



MIGRATION RESEARCH INSTITUTE

## **Burden Bearing, Burden Exporting: The Global Compact for Migration Seen from the Arab World**

### **Introduction**

Although The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) is not a treaty, and, therefore, not a legally binding document, its endorsement by the United Nations (152 of its members voted in favour of the Compact on 19 December 2018) put it on the agenda of international affairs. Particularly, the Compact is likely to justify pro-migration global actions to dismantle further the national policies in matters of migration, creating a context in which illegal migration will be more tolerated, if not encouraged. For this reason, it is set to play a pivotal role in the debates on migration in the years to come. However, because of its stated globalist political nature, and showy ideological character, the document sparked criticisms, scepticism and protests from different countries, on different continents (The United States, Hungary, Australia, Brazil, etc.).

In order to illustrate this political-ideological globalist framework of the document suffices it here to quote the authors of the document saying: “we learned that migration is a defining feature of our globalized world, connecting societies within and across all regions, making us all countries of origin, transit and destination”.<sup>1</sup> The least that could be said about this statement is that it is a red herring that distracts from the problem of illegal migration, which is fundamentally different from legal migration regulated by national and international laws.

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<sup>1</sup> Final draft of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (11 July 2018), p. 2. <https://www.un.org/pga/72/wp-content/.../51/2018/.../migration.pdf> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

Since the issue at stake is whether the Western countries (usually being the host countries of migration) would accept the Compact, and consequently migration or not, attention was turned to the attitudes of these countries: a clear rejection by some countries, caution from others, or enthusiasm for the Compact on behalf of other countries. In general, West European countries are prudent, and if their governments do not reject the Compact all at once, they delegate the matter to the parliaments for deliberations.

Thus far, there have been no studies which investigate the attitudes of countries which export migration, particularly those in the Middle East and North Africa. Yet, such investigation would allow us to inform the reader and the decision-makers on some views of the Global Compact for Migration seen from the MENA region. Additionally, analysing these attitudes within Middle Eastern and North African contexts will help us understand better the political and economic use of migration by these governments to export their incapacities of a better sharing of resources and good governance. In the pages that follow, we will give an account of attitudes of some Arab countries towards the Compact, discussing the interests of these countries in supporting or criticizing the Compact. We will inspect the positions of two supportive Arab governments (The United Arab Emirates and Tunisia) and two critical Arab governments (Algeria and Lebanon) before and in the aftermath of the United Nations Intergovernmental Conference on the Global Compact for Migration in Marrakech, Morocco (10-11 December 2018).

## **1. Tunisia: A Compact with benefits**

Tunisia's official position was expressed by Radhouane Ayara, the Tunisian Minister in charge of migration and Tunisians abroad who announced Tunisia's adoption of the Global Compact for Migration.<sup>2</sup> The Tunisian Minister said that "Tunisia was convinced that migration had been a manifestation of positive communication between societies".<sup>3</sup>

Ayara stated that the successful management of migration "is a collective responsibility that requires active and effective participation by all countries and other actors in the international community".<sup>4</sup> He asserted that the principle of shared responsibility

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<sup>2</sup> Tunis ta'tamid al-mithaq al-'alami min ajl al-hijra al-amina wa-l-munazzama wa-l-nizamiyya <http://www.achahed.com/تونس-تعتمد-الميثاق-العالمي-من-أجل-الهجرة> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>3</sup> Tunis tu'lin i'timadaha mithaq al-hijra al-amina wa-l-munazzama wa-l-nizamiyya <https://www.mosaiquefm.net/ar/تونس-أخبار-وطنية/460732/تونس-اعلان-اعتماد-ميثاق-الهجرة-الامنة-المنظمة-النظامية> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>4</sup> Tunis ta'tamid al-mithaq al-'alami min ajl al-hijra al-amina wa-l-munazzama wa-l-nizamiyya <http://www.achahed.com/تونس-تعتمد-الميثاق-العالمي-من-أجل-الهجرة> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

should lay the foundations for international cooperation “to protect the lives and rights of migrants and to make optimal use of migration and to address the risks and challenges they pose to individuals and communities in countries of origin, transit and destination”.<sup>5</sup> Ayara also called to address the real causes of illegal migration, stressing “the need to strengthen legal migration’s channels and to create suitable conditions for the integration of migrants in the host countries”.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the Tunisian government organised, in July 2018, a high-level informal dialogue on the Global Compact for Migration, a sort of “prequel” to the Conference of Marrakech, involving 18 countries.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, Tunisia embraces wholeheartedly the Compact, and even the vocabulary used by Ayara is borrowed to the document, emphasising the migrants’ rights, shared responsibility, the benefits of migration, and the regularization of illegal migration. No criticism of the document has been expressed. This attitude is typical of the Arab states that supported the Compact, usually profiting from mechanisms of cooperation with the EU to control migration from the Middle East and Africa to Europe.

Since 2018, Tunisia has benefited from another EU fund of 90.5 million euros to help North African countries (especially Tunisia and Morocco) managing borders and migrant flows through the Mediterranean routes. The fund allows Tunisia to save migrants in the sea, control the maritime borders and fight smugglers. This type of actions illustrates “shared responsibility” and privileged partnership thought of by the engineers of the Global Impact for Migration as exemplary.<sup>8</sup> Seen from Tunisia, whose economy and political stability largely depend on its partnership with the EU, support to the Compact reflects its policy of adherence to the EU’s migration strategy. The reward of “shared responsibility” is “shared benefits”; as expressed by Johannes Hahn, the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, this partnership assures the good of Europe, that of the migrants and the partner countries.<sup>9</sup>

Concomitant to this partnership is the gradual acceptance by Tunisia to become a host society of African migrants. However, locals and African migrants live in constant tension<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>6</sup> *Idem*

<sup>7</sup> Dialogue informel de Tunis sur le pacte mondial pour des migrations  
<https://tunisia.iom.int/news/dialogue-informel-de-tunis-sur-le-pacte-mondial-pour-des-migrations-sures-ordonnees-et> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>8</sup> Urubba tad’am Tunis bi-malayin al-uruwat lil-hadd min zahirat al-hijra ghayr al-shar’iyya  
<http://www.kapitalis.com/anbaa-tounes/2018/07/11/أوروبا تدمتونس بملايين الأوروات الملح> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>9</sup> EU Trust Fund for Africa: additional €90.5 million to strengthen border management and protection of migrants in North Africa

[http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-18-4366\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-4366_en.htm) (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>10</sup> Un étudiant guinéen violemment agressé à Tunis

(and this in spite of a voted law against racism<sup>11</sup> and initiatives by the civil society to encourage co-existence<sup>12</sup>). Lorena Lando, Head of Mission at the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Tunis estimates the number of Sub-Saharan migrants currently in Tunisia to be 75 500.<sup>13</sup>

These, however, are make-ups of a failed society and economy.<sup>14</sup> 1.3 million Tunisians (out of 11 million) are migrants abroad, including 81 % who live in Europe. 3073 illegal Tunisian migrants arrived in Italy in the first half of 2018. Tunisia was ranked first in 2018 in terms of arrivals of illegal migrants in Italy (more than Eritrea).<sup>15</sup> The number of illegal immigration operations intercepted from the beginning of January to the middle of December 2017 reached 307 operations.<sup>16</sup> Despite this active policy of interception, Kerkennah Islands, Zarzis and Bizerte are centres of daily illegal migration to Italy, under the eyes of police and coastal guard.<sup>17</sup> Some 30 000 young Tunisians have illegally immigrated to Italy since 2011.<sup>18</sup> Official Tunisian sources announced that 29 000 Tunisians were prevented from leaving the country during 2017. Tunisia, accused by Italy of exporting its illegal migrants, including criminals and terrorists, and of reluctance to readmit its citizens, has recently come under pressure.<sup>19</sup>

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[www.pouvoirsafrique.com/.../un-etudiant-guineen-violemment-agresse-a-tunis-images-choquantes](http://www.pouvoirsafrique.com/.../un-etudiant-guineen-violemment-agresse-a-tunis-images-choquantes) (last accessed 01-01-2019)

La Tunisie s'attaque au racisme

<https://www.la-croix.com/Monde/Afrique/Tunisie-sattaque-racisme-2018-10-12-1200975628> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>11</sup> Loi pénalisant le racisme en Tunisie : une première victoire pour la minorité noire

[https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2018/10/11/loi-penalisant-le-racisme-en-tunisie-une-premiere-victoire-pour-la-minorite-noire\\_5368149\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2018/10/11/loi-penalisant-le-racisme-en-tunisie-une-premiere-victoire-pour-la-minorite-noire_5368149_3212.html) (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>12</sup> Immigration : les jeunes Tunisiens de plus en plus tentés par l'exode

<https://www.lejdd.fr/International/immigration-les-jeunes-tunisiens-de-plus-en-plus-tentes-par-lexode-3757601> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>13</sup> 75.500 migrants et 700 réfugiés vivent en Tunisie selon l'OIM

[https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/75500-migrants-et-700-refugies-vivent-en-tunisie-selon-loim\\_mg\\_5b4dbb95e4b0de86f48658c8](https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/75500-migrants-et-700-refugies-vivent-en-tunisie-selon-loim_mg_5b4dbb95e4b0de86f48658c8) (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>14</sup> "Tunisia is finished": smugglers profit as downturn drives European exodus

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/feb/12/tunisia-finished-smugglers-profit-downturn-drives-european-exodus> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>15</sup> 75.500 migrants et 700 réfugiés vivent en Tunisie selon l'OIM

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<sup>16</sup> L'immigration clandestine inquiète les Tunisiens

<https://jamaity.org/2018/01/limmigration-clandestine-inquiete-les-tunisiens/> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>17</sup> «Dans la tête de ces gamins, l'avenir en Tunisie, ça n'existe pas»

<http://www.slate.fr/story/170136/migrations-jeunes-tunisie-italie-lampedusa> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

Tunisia migrant boat wreck: At least 100 people dead - CNN

<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/05/africa/tunisia-migrant.../index.html> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>18</sup> L'immigration clandestine inquiète les Tunisiens

<https://jamaity.org/2018/01/limmigration-clandestine-inquiete-les-tunisiens/> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>19</sup> Italie Immigration : Salvini en Tunisie veut bloquer les départs (last accessed 01-01-2019)

Thus, while Tunisia supports the Compact, it exports the burden of its unemployed, marginalised (both geographically and socially) and unqualified youth.<sup>20</sup> Certainly, the Compact benefits its migration policy, despite concessions to host Sub-Saharan Africans (at least as a temporary residence). In this regard, Tunisia is willing to conclude a "comprehensive" agreement on migration with the European Union, to manage the migratory flows, as announced by the Tunisian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>21</sup>

## 2. United Arab Emirates: Support the Compact, not the Rights

Nasser Bin Thani Al Hamli, the UAE's Minister of Human Resources and Emiratization, participated at the Marrakech conference where he affirmed his country's support for the Global Compact for Migration, focussing on policies governing labour relations and interim contractual work as one of the largest countries hosting temporary contractual employment.<sup>22</sup> For Al Hamli, the Global Compact for Migration provides a "framework for international and bilateral cooperation that will contribute to enhancing transparency, ensuring the rights of both parties to the labour relationship and promoting development benefits from the mobility of labour for sending and receiving states".<sup>23</sup> He declared that "the UAE will participate fully and effectively in the implementation and review of the agreement in the future based on the reality of national legislation in line with international principles and standards related to labour issues in parallel with strengthening the governance of the contractual work...through bilateral and multilateral dialogue with the sending countries".<sup>24</sup>

He also called to take into account "regional differences in terms of the challenges of this governance which differ from region to region, and which requires the sending and receiving countries to work in accordance with the specificity of each region to develop

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<https://fr.euronews.com/2018/09/27/immigration-salvini-en-tunisie-veut-bloquer-les-departs>(last accessed 01-01-2019)

À Tunis, Matteo Salvini met la pression sur le dossier de la migration

<https://www.jeuneafrique.com/636341/politique/a-tunis-matteo-salvini-met-la-pression-sur-le-dossier-de-la-migration/> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>20</sup> «Dans la tête de ces gamins, l'avenir en Tunisie, ça n'existe pas»

<http://www.slate.fr/story/170136/migrations-jeunes-tunisie-italie-lampedusa> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>21</sup> La Tunisie disposée à conclure un accord sur la migration avec l'Union européenne

[https://www.rtb.be/info/monde/detail\\_la-tunisie-disposee-a-conclure-un-accord-sur-la-migration-avec-l-union-europeenne?id=10025365](https://www.rtb.be/info/monde/detail_la-tunisie-disposee-a-conclure-un-accord-sur-la-migration-avec-l-union-europeenne?id=10025365) (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>22</sup> al-Imarat tu'akkid da'maha „mithaq al-hijra al-amina”

<https://www.albayan.ae/one-world/arabs/2018-12-11-1.3431560> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>23</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>24</sup> *Idem.*

partnerships and cooperation between them”.<sup>25</sup> Finally, he emphasised the role of the private sector “in the governance of the contractual work, which will ultimately contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Global Compact for Secure, Organized and Regulatory Migration and ensure the sustainability of this Agreement”.<sup>26</sup> According to Al Hamli, The UAE commits to further improve the standards of contractual labour governance.<sup>27</sup>

That said, no commitment was made with regard to illegal migration, solidarity, migration as a human right, etc. Even more, the UAE’s support for the Compact is conditioned, and if looked at closely is pragmatic, as it refers constantly to its national laws and policies in terms of imported labour. What also stands out from his statements is that the private sector and the specificity of the Gulf region will shape the form and content of work contracts with migrant workers in the UAE. In other words, the UAE supports the neoliberal framework of smuggling cheap labour (through global migration) to rich countries, sustained and regularized by the Compact, but still the UAE wants to keep control over these flows to protect its political sovereignty and the economic power of its own citizens.

The UAE’s economy is migration-based, growing from a GDP of around \$2.5 billion in 1971, when the country called in migrant workers, to \$370 billion in 2015. In 2015, “89 percent of the UAE population of 9.3 million were migrant workers, and an overwhelming majority of these workers were semi-skilled or unskilled from South Asian countries”.<sup>28</sup> The United Nations estimated in 2013 that India (2 852 207), Bangladesh (1 089 917), Pakistan (953 708), Egypt (711 708) and Philippines (477 139) are the five top countries which provide the UAE with cheap labour force.<sup>29</sup> They earn in average \$372 a month compared to \$5000 for the average Emirati citizen.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, The UAE offers only short term work contracts of up to three years and does not open permanent residency or naturalisation processes for these workers, who live constantly under the fear of deportation.<sup>31</sup>

This system of contractual cheap and short term labour is called *kafala* (sponsorship) denounced by some as exploitation and others as modern slavery. In its report of 2018, the

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<sup>25</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>26</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>27</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>28</sup> Riaz Hassan, The UAE’s Unsustainable Nation Building

<https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/uaes-unsustainable-nation-building> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>29</sup> Froilan T. Malit Jr. and Ali Al Youha, Labor Migration in the United Arab Emirates: Challenges and Responses

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/labor-migration-united-arab-emirates-challenges-and-responses> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>30</sup> Riaz Hassan, The UAE’s Unsustainable Nation Building

<https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/uaes-unsustainable-nation-building> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>31</sup> *Idem.*

Human Rights Watch asserts that “[T]he *kafala* (visa-sponsorship) system continues to tie migrant workers to their employers. Those who leave their employers can face punishment for ‘absconding,’ including fines, prison, and deportation. The UAE’s labour law excludes domestic workers, who face a range of abuses, from unpaid wages, confinement to the house, workdays up to 21 hours with no breaks, to physical or sexual assault by employers, from its protections”.<sup>32</sup> Recently, some reforms were initiated without abolishing the *kafala* system. Moreover, The Global Slavery Index 2018 notes that the estimated absolute number of victims of modern slavery in the UAE elevates to 15 000.<sup>33</sup>

### 3. Algeria: Reservations on the The Global Compact for Migration

Algeria is one of the leading Arab countries to have expressed reservations on the Global Compact for Migration adopted in Marrakech. Algerian Interior Minister Nouredine Badawi stressed that “Algeria considers that the final text does not distinguish between legal and illegal immigrants, especially in what pertains to basic services and integration, and that the lack of distinction between these two categories in a text of an international character is not appropriate because it does not contribute adequately to the fight against illegal migration”.<sup>34</sup>

Nouredine Badawi further uttered Algeria’s attachment to the principle of sovereignty declaring that “we consider that the mechanism of the implementation and follow-up of the document should be subject to the prior approval of States, taking into account the specific reality of migration in each country, avoiding the exploitation of immigration to interfere in the internal affairs of States”.<sup>35</sup> He added that “the text of the agreement did not effectively include practical measures in the area of prevention, management of armed conflicts, political crises, famine and drought as it is not feasible to address the effects of illegal migration without confronting and eradicating its real causes”.<sup>36</sup>

With regard to the argument of solidarity, Algerian Interior Minister said that “his country does not object to the solidarity dimensions of this agreement, but defends the right of

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<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Watch, World Report 2018, p. 588.

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>33</sup> Walk Free Foundation, The Global Slavery Index 2018, Arab States Report, p. 23.

<https://www.globalslaveryindex.org> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>34</sup> al-Jaza’ir: jumlat tahaffuzat bi-sha’n al-mithaq al-‘alami li ’l-hijra <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/society/2018/12/12/الجزائر-جملة-تحفظات-بشأن-الميثاق-العالمي-للحجرة> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>35</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>36</sup> *Idem.*

states in shaping their national policies in migration issues, recognising the essential role of states in the implementation and the follow-up of the Agreement, and its non-legally binding nature, together with the equitable sharing of responsibilities and burdens, as well as respect for human rights and international cooperation”.<sup>37</sup>

According to Badawi, “the large and continuous flow of migrants towards Algeria has had negative repercussions on order and security, which pushed us to take measures to contain these flows and reduce their size ... including the deportation of illegal immigrants in agreement with their countries of origin”.<sup>38</sup>

Presently, Algeria is a source of migration, as well as a transit and a host country of mainly Sub-Sahara African migrants. It is the latter dimension that seems to put more pressure on the Algerian government, in terms of providing services and returning populations to Niger and Mali, while the Algerian economy faces major hardships. Thus, Algeria’s own migration crisis explains its reservations on the Global Compact for Migration.

Sub-Saharan Africans constitute a major political issue in Algeria as well as a cause of social conflict as daily tensions erupt between local populations and Sub-Saharan Africans. Some 100 000 illegal migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa are estimated to live on the Algerian territory.<sup>39</sup> Algerian law criminalizes the entry or leaving the territory illegally with prison from two to six months in addition to fines, and illegal migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa are quickly expelled towards Mali and Niger. For example, the Algerian authorities have expelled within the last three years 18 000 citizens of Niger.<sup>40</sup>

The Algerian government justifies its restrictive policy with the involvement of illegal migration in the networks of drugs and crime. In this regard, Algeria used an agreement it had signed with Niger to return approximately 10 000 children from its southern neighbour who worked for a criminal network as beggars.<sup>41</sup> Thus, establishing order and security motivates Algeria’s policy, which costs the government 25 million euros yearly and attracts pressure from NGOs criticizing Algeria’s management of Sub-Saharan Africans, and actively providing services to these migrants on the Algerian territory.

Furthermore, Algeria is a source country of migrants embarking to Europe. Algerian shores, especially of Annaba, Oran and Aïn Témouchent Province, acquired importance

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<sup>37</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>38</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>39</sup> al-Jaza’ir fi muwajahat tahaddi al-hijra  
<https://orientxxi.info/magazine/article2223> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>40</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>41</sup> Furum al-idha’a : al-Jaza’ir ta’mal jahidatan ‘ala muharabat al-hijra gahyr al-shar’iyya min khilal tanmiyat al-manatiq al-hududiyya  
<http://www.radioalgerie.dz/news/ar/article/20181015/152563.html> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

recently in the Western and the Central Mediterranean routes. Algerian coastal guards daily prevent attempts of illegal migration from its shores to Spain, arresting hundreds of illegal migrants monthly, although others make it to the European coasts.<sup>42</sup> In her visit to Algeria in September 2018, Angela Merkel convinced the Algerian government to receive back 40 000 illegal Algerian migrants who live in Germany.<sup>43</sup>

#### 4. Lebanon and the Syrian quagmire

Gebran Bassil, the Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants, participated in the Marrakech conference, delivering a noteworthy critical speech of the Global Compact for Migration. He particularly drew attention to the confusion within the Compact between the category of refugees, displaced persons and migrants, between legal and illegal migrants, and the confusion between human rights and the sovereignty of the state and the national interests. A refugee, as he said, “has his human rights without giving him rights over states or their sovereignty”.<sup>44</sup> Bassil agrees with the Algerian position previously discussed and with the other critics of the Compact within Europe, and beyond, namely on the necessity to distinguish between legal and illegal migrations, which is in line with the sovereignty of nations to decide about the number and the profiles of migrants they would accept, and according to specific legal modalities. Moreover, Bassil insisted on the “Lebanese uncompromising position on the non-binding nature of this document and its respect for the sovereignty and specificities of the state in defining its national policies and immigration priorities”.<sup>45</sup>

All political correctness kept aside, Bassil said that “Lebanon has the highest rate of asylum and displacement in the history of mankind, reaching 200 refugees in a kilometre

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<sup>42</sup> Iibat muhawalat hijra ghayr shar‘iyya li-19 shakhsan fi al-Jaza’ir

<https://www.spa.gov.sa/1857845> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

al-Jaza’ir: iibat muhawalat 16 shakhsan al-hijra ghayr al-shar‘iyya ila Urubba

<https://24.ae/article/475051/الجزائر-إحياط-محاولة-16-شخصاً-الهجرة-غير-الشرعية-أوروبا>

al-Jaza’ir: iibat muhawalat 83 shakhsan al-hijra ghayr al-shar‘iyya ila Urubba (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<https://hamrinnews.net/world/2995991.html>

Iibat muhawalatayn li-l-hijra ghayr al-shar‘iyya wa-tawqif 45 shakhsan

<https://www.youm7.com/story/2018/11/10/4025934-إحياط-محاولتين-للحجرة-غير-الشرعية-في-الجزائر-وتوقيف-45-شخصاً>

(last accessed 01-01-2019)

al-Jaza’ir: tazayud halat al-hijra ghayr al-shar‘iyya wa-‘a’ilat tabhath ‘an abna’iha al-mafqudin

<https://www.alquds.co.uk/الجزائر-تزايد-حالات-الهجرة-غير-الشرعية/> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>43</sup> Mirkal fi al-Jaza’ir wa-l-hukuma tuwafiq ‘ala isti‘adat 40 alf muhajir jaza’iri ghayr shar‘i

<https://arabic.euronews.com/2018/09/17/merkel-in-algeria-on-agenda-migration-terror-fight-algeria-ok-repatriate-illegal-migrants>

(last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>44</sup> Basil fi al-mu’tamar al-duwali li-i’timad al-mithaq al-‘alami li-l-hijra fi Marrakish

<http://nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/380213/nna-leb.gov.lb/en> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>45</sup> *Idem*.

square, which cost Lebanese economy hundreds of billions of dollars”.<sup>46</sup> The Lebanese Minister of Economy, Raed Khoury estimated that the cost of the Syrian refugees for Lebanon was 18 billion dollars.<sup>47</sup> Bassil believes “the only solution to the mass migration of Syrians is the safe, dignified and sustainable return of displaced Syrians to their country, and any other solution will keep the dagger in the heart of Lebanon and the knife on your necks”.<sup>48</sup> The Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants also stressed that “Syria is safe today, most of the regions are safe, most of the Syrian refugees want to return if we help them and allocate them money to encourage them to return to their country and not to remain in their misery”.<sup>49</sup>

The problem of Syrian refugees in Lebanon explains largely Lebanon’s critical attitude.<sup>50</sup> All involved actors in the question of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon agree that the political situation allows the return of Syrians to their homes, and indeed some of them already did. While 88 % of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon would like to go back to their country, according to Mireille Girard, UNHCR Representative in Lebanon, UNHCR “make them wait about practical obstacles to their property, identity papers and legal status in their homeland”.<sup>51</sup> This hesitation frustrates the Lebanese government, and the more time passes, the more risks of Syrian settlement in Lebanon are real, an outcome that the Global Compact for Migration encourages. In a country based on sectarian distribution of power and resources, more than a million Syrians, mostly Sunnis, would be fatal to the Christian minority, as Raed Khoury, the Lebanese Minister of Economy, has estimated in 2017 the rate of Syrians in Lebanon to be 40 %.<sup>52</sup>

Economic connectivity is another dimension that increases the risk of Syrian settlement in Lebanon, namely that of the transformation of Syrians into a working class. This is in particular the case in the construction industry as “Syrian refugees make up an estimated

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<sup>46</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>47</sup> Les déplacés syriens représentent 40 % de la population au Liban, affirme le ministre de l’Économie <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1079674/les-deplacés-syriens-représentent-40-de-la-population-au-liban-affirme-le-ministre-de-leconomie.html> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>48</sup> Basil fi al-mu’tamar al-duwali li-i’timad al-mithaq al-‘alami li-l-hijra fi Marrakish <http://nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/380213/nna-leb.gov.lb/en> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>49</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>50</sup> In addition to the problem of the Palestinian refugees which is unsolved yet and flows of economic migrants who look for opportunities in Lebanon such as the Egyptians and the Ethiopians.

<sup>51</sup> Girard: 88 % of Syrian refugees want to return to Syria <http://nna-leb.gov.lb/en/show-news/96472/nna-leb.gov.lb/en> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>52</sup> Les déplacés syriens représentent 40 % de la population au Liban, affirme le ministre de l’Économie <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1079674/les-deplacés-syriens-représentent-40-de-la-population-au-liban-affirme-le-ministre-de-leconomie.html> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

70-80 % of construction workers in Lebanon”.<sup>53</sup> Other sectors such as agriculture and waste collection depend entirely on the Syrians. A new study by the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRC) published in November 2018 shows the importance of the Syrian refugees in the Lebanese economy as well as the exploitation of their fragile conditions by Lebanese and Western companies.<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

Both critical Arab states of the Global Compact for Migration (Algeria and Lebanon) and supportive Arab states (Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates) agree on the principles of specificity, sovereignty, and self-interest. Each of these states puts forward the specificity of its economy, demography or geography to claim an adaptive migration policy to its own context, even if some of these countries formally support the Compact. Moreover, all these states assert their sovereignty in the implementation or interpretation of the Compact according to their own national laws. Finally, all discussed Arab states promote their own interests, supporting the Compact in exchange of benefits, or criticizing it in the name of their security interests.

Whenever these states refer to cooperation, partnership or shared responsibility, they consider it as an opportunity to obtain help from the EU or other organisations to manage refugees (Lebanon) or migrants without being able to solve the migration of their own citizens (Tunisia and Algeria), or as a negotiation strategy to maintain the condescending *kafala* system (the United Arab Emirates). In particular, Tunisia and Algeria, although they share a common background, differ in their reactions to Compact. Algeria’s authoritarian regime refuses to let the EU influence its decision-making, benefiting from its oil and gas resources to defend its sovereignty. Conversely, Tunisia depends on the EU economically and politically, and aligns its policy on the EU’s migration policy.

The engineers of the Global Compact for Migration used the slogan “[I]t is important that migration unites rather than divides us”, but, seen from the Arab world, migration is a consequence of divisions and inequalities. The current Arab regimes consider migration a blessed window to outsource their inability to solve the inequalities between regions, classes

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<sup>53</sup> Syrian refugees risk exploitation in west-funded construction projects in Lebanon and Jordan <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/jordan-lebanon-construction/from-unacceptable-risks-to-shared-prosperity/press-release> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

<sup>54</sup> Syrian refugees risk exploitation in west-funded construction projects in Lebanon and Jordan <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/jordan-lebanon-construction/from-unacceptable-risks-to-shared-prosperity/press-release> (last accessed 01-01-2019)

and an unbearable rate of unemployment and demography. The desperate Arab youth which desires the standard of living in Europe sees in the Compact a golden gate, and is ready to jump, abandoning the necessity to work and improve their own homelands and societies.