



Highly-skilled migration into,
through and from the southern
and eastern Mediterranean
and sub Saharan Africa.
The case of Palestine

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Demographic and Economic Module



CARIM
Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration

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The case of Palestine

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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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Abstract

Today, the Palestinian Territories are, in terms of numbers emigrating, second only to Jordan and Iran among Middle Eastern and North African countries. Emigration flows increased particularly after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the First Gulf War (1990-91). The same occurred after the crisis of September 2000, when previously unheard of levels of poverty were registered. This paper approaches highly-skilled emigration from the Palestinian Territories by using surveys aimed at investigating those who wished to leave the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Specifically, research conducted in 2007 on a sample of health and higher-education sector employees reveals that 31% wanted to emigrate; in the same year, another survey stressed that one third of the young (aged 10-29 years old) would like to migrate; finally, the 2009 Labour Force Survey found that unemployment rates augment by years of schooling. These findings are alarming and the consequence of several factors including political instability, the deteriorating economic situation, high inflation and scarce employment opportunities.

Résumé

Aujourd'hui, les territoires palestiniens occupent le troisième rang en termes de taux d'émigration parmi les pays du Moyen-Orient et de l'Afrique du Nord, après la Jordanie et l'Iran. Les flux d'émigration ont particulièrement augmenté à la suite de l'invasion israélienne du Liban en 1982 et de la première guerre du Golfe (1990-91). Ce scénario s'est reproduit après la crise de septembre 2000, quand le seuil de pauvreté de la population a enregistré des niveaux jusque-là jamais atteints. Cette note a pour objectif d'analyser le phénomène de l'émigration des Palestiniens hautement qualifiés à partir des données provenant d'enquêtes évaluant le désir d'émigrer parmi les habitants de Cisjordanie et de la bande de Gaza. En 2007, une enquête menée auprès de salariés des secteurs de l'enseignement supérieur et de la santé a révélé que 31% d'entre eux aimeraient émigrer. Une autre enquête réalisée au cours de la même période souligne qu'un tiers des jeunes âgés entre 10 et 29 ans voudraient partir à l'étranger. En outre, en 2009, l'enquête sur les forces de travail a constaté que le taux de chômage a tendance à augmenter avec le nombre d'années d'études. Ces découvertes alarmantes sont la conséquence de plusieurs facteurs: à l'instabilité politique permanente s'ajoute la détérioration de la situation économique, comme en témoignent la hausse du taux d'inflation et la situation du marché de l'emploi qui ne cesse de se dégrader.

Introduction

Palestinians have suffered from political and socio-economic instability since the beginning of Israel's occupation in 1948. This has affected and reshaped the Palestinian labor market that could not cope with a continuous excess labor supply. Indeed, political and economic development in neighboring Arab countries, mainly the Gulf ones, has pushed many Palestinians to migrate there for the sake of improving their living conditions. In this period, due to the lack of supervisory authority over migration flows, there is a huge gap in available data on the numbers of Palestinians migrants as well as their motivations in migrating.

Migration of Palestinians from 1948 until 1990s, together with the greater importance attached to extended family relations in general, are two key features of the migration patterns of Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In addition, the political, economic instability and uncertainty of the future in the region have been major determinants in the size and description of migration from the Palestinian Territory.

Palestinian emigration is characterized by extended family relations: 66% of heads of refugee households in the West Bank and 59% of non-refugees have close relatives living abroad compared with 47% of non-refugees (Pedersen *et al.* 2001). The distribution of close relatives abroad by country reveals a high concentration in Jordan (49.2%), the Gulf States (21.8%), and other Arab countries (9.7%). A significant share settles in North America (10.5%), Latin America (1.5%) and Europe (4.6%) with only 1.7% elsewhere (Khawaja, 2005). Such relations have ultimately provided more opportunities for Palestinians in the Territory to emigrate as well as it has favored intermarriages between the Diaspora communities and Palestinians from the Territory and reinforced Palestinian national identity. In other words, this extended system of mutual help has become the engine of Palestinian emigration worldwide.

This paper is structured as follows: section 1 covers highly-skilled migration vs. brain drain; section 2 presents a short overview on the Palestinian educational system, while the third part discusses the patterns and dynamics of highly-skilled emigrants, their main socio-demographic characteristics, together with an overview of the determinants of highly-skilled emigration, i.e. the labour market and the political-economical determinants. Section 4 concludes the paper.

1. Highly-skilled migration vs. brain drain

The commonly used concept of brain drain is employed to describe the migration of highly- skilled persons from developing to developed countries or to countries characterized by a better geo-economical and professional situation than is found in sending countries. The phenomenon is considered as brain drain as it subtracts highly-skilled human resources from a sending country leading to a consequent scarcity in human resources. Most receiving countries depend on highly-skilled migrants to bridge the gap in the skilled labor force to guarantee the continuity of their economic growth; in 2000 about 20 million migrants in higher education aged 25 years and over lived in OECD countries (OECD, 2001).

2007 census data in the West Bank (excluding the annexed part of Jerusalem) showed that the secondary certificate holders amounted to 227 thousand of which 61 thousand were employed and 10 thousand were unemployed while 156 thousand were not in the labor force. Diploma holders amounted to 58 thousand of which 36 thousand were employed, four thousand were unemployed while 18 thousand were not in the labor force. Bachelor and above holders totaled 108 thousand of which 76 thousand were employed, about 11 thousand were unemployed while 21 thousand were not in the labor force. For those unemployed persons holding bachelor and above, 82% were in the 20-29

year age group demonstrating that we have here the emigration of highly-skilled persons but not a brain drain due to excess numbers of tertiary-educated people (PCBS, 2009a).

The picture will be clearer when the census data for the Gaza Strip is available. However, we can, for now, hypothesize that the situation is even worse than in the West Bank. Indeed, labor-force survey data assesses that, in 2009, the unemployment rate for the 20-24 age-group was respectively 57% and 39% in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank and 29% and 21% for the 25-29 year age-group. In addition, the unemployment rate for those who completed 13 years of schooling and above in the Gaza Strip was 30% compared to 17% in the West Bank in the second quarter 2009 (PCBS, 2009b).

Table 1 shows the unemployment rate by age, sex and educational level in the Palestinian Territory in 2008. Certainly, the unemployment rate among the 15-24 year age group (40.2%) is striking. The 25-34 year age group registered 25.5% in the same year. Thinking of the impact of the educational level on unemployment for males, a link is not surprisingly observed: as education increases unemployment decreases (i.e. from 30.4% for non-educated persons to 18.5% for Bachelor holders). On the contrary, an inverse relation is observed among females: as education level increases unemployment increases. Indeed, the highest unemployment rate was among females with bachelor degrees: 39.4% in 2008, while the lowest unemployment rate was among non-educated females at 4.7% in 2008.

Table 1. Unemployment Rate by Educational Level, Age Group and Sex, 2008

Age group	2008		
	Males	Females	Total
15-24	38.8	47.3	40.2
25-34	25.1	27.2	25.5
35-44	21.3	11.0	19.5
45-54	20.8	6.1	18.4
55-64	20.3	2.6	16.9
Total	26.7	24.1	26.2
Educational Level			
None	30.4	4.7	23.8
Primary	31.5	6.0	29.0
Secondary	24.3	16.6	23.6
Bachelor	18.5	39.4	27.2
Total	26.7	25.5	26.2

Source: PCBS, 2009. Labour force database, 2008.

2. Overview on the educational system in oPt

The basic educational system is compulsory till the tenth grade. Since the Palestinian Authority (PA) took over the responsibility of education and higher education in 1994, more efforts have been made to develop the educational infrastructure, building schools, universities and improving the educational environment, in addition to focusing on quality issues and developing the curriculum.

Higher-education institutions have been available since the 1970s and, till very recently, were increasing in number. Currently, the number of universities and colleges that offer bachelor and master degrees are 24 in addition to 19 intermediate colleges which offer an associate diploma. The higher-educational system is supported by student fees that cover almost 20% of all costs; the rest is covered by donations from the Arab and the international community, PA support, revenues of university research centers as well as twinning with foreign universities. Students studying in oPt universities are mainly financed by their families while also depending on loans provided by the government and the

private sector. Students studying abroad, meanwhile, depend on scholarships, family support and the students' own efforts (work and study). Expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP increased from 3.2% in 1996 to 5.8% in 2002. Investments in education have also increased since the establishment of the PA: from about 8 million in 1994 to 339 million in 2006. The percentage of enrollment in higher-education institutions increased from 2.2% in 1995 (PCBS, 2005a) to about 4.0% in 2007 (Ministry of Education & Higher Education, 2007).

3. Patterns and dynamics of highly-skilled migrants

The available data on migration revealed that the Palestinian Territory was third among sending countries in the Middle East and North Africa, after Jordan and Iran (World Bank, 2008a). Recently, it has been noted that the arrivals-departures balance is negative; in the first 8 months of 2009, the only Jordanian-Palestinian crossing border point the Karama bridge registered about minus 44 thousand, while it was about minus 63 thousand during the same period in 2008 (PSD, 2009).

Israeli border police has documented net migration at approximately 10,000 leaving the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the period 2000-2003, 12,000 in 2004, 16,000 in 2005 and 25,000 in 2006, with a likely significant rise in net-migration in 2007. Since September 2000, 10% of Christians living in Bethlehem have gone abroad: 2,071 persons and 357 households (UNSCO, 2004). The Palestinian Authority Deputy Minister of Foreign Ministry stated to the press that 'at the same time as gaining the return of about 235,000 Palestinians during 1994-2000 to the Palestinian Territory – who contributed effectively to the establishment of the Palestinian institutions – some 10,000 Palestinians filed approved emigration requests from the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the first quarter of 2007, and at least 45,000 emigration applications are being reviewed by different countries' (Shakid, 2007). Palestinian emigration flows towards European countries sharply increase with well defined political crises: e.g. the Israeli invasion of Lebanon (1982), the first *Intifada* (1987) and the first Gulf war (early nineties). From 1968 to 1987 the Palestinian emigration rate to European countries increased from 10% to 23%, while it decreased from 28% to 23% in the Gulf States (PEPRI, 2009)¹.

Numbers of Palestinian migrants in Europe reached about 242 thousand representing approximately 6% of Palestinians in the Palestinian Territory. Stock data from destination countries' sources state that about 15 thousand Palestinians live in Sweden and nearly 20 thousand have settled in Denmark, while the number of asylum seekers in Sweden was, according to that country's immigration officials, about 1,600 for the year 2006.² In 1999, a survey carried out by Birzeit University indicated that camp dwellers accounted for the highest percentage of those who emigrated to Jordan (72%), while more villagers (33%) migrated to the US and Canada and more urban migrants (28%) went to the Gulf States. These results indicate that patterns of migration are linked to family histories and the type of job opportunities on offer: villagers are mostly found in the US where there is a higher demand for unskilled labor and less special qualifications, while urban migrants, with generally higher levels of education, are typically found in the Gulf. Palestinian villagers migrating to the US tend to take up difficult or dangerous forms of unskilled work with the help of relatives and friends from their place of origin who have settled abroad. This help from the Diaspora constitutes the main way that Palestinian villagers find work in the US. Furthermore, a high percentage of Palestinians working in the US are employed by Palestinian and Arab businesses. In brief, Palestinians who move to the US received help from friends and relatives in getting unskilled jobs (Gicaman and Jonson, 2002).

¹ Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute, 2009. The brain drain of the Palestinian society: with an exploratory study of the health and higher education sectors

² Moreover, one foreign official in Ramallah, who decline to be identified, said: "we used to get an average of one or two inquiries a day but we are getting more than seven inquiries these days" (late 2006).

Several studies focusing on the resident population in the Palestinian Territory give an interesting picture of the socio-demographic characteristics of potential migrants.

In 2007, a survey carried out by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) noted that about one third of the youth (aged 15-29 years) wished to emigrate, (around 45% among males and 18% among females). This attitude was mainly driven by the economic situation, followed by safety and security concerns, then political and social reasons. In the same year, similar findings had been found by other two surveys carried out by Anajah University and the Palestinian Center for Public Polls and Near East Consulting (NEC), which respectively showed that about 38% and 34% of Palestinians wished to emigrate abroad.

According to NEC's findings, this percentage was equal to 38% among the youngest generations (Rabah, 2008), a value which was much higher than in 2003 when it stood at 23% (PCBS, 2008a). Indeed we can conclude that a high propensity to migrate is observed among Palestinians, especially among younger Palestinians. Moreover, the PCBS' survey allows us to investigate the educational characteristics of potential migrants, where the majority has a high-medium degree. Specifically, 32% are bachelor holders, 25% have a post graduate diploma and 27% have only secondary level education (PEPRI, 2009.)

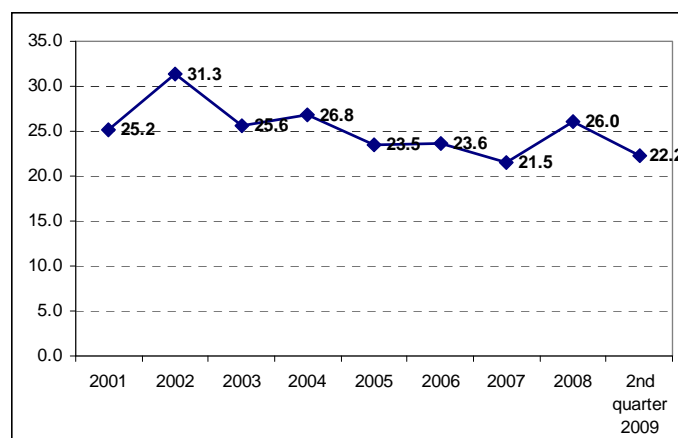
In order to analyze the propensity of highly-skilled individuals to migrate, it is instructive to look at another survey which restricted its sample to highly-skilled medical and educational staff (bachelor and above). Among them, almost one third (31%) wished to migrate (33% for the educational staff and 30% for the medical staff). The main motives were related to politics and security (80%), then developing their scientific specialization (77%), economic (61%), social (44%) motives and impatience with Israeli measures and policies (44%). With respect to the choice of destination country, Europe is the preferred destination (35%), followed by the Gulf States (21%), the US (16%) and Canada (14%) (PEPRI, 2009).

3.1 Labour-market determinants

In 2009, the unemployment rate equaled 22.2% (PCBS, 2009b), whereas in 1999 it had only been 11.8%. A partial explanation for this negative trend is found in the fact that before the 2000-crisis, the proportion of Palestinians who were working in Israel was almost double the number in the post-crisis period. It is worth highlighting that all Palestinian Workers in Israel return to their homes in the Palestinian Territory on a daily basis (Khawaja, 2008).

Figure 1 shows the unemployment rate in the Palestinian Territory from 2001 to 2009.

Figure 1 – Unemployment rate in the oPt, years 2001 - 2009



Source: Labour Force Survey, PCBS

In the second quarter of 2009, the unemployment rate was higher among the youngest generations. It equaled 29% in the 15-19 year age group, 39% for 20-24 years and 28% for 25-29 years. So, individuals aged between 15 and 29 were more likely to be unemployed. This finding is in line with our previous findings, which found that this group also has a very high propensity to migrate abroad. Besides, by looking at the unemployment rate by level of education, PCBS data (2009b) shows that unemployment stood at 22% among those who had completed 13 years of schooling (34% for females and 15% for males) and 23% for those who had completed 10-12 years of schooling (15% for females and 23% for males). Unemployment is one of the main pushing reasons for migration (PCBS, 2009b).

As the majority of employed persons are wage employees (62%), wage levels have decreased over time in terms of the nominal daily net wage. In 2008, inflation took a toll on Palestinians due to the c. 5% rise in food prices in addition to of a weak Palestinian economic performance; these additional factors may push the young to look for options abroad (PEPRI, 2009).

According to the results of the Birzeit University Survey, in 1999 there were on average 1.2 emigrants per household (Gicaman and Jonson, 2002). Of the emigrants, 55% were males and 51% were aged 35-54. Regarding their educational level, 20% held a university or college degree, 19% had secondary education and 3% a post-graduate degree (Gicaman and Jonson, 2002). Indeed, a high percentage of migrants in 1999 were young and highly skilled.

Work and family reasons were the main push factors (respectively 30% and 29%), followed by expulsion (16%), "other reasons", e.g. being born abroad or accompanying someone else (14%) and finally education (11%). The importance of working reasons is confirmed by a recent study (NEC, 2008) which found that 41% of emigrants emigrated in order to search for a job while 10% emigrated for safety concerns.

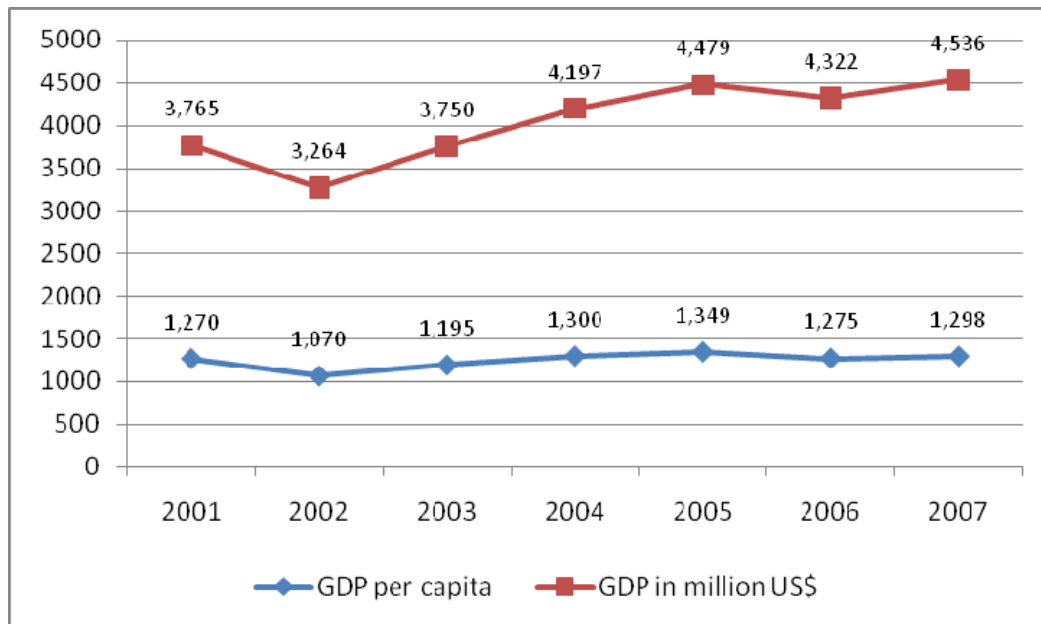
Thinking then of what lies behind migration, work was certainly the main reason; this underlines the impact of the deteriorated economic situation and high unemployment and poverty rates in the Palestinian Territory. The search for safety meanwhile is a reminder of the political instability that wracks the country. Those migrants who migrate for educational reasons will very probably stay abroad for work after completing their studies.

3.2 Policies and economic assessments

The situation for the Palestinian population worsened dramatically following the onset of the crisis of September 2000. Poverty levels have become higher than at any previous time, with, for the years 2001-2004, respectively 60.8%, 66.5%, 71.9% and 60.6% of Palestinian households living below the poverty threshold. In 2007 the poverty rate became 57.2% with 45.7% in the West Bank and 79.4% in Gaza Strip; while deep poverty for the period 2004-2007 was 25.6%, 29.5%, 30.8% and 30.3% for the respective years (PCBS, 2008b).

From 2001 to 2005, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) *per capita* in the Palestinian Territory (excluding East Jerusalem) was about respectively 1,270, 1,070, 1,195, 1,300 and 1,349 (US\$, constant prices), while GDP amounted to 3,765, 3,264, 3,750, 4,197 and 4,479 million US\$ (PCBS, 2008c) for the same years. Moreover, there was a GDP rise of only about 0.8% in 2008 with annual growth rates of about 3.0% "or close to", while the annual growth rate before 1999 was about 6% (World Bank, 2008b). The international boycott after Hamas' election victory in 2006 led to a failure to pay civil servants' salaries and the breakdown of the Palestinian Authority's ordinary functioning for about a year, and later the closure of the Gaza Strip in mid 2007 resulted in fighting between the two main Palestinian parties (Fateh and Hamas). All this should give some idea of how much the Palestinian economy has declined and even collapsed.

Figure 2 – Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and GDP *per capita* in the oPt at constant prices, years 2001 – 2007, million US\$ (*)



(*) Data does not include that part of Jerusalem which was annexed forcefully by Israel in 1967

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009c. National Accounts at Current and Constant prices (2004-2007). Ramallah - Palestine

The estimated monetary loss from the closure of the Israeli labour market to Palestinian labour during the first 27 months of Al-Aqsa *Intifada* was 1.3 billion US\$ in addition to 28 billion US\$ in work compensation for Palestinian workers in Israel, the latter figure represents more than 50% of the Palestinian GDP before the outbreak of the *Intifada* (PCBS, 2005b).

The Birzeit University 1999-Survey revealed that there were regular financial links between 15% of migrants and their families in the Palestinian Territory: 22% among males and 7% among females. Of the 22% male emigrants who maintained a link, more sent money (14%) than received money (8%) and of the 7% of females who had a link, more received financial support (4%) than sent money back (2%). By receiving country/region, migrants in US are more likely to send money back home (30%) than migrants in the Gulf States. In the latter region, remittances have declined in comparison to previous periods and other destinations, where financial links are weaker and, in the case of Jordan, more money flows out to emigrants than back to Palestinian households (Gicaman and Jonson, 2002).

The trend of remittances among Palestinians increased till 2000 (the outbreak of the second *intifada*) and dropped dramatically in 2001, to less than 50% of the value in 2000. Nor has this changed substantially since 2005. This pattern may be explained by the closure of the Israeli labour market and the losses that the Palestinian economy faced due to Israeli measures. The major share of these remittances belongs to Palestinian labour in Israel, and we can conclude that circular migration is concentrated in Israel and that it is affected by political instability (World Bank, 2009).

In early 2009, shortly after the end of Israel's military assault on the Gaza Strip, Palestinian (refugee) households ranked their top-ten needs and concerns: economic security (86%); employment (60%; 66% men and 54% women); personal safety and security (59%); family (45%; 49% women and 41% men); politics (43%); education (39%; 43% women and 36% men); health (35%; 60% in the 55+ age group); marriage (10%; 13% men and 7% women); emigration (10%; 14% men and 6% women); and recreation (5%) (FAFO and UNFPA, 2009).

The impact of the political situation on the Palestinian economy was negative (and this remains the case), so remittances from Palestinians living abroad to their extended families at home, is considered an important source of income for the Territory.

Politically, the period has been characterized by instability and insecurity as a direct result of the wide range of military and security measures taken by Israel: curfews, border closures, military checkpoints, the construction of the wall separating the Palestinian Territory from Israel, limitations on personal mobility, the special case of the Gaza Strip...etc. Socially, the levels of crime and insecurity have increased and affected living conditions. This situation pushed people, especially the young, to look for alternatives to address their economic, social, political and psychological needs. Emigration may have been an alternative but no statistical data on the impact of this situation on migration has been established.

The continuous demand on higher education in the Palestinian Territory, will lead to more and more graduates in different fields; this means more specialized graduates in the stretched labour market and, as the Palestinian labour market is suffering from high unemployment, particularly among the young and particularly among those with tertiary education; this will be another push factor for young Palestinians.

As long as the Ministry of Education and Higher Education do not have a strict policy to regulate those receiving higher-education specialization and as the universities do not restrict numbers to cope with the needs of the labour market, this will complicate the issue and push those graduates who wish to migrate.

For the year 2007/2008 67,000 students applied for universities and colleges 53,000 were accepted and 47,000 enrolled; these figures mean that there were about 20,000 students wishing to attend higher education who did not have the opportunity in the Palestinian Territory and a potential alternative for these would be emigration.

There were 25,000 graduates from universities and colleges in all specializations in 2007/2008 and taking into consideration the high unemployment rate among previously available graduates, this means that more graduates are entering the unemployment market. The major potential specialization fields for migration are science and computing (2500 graduates), engineering and manufacturing (1800 graduates) and health and welfare (1900 graduates). In addition, about 90,000 students are in secondary education, among which about two thirds will become highly-skilled. Year by year all these numbers increase pushing more young Palestinians abroad where there is demand (Ministry of Education & Higher Education, 2008).

The border crossings with neighboring countries are totally controlled by Israel. It is also worth noting that both Jordan and Egypt, as the only exits open for the Palestinians except for Jerusalemites, have strict border-crossing procedures. Palestinians who are trying to obtain an entry/migration visa to the US, Canada or Europe now face increased difficulties. In addition, the shortage of job opportunities in the Gulf States and the situation in Iraq has reduced migration opportunities for Palestinians.

In 2000, the closure of the Israeli labour market to the Palestinian labour force and the limited resources of the developing Palestinian economy forced the labour force driven out of Israel to seek jobs “illegally” in Israel, and in the Palestinian labour market with its limited capacity for absorbing the huge newly surplus workforce. This situation resulted in high unemployment and poverty rates together with low economic growth; this led to an increase in those wishing to migrate for job opportunities and improved economic conditions.

Migration flows as a result of the peace process and the Gulf Wars of the 1990s have increased the burden on the PNA to absorb returnees into the labour market and to benefit from their skills and experiences: a fact made much more difficult by the limited resources and vacancies available.

Despite these challenges, the PNA absorbed these expertises in the development process in the private and the public sectors at the early stages of PNA establishment and of building Palestinian institutions.

In the present terrible economic and political situation, the Palestinian Authority would very much like to regulate migration flow for the sake of building up the Palestinian state. But this cannot be achieved as the PA does not have control over crossing borders with neighbouring countries. So even if policies are drawn up, they cannot be applied effectively.

Conclusion

The migration of Palestinians in and out of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has been shaped, if not altogether determined, by the history of the region over a period of sixty years. Waves of out migrants caused by war, in the form of refugees and displaced populations, have created a world-wide Palestinian Diaspora, made up of millions, so that many people in the Palestinian Territory now have relatives and friends living abroad. These extended families generate high levels of solidarity and cooperation between the Palestinians within and outside the West Bank and the Gaza Strip who help to arrange marriages and to find employment and housing. In the context of the Palestinian Territory, political factors strongly reinforce the socio-economic aspects of migration choices.

Although there is insufficient data for recent years, it is probable that the trend is a continuing one. The net balance of arrivals and departures for the West Bank in the period 1967-present is always negative: on average about 10,000 annually, except in specific years, such as the years of the Gulf Wars when Palestinians were forced to return home and the period after the start of the peace process and the arrival of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leaders and their families. This means that in general the negative balance grows and falls in parallel with the military occupation and the conditions resulting from it, but it is difficult to demonstrate that particular events generate high levels of emigration (with the exception of the events in 1948 and 1967).

The main reason for migration by Palestinians relates to the economic factors resulting from the political instability and the infighting between the Palestinian parties. But to monitor the process adequately we need more tools to capture details. The specific situation of Palestinian emigrants may be best measured by matching data on entries and exits at borders (where this exists) with especially designed surveys to provide reliable migration data on Palestinians.

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