements triggered by conflict and violence in 2020. Most of the MENA region displacements took place in Syria and Yemen, as in previous years.⁴ However, new disaster-related displacements exceeded new conflict- and violence-related displacement in Yemen and Sudan in 2020.⁵ In Sudan, displacement due to disasters (454,000) was five times that caused by conflict and violence (79,000) in 2020.⁶ More broadly, in 2020, the MENA region recorded the largest number of disaster-related displacement in the past 10 years.⁷

A downward trend is observed beginning in 2016, when 4.9 million new internal displacements from conflict and violence and disasters were recorded. Since then, a relative reduction in the number of new displacements triggered by conflict and violence can be identified, with 2.1 million new internal displacements in 2020, which is a minority of the total number of internal displacements over the last decade in the region.

Although available data for the year 2021 are limited, UNHCR data from 2020 suggest that IDPs represent a far larger proportion of displaced populations than refugees or asylum seekers.⁸ For example, in Yemen, 98.6 per cent of the displaced populations are IDPs (4,002,012 IDPs to 54,906 refugees and asylum seekers from Yemen). In Iraq and Sudan, the ratio of IDPs to refugees and asylum seekers is relatively smaller (2.1 and 3.0 respectively), although IDPs still make up a sizeable proportion of the displaced population (68% and 75%, respectively). By contrast, the number of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers combined slightly outweighs the number of IDPs (6,796,720 refugees and asylum seekers to 6,701,972 IDPs). Even in this case, however, IDPs represent 49.6 per cent of the displaced population. Thus, displacement in conflict-affected MENA countries appears to be a largely internal phenomenon, with Syria as a notable exception.

Figure 3: Total numbers of IDPs in the Middle East and North Africa countries from 2010 to 2020



Source: IDMC 2021

- **Country-level analysis of forced migration trends**

According to the 2021 IOM Internal Displacement Report and UNHCR data, Syrians are the most represented nationality among IDPs, with a stable trend over the last few years because of the conflict. Yemen (3.6 million IDPs) and Sudan (2.1 million IDPs) are also countries with a notable share of their population displaced internally or in surrounding regions. These figures reflect a general decreasing trend in the last few years and a simultaneous increase in the number of returnees in the country.

2 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2021). [2021 Global Report on Internal Displacement](#). IDMC, Geneva.

3 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2021). [2021 Global Report on Internal Displacement](#). IDMC, Geneva.

4 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2021). [2021 Global Report on Internal Displacement](#). IDMC, Geneva.

5 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2021). [2021 Global Report on Internal Displacement](#). IDMC, Geneva.

6 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2021). [2021 Global Report on Internal Displacement](#). IDMC, Geneva.

7 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2021). [2021 Global Report on Internal Displacement](#). IDMC, Geneva.

8 UN High Commissioner for Refugees (2020). [UNHCR – Refugee Statistics](#). UNHCR, Geneva

In Iraq, Libya and Sudan, the number of new displacements fell in 2021 due to ceasefire agreements and peacebuilding initiatives. In Libya, for example, following Libyan National Army offensives against the Government of National Accord in western cities of the country from April 2019 to June 2020, a suspension of hostilities beginning in the second half of the year and a ceasefire in October 2020 decreased the number of new displacements and facilitated the return of those already displaced.⁹ The situation in these countries remains fragile, however, and more efforts are needed to reduce the risk of further conflict and displacement. Humanitarian aid remains essential for IDPs, but it will take longer-term peacebuilding and development interventions to resolve the underlying challenges that prolong the displacement of millions of people.

DISPLACEMENT TRACKING MATRIX IN IRAQ

As of 31 July 2021, the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) in Iraq recorded 1,191,470 IDPs in 18 governates. The number of IDPs sharply declined from October 2017, when 3.1 million IDPs were recorded, and has gradually decreased since then.

Returns of IDPs have steadily increased since mid-2015, with a sharp increase recorded between October and December 2017. As of 31 July 2021, 4,884,612 returnees were recorded, the highest since DTM data collection began. Between March and April 2021, 15,234 new returnees were recorded, fewer than those recorded in the January–February 2021 period (20,250) and one of the lowest return rates since 2015. This low return rate in March–April 2021 compared to previous rounds may be partially attributable to the closure and consolidation of

camps, which mainly took place between September and December 2020, and the subsequent increase in returns during that time.

In Yemen, after seven years of conflict, the affected population continues to face the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Basic needs remain high, driven by the escalating conflict, disease outbreaks, a declining economy and the breakdown of public institutions and services. Millions are projected to experience alarming levels of acute malnutrition and food insecurity in 2021, with an estimated 80 per cent of the population in need of humanitarian assistance. Over 170,000 people were displaced in 2020 alone, with the opening of over a dozen new frontlines and the escalation of hostilities in governorates such as Ma'rib, Al Jawf, Hodeidah and Taizz.¹⁰ Without a peaceful resolution of the conflict, the severity of needs is expected to worsen across the country. On top of conflict-related displacement, in 2020, Yemen experienced its highest level of disaster-related new displacements (223,000), resulting from floods and storms occurring between February and September 2020.¹¹ Despite the current crisis, migrants continue to arrive irregularly in Yemen, many with the hope of finding work in Saudi Arabia.

In the Syrian Arab Republic, an increase in hostilities between December 2019 and March 2020 resulted in the largest displacement event since 2011, with 960,000 new displacements.¹² Beginning in June 2021, a new escalation of hostilities caused a sharp rise in the number of new displacements. In addition to the conflict, wildfires in October 2020 and an economic recession related to the currency devaluation in April 2021 triggered further displacement. The recession also led to a spike in the prices of essential items and eroded the purchasing power of Syrians.¹³

Figure 1.A: IDP and returnee trends in Iraq from 2014 to April 2021



Source: IOM, 2021

9 IOM Libya (2021). [Libya IDP and Returnee Report 37 \(May - June 2021\)](#). IOM, Tripoli.

10 IOM Yemen (2021). [Situation Report on Yemen, June 2021](#). IOM, Sana'a; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2021). [2021 Global Report on Internal Displacement](#). IDMC, Geneva.

11 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2021). [2021 Global Report on Internal Displacement](#). IDMC, Geneva.

12 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2021). [2021 Global Report on Internal Displacement](#). IDMC, Geneva.

13 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2021). [2021 Global Report on Internal Displacement](#). IDMC, Geneva.

SYRIAN INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS AND REFUGEES IN THE WAKE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

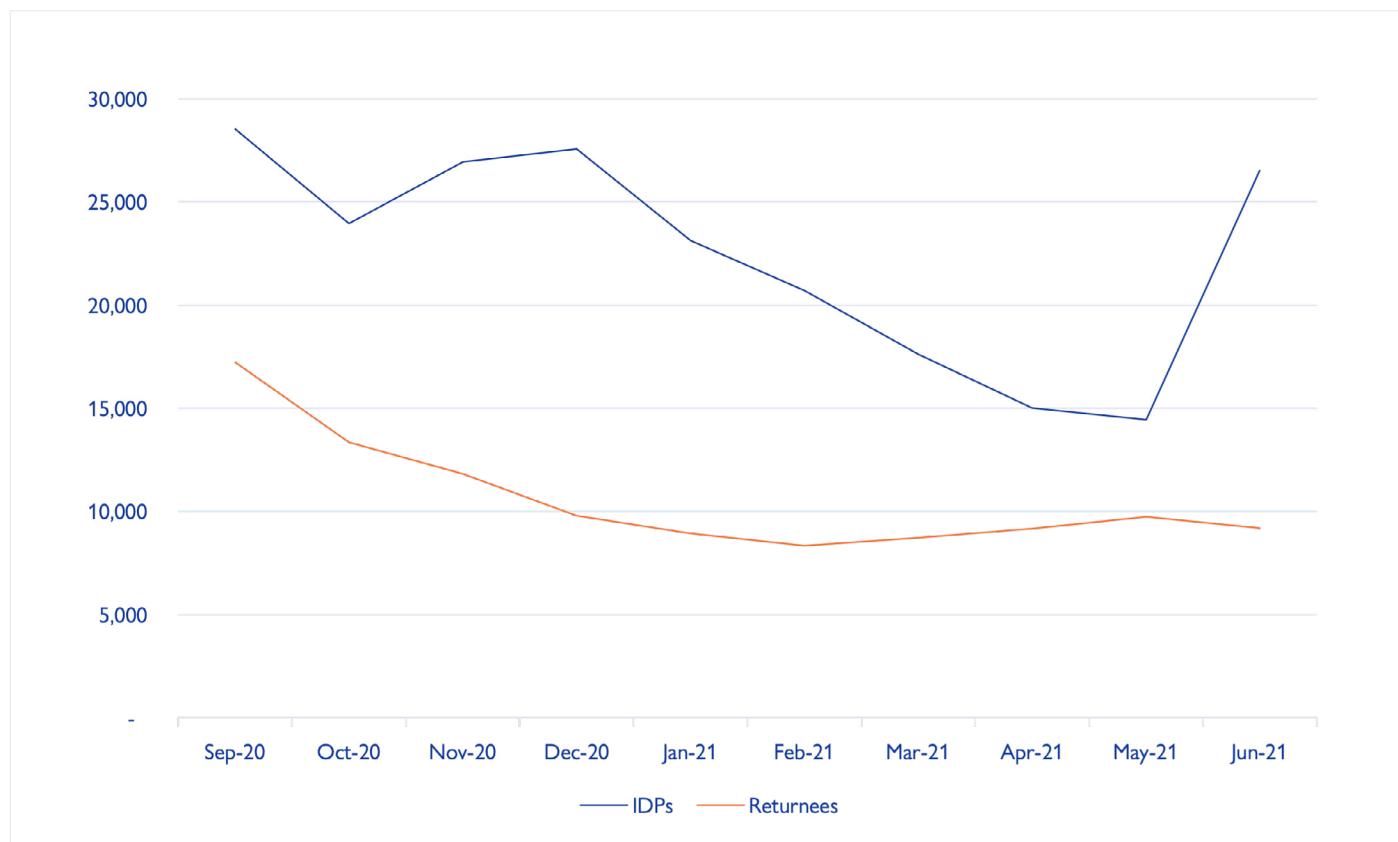
Returnees from within Syria comprise a subset of returnees who have returned to their place of origin for at least one month after having previously fled to another location within Syria for at least one month, while returnees from abroad returned to their community of origin for at least one month after having previously fled to another location outside Syria for at least one month. Since September 2020, a declining trend in the number of total Syrian returnees is recorded, which begins to stabilize from December 2020 onwards, with approximately 8,700–9,700 returnees per month through June 2021. Trends in Syria show a different pattern in the number of internally displaced persons, with an initial high and fluctuating trend, followed by a declining period and a spike in the month of June 2021.¹⁴

A recent publication by the Norwegian Refugee Council in 2021 shows that although nearly 2 million people fled their homes in Syria over the last year, no major arrivals of refugees were recorded in neighbouring countries. When more than 900,000 Syrians fled internal hostilities in early 2020, tens of thousands of families sheltered in camps. Many had been displaced several times before.

In Jordan and Lebanon, Syrians are allowed to enter the country if they meet certain criteria and have valid documentation. Thousands of Syrians have been denied the right to seek asylum even when borders were open, due to security concerns. Approximately 10,000 Syrians remain stranded in Rukban, an informal site in the desert along the border between Jordan and Syria, with little to no humanitarian assistance.

Repatriations back to Syria have been reported in several neighbouring countries, though the number of deportations varies considerably from one country to the other.

Figure 2.A: IDP and returnee trends trends in the Syrian Arab Republic from September 2020 to June 2021



Source: HNAP, 2021

¹⁴ HNAP, 2021.

MARITIME AND TERRESTRIAL MIGRATORY ROUTES TO EUROPE AND THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

Having presented data and trends related to the stock of migrants in the region and MENA migrants abroad, this section describes flows of migrants within and from the MENA region through examination of prominent migratory routes, including the Eastern, Western (including the so-called Canary Route) and Central Mediterranean Routes. Flows from the Horn of Africa (Somalia and Djibouti) to the Arabian Peninsula and within the Sahel region (between Mali and Algeria, Niger and Algeria and Niger and Libya) will also be analysed. In the first part of the following paragraphs, flows are presented regardless of the migrants' country of origin; in the second part, MENA migrants will be the focus. This section starts by describing Mediterranean migration flows towards Europe from the MENA countries, through analysis of data collected around several routes.

During the reporting period, COVID-19 affected regional mobility through various mobility restrictions and exacerbated the challenges facing migrant populations, forcing them to undertake perilous crossings.

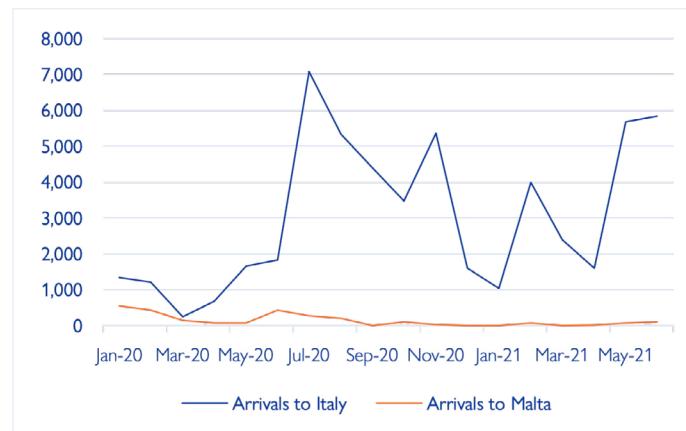
- **Central Mediterranean Route**

Migrants and asylum seekers use the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR) to reach Europe by sea. They embark on long and dangerous journeys departing from North Africa to cross the Mediterranean Sea and reach Europe. The route considered in this section is only relative to the departure of migrants from the Northern African countries towards European countries and not to the previous patterns of migration that started in sub-Saharan African countries. Many migrants transit Libya during their journey towards Europe due to its strategic location and governance gaps related to conflict in the country.

The CMR comprises migratory maritime crossings from North Africa to Italian territories, and to a lesser extent, Malta. Data for the overall period show the trends of new migrant arrivals at the shores of Maltese and Italian islands and mainland shores. Recent findings show that arrivals to Italy are departing from Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Turkey and Greece, and recently, to a lesser extent, from Albania, Montenegro, Lebanon and Egypt. In the first quarter of 2021, a relatively high number of migrants arrived in Italy via the CMR, while the second quarter of 2021 saw an increasing trend, with almost 6,000 new migrant arrivals per month in Italy in May and June 2021. Flows to Italy increased by approximately 67 per cent between the first and the second quarters of 2021. However, the recent increase in monthly arrivals did not reach the levels recorded in 2015–2017. As to the presence of migrants from the MENA region along this migration route, it is observed the

share decreased but absolute numbers increased for this group of migrants in the first semester of 2021 compared to 2020. However, more than two fifths of arrivals along the CMR are from MENA countries, particularly from Tunisia, Egypt and Sudan.

Figure 4: Central Mediterranean Route arrivals by sea to Italy and Malta from January 2020 to June 2021



Source: IOM, 2021

While search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea failed to eliminate the loss of life, the maritime operations of North Africa countries (namely Libya and Tunisia)¹⁵ have increased, resulting in more than 30,000 people intercepted during the first half of 2021 compared to 23,000 during the same period of 2020. Notably, the number of people who were returned to Libya reached over 15,000, almost three times as many as in the same period of 2020.

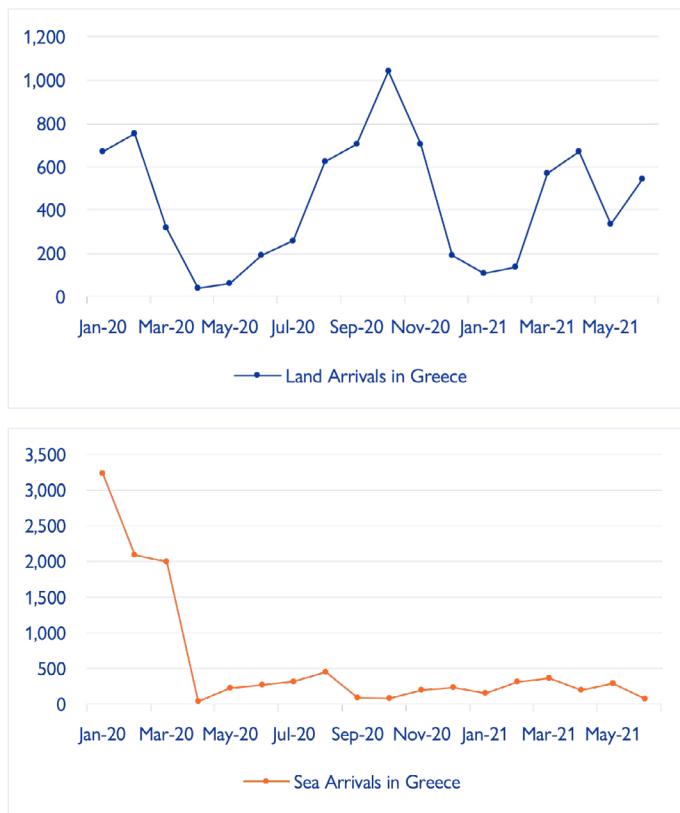
- **Eastern Mediterranean Route, arrivals to Greece and the Balkan Route**

The Eastern Mediterranean Route (EMR) refers to irregular arrivals in Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria. The figures reported below present the main trends of arrivals in European countries on the EMR. In the last two years, most migrants crossing the EMR came from the Middle East, mainly Syria and Iraq, as well as from South Asian countries, such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. In the first semester of 2021, we observe a sharp reduction of the share of migrants from the MENA region (mainly Syrians and to a lesser extent Iraqis) compared to 2020 where they represented about 30 per cent of total arrivals in Greece. The EMR is mixed between sea and land arrivals towards the Greek islands and Cyprus, and mainland and land arrivals towards Bulgaria. Overall, an increasing number of migrants have crossed into Bulgaria since July 2020. After a decrease in arrivals to Europe from September 2020 to February 2021, an increasing trend is recorded starting from March until the end of the reporting period in June 2021, while still not reaching the peaks recorded during the Syrian refugee crisis.

Sea and land arrivals to Greece have also picked up in the second half of 2020 after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, while both land and sea arrivals were very low in the first half of 2021, with only 1,500 migrant arrivals registered in April 2021.

¹⁵ Tunisia Coast Guard is also active in returns/rescues of both migrants departing from Tunisia and Libya.

Figure 5 and 6: Eastern Mediterranean Route land and sea arrivals in Greece from January 2020 to June 2021



Source: IOM, 2021

• Western Mediterranean Route

The Western Mediterranean Route (WMR) refers to irregular arrivals in Spain, both via the Mediterranean Sea from Morocco and Algeria to mainland Spain, and by land from Morocco to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in North Africa. IOM identified three main trajectories of the migration route leading to Spanish territories – the maritime route to the Canary Islands; the maritime route to the Balearic Islands, Iberian Peninsula and the land route to Ceuta and Melilla.

Notably, these migrant flows include both North Africans (mostly Moroccans and Algerians) and Western and sub-Saharan Africans with more than 60 per cent of the total number of arrivals from MENA countries. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, arrivals sharply decreased but increased beginning of July and continued increasing for the remainder of 2020. In January and February 2021, arrivals decreased, followed by an increase as of March and a stable trend until the end of the considered period in 2021.

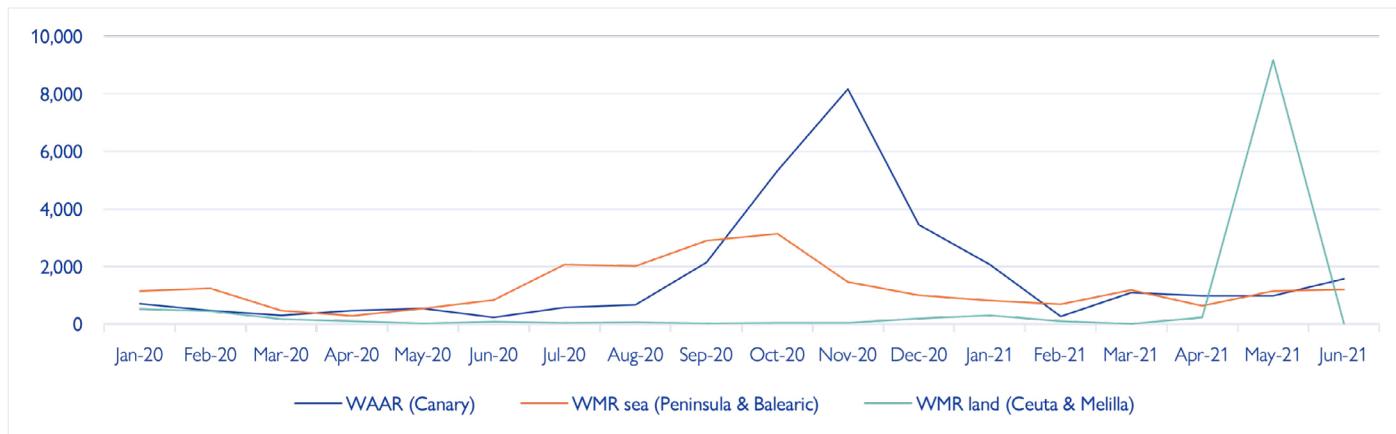
In May 2021, the spike indicates the arrival of more than 9,000 migrants into Spain by land.¹⁶

• Land and maritime routes towards North African countries and from the Horn of Africa towards the Arabian Peninsula

In Africa and the Middle East, DTM's Flow Monitoring (FM) activities record the flows of migrants within and between countries and collect information on numbers and characteristics of migrants on the move at selected points of high transit, mainly in the vicinity of land border crossing points. This section analyses data collected every six months over the last two years at the borders between: a) the Horn of Africa (Somalia and Djibouti) and the Arabian Peninsula and Yemen, b) in the Sahel region (between Mali and Algeria, Niger and Algeria and Niger and Libya) and c) Ethiopia and Sudan. This section aims to compare the volume of people on the move before and until the considered period and assess how COVID-19 related restrictions and closures as well as the impact of the pandemic on fragile socio-economic systems impacted the mobility of migrants between countries. Migrants' mobility has been affected regardless of the operational status of the points of entry (official or unofficial); an overall reduction is recorded in selected border points presented below.

The first wave of COVID-19 pandemic after March 2020 significantly impacted migrants' mobility from the Horn of Africa to Yemen. In the second quarter of 2021, migrants' arrivals into Yemen remained low and have declined relative to the period before the pandemic. More than 10,000 migrants (89% from

Figure 7: Western Mediterranean Route arrivals to Spain by sub-route from January 2020 to June 2021

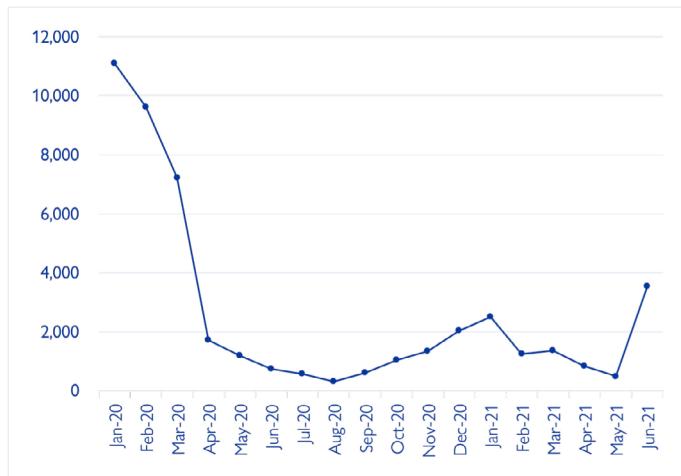


Source: IOM, 2021

¹⁶ The Spanish MOI is not counting these 9,000 arrivals in its official consolidated records at the end of the year, probably because they have returned most of them back to Morocco. IOM DTM Spain still counting them as they happened in reality.

Ethiopia and 11% from Somalia) arrived in Yemen in the first half of 2021, compared to more than 31,000 in the same period in 2020. On 11 June 2021, a boat carrying mostly Ethiopian migrants aboard departed from Djibouti in the Horn of Africa for Yemen across the Strait of Bab Al-Mandab and capsized, causing an unverified death toll of 200–300 people. As of June 2021, at least 32,000 migrants are stranded across Yemen, unable to reach their destination of Saudi Arabia due to border closures, and are left without shelter, water, food or health care.

Figure 8: Arrivals to Yemen from Horn of Africa from January 2020 to June 2021



Source: IOM, 2021

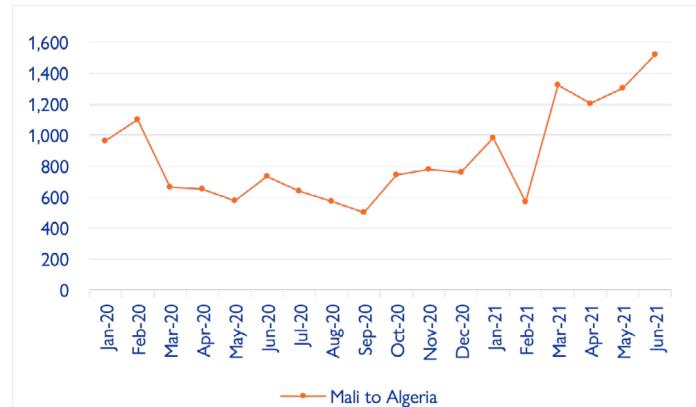
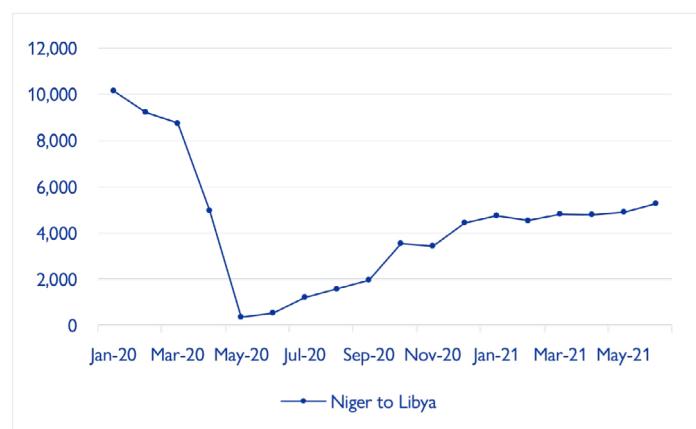
VOICES OF MIGRANTS: THE STORY OF A STRANDED ETHIOPIAN MIGRANT IN YEMEN DUE TO WAR AND COVID-19

COVID-19 has greatly reduced the movement of migrants from the Horn of Africa to Yemen due to pandemic-related restrictions. This has impacted the trip of Gamal, a young Ethiopian migrant who took the dangerous crossing to Yemen to find better opportunities in Saudi Arabia. "I was surprised when I reached Yemen and found that the passage to Saudi was closed due to the war and COVID-19. The smuggler had told me he would take me to Saudi, and that it would be easy trip," explained Gamal. He trekked from his home for days before taking a crammed boat across the Gulf of Aden for 10 days and crossing more than 280 km along north Sana'a before eventually turning back. "People were treating me in a very bad way, so I decided to come back to Aden. Here, I could not find any job where I could earn enough to survive. I slept on the street and under trees. The only way to eat, for me and many other migrants, is to wait outside restaurants and eat the leftovers," said Gamal. IOM has helped Gamal return on the last Voluntary Humanitarian Return flight before COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic.¹⁷

As for movements between sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa, a sharp increase of outgoing flows was observed at monitored points of entry between Mali and Algeria, while a moderately increasing trend is observed at the border points between Niger and Algeria and Niger and Libya compared to the last half of 2020 and the period before the outbreak of the pandemic.

Looking at the overall trend from the beginning of 2019, a decline in flows is observed from March 2020, when mobility restrictions started to be implemented, even as some ports remained officially open. Until June 2021, flows had not reached 2019 levels. A sharp decline is observed in outgoing flows from March 2020 onward and a slight stabilization trend in the following months in the movements between sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa. Compared to the trends of the first semester of 2020, the same period of 2021 shows a decline of around 53 per cent. Overall, flow volumes never reached the same levels as before the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, except between Mali and Algeria, partially attributable to movement restrictions imposed at country level and at the point of entry level, as well as other socioeconomic factors.

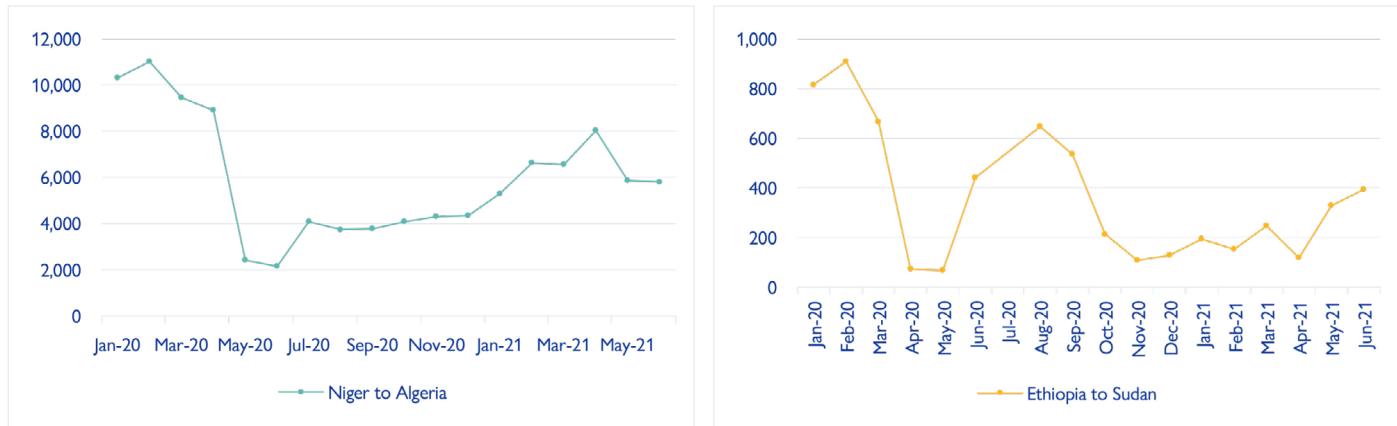
Figure 9, 10: Arrivals in the MENA region from Niger to Libya and Mali to Algeria from January 2020 to June 2021



Source: IOM, 2021

¹⁷ Testimony by IOM Yemen, 2021.

Figure 11, 12: Arrivals in the MENA region from Niger to Algeria and from Ethiopia to Sudan from January 2020 to June 2021



Source: IOM, 2021

Flows of migrants coming from Ethiopia, particularly towards Sudan, sharply decreased after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and mobility restrictions that followed. This migration pattern is composed of different flows, from seasonal migration to labour migration. Migration from the Horn of Africa and other sub-Saharan African countries towards Sudan – and likely towards Eastern Mediterranean Route – is a significant part of this pattern.



Immigration officials check the documents of a migrant returning to Ethiopia through IOM's Voluntary Humanitarian Return programme. © IOM 2021/Majed Mohammed

DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES ALONG MIGRATORY ROUTES AND MISSING MIGRANTS IN THE MENA REGION

Having analysed flows of migrants to and from the MENA region and key migration routes, this section considers deaths and disappearances during migration. IOM's Missing Migrants Project (MMP) recorded 1,161 deaths on maritime routes to Europe from or through North Africa during the first half in 2021. The CMR has been the deadliest (769) as in previous years, followed by the Western Africa Atlantic Route (WAAR) (250) and the VMR (167). Deaths have increased on all three maritime routes by 155 per cent compared to the same period last year, which witnessed lower figures (450) as movements decreased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, at least 96 migrants perished while transiting the MENA region in 2021.

MISSING MIGRANT PROJECT

The Missing Migrants Project (MMP) has recorded more than 40,000 migrant deaths and disappearances in transit worldwide since its inception in 2014. However, given the lack of verifiable or accessible sources, these figures are likely an understatement. This is specifically the case for the data on migratory routes within, to and from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. MMP relies on various sources of information such as national and local authorities, civil society organizations, migrant testimonies and the media – the latter being the main data source in the region in the absence of inclusive official reporting, which challenges the accuracy and completion of data.

- **Deaths on maritime routes from Africa to Europe and Western Asia in 2021**

At least 769 people have lost their lives on the CMR, which saw 464 fatalities off the Libyan coasts, and a gradual increase of recorded fatalities (243) off the coasts of Tunisia relative to the same period in 2020 (88) and 2019 (67). However, it is worth noting that several of the boats that capsized off Tunisia departed from Libya. The remaining incidents on CMR occurred off Algeria (10 fatalities) and Italy (52 fatalities).

Deaths have also significantly increased along the WMR during the first half of 2021 (167) in comparison to the same period in 2020 (77), but they have decreased from 2019 (201). Most of the incidents along the WMR occurred off the coasts of Algeria, claiming at least 79 lives, followed by Morocco (49) and Spain (35).

Among these incidents, at least 26 migrants died while crossing to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, mainly during April and May 2021, when a record number of migrants attempted to swim from Fnideq, Morocco to Ceuta, Spain. North Africans have constituted the largest group of migrants to die in the Mediterranean this year (130), followed by migrants from West Africa (47) and other regions (12), while the nationalities of the remaining individuals (752) are unknown, highlighting the gap in information on missing migrants.

At least 389 migrants perished while crossing the WAAR (Western Africa Atlantic Route) to the Canary Islands, a more than six-fold increase from the same period in 2019 (59) and more than a three-fold increase from 2020 (124). However, multiple social media reports on migrants missing from boats that disappeared indicate that the figures might be even higher. Most boats that sunk en route to the Canaries departed from the southern Moroccan coast. Additionally, of the migrants who died along the WAAR this year, 73 individuals were from West Africa, 13 were from North Africa and 303 nationalities remain unknown.

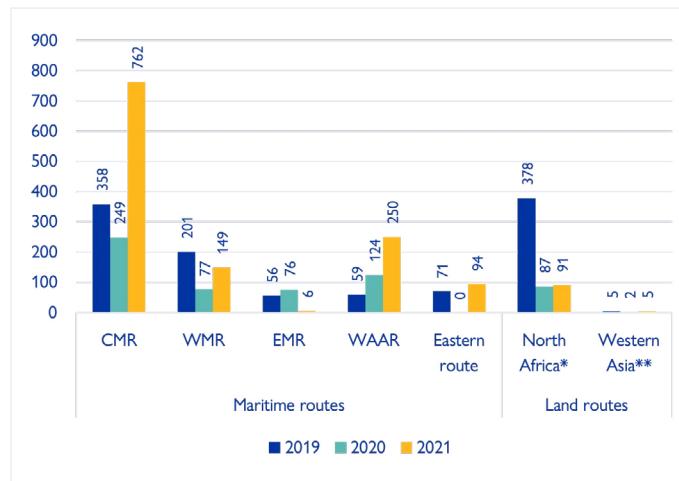
Similarly, the Eastern Route from the Horn of Africa to Yemen saw a drastic increase in recorded fatalities during the first half of 2021 in comparison to the same period in 2020, when no deaths were recorded, and in 2019, when two incidents off Djibouti took the lives of at least 71 migrants. This year, three incidents on the Eastern Route reportedly took the lives of a minimum of 94 migrants, with at least 30 remains retrieved following a tragic shipwreck in Bab Al-Mandab Strait off Ras Al-Ara, Yemen in June 2021. Local reports state that between 200 to 300 migrants also went missing in the incident; however, these figures cannot be verified.

- **Migratory deaths on land routes in North Africa and out of the Syrian Arab Republic**

During the first half of 2021, at least 91 deaths occurred in transit inside North Africa, including 60 deaths while crossing the perilous Sahara Desert, where many deaths in remote areas remain undocumented. This marks a slight increase from the same period in 2020, where at least 87 migrants died while transiting North Africa, including 72 deaths along the Sahara Desert route. By contrast, in 2019, 378 migrant deaths were recorded inside North Africa, of which 275 occurred while crossing the Sahara Desert.¹⁸

¹⁸ The sharp decrease in migrant deaths relative to 2019 may be largely explained by a change in methodology: the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) collected surveys on individual incidents involving a death during migration until January 2020. Data after this month are no longer available.

Figure 13: Migrant fatalities in MENA during January–June 2019–2021



Source: IOM, 2021

In Western Asia, at least one migrant died while crossing the border between the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey, while four Syrians died as they attempted to cross the Lebanese border. The number of fatalities in the first half of 2021 remains like that of the same period in 2019, when at least five migrants died while crossing the Syrian-Turkish border, but slightly higher than that of the same period in 2020, when one death occurred while crossing the Omani-UAE border and another while crossing the southwestern Lebanese border.



The IOM office in Tripoli, with UNHCR, had organized a two-day technical workshop for Libyan partners on saving lives of migrants off the Libyan coast on 29–30 July. © IOM 2015/Francesco Malavolta

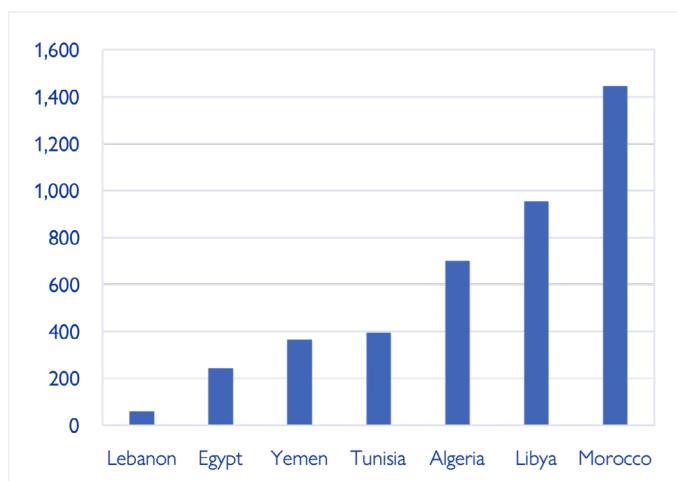
IOM-ASSISTED RETURNS AND GENERAL TRENDS OF STRANDED MIGRANTS IN THE REGION

Through its presence in the MENA region, the IOM Regional Office provides technical support, advice and oversight to IOM offices and partners across the region on issues related to migration management and protection and assistance to migrants and displaced populations.

IOM's Migrant Management Operational System Application (MiMOSA) is the institutional global information management system for multiple operational activities covering Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR)/Voluntary Humanitarian Return (VHR)/Assistance to Vulnerable Migrants case management under the Migration Protection and Assistance Division, medical operations and movement. MiMOSA is one of the most comprehensive datasets on voluntary assisted returns and offers statistical information on the socioeconomic profile of returnees.

The two graphs below show the total number of migrants recorded in outbound movements from MENA countries. According to the MiMOSA database, 4,224 migrants in MENA countries voluntarily returned to their countries of origin with the assistance of IOM from January to June 2021. Additionally, 1,201 migrants originating from MENA countries have voluntarily returned, mostly from European countries to their home countries. The largest part of assisted migrant returns occurred from North African countries: Morocco, Libya, Algeria and, to a lesser extent, Tunisia. Other sending countries report returns below 400 in the first half of 2021.

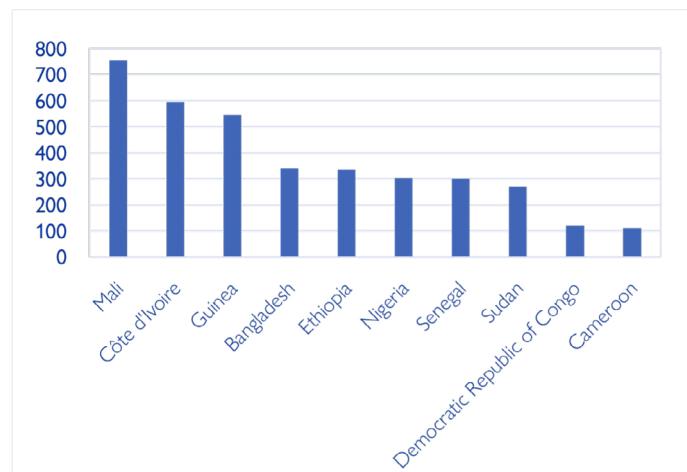
Figure 14: Migrants travelling from the MENA region by sending country



Source: IOM, 2021

19 IOM (2021). [Migrant Management Operational System Application \(MiMOSA\)](#). IOM, Geneva.

Figure 15: Migrants traveling from the MENA region by nationality



Source: IOM, 2021

With respect to nationality, all the returnees assisted by IOM from MENA countries originated from sub-Saharan African countries, except for Bangladeshis, who were mostly repatriated from Libya. The highest number of returnees are from West Africa (Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Nigeria and Senegal), followed by the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia and Sudan) and Central Africa (Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo).

Regarding the impact of COVID-19 on voluntary returns, the number of IOM beneficiaries who applied for and received AVRR assistance was low in the first half of 2021 (32 returns, mostly recorded in Lebanon). However, these figures may be influenced by a lack of awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic among migrants, as well as IOM programming and access influencing AVRR operations. The pandemic has undoubtedly slowed down the general trends observed above due to travel restrictions imposed in both MENA countries and countries where MENA migrants are hosted.

Data related to victims of trafficking show that only 96 migrants were returned to their countries of origin via the AVRR program, representing a clear slow down compared to 2020 and previous years¹⁹; (Box 2 in Annex).

VOICES OF MIGRANTS: HELPING A VICTIM OF TRAFFICKING IN EGYPT RETURN HOME DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Karla* is a Ugandan* woman who came to Egypt in 2016 through a friend but eventually found herself trafficked into forced labour under poor working conditions, her travel documents confiscated and her wages unpaid. Karla developed diabetes and was hospitalized. After fleeing her employer, she was sexually exploited by a man who abused her need for food and shelter and impregnated her. She had a miscarriage at home in 2019 and her friend evicted her. The survivor reached out to IOM Egypt to seek support to return to her country of origin.

→ IOM Egypt coordinated with the Ugandan embassy to issue her a travel document. However, in March 2020, the Egyptian government imposed a curfew and suspended international flights to contain the spread of COVID-19. IOM managed to secure a booking for Karla on a short-notice evacuation flight organized by the Ugandan embassy, coordinate with security to commute after-hours and arrange for quarantine with the receiving mission. However, Karla tested positive for COVID-19 before the flight, causing all arrangements to be cancelled as she quarantined for 14 days. Additionally, her caseworker tested positive as well. IOM provided Karla with financial and housing assistance as well as medical support before returning her home on another evacuation flight, where she reunited with her son and received reintegration assistance to restart her life in Uganda.¹⁹

*The name and nationality of the migrant have been altered for confidentiality.

- Indian workers returned from the Gulf countries

Tens of thousands of migrant workers from Southern Asia lost their jobs across the Gulf states due to the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these workers and other nationals were stranded due to the suspension of commercial flights in March 2020 in response to the global pandemic, including India, which extended its suspension of scheduled flights until 31 July 2021. Countries of origin organized special flights to return their citizens, but the process was challenging in mid-2020. However, the Government of India established Vande Bharat Mission (VBM) in May 2020 to return stranded nationals abroad and help stranded foreigners in India return home. Additionally, India established “air bubble” agreements to operate two-way flights with various countries including Bahrain, Iraq, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. As of 30 April 2021, India had facilitated the return of more than six million nationals through VBM, of which 42 per cent returned from the United Arab Emirates alone (2,544,288), and another 18 per cent from the remaining GCC states (1,113,147). VBM is currently operating its tenth phase, scheduled between 1 April 2021 and 30 October 2021.²²

- Ethiopians returned from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia²⁰

Since 2017, approximately 400,000 Ethiopian migrants have been returned from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the campaign launched by the Government of Saudi Arabia titled ‘A Nation without Violations’.²¹ Returnees arrive at Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa, where they are registered by IOM staff before continuing on to their destination, IOM also provides travel support to the most vulnerable migrants to their final destination. In April 2020, returns were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Returns resumed in September 2020 and stabilized at 1,000 returns per week in January 2021.

²⁰ Account by IOM Egypt, 2021.

²¹ IOM Regional Office for the East and Horn of Africa (2021). [Return of Ethiopian Migrants from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia \(5 May 2017 – 31 October 2021\)](#). IOM, Nairobi.

²² Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (2021). [Question No. 399 Indians Brought Back During COVID-19 Pandemic](#). Ministry of External Affairs, 22 July 2021.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MOBILITY AND POINTS OF ENTRY OPERATIONAL STATUS IN THE REGION

While previous sections presented broader trends and patterns related to migration during the reporting period, this section highlights thematic topics that emerged during the first half of 2021. Given the significance of the COVID-19 pandemic during this period, the section focuses on the effects of the pandemic on internal and international mobility within and outside the region, followed by a detailed discussion of its socioeconomic effects.²³ The imposition of border closures, controls and other restrictive measures related to medical and legal checks were observed in several countries in the region in the first phase of the pandemic, but even as international borders and transit points start to reopen, restrictions remain in place to varying extents at the regional and national level.²⁴

The operational status of POEs offers one metric for understanding the degree of COVID-19 restrictions on international mobility. For the purposes of this analysis, operational status of POEs can range from fully closed to partially operational and fully open. POEs considered in this analysis include airports, land border crossing points (road or rail), blue border crossing points (such as ports) and other locations of transit. This report describes the findings from data collected between January and June 2021 on 225 official points of entry across the region, including 106 land border crossings points, 69 airports and 50 blue border crossing points.²⁵

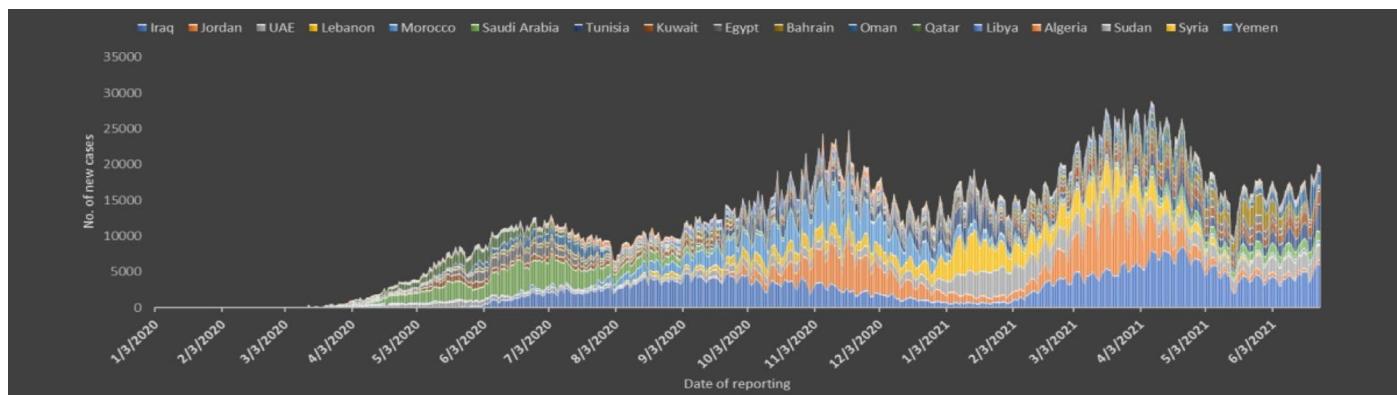
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE MENA REGION

As of the last week of June 2021, a total of 6,329,205 cases of COVID-19 have been reported in the region, resulting in 101,871 deaths and 5,994,549 recoveries. The MENA countries with the largest caseloads are Iraq (1,321,232), Jordan (749,319) and the United Arab Emirates (624,814), together accounting for 41.9 per cent of all COVID-19 cases reported in the region. Five out of the 17 countries in the region (Iraq, Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon and Morocco) have individually reported more than 500,000 cases of COVID-19, accounting for 58.6 per cent of all the cases in the region. Overall, the MENA region accounts for 3.5 per cent of the global total of COVID-19 cases.

In terms of COVID-19 fatalities, the five countries with the highest death toll in the region are Iraq (17,061), Egypt (16,062), Tunisia (14,579), Jordan (9,718) and Morocco (9,273), accounting for 64.4 per cent of all the COVID-19 related deaths reported. During the reporting period between January and June 2021, four countries, namely Tunisia, Egypt, Iraq and Oman, accounted for 71.2 per cent of the deaths reported. The top five countries with the highest COVID-19 fatality ratio are Yemen (19.7%), Sudan (7.5%), Syria (7.3%), Egypt (5.7%) and Tunisia (3.6%). The regional COVID-19 fatality ratio stands at 1.6 per cent. Cumulatively, the MENA region accounts for 2.6 per cent of the deaths associated with COVID-19 globally.

Between January and June 2021, the region has recorded two main waves of COVID-19: January–March, and then end of June. Countries are still at distinct phases of the outbreak and exhibit varying levels of transmissibility. Six countries, namely Iraq, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Kuwait and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, reported a surge in the number of new cases in June 2021. These new surges are attributable to the spread of COVID-19 variants of concern that have been reported in the region.

Figure 3.A: Daily distribution of COVID-19 cases among countries in the MENA region as of 30 June 2021



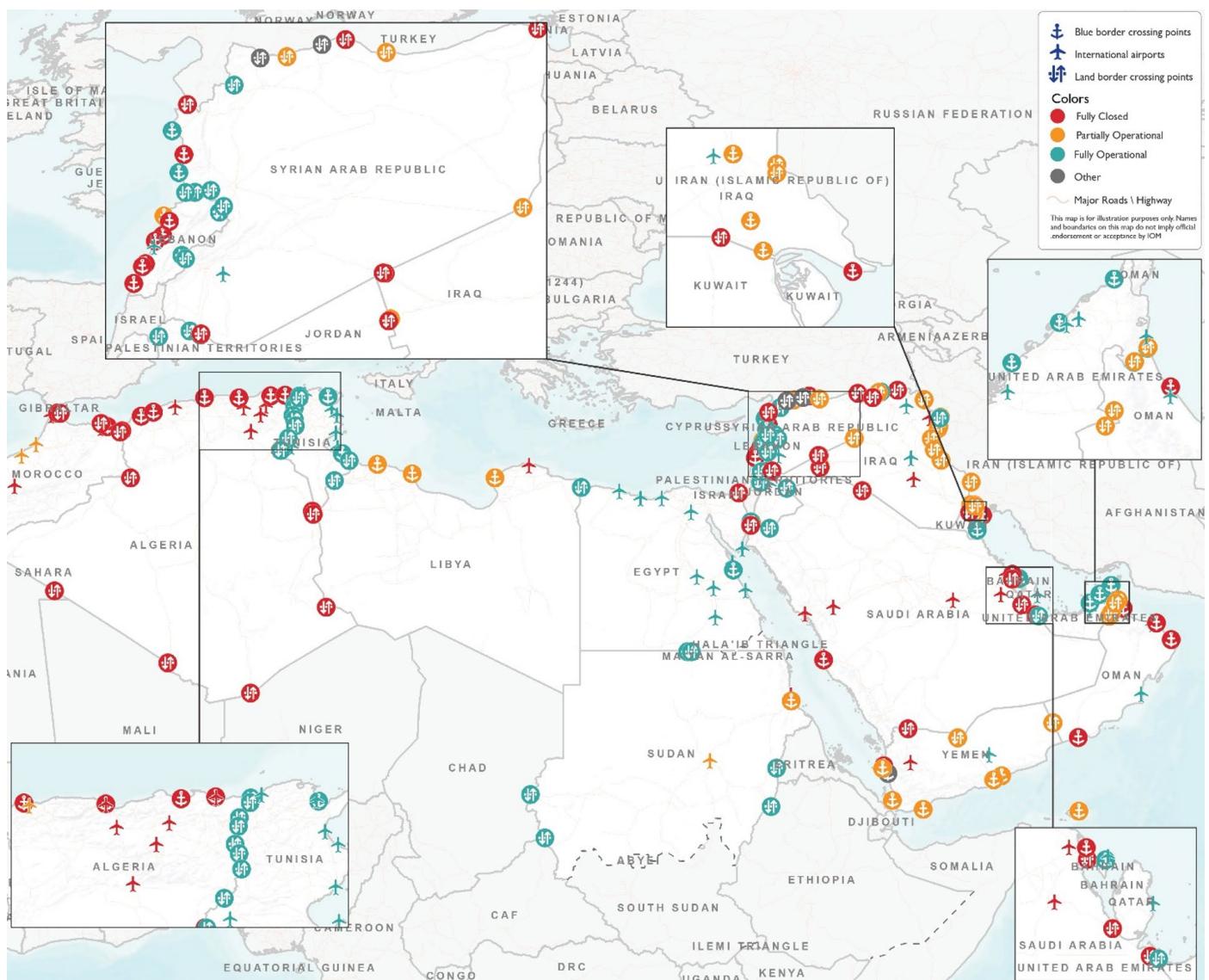
Source: World Health Organization (WHO)

23 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021). *International Migration 2020 Highlights*. UN DESA, New York.

24 To track and better understand how COVID-19 affects global mobility, IOM DTM has developed a global mobility database to monitor the status of mobility and visa restrictions at points of entry (PoEs), together with preparedness and response measures in place to prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response in line with international health regulations (IHR).

25 This work is based on the information collected by IOM Country offices in the Middle East and North Africa. The list of main publications related to this PoE exercise are available at: <https://iom.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=fab6abadaa20474ea3d4205a1ac10819>.

Map 1: Status of POE restrictions in the MENA region in December 2020

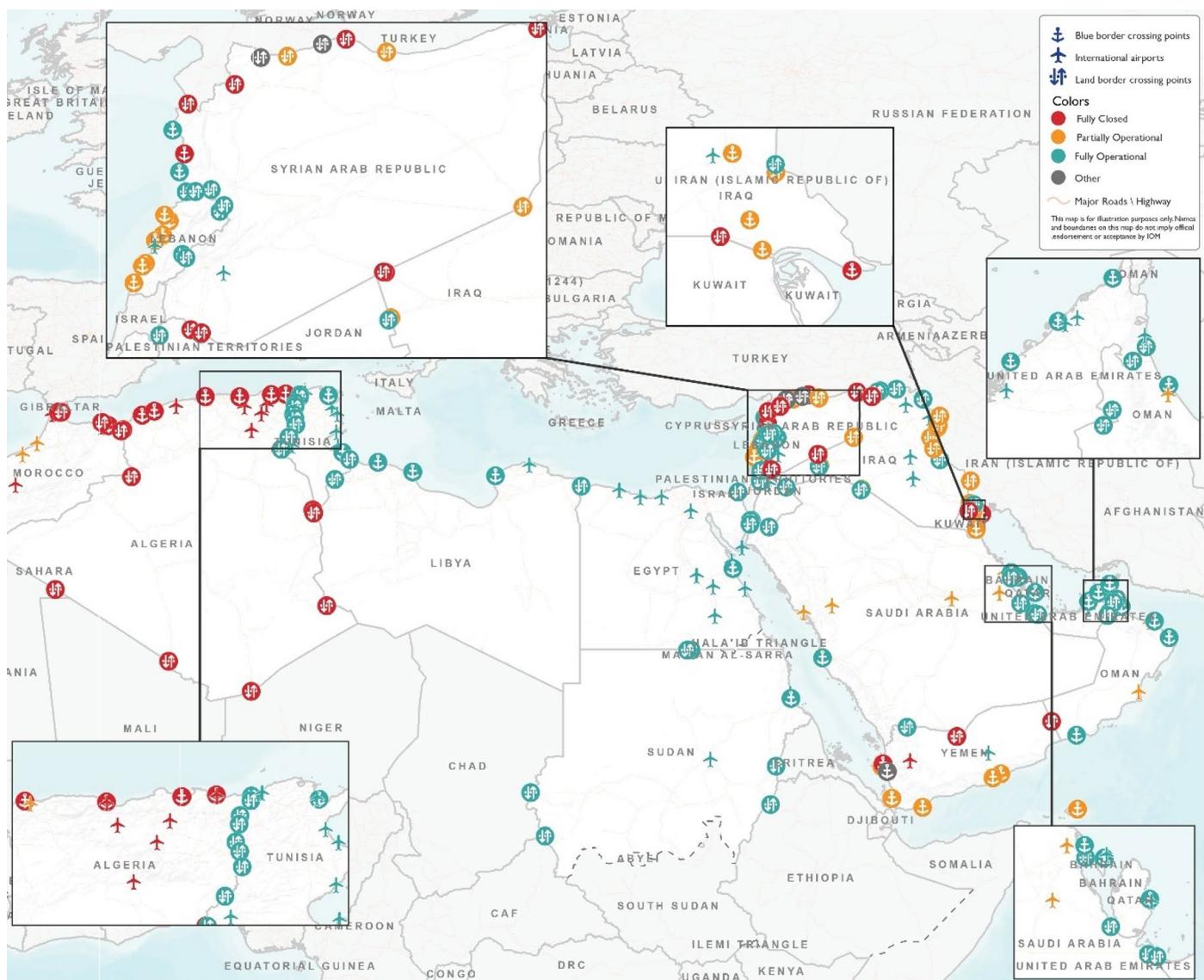


Restrictions on POEs within the MENA region have not changed significantly between December 2020 (Figure 3) and June 2021 (Figure 4). The trend of reopening POEs observed in the last quarter of 2020 continued in this period, if at a slower pace and in a more localized fashion among certain countries in the Arabian Peninsula. During the first half of 2021, POEs in certain countries remained closed. For example, in Algeria and Morocco, operational status of POEs ranged from fully closed to a limited number of partially operating POEs. Similarly, in Yemen the situation of POEs has not changed substantially, except for a land border crossing point that reopened during the reporting period.



COVID-19 awareness raising campaign in Ombeda locality, Omdurman-Khartoum State targeting homeless people in the community. © IOM 2020/Yasir Elbakri

Map 2: Status of POE restrictions in the MENA region in June 2021



At the PoE level, a clear reopening trend can be identified with respect to the operational status of POEs in June 2021 compared to December 2020. For example, international airports in Iraq, Morocco and Saudi Arabia reopened in June 2021. Similarly, blue border crossing points have also reopened in certain GCC countries and Sudan, while the status in other countries has not changed during the first half of 2021. With respect to the land border crossing points, a reopening of POEs can be observed in GCC countries, except for Oman.

The next section will provide detailed analysis of the socioeconomic outlook of migrants and mobile population in the region and from the MENA countries, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.



An IOM health staff screens an Ethiopian migrant for COVID-19 symptoms at the Aden airport before he boards a Voluntary Humanitarian Return flight to Addis Ababa.
© IOM 2021/Majed Mohammed

SOCIOECONOMIC OUTLOOK OF MIGRANTS AND MOBILE POPULATION IN THE MENA REGION

Migrants and displaced populations, who often exhibit pre-existing vulnerabilities and face significant structural barriers compared to other populations, have been severely affected by the outbreak of COVID-19. In June 2021, IOM's Regional Office for the MENA region published a report assessing the unique and diverse ways through which the COVID-19 pandemic affected the socioeconomic outcomes of migrant and displaced populations in the region. Adapting the UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19 to the specific realities of migrants and displaced populations, this report examines the implications of the pandemic on the socioeconomic well-being of migrants in the MENA region by examining macroeconomic impacts, intentions to migrate, labour conditions and access to basic services.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MENA MACROECONOMIC SYSTEMS AND MIGRANTS

In 2020, the MENA region's economies contracted by 3.8 per cent.²⁶ Migrants tend to be concentrated in the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic: construction, the service sector (including domestic and personal service workers), accommodation and food services and wholesale and retail trade.²⁷ The list of sectors impacted also points to the gendered effects on the pandemic, as women tend to be employed in greater numbers in the service sectors, while the workforce in the construction sector is largely male. This distinguishes the COVID-19 economic crisis from standard recessions, which tend to impact men more severely, as they work in cyclical industries most impacted by economic downturns.²⁸

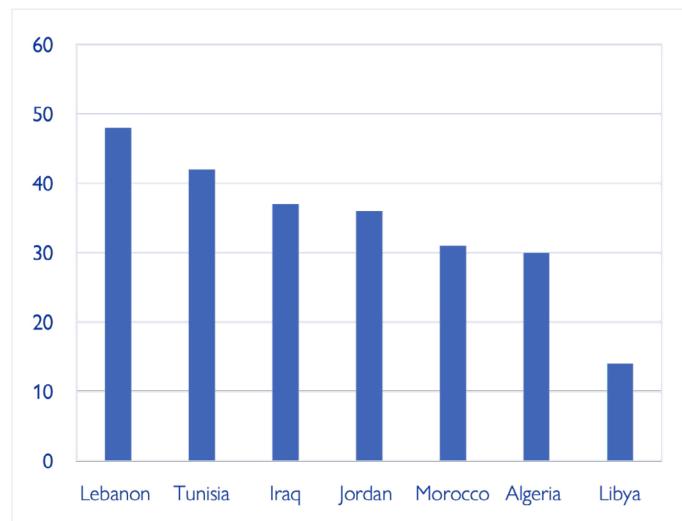
However, the COVID-19 crisis has affected migrant sending and receiving countries alike.²⁹ In destination countries, sectors with a high share of migrant workers were forced to fire members of their workforce; upon losing their jobs, many of these workers experienced a drop in their income and could no longer afford to send remittances home. Moreover, as travel restrictions were imposed, migrants could not return to their countries

of origin, even in the face of job loss.³⁰ Some circular migrants became stuck in host countries and others in their countries of origin, where already struggling labour markets and weak social protection systems compounded the challenge of reintegrating these workers. The struggle to return stranded migrants is particularly difficult considering the scale of labour migration in some of these countries.³¹

- **Intentions to migrate**

During the reporting period, interesting trends related to the conditions and profiles of migrants since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic emerged.³² Economic hardship is driving substantial proportions of the population in MENA countries to consider migration, notably among educated youth. About one third of respondents as a whole and substantial proportions across all surveyed countries said they considered emigration as an option. Of those who did, most respondents cited economic reasons except those in Lebanon. Emigration is much more strongly considered among young, educated, male and low-income conditions.

Figure 16: Desire to migrate in selected MENA countries in April 2021



Source: Arab Barometer April 2021

Other sources have confirmed that economic slowdowns are increasing the proportion of the population seeking to migrate. However, the desire to migrate is often frustrated by the different constraints at various stages in the migration process.³³ Consequently, the presence of several socioeconomic conditions, such as economic slowdowns, as well as many other factors that have a role in the decision to migrate, does not necessarily translate into an increased number of migrants from crisis-affected countries.

26 World Bank Group (2021). [Living with Debt: How Institutions Can Chart a Path to Recovery in the Middle East and North Africa](#). World Bank Group, Washington D.C.

27 International Labour Organization (2021). [World Employment and Social Outlook Trends](#). ILO, Geneva.

28 Alon, T., M. Doepeke, J. Olmstead-Rumsey & M. Tertilt (2020). [The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on gender equality](#). VoxEU, 19 April 2020.

29 Alon, T., M. Doepeke, J. Olmstead-Rumsey & M. Tertilt (2020). [The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on gender equality](#). VoxEU, 19 April 2020.

30 International Labour Organization (2021). [World Employment and Social Outlook Trends](#). ILO, Geneva.

31 Pappa, S., V. Ntella, T. Giannakas, V. G. Giannakoulis, E. Papoutsi & P. Katsaounou (2020). [Prevalence of depression, anxiety, and insomnia among healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review and meta-analysis](#). Brain Behav. Immun. 88:901-907.

32 Kayyali, A.-WV (2021). [Arab Public Opinion on Domestic Conditions: Findings from the Sixth Wave of Arab Barometer](#). Arab Barometer, Princeton.

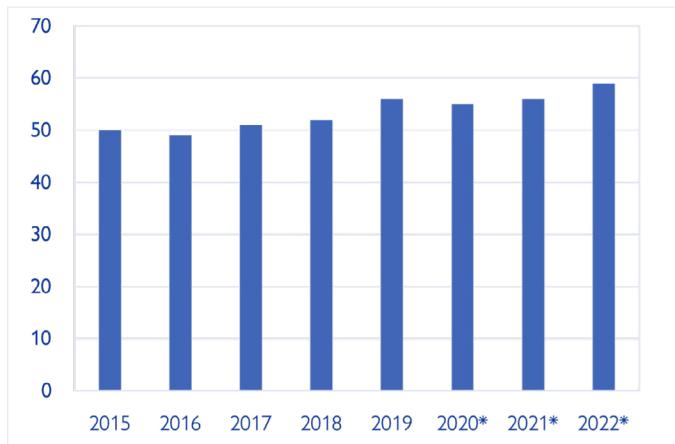
33 Food and Agriculture Organization (2019). [The State of Food and Agriculture in the World: Migration, Agriculture and Rural Development](#). FAO, Rome.

- **Remittances**

Other essential elements for the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on migrants and mobile populations are the level and patterns of remittances coming from abroad in MENA countries. In fragile MENA countries, such as Yemen, remittances represent an important source of income, particularly for displaced people, and a full tenth of the population relies entirely on remittances for income.³⁴ Remittance flows to the MENA region rose by 2.3 percent to 56 billion United States dollars (USD) in 2020.³⁵ This growth reflects strong remittance flows to Egypt and Morocco. Flows to Egypt increased by 11 per cent to a record high of USD 30 billion in 2020, while flows to Morocco rose by 6.5 per cent and Tunisia by 2.5 per cent. In contrast, other economies in the region experienced losses in 2020, with Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan showing double-digit declines. In 2021, remittances to the region are expected to grow more than 2 per cent due to moderate growth in the European area and weak outflows from GCC countries. On the other hand, the cost of sending USD 200 to the region fell slightly in the fourth quarter of 2020, although these costs may vary across different corridors. For example, the cost of sending money from high-income OECD countries to Lebanon remained extremely high, mostly above 10 per cent, while sending money from GCC countries to Egypt and Jordan costs around 3 per cent in some corridors.

The figure reported below presents the trend of remittances from MENA migrants. The last three columns provide the estimates for 2021 and 2022 and the preliminary data for 2020. In general, remittances increased during the considered period, thus revealing that the pandemic did not affect the total flow of remittances. Instead, MENA migrants demonstrated a level of economic resilience even as the pandemic impacted economies around the world. These findings confirm understandings of remittances as countercyclical relative to other economic indicators such as gross domestic product.

Figure 17: Remittances to MENA countries from 2015 to 2022*



Source: Statista, 2021

* Data for 2020 are preliminary and those for 2021 and 2022 are projections

The following subsections analyse remittance trends for three countries that are all representative of patterns related to remittances flows in the region: Egypt, Lebanon and Kuwait.

In the case of Egypt, remittances generally increased over the last three years despite the economic consequences of COVID-19 in 2020. A decline in remittances can be observed in the month of July 2020 due to the consequences of the COVID-19 impact on economic systems and sectors where migrants are employed. On the other hand, during the second half of 2020, the total amount of remittances increased relative to the same period in 2018 and 2019 and this can be explained by the economic rebound in hosting countries especially in Europe.

In Lebanon, remittance data show an initial decline in the first half of 2020 compared to the previous year; nevertheless, an increasing trend can be identified in the second half of 2020, illustrating the resilience of this income source for families of migrants in a period characterized by several political, social, economic, financial, monetary and health crises.

Similarly, in Kuwait, data on remittance flows show the same drop in the first period after the pandemic, followed by a recovery during the last quarter of 2020. Even though remittance data for 2021 are not available yet, the observed trends suggest these levels will steadily increase or at least remain constant if the conditions of economic recovery shown in the last months of 2020 persist.

In addition, IOM Libya in April 2021 presents the key findings about remittances sent by migrants from Libya to their countries of origin, utilizing microdata collected from over 41,000 migrant interviews conducted in 2019–2020. This report shows that the percentage of migrants sending remittances fell from 52% in January 2019 to 26% in July 2020, indicating that the dual crises related to armed conflict in western Libya and the COVID-19 pandemic affected migrants' ability to send remittances from Libya.

34 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo. UN Sustainable Development Group (2020). [A Strategic Framework for an Immediate Socio-Economic Response to Covid-19 in Yemen](#). UNSDG, New York.

35 World Bank Group (2021). [Migration and Development Brief 34: Resilience: COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens](#). World Bank Group, Washington D.C.; International Labour Organization (2021). [World Employment and Social Outlook Trends](#). ILO, Geneva.

• Labour conditions of migrant workers

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the vulnerabilities of the migrant worker population. Many migrant workers experienced an abrupt termination of their employment along with non-payment or delayed payment of wages. Discrimination against migrant workers may also contribute to higher levels of job loss than nationals during the pandemic.³⁶ Additionally, migrants seeking daily employment face important economic setbacks from the pandemic, as mobility restrictions prevent them from seeking new work. At the same time, migrants employed in both formal and informal jobs may lack access to social protection benefits that could compensate for their income losses.³⁷ Such lack of access has compounded the impact of the crisis in both destination countries and countries of origin. In destination countries, such as those in the EU, sectors reliant on seasonal migrant workers, including migrants from the MENA region, struggled to maintain their workforce because of the widespread travel restrictions.

By contrast, GCC countries are in a more secure economic position than other MENA countries, owing to strong labour markets and greater degree of political stability, which can support the enactment of broad policies in the face of crises. GCC countries nonetheless face challenges related to their limited economic diversification, such as a decrease in oil prices during the COVID-19 pandemic due to reduced demand. In GCC countries, characterized by dual labour markets, workers in the private sector are largely migrants. Migrants make up a significant share of the population in GCC countries and tend to have jobs in the service and construction industries. For example, in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, migrants represent close to 90 per cent of the population.³⁸

Women, youth, irregular migrants, recently arrived migrants, migrants in transit and returnees have been particularly affected by the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁹ Prior to the pandemic, youth unemployment rates in the region remained stubbornly high, while women in MENA countries encounter some of the largest gender disparities in labour market participation in the world.⁴⁰ After the outbreak of COVID-19, women experienced larger declines in year-on-year employment in 2020 compared to men (-4.1% vs. -1.9%) and younger people experienced larger declines than adults (-8.2% vs. -1.3%).⁴¹ Although these figures do not focus on mobile populations alone, it can be assumed that migrant women and youth were at least

as affected, if not more affected than the general population, given the additional pre-existing vulnerability they face because of their status as migrants.⁴² Irregular migrants also face distinct vulnerabilities as a result of their lack of legal status and their frequent employment in the informal sector. Key informant interviews – qualitative in-depth interviews with people that know the internal and external dynamics in the community – in the MENA region suggested that these two factors increased the probability of job loss, exploitation and reduced salaries during the pandemic.⁴³ For migrants who have recently arrived in the destination country or were in transit when the pandemic hit, lack of social networks in their new area diminished their level of resilience in the face of job loss compared to more established and settled migrants, as reported by IOM Libya.⁴⁴ Finally, returnees frequently require support to reintegrate into their countries of origin, particularly upon return, as they seek new employment opportunities and face a drop in income.⁴⁵ Thus, the COVID-19 crisis had a devastating, albeit differentiated, impact on the region, compounding ongoing crises.

• Access to health care, education and other basic services

This subsection will examine the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on access to health care, education and basic services. Because the COVID-19 pandemic is primarily a health emergency, it is important to understand the interactions between the pandemic's impact on health and socioeconomic well-being among migrants in the MENA region. Due to their status as migrants, these groups are often excluded from national insurance plans.⁴⁶ Even where migrants can access public health care services, resources of public providers may be limited, causing delays in access to treatment.⁴⁷ This has held true during the COVID-19 pandemic, as resources and personnel are diverted towards combatting the virus.⁴⁸ As a result of this limited access to public health care, migrants may need to rely on private providers. Yet the economic consequences of the pandemic, such as reduced income and declining purchasing power, may render private health care unaffordable for migrants.⁴⁹ Other factors such as limited access to transportation, discrimination and fears of being detained for irregular migrants can introduce further barriers to care.⁵⁰

Despite migrants' restricted access to health care, they may be more susceptible to COVID-19 transmission than other population groups due to their primary sectors of work, employment status, living conditions and access to information.

36 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo
37 Yara, A. (2020). [Migrant workers' health and COVID-19 in GCC countries](#). Arab Center, Washington DC.
38 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo
39 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo
40 International Labour Organization (2021). [World Employment and Social Outlook Trends](#). ILO, Geneva.
41 International Labour Organization (2021). [World Employment and Social Outlook Trends](#). ILO, Geneva.
42 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo
43 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo
44 IOM Libya and Voluntas (2021). [Assessment of the Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and IDPs in Libya](#). IOM, Tripoli.
45 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo
46 UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2020). [Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Refugees in the Arab Region: Technical Paper](#). UNESCWA, Beirut.
47 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo
48 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo
49 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo
50 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo

As indicated above, migrant workers are often concentrated in sectors of the economy with an elevated risk of exposure, such as the service and personal care sectors. Additionally, their frequent employment under informal arrangements impedes their access to adequate occupational safety and health measures, sick leave and other forms of social protection in their host countries.⁵¹ Moreover, the crowded conditions of migrant camps and detention centres for the displaced increases the likelihood of viral spread.⁵² Finally, while most migrants are aware of the COVID-19 pandemic, limited knowledge of local languages and reduced access to digital devices such as cell phones can hinder access to information on the evolution of the pandemic and awareness of preventative measures for reducing transmission and adequate responses in the event of suspected infection.⁵³

With respect to education, the closure of schools has negatively affected the learning of students around the world. However, disparities in access to the internet, computers and spaces conducive to studying have exacerbated pre-existing learning gaps between students with and without adequate finances. The shift to online learning may be particularly difficult for education systems with budget shortfalls prior the pandemic, as was the case in Yemen.⁵⁴ Lack of funding puts more strain on educators and may result in overcrowded classrooms, with negative impacts on student learning.⁵⁵ Learning loss, along with the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, may encourage more students to drop out of school and engage in child labour, thereby reducing their earning potential in the long-run.⁵⁶ While more information is needed on the effects of school closures and online learning on migrant and displaced populations specifically, their weakened economic position prior to the pandemic suggests that the negative consequences of these educational shifts may be heightened for these groups.⁵⁷

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced access to basic services and supplies, particularly in humanitarian settings in the MENA region.⁵⁸ The pandemic has disrupted supply chains for essential products, resulting in higher prices, at a time when migrants face reduced income and job loss.⁵⁹ Additionally, COVID-19-related movement restrictions, combined with reduced freedom of movement due to insecurity, can impede access to local markets.⁶⁰ In humanitarian settings, funding shortfalls to humanitarian organizations and mobility restrictions related to the pandemic have also limited the provision of aid and services to affected populations.⁶¹ A March 2021 IOM DTM pilot study in Sudan found that the pandemic restricted the availability of water, electricity, food and medical supplies.⁶²

FOOD INSECURITY AMONG MIGRANTS IN LIBYA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Although food insecurity was a challenge for migrants in Libya prior to March 2020, the socioeconomic consequences of COVID-19 pandemic, such as job and income loss, have exacerbated hunger in the country. The use of coping mechanisms to mitigate food shortages among migrants remains widespread and is intensified by a lack of access to social safety nets. Reliance on coping mechanisms indicates that many migrants are facing stress and insecurity as their budgets for food and other essential needs are stretched, which may impair their future ability to provide for themselves and deal with potential shocks. WFP and IOM Libya monitor food security and of migrants in Libya. In a report published on July 2021 they observed that, based on the analysis of more than 1,900 face-to-face interviews, 17 per cent of migrants were classified as food insecure, while 60 per cent were categorized as marginally food secure, meaning that they achieved minimal food consumption but are at risk of food insecurity. Moreover, more than 1,250 web-based interviews revealed that one in five migrants (19%) were food insecure, while 47 per cent were marginally food secure, illustrating the severe situation of migrants in the country. The increased use of coping strategies to mitigate food shortages compared to May 2020 appears to be closely related to the enduring socioeconomic effects of COVID-19, including a lack of labour opportunities.

- 51 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo
- 52 Amnesty International (2020). [COVID-19 makes Gulf countries' abuse of migrant workers impossible to ignore](#). Amnesty International, 30 April 2020.
- 53 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo
- 54 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo
- 55 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo
- 56 UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2020). [Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Refugees in the Arab Region: Technical Paper](#). UNESCWA, Beirut.
- 57 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2020). [COVID-19 Crisis Response in MENA Countries](#). OECD, Paris.
- 58 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo
- 59 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo
- 60 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo
- 61 IOM Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (2021). [Assessing the Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Displaced Populations in the MENA Region](#). IOM, Cairo
- 62 IOM Sudan (2021). [COVID-19 Socio-Economic Impact on Migrant, IDP and Returnee Communities Pilot Study](#). IOM, Khartoum.
- 63 The main nationalities represented in this analysis are Egyptians and Sudanese. Other nationalities surveyed include Iraqis, Syrians, Yemenis, Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians.

DATA AND EVIDENCE MAPPING OF PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GLOBAL COMPACT FOR SAFE, ORDERLY AND REGULAR MIGRATION (GCM) IN THE ARAB STATES

On 10 December 2018, most United Nations (UN) Member States adopted the GCM at an intergovernmental conference in Marrakesh, Morocco. The non-binding compact was endorsed nine days later by the UN General Assembly. The GCM is the first inter-governmental comprehensive agreement on migration and allows for flexible policy options based on various governments' capacities and sovereign decisions. The GCM addresses numerous aspects of international migration, such as the governance of migration, the migration-development nexus, the human rights of migrants and humanitarian considerations

as set out in its 23 objectives. On 24–25 February 2021, IOM, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia and the League of Arab States, in collaboration with the Regional United Nations Network on Migration in the Arab Region, held the first GCM Regional Review Conference for Arab States. The Arab Member States presented key findings of their voluntary national review reports and engaged in a fruitful discussion on challenges and opportunities with all relevant stakeholders. Data on migration represent a pillar of the GCM, considering the first objective commits Member States to 'collecting and utilizing accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies.' Thus, data have been at the centre of the discussions at the GCM Arab States Regional Review as well in as the national voluntary reports of Member States.

Table B.1: Arab States' main reported practices towards achieving GCM Objective 1⁶⁴

Bahrain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launched a national referral mechanism in 2018 to receive complaints from migrant workers against employers. This mechanism has played a role in informing policy in the labour market.
Egypt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established the Migration Data Analysis Unit at the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics to analyse key migration statistics with a view towards developing evidence-based migration governance. This led to a first publication "Migration Booklet" in 2019. September 2018: Presidential decree to establish a national database of expatriates to guide migration governance and track migrants abroad. September 2019: CAPMAS specialists trained on the technicalities and methodologies of designing data collection on Household International Migration Survey for Egypt, with the aim of overcoming data shortage problems on international migration nationally and regionally. The country hosted the second International Forum on Migration Statistics (IFMS) in Cairo in January 2020. The event reached up to 750+ attendees from 90 countries. The National Coordinating Committee for Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons mapped Egyptian governorates with the highest rates of irregular migration including departure and sending governorates to promote awareness and economic development in these governorates. The Government identified a need for capacity enhancement in several areas – data collection and analysis being one of the most crucial and cross-cutting ones.
Iraq	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2019: Undertook the Migration Governance Indicator Assessment in cooperation with IOM, examining various aspects of national capacity for managing migration using international reference standards in six thematic areas. Iraq is the first country in the MENA region to have completed both the National Migration Profile Exercise in 2019 – 2020 and the MGI assessment. The Government identified a lack of centralized system for migration data. Currently, migration data are not standardized in Iraq.
Jordan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government of Jordan started the process of creating a unified database of all non-Jordanians residing in Jordan. This database will be based on input and updates from all relevant entities dealing with or providing services to migrants. Analysis of the data once complete, will help decision-makers draft policies and make evidence-based decisions. The policies governing migration in Jordan aim to take into consideration all types and trends of migration, ensure implementation of national laws and enable outreach to the most vulnerable to provide protection.

⁶⁴ UN Network on Migration – Arab States (2021). [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration Voluntary National Reports](#), UN Network on Migration, Cairo. IOM RO Cairo Liaison and Policy Unit, 2021. Note: Libya abstained from adoption of the GCM but, regardless of adoption status, submitted Voluntary review reports on the GCM and has contributed to the GCM Regional review process.

Kuwait	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The General Authority for Manpower prepared databases for immigrant workers under its different specializations, registering workers in the private and oil sectors, in accordance with Law No. 109 of 2013. The Authority expanded digitalization of procedures and electronic services, producing reports based on the statistical data through the authority's electronic systems or surveys from specialized agencies such as the Information Systems Centre, Domestic Labour Administration and competent labour administrations. The Authority has engaged international organizations affiliated with the UN, such as ILO, IOM and UNDP, within the "Joint Programme in Support of the General Workforce Authority." One output of this programme is to build capacity in the preparation of evidence-based migration policies and programmes. It also offers information through official channels to migrants throughout all stages of their movement: before arrival, whilst working in Kuwait and upon return.
Lebanon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Central Administration of Statistics has recently published, in collaboration with the EU and ILO, a comprehensive survey on the workforce, living conditions of families and education rates in Lebanon.
Libya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objective 1 was revised as a basis for the development of a migration strategy for coordination between the various entities on research and evaluations for evidence-based policies. Through cooperative programmes with IOM, the relevant government bodies have displayed extensive interest in developing migrant data registration and sharing systems and are currently developing a national system focusing on these aspects. The Ministry of Labour is also considering establishing a labour market information system, which will include information related to migrant workers.
Morocco	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Kingdom of Morocco bases its assessment of the implementation of the National Strategy of Immigration and Asylum and the National Strategy for Moroccans Living Abroad on official statistics on the number of Moroccans living abroad and regular migrants in Morocco, the number of dismantled migrant smuggling and trafficking networks and migrants receiving assistance for their voluntary return to their countries of origin, as well as migration-related reports by different actors. Established the African Migration Observatory in Rabat in 2018 as the first mechanism of the African Union tasked with developing, monitoring and exchanging information among African countries to improve management of migration flows and rehabilitated and opened the National Migration Observatory for the collection of migration-related data at the national level, as well as for civil society and academia.
Qatar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The General Directorate of Passports of the Ministry of Interior is the main authority on expatriates in accordance with Law No. 21 of 2015. It thus offers a wide range of data and information on expatriates entering the State of Qatar disaggregated by name, nationality, date of birth, social status, profession, the date of entry and exit from any port in the State and purpose of entry. The Directorate also provides, in the case of entry of expatriates for work, data concerning the employment status of workers and their affiliated sectors (government, private, mixed), which enables state stakeholders to plan and formulate policies on various labour force, population and development affairs and to promote the participation of expats in making these policies, especially those working for Planning and Statistics, Permanent Population Committee, Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs.

Tunisia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Observatory for Migration, which was established in April 2014, aims to collect and categorize relevant migration statistical outputs and information from various institutions. Launched the “TUNISIA HIMS” field survey to establish a Tunisian Migration Information System that constitutes an essential mechanism for developing relevant national strategies and investigating forms of international migration and its relationship to development. In this context, a tripartite partnership agreement was signed between the National Observatory for Migration, the National Institute of Statistics, and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development, which has recently been adapted to the current COVID-19 context. Capacity-building on statistics to all workers in the field of migration, especially workers at the National Institute of Statistics and the National Observatory on Migration, as well as logistical support such as acquiring STATA for the Observatory. Established a database for the National Authority for Combating Trafficking in Persons. Ongoing creation of a working group at the National Council for Statistical Information to use statistics on labour migration to identify human resources needs in migration and develop comprehensive statistical programmes to create mechanisms to improve institutional coordination.
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IN FOCUS: A CASE APART: WORKING FEMALE MIGRANTS IN THE GULF COOPERATION COUNTRIES

The GCC countries rely on a significant migrant workforce in an array of low-skilled and high-skilled occupations especially in the private sector. Low-skilled migrants in the GCC often work as drivers, cooks and personal care services (assistance for elderly and children). These countries have the largest proportions of migrant domestic workers, comprising 83 per cent of all domestic workers in the MENA region. The demand for migrant workers in these occupations is driven by the accumulation of wealth, the unwillingness of nationals to undertake such work and the weak institutionalized care services. As a result, domestic workers in GCC countries are often women from Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Nepal, Indonesia, Kenya and Ethiopia.⁶⁵

In GCC countries and Jordan and Lebanon, migrant workers are subject to the kafala sponsorship system, which ties their legal status in the country to a particular employer.⁶⁶ If a migrant worker is fired or wishes to leave their job, they fall out of legal status and risk deportation. If they manage to evade detection by immigration authorities, they may face heightened precarity and risks of exploitation working in the informal economy.⁶⁷ Several changes and measures have been implemented to improve the conditions of migrant workers in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and reforms of the Kafala System in Gulf countries, such as Kuwait and United Arab Emirates.

Migrant domestic workers face additional vulnerabilities owing to the nature of domestic work and its location in an employer's home. Residing in an employer's home heightens a migrant domestic worker's dependence on their employer, removes any separation between work and personal life and reduces access to information and contacts outside the home.⁶⁸ This isolation and lack of boundaries increases the risk of abuse, exploitation and gender-based violence. Additionally, the devaluation of domestic work contributes to its low wages, while the loosely defined nature of the work can cause a domestic worker's list of tasks to expand far beyond the stipulated agreement, thus increasing the potential for exploitation. For example, a domestic worker initially hired to clean the house may subsequently be tasked with running errands, caring for children and animals and cooking meals.

However, domestic worker programs still do not recognize variations in the level and specialization that make up the domestic work sector. These programs typically only address the technical/vocational dimension of domestic work, such as learning how to operate household appliances and using detergents. Domestic work is largely relational. ILO research shows that transversal skills (communication, organizational capacity, predisposition towards work) are more in demand by employers than vocational skills. Programs are not linked to effective labour matching in countries of origin and destination; this skills mismatch leads to “care drain” in countries of origin and to “deskilling” in countries of destination. Both reduce the development potential of migrants and that of their countries of

⁶⁵ UN Network on Migration – Arab States (2021). [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration Voluntary National Reports](#). UN Network on Migration, Cairo. IOM RO Cairo Liaison and Policy Unit, 2021. Note: Libya abstained from adoption of the GCM but, regardless of adoption status, submitted Voluntary review reports on the GCM and has contributed to the GCM Regional review process.

⁶⁶ Aoun, Rana (2020). [COVID-19 Impact on Female Migrant Domestic Workers in the Middle East](#). Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Geneva.

⁶⁷ Aoun, Rana (2020). [COVID-19 Impact on Female Migrant Domestic Workers in the Middle East](#). Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Geneva.

⁶⁸ Aoun, Rana (2020). [COVID-19 Impact on Female Migrant Domestic Workers in the Middle East](#). Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Geneva.

⁶⁹ Amnesty International (2020). [COVID-19 makes Gulf countries' abuse of migrant workers impossible to ignore](#). Amnesty International, 30 April 2020.

⁷⁰ Aoun, Rana (2020). [COVID-19 Impact on Female Migrant Domestic Workers in the Middle East](#). Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Geneva.

⁷¹ Tayah, Marie-Jose (2021). [Skills Development and Recognition for Domestic Workers Across Borders](#). International Labour Organization, Geneva.

→ origin and destination. Unless the importance of these affective, relational and non-vocational skills is acknowledged and taken into consideration by career development programmes, they will continue to constitute a deadweight loss in any valuation of domestic work.⁷²

As a result of these structural power imbalances between migrant workers and employers, multiple forms of trafficking of women and girls have been recorded in the GCC region. Some female migrant domestic workers (referred to as “expatriate workers” or “foreign workers” in Gulf countries) who are subject to human trafficking may be forced to work excessive hours under inhumane conditions while their passports and wages are withheld. In some cases, victims are also subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated risks of trafficking for migrant women as the economic consequences of mobility restrictions worsen their financial position, causing them to rely on migration as a coping mechanism. Mobility restrictions also force them to pursue more dangerous pathways into destination countries.⁷³ Economics and human trafficking are deeply intertwined, as the level of economic development in the country of origin and income inequality between the host country and country of origin are important predictors of trafficking. Moreover, diversion of resources towards combatting the pandemic, in combination with mobility restrictions, may reduce access to educational and support services related to trafficking and forms of protection like asylum.⁷⁴ Finally, as law enforcement officials are frequently tasked with ensuring compliance with COVID-19-related

measures, they have less capacity to investigate and prosecute trafficking networks.⁷⁵

For migrant domestic workers in particular, the pandemic heightens pre-existing risks related to trafficking, exploitation, abuse and gender-based violence. Mobility restrictions have raised the caregiving burden on women and domestic workers, as lockdowns cause schools and places of employment to close and increase the number of hours spent at home.⁷⁶ Owing to the intimate and personal nature of care and domestic work, domestic workers may also be more likely to contract COVID-19.⁷⁷ Having COVID-19, in turn, may cause domestic workers to be kicked out of the home and lose their job, in addition to the negative consequences of the disease itself.⁷⁸ Even if a domestic worker does not test positive, the employer may still fire them abruptly, due to fears over transmission or the economic consequences of the pandemic.⁷⁹ In turn, the loss of employment for domestic workers means the loss of legal status and frequently housing, thereby heightening the domestic workers’ precarity and increasing their risks of trafficking.⁸⁰ In other instances, employers may lower wages or currency devaluation related to the pandemic may reduce their purchasing power.⁸¹ The pandemic has also exacerbated the risk of violence in the home, as domestic workers remain confined with their employers under conditions of heightened stress. It is important to note, however, that GCC countries have taken some measures to assist and protect female migrant workers by facilitating access to health, vaccinations, humanitarian assistance and returns to country of origin, among other things.

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IDP camp in Sulaimaniyah. © IOM 2020/Muse Mohammed

