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CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes 2010/12

Highly-Skilled Migration Series
Socio-Political Module



CARIM
Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration

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Socio-Political Module

CARIM-AS 2010/12

**Highly-skilled migration from Jordan:
a response to socio-political challenges**

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This publication is part of a series of papers on Highly-Skilled Migration written in the framework of the CARIM project and presented at a meeting organised in Florence: ‘Highly-Skilled Migration into, through and from Southern and Eastern Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Africa’ (30 November – 1 December 2009).

These papers will be discussed in two other meetings between Policy Makers and Experts on the same topic in early spring 2010. The results of these discussions will also be published.

The entire set of papers on Highly-Skilled Migration are available at <http://www.carim.org/HighlySkilledMigration>.

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[Full name of the author(s)], [title], CARIM AS [series number], Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, San Domenico di Fiesole (FI): European University Institute, [year of publication].

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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

600, 000 to 670,000 Jordanians are estimated to be employed abroad today, some half a million in the Gulf countries alone. Most of them are believed to be highly-skilled. On rare occasions, concern for this 'brain drain' is expressed. However, throughout its history, Jordan has always practised an 'open-door policy' towards the emigration of its citizens, officially to alleviate unemployment. After briefly retracing the dynamics of highly-skilled emigration, this report highlights the views expressed and policies implemented on the issue, before adding some socio-political explanations to the continuous disregard for the topic in official discourses, which contrasts, however, with recent policy-moves towards encouraging the expatriation of the highly-skilled. Among the 'push' factors for the highly skilled is the resilience of clientelism in society and the patterns of adjustment to free trade, the latter partly explaining the stagnation of salaries and standards of living. The open-door policy to emigration, recently reinforced by an increase in opportunities offered outside the Kingdom for skilled Jordanians, also responds to a range of socio-political challenges. For instance, it compensates lagging income (opportunities for higher salaries and stimulation of private revenues through workers' remittances). Expatriation of the highly skilled also ensures control over potential political opposition and, particularly, the reproduction of the elites.

Résumé

De 600 à 670 000 Jordaniens seraient employés à l'étranger, dont environ un-demi million dans les pays du Golfe; ils seraient en majorité hautement qualifiés. A de rares occasions, des voix s'élèvent contre cette "fuite des cerveaux". Au cours de son histoire pourtant, la Jordanie a toujours pratiqué la "politique de la porte ouverte" à l'égard de ses citoyens, officiellement afin de lutter contre le chômage. Après avoir brièvement retracé les dynamiques de l'émigration des travailleurs hautement qualifiés, ce rapport met en lumière les opinions et les politiques menées à l'égard de cette question. On envisage ensuite quelques explications de nature sociopolitique au relatif silence des politiques officielles jordaniennes sur le sujet, qui contraste avec une intensification récente des politiques encourageant l'expatriation des plus qualifiés. Le clientélisme et les modalités de l'ajustement vers l'économie de marché comptent parmi les principaux facteurs de "répulsion" à l'égard des travailleurs hautement qualifiés, ce dernier expliquant la stagnation des salaires et du niveau de vie dans le royaume. La politique de la "porte ouverte" répond aussi à certains impératifs sociopolitiques : l'expatriation contribue à compenser la stagnation des salaires en offrant l'opportunité de revenus plus élevés à l'étranger et augmente les revenus des familles par les remises privées des travailleurs. L'encouragement à l'expatriation des plus qualifiés est aussi une stratégie d'"évacuation" de la contestation politique mais, surtout, de reproduction des élites.

Introduction

According to a recent report by the Gulf-based recruiting agency TalentRepublic, around 70,000 Arab university graduates emigrate annually to search for jobs overseas, while about 54% of Arab students studying abroad do not come back to their home country to seek job opportunities. Moreover, about 100,000 scientists, doctors and engineers leave Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Tunis, Morocco and Algeria annually. 70% of scientists do not return home, while about 50% of doctors, 23% of engineers and 15% of scientists move to Europe, the United States and Canada¹.

Indeed, the officially acknowledged number of Jordanian expatriates today is between 600,000 and 670,000², which remains a guesstimate because Jordan does not keep a record of its expatriates, their profiles and destination³. Some estimates put Jordanian migrant labourers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries alone, their main destination, at between 165,000 and half a million in the mid years of the present decade (respectively MoL, 2009: 56 and Oxford Business Group, 2005: 33) if not more. These migrants are found in various sectors including media, engineering, the financial and banking sector, teaching and research, the Army, intelligence services, etc. This suggests that a high level of professional skills is, in many cases, an asset or even, a prerequisite for migration, which is confirmed by bilateral negotiations for the hiring of Jordanian workers in the Gulf⁴. Also, numerous Jordanian students undertake undergraduate and post-graduate courses abroad⁵. By contrast, Jordan imports low- and semi-skilled manpower.⁶

Indeed, Jordan throughout its history has always practised an ‘open-door policy’ towards the emigration of its citizens, officially for the alleviation of unemployment. However, an effective ‘drain’ on highly-skilled, employed professionals is indeed underway, as witnessed for example in a recent

¹ "Reforms in regional education system key to addressing evolving job market requirements- TalentRepublic.net report - Governments urged to provide more information on occupational opportunities and create awareness about realities of the job market", September 27th, 2009, <http://www.talentrepublic.net/NewsDetails.aspx?ID=1>; "Government initiatives needed to lure Arab talent back home – report. Talent-exporting Arab countries lose USD1.57 billion annually from brain drain; 54% of Arab students studying abroad do not return to their home countries", September 17, 2009 <http://www.talentrepublic.net/NewsDetails.aspx?ID=2>

² Interview, Department of Statistics, Amman, later published in Ghazal, M. "Around 0.6m Jordanians work abroad", *Jordan Times*, 14/01/2008.

³ The 2004 census does not allow for the drawing of a clear picture of Jordanian migrants abroad, as data is collected from household members remaining in Jordan, and only takes into account migrants away from home for less than one year, either for work purposes or accompanying other migrants. Instead, other groups including migrant students, people treated in hospitals abroad and members of the Jordanian contingent in the UN forces are counted whatever their duration of stay abroad (HKJ / DoS, main results, *Population and Housing Census 2004*, vol. 4., 2006, p.18).

⁴ For example the 2009 bilateral negotiations with the economically-booming Emirate of Qatar, which were aiming at recruiting ‘trained and skilled workers, especially in the construction field’. Petra News Agency. "Shbeikat discusses with Qatari envoy means to recruit Jordanian workers", *Jordan Times*, 19/03/09.

⁵ In 2004-2005 for instance, there were 16,974 students abroad according to the Ministry of Higher Education. However, this figure does not include the students studying abroad without Jordanian institutional support. The Jordanian Ministry of Higher Education advertises a wealth of opportunities for studying abroad, as can be seen on its website <http://www.mohe.gov.jo>

⁶ Indeed, the latest available data for 2008 shows that highly-skilled immigrants made up only 0.2% of the total legal manpower registered in the country (proportion of legal migrants – i.e. those holding a work permit delivered by the Ministry of Labour – with post-graduate degree). 87% of these highly skilled legal workers are men and 67% are Iraqi nationals. Less than 1% of these receive an upper bracket income (a monthly salary of more than 500 Jordanian Dinars) Ministry of Labour. *Annual Report for the Year 2008*, Amman: Policy and Strategic Planning Unit, MoL, n.d.

In the academic year 2008/2009, Jordan hosted 27,871 university students from abroad, roughly 12% of the overall student population educated in the Kingdom (Statistics of the Ministry of Higher Education, available at <http://www.mohe.gov.jo>).

survey that stated 17% of public university teachers in the Kingdom had left their jobs during the year 2007-2008⁷. Such a movement does not necessarily reflect negatively on the economy of the country. This conclusion is reached for instance in Nadim Zaqqa's study, the only one available to date on skilled emigration from Jordan (Zaqqa, 2006).

For the purpose of this paper, only emigration will be studied, as Jordan is not, as noted above, an importer of highly-skilled manpower. Highly-skilled migration is defined as the migration of persons with tertiary-level education, whether they achieved that level before or after migration, depending on the profession in question. After briefly retracing the dynamics of highly-skilled emigration, our task in this report is to highlight views expressed and policies implemented on the issue, before adding some socio-political explanations to the continuous disregard for the topic in official discourses in Jordan, as well as to recent policies aimed at sustaining the high levels of highly-skilled emigration from the Kingdom. Among the 'push' factors for the highly skilled is the resilience of clientelism in society and the patterns of adjustment to free trade, the latter partly explaining the stagnation of salaries and standards of living. The open-door policy to emigration, recently reinforced by an increase in opportunities offered outside the Kingdom for skilled Jordanians, also responds to a range of socio-political challenges. For instance, migration compensates lagging income (opportunities for higher salaries, stimulation of private revenues through workers' remittances). Expatriation of the highly skilled also ensures control over potential political opposition and, particularly, the reproduction of the elites.

I. Dynamics and processes of skilled emigration from Jordan

Historical dynamics

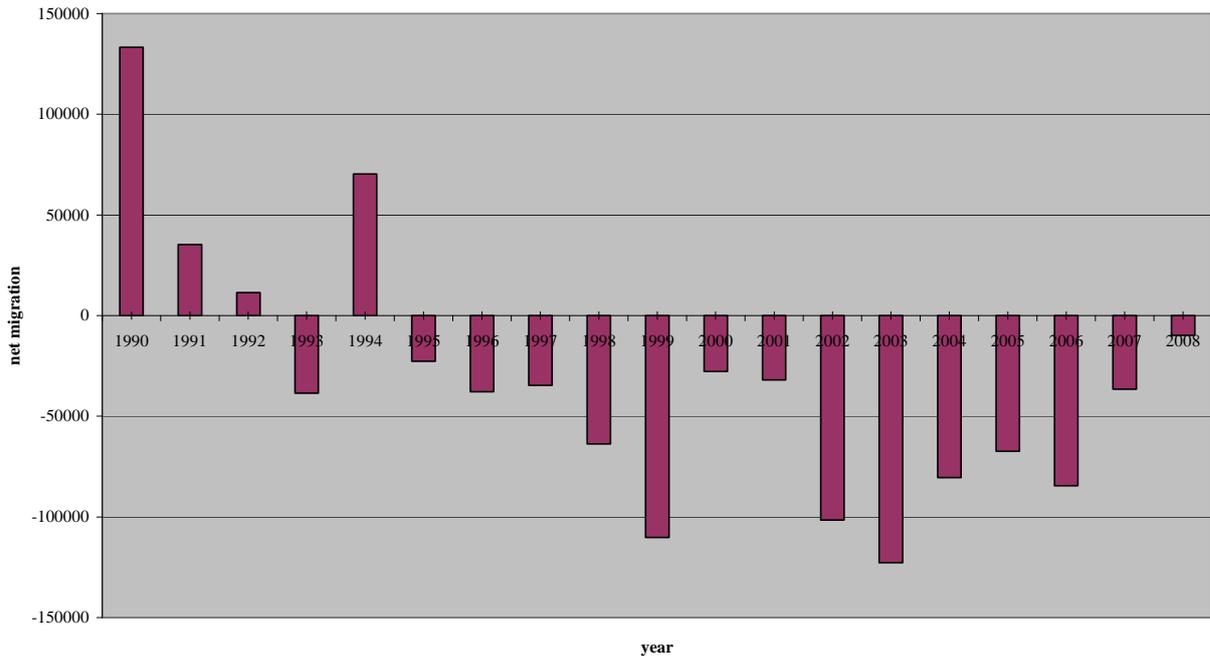
Little data is available on general emigration trends from Jordan. Following the 1973 oil-boom, emigration from Jordan to the oil-producing countries surged. However, the progressive replacement of Arab by Asian labour after 1979 led to the gradual return of Jordanian migrants from the Gulf countries from the mid-1980s onwards. The 1990-1991 Gulf War then forced a further 300,000 expatriates home.

Numbers started growing again as early as 1995, just after the signing of the peace process between Jordan and Israel. Since then, it has continued to increase, as shown in chart 1. Public Security Directorate data on entries and exits by nationality, show that net migration remains negative over the period⁸.

⁷ Survey by Dr Anwar Al-Battikhi, Higher Council for Science and Technology, Amman. Results taken from <http://ammonnews.net/print.aspx?Articleno=41025>, 30/06/2009 and Al-Jazeera TV, 01/07/2009.

⁸ However, the apparent decrease in net migration since 2007 is not consistent with the reality described by Jordanian citizens and officials. For 2008, an increase in returns may have been witnessed, due to the onset of the financial crisis. However, PSD datasets show a doubling in the numbers of Jordanians having crossed the borders between 2004 and 2006. This suggests a change in counting procedures rather than a decrease in the number of Jordanians heading and residing abroad.

Net migration of Jordanians (1990-2008)



Source: Public Security Department, data on entries and departures.

Chart 1

First, Jordanian migrants turned away from the Gulf countries, their main destination during the 1970s, and chose, instead, North America (Canada and the US) and Australia as a destination⁹. Later on, after September 9/11 when emigration to Western countries became increasingly difficult, Gulf countries were again the favourite destination for Jordanians, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, though not Kuwait (De Bel-Air, 2003). The increase in oil prices led to considerable investment in all sorts of projects in the Gulf region, which increased the need for highly-skilled workers in numerous sectors: the Army, construction, education, services, etc. Out of the estimated 500,000 to 600,000 Jordanians employed in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia is said to boast the most, with 250,000 to 300,000 of them working in highly-skilled positions. Table 1 gives various estimates from the Jordanian Department of Statistics. The Ministry of Labour provides other estimates of Jordanians in the Gulf and Libya, provided by the Ministry's Labour advisors posted there¹⁰.

⁹ Estimates suggest 50% of all Jordanian migrants were in North America at the end of the 1990s. Between 1995 and 2002, the request for emigration visas to Canada trebled, and emigration to the US also increased notably, while becoming increasingly illegal.

¹⁰ Sources: personal communications and press quotations for DoS estimates: JT. "Expatriate remittances drop", *Jordan Times*, 12/06/2009; Petra News Agency. "Shbeikat discusses with Qatari envoy means to recruit Jordanian workers", *Jordan Times*, 19/03/2009. For the Ministry of Labour' data, see MoL, 2009: 56.

Table 1. Jordanian workers in oil-producing countries: some estimates (2008-2009)

	DoS (estimates)	Ministry of Labour (2008)
UAE	250 000	54 834
Qatar	27- 36 000	30 748
Kuwait	42 000	18 888
Oman	n.d.	3 396
Saudi Arabia	250-300 000	50 928
Libya	n.d.	3 060
TOTAL	500- 600 000	164 854

Profile of migrants

In the 1980s, a survey on Jordanian emigrants abroad emphasized their level of skills: 32% of them held a university degree (7.3% in the non-migrant population) and 36% were employed as technicians¹¹. The public sector and, especially, the Army trained a number of these highly-skilled migrants.

At present, no wide-scale survey data is available regarding the profile of emigrants abroad. In his study on the migration of human capital from Jordan, N. Zaqqa (2006: 100) estimates that 29% of Jordanian workers abroad have university education. More generally, it is known that Jordanian emigrants in the Gulf are most often employed in skilled or highly-skilled jobs. The Bahraini Army, as well as that country's public sector and intelligence services, hired Jordanian soldiers, some of whom had retired. The Qatar-based TV channel Al-Jazeera, as well as the emergent UAE, various private and public TV and press groups, also relied heavily on Jordanian professionals. The recent development of some Emirates like Sharjah or Al-Ain owes much to a regular flow of Jordanian university teachers and professionals. The UAE and Qatar, where the construction sector is booming, hired trained and skilled Jordanian workers. Very recently, skilled medical staff from the Kingdom was to be hired in Bahrain¹².

Reasons spurring highly-skilled emigration

According to various accounts from highly-skilled professionals in Jordan, an increase in the household's financial income, meeting needs for important purchase purposes, as well as, to a lesser extent, strategies for professional status enhancement or training are the main 'positive' motivations for emigration. However, emigration is also a reaction to nepotism, (neo)patrimonialism and clientelism¹³, which plague all countries in the region and their educational and professional environments¹⁴. Emigrating is a response too to unemployment, which hits highly educated young people, male and female: the rate of unemployment for holders of university degrees (bachelors and

¹¹ Royal Scientific Society (RSS). Workers Migration Abroad: Socio-Economic Implications for Households in Jordan, Amman: RSS/Economic Department, 1983.

¹² Al-Khitani, F. "A governmental policy encouraging the brain drain", Al-Arab Al-Yaum, 29/10/2009; Petra. "Jordan to provide Bahrain with skilled medical staff", Jordan Times, 30/10/2009.

¹³ On patrimonialism, see Brynen, R. "The Neopatrimonial Dimension of Palestinian Politics", Journal of Palestine Studies XXV, n°1 (Autumn 1995), pp. 23-36; on clientelism, see LECA, J. / SCHEMEIL, Y. Clientelism et patrimonialism in the Arab world", International Political Science Review, vol. 4, n°4, 1983, pp. 455-494.

¹⁴ Fayez, H. "Our academics...and the brain drain", Jordan Times, 07/08/2009.

above) is the highest, standing at 18%, as compared to an average unemployment rate of 14-15% among the population aged 15 and above¹⁵.

To a certain extent, emigration from Jordan from the 1990s onwards could be seen as a liberalisation-led 'migration hump'. Indeed, to date the emigration trend is still sustained by the three conditions, which were seen to be in other contexts necessary for migration: 1) continuous job opportunities abroad (here particularly the Gulf countries); 2) 'supply-push emigration pressures as the sending country adjusts to freer trade'; and, 3) 'social networks that provide information, funds and social capital [in order to] bridge the border' (Martin, 2001: 38, on Mexico). This set of factors also fits the case of Jordan and some data confirms the match between Jordan's emigrants and a 'population that is socially and economically uprooted and prone to migration', described by various authors such as Massey *et. al.* (1998: 93), or S. Sassen (1988): their young age, the high turnover in positions, and most of all, the fact that the Jordanian population as a whole, male and female, has almost universal access to education within the concerned age-brackets and, thus, to a kind of social capital negotiable abroad rather than in Jordan. As a matter of fact, young professionals often plead that labour has become devalued in the context of Jordan's massive liberalisation and deregulation policy, a policy that has been in place since the mid-1990s¹⁶. Low salaries offered on the work market do not satisfy financial, social and political ambition in the professional class. Highly-skilled young nationals have high-reservation wages, 'based on expectations of obtaining public sector or foreign jobs'. As noted above, highly-skilled Jordanians, indeed, often come from middle- or upper-class families which themselves benefit from remittances sent by expatriate family members (Razzaz/ Iqbal, 2008). Beyond 'self-selection factors' there is thus also the effect of 'out-selection factors' (Beine *et al.*, 2009) on the emigration of the highly skilled, namely, the various actors' views and policies.

II. Actors and policies: 'open-door', brain gain vs. brain drain

Views

Historically, skilled emigration was a non-topic with the 'open-door' policy. Only a few technocrats raised the issue of 'brain drain' after the 1973 upsurge of emigration, among them the then-Crown Prince Al-Hassan bin Talal (De Bel-Air, 2003b). In general, the migration of Jordanians was considered as a way to publicize the Arab identity of Hashemite Jordan, as well as a way of exchanging assets with Arab oil-producing countries in return for development aid.

Today, the economic reform process, aimed at attracting Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs), targets the promotion of Jordan as a regional technology hub. The development of the IT sector, especially, is one of the priorities in the reform agenda. Therefore, the issue of the brain drain is sometimes mentioned in public discourses as a handicap: high-level technicians are not trained in Jordan and Jordanian students involved in high-level scientific institutions abroad are hesitant about coming back for lack of rewarding and challenging opportunities in the Kingdom. For instance, King Abdullah acknowledges that 'we have a problem of brain drain in Jordan, and we want to be able to change that into brain gain. We want to be able to give the opportunity to Jordanians all over the world to come back to their country, because we can offer them the opportunity to excel in their own homeland'¹⁷.

¹⁵ Unemployment rates for Jordanians aged 15+, by sex and educational level (Jordan Employment and Unemployment Survey 2005).

¹⁶ This led employers to invest in sectors that are characterized by relatively low-wage jobs, the results of structural reforms and continuing distortions in work market organization (Razzaz/ Iqbal, 2008).

¹⁷ King Abdullah's closing speech, Second ICT Forum (Sept. 30th - Oct. 1st, 2002). ICT Forums have been held yearly in the country since 2001.

Another, slightly different ‘technocratic’ view emerged at the end of 2007, with the Higher Council for Science and Technology (HCST)’s 13th Annual Science Week. In promoting the setting up of the El Hassan Science City¹⁸ and discussing the issue of ways to evaluate intellectual property at the 3rd Conference on Technology Commercialisation, Princess Sumaya Bint al-Hassan, head of the EHSC, advocated involving the Jordanian Diaspora in order to address the depletion of expertise in the field. Coming to terms with the fact that ‘the movement of human capital across borders is not a zero-sum game’ and, rather, a ‘brain gain’, the Princess and EHSC advocated ‘supranational thinking’¹⁹.

However, other voices speak up against ‘brain drain’. Business people in high tech sectors lament the lack of available manpower in the country, while degree-holders deplore the generally bad working conditions and the absence of rewarding salaries and packages offered to them by employers in Jordan, in comparison to the Gulf countries²⁰. In June 2009, a study revealed that 17% of public university teachers throughout the Kingdom had quit their jobs during the year 2007-2008, raising fears for a worsening brain drain and repercussions on the quality of higher education as a whole²¹. The necessity of improving higher education through better remuneration for university professors and researchers is a recurrent claim from professionals and employers, university employees and students. The agreement between Bahrain and Jordan, aimed at providing the Gulf Kingdom with skilled medical personnel from Jordan, was also criticised by some in the press, given the deteriorating quality of care in public hospitals throughout Jordan.²²

The members of the Royal family, through an impressive network of internationally-funded semi-public or non-governmental scientific institutions and programmes, thus promote a vision of modernity, excellence and above all, international influence and connections for Jordan. Absence of returns on investment in education is though hardly mentioned and the expatriation or the return of the highly skilled is not a priority. It should be noted that these official discourses do not adopt a rights-based approach, taking expatriates as citizens and would-be migrants as victims, deprived of the right to have an economically and socially-fulfilling life within the national institutional system. Instead, expatriates are taken as a resource to tap, within a globalised environment. The Pan-Arabist view, typical of King Hussein’s times, shifted to an economy-gearred advocacy connecting Jordan to international business networks, a view in which expatriates are merely a commodity; expatriation is seen, if mentioned at all, as a potential ‘brain gain’. By contrast, professionals and average Jordanians are more ‘nationalistic’ (i.e., claiming for the well being and resources they are entitled to, as citizens of the country) in raising the issue of deteriorating services and the lack of challenging prospects. Expatriation is seen rather as a necessity and a constraint, not as a potentially enriching option.

Yet, though far-reaching, the issue of brain drain is rarely mentioned, especially when compared to the huge, widely-discussed controversy over immigration, labour and, to a much lesser extent, identity, which involves a variety of actors and intermediate bodies. No wide-scale public debate, be it bottom-up or top-down, has been opened on the issue. Moreover, no voluntary policy is implemented to counter the expatriation of highly-skilled Jordanians.

¹⁸ A compound encompassing the Royal Scientific Society (RSS), the Princess Sumaya University for Science and Technology (PSUT), the Queen Rania Centre for Entrepreneurship (QRCE) and the Higher Council for Science and Technology (HCST).

¹⁹ Steityeh, Z. "Brain Gain", *Jordan Business*, December 2007.

²⁰ For example, Tarawnah, N. "Turning over a new leaf", *Jordan Business*, July 2008.

²¹ Survey by Dr Anwar Al-Battikhi, Higher Council for Science and Technology, Amman. Results taken from <http://ammonnews.net/print.aspx?Articleno=41025>, 30/06/2009 and Al-Jazeera TV, 01/07/2009.

²² Al-Khitani, F. "A governmental policy encouraging the brain drain", *Al-Arab Al-Yaum*, 29/10/2009, noting the paradox of sending medical staff away, while at the same time the King had visited a hospital in Amman and publicly pointed to its bad records.

Policies

Indeed, despite the lukewarm regrets expressed by officials regarding the existence of ‘brain drain’, and even if migration, in most cases, is left to the initiative of individuals who mobilise all sorts of information sources and mechanisms in order to leave Jordan²³, a range of policies are implemented by governmental bodies that effectively encourage the migration of skilled Jordanians.

Under the heading ‘Employment Support and Vocational Training Theme’, the National Agenda²⁴ sets out to ‘create an Outplacement Department, with the aim of matching regional and international demand with the Jordanian labour force and providing assistance to Jordanians working abroad’. It also sets at a target for 2012 the outplacement of 1000 Jordanian workers abroad; for 2017, the Agenda hopes for 3000 such outplacements (National Agenda, n. d. pp. 26-27). Similarly, within its general ‘social sector’ section, the Planning Ministry’s 2004-2006 Social and Economic Development Plan notes that it intends ‘[t]o streamline the Jordanian labor market and explore the potential for finding job opportunities abroad, and encourage the private sector to invest in this field’ (MoP, n.d.: 25). However, the higher-education sector is not specifically targeted by such official measures: the Plan, essentially, emphasizes the necessity of achieving excellence and international standards applicable in the field. Nor is the issue of brain drain explicitly addressed. Rather, expatriation of workers is put forward as one of the available ways to address the main policy-focus, i.e., the alleviation of unemployment in Jordan.

For the highly skilled, the Jordanian Ministry of Higher Education advertises a wealth of opportunities for studying abroad²⁵. Another set of measures can be taken as incentives for skilled Jordanians to migrate: bilateral contracts in targeted professional fields. Agreements were signed, for instance, in 2001 with Kuwait, with Qatar in 1997 and (under discussion) in 2009, with the United Arab Emirates in 2006, as well as in December 2009 for the secondment of Army professionals and with Bahrain for medical staff in October 2009. These agreements are said to boost labour cooperation and the exchange of expertise between countries. However, they do not cater for the transfer of Jordanian state employees to governmental institutions in the receiving countries, as was the case until the late 1980s. Rather, they promote the recruitment of unemployed Jordanians in private-sector companies. At the 2008 Doha Arab Economic Development and Social Summit, Jordan actually called for the implementation of a regional labour market by 2020, and for the facilitation of circulation and administrative procedures allowing manpower to circulate between countries, in order to match labour demands and offers. It can be said that with such agreements, Jordan and the receiving countries manage migration flows on the model of circular migration²⁶.

As a matter of fact, the public sector recently boosted its role as a facilitator for connecting Jordanians with job opportunities abroad. Jordanian embassies to the Gulf host commercial sections. In its Strategic Plan 2009-2011, the Ministry of Labour mentioned the implementation of Project 3-1 entitled ‘activation of the role of labour consultants abroad’. This programme is geared towards Jordanian expatriates and aims at defending the rights of Jordanian workers abroad, at providing them

²³ Word of mouth, recruiting agencies collecting CVs or hiring away specific professionals, spontaneous applications to companies abroad and *secondments* from Jordanian private sector companies operating abroad

²⁴ Under the call for a National Agenda, an initiative to outline an action plan for complete quality and quantity reform for the Jordanian economy and the welfare of its citizens for the next 10 years was issued by Royal Decree in 2005. The defined targets for each initiative have to be met over the initiative’s term with priorities reflected in the budget, supported by performance indicators to measure success. The three objectives are: improving the quality of life of citizens through income-generating opportunities (i.e. creating a favorable investment environment and labor policy by reforming governmental policy, stimulating economic development, and improving social welfare and security); improving living standards; and guaranteeing social welfare.

²⁵ As witnessed for example in its website <http://www.mohe.gov.jo>.

²⁶ For examples of such agreements, see the following texts: <http://www.carim.org/index.php?callContent=72&text=1125>; <http://www.carim.org/index.php?callContent=72&text=1124>

with job opportunities and, also, at organising training and placement abroad for unemployed Jordanians (MoL, 2009: 24-26). On a wider scale, the Ministry of Labour launched in August 2004 a National Employment Centre in order to address the issue of unemployment among all Jordanians. The service has developed a free-of-charge 'service delivery path' for its job matching and career counselling services, which in effect relies heavily on 'labour cooperation' between Jordan and the Gulf countries²⁷, as it advertises job opportunities in Jordan as well as abroad²⁸. Also, the Al-Manar project at the National Center for Human Resources Development (NCHRD) developed a bilingual web-based employment system (ELE), matching job seekers and job advertisements for free. Announcements are displayed by labour advertisement companies and most of them offer opportunities in the Gulf and other Arab countries²⁹. It is worth noting that all these projects are externally-funded.

More generally, the priority feature of the National Agenda is the development of a 'Knowledge economy' in Jordan, through the transformation of the education curriculum, the development of professional programs and the integration of ICT based learning and skills improvement, with the aim of creating a skilled and flexible workforce, and of increasing student opportunities. The leading initiative in the matter is the Second Educational Reform for a Knowledge Economy (ERfKE II) project, funded by a variety of international donors³⁰. Indeed, gearing education and, more generally, the management of human resources so as to connect Jordan to the Knowledge economy presupposes the increasingly fluid mobility of capital, innovation, business and, above all, skilled and highly-skilled people for the dissemination of knowledge, within a deregulated economy³¹. Therefore, one can say that Jordan does promote highly-skilled labour cross-border mobility, through targeted actions as well as by setting up a general policy context to raise the Kingdom to the level of a world-standard deregulated, knowledge-based economy. Indeed, particularly noteworthy is the fact that such a general policy-framework is designed and implemented with the assistance of international and Western donors (World Bank, European Union, USAID, Canada-based CIDA, etc.).

As no barriers are put against the expatriation of skilled citizens, their return to the Kingdom is not high on the national agenda either.

In fact, the only policies specifically targeting Jordanian expatriates of a high socio-economic background and skills³² are geared towards attracting their investment in Jordan. Annual conferences were organised by the Labour Ministry between 1985 and 1989, for this purpose. In 1998, the initiative resumed and conferences were held in 2001, in 2003, 2005 and 2008. They are put under royal patronage and involve high-ranking political and economic actors (including the Royal Court, various government ministries, the Jordan Investment Board and the Jordanian Businessmen Association).

²⁷ 'It provides job seekers career counseling, job search, resume writing, and interview skills at no cost. And it helps employers with market research, job fairs, corporate career days, candidate screening and interviewing, marketing and recruiting, and lends its facilities for applicant testing.' ("Jordan's New Employment Center Matches Job Seekers with Employers", <http://www.nathaninc.com/index.asp?bid=751286>)

²⁸ <http://www.nec.jo/nees/>

²⁹ <http://www.almanar.jo/ele/web/>

³⁰ <http://web.worldbank.org/external/projects/main?enableDHL=TRUE&menuPK=2805115&pagePK=64312881&piPK=64625380&theSitePK=2748750&Projectid=P105036>

³¹ Dahlman, C. *World Bank Knowledge Economy Products and Strategy: Emerging Lessons*, PREM Learning Week, Washington DC, April 9, 2003. info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/108507/KE.ppt

³² The circular document for the Fifth Conference for Jordanian Businessmen and Investors, held in August 2008 under the title 'Together We Build the Future Jordan', states that: 'because they are characterised by education and expertise, the business and investments Jordanian have been able to take up leading positions throughout this world, among the people of money and business in all sectors and keep up with scientific developments and adopt the highest levels of technology and modern skills. They have been able to build successful economic institutions by all measures, in the country and in the Diaspora'.

Also, the Jordanian Investment Board (JIB) launched in 2003 a programme targeting expatriates around the world interested in investing in their home country, entitled 'Your home is your castle'³³.

Tapping the resources of Jordanians abroad might be considered a way of encouraging migration. However, if the conferences, for instance, are the occasion for discussing the shortcomings and required legal and technical improvement for ensuring greater access to investment in Jordan (fighting red tape and providing guarantees against frauds), they do not cater specifically to the needs of potential expatriate investors. In the 1995 Investment Promotion Law, the same legal, tax or other incentives are applied to Jordanian expatriates as to other investors from abroad, as noted by Laurie Brand (Brand, 2006: 210). Nevertheless, even though such scenarios are rare, some specific fields such as the ICT sector benefited not only from foreign investment from Jordanian expatriates, but also from their know-how. Two leading firms in the sector, Estarta and Eskedenia, have settled in Jordan and developed regional markets in the Middle East, thanks to the experience that Estarta acquired in the US and Europe and that Eskedenia acquired in Sweden with Ericsson (Oxford Business Group, 2005: 132).

Lastly, an important element of Jordan's skilled emigration policy or no-policy (or, at best, little policy) is the lack of consistent data on Jordanian citizens abroad, generally, and on skilled expatriates particularly. L. Brand describes the difficulties encountered by Jordanian public and private sector organisers in the preparation for the first Expatriate Businessmen Conference after the first Gulf War, due to 'the lack of a database on expatriate businessmen' (Brand, 2006: 210). To date, some estimates on the numbers of Jordanians abroad have been offered by the Departments of Statistics and quoted in this report, which are not based on systematic accounts. The gap between these estimates and those of the Ministry of Labour (Table 1) highlights the lack of control exerted by Jordan on its labour migrants. Defining and estimating stocks and flows of expatriates raises difficult technical challenges. However, the relative ignorance of highly-skilled emigration, in Jordan, a country so ambitious in achieving scientific excellence and commercial leadership, also raises questions of a political nature.

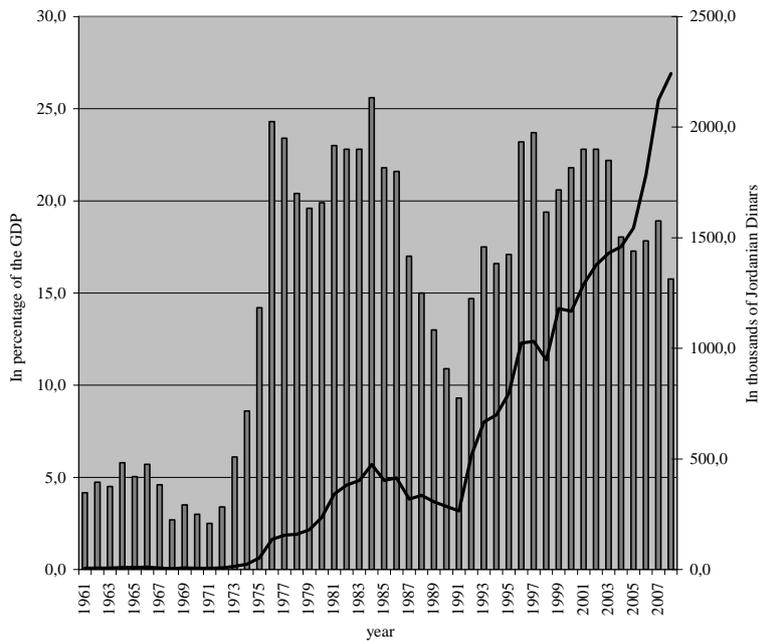
III. Skilled emigration as 'brain strain': a political calculus

Leaving the door open to emigration, in general, is an essential asset for compensation for lagging average incomes and, more generally, for political stabilisation in the country.

First, emigrants abroad guarantee families a supplementary income through remittances. Even if their share in the GDP seems on the decrease, their overall contribution is, in fact, steadily rising (Chart 2). Remittances are a private asset, which means that they help families keep up with access to infrastructures and with the level of goods consumption which was characteristic of the period of the *rentier* state. Therefore, they also help smooth out the socio-political effects of the economic transition experienced by Jordan, namely the liberalisation of the economy, which led to a drop in the standard of living for the lower classes and the erosion of the middle class. The potentiality for a drop in expatriate remittances due to the economic slowdown after 2008 was a big concern for Jordan, as witnessed in the press: a reminder of the politico-economic outreach of Jordanian skilled emigration abroad, and especially in the Gulf countries, in terms of rent-seeking (the remittances) and domestic political stabilisation.

³³ Joha, Gh. "Expatriates demand transparency in investment procedures", *The Star*, August 14, 2003. As of now, no data or information could be gathered on the outcomes and implementation of this policy.

Remittances of expatriate Jordanians (1961-2008).



Source: Central Bank of Jordan.

Second, emigration in general, and particularly for the highly-skilled ('exit'), compensates for a lack of public expression ('voice') (Ahmed, 1997). It conveniently allows for the exit of potential opponents, thus alleviating the risk of political destabilisation worked by the frustrated would-be middle or upper classes.

Third, this continuous emigration can also be seen as a short-term opportunity for Jordan, as it provides an 'exit' for citizens who feel cut off from the redistribution process, due to the looming economic crisis and the post-*rentier* economic transition (De Bel-Air, 2003a). The new upsurge in emigration alleviates the high rates of unemployment which increases as privatisation goes on and as the average standard of living declines. Salaries are also low and foreclose access to social capital in the country (start a family life, access independent housing, leisure, etc.). Emigration thus gives young people access to economic capital outside the country in the short term, during the process of economic adjustment. This is especially crucial for highly-educated young, be they male or female: as noted above, the rate of unemployment for university degrees holders (bachelors and above) is higher than for the rest of the population on average

However, implemented policies were seen to contradict the discourses advocating either control of the brain drain, or encouragement of a brain gain, i.e. a return of Jordanian expatriates who would then work for their country's development. Not only are no incentives proposed so as to encourage the return of expatriates, but the emigration of skilled workers is also encouraged. This raises three sets of questions: first, that of Jordan's self-definition, as a nation, as part of a sub region (Arab Middle East, a common labour market with Gulf countries), and as a globalised entity. Second, the lack of attempts at measuring, if not controlling, the brain drain poses the question of relations between policy-makers and intellectual elites, i.e., the question of the social contract and the distribution of roles within the decision-making process. Third, in connection with the latter, though more generally, there is the matter of how the Kingdom sees the link between migration and its national development process, i.e. whether development should depend on the agency of the migrants themselves or on institutional change.

Answering the first question is arduous, as Jordan's policy-makers give off contradictory signals, to their resident citizens, to their Arab economic and political partners and to the international

community: the international community exerting pressure on the Kingdom's developmental patterns, which have to fit within the structural adjustment programme. This situation explains the apparent contradiction between the King's words and those of other officials describing skilled emigration as brain drain, and the policies on the ground encouraging the expatriation of highly-skilled professionals

The second issue is the quasi-ignorance of the country's intellectual elite by the political leadership. This suggests that the latter is defiant of diverging views regarding its development process, be they economic, social or political. The Kingdom, indeed, is under strong political pressure, due to the unstable situation in the region as a whole. At the same time, international pressure forces the Kingdom to abide by a strict agenda of economic liberalisation, though not political liberalisation given the region's instability. This tight path does not allow for risk-taking and innovation in terms of the decision-making process, which leads to the reproduction of the economic, social and political elites inside the country. Hence, Jordan is still resisting an all-citizen encompassing process of nation-building, while open-doors to emigration allows for a short-term strategy of economic and political relief. In any case, one can only wonder if Jordan, in the current period, needs the participation of all its highly-skilled citizens (be they resident or expatriates) in its economy. Immigrants, as noted above, are overwhelmingly unskilled or semi-skilled workers and market needs, as of now, are mainly in low-wage economic sectors, due to the structural economic reforms in place since the late 1980s (as explained on p. 9, footnote 16 of this report). Moreover, for Jordanians abroad political considerations may be involved. Diasporas have been actors of political change in their countries of origin (Koslowski, 2005). Even though a sizeable proportion of emigrants reside in politically- and socially-conservative Gulf countries, their involvement back in Jordan has to be channelled and limited to the economic sphere, in order not to threaten the fore-mentioned reproduction of elites. This can explain the half-heartedness of policies aiming at securing links with expatriate citizens. Conversely, actors who assess the emigration of the highly-skilled in terms of a 'brain drain' call in fact for the 'nationalisation' of political, social, economic and cultural issues linked to education. The debate on the brain drain is then another facet of the multi-dimensional debate on citizenship (re)definition in Jordan as elsewhere.

This leads us to the third issue, that of the role given to migrants in the development process in Jordan. Whether labelled as a 'brain drain' or 'brain gain', highly-skilled migration is directly linked to the development process, thus placing the responsibility for development on the agency of migrants, rather than on institutional structures, as emphasized by R. Skeldon in an assessment of current migration policies streamlined for the development of sending and receiving countries (Skeldon, 2008). We have tried in this report to show that certain developmental choices for the economy actually generated the emigration of the highly-skilled, and until recently, the policy-communication and management of highly-skilled migration flows remained relatively loose. However, discourses have emerged and more proactive policies have been implemented encouraging highly-skilled expatriation. This appears in total contrast with the voluntary policies promoting vocational training and skills acquisition for unemployed Jordanians, aiming at the replacement of unskilled and semi-skilled labour immigrants, as shown in previous reports on Jordan (De Bel-Air, 2008). This setup tells us a lot about the short- to middle-term development choices in Jordan, presently monitored by international and foreign donors: a low-level service and consumerist economy. In the meantime, institutional change is strictly controlled by the exit of potential competitors on social and political scene.

Conclusion

The issue of whether skilled emigration from Jordan, or elsewhere, is a 'brain drain', a 'brain gain', a 'brain strain' or, indeed, 'a brain circulation' is rooted in the peculiarities of its political and social history, which tie labour to citizenship and development, thus turning migration into a political issue. It is also worth mentioning that this conclusion is relevant in the case of low- and semi-skilled immigration (which Machreq countries want to counter through the 'nationalisation'³⁴ of labour), as much as for skilled emigration, largely left to its own devices if not actively encouraged. Therefore, it could be said that the ways of achieving international competition for excellence, which Jordan clearly wants to join, are rooted in each country's social contract and, more specifically, in the relationship between a polity and its national elites. This determines, first, the propensity of skilled nationals to stay and/or that of expatriates to invest in their country of origin (economically, through technology transfers or human-capital returns) and, second, the nature and volume of incentives states and regimes need to put, for their elites not to turn away from their origin countries, i.e., to make them feel like citizens.

Assessing the outcome of skilled emigration also depends on the scale of observation and action. In the case of Jordan the most influential policy-makers adopted a schematic globalised view. Hence, the increasing articulation between the Jordanian and Gulf labour markets substitutes the very notion of brain drain for demand/supply within a homogeneous economic system, by shifting the scope of observation from the national to the regional level. Symmetrically, the notion of brain drain is only valid at the national level, within a national framework for development.

Lastly, both highly-skilled and low-skilled migration patterns and policies have to be studied as two facets of a single system. Thus the developmental policy choices of a country like Jordan are conducted within an increasingly global web of political interrelations, funding systems and labour circulation.

It is, therefore, problematic to seek a general definition and implementation pattern of best practises likely to make highly-skilled migration schemes a success. No consensus can be reached among all actors involved, on the definition of what the 'positive' or 'negative' outcomes of such cross-borders movements would be, as economic/social/political stability does not necessarily match and overlap with a successful (i.e. all citizens-encompassing) nation-building process. Research on best practice for the emigration of the highly-skilled should be concerned with assessing the phenomenon at multiple scales and by incorporating social and political concerns in the policy-making process, in order to question the institutional setup of the country as likely either to make highly-skilled migration a successful tool or a handicap for global development.

³⁴ "Gulfization", "Jordanization" for instance.

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