



IOM's insitutional communication with expatriate groups from the Middle East and North Africa

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## Migration and Development in Jordan: Unraveling Complex Interconnections

Jordan is the sixth highest refugee-hosting country in the world and received nearly 3.8 billion USD in remittances in 2015, according to the World Bank, yet minimal information is available with respect to remittances amongst the Syrian refugee community. To address these information gaps, together IOM Jordan and [REACH-Initiative](#) conducted a qualitative assessment consisting of a series of focus group discussions and Key Informant Interviews amongst Syrian refugees living in Jordan. Preliminary findings pointed out to the channels used and relationships behind remittance transfers, but also on methodological challenges when conducting such research. It seems that Syrian refugees perceive significant risks when talking about remittances, which prompted IOM and REACH to rethink the methods of collecting pertinent data. Once the method was changed, the study found that Syrian refugees receiving remittances in Jordan are primarily receiving from relatives living in the Gulf region, mainly through formal money service businesses. Those who are able to send remittances from Jordan are primarily sending money to relatives living in Syria, and are more likely to use informal methods, such as hawala and family networks. Although participants in the study largely acknowledged the advantages of a digital platform, responses on the likelihood of Syrian refugees in Jordan adopting such a method were mixed. The study concludes with recommendations on ways to overcome the obstacles identified by the participants, mainly with regards to the mobility of camp residents and high fees of money transfer services. Several avenues for future research are suggested, particularly to better quantify the prevalence of remittances transfers among Syrian refugees.

The second research stream looks into the current contribution of, and potential for, Jordanian expatriates in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to strengthen the Jordanian economy and resilience during humanitarian crises. Although macro data is available on remittances from Jordanian expatriates in the GCC, the study, conducted by Dr. George Naufal (featured in this issue of the Arab Expatriate Exchange) will focus on migration and remittance related behaviour, specifically highlighting current challenges, habits and opportunities that Jordanians face while sending money back home. Using both quantitative and qualitative data, it will shed light on the channels, both formal and informal, used by Jordanians to transfer money to Jordan, and explore the policy implications of the findings, with recommendations on maximizing the positive development effects of remittance inflows on the Jordanian economy.

This innovative research was conducted within the framework of the Strengthening the Jordanian Economy Diaspora Links and examining the Remittances Transfers amongst Syrian Refugees in Jordan project which started in March 2016 and is implemented by IOM Jordan. With funding from the IOM Development Fund, IOM Jordan aims to use this initial research to explore the current and potential roles of the Jordanian diaspora in economic development and humanitarian relief as well as how to utilize remittances to boost resilience during humanitarian crises.

## Alwehdah: Helping to Rebuild Yemen from across the Ocean

The first Arab migrants to Singapore arrived in 1819, a long way from the Hadhramout region of modern-day Yemen. Yet, within a span of just two decades, the Arab community of Singapore numbered around 16,000. The early influx of Hadhrami migrants, as well as their intermarrying and integration into the local populace, accounted for this rapid community growth. To address their needs, an “Arab Union” was assembled as a loosely organized group in the early 1900s. Subsequently, on 11 Nov 1946, it was renamed and officially registered as The Arabs’ Association Singapore ([Alwehdah](#)) as a voluntary, non-profit community organization representing all Singapore Arabs. Since then, Alwehdah has strived to promote the Arabic language, to spread Islamic knowledge within the local community, and to promote interaction and cordial relations amongst members. One of the Association’s staple initiatives to this end was the publication of a bilingual periodical beginning in the early 1990s. The periodical, originally called “Al Shorouq” and later renamed “Al-Mahjar,” presents both English and Arabic content relevant to the Singapore Arab community.



Singapore Arabs have always maintained close relations with their home community through direct family ties. Until recently, many visited Hadhramout on an annual basis, bringing much-anticipated gifts to their families. Unfortunately, such travel to and from Hadhramout has decreased sharply since the onset of the ongoing crisis. Nonetheless, many Singapore Arabs continue to support their families and friends in Hadhramout through remittances from endowments and trusts set up by early Hadhrami migrants to Singapore. These remittances constitute part of the global inflow of approximately USD 3.4 billion annually reaching Yemen through official channels in addition to the significant remittances transferred through informal networks to areas with poor penetration of financial services.

Over the last 70 years, Alwehdah has responded to emerging issues of concern to the community, thus expanding its scope of work from its initial aims. For example, the dilution of Hadhrami culture prompted Alwehdah to establish the “Firqah Alwehdah” Arabic Band and Dance Troup, which has since performed at numerous national and regional cultural events. Later the lack of financial assistance available to Singapore Arab students motivated the Association to create the “Alwehdah Bursary Fund” in 2014 to support underprivileged, promising youth within the Arab community in their pursuit of tertiary education.

Beyond Singapore, Alwehdah has regularly assisted in humanitarian efforts faced by Yemenis. In 2016, according to OCHA statistics, over 84% of the Yemen’s population of 25 million were in need of humanitarian assistance. In a bid to alleviate some of this distress, the Association recently signed a memorandum of understanding with UN Development Program (UNDP) to formalize a partnership to facilitate Hadhrami diaspora in Singapore and other neighbouring countries to extend humanitarian and infrastructural aid to Yemen under the UNDP “Yemen Our Home” initiative. On 2 December 2016 “Yemen Our Home” was officially launched with a focus on providing alternative (solar) energy to schools in Hadhramout lacking stable electricity supply. A web crowdfunding portal, [www.YemenAid.com](http://www.YemenAid.com), was also set up to facilitate donors to pledge their support. Through these means, an impressive USD 40,000 has been raised within a month of the campaign’s launch. This fundraising effort follows another successful campaign that the Association conducted in 1998 where it raised USD 75,000 in response to flooding that took place in the Hadhramout valley. The current fundraising campaign will continue until March 2017 with the hope of maximising the impact of the initiative across education institutions in the Hadhramout region. With such a long history of community work it is no wonder that Alwehdah’s efforts have been recognised by World Scientific Series on Singapore’s 50 Years of Nation-Building published in 2016. Notably, in the same year, they were paid a special visit by an official delegation from Moldova seeking to learn of the Association’s best practices in engaging the diaspora to contribute back to their motherland.

Since its conception, a minor hindrance to the Association’s work has been a lack of funding, which has historically depended on sporadic donations from the small community. Fortunately, in 1989, a successful fundraising effort from members and well-wishers, both locally and overseas, allowed the Association to secure a permanent 13,000 sq ft freehold premise where their Clubhouse now stands. Rental of the Clubhouse facilities now serve as an alternate source of funding to sustain the Association’s operations. Looking forward, Alwehdah is working on developing a sustainable community-driven fund as an intrinsic solution to the long-term social and educational needs of the local Arab community.



*Alwehdah organized an iftar for the Arab community during Ramadan. Photo: Alwehdah.*

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## Building Bridges of Understanding: One Researcher Gives Back with Knowledge, Advice, and Mentorship



*George Naufal is a senior research associate at the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University. His primary research includes migration and its consequences mainly the impact of remittances on the remitting countries as well as the effects of social networks on different aspects of the economy.*

### What is your link to the Arab expatriate community and to Lebanon?

On a personal note, my family is still in Lebanon and many of my friends and colleagues are still living there, so I am in constant contact with Lebanon whether visiting regularly or following the local and regional news. In terms of the link to the Lebanese expatriate community, the social networks are very strong both professionally and socially. This is primarily accomplished through social media.

### What has been the trajectory for your success? Do you think being an expatriate has contributed to your career? If so, how?

The main source behind my success is education. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to attend the International College in Beirut and the American University of Beirut, which both prepared me for a graduate degree in the United States. The recent worldwide interest in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and its migrants to the West has bolstered my career. I am able to provide first-hand experience and knowledge of the region with hopes to build bridges of understanding between the East and West. In addition, the Lebanese diaspora has been very successful and this often translates into respect and admiration.

### Have you been involved in any projects related to Lebanon or the MENA region (humanitarian, development, business, research, etc)?

My research interests are mainly centered on the MENA region. I have been involved in several reports, book and book chapters, and articles on issues that are important to the region such as migration, flows of remittances, youth unemployment and social capital (wasta). My research allowed me to offer advice on these important topics to NGOs, government institutions and private companies. Also, I maintain contact with current and former university students from all over the MENA region and advise them on graduate and professional opportunities. This keeps me up to date with the current issues challenging highly educated youth in the region.

### What are your views on how the Lebanese diaspora can best maintain links and support development of communities in Lebanon?

One of the main ways to help migrant sending countries is to remit and Lebanese expatriates already do that well. Lebanon consistently ranks in the top remittance receiving countries whether by amount or size relative to the local output. An important compliment to sending money is to stay in touch and visit on a regular basis. Visiting in person allows you to see the issues and struggles that different communities in Lebanon are dealing with and perhaps guide some of the remittance flows into these much needed areas. Another crucial step towards creating and maintaining support to Lebanon is to build a support system in countries that influence policies in the region and specifically Lebanon. This support system would be based on an active lobby that has Lebanon and its communities in its best interest. Finally, a better future for Lebanon is going to be dependent on its youth, therefore any strategies that would help and support the

## What's new at IOM?

- IOM The Netherlands launched the project Connecting Diaspora for Development (CD4D) as a successor to the previous Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals projects. CD4D is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and aims to create linkages through temporary assignments and other networking tools between (i) diaspora experts and institutions in the country of origin; (ii) institutions in the country of origin and destination and; (iii) among diaspora experts themselves. CD4D will operate in six countries of origin, including Morocco in the MENA region. For more information contact Adri Zagers at [azagers@iom.int](mailto:azagers@iom.int)
- In partnership with the American University in Cairo's Center for Migration & Refugee Studies, IOM Egypt has launched a short-term certificate on migration governance. The inaugural programme will run from November 2016 to May 2017 and will include seven five-day modules over this period. Modules will be taught by IOM experts along with AUC professors and will include such subjects as migration and development and labour migration. For more information contact Greta Ellero at [geller@iom.int](mailto:geller@iom.int).

## Submit to the next issue

Submissions accepted for the following sections:

- Successful project
- Highlighting Diaspora Group
- Expatriate Success Story
- Announcements

For more information and submissions, please email [iommenanews@iom.int](mailto:iommenanews@iom.int).

## Announcements

- **Feb. 27-28**, Echborn Germany: In collaboration with the Centre for Mediterranean Integration (CMI), the World Bank, GiZ, and other partners, IOM will support a conference for Syrian Diaspora aimed at identifying opportunities and addressing challenges for Syrian diaspora to invest to support livelihoods and employment opportunities for displaced Syrians and host communities as well as, eventually, in a post-crisis Syria. The conference aims to bring together Syrian diaspora experts and businessmen, relevant international organizations and donor organizations.

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