

# **1. Overview of international migration and forced displacement trends in the Arab region**





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## Summary statement

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International migration and forced displacement are widely recognized as major areas of concern and policy interest in Arab countries. The Arab region continues to be a prominent region of origin, transit and destination for international migration and forced displacement, hosting around 41.4 million migrants and refugees in 2020, constituting 15 per cent of all international migrants worldwide. In the present chapter, the DESA definition of ‘international migrant’, which includes any person who changes their country of usual residence (excluding short-term movement for purposes of recreation, holiday, visits to friends and relatives, business, medical treatment or religious pilgrimage) is used solely for statistical purposes. There is no legal definition of international migrant. Although migrant workers make up the largest group, nearly 9.3 million refugees have also sought protection in the region, including 3.6 million refugees under the UNHCR mandate and 5.7 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA. At the same time, Arab countries were the origin of an estimated 32.8 million migrants and refugees in 2020. Displacement induced by conflict and violence has continued, with almost 8.9 million refugees originating from Arab countries in 2020, comprising 43 per cent of the global total. The massive volume of migration and forced displacement within and from the region poses considerable challenges. To improve migration management and refugee protection in Arab countries, it is crucial to strengthen the evidence base in these areas, and to collect and analyse high-quality, disaggregated data on international migrants, migrant workers, refugees, stateless migrants and refugees, international tertiary students, and other relevant groups.

## Background

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The availability and contextualisation of data on international migration and forced displacement is a prerequisite for evidence-based policymaking and for a public discourse void of misconceptions. The first objective of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration<sup>3</sup> calls for strengthening the global evidence base by collecting, analysing and disseminating accurate and disaggregated data. In addition, the Global Compact on Refugees<sup>4</sup> emphasises the criticality of reliable, comparable and timely data for evidence-

based measures “to improve socioeconomic conditions for refugees and host communities; assess and address the impact of large refugee populations on host countries in emergency and protracted situations; and identify and plan appropriate solutions”.<sup>5</sup>

Chapter 1 of the Situation Report on International Migration in the Arab Region contributes to this ambition, and has served to enhance the understanding of international migration and forced displacement in the Arab

region since the first edition of the report in 2015. It provides regional data on the number of people on the move, including international migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and stateless persons, disaggregated by sex, age and other diverse characteristics, including countries of origin or habitual residence, countries of transit and destination, and sociodemographic profiles. Nonetheless, it is difficult to have a single picture of migration and forced displacement in the Arab region, as it is characterised by a high degree of diversity across countries and over time.

Chapter 1 of the present report offers a brief overview of the key trends and patterns of international migration and forced displacement in the Arab region, followed by a summary of the major factors influencing people's decisions to cross borders, and a detailed update of relevant data and comparisons of historical trends covering the period 1990-2020. The chapter also encompasses information related to remittances to and from Arab countries. Furthermore, where possible, it provides insight into the estimated impact of the COVID-19 crisis on international migration and forced displacement, with special regard to labour migration and remittances, which are believed to be among the most affected domains.

The main data source for chapter 1 is the 2020 edition of the International Migrant Stock database,<sup>6</sup> issued by the DESA Population Division. In this dataset, international migrants are defined as those living in a country who are either foreign-born or foreign citizens.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, when using data from this dataset, refugees are included in the total international migrant stock, which poses some limitations to the analysis.<sup>8</sup> For the sake of comprehension, the present report always refers to persons accounted for in the DESA database as "migrants and refugees", and clarifications and analysis are included where possible to distinguish between international migrants and refugees, and their different situations. It is important to note the different realities

and migration patterns in the region, with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) subregion hosting mostly migrant workers, while refugees are mostly concentrated in the Mashreq. Therefore, in reference to GCC, the data denoted mainly refers to migrants, given the migration trends to the GCC. For more detailed information and to provide specific data on refugees, the present report uses data produced by UNHCR<sup>9</sup> (population figures dataset from Refugee Data Finder),<sup>10</sup> and by UNRWA<sup>11</sup> (UNRWA Registered Population Dashboard 2020).<sup>12</sup>

The present report analyses international migration and forced displacement patterns at the regional and subregional levels. Unless otherwise specified, the present report defines the Arab region as comprising 22 countries, member States of the League of Arab States. They are further divided into four subregional groups of countries:

- **GCC countries:** Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.
- **Maghreb countries:** Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia.
- **Mashreq countries:** Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the State of Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic.
- **Arab least developed countries (LDCs):** the Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen.

To complement the demographic picture of international migration and forced displacement in the region and to provide insight into its economic dynamics, the present chapter also includes data on remittances sent from and to Arab countries. These are based on the May 2021 update of the World Bank's Annual Remittances Data and the World Bank's 2018 Bilateral Remittance Matrix. Other data sources include the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), IFAD, ILO and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

## A. Information highlights: overview of key migration and forced displacement trends and patterns in the Arab region

### 1. Migration and forced displacement in Arab countries

In 2020, Arab countries hosted 41.4 million international migrants and refugees, who made up around 15 per cent of all migrants and refugees worldwide. Their number has almost tripled from 14.2 million in 1990.

The GCC subregion was home to almost three quarters of all migrants and refugees in the Arab region, most of them migrant workers. Mashreq countries hosted 18 per cent, driven by both forced displacement and labour migration.

The Middle East<sup>13</sup> had the highest proportion of migrant workers of the total workforce worldwide in 2019, at 41 per cent. The GCC subregion in particular continues to be a major labour migration hub.

One third of the migrant and refugee population in the Arab region were women in 2020. Women represented nearly half of all migrants and refugees in the Mashreq and the Arab LDCs, but only 35 per cent in the Maghreb and 28 per cent in GCC countries.

More than two thirds of all migrants and refugees residing in Arab countries were of working age (25-64 years old) in 2020. Children (0-14 years old)<sup>14</sup> represented 18 per cent, young people (15-24 years old) comprised 11 per cent, and older persons (aged 65+) constituted only 3 per cent.

Around 23 per cent of all migrants and refugees in the Arab region were from India in 2020. Other prominent countries of origin included Bangladesh, Pakistan, the State of Palestine, and the Syrian Arab Republic.

Approximately 36 per cent of all conflict-induced IDPs globally were in Arab countries in 2020, making up around 17.1 million persons. The Syrian Arab Republic had the highest conflict-induced internal displacement in the world in 2020, reaching 6.6 million.

In 2020, 3.6 million refugees registered with UNHCR resided in Arab countries. In addition, UNRWA reported 5.7 million Palestine refugees in the region. Jordan and Lebanon hosted the largest number of refugees as a proportion of their populations globally.



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international migrants and refugees

**1/3** of the migrant and  
refugee population in the Arab  
region were women in 2020

Around **23%** of all  
migrants and refugees in the Arab  
region were from India in 2020

## 2. Migration and forced displacement from Arab countries

In 2020, almost 32.8 million international migrants and refugees originated from Arab countries, 44 per cent of whom stayed within the region. Their number tripled from 10.8 million in 1990.

Around 61 per cent of all migrants and refugees from Arab countries originated from the Mashreq in 2020.

More than 2 out of 5 refugees in the world came from Arab countries in 2020. Arab countries were the origin of nearly 8.9 million refugees registered with UNHCR in 2020, three quarters of whom came from the Syrian Arab Republic.

Three quarters of all refugees from Arab countries were staying in neighbouring countries in 2020. Turkey was the main country of destination hosting more than 3.6 million refugees from the Arab region, or 41 per cent.

## 3. Remittances

Arab countries received \$57.9 billion in remittances in 2020, representing 8 per cent of global remittance inflows. Remittance inflows exceeded the amount the Arab region received in foreign direct investment by 1.7 times, and official development assistance and official aid by 1.8 times in 2019.

Around 23 per cent of all global remittance outflows came from GCC countries in 2019. Total remittances sent from Arab countries reached \$119 billion, with 95 per cent coming from GCC countries.

In 2020, the cost of sending remittances to the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) was 6.58 per cent according to the World Bank, close to the global average of 6.51 per cent but far from the target of 3 per cent by 2030 set by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10.c.

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## B. Drivers and influencing factors of migration and forced displacement in the Arab region

Decisions to leave one's country of origin or habitual residence are always driven by a set of complex and interrelated factors, which

make it difficult to divide people on the move into strictly distinct categories. A number of factors stand out, however, as major motives

to move; while other factors facilitate such movements, protract migration and forced displacement, or discourage people from returning to their countries of origin even after the primary driver for moving has abated. The following summarizes the most prominent of

these factors and their characteristic traits. Nonetheless, this overview is not exhaustive, and the complexity of the situation of every individual woman, man and child migrant and refugee can only be captured by considering all these factors simultaneously.

## Economic and social factors

### Why

Poverty, inequality and discrimination, difficulties in accessing job opportunities, unemployment, low wages, inaccessible quality education, low returns on education, non-inclusive urban development, precarious habitats, poor living conditions.

### Who

Young people; working age population, especially men, although women are also represented in significant numbers, particularly in the care sector and domestic work.

### Origin

Less developed countries (especially middle-income countries), countries with high unemployment rates.

### Destination

High-income economies, countries with better standards of living, countries with high demand for foreign labour, countries with bilateral agreements with countries of origin, countries with considerable presence of nationals from country of origin (diaspora or significant stock of migrant workers).



## Violence and persecution

### Why

War; conflict; violence, foreign occupation; political instability; persecution on the basis of race, religion or nationality; membership of a particular social group or political movement; threat to lives; destruction of infrastructure and housing; disruption of basic services and livelihoods; food insecurity; disease.

### Who

All demographic groups.

### Origin

Countries where the security and protection of individuals who are at risk of violence and persecution cannot be guaranteed, including countries experiencing war, foreign occupation, political instability, or civil unrest.

### Destination

Neighbouring countries, countries with higher level of safety and protection, countries with historical ties or linguistic and ethnic similarities.



## Environmental factors

### Why

Environmental pressure, resource scarcity, natural disaster, climate change, climate events (drought, sea level rise, flash floods, desertification), water stress, water pollution, land degradation, diminishing agricultural production and livelihoods.

### Who

Mostly rural populations with a high dependency on natural resources and agriculture.

### Origin

Countries experiencing environmental pressures.

### Destination

Mostly neighbouring countries or countries within the same region.



## Facilitating and mediating factors

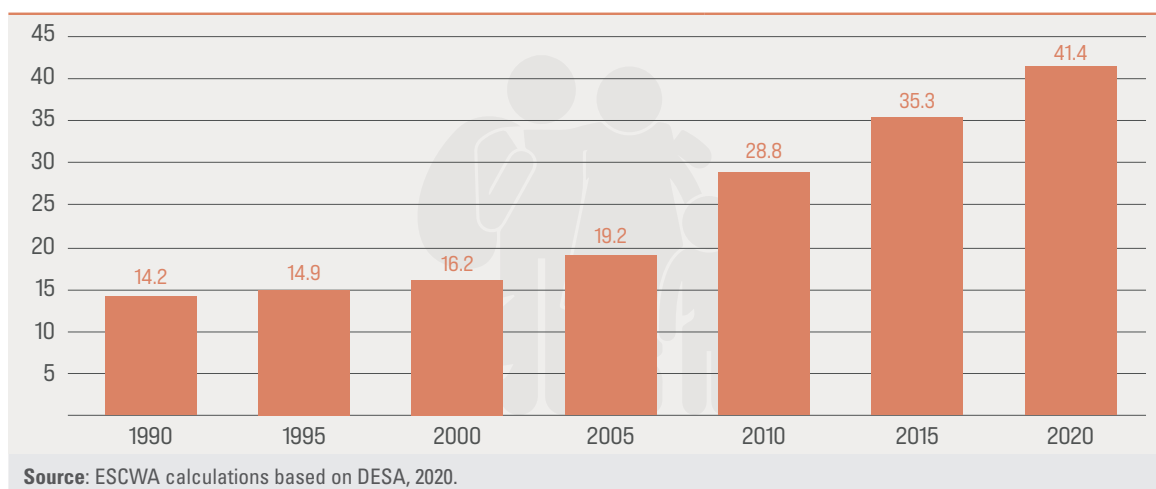
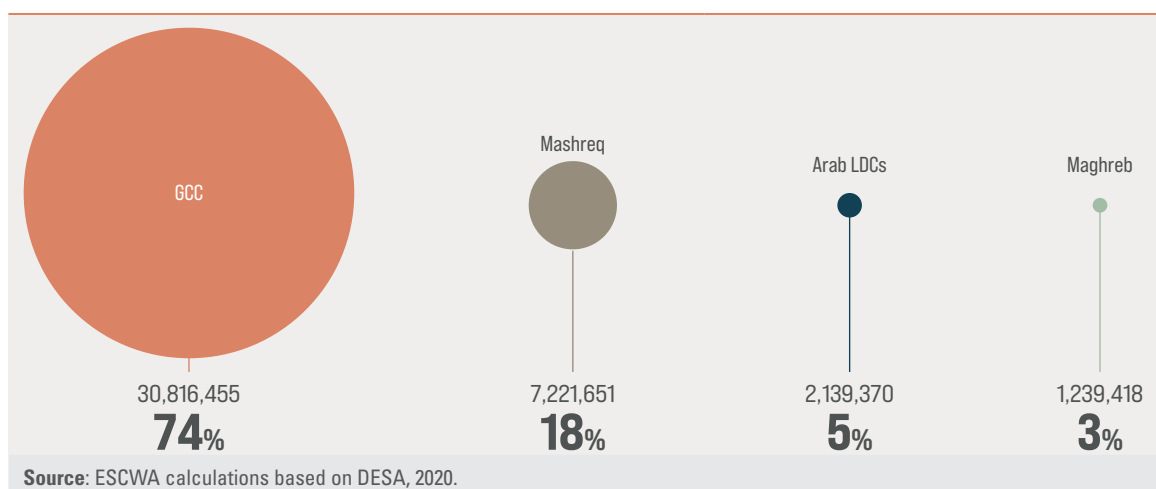
- Diaspora and migration networks, historical ties, language and education links, geographic proximity.
- New communications channels, social media networks, enhanced information flow.
- Employer demand, intermediaries (recruitment and placement agencies).
- Migration governance and policies in destination countries, bilateral, regional and multilateral trade and labour migration agreements, ease of travel, ease of legal and administrative procedures regarding family reunification, admission, residency and employment.



## C. Migration and forced displacement in Arab countries

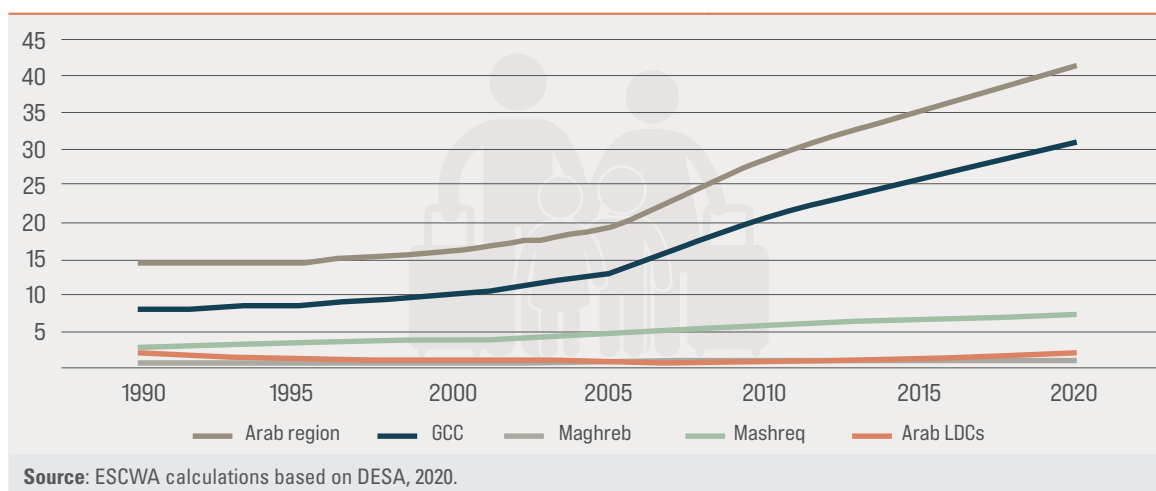
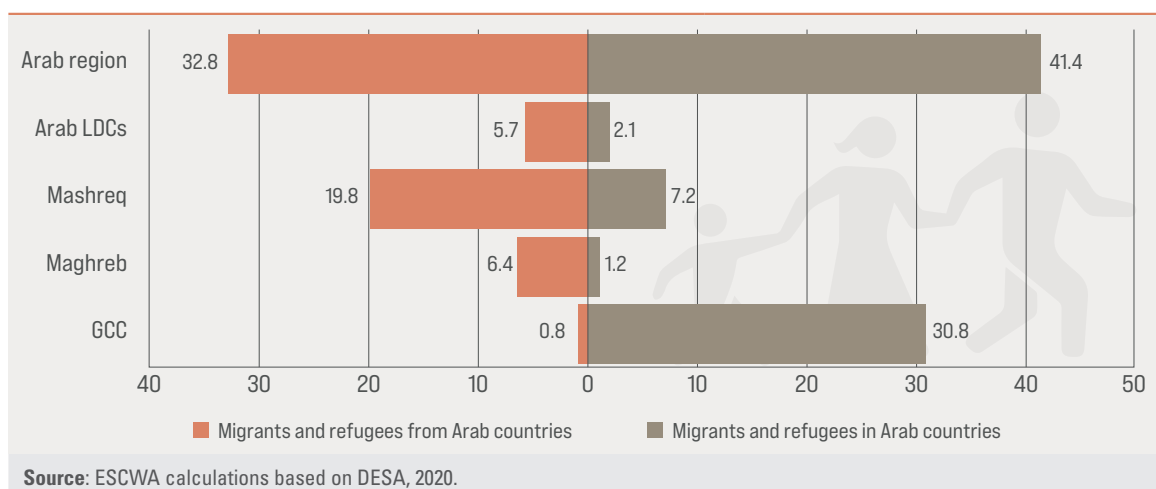
Migration and forced displacement are prominent features of the Arab region, which hosted 41.4 million international migrants and refugees in 2020, representing 15 per cent of migrants and refugees globally (figure 1). There has been significant growth in the number of international migrants and refugees in the region: in 1990, there were 14.2 million international migrants and refugees in the Arab region, representing around 9 per cent of the total number worldwide.

The distribution of migrants and refugees within the Arab region varies greatly across subregions, with GCC countries being the most prominent recipients. In 2020, GCC countries hosted 74 per cent of the total number of migrants and refugees,<sup>15</sup> most of whom were migrant workers, or 30.8 million persons, while 18 per cent lived in the Mashreq, 5 per cent in the Arab LDCs, and 3 per cent in the Maghreb (figure 2).

**Figure 1.** Number of migrants and refugees in the Arab region, 1990-2020 (Millions)**Figure 2.** Distribution of migrants and refugees in the Arab region by subregion, 2020

The migrant population in GCC countries has grown substantially compared with other subregions from 8.2 million in 1990 to 30.8 million in 2020. This is primarily attributed to the increased demand for migrant workers in the subregion. The migrant and refugee population in the Mashreq has also grown significantly, from 2.9 million in 1990 to 7.2 million in 2020. In contrast, the number of migrants and refugees has decreased in the Arab LDCs from 2.2 million in 1990 to 2.1 million in 2020, and has only slightly increased in the Maghreb from 0.8 million in 1990 to 1.2 million in 2020 (figure 3).

Since 1990, the Arab region has been characterized by more international migrants and refugees living in Arab countries than Arab nationals living abroad (figure 4). However, the trends vary significantly between subregions. While GCC countries have 37 times more international migrants than nationals living abroad, the other subregions show the opposite trend. The Maghreb has five times more nationals living abroad than international migrants and refugees living in the subregion, while the Arab LDCs and the Mashreq have almost 3 times each.

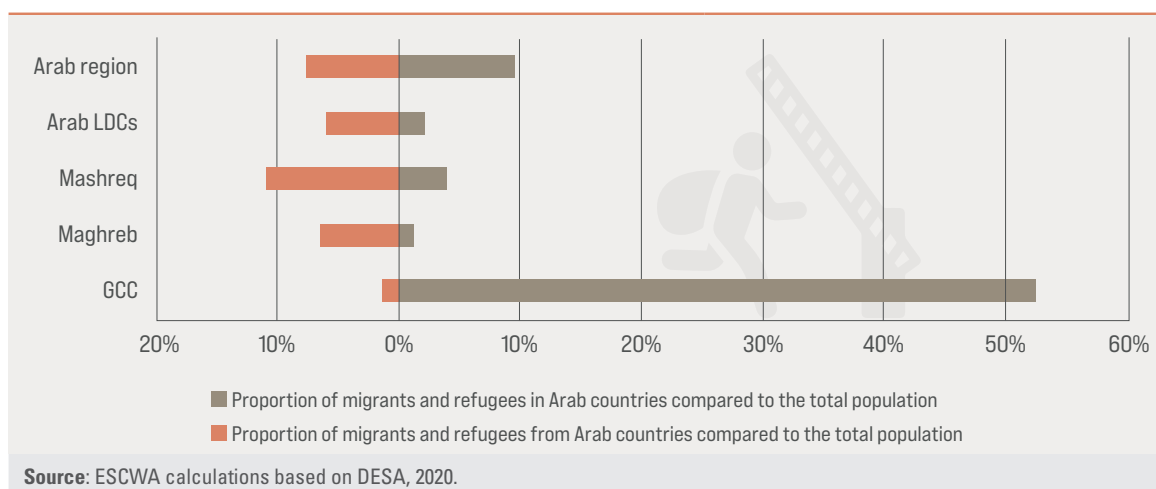
**Figure 3.** Number of migrants and refugees in the Arab region by subregion, 1990-2020 (Millions)**Figure 4.** Number of migrants and refugees from and in Arab countries by subregion, 2020 (Millions)

The share of international migrants and refugees residing in Arab countries of the total population also varies considerably among subregions (figure 5), ranging from a high of 53 per cent in GCC countries to a low of 1 per cent in the Maghreb. The proportion of migrants and refugees as part of the total population in the Arab region has steadily increased over the last three decades, from above 6 per cent in 1990 to over 9 per cent in 2020, driven by increases in GCC countries. In 2020, the number of nationals living outside a subregion compared to its population was the

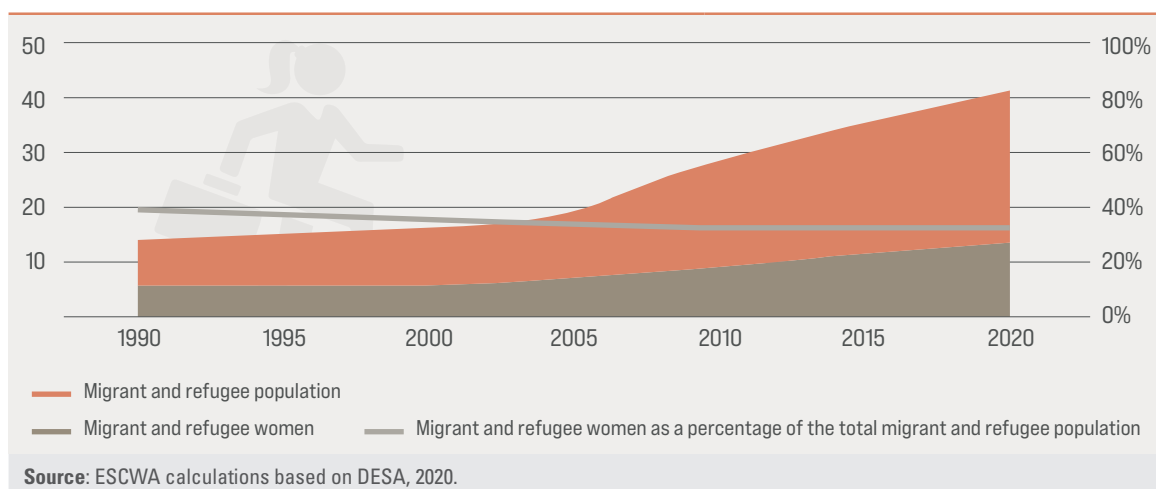
highest in the Mashreq (11 per cent) and the lowest in GCC countries (1 per cent).

In 2020, women made up 33 per cent of the migrant and refugee population in the Arab region, a proportion that has remained steady since 2010, after slowly decreasing from 39 per cent in 1990 (figure 6). Though their share has slightly decreased, the number of women migrants and refugees has increased from 5.6 million in 1990 to 13.6 million in 2020, with an additional almost 2 million women migrants and refugees in the region since 2015.

**Figure 5.** Proportion of migrants and refugees from and in Arab countries by subregion, 2020



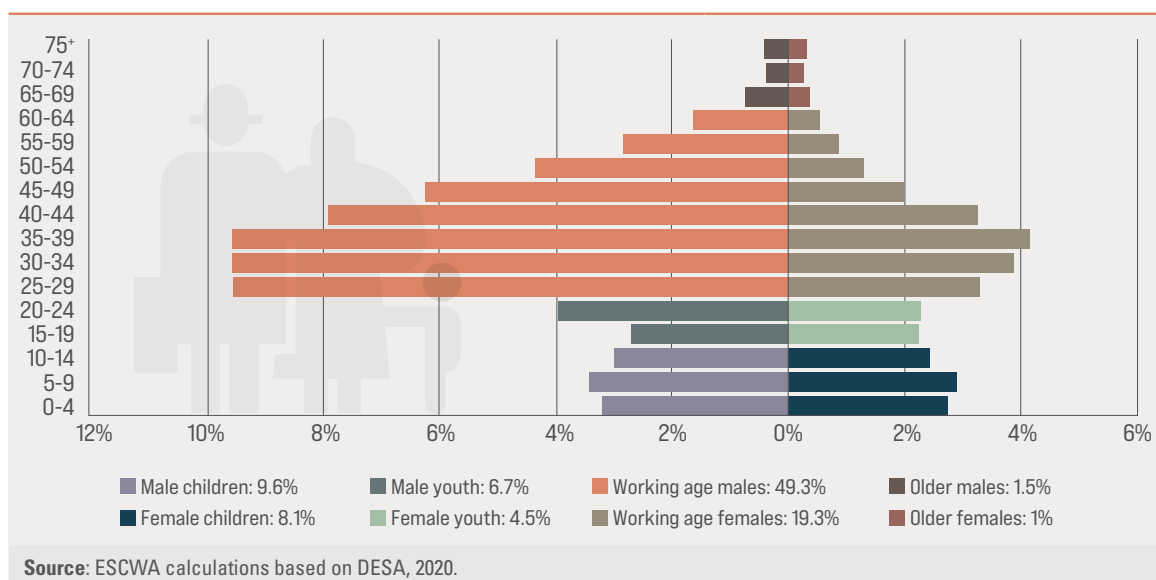
**Figure 6.** Number and proportion of migrant and refugee women among the total migrant and refugee population in the Arab region, 1990-2020 (Millions)



In 2020, women represented nearly half of the migrant and refugee population in the Mashreq and in the Arab LDCs (49.5 per cent and 48 per cent, respectively), 35 per cent in the Maghreb, and 28 per cent in GCC countries. These diverging trends can be explained by the proportionally higher number of men who migrate to work in GCC countries and the Maghreb, in contrast to the often conflict-induced displacement dynamic to the Arab LDCs and the Mashreq, which are generally characterised by a more even gender distribution. For example,

in Jordan and Lebanon, which host large numbers of refugees and forcibly displaced persons from the State of Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic, women represented 49 per cent and 51 per cent of the migrant and refugee populations, respectively. In contrast, in GCC countries, which are prominent destinations for male migrant workers, starker differences appear in the gender balance of the migrant and refugee population, with the proportion of women varying from a low of 16 per cent in Oman to a high of 34 per cent in Kuwait.

**Figure 7.** Distribution of migrants and refugees in the Arab region by age, age group and sex, 2020

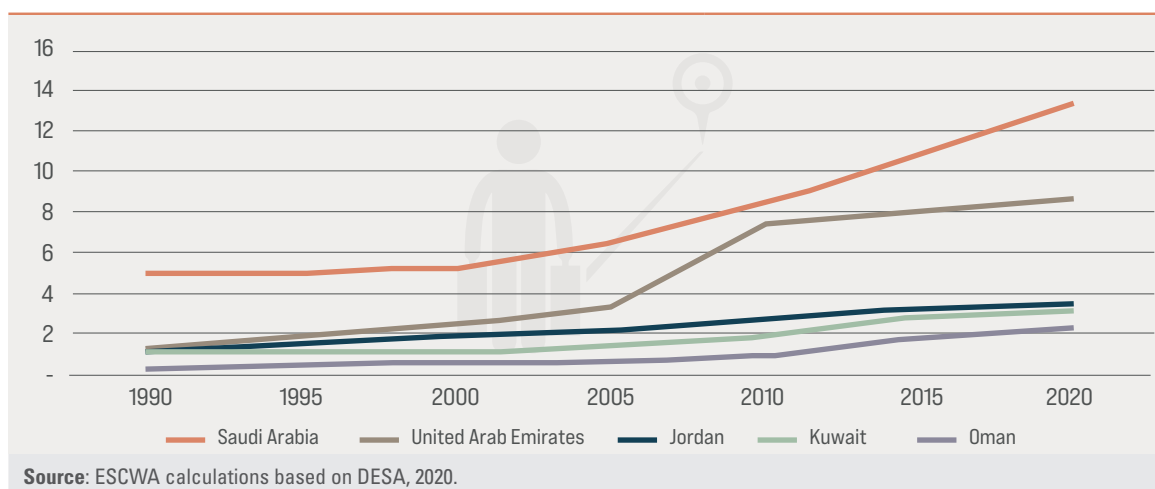


The diversity of migration and forced displacement trends in the Arab region is also exemplified by the various age groups of migrants and refugees living in the region. Working-age (25-64 years old) men represented 49.3 per cent of all migrants and refugees in the region in 2020, and working-age women comprised 19.3 per cent (figure 7). Children (0-14 years old) represented 17.7 per cent of the migrant and refugee population, young people (15-24 years old) constituted 11.2 per cent, working-age persons comprised 68.6 per cent, and older persons (aged 65+) represented 2.5 per cent. Children, young people and older persons' age groups showed a more even sex distribution, with slightly more men.

GCC countries were dominant among the top five countries of destination for migrants in the region in 2020 (figure 8). Of these, Saudi Arabia had the largest number of migrants (accounting for 13.5 million), followed by the United Arab Emirates (8.7 million). Kuwait with 3.1 million migrants and Oman with 2.4 million also make it to the top five destination countries in the region. GCC countries in general are characterized by their high demand for migrant workers.

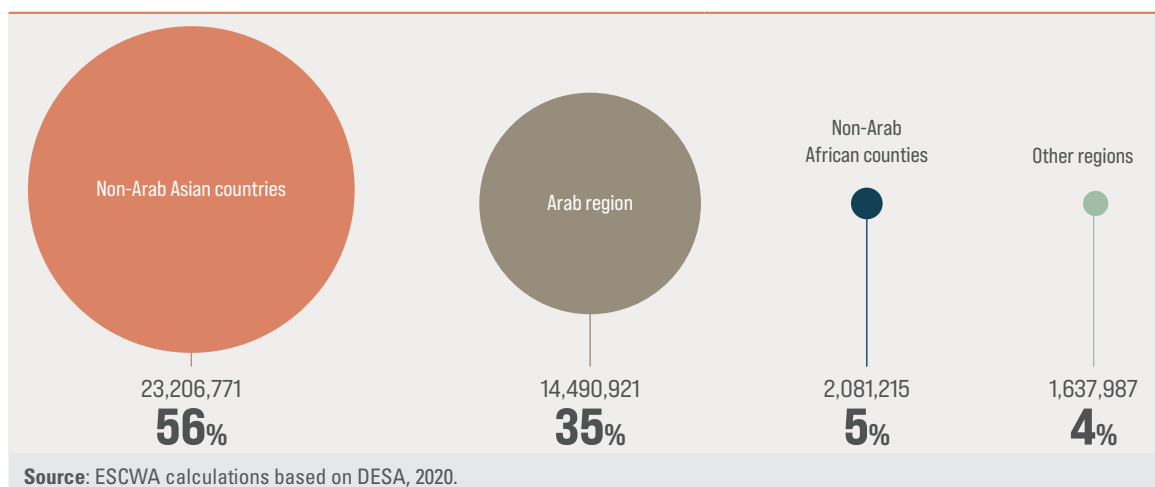
Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic were also among the region's top countries of destination for international migrants and refugees displaced by ongoing conflict. According to DESA estimates, in 2020, 3.5 million migrants and refugees were living in Jordan, 1.7 million in Lebanon, 1.4 million in the Sudan, almost 0.9 million in the Syrian Arab Republic, and 0.8 million in Libya.

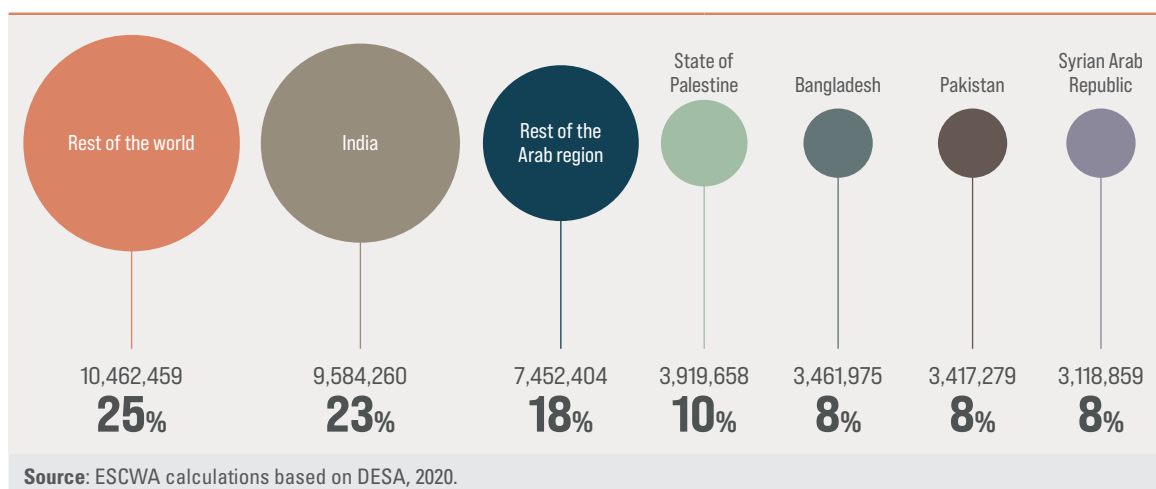
In 2020, around 35 per cent of migrants and refugees in the Arab region, comprising approximately 14.5 million persons, originated from within the region. More than half (56 per cent or 23.2 million) of migrants and refugees in the Arab region came from non-Arab Asian countries, predominantly migrant workers, and 5 per cent from non-Arab African countries (figure 9). There is significant variance in the gender composition of migrants and refugees originating from different regions. Only about a quarter (26 per cent) of migrants and refugees residing in the Arab region who originated from non-Arab Asian countries were women in 2020, compared with 41 per cent in the case of intraregional migrants and refugees. Moreover, almost half (47 per cent) of migrants and refugees residing in the Arab region who originated from non-Arab African countries were women.

**Figure 8.** Top five Arab countries of destination for migrants and refugees, 1990-2020 (Millions)

The top country of origin of migrants and refugees in the Arab region in 2020 was India, the country of origin of 23 per cent of the Arab region's migrants and refugees, most of whom were migrant workers (figure 10). The number of migrants from India started to rise in 2005, increasing by 157 per cent between 2005 and 2020. The Bangladeshi and Pakistani migrant and refugee population in the region also started increasing in 2005, although at a slower pace, reaching 3.5 million and 3.4 million in 2020, respectively. In 2020, less than a quarter (24 per cent) of migrants and refugees living in the Arab region who were

of Indian or Pakistani origin were women. This proportion is even lower at 17 per cent in the case of Bangladesh, which is also a significant source of labour migration to Arab countries. In contrast, the State of Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic, which are marked by conflict-induced forced displacement dynamics, show a significantly more even gender composition. Around 48 per cent of migrants and refugees in the Arab region originating from the State of Palestine were women in 2020, while the same figure stood at 47 per cent for the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Figure 9.** Regions of origin of migrants and refugees in the Arab region, 2020

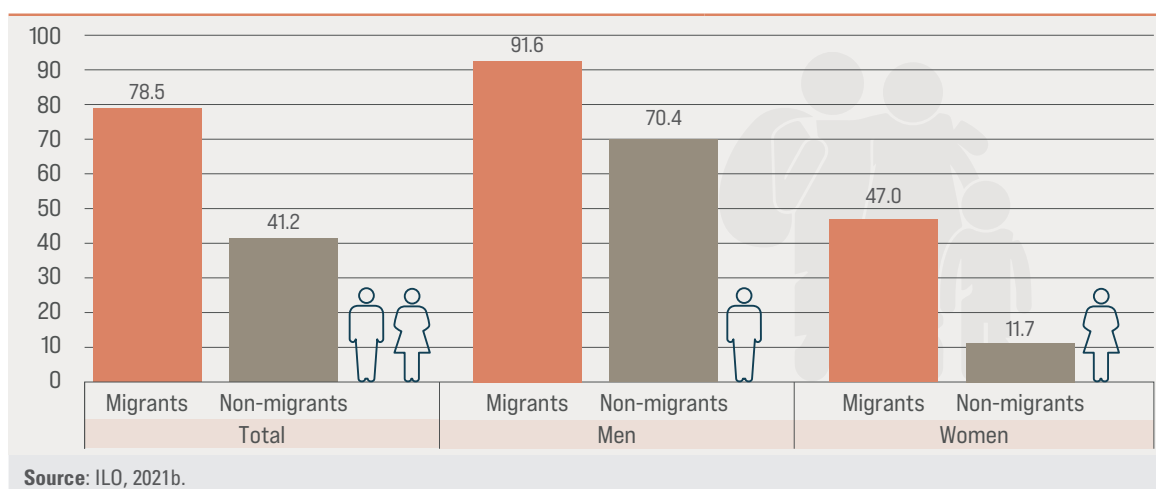
**Figure 10.** Top five countries of origin of migrants and refugees in the Arab region, 2020

## 1. Migrant workers in the Arab region

The Arab region continues to be a significant labour migration hub. The number of migrant workers in 12 Arab countries<sup>16</sup> amounted to 24.1 million persons in 2019, representing 14 per cent of migrant workers worldwide. The region is also characterised by the highest global share of migrant workers in the total workforce, reaching 41 per cent compared with the global average of 5 per cent in the 12 countries. This means that two of every five workers are migrants, particularly as a result of the high labour force participation rates of

migrants compared with nationals, especially women (figure 11).

In these 12 countries, close to 83 per cent of all migrant workers are men. Women constitute only 17 per cent of the region's migrant worker population, compared with a global average of 41 per cent. The relatively low proportion of women migrant workers compared with other world regions can be attributed to the relatively limited employment opportunities available to women migrant workers in the Arab region outside of the care economy, including domestic work.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 11.** Labour force participation rates of migrants and non-migrants, by sex, 2019 (Percentage)

The COVID-19 pandemic has had exceptional consequences for the global economy, labour markets and mobility, with ramifications for the magnitude and characteristics of international labour migration. It is still difficult to assess the full impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the volumes of labour migration globally and in Arab countries, given that only estimates from 2019 predating the pandemic are currently available. However, since the beginning of the pandemic, some increases in return migration have been observed, which may have lasting effects depending on the evolution of the socioeconomic situation globally and in the region.

## 2. Internal displacement

According to IDMC data, the total number of conflict-induced IDPs in the Arab region reached almost 17.1 million in 2020 (table 1), comprising 36 per cent of the global total. The Syrian Arab Republic, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen were among the top 10 countries worldwide with the highest number of IDPs as a result of conflict. In 2020, a total of 4.2 million people were newly internally displaced in the region, of whom 2.4 million were displaced by

conflict and 1.8 million by natural disasters, with over half of them in Somalia owing to floods (table 2).

Of the total number of IDPs displaced by conflict in the Arab region in 2020, 46 per cent were in the Mashreq, comprising 7.9 million persons, predominantly in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. The Syrian Arab Republic was the country with the highest conflict-induced internal displacement globally in 2020, reaching close to 6.6 million. It was also the country with the highest number of IDPs as a percentage of the total population in the Arab region, at 38 per cent. There were also more than 1.2 million IDPs in Iraq in 2020, a number that is showing a decreasing trend.

The Arab LDCs were the location of 52 per cent of conflict-induced internal displacements in the Arab region in 2020, or 8.9 million persons, in Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen. Yemen experienced a severe eleven-fold increase in internal displacement owing to conflict and violence between 2014 and 2020, with an IDP population of 3.6 million in 2020.<sup>18</sup>

The IDP population displaced by conflict decreased significantly between 2015 and 2017,

**Table 1.** Internally displaced persons owing to conflict and violence in Arab countries, 2014-2020

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Egypt	4,100	9,100	9,100	36,000	3,200	3,200	3,200
Iraq	3,276,000	3,290,000	3,035,000	2,648,000	1,962,000	1,555,000	1,224,000
Lebanon	20,000	12,000	12,000	11,000	11,000	7,000	7,000
Libya	400,000	500,000	304,000	197,000	221,000	451,000	278,000
Somalia	1,107,000	1,223,000	1,107,000	825,000	2,648,000	2,648,000	2,968,000
State of Palestine	275,000	221,000	193,000	231,000	238,000	243,000	131,000
Sudan	3,100,000	3,182,000	3,300,000	2,072,000	2,072,000	2,134,000	2,276,000
Syrian Arab Republic	7,600,000	6,600,000	6,326,000	6,784,000	6,119,000	6,495,000	6,568,000
Yemen	334,000	2,509,000	1,974,000	2,014,000	2,324,000	3,635,000	3,635,000
<b>Total Arab region</b>	<b>16,116,100</b>	<b>17,546,100</b>	<b>16,262,600</b>	<b>14,818,000</b>	<b>15,598,200</b>	<b>17,171,204</b>	<b>17,090,200</b>

**Source:** Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2020.

**Note:** Data does not include disaster-induced displacement. Only countries with more than 3,000 conflict-induced IDPs in a given year have been included in table 1. The total includes all Arab countries.

but increased considerably again between 2017 and 2019. It has remained stable since 2019. However, these numbers should be considered with caution, since access to IDP camps and other designated areas is severely constrained because of widespread insecurity and instability, among other reasons. Somalia and the Sudan also accounted for significant numbers of conflict-induced IDPs in 2020, with close to 3 million and 2.3 million persons, respectively.

The Arab LDCs also accounted for almost all disaster-induced internal displacement in the Arab region in 2020, particularly Somalia with

more than 1 million and the Sudan with 454,000 IDPs newly displaced by disaster in 2020.

### 3. Forced displacement

According to 2020 UNHCR data,<sup>19</sup> the total population of concern in the Arab region, including refugees and persons in refugee-like situations, asylum-seekers, returned refugees, internally displaced persons, returned IDPs, stateless persons and others of concern, amounted to 21.9 million persons. Of these, 17.7 million were IDPs protected/assisted by UNHCR, including people

**Table 2.** Internal displacement in Arab countries, 2020

Country	New conflict-caused displacements in 2020	New disaster-induced displacements in 2020	Number of conflict-induced IDPs in 2020	Conflict-induced IDPs as a percentage of the total population
Algeria	-	9,600	-	
Bahrain	-	-	-	
Comoros	-	-	-	
Djibouti	-	11	-	
Egypt	1,000	8,400	3,200	0.0%
Iraq	67,000	1,200	1,224,000	3.0%
Jordan	-	140	-	
Kuwait	-	-	-	
Lebanon	-	-	7,000	0.1%
Libya	39,000	-	278,000	4.0%
Mauritania	-	1,600	-	
Morocco	-	340	-	
Oman	-	120	-	
Qatar	-	-	-	
Saudi Arabia	-	610	-	
Somalia	293,000	1,037,000	2,968,000	18.7%
State of Palestine	1,000	110	131,000	2.6%
Sudan	79,000	454,000	2,276,000	5.2%
Syrian Arab Republic	1,822,000	25,000	6,568,000	37.5%
Tunisia	-	10,000	-	
United Arab Emirates	-	610	-	
Yemen	143,000	223,000	3,635,000	12.2%
<b>Total Arab region</b>	<b>2,445,000</b>	<b>1,771,741</b>	<b>17,090,200</b>	<b>3.9%</b>

**Source:** ESCWA calculations based on DESA, 2019; and Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2020.

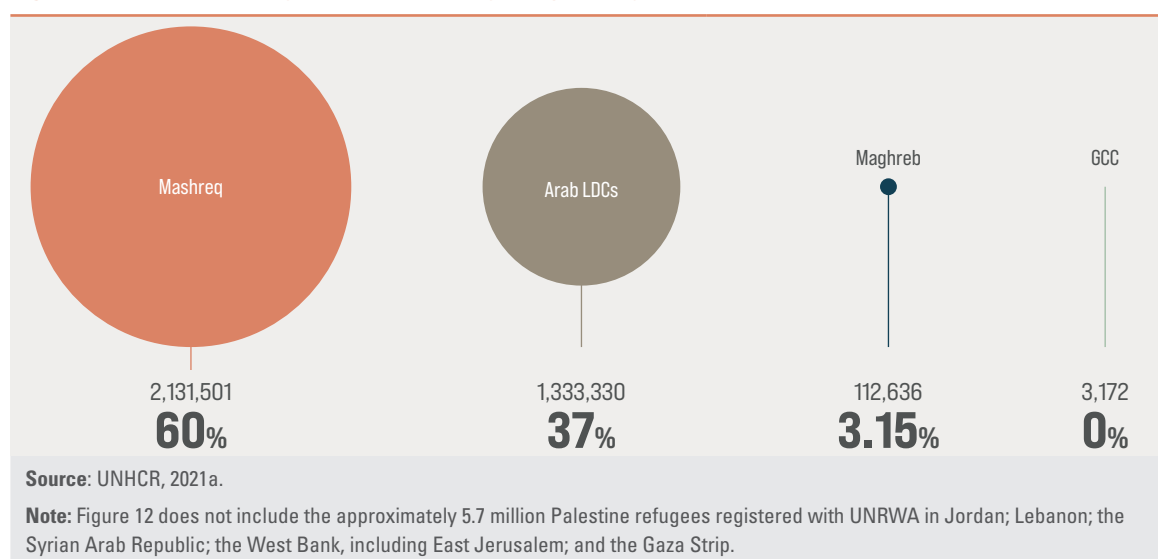
in IDP-like situations; 3.6 million were refugees under the UNHCR mandate; and over 370,000 were stateless persons but this mainly includes in situ stateless persons who are not forcibly displaced.

In total, 60 per cent of all refugees registered with UNHCR in the Arab region, more than 2.1 million persons, were located in Mashreq countries. Moreover, 37 per cent, or 1.3 million, were living in the Arab LDCs. The vast majority of the remaining refugees in the region (around 113,000) stayed in

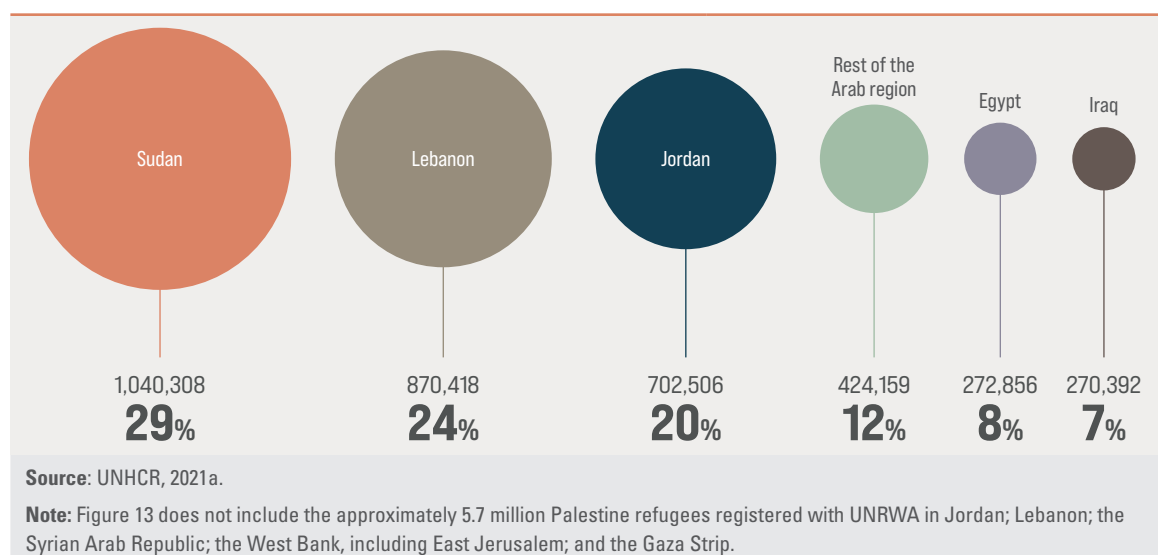
the Maghreb, while the number of refugees in GCC countries was negligible compared with other subregions (figure 12).

As reported by UNHCR, the Sudan hosted the largest number of refugees in the region in 2020 (over 1 million), followed by Lebanon (870,000) and Jordan (703,000) (figure 13). Jordan and Lebanon continue to host the highest global rates of refugees relative to their populations. Egypt and Iraq each hosted around 270,000 refugees in 2020.

**Figure 12.** Number of refugees in the Arab region by subregion, 2020



**Figure 13.** Top five Arab countries of destination for refugees, 2020

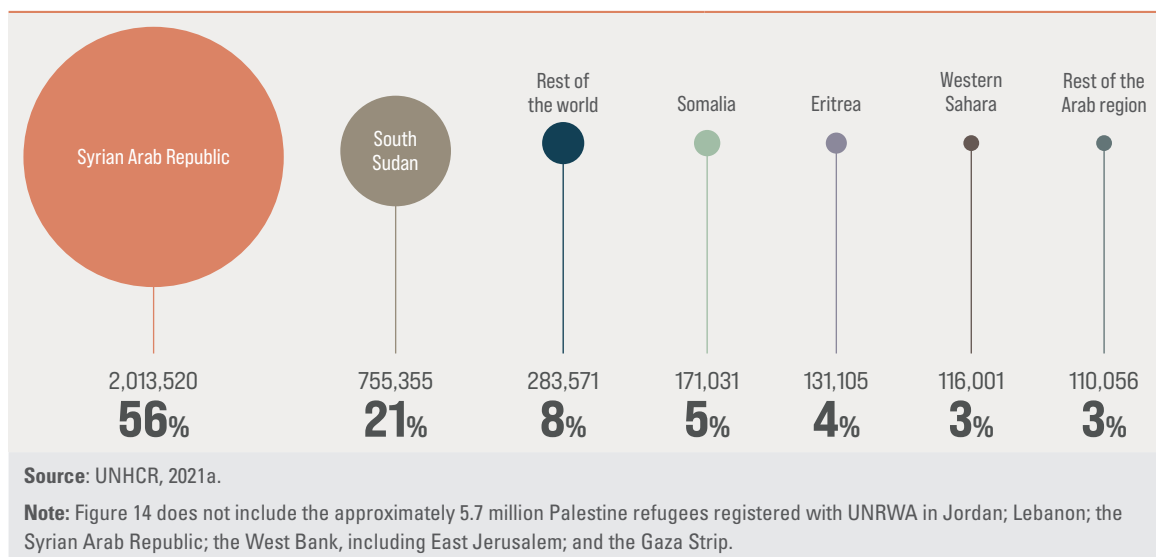


Regarding the origin of refugees registered with UNHCR in the Arab region in 2020, around two-thirds were from inside the region, while one-third came from non-Arab African countries. The majority of refugees in the Arab region originated from the Syrian Arab Republic, comprising slightly more than 2 million or 56 per cent of all refugees in the region (figure 14). Over a fifth were from South Sudan, while less than 0.2 million originated from Somalia and around

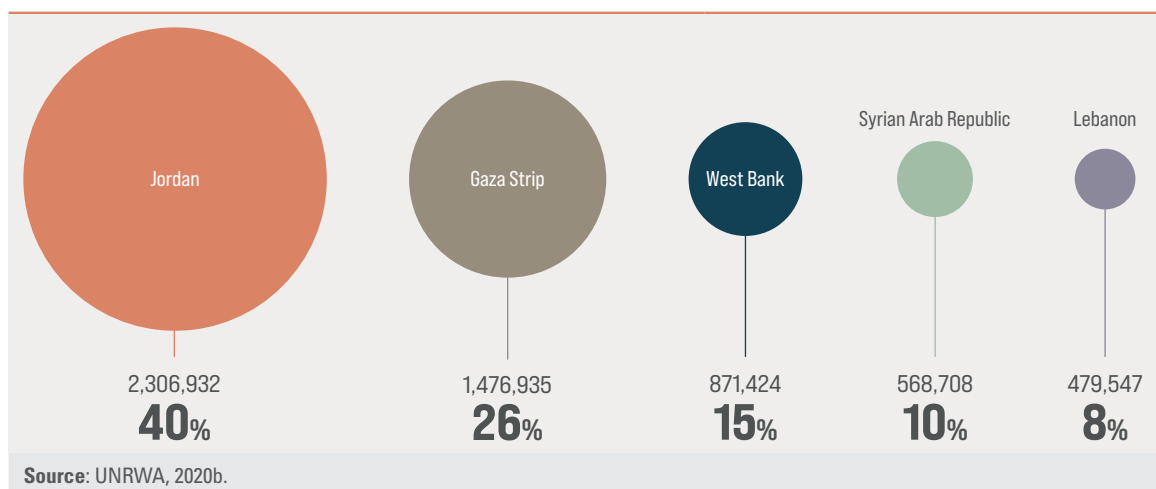
0.1 million from Eritrea and from the territory of Western Sahara.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the refugees under the UNHCR mandate, UNRWA reported 5.7 million registered Palestine refugees under its mandate by the end of 2020, including Palestine refugees in Jordan; Lebanon; the Syrian Arab Republic; the West Bank, including East Jerusalem; and the Gaza Strip (figure 15).

**Figure 14.** Top five countries/territories of origin of refugees in the Arab region, 2020



**Figure 15.** Number of Palestine refugees in UNRWA countries of operation, 2020

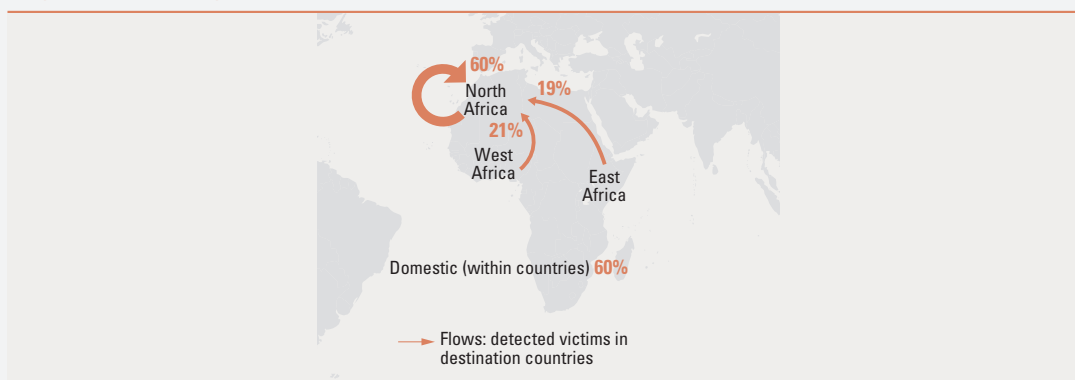


### Box 1. Trafficking in persons trends in the Middle East and North Africa

Human trafficking is a form of transnational organized crime that affects the entire MENA region, with most countries being at the same time countries of origin, transit and destination. There is, however, considerable variance in the patterns and trends of trafficking in persons among North African countries, GCC countries, and other Middle Eastern countries, which merit a specific focus on each of these subregions.

North African countries have detected primarily domestic victims, along with victims from West and East Africa. According to UNODC, in 2018, as much as 60 per cent of trafficking victims detected in North African countries originated from the same country where they were found. In terms of trafficking in persons from North Africa, western and southern Europe have been identified as the most significant destinations, with 6 per cent of the victims detected in western and southern Europe originating from North African countries. Around 69 per cent of detected victims of human trafficking were adults, with women and men detected in almost equal shares. North African countries detected significantly more trafficked children than the rest of the region.

#### Origins of trafficking victims detected in North Africa, 2018 (or most recent)

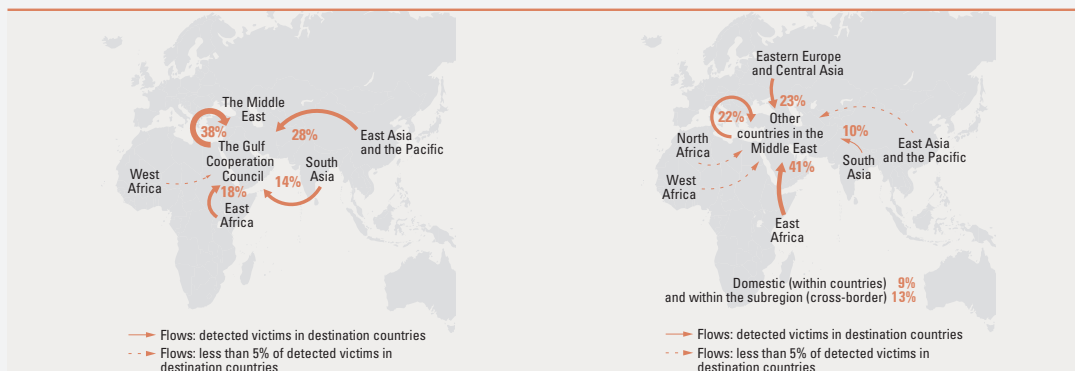


**Source:** UNODC elaboration of national data.

**Note:** The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

GCC countries have detected large numbers of Asian victims, victims from other countries of the Middle East and from East Africa. The majority of detected victims were men.

#### Origins of trafficking victims detected in the Middle East, 2018 (or most recent)

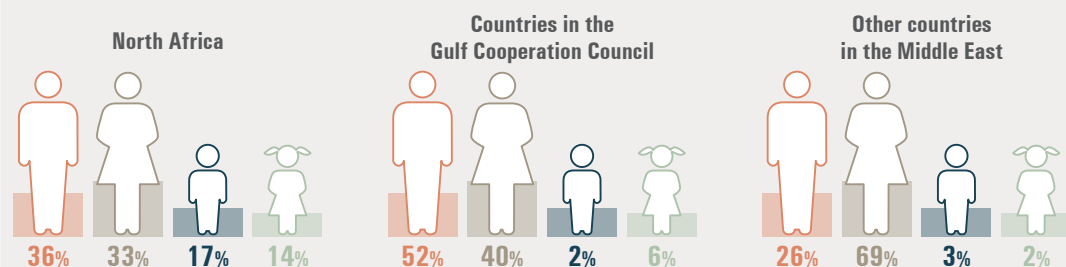


**Source:** UNODC elaboration of national data.

**Note:** The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Data on detection and repatriation show that other Middle Eastern countries are a destination for victims from a wide range of origins. Countries have detected significant shares of victims from East Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, South Asia, as well as victims of intraregional trafficking. Women made up the majority of detected victims.

#### Shares of detected victims of trafficking in North Africa and the Middle East,\* by age group and sex, 2018 (or most recent)

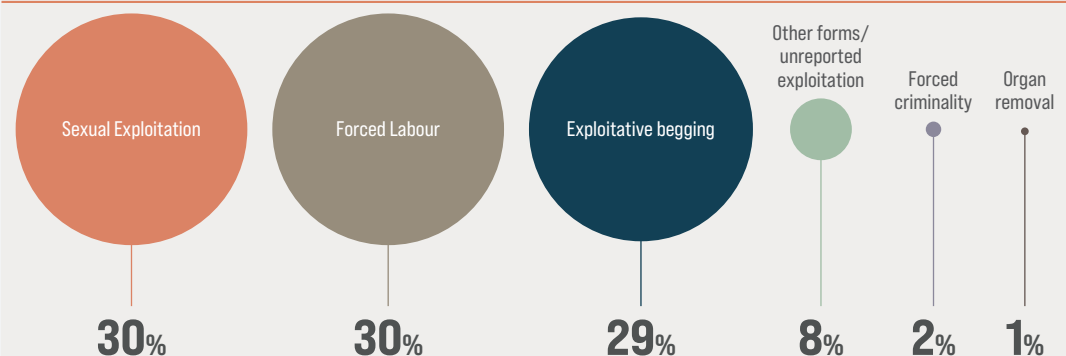


Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.

\* Based on data on sex and age of 1,690 victims detected in 13 countries in North Africa and the Middle East.

In 2018, detected trafficking victims in the MENA region were trafficked for sexual exploitation (30 per cent), forced labour (30 per cent), exploitative begging (29 per cent), forced criminality (2 per cent), organ removal (1 per cent) and other forms or unreported exploitation (8 per cent). Women comprised most of the victims trafficked for sexual exploitation, and two thirds of the victims trafficked for forced labour. At the same time, most of the victims trafficked for the purpose of organ removal were men. Trafficking for the purpose of exploitive begging is a less commonly reported form of trafficking globally, but MENA countries report significant numbers of this form of trafficking compared with other regions. Recruiting children for the purpose of exploitation in drug trafficking has also been documented along migration routes from the Middle East to Europe.

#### Shares of detected victims of trafficking in North Africa and the Middle East,\* by forms of exploitation, 2018 (or most recent)



Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.

\* Based on data on forms of exploitation for 1,121 victims detected in 12 countries in North Africa and the Middle East.

Source: UNODC, *Global Report On Trafficking In Persons*, 2020, pp. 170-172.

Available at [www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTIP\\_2020\\_Chapter6.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTIP_2020_Chapter6.pdf).

**Note:** In box 1, the MENA region is understood to comprise North African Arab countries (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia), GCC countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates), and the other countries of the Middle East (Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic).

## D. Migration and forced displacement from Arab countries

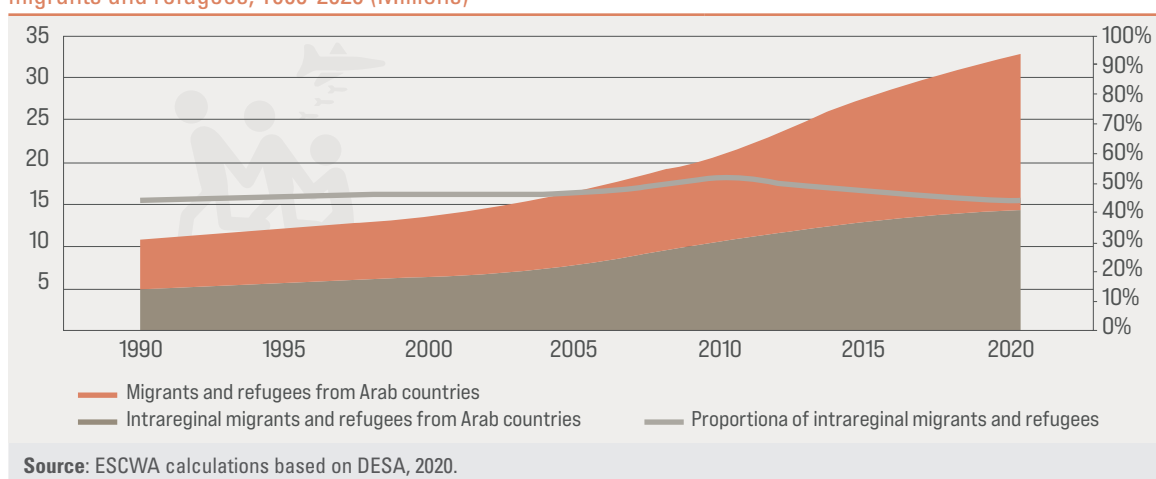
### 1. Overall migration and forced displacement trends

The number of international migrants and refugees originating from the Arab region has grown from approximately 10.8 million in 1990 to 32.8 million in 2020, increasing by 203 per cent in a 30-year span. Since 2015, the number has increased by 4.6 million, or 16 per cent, but at a slower rate than in the previous five-year period. Of all the migrants and refugees from Arab countries, 44 per cent (14.5 million) stayed

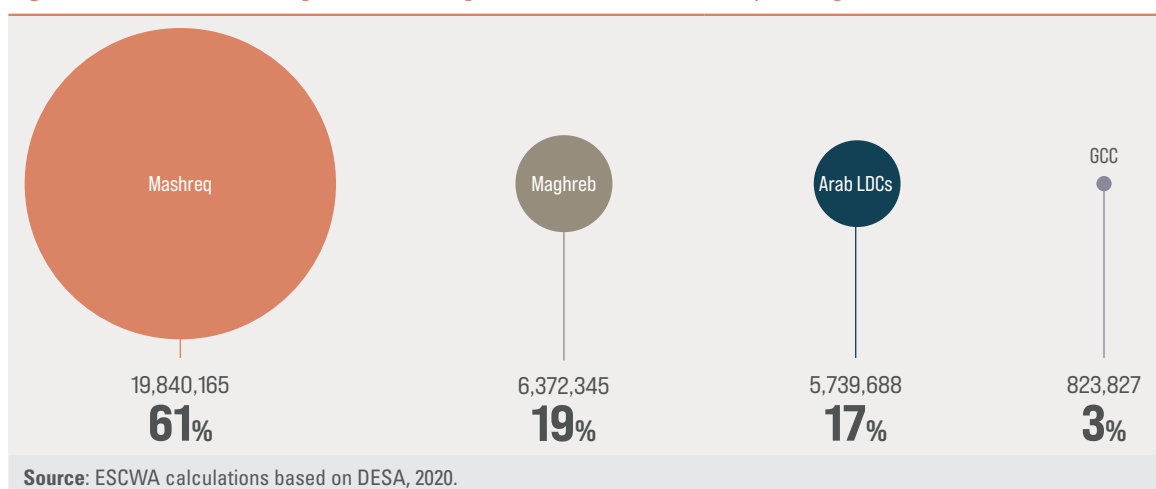
in the region, a proportion that has remained largely stable since 1990 when intraregional migrants and refugees represented close to 45 per cent of all migrants and refugees originating from the Arab region (figure 16).

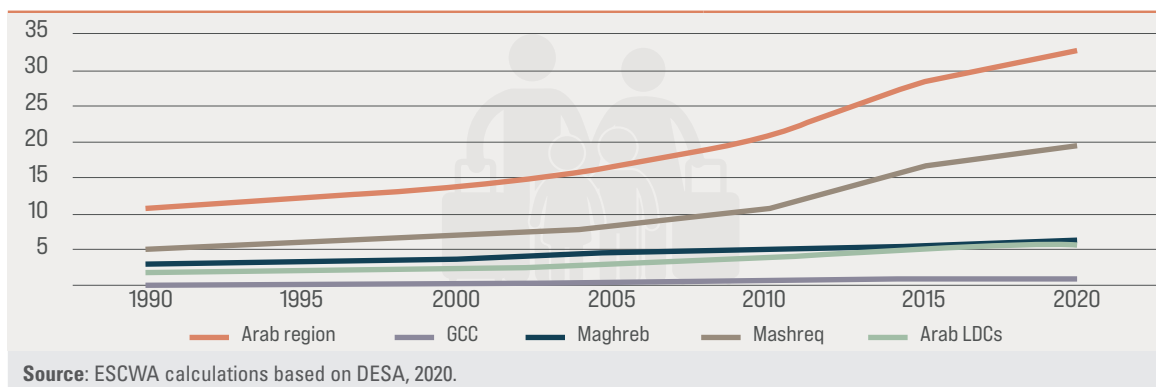
In 2020, around 61 per cent (over 19.8 million) of migrants and refugees from Arab countries originated from the Mashreq, 19 per cent (nearly 6.4 million) from the Maghreb, 17 per cent (slightly more than 5.7 million) from the Arab LDCs, and 3 per cent (0.8 million) from GCC countries (figure 17).

**Figure 16.** Number of migrants and refugees from Arab countries, and number and share of intraregional migrants and refugees, 1990-2020 (Millions)



**Figure 17.** Distribution of migrants and refugees from Arab countries by subregion, 2020

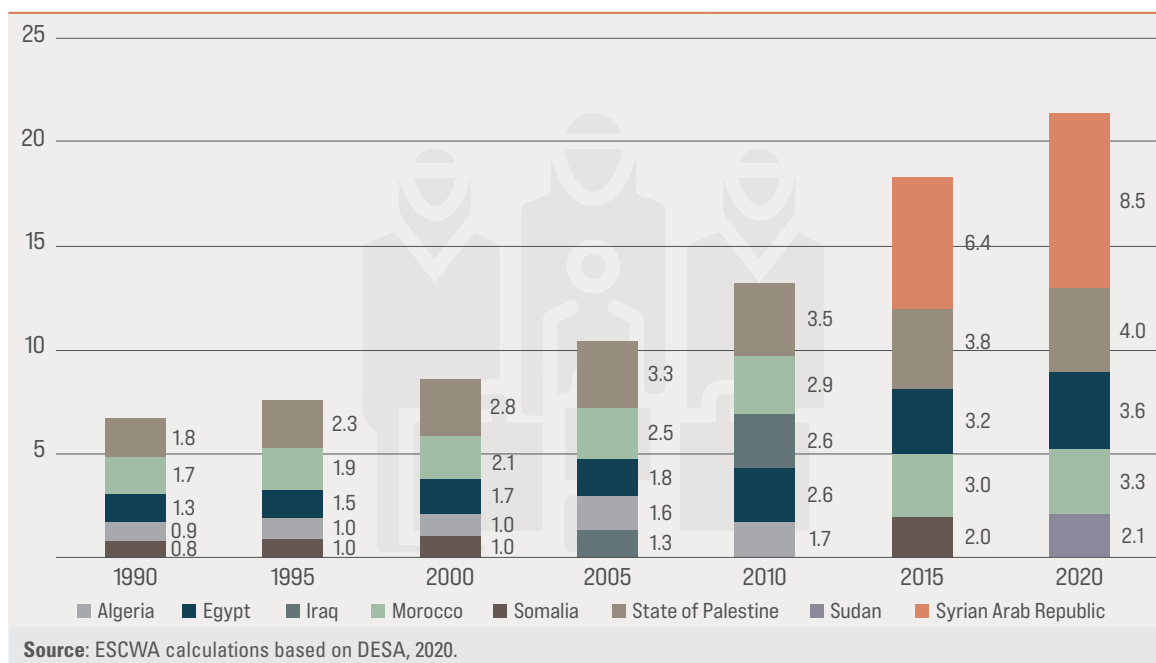


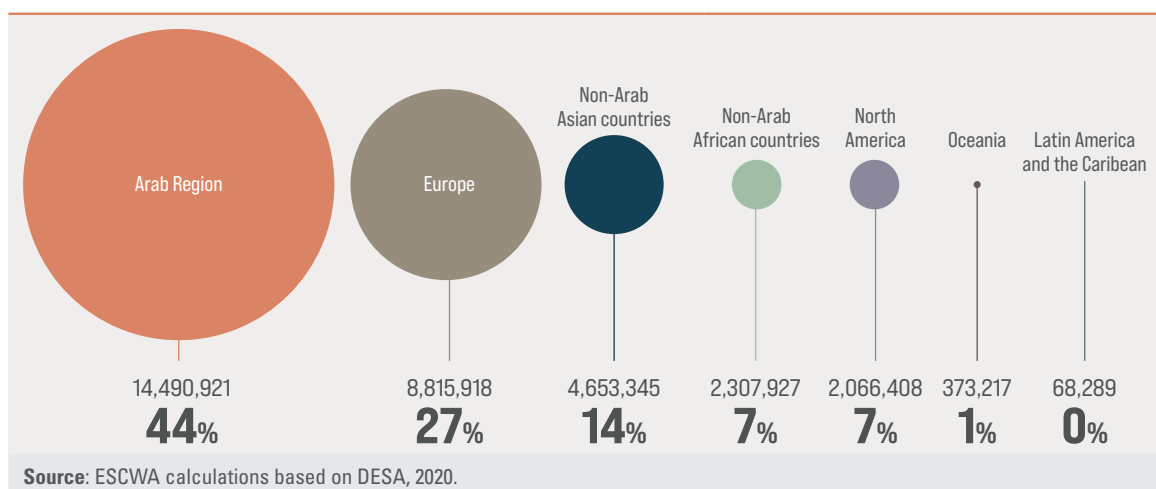
**Figure 18.** Number of migrants and refugees from Arab countries by subregion, 1990-2020 (Millions)

This distribution of migrants and refugees in the subregions has remained mostly stable since 1990, except for a moderate growth in the share of migrants and refugees from the Mashreq, alongside a decrease in the proportion of those originating from the Maghreb (figure 18).

From 1990 to 2000, the top five Arab countries of origin of migrants and refugees, in descending order, were the State of Palestine, Morocco, Egypt, Algeria and Somalia. In 2005 and 2010, Iraq replaced Somalia on the list of top five Arab countries of origin, while the Syrian Arab Republic

has become the largest Arab country of origin of migrants and refugees since 2015, largely because of massive numbers of refugees fleeing the country since its civil war began in 2011. It was followed in 2020 by the State of Palestine, which has significant protracted displacement. Egypt and Morocco were also significant countries of origin, mainly of migrant workers. The Sudan closed the list of the top five Arab countries of origin of migrants and refugees in 2020 (figure 19). This data provides evidence that the most prominent patterns of migration from the region are conflict-induced migration and labour migration.

**Figure 19.** Top five Arab countries of origin of migrants and refugees, 1990-2020 (Millions)

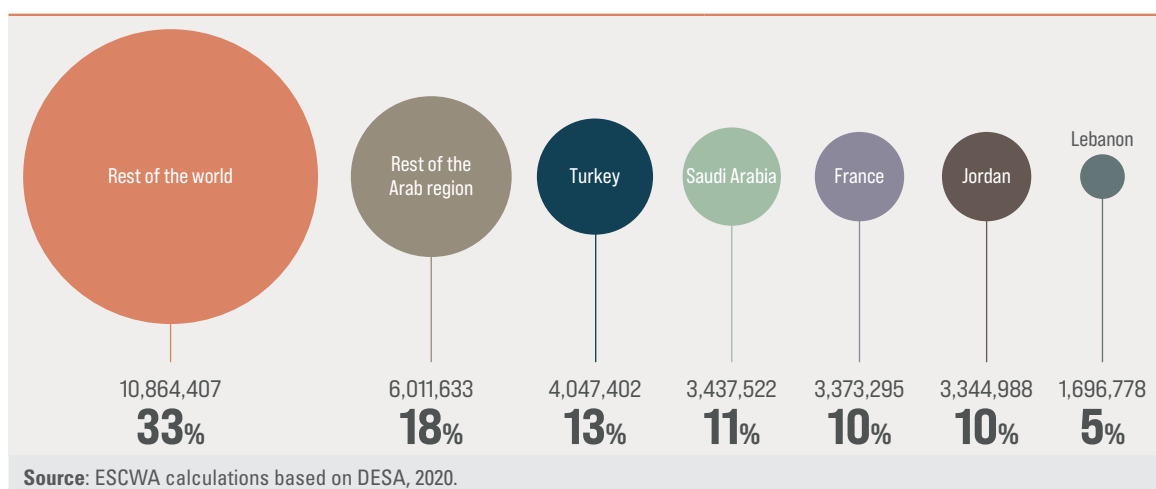
**Figure 20.** Regions of destination for migrants and refugees from Arab countries, 2020

In 2020, women migrants and refugees represented 44 per cent of all migrants and refugees from the Arab region, a proportion that has remained relatively stable since 1990. The number of women migrants and refugees from Arab countries in 2020 was slightly above 14.3 million, 16 per cent more than in 2015. The share of women migrants and refugees presents relatively little variation of 4 percentage points across subregions.

According to 2020 data, 44 per cent of migrants and refugees from Arab countries stayed within the Arab region, while slightly more than a quarter were in Europe, around 14 per cent in

non-Arab Asian countries, 7 per cent in non-Arab African countries and 7 per cent in North America<sup>21</sup> (figure 20).

Turkey was the top country of destination for migrants and refugees from the Arab region, with over 4 million in 2020, or 13 per cent of the total Arab migrant and refugee population (figure 21). Saudi Arabia was the destination for over 3.4 million migrants and refugees, while France and Jordan were the destinations for 3.4 million and 3.3 million, respectively, and Lebanon for 1.7 million. The rest of the Arab countries combined received 18 per cent of migrants and refugees from Arab countries,

**Figure 21.** Top five countries of destination for migrants and refugees from Arab countries, 2020

who mostly stayed in the United Arab Emirates and the Syrian Arab Republic (in the case of the latter, predominantly refugees from Iraq and the State of Palestine). The remaining 10.9 million migrants and refugees from the Arab region (33 per cent) travelled to other countries worldwide, notably Germany, Spain and the United States of America.

### Forced displacement

According to 2020 UNHCR data, Arab countries were the origin of a total population of concern to UNHCR of approximately 27.2 million persons, representing 30 per cent

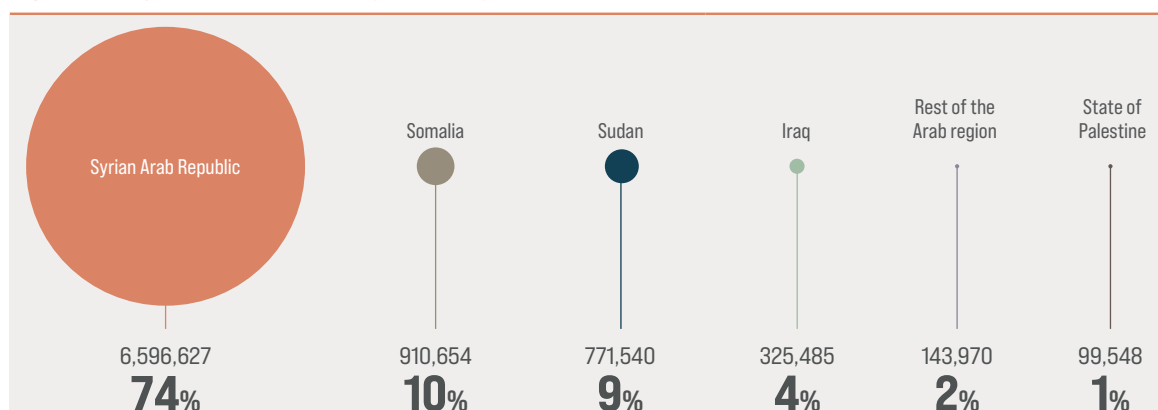
of the global population of concern. Of the population of concern from Arab countries accounted for by UNHCR, close to 8.9 million were refugees (table 3), who represented 43 per cent of the global refugee population of nearly 20.7 million. The number of refugees from Arab countries increased between 2015 and 2020 by 25 per cent, raising the number of refugees from the region by close to 1.8 million, with the vast majority of this increase driven by forced displacement from the Syrian Arab Republic. There were also over 574,000 asylum seekers from the region in 2020, predominantly from Iraq (241,000) and the Syrian Arab Republic (107,000).

**Table 3.** Refugees from Arab countries registered with UNHCR, 2015-2020

Country of origin	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Algeria	3,470	3,705	4,021	4,186	4,519	4,693
Bahrain	422	461	497	540	557	554
Comoros	550	572	600	624	658	793
Djibouti	1,059	1,437	1,761	2,124	2,351	2,444
Egypt	17,929	19,792	22,106	24,850	27,416	26,604
Iraq	264,086	316,056	362,536	372,332	336,274	333,418
Jordan	1,836	1,919	2,119	2,426	2,313	2,489
Kuwait	1,076	1,013	1,097	1,251	1,300	1,442
Lebanon	4,353	4,719	5,302	5,621	5,647	5,495
Libya	6,077	8,831	11,205	13,868	16,033	17,595
Mauritania	34,656	36,263	36,525	37,050	37,423	37,941
Morocco	1,760	2,240	3,089	3,873	4,642	4,489
Oman	36	35	39	42	42	52
Qatar	21	25	31	30	36	38
Saudi Arabia	686	937	1,219	1,492	1,721	2,030
Somalia	1,123,144	1,012,320	986,386	949,637	901,596	814,551
State of Palestine	98,013	97,794	99,630	100,728	96,253	100,317
Sudan	627,080	650,391	694,556	724,787	734,780	787,755
Syrian Arab Republic	4,873,236	5,524,511	6,310,498	6,654,374	6,615,249	6,689,582
Tunisia	1,554	1,687	1,826	1,985	2,068	1,653
United Arab Emirates	91	103	137	169	155	191
Yemen	15,901	18,427	23,555	31,145	36,522	33,369
<b>Total Arab region</b>	<b>7,077,036</b>	<b>7,703,238</b>	<b>8,568,735</b>	<b>8,933,134</b>	<b>8,827,555</b>	<b>8,867,495</b>

Source: UNHCR, 2021a.

**Note:** Table 3 does not include the approximately 5.7 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA in Jordan; Lebanon; the Syrian Arab Republic; the West Bank, including East Jerusalem; and the Gaza Strip.

**Figure 22.** Top five countries of origin of refugees from Arab countries, 2020

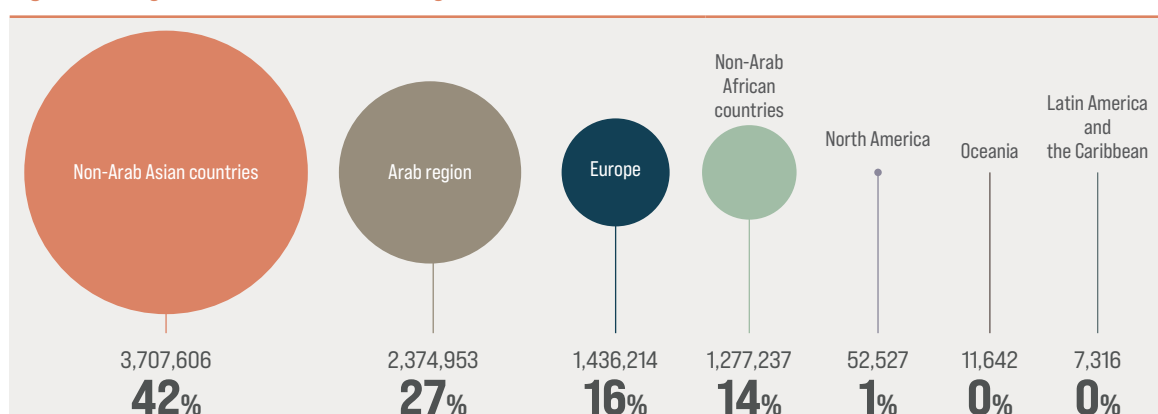
Source: UNHCR, 2021a.

Note: Figure 22 does not include the approximately 5.7 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA in Jordan; Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic; the West Bank, including East Jerusalem; and the Gaza Strip.

The large majority of refugees (81 per cent) were from Mashreq countries, while the Arab LDCs accounted for 19 per cent. The Syrian Arab Republic was the country of origin of 6.7 million refugees, constituting 75 per cent of refugees from Arab countries (figure 22), and 32 per cent of the global refugee population. Somalia was the second largest country of origin of refugees in the region at 815,000, followed by the Sudan at 788,000 and Iraq at 333,000 refugees. Furthermore, approximately 100,000 refugees from the State of Palestine were registered with UNHCR in 2020, and UNRWA

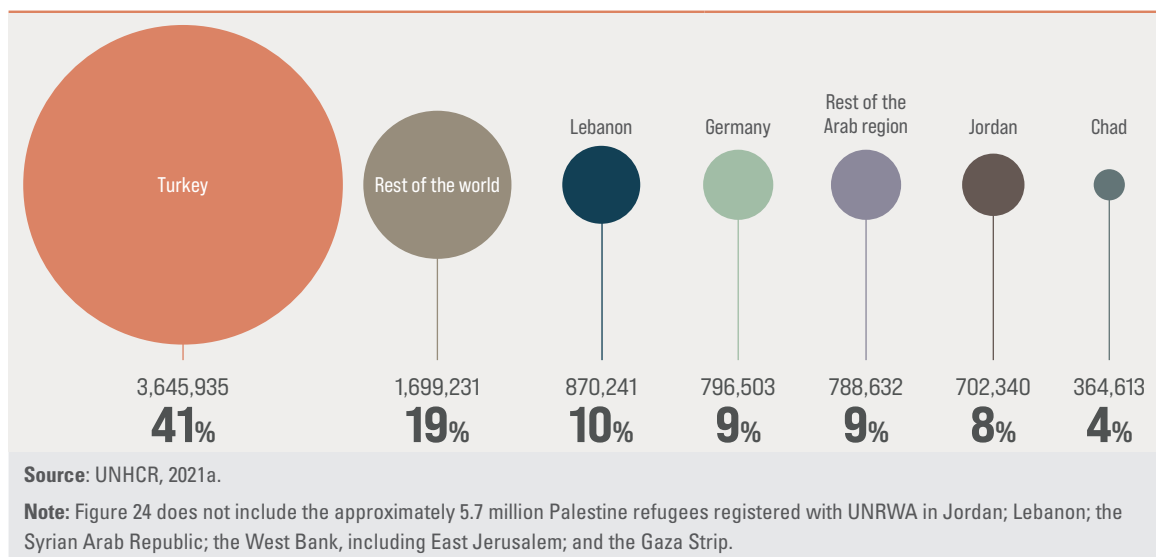
reported 5.7 million Palestine refugees under its mandate in the same year.

Of the total 8.9 million refugees from Arab countries accounted for by UNHCR in 2020, around 27 per cent stayed in the region, while 42 per cent moved to non-Arab Asian countries (figure 23). Europe was the third largest region of destination, receiving 16 per cent of refugees from the Arab region, while 14 per cent of refugees from Arab countries went to non-Arab African countries.

**Figure 23.** Regions of destination of refugees from Arab countries, 2020

Source: UNHCR, 2021a.

Note: Figure 23 does not include the approximately 5.7 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA in Jordan; Lebanon; the Syrian Arab Republic; the West Bank, including East Jerusalem; and the Gaza Strip.

**Figure 24.** Top five countries of destination for refugees from Arab countries, 2020

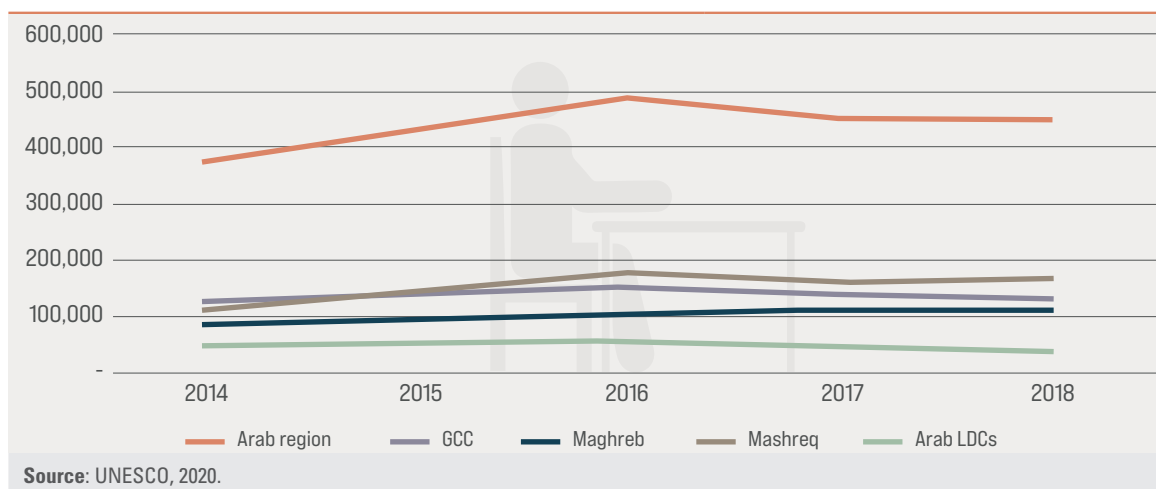
Approximately 73 per cent of all refugees from Arab countries resided in a country that was neighbouring (sharing a land border with) their country of origin.

Arab refugees, with 870,000 and 797,000, respectively. Moreover, Germany was the only European country in the top five destination countries.

In 2020, Turkey was the top country of destination for refugees from the Arab region, hosting more than 3.6 million persons (figure 24). Lebanon and Germany were the second and third largest destination countries for

## 2. Student mobility

Education is an important driver of migration for young people. In 2018, UNESCO reported close

**Figure 25.** Number of tertiary students from Arab countries studying abroad, by subregion, 2014-2018

to 449,000 tertiary students from Arab countries studying abroad (figure 25).

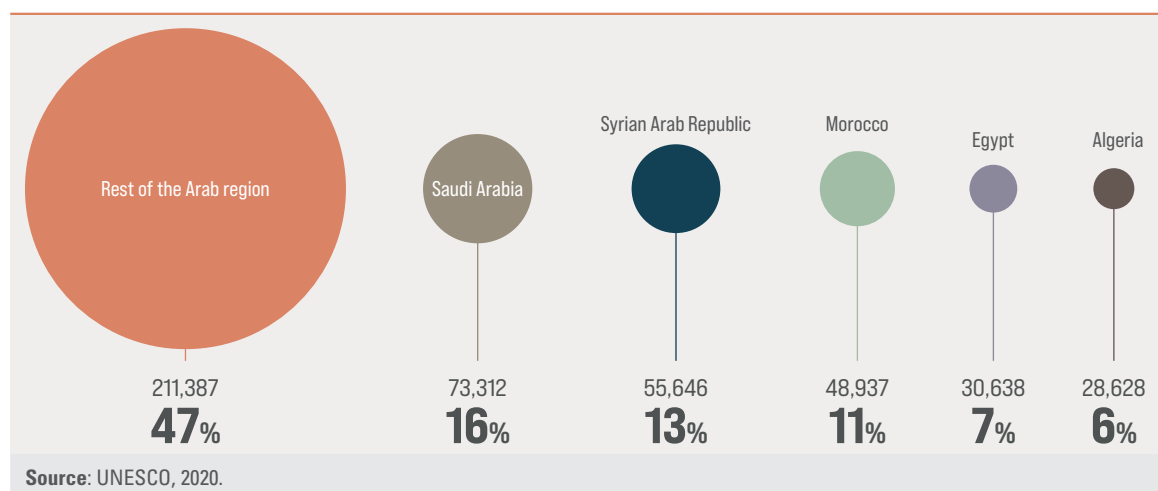
The top Arab countries of origin of internationally mobile students in 2018 were Saudi Arabia with over 73,000, the Syrian Arab Republic with nearly 56,000, and Morocco with close to 49,000 (figure 26).

In terms of regions of destination, Europe was the top destination for tertiary students from Arab countries in 2018 (over 182,000), while close

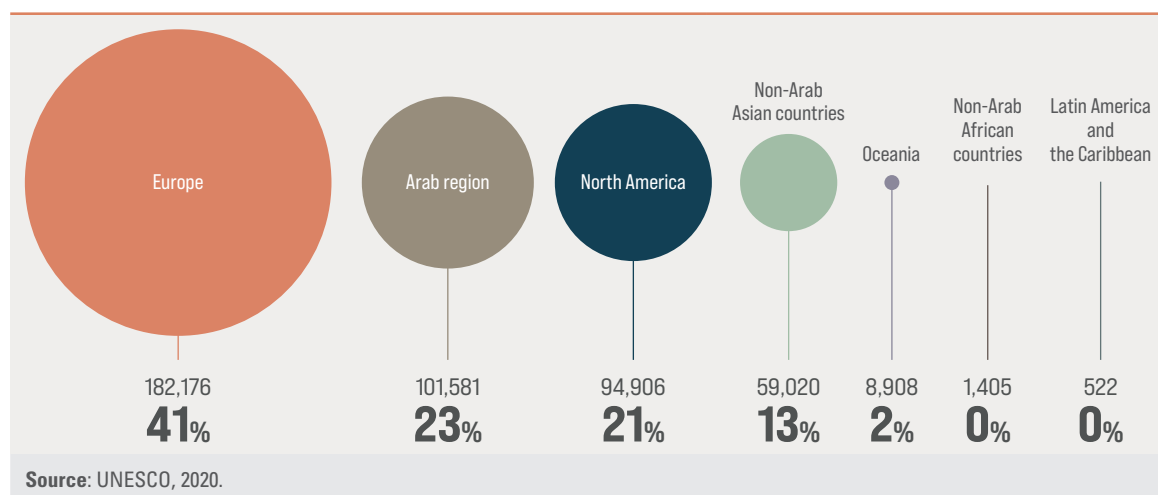
to 102,000 mobile tertiary students from Arab countries moved within the region. North America was also a prominent region of destination for around 95,000 tertiary students (figure 27).

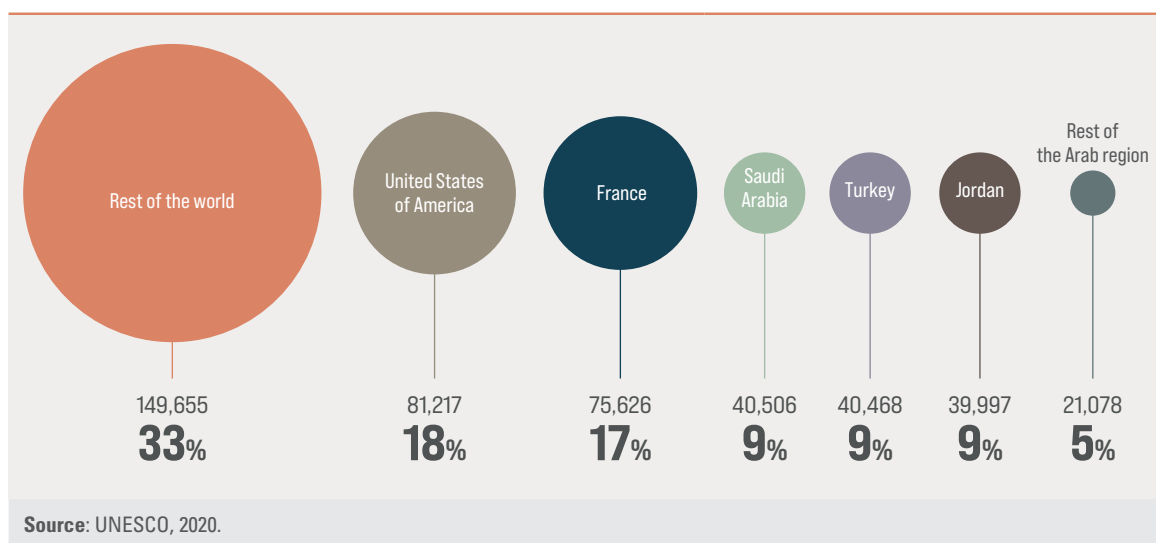
The main destination countries of Arab tertiary students in 2018 were the United States with over 81,000, France with around 76,000, and Saudi Arabia with 41,000 (figure 28). Jordan and Turkey were also prominent countries of destination for tertiary students from Arab countries.

**Figure 26.** Top five Arab countries of origin of tertiary students studying abroad, 2018



**Figure 27.** Regions of destination for tertiary students from Arab countries studying abroad, 2018



**Figure 28.** Top five countries of destination for tertiary students from Arab countries studying abroad, 2018

## E. Migration and forced displacement by subregion

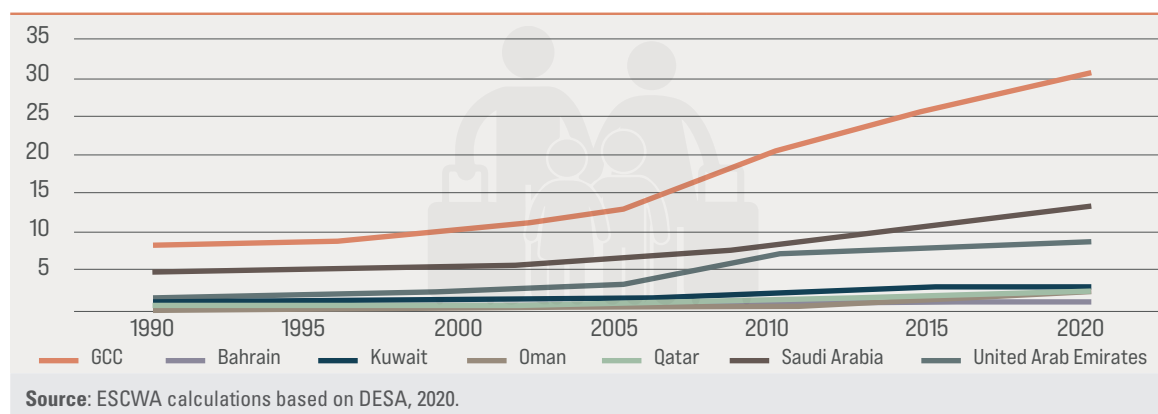
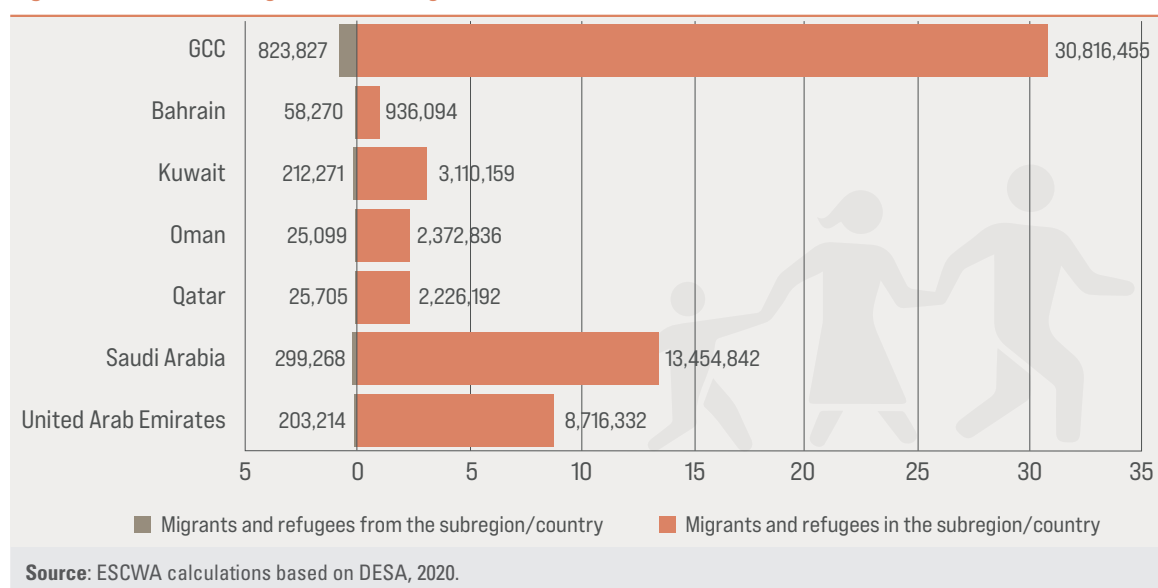
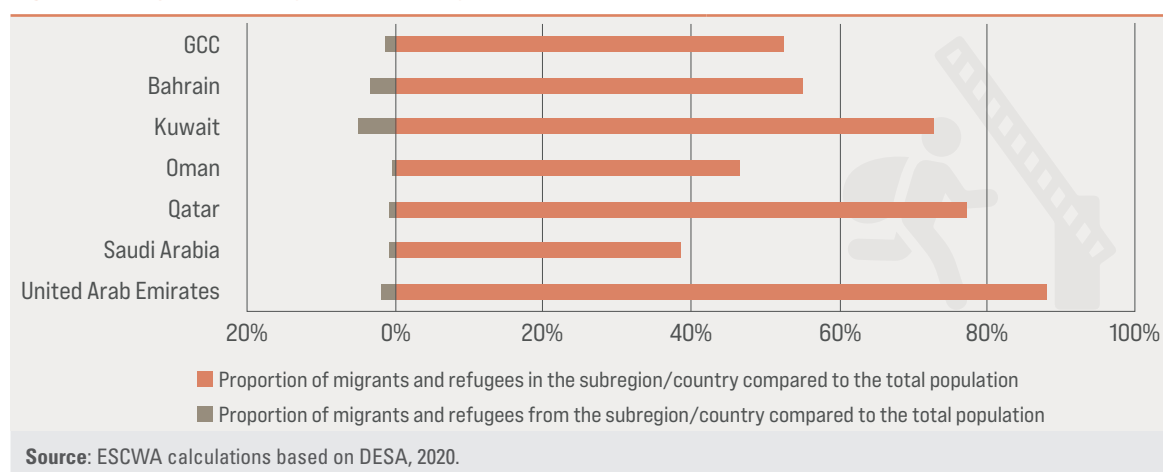
### 1. Gulf Cooperation Council countries

#### (a) Migration and forced displacement to GCC countries

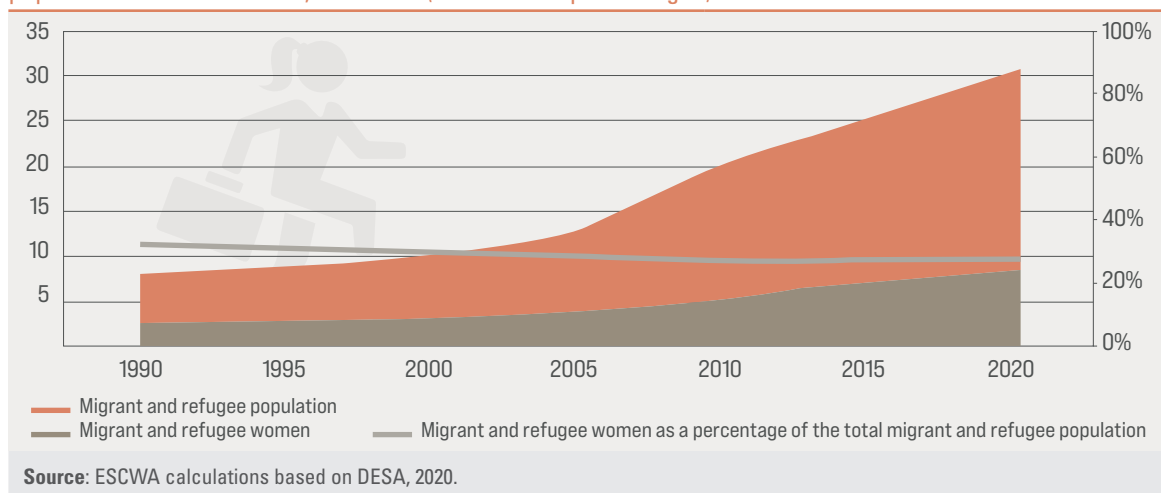
GCC countries were the destination of 74 per cent of the total migrant population in the Arab region, totalling 30.8 million in 2020. Labour migration continues to be the major migration trend in the GCC subregion. The GCC subregion has witnessed significant growth in its migrant population since 1990, when it stood at 8.2 million (figure 29). Intense growth commenced around 2005. Since 2015, the migrant population in the subregion has increased by 19 per cent, with 4.9 million migrants more in 2020 than in 2015. Saudi Arabia received the largest number of migrants both in the Arab region and in the GCC subregion, with nearly 13.5 million in 2020, an increase of around 2.7 million persons or 25 per cent compared with 2015. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia had the third largest number of migrants globally, surpassed only by Germany and the United States. The United Arab Emirates was the

second-highest destination country in both the region and the subregion, with 8.7 million migrants, which constitutes an increase of slightly more than 721,000 persons or 9 per cent compared with 2015. It was also the country with the sixth largest number of migrants globally.

The GCC subregion has a high number of migrants, both in net numbers and as a proportion of the total population (figures 30 and 31), owing to the high number of migrant workers. The average share of migrants of the total population in 2020 was 53 per cent, ranging from a low of 39 per cent in Saudi Arabia to a high of 88 per cent in the United Arab Emirates. The United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Kuwait ranked first, second and third worldwide, respectively, with the largest proportions of migrants in their population. The number of migrants going to all GCC countries is also much larger than the number of those originating from GCC countries, owing to the relatively smaller number of GCC nationals and their low migration rates.

**Figure 29.** Number of migrants and refugees in GCC countries, 1990-2020 (Millions)**Figure 30.** Number of migrants and refugees from and in GCC countries, 2020 (Millions)**Figure 31.** Proportion of migrants and refugees from and in GCC countries, 2020

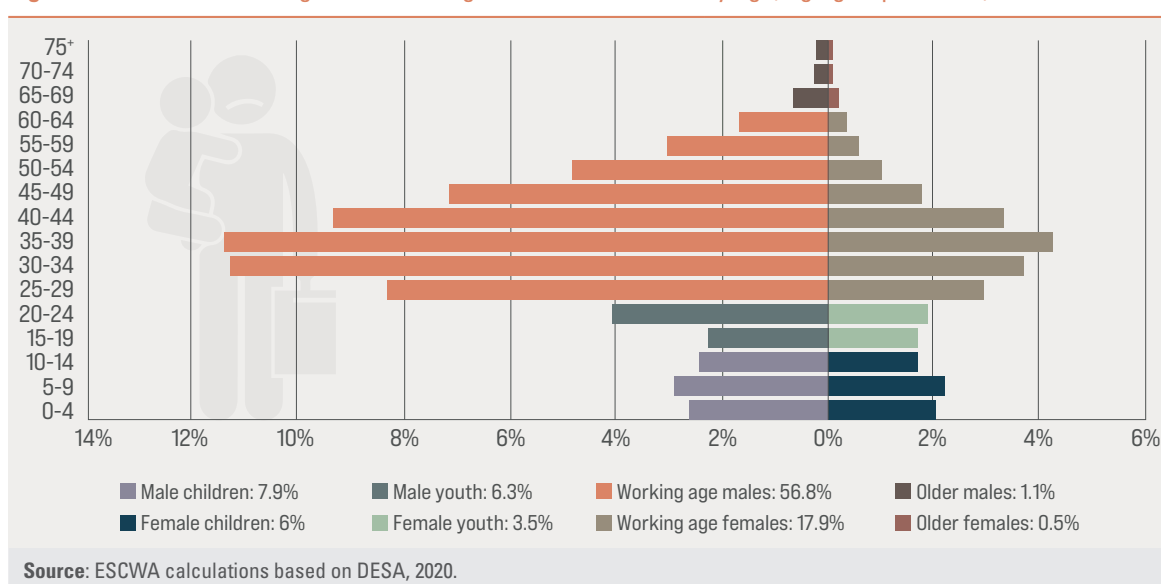
**Figure 32.** Number and proportion of migrant and refugee women among the total migrant and refugee population in GCC countries, 1990-2020 (Millions and percentages)

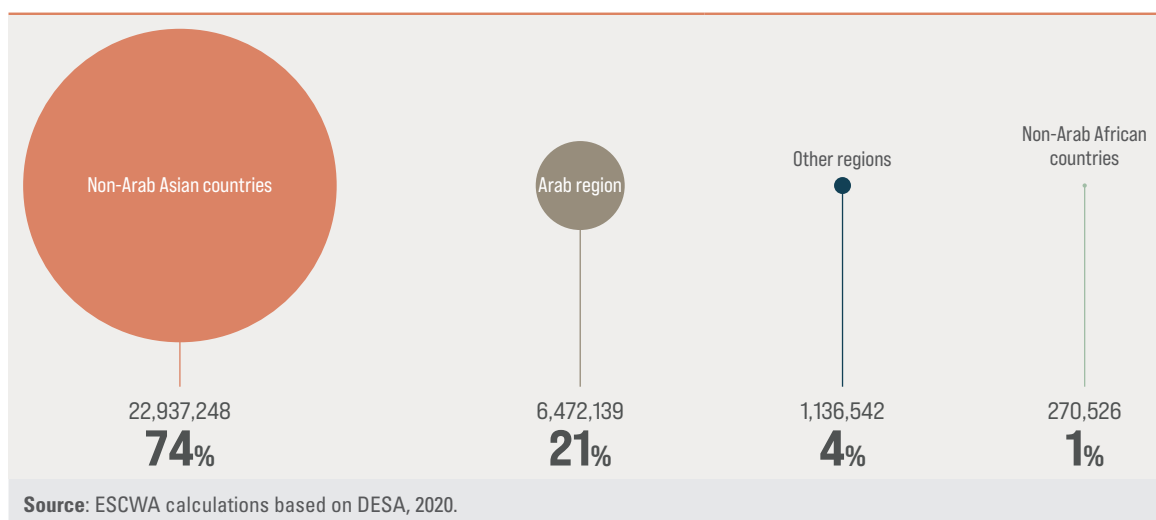


In 2020, there were almost 8.6 million migrant women in GCC countries, constituting 28 per cent of all migrants in the region (figure 32). Their number has increased by 20 per cent (1.4 million) since 2015, but their proportion has remained stable. In 2020, there were over 4.2 million women migrants in Saudi Arabia, 2.3 million in the United Arab Emirates, and 1 million in Kuwait.

As for the age structure of migrants in the GCC subregion, in 2020, working-age men constituted 56.8 per cent of the total migrant population, while working-age women represented 17.9 per cent. In total, working-age migrants represented 74.7 per cent of the total migrant population, the highest proportion of all subregions, while children comprised 13.9 per cent, young people 9.8 per cent, and older persons 1.6 per cent (figure 33).

**Figure 33.** Distribution of migrants and refugees in GCC countries by age, age group and sex, 2020

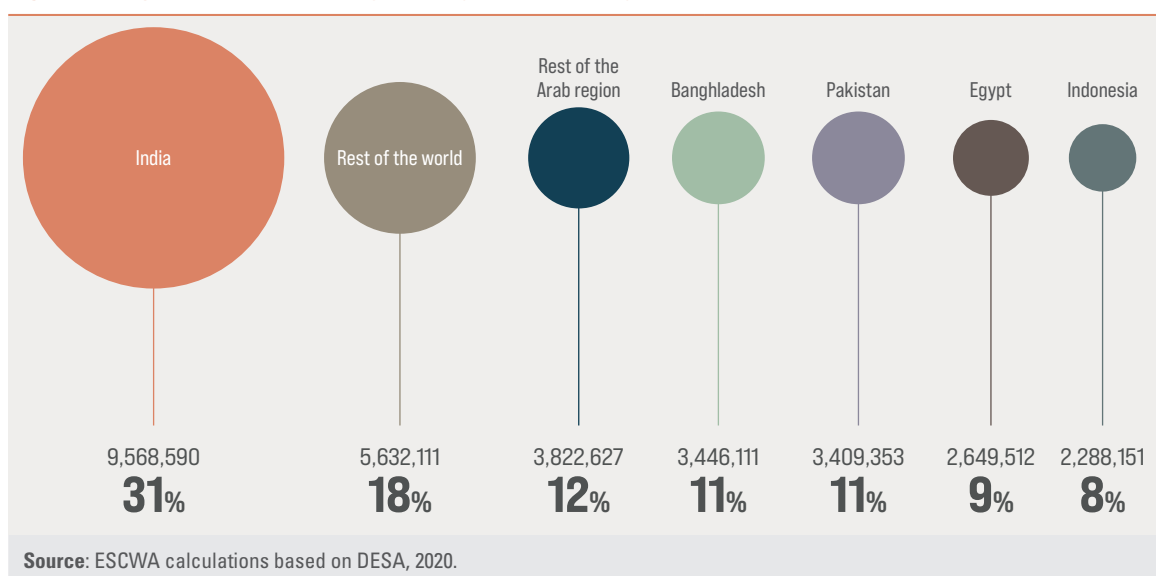


**Figure 34.** Regions of origin of migrants and refugees in GCC countries, 2020

Almost three quarters of migrants in GCC countries originated from non-Arab Asian countries in 2020. Around 21 per cent (almost 6.5 million) came from Arab countries (figure 34).

The main country of origin of migrants in the GCC subregion was India, with 9.6 million migrants in 2020, equivalent to 31 per cent of

all migrants and refugees in the subregion (figure 35). Bangladesh and Pakistan were the countries of origin of around 3.4 million migrants each, and Egypt was the main Arab country of origin with 2.6 million migrants living in the GCC subregion. The proportional distribution of migrants in the GCC subregion among the top countries of origin has remained stable since 2015.

**Figure 35.** Top five countries of origin of migrants and refugees in GCC countries, 2020

## Box 2. Migrant workers in the health-care field in the GCC subregion

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the essential role of migrant workers in societies, particularly in countries that rely heavily on migrant workers to provide health-care services. GCC countries are represented prominently among these countries, with a particularly high proportion of health workers having a migration background. In Bahrain, around 16 per cent of physicians and 50 per cent of nurses were migrants as at 2019.<sup>a</sup> In Kuwait, 67 per cent of physicians, 48 per cent of dentists and 96 per cent of nurses were migrants as at 2017.<sup>b</sup> In Saudi Arabia, around 54 per cent of physicians and dentists, and around 38 per cent of nurses were migrants as at 2020.<sup>c</sup> Acknowledging the importance of migrant workers for the GCC subregion's health-care systems, annex 6 of the present report sets out the requirements for recruiting health professionals in GCC countries. Moreover, many women migrant workers are hired on domestic work contracts, but provide medical care.

<sup>a</sup> [www.moh.gov.bh/Content/Files/Publications/statistics/HS2019/hs2019\\_a.htm](http://www.moh.gov.bh/Content/Files/Publications/statistics/HS2019/hs2019_a.htm).

<sup>b</sup> [www.csb.gov.kw/Pages/Statistics\\_en?ID=59&ParentCatID=+70](http://www.csb.gov.kw/Pages/Statistics_en?ID=59&ParentCatID=+70).

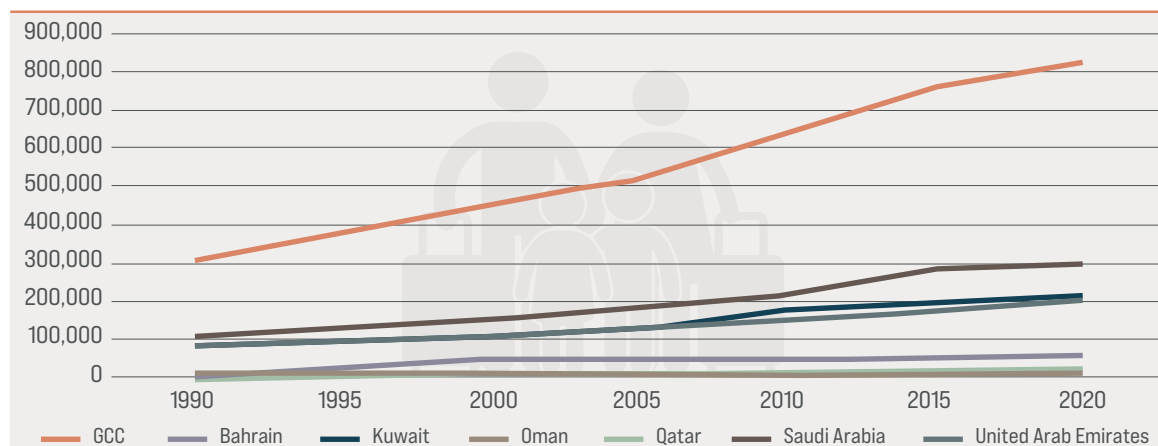
<sup>c</sup> [www.moh.gov.sa/Ministry/Statistics/book/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.moh.gov.sa/Ministry/Statistics/book/Pages/default.aspx).

Forced displacement to GCC countries has been minimal, both compared with the number of migrant workers in the subregion, and with forced displacement trends in other subregions. According to 2020 UNHCR data, nearly 3,200 people were granted refugee status in GCC countries. There were also around 18,000 asylum seekers in the subregion. UNHCR also reported more than 163,000 stateless persons in the subregion.<sup>22</sup>

## (b) Migration and forced displacement from GCC countries

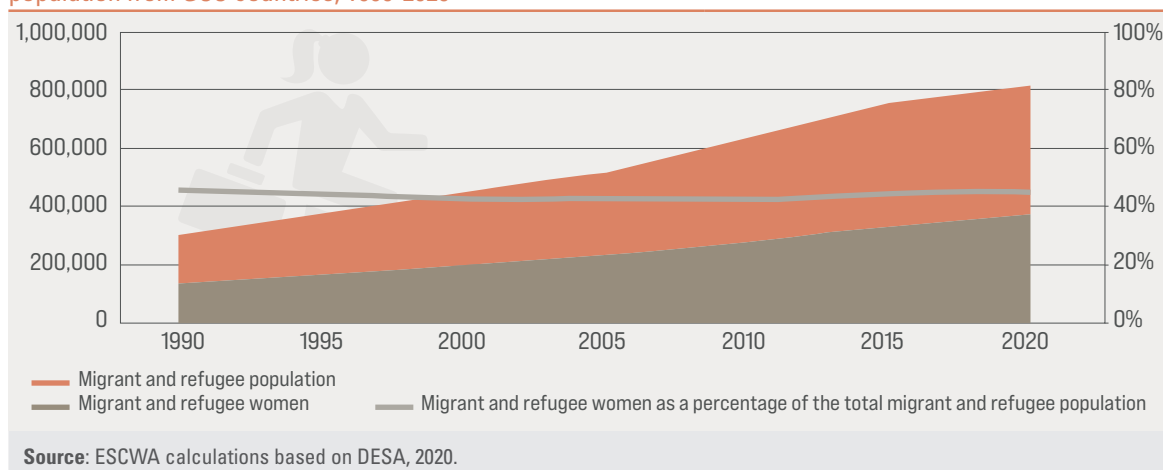
In 2020, around 824,000 migrants and refugees originated from GCC countries, a rise of approximately 64,000 (8 per cent) from 2015 (figure 36). The number of migrants and refugees from the subregion has almost tripled since 1990 and has progressively grown since then, albeit at a slower pace since 2015. Migrants and refugees from GCC

Figure 36. Number of migrants and refugees from GCC countries, 1990-2020



Source: ESCWA calculations based on DESA, 2020.

**Figure 37.** Number and proportion of migrant and refugee women among the total migrant and refugee population from GCC countries, 1990-2020



countries represented roughly 1 per cent of the total population of the subregion in 2020, a percentage that has remained virtually the same since 1990.

As of 2020, approximately 371,000 women have moved outside of their GCC countries of origin, representing 45 per cent of all migrants and refugees from the subregion (figure 37). Between 2015 and 2020, the number of women migrants and refugees rose for all GCC countries, ranging from an increase of 8 per cent in Qatar to 28 per cent in Bahrain. The proportion of migrant and refugee women among the total migrant and refugee population from GCC countries ranged from a high of 59 per cent in Bahrain to a low of 39 per cent in Kuwait.

In 2020, around 41 per cent of migrants and refugees from GCC countries stayed within the Arab region (figure 38). In North America, Canada and the United States were the destination of 24 per cent of migrants and refugees from the subregion. Europe was the third largest region of destination, receiving more than 15 per cent of GCC migrants and refugees. Non-Arab Asian countries received 14 per cent, most notably India, which was the fifth country of destination overall for migrants and refugees from the subregion (figure 39).

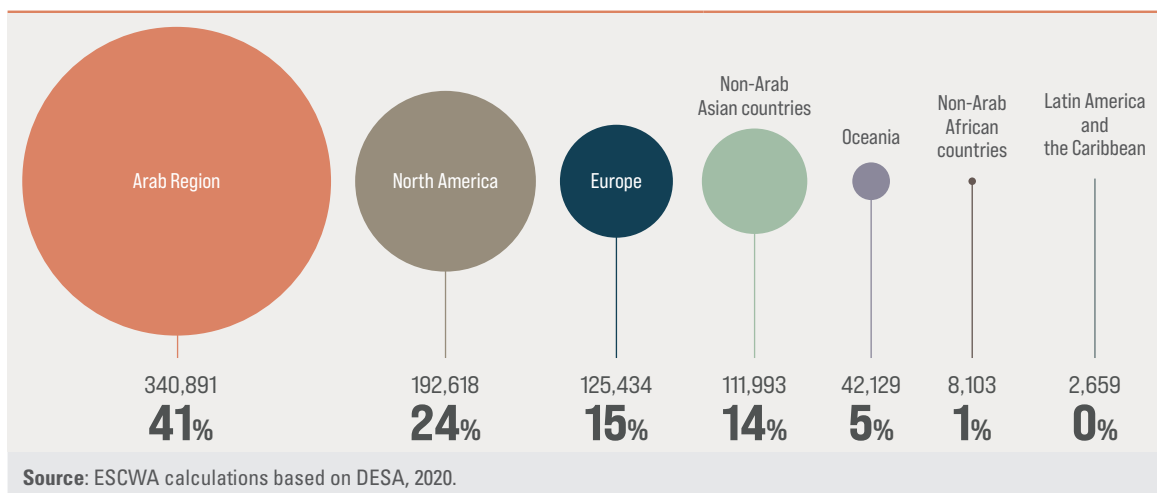
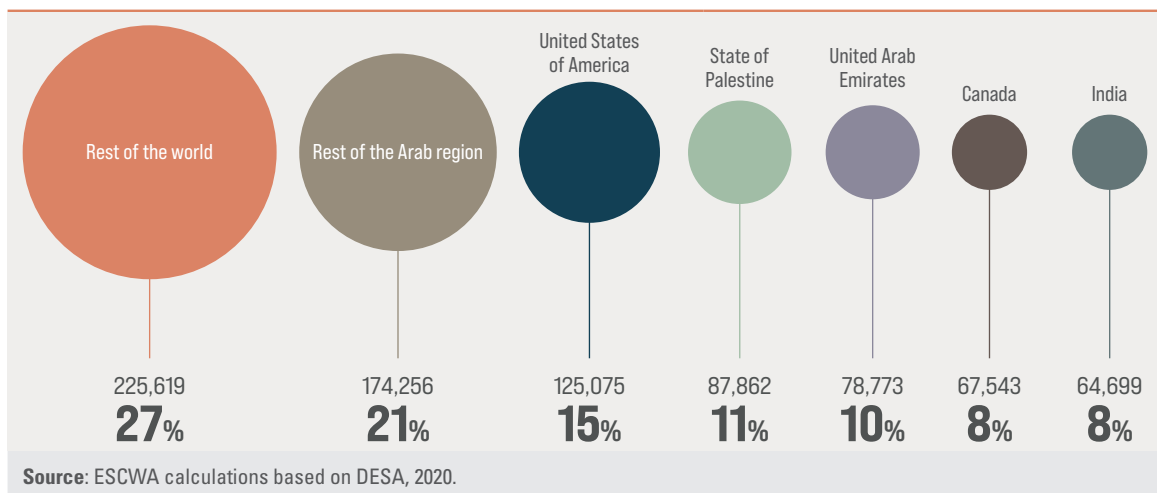
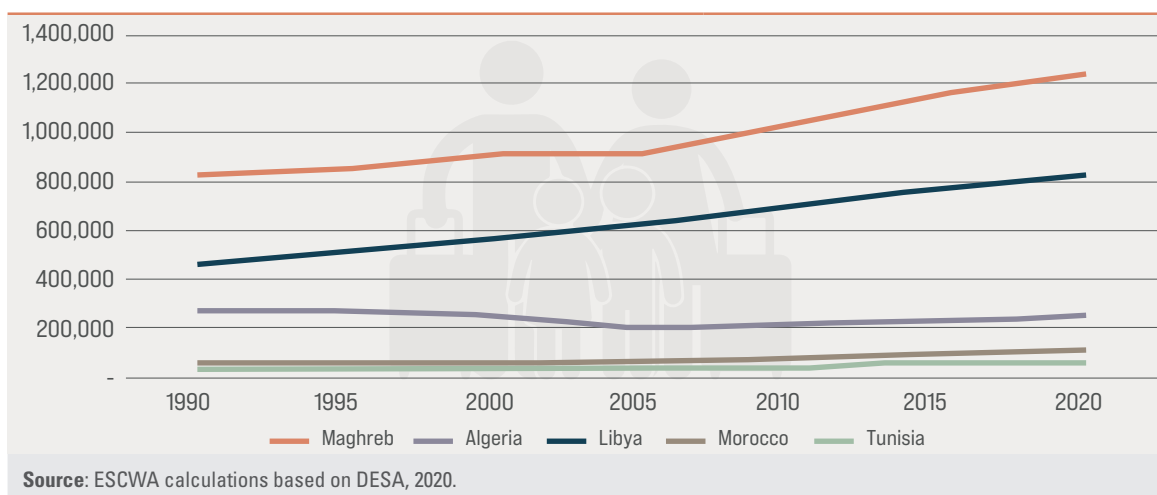
According to 2020 UNHCR data, the GCC subregion was the origin of around 4,300 refugees,

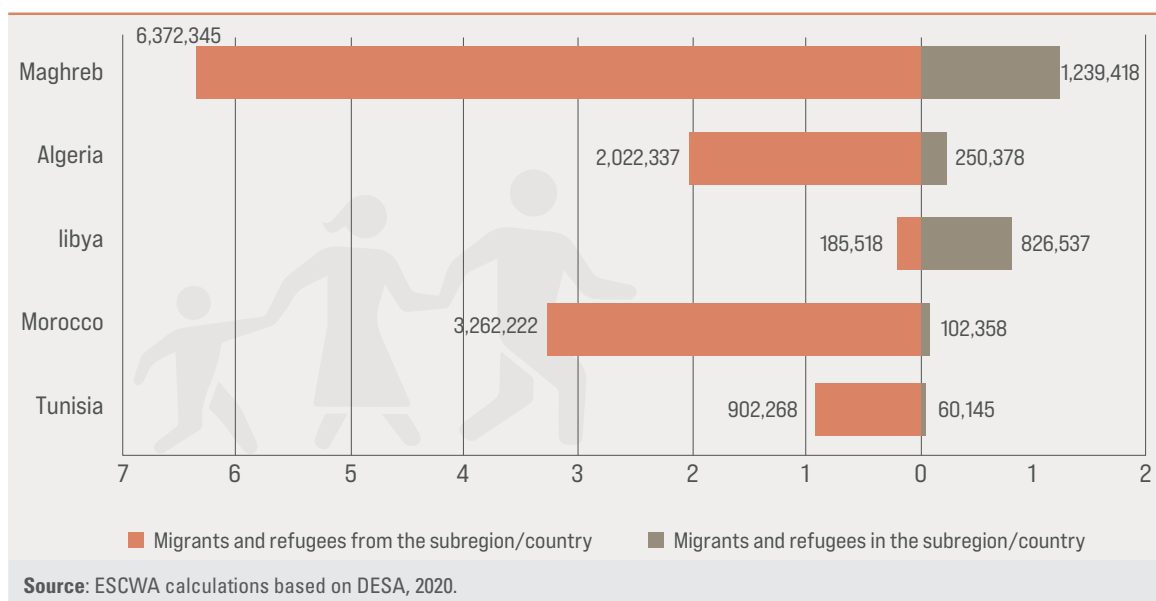
predominantly from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, which were the origin of around 2,000 and 1,400 refugees, respectively. Their most common destinations were Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. UNHCR also registered over 3,000 asylum seekers from the subregion.

## 2. Maghreb subregion

### (a) Migration and forced displacement to the Maghreb

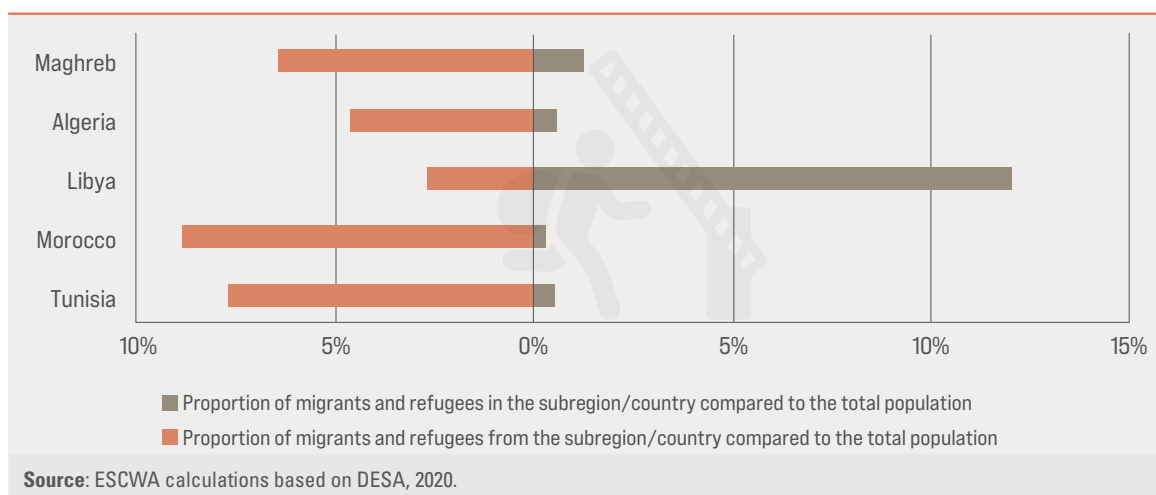
The total migrant and refugee population in the Maghreb stood at 1.2 million in 2020, a rise of 7 per cent since 2015, which represents close to 80,000 additional migrants and refugees (figure 40). Libya is the country with the largest migrant and refugee population in the subregion: it hosted 67 per cent (827,000) of the migrants and refugees in the subregion in 2020, followed by Algeria at 20 per cent (250,000). While Libya has seen a steady increase in its migrant and refugee population since 1990, Algeria witnessed a decreasing migrant and refugee population from 1990 to 2005, after which the number of migrants and refugees slowly began increasing. Morocco and Tunisia were the destinations for 8 per cent and close to 5 per cent, respectively, of the migrant and refugee population in the subregion in 2020.

**Figure 38.** Regions of destination for migrants and refugees from GCC countries, 2020**Figure 39.** Top five countries of destination for migrants and refugees from GCC countries, 2020**Figure 40.** Number of migrants and refugees in the Maghreb, 1990-2020

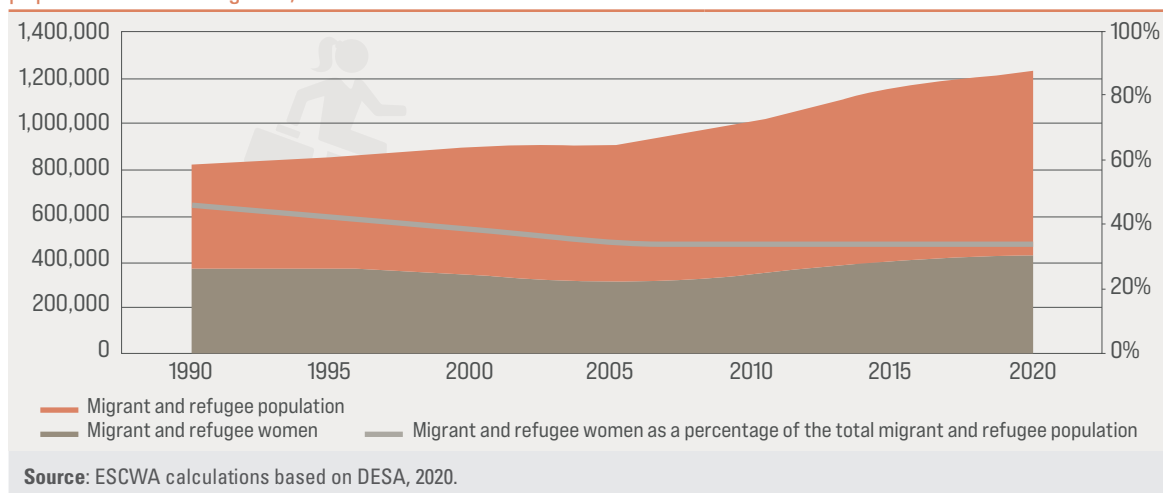
**Figure 41.** Number of migrants and refugees from and in the Maghreb, 2020 (Millions)

The Maghreb subregion is generally characterised by a larger number of persons leaving its countries than arriving to them (figure 41). The average share of migrants and refugees of the subregion's population has been consistently low, currently making up around 1 per cent, while the proportion of nationals abroad compared with the total population of the subregion is slightly above 6 per cent (figure 42). Algeria, Morocco and

Tunisia all have significantly more nationals outside of the country than migrants and refugees residing in them, both in terms of absolute numbers and when compared with the total population. Libya, a destination and transit country for migrants, is an outlier showing the opposite pattern, and had a migrant and refugee population that comprised 12 per cent of its total population in 2020.

**Figure 42.** Proportion of migrants and refugees from and in the Maghreb, 2020

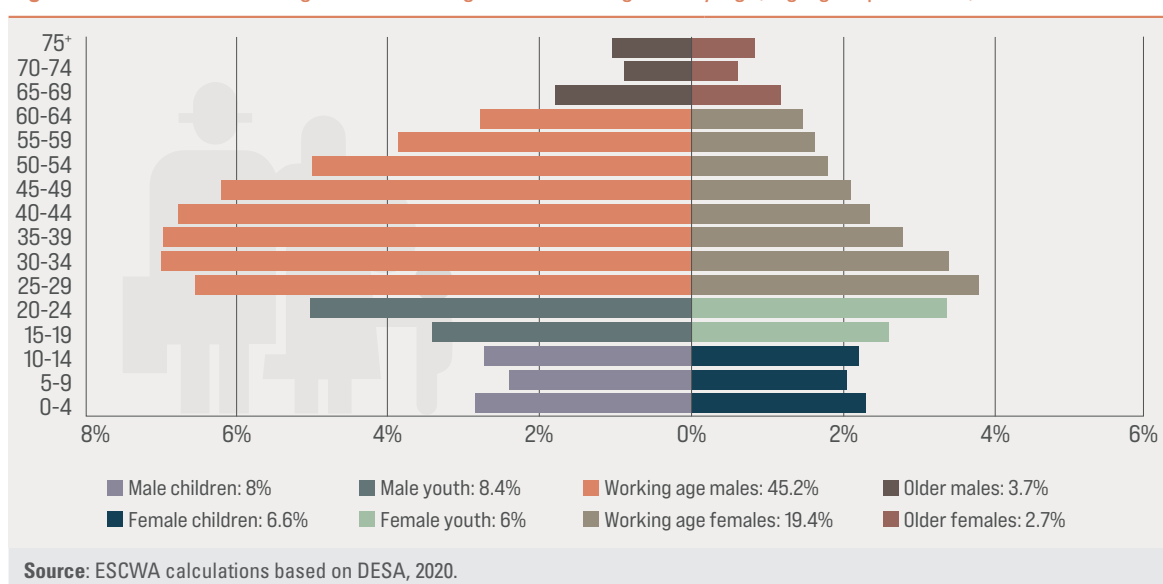
**Figure 43.** Number and proportion of migrant and refugee women among the total migrant and refugee population in the Maghreb, 1990-2020

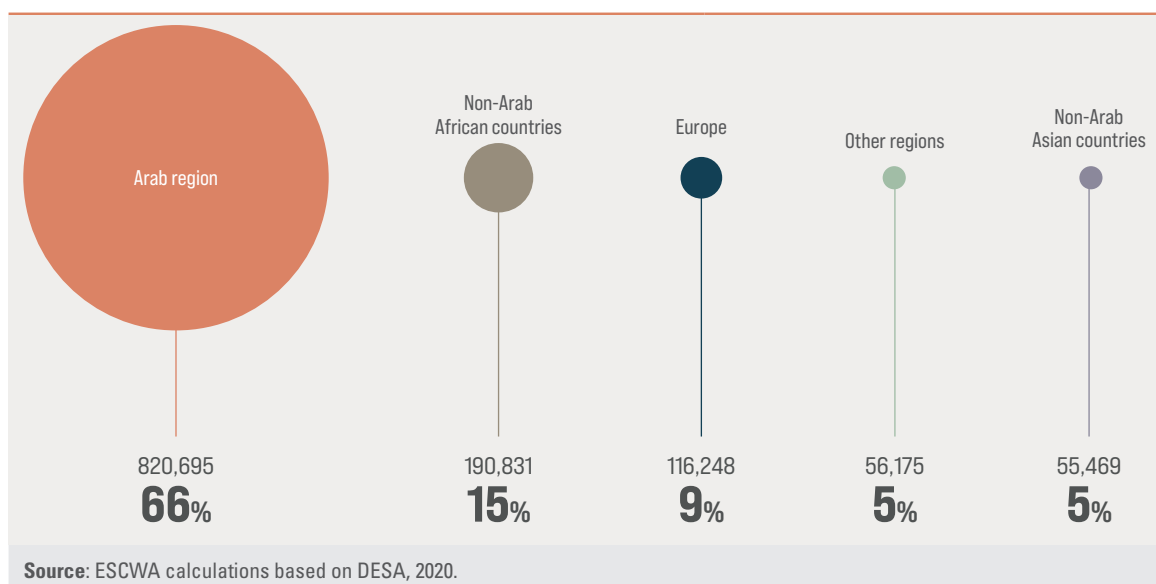


The share of women migrants and refugees in the Maghreb was around 35 per cent in 2020, a proportion that has remained stable since 2005, after a dramatic decrease compared with 1990 when women represented 46 per cent of the migrant and refugee population in the subregion (figure 43). In 2020, there were around 429,000 women migrants and refugees in the subregion, 5 per cent more than in 2015.

In terms of age structure, in 2020, children represented 14.6 per cent of the total migrant and refugee population in the subregion, while young people made up 14.4 per cent. The total working-age population represented 64.6 per cent of the total migrant and refugee population, with working-age men comprising 45.2 per cent, and working-age women constituting 19.4 per cent. Older persons comprised 6.4 per cent of the total migrant and refugee population (figure 44).

**Figure 44.** Distribution of migrants and refugees in the Maghreb by age, age group and sex, 2020

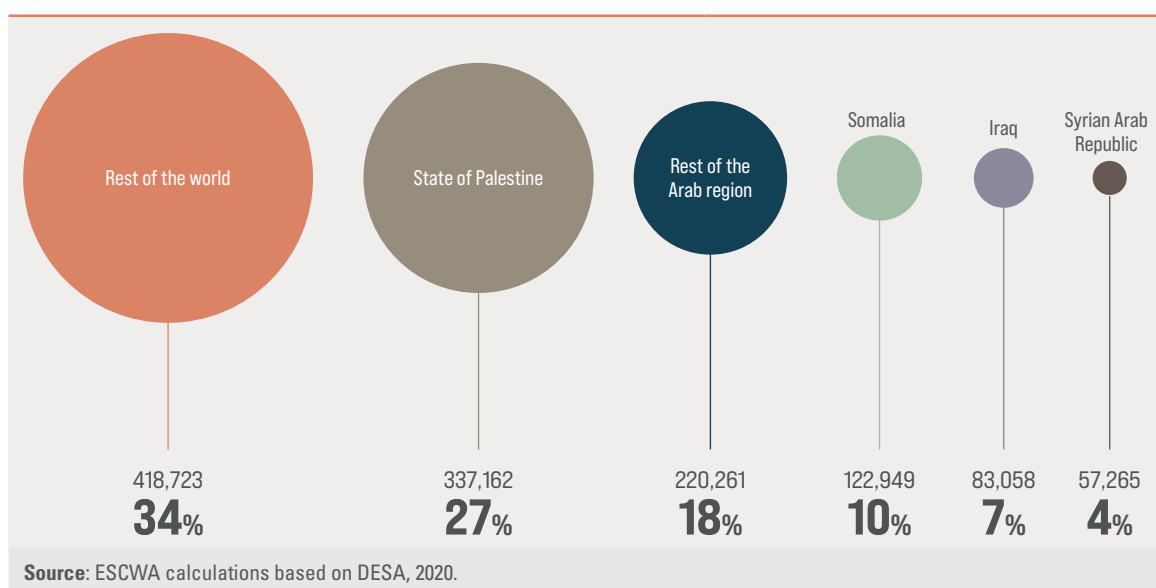


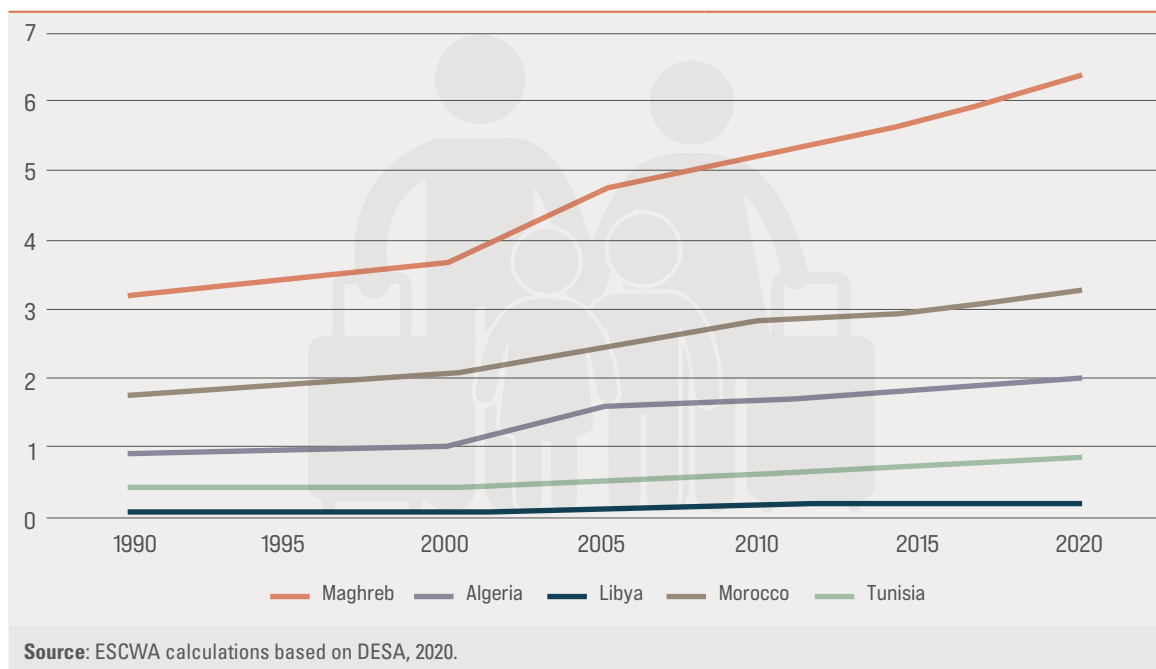
**Figure 45.** Regions of origin of migrants and refugees in the Maghreb, 2020

The Maghreb subregion is characterized by migrants and refugees predominantly from other Arab countries and, to a lesser extent, from sub-Saharan Africa. However, this picture could differ significantly when irregular and mixed movements are considered. Significant transit migration towards Europe also has a strong influence on migration patterns to the subregion. Two thirds of migrants and refugees

in the Maghreb were from the Arab region in 2020, comprising around 821,000 persons. Around 15 per cent (191,000) of migrants and refugees originated from non-Arab African countries, and 9 per cent (116,000) from Europe (figure 45).

In 2020, most migrants and refugees in the Maghreb came from the State of Palestine, totalling 337,000 (figure 46).

**Figure 46.** Top five countries or territories of origin of migrants and refugees in the Maghreb, 2020

**Figure 47.** Number of migrants and refugees from Maghreb countries, 1990-2020 (Millions)

According to UNHCR, close to 113,000 refugees were living in the Maghreb in 2020, mostly in Algeria, which was the destination of 87 per cent (98,000) of the subregion's refugees. Libya had 4,000 registered refugees, Morocco had 8,000, and Tunisia had close to 3,000. Most refugees in the subregion came from Western Sahara and resided in Algeria. Furthermore, UNHCR reported over 51,000 asylum seekers in the Maghreb in 2020, around 78 per cent of them in Libya.

#### **(b) Migration and forced displacement from the Maghreb**

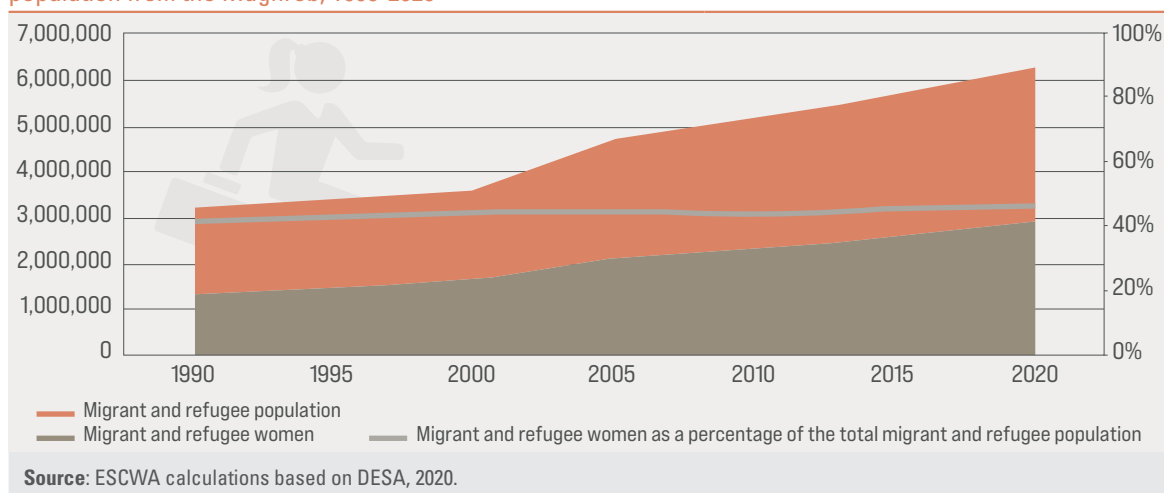
In 2020, around 19 per cent (6.4 million) of all migrants and refugees from the Arab region were from the Maghreb. Morocco was the top country of origin in the subregion, with nearly 3.3 million nationals abroad, most of them migrant workers. It was followed by Algeria with 2 million, Tunisia with 902,000, and Libya with 186,000 migrants and refugees originating

from the country (figure 47). Since 2015, the number of migrants and refugees from the subregion increased by 11 per cent. Nationals abroad compared with the total population of Maghreb countries represented 6 per cent in 2020, ranging between a low of 3 per cent in the case of Libya and 9 per cent for Morocco.

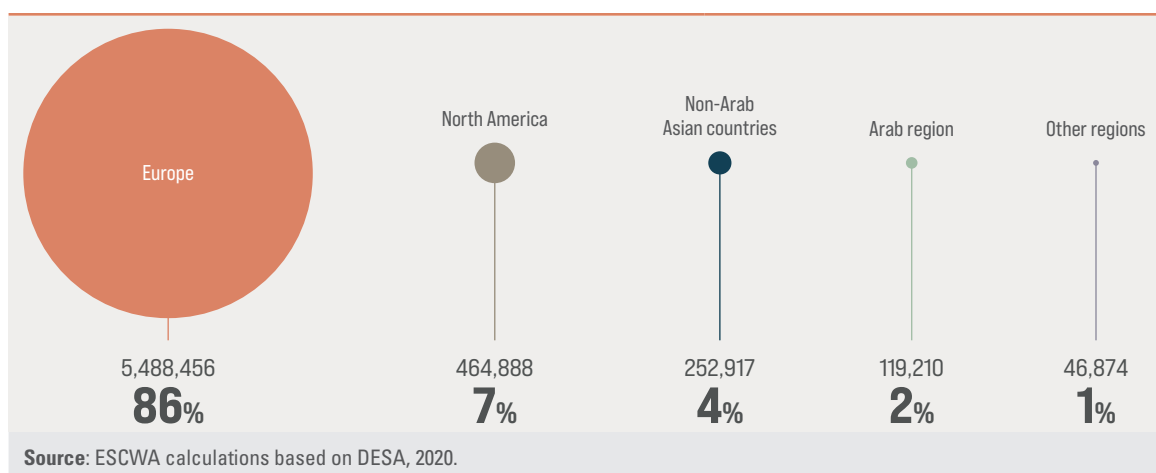
Women made up 47 per cent of the migrant and refugee population from the Maghreb in 2020, totalling nearly 3 million (figure 48). Morocco was the origin of the largest number of women migrants (1.6 million), followed by Algeria (937,000), Tunisia (400,000) and Libya (84,000).

In 2020, Europe was the predominant region of destination, receiving 86 per cent of migrants and refugees from the Maghreb, mostly in France with 3.1 million, Spain with 852,000, and Italy with 617,000 (figures 49 and 50). France was the destination for 49 per cent of migrants and refugees from the Maghreb.

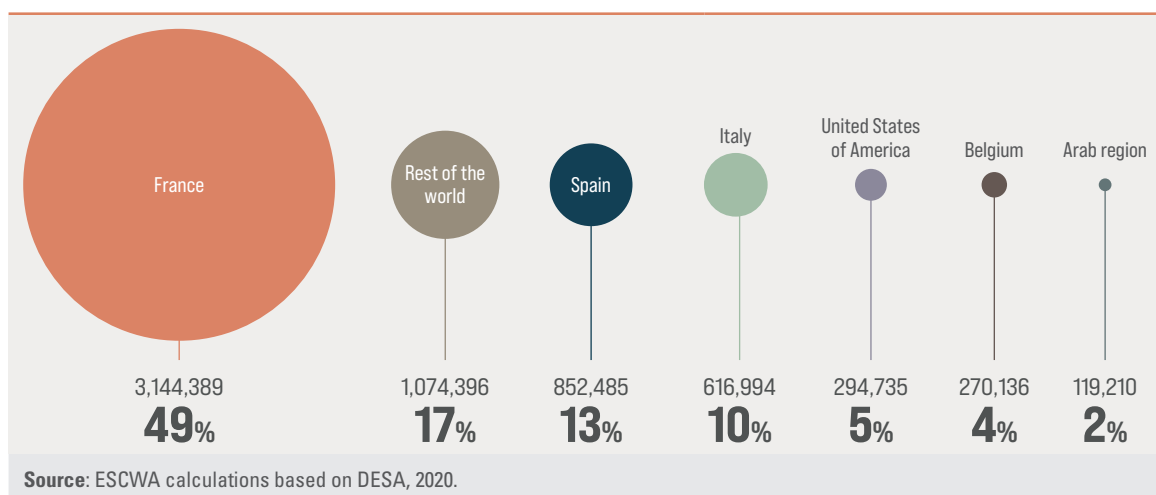
**Figure 48.** Number and proportion of migrant and refugee women among the total migrant and refugee population from the Maghreb, 1990-2020

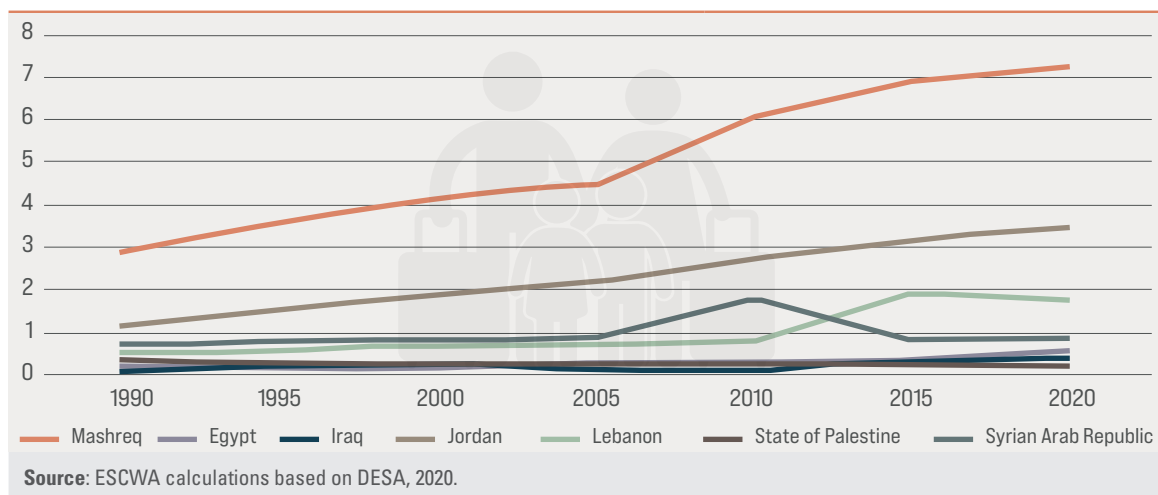


**Figure 49.** Regions of destination for migrants and refugees from the Maghreb, 2020



**Figure 50.** Top five countries of destination for migrants and refugees from the Maghreb, 2020



**Figure 51. Number of migrants and refugees in the Mashreq, 1990-2020 (Millions)**

The Maghreb was the origin of more than 28,000 refugees as at 2020, with 62 per cent from Libya (18,000). The number of refugees from the subregion more than doubled between 2015 and 2020, mostly owing to an upsurge of refugees from Libya. There were also around 24,000 asylum seekers from the subregion.

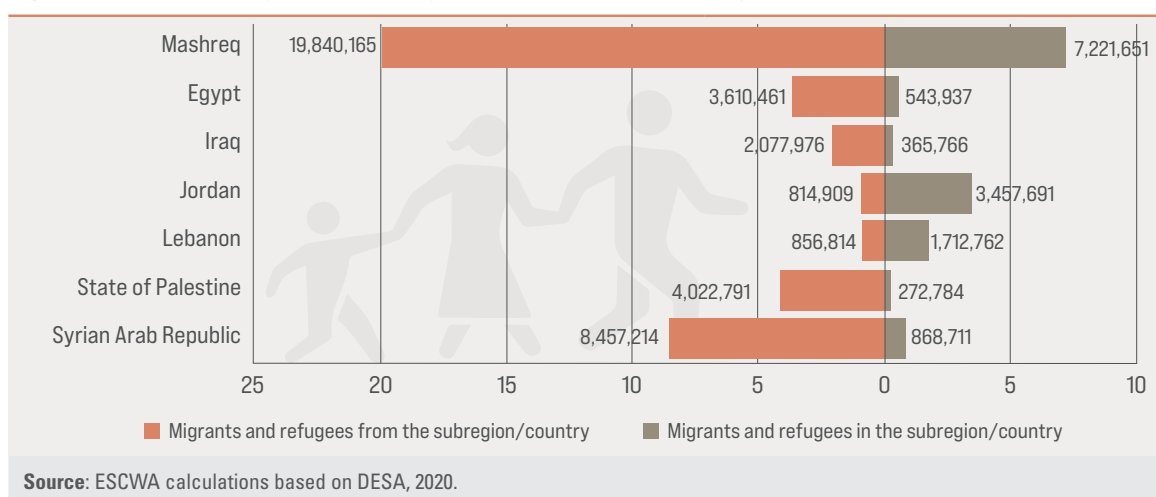
### 3. Mashreq subregion

#### (a) Migration and forced displacement to the Mashreq

The Mashreq hosted around 7.2 million migrants and refugees in 2020, comprising 18 per cent of the Arab region's migrant and refugee population (figure 51). After steady growth in the migrant and refugee population since 1990, which increased at a faster rate from 2005 to 2015, the size of the migrant and refugee population has largely stabilized in the subregion. Jordan has hosted the largest number of migrants and refugees in the Mashreq since 1990, rising steadily from 1.1 million in 1990 to almost 3.5 million in 2020. In 2012, Lebanon became the country with the second largest migrant and refugee population in the subregion. Lebanon saw a steep rise in its migrant and refugee population from 2010 to 2015, mainly owing to

the influx of Syrian refugees, but this population decreased by almost 11 per cent (203,000) from 2015 to 2020. In contrast, the migrant and refugee population in the Syrian Arab Republic, which has slowly increased since 1990, saw a sharp increase between 2005 and 2010 when it doubled in size, and then almost halved in size from 2010 to 2015. Migrant and refugee populations in Egypt and Iraq have seen an increasing trend over the past three decades, with the migrant and refugee population of Egypt rising markedly between 2015 and 2020, and that of Iraq between 2010 and 2015. Meanwhile, the figures for the State of Palestine remained stable between 1990 and 2020.

When comparing the numbers of migrants and refugees living in the subregion's countries with the numbers of their nationals abroad (figure 52), there is a prominent pattern of significantly more nationals abroad originating from countries that have experienced violence, security threats and persecution, like Iraq, the State of Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic. Egypt also has a much higher number of nationals outside the country than migrants and refugees present in the country, owing to the high rates of labour migration from the country, and low rates of labour migration and refugee movement into the country. Contrastingly, in Jordan and Lebanon, the main destination

**Figure 52. Number of migrants and refugees from and in the Mashreq, 2020 (Millions)**

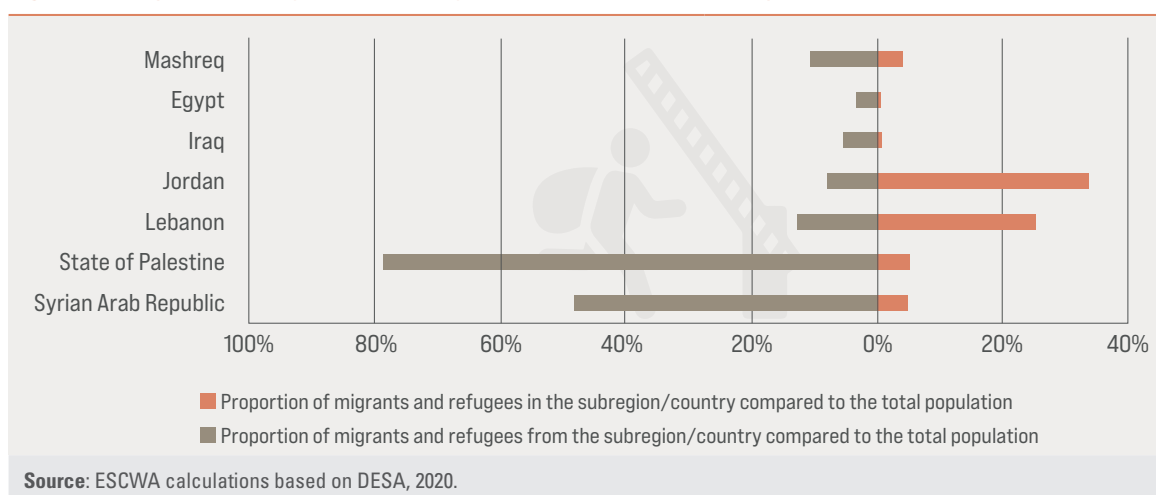
countries for refugees from the Mashreq, there are a larger numbers of migrants and refugees in those countries than the number of their nationals living abroad.<sup>23</sup>

There is also considerable variation between Mashreq countries in terms of the share of migrants and refugees hosted by them relative to their total population (figure 53). While Jordan and Lebanon had high proportions of migrants and refugees (34 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively), they made up around 5 per

cent in the State of Palestine<sup>24</sup> and the Syrian Arab Republic, and 1 per cent in Egypt and Iraq.

Women made up almost half of the migrant and refugee population in the Mashreq in 2020 (figure 54), a share that has remained stable since 1990. The number of women migrants and refugees increased by approximately 5 per cent from 2015 to reach almost 3.6 million in 2020.

Regarding age structure, child and young migrants and refugees were more common

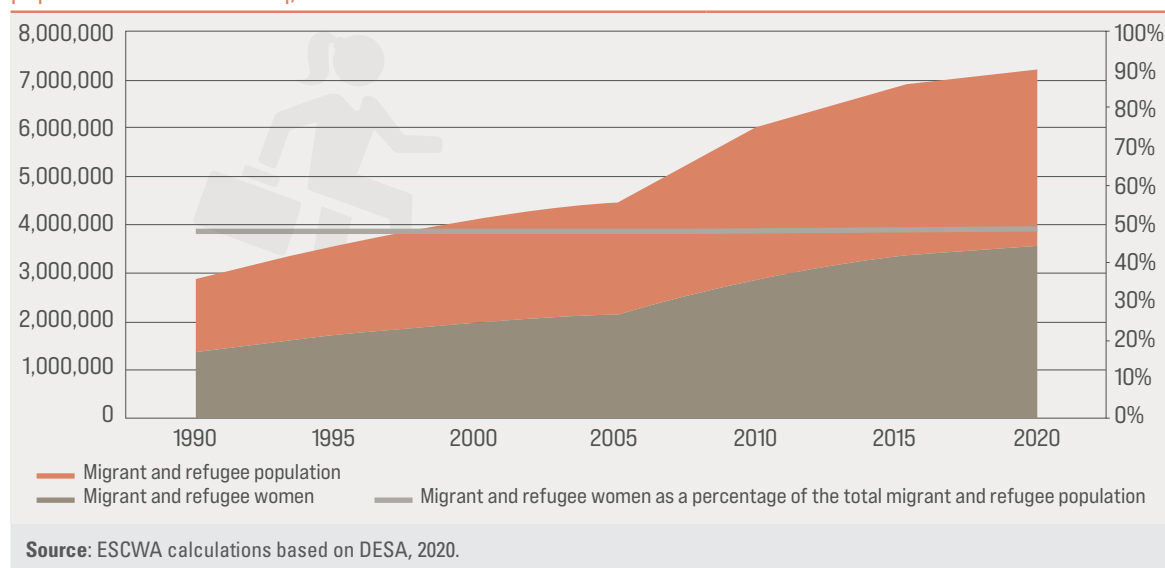
**Figure 53. Proportion of migrants and refugees from and in the Mashreq, 2020**

in the Mashreq than in the other subregions in 2020, comprising 29.7 per cent and 14.9 per cent, respectively, of the migrant and refugee population, and constituting a total of 44.6 per cent (figure 55). Working-age persons comprised 50.3 per cent of the total migrant and refugee population, while older persons represented

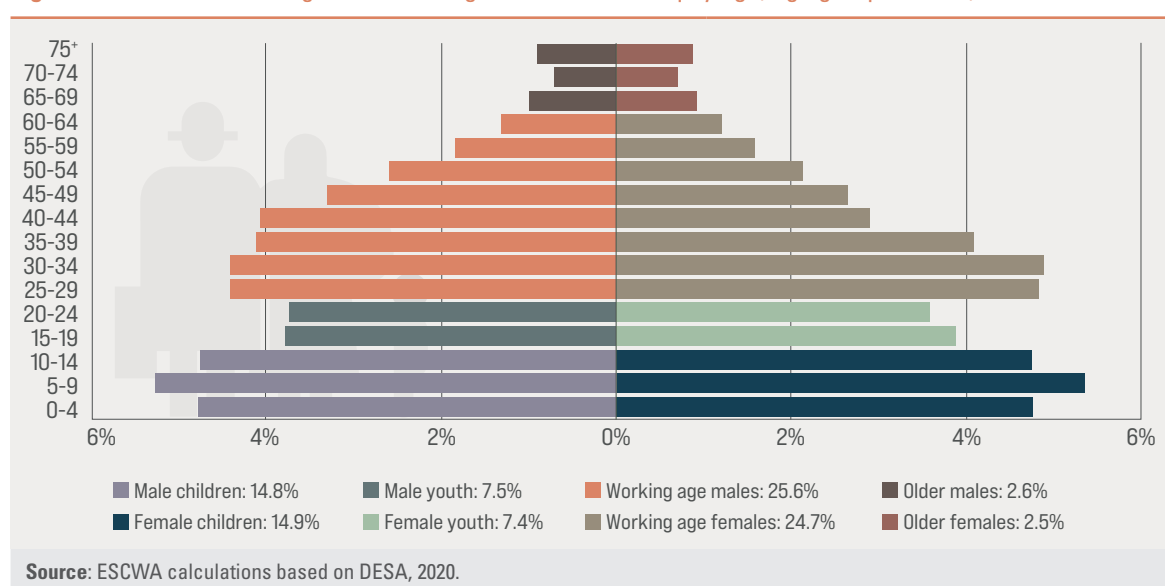
5.1 per cent. The distribution between men and women along all age groups was fairly even.

In 2020, around 93 per cent of migrants and refugees in the Mashreq were from the Arab region, totalling 6.7 million people, a significant number of whom were refugees (figure 56).

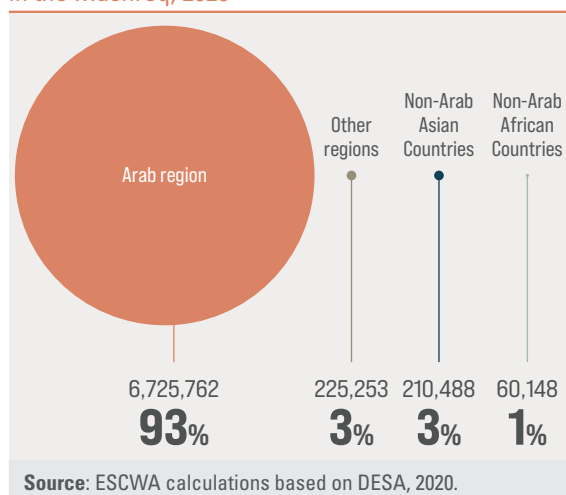
**Figure 54.** Number and proportion of migrant and refugee women among the total migrant and refugee population in the Mashreq, 1990-2020



**Figure 55.** Distribution of migrants and refugees in the Mashreq by age, age group and sex, 2020



**Figure 56.** Regions of origin of migrants and refugees in the Mashreq, 2020



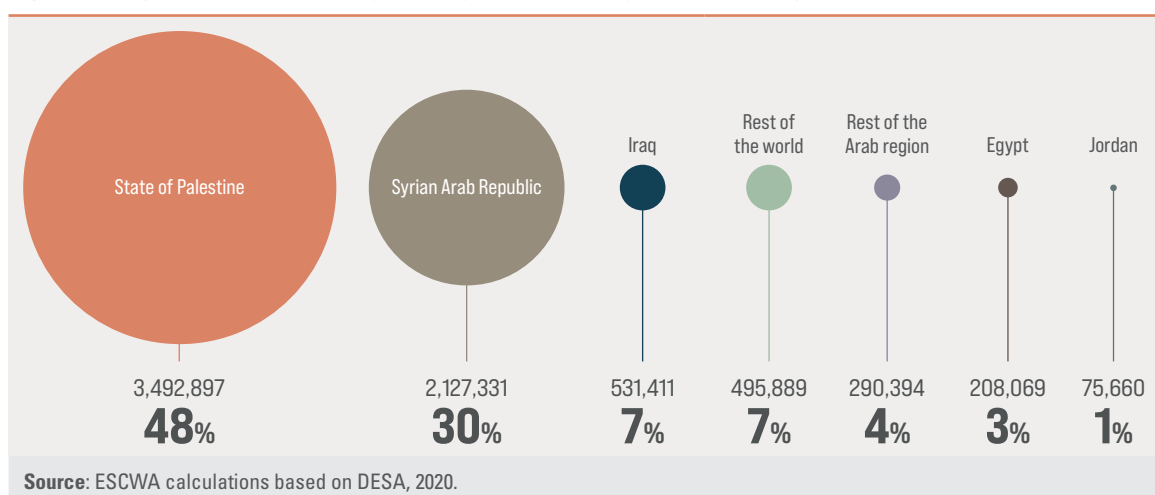
The State of Palestine was the country of origin of almost 3.5 million migrants and refugees in the subregion (48 per cent), followed by the Syrian Arab Republic with slightly more than 2.1 million (30 per cent), and Iraq with around 531,000 (7 per cent) (figure 57).

As at 2020, 60 per cent of refugees under the UNHCR mandate in the Arab region lived in the Mashreq, totalling over 2.1 million persons. The vast majority of them originated from within the subregion. There were around 870,000 refugees reported by UNHCR in Lebanon, and nearly 703,000 in Jordan. Egypt hosted close to 273,000

reported refugees, Iraq hosted 270,000, and the Syrian Arab Republic hosted approximately 15,000. The gender composition of refugees residing in the Mashreq was even, with both women and men constituting 50 per cent of the refugee population.

Moreover, at the end of 2020, UNRWA reported 5.7 million Palestine refugees in its countries of operation, which are Jordan; Lebanon; the Syrian Arab Republic; the West Bank, including East Jerusalem; and the Gaza Strip. According to UNRWA data, over 2.3 million Palestine refugees were registered in Jordan, 1.5 million in Gaza, and around 871,000 in the West Bank. Nearly 569,000 Palestine refugees were still registered with UNRWA in the Syrian Arab Republic, although many had fled to neighbouring countries and beyond owing to the ongoing conflict in the country. As such, UNRWA is currently aware of approximately 430,000 Palestine refugees who remain in the Syrian Arab Republic, a third of whom continue to be internally displaced as a result of the Syrian civil war. Furthermore, approximately 480,000 Palestine refugees were registered with UNRWA in Lebanon. Jordan and Lebanon continue to host the highest rates of refugees (registered with UNHCR and UNRWA) relative to their populations globally, at 29 and 20 per cent, respectively.

**Figure 57.** Top five countries of origin of migrants and refugees in Mashreq countries, 2020



### (b) Migration and forced displacement from the Mashreq

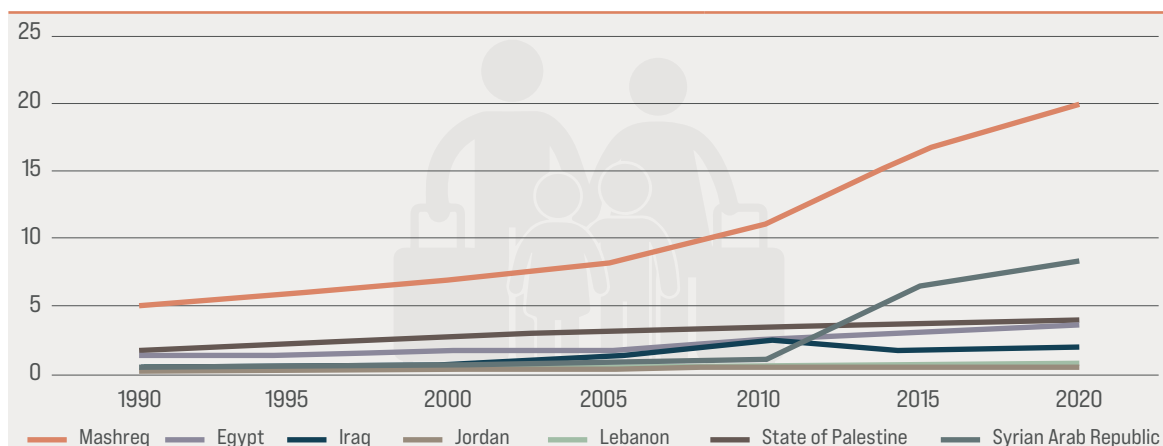
Migration and forced displacement from the Mashreq has almost quadrupled since 1990, when there were 5.2 million migrants and refugees from the subregion, reaching 19.8 million in 2020 (figure 58). The migrant and refugee population from the Mashreq saw a drastic increase between 2010 and 2015, mostly because of conflict, but the rate of growth has since somewhat decelerated. In 2020, migrants and refugees from the Mashreq made up a high of 61 per cent of all migrants and refugees from Arab countries. The proportion of Mashreq nationals living abroad compared with the total population varied extensively between countries, reaching 79 per cent for the State of Palestine, 48 per cent for the Syrian Arab Republic, 13 per cent for Lebanon, and less than 8 per cent for the remaining Mashreq countries.

The State of Palestine had the largest population abroad before 2010, whereafter it was surpassed by the Syrian Arab Republic. According to DESA, the migrant and refugee population abroad from the State of Palestine has been increasing steadily from 1.8 million in 1990 to 4 million in 2020. In contrast, the migrant and refugee population from the Syrian Arab Republic was slowly increasing until 2010 (less than doubling in a 20-year span), and then grew six-fold in just five years

between 2010 and 2015 because of the ongoing conflict in the country that has resulted in large scale refugee movements. Growth rates have slowed since 2015 but remained substantial. As a result, there were close to 8.5 million migrants and refugees originating from the Syrian Arab Republic in 2020, which is 2 million people (31 per cent) more than in 2015. Iraq has seen considerable fluctuation in its national migrant and refugee population owing to ongoing political instability. From 2005 to 2010, there was a 91 per cent increase in migrants and refugees from Iraq, totalling over 1.2 million people, and reaching a high of 2.6 million in 2010. This number decreased substantively in subsequent years to approach 2005 levels owing to returns, but picked up again and reached close to 2.1 million in 2020.

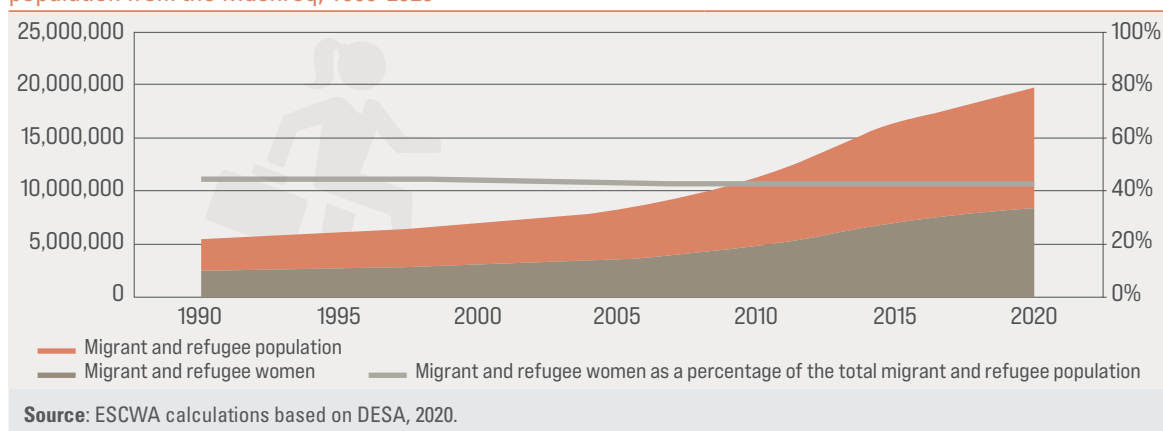
There were 8.5 million women migrants and refugees from the Mashreq in 2020, representing 43 per cent of the migrant and refugee population from the subregion (figure 59). Their number has grown by 20 per cent since 2015, and almost quadrupled since 1990. Egypt and Jordan, where labour emigration is the dominant pattern, had a relatively lower share of women among all migrants and refugees originating from these countries, representing 35 per cent and 37 per cent, respectively. In contrast, Iraq and the State of Palestine had the highest proportions, with women making up 50 per cent and 47 per cent, respectively.

**Figure 58.** Number of migrants and refugees from the Mashreq, 1990-2020 (Millions)



Source: ESCWA calculations based on DESA, 2020.

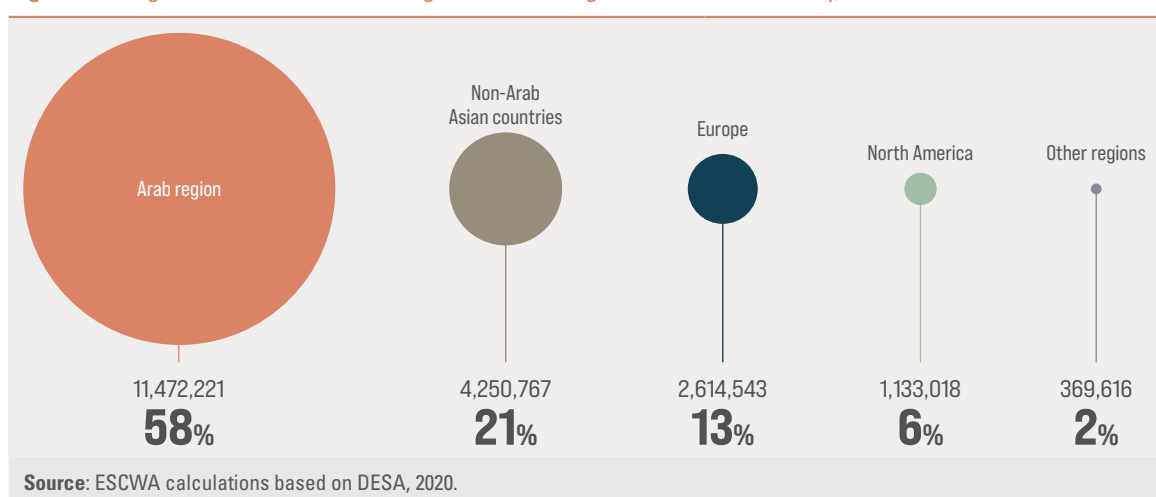
**Figure 59.** Number and proportion of migrant and refugee women among the total migrant and refugee population from the Mashreq, 1990-2020

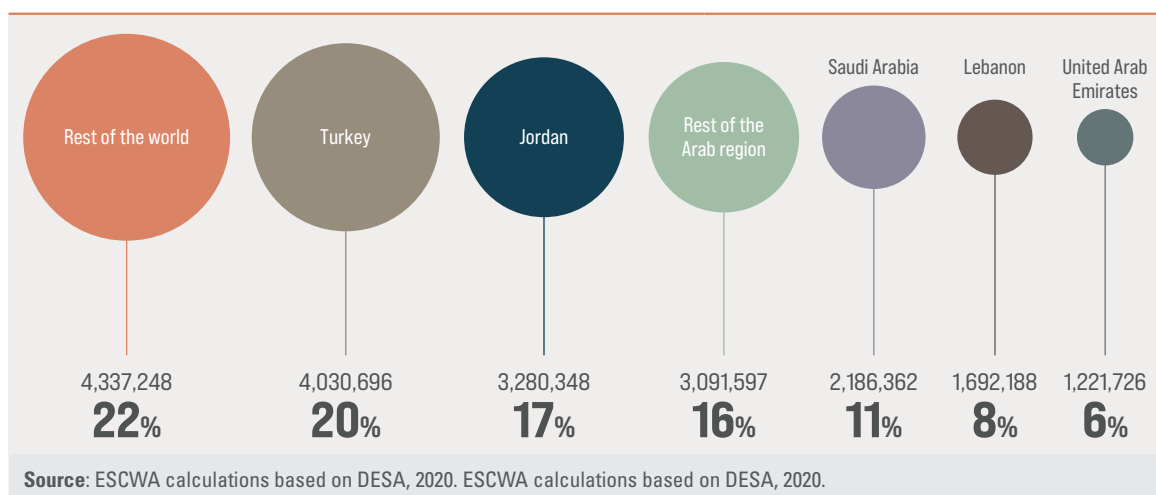


Arab countries received 58 per cent (11.5 million) of migrants and refugees from the Mashreq subregion, mainly from Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Non-Arab Asian countries, predominantly Turkey, received 21 per cent, and Europe received 13 per cent (figures 60 and 61). Turkey was the main individual country of destination for migrants and refugees originating from the Mashreq in 2020, hosting 4 million persons, almost 3.6 million of whom were refugees under the UNHCR mandate. This is an increase of around 1.2 million from the 2.9 million migrants and refugees from the Mashreq it hosted in 2015. Jordan was the second largest country of destination for migrants and refugees from the subregion, with close to 3.3 million persons. Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates also counted significant numbers.

In 2020, there were around 7.2 million refugees originating from the Mashreq subregion, making up 35 per cent of all refugees worldwide, and 81 per cent of all refugees from Arab countries. They were predominantly from the Syrian Arab Republic, which was the country of origin of almost 6.7 million refugees, displaced mostly by protracted conflict. Moreover, there were over 333,000 refugees from Iraq, around 27,000 from Egypt, more than 5,000 from Lebanon, and over 2,000 from Jordan. Furthermore, approximately 100,000 refugees from the State of Palestine were registered with UNHCR according to 2020 data, and UNRWA reported 5.7 million Palestine refugees under its mandate at the end of 2020. UNHCR also reported over 389,000 asylum seekers from the Mashreq in 2020, mostly from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Figure 60.** Regions of destination for migrants and refugees from the Mashreq, 2020



**Figure 61.** Top five countries of destination for migrants and refugees from the Mashreq, 2020

#### 4. Arab least developed countries

##### (a) Migration and forced displacement to the Arab least developed countries

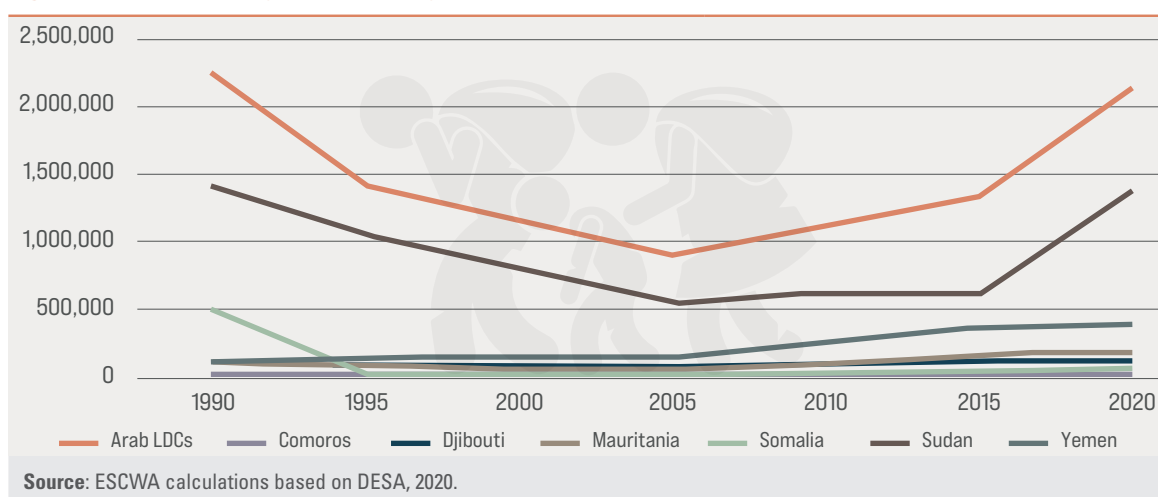
In contrast to the above subregions, which have seen a continuous upward trend in their migrant and refugee populations since 1990, the Arab LDCs witnessed a significant drop in the number of migrants and refugees between 1990 and 2005, contracting by 60 per cent from 2.2 million to slightly over 0.9 million (figure 62). The migrant and refugee population started growing in the Arab LDCs after

2005, reaching 2.1 million in 2020. Between 2015 and 2020, the Arab LDCs hosted almost 807,000 more migrants and refugees, constituting a 61 per cent increase. These fluctuations were driven mostly by developments in the number of migrants and refugees in the Sudan, as well as in Somalia and Yemen. The Sudan had the largest migrant and refugee population among the Arab LDCs in 2020, hosting almost 1.4 million migrants and refugees. In Yemen, the migrant and refugee population has been growing since 2005. Although it slowed between 2015 and 2020, it reached more than 387,000 by 2020.

#### Box 3. Forced displacement in Yemen

Yemen remains at the crossroads of population movements. Between 2016 and 2020, thousands of Ethiopians and Somalis transited through Yemen, heading to other destinations. The COVID-19 pandemic created new mobility barriers and protection risks, causing arrivals to drop substantially in the last two years. These restrictions stranded many migrants. According to IOM, 77 per cent of arrivals in 2021 were men and 15 per cent were women. As more women migrated independently, many were believed to have fallen victim to exploitation and abuse by smugglers and traffickers of human beings. The protection environment continued to deteriorate as fighting escalated around the country, displacing 4 million Yemenis, destroying infrastructure, undermining the economy, curbing income opportunities, heightening food insecurity, and pushing families to adopt negative coping strategies. Yemen currently hosts some 141,000 refugees and asylum seekers, mainly from Somalia (80.5 per cent) and Ethiopia (11.5 per cent), of whom 40 per cent are women and 19 per cent are children. The ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in Yemen, coupled with the pandemic, has taken a toll on refugees, increasing their dependency on humanitarian assistance from UNHCR and its partners; negatively affecting access to durable solutions, including voluntary repatriation; and shrinking asylum space.

Source: Compiled by UNHCR.

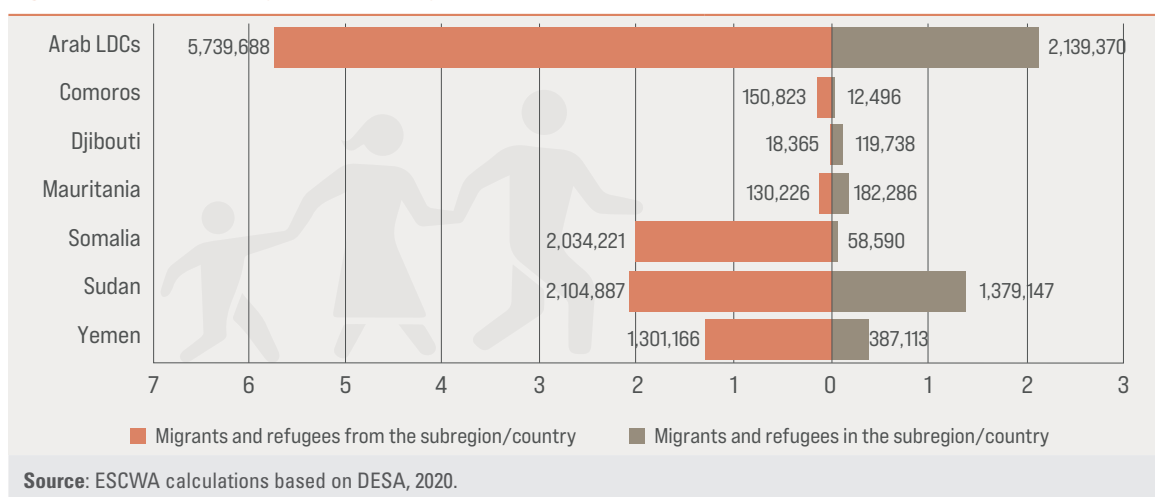
**Figure 62.** Number of migrants and refugees in the Arab LDCs, 1990-2020

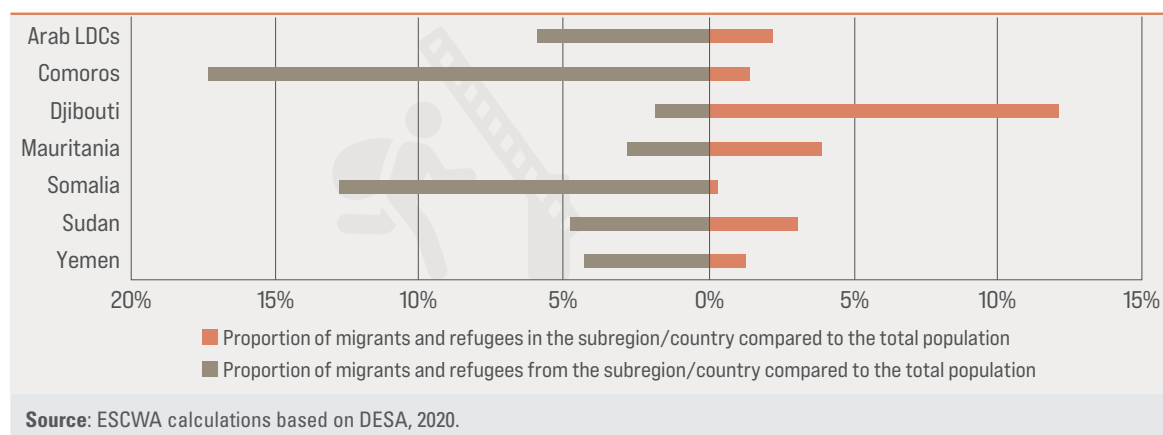
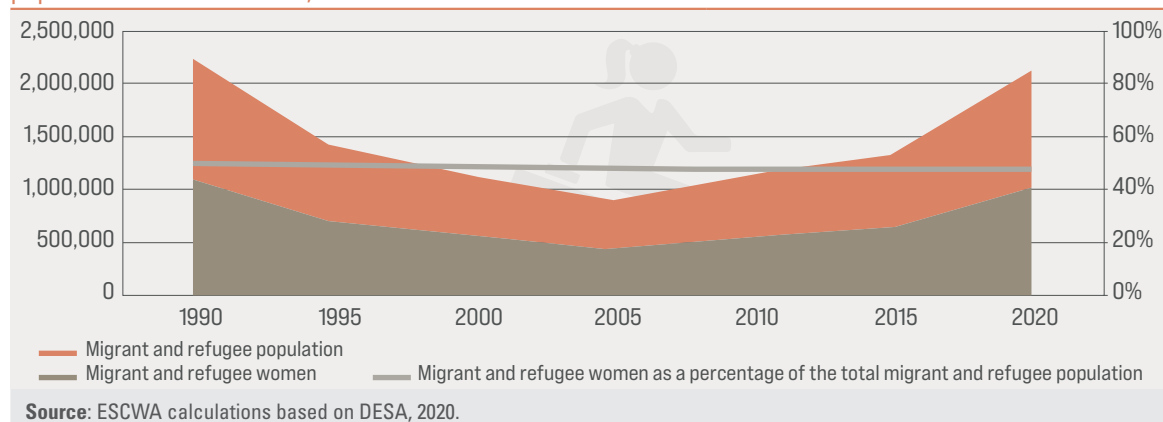
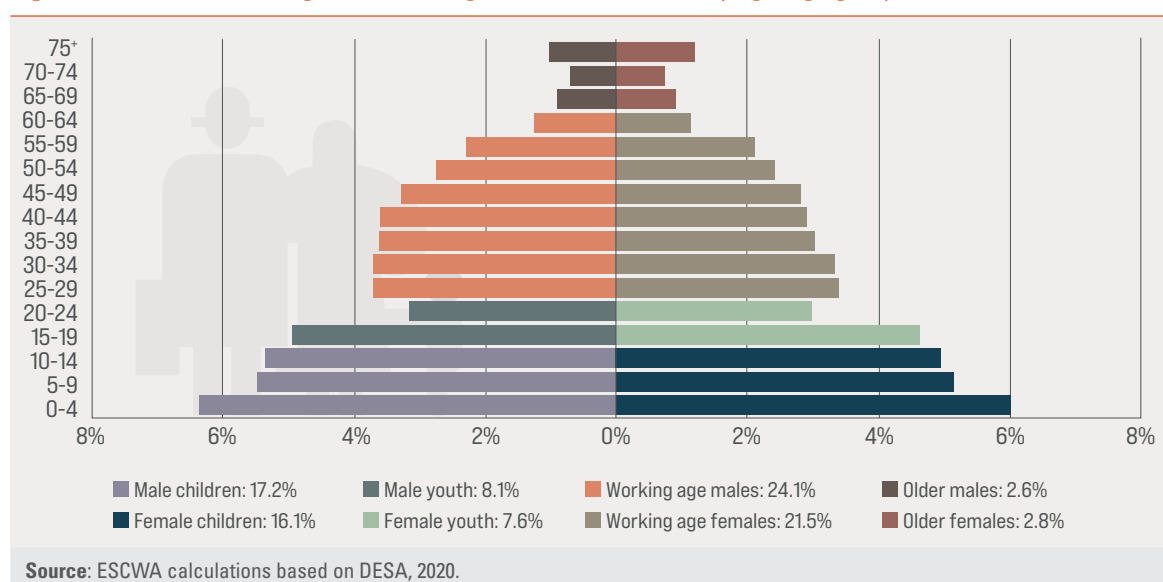
With the exception of Djibouti and Mauritania, the Arab LDCs had a much larger number of nationals living abroad than of migrants and refugees within their territory (figure 63). In 2020, migrants and refugees comprised 2 per cent of the population of the Arab LDCs, a significant drop from 5 per cent in 1990 (figure 64).

There were slightly more than 1 million migrant and refugee women in 2020 in the Arab LDCs, comprising 48 per cent of the migrant and

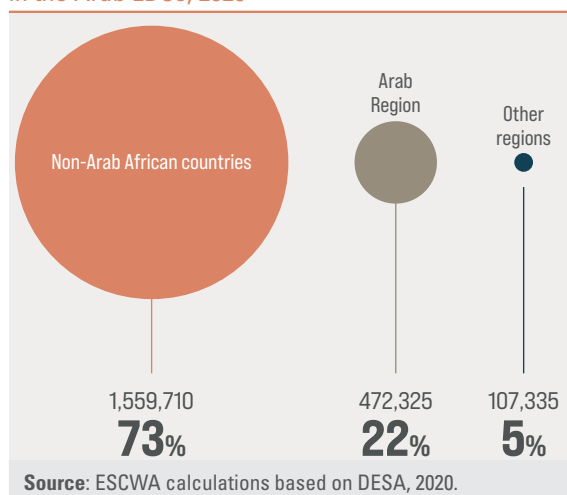
refugee population, a proportion that has remained stable since 1990 (figure 65).

Migrants and refugees are evenly distributed between men and women across all age groups, with a slight proportional advantage for men over women below 65 years old (figure 66). Children represented 33.3 per cent of the migrant and refugee population, young people totalled 15.7 per cent, working-age persons reached 45.6 per cent, and older persons represented 5.4 per cent.

**Figure 63.** Number of migrants and refugees from and in the Arab LDCs, 2020 (Millions)

**Figure 64.** Proportion of migrants and refugees from and in the Arab LDCs, 2020**Figure 65.** Number and proportion of migrant and refugee women among the total migrant and refugee population in the Arab LDCs, 1990-2020**Figure 66.** Distribution of migrants and refugees in the Arab LDCs by age, age group and sex, 2020

**Figure 67.** Regions of origin of migrants and refugees in the Arab LDCs, 2020



Most migrants and refugees in the Arab LDCs came from non-Arab African countries, comprising almost 1.6 million persons or 73 per cent of the migrants and refugees in the subregion. The Arab region was the origin of 22 per cent of migrants and refugees in the Arab LDCs (figure 67).

In 2020, around 41 per cent (868,000) of the migrant and refugee population in the Arab LDCs originated from South Sudan, the vast majority of whom became refugees in

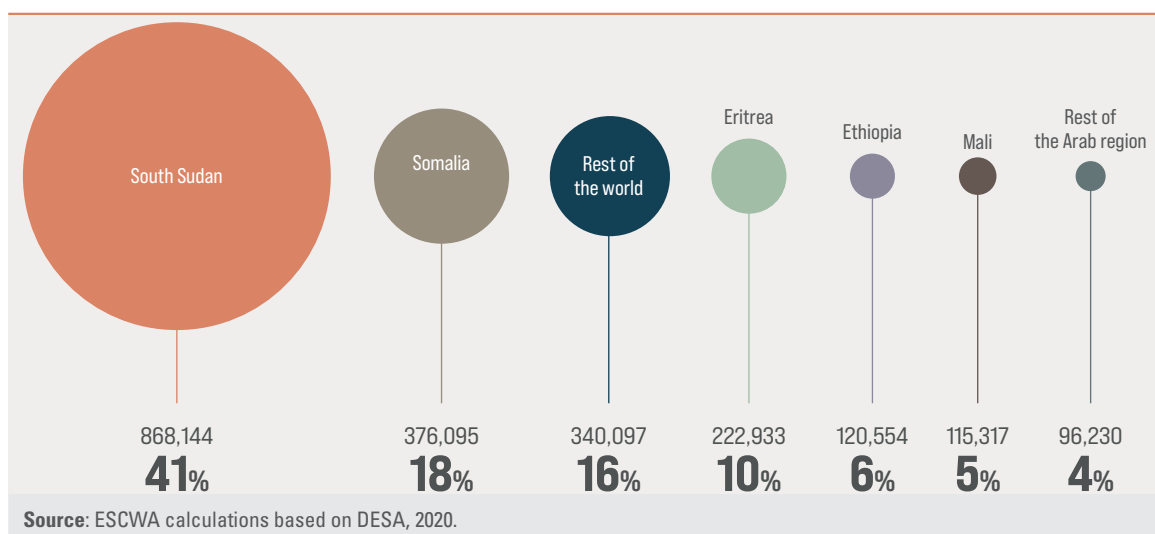
neighbouring Sudan (figure 68). In 2020, the number of migrants and refugees from South Sudan was more than three times higher than in 2015, when that figure stood at 257,000. Somalia was the country of origin of over 376,000 migrants and refugees staying in other Arab LDCs.

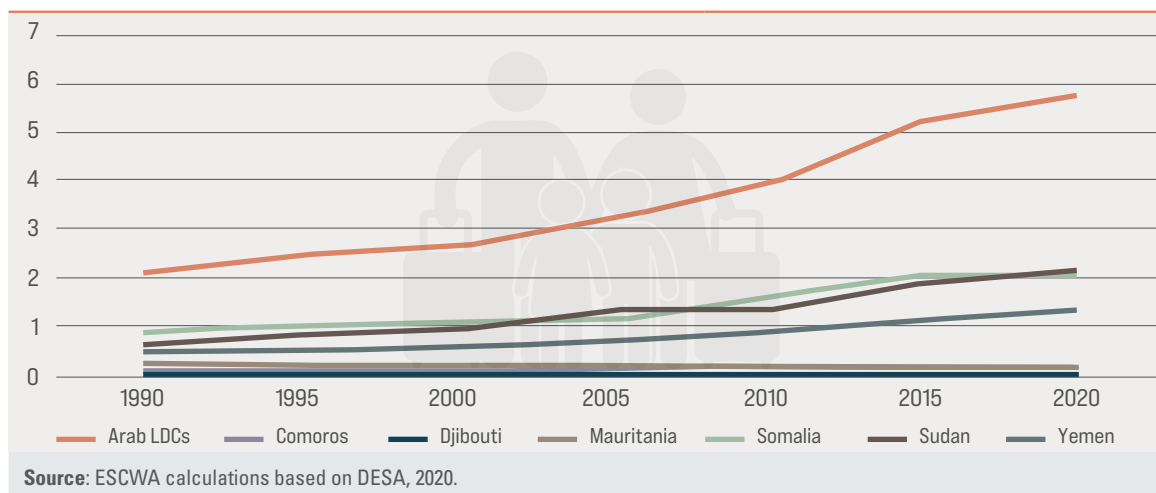
Based on 2020 UNHCR data, the Arab LDCs were the destination of 1.3 million refugees, the majority of whom stayed in the Sudan, which had over 1 million reported refugees. The number of refugees in the Arab LDCs has almost doubled since 2015, mostly driven by forced displacement from South Sudan to the Sudan. There were 167,000 registered refugees in Yemen; 94,000 in Mauritania; 21,000 in Djibouti; and 11,000 in Somalia. The majority of refugees in the Arab LDCs came from one of the other Arab LDCs (mainly Somalia) or from neighbouring countries, predominantly Eritrea and South Sudan.

#### (b) Migration and forced displacement from the Arab least developed countries

Migration and forced displacement from the Arab LDCs has grown substantially from 2.1 million migrants and refugees in 1990 to over 5.7 million in

**Figure 68.** Top five countries of origin of migrants and refugees in the Arab LDCs, 2020



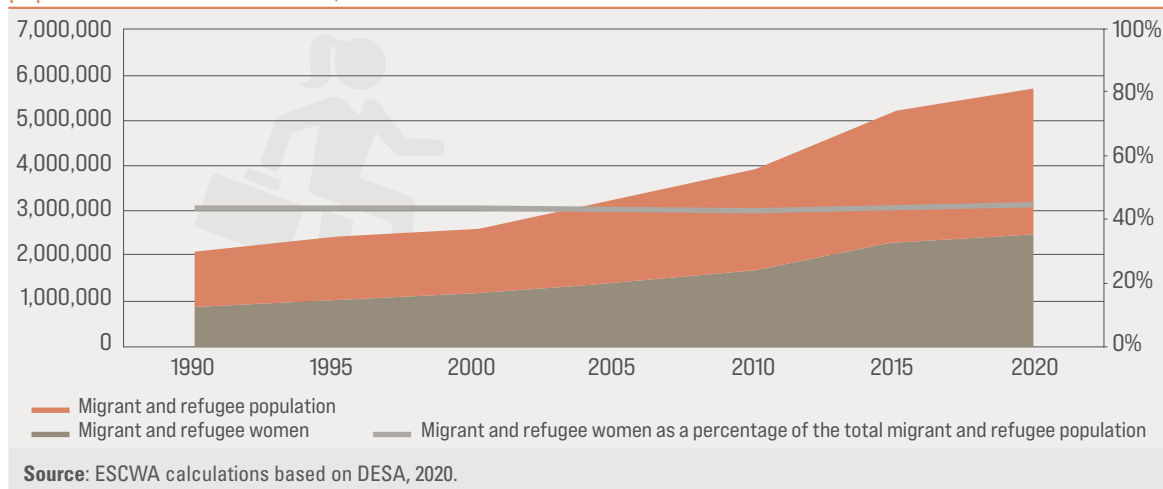
**Figure 69.** Number of migrants and refugees from the Arab LDCs, 1990-2020 (Millions)

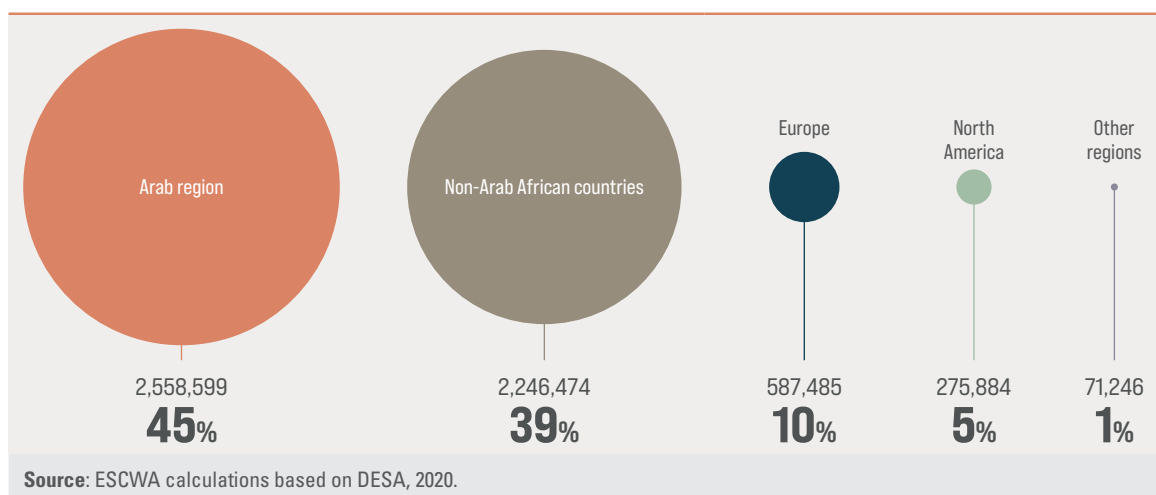
2020, comprising around 17 per cent of all migrants and refugees from Arab countries in 2020 (figure 69). The share of Arab LDC nationals living abroad varied among countries, and was most significant in the case of the Comoros and Somalia, reaching 17 per cent and 13 per cent, respectively, compared with their total populations.

The Sudan and Somalia were the top two countries of origin among the Arab LDCs, with around 2.1 million and 2 million nationals living abroad in 2020, respectively. Yemen was the country of origin of slightly more than 1.3 million migrants and refugees in 2020, and the number of Yemeni migrants and refugees increased by 19 per cent between 2015

and 2020. Around 151,000 migrants originated from the Comoros and 130,000 from Mauritania. Djibouti was the country of origin of the fewest migrants and refugees in the Arab region, with slightly more than 18,000 nationals living abroad.

Women represented 44 per cent of migrants and refugees from the Arab LDCs in 2020, accounting for 2.5 million women and girls (figure 70). This proportion has remained stable since 1990. In 2020, Yemen had the lowest proportion of women migrants and refugees from the country at 35 per cent, and the Comoros was the country with the highest proportion at 52 per cent.

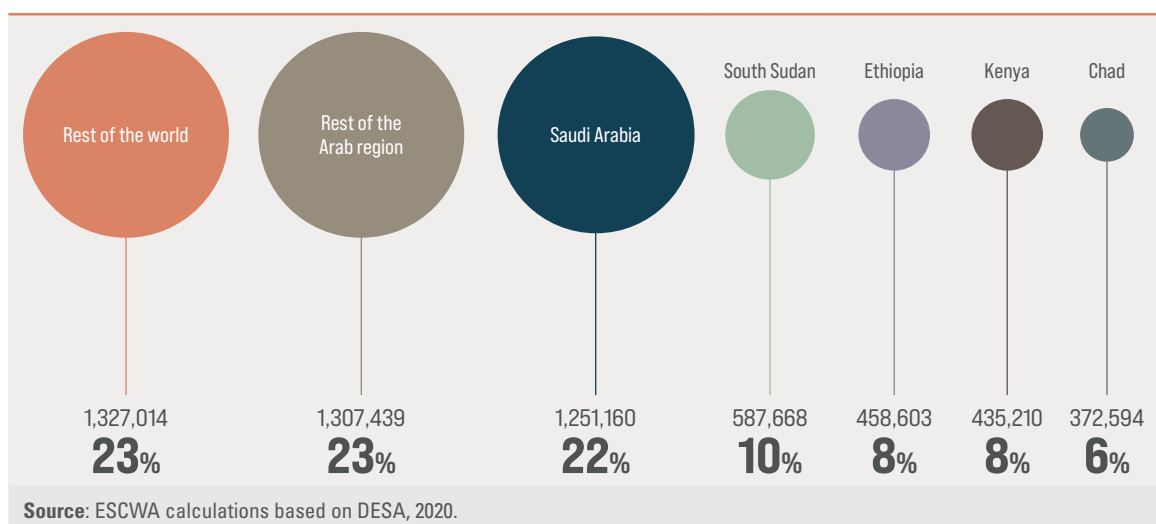
**Figure 70.** Number and proportion of migrant and refugee women among the total migrant and refugee population from the Arab LDCs, 1990-2020

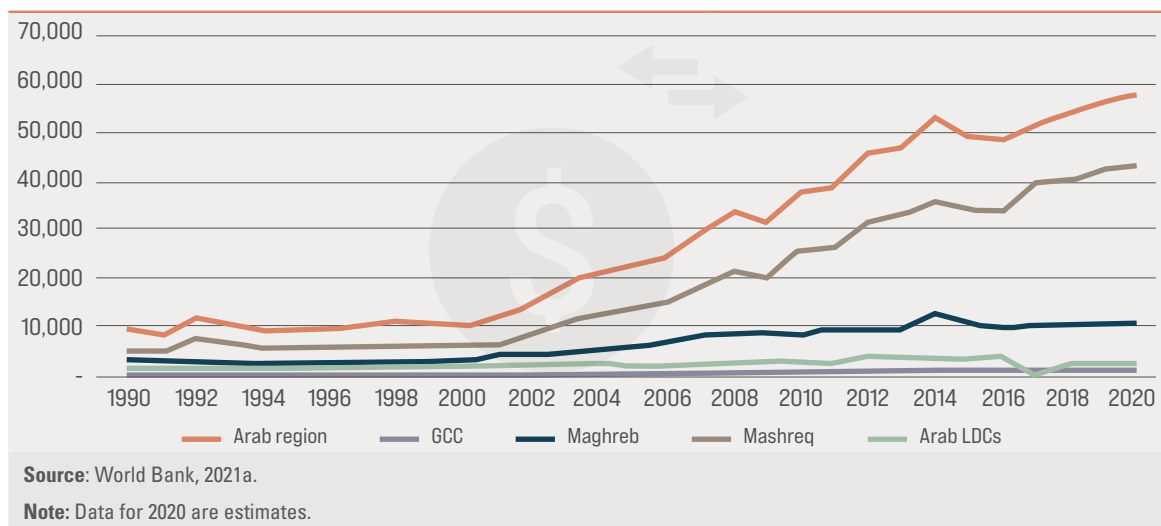
**Figure 71.** Regions of destination for migrants and refugees from the Arab LDCs, 2020

In 2020, 45 per cent of migrants and refugees from the Arab LDCs (almost 2.6 million) resided in other Arab countries (figure 71). Saudi Arabia, which was the destination for 22 per cent of the total migrant and refugee population from the Arab LDCs, or almost 1.3 million persons, was the top country of destination (figure 72). Non-Arab Africa was the second largest destination region, hosting about 39 per cent of migrants and refugees from the Arab LDCs, with Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan in the top five destination

countries for migrants and refugees from the Arab LDCs.

Registered refugees with UNHCR from the Arab LDCs amounted to nearly 1.7 million in 2020, mostly coming from Somalia (815,000) and the Sudan (788,000). There were also close to 38,000 refugees from Mauritania, 33,000 from Yemen, 2,000 from Djibouti, and 793 from the Comoros. There were also 158,000 asylum seekers from the Arab LDCs reported by UNHCR in 2020.

**Figure 72.** Top five countries of destination for migrants and refugees from the Arab LDCs, 2020

**Figure 73.** Remittance inflows to the Arab region by subregion, 1990-2020 (Millions of dollars)

## F. Inflows, outflows and costs of remittances in the Arab region

The Arab region, especially the GCC countries, are a major source of global remittances. Remittances constitute a significant source of income for several Arab countries. Remittances are an important contributor to development in migrants' countries of origin. They have the potential to contribute to poverty reduction; are often used to finance education, health and housing; provide capital for purchases and investment; and increase the flow of foreign currency, among other benefits.

The Arab region received an estimated \$57.9 billion in remittances in 2020, constituting 8 per cent of global remittance inflows. Remittance inflows to the region started to rise sharply from around \$11 billion in 2000, and although their amount decreased somewhat in 2009, 2015 and 2016, they have mostly seen a steady increase over the past two decades (figure 73). The COVID-19 crisis that unfolded in 2020 has had an adverse effect on remittances, which have dropped by an estimated 2 per cent globally compared with pre-pandemic figures. The main reason behind this decline is the dual shock of the global economic slowdown

and collapse of oil prices as a consequence of the pandemic. This downturn, however, appears to be less dramatic than initial estimates suggested. While more time is needed to assess the full picture of the fallout of the COVID-19 crisis on remittance flows, trends have so far reconfirmed the resilience and the counter-cyclical nature of remittances. Defying bleak outlooks, remittances to the Arab region increased by 2.5 percent between 2019 and 2020.

As for the individual subregions, the Mashreq received the largest amount of remittances at \$43.2 billion in 2020, representing 75 per cent of all remittances sent to the region. Egypt was the top receiving Arab country with \$29.6 billion in 2020. The Maghreb subregion received \$11.2 billion, with Morocco receiving \$7.4 billion. The Arab LDCs received \$2.5 billion, while the GCC was the subregion with the lowest inflow of remittances in 2020, receiving less than 2 per cent of all remittances to the region at around \$1 billion.

In 2019, remittance inflows exceeded the amount the region received in official development assistance and official aid by 1.8 times, totalling \$31.6 billion (table 4). Remittances were also 1.7

times the amount the region received in net foreign direct investments (FDI), constituting \$32.9 billion. Remittance inflows were a significant source of income in some countries: they represented 14 per cent of GDP in the Comoros and in Lebanon, 10 per cent in Jordan, and 9 per cent in Egypt. Remittances also exceeded 24 times the amount of FDI received by the State of Palestine, 21 times the FDI received

by the Comoros, and five times the FDI received by Jordan.

In 2018, approximately \$30 billion in remittance inflows to the Arab region came from other Arab countries, representing 52 per cent of the region's remittance inflows, mostly from Saudi Arabia (\$11.4 billion), the United Arab Emirates (\$9 billion)

**Table 4. GDP, official development assistance, foreign direct investment and remittance inflows by country, 2019**

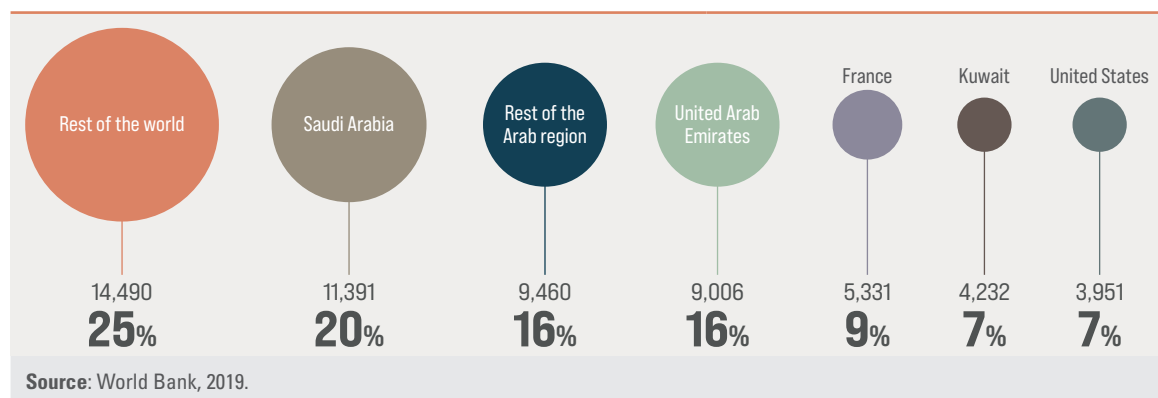
2019	GDP (current dollars, millions)	Net official development assistance and official aid received (current dollars, millions)	Foreign direct investment, net inflows (BoP, current dollars, millions)	Remittance inflows (current dollars, millions)	Remittance inflows as a percentage of GDP	Remittance inflows as a percentage of official development assistance	Remittance inflows as a percentage of foreign direct investment
Algeria	171,091	176	1,382	1,786	1.0%	1016.3%	129.2%
Bahrain	38,574	-	942	-			
Comoros	1,166	78	8	169	14.5%	215.6%	2146.2%
Djibouti	3,325	272	182	79	2.4%	29.2%	43.7%
Egypt	303,092	1,741	9,010	26,781	8.8%	1538.6%	297.2%
Iraq	234,094	2,212	-3,076	859	0.4%	38.8%	
Jordan	44,503	2,797	825	4,389	9.9%	156.9%	531.7%
Kuwait	134,629	-	675	26	0.0%		3.8%
Lebanon	51,992	1,525	2,223	7,410	14.3%	485.7%	333.3%
Libya	52,091	316	-	-			
Mauritania	7,601	412	-884	64	0.8%	15.6%	
Morocco	119,700	758	1,600	6,963	5.8%	918.7%	435.2%
Oman	76,332	-	3,420	39	0.1%		1.1%
Qatar	175,838	-	-2,813	577	0.3%		
Saudi Arabia	792,967	-	4,563	334	0.0%		7.3%
Somalia	-	1,866	447	1,577		84.5%	352.8%
State of Palestine	-	2,234	122	2,861		128.0%	2352.1%
Sudan	30,513	1,625	-	522	1.7%	32.1%	
Syrian Arab Republic	-	10,250	-				
Tunisia	38,797	984	810	2,050	5.3%	208.3%	253.0%
United Arab Emirates	421,142	-	13,787	-			
Yemen	22,581	4,397	-371	-			
<b>Total Arab region</b>	<b>2,720,027</b>	<b>31,643</b>	<b>32,853</b>	<b>56,486</b>	<b>2.1%</b>	<b>178.5%</b>	<b>171.9%</b>

Source: World Bank, 2021a, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e.

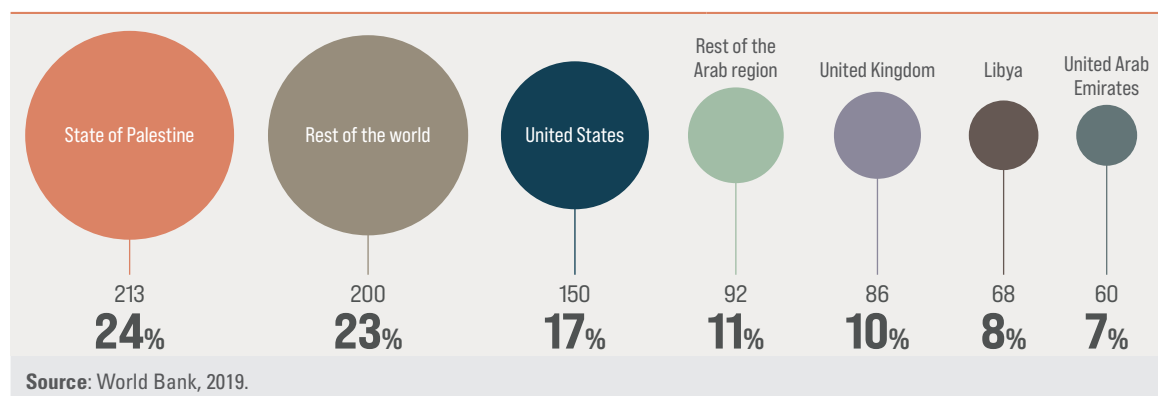
and Kuwait (\$4.2 billion) (figure 74). A further 25 per cent (over \$14.4 billion) came from Europe, notably from France (\$5.3 billion), Italy (\$2.1 billion),

Spain (\$1.9 billion), and Germany (\$1.5 billion). An additional \$5.6 billion, 10 per cent of the region's inflow of remittances, came from North America.

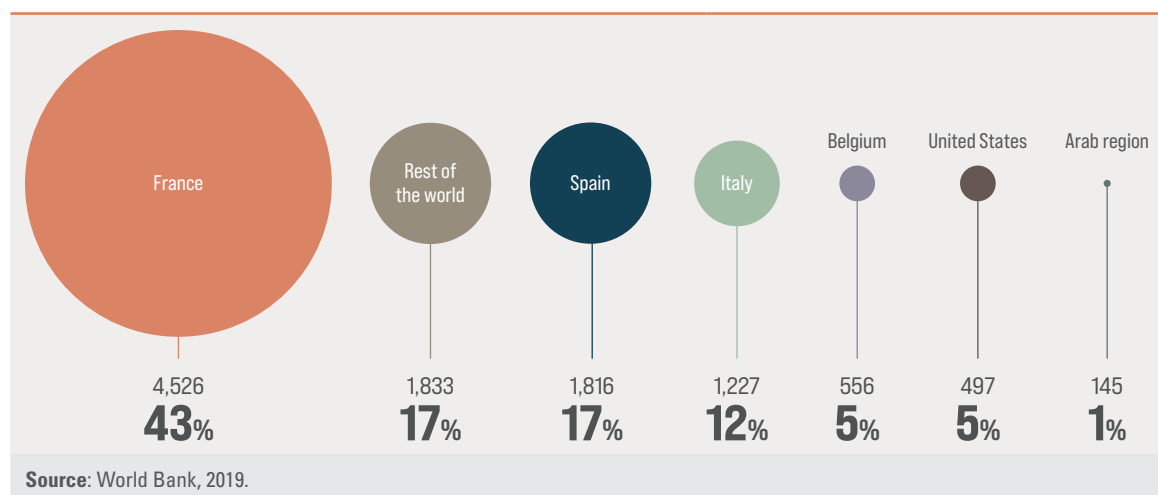
**Figure 74.** Top five remittance-sending countries to the Arab region, 2018 (Millions of dollars)



**Figure 75.** Top five remittance-sending countries to GCC countries, 2018 (Millions of dollars)



**Figure 76.** Top five remittance-sending countries to the Maghreb, 2018 (Millions of dollars)

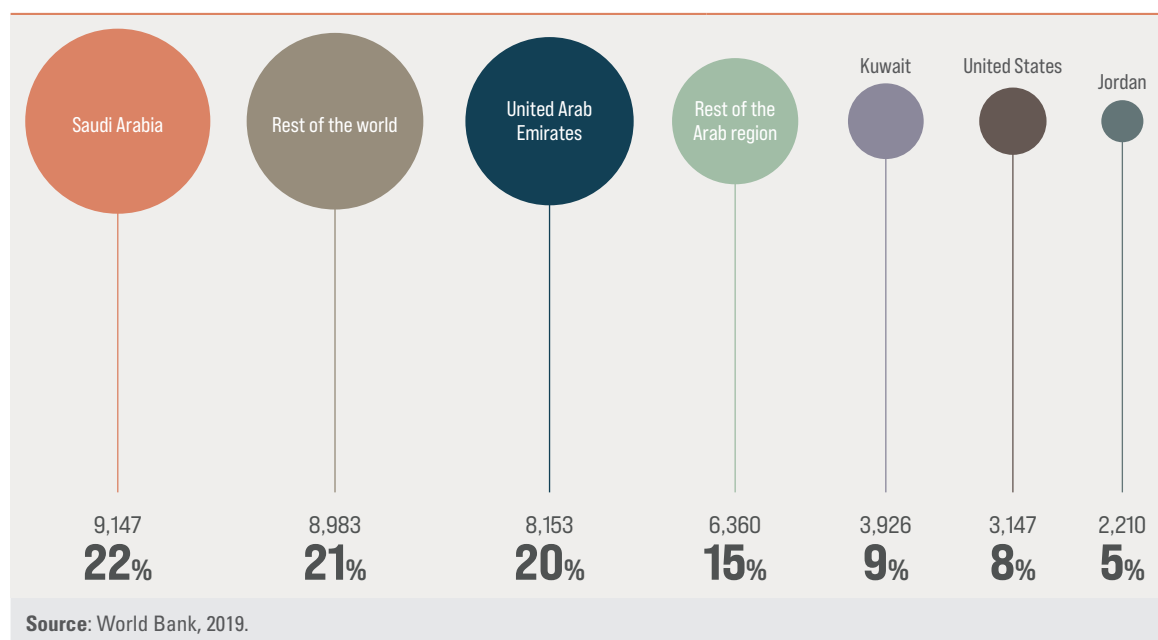


A subregional breakdown of remittances sent to the Arab region is provided in figures 75 to 78.

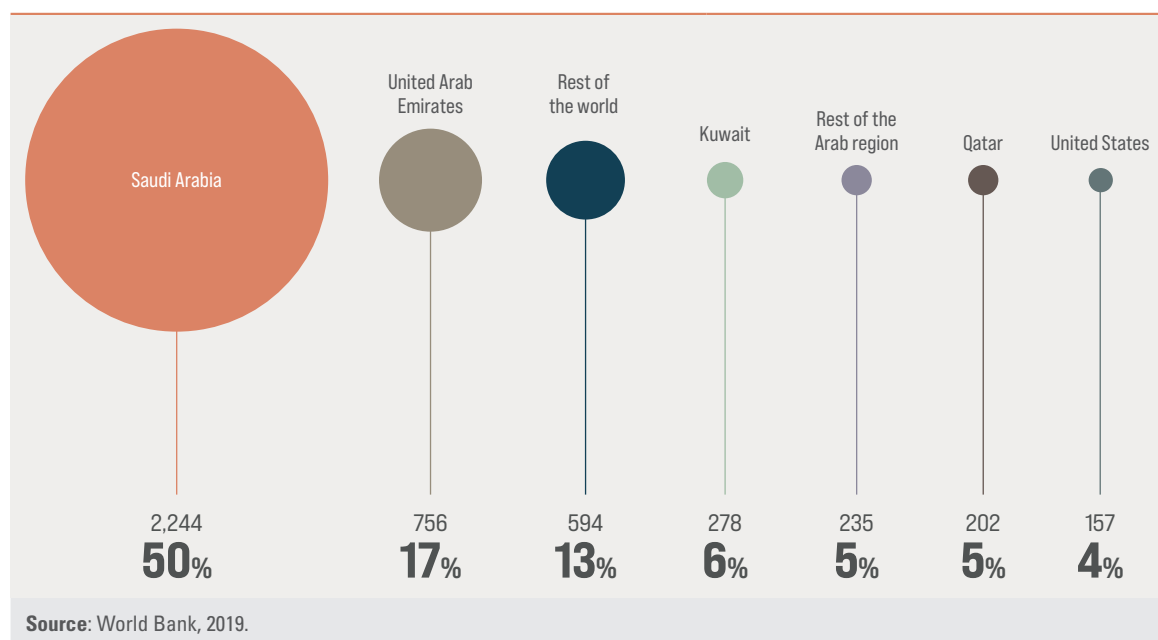
Close to a quarter (24 per cent) of global remittance outflows in 2019 came from the Arab region,

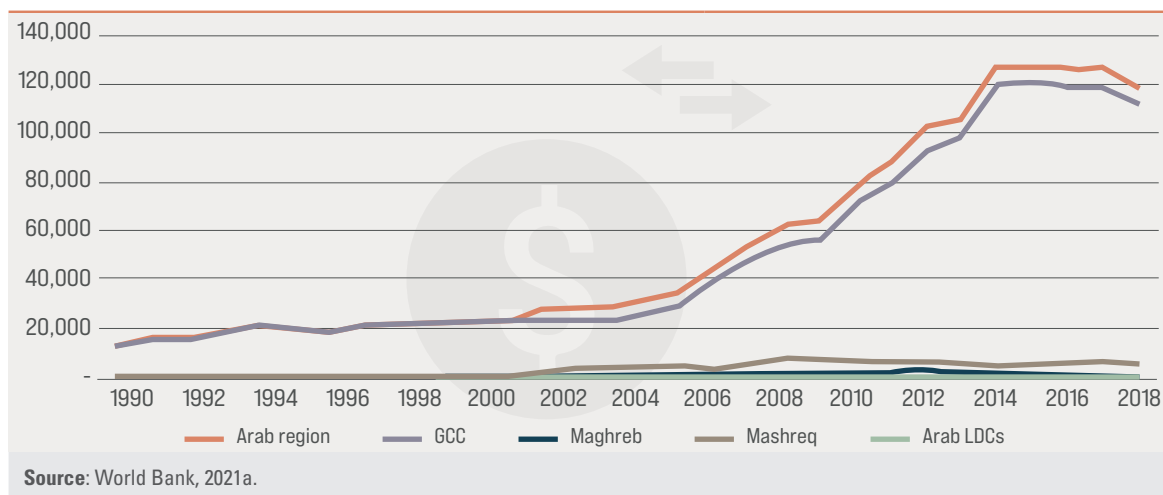
estimated at \$119 billion (figure 79), almost all (95 per cent or \$113 billion) from GCC countries. The Mashreq was the origin of \$6.1 billion in remittances, the Maghreb of \$244 million, and the Arab LDCs of \$154 million. Top remittance-sending countries

**Figure 77.** Top five remittance-sending countries to the Mashreq, 2018 (Millions of dollars)



**Figure 78.** Top five remittance-sending countries to the Arab LDCs, 2018 (Millions of dollars)



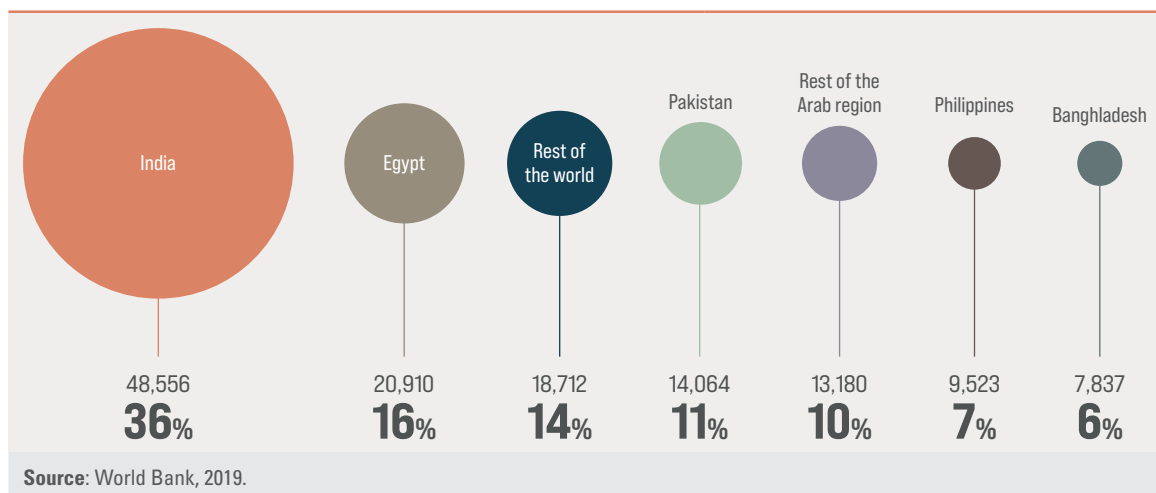
**Figure 79.** Remittance outflows from Arab countries by subregion, 1990-2019 (Millions of dollars)

from the region were the United Arab Emirates at \$45 billion; Saudi Arabia at \$31.2 billion; and Kuwait, Oman and Qatar ranging between approximately \$9 billion and \$15 billion each. As a result of considerably higher remittance outflows compared with remittance inflows to Arab countries, the net annual outflow of remittances from the region totalled \$62.5 billion in 2019.

In 2018, non-Arab Asian countries received 72 per cent, or \$95.6 billion, of all remittances sent from Arab countries. Arab countries' share of remittances originating from the region

was 26 per cent, with Egypt receiving more remittances sent from Arab countries than all other countries in the region combined. Europe and non-Arab African countries both received around 1 per cent of all remittances sent from Arab countries.

India received the largest amount of remittances from the Arab region, estimated at \$48.6 billion in 2018, followed by Egypt at \$20.9 billion, Pakistan at \$14.1 billion, the Philippines at \$9.5 billion, and Bangladesh at \$7.8 billion (figure 80).

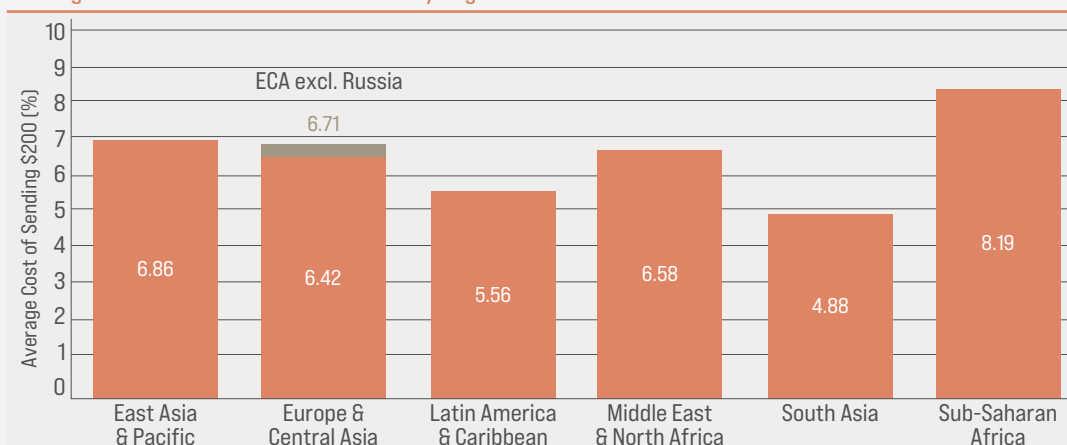
**Figure 80.** Top five countries receiving remittances from Arab countries, 2018 (Millions of dollars)

### Box 4. Reducing the cost of remittances to the MENA region

At the end of 2020, sending remittances to the MENA region cost 6.58 per cent, slightly higher than the global average of 6.51 per cent,<sup>a</sup> but still far from the SDG 10.c target of by 2030 reducing to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent.

This has a large impact on receiving families in the region, as each percentage point in transaction costs deprives them of about \$548 million per year. Remittances represent an average of 60 per cent of recipients' family income (for both urban and rural families), and more than double their disposable income.<sup>b</sup>

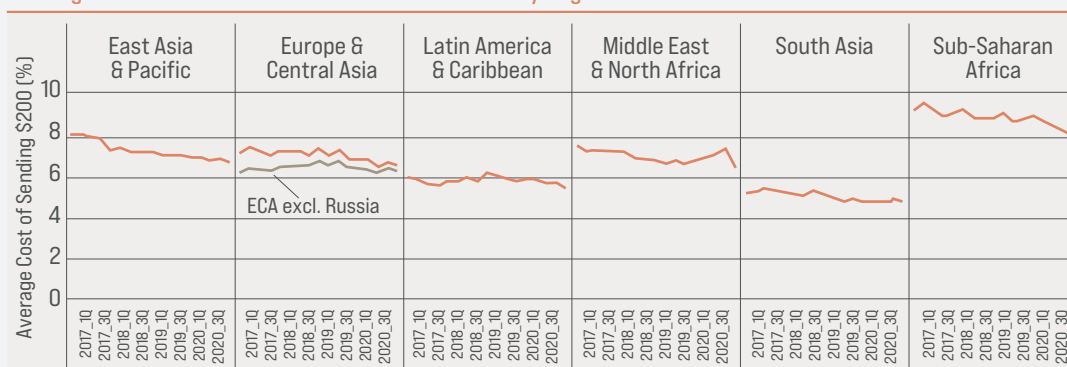
#### Average costs of remittance services by region



Source: World Bank, 2020.

In 2020, the MENA region experienced an initial increase in the cost of receiving remittances, but then witnessed the largest decrease in the last quarter of 2020 compared with other regions worldwide, namely from 7.51 to 6.58 per cent.<sup>c</sup>

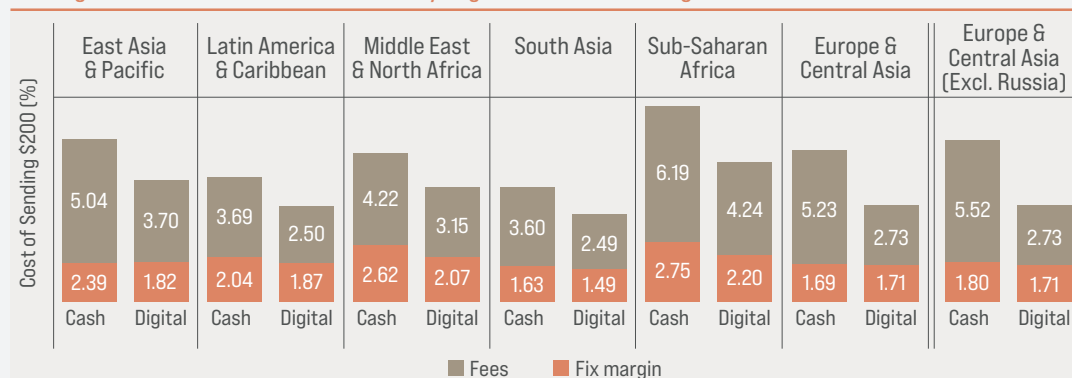
#### Average costs of remittance services over time by region



Source: World Bank, 2020.

In the MENA region, as is the case worldwide, the costs of non-digital remittance services (6.84 per cent) are higher than those of digital services (5.22 per cent).<sup>d</sup>

### Average costs of remittance services by region: cash versus digital



Source: World Bank, 2020.

The factors driving the high costs of transfers in some corridors include inconsistent data formats (fragmented and truncated) for cross-border payments (mainly relevant to banking processes), complex processing of compliance checks related to anti-money laundering and combating terrorism financing, limited operating hours, legacy technology platforms, long transaction chains, high funding costs, and weak competition.

Source: IFAD, 2017.

**Note:** In box 4, the MENA region is understood to comprise Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the State of Palestine, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

<sup>a</sup> World Bank, 2020.

<sup>b</sup> IFAD, 2017.

<sup>c</sup> World Bank, 2020.

<sup>d</sup> Ibid.

## G. Summary of key findings

**Migration and forced displacement in the Arab region continue to be characterised by a high degree of complexity**, which was further intensified by the impact of the pandemic and the economic crisis witnessed in countries across the region. While it remains to be seen how deeply migration and forced displacement are going to be affected by the COVID-19 crisis, the Arab region remains a major arena of migration and refugee movements.

**In 2020, an estimated 41.4 million international migrants and refugees were residing in Arab countries**, constituting 15 percent of all migrants and refugees globally. Around 33 per cent of migrants and refugees in the region

were women, with considerable subregional variation owing to the various patterns of migration and forced displacement across subregions. Women made up almost half of the migrant and refugee population in the Mashreq and in the Arab LDCs, compared with 35 per cent in the Maghreb and only 28 per cent in the GCC subregion.

**The GCC subregion, in particular, continues to be a labour migration hub, which hosted 74 per cent of the total migrant and refugee population in the Arab region**, or 30.8 million persons, in 2020. It attracted mostly migrant workers, who constitute a significant proportion of the total workforce. However,

the pandemic coupled with the collapse in oil prices have caused unprecedented disruption to the economies of GCC countries, and exacerbated the risk of migrant workers ending up in an irregular situation owing to job loss, as well as the risk of immigration detention and forced return.

**Migration and forced displacement is a less prominent feature in the Maghreb**, as the subregion is not a destination for a high number of migrant workers or refugees. However, there is a significant trend of transit migration through the subregion, which is more difficult to document in terms of its volume owing to its often irregular nature. Migratory movement from Maghreb countries follows historical patterns and is heavily oriented towards Europe.

**In the Mashreq, forced displacement is a major driver of population movements**, although there are also high numbers of migrant workers in Jordan and Lebanon. Both countries are also hosting large numbers of refugees, and have the highest proportions of refugees as a percentage of the total population worldwide. The subregion also accounts for a large majority (81 per cent) of refugees originating from Arab countries, most of them from the Syrian Arab Republic.

**The Arab LDCs are marked by intricate migration and forced displacement patterns, and by considerable fluctuations over time.** Most migrants and refugees in the subregion are hosted by the Sudan, most of them refugees from neighbouring South Sudan. The Sudan, Somalia and to a lesser extent Yemen

are main countries of origin of migrants and refugees. Transit migration through the subregion is also a significant pattern.

**Forced displacement owing to violence and persecution continues to be a prominent feature of the Arab region.** Around 43 per cent of the global refugee population under the UNHCR mandate originated from Arab countries in 2020, representing close to 8.9 million people. Almost all came from the Mashreq (Iraq, the State of Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic) or from the Arab LDCs (Somalia and the Sudan). As much as 73 per cent of all refugees from Arab countries stayed in countries that were sharing a land border with their countries of origin. Moreover, there were 5.7 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA and 17.1 million conflict-induced internally displaced persons in the Arab region, accounting for 36 per cent of all IDPs displaced by conflict globally.

**The Arab region remains a remittance hub**, despite the dual shock of the pandemic and falling oil prices, which have had notable consequences for remittance outflows from GCC countries, as well as considerable global implications.

**Chapter 1 of the present report focused on key trends, patterns and drivers of migration and forced displacement in the Arab region.** The following chapter provides an overview of recent policy developments in the area of migration governance in Arab countries at the national, bilateral, regional and global levels.