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Rural Communities and Migration: *An Assessment of Migration Factors in the South Mediterranean*





Report written by:
Alexis McLean

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Executive Summary

a) Background, Objectives and Methodology

Rural communities in North Africa and the Middle East are confronted to a myriad of context-specific challenges. While food security is rising on the global and regional agendas, countries are experiencing demographic decline in rural areas, important shortcomings in rural development and environmental degradation resulting from resource overexploitation and climate change. For communities in rural areas, the conjunction and intensification of these trends raises serious questions as to their ability to cope now and in the near future.

This study is devoted to the analysis of the migration phenomenon in the South Mediterranean's rural areas. Unlike recent sub-national approaches focusing on cities, and their capacities to receive, the study clarifies by which mechanisms rural communities are entangled in national, regional and international mobility patterns. Often viewed as areas of departure exclusively, the analysis aims to nuance this perspective by demonstrating that rural areas' exposition to global interfaces, such as trade, agriculture and climate action, has overlooked migration implications that policy-makers need to acknowledge. Investigating these implications and assessing corresponding potential for migration policy-making is at the core of the study. The results and recommendations arising from the study are meant to consolidate knowledge on migration in the Euro-Mediterranean region in line with the target 10.7 of the UN sustainable development goals to achieve safe, orderly and regular migration.

The study focuses on identifying and explaining rural trends of migration, as understood in the widest conception of the term. To do so it draws on a multi-disciplinary and synthetic examination of the situation in five countries: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. Although the discussed trends may be more widely applicable, they are to be considered first and foremost in relation to this restricted group. The study relies on a mixed methods approach: desk research and key informant interviews in all countries surveyed have been the main means of data collection.

b) Main Findings

The evidence indicates systematic association between the structural transformation experienced in the region and the observed dynamics of rural (out- and in-) migration. Namely, the emergence of an intensive, export-oriented agrarian model, powered by large-scale holdings, advanced irrigation infrastructure and integration within urban markets is detrimental to smallholder farmers and populations depending on agricultural output for income. For rural communities, the resulting loss of livelihood and the associated erosion of traditional social structures is increasing the impetus to move away, either internally or abroad. The situation is exacerbated by the lack of tangible non-farm livelihoods, which marginalised rural populations might consider as alternatives, especially the youth.

In the meantime, the transformation fuels agriculture demand for a flexible, low-qualified type of labour increasingly met by foreign workers, particularly in the context of transit migration or border areas. The omnipresence of informal work in rural areas favours unethical recruitment practices and abusive working conditions, in addition to preventing migrants from contributing fully to their social environment, underscoring the need for a greater regulation in the sector.

The study's main findings can be articulated as follows:

- I. Rural exodus is a defining phenomenon amongst societies in the region. Out-migration concerns predominantly men and younger segments of the rural population.
- II. Motivations to emigrate remain primarily socio-economic, but increasingly encompass considerations related to social norms, lifestyle and occupational aspirations
- III. Due to their accessibility, urban areas are, originally, more attractive options for rural migrants than

international migration, resulting in sustained urbanisation, intense rural-urban interaction and considerable levels of internal mobility. The ensuing pressure on cities' infrastructure and labour markets creates fertile ground for the intensification of migration projects.

- IV. In the meantime, the region is characterised by ambitious agricultural strategies despite deteriorating environmental prospects and growing demographic and/or skill gaps.
- V. Third-country migrants moving to rural areas tend to occupy low-skilled jobs, are spatially concentrated along migration routes or border areas, cluster around agricultural hubs (and large farms) and lack proper protection.
- VI. Knowledge about the contribution of (im)migrants to rural communities and working conditions in agriculture is particularly scarce. More research is required to shed light on vulnerabilities, promote decent jobs and maximise the economic benefits of migration for rural communities.
- VII. Migrant household survey attest to sustained interest from the diaspora in agricultural affairs and the development of rural areas. Agriculture receives a substantial share of the diaspora's investment back home.

c) Recommendations for Policy Action

These few findings highlight the potential of action based on fluid policy integration, in particular between rural development, the climate and water nexus, agriculture, and migration, to name a few. Unreservedly, this study shows that policy convergence across domains must become a priority for delivering on migration-related development goals. Mindful of these considerations, policy-makers are invited to examine the following recommendations:

1. **Gather further evidence on the current and projected effects of climate change on farming practices** throughout the region as well their relationship with rural residents' migration aspirations;
2. **Maximise the climate- and water-sensitivity of migration interventions**, in particular by aligning poverty reduction and livelihood-enhancing programming on national climate adaption goals;
3. **Support economic diversification in rural areas** by providing training, entrepreneurship and grant schemes for the professionalisation of off-farm businesses, with an emphasis on eco-tourism and agro-processing;
4. **Promote regulation of rural labour markets**, in particular with regards to the formalisation of employment of vulnerable people (women, youth and immigrants) in agriculture by engaging employers, trade unions and community representatives at the sub-national level;
5. **Tackle the negative perception of rural lifestyles** in the region through pilot campaigns in education and/or communication, effectively targeting younger populations as a way to curb demographic imbalances;
6. **Lift restrictions to internal mobility** and support incoming areas, predominantly urban or peri-urban areas, in view to maximise the adaptive capacities of rural populations;
7. **Involve return migrants and the diaspora** in the consolidation of the agricultural sector and the virtuous exchange of sustainable agricultural practices and methods.

Introduction

Recent research on migration has taken to examine the phenomenon from the perspective of cities. Prompted by accelerating urbanisation trends, analysts and policy-makers have been interrogating the role played by urban spaces in migration flows, improving common knowledge on the local dimension and significance of migration while bringing to light pressing challenges for cities to tackle.

That migration is deeply embedded in cities' landscape and social structure must not obscure the function that non-urban spaces play in the shaping of migration flows at the global level. For migrants, rural areas may well represent areas of departure as well as transit or destination. In return, rural societies are profoundly impacted by the mobility of people. Although the share of rural migrants in the world is subject to uncertainty, it's important to highlight that 40 percent of total remittances are directed towards rural areas, suggesting that rural 'peripheries' are more than marginal links in worldwide migration processes¹. In the Mediterranean region particularly, migration is often a reflection of rural societies' interlocked challenges and opportunities, and a product of their transformational pathway.

In 2022, rural communities in North Africa and the Middle East are confronted to a myriad of context-specific challenges. While food security is rising on the global and regional agendas², rural areas are experiencing demographic decline³, important shortcomings in development and environmental degradation resulting from resource overexploitation and climate change. For farmers and rural communities, the conjunction and intensification of these trends raise serious questions as to their ability to cope now and in the near future.

Understanding the interaction between rural development and migration is fundamental to ensuring migration, when it occurs, is not solely an act of desperation but rather a carefully-considered choice, in line with internationally-endorsed principles of safe, regular and orderly migration.

This study is devoted to the analysis of the migration phenomenon in the South Mediterranean's rural areas. Unlike recent sub-national approaches focusing on cities, and their capacities to receive, the study clarifies by which mechanisms rural communities are entangled in national, regional and international mobility patterns. Furthermore, the analysis aims at challenging the conception of rural areas as spaces of emigration exclusively, by demonstrating that rural areas' exposition to global interfaces, such as trade, agriculture and climate action, may have overlooked implications in terms of migration.

The study aims to answer the following research question: How do the dynamics of rural development affect mobility from and to rural areas? To do so, it draws on a multi-disciplinary examination of rural migration trends in five countries of the region: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. This selection aims to reflect the diversity of rural dynamics in the south Mediterranean region while giving due prominence to countries where agriculture and rural development are national priorities.

Furthermore, this study offers reflections to better understand the multi-faceted interactions between rural communities and migration. It acts as a useful reference for enhancing the overall rural sensitivity of migration interventions and for guiding migration programming in rural contexts. By doing so, it also generates clear perspectives

¹ FAO (2019), FAO Migration Framework, Migration as a Choice and an Opportunity for Rural Development.

² ECDPM (2022), Russia's invasion leaves North Africa with a food crisis – What can Europe do?

³ CIRAD and CIHEAM (2017), Study on Small-Scale Family Farming in the Near-East and North Africa Region.

for improving coherence between migration and other sectoral policies, in particular regarding agriculture, rural development as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation. In this sense, the study's recommendations are meant to improve migration policy's alignment and its influence on sustainable development goals in rural areas.

This study is based on desk research and key insights drawn from stakeholder interviews. The desk research examines literature, drawing primarily on studies, policy papers and project material but also relies prominently on national statistical sources like population censuses from statistics offices (HCP, INS, CAPMAS), migration and household surveys (MED Household International Migration Surveys (HIMS)) and international databases (World Bank Data Portal, ILOSTAT and FAOSTAT among others). To complement the literature review, semi-structured interviews were organised with experts in each country surveyed. The experts have been selected on the basis of their work experience and knowledge in relation to rural development, agriculture or migration in the EU's south neighbourhood.

One of the constraints to conducting this research was the absence of an internationally-agreed classification of urban and rural areas to rely on to objectively compare rural places across different countries. As noted by the International Labour Organisations' (ILO) statistics division, one area classified as rural in one country may be classified as urban in another. To overcome this constraint, this study adopts a synthetic conception of rural areas, whereby rural areas may be understood as places of relatively low urbanisation and/or low density of population and characterised by a certain degree of geographic isolation⁴. In the same logic, agriculture mustn't be seen as a feature of rural areas exclusively. In fact, an increasing portion of cropland in the Middle East and North Africa is located near or within urban centres, notably as a result of urbanisation trends. Therefore, much agricultural land doesn't fall within the geographic scope of this study per se. Unless specified otherwise, considerations related to agriculture in the study refer to smallholder farming, which, in addition to overlapping with the conception of rural areas presented above, remains the most prevalent form of farming in the region⁵.

This study is organised in three broad chapters:

1. The first chapter features an overview of key characteristics relating to rural development in the five countries concerned. On this account, it focuses on the manifestations of rural transformation in the region, with particular reference to socio-economic inequalities, the role of agriculture and the impact of climate change on rural livelihoods.
2. The second chapter is dedicated to patterns of out-migration in rural areas. This chapter covers how, and to what extent, people's mobility, both internally and internationally, is driven by dynamics of rural transformation. An important point of discussion is the review of rural determinants of migration, in light of the structuring conditions discussed earlier.
3. Finally, the third chapter investigates rural places as areas of transit or destinations for international migrants. Here, a key objective is to elaborate on some features and pitfalls pertaining to the agricultural sector as a source of foreign employment in rural areas.

⁴ ILO (2020) Rural and Urban Labour Markets: Different Challenges for Promoting Decent Work, Spotlight on Work Statistics 11, ILO Brief.

⁵ Ghanem Hafez (2015), Agriculture and Rural Development for Inclusive Growth and Food Security in Morocco, Global Economy and Development at Brookings, Working Paper 82.

1. Characteristics of Rural Development in the Region

1.1 Rural-Urban Disparities

Human development has been progressing steadily throughout the Middle East and North Africa region, mirroring a long-term rise in economic growth and average income. In Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, tangible improvements in the infrastructure, enhanced health and education outcomes, and increased purchasing power have all contributed to drive populations' economic and social well-being to unprecedented levels. In 2021, all countries except Morocco had achieved 'high' levels of human development, as measured by the Human Development Index (HDI)⁶. In light of the protracted conflicts affecting parts of the region, and the recent disruptions caused by the COVID-19 crisis, maintaining this upwards course over time is, arguably, a policy success.

It is important, however, to reflect on the limitations of these significant achievements. In particular, the development trajectory in these countries has suffered from a lack of spatial homogeneity, resulting in, and often perpetuating, clear cleavages between 'hubs' of relative wealth and activity and marginalised areas. Throughout the region, there is a marked tendency notably for rural areas to underperform in terms of development indicators, compared to big cities and other urbanised regions. Although they account for a large share of the overall population, and make a crucial contribution to the national output, populations in rural areas are remunerated less for their labour, demonstrate lower educational attainment and are in general poorer than their urban counterparts. The considerable implications of these inequalities in terms of human mobility will be covered later in this study.

In a context of structural transformation, as experienced in the region, productivity gains and investment tend to shift from the traditionally-dominant agricultural to the emerging industry and service sectors, in practice leading to large-scale concentration of jobs and income in cities⁷. Geographic inequalities also often result from underinvestment linked to competing priorities at the national level. Indeed, representation of rural areas' interests in public debate is fairly inconsistent. For example, arising issues in rural areas are less likely to receive the necessary exposure, through media, collective action or else, to incentivise and eventually trigger impactful public action. To a large extent, such drivers of rural-urban fractures are also observed in countries of the European Union and beyond.

In North Africa and the Middle East, as elsewhere, rural-urban disparities incorporate different dimensions, resulting in distinct yet mutually-reinforcing manifestations of geographical inequalities. For the populations concerned, these deprivations often shape life aspirations while providing the inevitable backdrop to individual- or household-level decision-making processes. To illustrate this point, the following section will examine findings from various household surveys focussed on rural-urban differentials.

⁶ Human Development Report 2021-2022. An index of 0.7 to 0.8 indicates 'high' development. Morocco scored 0.683 in 2021.

⁷ IFPRI and FAO (2018), Agriculture and Economic Transformation in the Middle East and North Africa. A Review of the Past with Lessons for the Future. Food Policy Report.

Divergence in Poverty Levels

Survey data has consistently showed that poverty is more commonly associated with rural regions. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)⁸, which measures poverty using a combination of variables, estimates that rural populations account for 83 percent of the 'acutely poor' in the whole Arab region⁹.

In Tunisia, addressing the unique challenges arising from unequal socio-economic development across the country represents a key national priority. As shown in Table 1, populations living below the poverty threshold accounted for 26 percent of the rural population in 2020 against merely 6 percent in the country's big cities. In the governorates of Kairouan, Beja or Le Kef, the country's traditional rural and agricultural heartlands, poverty rates exceed 30 percent - the highest among all governorates, reflecting a nation-wide negative correlation between urbanisation rates and poverty levels. In line with these observations, employment in agriculture is also associated with higher poverty levels than other sectors of the Tunisian economy, meaning that agricultural workers are more likely to be poor compared to those employed in other sectors¹⁰.

Table 1. Poverty rates by area of residence in Tunisia

Area	Population (In million)	Poverty rates
Big cities ¹¹	3.8	6.3%
Medium cities	3.1	15%
Rural	3.5	26%
Total	10.4	15%

Source: INS et BM (2020)

The observed variations in poverty levels between urban and rural areas apply similarly in the other contexts investigated. In Morocco, multidimensional poverty affects 13.5 percent of rural residents but only 1.2 percent of urbans. Nationally, the regions of Draa Tafilalt and Mellal Khenifra, the two least urbanised regions in Morocco, experience the highest poverty rates, at respectively 14 percent and 9 percent. In total, two-thirds of the 'poor' segment of the Moroccan population reside in rural areas, even if these areas only account for one-third of the overall population¹². Differences in average income are key to understand these inequalities: rural Moroccans earn, on average, one third less than their urban counterparts.

Despite being an overwhelmingly urbanised society, Jordan is also affected by rural poverty: about 19 percent of the rural population is considered poor, versus 10 percent in cities. Additionally, like in Tunisia, Jordanian households active in the agrarian sector earn typically less than any other households¹³.

⁸ The MPI is an international resource launched by the University of Oxford in partnership with UNDP in order to complement traditional poverty measure instrument like the poverty rate. It monitors population deprivations across three dimensions (Health, Education and Standards of Living) and ten indicators.

⁹ UNESCWA (2017), Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report

¹⁰ INS et Banque Mondiale (2020), Carte de la Pauvreté en Tunisie.

¹¹ Includes Tunis and surroundings, Sfax, Sousse, Monastir and Manouba.

¹² HCP (2022), Les Indicateurs Sociaux du Maroc, Edition 2022.

¹³ IFPRI (2018), The role of Agriculture and Agro-Processing for Development in Jordan, Regional Program, Working Paper 05.

It is important to note that the highlighted gaps between rural and urban segments of the population do not exist in isolation. Beyond material considerations, rural residents are also disadvantaged in their access to essential services such as health and education, undermining these communities' current economic potential while de facto curtailing future opportunities for the youth.

Divergence in Educational Attainment

Education is a pillar and key enabler of societies' economic and social prosperity. Considerable progress in enrollment from primary to tertiary levels of education indicate education ranks high as a government priority throughout the region. Nonetheless, rural areas keep being characterised by limited educational attainments. In spite of considerable recent progress in this area, 35 percent of Moroccans over 15 years old are still considered illiterate (down from 50 percent in 1994). In rural areas, 50 percent of residents are illiterate. Furthermore, 73 percent of rural Moroccans report no school certificate, compared to 36 percent of urbans¹⁴. In light of these findings, it is vital for school enrolment efforts to enhance geographical targeting and focus on primary education in order to maximise impact and meet rural needs. In relation to this, actions such as the Dar Taliba project, implemented by the Mohammed V Foundation for Solidarity since 2008, which improves schooling for rural children since 2008 are particularly pertinent¹⁵.

Education disparities are equally a source of concern in Egypt. According to a 2019 survey covering Upper Egypt, half of rural women lack any type of formal education. In the same survey, 30 percent of household heads, predominantly men, reported having no education¹⁶. In a more nuanced way, data from Jordan indicates that agricultural households are consistently linked to lower educational attainment than households operating in non-agricultural sectors, even within rural areas themselves. An identical relationship is observed in the case of Tunisian agricultural workers¹⁷.

Divergence in Infrastructure Provision

Furthermore, rural dwellers' access to basic consumer services including water and sanitation, electricity, road infrastructure or public transport, is limited. In North Africa in particular, barriers to rural areas' socio-economic integration are very often natural, arising from low population density and/or challenging topography. Overcoming this isolation requires considerable public investment and higher per capita spending, which complicates access to common goods for communities in hard-to-reach localities. The gap is particularly visible regarding running water access in Morocco. Figure 1 indicates that only 61 percent of the rural population in Morocco is provided with access to running water, against almost 100 percent in urban areas¹⁸. Tunisia's centre and western regions face similar deficiencies in accessing public infrastructure¹⁹.

¹⁴ HCP (2022) *ibid*.

¹⁵ <http://www.fms.ma/en/fields/education>. The Dar Taliba project focuses on providing girls from rural areas with boarding facilities and teacher supervision as a way to overcome geographic isolation and increase enrolment rates in Morocco's rural areas. Since its launch in 2000, 86 facilities have been built near schools accommodating a total of almost 7,000 students.

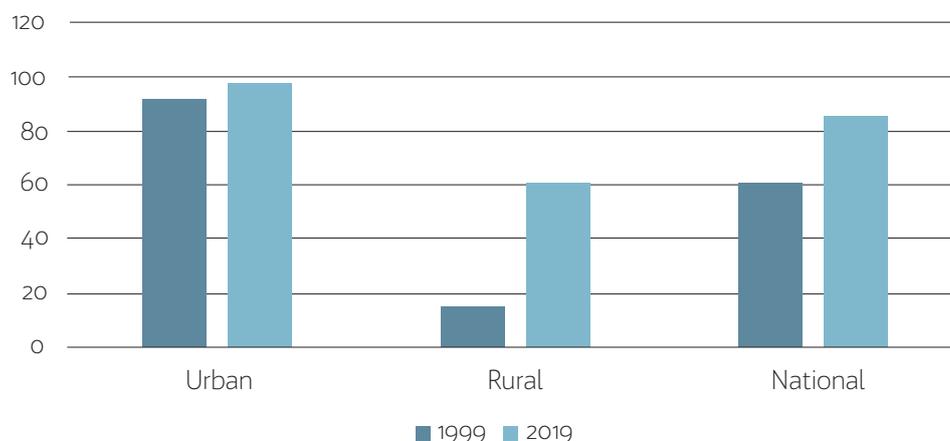
¹⁶ IFPRI (2019), Characteristics of Smallholder Farm Households in Upper Egypt, Implications for nutrition-sensitive agricultural interventions, Working Paper.

¹⁷ IFPRI (2018), The role of Agriculture and Agro-Processing for Development in Tunisia, Regional Program, Working Paper 09.

¹⁸ HCP (2022) *ibid*.

¹⁹ INS et Banque Mondiale (2020), *ibid*. P. 28.

Figure 1 Potable Water Access in Morocco by area of residence (% of population)



Source: HCP (2022)

This partial analysis seems to show that rural areas are disproportionately affected by poverty. Although there is stark differences between rural places themselves, the development rift between cities and the countryside is arguably a structuring phenomenon throughout the region. On account of this, rural communities lack substantial socio-economic prospects and are particularly vulnerable to disruptions and crisis, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. This calls for tailor-made support, especially for the youngest segments of the population.

To achieve the sustainable integration of marginalised areas, rural development planning must tackle the ramifications of overlapping (and cumulative) rural poverty drivers. Because poverty is generally accompanied by poor a labour market, education, and health or social performance, as reflected in the case of Tunisia's western regions², holistic strategies combining complementary interventions in different policy areas, are best suited to address the challenges of rural communities.

1.2 Prospects for Agriculture

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and resulting tensions on global food supply chains, has put Mediterranean countries' agricultural strategies right under the spotlight. These countries' exposure to price shocks on staple commodities, in particular wheat, as well as farmers' reliance on Russian-produced fertilizers are creating new challenges for the security and sustainability of food supply in the region²¹. Beyond short-term relief measures for populations affected, addressing these vulnerabilities will require reforming domestic agricultural models to better align on the needs of food consumers but also to incentivise producers, including smallholders and rural populations.

²⁰ INS et Banque Mondiale (2020);ibid.

²¹ ICMPD (2022), Could disruptions to Eastern European wheat spur displacement in Africa? Commentary.

Agriculture and the Economy in the South Mediterranean

The structural transformation of the region's economies has led agriculture to gradually lose importance relative to national GDPs. Table 2 shows that, in 1965, agriculture accounted for about a quarter of Egypt's, Morocco's and Tunisia's GDP, reflecting the predominantly agrarian nature of these economies. This share has since shrunk to about 12, 13 and 9 percent respectively. Although still a substantial contributor to national outputs, agriculture is no longer the main component of economic growth in the region.

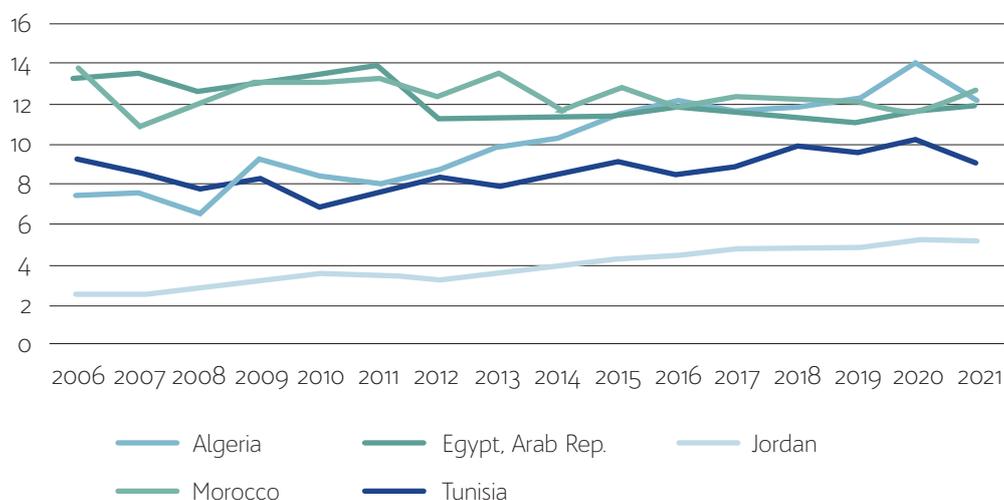
Table 2 Selected indicators in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia

	Rural population in 2021 (% of total population)	Employment in agriculture in 2019 (% of total employment)	Agriculture, forestry, and fishing, value added in 2021 (% of GDP)
Algeria	26	10	12
Egypt	57	20	12
Jordan	9	2	5
Morocco	36	33	13
Tunisia	30	14	9
Global	44	27	4

Source: World Bank Open Data

Interestingly, there are indications that this downwards trend is being reversed. Since 2008 the share of agriculture in the GDP has doubled in Algeria and Jordan, while improving modestly in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia (Figure 2). The expansion of the agricultural sector in the recent period can be ascribed to the effectiveness of state policies, which have repositioned agriculture as a strategic priority and facilitated capital inflows to the sector.

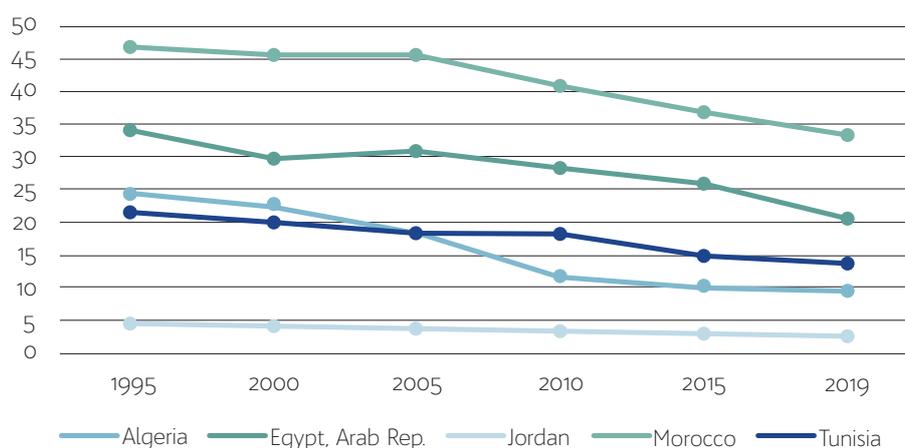
Figure 2 Share of agriculture as percentage of GDP since 2006



Source: ILOSTAT

Regardless of these recent developments, the relative decline of agriculture has profoundly impacted the structure of national labour markets as well as the demographic balance between rural and urban areas. As indicated in Figure 3, Algeria, Egypt and Morocco's respective share of employment in agriculture has decreased by about 15 percentage points since 1995, suggesting an important redistribution of the labour force towards more dynamics sectors of the economy. In parallel, the share of rural population has dropped to about a third of the population (except in Egypt and Jordan where this share is respectively much bigger and smaller). This does not necessarily translate a net decline in population in these areas, but rather a stronger attractiveness and growth of cities in comparison.

Figure 3 Agriculture as percentage of total employment in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia



Source: ILOSTAT

The COVID-19 crisis has been particularly harmful to the agricultural sector's development. As a result of lockdowns and mobility restrictions, over 270,000 jobs have reportedly been destroyed in Morocco in 2020 in the agricultural sector alone, amounting to 63 percent of the country's job losses that year²². In general, rural areas have been intensely affected by the crisis, as most jobs are related to farming and agricultural-related activities.

National Strategies for Agriculture

At the policy level, drastic efforts have been deployed to generate a new impetus in agriculture. Countries in the region usually see agriculture as key to drive growth and confront labour underutilisation in the region's poorest areas²³.

In Jordan, the National Strategy for Agricultural Development (NSAD), delivered under the Jordan 2025 Vision, aims to increase agricultural production by 10 percent per year while increasing the share of agriculture in total exports. Launched in 2016, this strategy is bearing fruit: the sector has grown at a 12 percent annual rate in 2018 and the share of agriculture in GDP has markedly increased between 2006 and 2021, from 2.5 to almost 6 percent. This expansion is mostly attributed to the increase in crop performance, as a result of investments made under the NSAD²⁴.

²² HCP, Enquete nationale sur l'emploi

²³ Ghanem Hafez (2015), Agriculture and Rural Development for Inclusive Growth and Food Security in Morocco, Global Economy and Development at Brookings, Working Paper 82.

²⁴ IFPRI (2018), The role of Agriculture and Agro-Processing for Development in Jordan, Regional Program, Working Paper 05.



The launch of Morocco's 'Plan Vert' in 2008 has raised agricultural planning as a national development priority. Conceived as an overarching modernising framework, it set out to boost national production, enhance the sector's international competitiveness and bridge the rural gap by generating sustainable employment opportunities. In 2018, due to a mix of public and private funding, the plan had secured a 7 percent annual output increase, the creation of 1.5 million jobs and a 2.5-fold income increase for 3 million rural inhabitants. Like in Jordan, Moroccan farmers benefitted from considerable productivity gains to market more products at comparatively more favourable prices²⁵.

With Egypt's Sustainable Agricultural Development Strategy (SADS), adopted in 2015, the government remains resolutely focused on its internal market and objectives of food security. Despite constraints on available land and water, the SADS plans to reach self-sufficiency in wheat and maize by 2030. To achieve this, the strategy plans to 'reclaim' half a million hectares of arable land by 2030, mainly through converting desert areas away from the Nile region into fertile zones for agriculture. Aware of the Nile's sensitivity to climate change, the strategy proposes to phase out water-intensive crops while greatly improving the efficiency of irrigation systems, for example by using treated waste water.

The delivery of these ambitious agricultural agendas has coincided with a qualitative shift in crop patterns. In Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, the cultivation of fruits and vegetables has been rising, at the expense of traditional crops like wheat, maize and other cereals. Agricultural data shows an increased preference from farmers for cash crops, which are characterised by higher value and stronger export potential. This includes high-yield crops like citrus and berries in the case of Morocco, vegetables and melons in Tunisia or olives in Jordan. The production share of vegetables in Tunisia's total agricultural production has doubled between 1961 and 2013. In the same vein, in Morocco, citrus production has practically doubled in volume in 10 years, from 1,200,000 to 2,200,000 tons produced between 2008 and 2018.

Due to its geographical proximity, the EU attracts the largest share of these countries' exports. Indeed, 90 percent of Morocco's vegetable trading occurs with the EU. The country is a net provider of food to the bloc, as well as Africa's top exporter of vegetables and citrus. Since the launch of the Plan Vert, exports have grown 65 percent in value, indicating a clear upgrade in Morocco's trading position. In a similar way, 50 percent of key Tunisian crops, such as dates or olives, are destined for international markets²⁶.

In contrast, Egyptian agriculture primarily revolves around the cultivation of cereals for domestic purposes, in particular amongst smallholders. Wheat remains the most widely cultivated crop, covering about 50 percent of the country's cultivated areas²⁷. Along with maize and rice, wheat benefits from a favourable regulatory environment, through a system of price support and input subsidies for farmers, designed to encourage local production and keep food affordable for the population²⁸.

The development of agriculture is therefore to be predominantly attributed to countries' enhanced trade integration and the development of high-value crops intended primarily for European markets. This orientation has been noted to fuel the emergence of a dualistic farming system as it disproportionately favours large competitive farms which benefit from access to international retailing networks, flexible production capacities, credit facilities as well as modern equipment. Contrastingly, family farming, which remains predominant in the region, doesn't have the necessary land prerequisites or irrigation capacities to grow with efficiency the crops in high demand on international markets.

The current geopolitical situation has also played a role in underscoring the food security implications of an export-dominated system. By overlooking cereal production, countries of North Africa and the Middle east have grown

25 ENPARD Méditerranée (2019), Rapport de synthèse sur l'agriculture au Maroc, CIHEAM & UE.

26 IFPRI (2018), The role of Agriculture and Agro-Processing for Development in Tunisia, Regional Program, Working Paper 09.

27 IFPRI (2018), An Agricultural Policy Review of Egypt, First Steps Towards a New Strategy.

28 Climate-Resilient Policies and Investment for EG's agricultural sector

extremely reliant on imports, exposing them dangerously to price fluctuations on world markets. For example, Tunisia's production covers only 20 percent of its needs while Egypt counts among the world's leading wheat importers in total volume²⁹.

1.3 Exposure to Climate Change and Water Scarcity

Agriculture in the Mediterranean region is set to be particularly affected by the effects of climate change. This is due to a combination of factors: First, the Mediterranean region, and in particular its southern part, is already viewed as one of the most water-vulnerable areas of the world. Indeed, all countries in this study are characterised by extremely low water availability levels per capita³⁰. Second, rising temperatures are causing downturns in average precipitation while accelerating the pace, as well as intensity of heatwaves. Finally, rising sea levels are associated with increased risk of salinisation in low-lying coastal areas, in particular in the Nile delta. The combined effect of these slow-onset climate events on agricultural activities, as well as the well-being of populations depending on them, has been the subject of increasing research and policy action.

Prospects for agricultural development in the region are, perhaps more than anywhere else, intrinsically tied to water management issues. According to recent estimates, agriculture accounts for 83 percent of freshwater water consumption in Egypt, 85 percent in Morocco and 75 percent in Tunisia, reflecting the magnitude of these countries' exposure, and their vulnerability, to water scarcity resulting from climate change.

It is important to underline how climate factors play out differently depending on the type of agriculture practiced. In Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, agriculture is predominantly rain-fed. Unlike Egypt, and to a lesser extent Jordan, irrigation only represents a marginal, and expensive, source of water supply for farmers in these countries. In this context, shortfalls in rainfall are directly responsible for the decline in quality and quantity of crops to be harvested. On the long-term, declining rainfall is also correlated with an increasing aridity of the soil, which leads to gradual yet irreversible damages to land productivity. In both cases, farmers' income is set to be critically impacted by these degraded environmental conditions.

Water-stress is already having concrete implications for the livelihood of rural populations in the exposed regions of the Maghreb. Increasingly arid conditions, especially in Sahel-bordering regions, are turning rural communities away from farming activities and livestock, depriving entire communities from vital sources of employment and income. In Tunisia's Kairouan governorate, the reduced water inflow coming from the Nebhana dam has severely affected the fertility of surrounding lands, forcing farmers to relocate downstream³¹. Water-scarcity is expected to have nation-wide consequences in the most exposed countries: In Tunisia, half of the national olive production is at risk due to decline in water inflows in key growing areas. Given the sector's size, labour market effects will presumably reverberate across regions and the agro-processing chain³².

The existence of a large-scale irrigation infrastructure in Egypt and Jordan means water scarcity manifests itself distinctively. In Egypt, since all cultivated lands are concentrated around the Nile and depend on the river for irrigation, these lands may be considered more resilient in light of changing weather-related events³³. Nevertheless, projections from the International Panel On Climate Change (IPCC) indicate the outflow from the Nile Basin is set to slow down over time, while instances of flooding, as a result of changing precipitation patterns, will threaten

²⁹ Observatory for Economic Complexity

³⁰ IFPRI (2018), *The role of Agriculture and Agro-Processing for Development in Tunisia*, Regional Program, Working Paper 09.

³¹ CMI (2022), *Water Security Nexus in North Africa*.

³² IFPRI (2018), *Agriculture and Economic Transformation in North Africa and the Middle East*.

³³ The Nile valley and Nile Delta are home to 95 percent of Egypt's population.

communities living directly on the riverside³⁴. In addition to this, agriculture in the Nile’s Delta region, considered the most fertile in Egypt, is highly vulnerable to pressures exerted by water salinization, a process caused by sea levels rising and penetrating the few groundwater resources available for pumping.

Jordan counts amongst the most water-scarce countries in the world. To improve the country’s access to water, and fulfil its goals in agriculture, the country is gradually building up its irrigation capacities while actively promoting water-saving and water re-use techniques. However, in light of Jordan’s very limited surface and groundwater resources, the water-intensity of the country’s main export crops, primarily vegetables and olives, compounds the overall negative impact on the country’s water security³⁵.

Data on changing weather patterns and agricultural performance allows for a better recognition of the challenges related to climate change in the region. Most models anticipate a downturn in precipitation by approximately one-third, on an annual basis, by mid-century, under a ‘normal’ climate action scenario. According to the IPCC, a reduction in precipitation in North Africa by the end of the century is ‘very likely’ – regardless of actions taken until then. Evidently, this kind of trajectory would bear major consequences for the viability of farming in the region. The deterioration of environmental conditions for agriculture is expected to ripple through the economic structures of affected countries, ultimately curtailing production and economic growth, as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 3 Climate conditions and economic indicators

	Fluctuation in Rainfall	Fluctuation in productivity (yield)	Macro-level indicators
Egypt	-35% by 2040	-10% by 2050	-5% food production by 2050
Morocco	-30% by 2050		-6% on economic growth by 2050
Tunisia	-17% by 2050	Up to-10% by 2030 ³⁶	-30% cereal crops by 2030

Source: Composite of different data sources including World Bank, IFPRI and national-level statistics

Note these national-level projections are based on net calculations and may not reflect significant variations between regions.

Top wheat importers, such as Egypt, run in addition the risk of ‘cascading’ climate impact as world prices for staple commodities increase due to climate-related productivity constraints. These cascading effects may severely undermine food security amongst those who depend most on these imports, in particular farmers and rural communities.

Furthermore, it is essential to note that independently from climate factors, water needs for direct human consumption have been soaring in the region as a result of urbanisation and higher standards of living. This increased ‘private’ demand is considered an aggravating factor of overall water shortages, sometimes to a greater extent than climate change itself³⁷. Although agriculture remains the biggest consumer of freshwater resources, therefore shouldering most of the responsibility, policy responses also need to better monitor and regulate domestic and industrial water usage to fully meet countries’ water security needs.

³⁴ IPCC (2014)

³⁵ IFPRI (2018), *The Role of Agriculture in Jordan*.

³⁶ Green Climate Fund (2021)

³⁷ IPCC

2. Emigration in the Context of Structural Transformation

Rural out-migration is covered extensively in migration literature. Nevertheless, the accelerated pace of environmental degradation and economic trade-offs resulting from structural transformation are reshaping dynamics of mobility, prompting policy-makers to consider new approaches to rural development and migration. To take advantage of migration's benefits while minimising fragilities arising from these trends, renewed efforts must be dedicated towards unpacking the complex linkages between structural transformation, the climate-water nexus and migration in the region.

Therefore, the aim of the following chapter is to review prominent patterns in rural out-migration, in light of the transformative dynamics discussed in chapter 1, particularly in relation to migration drivers, rural-to-urban mobility and the international dimension of rural emigrants.

2.1 A Review of Rural Migration Determinants

Migration determinants in rural areas are usually divided between micro-, household- and macro-level determinants. Given the geographic focus of this study, the following factors are considered to be the most relevant in migration decision-making in rural areas:

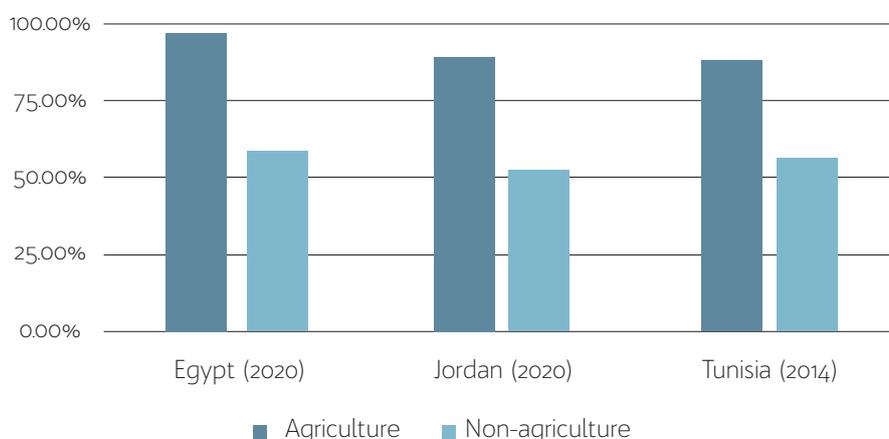
- Rural labour market characteristics;
- Cultural and societal norms;
- Youth aspirations and education;

This classification excludes drivers not commonly related to any of the countries covered but may be observed more intensely elsewhere, such as conflict or persecution. The distinction between drivers shouldn't obscure the fact that drivers are closely interrelated and that, from a migrant's perspective, migration decisions typically involve overlapping (and mutually-reinforcing) considerations. For example, a young female migrant might consider migrating to find better higher education opportunities yet also with the intention to gain more autonomy in light of rural areas' social barriers.

Informality and Concentration of Rural Labour Markets

Rural migrants' migration aspirations are predominantly a function of socio-economic considerations. From a macro-perspective, dysfunctionalities in the region's labour markets apply to rural areas, notably in relation to underemployment, the education-job mismatch and informality. In this section, we will examine rural labour markets through two key factors of labour vulnerability: informality and lack of economic diversification.

Figure 4 Estimates on informal employment by sector in Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia



Source: ILOSTAT

Informality is a rampant phenomenon in rural areas. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that 80 percent of rural work in North Africa is informal, compared to 60 percent in urban areas³⁸. In agriculture especially, informal employment is particularly rife: as shown in Figure 4, approximately 90 percent of workers in Jordan and Tunisia and almost 100 percent in Egypt are thought to be informally employed. This proportion is much higher than in other sectors, where the shadow economy covers approximately 50 percent of the labour force³⁹. Amongst informal workers, women and youth are disproportionately represented.

‘Contributing’ household labour accounts for a significant amount of informal workers, especially in family farms. In rural areas, women and younger family members are routinely expected to participate in the farm’s day-to-day duties, for instance taking care of harvesting or animal husbandry. The menial and domestic nature of this work implies exposure to health and physical hazards. Since it relies on domestic or communal solidarity, contributing labour is generally unpaid and doesn’t represent a source of social recognition for those who perform it⁴⁰.

Informality in agriculture is commonly associated with long working hours, precarious working conditions, low wages, exposition to chemical substances, physical strain and lack of social protection⁴¹. Given the scale and pervasiveness of rural informality, workers often face considerable risks simply to secure an income. Breaking the cycle of pervasive informality in the countryside requires pro-active and targeted measures in favour of smallholders, by simplifying the agricultural tax regime and exonerating small farms below a certain level of income to bring them to the formal sector.

Concomitantly, rural areas suffer from a crippling lack of economic diversification. Although agricultural employment is decreasing as a share of total employment, farming remains by far the mainstay of rural economies. In some settings, such as Tunisia’s centre and western governorates, agriculture accounts for over half of total employment⁴².

38 IMF (2022), Informality, Development and the Business Cycle in North Africa. Departmental Paper. Washington DC.

39 ILOSTAT. See SDG Indicator 8.3.1.

40 CIRAD and CIHEAM (2017), Study on Small-Scale Family Farming in the Near-East and North Africa Region.

41 Bossenbroek L, Ftouhi H. (2021), The plight of female agricultural wagedworkers in Morocco during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cah. Agric. 30: 40

42 IFPRI (2018), The role of Agriculture and Agro-Processing for Development in Tunisia, Regional Program, Working Paper 09.



The evidence reviewed earlier shows that rural livelihoods are pressured by the growing dualisation of the sector and climatic conditions. Remaining employment opportunities are marginal and mostly found in small services and trade or in the local public administration. This situation considerably restricts the spectrum of opportunities available for rural dwellers, regardless of their skill and education levels.

In this context, it is not surprising that many farming households decide to opt for income-diversifying strategies which may include one or several household members taking up employment in bigger, neighbouring farms or commuting to nearby towns to engage in petty trade, public works or construction on a part-time or full-time basis⁴³. Survey data shows that, for rural households, the share of total income derived from agriculture is declining while the number of income sources per household are increasing, suggesting that more and more farmers don't fully rely on agriculture⁴⁴. For rural households who can afford it, the migration of a family member (either to cities or abroad) is the ultimate step towards optimising diversification of income in light of declining farming prospects.

To tackle rural poverty, the effects of climate change and out-migration, rural development strategies must create a conducive environment for people to safely exit agriculture and for non-agricultural, small and medium businesses to flourish. This includes accompanying local entrepreneurs in setting up operations, notably through the provision of financial and technical support, and to increase the targeted areas' infrastructure network to accelerate integration with consumer markets.

Considering its significant potential for export, agro-processing is very often considered a clear area of untapped potential for rural areas. The sector is still modest in most countries (2 percent of GDP in Tunisia) but is often considered a gateway to higher-value markets (olive oil for example) while being constantly associated with higher income for workers down the chain. Local actors also point out robust prospects for the development of eco-tourism and hand-made crafting in the region's rural areas, based on high interest for the region's unique (natural or cultural) heritage.

Social and Cultural Norms

At the individual (micro) level, propensity to migrate is also often associated with a strong desire for emancipation. Research on current and prospective migrants highlight the role of somewhat rigid social and cultural norms as well as values in shaping migration aspirations, especially amongst the youth⁴⁵.

The omnipresence of family labour (and its coercive nature in some instances), the lack of civic participation and representation, and the prevalence of patriarchal hierarchies, are all structural conditions that, in many instances, may exert negative pressure on perceptions of individual agency^{46,47}.

Reports on rural development stress that women are particularly vulnerable in light of oppressive social and gender relations. The persistence of strict gender roles across the region severely restricts women's access to primary and secondary education and greatly complicates their access to formal agricultural employment. Consequently, women working in the fields are commonly assigned arduous and hazardous tasks, with detrimental effects on health and living conditions⁴⁸. They also face challenges in starting their own agricultural entrepreneurial activities, as they possess insufficient economic assets, savings and social capital. The income gap between women and men in

43 CIRAD and CIHEAM (2017), *ibid*.

44 HCP (2021), Note, Sources de revenu des ménages, Structure et inégalité

45 CIHEAM (2018), *ibid*.

46 IFAD, Migration and Transformation Pathways.

47 CIHEAM (2018), Migrations et Développement Rural Inclusif en Méditerranée, Chapitre 7, Migration des jeunes ruraux méditerranéens. *Ibid*.

48 Bouzidi, Z., Saker E., and Wided M., (2011), Le travail des femmes dans le secteur agricole: Entre précarité et empowerment—Cas de trois régions en Egypte, au Maroc et en Tunisie, Gender and Work in the MENA Region Working Paper no. 22. Cairo: Population Council.

agriculture In Morocco has been reported to reach 50 percent⁴⁹. Additionally, complex land regulations mean very few women actually do own their land, even as widows⁵⁰.

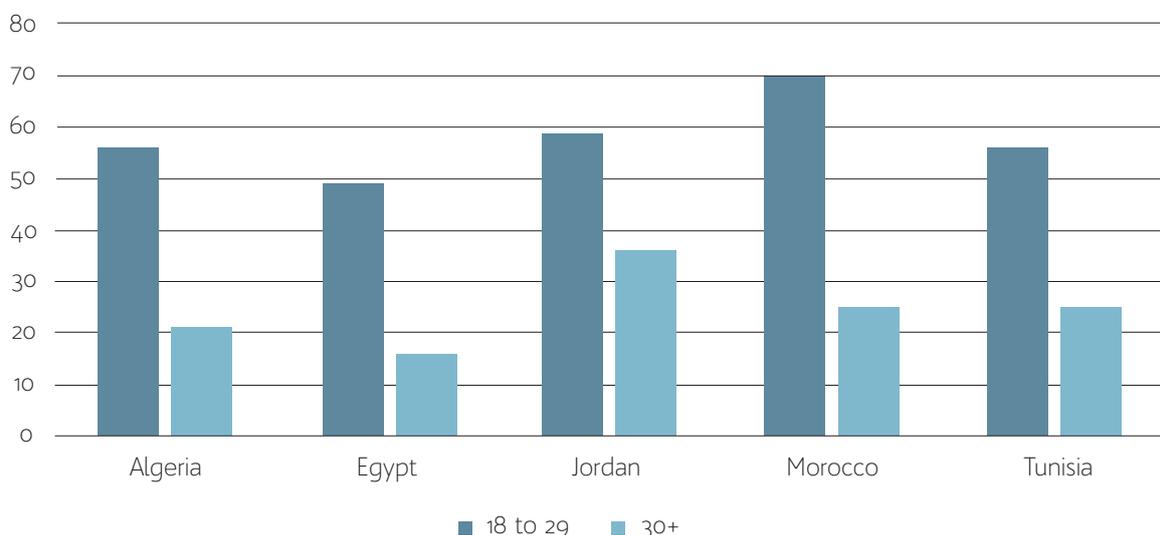
Women wishing to work outside the household must often navigate through informal networks as the ingrained stigma related to women’s work means employers are reluctant to hire them. It has been described how women in rural Moroccan regions are compelled take up fieldwork in bigger holdings, where working conditions can be strenuous and dangerous due to the little consideration granted to workers’ security. In other instances, women’s labour is confined to a specific set of jobs (schools, dairy farming, etc.).

In spite of their often precarious situation, the share of women in total agricultural employment is actually increasing⁵¹. Indeed, the income diversification trend discussed earlier has materialised in men moving away from the villages towards more prosperous areas where industries are located, either temporarily or permanently, depending on the type of migration project pursued. In response, women are expected to endorse greater household responsibilities, including working the fields in their husband’s absence. Within rural areas, this shift in occupational relations is potentially a powerful catalyst towards attenuating gender-related barriers.

Youth Aspirations and Education

Youth surveys, especially in North Africa, reveal a deep sense of economic, political and social marginalisation, predominantly arising from high youth unemployment and the lack of life perspectives. The difficulty to project oneself into adulthood has been demonstrated to be a source of deep social frustration as well as a precursor to migration aspirations⁵². In general, aspirations to migrate are (much) higher amongst youngest segments of the populations as revealed in the graph below.

Figure 5 Desire to emigrate by age group and by country in 2019



Source: Arab barometer, Wave V

49 Bossenbroek Lisa. Les ouvrières agricoles dans le Saïss au Maroc, actrices de changements sociaux ? Alternatives Rurales (7), Décembre 2019.

50 FAO (2019). Rural Migration in the Near East and North Africa, Regional Trends, Cairo.

51 FAO (2019), *ibid.*

52 ICMPD (2022). Youth and Migration in the Maghreb: A Review of Youth Aspirations in Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia, EUROMED Migration V.

In rural areas, desire to emigrate is linked to both material and abstract factors. Job prospects but also training opportunities or higher education programmes are relatively scarce. As a consequence, young people have few other options besides supporting family holdings as contributing labour or, alternatively, engage in small menial work around farming to help raise the household income. In 2020, 32 percent of young Moroccans in rural areas reported having no occupation whatsoever (including in the field of education, employment or training)⁵³

In rural areas, the quality of the education system is a persisting source of discontent. Besides lacking in equipment and learning material, rural schools are confronted with shortcomings in terms of qualified and trained teaching staff. Lagging education standards in rural areas compared to cities mean pupils and students are more likely to be constrained in their learning development, to miss on important learning objectives or to drop out from the school system entirely.

For older youth segments, tertiary education is a key reason for out-migration, and accounts for a large portion of rural-urban migrants. Distances to urban centres often imply new students must relocate from the hinterland in order to attend university. Even if conceived as temporary, out-migration for education reasons generally becomes permanent since, upon graduation, rural migrants tend to settle in to search for employment opportunities suited to their aspirations.

In all countries of this study, urban centres tend to exert a strong pull on rural youth. Cities are associated with positive values such as modernity, independence and comfort. In contrast, the youth regret rural areas' lack of leisure, challenging working conditions and often intrusive family or community customs. This perception is amplified due to youth increased exposure to social media, which tends to valorise urban, consumerist lifestyles. Reports also indicate that the diaspora plays an important role in circulating narratives of wealth and success resulting from out-migration.

Young peoples' rural exodus is already reshaping demographic pyramids in the countryside. In Morocco, the share of young people (aged 0 to 24) is expected to drop, from roughly half the population in 2014 to 33 percent in 2040⁵⁴. Economically speaking, this trend is likely to structurally affect rural areas' productive capacities as the working-age population continues to shrink. On the medium to long-run, shortages in skill and labour are thus expected, especially in large-scale farming and despite the sector's increased mechanisation, with negative implications in terms of food production and security. Socially, the trend may further entrench rural areas' marginalisation and exacerbate rural-urban drifts in living standards.

To offer youth a different perspective, agricultural work needs to be valorised under all its aspects. This includes raising agricultural wages and the recent increase of farm workers minimum guaranteed wage (SMAG) in Morocco is a very positive step. Yet, local stakeholders also point to the necessity of targeting young people's skills and interests, which diverge from their parents'. Here, positive outcomes in local entrepreneurship initiatives, whereby young rural dwellers are offered a package of incentives to set up small companies in services or agro-business, can inspire national policy. Most importantly, in a context of high climate stress, prospects for young people and environmental factors are undeniably intertwined. For this reason, climate adaption strategies, including systematic water-conservation and agro-ecological approaches, are essential to preserve livelihoods in agriculture and give young people a reason to stay.

⁵³ HCP (2022), Les Indicateurs Sociaux du Maroc, Edition 2022.

⁵⁴ ENPARD Méditerranée (2019), Rapport de synthèse sur l'agriculture au Maroc, CIHEAM & UE.

2.2 Trends in Internal Migration

There is little macro-level knowledge related to outflows of rural emigrants. The lack of quantitative data disaggregated by (sub-national) area of departure means disentangling rural out-migration from total outflows at the national level is complex. Meanwhile, internal movements, such as occurring between rural and urban areas, are only very occasionally recorded and if so, on the basis of rigidly-defined administrative entities. Since rural to urban migrants don't cross any borders, and remain within the same territorial entity, there is very little attention and administrative capacity dedicated to tracking their movements, even though internal migrants reportedly account for four times the total of international migrants globally⁵⁵.

This situation has different implications: i) From the sending country's perspective, there is little knowledge on the proportion of rurals amongst total emigrants, ii) From the receiving country's perspective, there is little knowledge on the proportion of rurals amongst immigrants, iii) For all countries, internal migration is an understudied aspect of people's mobility.

Nevertheless, there is sufficient indication to believe internal migration most certainly occurs at high rates across the region⁵⁶. Furthermore, thanks to population surveys and qualitative accounts, there is reasonable certainty that that rural-to-urban migration surpasses in significance all other kinds of internal movements (urban to urban, rural to rural or urban to rural).

Amongst all countries studied, Egypt has the biggest rural population in both relative and absolute terms. Importantly, its rural population is very young and growing. In this context, rural-to-urban migration represents a crucial coping mechanism for young people experiencing underemployment. Hence, rural exodus is broadly considered a demographic 'valve', helping alleviate social pressures resulting from urban sprawl and land fragmentation, diminishing agricultural prospects and overall labour underutilisation. A 2017 CAPMAS survey estimates there is 8 million internal migrants in the country. In line with observations made earlier, most Egyptian internal migrants are young men who, upon joining urban centres, work in the informal sector with the intention to send money back to their families. According to labour market surveys, rural women are increasingly represented in these internal flows, in conjunction with relaxing social barriers and the service sector's reliance on a female labour force⁵⁷.

Similar trends have been highlighted in Tunisia and Morocco, albeit on a lesser scale. Tunisia's social disparities exert strong pressures on the country's demographic balance. The poorest regions, which happen to be predominantly rural, are characterised by negative net migration rates, in contrast to positive net rates reported in the country's urban and coastal areas: Between 2009 and 2014, out-migration has driven the population in Kairouan's governorate to decrease by 4 percent (net outflow). The National Institute of Statistics (INS) reports a total of 34,000 people leaving the area in that period⁵⁸. In the meantime, Tunis' district, corresponding to the greater Tunis areas, has experienced a net inflow of over 60,000.

For Morocco, aggregate figures provided by the High Commission for Planning of Morocco (HCP) are particularly informative: Migration is responsible for an average 1.5 percent population decline on a yearly basis in the country's rural areas. In absolute terms, this amounts to a negative outflow of approximately 195,000 people in 2020-21. Mirroring this outflow, cities have been characterised by net positive rates of about 0.6 percent. Presumably, rural migrants moving away from the countryside account for the bulk of this growth (mostly because moving internally implies far fewer barriers than international migration). The fact that these rates have remained remarkably stable

55 CIHEAM (2018), *Migrations et Développement Rural Inclusif en Méditerranée*, Chapitre 8 Sous-développement rural et migrations internes.

56 CIHEAM (2018), *Migrations et Développement Rural Inclusif en Méditerranée*, Chapitre 7, Migration des jeunes ruraux méditerranéens.

57 Abu Hatab and al. (2022), *Who Moves and Who Gains from Internal Migration in Egypt? Evidence from Two Waves of a Labour Market Panel Survey*, Habitat International.

58 INS, *Kairouan à travers le Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat 2014*.

over the past 20 years speaks to the intensity of structural transformation and its impact on socio-demographic processes in the country as well as the enduring attractiveness of the urban centres. However, it is false to assume a wholly linear movement from rural areas to cities. A share of the rural emigration is composed of people moving internationally, while urban expansion is also related to the arrival of international immigrants.

Figure 6 Net migration rate per area in Morocco



Source: Haut Commissariat au Plan

As indicated above, impacts of rural-to-urban migration are not limited to the areas of departure. Throughout the Middle East and North Africa, internal migration is responsible for a dramatic acceleration of urbanisation as people leave rural areas to find better working conditions in cities. The region's urban centres, predominantly capital cities and coastal areas, have witnessed considerable growth in the past 20 years and projections indicate the movement is likely to carry on on account of environmental degradation and exogenous shocks in the countryside. The World Bank anticipates an additional 19 million internal migrants by 2050 in north Africa, predominantly from rain-fed croplands and coastal areas and headed towards densely-settled urban centres⁵⁹.

In light of internal migration's pace and significance, Egypt is particularly exposed to urban sprawling. It is considered that the Egyptian urban landscape grows by an average 2 percent per year, having to accommodate an extra 1 million inhabitants. The implications of urban sprawling are felt nation-wide: every year, an estimated 30,000 hectares of arable land is lost to make way for new urban infrastructure (roads, building blocks, informal settlements), in particular around Cairo and the Nile Delta⁶⁰. This is also the case elsewhere: In Tunisia it is an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 hectares that are lost to urban pressure⁶¹. The expansion of cities in once-agricultural lands is also responsible for the depletion of fresh water resources, degradation of soil quality (through construction works) and fragmentation of farm holdings, resulting in increased probability of displacement amongst farmers.

In Jordan, the distinction between rural and urban areas is challenged by the urban sprawling experienced around Amman and Irbid. As a result, agriculture is increasingly being integrated in the cities' social and economic fabric, and

59 Clement, Viviane, Kanta Kumari Rigaud, Alex de Sherbinin, Bryan Jones, Susana Adamo, Jacob Schewe, Nian Sadiq, and Elham Shabahat. 2021. Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration. Washington, DC, The World Bank.

60 Abu Hatab and al, (2022), Ibid.

61 CIHEAM (2018), Migrations et Développement Rural Inclusif en Méditerranée, Chapitre 8 Sous-développement rural et migrations internes.

managed as by urban authorities. According to interview respondents, urban authorities actively encourage their populations to engage in domestic production by lending equipment and ensuring access to seeds, pesticides and training on small-scale farming. Small plots of land and/or roofing areas are also reserved for urban farming.

In many ways, cities play a crucial role in offering better living prospects for internal migrants driven by a lack of rural opportunities. However the risks linked to the region's rapid urbanisation are becoming increasingly clear. In all countries, sustained migration from rural areas is putting pressure on urban centres to meet rapidly growing needs in terms of housing, schooling and health. The urban centres' labour markets, traditionally seen as less discriminating, especially for women, are nonetheless constrained in their capacity to absorb an ever-growing labour supply, meaning informal work is more common for newly-arrived migrants who have less skills and networks to market themselves. Like in rural areas, promotion of decent work, in particular amongst the rural emigrants, needs to be a key feature of policy. Furthermore, urban planning needs to take into account climate vulnerabilities arising from cities' swift and unplanned expansion. Heatwaves are expected to be more intense in densely-built environments. Informal settlements are also more prone to be affected by flooding in case of heavy rains due to the lack of drainage systems.⁶²

2.3 Trends in International Migration

Mapping Rural International Migrants

Parameters shaping migrants' choice of destination are very context-specific. In the case of voluntary migration, these choices may be a function of the migrants' own financial capacities, their perception of opportunities in the destination, the existence of transnational social 'networks' or the availability and accessibility of legal migration routes.

Rural emigrants tend to favour domestic destinations over international ones, even if the respective flows cannot be precisely quantified. In general, for prospective migrants, migrating internally requires fewer resources to undertake, is less associated with social or economic risk, doesn't imply major linguistic or socio-cultural barriers and, most importantly, is not constrained by state-enacted mobility restrictions. All in all, internal migration tends to be more accessible, making it a more prevalent form of movement. On that account, rural emigrants in the region are most often bound for their countries' urban centres than for destinations abroad⁶³.

This does not mean linkages between rural areas and international migration are marginal. Rural dwellers are more likely to consider migrating abroad if they possess a certain level of resources and skills that may be applied in the destination country, in addition to a network of relatives or friends already located there. The choice of pursuing an international migration project might also be dictated by negative perspectives in the country's urban centres or in other typical destination zones. Some researchers have established that internal migration may increase propensity to migrate internationally later on, materialising into 'step' migration processes. However, consistent data on the phenomenon is lacking for the North Africa and Middle East region⁶⁴.

Knowledge on international migration's rural dimension may be gleaned by examining migrant's household surveys and in particular modules related to current migrants. Examining the geographical origin of migrants from a specific country, there is a clear-cut trend in favour of urban migrants: In the total emigrant stock, current emigrants from cities and urban centres usually surpass those from rural areas in number.

⁶² Gaub Florence (2021), Arab Climate Futures, Chaillot Paper, ISS.

⁶³ FAO (2019), Rural Migration in the Near East and North Africa, Regional Trends, Cairo.

⁶⁴ Berriane M., Haas H. and Natter K. (2021) Social Transformations and Migrations in Morocco, Working Papers, International Migration Institute. Paper 171.

In Morocco and Tunisia, rural areas tend to be under-represented amongst international migrants: 10 percent of urban households are 'exposed' to migration, i.e. count at least one migrant member, against merely 5 percent in rural areas. In the predominantly rural regions of Souss-Massa and Draa Tafilalet, only 6 percent of all households are migrant households. Overall, these two regions concentrate about 9 percent of the total emigrant population. In comparison, the regions of Casablanca, Beni Mellal and Rabat account together for half of the current Moroccan migrant population⁶⁵. Similarly, three quarters of Tunisian emigrants come from either Tunis or another (urbanised) coastal region. The north- and centre-west region combined account for solely 8 percent of emigrants⁶⁶. Data relating to aspirations to migrate paint a similar picture: In Tunisia's North- and Centre-West regions, only 10 to 15 percent of the population reports intentions to migrate against 26 percent in Tunis⁶⁷. Overall, it seems that, in these countries, rural areas are less prone to be departure points for international migration than urban centres.

It remains to be seen if these imbalances hold when taking into account the realities of irregular migration. There is indeed indications that aspiring migrants from rural areas are more inclined to consider irregular channels of migration, if need be, than their urban counterparts⁶⁸.

Additionally, important nuances emerge when taking the relative size of the countries' rural-urban population into consideration. In 2014, in Jordan, rural households accounted for only 14 percent of current migrant households (households for which at least one member resides abroad). Since only 9 percent of the population is considered rural, international migration may be interpreted as more significant for rural areas on a per capita basis⁶⁹.

The seemingly greater predisposition for urban communities to migrate can be attributed to several factors: First, as discussed in Chapter 1, rural communities are poorer than their urban counterparts on average. As a result, they possess less resources to dedicate to mobility projects, which are more costly in the case of international migration. It has been described how migration from the poorest, most marginal areas in Morocco, such as the Middle and High Atlas, has focused on internal destinations⁷⁰. Second, more than rural areas, urban centres are characterised by extensive migration 'networks' which migration research has demonstrated to be essential to activate individuals' migration decisions. Third, relative 'immobility' in rural areas may also attest to rural communities' attachment to their land, including its emotional and economic dimension. It is legitimate to believe that these areas' rich agricultural fabric and history may act as a moderating factor for migration aspirations.

Nevertheless, indications from Tunisia suggest a transformative process is in the making. According to a FAO survey carried out in the country's rural areas, the 2011 revolution marked a turning point in rural people's mobility. Before 2011, rural dwellers accounted for approximately 20 percent of international emigrants. Since then, rural and urban areas are equally represented in the current migrant population⁷¹. How the 2011 events have influenced these patterns is not clear. Experts have pointed to the deterioration of the rural infrastructure post-2011 and growing distrust towards political action to explain these changes in the hinterland⁷². In the survey, 2011 coincides with an increase of out-migration for education reasons, in particular among women. It is hypothesised that the political transition might have generated more favourable predispositions towards female out-migration and migration for education reasons in rural settings.

65 HCP (2020) *La Migration Internationale au Maroc, Résultats de l'Enquête Nationale sur la Migration Internationale 2018-2019*.

66 INS et ONM (2021), Tunisia HIMS, *Enquête Nationale sur la Migration Internationale, Progrès Migration*.

67 INS et ONM (2021), Tunisia HIMS, *Enquête Nationale sur la Migration Internationale, Progrès Migration*.

68 FAO (2018) *Rural Migration in Tunisia, Drivers and Patterns of Rural Youth Migration and its Impact on Food Security and Rural Livelihoods in Tunisia*. Rome

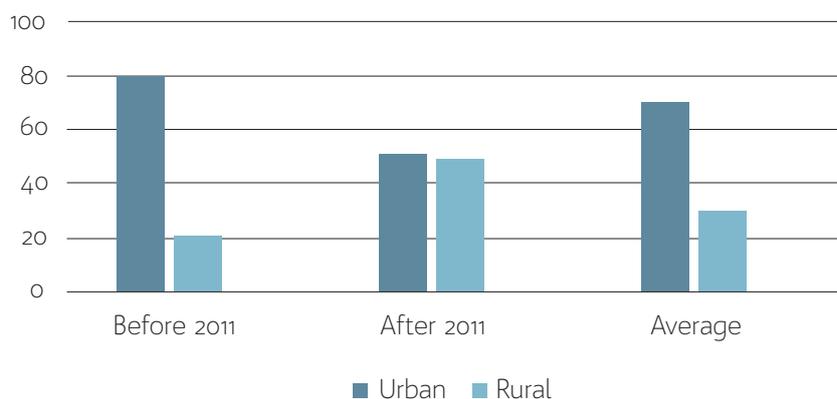
69 Department of Statistics (DoS) (2016). *Jordan-HIMS. Jordan Household International Migration Survey 2014 – Final Report*. Jordanian Department of Statistics. Amman. Jordan.

70 Berriane M., Haas H. and Natter K, *ibid*.

71 FAO (2018) *Rural Migration in Tunisia, Drivers and Patterns of Rural Youth Migration and its Impact on Food Security and Rural Livelihoods in Tunisia*. Rome.

72 Orient XXI, 'En Tunisie la Migration est un Projet Partagée par des Pans Entier de la Société', Entretien avec Hassan Boubakri. 19 Octobre 2022.

Figure 7 Tunisian Emigrants by Area of Origin (FAO Survey)



Source: FAO (2018)

Interestingly, there's a prevalent gender bias in migration decisions in rural areas. Statistics show that migrant households tend to be headed by women, suggesting a relative disengagement of men from farming duties due to out-migration. The share of women-headed household in Moroccan rural areas is indeed quite significant among migrants' households (31 percent) and more in line with the national average within non-migrant households (7 percent). This differential is much less pronounced in the case of urban households⁷³.

It is worth noting out-migration in Egypt has a more distinctive rural dimension than elsewhere. Unlike other North African countries, there is evidence of an overrepresentation of rural individuals amongst total migrants. Between 1998 and 2012, rurals accounted for 70 percent of international migrants⁷⁴. The fact that Egypt's rural population is comparatively much bigger, may explain this difference with other countries. Interviewed experts also pointed out the specific labour market profiles of receiving countries as accommodating factors for rural migrants. Unlike European destinations, Gulf countries, where most Egyptians abroad are settled, are characterised by lower labour market barriers and large demand for low-skilled workers, in addition to not requiring specific linguistic skills.

Engagement of the Rural Diaspora

Migrants are often portrayed as key contributors to rural development. Through household remittances, direct investment, business creation, transfer of technology and knowledge or facilitation of trade, rural emigrants may participate to enhancing agricultural productivity or finding new markets for locally-produced goods, creating jobs and generating livelihoods in their places of origin⁷⁵. Reportedly, the contribution of migrants also extends to non-economic spheres through the dissemination of ideas, norms and values for example, leading diasporas to become agents of social change in origin countries⁷⁶.

Few studies have been dedicated to exploring remittances and other types of financial transfers in the context of the region's rural areas. In Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, remittance inflows account for at least 5 percent of national GDPs, however it is not precisely known to which extent these flows are directed towards rural areas⁷⁷. In addition, internal transfers from cities are not typically considered in total inflows, although it is probable they

73 HCP (2020), *ibid*.

74 David A. and Jarreau J. (2016) *Determinants of Emigration: Evidence from Egypt*. ERF, Egypt.

75 FAO, IFAD, IOM & WFP (2018). *The Linkages between Migration, Agriculture, Food Security and Rural Development*. Technical Report.

76 Berriane M., Haas H. and Natter K. *ibid*.

77 KNOMAD Remittance portal: <https://www.knomad.org/data/remittances>



constitute a major source of income and development for rural regions given the predominance of internal movements. As a consequence, it is difficult to estimate the economic and financial involvement of current migrants, internal or international, in their communities of origin. Conversely, the impact of migration on rural development is not consistently and comprehensively measured.

The intensity of migrants' engagement in their origin communities varies depending on the type of migration undertaken. As discussed before, rural dwellers may choose to emigrate seasonally, working in cities during the lean season or taking up employment as manual labourers in more productive holdings for a few weeks to a few months' at a time. In this case, migration adopts a circular pattern which responds to households' need to diversify their income sources while staying involved in small-scale, mostly subsistence-based agriculture⁷⁸. Most findings indicate that internal migrants, seasonal or not, remain committed to agricultural affairs and the management of family farming. Temporary migration, and the resulting diversification of income, has been proven to help smallholders balance the instability of land returns while being associated with a reduction in poverty levels for those households undertaking it⁷⁹.

International migrants face more barriers in engaging their communities of origin. Research on the subject find that, even if they maintain contact, for example returning a few times a year, international migrants participate less in agricultural activities than their internal peers⁸⁰. However, international migration is also associated with higher levels of remittances than internal migration. Although situations are very disparate, migrants abroad tend to earn wages in line with host countries' labour regulations. In contrast, internal migrants are often confronted to informal labour markets and are not earning sufficiently to contribute to livelihoods in the countryside⁸¹. Like for seasonal migration, international mobility has positive repercussions on the household's living standards.

Gender roles redistribution is another highly-visible consequence of emigration from rural areas. Whether internal or international, migration is commonly associated with increased responsibilities and workload for women. In some geographical areas, women labour in agriculture is considered to surpass that of men. Some specific tasks may have been completely feminised as a result, for example harvesting or animal husbandry in Morocco⁸². In many instances however, the feminisation of agricultural jobs has not resulted in the large-scale formalisation of women in the labour force, meaning women in agriculture are still underpaid and exposed to arduous working conditions⁸³.

Remittances are used for a wide array of purposes. In Egypt, Morocco or Tunisia, there is robust evidence showing that a significant portion of remittance is spent on housing and purchasing real estate. This type of spending may reflect migrants' willingness to prepare for return or may translate increased living standards for families staying behind. In the case of Morocco, Berriane indicates that rural migrants' remittances have even been a catalyst for urbanisation in the country's southern regions. Left-behind households have indeed turned to building houses in villages or smaller towns in order to benefit from these places' better access to public infrastructure and non-farm jobs. In this sense, remittances derived from international migration have also contributed to shape the country's rural-to-urban mobility trends as migrant households have used the funds available to move out of the countryside⁸⁴. In socio-economic terms, the effect of international migration on left-behind households is noticeable, as migrant households demonstrate better employability and income levels than non-migrant ones⁸⁵.

78 FAO (2018) Ibid.

79 IFPRI and FAO (2018), Agriculture and Economic Transformation in the Middle East and North Africa. A Review of the Past with Lessons for the Future. Food Policy Report.

80 FAO (2018) Rural Migration in Tunisia, *ibid*.

81 FAO (2019), Rural Migration in the Near East and North Africa, Regional Trends, Cairo.

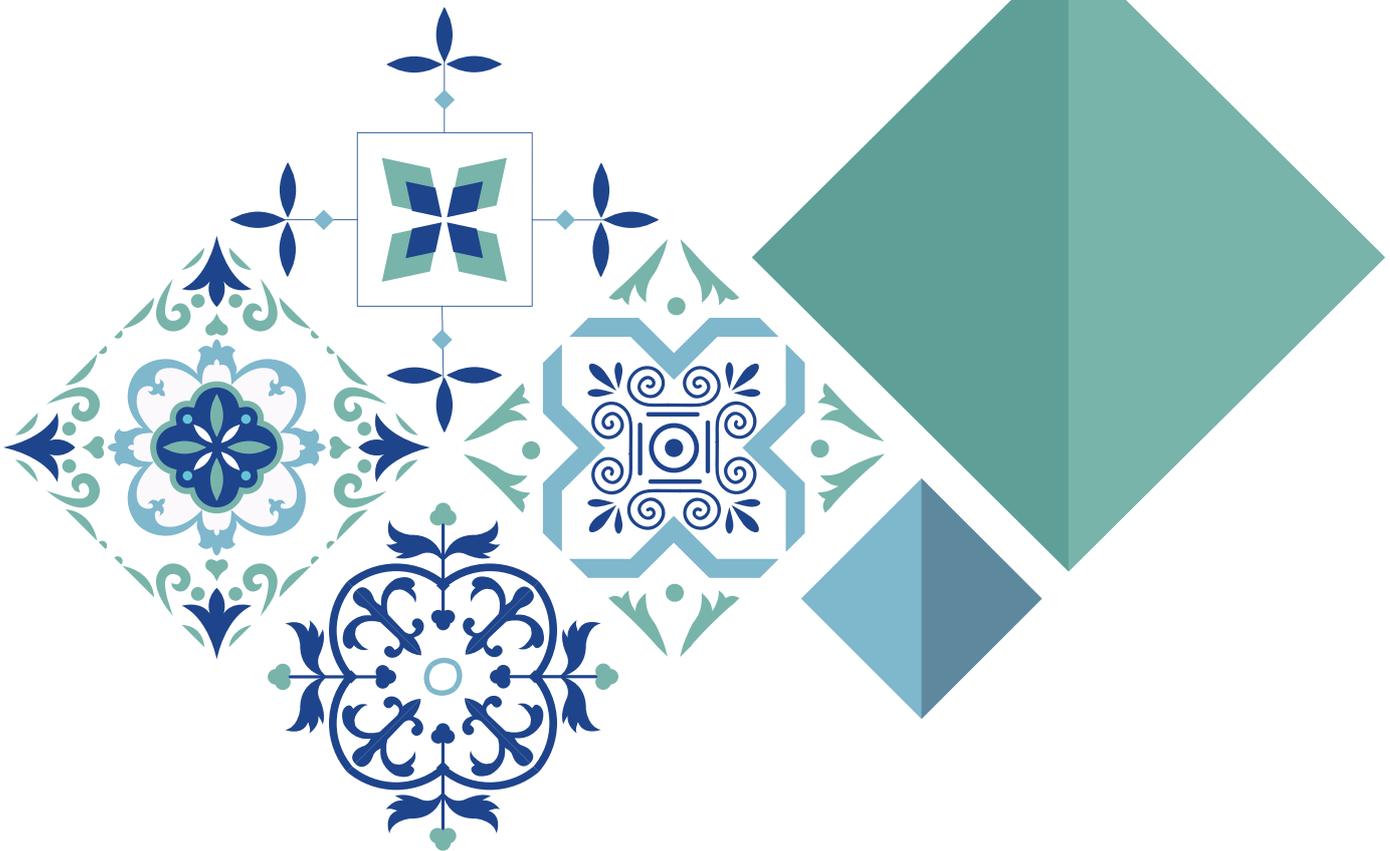
82 David A. and Nilsson B. (2021) Migration and Rural Development in NENA Countries, Case Study, *Regions et Developpement*, n 53-2021.

83 CIRAD and CIHEAM (2017), Study on Small-Scale Family Farming in the Near-East and North Africa Region.

84 Berriane M., Haas H. and Natter K. *Ibid*.

85 IFPRI and FAO (2018), Agriculture and Economic Transformation in the Middle East and North Africa. A Review of the Past with Lessons for the Future. Food Policy Report.

There is a widespread consensus that current migrants' know-how and capital are key to sustainable livelihoods in agriculture. Because agriculture is a prominent area of employment for North Africans abroad, there is conceivably a range of opportunities to harness in terms of knowledge and technical transfer⁸⁶. Diaspora engagement should therefore focus on mobilising this expertise, and the related market opportunities to serve the broader interests of rural areas, in particular with regards to developing off-farm entrepreneurship and boosting the sector's resilience to climate change.



86 Respectively 20 and 13 percent of Moroccan and Tunisian emigrants are working in the agricultural sector

3. Immigration and Reintegration

3.1 An Overview of Immigration Patterns

North African and Middle Eastern countries are often considered at once countries of origin, transit and destination of migrants. Conflict and climate-related displacement accounts for a significant portion of migration within and towards the region. Mediterranean countries host a large number of forcibly displaced persons, particularly since the outset of the Syrian conflict in 2011. Ten years on, there is about 5.6 million displaced Syrians in the region, including over 1 million in Jordan alone⁸⁷. Syrians have also migrated to other countries in the region, such as Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. Moreover, Tunisia has been hosting displaced populations from neighbouring Libya which was itself at the receiving end of inter-African migration routes.

In the meantime, North African countries experience a regular influx of migrants departing from Sub Saharan Africa. Often framed as 'economic' migration, this intra-continental mobility entails in fact a very wide spectrum of migrant motivations, trajectories, prospects and legal statuses. It is driven primarily by working-age adults searching for job opportunities, but also by asylum-seekers and migrants in need of protection, seasonal and 'circular' workers, students enrolled in higher education or families in situations of transit moving onwards towards Europe. Their situation may be voluntary or accidental, legal or irregular and their stay may last from a couple of weeks to decades⁸⁸. Because of these mixed movements, migration in the region defies straightforward categorisation and complicates the establishment of policy frameworks for protection and migration management. Additionally, mobility is also composed of nationals returning to their countries of origin after spells of time in Europe, the Gulf countries or Libya in the case of Tunisia. This return migration is receiving increasing attention, both in policy and migration literature.

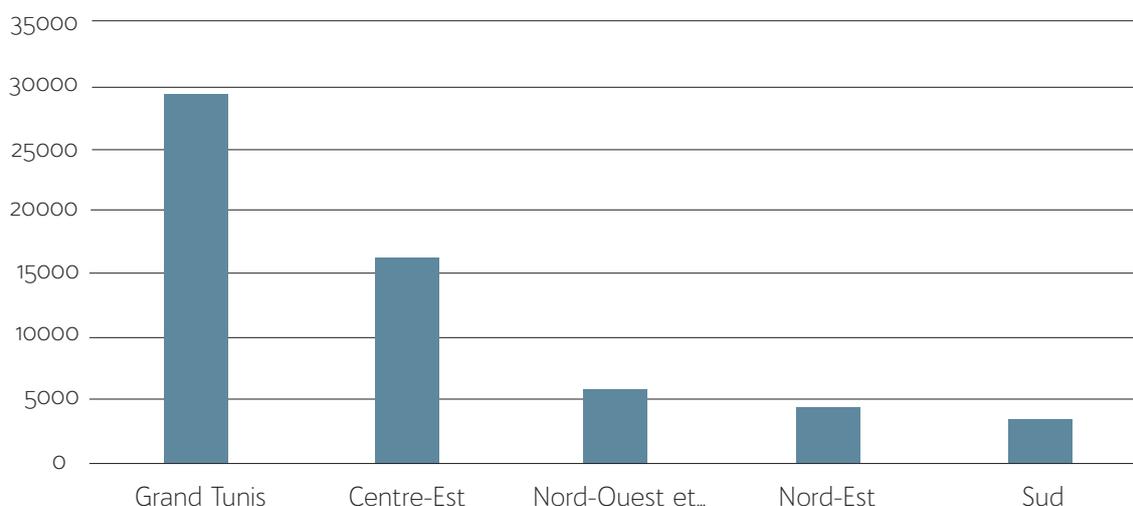
The situation of immigrants in rural areas reflects this complexity. The few statistical sources available on immigrants' characteristics seem to indicate that rural areas are not usually conceived as destinations when immigrants set out on their journey. The absence of medium and big businesses, the pre-eminence of small-scale family farming and, as outlined earlier, insufficient diversification mean that employment prospects are scant, in particular for foreigners. In this respect, urban centres like capital cities or touristic areas (mostly on the coast), offer more guarantees to make a living thanks to the size of informal markets and the presence of information brokers.

In Tunisia, the rural regions account for a very small fraction of the residing foreign population, unlike cities and coastal areas. Out of the estimated 58,000 non-nationals in Tunisia, solely 5,000, or barely 10 percent, are thought to be residing in the interior regions, which are predominantly rural and agricultural. In comparison, the Tunis greater region concentrates about half of this immigrant population.

⁸⁷ Jordan Response Plan 2017-2019.

⁸⁸ Terre d'Asile Tunisie (2016), Portraits de Migrants.

Figure 8 Distribution of immigrant population by region of residence in Tunisia



Source: INS (2021)

In addition to clear spatial patterns of residence, migrants' engagement with the agricultural sector seems to be very limited. The sector only employed 7 percent of the immigrant labour force in 2020, way behind services (61 percent), industry (18 percent) and construction (14 percent). Employment in agriculture concerns 10.5 percent of sub-Saharan migrants and 8 percent of migrants from neighbouring countries. Other migrants are not represented at all in the sector⁸⁹.

In Morocco, agriculture is also a less desirable field of work. According to a 2021 survey delivered by the HCP, immigrant's share in agriculture is negligible. Services are by far the primary area of employment, accounting for approximately half of immigrant employment, followed by trade (22 percent) and construction (12 percent). Agriculture was reported to be the occupation of merely 8 percent of survey respondents⁹⁰. 24 percent of Malian nationals are involved in agriculture as per the survey. Along with Senegalese (15 percent), this is the only group to show a distinctive presence in the sector.

These findings for Morocco and Tunisia paint a picture of an immigrant population concentrated predominantly in the countries' urban and more prosperous centres. Statistics show they are active in the 'service' sector which covers an array of jobs in petty trading, gastronomy, tourism, etc. This speaks in favour of cities as being attractive destinations for international migrants as much as for internal ones. Urban centres additionally present international migrants with the likelihood to find pre-existing community networks or brokers to facilitate arrival and access to housing and other vital services like healthcare. These networks are also proven to help new immigrants by connecting with potential employers, guiding them through regulations and administrative systems or acting as vectors of solidarity⁹¹. Importantly, and in contrast to rural areas, urban centres possess the banking infrastructure to respond to migrants' needs in terms of sending remittances to their families via safe channels.

To a certain extent, these observations deserve some nuance. First, the employment data as part of the HIMS

89 INS et ONM (2021), Tunisia HIMS, Enquête Nationale sur la Migration Internationale, Progrès Migration.

90 HCP (2021) La Migration Forcée au Maroc, Résultats de l'Enquête Nationale de 2021.

91 Base de données DIOC-E, OECD



surveys reflects above all the reality of declared work, which as discussed under chapter 1, is extremely marginal in rural areas (about 10 percent). On this account it might be legitimate to wonder if, and to which extent, the data on migrants in agricultural employment, as well as in construction, is an under-estimation. Considering that most foreign workers are, according to an expert interview conducted, in a situation of transit, it is conceivable that their labour evades official records. Second, in the case of Morocco, the survey was delivered in the country's biggest cities, raising risks of geographical bias in the way results have been collected. Half the survey sample resided in Casablanca or Rabat at the time of the fieldwork, giving urban respondents relatively more exposition. To capture the significance of immigration in rural areas with precision it may be useful to expand the survey's geographical sampling in the future.

According to some accounts, foreign workers are increasingly filling labour shortages in North Africa's agriculture, notably in response to the disengagement of the male rural workforce⁹². These workers are found in the most productive and labour-intensive farms, which are characterised by advanced crop techniques and export-focused production. Due to the isolated nature of these holdings and the considerable areas covered, little information typically filters on the characteristics and well-being of this foreign population. There is evidence that the specificities of agricultural work may attract people in situations of transit: it doesn't require specific training, can be carried out on the move, entails generic menial tasks (especially during harvesting), and provides an immediate, yet very limited, source of income, designed mainly to cover future movement (to cities or to Europe) or to support communities back in countries of origin.

Considering the sector's labour practices, it is conceivable that most foreign workers on these holdings are informal wage labourers and therefore don't benefit from minimum salary and social protection guarantees. They may be exposed to these farms' precarious working environment, for example by being requested to manipulate chemical substances, heavy machinery or livestock without proper equipment or training. Distance from towns implies housing options are scarce and commute from towns may often be very long and expensive. In the absence of collective representation mechanisms, through trade unions or community organisations, foreign workers are particularly vulnerable in case of mistreatment at the hands of employers.⁹³ To respond to these new trends, it is advisable for labour authorities to strengthen their monitoring in rural areas, in particular with regards to the situation of immigrants. The establishment of efficient referral mechanisms may also bear fruit as most victims may be in irregular situations and unwilling to raise attention. Trade unions have a particular responsibility in safeguarding migrants' rights, in particular in the farming sector. The opening of dedicated 'migrant areas' by Tunisian Trade Unions in Tunis and Sousse represents a step in the right direction⁹⁴.

3.2 Foreign Agricultural Workers in Jordan: towards a more inclusive approach

Jordan's experience in hosting migrants is, in contrast, shaped by decades of conflict-related influx. Considerable movements of population have had a deep impact on the Jordanian society, putting strain on essential infrastructure, increasing competition for resources and affecting the composition of its labour market. In this challenging context, the country has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to adapt and has gone a long way to foster a sense of socio-economic security including for vulnerable populations.

⁹² FAO (2018) Rural Migration in Tunisia, Drivers and Patterns of Rural Youth Migration and its Impact on Food Security and Rural Livelihoods in Tunisia. Rome.

⁹³ FAO (2019) *ibid.*

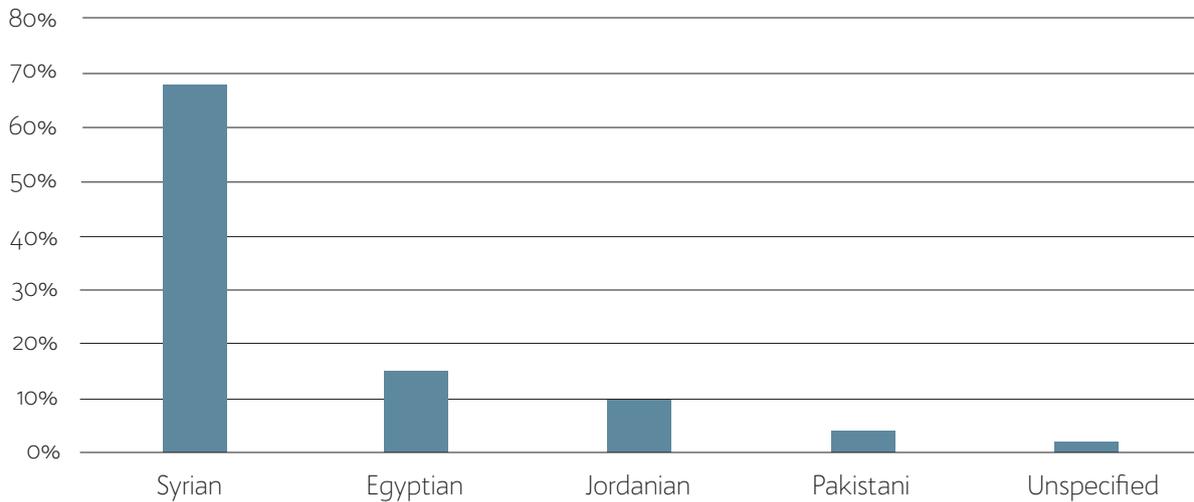
⁹⁴ Ouverture des premiers « Espace-Migrants » à l'UGTT: Inauguration de deux « Espaces-Migrants » à l'UGTT Tunis et Sousse destinés aux travailleurs migrants étrangers en Tunisie (ilo.org). The UGTT, through support by the ILO, has opened two physical spaces dedicated to addressing migrant workers' requests and grievances.

In this respect, agriculture plays a key role in the development of livelihoods of Syrian refugees in Jordan. As indicated in previous chapters, agriculture in Jordan has grown steadily over the past few years, primarily as a result of productivity gains and external demand in neighbouring Gulf markets. Work opportunities arising from this expansion have been mostly taken up by low-skilled, foreign workers rather than Jordanian nationals. In parallel, the reforms introduced under the Jordan Compact⁹⁵ have contributed to open the agricultural labour market, as well as other strategic sectors, for Syrians residing in Jordan. The lifting of restrictions for agricultural workers prompted a major re-composition of the labour force and, incidentally, a shift in the rural landscape in Jordan: According to a 2018 ILO survey, Syrians may represent as much as 70 percent of the workforce in the sector. Along with other nationalities (Egyptians, Pakistani), non-Jordanians account for 90 percent of labour in farms⁹⁶. In the country's rural regions, where they are proportionally most represented, Syrians amount to almost 35 percent of the population⁹⁷

These few indications suggest a relationship of interdependence between employers and the foreign workforce. In certain governorates, agriculture represents a key lifeline for refugees. In Mafraq for example, agriculture accounts for 24 percent of Syrian total employment (which remains confined to a few sectors of activity). The issuance of thousands of work permits by authorities was instrumental to create safe and decent work for refugees and dramatically increase the potential for self-reliance. For instance, 95 percent of the survey respondents indicated possessing a valid permit and almost all of them reported being paid at least the minimum wage for Syrians in Jordan, amounting to about 5 JD per day.

For employers, the Syrian workforce contributes to fill the labour shortages arising from rural exodus and ageing demographics. Although the share of employment in agriculture at national level is constantly decreasing, notably as a result of mechanisation, most farms rely, partially or entirely, on foreign labour of some kind, in particular during the harvesting season.

Figure 9 Workforce by Nationality, ILO survey in Irbid and Mafraq governorates



Source: ILO (2018)

⁹⁵ <https://odi.org/en/publications/the-jordan-compact-lessons-learnt-and-implications-for-future-refugee-compacts/>

⁹⁶ ILO (2018), Decent Work and the Agricultural Sector in Jordan, Evidence from Workers' and Employers' Surveys.

⁹⁷ IFPRI (2018), The role of Agriculture and Agro-Processing for Development in Jordan, Regional Program, Working Paper 05.

This reliance on foreign human capital is set to grow as the country keeps promoting domestic production in order to meet the objectives of the NSAD and alleviate risks related to food security. The government has for example specifically targeted the refugee population in its effort to stimulate the local food supply: measures include the provision of training programmes and counselling to stimulate agro-entrepreneurship, provision of seeds, equipment and irrigation training to women refugees and the development of agricultural programmes within refugee camps.

Nevertheless, work in agriculture is still associated with lower income and a high degree of precariousness. Because of the holdings' distance from towns, workers are either forced to commute or to live in tents, shelters, or other forms of temporary accommodation provided by the employer. Also, work in the field is rarely subject to formal contracts: like in North Africa, the workforce is primarily composed of wage labourers who engage on specific tasks depending on seasonality. Social security and health provisions are de facto excluded from most working arrangements. In addition, the ILO has reported instances of child labour, in particular in the context of agriculture. In spite of the Jordanian education system's very favourable conditions for Syrian children, there is a relative lack of accessibility of schools in rural areas, leading some families to bring children to work.

The influx of Syrian refugees has profoundly altered social structures in Jordan. In particular, rural areas have experienced wide-ranging changes arising from this influx, predominantly in terms of these areas' demographic, economic and social structures. For Jordanians as well as the international community, the pace and scale of employment creation in agriculture has contributed to shed light on the potential of migration for rural development and food security, all the while underscoring some of the pitfalls associated with large-scale influxes of population.

3.3 Characteristics of Returning Migrants in Rural Areas

The question of migrants' reintegration in their countries of origin in the post-return phase of migration tends to increasingly crystallise policy-makers' attention, especially in traditional hosting countries of migrants. For example, the *New EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration* frames voluntary returns an opportunity to contribute to the development of home communities⁹⁸. However, the consequential differences in migrants' motivations, backgrounds and resources, as well as in host countries' socio-economic environments, considerably complicate efforts to leverage the development potential of reintegration. This is particularly the case in rural areas.

Return statistics from Tunisia and Morocco indicate that returns to rural areas are not particularly significant in numbers. The HIMS survey for Morocco reveals that less than 20 percent of return migrants over the 2018-2019 period reside in rural areas. In Tunisia, the western regions account for a small fraction of returns to the country, 8 and 3 percent for the North- and South-West respectively. This suggests an existing inclination for returning migrants to settle primarily in cities, where work is available in greater quality and quantity than in rural places. According to experts interviewed, rural emigrants, especially younger ones, might opt to settle in cities to tap from the social networks available and to avoid the stigma commonly associated to return migrants. It is not known if migrants who engage in circular and seasonal schemes of migration are considered return migrants in the referenced literature.

The lack of opportunities in rural areas is not however a major barrier to investing in agriculture. As discussed in Chapter 2, North African emigrants have a distinct financial interest in agricultural activities, as evidenced by relatively high investment rates for current migrants. This interest is seemingly continued in the post-return phase. For example, 30 percent of Tunisian returning migrants have invested in agriculture upon return⁹⁹. The fact that more Tunisian returnees invest in agriculture than any other sector points to a certain attractiveness of the sector for returnees.

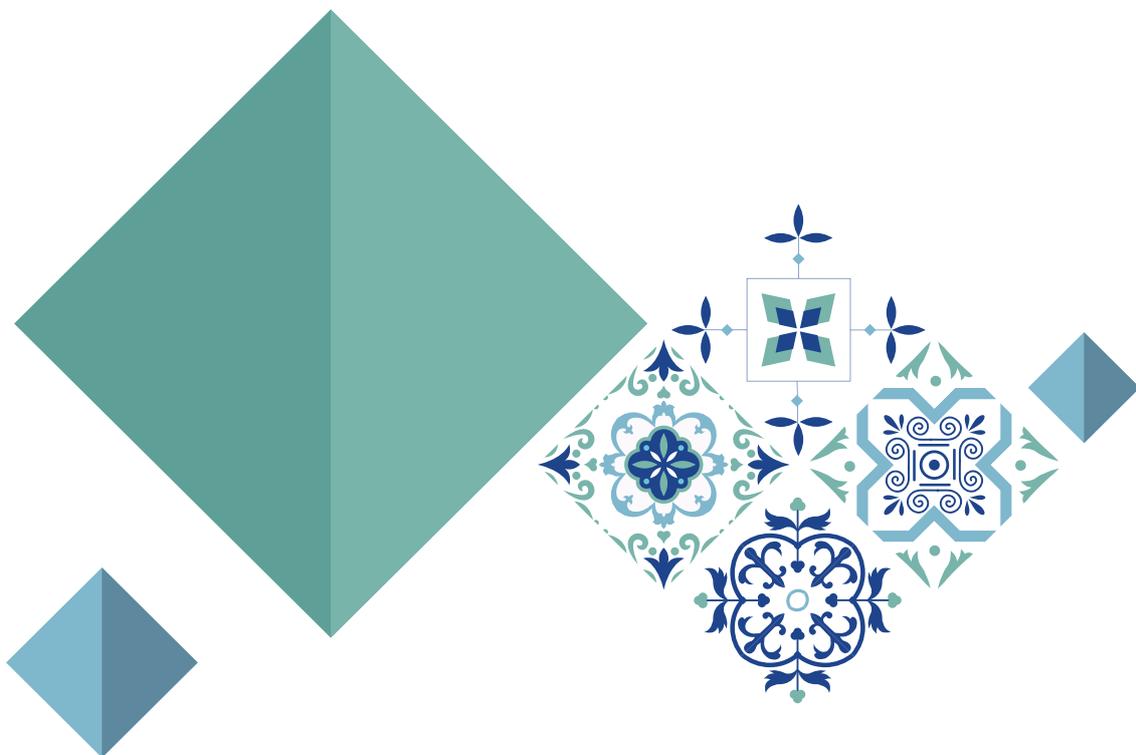
⁹⁸ European Commission (2021), Communication from the Commission, The EU strategy on voluntary return and reintegration.

⁹⁹ INS et ONM (2021), *ibid.*

This preference also correlates with findings in Morocco: After trading, agriculture represents the second most important area of investment for returnees (17 percent). Interestingly, agriculture is the most popular investment for older migrants (above 60) in the country, whereas among younger returnees, trading is more commonly preferred¹⁰⁰. These findings are consistent with the perception that agriculture might suit an older generation of returning migrants for whom countries of origin offer favourable conditions to undertake small-scale agricultural projects.

Policy debates tend to frame return migrants as potential resources for the development of rural areas. Nevertheless, according to the experts interviewed on the topic, there is no institutional framework accompanying the re-integration process of returning migrants. As a result, reintegration in origin societies might be fraught with challenges and resulting in sub-optimal outcomes in terms of social inclusion. This is ascribed to a general lack of interest for the situation of returnees from national authorities but also to the failure of internationally-sponsored projects to take into account the limitations of the rural economy.

For reintegration efforts to ultimately bear fruit, dedicated interventions have to mirror and integrate the specific challenges facing rural areas. For example, entrepreneurship support through grants and/or technical training for returnees needs to be aligned on overarching resilience-building strategies. Returnees also may be incentivised towards creating non-farm businesses, especially in areas where farming is challenged by environmental degradation. To achieve this, measures must capitalise on the existing skills and knowledge of the diaspora and the returnee community. Since a large portion of returnees have practiced agriculture in destination countries, facilitating technology and know-how transfers may be particularly conducive and pave the way for new opportunities in local value chains and increases in businesses' productivity.



100 HCP (2020) *ibid.*



Concluding Remarks

The present discussion has highlighted how rural societies in the region are currently undergoing a process of deep structural transformation, disrupting traditional livelihood systems while breeding new vulnerabilities. In addition to that, rural communities are often at the forefront of the compounding energy, food and climate emergencies. Farmers are struggling to stay afloat in light of fertiliser shortages, sky-rocketing grain and food prices and declining harvests. Surrounding communities are deeply affected as agriculture remains the predominant source of income in rural economies. In these conditions, out-migration may appear as the only viable option to make a living. Concurrently, the discussion has also shed light on vulnerable groups like the youth, women and also, increasingly in rural contexts, of incoming and/or transit migrants, employed in agriculture. Innovative and holistic thinking is needed in the years to come to safeguard rural and farming livelihoods through these turbulent times and offer these communities robust reasons to stay. As a contribution to this reflection, the study invites policy-makers to prioritise action along four main dimensions.

First, supporting rural areas in the midst of this transition begins with the building up of rural societies' resilience. This report argues that climate events, through their detrimental impact on livelihoods, are underlying but decisive factors behind migration aspirations. Rural communities around the region are exposed to chronic water insecurity, as a consequence of overconsumption and climate change-induced variation in raining patterns and river flows. This scarcity is already having effects on the ground as droughts and heatwaves depress returns from the land, crippling farmers' income and living standards. To combat this phenomenon, efforts must quickly concentrate on providing farmers, especially smallholders, with the necessary instruments to adapt to the changing weather conditions. The extension of irrigation to arid and semi-arid settings is an essential yet not entirely sufficient step. Due to the extreme scarcity in the region's water basins, and their limited regenerative capacities, genuine resilience can only be achieved through a holistic approach which resolutely tackles demand-side factors. Beyond investing in highly-calibrated irrigation techniques, the sector should prioritise crops that are inherently best suited to dry conditions and, as a result, require less water to grow. Additionally, harnessing the potential of modern technologies or 'smart' agriculture is expected to go a long way towards rationalising water use. For example, In Jordan, farmers are turning towards innovative techniques like hydroponics or vertical farming with support from the government¹⁰¹. In Egypt, 'agri-tech' start-ups are offering farmers digital solutions to facilitate their adaptation to changing weather patterns. For instance, a recently-launched app relying on pinpoint satellite imagery provides farmers with the possibility to monitor crops and anticipate infestations or adverse plant reaction¹⁰². Throughout this process, governments have a key role to play in supporting research and development on adaption techniques while facilitating smallholders' access to training, technology and equipment.

Second, policies and strategies for rural development should focus on unlocking the potential of young people. The adverse conditions experienced by youth in rural areas are well-known: labour market exclusion, prevalence of domestic or precarious work, low social status and civic participation, lack of education opportunities and restricted autonomy in light of rigid social and cultural norms. According to local stakeholders, the emergence of digital communication and social media, notably through its predisposition to exalt urban culture and values, is a major explanation to the gravitational pull exerted by urban centres on young people. Nevertheless, there is good reason to believe that young people remain attached to the land and their communities and are not inevitably considering migration as the most desirable option. Most youth-centred policies have focused on creating more and better avenues for agricultural entrepreneurship in rural areas. This is the purpose of the Rural Youth Migration (RYM) project implemented by the FAO in Tunisia. In partnership with the Ministry for Agriculture, the project aimed to

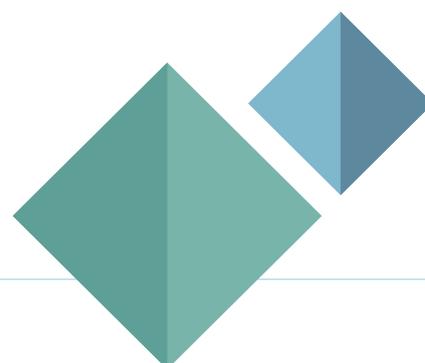
¹⁰¹ WEF, *This aeroponics farm could be the future of food in Jordan*, 22.03.2022.

¹⁰² Tim McDonnell, *Tech startups are scrambling to save Egypt's farmers from climate change*, Quartz, 11.10.2022.

materialise young people's business ideas by facilitating access to credit (to purchase land), to technical training on farming and management practices and mentoring via a network of agricultural coaches. This support provided by the latter was considered as particularly helpful to build young people's confidence¹⁰³. If these initiatives are useful to boost agricultural entrepreneurship, it would be very sensible to enlarge the scope of supported activities to off-farm enterprises, as an engine for economic diversification and climate adaptation in rural areas. For instance, growing sectors like eco-tourism, artisanal crafts or agro-processing have been proven to match youth interests and skills. New mentoring and credit schemes, following the model of RYM project, could be adapted to specifically target these fields of entrepreneurship.

Third, by many accounts, the potential of the diaspora has largely remained 'untapped'. In many social contexts, migration can represent a powerful catalyst for local development. Though the sending of remittances, but also thanks to the transfer of skills, knowledge, ideas and human capital more broadly, current migrants can decisively contribute to origin communities' prosperity. Research shows however that the migration-development nexus does not necessarily entail a straightforward relationship and that the potential of the diaspora depends principally on migrants' integration in destination countries as well as their connexion with origin societies. Considering the size of diasporas from south Mediterranean countries, and their diverse set of skills, the engagement of migrants abroad features prominently in national and regional migration agendas. In particular, for rural areas, there is distinct potential from leveraging migrants' know-how and technical skills given that many are active in agriculture in destination countries. In that respect, rural emigrants can accelerate the modernisation and climate adaptation efforts of smallholders in the region. By the same token, agriculture accounts for a substantial share of migrants' investment in North Africa, underscoring the link rural emigrants keep with their communities at home. Channelling this engagement towards rural development projects is the ambition of the association 'Migration et Développement', a diaspora organisation from Morocco. Interestingly, the organisation seeks to engage current migrants by fostering community linkages across borders, and by involving them as well as communities at home in joint and localised development projects. The dynamic and participative nature of these multi-level interfaces have resulted in the development of vital infrastructure projects (water, electricity, schools) but also in critical areas related to entrepreneurship and job creation as well as local governance.

Fourth, and last, rural development strategies must become more inclusive, in particular with regards to labour protection, to contribute efficiently to development goals. Women and households of disengaged male migrants are particularly affected by precarious living conditions, on account of widespread unpaid labour, arduous work and the relative absence of public social protection to combat poverty in the region's rural areas. The unsafety of transport systems and precarious housing for female agricultural workers are additional serious problems raised by the experts interviewed in the framework of the study. To a large extent, these hardships afflict the immigrant population as well. Incoming foreign workers don't necessarily mean to stay or even reside in rural areas but depend on agricultural wages to establish themselves and meet their basic needs as well as their families' back home. Since most labour is undeclared, migrants lack the leverage to pressure employers into improving on-field working conditions and living standards. However, with increased emphasis on domestic food production, and the positive trade outlook, this situation may change in their favour. Agricultural workers have a crucial role to play in bringing farming systems in the South Mediterranean countries more in line with proclaimed objectives of domestic food security and adaptability to weather-related events. To support these goals, authorities need ensure agricultural employment and rural livelihoods comply with principles of dignified and decent work for all, including marginalised groups like women and immigrants.



¹⁰³ FAO (2018), the Rural Youth Mobility Project, Methodology and Results.

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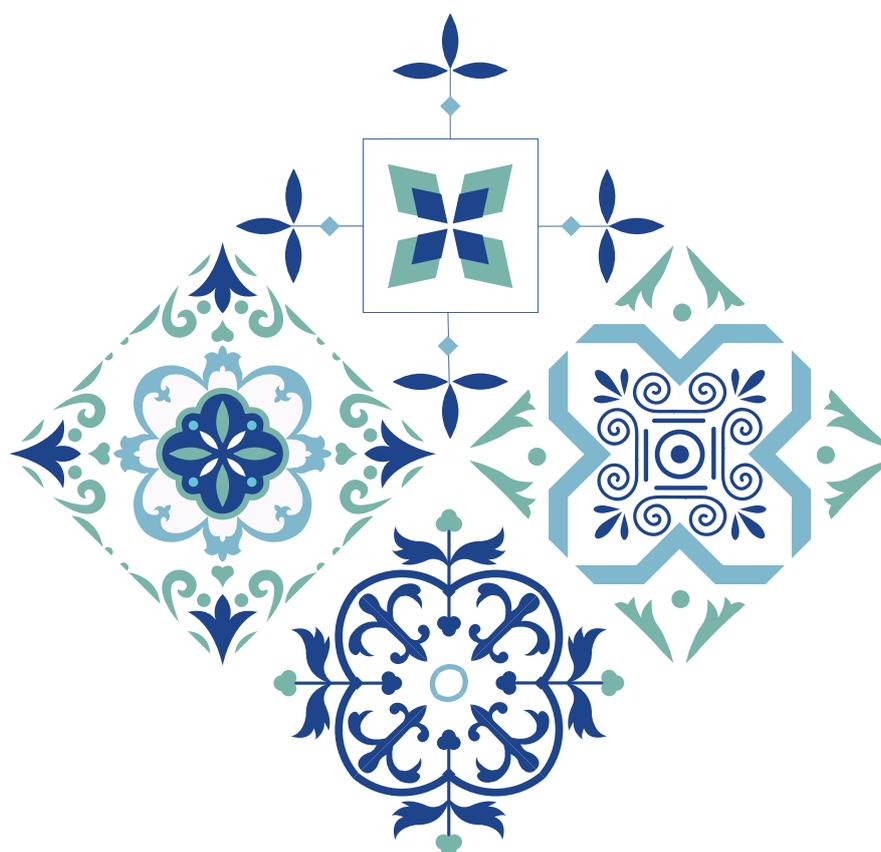
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ICMPD Regional Office for the Mediterranean

Europa Centre, 2nd floor
John Lopez Street
Floriana, FRN 1400
Malta
Tel: +356 277 92 610



Euromed Migration



@EUROMEDMigr



emm5team@icmpd.org



www.icmpd.org/emm5

