

March 2021

KAS PoDiMed Survey 2020

Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean



Migration in the Middle East and North Africa

What are the Public Perceptions in the Region?

Executive Summary

Significant percentages of Arab citizens across the region report that they would like to emigrate from the MENA region based on a new survey from the Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS PoDiMed). In both Tunisia and Lebanon that percentage hovers around a third of the adult population. In other Arab countries, about a quarter of the population expresses a similar desire. The overwhelming majority of those who wish to emigrate cite existing economic struggles as the most immediate push factor. The second most cited reason is educational opportunity.

Two patterns structure emigration flows from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The first is that a disproportionate amount of youth want to leave their homeland. Most of these youth leave their countries to establish new lives abroad. The second factor is that educated individuals are more likely to say that they want to emigrate. Both these phenomena could exacerbate the significant brain drain phenomenon already confronting the region.

Economic instability due to wars, displacement, and entrenched levels of authoritarianism continue to serve as emigration “push” factors across MENA. Before the Arab Spring, an estimated ten to twelve percent of the region’s youth emigrated abroad. After the Arab Spring, that percentage stands closer to 25 percent.¹ Some estimates suggest that the Arab World contributes about one-third of the total brain drain from across all developing countries.² The effects of brain drain are estimated to cost the Arab world up to \$2 billion a year.³ A study by the Arab League’s Department of Population and Migration Policies found that 70% of university graduates seek job opportunities outside of their birth countries. Mostly countries of the Levant and North Africa suffer from this drainage of talent and human capital. Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Morocco and Lebanon all see similar trends.⁴

The KAS surveys find that there’s a significant desire for those more educated and from among the youth to emigrate, thus contributing to the region’s already troubling brain drain. These findings are based on nationally representative public opinion surveys that included approximately 1,800 respondents in six countries: Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia, with a total of 10,841 respondents. Respondents were chosen randomly, meaning the results can be generalized to the broader population. The surveys were weighted to account for any random variations that may exist by gender, age, level of education, or geographic area. The margin of error for each country is less than ±3 percent. All interviews were conducted between October 26 and December 8, 2020. The surveys were conducted on behalf of the Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS PoDiMed) by Arab Research and Analytics Associates (ARAA).

¹ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/arab-brain-drain-accelerates-after-arab-spring-un>

² <https://reachimmigration.com/en/blog/the-brain-drain-in-the-arab-world>

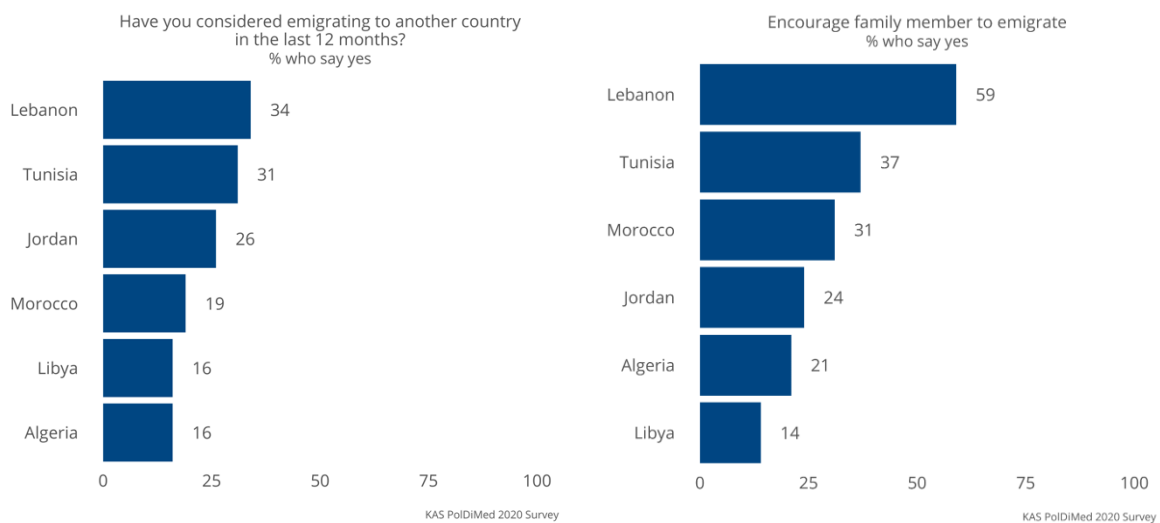
³ <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1383526>

⁴ <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1383526>

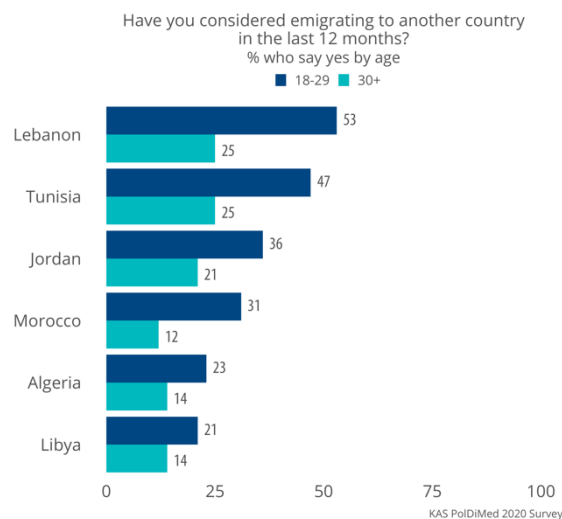
Migration

A substantial percentage of Arabs desire to leave their countries. A third in economically ravished Lebanon and newly democratic Tunisia express this desire while about a quarter of Jordanians express an aspiration to migrate. In Lebanon, the percentage has increased by about ten percentage points since 2018, where a similar question was asked on the Arab Barometer. Ongoing economic challenges in both countries are most likely the reason why a significant percentage of citizens prefer to emigrate.

In the remaining countries, small but significant shares of the population have considered emigrating, ranging between 19 percent in Morocco and 16 percent in Algeria and Libya. In all three countries, the desire to emigrate is now lower in than in the 2018-2019 Arab Barometer survey. Mainly, this decline is likely due to the fact that COVID-related restrictions have depressed the percentage of respondents considering emigration, which may rise again as global restrictions on the free movement of people ease.

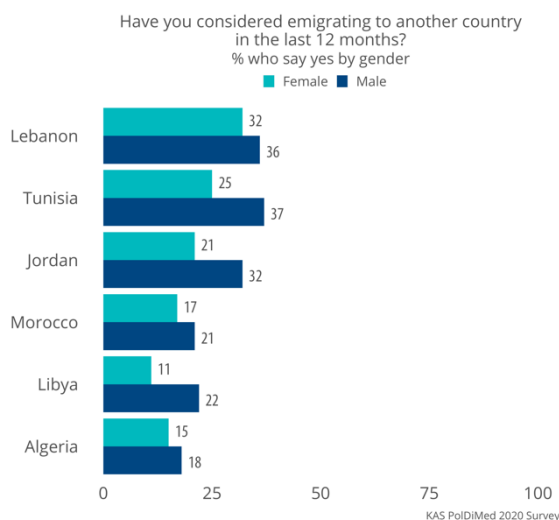


Not only do substantial numbers of citizens wish to emigrate, but they also seem to hold this preference for a family member as well. When asked about encouraging another family member to migrate, a clear majority of 57 percent in Lebanon agree with this statement, followed by Tunisia and Morocco where 37 percent and 31 percent respectively indicated the same preference for a family member to migrate.

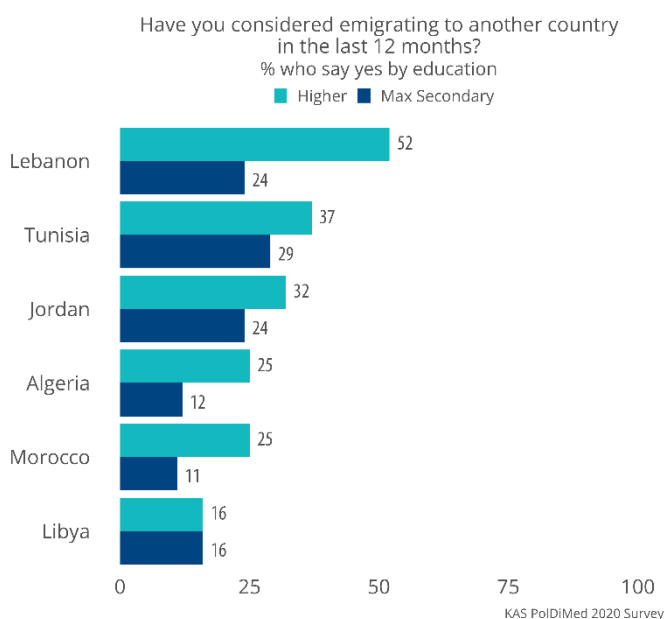


The preference to emigrate is far higher for youth ages 18-29 than those who are 30 or older. In Lebanon, youth are more than twice as likely to have thought about emigrating (53 percent vs. 25 percent) while they are nearly twice as likely to have done so in Tunisia (47 percent vs. 25 percent). Meanwhile, in Morocco they are 19 points more likely to have considering emigrating compared with nine points in Algeria and seven points in Libya. Clearly, the youth are far more interested to emigrate.

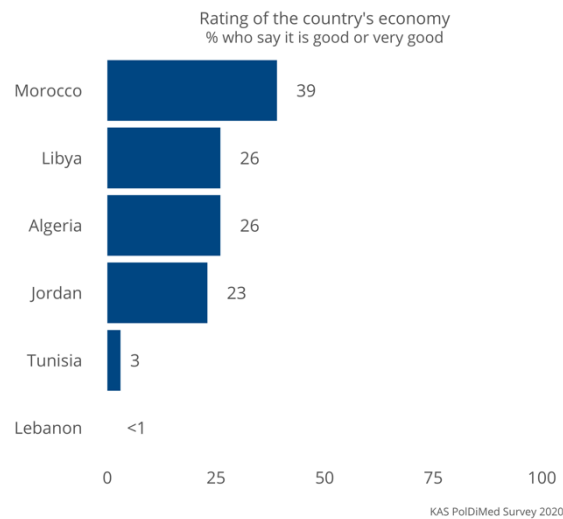
Men are also far more likely to want to emigrate than women. Differences are especially pronounced in Tunisia (+12 points), Jordan, and Libya (+11 points, respectively). This accords with prior Arab Barometer surveys, which consistently find a difference by gender related to the desire to emigrate.



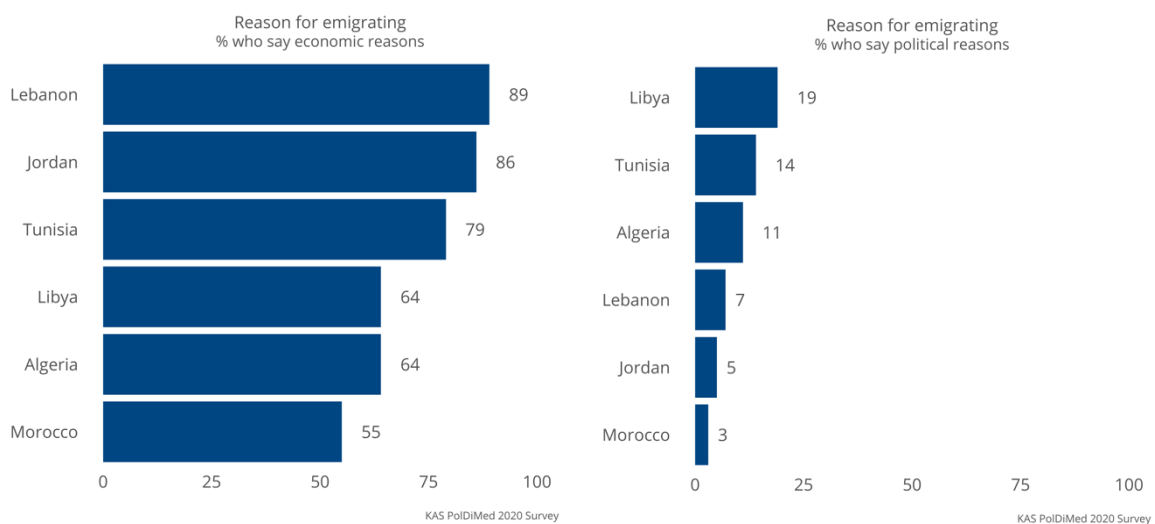
Perhaps most concerning about these patterns is the very high percentage of educated people who seek to emigrate. Across every country, with the exception of Libya, Arab citizens who have education beyond secondary school are more likely to say that they want to emigrate. Among those with high levels of human capital, a significant percentage state that they would like to leave their countries of origin. A staggering 52 percent of highly educated individuals in Lebanon seek to emigrate compared with 37 percent and 32 percent of high achieving Tunisians and Jordanians. They are joined by 25 percent of Algerians and Moroccans with similar desires.



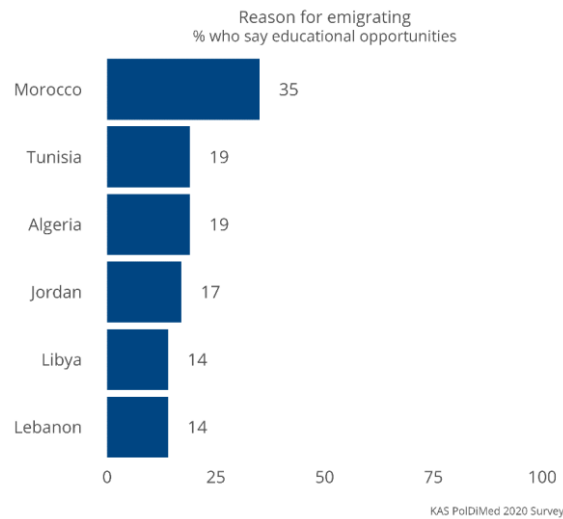
Among those who have considered migrating, there are many potential reasons for leaving. However, a majority in all countries report economic considerations as the primary motivation of their decision. This reason is most common in Lebanon (89 percent), Jordan (86 percent), and Tunisia (79 percent). These findings are of little surprise. Citizens in these three countries are least likely to say that their country's economy is performing well. In fact, less than 1 percent of Lebanese, about 3 percent of Tunisians, and 23 percent of Jordanians have a positive assessment of their country's economy. Elsewhere across the region, more than 50 percent cite economic reasons for the purpose behind their desire to emigrate, including 62 percent in Libya, 57 percent in Algeria, and 55 percent in Morocco.



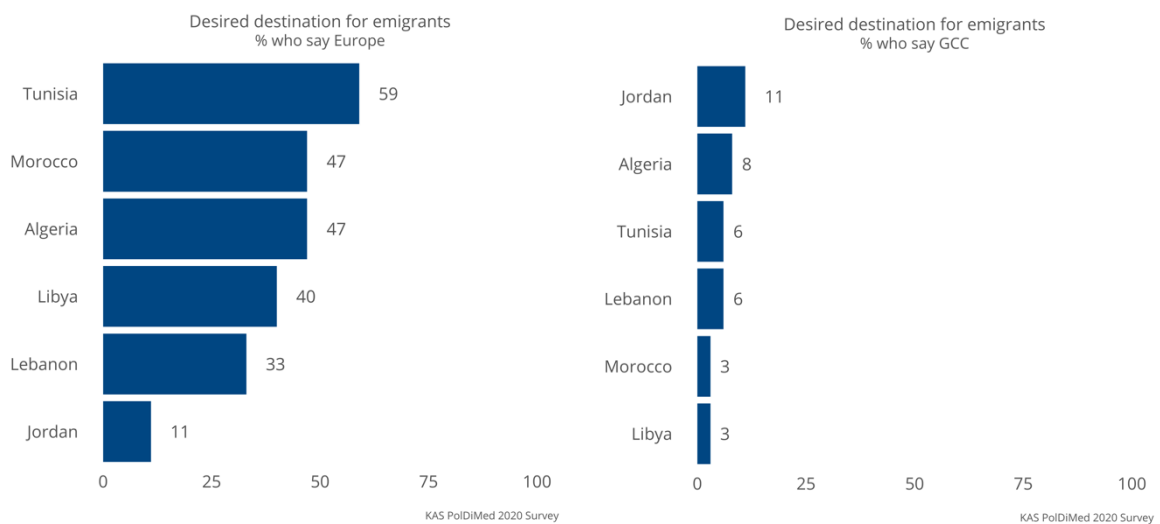
The findings here substantiate the patterns linked to the Arab brain drain that has afflicted the region for decades. These incredible levels of migration preferences, especially among those with the highest levels of human capital, is directly consequential for the future of the region, where existing challenges necessitate the input and help from the region's brightest minds. Lebanon's economic fragility and Tunisia's democratic infancy, for example, require consistent assistance from their country's human capital holders. Yet it appears that these citizens are so disillusioned, they feel forced to seek opportunities elsewhere.

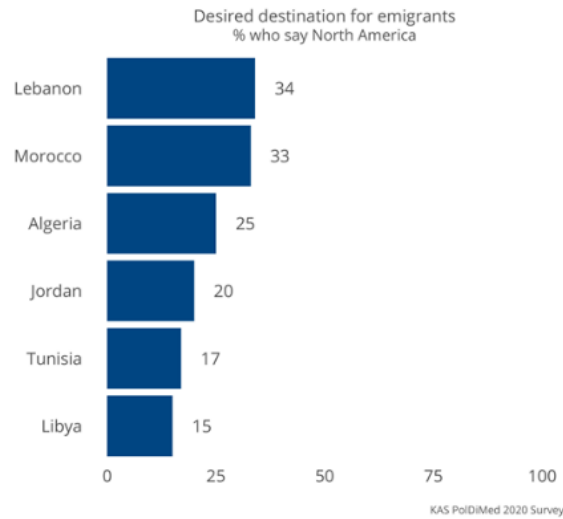


The second major pull factor for emigration is educational opportunities. A third of Moroccans state that educational opportunities are a primary factor influencing their decisions to emigrate. Close to 20 percent of citizens in Tunisia, Algeria and Jordan share this assessment. That the youth and educated are increasingly more likely to emigrate for economic and educational reasons further exacerbates the already deleterious Arab brain drain.



The predominate destination for potential migrants is the West, especially Europe. When asked to list destinations where they are considering migrating, the most common response in all Maghreb countries was Europe, including 59 percent in Tunisia, 47 percent in Morocco and Algeria, and 40 percent in Libya. In Levant countries, North America is cited as frequently in Lebanon while Jordanians are nearly twice as likely to prefer North America compared with Europe (20 percent vs. 11 percent). By comparison, destinations in other parts of the world were far less commonly listed. The countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a historic importer of workers from other Arab countries, is far less popular, with no more than 11 percent in Jordan seeking to move to the Arab Gulf.





Conclusion

The results reported here largely correspond with historic migration patterns, suggesting that potential migrants may seek to leave for economic reasons in countries that are struggling to provide opportunities. It follows that they are also more likely to seek to move to countries with better economic opportunities but also those that have a significant diaspora population where they may have relatives or friends to help with the transition.

As economic conditions continue to be an ongoing painful reality for citizens in the region, youth and those with higher levels of education, will continue to seek opportunities elsewhere, thereby exacerbating the brain drain across the region. As COVID-related restrictions on freedom of movement ease in the coming years and economic challenges remain a daily reality, there will likely be a continued widespread desire among many Arab citizens, particularly the young and educated, to try to move for better economic opportunities.

Even while the KAS PoDiMed 2020 survey find that citizens since the Arab Spring are utilizing their voices to demand accountability and representation, it also finds that the exit option remains a real and rational response to the region's ongoing challenges.

Conducted by:

Arab Research and Analytics Associates (ARAA) is a collaborative team of analysts specializing in public opinion research in the Middle East and North Africa. Its team combine decades of experience surveying this region in more than 20 countries. ARAA works with its clients to gather reliable and accurate data on public opinion across the region. ARAA has conducted surveys on behalf of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Stanford University, and Deakin University, among others. For more information, visit www.araaconsulting.com or contact info@araaconsulting.com.



About KAS PoDiMed:

The **Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean** of the **Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS PoDiMed)** implements transnational projects from Tunis with reference to the entire area of the southern (Maghreb) and eastern Mediterranean (Mashrek). It is designed to strengthen political dialogue, social and economic integration in the region and to promote long-term partnership with the European Union. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung is a non-governmental German political foundation with over 100 offices worldwide and 12 programs in the MENA region. Nationally and internationally, we work for peace, freedom and justice through political education. The consolidation of democracy and development cooperation are our particular concerns. For more information, visit www.kas.de/poldimed or contact info.poldimed@kas.de.



Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V.

Thomas Volk
Director
Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean
Tunis, Tunisia
www.kas.de/poldimed
info.poldimed@kas.de



The text accompanying this publication is published under a Creative Commons license: "Creative Commons Attribution- Share Alike 4.0 international" (CC BY-SA 4.0), <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>