



## Reset or Repeat: Will Coronavirus Change the Migration Trends?

### Introduction

On 20 March 2020, Foreign Policy asked 12 thinkers in the field of political science to answer the question how the world will look after the coronavirus pandemic. While these thinkers agreed that the pandemic will change the world forever,<sup>1</sup> little was said about migration except that the world will move towards “selective self-sufficiency and even greater opposition to large-scale immigration”<sup>2</sup> as put by Richard N. Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations. Few days later, the German minister of development Gerd Müller anticipates state collapse in the developing countries, chaos and civil war, and as a result “waves of refugees which will affect us too.”<sup>3</sup> Currently, there are no studies of concrete changes and trends in the migration factors and movements in the times of coronavirus. In the following paper, we attempt to depict eight trends we observed in the context of this pandemic with regard to migration. These are preliminary observations and need further research.

### 1. Safe homes: Voluntary return and the nation-state

A first trend to be highlighted is the voluntary return of thousands of immigrants from Europe to their countries in the Middle East and North Africa. In Egypt, when the government decided to stop international flights from and to Egypt on 19 March 2020, the return of Egyptians abroad became a public concern. The minister of immigration came under a lot of pressure from the Egyptian diaspora and from inside Egypt in order to repatriate Egyptians abroad. By 29 March 2020, the ministry of immigration received the call for help of more than 12,000 Egyptians in Europe, the USA and the Gulf countries.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, attitudes of love of the country and donations by Egyptian diaspora to Egypt to fight coronavirus<sup>5</sup> exacerbated a renewed pathos of patriotism, belonging, and “feeling safe only in Egypt”.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> How the World Will Look After the Coronavirus Pandemic

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/20/world-order-after-coronavirus-pandemic/> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>3</sup> Gerd Müller: „Habe Sorgen, dass es in fragilen Staaten zu Bürgerkriegen kommt“

<https://www.augsburger-allgemeine.de/politik/Gerd-Mueller-Habe-Sorgen-dass-es-in-fragilen-Staaten-zu-Buergerkriegen-kommt-id57182856.html> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Wazirat al-hijra: istaqbalna 12 alf istighatha min al-Misriyyin al-‘aliqin bi-l-kharj

خاص-وزيرة-الهجرة-استقبلنا-11-ألف-استغاثة-من-المصريين-العالمين-  
[akhbarelyom.com/news/newdetails/3023849/1/](http://akhbarelyom.com/news/newdetails/3023849/1/) (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Rajul a‘mal misri bi-l-Wilayat al-Muttahida yatabarra‘ bi-100 alf dular li-sunduq Tahya Misr

<http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=29032020&id=7b84b0c4-088a-4657-8826-fd5e9a58535a> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Misriyya min al-‘aliqin fi Britania ‘aqib al-‘awda : ash‘ur bi-l-aman fi Misr

Similar attitudes were observed in Tunisia,<sup>7</sup> Algeria<sup>8</sup> and Lebanon.<sup>9</sup> After researching over a thousand media content produced in the MENA region we were struck with the renewal of belonging. For example, the following tweet by a young Iranian says that in the times of coronavirus, homeland and home city are criteria that matter in the authentic identity of people, and that people take more seriously attachment to one's place and city. Many other people expressed the same attachment to their lands and places across the Middle East and North Africa, and others paid thousands of euros to bury their family members in their home countries.



Source: <https://twitter.com/Dajrabez/status/1244223924029870082>

These cases could indicate two things. The first one is that many immigrants will regard health and home as priorities, reconsidering, thus, the whole immigration project. As Europe became the epicentre of coronavirus, many immigrants abandoned their property and run home. This, of course, has to be mitigated: people acted under fear and emergency situations, and could come back to Europe soon. Second, states in the MENA region emerged as able to play an active role in taking in charge of their citizens. This could be consolidated in favour of a return policy. This “patriotic upsurge” and return to the nation-state could be capitalised on for a restart in exporting countries. Since the MENA states were the weakest elements in fighting migration to Europe, the mobilisation around coronavirus could make the states of the region more sensitive to renegotiate a new migration policy. This is also to be taken cautiously as the states of the region were put under pressure to return their citizens.

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foxegyptnews.net/ال-مصرى-من-العالمين-في-بريطانيا-عقب-ال- (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Al-Jaza'ir tabda' tarhil ra'ayaha al-'aliqin fi Turkiya al-Jumu'a

[www.alaraby.co.uk/flashnews/2020/3/31/](http://www.alaraby.co.uk/flashnews/2020/3/31/) الجزائر تبدأ ترحيل رعاياها العالقين في تركيا الجمعة (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Kuruna ya'kis ittijah al-hijra bayna Italia wa-Tunis

aaawsat.com/home/article/2173341/كورونا-يعكس-اتجاه-الهجرة-بين-إيطاليا-وتونس (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Safir Lubnan fi Musku: 'asharat al-tullab yarghabun bi-l-'awda

[www.lebanon24.com/news/lebanon/688884/](http://www.lebanon24.com/news/lebanon/688884/) سفير لبنان في موسكو - عشرات الطلاب يريدون بالعودة (last accessed 05 April 2020).

## 2. The migration of the medical staff

The brain drain from the MENA region to Western countries is a recurrent problem, and has been around for a long time. However, the coronavirus created an even encouraging context to migrate, especially for the medical staff. However, emotional factors rather than concrete demand play here an important role. By the end of March 2020, two events created momentum around the immigration of the medical staff in the MENA region: first, the rumor that the USA delivers a visa to any doctor or nurse to help fight the coronavirus. Second, the death of three doctors from Sudan and Iraq in the UK and (who were the first victims of coronavirus in the medical staff in this country) had generated empathy throughout the Muslim world.<sup>10</sup>

In the last week of March 2020, the American Embassy in Egypt announced that the doctors who had submitted an immigration application before the coronavirus erupted and were accepted after completing the procedures of travel, and were scheduled to travel to the United States should be able to travel to the USA as soon as flights are open.<sup>11</sup> This was enough to spark a whole polemic in Egypt about the emigration of doctors while the country needs them. The most common attitude was to call the American invitation an attempt to steal “Egyptian doctors” and the ministry of health in Egypt had to issue a decision to ban Egyptian doctors from travel.<sup>12</sup> Some unofficial sources went as far to say that 3,500 Egyptian doctors applied for immigration at the American Embassy.<sup>13</sup>

The debate spread to other Arab countries. Thus, in Morocco several associations asked the Prime Minister to employ doctors and nurses who are unemployed without the usual selection processes in order to fight coronavirus.<sup>14</sup> Others invited unemployed doctors in Morocco to apply for migration to France, Canada, the USA or Germany stating that these countries „have a shortage in doctors especially as this epidemic will not end in June, but will continue to spread since there is no vaccine, and it is a loss for a physician to remain unable to benefit humanity while the land of God is wide”.<sup>15</sup>

## 3. Coronavirus is likely to intensify push factors of migration in the MENA region

It is certain that the impact of coronavirus on the economy does not discriminate between sending and receiving countries of immigration; most economies will enter into recession and will suffer from disastrous consequences. Nonetheless, as announced by the International Labor Organization the difficulties in the developing countries are more serious than in the developed countries as many more people live through informal and low-income jobs. For millions of people in the Middle East and North Africa, the lockdown means losing the wages for each day they stay at home. Many of them do not have access to healthcare in the absence of health insurance that contributes to their treatment, and thus face the risk of disease and

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<sup>10</sup> Three Muslim doctors become first physicians in UK to die of coronavirus  
<https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/3/30/british-muslim-doctors-become-first-to-die-of-coronavirus> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Raddan ‘ala al-sha’i’at .. al-Kharjiyya al-amrikiyya tanfi taghyir ijra’at al-safar li-l-atibba’  
<https://www.mobtada.com/details/922228> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Sariqat al-atibba’ wa-l-mumarridin al-misriyyin ‘an tariq al-hijra.. balagh li Wazirat al-sihha: imna’u safar al-atibba’  
<https://www.elbalad.news/4244112> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>13</sup> ‘Udw bi-l-Atibba’”: laysa ladayna ma’lumat khasa bi-a’dad al-mutaqaddimin li-l-hijra li Amrika  
[www.youm7.com/story/2020/3/31/4696828/عضو-ب-الاطباء-ليس-لدينا-معلومات-خاصة-باعداد-المتقدمين-للحجرة](http://www.youm7.com/story/2020/3/31/4696828/عضو-ب-الاطباء-ليس-لدينا-معلومات-خاصة-باعداد-المتقدمين-للحجرة)  
(last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>14</sup> Hay’at tatalib al-Hukuma bi-tawzif al-atibba’ al-mu’attalin li-muwajahat Kuruna  
<https://www.hespress.com/societe/465705.html> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>15</sup> *Idem*.

poverty.<sup>16</sup> The situation is similar to that of the economic crisis of 2008 which drove millions to immigration to Europe.

The United Nations was even more specific as it estimates that 8 million Arabs are threatened by poverty because of coronavirus. It also estimated the number of people to suffer from malnutrition to increase by 2 million. This means 101 million people in the Arab world will be poor and the number of those who will suffer from malnutrition will increase to 52 million people. Young people will particularly have to endure these consequences. The United Nations estimated that the coronavirus would lead to the loss to 1.7 million jobs in the Arab World, and that the GDP of Arab countries will lose 42 billion dollars in the context of coronavirus.<sup>17</sup> Unless governments adopt quick and effective policies, we are heading probably to a scenario comparable to that of 2015.

Iran faces no less dramatic situation. Under the pressure of economic sanctions, crashing oil prices and hit hard by coronavirus, the government announced a livelihood allowance for four months for 19 million households.<sup>18</sup> It is a temporary solution which is intended to cover basic needs. The Iranian media owned by the state emphasized the resistance and conspiracy narratives against Iran and the capacity of the Iranian economy to survive. Nevertheless, independent media depicted a disastrous social and economic picture amidst the total uncertainty of citizens about the future and the closure of many of Iran's economic sectors.<sup>19</sup> Concretely, two million people who lost their livelihood because of coronavirus are not covered by the welfare system.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4. About Italy: Apocalypse now and heaven tomorrow

Hundreds of people in social media in the MENA region endorsed the view that Europe is dying of coronavirus and will open its gates for immigration. It might be said that this is a mere wish; this, however, underestimates the importance of rumors, wishes and perception in the people's actions. Thomas theorem taught us that people's perception although not real, generates actions that are real, especially if people have the predisposition to believe in apocalyptic scenarios. Let us consider few examples published on 30 and 31 March 2020:

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<sup>16</sup> "al-'Amal al-dawliyya" tuhadhdhir min irtifa' mu'addalat al-faqr bi-sabab Kuruna <https://www.almamlakatv.com/news/36678> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>17</sup> al-Umam al-muttahida: 8 malayin 'arabi muhaddad bi-l-faqr jarra' Kuruna [www.awrag.org/الأمم-المتحدة-8-ملايين-عربي-مهتدون-بالف](http://www.awrag.org/الأمم-المتحدة-8-ملايين-عربي-مهتدون-بالف) (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>18</sup> Mutaqziyan basta himayat-i ma'ishat ba'da az forukesh kardan mawj Kuruna thabt nama kunand [www.ilna.news/بخش-کارگری-883513/9-متقاضیان-بسته-حمایت-معیشتی-بعد-از-فروکش-کردن-موج-کر-ونا-ثبت-نام-کنند](http://www.ilna.news/بخش-کارگری-883513/9-متقاضیان-بسته-حمایت-معیشتی-بعد-از-فروکش-کردن-موج-کر-ونا-ثبت-نام-کنند) (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>19</sup> Kuruna: balayi jan iqtisad Iran <https://www.independentpersian.com/node/44021/> دیدگاه/کرونا؛-بلای-جان-اقتصاد-ایران (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>20</sup> Kuruna dar Iran: Mushkil mali du miliun nafar [iranintl.com/تازه-چه-خبر/کرونا-در-ایران؛-مشکل-مالی-دو-میلیون-نفر،-کمبود-دو-هزار-دستگاه-تنفس](http://iranintl.com/تازه-چه-خبر/کرونا-در-ایران؛-مشکل-مالی-دو-میلیون-نفر،-کمبود-دو-هزار-دستگاه-تنفس) (last accessed 05 April 2020).



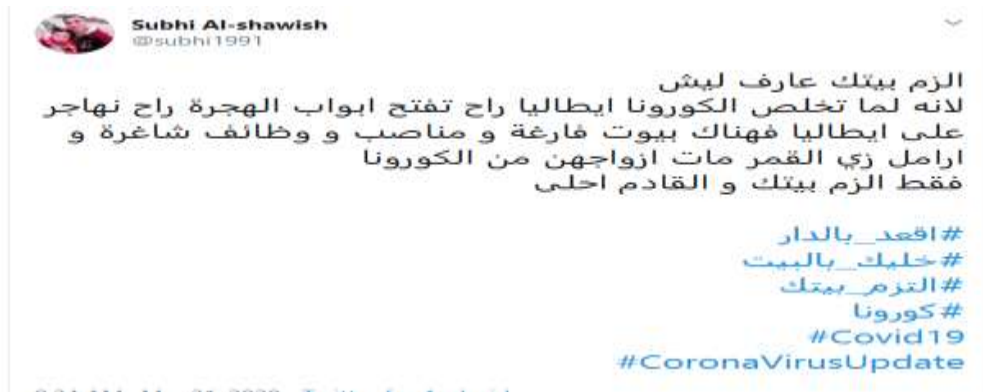
Source: <https://twitter.com/lkgud0e/status/1244740584893550592>

The author of the tweet, an Egyptian Islamist (probably from the Muslim Brotherhood) with 8,063 followers, wrote a short note on Europe and Corona, commented by several of his followers. He said that “Europe is considered to be the continent that was mostly harmed by coronavirus: Italy is in agony, followed by Spain, and the other countries are on the road... the numbers frighten the whole world. Could it be that this microscopic virus remaps Europe? Will Europe open wide the migration gates and then Islam will conquer it?! Think about it!” Most reactions to this tweet are enthusiastic about this apocalyptic outcome.



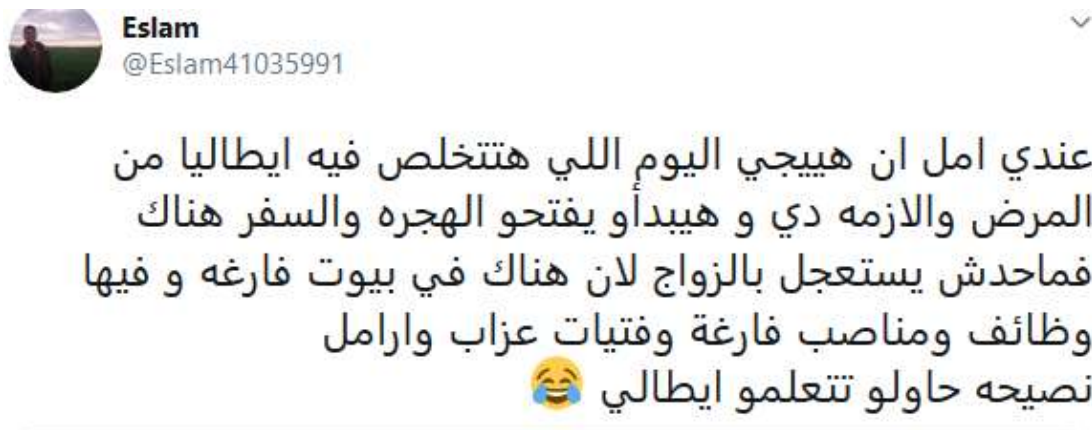
Source: [https://twitter.com/\\_Joe4u/status/1244718070263885824](https://twitter.com/_Joe4u/status/1244718070263885824)

An Egyptian small entrepreneur tweeted the following: „Just listen to me! The average of age and seniority is very high in all Europe, and you can see what the death rate of Corona is doing to Europe. After the wave of Corona will end, the governments of Europe will open the migration gates wide so that they can increase their population, and at that moment you will see all mentally disabled people from the Arab countries and ISIS followers become European citizens. These are my previsions for the period after the lockdown”.



Source: <https://twitter.com/subhi1991/status/1244890761528819712>

This tweet by Subhi al-Shawish a Palestinian activist in Gaza, tweeted on 31 March 2020 says the following: „you should stay at home, you know why?! Because when corovonavirus is over, Italy will open the gates of migration. We will migrate to Italy because there we will find empty houses, available jobs, and widow women to marry beautiful like the moon, their husbands died from Corona. Stay at home and you will see that nice things are coming”.



Source: <https://twitter.com/Eslam41035991/status/1243883593593688064>

Another tweet by Eslam says that „I am hopeful that a day will come when Italy will get rid of the decease, and this crisis, and then they will open the migration gates and travel. Here is my advice to everyone: none should hurry up to marry in Egypt, because in Italy there are free houses, available jobs, and young girls, and widows to marry. My advice: try to learn Italian.”

## 5. Bio-aggression

In mid-March 2020, Bahrain accused Iran of “biological aggression by covering up the spread of the coronavirus and failing to stamp Bahraini travelers’ passports.”<sup>21</sup> Bahraini interior minister General Sheikh Rashid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa added that “with this behavior, Iran has allowed the disease to travel abroad, and in his estimation this constitutes a

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<sup>21</sup> Bahrain accuses Iran of 'biological aggression', Gulf states try to curb coronavirus <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-saudi-travel/bahrain-accuses-iran-of-biological-aggression-gulf-states-try-to-curb-coronavirus-idUSKBN20Z03K> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

form of biological aggression that is criminalised by international law, as it has put in danger our safety and health and that of others".<sup>22</sup> Amidst tension between Iran and Bahrain, the latter announced on 2 April 2020 that 68% of its Corona patients came from Iran.<sup>23</sup>

Saudi Arabia also accused Iran of spreading Corona in the Gulf region by facilitating the entry of Saudi Shia visitors to Iran without stamping their passports.<sup>24</sup> At the end of March, the Saudi Newspaper 'Ukaz which is close to the Saudi regime and the most important media in the Kingdom, published an article in which it says that "Erdoğan spread "Corona" in Europe by transmitting the disease to Europe and turning it into a deadly weapon through the weapon of immigrants".<sup>25</sup> Saudis were accused by Huthis in Yemen of dropping infected boxes over Huthi territories, especially in the capital Sana'a which was presumably free of any Corona cases.<sup>26</sup>

In this context, on 19 March 2020 ISIS called its followers to put pressure on Westerners and to increase their vulnerability".<sup>27</sup> The terrorist attacks carried on by ISIS after this call in Afghanistan and Egypt were armed terrorist attacks. On 26 March 2020 ISIS declared that coronavirus was a divine punishment for the USA and other countries, showing the weakness of these countries.<sup>28</sup> While ISIS continued its operations in Africa (Nigeria and Chad) and the Middle East, no bio-terrorism was reported. The so-called Corona-jihad in India was shown to be caused by a pacifist Islamic missionary movement (Tablighi Jamaat which held illegally a large religious meeting).<sup>29</sup> Dozens of cases of open mosques in Europe under lockdown or people spitting and coughing deliberately on people were reported by international media, but so were other cases by non-Muslims as well.<sup>30</sup>

## 6. Borders matter

In the times of coronavirus, closing and tightening borders control never seemed to be questioned. Most countries in the world closed their borders as soon as the WHO announced Covid-19 to be a global pandemic. Even the EU recommended in a document entitled *What can the EU do to alleviate the impact of the coronavirus crisis?* published in March 2020 „greater controls on people crossing external EU borders".<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, EU countries

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<sup>22</sup> Bahrain accuses Iran of 'biological aggression', Gulf states try to curb coronavirus

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-saudi-travel/bahrain-accuses-iran-of-biological-aggression-gulf-states-try-to-curb-coronavirus-idUSKBN20Z03K> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>23</sup> Al-Bahrain: 68% min musabi Kuruna qadimu min Iran

[www.alarabiya.net/ar/coronavirus/2020/04/02/81-اصابة-جديدة-في-عمان-منعافى-من-كورونا-في-الكويت-و-21-اصابة-جديدة-في-عمان.html](http://www.alarabiya.net/ar/coronavirus/2020/04/02/81-اصابة-جديدة-في-عمان-منعافى-من-كورونا-في-الكويت-و-21-اصابة-جديدة-في-عمان.html) (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>24</sup> al-Sa'udiyya tattahim Iran bi-nashr al-Kuruna

<http://www.ahdath24.com/article/205531> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Hal nashara al-saffah Ardughan Kuruna fi Urubba!

<https://www.okaz.com.sa/articles/authors/2017352> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>26</sup> al-Huthiyun yattahimun al-Sa'udiyya bi-nashr Kuruna fi al-Yaman 'abra sanadiq mulawwatha bi-l-waba'

<https://debrief.net/news-16069.html> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>27</sup> Sahifat al-Naba' 226

[www.anib-ras.cf/2020/03/226.html](http://www.anib-ras.cf/2020/03/226.html) (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>28</sup> Sahifat al-Naba' 227

<https://www.anib-ras.cf/2020/03/227.html> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>29</sup> Why Flinging the Term 'Corona Jihad' at the Tablighi Jamaat Makes No Sense

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-52147260> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>30</sup> Woman charged after coughing, spitting on Police

<http://www.mycg.com.au/woman-charged-after-coughing-spitting-on-police/> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>31</sup> What can the EU do to alleviate the impact of the Coronavirus crisis?

closed or tightened border control inside the EU. This measure has brought illegal migration almost to a dead point. Closing the borders within the EU is not expected to continue in the near future, although greater controls at the external EU borders should be maintained not only to assure safety from coronavirus, but also from other illegal migration and potential security threats.

In particular, the Greek-Turkish borders which were under high tension in February and early March 2020, are crucial in this regard. Panic spread in Greece when the first case of coronavirus was announced in a migrant camp.<sup>32</sup> Prime Minister of Greece Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced a policy to counter both coronavirus and migration; he underlined that „the government's plan for managing migration - based on protection of the borders, rapid procedures for both asylum and returns and controlled migrant accommodation structures - continues to apply in full”.<sup>33</sup>

In the MENA region, most countries closed their borders, from Pakistan to Morocco by mid-March 2020. This decision was without incidents. Turkey which previously opened its borders with the EU for migrants to obtain diplomatic and financial support closed its borders with Greece and Bulgaria willingly.<sup>34</sup> Morocco closed its borders with Spain: this affected a vital sector that of strawberry in South Spain which relies on around 6,000 Moroccan seasonal female workers, despite Spanish requests to let these workers travel to Spain.<sup>35</sup>

## 7. The flexibility of the smugglers

Following the closing of the borders and tightening of control, human smuggling decreased. However, it did not stop and smugglers continued to offer their services on social media. As the coronavirus hit hard the economies of MENA region with anticipated political unrest, smugglers will enjoy immense opportunities, especially in the marginal places. This is the case of Yemen. As the various military factions are busy fighting and assuring daily survival for the populations under their control, they have little capacity to watch out networks of Africans smuggled into Western Yemen.<sup>36</sup>

Data from Europol revealed by Rob Wainwright, the Director of Europol (from 2009 until 2018) shows that in 2016 Europol had some 50,000 suspected people smugglers in its database. He also asserted that „about one million migrants entered the European Union in 2015 of which nine out of 10 paid “facilitation services” to loose networks of criminals paying between 3,000-6,000 euros each”.<sup>37</sup>

Smugglers are flexible enough to find news routes of migration. For example, they returned people illegally from Europe to their countries of origin. This is the case of a group

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[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/649338/EPRS\\_BRI\(2020\)649338\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/649338/EPRS_BRI(2020)649338_EN.pdf) (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>32</sup> Greece confirms first coronavirus case in migrant camp

<https://www.ft.com/content/cee3c95d-f2cd-4529-828f-637a1a9ab380> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>33</sup> Coronavirus, migration top agenda in cabinet meeting chaired by PM

<https://www.amna.gr/en/article/434623/Coronavirus--migration-top-agenda-in-cabinet-meeting-chaired-by-PM> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>34</sup> Turkiya tughliq hududaha ma‘a al-Yunan wa-Bulgharia li-mukafahat Kuruna

[aawsat.com/home/article/2187131/«توكريا-تغلق-حدودها-مع-اليونان-وبلغاريا-للمكافحة-«كورونا/نا](http://aawsat.com/home/article/2187131/«توكريا-تغلق-حدودها-مع-اليونان-وبلغاريا-للمكافحة-«كورونا/نا) (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>35</sup> al-Maghrib yughliq al-hudud fi wajh al-‘amilat.. wa-huqul al-farawla fi azma bi-Isbania

[www.assahifa.com/المغرب-يغلق-الحدود-في-وجه-العاملات-وح](http://www.assahifa.com/المغرب-يغلق-الحدود-في-وجه-العاملات-وح) (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>36</sup> Hamla ‘askariyya li-man‘ tahrir al-afariqa ‘abra manatiq al-sahil al-gharbi

<https://almushahid.net/58362/> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>37</sup> Europol chief says people smugglers at record levels as criminal gangs move in

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-smuggling-europe-idUKKCN0ZS2D1> (last accessed 05 April 2020).



of 100 Moroccans who, to escape the coronavirus that is rampant in Spain, “made the crossing in the opposite direction, towards Morocco, aboard two inflatable boats and each illegal migrant paid 6,000 euros to the smugglers”.<sup>38</sup>

## 8. Students and e-learning

For decades, fake students undermine the education system in Europe, benefiting from falsification networks and corruption in the source countries, and weakness in the host countries to migrate, damaging trust and sustainability of European universities. France, for example, went recently through major scandals of institutes that help fake students migrate to the country. In 2016, a scandal led to shutting down the High Institute of Commerce and French for foreigners (L'école de commerce et de FLE) in Paris which allowed hundreds of fake Chinese students to get a visa for 3,000 to 5,000 euros (the fees of enrollment).<sup>39</sup>

International students were involved in March 2020 in various situations of crisis. Chinese students played an active role in spreading coronavirus in the Shiite city of Qom in Iran. Iranian students were the earliest cases of coronavirus identified in Hungary. In early March, a network involving politicians in Morocco sent hundreds of students to Turkey.<sup>40</sup> The University Umma al-Qura in Saudi Arabia decided to put all its foreign students (570 students of 70 nationalities) in the quarantine by way of prevention in hotels.<sup>41</sup> A report by Aljazeera said that Corona dashes dreams of Arab scholarship students in Europe.<sup>42</sup> Student migration as shown by the following tweet of Lebanese students in crowds at the French Embassy in Beirut could be a major trend in the making.



<sup>38</sup> Insolite: des immigrés clandestins déboursent 60.000 dirhams pour rentrer au Maroc <https://fr.le360.ma/societe/insolite-des-immigres-clandestins-deboursent-60000-dirhams-pour-rentre-au-maroc-212295> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>39</sup> Affaire des "faux étudiants chinois" : l'ispem ferme ses portes <http://www.letudiant.fr/educpros/actualite/affaires-des-faux-etudiants-chinois-l-ispem-ferme-ses-portes.html> (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>40</sup> Najl al-Shubani yaqud hamla tahjir al-talaba al-maghariba ila Turkiya [www.barlamane.com/نجل-الشوباني-يقود-حملة-تهجير-الطالبة-المغربية-الى-تركيا](http://www.barlamane.com/نجل-الشوباني-يقود-حملة-تهجير-الطالبة-المغربية-الى-تركيا) (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>41</sup> Jami'at Umm al-Qura tanqul tullabaha al-wafidin ila funduq ihtraziyyan [www.alarabiya.net/ar/saudi-today/2020/03/31/جامعة-أم-القرى-تنقل-طلابها-الوافدين-إلى-فندق-احتراسي](http://www.alarabiya.net/ar/saudi-today/2020/03/31/جامعة-أم-القرى-تنقل-طلابها-الوافدين-إلى-فندق-احتراسي) (last accessed 05 April 2020).

<sup>42</sup> Kuruna yutih bi-ahlam tullab al-minah al-ta'limiyya al-'Arab fi Urubba [www.aljazeera.net/news/lifestyle/2020/4/1/واقع-غامض-ومصير-مجهول-كورونا-نايطيح-بأحلام-طلاب-المنح-التعليمية-في-أوروبا](http://www.aljazeera.net/news/lifestyle/2020/4/1/واقع-غامض-ومصير-مجهول-كورونا-نايطيح-بأحلام-طلاب-المنح-التعليمية-في-أوروبا) (last accessed 05 April 2020).

Distance learning could offer a fantastic venue for serious foreign students who would like to obtain a degree in a European higher education institution. That is to say, universities could establish programs with limited mobility, to counter student migration, using innovative strategies of online learning, short visits, collaborating with local universities for facilities and training (medical or technical studies) for example.

### **Concluding remarks**

Migration is shifting in the times of coronavirus, offering opportunities for some and bringing threats for others; overall, migration experiences three large moments: contraction, flexibility and expansion. Since sovereign states tend to adopt restrictive and emergency policies, borders are closed, patriotic emotions take over, economies shut down, the migration pull factors exert little effect and migration movements contract. Yet, several indicators discussed in this paper show that smugglers, certain categories of migrants such as the students and the medical staff are flexible: the aggravation of the push factors, opportunism and the economic and political uncertainties prepare a movement of expansion in the aftermath of coronavirus. The West, disrupted but determined to reset and compete with China in economy, as it uses to do in the aftermath of any major crisis, might call in foreign cheap workers as well as open the door to foreign students. However, the EU is lacking immunity in all sectors, and while the threats are legion, opportunities will be rare. Would the EU accept migration as a competence of sovereign states? Aren't national interest, autonomy and restrictive immigration the appropriate approach to set Europe for innovation and competition, amidst global vulnerabilities, recession and instability? Will Europe reset or repeat?