

Egyptian migrant workers in Jordan

WORKING PAPER



AUTHORS

Duaa Ajarmeh, Head of Research (IRCKHF Jordan);
Rawan Rbihat, Senior Researcher (IRCKHF Jordan);
Dalia Haddad, Research Analyst (IRCKHF Jordan);
Maysara Damagh, Researcher (IRCKHF Jordan)

Contents

AUTHORS	1
BOXES	4
TABLES	4
FIGURES	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
FACTORS BEHIND MIGRATION	5
MIGRATION AND ITS IMPACTS ON FAMILIES	5
MIGRANT WORKERS, WORKING CONDITIONS AND RIGHTS	6
INTRODUCTION	7
EGYPTIAN MIGRANTS IN JORDAN: AN OVERVIEW	8
LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR EGYPTIAN MIGRANTS IN JORDAN	10
SECTORS OF WORK	12
FACTORS THAT IMPACT THE DECISION TO MIGRATE	12
THE ROLES OF INTERMEDIARIES	14
FORMS OF INTERMEDIARIES	15
THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION TO JORDAN ON FAMILY STRUCTURES	19
FAMILY ROLES DURING THE STAY IN JORDAN	20
IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON CHILDREN	21
WORK CONDITIONS	23
WAGE MANAGEMENT MECHANISM	27
ENTITLEMENT TO VACATION TO EGYPT	28
SOCIAL LIFE AND EXPERIENCES OF INEQUALITY AMONG EGYPTIAN WORKERS IN JORDAN	30

THE RIGHTS OF EGYPTIAN MIGRANT WORKERS	31
THE IMPACT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES ON EGYPTIAN WORKERS	33
THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EGYPTIAN MIGRANT WORKERS	34
CONCLUSION	34
REFERENCES	38

Boxes, tables and figures

BOXES

Box 1. Intermediaries	14
Box 2. Challenges for migrant workers.....	20
Box 3. Social security contributions.....	25

TABLES

Tab 1. Social security	27
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FIGURES

Fig 1. Industries where respondents work.....	7
Fig 2. Timeline of legal agreements on Egyptian migrants.....	11

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper on migrant Egyptian workers in Jordan provides an overview of the current economic environment, historical pattern, and legal framework of Egyptian workers' migration to Jordan. Based on both primary and secondary research, the paper explores the major factors behind Egyptian workers' migration, the issues and difficulties that Egyptian migrant workers have faced during their work, their relationships with their families, and their social lives in Jordan. This paper aims to give readers a clear idea of what Egyptian migrant workers experience in Jordan before and after COVID-19 in their work, their families, and societies. It provides a baseline for policymakers and other organisations working on the same issue.

FACTORS BEHIND MIGRATION

Egyptian migrant workers are pulled by more economic opportunities and better living standards in Jordan, while at the same time pushed by the poor economic and social conditions in their home country. Customs, traditions as well as social respect also play into the motivation for migration. For female migrants, marriage and chances for a new life plays another important role.

Most Egyptian migrant workers rely on various forms and often multiple levels of intermediaries to gain a work permit and a work contract in Jordan. Illegally, they are required to pay commission fees to intermediaries that can reach 4,300 USD. Intermediaries include migrant workers' relatives and friends, as well as those in close relationships with the employers and companies themselves. The former often put migrant workers into contact with the latter form of intermediaries. This research found that illegal contract trading and the number of various intermediaries add to the costs of migration and increase migrant workers' suffering. Migrant workers are placed in a vulnerable condition because of their lack of knowledge about the situation in Jordan.

MIGRATION AND ITS IMPACTS ON FAMILIES

This research found that male migrant workers and their wives (either in Egypt or in Jordan) perform different family roles. Male workers take the financial responsibility whilst their wives play a more domestic role. However, noticeably, female migrant workers sometimes need to perform both roles, the domestic and the financial. Migration affects the children of migrant workers both negatively and positively. Children's living standards and education opportunities can be improved by parental migration. However, they might suffer detriments through missing their parents as they grow up.

MIGRANT WORKERS, WORKING CONDITIONS AND RIGHTS

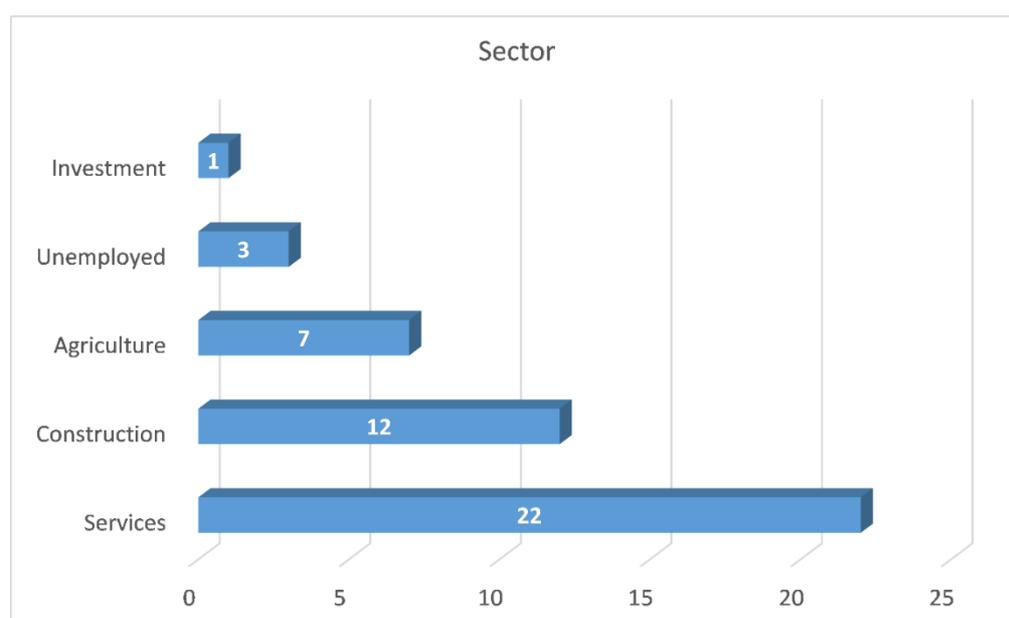
The majority of Egyptian migrant workers are employed in agriculture since a work permit is affordable and easy to get. However, Egyptian migrants prefer to work in the construction or service industries, where they may make more money, despite the fact that they only possess a work permit for the agriculture industry. This research found that the working conditions for Egyptian migrant labourers are often deplorable. In part, this is because Egyptian workers are viewed by employers in Jordan as more tolerant of difficult labour conditions and willing to accept lower wages.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the economic context, historical pattern, and legal framework of the migration of Egyptian workers to Jordan. The paper employed primary and secondary research techniques for a period of one year. A comprehensive desk review of existing migration literature pertinent to the Jordanian context was conducted to understand the current situation, any recent development involving Egyptian migrants in Jordan and to identify any gaps in the literature. The primary investigation was conducted utilizing qualitative research methods, specifically; the study utilized in-depth interviews (IDIs) and interviews with key informants (KIs). This research did not employ focus group discussions (FGDs) because, when legal status is an issue, participants fear sanctions and will not speak freely if others are present.

45 IDIs with Egyptian migrant workers, 30 men and 15 females, were conducted, eight of whom were married to Jordanians. The majority of respondents were married, with only three male respondents single. The study sample was split by age and gender, with 42% of respondents between the ages of 30 and 39. Only 5% of responders were between the ages of 60 and 69. Regarding the sample's educational level, 41% of the interviewees were illiterate. The graph below (Figure 1) illustrates the industries in which respondents are employed. 22 of the total 45 respondents were working in the service industry, namely as cleaners. In addition, 10 KIs were carried out targeting relevant government officials (e.g., Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Interior), local NGOs (e.g., Tamkeen for Legal Aid and Human Rights, Phenix Center for Economic Studies, and Justice Center for Legal Aid), and the International Labour Organisation,

FIG 1. INDUSTRIES WHERE RESPONDENTS WORK



EGYPTIAN MIGRANTS IN JORDAN: AN OVERVIEW

Migration has long played a significant role in the political, economic, and social spheres in Egypt. Egyptian labour migration to countries in the Arab Middle East started in the mid-1970s when emigration was encouraged by the authorities (Zohary, 2020). One essential consideration for encouraging migration was the need to find external outlets for the growing Egyptian labour force because the domestic labour market was not deemed capable of absorbing the Egyptian supply of labour. Jordan hosts the largest number of Egyptian labour migrants second only to Saudi Arabia.

Egyptians have a 40-year history of working in Jordan, mainly in the service, agriculture, and construction industries. According to an interview with an official of the Ministry of Interior, the number of Egyptians in Jordan is estimated at 420,000 workers, making up the largest proportion of expatriate workers. However, the Ministry of Labour reports that the total number of Egyptian workers who are not officially documented or counted in Jordan is much higher (Al Ntour, 2018). Thus, some estimates put the number of Egyptians in Jordan at 520,000, with around 320,000 without work permits in the service, agriculture, and construction industries (Hartnett, 2019).

The main reason for the large inflow of labour migrants is the fact that Jordan has more attractive employment and income opportunities than some of its neighbours. The limited availability of jobs and poor living conditions in Egypt along with higher incomes abroad, push Egyptians to seek employment elsewhere, even if that employment is not related to their education or specialization. Following the Arab Spring, the number of Egyptian migrants to Jordan with a higher education degree has significantly increased, however, migrants who have less education and work experience, continue to dominate the makeup of Egyptian migrants in Jordan (Abdelfattah, 2019).

As for the gender composition of Egyptians in Jordan, 82% of Egyptians are males while only 18 percent are females. Most of the Egyptian migrants in Jordan are semi-skilled young males who usually migrate individually. Only 3% of Egyptians migrate with their families and most Egyptians plan to return to their country (CMRS-AUS, 2020). During our research, a key person at the Ministry of Interior indicated that currently Egyptian women are not permitted to enter Jordan without their husbands and can only enter after satisfying stringent requirements. Primarily, the husband should be registered with the Social Security Corporation to prove that he has a stable job, have a monthly income of more than 714 USD, or enjoy investor status. Thus, most Egyptian women who do go to Jordan do so with their husbands rather than coming alone.

This research found that farmers in Jordan prefer to hire Egyptians due to their willingness to perform physically demanding duties and work very long hours, as well as the fact that they can be paid late. Few Jordanians engage in this industry. In all sectors of employment, 13 working hours per day are common, with Egyptians appearing to be one of the most overworked groups in Jordan (Tamkeen, 2014). The average workload adds up to 6.26 days per week and 9.49 hours per day (Abdelfattah, 2019).



Farms in Jordan Valley. Photo taken by IRCKHF research team.

Most migrant Egyptians live in poor conditions, with urban and peri-urban workers sharing small, crowded apartments, and agricultural workers living in concrete huts on the fields (Al-Natour, 2018). The work is physically taxing, to the extent that some Egyptians who came to Jordan on work permits for agricultural employment “escape” to other sectors, like services or construction where the working conditions are perceived to be better. Most Egyptian construction workers enter the Jordanian sector with no prior experience or vocational training advantage over Jordanians (ILO, 2017). However, as they are migrant workers who come, often alone, primarily to work and earn money, they are willing to accept lower working conditions than Jordanians who strive for a long-term perspective, a career and work-life balance (Adli, 2019).

According to migrant workers interviewed, they face significant challenges. The sponsorship system (Kafala) defines the relationship between foreign workers and their local sponsor who is also the employer known as the Kafeel. Among these disadvantages are the confiscation of their passports by their employer, low salaries (approximately 437 USD), salary retention, and the inability to change employers. Based on this system, migrant workers require permission from their sponsor to switch jobs, terminate employment, and enter and exit the host country. Various studies and papers have also documented these violations (Tamkeen, 2012, LPMAS, 2016 and Abdelfattah, 2019).

Prior to the Syrian civil war, Egyptians were the single largest migrant labour community in Jordan. Labour market pressures and changes to the Jordanian work permit system have resulted in the increasing vulnerability of Egyptian labour (Hartnett, 2019). Recently, the Government of Jordan also increased efforts to restrict the inflow of labour and deport Egyptians who violate the terms of their work permits, such as by working for a different employer or in a different industry than listed on the work permit. Although Jordanian officials have not provided explicit explanations for their actions, it is possible that they are related to the Jordan Compact, an effort supported by the international community to increase refugee

access to the labour market as part of a new response to protracted displacement centred on inclusive growth for refugees and the host country. As part of the Compact agreement, the international community committed to provide Jordan with concessional trade and financing on the condition that Jordan formalize employment for 200,000 Syrian refugees. This has meant that the Jordanian government has prioritised placing Syrian refugees into employment (Gerasimos, 2022).

Egyptian workers prefer to work in sectors that do not require academic qualifications or extensive experience. However, preferences are restricted by the sectors permitted for the Egyptian workers to work in as determined by the Ministry of Labour. For instance, Jordan has ceased to issue work permits to Egyptians to work in some sectors such as construction but has continued to issue agricultural permits. Additionally, while some Egyptian workers prefer to work for a company or a restaurant for the purpose of stability and fixed income, others prefer to work in a sector in which they can receive higher income even if this is more precarious. Furthermore, construction workers may prefer construction sector as they have experience in this sector. Though the agricultural work is difficult, it remains the easiest for Egyptian workers to access in terms of availability of permits and requirement of little experience. The agricultural permits are also the least costly.

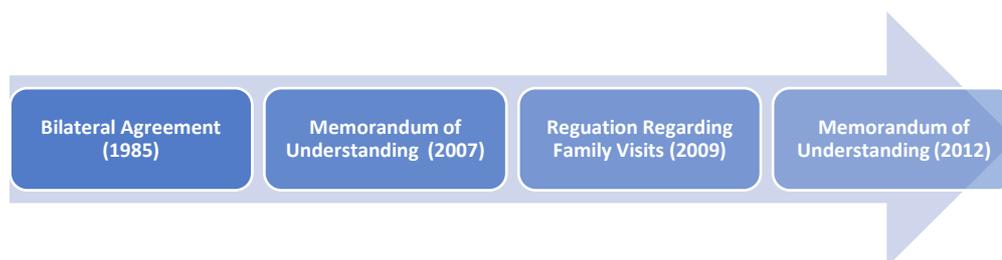
Some workers reported that work sector preferences might be related to the region of Egypt where individuals originate.

“People from Upper Egypt prefer to perform the hard work, while people from Mansoura and Menoufia prefer to work in bakeries and dessert shops”. (A construction worker who has been in Jordan for 22 years).

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR EGYPTIAN MIGRANTS IN JORDAN

Article 12 of the Labour Law stipulates that non-Jordanian workers may only be employed with the permission of the Minister of Labour if the work they perform needs expertise and abilities that are unavailable or insufficient in the Jordanian workforce. According to the Minister's Directives, Egyptians are only permitted to work in specific sectors such as the agricultural, construction, and services sector. This is further defined and structured by the bilateral agreement between Egypt and Jordan in the field of labour, workforce, and migration (see Figure 2). This agreement, signed in 1985, is mainly between the Egyptian Ministry of Manpower (MoM) and the Jordanian Ministry of Labour (MoL). A subsequent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2007 was adopted to regulate the entry of Egyptian labourers to Jordan according to the demands of the local labour market (Turner & Lenner, 2019).

FIG 2. TIMELINE OF LEGAL AGREEMENTS ON EGYPTIAN MIGRANTS



In 2006, an additional MoU ensured further cooperation regarding the access of Egyptian migrant workers to social security in Jordan. This was succeeded in 2009 with a set of regulations put in place by the two governments regarding family reunification and visits to Jordan. The last MoU between the two governments was signed in 2012. This set out provisions to facilitate the return home of Egyptian workers when their contract expires and there are no objections from the employer, as well as to allow the entrance of Egyptian workers through airports in Jordan using the same procedures as Nuweiba Port. The MoU also recommends to the Jordanian Council of Ministers that Egyptian workers benefit from the Minimum Wage Directive and that Egyptian workers be given 60 days to regularize their status if they violate their work permit.

This research found that the absorption of Egyptian workers by the Jordanian labour market significantly lessens the burden on the Egyptian economy and therefore is a source of political leverage for Jordan. The political ties between Jordan and Egypt are positive, and Jordan has never resorted to the mass termination and expulsion of Egyptian workers. It should be noted that in the past, certain Gulf countries resorted to this strategy by terminating the contracts of migrant workers of a particular nationality owing to political disagreements. During the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991, Jordanians and Palestinians were deported from Kuwait and other Gulf countries due to the political stance of the Jordanian government.

Foreign residents (including Egyptians) in Jordan are bound to their employer by the Kafala (sponsorship) system. Some nationalities can enter the country without a visa, such as Egyptian nationals, but a valid work permit (renewable every year), is mandatory for all migrant workers, with the exception of children of Jordanian women married to non-Jordanians. The Minister of Labour published Instructions on the Employment and Recruitment of Non-Jordanian Workers in 2012. The guidelines describe how migrant workers can be brought into Jordan, as well as the documentation and funds that must be deposited by the grantee/employer to ensure compliance with the law. There is also a focus on the requirement that non-Jordanian workers obtain consent from their current employer in order to work for a different employer. Additionally, domestic, agricultural, and industrial zone workers are not permitted to switch sectors.

SECTORS OF WORK

As noted above, Egyptian migrant workers usually work in agriculture, construction, and services. However, they cannot alternate between the sectors freely as the permits are issued for a specific sector. They can only change the job after one year or six months, depending on the accounts, and with consent from the first employer. This, in effect, creates an unwritten sponsorship system. Egyptian workers can become illegal workers if they work for someone other than the specific employer, if they do not have a work permit and if they work in a place (governorate) that is not stated in their work permits. Moreover, the employer's consent is required for workers to take a leave day. Although solutions such as a non-employer-specific permit exist, they are too expensive to obtain. The fees for a non-employer-specific permit are approximately 1,700 USD, but the fees for other work permits range from 500 USD to 700 USD. In other words, restrictive work permits are far easier to access.

FACTORS THAT IMPACT THE DECISION TO MIGRATE

One of the most important reasons impacting the decision to migrate is the difficult economic situation in Egypt. Most workers plan on earning money and then returning home.

“It is all about the money. For me, my country is the best place for me to be, but I am forced to emigrate because I have children and want to change my life, but I cannot find the chance to do that in Egypt. So, I am forced to search for a means to... you know, the normal reasons everyone is aware of.” (A construction worker, in Jordan for 20 years)

The majority of male workers included in this study came to Jordan to improve their own and their families' living standards. Most of the migrants told stories about poor economic conditions. Many migrants reported similar stories such as this one:

“The economic conditions are poor in Egypt. I could not secure my daily expenses. I wanted to improve my living standards and build my own house. I did not like to migrate because of my family and children. If I ask my cousin to lend me 1,000 Egyptian Pounds (51 USD), he will shortly ask me to repay such an amount. As long as a person is strong, he must work hard to improve his living conditions, especially if he has little children.” (A cleaner worker in hospital, working in Jordan for 5 years)

Sometimes people migrate looking for security and stability in another country. One respondent said that he left his country to flee from the problems among his relatives.

“There were problems between my family members and my relatives. I decided to leave these problems behind me and migrate to Jordan.” (A cleaner with services company, working in Jordan for 15 years)

Some migrants reported that the reason for their migration was the customs and traditions. Migration for work has become part of the culture of the local community living in Upper and some suburbs of Egypt in particular.

“It is a tradition in Upper Egypt that most people migrate. Some people migrated to Kuwait and others migrated to KSA (Saudi Arabia). I migrated to Jordan, and many people will migrate in the future”. (An agriculture worker, for 20 years)

On a community level, the migrant is often perceived as well off by his family, which adds to the appeal of working abroad. It has been implied that the worker might wish to conceal some part of the truth regarding his usual workload and working conditions, which adds to the level of respect he enjoys at home. The workers are also not fully aware of the situation in Jordan before they choose to migrate. Migrants choose Jordan specifically, because of cultural similarities and shared language. Due to its proximity to Egypt, travel to Jordan utilizing the ferries is inexpensive. The leniency in the approach to the informal economy and value of the Jordanian dinar relative to the Egyptian pound is high. The latter, informal working, became stricter in recent years, however, it still allows migrants to work more than one job and thus, earn more money. Political and policy factors for migration were said to be rare, yet it is worth mentioning that it is precisely because of political/policy factors that the Egyptians are free to enter Jordan without a visa, which ultimately facilitates the migration. Additionally, they are exempt from residency law, although they do need a work permit.

“If we want to talk about the Egyptian workers, the Egyptian worker has a special status as he has an unrestricted nationality meaning he can enter Jordan and stay without residency because there is reciprocity between Jordan and Egypt and he does not pay for the residence. But if he wants to work, he should have a work permit.” (Key Person at an NGO that provides legal aid).

Female migrants included in this study provided different reasons for their migration. The main reason was the marriage to Jordanian men or Egyptian migrants working in Jordan. Most of the women stated that they came to Jordan to start a new and stable life. Some female respondents stated that they migrated with their

husbands to reduce the cost incurred by their husbands. One woman migrated to Jordan because she was mistreated by her stepmother and decided to leave Egypt. She believed that marriage was the only solution for her to lead a different life.

THE ROLES OF INTERMEDIARIES

The majority of the Egyptian workers in Jordan paid a substantial amount of money ranging up to 4,300 USD to come to Jordan. This is called the “contract price” and although this process is nowhere to be found in the law, it is in fact a part of a widespread and illegal phenomenon of work permit trade that leaves the migrant workers in a precarious position. The process involves two key individuals: the Jordanian, who can issue work permits through the Ministry of Labour, and the Egyptian, who provides the Jordanian employer with the names of Egyptians who seek to work in Jordan. The Egyptian migrant worker may enter Jordan once the work permit is issued. Other parties may be involved between the two primary parties; some may receive a portion of the commission while others do not because they are merely performing a favour for a friend or relative.

BOX 1. INTERMEDIARIES

Intermediaries do not follow a certain mechanism. An intermediary for one worker is often a person from a network of social relations and brokers. It can be called “a chain of intermediaries”. The more the number of actors involved, the higher the price of the contract is. In other cases, the direct intermediary does not benefit (who is usually a family member) from this process, but rather he helps a worker to secure the required amount.

The trade is carried out through intermediaries or brokers, known as *simsar* in Arabic. The intermediary is a link between the employer and the worker. Usually, an employer will contact the intermediary and sell the contracts to him. The intermediary recruits the workers. It creates a problem where a worker arrives but is not actually employed by his declared employer on the work permit. The worker ends up on his own looking for a different job, which is against the law. The worker typically pays between 3,500 USD and 4,300 USD to the intermediary, however the actual expenses range from 500 USD to 700 USD depending on the sector.

Many workers coming directly from Egypt lack awareness about the work permit process. They are led to believe that they are being issued a permit open to all sectors and are free to work wherever they wish to, when in fact the sector change invalidates their permit and constitutes grounds for deportation.

"Recently workers started to sell their wife's gold, even if, for example, if he has cattle or livestock, he will sell them in order to come here because he

cannot afford it otherwise, he has to sell everything. There are so many expenses, and they weigh heavily on him. Children grow up, and the expenses increase, and he is unable to work there. He is not able to catch up with them. He has to go that way. It is very difficult, and the conditions are hard, but he has to." (Egyptian migrant worker in Amman, service industry).

Furthermore, after having paid for the work permit, Egyptian migrant workers are likely to be indebted and forced to stay in Jordan to make up for that loss. This form of exploitation can be considered as a form of human trafficking.

"This forces Egyptian workers to borrow money, pawn their lands, etc. In order to come to Jordan. There should be stricter control because the working conditions for migrant workers might be similar to human trafficking." (Key person in the National Centre for Human Rights).

The process is complicated but often the relationship between the work permit broker (Jordanian employer) and the work ends when the broker receives the permit and contract issuance costs. Workers often have a verbal agreement to reach the broker if they face any issues. Alternatively, the brokers are known to abandon the recruited workers upon their entry to Jordan. The relationship can continue when the work permit expires; however, when this occurs, the brokers charge twice as much to renew the work permit. In the majority of cases, the broker grants the worker authorization to work for a new Jordanian employer, and the relationship then terminates permanently.

FORMS OF INTERMEDIARIES

The majority of responders, with the exception of five, entered Jordan via intermediaries. However, three of workers formally came to Jordan through the relevant companies, where all of them worked for support service companies that provide cleaning services to major hospitals in Amman. It should be noted that these companies are well established, and when they issue work permits, they do it because they require these people and not to sell contracts and work permits. According to the interviews with the Egyptian workers, intermediaries have various forms in the labour market in Jordan and can be divided based on employment type. Fifteen respondents reported that the intermediaries that helped them come to Jordan were members of relatives and acquaintances networks (such as fathers, siblings, or friends) who are sometimes called "contract dealers".

Nine respondents stated that the intermediaries were Jordanian and Egyptian brokers who sell contracts. Despite the lack of formal legislative framework, that governs the activities of employment of Egyptian migrant workers, two respondents reported that they made use of the travel offices that target workers and issue work contract for them in Egypt to help them come to Jordan. Travel offices played the

role of brokers and they sold work contracts to workers. While seventeen respondents reported that an intermediary is usually one of the relatives or friends, sometimes such a person is not the same person who communicates with Jordanian employers and looks for a sponsor. They often communicate with another person “the broker” who usually knows employers well and has direct contact with them.

The roles of intermediaries cannot be clearly defined, as it depends on the form of the intermediary, the nature of the relationship with him, and the degree of his desire to help. An intermediary from the network of relatives and acquaintances usually performs various activities before the employment of a worker. Such activities include securing work, preparing the contract, and helping a worker to secure the contract amount. After arrival, an intermediary's roles include receiving and guiding a worker, and sharing a house with him. This form of intermediary is typically a friend, relative, or part of the same family. Yet, if a broker and an intermediary are the same person, then his role is confined to preparing the contract and selling it to the person wishing to work, as their role ends at this stage after they have collected the contract price or part of it.

Most of the workers believed that the influence of intermediaries depends on their type. If the intermediary is one of a worker's relatives, i.e. within his close social network, he is likely to have a positive impact. This includes providing advice to the relevant worker to make a decision to come or not come to work in Jordan and to look for a job opportunity for him, help secure the amount of the contract as much as they can, as well as provide social support after a worker's arrival. Some workers felt that the degree of family or familiarity typically determined the commission to be paid, also known as the contract price. If a relevant worker is a relative of the intermediary, the intermediary receives a lower commission. Typically, these intermediaries are not the important players in the process; the Jordanian employer who issues the work permit receives the bulk of the commission.

Despite the fact that intermediaries currently play a major role in the employment process, the majority of respondents reported that the influence of intermediaries is primarily negative, as they exploit people's need for work and increase the contract price by up to twice as much through contract trading. While a small number of workers believed that the broker (contract dealer) deserves the additional amount paid for the service he provided, most of them believed that the broker exploited them and violated their rights because they need to work. Egyptian workers incur more financial burdens and might be forced to sell their wives' savings and their own property such as livestock and plots of land to be able to find a job opportunity in Jordan.

“Many people fall in this trap and face this problem, especially those who do not seek advice. A person in need borrows money to pay the expenses in

order to improve his economic status through migration.” (Worker in the construction sector).

Contract trading is arguably one of the most important problems faced by the Egyptian workers, where intermediaries play a key role in such trade. Though intermediaries receive a high commission, some of them defraud job seekers. Two interviewed workers were defrauded, when intermediaries, an Egyptian travel office and a Jordanian intermediary, promised to provide them with work contracts, but they disappeared and ceased to reply to workers' calls.

“A Jordanian guy defrauded me after I paid him 282 USD. I wanted him to bring a work contract for my friend. He kept promising me to bring it, but he did not. He did not return money to me and stopped answering my calls.” (Worker in services company, work in Jordan for 15 years).

Additionally, four respondents reported that they were shocked by the high cost of living and the lack of job opportunities, especially in the agricultural sector, given that they have sold their property and had to borrow some money from their acquaintances. Contract trading is frequently noted as a way in the agricultural sector to obtain agricultural work permits easily and at a lower cost compared to work permits for other sectors.

“I was forced to travel to achieve my desired goal. Recently, some people have sold their wives' gold jewellery and their livestock with the aim of coming to Jordan. The living conditions in Egypt are poor and a person cannot support his family. People seek migration in order to improve their economic status.” (A cleaner with services company, work in Jordan for 14 years).

An agricultural worker who worked in Jordan in the past and has returned to Jordan for 10 months stated that:

“Many young people came to Jordan and regretted it. Some young people spent 20-40 days in Jordan and then they left, though they had work contracts. Some of them paid 3,523 USD for the work permit but they did not find any job opportunities. They stayed unemployed for a long time, what could they do?”

The problem is that a worker wishing to come to Jordan is deluded by the intermediary, where a worker is convinced that he could compensate for the travel expenses and the contract price once he starts working in Jordan. Some respondents stated that they do not encourage people to come to Jordan due to the difficult economic circumstances and lack of real job opportunities. Brokers are negatively viewed as brokerage often involves trade and fraud. Some workers explained that they could not play such role as it involves deception and fraud in light

of the difficult economic circumstances. They believed that a person should not encourage workers to come to Jordan by telling lies about the reality, and they believed that this business is part of unacceptable trade.

Furthermore, the findings show that most of the Egyptian workers who spent more than 15-year-service in Jordan did not need an intermediary to facilitate work formalities and arrange their arrival process. They used to request assistance from one of their friends to find a house and organise their affairs in Jordan. Unfortunately, the situation changed in 2009, when the government established a policy requiring migrant workers to obtain a work permit and a work contract before entering Jordan. Only one worker came to Jordan through a travel agency. On the other hand, most of the workers who spent less than 10 years in Jordan depended on an intermediary to help them find a job opportunity and facilitate their arrival process.

“In the past, there were no intermediaries. A person could travel to Jordan, Iraq or any other country. The work permit was required but it was not costly; it cost was 14 USD. Sometimes an employer procured the work permit at his own expense. Matters used to go smoothly in the past.” (A retired restaurant worker, in Jordan for 41 years).

The experiences of workers in the sectors targeted in this study (agriculture, services, and construction) did not differ in terms of the workers' relationship with intermediaries and brokers. However, it should be noted that workers in the agricultural sector are expected to be more vulnerable to violations, as work permits are easily obtained in this sector. Yet, the findings of the interviews showed that the majority of workers in various sectors face the same problems with regard to intermediaries. This might be attributed to the fact that workers in other sectors work illegally as they have an agricultural permit but work in other sectors, especially the service sector.

The matter gets more complicated if the service companies where Egyptian migrant work, face legal problems related to the Ministry of Labour's regulations. In this case, such companies cannot procure work permits for their workers, as workers are forced to look for external sponsors. This involves paying additional amounts to brokers and fictitious sponsors. To make it more explicit, some workers in a support service company operating in a hospital in Amman reported that they had to look for an external sponsor, as the company did not procure work permits for them. This drove them to pay additional amounts to the intermediary and sponsor.

“If the company fails to procure a work permit for a worker, a worker is forced to go to the dealers. You can do nothing without the work permit...the dealer charges a worker 1,400 USD for the permit. At the same time, a worker is still illegal.” (An office boy in a service company, in Jordan for 11 years).

None of the 15 interviewed Egyptian women dealt with intermediaries. This is because Egyptian women do not come alone to Jordan: as noted above, they are often married to a Jordanian or come with their Egyptian husbands who work in Jordan. The female respondents reported that their husbands hardly talk about the work details. However, some of them reported basic knowledge about the role of intermediaries and the additional amounts paid by a worker to procure a work permit. It should be noted that the high prices of permits and work contracts are not attributed to the intermediaries exclusively. Usually, a sponsor or employer is the one who raises the price and requests greater amounts of money than the officially announced sums, which may amount to three times the stipulated charge and reach up to 4,300 USD. This point will be discussed in detail in the working conditions section.

THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION TO JORDAN ON FAMILY STRUCTURES

The data collected during the key informant interviews provides diverse accounts of the family situation of Egyptian migrant workers. On the one hand, it seems that Egyptian migrants can bring their families to Jordan provided that their wages reach a certain amount and they have a subscription with the Social Security Corporation which is the only entity in Jordan that provides social protection through contributions by employees and employers. However, even if these conditions are fulfilled, approval to bring the family is not guaranteed. Moreover, workers cannot extend their residency to their families. Families require an approval to enter Jordan from the Ministry of Interior, and later a separate work permit if an adult family member wishes to work. The head of an association specializing in Egypt and Jordan relationships stated that:

“Currently if you want to bring your wife, you should have a certain salary (not less than 635 USD), participate in Social Security, and have a residence and a rental contract. A worker cannot fulfill all these requirements.”

Unsurprisingly therefore, the overwhelmingly male workers usually leave their families in Egypt, where they eventually return. As mentioned by the director of a legal aid NGO:

“In terms of society, there is no impact because there are no big families, only have working men, so their impact is limited.”

This is because the costs of living and healthcare in Egypt are much lower, so the workers come alone to earn money in Jordan and remit monies to their families. Migrant men in Jordan communicate with their families back in Egypt through the internet, including free calls. Visits back home were, however, rare according to

interviewees, on average happening every three or four years. This is likely to result in weaker family bonds and negative social effects.

BOX 2. CHALLENGES FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

“Agriculture workers are not included in the social security, and institutions that have two employees only are not included in the social security. This means that the worker lost his right; if something happens to him, he is not insured because the social security is considered health insurance and life insurance.”

(Director of CBO working on Egyptian migrant issues).

FAMILY ROLES DURING THE STAY IN JORDAN

This research found that the roles of male and female migrants differ and both were required to perform certain roles during their stay in Jordan. Most of the male migrants included in this study played a key role in securing domestic expenses including expenses of education, health services, food, and other household costs. All interviewees considered that the breadwinner role is the most important one. One of interviewee talked about his main role with regard to his family back in Egypt, where he sends them monthly expenses in order to overcome the difficult economic conditions. He reported that:

“I am required to secure my family’s expenses and to improve their living conditions.” (A construction worker, in Jordan for 8 years).

According to the Egyptian customs and traditions, men cover the costs associated with weddings, including preparations for marriage. Their responsibilities extend to their daughters as well as sisters, and financial as well as providing moral guidance. One migrant interviewee explained that the responsibility for his family has become greater after the death of his father, as he is the eldest brother. Another migrant interviewee reported that he had to request assistance from his friends to manage his children’s affairs since he was working in Jordan.

The majority of female migrants included in this research had similar roles with respect to taking care of children and the house. Around half of the female respondents reported that they had to work to help their husbands secure the domestic expenses. A female respondent said that she played additional roles, as she is solely responsible for securing the domestic expenses and childrearing due to the sickness of her husband.

“I am responsible for everything. I have a job. I control everything in the house. I order my children not to go to certain places and not to socialize

with certain people.” (Daily domestic worker, living in Jordan with her husband for 25 years).

IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON CHILDREN

The findings show that Egyptian workers' migration had positive and negative impacts on their children and that such impacts differ depending on whether the children are in Egypt or Jordan. The positive aspects for the children in Egypt include remittances that enable families to better pay for private tuition, food and drink, and medication. However, they miss the psychological aspects of a father's presence in the home. A father's presence in the house maintains the children's psychological and mental health, as he observes details of their life, listens to them and plays with them. Migrant children cannot experience such feelings due to the father's absence. Consequently, most male interviewees shared that they felt their migration had a negative impact on their children. For instance, one of the interviewees said that his child ceased to obey his orders and started to hit his mother.

“He is at the 9th grade. He does not go to school and keeps playing in the street. When his mother asked him to go to school, he hit her and started to encourage his brother not to go to school.” (A construction worker, in Jordan for 20 years).

The majority of female interviewees reported that they did not notice any negative impacts on their children. This is likely to be because they, unlike the men, were not separated from their children. Their children were with their mothers in Jordan, either because they were born in Jordan or because they came to Jordan at an early age. A female migrant reported that her children love Jordan.

“They love Jordan more than Egypt. They love school, the living standards, travel, etc. This has had positive impacts on them.” (Egyptian migrant woman, in Jordan with her Egyptian husband for 18 years).

For children back in Egypt, life is somewhat different. Male interviewees indicated that their children were required to assume their responsibilities, including participating in events on behalf of their fathers. One interviewee reported that:

“At weddings, it is a tradition in our region to give a certain amount of money to the groom. After migration, my sons started to do so on behalf of me.” (Migrant worker, in Jordan for 15 years).

These customs and traditions remain with migrants even in migration. Moreover, some children took the responsibility for buying the household needs. On top of that, this research has also found that the precarious situation of male Egyptian migrant workers seems to affect their partners. According to key informant interviewees, most of the Egyptian female workers present in Jordan are married to male

Egyptians, also working in Jordan. This is because Egypt does not allow women to be recruited in Jordan.

“Jordan does not allow the wives of Egyptian workers to enter the country, except for certain difficult and rare cases”. (Official of the Ministry of the Interior).

Women can only obtain a work permit with the approval of the Egyptian Embassy. Without this, they are likely to be working irregularly and hence vulnerable to exploitation. Overall, due to the tough working conditions, there are very few Egyptian female workers. The director of an economic research centre in Jordan mentioned that:

“Often, these female workers are not skilled, so they work in occupations closer to rudimentary skills; as cleaners in support services companies, in hospitals, health clinics, or large companies. They often take low wages. The working conditions in the health support services sector are poor. Therefore, you can rarely find female Egyptian workers in this sector, compared to male Egyptian workers.”

In Jordan, the children of the Egyptian migrants are entitled to attend schools as long as the father holds a valid work permit. In Jordan, public school fees are considered minimal, nevertheless, the registration fees for Egyptian children in public schools in Jordan are more than the fees charged for Jordanians. The majority of the respondents mentioned that they pay around 113 USD per year for their children. Despite the fact that migrant workers pay for public schools unlike Jordanians, they reported that their children do go to school and they can easily access education. However, a few respondents mentioned that it was not easy to register their children in school as they ask for the father’s work permit and sometimes this is not available.

Additionally, Egyptian students have to pay for their books as well, whereas Jordanian students are offered the books for free. Interviewees reported that they feel discriminated against regarding receiving the books. One interviewee mentioned that the school their child attended prefers throwing away the books rather than giving them out for free. Furthermore, they mentioned that they must go to the ministry to receive the books, which adds pressure. Discrimination in Jordanian schools may lead to children discontinuing their education, according to some interviewees. One interviewee reported that her daughter was bullied in school in Jordan, including through physical violence. When the school failed to take action against the bully, the father decided that they should leave the school.

Egyptian workers in Jordan are required to pay for health services, even in public hospitals and health centres.

“My daughter is married to my cousin. They receive medical services from Bashir Hospital. Five-year [old] children are permitted to receive such services in public hospitals. Her son is a thalassemia patient. He needs medication on a monthly basis. When a child is six, he cannot receive such services since his father is Egyptian. They have to medicate him at their own expense.” (Egyptian women migrant, in Jordan for 25 years).

“Unfortunately, if the foreign worker in Jordan wanted to go to health centres or government hospitals, he pays higher rates when compared with uninsured Jordanians. If you noticed, during the last few years, 6-7 years, only a few Egyptians had their families with them because the cost of health care is high and the cost of living in Jordan is high. Therefore, they come here alone to earn money to transfer to Egypt because the cost of living in Egypt is much cheaper than here.” (Key informant interviewee).

WORK CONDITIONS

Egyptians predominate in the agricultural industry. Although Jordanian men do not work in this sector, some Jordanian women do. Since this sector is predominantly informal, official statistics are absent. Egyptian workers are compensated more than Jordanian women because they are viewed as more productive: the daily rate for Egyptians is 21 USD, while the daily rate for Jordanian women is 10-12 USD. The difficult working conditions in this field include the usage of pesticides without safety precautions, extreme weather conditions due to high temperatures, insect bites, and substandard housing.

According to key informants, one of the biggest issues that Egyptian migrant workers face is the lack of health insurance and social security coverage. Most construction workers are not covered by social security. Even when companies do provide health insurance, their workers are often unaware of their rights and entitlements. In the same vein, employers also seem to be unaware of their duties to cover the costs of work-related injuries. Additionally, there is a significant lack of transparent law regulations, with frequently changing directives, which renders the legality of working conditions even more convoluted.

“When the migrant worker wants to resort to official bodies, he finds the procedures to be a bit vague, resorting to courts to be expensive, and that he lacks the time to follow up. All these issues make him lose his rights and force him to waive his right or not upon them in case he was subject to injustice.” (An expert in labour issues).

All the Egyptians interviewed for this study had signed work contracts before they had come to Jordan. It is relatively common for intermediaries to charge a fee in return for brokering an employment contract. In other words, Egyptians are charged

money in order to receive a contract of employment. This is not covered under Jordanian law. This is known as contract trading.

“I really knew nothing; they told me that you must pay for the contract, and I agreed and paid.” (A worker at a service company in a hospital has been in Jordan for 6 years).

The Jordanian Ministry of Labour provides a template (model) contract of employment on which indicates that type of work, workplace, wage, employer's name, and worker's name and date and place of birth should be specified. This template also addresses the obligations of the worker, including that workers should comply with employer's instructions. However, it does not set out workers' rights such as the required working hours, leaves, and required tasks. Lack of clarification of the worker's rights makes migrant workers more vulnerable to violations as they are not aware of them. Despite having work contracts, Egyptians interviewed for this study emphasised that their actual working conditions, workplace and salary differed from those set out on their contract.

“What is the purpose of the work contract? As the work contract provides for a specific salary, a worker must be paid such salary. When a worker receives a salary, he must sign a receipt under the work contract. When I asked the employer to show me the receipts, he showed me just one signed receipt. The employer paid me just a salary of one month. He claimed that he paid me salaries of 12 months, but he could not prove this since there were no receipts signed by me.” (An agricultural worker, in Jordan for 7 years).

Agricultural permits are the most sought-after permits by Egyptian workers since they are inexpensive, about 400 USD and simple to get. Furthermore, Egyptian workers prefer those permits as the Jordanian government restricts access to work permits for certain sectors, such as the construction sector. Jordanian law requires a worker to work for the employer whose name is mentioned in the work permit. If a worker works for another employer, then the migrant is an illegal worker and should be deported according to Jordanian law. Nevertheless, according to interviewees, a large proportion of workers do so for several reasons as mentioned earlier.

The Ministry of Labour does not require the presence of a worker when a work permit is procured or renewed. Article 8 of Instructions on the Employment and Recruitment of non-Jordanian workers provides that “the employer or the approved agent may approach the competent directorate to renew the work permit of a non-Jordanian worker at least one month before the expiration date”. The absence of the worker at the time of renewal might drive the employer to renew the work contract for one year without the approval of the worker. Doing so requires a worker to sign a

new work contract to compel them to work. In this case, a worker might be further exploited by intermediaries.

“When the employer approaches the Ministry of Labour to procure a work permit, he asks every worker to pay a commission. The work permit’s cost is 564 USD, but the employer asks the worker to pay 987 – 1,128 USD. I really do not know what the exact cost is, as I have never approached the Ministry since I worked for this company. I just give them money and my passport, and they may give me the permit after 20-30 days.” (A janitor at a services company in Jordan for 7 years).

Some workers stated that if their work permits expire before they receive their payable wages, the employer does not pay them such wages. They cannot claim such amounts since the work permits expire and there is no legal recourse to receive their wages. An Egyptian interviewee who works in an investment sector indicated that some sponsors employ a worker. When a worker’s permit expires and he claims his remaining wage, the sponsor denies this and refuses to pay it. Recently, the Ministry of Labour introduced a “free work permit”. Such a permit allows its holder to work for any employer in the same sector without a sponsor. It seems that this type of permit reduces the intervention of intermediaries and contract trading. However, the price of a work permit is high, as much as 3,526 USD. It is difficult for a worker to pay such an amount.

“I have a free work permit. I paid 3,526 USD to obtain the free permit. I borrowed amounts from my friends and I almost sold everything I had to procure the permit. Currently, this permit is costly; I will keep repaying the amounts I borrowed and I will borrow money when I want to renew the permit. However, it differs from the agricultural permit, where the holder of an agricultural permit is obliged to work for the sponsor and his salary is less than the salary of the holder of a free permit. For example, he is paid 282 USD a month.” (An agricultural worker that has worked in Jordan for 9 months).

BOX 3. SOCIAL SECURITY CONTRIBUTIONS

Article 4 of the Social Security Law provides for the categories covered by social security, including the “worker”, Jordanian or non-Jordanian, who works in Jordan. Some workers reported that not all employers registered workers with social security. The highest percentage of the workers affiliated with social security was among the permanent workers who work at hospitals and companies. Despite the amendments to the Social Security law and issuance of instructions on agricultural workers, most of the agricultural workers reported that they were not affiliated with social security, while some of them showed interest.

Some workers reported that the pension and the lump-sum benefit as well as the health insurance are the most important advantages of a subscription to social security. A respondent stated that:

“The advantage is that if a worker wants to leave Jordan, he can collect the lump sum from the Social Security Corporation. The amount of the lump sum depends on the years of service. It seems as if a person saves money on a monthly basis, then he can get such money at the end of service.” (Egyptian migrants who holds an investor card, in Jordan for 32 years).

Although most of the workers who occupy permanent jobs are affiliated with social security, they might be deceived by employers. A worker reported that he was surprised when he discovered that his contribution period is less than his years of service, though the employer deducted an amount of his salary on a monthly basis on the pretext of payment of security contributions.

“The company did not register me with the social security. I have been working at the hospital since 2015. I found that my contribution period is 3 years and a half. I used to move from one company to another. I have worked for three companies. I think the third company did not register me with social security. I worked for a company for 2 years, but I discovered that my contribution period was only 9 months, and it was 7 or 12 months in another company.” (A janitor at a service company, in Jordan for 7 years.)

Some workers stated that the main problem is the high contributions that a worker cannot pay.

“Indeed, I pay to the government 700-800 USD as fees. The government obligated us to subscribe to social security, but I cannot pay the contributions. I do not object to the fees of the permit, though such fees are high, and though I don’t work on a regular basis.” (A construction worker, in Jordan for 20 years.)

TAB 1. SOCIAL SECURITY

Category	Total	Males	Females
Egyptian workers covered by social security	78,707	77,692	1,015
Workers who procured permits according to the instructions on agricultural holdings	11,207	11,207	-
Free work permit	13,387	13,142	245
Egyptian workers who cumulatively receive pension from social security	3,726	3,636	90

Number of registered agricultural holdings (1,466 holdings)

WAGE MANAGEMENT MECHANISM

Egyptian workers come to Jordan with the aim of improving their economic status and support their families. The interviews show that married workers mainly divide their wages into three portions: the first portion is for personal and daily expenses such as the food and rent; the second portion is saved to cover the cost of work permit's renewal, contract and the medical examination, the third portion is transferred to the family. The last portion is the most important one as workers send a third of their income to their families in Egypt to cover their daily expenses. The amounts sent by workers to their families vary, however, it is noted that if a worker is paid a higher wage and occupies a permanent job, he is more able to transfer larger amounts on a regular basis.

Division of wages differs according to the circumstances of workers. If a worker and his family settle in Jordan, he only sends money to Egypt in emergencies to help their extended families. An agricultural worker stated:

"I have to save money for the annual permit and medical examination, even if at the expense of my children's wellbeing. I have to be a legal worker, and I have to hold my permit wherever I go. I have to pay the rent. I save some money for my food and drinks and the mobile phone credit... Sometimes, I work for 2-3 weeks successively, and sometimes I work for 2-3 days. We are

five workers in Jordan and we live in the same house. We help each other to send enough money to our families.” (An agricultural worker, in Jordan for 15 years).

Agricultural workers usually send money to Egypt through the so-called bag. A person named “a bag guy” collects the sums the workers want to send to their families in Egypt and he does so for a small commission. Workers use this method since such a person is often from the same region to which a worker belongs. This makes it easier for their families to receive the money instead of visiting an exchange office or a bank and allows their families to save the fees of transportation to/from the exchange office. An interviewee in the construction sector said that:

“Through the exchange office, for example. Also, there are the bag guys. A bag guy receives 1.4 USD commissions for sending 100 USD to Egypt. If the bag guy is in Jordan and his children in Egypt, he calls his children and asks them to send the amount to a certain family. I am supposed to send money to my family every week.” (A construction worker, in Jordan for 22 years)

Additionally, the interviews with workers showed that many workers have not sent money to their families for more than one month. This is due to the poor conditions and the few working days they work in the agricultural sector.

“I sometimes send money to Egypt with one of my relatives or friends. Honestly, I do not send money every month; the conditions have become poor here. I worked for one day this week. How I could divide such a low amount! I can hardly cover my food and drinks. I hope things get better in the future.” (A construction worker, in Jordan for 27 years)

However, Egyptians who spent more than 20 years in Jordan are more able to save money. Some interviewees had managed to save money that helped them build housing for their families in Egypt.

“We built a house. None can do anything except in my presence. The remaining expenses cover food and drink. All my children go to school.” (A construction worker, in Jordan for 27 years)

ENTITLEMENT TO VACATION TO EGYPT

The majority of workers reported that nothing prevents them from taking a vacation to Egypt, however, visiting Egypt requires a valid work permit, travel expenses and approval of the sponsor (employer). Workers often face problems in this respect as most of them do not work directly for the sponsor or do not know him. This requires them to seek assistance of intermediaries who know the sponsor. This means that they have to pay more money to the sponsor and the intermediaries in

order to visit Egypt. Some workers stated that the amount might reach 700 USD and they could not pay it.

“Today, when an employer wants to procure a permit for a worker, he obliges the worker to pay a certain amount for social security purposes, though the company for which a worker works already registered him with the social security. We are forced to perform jobs other than those performed in the company. If a worker needs to get a vacation, a sponsor asks the worker to pay 210 – 350 USD in order to pay social security contributions and the vacation fees. This is the main problem a worker faces when he wants to get a vacation.” (A janitor at a hospital in Jordan for 12 years.)

Moreover, the employer’s approval of the vacation is one of the most important challenges faced by a worker. A worker in the service sector stated that the company for which he works has refused to give him a vacation several times. His mother and brother passed away and he could not attend their funeral.

“Day workers can easily get a vacation. In companies, it is difficult for a worker to get a vacation. The company obliges a worker to get the vacation for the period and at the times determined by it.” (A worker at a service company, in Jordan for 7 years.)

This research found that the workers who go on a vacation to Egypt on a regular basis are often married, where they have to visit Egypt to meet their wives and children and learn about their affairs. It differs when it comes to the workers who have their wives with them in Jordan. They usually visit Egypt if they have surplus money to do so. Additionally, the findings show that the majority of women were less able to visit Egypt, whether married to a Jordanian or an Egyptian, and the main barrier to this was the cost of travel. Unmarried workers reported that the workers who have families in Egypt (wives and children) are the most in need of a vacation, while unmarried workers can save the travel expenses and spend the vacation in Jordan.

“I have a work permit... the permit is required for the vacation. If [I] procure approval from the Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for my children who go to school, the approval is certified by the Egyptian Embassy, and a child must be accompanied by his mother.” (A retired worker, in Jordan for 41 years.)

SOCIAL LIFE AND EXPERIENCES OF INEQUALITY AMONG EGYPTIAN WORKERS IN JORDAN

According to analysis of the key informant interviews, all migrant workers and their families in Jordan are treated the same in terms of access to health and education sectors. Egyptians are more engaged in society and integrated better than other groups of migrants, however, they may be looked down on.

“There is interaction and social integration. The only problem is the view of the profession and the lack of respect for the profession. For example, you will hear someone say ‘Do you think I am an Egyptian?’” (Key person at an NGO that provides legal aid.)

The Egyptian community in Jordan seems to be tight-knit and fairly isolated. It acts as a support mechanism in case of any issues as well as a positive social outlet for the migrants.

“Egyptian workers are socially isolated; they are social with other Egyptians only. We have never felt that they mingle- although they sometimes have their families with them.” (Interviewee at the National Center for Human Rights)

Additionally, migrant workers are entitled to social aid such as protection from domestic violence and relief packages.

“Among the services that we provide to non-Jordanians and Egyptians, we have a department concerned with protection from domestic violence, and 3 Family Reconciliation Centres – in the centre (which is the first established), the north, and the south... Also, some directorates subsidiary of the Ministry of Social Development provides in-kind assistance, parcels, or supplies during winter, in the event of a fire in houses, or other disasters. This is called “relief,” we do not discriminate between Egyptians or Jordanians when we offer help.” (Ministry of Social Development representative).

A phenomenon of positive discrimination towards migrant workers that was mentioned concerned workers being eligible for pension or a lump sum compensation upon their return to their respective countries, after having stayed in Jordan for a long time.

“We have data showing that many Egyptian workers spent a very long time in Jordan, and when they returned to Egypt, they received pension just like Jordanians.” (Director of economic research centre).

Yet, as stated before, one of the biggest issues faced by Egyptian migrant workers and their families is a lack of social security and health insurance. Even though laws such as the Bylaw for Agricultural Workers cover a decent residence for workers, sick leaves, etc., there is a lack of supervision and awareness which results in non-compliance with the law. Another issue raised was the difficulties when leaving Jordan. Workers need a letter that is approved by their employer and later stamped by the Ministry of Labour. They cannot return to Jordan without the document, however, the employer needs to apply and if the employer has any liabilities towards the government, the worker cannot obtain the document. The process creates unnecessary obstacles, especially in case of emergencies back home.

“Therefore, the worker’s request to leave the country stops, which is problematic because this is not the worker’s fault. This is not fair for workers.” (An expert in labour issues).

It has been stated that the process arose due to the absence of an applicable residency law, which in turn forced those additional measures. The high cost of work permits, and the common practice of illegal work deter Egyptian migrant workers from using official channels and services that are available to them. Many choose to stay in hiding to avoid deportation, even in cases of serious illness, abuse, or wage delays.

“They prefer to die in the residence and not go to the doctor, just because they don’t have work permits. There are many similar cases. They cannot go to the hospital because of the incident delegate, who is a police officer, asks for the worker’s permit. Also, there are police patrols everywhere that can stop any bus or car and ask for work permits. They may have COVID-19 and get very sick but prefer not to leave the farm.” (Key person at an NGO that provides legal aid).

Lastly, Egyptian migrant workers are also less likely to transfer to another employer, demand their rights or raise the alarm on unsafe working conditions. Absconding is considered grounds for detention and deportation. Thus, these vulnerabilities are attractive to employers who prefer those kinds of workers instead of the ones that can move around freely and exert their rights.

THE RIGHTS OF EGYPTIAN MIGRANT WORKERS

Migrant workers in Jordan face many issues during their work including issues related to their work permits, social security, and wages. Male workers in the housekeeping sector especially, reported that they face issues with employers such as delaying their salaries, beating them, not paying their salaries, and treating them disrespectfully. When migrant workers’ rights are violated, it was revealed in the

interviews that they usually resort to five main bodies: the Ministry of Labour, Social Security Cooperation, the police, the Egyptian embassy and the leader of the tribe “*Sheikh Al Asheera*”.

When legal issues are involved, however, respondents believe that submitting a case to the court is costly and time consuming. Requiring a witness to each case and nepotism are also considered as major barriers for the migrant workers to submit a case to ask for their rights. One respondent mentioned that their rights disappeared due to the phenomena of nepotism. Some respondents do not have a work permit, or they are working illegally, hence, they avoid claiming their rights from the government. It is worth mentioning that some respondents reported that they do not know where they can go to claim their rights. Other respondents reported that they would not claim their rights and they will only leave it to God.

Furthermore, migrant workers reported being scammed. One respondent said that after he submitted his claim to the court, he started to receive threats from the individuals that scammed him. Another issue that arose from a female migrant was racism from the society around her.

“Honestly, I mean, no matter what your capabilities are, no matter how strong you are, you have to be silent in order to live, not out of fear, but because you are a stranger. Any kind of reaction you will take is counted on you. There is no fear. It is different from the people from this country!” (An agricultural worker, in Jordan for 7 years.)

Workers in the housekeeping sector also disclosed that they do not claim their rights as the court will require witnesses and usually there will be no witnesses other than the family that employs them. Additionally, migrant workers believe that employers are more powerful than migrant workers. One respondent who works in the agriculture sector reported:

“So, when I’m working in a house and get deprived of my salary for 5 months or 6 months, besides that my permit is on the employer, and get fired and I go to the MoL, they connect me with the judiciary and the judiciary ask me to bring witnesses, where can I bring them from? While there is no end of the contract between the employer and I, no signatures on salaries or resignation.”

Mainly, Egyptian workers come to Jordan for the purpose of working and they avoid trouble. They reported that they come for a living, and if they face an issue, they do not claim it. This research found that there are no unions or organisations that support Egyptian migrant workers. On the one hand, few interviewees believe that the current unions or organisations set rules for migrant workers and their

employers in terms of working hours and overtime. One respondent who has been working in Jordan for 32 years reported:

“When I say that there is an organisation that adopts this thing and directs the worker on his rights and duties, his working hours from this hour to that hour, if he worked for extra hours, he should take overtime money. You work for extra hours, so this should be added to your salary. Yes, you should do 1, 2, 3 this way the problem should be done”.

On the other hand, few interviewees believe that the labour law is clear enough for the workers regarding vacations, hence; there is no need for unions. Some of the respondents are not aware if there are unions or not. Unions reduce inequality and they support workers in asking for their rights including wages, vacations, and working hours. The absence of these unions for migrant workers will reduce the chance of enhancing the conditions of these workers. Additionally, the absence of such unions will lead to an increase in violations against migrant workers.

THE IMPACT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES ON EGYPTIAN WORKERS

Egyptian migrant workers compete with Syrian workers for jobs in the same sectors, such as construction and agriculture, however, our interviews show that the Egyptian workers seem to have the “upper hand” for two main reasons. Firstly, Egyptian workers have a good reputation as agricultural workers since Egypt is described to be an agricultural country. Thus, Egyptian migrant workers are deemed more capable. There are 1,300,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan. However, work for Egyptians was not greatly affected because Syrians are not able to carry out these tasks. Secondly, many Syrian workers come with their families whereas Egyptian workers come on their own. It is preferable for employers in the construction sector to hire individual workers who are able to stay on-site. This way the employer does not have to worry about transportation allowance or logistics.

“Many Syrian workers came with their families, whereas Egyptian workers- I recall one statistic and please excuse me I cannot recall where I saw it, but more than 90% of Egyptians in the construction sector [come] without families and that are individuals, and this obviously means that it is easier- well it’s more preferable for employers to employ such workers because they can be based on-site staying in dormitories, they don’t have to provide transportation allowance to the workers or worry about logistics, so that’s one thing.” (Representative from ILO, Jordan).

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EGYPTIAN MIGRANT WORKERS

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown measures affected Egyptian migrant workers. Informal workers in particular were disproportionately affected by the crisis. Many day labourers were reported by interviewees to have lost their jobs, returned to Egypt, or struggled with providing for their families back home. They either moved to governorates with more relaxed lockdown measures in pursuit of employment or stopped working entirely. Even those who continued with their work stopped receiving their wages.

“Migrant workers received nothing, except for aid from the associations that know them. Therefore, their jobs stopped, and many of them left Amman and went to other governorates- because, in the governorates, they do not adhere to lockdown measures as in Amman. So, they went there to work- while others returned to Egypt.” (Director of an economic research centre).

According to the Ministry of Interior, initially there were no deportations of migrant workers during the lockdown, while the return of the workers who wished to leave Jordan was facilitated. A representative from the Ministry of Labour stated that:

“There was no deportation in 2020, only for security concerns, until July 2021 when the Prime Ministry issued a decision to give them a chance until October to correct their situation. Those who did not correct their situation are deported after October.... There was an increase in the number of workers who wish to return and were exempt from all incurred fees and which return was facilitated.”

Provisions such as unemployment compensation do not exist for Egyptian workers due to the absence of social security. Respondents emphasised that the migrant workers, both formal and informal, were left with virtually no safety nets and their situation continued to be unsupervised. Additionally, the pandemic further restricted access to government departments responsible for handling complaints. For example, filing complaints to the Ministry of Labour has become even more challenging because of the turn towards technology and the digital sphere, which may not be very accessible to many migrant workers.

CONCLUSION

This is the third generation of Egyptian migrant workers who have come to Jordan for work. Over the past forty years, Egyptian migrant workers in Jordan have engaged in various sectors, most notably the agricultural sector, which comprises the vast majority of Egyptian labor, in addition to the construction and services sectors. According to statistics, the majority of Egyptian migrant workers are male:

women do not come to Jordan alone, but accompany their husbands. Taking up the migration of Egyptian workers to Jordan requires considering the social factors that play a major role in making the decision to migrate. Although they form small, closed communities inside Jordan, Egyptian migrant workers are well respected and welcomed by Jordanian society.

Egyptian migrant workers choose Jordan specifically because of the cultural similarities, the common language, and the common religion between Jordan and Egypt. Another reason is the large difference in the exchange rate between the Jordanian and Egyptian currencies, which enables Egyptian workers to transfer remittances to their families in Egypt and sometimes save money. Additionally, Egypt and Jordan are neighboring countries, which means that Egyptian workers can enter Jordan through Aqaba Port at a lower cost compared to air travel.

Despite these facilities, migrant workers, in general, and Egyptian migrant workers in particular, face many challenges as they are vulnerable groups. It is not only a matter of feeling, but it also affects the ability of these migrants to access justice. Egyptian migrant workers often refrain from lodging complaints with the concerned authorities. They believe that such concerned authorities will favor a defendant as s/he is “a Jordanian citizen”, alluding to “connections” and “nepotism”. It is also difficult to make general judgments because there are other allegations opposed to the said claim. This increases the importance of developing clear complaint mechanisms that guarantee the protection of a complainant, their access to justice and prevent favoritism of public officials.

Interviews that were conducted for the purposes of this paper show that the most important problems faced by Egyptian migrant workers relate to the instructions on work permits. A migrant worker cannot change workplace or labour sector, nor can he take leave without the approval of the employer. As to the working conditions, migrant workers, especially in the agricultural sector, experience difficult working conditions. These include long working hours, working under the scorching heat of the sun, lack of vocational health and safety equipment, lack of inclusion in social protection such as medical insurance, social security, low salaries, and delayed payment.

Discrimination at the workplace and when seeking legal aids acts as another difficulty that Egyptian migrant workers encounter and have endured. This varies from delayed wages, random deductions from salary, and non-compliance from their employers to safety and health requirements. Thus, for Egyptian migrants, social isolation is a major issue. Often, Egyptian community forms their mutual-support mechanism. Unfortunately, Egyptian migrant workers rarely fight against these inequalities and other illegal actions experienced since many of them, regardless of the reasons, lack legal work permits or residency permits. This leaves them highly vulnerable to the risk of deportation while seeking justice, not to mention high

submission fees of a case to the court. Therefore, very few unions or organisations that can support workers insist on their rights as well.

The intervention of brokers or the so-called “intermediaries” exacerbate the problems faced by the Egyptian migrant workers. Intermediaries play a key role in the recruitment process, starting from the moment the worker decides to come to Jordan. The influence of intermediaries is primarily negative, as they exploit people’s need for work and double a contract price, a phenomenon that has become known as “contract trade”. They also often mislead migrants by focusing on the positives and neglecting the negatives, which drives some migrant workers to sell all their property and borrow money. Ultimately, migrant workers are confronted with the high cost of living and the lack of job opportunities once they arrive in Jordan.

However, intermediaries are an important source of information for workers, especially with regard to information about employment, mobility, and housing. Further, if an intermediary is part of a worker’s social network, he is likely to have a positive impact in terms of job research or securing the contract value. Moreover, the degree of kinship or acquaintance often determines the contract price. If the person seeking work is close to the intermediary, the commission paid by such person is less than the commission paid by others. Likewise, the social network, in many cases, supports and assists the worker. If a worker commits an offense and is likely to be deported, where members of the social network pay the fine for the offense to the concerned authorities and do not allow deportation of the worker. In spite of the importance of social networks, they do not constitute a force capable of protecting or claiming rights.

This role played by intermediaries and the common terms used by Egyptian workers, such as the commercial contract and the free contract, though such terms are not provided for under the law, indicate legal gaps in the mechanisms for bringing Egyptian workers. This provides an opportunity for brokers and intermediaries to exploit workers and receive large sums of money from contract trade.

Our findings also show that the majority of Egyptian migrants come to Jordan alone. While some of them can bring their families later to settle in Jordan, most remain in Jordan alone and return to Egypt only on vacations. The reasons for this include the fact that some workers want their families to stay in Egypt due to the high cost of living in Jordan and the inability to meet the requirements of life. However, they can transfer money to their families that is sufficient for them to live a decent life in Egypt. Additionally, the Jordanian government has become stricter with regard to bringing families. For example, during the period covered by the research, Jordan did not allow families to migrate together. This is due to the fact that the government wants to restrict the number of migrants coming to Jordan. Under the cooperation agreements between Jordan and Egypt, a worker is only permitted to work in Jordan

for a specific period. This contradicts the idea of bringing families to live in Jordan, which suggests settlement. It is also noted that the men in the majority of families settled in Jordan work in the construction or services sector. Migrants working in the agricultural sector cannot bring their families to Jordan due to difficult circumstances, except in rare cases in which an Egyptian worker commercially leases a farm in which he and his family members live and work.

Despite the difficult conditions faced by some Egyptian workers, including precarious job opportunities, low wages, and high prices for work permits, they will face greater challenges if they want to make the decision to return to Egypt. These challenges include the difficult living conditions in their areas of the residence that drove them to emigrate, the regulations and instructions related to work contracts and work permits and the consequences of their termination. Additionally, social factors related to the concept of “migration” in the minds of Egyptian families and that they can make their dreams come true through migration. Egyptian families believe that migration is a golden opportunity yet when they migrate, they find that reality is completely different and it is difficult for them to make their dreams come true. However, they cannot go back or discuss the realities as they do not want to disappoint their families.

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Contact authors

Rawan Rbihat, Information and Research Center – King Hussein Foundation
info@irckhf.org

Suggested citation

Duaa Ajarmeh, Rawan Rbihat, Dalia Haddad and Maysara Damagh (2023). Egyptian workers in Jordan, MIDEQ Working Paper. Amman, Jordan: MIDEQ. Available at: <https://www.mideq.org/en/resources-index-page/egyptian-migrant-workers-in-jordan>

Cover image

Farmers after completing pesticide spraying at the Abu Kishik Farm in Mafraq, Jordan. Photo by Seersa Abaza / IWMI. CC-BY-NC.

Funding

This work has been funded by the UKRI Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) [Grant Reference: ES/S007415/1]. The GCRF is a five-year £1.5 billion fund aimed at addressing the problems faced by developing countries.

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Contact MIDEQ

Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR)
Coventry University, IV5, Innovation Village
Cheetah Road, Coventry, CV1 2TL UK

Tel. +44 24 7765 1182

E-mail: mideq@coventry.ac.uk