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General Overview of Migration into, through and from Syria

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Recent Developments**
Demographic and Economical Module



CARIM
Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration

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CARIM-AS 2010/41**

**General Overview of Migration
into, through and from Syria**

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The entire set of papers on Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Migration: Recent Developments are available at <http://www.carim.org/ql/MigrationDevelopments>.

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Within this framework, CARIM aims, in an academic perspective, to observe, analyse, and forecast migration in Southern & Eastern Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Countries (hereafter Region).

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Abstract

This paper provides a general overview of Syrian migration. Migration in Syria has been particularly affected by the economic and socio-political environment in the region. Figures for Syrian emigrants vary widely because of the lack of available data and because too of the different methodologies employed in measurement; they range from between about one million and fifteen million. Arab countries are the main destination for Syrian emigrants, especially for those who engage in circular migration. Remittances sent by emigrants to their families seem to play a growing role in the Syrian economy: their contribution to GDP increased from less than 1% in 2000 to about 5% in 2009. The number of immigrants in Syria can be more accurately gauged than the number of emigrants given that more than 90% of these are refugees who are monitored and tracked by the government and international organizations. The number of refugees in Syria was estimated at around 1.4 million in 2009; the majority were Iraqis followed by Palestinians with a small minority from other nationalities. About 10% of Iraqi refugees were subject to resettlement in third countries. The remaining immigrants are workers who could be divided into two groups; the first including highly-skilled employees, while the second and larger group is made up of domestic workers coming from southeast Asian countries. Laws and regulations that are related to migration in Syria focus on organizing and controlling immigrants' inflow and encouraging emigrants to invest in the country.

Résumé

Cet article livre un panorama général du phénomène migratoire en Syrie encore récemment encouragé par les conditions éco-socio-politiques enlisant l'ensemble de la région. Il reste que, toutefois, de grands écarts de mesure de l'émigration syrienne se creusent – tenant à la fois au peu de données disponibles, et à des méthodes de recensement différentes : cette estimation repose, en effet, sur un écart allant de un à quinze millions d'émigrés. Les pays arabes représentent la principale destination de l'émigration syrienne, en particulier s'agissant des candidats investis dans un parcours migratoire circulaire. En outre, la contribution croissante des envois de fond – transférés par les émigrés à leurs familles – dans l'économie syrienne est forte à souligner, avec une proportion dans le PNB s'élevant de moins de 1% en 2000 à environ 5% en 2009. S'agissant de l'immigration en Syrie, le nombre d'immigrés enregistré sur le territoire est plus aisément recensable par comparaison avec le nombre d'émigrants, dans la mesure essentielle où plus de 90% des immigrés sont à la fois couverts par le statut de réfugiés, et recensés et suivis comme tels par le gouvernement et les organisations internationales. Il en ressort que le nombre de réfugiés en Syrie a été estimé, au titre de l'année 2009, à hauteur de 1.4 millions d'individus ; la majorité est constituée d'Irakiens, suivie par des Palestiniens et par une minorité plus restreinte constituée de diverses nationalités. Néanmoins, près de 10% des réfugiés irakiens ont été sujet à une réinstallation dans des pays tiers. Le segment restant de la population immigrée est constitué de travailleurs, classe subdivisée en deux catégories : la première catégorie compte parmi ses rangs des employés hautement qualifiés, alors que la seconde – plus largement constituée – comprend essentiellement des travailleurs domestiques issus des pays de l'Asie du Sud-est. Les lois et règlements portant sur la migration tels qu'en vigueur en Syrie mettent surtout l'accent sur l'organisation et le contrôle des flux d'immigration, et la promotion des investissements versés dans le pays par les émigrés.

Introduction

In the last century, the Middle East has witnessed a number of major migration waves due to economic fluctuations and wars. Syria is no different from other countries in the region and, indeed, is one of the countries that has most migration activity as it hosts hundreds of thousands of immigrants and has sent millions of emigrants abroad.

Economic factors have been one of the principal factors driving Syrian emigrants into looking for better opportunities abroad. Although migration is ongoing, historically, Syria has witnessed several waves of emigration. Due to these waves, Syria has suffered from a substantial brain drain as Syria's skilled workers and highly-educated youth have been leaving the country seeking higher education and better living conditions outside the country. On the other hand, Syrian remittances come in at about 5% of GDP which may have a great impact on the national economy, yet remittances depend ultimately on the global economic situation and other regional geopolitical and socio-political factors.

In addition, Syria has been the destination for many immigration waves in a region which has witnessed more than its share of wars and that has been a sanctuary for many Arab refugees, particularly Iraqi and Palestinian refugees: indeed, according to the World Bank, Syria is among the top 10 immigration countries in the world. Considering the estimated size of this migrant population, managing migration could contribute to the development of the country; likewise, mismanagement could lead to negative impact on macro-economic conditions and social structure. Thus, there is an urgent need for further studies on Syrian migration, though this is made more difficult by the lack of accurate data.

This paper offers an initial preparatory phase before giving a more comprehensive analysis of migration in Syria. It begins with a brief introduction to migration in the Syrian context, the second section provides a summary of the main Syrian emigrants' categories, the third section presents an overview of the immigrant structure in Syria, and the fourth section highlights laws and regulations affecting migration with the general conclusion following on.

The study uses figures from local institutions responsible and concerned with migration issues in Syria. Additionally, the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) is often cited especially for figures related to population size and the Syrian economy. Other sources include the UN, the IOM, the World Bank, CARIM, and an important study carried out by Jamal Barrout (2008) on 'Migration in Syria', written in cooperation with the IOM office in Syria.

I. Migration in the Syrian Context

The total population living in Syria was estimated, in mid 2009, at 20.1 million with an annual growth rate of 2.4%, having dropped from 3.4% in the 1980s and early 1990s. About 60% of this population is aged 24 years or younger, thereby placing additional pressure on the government in terms of providing high-quality educational services and additional job opportunities for meeting increasing numbers of new entrants into the job market. However, and despite the 5% average annual growth rate for the Syrian economy between 2001 and 2009, the number of employed individuals remained almost the same over this period. In other words, a small number of additional job opportunities were created, which might be one of the factors pushing Syrians, particularly younger Syrians, into searching for jobs abroad.

On the other hand, Syria's recent transition to a social-market economy in 2005 and the accompanying economic and legal reforms have been attracting more foreign and local investment, thereby increasing the demand for foreign experts, especially in newly-opened sectors such as telecommunications, banking and insurance. Moreover, changes in consumption patterns, together with the adjusted regulations, have brought about new habits in Syrian families such as employment

for domestic workers from Southeast Asia, currently estimated at 75,000-100,000 employees.¹ Such developments have dramatically increased the number of foreign workers in Syria.

The socio-political environment in Syria has also played a major role in determining the size and the timing of migration waves from, through, and into the country. In terms of migration from Syria, there were three main waves; the first one occurred in the mid nineteenth-century due to the poor living conditions and obligatory military service that was enforced in the Ottoman Empire at the time. The main destinations were the US, South America, Europe, and Australia. The second wave occurred between 1958 and 1970 in which time large numbers of Syrian entrepreneurs, capitalists and professionals migrated with their families, mainly to Lebanon, the Gulf countries and Europe, in order to avoid the rigid regulations issued by the socialist regime at home and to benefit from the flourishing job market opportunities in the countries of destination. The third wave began in the 1990s, when thousands of Syrians engaged in temporary migration to Lebanon for work, and it slowed down significantly in 2005 following the assassination of the then Lebanese Prime minister Hariri and the ensuing political instability.

In terms of immigration, the majority of foreign nationals consists of refugees from other Arab countries who were compelled to leave following wars and major political conflicts. A first major wave of immigration into Syria occurred in 1948, after the Arab-Israeli war, when tens of thousands of Palestinians resettled in Syria after they were forced by the Israelis to leave their home country. Following the 1967 war, Syria received thousands of refugees from the territories occupied by Israel. More recently, and following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, more than one million Iraqis entered Syria to live or to be resettled in other countries (Barrou, 2008).

II. Emigration from Syria

The International Organization for Migration defines migrants as individuals who cross international borders in order to change his/her country of usual residence for a period of at least three months.² In Syria, there are two main categories of migrants: a) 'Emigrants' who left the country with no intention of coming back in the foreseeable future and b) 'Circular Migrants' including individuals who left Syria, mostly for work, and who return after a relatively short period. Both migrant categories are considered a source of national income for Syria given the remittances that they send back, remittances which seem to play a growing role in the national economy.

A. Emigrants

In 2010, the Syrian Ministry of Expatriates estimated the Syrian Diaspora abroad to be close to 15 million. However, this estimate is neither precise nor definite. Barrou estimates the size of the Syrian Diaspora since the middle of nineteenth century at 9.8 million. He estimates the number of emigrants, along with their relatives, who left Syria before 1922 to be around 500,000 and with 2.5% annual increase, this number adds up to 4,180,444 by 2007. The number of emigrants between 1922 and 2007 is estimated at 4,208,138 based on the present population size for Syria multiplied by the estimated annual migration rate and emigrant growth rate in the countries of destination. Together these estimates equal about 9.8 million.

A World Bank study in 2010 estimates that emigrant stock is 4.2% of the total population; which means that the total number of emigrants is less than a million (944.6 thousands) (World Bank, 2010).

The countries of destination differ according to migration period, for instance, in the 1960s and 1970s, the Gulf Countries in addition to Libya, Lebanon, and some African countries were among the

¹ According to private manpower agencies working in Syria

² This period ranges from three months to three years according to the legislation and practices of each country.

top countries of choice for emigration. Whereas the beginning of the twentieth century witnessed huge migration waves headed for the US, South America, and Europe, more recently, Syrians attempt to migrate to the Gulf Countries, Lebanon, Canada, the US, Australia, and Europe. Data from the World Bank and CARIM suggests that about 75% of the Syrian emigrants move to Arab countries.

Data from destination countries statistics (as collected by OECD in years around 2000) shows that Syrian emigrants aged 15 years and above are almost equally divided between three levels of education; namely secondary level and below (33%), secondary and vocational level (32%), and university level (30%). The same data shows that the labor force participation rate among Syrian emigrants aged 15 years and above was about 55% and that the unemployment rate was around 10%.

The only official data on migration that Syria has is based on the net annual movement of Syrians to and from the country. This data does not accurately reflect migration rates as it does not take the international definition of a migrant into account, nor does it take into account individuals who leave Syria at the end of the year and who return early in the following year. The contradictory estimates for the size of the Syrian population abroad, in addition to the lack of information about their socio-economic characteristics, highlights the need for updated, credible and official data, data that is based on clear and scientific methodologies.

B. Circular Migrants

Circular migration refers to the movement of people between two countries, mainly for work, when that work eventually brings them back to their home country. Typically it occurs on a temporary or seasonal basis as a reaction to an increase in demand for labor in the receiving countries, and a high labor supply in the sending countries.

In this context, Syria is considered as a sending country for circular migration, where thousands of Syrian workers migrate temporarily to neighboring countries, especially to Lebanon. The circular migration of workers from Syria to Lebanon has been taking place for many years; yet, it flourished during the post-war period (1990-2005) following the abolition of visa procedures between the two countries that eased transit between them, in addition to the fact that non-institutionalized migration provided workers with a lot of flexibility in terms of working places and types of employment.

There are no accurate figures for Syrian workers in Lebanon, but, estimates range from between 300,000 and 500,000 during the post-war period, and this is 10-15% of the overall Syrian labor force (Infopro, 2008). According to a 2008 piece of research by Beirut-based website named InfoPro, over 75% of Syrians in Lebanon work in the construction sector, 15% are cleaners, and 10% are itinerant sellers. However, the migrant situation largely depends on the political conditions and the relations between the two countries. For instance, after Hariri's assassination and the withdrawal of Syrian troops in 2005 this number decreased drastically. Moreover, the Lebanese Ministry of Labor attempted to institutionalize circular migration between Syria and Lebanon, but no decrees or regulations have yet been issued.

C. Remittances

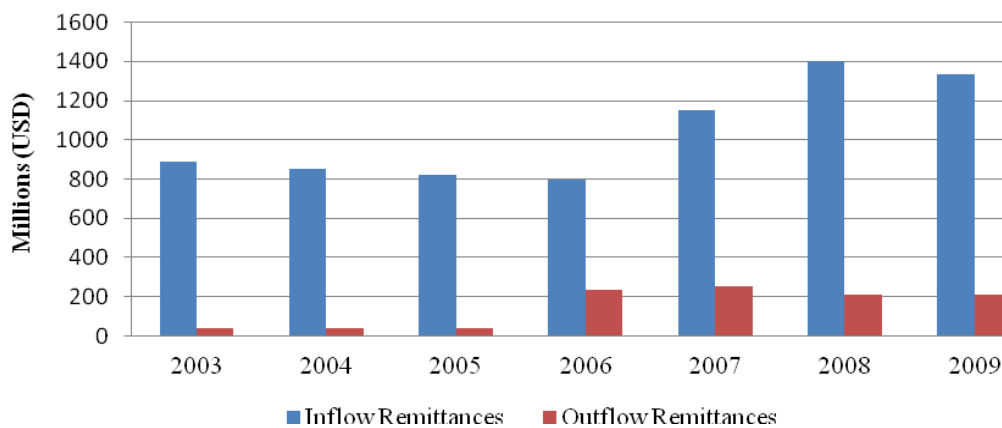
Remittances are classified as current private transfers from migrant workers resident in the host country for more than a year, irrespective of their immigration status, to recipients in their country of origin. Remittances sent to Syria tend to be of small and irregular quantities and they are spent mostly either on living essentials or they are saved.

Figure 1 shows that inflow remittances are much higher than outflow remittances. However, the latter increased notably in 2006 probably due to the foreign investment and the increasing number of working immigrants in Syria. According to Barrou (2008), the sudden rise in inflow remittances to the country in the years after 2005 may have been caused by the migration of Syrian capital from

Lebanon to Syria due to turbulent relations with Lebanon and growing investments on the part of emigrants in Syria, especially after private banks reached a certain level of maturity and professionalism. It is also noticeable from the chart that there is a growing trend in inflow remittances 2006-2008; yet, inflow remittances decreased in 2009 and this may have been caused by the global financial crisis.

Remittances coming from Syrian emigrants residing in GCC countries (especially Saudi Arabia) are considered to form the biggest share of overall remittances. The amount of remittances sent to Syria from Arab countries in 2010 was 555.8 million USD which is about 40% of overall inflow remittances. In addition to regular channels, Syrians transfer remittances through irregular money transfer channels (i.e. outside the banking and money transfer system) as the value of irregular inflow remittances for the years 2000-2006 was between 512 and 769 million USD according to the Central Bank of Syria records.

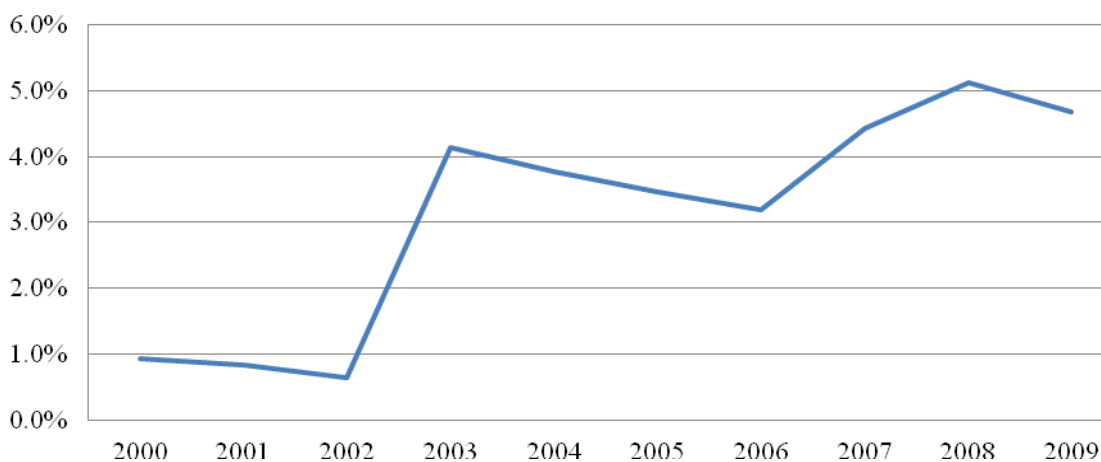
Figure 1: Inflow and Outflow Remittances (2003 - 2009)



Source: World Development Indicators, World DataBank

Figure 2 shows that the remittances as a percentage of GDP (constant price 2000) in 2009 was 4.7% up from less than 1% in 2000. The highest percentage came in 2008 where it reached 5.1% of the GDP. The sharp increase in 2003 could be due to one of two factors; the first is the entry of private banks, thus, regular transfers are facilitated, the second, the improvement in recording systems at the Central Bank.

Figure 2: Remittances as a Percentage of GDP (2000 - 2009)



Source: World Development Indicators, World dataBank

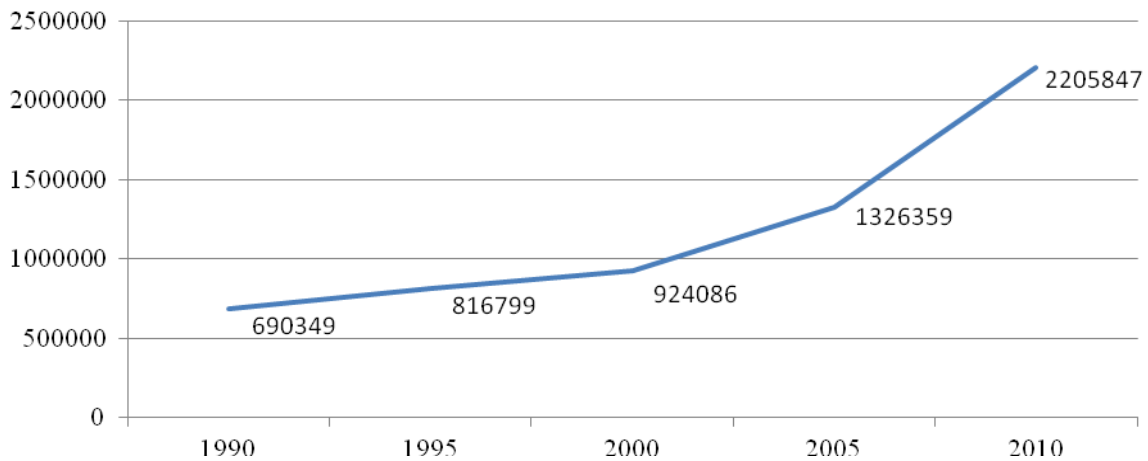
In terms of remittance share *per capita* in USD, this increased from 11 in 2000 to 63 in 2010 which reflects the growing importance of remittances for Syrians. However, remittances cannot be considered as a steady source of income in Syria since their volume is so dependent on the global economic situation and other regional geopolitical and socio-political factors.

III. Immigration to Syria

Although Syria may be considered to be predominantly a sending country of migrants, continuous changes in the socio-political environment in the Middle East in addition to its pan-Arab policies have made it one of the main receiving countries of immigrants in the region. These immigrants can be categorized in three main groups, the first one, which forms more than 90% of the immigrants in Syria, are ‘refugees’ who have been forced to leave their countries, the second are ‘workers’ who migrate seeking job opportunities in Syria; finally, the third group are ‘transit migrants’ who enter Syria for a short time to be resettled in other countries either legally or illegally.

In 2009, a study conducted by the Syrian Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) estimated the number of immigrants in Syria between 1990 and 2005, including a projection for 2010:

Figure 3: Immigrants Stock (1990-2010)



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2009. *Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2008 Revision*

The above figure shows that the average annual growth rate of immigrant stock increased from 3.4% between 1990 and 2000 to 13.9% between 2001 and 2010 with an average for the whole period of about 11%. The sharp increase in the last ten years is mainly due to Iraqi refugees; however, the estimated number in 2010 is not in line with UNHCR’s much lower estimate.

A. Refugees

Syria adopts the international definition of a refugee recognized by the 1951 UN Convention/1967 Protocol, and the 1969 OAU Convention. In total, the number of refugees reached about 1.232 million refugees in early 2010, with an additional 300,000 considered as stateless persons. By country of origin, the refugees in Syria are:

- Palestinians:** Most Palestinian refugees fled from different parts of Palestine to Syria in 1948, after the Israeli occupation. Additional refugees arrived after the 1967 war; and the number increased in 1970 as a result of the military campaign in Jordan at that time. Another wave of Palestinian refugees entered Syria after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Official UNRWA figures show that 472,000 registered refugees were based in Syria at the end of

2009. Palestinian refugees can move freely in all parts of Syria holding a Travel Document that is valid for six years, like Syrian passports, and that, according to Art. 20 of Law 1311, enables its holder to return to Syria without a visa. According to Syrian law, Palestinians do not require work permits and may be employed in the government. They do not have the right to own farm land, and each individual is permitted to own only one house.

- *Iraqis:* Since 2003, and after the US invasion of Iraq, Syria has been a primary destination for Iraqi refugees as Syrian regulations do not require them to obtain an entrance visa. The majority of these refugees (about 60%) entered the country between 2005 and 2007, and they reached their peak in 2007 at about 1.2 million individuals.³ According to UNHCR official figures, this number decreased to about 750,000 refugees in 2010, of which only 167,000 were assisted by UNHCR. At the end of 2011, the total number of refugees was expected to be about 260,000 *if* the socio-political and economic environment in Iraq improves continuously. Up until 2007, Iraqis were permitted to enter Syria without a visa. However, in October 2007 the Syrian Government legislated that any Iraqi wishing to enter the country was required to obtain a visa from the Syrian Embassy in Baghdad. Thus, Iraqis without visas are no longer permitted. As refugees, Iraqis in Syria are not permitted to work or open their own businesses; they are fully dependent on external financial support, including their savings, remittances and humanitarian assistance, while their savings continue to run out and the cost of living in Syria rises. This situation is forcing an increasing number of refugees to seek employment in the informal sector including illegal jobs.
- *Others:* According to the UNHCR statistics, in 2010 Syria hosted about 10,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from countries other than Palestine and Iraq. They came to Syria mainly from Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Somalia and Sudan. Moreover, Syria has about 300,000 stateless Kurds who have been living without Syrian citizenship, and thus without fundamental civil rights, since 1962.⁴

B. Workers

Following the transition to a social-market economy and given the changes that occurred in the pattern of consumption among some Syrian families, numbers of foreign workers have increased notably in the last 10 years. These workers can be categorized as follows:

- *Highly-skilled employees:* This category emerged to fill the gap between job market's demand for highly-skilled workers in emerging fields and the relatively weak local supply in several sectors such as banking, insurance, and investment. Tracking and recording the number of these immigrant employees began in 2010 when the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MOSAL) issued labor law No. 17 in which foreign employees were required to undergo registration and had to meet several conditions if they wished to work in Syria. Such conditions demanded that these employees should have specific expertise that is not available among Syrians, and they are also required to train Syrian workers to obtain the necessary experience in a relatively short period of time. Official statistics issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MOSAL) stated that, in June 2010, the total number of registered foreign employees was 995; yet, there are large numbers of unregistered employees who are employed in different sectors and who have been residing in Syria for more than one year. It is worth mentioning that there is some anecdotal evidence that points to the presence of high-tech experts, particularly from Russia, who had been residing in Syria with their families for a

³ Several Syrian officials mentioned that the number of Iraqi refugees ranges from 1-1.5 millions. The Ministry of Interior stated that this number is close to 1.2 million refugees.

⁴ This group is mentioned in this study as immigrants since they live in Syria without having Syrian nationality. However, a lot of studies consider this group as Syrians with fewer civil rights.

relatively long period. There is no official figures regarding their number, but several press reports estimated it between 5,000 and 7,500 individuals.

- *Domestic workers:* In 2001, the employment of foreign nationals as domestic workers by Syrians was legalized, since then; the demand for and migration of these workers to Syria has increased notably. In 2010, and according to Syrian manpower agencies, there are about 75,000 to 100,000 foreign domestic workers in Syria mainly from Indonesia, the Philippines, and Ethiopia. In 2006, the manpower agencies that import foreign domestic workers were legalized and organized through decree No. 81 that is applied by MOSAL, and that includes the conditions under which these agencies should function.

C. Transit migrants

These migrants reside in Syria on a temporary basis with the intention of migrating to a country other than their country of origin. In this context, Syria has two relevant groups; first, individuals who enter Syria irregularly and attempt or are forced to relocate to another country (this includes human trafficking). Second, refugees, Iraqis in particular, who require to be resettled in the EU, the US, or Canada.

The Immigration Directorate of the Ministry of Interior in Syria estimates that irregular migration since the war in Iraq has become difficult to manage and measure. The official figure for irregular migrants, before 2004, announced by the Syrian authorities stood at 261 individuals in 2003. There are no figures or official statistics regarding the number of victims of human trafficking in Syria, yet, the authority issued counter-trafficking legislation in January 2010 as Legislative Decree Number 3 for 2010.

In terms of refugees who require resettlement, UNHCR referred some 33,000 Iraqis for resettlement from 2007 to mid-2009; another 32,000 persons who have not yet been referred are considered eligible for this durable solution.

IV. Regulatory Framework

The Syrian government regards Syria's immigration levels as satisfactory and its policy is to maintain these immigration levels. As for emigration levels, the Syrian government considers them to be too high and its policy is to lower these levels. There are several institutions that are concerned with migration regulations in the country such as the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor and the Ministry of Expatriates.

A. National Laws and Regulations

Law No.17 issued in 2010 regulated the work of Syrian emigrants allowing the establishment of employment offices or agencies with the responsibility for administering the relations between Syrian workers interested in working outside Syria and businesses asking for Syrian workers (article /23/ of Law No.17). According to article /23/, these employment agencies or offices are required to send monthly reports to the general employment office MOSAL.

The same Law /17/ also regulated the work of immigrants in Syria (article /27/). The law assures that all non-Syrian workers in Syria should obtain a work permit/authorization. It also demands that these workers should be treated equally, i.e. just like the Syrian workers (article/28/).

Law /2040/ issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor in 2005 defined the principles and requirements for the employment of immigrants (the employment of foreign nationals) in Syria. Article /20/ of this law clearly states that the percentage of non-Syrian workers in businesses should not exceed 10%. This article was later modified by the Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and reduced to 3% as the maximum percentage of non-Syrian workers in financial and banking sector

businesses. Moreover, law /81/ issued by the Syrian Prime Minister in 2006 regulated the profession of offices/agencies that bring foreign female workers to work as housekeepers in Syria.

In 2010, the Syrian president issued a new law /3/ concerned with preventing human trafficking crimes (article /2/) especially crimes against women and children. This law advocated the creation of a special department in the Ministry of Interior with the purpose of combating human trafficking crimes. Moreover, it advocated the creation of special centers for the assistance of the victims of human-trafficking crimes.

Additionally, there are several regulations, decrees, and agreements that attempt to systemize migration in Syria. These include bilateral agreements with several countries to organize Syrian workers abroad, adjusting the entry conditions for refugees to manage the number of immigrants, facilitating procedures for expatriates to invest and work in Syria and increasing the flexibility in completing obligatory military services.

B. International Migration Conventions

The table below shows the migration conventions/protocols that were ratified by Syria and those that were not ratified:

Table 1. Migration conventions and protocols ratified and not ratified by Syria

Conventions and Protocols	Issued in:	Ratified by Syria in:	Not ratified by Syria
ILO Convention concerning Migration for Employment (revised) (No.97)	1949	---	√
Convention relating to the Status of Refugees	1951	---	√
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	1966	1969	---
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	1966	1969	---
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	1966	1969	---
Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees	1967	---	√
ILO Convention concerning Migration in Abusive Conditions and the Promotion of Equality of Migrant Workers (No.143)	1975	---	√
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	1979	2003	---
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	1984	2004	---
Convention on the Rights of the Child	1989	1993	---
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families	1990	2005	---
Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children,	2000	2000	---
Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air	2000	---	√

Source: Human Development Report, 2009 and International Migration Report, 2006

To this date Syria has not ratified the convention on the status of refugees, probably because its policy does not consider those Palestinians who immigrated to Syria as refugees and because it continues to support their right to return to their occupied land 'Palestine'.

Conclusion

This paper presents a brief overview of migration in Syria in terms of both inflow and outflow of migrants. Available figures on the total number of emigrants were found to vary widely, thus, obtaining data based on a unified and clear methodology is a necessity for accurate estimates for the number of emigrants into and out of Syrian. The current data indicates that the main destinations for Syrian emigrants are Arab Gulf countries followed by Canada, the US, and Europe, whereas South America was among the top destinations for the first wave of emigrants in the mid nineteenth century. These emigrants have different educational backgrounds; yet, the highly-skilled ones have tended to migrate to the more developed countries, and migrants with low skills usually migrate to work in Arab countries particularly in Lebanon, which is considered the first destination for Syrian circular migrants.

The study also finds that the estimated number of immigrants is high, which may place a burden on Syria's resources and economy particularly as Syria suffers from a weak job market and relatively poor infrastructure. The majority of these immigrants are refugees from Palestine and Iraq. Palestinian refugees are virtually treated by the existing laws and regulations as Syrians; however, Iraqis are not permitted to work or to start their own business and this pushes many of them to find employment in the informal sector or to practice illegal jobs such as prostitution. Domestic workers are another source of immigration in Syria, and recently, their jobs have been organized by several decrees and regulations. This will assure an additional income for the government through taxes and fees collected from the Syrian families who hire these workers. Yet, the social impact of this phenomenon, which is relatively new in Syria, needs in-depth studies.

Laws and regulations related to migration have reduced the large number of immigrants entering Syria, and has legalized their activities inside the country. But, they have not attracted the expected levels of investment in Syria from the Syrian Diaspora abroad. This may point to the need for further or more comprehensive economic, institutional and regulatory reform.

Finally, further research needs to be conducted in order to overcome the issue of the poor data related to migration in Syria so as to analyze the impact of migration on the national economy and the social structure of Syrian society.

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