With nearly 19 million international migrants in 2005, the Middle East\textsuperscript{1} has experienced an increase of 3.2 million migrants since 2000 (UN DESA, 2005).

Together with the Mediterranean basin, the Middle East is characterized by highly contrasting labour market features, with certain countries experiencing surplus labour supply and other exhibiting labour shortages.

Temporary workers from overseas are the most prominent migration feature in the Middle East region, especially in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States.

Saudi Arabia is the largest source country of remittances, with an outflow of USD 14 billion in 2005 (World Bank, 2006).

Egypt and Lebanon, with USD 5.9 billion and USD 5.8 billion, respectively, were the two major recipients of remittances in 2007 (World Bank, 2008).

\textbf{ARAB MASHREK}

From 2000 to 2005, migrant stocks increased in all Arab Mashrek countries, apart from Iraq, which experienced a drastic decrease of its migrant population after the outbreak of the second Gulf War in 2002, which also had an important impact on internal migration in Iraq. Jordan is the major destination for migrants in the region, with 2.2 million immigrants in 2005, 80 per cent of whom are refugees (UN DESA, 2005) (see Figure 1).

\textbf{Figure 1:}

\textbf{Stock of migrants in the Arab Mashrek, by destination, 2000 and 2005}

Part A: Total number of migrants

\textsuperscript{1} Following the regional classification used in IOM (2005), this section examines the Arab Mashrek (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), Syria and Yemen), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)) and Israel.
Part B: As a share of total population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OPT</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UN DESA, 2005.

The number of migrants as a proportion of the total population has remained stable in all countries except Iraq: the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) are in first place with international migrants making up 45 per cent of their population, followed by Jordan (39%) and Lebanon (18%) (UN DESA, 2005) (see Figure 1).

The figures for the OPT consist of Palestinian refugees coming under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). As at 30 June 2008, the total registered refugee population in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank stood at 1.06 million and 754,263, respectively (UNRWA, 2008).

People flows from the Arab Mashrek to GCC States are considerable, but mobility between Arab Mashrek countries is also significant

- In 2005, 461,211 Syrian citizens left their country to go to Saudi Arabia, the second most popular destination for Syrians after Lebanon (in 2005, 2.45 million Syrian citizens entered Lebanon) (CARIM, 2005).
- In 2003, an estimated 400,000 Syrians were cross-border commuters, who lived in Syria and worked in Lebanon (Sadeldine, 2005).
- In 2005, 1.68 million Lebanese citizens, or 29 per cent of all annual arrivals, came to Syria, followed by Jordanians, whose numbers increased from 609,000 to 940,000 over the 2001-2005 period (CARIM, 2005).

Lately, the Arab Mashrek has also been characterized by significant migration to destinations further afield, especially from Lebanon and Egypt ...

- Recent data indicate that Europe is increasingly becoming a destination for migrants from Egypt and Lebanon, with stocks of 127,060 and 111,691 migrants, respectively, followed by Syria with 70,879 migrants (Fargues, 2006) (see Figure 2).
- Italy has become a popular destination for Egyptians. In 2006, there were 46,834 Egyptians regularly residing\(^2\) in Italy, compared to 32,381 in 2001 (ISTAT, 2006).
- The U.S. is another popular destination for Arab Mashrek migrants, with Egypt and Lebanon ranking first and second among countries of origin (113,995 and 105,920 migrants, respectively) (Fargues, 2006) (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emigrants from the Arab Mashrek</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * Data for countries of destination were collected from countries providing the latest available census data on foreign residents by country of nationality/birth. Some of the world’s major destination countries for overseas temporary workers, such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and other Gulf states could not be included for lack of accurate data.


\(^2\) i.e. all migrants who hold a residence permit.
... leaving more room for low-skilled workers from Asian countries

- Lebanon, together with Jordan and Egypt, are destinations for increasing numbers of workers mainly from Sri Lanka and the Philippines. More than 55,000 work permits are issued in Lebanon each year to East Asians, mostly to women (Fargues, 2006).

**Arab Mashrek countries are a source of both highly skilled and low-skilled migrants**

- The active migrant workforce originating from the Middle East Arab countries is predominantly low or semi-skilled, but some countries, such as Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt, also experience a high degree of highly skilled emigration. While migrants from Jordan, for instance, are predominantly hired as service workers (35%), lawyers and managers account for 33 per cent of migrants leaving the country (Fargues, 2006) (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Migrants from Jordan, according to occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plant and machine operators and assemblers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers, senior officials and managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled agricultural and fishery workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crafts and trade-related workers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Only the following countries of residence providing the distribution by occupation of Jordanian migrants are included in the Figure: Austria, Canada, France, Spain and the U.S.

**Source:** Fargues, 2006.

The region is strongly affected by the presence of refugees and IDPs

- At mid-2005, Jordan was host to 1.8 million refugees (UN DESA, 2005). Most of them were Palestinians (on 30 June 2008, 1.93 million Palestinians refugees were registered in Jordan with UNRWA) constituting 31 per cent of the total population of the country (5.7 million), the highest ratio in any of UNRWA’s operational regions.

- Syria also has a sizable Palestinian refugee population, estimated at 424,650 or 2.2 per cent of its total population in 2005 (UNRWA, 2006; UN DESA, 2005).

- Nearly one million people were displaced at the height of the Middle East conflict in the summer of 2006 – the vast majority of them in Lebanon. Some 200,000 are estimated to remain in a situation of displacement (IDMC, 2006).

**Arab Mashrek countries are important sources of remittances**

- The remittances sent from the Arab Mashrek countries were estimated at USD 3.7 billion in 2007, with USD 2.8 billion from Lebanon alone (World Bank, 2008).

... but they are mostly significant recipients of remittances

- The total amount of remittances sent to Arab Mashrek countries reached USD 17.2 billion in 2007 (World Bank, 2008). Egypt and Lebanon received almost USD 6 billion each and alone.

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1 See UNRWA (2008). Under UNRWA’s operational definition, Palestinian refugees are persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, and who lost both their homes and means of livelihoods as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict (http://www.un.org/unrwa/refugees/whois.html). UNRWA’s definition of a refugee also covers the descendants of persons who became refugees in 1948 and, as a consequence, the number of registered Palestinian refugees continues to rise due to natural population growth.
accounted for two-thirds of remittances received in the sub-region (see Figure 4).

- Remittances sent to Egypt rose sharply from USD 2.9 billion in 2000 to USD 5.9 billion in 2007 (World Bank, 2008).

**Figure 4:**

Remittances to the Arab Mashrek, 2007 (billions of USD)

Note: Iraq is not included in the Figure as data are unavailable.

- In Lebanon and Jordan, remittances represent an important source of income. They increased, respectively, from USD 1.58 and USD 1.84 billion in 2000 to USD 5.8 and USD 2.9 billion in 2007 and, at 22.9 per cent, Lebanon received the highest share in relation to GDP in the Mediterranean region. In Jordan, net remittances accounted for 20.4 per cent of GDP, while in Egypt they accounted for five per cent (World Bank, 2008).

- Remittances have significantly improved Lebanon’s creditworthiness and access to international capital markets. When remittances are included, debts as a proportion of exports decrease from 732 per cent to 355 per cent (World Bank, 2006).

**GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL STATES**

- Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States are the third-largest region of destination in the world after North America and Europe. They host a total of 12.8 million non-nationals, representing over a third (36%) of their population of 36 million (UN DESA, 2005).

- Between 2000 and 2005, the stock of non-nationals in the GCC States, as a share of their total populations, increased by an annual average of 0.4 per cent (UN DESA, 2005).

- Saudi Arabia has the largest absolute numbers of non-nationals, while Qatar, the UAE and Kuwait are the countries with the highest numbers of non-nationals as a share of their total populations (UN DESA, 2005; http://www.kuwaittimes.net/, February 2007) (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5:**

Stock of non-nationals in individual GCC countries, 2000 and 2005

Part A: Population of non-nationals

Part B: As a share of total population

Source: UN DESA, 2005.
**GCC economies continue to rely heavily on temporary workers from overseas**

- The six GCC States\(^4\) experienced a sharp increase in the inflow of overseas workers from one million in 1970 to four million in 1980, and 9.6 million in 2000, of whom 5.1 million lived in Saudi Arabia (UN DESA, 2002), and the numbers have since continued to rise.
- The largest groups of overseas temporary workers in GCC States in 2002 were Indian nationals, with 3.2 million, followed by Pakistanis, Egyptians and Yemenis (Baldwin-Edwards, 2005).
- In 2002, there were approximately 1.35 million Egyptian temporary contractual workers in Saudi Arabia and, in 2005, out of 250,244 contracts issued to Egyptians to work in Gulf countries, 136,468 contracts were from Saudi Arabia, including 38,657 for highly qualified Egyptian nationals (IDB, 2006).

**As the number of expatriates of Arab origin in GCC States decreased, workers have been recruited from more distant origins**

- In all GCC States, Arabs now constitute only a minority of the expatriate population: 38 per cent in Saudi Arabia, 46 per cent in Kuwait, 25 per cent in Qatar, 10 per cent in the UAE and less than five per cent in Oman, where non-Arabs account for 95.6 per cent of the non-national labour force in the public and private sectors combined (Fargues, 2006). On the other hand, GCC States host 7.5 million Asians (Baldwin-Edwards, 2005), who account for 74 per cent of non-nationals residing on their territory. An increasing part of the Asian labour force is female. The global trend towards the feminization of labour mobility, especially of Asian overseas workers, may therefore also be observed in the GCC States, where women constitute 30 per cent of the foreign labour force. Most female workers, however, are still concentrated in the domestic services sector (UN DESA, 2006; ILO, 2006).

**Over the next two decades, the national labour force in the GCC and Arab Mashrek countries is expected to grow dramatically**

- Due to rapid demographic growth and rising labour market participation rates, especially of women, the labour force in GCC States is expected to increase from 11.6 million in 2000 to 20.7 million by 2020 (see Figure 6).\(^5\) Estimates for the Arab Mashrek countries foresee an increase from 37 to 66 million over the same period. Substantial labour market, economic and labour force policy reforms will be needed to respond to these major changes (Baldwin-Edwards, 2005).

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4 Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

5 Estimates reported here were calculated using the total fertility rate (TFR) and life expectancy data estimated by the UN.
ISRAEL

- From 2000 to 2005, the number of international migrants in Israel increased by about 20 per cent from 2.3 million in 2000, or 37 per cent of the population, to 2.7 million in 2005, or 40 per cent of the population (UN DESA, 2005) (see Figure 7).

Figure 7:
Stock of migrants in Israel, 2000 and 2005

Part A: Total number of migrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Migrants (Thousands)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2,256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2,661</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part B: As a share of total population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Share of Total Population (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>37.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>39.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UN DESA, 2005.

- Persons of Jewish ancestry account for a large share of total immigration to Israel, facilitated by the “Law of Return” of 1950 and its subsequent amendments. Ethiopian Jews, or Falasha, constitute another important migrant group, estimated in 2005 by the Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews to number around 85,000, of whom some 20,000 were already born in Israel.

The largest immigration flow of the last 20 years occurred in the wake of the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, when approximately 900,000 Soviet Jews settled in Israel (Kruger, 2005).

- In addition, non-Jewish and non-Palestinian temporary migrant workers have lately been accepted by Israel to support its prosperous economy. 2003 estimates put the number of migrant workers at about 189,000. They come mainly from Southeast Asia and eastern Europe and are hired as low-skilled workers. The largest groups are from the Philippines (around 50,000) working mainly as home health care workers, followed by Thai migrant workers (some 30,000) who work in agriculture, and Chinese (15,000) active in construction. Another approximately 65,000 foreign workers are from eastern Europe (over half of whom are from Romania) who work mainly in construction. Women constitute around one-third of all migrants and are mainly employed in the 24-hour home healthcare sector (Kruger, 2005).
Note 1: It should be noted that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States do not refer to non-nationals as “immigrants” or “migrants” because they view these terms as being associated with permanent immigration or settlement. Most non-nationals resident in the GCC States are temporary contractual workers.
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2008

World Bank

2004

2006

2008